



**ACT**  
Government

CANBERRA  
MUSEUM  
+GALLERY

## Canberra Museum and Gallery

# COLLECTIONS POLICY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A Single Policy Statement

Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG) has established, and will continue to develop a permanent collection that integrates the visual arts and social history. The Collection focuses on the articulation of the historical, social, artistic and environmental identity of the Canberra region. This single policy document guides collecting activities. It relates to, and supports, CMAG's Exhibition Policy and Education Policy.

This policy was originally developed through a process of research and consultation with collecting agencies and community groups both within the ACT and interstate. It has since been reviewed on a regular basis, and will continue to be an evolving document and be subject to regular review.

## 2. COLLECTION PRINCIPLES & OBJECTIVES

**2.1** We are the ACT's own museum and gallery and provide custodianship for the territory's collection. CMAG's purpose is to work in partnership with the community to explore and celebrate Canberra's social history and visual arts. This provides the overriding philosophical ethos for CMAG's collection development. In accordance with this purpose, the principles that inform and underpin CMAG's collecting activity are as follows:

- *CMAG's focus is the articulation of the historical, social, artistic and environmental identity of the Canberra region.*
- *CMAG is, and will continue to be adventurous in exploring the relationships between the region's visual arts and heritage, presenting Canberra as a vital community.*
- *CMAG's principles of community ownership and community partnerships inform the design, planning and activity of the CMAG.*
- *CMAG's collecting activities recognise the value of our collective and dispersed collections held by other institutions, organisations and individuals.*

### 2.2 Collection Objectives

In addition to reflecting CMAG's philosophical ethos, CMAG's collection has been established, and will continue to be developed, to fulfill a number of agreed purposes and objectives. With the integration of social history and visual arts, all collecting will be informed by the personal stories and experiences of artists/makers, individuals and communities. Placing objects in a contextual environment is integral to CMAG's research, display and interpretation. The aims of the collection are:

- *to develop a permanent collection which expresses the various Canberra identities (as defined by community groups and individuals); sense of place and cultural diversity*
- *to preserve, reflect, document and challenge the past, present and future of the ACT community*
- *to be made accessible through exhibition, education, publication and other programs by CMAG staff and the community*
- *to provide a research resource for CMAG, the community, students and researchers and other agencies*
- *to be accessible on a loans basis to other collecting/exhibiting bodies demonstrating appropriate museum environments, security and climate control*
- *to be a valued part of the Distributed National Collection and heritage of Australia*
- *to promote greater awareness and appreciation of the ACT community*

- *to provide opportunities for the people of Canberra and the region to learn, explore and participate in the telling, expression and critical analysis of their own stories, practices and experiences.*

These objectives will be achieved by acquiring items which reveal, for example:

- *significant social content*
- *evidence of practices, lifestyles or stories relating to aspects of Canberra history*
- *a capacity to establish links with other stories/practices/institutions*
- *stories of people expressing our commonalities or distinction which may help our shared understanding of our community*
- *works of art, particularly from the Canberra region, which are of local, regional or national significance*
- *works of art of high aesthetic quality or revealing unique or special features which have been influential or important in the Canberra region*
- *a diversity of visual arts practice through a range of media*

All acquisitions (whether acquired through purchase, donation, bequest or other means) will be supported by thorough and ongoing research and will be stored and managed to the highest museum standards. Community knowledge and input will be important and highly valued in both the processes of acquisition and the subsequent use of collection items.

### **2.3 Legal & Ethical Underpinnings**

#### **2.3.1 Ownership & Copyright**

When an object or work is donated, bequeathed or sold to CMAG, legal title must be transferred from the donor or vendor to the accepting body. As a general rule, CMAG will not accept objects or works with encumbrances attached. Some objects or works may have cultural, religious or other restrictions placed upon them, and these will be negotiated in advance of acceptance.

It may not be appropriate or possible to transfer copyright at the time of donation or purchase. Copyright may remain with the donor/vendor/artist or a limited licence to copyright may be provided to CMAG.

## 2.3.2 Professional Ethics

In addition to observing CMAG's principles, collecting activities and collection management procedures will also be informed by current professional and ethical guidelines such as the *Code of Ethics: for art, history and science museums*, established by Museums Australia Inc. These guidelines inform professional gallery and museum practices and cover the following areas of activity;

- *acquisitions to museum collections*
- *display of collections*
- *research into collections*
- *disposal of collections*
- *professional conduct*

This document can be obtained from the Museums Australia Inc. office or can be accessed at CMAG's offices.

## 2.4 Strategic Partnerships

### 2.4.1 The Distributed National Collection

The Distributed National Collection is the "sum of all moveable cultural heritage of significance to the nation, including cultural heritage collections and objects which are in the custody of a wide range of organisations and individuals". (Cultural Ministers Council, *National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage*, Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, p. 8)

CMAG views its collection as a valued part of the Distributed National Collection. In accordance with this philosophy, the CMAG collection will develop in a fashion which complements and respects the collecting activities of other agencies, community organisations groups and individuals, both within the ACT and interstate.

### 2.4.2 Co-operative Collecting Policies & Practice

CMAG will encourage the development of co-operative cultural planning agreements and collecting policies with other agencies, individuals or groups as appropriate.

CMAG recognises the value of community based collections and those developed by individuals. CMAG will explore opportunities to work with the custodians of these collections in a mutually beneficial way.

## 3. SELECTION CRITERIA

### 3.1 Conceptual Criteria

Selection criteria determine the direction and breadth of collection development. CMAG will represent both outstanding examples of visual arts and material culture, and also popular culture.

“Targeted” or “priority” collecting may address specific historiographic questions or exhibition or research themes.

Both visual art and social history will address the following themes:

#### ***Canberra Identity***

The nexus between individual, local and national identity is integral to Canberra's heritage and has a significant impact on the community. Canberra's history reaches back before the establishment of the national capital. This theme complements and extends the collecting activities of other agencies and explores the region's visual arts and social history from the beginning of human occupation to the present in consultation with the traditional custodians of the Canberra region, the Ngunnawal, Ngunawal and Ngambri peoples.

#### ***A Sense of Place***

As well as investigating the planning and development of Canberra, this theme will explore interactions with the natural landscape, and its influence upon a Canberran identity. It will examine relevant organisations and societies, and aspects of leisure, festivals and celebrations.

#### ***Canberra's Cultural Diversity***

This theme will explore the unique role of the traditional custodians of the region, and examine the history, dynamics and contemporary reality of cultural diversity in the Canberra region.

These themes are broad contexts for more detailed investigations. They will include the many stories of Canberra – of individuals, groups, associations, organisations and institutions.

### 3.2 General Criteria

Equally important as conceptual criteria are issues of:

- relevance to the expressed themes
- provenance
- condition
- conservation implications
- funding
- exhibition potential
- duplication
- objects/works in danger
- significance

## 4. Methods of Acquisition

Objects or works for inclusion in the collection will be acquired through the following means:

- *Donation*
- *Taxation Incentives for the Arts*
- *Purchase*
- *Sponsorships*
- *Endowments*
- *Commissioning*
- *Transfer from other agencies*
- *Bequests*

Procedures for acquiring objects or works are set out in the Attachment to this policy.

## 5. Deaccessioning

As a general rule, deaccessioning is not recommended. In order to ensure responsible deaccessioning practice, each object or work must undergo a rigorous process of assessment prior to a decision to recommend deaccessioning.

**ATTACHMENT** Acquisition Procedures Objects or works are considered and acquired through the following steps:

1. (a) An offer of a work/object is received from sources such as donor, bequest, endowment, Taxation Incentives for the Arts Program, transfer from other agency; or  
(b) a work/object is solicited by the Canberra Museum and Gallery, for example, by commission, purchase from dealer/individual, transfer requested by CMAG from other institution.
2. Potential item sighted (in some circumstances, this may be image only).
3. Initial assessment conducted by curatorial team. At this stage there may be recommendation for referral to another agency or individual, if considered appropriate.
4. More extensive research is then undertaken for those items to proceed for acquisition and an Acquisition Assessment form completed (sample form is attached).
5. The Director has a delegation to purchase objects or works, determined against the selection criteria, to the value of \$11,000. Documentation is still required on these.
6. Objects or works proposed for purchase over the value of \$11,000, or of a potentially controversial nature, or of exceptional significance, are considered by the Corporation Board.
7. Donations/gifts over the value of \$22,000 are considered by the Corporation Board.