



Making Great Art Work:
Arts Council Collection Policy
2018–2022



Bailiúchán an Chomhairle Ealaíon
Arts Council Collection

General Description and Context

The Arts Council began collecting works of art in 1962. The aim from the beginning was to purchase work from living artists at a critical stage in their career. The collection has continued to grow through regular acquisitions and there are now approx. 1,100 works in the collection.

The mission statement for the collection is 'The Arts Council's collection supports artists' and public engagement with the arts. It does this by purchasing excellent contemporary work to be enjoyed and valued through display and programmes delivered directly and with partners. Through the collection, the Arts Council also acts as a custodian and carer of great art on behalf of the people of Ireland.'

Operating as a 'museum without walls' it is primarily a lending collection. Works can be seen in schools, hospitals, public sector buildings, as well as galleries, museums and other arts organisations in Ireland.

The collection contains works by many important modern and contemporary Irish artists, including all the artists who have represented Ireland at Venice with solo exhibitions, members of Aosdána (past and present), and artists who been nominated for or received international awards such as Prix Pictet and the Turner Prize.

The collection can loosely be divided into three main categories:

- Two-dimensional work including paintings, drawings, prints and photographs on paper and canvas (comprising approximately 85% of the collection)
- Three-dimensional work including sculpture, ceramics and installations (comprising approximately 10% of the collection)
- Multi-media including videos and sound recordings (comprising approximately 5% of the collection)

The Arts Council Collection is part of the national collection and plays a role in development and support of contemporary art alongside organisations such as The Office of Public Works, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and Crawford Art Gallery as well local authority collections across Ireland.

Artists and the Collection

Support for artists is one of the key priorities of the Arts Council's [*Making Great Art Work*](#) (MGAW) Strategy. The strategy states that the work of artists illuminates the present, nourishes our understanding of the past, and inspires our visions of the future. This encapsulates the function of the collection.

The aim of the collection has been, from the beginning, to support living artists at a critical stage in their career and not to focus on creating a museum-like collection.

Purchasing work from artists and sharing the collection with the public ensures some of the key objectives of MGAW are met.

To achieve this, the Arts Council will:

- Aim to ensure that artists are supported at key stages in the life cycle of their careers
- Place an emphasis on the fair and equitable remuneration of artists
- Give equal consideration to all media/materials
- Support artists in the making of high-quality art

Public Engagement and the Collection

As the other priority area in *Making Great Art Work*, it is important that the collection reflects the goal of having more people enjoying high-quality arts experiences. Public engagement and access to the collection primarily takes place through loans, exhibitions, events and online platforms.

Public engagement with the collection will be informed by the following goals:

- Engage the public by having the collection on display in buildings that can be easily accessed by the public and begin to phase out loans to buildings that are not
- Ensure the collection can be accessed by diverse publics across Ireland, especially in rural areas or areas with a low visual arts provision, partnering with existing arts infrastructure, arts offices and other local partners.
- Utilise technology to facilitate access to the entire collection in a meaningful and contemporary way
- Partner with the existing arts infrastructure to facilitate best practice in engagement programmes relating to the display of the collection
- Partner with organisations that work in the area of Young People, Children and Education to facilitate engagement with the collection by children, young people and third level students
- Explore the possibility of regular public access with a programmed gallery/education/research space.

Collection Development Areas

Over the lifetime of this policy it is a priority for the Arts Council that the Collection is seen as a development tool in the delivery of the main pillars of *Making Great Art Work*, that of supporting artists and increasing public engagement with the arts.

This will be achieved by acquiring new works, improving equality and diversity in the collection, increasing the amount of collection works on short-term and long-term loans, and establishing clear guidelines for de-accessioning, gifts and unsolicited works.

Acquisitions

The Arts Council Collection is dynamic and evolving. This is underpinned by a commitment to acquire new works for the collection on an on-going basis. These acquisitions allow the Arts Council to provide public access to the collection through loans and exhibitions.

The process of acquiring work for the collection is overseen by the Collection Acquisitions Committee, whose membership will comprise members of the Arts Council, as well as a broad and complimentary external membership.

Given the unique position the Arts Council Collection holds in the development of the visual arts since the early 1960's it is important that future acquisitions continue in the tradition of purchasing works of art that are ambitious, challenging and innovative.

To support the delivery of *MGAW* and to continue to build an important national collection, the Arts Council will:

- Support artists in the making of high-quality art
- Acquire works from artists, from emerging to established, at an important stage in their career
- Continue to add works of scale, ambition and excellence
- Focus on acquiring recent works
- Only acquire work by artists who have not been previously purchased by the Arts Council, with the exception of work which demonstrates a significant shift in an artist's practice

Equality and Diversity

This policy takes account of the Arts Council's [**Equality, Human Rights & Diversity Policy & Strategy**](#) and as such will seek to better represent contemporary Irish society and to actively promote a more equitable representation of artists from diverse backgrounds, taking account of the nine grounds for discrimination in legislation (Gender; Civil status; Family status; Sexual orientation; Religion; Age; Disability; Race; Membership of the Traveller community) and social class.

To ensure that the collection meets these policy aims the Arts Council will:

- Continue to acquire work of the highest quality whilst being cognisant of the need for the collection to better reflect contemporary Ireland
- Work with creative organisations who have an equality and diversity remit to ensure the acquisitions committee are aware of the variety of artists working across Ireland

- Carry out research on the collection to identify which categories are under-represented and aim to represent those areas more fully in the collection going forward
- Ensure that members of the Collection Acquisitions Committee are drawn from diverse backgrounds

Loans

As a loan collection, the Arts Council makes work available to publicly funded organisations for long-term loans, as well as partnering with galleries, museums and other exhibition contexts in Ireland and internationally. Having works from the collection on display in public buildings is an important way of sharing this resource, assisting the Arts Council to realise many of the goals set out in *Making Great Art Work*. Encountering art work in schools, hospitals, library, and other public buildings can be a positive experience that can assist with the mediation of the collection to a wide variety of publics.

In delivering the Arts Council's aim of developing capacity for the visual arts in Ireland, it is important to have work from the Arts Council collection on exhibition. These exhibitions can be a useful way for smaller, regional venues to augment their programme with works of international significance.

To support the mediation of the collection through exhibitions, the Arts Council will:

- Actively facilitate the display of the collection in galleries, museums and other cultural venues in Ireland and internationally
- Work with our partners – especially in local government – to present great art that will enable meaningful public engagement with the collection
- Work with organisations to ensure that loans are timely, in line with best collection management practice

Whilst it is an aspiration to have as many works from the Arts Council on display at any given time that must be balanced with the responsibility we have for care of the collection, especially in buildings that do not have museum-like environmental and security standards.

Therefore, all requests for loans from the collection will need to meet the following conditions:

- Borrowers will have to provide a clear demonstration that the public can easily access these works and not just the staff or official visitors
- Borrowers need to be cognisant of the environmental considerations in any loan request and all loans will be subject to a two-year time limit. This may be extended following formal agreement between both parties
- Borrowers will have to acknowledge that works can be recalled by the Arts Council for exhibition or operational purposes. Any works recalled may be replaced, subject to formal agreement, by other works from the collection
- Borrowers will have to cover the cost of transport (from and return to Arts Council), professional art handlers and nail-to-nail insurance for the duration of the loan

- Borrowers will have to sign a loan agreement, which explains in greater detail the conditions both parties to the loan must meet

De-accessioning

The collection tells the story of contemporary art as it happened since the Council was founded. Artistically, the de-accessioning of any part of the collection could be problematic as often works can become unfashionable for a period, and remain in storage, but often these works can become fashionable and popular again. It is, however, important to have a formal de-accessioning policy for works that are irrevocably damaged, lost or duplicated within the collection.

Works will only be de-accessioned in exceptional circumstances and never for financial gain. The conditions for de-accessioning will only be met if:

- Works are damaged beyond repair, or the cost of restoration exceeds the value of the work
- Works are missing, presumed lost and efforts have been exhausted to recover the work(s)
- There are more than one of the same work already in collection, primarily duplicate prints from same edition
- Work is unattributed, no proof of purchase exists or there is no provenance for the work

Unsolicited Approaches and Gifts

Unsolicited approaches for works to be acquired or for gifts to be made to the Arts Council Collection are not accepted.