



## Society of Vertebrate Paleontology

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FEIN: 06-0906643

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September 1, 2021

Hôtel Drouot

9, rue Drouot

75009 Paris, France

Dear M. Ribeyre and M. Giquello,

We are writing to you in our capacity as members of the Executive Committee of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP: <http://vertpaleo.org/>), to express our concern about your forthcoming auction on Tuesday 6th October of the *Triceratops* specimen known as 'Big John'.

The SVP is a nonprofit scientific organization with approximately 2000 members that represents vertebrate paleontologists on an international scale. The Society's remit is to advance the science of vertebrate paleontology around the world. Your forthcoming auction of this well-known and iconic dinosaur skeleton has raised substantial concern in the international paleontological community. While normally we would call for the cancellation of the auction of this fossil, we understand that this is a legally mandated sale.

We therefore urge you to reconsider the sale of this important skeleton. Specifically, the sale should be restricted to bidders from institutions committed to curating specimens for the public good and in perpetuity, or those bidding on behalf of such institutions.

We outline our reasons as follows. Scientifically important vertebrate fossils are part of our collective natural heritage and deserve to be held in public trust. Scientific practice demands that conclusions drawn from the fossils should be verifiable: i.e., scientists must be able to reexamine, re-measure, and reinterpret them (such reexamination can happen decades or even centuries after their discovery). Fossil specimens that are sold into private hands are potentially lost to science. Even if made accessible to scientists, information contained within privately owned specimens and future access cannot be guaranteed, and therefore verification of scientific claims (the essence of scientific progress) cannot be performed. For these reasons, our Society's bylaws explicitly state that "The barter, sale, or purchase of scientifically significant vertebrate fossils is not condoned, unless it brings them into, or keeps them within, a public trust."



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The SVP also opposed the auction of a *Tyrannosaurus* by Christie's last autumn, an *Allosaurus* skeleton in Paris by the auction house Aguttes in April of 2018, and the auction of two further dinosaur specimens *Allosaurus* and *Camptosaurus* in November 2018. These auctions received strong criticism from the scientific community and scientific media outlets, for example:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/t-rex-sold-318-million-and-paleontologists-are-worried-180976071/>

<https://www.newsweek.com/dinosaur-auction-aguttes-paleontologists-960808>  
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05299-3>

<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.360.6393.1050>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/scientists-are-not-happy-about-private-sale-mysterious-dinosaur-skeleton-180969246/>

You will therefore understand our position, and we strongly urge you to reconsider the terms of sale of this important specimen. We are happy to provide further information pertaining to this matter should you so wish.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jessica M. Theodor'.

Jessica M. Theodor, Ph.D.  
SVP President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Lewis'.

Margaret Lewis, Ph. D.  
SVP Vice President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emily J. Rayfield'.

Emily J. Rayfield, Ph.D.  
Past SVP President