



University Policy: American University Museum Exhibition and Program Policy

Policy Category: Exhibition Policies

Subject: Approval of Controversial AU Museum Exhibitions

Offices Responsible for Review of this Policy: College of Arts and Sciences

Procedures: Review and Approval of Potentially Controversial AU Museum Exhibitions

I. SCOPE

The American University Museum’s primary mission is to exhibit international and political art that reflects the university’s commitment to public service, global perspectives, political engagement and social justice. Accordingly, it presents significant and provocative arts programming that may awe, illuminate, challenge, unsettle, confound, provoke, and—at times—offend.

To exhibit a work of art is not to endorse the work or the vision, the ideas or opinions of the artist. Rather, it is to uphold the right of all to experience diverse visions and points of view. If and when controversies arise from the exhibition of one or more works of art, the American University and its Museum welcome public discussion and debate, out of the conviction that such discussion is integral to the experience of the art.

The purpose of this policy is to outline procedures for the initial review and approval of potentially controversial exhibitions, as well as strategies for dealing with controversy if and when it occurs. This policy applies only to programming that occurs within the confines of the AU Museum and its adjacent Sculpture Garden.

II. DEFINITIONS

Standing Exhibition Review Team – This team will be comprised of the Museum’s Director and Curator, a representative of the Studio Art Program, a representative of University Communications and Marketing, a representative of the Office of Risk Management and Safety, and a representative of the Office of the General Counsel, or other University representatives, as deemed appropriate.

III. POLICY STATEMENT

A. Procedures for the Approval of, and Preparation for, Potentially Controversial Exhibits

1. When the opportunity arises to present artistic exhibitions and/or programming with the potential to generate significant public controversy, the Museum’s Director and Curator will, from the outset, discuss with the artist the University’s policy on removing art from an exhibit before the agreed-upon termination date. At the same time, the Museum’s Director and Curator will immediately present all relevant information about the exhibit, including details about the artist and the goals and context of the exhibit, to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS Dean).

2. Should the CAS Dean determine that the exhibition as proposed poses significant reputational risk to the University and/or the potential to compromise the safety of members of the AU community, s/he will convene a standing Exhibition Review Team. This Exhibition Review Team serves in an advisory capacity to the CAS Dean, who will make a final determination on whether and how to host the exhibition, in consultation with the University President and Provost, as necessary.
3. If the exhibit is approved, the Museum's Director and Curator will begin to prepare, with the help of academic colleagues as appropriate, materials to facilitate public engagement around the issues raised by an exhibition. Typically, this engagement strategy will involve many of the following steps.

B. Creating a public engagement schedule and framework for a potentially controversial exhibition before it opens

1. The Museum's Director and Curator will prepare materials that identify the artist, the exhibition, and the larger context and history of the work.
2. The Museum's Director and Curator will identify target audiences who can provide input and opportunities for community dialogue in advance of the show, to help the Museum strategize on how it might acknowledge particular sensitivities. The primary goal of this work is to engender trust through interpretation, programming, partnerships and communications and to avoid needlessly empowering oppositional groups primarily interested in stirring controversy that might promote their specific agendas.
3. Informed by community feedback, the Museum will prepare effective responses to possible criticism and provide guidance on issues of presentation and contextualization, staff training and responding to public queries.
4. The Museum's Director and Curator will lead the preparation of educational programming around controversial exhibitions, to promote respectful discussion and encourage productive dialogue. S/he will collaborate with exhibit curators and pertinent educators from the earliest stages of a project to develop opportunities for constructive civic engagement.
5. The Museum's Director and Curator will also provide a variety of auxiliary educational materials, such as historical material from the AU Library and the Katzen Art Center's Visual Resources Center or recent curatorial essays.

C. Engaging in preliminary public relations

1. In advance of all potentially controversial exhibitions, a representative from University Communications and Marketing will work with Museum staff to develop a strong communications plan, offering multiple opportunities for dialogue.
2. When appropriate, Museum staff will identify supporters among exhibition funders and establish coalitions with like-minded arts organizations, to build trust, understanding and fruitful alliances.

D. Making use of signage and educational programming

1. Museum staff will produce a variety of educational materials that serve to contextualize potentially controversial exhibitions, in the interest of greater aesthetic and/or historical understanding.
2. To the extent possible, written warnings or disclaimers will be informational, not prejudicial for or against controversial content.

E. Procedures for Addressing Public Complaints after an Exhibition Opens

1. Should any member of the Exhibition Review Team receive or become aware of significant complaints about an exhibition, s/he will immediately notify the other team members, the CAS Dean, as well as the University's President and Provost.
2. The President, Provost and Exhibition Review Team will evaluate the complaints received, with special attention to the credentials of the complaining party and to the question of whether the complaint represents sincere criticism or an act of political opportunism by a group leveraging controversy to serve other goals.
3. If the complaint(s) include threatening language or actions that suggest a potential risk to the safety of the art or to members of the AU community, the University's Office of Public Safety will be immediately notified to provide heightened security, as necessary. In this case, the President and his/her designees will work with a representative of that office to evaluate and contain any possible threats. If necessary, law enforcement will be informed. Although cancellation or early termination of an exhibit bears its own reputational risks, it is the prerogative of the President or his/her designee to do so in the face of potential threats.

F. Should the exhibit be allowed to proceed:

1. The Exhibition Review Team will create a crisis plan, and appoint a crisis manager and an ad hoc team of colleagues best equipped to deal with the situation.
2. The Museum's Director and Curator will notify the artist(s) and exhibition funders and prepare them for possible press attention, often recommending that artist(s) not take press calls.
3. The Museum's Director and Curator will prepare and disseminate talking points/FAQs in coordination with University Communications and Marketing.
4. If deemed appropriate by the Exhibition Review Team, the Museum's Director and Curator and museum staff will create additional programming to provide opportunities for thoughtful discussion among community members and concerned stakeholders.
5. University leadership will consider contacting trustees or other university officials, as needed.

G. In the event of specific complaints:

1. The Museum's Director and Curator will provide a copy of the Museum's exhibition selection procedure or similar document to complainant(s), if applicable.
2. If a complainant is deemed credible, s/he may—at the discretion of the Review Team—be given the opportunity to discuss the exhibition with the Museum's Director and Curator or another museum representative.
3. If the complainant is not satisfied after discussing the details of the exhibition and the artist's intent, s/he may be invited to formally lodge a complaint in writing. All complaints that are formally solicited will receive a written response from one or more members of the Exhibition Review Team.

H. Working with the Press and Media after the Exhibit's Opening

1. The Vice President of Communication (or his/her designee) will refine the communication plan developed in the preparatory stage.
2. The Vice President of Communication will appoint one spokesperson to discuss the institution's programming priorities with the public and the media. To the degree possible, all community members will defer to the spokesperson and otherwise refrain from all comments in public places or circumstances.

3. To the extent possible, the designated spokesperson will include in the response to inquiries an outline of the museum's mission in addition to information about the exhibition in question. S/he will contextualize the exhibition within the museum's exhibition history and avoid an approach that empowers the opposition and allows that opposition to frame the discussion.
4. The spokesperson will use the dynamics of the media to the university's advantage and be aware of the difference between the cultural press and hard news, as well as of who is writing/producing the story, what section of a paper/type of broadcast it will appear in, and who is editing it.
5. If necessary, the Vice President of Communication and university leadership will consider seeking the assistance of a public relations or crisis management firm.

IV. ADMINISTRATION

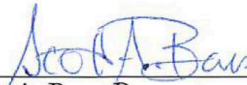
1. Katzen Arts Center staff will receive a copy of this policy, and will be trained by supervisors on all updated procedures.
2. This policy will be posted on the CAS Dean's Policies website.
3. This policy will be reviewed periodically by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, in consultation with the AU Museum Director and Curator.

V. EFFECTIVE DATE(S)

This Policy is effective April 1, 2018.

VI. SIGNATURE, TITLE AND DATE OF APPROVAL

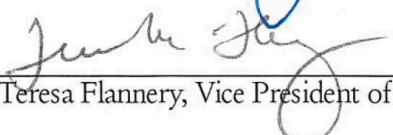
This policy needs to be signed by the appropriate officer (listed below) before it is considered approved.



Scott A. Bass, Provost



Douglas Kudravetz, CFO, Vice President and Treasurer



Teresa Flannery, Vice President of Communications

Date Approved: April 1, 2018