

Collections Development Policy

Name of museum:	The Royal Academy of Arts
Name of governing body:	The Council of the Royal Academy of Arts
Date of first approval:	12 January 2010
Date of review:	4 February 2020
Date of next review:	2025 or as required

Policy review procedure:

The Collections Development Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Collections Development Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.

1. Relationship to other relevant policies/ plans of the organisation

1.1 The museum's statement of purpose is:

The Royal Academy of Arts (RA) was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The RA 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 RA 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, and holds an archive of international importance. 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 Collection Gallery.

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

- 1.2 The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.
- 1.3 By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.
- 1.4 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 1.5 The museum recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its

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collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using Spectrum primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

- 1.6 The museum will undertake 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.
- 1.7 The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

2. History of the Collections

The RA is the oldest Fine Arts institution in Great Britain. Established in 1768 by George III, its founding membership consisted of 34 leading artists and architects, including Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Angelica Kauffman and William Chambers. As a body they determined to establish a British School of visual arts and architecture of international distinction, to hold an annual exhibition of contemporary British Art, and to found a school for the professional training of young artists. A Library and Collection were created to serve the Schools and to provide inspiration for current and future generations.

These aspirations are reflected throughout the holdings of the RA's Collection, Library and Archives. Its Collection not only embraces the wide range of historical and contemporary materials that the RA has deemed necessary for the training of the artist in Britain, but also the 'specimens of their ability' or Diploma Works that every elected Royal Academician is required to present to the institution. There is an important collection of portraits of artists in different media, drawings and sketchbooks by Academicians including George Stubbs's preparatory drawings for the *Anatomy of the Horse* publication.

The majority of the Collection dates from the foundation of the RA in 1768 to the present day but there are some exceptions including a sculpture by Michelangelo, early copies after Old Masters such as those by Giampietrino, Rosso Fiorentino and Sir James Thornhill, as well as some prints and drawings.

The RA Library was the first of its kind to be established by any fine arts institution in Britain and preserves intact all the printed materials acquired by successive Academician Librarians to guide the RA's students towards the highest possible standards of excellence in their work.

The Archive houses the complete official records of the institution as well as major deposits of Academicians' personal papers, particularly from the 18th and 19th century, together with the complete surviving records of several other artists' societies that the RA superseded and outlived.

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3. An overview of current collections

The RA Collection consists of works of art and other objects of historic, artistic or associational significance owned by the RA, namely: paintings, sculpture (including medals, dies, cameos, and intaglio gems); drawings; artists' sketchbooks; individually issued prints; plaster casts (including pastes of gems), time-based media, 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 core of the Collection is the Diploma Works which are given by Academicians on their election and are predominantly by British Artists and Architects. In addition to this, the Collection is strong in portraits of Academicians and other artists in many different media including paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints and medals.

To supplement their Diploma Work, printmaker-members are encouraged to donate recent prints. Chris Orr, Stephen Chambers and Eileen Cooper have also designated the RA Collection as their preferred repository for archival proofs of their prints. Portraits of members past and present are acquired through purchase, commission and donation.

The RA Schools were established from the foundation of the RA and much of the material in the Library as well as anatomical and life drawings, skeletons, painted copies, including a 16th century copy of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, plaster casts and prints after Old Masters, were collected especially for the students of the RA Schools. The Michelangelo *Taddei Tondo*, the only marble by Michelangelo in the UK, was given to inspire both RA students and Academicians.

The RA Library comprises printed books, pamphlets, maps, plans and posters, and prints published in series or in illustration of a text. The RA Photographic Archive holds photographic prints, transparencies, glass slides and negatives, films and videotapes. The Special Illustrated Books Collection includes a strong focus on books illustrated by Royal Academicians and past students.

The RA Archives holds papers and documents relating to the institution's history as well as artists' letters and archives. In addition to the continuous growth of the Archive through the deposit of the institution's modern records, historical documents relating to the history of the institution and its Members are actively sought.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

The Collection exists to serve the broad educational goal of the RA as an institution designed to promote creative endeavour in, and critical understanding of, the visual arts in the United Kingdom. In addition to newly-elected Academicians Diploma Works, the RA seeks primarily to acquire works of art (namely paintings, sculpture, original or reproductive prints, drawings and artists' sketchbooks and time-based media), books and archives that will:

- Exemplify a particular achievement of an Academician or shed light on his or her career, formative influences or working practises as a professional artist
- Illuminate the function of the RA 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 RA,

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particularly if it relates to the RA'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 an Academician.

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

5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

- 5.1 The museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.
- 5.2 The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

Academicians very occasionally request to exchange their Diploma Works for an alternative they feel better represents their work. RA Council reserves the right to refuse this request. Historic or illustrated books may be deaccessioned if they are damaged beyond repair, are duplicates, or fall clearly outside the scope of the collecting policy.

6. Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

- 6.1 The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

7. Collecting policies of other museums

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

- 7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museums and organisations:

- Tate Britain
- Victoria & Albert Museum
- The Courtauld Institute of Art
- The British Museum
- National Portrait Gallery
- Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

Other institutions will be consulted as appropriate.

- 7.3 Joint acquisitions with Accredited museums or galleries will be considered on a case by case basis.

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8. Archival holdings

- 8.1 The RA has accepted archives from external sources since 1816, with the bequest of documents owned by Nathaniel Marchant R.A. Until the appointment of a professional archivist in 1996 archives were acquired or accepted on the justification that they bore a strong connection to the life of the RA and its members. This remains the principal argument for archival acquisitions according to a Collecting Policy first approved in 2003 and since subject to periodic review.
- 8.2 With regard to the acquisition of contemporary artists' archives, the RA seeks close co-ordination with other collecting institutions, such as Tate, the Victoria & Albert Museum and regional archives, with the aim that archives are acquired by the most appropriate institution in every case.
- 8.3 The RA's official papers archive documents the activities of the RA since 1768 and form the most significant element of the Archives as a whole. The official papers archive continues to accumulate material via an active records management programme encompassing all departments of the RA. In addition, an audio-visual archive has been developed since 2004. This seeks to document the activities of the RA through lecture, debate and interviews with key staff, students and artist members.
- 8.4 With regard to the archives owned, held or sought for acquisition, the RA is guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom (2002) and the National Archives' standard for record repositories (2004).

9. Acquisition

- 9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is as follows:

Diploma Works are approved by Council.

The approval of all other acquisitions is by the Secretary and CEO or the Director of Learning & Collections as appropriate, in consultation with the relevant Collection curator.

If the acquisition is by purchase and is more than £5,000 in value, then a case for accessioning must be made by the Director of Learning and Collections to the Collections & Library Committee for recommendation to Council.

Any uncertainty about the ability to safely care for and/or store the proposed work versus the importance of the gift to the RA should be referred, in the first instance, to the Collections Committee.

- 9.2 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).
- 9.3 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

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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.

10. Human remains

- 10.1 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.

11. Biological and geological material

- 11.1 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.

12. Archaeological material

- 12.1 The museum will not acquire any archaeological material.

13. Exceptions

- 13.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the museum is:
- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
 - acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin

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. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

14. Spoliation

- 14.1 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.

15. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

- 15.1 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 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

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- 15.2 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'.
- 16. Disposal procedures**
- 16.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the Spectrum primary procedures on disposal.
- 16.2 The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.
- 16.3 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.
- 16.4 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort – destruction.
- 16.5 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 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. 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.
- 16.6 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 or manager of the collection acting alone.
- 16.7 Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. 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.
- 16.8 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museum to which it was offered 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 a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
- 16.9 The announcement relating to the 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

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received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

- 16.10 Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly 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 the Arts Council England.
- 16.11 The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.
- 16.12 Full records will be kept of all decisions of 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.

Disposal by exchange:

- 16.13 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.

16.13.1 In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or non-Accredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 16.1-5 will apply.

16.13.2 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.

16.13.3 If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will place a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, or make an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).

16.13.4 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.

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Disposal by destruction

- 16.14 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 16.15 It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.
- 16.16 Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.
- 16.17 Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.
- 16.18 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.