

Appraising the Accessibility of Provenance Research Workshops

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Calls for restitution propelled by the Black Lives Matter movement, the 2019 introduction of bills in the U.S. House and Senate to study reparations for the effects of slavery, the widely-read decolonizing reports by French art historian Bénédicte Savoy and British archaeology professor Dan Hicks, past and present looting, and the adoption of new collection policies such as the Smithsonian's on ethical returns on April 29, have "roiled the museum world"¹ and now position (museum) archivists to speak on items' provenance narratives to governing authorities. Preparing provenance researchers of all titles and experience levels to face knotty restitution issues is arguably part of the collecting institution's due diligence, and continuing education providers have met some needs.

The importance of provenance is evidenced by the current public pressure on archivists to provide detailed provenance information about items in their care; however, thousands of materials remain unexamined due to lack of both an extensible protocol and access to formal learning opportunities. To meet the public demand for swift action on collections, new offerings must concertedly address extant limiting factors: case study reliance, prohibitive costs, high selectivity towards their applicants, and even internationalization which can hinder in-person accessibility to such knowledge. Our presentation will review the successes of major efforts such as the European-led Provenance Research Training Program (P RTP), the German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP, 2017-19) and Hidden Networks: The Trade of Asian Art (2020-22), German professorships in provenance research (Berlin, Leuphana), annual courses by the U.S.-based Holocaust Art Restitution Project [Inc.] (HARP) co-located with the Association for Research into Crimes Against Art's (ARCA) Amelia Conference, and academic courses based in U.S. law schools and museum studies programs, among others (e.g., U.K.'s Christie's), to articulate how future education about provenance might reach worldwide audiences and amplify (if not crowdsource) provenance research progress.

1. Loos, Ted. (2022, April 27). 'A long way home for 'looted' art is getting shorter.' *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/arts/design/victoria-reed-museum-of-fine-arts-stolen-artwork.html>

About the authors:

Sarah A. Buchanan is an Assistant Professor at the iSchool at the University of Missouri. She serves as the emphasis leader for Archival Studies, investigating provenance research methods, data storytelling with archives, and preservation of audiovisual collections. Dr. Buchanan is active in the Society of American Archivists, advising Mizzou's student chapter and serving as a member of the SAA CODA: Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment. This presentation is part of her "Developing Extensible Methods for Provenance Research" Early Career Development project generously supported by IMLS (grant RE-246339-OLS-20), online at <https://provenanceinfo.wordpress.com/>.

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Victoria S. Reed was named the Curator for Provenance at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), in July 2010. In this role, she is responsible for the research and documentation of the provenance of the MFA's encyclopedic collection, the review of potential acquisitions and loans, and the development of due diligence policies and practice throughout the curatorial division. Previously, she was the Assistant Curator for Provenance (2008–2010) and Research Fellow for Provenance (2003–2008) in the MFA's Art of Europe department. Reed has lectured widely and published extensively on matters related to provenance research, museum ethics, and restitution. She received her MA and Ph.D. in art history at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, and her BA in liberal arts at Sarah Lawrence College. Dr. Reed is an Advisor on the project.