

Acquisition and disposal policy

Victoria and Albert Museum

2019

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1. Scope of the Collections and Policy

1.1. Object Types

The V&A is the national museum of art and design. It collects objects and archives illustrating and documenting the international history of art and design as exemplified in, amongst others, the fields of architecture, books, ceramics, designs (including digital designs), drawings, fashion, furniture, glass, jewellery, manuscripts, metalwork, miniatures, paintings, performing arts, photography, prints, product design, sculpture, silver, tapestries, textiles, toys, watercolours and woodwork. In acquiring objects, the Museum is influenced by its existing collections, but it must always be alive to the possibility of acquiring new types of object resulting from technological and social developments. The Board of Trustees requires that collecting priorities for the Museum's collections will be presented from time to time for approval.

1.2. The Collection Departments of the Museum

- Asia
- Design, Architecture and Digital
- Furniture, Textiles and Fashion
- Museum of Childhood
- Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass
- Theatre & Performance
- Word & Image

1.3. Geographical Boundaries

Objects are collected from several major artistic traditions. The Museum does not normally collect pre-European settlement material from the Americas and Australasia. The Museum does not collect historic material from Oceania and Africa south of the Sahara.

1.4 Chronological Boundaries

Objects from Europe are collected from 300 AD onwards. There are no time restrictions on objects from East, South and South-East Asia. Pre-Islamic objects from the Middle East are not acquired except for textiles. The V&A continues to be a dynamic force in acquiring contemporary objects from all cultures and it is the policy of the Board of Trustees to allocate money from both the central and department funds to contemporary objects.

1.5 Technological Boundaries

Objects with mechanical and/or electronic parts are collected. They are intended to chart the history of design and its interplay with technology. For contemporary material, the museum's interest in technology runs beyond the formal appraisal of the physical object and encompasses the design and functionality of the software and hardware design, and in addition, the V&A also acquires born-digital objects of art and design. It is important that objects of these types are operable or that the experience of them in action is preserved.

1.6 The V&A and other British Institutions

The Board of Trustees recognises that the national heritage is preserved in a network of British museums and other institutions in the public and private sectors. The museum will take account of the collecting policies of

other museums and organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, about the appropriate placement of an object, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

It sees its responsibility not only in acquiring objects for the V&A but also in stimulating and supporting other institutions to acquire objects. It does this through a network of formal and informal agreements with other bodies, including the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund. The Board of Trustees will consider collaborative purchases with other museums.

Government, external bodies and funders, other museums and organisations draw on the significant expertise which V&A staff have in the broad range of the museum's international collections.

1.7 National Art Library

Acquisitions and Disposals from the National Art Library are documented separately in the National Art Library Documentary Collection Development Policy

2. Acquisition

2.1 Under the National Heritage Act 1983, the Board of Trustees "may acquire (whether by purchase, exchange or gift) any objects which in their opinion it is desirable to add to their collections".

Criteria for Acquisition

2.2 To qualify for inclusion in the collections an object must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

Aesthetic

An object should be of great beauty or aesthetic significance; it should be excellent in design or present a solution to a problem of design; it should be a major example of type of design or art collected by in the Museum.

Technical

An object should illustrate a significant development of a specific technique; it should exemplify innovation and/or excellence of craftsmanship or manufacture; it should increase the understanding of the method of construction or making of a particular class of collected objects; it should illuminate an aspect of design process.

Historical

An object should contribute significantly to the history of the art and design collected by the Museum; it should be a datable work by an important designer, artist or workshop; it should have a significant provenance; it should be associated with an important social, cultural or political event; it should provide evidence of the workings (design, production, marketing) of a specific industry and/or trade; it should be or have been regarded as particularly significant for reasons of design, style or technique.

Documentary

An object should throw light on other objects in the collections; it should provide a record of a way of life and the role design plays in society; it should reflect the taste of a certain period in an especially evocative manner.

Completion of Objects

The Museum aims to acquire any object or parts of objects which complete an object already in the collections.

2.3 To qualify for inclusion in the Theatre and Performance collections artefacts should document the history, craft or practice of the performing arts in Britain.

2.4 To qualify for inclusion in the collections of the V&A Museum of Childhood artefacts should illustrate child-focused, human-centred design.

2.5 It is the responsibility of each Keeper to produce and maintain a document detailing the scope of the collection for which he/she is responsible and describing the current basis for acquiring further objects for the Museum.

2.6 Acquisitions outside the stated collecting policy will be made only in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the Museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

Legal and Ethical Boundaries for Acquisition

2.7 The Museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.

2.6 The Museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and the use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard.

2.7 The Museum will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object unless it is satisfied that it can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

2.8 In particular, the Museum will not acquire any object unless it is satisfied that the object has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned, including the United Kingdom) in violation of that country's laws.

2.9 In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the Museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The Museum will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

2.10 The Museum will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the Museum has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

Any exception to the above will only be because the Museum is either:

- (i) acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or
- (ii) acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or
- (iii) acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or

(iv) in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

In these cases the Museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

2.11 As the Museum holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005.

2.12 In accordance with the 1998 National Museum Directors' Council's (NMDC) 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions' (2016 revision), the Museum will conduct provenance research with regards to the years 1933-45 to satisfy itself that the item was not lost by its rightful owners as a result of Nazi persecution without restitution or commensurate reparation having taken place subsequently.

Organisational limitations for acquisition.

2.13 The Museum will also take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements:

Physical Condition

If necessary conservation measures are not feasible, an object will not normally be acquired.

Space

If suitable space is not available and if public access cannot be guaranteed, an object will not normally be acquired.

Resources

The total cost of an object covering the purchase price, transport and handling charges, costs of conservation, documentation, curation, display and storage should be considered when assessing the acquisition of an object.

Copyright

The copyright owner should be identified, wherever possible, and either copyright assigned to the Museum or a copyright licence obtained.

Governance of Acquisitions

2.16 Responsibility for all acquisitions is delegated by the Board to the Director and by the Director to the Director of Collections. The exercise of judgement on the suitability of objects for each collection is the responsibility of the Keeper of that collection. The Keeper will also ensure by consultation, where necessary, with the Director of Conservation and Collections Management, that the practical implications of each acquisition have been properly considered.

2.17 Subject to the limitations cited in Section 2.2, the Keeper has discretion to acquire objects by gift or bequest, and by purchase up to the limit (as set from time to time by the Director) of the departmental purchase grant, provided that funds from no source other than the departmental purchase grant are being used. When a purchase involves money from the Central Fund, from Trust Funds, from the Friends or Patrons of the Museum, or from outside funding bodies, including sponsors, authorisation from the Director is required, which is managed through Collections Group. Purchases over £100,000 require the approval of the Board of Trustees, on recommendation of the Trustees' Collections Committee. The case for such acquisitions will be prepared by the Keeper in consultation with the Director of Collections. Where a gift or bequest is made subject to any condition it should be referred to the Director of Collections.

2.18 Progress on major purchases is monitored by the Director of Collections and reported to the Executive Board and Board of Trustees through the Trustees' Collections Committee. Records of all acquisitions will be monitored by the Head of Collections Management who will report annually to the Director of Collections and Director of Finance and to the Board of Trustees through the Trustees' Collections Committee. The Annual Report of the Board to Parliament will include a section drafted by the Director of Collections on the development of the collections over the period since the last report.

Acquisition through long-term borrowing

2.19 The Museum has had a long history of both lending and borrowing long term, but in recent years it has been the Museum's policy to restrict in-coming loans and to accept them only in exceptional circumstances. Occasionally we borrow items that are of exceptional national or international importance or which are particularly required for a planned display. When possible, loans are negotiated that include agreement to give, bequeath or sell items to the Museum after an agreed period. Loans from other public collections, however, are considered differently and in recent years the Museum has been active in promoting reciprocal loans where appropriate, to ensure the liveliest public access to the national collections. In certain circumstances also, loans are accepted with the intention not only of showing exceptional treasures, but of ensuring that owners such as churches or religious orders can provide public access and avoid the pressures of insurance or special environmental provision that might encourage them to sell.

3. Disposal

3.1 By definition in the National Heritage Act 1983, the Museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives but is permitted to dispose of objects under specific circumstances outlined in section 3.4. The Board of Trustees accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the Museum's collection, and will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.

Governance of Disposals

3.2 Responsibility for disposal from the collections is delegated by the Board to the Director and by the Director to the Director of Collections. The exercise of judgement on the suitability of objects for disposal is the responsibility of the Keeper of the relevant collection. To maintain an adequate safeguard against injudicious disposal a formal disposal board must consider each case. The Director of Collections agrees the composition and date of the Disposal Board. The Board will be convened by the relevant Curator, and consist of the Keeper of the Collection, a relevant subject specialist, a knowledgeable adviser from a different collection or VARI or, if necessary, an outside expert. In addition, the Head of Conservation, where deterioration is the reason for disposal, must agree to disposal. The recommendation of each Disposal Board must be reported to the Director of Collections who will present the result to Collections Group and Executive Board for approval. If the current market value of the disposal is greater than £100,000 it must be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval, on recommendation of the Trustees' Collections Committee.

3.3 Full records will be kept of all disposal decisions and the items involved and retained in perpetuity within the Museum archive. Proper arrangements will be made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable, in accordance with the SPECTRUM procedure on deaccession and disposal.

Motivation for Disposal

3.4 Under the National Heritage Act 1983, as amended by the Museums & Galleries Act 1992, the Board of Trustees may dispose of an object by sale, exchange or gift, unless specific restrictions apply, only if it falls into one or more of the following categories:

- 3.4.1 It is a duplicate of another object.
- 3.4.2 The object is unsuitable for retention and can be disposed of without detriment to the interests of students or other members of the public.
- 3.4.3 Although not falling into the above categories, an object (including a document) may be given, sold to or exchanged with an institution specified in Schedule 5 to the Museums & Galleries Act 1992 supplemented by subsequent Statutory Instruments (see Appendix 1). Any object may be disposed of in this manner, notwithstanding a trust or condition, subject to the terms of Section 6 of the 1992 Act.
- 3.4.4 The Board may destroy or otherwise dispose of an object if it has deteriorated beyond usefulness for the purposes of the collections, because of damage, physical deterioration or infestation by destructive organisms. An object may be disposed of in this manner notwithstanding a trust or condition prohibiting or restricting the disposal of the object.

3.5 The 2004 Human Tissue Act allows the Museum to de-accession human remains under 1000 years old. In taking this decision, the Museum will follow the 'Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums' issued by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 2005.

3.6 If the Museum becomes aware that an item in its collections may have been lost by its rightful owners as a result of Nazi persecution without restitution or commensurate reparation having taken place subsequently, it will follow the principles set out in the 1998 National Museum Directors' Council's (NMDC) 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions' (revised in 2016). In accordance with the 2009 Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Act, the Museum can 'return certain cultural objects on grounds relating to events occurring during the Nazi era' in cases in which this is recommended by the Spoliation Advisory Panel and authorised by the Secretary of State

Methods of Disposal

3.7 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons, the method of disposal may be gift, transfer, exchange or sale. The museum will prioritise disposal by gift, transfer or exchange over disposal by sale.

3.8 The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

3.9 Where the motivation for disposal is deterioration, the destruction of the object will be conducted in a manner approved by the disposal board.

Requirements placed on the Museum for all disposals

3.10 The Museum will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account.

3.11 Where an object has been acquired with the aid of external funding any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

3.12 Whether the disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons, the decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors, including the public benefit, the implications for the Museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. External expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and sources communities and others served by the Museum will also be sought.

Additional requirements placed on the Museum for Disposal by method of sale

3.13 The museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of material by sale, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other specialist journals where appropriate for a period of at least two months. The announcement will indicate the number and nature of objects involved. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other accredited museums. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the Museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

3.14 Any monies received by the Museum from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from Arts Council.

3.15 The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation Standard.

Additional requirements for Curatorially Motivated Disposals by gift, transfer or exchange

3.16 Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining the item within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift, to accredited museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.

3.17 If the material is not acquired by any accredited museum to which it was offered directly as a gift, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums current mechanism, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

3.18 The announcement relating to gift will indicate the number and nature of objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other accredited museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the Museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

3.18 The nature of disposal by exchange means that the Museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another accredited museum. The Museum will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.

3.19 If the disposal by exchange is proposed to be made with a specific accredited museum, other accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.

3.20 If the exchange is proposed with a non-accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will make an announcement in the Museums Journal and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

3.21 Both the notification and announcements must provide information on the number and nature of the objects involved both in the Museum's collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the governing body must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

Routine disposals from the National Art Library

3.23 The Keeper of the Word & Image collection is formally authorised to dispose routinely and systematically of material which falls into the following categories, without needing to convene a disposal board to consider individual cases:

- Superseded issues of directories, almanacs, timetables, yearbooks, and similar reference works which are issued on a regular basis, so that previous issues are entirely superseded by successive ones, whose primary focus is not art-related, and whose subject content is such that long-term retention of outdated issues is not
- felt to be desirable. Directories which relate primarily to the art world, artists, galleries, or museums will normally be kept, as they may be useful to researchers in years to come.
- Superseded editions of bibliographies and other reference works which are acquired primarily as working tools for the NAL or one of its sections (e.g. national listings of books in print, lists of publishers or booksellers).
- Duplicate copies of reference material or periodicals, which are acquired for the Library's working needs but which have served their purpose and are either no longer required, or superseded by later issues.

3.24 Titles for disposal must be approved by the Keeper and a list of such titles must be maintained. Disposal cycles will be recorded on the NAL catalogue.