Collections Development Strategy 2022-2024

This should be read alongside the Museum’s Collection Development Policy.

Context

The Museum’s mission (2019) sets out to “touch people’s lives by engaging powerfully, thoughtfully and pleasurably with as wide a public as possible”. To meet this aim we must work collaboratively to “develop our collection in ways that better reflect the backgrounds and interests of all our visitors”. In particular, we are committed to acquiring objects that support research and teaching of global histories of arts and material culture, and that “stimulate thought and discussion, expanding our narratives of European and Asian art and material culture, and exploring areas of artistic production not yet represented in Cambridge”.

Principles

Our collections development activity will seek to enhance the collection following four principles:

Creative & ambitious

- reflect the excitement and joy of identifying, researching, teaching with and presenting new objects and artworks;
- promote visual literacy and new ways of looking at art and material culture;
- build upon the history, nature and range of the Fitzwilliam collection, not limited by an ambition to achieve encyclopaedic coverage.

Distinctive & innovative

- reflect the Museum’s role within the University’s research, particularly within the University’s Strategic Research Initiative Collections-Connections-Communities and in collaboration with Cambridge Visual Culture;
- support immersive and impactful displays and digital programming;
- support University teaching programmes.

Relevant & collaborative

- reflect and inform our commitment to multivocality, so that the collection better inspires a diversity of thought, perspectives and opinions;
- convey clearly the museum’s ambitions to develop the collection across a broad timespan and range of objects and artworks;
developed the collection in collaboration with our audiences, and support the wider aims of the University of Cambridge Museums.

**Inclusive & sustainable**

- develop meaningful relationships with artists, collectors and donors, and fosters more flexible bequests and gifts, and support continued donations through the Acceptance-in-Lieu and Cultural Gifts Scheme;
- when considering historic objects from specific parts of the world, we would seek to engage with museums, communities and/or relevant organisations before acquisition;
- seek to exploit display and communications opportunities, to better ensure equitable physical and virtual access to newly acquired artworks and objects.

**Strategic approach**

The Museum will develop its collection through four strands of activity.

1. **Responsive**

Through a growing network of collectors, artists and dealers, and our long-standing reputation for acquisitions, we will continue to acquire works of outstanding/museum quality and significance, assessed against the criteria set out in the Collections Development Policy.

We will advocate for the Fitzwilliam as a place for the donation of objects and artworks via the Cultural Gift Scheme and Acceptance in Lieu.

2. **Proactive**

A suite of defined projects, of different scale and duration, will be instigated to acquire objects and artworks that enhance the Museum’s coverage of under-represented peoples, cultures, regions of the world, or artistic traditions, particularly where such collections are not present in the wider University, and to ensure the collection contains works by new and emerging artists. Where we address social, historical or political issues, we would endeavour to ensure representation of different vantage points and perspectives.

These proactive projects would be aligned to mission aims, and often to specific exhibition, display and research projects, and generally be thematic in focus, rather than focused on specific types of object or art. Where possible, we would seek to engage Early Career Researchers, other University specialists and external collaborators on these projects. In some instances, the Museum might convene an advisory board to provide constructive advice and strategic steer to these projects.

3. **Creative**

We will build upon our track record of working with, and commissioning, artists, performers and other creative practitioners, to produce artworks and installations that engage with challenges for contemporary society and/or with the historic collections. We will offer open
opportunities that encourage proposals and catalyse new collaborations, complementing continued engagement with invited creative practitioners.

These artists will be encouraged to engage with the distinctive University research environment, to be practice-based researchers, affiliated with Cambridge Visual Culture and other research networks. This strand also offers opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships with galleries and dealers.

We will ensure, where possible, sustainable and appropriate, that the works or associated archives or records of the creative process are accessioned into the collection. The commissions might include interventions in the galleries or digital programming, which we will endeavour to facilitate future research.

4. Reflective

We will instigate projects to critically review and assess the scope, quality and relevance of specific areas of the collection, to inform proposals for de-accessioning. This would not be around single artworks or objects, but assemblages of material where parts of the collection may not be appropriate within the Fitzwilliam Museum. Such projects would include input from external specialists with experts in the relevant artworks or material culture.

Should Syndicate approve de-accession of items, any proceeds would be solely dedicated to the acquisition of objects, for example through supporting proactive acquisition projects.

Policy

All acquisitions – whether responsive or under one of the other strands of activity – will follow the criteria, processes and procedures, legal and ethical considerations set out in the Collections Development Policy.

The Director and Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum

First approved: 22 November 2021