



**V&A Collections Development Policy
Including Acquisition & Disposal Policy**

Victoria & Albert Museum
South Kensington,
London, SW7 2RL
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Appendix 6.o National Art Library Policy for the Development of Documentary Materials

Scope, history and standing of the National Art Library's documentary collections

The National Art Library (NAL) is one of the world's greatest libraries on the applied and decorative arts, and is one of the national collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). It covers the whole field of art, craft and design, and its holdings today number up to a million items. This policy governs the documentary materials acquired and managed by the NAL, that is, secondary works of a bibliographical nature, in print, electronic and other formats, and a variety of forms of documentation ranging from ephemera and recordings to documentary manuscripts.¹³ Works acquired as curatorial objects (bindings, artists' books, illustrated books, fine printing, books significant as historical objects, books remarkable for their design or material aspects, also illumination and calligraphy) are dealt with in Section 4 of the V&A Collecting Plan.

From its inception in 1837 and its establishment as the library in what became the South Kensington Museum after 1851 (from 1899 the V&A), the NAL collected on an international scale. The V&A's mission was to create a link between what the 19th century regarded as fine art and the applied arts that would improve the design of British products. The NAL set out to document the development of both areas, and key historic as well as contemporary works were acquired, forming the world-class foundation for the necessarily more selective acquisition programme that continues today. It has great strengths in catalogues of exhibitions, and of auction sales: of the latter it holds the largest individually catalogued – and therefore readily accessible – collection in the UK. In addition, the NAL has unique discrete special collections of a documentary nature, especially in relation to its own foundation and context, e.g. papers and library of Sir Henry Cole; publications of the Great Exhibition of 1851 and other international exhibitions, a complete file of publications issued by the V&A. Manuscript collections include letters, account books and other records of individual artists and the production and marketing of decorative and artistic objects. Extensive Information Files contain ephemeral documentation about artists from the late 20th century on. Two immensely important literary collections bequeathed in the 19th century by Alexander Dyce and John Forster are in some ways anomalous. However they not only bring scholars to the NAL and the V&A from all over Britain and the world, they contextualise their donors' art collections, which also came to the museum; furthermore, Dyce contains resources for the early history of theatre, and Forster – along with the manuscripts of nearly all Charles Dickens's novels – brought to the V&A one of its great treasures: the three notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci.

¹³ This document is heavily based on the first comprehensive collecting policy produced for the library in recent times, *The National Art Library: a policy for the development of the collections*, ed. Jan van der Wateren and Rowan Watson (National Art Library, V&A, 1993)

Cooperation

It is important to understand that the NAL has always had a concern for art documentation beyond what it could physically collect itself. The great *Universal catalogue of books on art* (London, 1870-75) aimed at compiling a complete collective bibliography of works on art held in all the great libraries of the western world. For purposes of reference and for its core areas, the NAL needs to collect very fully: beyond this, it considers that knowledge about the location of a work can be as useful to researchers as actually possessing it. Further, today this knowledge can often lead to swift delivery by electronic means, transforming the landscape in which collecting takes place. Today the NAL's holdings are discoverable internationally online, not only within its own catalogue but in many large 'union' catalogues, and also on the open internet.

The NAL aims to play a full part in developing frameworks within which there can be shared responsibility for maintaining full documentation about art, craft and design.

London is rich in libraries for the study of art, craft and design. There are various mechanisms for promoting co-operation in the matter of collection development. Among these ARLIS (The Art Libraries Society of Great Britain and Ireland), the Library Committee on the History of Art, and the Palaeography Co-operative Acquisition Committee for Facsimiles, Microforms, Electronic Resources. For books there is regular formal contact with the British Library, and as far as manuscripts and archives are concerned, the NAL has long had regular informal contact with the British Library Department of Manuscripts, with other national, university and local archive repositories and manuscript collections. Whenever collectable material becomes available; co-operation with the Historical Manuscripts Commission, now part of The National Archives, has also been regular. The NAL will always investigate the availability of expensive or specialist works (ie outside its core areas) in libraries within the M25 area and in the UK generally.

The NAL is an active contributor to the UK Research Libraries Network (RLUK), the body set up to lead provision of research information in the UK in the new electronic environment. On the European and international level the NAL catalogue is integrated into ARTLIBRARIES.NET which brings together all the significant art libraries across Europe, North America and Australasia.

Further arrangements for co-ordinating development strategies are being worked out with other libraries in London and beyond, whose subject areas overlap with those of the NAL. Such arrangements will develop as art libraries develop automated catalogues that allow the totality of holdings to be considered as a single, jointly managed resource.

The NAL has taken a leading role in the ARLIS survey of holdings of periodicals relating to art, craft and design, and in the development of the ARLIS.NET directory, which plots the strengths of libraries nationally in their coverage of art, craft and design. The NAL likewise supports initiatives to map the strengths of individual collections throughout the UK.

The NAL is also engaged in negotiations elsewhere to co-ordinate collecting. The library of Tate (Tate Modern and Tate Britain) is strong in post-1945 European art, and in 20th century painting generally. The library of the Royal Academy concentrates on works about academicians but also covers painting in Britain from the date of its establishment. The National Gallery Library collects to document European painting from the High Middle Ages to ca.1900 (British painting is covered to a very limited area), though in this case there is no immediate plan for automation. In all these cases, discussions take place to co-ordinate collection development activities.

The NAL's acquisition of British imprint books, which are acquired through legal deposit by the British Library (BL), is generally limited to those essential for reference and access to learning. The NAL and BL have set up a working group to maximise the value of collaboration.

The NAL is involved in the elaboration of principles for legal deposit of electronic publications in the UK, in the wake of recent legislation, and has a role in regard to those electronic publications that relate to art, craft and design.

Automated catalogues are, of course, crucial to the effectiveness with which any library can take its place in a distributed national collection, as are appropriate arrangements for access, retention policies and budgets sufficient to enable appropriate coverage of the agreed field.

The NAL and the V&A

Books and 'library-type materials' are additionally housed in various parts of the V&A. The Theatre Collection has its own library and shares reading room facilities with the NAL and Archive collections at Blythe House. The Museum of Childhood at Bethnal Green has a growing collection of works relating to its collections on childhood. The curatorial departments of the museum (Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics & Glass; Furniture, Textiles and Fashion; Asian) each have their own working libraries, as do the the Word & Image Department's collections of Prints and Drawings, Paintings and Photographs. These have been developed since the institution of the materials-based departments in 1908 and the geographically-based departments in the 1970s.

They represent 'working tools' for the subject area in question, and include works that refer to individual objects in their care and to the ways they wish to interpret them. Some specialist areas of the Museum's bibliographical holdings are developed within departments: technical and scientific works are selected and housed in the V&A's Conservation Department library, for instance.

The Museum's aim is for all its bibliographical resources to be included in the NAL's computer catalogue, so that access may be had to all from a single source. Technical measures are also in development museum-wide to provide integrated access to these documentary resources alongside object collections and archives.

Selection

Members of the Collection Development team share the responsibility for selecting across all subject areas of the collection and although the mechanism for selecting new stock is more fully described in procedure manuals, it is worth noting that selection is carried out in the most systematic a way as possible by reviewing a wide range of publishers' and booksellers' information. This information is increasingly in the form of electronic alerts making use of suppliers' ability to pre-select material according to agreed profiles. Selection methods are more fully described in procedure manuals. Publicity materials of publishers and booksellers are scrutinised by those with responsibility for various areas of collecting (by no means all supply details of works available grouped by subject), as are a large number of periodicals, and newsletters. The contribution of the expertise of V&A curators is maintained by liaison between the NAL and Museum departments. Suggestions from colleagues and from the public for additions to NAL stock are actively encouraged.

The National Art Library's collecting aims for documentary materials

The NAL collects to provide comprehensive documentation for the applied and decorative arts, and to support its role in national information provision on art and design. Its collecting will reflect its continuing commitment to scholars, and support information services to students and the diverse public

In the interests of effective use of resources and expertise, the NAL will utilize its relationship with the V&A, and focuses acquisition on what is published world-wide about the subjects represented by the V&A and its collections, that is to say the core subjects of the applied arts, craft and design. It will also continue to collect materials which allow study of the place of the fine arts and material culture in the societies represented in the V&A's collections; however, in these areas, co-operation with other libraries will be vital to ensure appropriate coverage nationally.

The present policy covers mainly new and recent publications; used and out-of-print books are collected only when of importance for the Museum's core subjects – there is no effort to retrospectively complete gaps when any title not in the NAL is known to be publicly accessible in other UK libraries, unless through donation.

Level of works collected

In gathering documentation for the V&A's core subjects and for the history and practice of art, craft and design generally, the NAL collects works which add to knowledge and serious debate. Elementary guides are not usually collected except by way of representative sample. The NAL also considers for acquisition works which help to represent the current range of style and format of material published on art and design, and acquires selectively those which have some elements that add significantly to the documentary resources of the Museum. Art publishing today is characterised at the popular level by books which repackage other works. Many such works are intended for the gift market. Publications of this sort are not normally collected. Instructional manuals for areas such as ceramics, metalwork, architecture or photography are

not normally collected except selectively when they throw light on popular practice or impact significantly upon the work of a major practitioner or movement.

Chronological and geographical range

For societies generally considered to be part of the 'Western tradition', the NAL's collecting focuses on the period from ca.400 CE to the present.

For Europe, works are collected selectively for the Greek and Roman periods, sufficient to document what had a subsequent impact upon Western art and material culture, that is to say Europe and North America. Works relating to Medieval and Renaissance Europe are acquired both for their relevance to the V&A's holdings and for contextual aspects that allow these objects to be effectively presented; where the publication of source materials is concerned (eg archives materials, chronicles), only those that relate to objects of a kind held by the V&A are bought. The same approach, but interpreted in a narrower fashion, governs works acquired for the Early Modern, Modern and Contemporary periods; here, the periods are covered in detail by many other London libraries. However, the needs of students on the V&A/RCA MA courses are borne in mind.

Ancient civilisations that have had a direct impact upon western culture are documented at a basic level, except in the case of East Asia (China, Japan, Korea), South and South-East Asia, and the Middle East – there are V&A departments dedicated to the art and material culture of these areas. Other libraries in London, staffed by librarians with specialist subject and language knowledge, cover these areas. Advice about what the NAL can acquire to supplement these libraries is regularly sought from V&A curators, though significant works are always acquired if they relate to V&A objects and the environments in which they were produced and consumed.

African, Latin-American, native American and Oceanic civilisations are covered at a minimal level, except for modern periods where contact with Western cultures was significant.

Languages

For subject areas that are central to the Museum's purpose, works are collected in all European languages, the criterion being the usefulness and value of the text and images. Subsequent translations into English are acquired for the more important works when there is considered to be no English equivalent, or when the translation includes important new matter.

Collecting strengths – introduction

This document uses the same terms to describe its collecting as the V&A's Collecting Plan (see Appendix 5), and with similar definitions.¹⁴ In order to make the present policy more useful outside the V&A, the terms chosen are those used by the ARLIS survey of collection strengths.

- Minimal Level – outline of the subject

¹⁴ These were developed by ARLIS for its survey of collections in UK libraries

- Basic Information Level – materials that serve to introduce and define a subject
- Study Level – supporting sustained independent study
- Research Level – materials that allow current research to be followed in some depth, without seeking to supply comprehensively published primary materials
- Comprehensive Level – materials that allow fullest research, with all significant works actively sought out.

The NAL's areas of collecting can be defined as:

'Access to Learning' Collections, with works that document, and maintain a current awareness in, the whole field of the fine arts, the applied and decorative arts, craft and design, both for the serious beginner and those with extended knowledge in some aspect of the field, including contextual and basic reference material.

Core Collections, with works on the applied arts and decorative arts that are central to the Museum's purpose and reflected in the names of its material-based curatorial departments (the geographically-based Asian Department contains similar classes of artefact). The Core Collections may be divided into those serving subjects for which there is a relatively small amount of publishing, and those characterised by publishing in bulk. In the latter case, strict criteria regarding quality, originality and usefulness have to be brought to bear in selection.

Access to Learning Collections

These provide a basic bibliography of art, craft and design, one that is international in scope. Included are works that allow an overview of the subject area, and allow access to the way that it is and has been studied, and to what can be termed 'the current state of knowledge'. A small part of these collections will be made available as a browsing library for both casual readers and those who come for concentrated study.

Under this rubric are collected:

- reference works for art, craft and design;
- encyclopaedias, bibliographical and subject-based dictionaries (in all languages);
- works about the societies which have produced the kinds of objects found in V&A collections;
- works that provide a historical or other framework for presenting V&A collections;
- works about past and contemporary societies (of an historical, anthropological, or sociological nature) which have influenced the way in which any period is considered;
- works about the way objects are marketed and consumed, from studies of the advertising industry to investigation of shopping and its history.

Core Subject Collections

The core subjects are those defined by the artefacts that form the foundation collections of the Museum. These subjects are reflected in the names of V&A material-based departments. The artefacts, of a similar kind, found in the geographically-based Asian Department, extend the

scope of the core subjects outside Western Europe and the Americas to India and South-East Asia, East Asia and the Middle East. The names of the branch museums similarly indicate another dimension to the core collections. The name of the material-based departments and branch museums indicate the following subject areas:

Sculpture (up to 1900)

Metalwork (including silver and jewellery)

Ceramics

Glass

Furniture

Textiles

Fashion

Word & Image (paintings, designs, photographs, prints and books)

Theatre Studies

Childhood

The word 'Art' today is largely conceived of as painting rather than the applied and decorative arts; painting and to a lesser extent sculpture attract most attention by publishers. The following account of subject areas in which the NAL collects makes a division between those subjects on which little is published, and those where selection is made according to the criteria discussed above (ie contributing to the advance of knowledge and supporting contemporary debate).

Works on the following subjects, whether considering historic, modern or contemporary periods, are collected to comprehensive level.

Applied and Decorative Arts (historic, modern and contemporary)

Ceramics

Furniture

Glass

Jewellery

Metalwork

Sculpture to ca.1900

Textiles

Every publication produced by, or in association with, the V&A itself, including gallery trails, exhibition guides, newsletters etc., is acquired, usually in two or more copies. Publicity material such as 'What's On' guides, course prospectuses etc. are not collected by the NAL (but are archived).

A great amount is published about the following subjects, a large proportion of it in glossy format, 're-packaged' and derivative in nature; strict quality controls are applied in these areas. Works in the following areas are collected on a selective basis to a comprehensive level.

Architecture

The NAL collects selectively works on architecture. Emphasis is placed on works that discuss the subject in the wider context of art history, reflecting the influence of architecture on artistic movements, ornament, design and the development of taste. Areas to be collected will include:

- works discussing architecture from a design point of view;
- architecture and interior design;
- architecture and artistic movements;
- philosophy of architecture;
- architecture and society;
- urban environment;
- monographs on major historic architects;
- monographs on contemporary architects who have had a wider influence on contemporary design.

The Book

For policy on collecting *examples* of the art of the book, see the V&A Collecting Plan, section 4. Works on these subjects are collected to comprehensive level when they relate to design aspects rather than the actual technology of production. Catalogues and bibliographies are collected only when they relate to the holdings of the NAL.

Contemporary Art (from painting to installations)

Works on applied and decorative arts that can be called contemporary are collected comprehensively. It is not possible, in practice, to cut off the fields of design and craft from the contemporary practice of art, so that works about current activities comprehended by the notion of 'art' are collected to study level, though works that relate to objects and activities within the V&A are collected to research level.

Works about the practitioners who condition the contemporary art scene across the world are collected to study level, the emphasis being upon those which are likely to have a permanent value and which are significant indicators of the 'art scene' as a whole. Works on artists who use video, digital media and holography are collected selectively to support the V&A's holdings of such materials. No attempt is made to document the entirety of contemporary art practice.

Design (historic, modern and contemporary)

General

The NAL collects to a comprehensive level material covering all aspects of design, from graphic and industrial design to product and interior design. However, the collection focuses primarily on designers and design movements that have had a significant influence on the decorative arts. Particular emphasis is placed on design principles, elements, styles and decorative motifs, as well as design as it is experienced by urban populations in the industrialised world, from guidance systems in transport to window dressing.

Graphic Design

Works are collected to a comprehensive level on the subject both as an art form and as a marketing tool, particularly in the field of publishing and packaging; includes promotional design, advertising, packaging, editorial design and motion graphics

Interior Design

Works are collected to a comprehensive level on the history and current practice of interior design in all its aspects, particularly those on successful designers and practices, and materials that have had major influences on the way it is, and has been, carried out.

Landscape Design

Works collected very selectively, as an adjunct to works on architecture and interior design.

Product design

Works on the background of commonly-available products in industrialised societies, from the conception to the marketing and distribution, are collected to research level. In some cases this provides documentation for objects held by the V&A, in others it provides a surrogate for the 'original'.

Production and TV design

Works are collected very selectively: only major works that relate this area to the wider field of design.

Fashion

The NAL's collecting, to a comprehensive level, focuses on the theory and history of costume, trends and periods, key designers and contemporary fashion. Particular attention is paid to the business aspects of marketing fashion, and to the fashion 'counter-culture' in industrialised societies. Accounts of commercial and student fashion shows are also collected. Material about accessories, makeup/body art, hairstyles and stage costume is collected to study level only.

Painting (historic and modern)

Painting, in Western society, has always served to define notions of art; it is a subject of major importance to a museum of Art and Design that defines itself as a prime source of inspiration for the creative industries and the study of visual culture. The practice of painting has always been related to the need to furnish interiors and provide spaces with consciously or unconsciously constructed messages relevant to the environment in which they operated.

The V&A houses a major collection of paintings, works given partly in support of its educational mission and partly to form the nucleus of a Collection of British Painting. When the Museum was founded its goal was to apply art to the products of industry, and paintings were a major resource for study. The V&A houses the National Collection of Painting in Watercolour, so that works on this subject are collected at a comprehensive level, as are works on fresco and mosaics, both revived in the 19th century for decorative purposes.

The NAL collects works on painting to study level, but aims to be more comprehensive in the following cases:

- works on painters and movements represented in its collections;
- works on painters who had or have a particular significance for interior design or for their engagement with industry;
- works on painters influential on the way the arts in general were seen and discussed at any particular period, particularly those associated with movements that encompassed the applied and decorative arts;
- works on techniques that document major methods of painting practice, methods exemplified in V&A objects; these include illumination, wall painting and fresco, tempera, oil-painting, acrylics.

Photography

The NAL collects to support the V&A's collection of Photography as Art. It collects to research level works on the history of photography. It collects works about or containing the images of photographers represented in the V&A's collection, and a restricted number of such works about other photographers, according to their perceived importance in the field.

Works about the applications of photography to industry, in particular photo-reportage, are collected to research level (see also Graphic Design).

Formats

General

Works are collected in the form of monographs, periodicals and other formats including documentary manuscripts, and multimedia publications. Although new stock is predominantly in print format electronic resources are being increasingly acquired, these include: CD, DVD, online subscriptions and most recently e-books.

Sales Catalogues

The catalogues produced by the major auction houses in Europe and North America are added to the NAL's stock. Others are added to stock when they concern objects that relate to those held in the Museum.

Exhibition catalogues.

For the most part, these are treated like monographs and added to stock on the basis of their significance for subjects served by the NAL. The NAL actively seeks out catalogues of exhibitions from a number of galleries. By an arrangement with the BL, British exhibition catalogues received as part of the Legal Deposit scheme which would not normally be individually catalogued by the BL are passed to the NAL, where they are catalogued to agreed standards and held as a marked collection on behalf of the BL. The BL retains all the published catalogues of some 60 galleries and museums according to a list agreed with the NAL.

Periodicals

Much of the documentation collected by the NAL comes in the form of periodical publications. The range of titles is constantly monitored and compared to that of other libraries in London and beyond, with a view to minimising duplication. New titles are normally added to stock only when the title concerns a core V&A subject, though a decision is always made in the light of the title's availability in London.

Information Files

Ephemera and minor publications that relate to individual artists, designers and craftspeople, or to events or organisations that have significance for the Museum's core subjects, are kept in Information Files. These are described on the computer catalogue in simple records (usually no more than a name, personal or institutional). They also include statements by the makers of objects acquired by the department. This mechanism allows documentation that is not published in the conventional sense of the term to be compiled and made available. Procedures for making up such files are intended to ensure that only material that does not duplicate what is easily available in hard copy or automated format is included.

The Information Files include material compiled by individuals outside the Museum, the most notable example being the working files of Edward Lucie-Smith, acquired by the NAL in 1991. Some curatorial departments of the V&A send material for the NAL's Information Files in order to make publicly available documentation gathered in the course of the management of their collections.

Ephemera

There are twice-yearly trawls of ephemera (16 June and 16 December) carried out by Museum staff to document the design environment of the metropolitan area. Magazines are also trawled in this way, selection being based on the notoriety of the titles in question. The sampling approach allows titles to be represented in the collection – and thus available for display purposes in Museum galleries – without the drain of resources that a full subscription would entail.

On-line resources

An increasing amount of material is available on-line for subscription. Facilities currently subscribed to are listed on the NAL's website. These include some major reference works, for example the *Grove Dictionary of Art* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and also facilities such as *Art Sales Index* and *Design and Applied Arts Index*. The trend in publishing is for journals to offer on-line as well as hard-copy versions, for the time being for a very low cost. In these cases, an on-line version is taken with the hard copy version. Every effort, particularly in consortia with other libraries, is made to access digitized material relevant to the collecting and study areas supported by the NAL.

Trade Literature

The NAL builds upon 19th century acquisitions of trade literature (catalogues of retailers and manufacturers, brochures, promotional literature) by pro-active collecting of contemporary trade literature, to a research level.

Documentary manuscripts

Manuscripts such as diaries, recipe books, inventories, individual letters, small collections of correspondence, are acquired when they are deemed to add significantly to what is known about the areas to which they relate. Larger collections of manuscript material are handled by the V&A's Archive of Art and Design (AAD). In each case, acquisition is made in close consultation with Museum curators, other interested public collections and with the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

Retention and De-accessioning

Most works that enter the NAL join the V&A's permanent collections. First editions of works are not de-accessioned when a second edition is published. However, some common reference works – directories in particular – may be de-accessioned when a new edition appears, though a number are retained when the contents are considered to have an on-going value. When works appear in translation, the preferred version will be that in the original language, though English language versions will also be collected for core subjects. Damaged works are de-accessioned in cases where it is cheaper to replace the volume in question with a new copy. All works are de-accessioned according to the V&A's established procedures.

National Art Library

Word & Image Department

Victoria and Albert Museum