

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW REPORT CALLS FOR INCREASED INVESTMENT IN MUSEUMS AND THEIR COLLECTIONS

Why Collect?, a report on museum collecting in the UK by historian Sir David Cannadine, was launched at Tate Modern today. The publication was commissioned by Art Fund and the Wolfson Foundation to mark 40 years of their collaboration in bringing art and objects into public collections.

The report highlights the ever-widening gap between the spiralling prices of works on the international art market and the limited acquisition funds available to museums and galleries in the UK. It calls for increased investment in museums and their collections, as public spending on museums has decreased by 13% in real terms over the last decade. It is, writes Cannadine, a report that 'instead of giving comfort and reassurance, expresses anxiety and concern.'

Cannadine's analysis of museum and gallery collecting traces its history from the 1830s to the present day, and is accompanied by 11 case studies which explore various facets of the social and cultural impact of collecting. This is supported by statistical evidence from a national survey involving 266 collecting institutions. The report was undertaken to address the question of how, why and on what scale publicly funded museums and galleries continue to expand their collections. It includes the following:

Investment in museum collections

- Cannadine cites the £333m recently paid for Leonardo da Vinci's Salvator Mundi, more than half the entire amount that the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and other London-based official bodies allocated to England's museums and galleries in 2016-17.
- A recent survey is referenced which shows the UK government spends less on culture in percentage terms than Denmark or France, or Hungary or Latvia.
- The museums of the UK have experienced a decade of diminished funding: in real terms, public spending on museums and galleries in England has declined by 13%, from £829m in 2007 to £720m 10 years later, and the reduction has been greatest in funding provided by local authorities.
- There is evidence to suggest that through this decline 'attention (and thus resources) has shifted away from what must be the core purpose [of] museums and galleries...to maintain, develop and curate their collections'.

- The morale, confidence and the numbers of curatorial staff, who are essential to the management, display and development of the nation's public art collections, 'have been in serious decline for some time'.
- For those employed in museums 'salary levels are 7% lower than the market average in comparable sectors, rising to 25% below market rate for junior roles in collections and curations management.'

Museum collecting and display

- The report assesses the arguments for extending and adding to museum collections – above all so 'they remain dynamic and evolving rather than inert and lifeless'.
- Many museums and galleries only display a fraction of their holdings – often less than 10% – and the report references recent arguments for making their stored collections more publicly available. For example, the establishment of the Glasgow Museum Resource Centre, housing around 1.4million objects, and open to the public seven days a week, or the V&A's whole new facility for this purpose in east London.
- The digital revolution has enabled entire collections to be accessed and viewed online and 'the more that we can learn about collections from exploring them online, the more we are likely to want to go and visit them in situ'.
- Only half of the 266 UK museums and galleries surveyed had a specific budget allocation for collecting, and in most cases it was rarely more than 1% of the overall amount that was spent. Although almost all of the respondents had been able to add objects to their collections over the last five years, gifts and bequests were the most frequently used methods. The survey results demonstrated that, except in the case of the national museums, collecting for most museums and galleries is no more than a marginal activity.

Case studies

The impact of new acquisitions of works of art and objects was found to be transformative both for museums and the people visiting them – in many different ways – in nine of the report's eleven case studies:

- In Manchester the relatively unusual acquisition of a refugee's life jacket from Greece was part of a new approach to thematic collecting, and formed part of Manchester Museum's remit to 'promote understanding between cultures and develop a sustainable world'.
- In the case of Hull, the purchase of Pietro Lorenzetti's early Renaissance masterpiece *Christ between Saints Paul and Peter* (c1320) significantly raised the profile of the Ferens Art Gallery and, alongside several high profile national partnership exhibitions, helped to demonstrate increased confidence and ambition during the lead-in to Hull's bid to become UK City of Culture in 2017.
- Glasgow Museums acquired examples of contemporary Indian painted truck backs – examples of Punjabi street art - to engage more closely with the city's multicultural communities.
- At the University of Cambridge, its Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology bought contemporary Australian art with an aim to shed light on, and create discussion around, colonial depictions of Aboriginal culture from the middle of the 19th century.
- In Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent the acquisition and display of a locally discovered Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire Hoard brought increased visitor numbers and tangible educational and economic benefits to both cities.
- In Belfast, the Ulster Museum initiated a project to tell an inclusive and diverse story of the Troubles, and acquired artefacts for a dedicated gallery.

- In Folkestone, an independent arts charity, the Creative Foundation, pioneered a new way of collecting and displaying civic art, thereby contributing to the town's much-needed economic and social regeneration.
- In Eastbourne, the Towner Art Gallery raised its profile and attracted new funding by focussing on collecting contemporary film and video work.
- Tate Modern in London pioneered the collection of performance-based and live action work, facing the inherent practical and financial challenges head on.
- The remaining two case studies look, by contrast, at deaccessioning – the very opposite of collecting. The Imperial War Museum's disposal of selected materials in order to focus and refine its collections was part of a carefully managed strategy. Meanwhile the disposal of an ancient Egyptian statue of Sekhemka (c2400-2300 BC) from Northampton Museum and Art Gallery by Northampton Borough Council, in order to raise funds for a capital project, aroused considerable controversy.

[Download the report at artfund.org/why-collect](https://artfund.org/why-collect)

Sir David Cannadine, author of *Why Collect?*, said, 'If ever there was a time to increase investment in museum curators and their collections, then that time is now. I call on government to take action in response by accompanying and encouraging philanthropic funding and very much hope that this report may assist the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in their conversations with the Treasury in seeking for public funding for the arts to be developed and expanded.'

Stephen Deuchar, Director, Art Fund, said, 'My thanks to Sir David Cannadine for this timely and penetrating report on the state of museum collecting in the UK today. To have an historian of his stature surveying this important area is invaluable. His concerns over the lack of public investment in the growth and care of our nation's collections, and in the people responsible for them, should be heeded. Museum collections have a demonstrable impact on people's cultural lives and wellbeing, and are thus a vital part of the social fabric of our country. Art Fund's charitable programme – helping museums to build their collections, to share them more widely, and to develop the skills and expertise of their curators – is more needed than ever. We therefore plan to increase our grant giving to £10m a year by 2020. In our determination to see standards rise on all fronts we will also continue to need enlightened partners like the Wolfson Foundation, the developing generosity of private philanthropists, and – crucially – increased public investment in UK museums and their collections for the benefit of everyone.'

Paul Ramsbottom, Chief Executive, Wolfson Foundation, said, 'Sir David Cannadine's report is characteristically insightful. It demonstrates again the range and importance of the collections held in the country's museums and galleries as well as the critical role of the curators who interpret and develop those collections. While the funding challenges facing the sector may not be historically unique, they are certainly severe and potentially very damaging. What the report makes abundantly clear is the need for increased and intelligent funding – from both philanthropy and, crucially, the public purse. That message of partnership is perhaps particularly appropriate given that the report was commissioned to mark 40 years of a rather different partnership: forty years of the fruitful partnership between Wolfson and the Art Fund.'

Maria Balshaw, Director, Tate, said: 'The works in our collections are a spur for the evolution of ideas and reflect the society of their time. It is vital that we have the resources to collect and care for works of the highest calibre. We need to be able to tell both a global and local story for generations to come and to provide powerful impetus for future creativity.'

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Notes to Editors:

Sir David Cannadine

David Cannadine is Dodge Professor of History, Princeton University, Editor, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, and President of the British Academy.

Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £39 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 139,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 320 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant giving, Art Fund's support to museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by The Hepworth Wakefield in 2017) and a range of digital platforms. Find out more about Art Fund and the National Art Pass at artfund.org

The Wolfson Foundation

The Wolfson Foundation is an independent charity that supports and promotes excellence in the fields of science, health, education and the arts. Over the past six decades it has awarded some £1.8 billion in real terms to over 10,000 projects all on the basis of expert peer review. One of its major funding programmes is the support of museums and galleries, both large and small, across the UK. Find out more about the Wolfson Foundation at wolfson.org.uk