

# Collections Information and Access Policy

## Victoria and Albert Museum

2019

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## Contents Page:

<b>1.Purpose of Policy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Documentation</b>	<b>3-5</b>
<b>2.1 Principles</b>	<b>3-4</b>
<b>2.2 Acquisitions</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.3 Cataloguing</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.4 Location and Audit Control</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>3. Access</b>	<b>5-7</b>
<b>3.1 Principles</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.2 Galleries</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.3 Temporary Exhibitions</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3.4 Reference Collections</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3.5 Information Services and Enquiries</b>	<b>6-7</b>
<b>4. Photography and Filming</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Due Diligence</b>	<b>7-8</b>
<b>6. Management of rights in in-copyright works in the museum collection</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<b>7. Indemnity and Insurance</b>	<b>9-10</b>
<b>8. Lending</b>	<b>11-12</b>
<b>8.1 Principles</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>8.2 Long Term Lending</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>8.3 Touring Exhibitions</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>9. Borrowing</b>	<b>12</b>

# 1. Purpose of Policy

- 1.1 The National Heritage Act, 1983, established the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum to care for, preserve and add items to the collections, exhibit them to the public, make them available for study/research, promote enjoyment of art, craft and design, provide education, undertake research and to preserve/increase the utility of the collections.
- 1.2 The Board delegates authority to the Director to take operational decisions and to implement the obligations laid down by the Act.
- 1.3 The V&A's mission is to be recognised as the world's leading museum of art, design and performance. And to enrich peoples' lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience.
- 1.4 This Policy is part of the V&A's Collections Management Policy framework, which consists of:
  - Collections Development Policy, 2019
  - Collections Information and Access Policy, 2019
  - Collections Care and Conservation Policy 2019
  - Loans Policy and Conditions, 2018
- 1.5 The V&A Collections comprise Objects and Works of Art, Library Collections held by the National Art Library and Archive collections held by the V&A as an appointed place of deposit under the Public Records Act 1958.
- 1.6 The Collections Information and Access Policy supports the museum's ambitions and responsibilities in relation to collections information and access, in line with the Museum's Strategic Objectives and in proportion to resources available.

## 2. Documentation

### 2.1 Principles

- 2.1.1 The Museum's collections include both physical and digital collection items. Information about the collections and associated intellectual property is key to enabling access to the collections.
- 2.1.2 The Museum is committed to creating and maintaining good quality and up to date information about collection items, which conforms to appropriate national and international standards wherever possible.
- 2.1.3 This enables the Museum to account for and enable access to all items for which the Museum is legally responsible: collection items, loans to the V&A, items on deposit, unaccessioned and previously undocumented items. Documentation must be available for inspection by the Museum's auditors.
- 2.1.4 The Museum is committed to ensuring that the Collections Systems are the primary tool for creating and managing collections information and items for which the Museum is legally responsible.
- 2.1.5 All staff responsible for recording collections documentation must receive training in the relevant data standards and appropriate Collections Systems, to enable the accurate input and

retrieval of collections information. All data shall be traceable through an audit trail as to who created or edited it.

2.1.6 The security of the Collections Systems and back up procedures are set out in the Museum's IT Policy, 2015. The Museum is committed to regular reviews of the Collections Systems to ensure they are fit for purpose and that collection information is appropriately safeguarded against potential future obsolescence of the systems.

## 2.2 Acquisitions

2.2.1 An accession record must be created for all items added to the V&A collections describing each item, or group of items, listing them by unique identifying number. The Keepers are responsible for the accession record of each collection item in the appropriate Collections System.

2.2.2 A printed accessions record will be produced annually on archival quality paper which records the formal acceptance of items into the Museum's collections and is authorised by the acquiring Keeper.

## 2.3 Cataloguing

2.3.1 A catalogue record adhering to agreed Museum-wide data standards should be created as soon as possible after the item has been accessioned. The history of each collection item and a record of any activities associated with it must be kept. Appropriate indexes to catalogue records should be provided. The Keepers are responsible for the catalogue record of each collection item in the appropriate Collections System.

2.3.2 Details of gaps and backlogs of documentation are maintained by each collection, where relevant. A plan to complete cataloguing gaps is in place and progressed as resources permit.

2.3.3 The Museum aims to create a digital image of each collection item or group of items. All new acquisitions should be photographed by a Museum photographer or have a 'record shot' taken by a member of staff. The image should be stored in the appropriate Collections System. The exceptions are archives, books or other large documentary collections where a representative image may be taken.

## 2.4 Location Control and Audit

2.4.1 The Collections Systems are the Museum's primary inventory systems. The Keepers are responsible for the inventory level record of each collection item.

2.4.2 The inventory level record should meet the accountability information standard, containing the legal status, an accurate and up to date location and sufficient information for identification for each item that the Museum is legally responsible for. The inventory for museum objects and archive collections is recorded in Index+ (which retains a history of moves), a separate system is used for Library collections (which holds the current location).

2.4.3 Entry and exit documentation is maintained for all collection items, or group of items, and other items that the Museum is legally responsible for, recording the source of the item, the terms of receipt and the location of the item.

2.4.4 No item movement is complete until it is recorded on the appropriate Digital Asset Management System.

2.4.5 Specified areas of the collections are systematically audited annually and remedial action taken by the Keeper of the relevant collection following the identification of missing or wrongly-documented items.

2.4.6 The Collections Management Department is responsible for carrying out Spot Checks and Audits to verify the physical presence of items in locations as recorded on the appropriate Collections System and for the audit of temporarily located (primarily for exhibition and display) objects.

## 3. Access

### 3.1 Principles

3.1.1 The Museum is committed to offering the widest and most appropriate forms of access to its collections, expertise, facilities and services. The Museum is actively working to overcome any physical, intellectual, cultural, attitudinal, digital and financial barriers, through integrating equality and diversity into everything that we do.

3.1.2 The V&A champions free access to collections and collections information, through some exhibitions and displays, loans, learning programme, publications, website, data sharing projects, and via our study rooms (where no intellectual property or other restrictions apply), in order to promote knowledge and unlock creativity.

3.1.3 The Museum presents a broad range of exhibitions and displays, which reflect many cultures and artistic practices. The V&A defines target audiences and develops interpretation, informed by evaluation, to suit these audiences.

3.1.4 The Museum delivers a wide range of learning programmes which are developed to suit different levels of prior knowledge, cultural and educational backgrounds, interests and learning styles.

3.1.5 The Museum will manage the competing demands of access and long term collection care in accordance with the Collections Care and Conservation Policy.

3.1.6 The Museum champions digital access to our collections both through the Museum's own website and through provision of tools to allow collections information to be accessible to heritage data aggregation projects.

### 3.2 Galleries

3.2.1 Information about items on display in galleries is provided through labels, wall texts and other contextual and complementary information.

3.2.2 As galleries are refurbished electronic multimedia information services are provided, where appropriate, giving access to information about the items and themes within the galleries and access to information about other items.

## 3.3 Temporary Exhibitions

Temporary exhibitions allow items not normally on display in the galleries to be shown to the public. This also allows items to be displayed in different contexts and alongside items borrowed from other collections.

## 3.4 Reference Collections

3.4.1 The V&A collections consist of 'Display collections' and 'Reference collections'. Display collections are suitable for longer-term gallery display. Reference collections include works of art on paper and other organic objects such as lacquer, books and textiles, which can only be displayed for short periods for conservation reasons, as they are sensitive to light.

3.4.2 Collection items not on display can be viewed by making an appointment with the relevant collection, subject to resources and the condition of the collection item. Some items can be seen in dedicated study rooms (it is not necessary to make an appointment for those marked\*). Reference collections are also used in handling sessions.

The list below represents an indicative list of study rooms available at the time of the publication of the policy. When collections are inaccessible through a named study room for operational reasons, the reasons for and duration of the removal of access will be communicated with museum users in advance. As new study rooms become available across the V&A's multiple sites these will be publicised.

- Ceramics Study Room (South Kensington)
- National Art Library (South Kensington)\*
- Prints and Drawings Study Room (South Kensington)\*
- South and South-East Asian Study Room (South Kensington)
- Archive of Art & Design (Blythe House Archive & Library Reading Room)
- Beatrix Potter Collections and Children's Book Collections (Blythe House Archive & Library Reading Room)
- The Clothworkers' Centre for Textiles and Fashion Study and Conservation (Blythe House)
- Theatre and Performance Collections (Blythe House Archive & Library Reading Room)
- V&A Archive (Blythe House Archive & Library Reading Room)
- Museum of Childhood Study Room (Bethnal Green)

3.4.3 Appropriate levels of access are monitored and approved by the Keeper and staff of the collection, who have the right to refuse or terminate access at their discretion in order to protect the collections.

3.4.4 Access to collections at the Museum of Childhood is monitored and controlled by the Creative and Skills Director, Museum of Childhood.

3.4.5 Facilities may be provided for close inspection of collection items, providing it is justified and the item is not placed at risk. Special arrangements will be considered for visitors with disabilities.

## 3.5 Information Services and Enquiries

3.5.1 The Museum provides online access to the collections and collections information through the Museum website and online collection catalogues, which are updated regularly with new

information as it becomes available. It is the Museum's expectation that this form of access to information will be the first line of enquiry for visitors.

3.5.2 The V&A 'Search the Collections' site provides free access to collection records and images. Content is made freely available, where no rights or data restrictions apply, to third parties, subject to the Terms and Conditions of the site.

3.5.3 Images for commercial purposes which fall outside the terms and conditions of 'Search the Collections' may be supplied and licensed through V&A Images.

3.5.4 More detailed collections information is provided through catalogues (printed or unpublished) and through V&A collections registers and indexes.

3.5.5 The Museum will answer enquiries regarding its collections in order to supplement information provided elsewhere.

3.5.6 The Museum will ensure that all information is processed in accordance with relevant statutory requirements, including the General Data Protection Regulations and Freedom of Information Act.

3.5.7 The Museum provides a free service, subject to resources, whereby curatorial staff provide an opinion on items for which it has the relevant expertise.

## 4. Photography and Filming

4.1 Visitors can take photographs or videos of V&A collections on display in galleries for personal use. Flash photography is permitted but visitors may not use a tripod, monopod or supplementary video lighting.

4.2 No unauthorised general filming is permitted in galleries for data protection and intellectual property reasons.

4.3 Photography and video may be restricted in special exhibitions, selected galleries, the V&A shop or of items on loan to the V&A. Permission is required from the owner and copyright restrictions may apply.

4.4 Visitors to the National Art Library may make copies for personal use, e.g. research, for a non-commercial purpose or private study. The Library also provides a copying service on request.

## 5. Due Diligence

5.1 Guidelines issued by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) define due diligence as the necessary precaution that museums take to ensure that they acquire, borrow or lend only ethically acceptable items and reject items that may have been looted or illegally exported.

5.2 The Director of the V&A has overall responsibility for ensuring the appropriate due diligence procedures are carried out.

5.3 The application of due diligence procedures are assigned primarily to the collection curator or the exhibition curator(s). Where appropriate, further guidance and advice will be sought from additional curatorial and specialist consultants, such as colleagues from within the V&A, other national museums, academic institutions, and major auction houses as well as consulting art loss databases.

- 5.4 The Museum will not acquire or borrow any item unless it is satisfied that the owner/lender has full title and that they or any agent acting for them has full legal authority to enter into an agreement with the Museum. The V&A will not proceed should there be any doubt over the legality of ownership, removal from the country of origin, or entry into the UK.
- 5.5 Records and documentation of due diligence are to be retained: all relevant correspondence, details of published information, signed loan agreements, lender's evidence, and photographic evidence is to be kept on permanent files, in accordance with Spectrum standards and under direction from the National Archives on stewardship of public records.

## 6. Management of rights in in-copyright works in the museum collection

### 6.1. Introduction

6.1.1 In order to enable and develop the V&A's public access remit and commercial activities, the Museum is required to effectively assess and manage risks associated with making its collections available, and to ensure all staff are equipped with the tools required to address copyright.

6.1.2 The V&A Collections span art, design and performance, containing creative works, which will be or will have been protected by copyright. These include a number of works for which rights were not cleared when they were acquired. For some of these works, the rights holder cannot be identified or found.

6.1.3 The V&A regards the majority of uncleared works, or works for which the rights holder cannot be identified, in its collections as being low risk. These are works for which the copyright or related right is likely to have expired or where the rights holder cannot be traced.

6.1.4 A smaller proportion of these works are regarded as being higher risk.

6.1.5 The Collections Management Department is responsible for publishing internal guidance on assessing whether a work is low risk or high risk.

### 6.2. Management of Risk in publication of existing works

6.2.1 Low risk works. The V&A publishes all images which are expected to be low risk online through the Search the Collections database and V&A website.

6.2.2 Unidentified risk works. The V&A has an appetite for risk which allows the publication of images for which the risk level has not yet been identified online at low resolution. V&A staff will not actively perform a risk assessment for these works before publication online.

6.2.3 Identified high risk works. The V&A does not publish images online for works actively identified as being high risk. The V&A will also remove any image published which has been actively identified as high risk.

6.2.4 The management of risk is supported by the V&A's Copyright Statement and Notice and Take Down Policy and takes into account relevant UK Copyright law.

## 6.3 Reduction of risk in new acquisitions and loans

6.3.1 V&A staff will seek to clear rights to use all works acquired by the Collections and loaned for the purpose of exhibition at the point that the acquisition or loan is agreed.

6.3.2 V&A staff identifying images for uses which support the public programme will attempt to clear rights before use. In the event that rights cannot be identified, V&A staff will perform a risk assessment relating to the copyright before use. Bullets and a numbering style have been included.

## 7. Indemnity and Insurance

### 7.1 V&A Collection items on V&A premises

Collection items are not covered by Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) whilst on V&A premises or in transit for purposes other than loan and the Museum may not cover them by commercial insurance. The Museum will therefore pay particular attention to risk management in all collections management activities.

### 7.2 V&A Collection items on Loan

7.2.1 Collection items lent for the public benefit to UK borrowers may be covered under the terms of GIS, provided that the Registrar is satisfied that standards of care, security and fire prevention will, as far as is reasonably practicable, ensure the safety of the objects on loan. This will be achieved by: ensuring that the security of the borrower is consistent with the V&A's security standards, consultation with the V&A's Designated Security Officer (DSO), Loan Agreement, the use of fine art agents and consultation with the Security Advisor. Where these standards are met, borrowers will be asked to accept minimum liability for the loan, and may be required to insure against this. Items lent to other national museum bodies and government departments will be lent under the same conditions, but at the V&A's own risk.

7.2.2 Items lent to venues which do not qualify for GIS, or another country's indemnity scheme, will be covered by commercial insurance. It is the responsibility of the Registrar to ensure that any insurance or international indemnity provides the appropriate level of cover and that care, security and fire prevention standards are met.

### 7.3 Items on Loan to V&A

7.3.1 The Museum applies on an individual basis for GIS for items valued over the minimum specified, where these are eligible for such cover. In return, the Museum will take the same reasonable care of such items as it would of its own collections. In particular, the Registrar will vet all transport arrangements in order for GIS to apply.

7.3.2 The Registrar is responsible for the annual reporting of contingent liabilities to DCMS and for liaison with ACE regarding the interpretation of the GIS and any other matters related to loans.

# 8 Lending

## 8.1 Principles

8.1.1 Under the National Heritage Act 1983, the Board of Trustees may lend, subject to the provisions of the Act, any object the property which is vested in the Board. The Board may also lend items from restricted collections.

8.1.2 The conditions under which the Museum will lend items are stated in the V&A's Loan Policy, Standard Loan Agreement or Loan Hire Agreement for Touring Exhibitions.

8.1.3 The loan of any item with a valuation of £1,000,000 or over, or of a sensitive nature, or which forms part of a collection subject to restrictive conditions, requires the approval of the Board of Trustees on the recommendation of the Trustees' Collections Committee.

8.1.4 The authorisation of the loan of individual items up to £1,000,000 in value is delegated by the Board of Trustees to the Director and by the Director to the Keepers. The Keeper's decision is informed by advice from departments responsible for the preparation of the items for loan. The Collections Group is responsible for reviewing loan requests that are to be refused. Where an item is on display in a gallery, the Keeper in charge of that gallery is consulted.

8.1.5 The following criteria will be used to assess a loan request:

- the physical suitability of the item for transport and display;
- the degree of risk surrounding the loan and the moderation to the Museum's satisfaction;
- the effects of the loan on the interests of the V&A's own visiting public;
- the resources required to make the item available;
- the suitability of the borrowing institution;
- any prior commitments for the item (e.g. planned exhibitions, research, learning, publication or conservation activities);
- the status of the exhibition to which the item would be lent, the item's significance to the theme and purpose of the exhibition; and
- the formal final loan request having been received with sufficient time to prepare the items. This is a minimum of 9 months for both UK and overseas borrowers.

8.1.6 From time to time special restrictions may be placed on certain collections or categories of items, linked to V&A projects: for example, to preserve a newly-opened gallery as installed for a period after opening, or where items are inaccessible due to storage or gallery projects.

8.1.7 The Museum will normally expect the borrower to cover all the associated costs of lending. These include conservation work, mounting, framing, photography, packing, transport, couriers and installation. Non-UK borrowers will be asked to pay an administration fee, calculated on the basis of the number of items requested.

8.1.8 The Museum will determine whether to courier items sent on loan according to the following considerations:

- the rarity, significance and fragility of the item
- any special handling or installation requirements

- the anticipated professionalism of staff at the venue
- the number of items in the consignment
- the value of the consignment.

8.1.9 The Registrar is responsible for the administration of loans, maintaining a central record of all lending and ensuring the conformity of arrangements to an agreed standard.

8.1.10 Photographic image/s of every item lent will be held by the Museum.

8.1.11 The Museum will assess the level of threat and vulnerability throughout the duration of the loan. In consultation with the V&A's DSO, the Museum will understand the level of risk that the Museum is prepared to tolerate and implement proportionate security controls to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

## 8.2 Long-Term Lending

8.2.1 The Museum allows lending for longer periods as a means of making parts of its collections not on display more widely available to the public by supporting permanent displays in other institutions.

8.2.2 The loan will normally be reviewed every three years. At the review, valuations will be updated, object location confirmed and confirmation sought that the appropriate insurance or indemnity arrangements are in place and that the conditions of loan continue to be satisfied.

8.2.3 Borrowers will be asked to complete an annual audit and send a report to the Registrar confirming the location and valuation of all borrowed items.

## 8.3 Touring Exhibitions

8.3.1 A 'touring exhibition' is a complete exhibition, or a major part of one, initiated and prepared by the Museum and including significant information, in the form of label texts, information panels and catalogue entries, in addition to items from the collections and items borrowed from external lenders. Arrangements for such touring exhibitions are individually negotiated.

8.3.2 The administration and delivery of touring exhibitions is the responsibility of the Head of Exhibitions and Loans who will advise the Director in order to seek, as necessary, the agreement of the Board of Trustees, on the recommendation of the Trustees' Collections Committee.

8.3.3 The Creative and Skills Director is responsible for the administration and delivery of Museum of Childhood touring exhibitions.

8.3.4 The Director of the Theatre and Performance Collections is responsible for the administration and delivery of Theatre and Performance display touring exhibitions

## 9 Borrowing

9.1 Under the National Heritage Act 1983, the Board of Trustees may borrow items from other public institutions or private individuals for the purposes of temporary exhibitions, displays, study, or for long-term display in galleries.

- 9.2 Authority for the acceptance of long-term loans is delegated by the Board to the Director and in turn to the Director of Collections and Keepers who should be consulted about all loans other than those for exhibitions. It is the policy of the Museum to accept loans that will be used for temporary exhibitions or displays or display and study only.
- 9.3 All loans taken into the Museum are governed by specific terms and conditions included in a Loan Agreement that makes clear the respective responsibilities and rights of owner and Museum.
- 9.4 Responsibility for the overall administration of incoming loans, including those for temporary exhibition or displays, rests with the Head of Exhibitions and Loans. Detailed arrangements for receipt, registration and indemnity are the responsibility of the Registrar in consultation with the relevant collection or with the Exhibition Department as appropriate.
- 8.5 The exercise of judgement on the suitability of an item to be borrowed by the Museum for display or study rests in the first instance with the Keeper of the relevant collection. In the case of loans for temporary exhibitions or displays the exercise of judgement will rest with the curator of the temporary exhibition and Head of Exhibitions and Loans.
- 8.6 No item should be borrowed unless it is in a suitable condition to travel and be displayed or used for purposes as defined in the Act.
- 8.7 No conservation should normally be carried out on items borrowed for temporary exhibitions or displays unless agreed with the lender in writing in advance. In the event of unforeseen deterioration or emergency the permission of the owner must be obtained, preferably in writing, before any treatment is carried out.
- 8.8 A photograph must be taken of any incoming item on arrival at the Museum.
- 8.9 All long term loans are reviewed every three years and should be returned if it is no longer possible or appropriate for the objects to be on display or otherwise accessible to the public.