



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **ASIAN ANTIQUITIES EXPERT INDICTED FOR WIRE FRAUD**

#### ***Charges Stem from Ongoing Federal Probe into Trafficking of Asian Antiquities***

LOS ANGELES – An internationally recognized expert on Asian antiquities is expected to make her initial appearance this afternoon in federal court in Seattle where she was arrested late Friday on a federal wire fraud charge stemming from an ongoing multi-agency investigation into the importation of plundered antiquities from Southeast Asia.

Roxanna M. Brown, 62, director of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum at Bangkok University in Thailand, was indicted by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles on Friday. The indictment alleges that she allowed her electronic signature to be used on appraisal forms that, for tax purposes, inflated the value of antiquities donated to several Southern California museums.

The charges against Brown come four months after federal agents executed search warrants at four Southern California museums and the Silk Roads Gallery in Los Angeles. According to the affidavit filed in connection with the search of Silk Roads, the gallery's owners, Jonathan and Cari Markell, used Brown's electronic signature on several occasions to falsify appraisal forms so that collectors could claim increased tax deductions for objects donated to museums.

The search warrant affidavit details how an undercover agent posing as a collector approached the Markells in 2006 about donating several Asian antiquities to museums for charitable tax deductions. Jonathan Markell allegedly told the

agent he normally charged \$1,500 for an item or items that would be appraised at just under \$5,000. Subsequently, the undercover agent met with the Markells at their home where he viewed a collection of Thai antiquities he had purchased from the gallery owners for \$1,500 in cash. According to the affidavit, the Markells showed the agent an appraisal form purportedly prepared by Brown in which she claimed she had inspected the objects and valued them at \$4,990. The items were ultimately donated to the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena.

*An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.*

The wire fraud charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

Brown was taken into custody by special agents with IRS-Criminal Investigation and the National Parks Service. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is also involved in the ongoing investigation. Brown's prosecution is being handled by the United States Attorney's Office for the Central District of California.

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