

**Consultative Committee on the  
Core Arts and Cultural Facilities of the  
West Kowloon Cultural District**

**Museums Advisory Group**

**American Association of Museums Survey in 1999  
and the Survey on British Museums  
by the Art Fund in 2005/06**

**Purpose**

This paper provides information on the findings of two surveys conducted by the American Association of Museums of the United States in 1999 and the Art Fund of the United Kingdom in 2005/2006.

**Background**

2. In 1999, the American Association of Museums conducted a Financial Information Survey on 700 museums in the United States to study various issues including the attendance and the sources of operating income. It was an extensive museum survey and was not conducted on a

regular basis. It is worth noting that for art museums, the average number of visitors for 253 art museums was 140 724 in a year and that 69.1% operating income came from earned sources such as souvenirs, as well as private sources such as donations. The survey summary is at **Annex A**.

3. Founded in 1903, the Art Fund is an independent charity in the United Kingdom committed to promoting art for people to enjoy. The Art Fund has conducted a survey on 305 British museums to study their collecting activity for the period from November 2005 to April 2006. A brief report on the survey is at **Annex B**.

4. Some salient points are listed below for Members' information:-

(a) Collecting

- Acquisition are important (more than 85%) for a museum

(b) Collecting Activity

- Most British Museums (69%) collected their artworks through gifts and donations
- Few Museums (12%) collected primarily by acquiring artworks to be followed by loans, bequests and archaeological fieldwork

(c) Obstacles to Collecting

- Lack of funding (51%)

- Shortage of display and storage space (84%)
- Shortage of experienced staff and management time (82%)
- Shortage of art market information (70%)
- Shortage of curatorial expertise (50%)

(d) Suggested Measures to Increase Collection

- Increase funding for acquisition (55%)
- More art market information (19%)
- Increase display and storage space (13%)
- More staff especially curatorial staff (10%)
- Other suggestions such as increase tax incentives

**Leisure and Cultural Services Department**

**June 2006**

1999 Survey of USA Museums by American Association of Museums

1999 Profile	Art Museums	History Museums	Specialized Museums	Children's Museums	Living Collections	Natural History/ Science Museums
Sample Size	253	178	112	21	30	106
Average Attendance	140,724	96,774	94,262	72,568	243,913	243,913
Median Attendance	46,277	13,500	30,000	52,776	115,000	87,493
% Charging Admission Fees	41.1%	49.1%	58.5%	84.2%	58.5%	67.9%
Median Adult Admission Charge	\$5.00	\$3.00	\$4.50	\$3.75	\$4.50	\$5.00
% of Museums with Membership Programs	83.9%	77.0%	75.4%	81.0%	75.4%	82.1%
Median Number of Members	929	413	700	435	700	1000
Median Endowment	\$2,544,826	\$292,304	\$723,433	\$191,416	\$800,000	\$760,015
% Operating Income from Earned Sources	23.3%	27.0%	32.8%	33.4%	37.4%	31.4%
% Operating Income from Private Sources	45.8%	26.5%	32.2%	34.0%	21.4%	31.4%

(only English Version is available)



## The Collecting Challenge: The Art Fund Museum Survey 2006

(only English Version is available)

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

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.

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

Supported by:



'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



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

## 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



'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