

# ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL POLICY

**Name of museum:** Royal Academy of Arts

**Name of governing body:** Council of the Royal Academy of Arts

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:**  
12 January 2010

**Date at which this policy is due for review:**  
January 2015

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## 1. Museum's statement of purpose

The Royal Academy of Arts has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects. We were founded by George III in 1768 to promote painting, printmaking, sculpture and architecture; there are some 100 Academicians in those disciplines. Today the Royal Academy continues to encourage the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The Royal Academy mounts a continuous programme of internationally renowned loan exhibitions complemented by gallery education programmes, seminars and debates. The Summer Exhibition of works of art by Academicians and other artists, the largest open-submission exhibition of works for sale in the world, has been held every year since 1769. Future generations of artists are trained in the RA Schools, which offer the only three-year postgraduate fine-art course in Britain. The Royal Academy owns a major collection of works by Academicians past and present and has the oldest and one of the best fine-art libraries in Britain. The collection has been given gifts such as the Michelangelo *Taddei Tondo*, one of the greatest works of art in the world, which is on display in the Sackler Wing.

The Royal Academy supports itself through admission charges and sales, the Friends and the generosity of its individual and corporate benefactors. The Royal Academy receives no regular government funding for its cultural activities.

## 2. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes and the periods of time and /or geographic areas to which the collections relate

The collections consists of works of art and other objects of historic, artistic or associational significance owned by the Royal Academy of Arts, namely: paintings, sculpture (including medals, dies, cameos, and intaglio gems); drawings; artists' sketchbooks; individually issued prints; plaster casts (including pastes of gems); objects of memorabilia, including artists' tools and materials; historic silver and silverplate; historic items of furniture; picture frames; and certain fittings and fixtures within Burlington House.

The majority of the Collection dates from the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768 to the present day. Exceptions to this rule include early copies after Old Masters such as those by Giampietrino, Rosso Fiorentino and Sir James Thornhill, as well as some prints and drawings.

The core of the Collection are Diploma Works which are given by Academicians on their election and are predominantly by British Artists and Architects. In addition to this, the

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Collection is strong in portraits of artists in many different media including paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints and medals.

The Royal Academy Library comprises printed books, pamphlets, maps, plans and posters, and prints published in series or in illustration of a text; the Royal Academy Photographic Collection and Archive, which holds photographic prints, transparencies, glass slides and negatives, films and videotapes; and the Royal Academy Archives which holds papers and documents relating to the institution's history as well as artists' letters and archives.

The Royal Academy Schools were established from the foundation of the Royal Academy and much of the material in the Library as well as anatomical drawings, skeletons, painted copies, plaster casts and prints after Old Masters were collected especially for the students of the Royal Academy Schools. The Michelangelo *Taddei Tondo*, the only marble by Michelangelo in the UK, was also given to act as an inspiration for the students in the Schools.

### **3. Criteria governing future acquisition policy including the subjects or themes, periods of time and/or geographic areas and any collections which will not be subject to further acquisition.**

The collections exist to serve the broad educational goal of the Royal Academy as an institution designed to promote creative endeavour in, and critical understanding of the visual arts in the United Kingdom.

The collections seek primarily to acquire works of art (namely paintings, sculpture, original or reproductive prints, drawings and artists' sketchbooks), books and archives that will:

- Exemplify the particular achievement of each Member of the Royal Academy; shed light on his or her career, formative influences and working practises as a professional artist
- Illuminate the functioning of the Academy as an institution for the training of artists, the promotion of artistic endeavour, and the influencing of public taste
- Relate to the history of any of the current or previous premises of the Royal Academy, particularly if it relates to the Academy's occupancy

Certain objects of memorabilia (specifically artists' tools and materials) are also sought, provided they have a clear provenance of use or ownership by a Member of the Royal Academy.

It is not our policy to acquire further skeletons for the Royal Academy Schools.

### **4. Limitations on collecting**

The museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

### **5. Collecting policies of other museums**

The museum will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with

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these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialisms, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Specific reference is made to the following museum(s):

- Tate Britain
- Victoria & Albert Museum
- Courtauld Institute of Art
- The British Museum

### 6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

The Regional MLA / Museum Galleries Scotland / NIMC / CyMAL will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

### 7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made 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.

### 8. Acquisition procedures

a. The museum will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

b. In particular, the museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).

c. 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 governing body 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.

d. So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the museum will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

e. The museum will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics)

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in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e will only be because the museum is either:

acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or

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

acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or

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.

g. 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.

### 9. Spoliation

The museum will use the statement of principles 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period', issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

### 10. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

The museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the "Guidance for the care of human remains in museums" issued by DCMS in 2005), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The museum will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 12a-12d, 12g and 12s below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the "Guidance for the care of human remains in museums".

### 11. Management of archives

As the museum holds / intends to acquire archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).

### 12. Disposal procedures

#### Disposal preliminaries

a. The governing body will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.

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- b. By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore 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.
- c. 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.
- d. When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, 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.

### **Motivation for disposal and method of disposal**

- e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 12g-12s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.
- f. The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons

### **The disposal decision-making process**

- g. Whether the disposal is motivated either by curatorial or financial reasons, the decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body 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 source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.

### **Responsibility for disposal decision-making**

- h. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.

### **Use of proceeds of sale**

- i. Any monies received by the museum governing body 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 MLA.
- j. 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.

### **Disposal by gift or sale**

- k. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- l. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material, normally through an announcement in the Museums

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Association's Museums Journal, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

m. The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or 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.

### **Disposal by exchange**

n. 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 governing body will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.

o. In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or unaccredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 12a-12d and 12g-12h will be followed as will the procedures in paragraphs 12p-12s.

p. If the 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.

q. 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.

r. Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or 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.

### **Documenting disposal**

s. Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements 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 SPECTRUM Procedure on deaccession and disposal.

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