

Association of Registrars and Collections Specialists
2023 Conference Stipend Awardee Session Review

Nadia Al-Khalifah

The Menil Collection

1511 Branard Street, Houston, TX 77006

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Session: *Bridging Continents: Loans, Collaboration, and Partnership with Museums and Institutions in Africa*

Date: Thursday, November 9, 2023 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Presenters: Kristina Bottomley, Mary Allen, Ester Harrison, Julien Leaune, and Adrienne Reid

Summary: Amid worldwide scrutiny of museum restitution practices and discussions about the restitution and/or repatriation of cultural heritage objects to source countries, museums are also successfully lending and borrowing with African museums and institutions. In this session, panelists will share their experiences working collaboratively with African countries, covering loan negotiations, courier arrangements, insurance, art transportation, packing standards, communication best practices, and reciprocity. Registrars and shipping partners will discuss how they negotiated challenges, both cultural and economic, and forged strong connections with Africa-based colleagues and museums, encouraging momentum for more collaborative cultural exchange in the future.

In recent years there has been an increase interest to lend or loan artwork to and from Africa—especially as it pertains to a growing practice of restitution practices. As an early-career collection and exhibition registrar, I felt it was essential to attend the ARCS session *Bridging Continents: Loans, Collaboration, and Partnership with Museums and Institutions in Africa* for referential evidence of recent successes in this realm.

This session was introduced and moderated by Huntington T. Block Art Insurance Broker Adrienne Reid. Reid, who oversaw the insurance coverage for each of the forthcoming speaker's projects, shared that the session was a product of her interest to learn more about the logistical aspect of each of these unique loans which are truly on the cutting edge of our field. Additional support was provided by LP Art Museum Commercial Director Julien Leaune, who oversaw the international shipping logistics of each of these projects.

Immediately, I was captivated with Reid's curiosity as it pertained to her role as the insurance broker with such complex loans. She shared that while she assisted with the coverage of these loans, she wanted to gain additional insight as to better understand what logistical and legal situations her clients were overseeing to better understand the process. As Reid also oversees the insurance for my institution, this provided me additional confidence working alongside her as I reach out to her on forthcoming African loans.

The moderation by Adrienne Reid was beneficial as she kept the conversation engaging and excited with her enthusiasm which I appreciated immensely. During the "Questions & Answers" section at the end of the presentation, Julien Leaune's fine art logistics knowledge was

essential as there were a number of challenging questions that benefitted from his expertise and experience.

The selection of speakers who presented was impressive as they offered a variation of scenarios related to topic. The speakers included: Kristina Bottomley, Assistant Director of Collections and Exhibitions at Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Northwestern University; Mary Allen, Senior Associate Registrar of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Ester Harrison, Art Registrar for Loans and Exhibitions at the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin.

I appreciated the flow of the session which allowed each participant to introduce their project followed by a dialogue amongst the group about how they prepared the loan and shipping logistics, handled unexpected complications, and final results and thoughts. This format allowed attendees to easily understand the challenges and questions that were presented at the same time within each project, which showcased just how similar yet different each loan was.

The supporting PowerPoint laid out the loan process with simple visuals and key statements which allowed me to easily digest important take-aways, such as vital shipping logistical scenarios to be aware of (e.g. limited availability of flights, travel restrictions between provinces, cargo expectations, unexpected travel delays).

While I understand the requirement to be flexible within my role as a registrar, this presentation really highlighted the importance of balancing being prepared with accepting the

uncreditable circumstances with ease. Keeping a positive perspective under challenging timelines and new situations was essential for the success of each of these projects which in turn should be applied to our daily practice and “average” loan logistics.

Following the session, I immediately began brain storming forthcoming projects and potential acquisitions with and to Africa that my institution may participate in. We recently completed the loan of a number of works from Africa but were privileged to have the incoming and outgoing international logistics overseen by a gallery. This presentation has given me a better understanding of what I can expect when overseeing the logistics myself.

I have a better understanding of the importance of handling indigenous and African objects and loans with an additional level of caution and care. As the objects viewed with a unique respect and admiration by each culture, it is our responsibility as museums to abide by their traditions surrounding the handling, movement, and display of the loan. I learned that this could mean a variation of things, including participating in ceremonies when the objects have been removed or returned, and the timing of the object is subjected to the lender’s schedule.

Overall, I felt this session was by far my favorite from the selection that I attended during the 2023 ARCS conference. The inclusion of speakers from different roles of a project (i.e. insurance, shipping logistics, registrar), provided a vast amount of information and helped answer a number of questions that could otherwise have been left out of the fluid dialogue. I was very privileged to have received a travel stipend to attend the conference in exchange for a session review. My knowledge of the field and my role has grown in addition to my networking

circle of colleagues in this field. For forthcoming sessions in the years to come, I would love to see the dialogue between various roles related to the project presented. As registrars, we are often working with numerous constituents, both internal and external, and these types of dialogues can help expand our knowledge and understanding of expectations and our need for flexibility and growth.