MAAS Collection Development Policy

![MAAS logo — Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences]

Draft policy for comment: 13 November 2015	
Date Approved: 10 December 2015	
Date for Review: December 2017	

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1. Introduction

Founded in 1880, the Museum is a publicly funded institution governed by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Act 1945 and board of Trustees. It is a statutory body in the NSW Department of Justice, responsible to the Minister for the Arts. The Museum has three sites: the Powerhouse Museum (opened 1988), Sydney Observatory (transferred 1982) and the Castle Hill site (acquired 1947).

The 1945 Act identified two main collecting areas: objects demonstrating the 'industrial advance of civilisation' and those promoting 'craftsmanship and artistic taste'. In the lead up to the opening of the Powerhouse in 1988, new directions for collecting were established, particularly the Museum's commitment to collecting contemporary science, technology, decorative arts, crafts and product design. The Museum's first collection development policy was issued in 1991 (revised 2001) with the aim "To represent the nature, social context and histories of science, technology, industry, design, decorative art and the peoples of New South Wales'.

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) Strategic Plan (2020 Vision) describes a new interdisciplinary way of working. The Museum's vision will be delivered through four strategic ambitions: Curiosity, Creativity, Collaboration, and Sustainability. These ambitions are interdependent, fostering a whole-of-organisation approach. The MAAS 2020 Vision describes themes and disciplines that will be used to determine our program and build a consistent identity for our Museum. While we will continue to maintain our vast and diverse collection the focus for developing the collection will be on the following disciplines: technologies, health and medicine, physical sciences, architecture and the built environment, design and decorative arts, fashion and contemporary culture. Collecting priorities will be aligned with the Museum's vision to be the leading museum of applied arts and sciences; inspiring communities and transforming our world. Strategic emphasis will be given to acquiring significant and innovative objects that demonstrate how technology, engineering, science and design impact Australia and the world. The collection will be developed with an outward focus representative of global developments as well as representing our place in our state and region.

2. Purpose of the Collection

The Museum is acknowledged internationally for the calibre of its collection, scholarship and exhibitions. Our collection spans Australian and international history, science, technology, design, industry, decorative arts, music, transport and space exploration. It is home to the material heritage and stories of Australia's diverse communities and cultures, providing insights into Australian history and society.

The collection lies at the core of Museum business, enabling it to fulfil both its mission to be 'a catalyst for creative expression and curious minds,' *and its* vision: 'to be the leading Museum of applied arts and sciences; inspiring communities and transforming our world.' Through collecting, preserving and documenting Australian material culture and its global context, the Museum advances our understanding and valuing of the past, inspires creativity and innovation, and increases our ability to respond to present and future challenges.

3. Guidelines for collecting

3.1. Rationale

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences 2020 Vision strategic goals stipulate that our evolving collections will inspire and act as a catalyst for advancing knowledge.

Collecting priorities are determined by curatorial collecting plans aligned with the Museum's exhibition, program and research commitments. These priorities will reflect the themes and disciplines described in the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences 2020 Vision.

Collecting plans recognise General Themes and Focus Disciplines as listed in this Policy (4.1 & 4.2) and are mediated by the Museum's significance criteria (3.3) and a continued focus on collecting the contemporary. Collecting plans, which are revised on a regular basis, guide collection development including acceptance of donations and ensure that the collection remains manageable, sustainable and relevant.

3.2 Collecting practices

Curators rigorously research objects and their provenance according to the Provenance Research Guidelines and utilising the Due diligence provenance checklist. Acquisition proposals are prepared according to the Acquisition and Accession Policy. They are reviewed by a Collection Development Committee made up of representatives from Curatorial, Registration and Conservation and chaired by the Director of Curatorial, Collections & Exhibitions. Following recommendations agreed to by this group, objects, archives and associated materials are permanently acquired and entered into the Register following approval from the Director. When an object enters the collection, title passes directly to the Trust. Objects are not acquired on permanent loan or any other form of conditional transfer. The Museum does not guarantee to display material acquired as stated in the Deed of Gift which outlines the terms regarding the acceptance of gifts.

Material is acquired by the Museum with the intention of ensuring its long-term care and preservation. From time to time however, for reasons summarised below (6.0), material is recommended for deaccessioning.

A significant shift in the nature of the Museum's collection over the last ten years is in the growth in Australia and globally of digital materials and, consequently, their acquisition in their own right as well as for reasons of contextualisation. Digital objects will be assessed for acquisition according to the collecting criteria (3.3) with reference to current museum practices for managing and preserving digital material.

3.3 Collecting criteria

Curators assess all objects proposed for acquisition, whether by purchase, donation, bequest, sponsorship or transfer, by assessing their significance. This is done with reference to the existing collection. Significance is assessed against consistent criteria:

3.3.1 Each object collected will have significance to past or present Australian society within a global context, reflecting important innovations, changes, themes and processes in material culture with regard to *one or more of the following criteria*:

- *design:* the object's innovative, effective and/or highly creative design and production and/or its inherent ability to reflect a design trend, theme or movement, and/or the influence and reputation of the designer/maker;
- *scientific and research significance:* the object illustrates significant innovations in science, technology and industry, and/or has, alone or in association with other objects, significant research potential;
- *historic significance*: the object's association with people, events, places and themes; its history of use; how it operates and/or functions, and its implications for the future;
- *cultural and social significance:* the object has symbolic status that links it to cultural traditions or social/spiritual contexts, and/or reflects beliefs, customs and lifestyles in Australia or globally.

- *aesthetic significance:* the object may be aesthetically significant for its artistic merit, craftsmanship, style, technical excellence, beauty, demonstration of skill and quality of design and execution.

3.3.2. The main criteria for assessing significance are modified by considerations of:

- *provenance*: preference will be given to objects with established provenance and detailed documentation;
- *rarity*: preference will be given to unique and rare objects documenting important developments, themes and processes;
- *representativeness*: in some cases the fact that an object is typical of its kind will add to its significance;
- *condition, material stability and completeness*: sufficiently robust to render the object suitable for storage, access, and use in Museum programs;
- *interpretative potential*: having the capacity to demonstrate achievements, themes and changes in technology and design practice, and /or to communicate social and cultural practices and meanings for our diverse audiences.

The criteria above are a modified version of guidelines published in the Collection Council of Australia's *Significance: A Guide to Assessing the Cultural Heritage of Objects and Collections (2001)*. They reflect the nature and breadth of this Museum's collection and the Museum's mission and vision.

3.4 The significance statement

The significance statement is a key component of an object's documentation and can be accessed by the public through the Museum's website. It is guided by the same criteria that determine the selection and acceptance of objects for the Museum's collection (as listed above). Prepared by curators during the acquisition process (and also retrospectively for objects acquired prior to the introduction of this requirement), the significance statement is essentially a concise summary of the values, meaning and importance of an object or collection of objects. Recognising that statements of significance reflect the expertise, knowledge and judgement of a curator at a particular point in time, they are signed and dated and details of any references used are included.

3.5 The significance category

Essential to the acquisition process is the identification of the significance category for each object or collection of objects. Significance categories assist the Museum to appropriately manage the collection under risk management principles identified in the Strategic Collections Policy Framework. They are as follows:

A: objects that are irreplaceable and deemed by their intrinsic value, historic association or cultural significance to be national or international treasures. A collection of objects can be identified as 'A' even when individual objects within that collection are not of great national or international significance.

B: objects that are likely to be very difficult or expensive to replace and deemed by their intrinsic value, historic association, cultural significance or rarity to be of importance in a state, national or international context. A collection of objects can be identified as 'B' even when individual objects are not of great cultural significance.

C: objects have considerable cultural or social significance. They may be replaceable but are still deemed to be of importance because of their intrinsic value, historic association, scientific, artistic and cultural significance or rarity. Most acquisitions will fall within this category.

S: objects of particular significance to the state of NSW. These are objects that are deemed excellent examples of the movable heritage of the state because of their association with historic or contemporary events, people, regions or sites. These can also be A or B objects.

The classification of objects within these categories is periodically reviewed and may be subject to change.

4. Current collecting priorities

4.1   General themes

Consistent with the MAAS 2020 Vision, current collection development activities focus on four general themes pertinent to all active collection areas:

- Our place in time – our past, present and future
- Our place in our state and our region, a focus on Asia
- Innovation and technological change
- Economic and environmental sustainability

These general themes are underpinned by the Museum's commitment to recording and fostering creative industries and traditional and contemporary craft skills and to documenting changes in science and technology in the 21st century. An increased focus will be on developing the collection of Indigenous material across all disciplines with a view to increasing knowledge and awareness of the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

4.2   Focus disciplines

The Museum's core collecting areas span broadly across the applied arts and sciences. They are described below according the focus disciplines in the MAAS 2020 Vision. There is considerable overlap across disciplines which share interests in a range of themes such as materials, processes and production technologies, cultural contexts and the wider design practice. These inter-disciplinary links and collaboration are actively explored; they are based on the belief that shared perspectives enrich our understanding and appreciation of material culture and enable the Museum to construct more encompassing and meaningful stories both about our heritage and about living in a contemporary world.

The curatorial department collects historical and contemporary objects designed, made and used in Australia but also representative of production or use in a range of countries, regions and cultures. Whenever possible, objects are collected with contextual and narrative information such as associated documents, stories, images, drawings, devices, systems, models, prototypes and displays, advertising material, audiovisual recordings, digital files, oral histories and socio-cultural meaning, to fully document the object and its many dimensions.

4.2.1 Technologies
Technology at MAAS refers to the practical application of knowledge to better and more effectively accomplishing tasks across the spectrum of human activity. It refers to individual machines and tools as well as systems. Technology is also understood to include the know-how, practices, processes and skills that mediate all aspects of society.

Collecting in this area includes information, communications, media and imaging technologies, robotics, small scale digital manufacturing, transport and space technologies, biotechnologies, military innovation with implications for the broader community, nanotechnologies and other

emerging technologies, especially digital technologies. It includes hardware and machinery related to domestic and manufacturing technologies, office technology as well as other industrial and professional tools.

4.2.2 Health and medicine
Health is understood as the state of being free from illness and injury, but more than that to be a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being. Medicine is the science and practice of the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of human disease. In the Museum context, this discipline also includes surgery, fitness, longevity, public health, community health and traditional remedies. The history of and changing community and social attitudes towards health and medicine are also included.

Collecting in this area includes Australian innovations in drugs, vaccines, or surgery; medical devices and imaging technology; biotechnologies including genetic engineering; public health and safety, health education; diseases with increasing impact on the community, issues such as vaccination, euthanasia and birth control.

4.2.3 Physical sciences
Science is defined broadly as a set of approaches, referred to as scientific methods, through which we gain insight into our world. It includes the body of knowledge already accumulated using such methods. Physical sciences is used here to be distinct from the life sciences.

Collecting in this area includes physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, climate science, meteorology, material science, computational science, space science and agricultural science. It also includes the history and development of those sciences as well as contemporary research, especially in Australia. Collecting will illustrate the understanding of those sciences in our society and their potential for our future economic, social and environmental well-being and success.

4.2.4 Engineering
Engineering at MAAS refers to the practical application of science and technology to commerce or industry and the built environment for the benefit of the community. This includes the design, manufacture, operation and maintenance of efficient and economical structures, machines, processes, and systems. It also includes the social, cultural and historical contexts in which engineering practice occurs.

Collecting in this area includes civil, construction, mechanical, electrical, mining and materials engineering; transport technologies; energy and power technologies; design for mass production; trade tools and traditional crafts and skills; machine tools and production; engineering practices such as drawing, testing, modelling and prototyping.

4.2.5 Architecture and the built environment
This discipline includes the art, science, design, construction, management, and use of buildings and structures and spaces that provide the setting for human activity, from large scale civic places to personal domains. It also includes the supporting infrastructure.

Collecting in this area includes: historical and contemporary architecture and design of urban spaces; architectural drawings, documentation and models, agricultural and urban vehicles, and mass transit systems; roads, railways, ports and airports and their control systems; urban planning, infrastructure and systems (gas, electricity, power, communication, water, sewerage and waste systems).

4.2.6 Design and decorative arts
Design and decorative Arts at MAAS includes visual culture and problem solving from antiquity to the present, with a particular focus on artefacts from Australia, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region from the eighteenth century onwards. Themes include the applied arts: industrial and

product design, graphic design, photography, interior design; as well as craft, performing arts, everyday life, ceremonies and leisure.

The collection covers all aspects of design and decorative arts from glass, ceramics, lacquer, plastics, textiles, furniture and woodwork; to musical instruments; commercial art and visual communication; architectural elements; jewellery, numismatics and metalwork.

4.2.7 Fashion

Fashion at MAAS encompasses the breadth of work generated in the production and consumption of fashionable dress from clothing and textiles to promotional material. Themes include the work of key designers and manufacturers, fashion trends from the eighteenth century to the present, alternative and subcultural style, customary dress and the diversity of Australian fashion culture.

Collecting in this area includes fashion from colonial to contemporary Australia, Europe, North America and Asia as well as illustration, drawing, photography, swatch books, designer and company archives, and industrial technology.

4.2.8 Contemporary culture

Refers to the catalysts and contexts for change in our society. This might include political, social, creative or technological factors that mediate both the individual and collective experience of our time. This discipline is forward looking, but also provides a lens through which the past can be better understood. It also attempts to reflect changing museological and curatorial practices, making more vivid the contemporary circumstances surrounding the development of objects and ideas and allowing for experimentation and innovation in what and how we collect.

5. Archive collections

These represent the papers of individuals and the records of organisations and businesses. Archives are arranged and described according to archival principles but are incorporated within the Museum's collection. Development of the archives will support the general themes (4.1) and focus disciplines (4.2) and primarily document design and production processes that reflect the Museum's collections rather than business records. Archival material relevant to the Museum's collections includes unpublished documentation, correspondence, typescripts, photographs, reports, research materials, ephemera, scrapbooks, diaries, annotated books, design drawings and other primary source material. MAAS archives provide research support to enrich and enhance the Museum's curatorial, collection, exhibition, programming and educational objectives.

6. Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning is the process of de-registering an object from the collection. These objects are ordinary collection objects, D (disposable) collection objects and E (education) collection objects. The policy and procedures for managing and approving deaccessions are outlined in the MAAS *Deaccessioning Policy* (2015).

In summary, objects are assessed for deaccessioning on the basis of their relation to the current Collection Development Policy, their significance, condition, cost of their conservation and storage, whether they duplicate other objects in the collection and where an individual, group, organisation or community establishes greater claim on ownership than the Museum for 'moral, ethical, personal, compassionate, cultural, religious or legal reasons'.

7. Related Museum plans, policies and procedures

This policy complements:
- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) Strategic Plan (2020 Vision), 2014
- MAAS Strategic Collections Policy Framework 2015

This policy supersedes:
- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, Collection Development Policy, 1991
- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, Collection Development and Research Policy, 2001
- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, Collection Development Policy, 2010

8. Related external policies, plans and procedures

This policy recognises:
- NSW 2021 Plan (2011), particularly goals 15 and 27 to 'improve education and learning outcomes for all students' and 'enhance cultural, creative, sporting and recreation opportunities'
- Arts NSW Business Plan 2013 - 2015
- Create in NSW: NSW Arts and Cultural Policy Framework (2015)
- Movable Cultural Heritage Principles, NSW Heritage Office, 2000
- Previous possessions, new obligations - a plain English summary of policies for museums in Australia and Torres Strait Islander people,   AMAM, 1993
- Code of ethics for art history and science museums, Museums Australia, 1999
- Code of ethics for museums, International Council of Museums, 2004
- UNESCO Convention (prohibiting the illicit trade in cultural property), 1970
- Australian Best Practice Guide to Collecting Cultural Material, 2014

9. Relevant legislation

- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Act, 1945
- Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act, 1986

10. Schemes assisting collection development

Powerhouse Foundation
Two Commonwealth schemes:
- Cultural Gifts Program
- The National Cultural Heritage Account

11. Relationship to other collecting institutions

The Museum endeavours to work collaboratively with other museums, libraries, galleries, archives, heritage and community organisations.

12. References

National Museum of Australia, Collections Development Plan, 2008
Science Museum Collecting Policy Statement, 2010
Victoria and Albert Museum, V&A Collections Development Policy, 2010

13. Responsible Officer Head of Curatorial

14. Responsible Department & Unit Curatorial, Collections & Exhibitions, Curatorial Team.

15. Amendment history

Version	Date issued	Notes	By
1	10 November 2015		Head of Curatorial
2	13 November 2015	Reformatted	Governance Manager
3	10 December 2015	Executive approval with edits updated	Head of Curatorial