

INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIA JOIN TO HELP SAFEGUARD CULTURAL HERITAGE

NEW YORK JULY 10, 2003—SAFE (Saving Antiquities For Everyone) is a new nonprofit dedicated to raising public awareness of the critical issue of preserving our endangered cultural and artistic heritage.

The organization is an outgrowth of the ransacking of the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad in April of this year. “On three frightful days, some of the most precious remnants of early civilization were either stolen or destroyed,” notes Cindy Ho, an advertising art director and founder of SAFE.

“We call upon leaders of academia and the communications industries to work together in the creation of a multidisciplinary global public awareness campaign to inform the public why it is important to preserve antiquities,” Ms. Ho continued. SAFE intends to bring together professionals from communications media and advertising with experts in the academic and museum communities.

SAFE’s website, at www.safenow.net, provides information about the Iraq crisis, the problem of looting beyond Iraq, and the illicit antiquities trade. In addition, the website showcases SAFE's effort to recruit participants, and provides ideas for projects, a forum for discussion, and a resource library. With colorful images showing artifacts from the Baghdad Museum, the SAFE website aims to open up the line of communication between industry and academia.

SAFE launches on the heels of the recent confusion over the number of objects lost in Baghdad. “The fact is, the widely reported ‘33 lost objects’ do not take into account the thousands of pieces stolen from the museum’s storage galleries,” said SAFE member Cynthia Bates, veteran advertising planner and now graduate student in archaeology at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Worse, looting continues every day at archaeological sites across Iraq, and around the world including third-world countries, North America, and Europe.

Ms. Bates considers this even more devastating than the loss of the objects themselves, because it “destroys the archaeological context.” Looting makes it impossible for archaeologists to piece together ancient societies in a way that can tell us a coherent story of our ancestors and origins.

“What happened in Iraq is a wake-up call to finally get something done about this age-old problem before media attention evaporates,” said Cindy Ho. “What we propose is very ambitious. We’re dealing with a global problem that’s fueled by the black-market antiquities trade. It’s important to inform the general public that our collective cultural heritage is in danger.”

SAFE’s first brainstorming sessions are planned for Chicago as well as New York. For further information, please contact us at safeinfo@safenow.net, or Ruth Lerman at 917-496-6890.