

# News release

11 May 2006

## **COLLECTING CRISIS: Art Fund museum survey reveals many museums are no longer actively adding to their collections and warns that the collecting habit may become a thing of the past**



New research published by The Art Fund reveals that museums and galleries are passively acquiring, rather than actively collecting – 70% of UK museums now acquire objects mainly or solely by gift, and 60% allocate no funds at all for adding to their collections. The Art Fund's research exposes a real crisis in funding and a failure by central and local government to recognise the importance of collecting to the life of our museums.

The Art Fund's UK-wide research, the first authoritative study into museum and gallery collecting activity, was completed by 305 institutions (1/6 of all accredited museums) and exposes massive gulfs between different types of museums and across the regions. It points to a worrying trend – the focus on improving education, access and social inclusion is diverting museums from the central task of building their collections. Lack of advocacy and support for collecting in both central and local government means there is a danger that the collecting habit is being lost, along with the skills and expertise necessary for it.

David Barrie, Director of The Art Fund said:

“These figures for the first time put real facts behind concerns we and the sector have had for some time. Our research shows that there is a real crisis in funding and as a result morale in museums is low – we urge the Government to adopt a more positive approach. Collections are at the heart of museums – they must be continually enriched and renewed to keep our museums vibrant and appealing, to educate and inform now and in the future.”

### **Museums are passively collecting, instead of actively collecting:**

- 70% of museums said the main source of acquiring is by gift and 95% of the objects donated are of little or no monetary value
- Just 2% of museums cited collecting as a top priority
- The knock-on effect is a loss of curatorial skill and stagnant museum collections

### **The funding crisis:**

- Only 10% of UK museums allocate a fixed proportion of their income for collecting, and 60% of museums were unable to allocate any income for collecting last year
- One third of museums have seen a decrease in the funds they allocate to purchases in the last five years. Local authority-owned museums in particular have seen budgets slashed
- This has meant museums losing out on significant objects and resources being diverted away from collecting

We are an independent charity committed to saving art for everyone to enjoy. Since we began in 1903, we have helped to save over 850,000 works of art. Today, some 80,000 members fund our work. In return, they receive free or reduced-price admission to many museums and galleries in the UK. This is not the only reason they join: they support us because they love art.

**The huge disparities between types of museums and regions:**

- The three poorest regions are East Midlands, East of England, West Midlands
- The richest region is London
- Last year national museums purchased more than three times the volume of objects than all other types of museums *put together* – nationals purchase on average of around 100 objects last year, compared to just 5 by independent museums – and 20% of independent collections purchased nothing at all

**Future threats to collecting:**

- 96% of museums – across all types – feel inadequate core funding is a serious barrier to collecting
- 84% of museums said the shortage of space is a real problem
- 50% said shortage of curatorial expertise
- 27% said spiralling art market prices

**Art Fund action:**

- The Art Fund will announce a new grant-giving scheme to promote active collecting in the autumn

The research, *The Collecting Challenge: The Art Fund Museum Survey 2006*, was undertaken by FreshMinds, a London-based research company with a proven track record in public sector practice. A sample of 305 museums completed an online survey. The Art Fund supplemented this with a series of one-to-one interviews.

- Ends -

**For further information please contact:** Sarah Harrison, Tanera Bryden or Francesca Rivett-Carnac in The Art Fund press office on 020 7225 4820/22/37

**Notes to editors:**

- The Art Fund survey is probably the most comprehensive survey of museum and gallery acquisitions ever held in the UK
- The research consisted of an online questionnaire and a series of one-to-one interviews conducted between November 2005 and April 2006
- 305 museums – one-sixth of all accredited museums in the UK – completed an online survey between November 2005 and January 2006. Museums of all types (not just art) took part, across all types and all regions: 124 local authority-owned collections took part  
113 independent museums, 43 university museums and 25 national museums
- The Art Fund is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections and campaigns widely on behalf of museums and their visitors
- It has 80,000 members. Since its foundation in 1903, The Art Fund has helped UK public collections acquire over 850,000 works of art, ranging from Bronze Age treasures to contemporary works of art
- In 2005 The Art Fund offered over £4.1 million to museums and galleries and distributed 12 gifts and bequests

- Independent of government, The Art Fund is uniquely placed to campaign on behalf of public collections across the UK. It was at the forefront of the campaign for free admission in 2002 and the campaign to save the Macclesfield Psalter in 2005
- In April The Art Fund unveiled one of the most significant projects in its history – a permanent 'Skyspace' at Yorkshire Sculpture Park by James Turrell
- A 10-part documentary series on The Art Fund is to be aired on the Sky channel Artsworld, throughout May, June and July. *Saved for the Nation* will celebrate 100 art treasures acquired with The Art Fund's help over the last century.
- Visit the charity's website at [www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org)
  
- FreshMinds is a research consultancy. The firm works for public sector organisations and multi-national blue-chips. The company has a team of analysts across Europe who help organisations analyse their customers, competitors and markets. Private sector expertise includes financial and professional services, consumer goods and media. Public sector clients include HM Treasury, the DTI and the British Council. FreshMinds also provides clients direct access to their analysts through their temporary and permanent recruitment services. Visit their website at [www.freshminds.co.uk](http://www.freshminds.co.uk)