



Expert Interview with Ariane Moser of Artive

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In this Expert Interview with Ariane Moser, COO of Artive, we explore at-risk art collections, sustainable business models and Artive's noble mission to protect the world's cultural heritage.

About Ariane



Ariane Moser is Chief Operations Officer at Artive Inc., a U.S. non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting the world's cultural heritage. With an MA from Sotheby's Institute of Art in London, her studies include Art History Sinology and East Asian Art History at the University of Zurich, with previous roles as Research Specialist and Relationship Manager at the Art Recovery Group and ArtBanc International in London.

Thank you for joining us today, Ariane!

What excites you most about your role at Artive?

We are a close-knit community here at Artive, and since the organisation is still relatively small and young, there is a lot of opportunity to dive into many different aspects of the day-to-day running of a non-profit.

I really enjoy the communication and exchange of experiences and ideas, connecting with people in all sorts of disciplines in order to further the protection of cultural heritage.

What excites me most though is my work with our ambassadors. Seeing a network of people who share the same core beliefs, as people and as professionals in the field, come together and drive Artive's mission forward is quite humbling to experience.

So much of our outreach and work is only made possible because of the passion and the heart they bring to Artive.

From your many years of experience working with at-risk art collections, which risk do you think is most overlooked, and why?

We could look at the many risks and divide them into different categories. If we are talking about risk to the object itself – and the safety of the object is always Artive's priority – then of course, poor handling and storage will pose a very tangible risk to the object.

Then there are risks that are of a legal and ethical nature. Thefts, loots, fakes and forgeries are hopefully seen as the most common risks people think of, but as the world gets more connected, and as works of art are shared as an asset with financial aspects across different industries, the list of potential risks gets longer.

Do you know if the object is part of a family dispute? Has the work left its country of origin with the correct export papers? How do you know

this work hasn't been filed as destroyed during a domestic fire 5 years earlier?

There are countless risks that could lie just underneath the surface. I personally think those are the risks that are still widely overlooked.

Depending on the current holder, unravelling a risk of legal or ethical nature, may sometimes put the physical safety of the object at risk too.

Artive has a noble mission to protect the world's cultural property. What factors in the global art trade currently enable or hinder your mission?

I sometimes have the impression that the factors that enable our mission are the very factors that hinder it at the same time.

The rise of technology and digitisation as tools to make more information and knowledge available to a wider audience have certainly set the stage for an organisation like ours to step up. It will be interesting to see what effect COVID-19 will have on the relationship of the different art market participants and technology.

So much had to go online and digital during the lockdowns, perhaps this helped how we feel about using technology overall. At the same time, there may still be some cautious apprehension about the use of technology. Can we trust it? Does it work? Is my information safe? (Those are of course all valid and important questions too!).

Technology and the use of it can be an abstract concept to understand and if you pair this with hesitation, then progress may move slower than expected. Being more connected is a wonderful thing, the exchange of information, research results, knowledge, resources, etc. are all factors that enable our mission.

At the same time, the hesitation or lack of interdisciplinary exchange is what hinders our mission at the same time.

From your perspective as an art historian, which items of data in the Artive database ignite the most interest in you, and why?

I don't think I can say that I have "favourite" objects that are on the database. I am happy to include every object that finds a place in our dataset with its own claim and its own story.

Of course, there are cases that make for a more "exciting" story, but every object on the database has its own merit. Most of the items that are on the database are objects that are easily moveable and therefore often fall into the paintings, sculptures and ceramics category.

I personally find objects used for religious and ritual purposes fascinating. The stories they tell are so rich with everything that makes us human – and the loss of context in the event of a theft or loot, the loss to the community is what we find must be restored and made just again.

What changes do you think the art world needs to make to facilitate a truly sustainable business model?

This is not an easy question but certainly one that has occupied the minds of a lot of individuals, organisations and companies over the years.

I personally believe that multiple things have to change if we are to look at the ecosystem that is the wider art world as a sustainable model.

What do we mean when we say "sustainable"?

Sustainability in this sense could mean how the "theoretical" coexists with the "practical", e.g. how the trade continues to thrive whilst making sure that no illicit objects are circulating the market.

How can due diligence for every piece that goes through auction or a private sale be secured, even on a small budget and a tight timeline?

There needs to be a paradigm shift in the way that due diligence is approached, in the way that we open ourselves up to interdisciplinary collaborations, the way we take responsibility for ethical practices, and the way we interpret information.

We have to change the mentality towards a more holistic approach to trading, collecting, researching and respecting our precious cultural heritage. This is unlikely to change without some changes in international legislations and a redistribution of funding.

There needs to be more financial support for the work that the public sector is doing.

How would the future look if we all realised that we're in this together? In many ways, you can see some parallels to the situation we find ourselves in globally at the moment.

We're all so much more connected and interdependent that we thought we were. And so I think this is a group effort and hard work, to shape a better, more sustainable future.