

## Tortoises removed from art museum

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The Aspen Art Museum's three iPad-mounted desert tortoises were removed from Aspen on Monday at the request of a local veterinarian concerned about the town's recent streak of cold and wet weather, according to the organization.

Dual iPads affixed to the African sulcata tortoises' shells also were removed as the animals were transported to a conservation site that will serve as their permanent home. Museum spokeswoman Sara Fitzmaurice did not disclose the state or region where the animals were taken, as the conservatory has requested anonymity, but she described it as a warm-weather location.

She also claimed that the decision was based solely on advice from veterinarian Dr. Elizabeth Kremzier and was not in response to public backlash against the art installation.

Tortoises Big Bertha, Gracie Pink Star and Whale Wanderer — who carried iPads displaying footage of area ghost towns in Cai Guo-Qiang's "Moving Ghost Town" — gained the attention of national media outlets in early August, when Aspen resident Lisbeth Oden started a petition calling for the removal of the Apple devices.

Oden's 6,500 petitioners inspired the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity to deliver its own petition, which garnered more than 12,000 signatures.

Also crying foul was the self-proclaimed "Salamander Commander" Andy Sabin, a New York businessman and Turtle Conservancy benefactor. Sabin, an East Hampton resident, owns Sabin

Metal Corp., which is the largest private refinery of silver, gold and platinum in the world, according to Hamptons magazine. He recently purchased ads in The Aspen Times asking the public to stop supporting and attending the museum until the iPads were removed.

"Cold blooded does not mean I do not feel pain or fear," the ad reads. "I am a life, and my life is precious ... I am a turtle."

"For whatever reason they did it, I'm happy they did the right thing," Sabin said in an interview Monday. "I'm excited that the tortoises can get to a climate more suitable than Aspen, and I'm happy the museum thought it was the right thing to do."

Fitzmaurice reiterated that the iPads were affixed to the tortoise shells using noninvasive silicone epoxy material without any drilling involved.

In a statement, the museum said it would never harm or abuse animals or "place any living thing in danger," noting Kremzier's involvement.

"In light of the current unseasonably cold and wet weather conditions forecasted for Aspen, (Kremzier) is recommending that the tortoises are relocated as of (Monday)," the statement said, adding that the new home was selected in consultation with the Turtle Conservancy.

The museum also noted that it stands by Guo-Qiang's installation, citing a number of similar projects involving live animals: Lucinda Childs' 1965 presentation "Spring Training" involved 30 desert turtles with flashlights taped to their backs; in 1974, Joseph Beuy caged himself with a live coyote; and in 2012, Darren Bader used live cats as sculptures.

“We respectfully acknowledge the perspectives of those who believe that live animals should simply never be used in artworks, despite the long history of artist projects that have included them,” the statement said.

Though the tortoises have been removed, the installation, its rooftop enclosure and its iPads will remain in Aspen through Oct. 5. The devices will continue showing ghost-town footage taken by the tortoises as well as new footage reflecting the animals point of view while on the rooftop.