

The Collecting Challenge: The Art Fund Museum Survey 2006

Between November 2005 and April 2006 305 museums (one sixth of all those 'accredited') took part in The Art Fund's survey of collecting activity.

The first authoritative study of UK collecting, the research took a detailed look at acquisitions in UK museums - of all types, and across all regions - over the last five years.

The Art Fund mission statement

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. This is not the only reason they join: they support us because they love art.

Collecting is not a priority - but museums say it should be

We asked museums to identify their current priorities. Most museums say collecting has slid down priorities in the last five years, but that collecting is of vital importance. They argue that collections must be continually renewed in order for a museum to survive and prosper. Museums agree that collecting should go hand in hand with other objectives, such as access and education programmes.

Just 2% of museums say collecting is a priority. Five times more cite education and outreach

Just 13% of museums feel their collecting activity 'absolutely' matches their aspirations

70% of UK museums believe new acquisitions are vital for attracting new and repeat visitors

More than 85% of museums believe acquisitions are important because of the historic, aesthetic or artistic (intrinsic) appeal of the objects

78% feel acquisitions are important for educational purposes

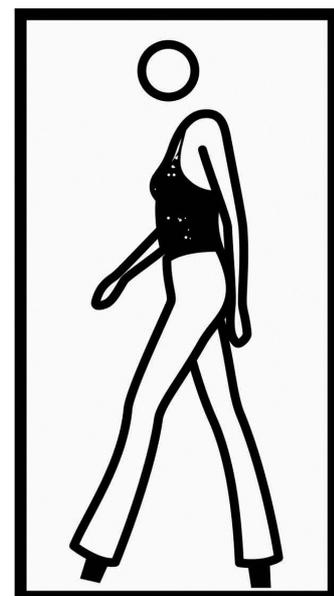
Most museums are passively acquiring, not actively collecting

UK museums most commonly acquire new material through donations. Lack of funding means that many are reliant - some entirely dependent - on the generosity of donors.

69% say the most common method of acquiring over the last five years has been through gifts

Only 12% collect primarily by purchase. Loans came third, then bequests and archaeological fieldwork

51% of museums say the main influence on collecting activity is lack of funding, meaning they are heavily reliant on gifts and bequests



Julian Opie
Sara Walking - Sparkly Top and Jeans, 2003
Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums
ArtFunded 2004
© Julian Opie, courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

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'The shortage of funds is a major threat to future purchases - this obstacle, coupled with the shortage of space for existing collections, threatens the future of collecting. These obstacles must be overcome as the health of a collection depends on its development'

Mungo Campbell, Deputy Director,
Hunterian Art Gallery

There are huge disparities between types of museum and region

Last year national museums purchased three times more objects than all other types of museum put together. Independent museums were the 'poorest' in collecting terms. London, as expected, emerged as the 'richest' region, and the East Midlands as the 'poorest'.

Each national museum purchased an average of **108** objects last year (though this figure is inflated by archaeological items of low monetary value purchased, for example, by the British Museum), compared to just **5** purchases by each independent museum - although 20% of independent collections purchased nothing at all.

87% of purchases by independent museums were objects valued at less than £1,000. Meanwhile 30% of objects purchased by national museums were valued at more than £1,000 (and almost 10% valued at more than £10,000).

University museums receive more bequests than any other type of museum - almost twice as many as national museums and three times more than local authority museums.

The three poorest regions in terms of value and volume of purchases are the East Midlands, East of England and West Midlands. The richest is London.

Overall, museums in **Scotland** and the **South East** are most satisfied with their collecting activity, and **Wales** and the **East of England** are the least.

The main problem is shortage of funds...

Many museums are unable to allocate any of their own funds to purchases, and are reliant on external and independent sources of money to help them collect.

96% of museums say inadequate core funding is currently a barrier to collecting - half say it is a 'very serious' problem. 60% of museums believe the main future threat to museum collecting is lack of funding

Less than 10% of UK museums allocate a fixed proportion of their government, local authority or independent income each year to collecting

60% of museums were unable to allocate any income to collecting last year

33% of museums reduced the proportion of income they allocate for purchases in the last five years - and of these, one third have reduced purchase expenditure by more than half

Where do museums turn for funding to help them collect?

Museums were asked to rate, in order, which sources of funding have been the most instrumental in helping them to purchase objects in the last five years:

- 1 The Art Fund**
independent charity
- 2 MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund**
the only fund in England and Wales dedicated to helping regional museums collect
- 3 Friends' organisations**
- 4 Donations from members of the public** especially when a museum specifically appeals for donations towards the purchase of an object
- 5 The Heritage Lottery Fund**
the distributor of National Lottery funds for heritage
- 6 Trusts and foundations**
- 7 Endowment Funds**
a number of museums have endowment funds that may be used to help purchase objects
- 8 The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF)** was cited as the least instrumental - as the 'fund of last resort' for heritage items at risk, the NHMF tends to help fewer museums but with significant sums, so this is easily explained



Botticelli
Virgin Adoring the Sleeping Christ Child, c 1485
National Galleries of Scotland
ArtFunded 1999

'We would love to collect more of the treasure that is found in this region - our local heritage - but our purchase fund goes nowhere. It is a drop in the ocean compared to the funds we need to meet our aspirations. Collecting ought not to be such a luxury - it is the lifeblood of museums'

Sally Dummer, Collections Manager, Ipswich Borough Council Museums and Galleries

'For our organisations to realise their considerable potential to deliver inspiring and engaging approaches to learning, and for the sector to play its part in social cohesion, collections must be kept 'alive' and relevant through active acquisitions programmes.'

Virginia Tandy, Director, Manchester City Galleries

...but funding is not the only concern

The ones that got away

We asked museums to tell us about the most expensive or significant object they were unable to buy in the last five years. Their top four 'losses' were as follows:

1 Jan Steen's *The Burgher of Delft and his Daughter*

(£8.1m) Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales did consider launching a bid to purchase this painting but decided that it was so far beyond their means that they had no chance in making the significant acquisition

2 Transitional German armour of Von Hellingen c 1500

(£2.8m) Royal Armouries, Leeds, wanted to acquire the armour but were unable to secure Lottery funding

3 A pair of spalliera panels

(painted panels from a piece of furniture) (£1.3m) The Ashmolean Museum wanted to purchase them but there were inadequate funds available

4 Stanhope Forbes' *The Seine Boat*

(£1.1m) Penlee House Gallery and Museum were unable to raise the funds in time

Where is the government support?

The public money available to museums and galleries for purchases is falling. In the last ten years:

- The amount of government money our five major national museums have spent each year on acquisitions has fallen by 90%
- Last year the HLF spent just £2.3 million on art acquisitions (less than 1% of expenditure), compared to over £18 million ten years ago
- Income to the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the government's fund of last resort for heritage objects at risk, has fallen by almost 40%
- Income to the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the only fund in England and Wales dedicated to helping regional museums collect, has fallen by one third
- Meanwhile, art market prices have risen to many times their previous levels. For instance, between 1980/1 and 2004/5, according to the *Art Market Report*, Old Master paintings rose by 413% and the top 2% rose by 2,276%

While the chronic shortage of funding emerged as the over-whelming concern for museums, several other current and potential obstacles to collecting emerged - particularly the lack of space and shortage of experienced or specialist staff.

84% of museums say that shortage of space, either for display or storage, is a serious obstacle to collecting. Museums feel that collecting should be seen as part of 'collections management', which includes de-accessioning or disposing of objects. They support the idea that public collections should not remain static, but should be continually renewed to keep them relevant, fresh and alive

70% feel that shortage of information on what is available, and unfamiliarity with the art market, is an obstacle to collecting

50% of museums say shortage of curatorial expertise within museums is an obstacle. There is a serious danger that without investment in the development of curators who can seek out the best objects on offer, our public collections - especially outside the main centres - will stagnate

27% of museums think rising art market prices threaten the ability of museums to collect in future

82% say shortage of staff and management time is a problem

'Collections are seemingly viewed as less important. The greater emphasis on access and social inclusion and the wider availability of funding in these areas means there is less staff time to consider collections management and acquisitions'

Lucy Whetstone, Curator,
The Hatton Gallery (University of Newcastle)

'Active, considered collecting is essential if we are to keep our museums alive and relevant for today's audiences. It is vital that collections reflect, and communicate with, contemporary communities if museums are to play an effective role in the cultural life of this country.'

Kate Brindley, Director,
Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archive

The future of collecting

Museums were asked what would make them more willing and able to add to their collections in future.

55% say increased funding

19% say more information about the art market, how and what to buy and what funding is available to them

13% say increased space, either for the display or storage of collections, would help them to collect

10% say more staff (especially curatorial staff) and more time to dedicate to acquiring objects. Museums feel it is important to re-assert the importance of curatorial expertise, as this has been lost in many museums

A number of local authority museums feel that they would be better able to collect if they were permitted to carry funds over from year to year. Many local authority museums are limited in what they can purchase depending on the time of year - and if funds are not spent by the end of the financial year, they are lost.

Other suggestions include improved tax incentives for people to donate objects to museums, a return to ring-fenced purchase funds and a more flexible approach by some funding bodies - in particular the Heritage Lottery Fund - to the needs of museums.

Collaborative purchases: one way to collect

In 2005 the Ashmolean Museum wanted to acquire the **Cassel Silver**, a rare collection of eleven pieces of early English silver, valued at £1.69 million. Unable to raise the funds alone, the museum, together with the Victoria and Albert Museum, formed a consortium with nine other museums across England and Wales. The consortium agreed a price and applied to The Art Fund and the NHMF for grants. The price was met with a grant of £850,000 from the NHMF, £404,445 from The Art Fund and the remaining £433,000 was contributed by the participating museums. The museums have organised a UK tour of the silver, to ensure that as many people as possible will be able to see the collection first hand. The purchase is one of the most extensive collaborations yet undertaken by UK museums - and a fine example of what can be achieved when funding bodies and museums work together.



Jacob Bodendick
Charles II silver ginger jar, 1674
Fitzwilliam Museum
ArtFunded 2005

The importance of external funds

The opportunity to acquire the **Beckford Coffe**r arose when it was export-stopped in 2004. The coffe was designed for William Beckford, the eccentric polymath of Fonthill Abbey outside Bath, and was judged by experts to be of outstanding aesthetic, scholarly and historical importance. The V&A approached the National Heritage Memorial Fund, thinking that they would be positive as they had previously supported Beckford heritage items, but they were discouraged from applying. Instead they eventually raised the £125,000 required themselves - with £60,000 from The Art Fund and the rest from private donors, V&A friends and their own funds so the public can enjoy a work from Beckford's celebrated collection.

The role of The Art Fund

In the last five years:

- The Art Fund has given almost 300 UK museums £18 million in grants towards the purchase of over 360,000 objects
 - The Art Fund has paid on average 15% of the total cost of the object acquired
 - 36% of Art Fund grants have been for drawings, watercolours and prints, 25% for paintings, 20% for contemporary works, 10% for sculpture and 6% for treasure objects
 - Collectively, London museums have applied for and received more Art Fund grants than any other region in the last five years, and museums in the East Midlands the least - mirroring the findings of the survey
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