



ACQUISITION AND ACCESSION POLICY

Approved by the Council of Trustees
24 August 2023

Policy statement

Control of the State Collection is vested in the Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria by virtue of *The National Gallery of Victoria Act (1966)* (Vic), as amended (the Act). The Council of Trustees acknowledges its obligations under the Act to maintain, conserve, develop and promote the State Collection of works of art.

Acquisition and accessioning of works of art into the State Collection occurs within an accepted framework to ensure compliance with legal and ethical requirements in accordance with Collection development strategies. Acquisition priorities will be determined in accordance with the NGV Collections Strategy.

Application

This Policy applies to all acquisitions of artworks and related materials, whether or not these are accessioned into the State Collection.

Context

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Amendment) 1979
- *Australian Best Practice Guide to Collecting Cultural Material*, Australian Government, Attorney General's Department, Ministry for the Arts, 2015
- ICOM *Code of Ethics*, 2006
- Museums Australia *Code of Ethics* 1999
- *Continuous Cultures Ongoing Responsibilities: principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage* (2005)
- Pacific Islands Museums Association Code of Ethics for Pacific Museums and Cultural Centres, 2006
- The 1995 Unidroit Convention
- UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
- UNESCO Red Lists
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007
- *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic)

This policy is also informed by the traditions and precedent set since the establishment of the National Gallery of Victoria in 1861. The NGV Collections Strategy (as revised from time to time) identifies a series of key priorities guiding collection development. While acknowledging that acquisitions will be made across the Collection as significant opportunities arise, collecting will be actively focused according to the NGV Collections Strategy.

It is recognised that the Collections have been formed almost in their entirety on the basis of donations from the community. Since the establishment of the Felton Bequest in 1904, the State Government has generally played a limited role in funding acquisitions for the NGV.



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Key principles

1. Acquisition and Accession

- 1.1. Works of art are chattels. As a result, legal title passes when the parties intend it to pass. The passing of title to the NGV is best confirmed by written agreement. At the NGV, following in principle approval of the acquisition by the Council of Trustees, property passes when a relevant agreement of transfer of title between the NGV and the donor or seller has been executed. This is also the date of Accession into the State Collection.
- 1.2. For gifts to the State Collection from the Felton Bequest, legal title in the work passes to the NGV on handover from the Felton Committee, which is formalised by the execution of a deed of gift. The date of accession is the date of the execution of the deed of gift.
- 1.3. The Council of Trustees may give approval to bid at auction. For works purchased through auction, legal title passes in accordance with the terms set out by the auction house. The date of property passing is also the date of accession into the State Collection.

2. Acquisition and Non-Accession

- 2.1. In some instances, where an acquisition is of benefit to the NGV, works of art or other material can be acquired which are not accessioned into the State Collection. There may be two principal reasons for this:
 - The material is not appropriate for accession into the State Collection, but is of benefit as it relates to or supports the State Collection for research purposes, study or reference; or
 - Acceptance of a bequest or gift with the intention of later sale or disposal, with any proceeds that may arise from the disposal being used for the acquisition of other works of art.
- 2.2. Works of art acquired through bequest or gift with the intention of later sale are managed in accordance with NGV's processes for managing assets.
- 2.3. The Council of Trustees will be advised of any works of art or material acquired but not accessioned into the State Collection. The NGV uses a separate template deed of gift for such items, that makes it clear to the donor that the material is being acquired for purposes other than accessioning into the State Collection.

3. Methods of Acquisition

- 3.1. Works of art may be acquired through a variety of means, including gift, bequest, purchase or commission. In some instances, other methods of acquisition will be considered on a case-by-case basis where the transactions enable the passing of legal title to the NGV. To safeguard the integrity of the State Collection and to guard against misrepresentation, it is critical that, prior to acquisition, regardless of method, the ownership be thoroughly researched and due diligence undertaken as outlined in section 5.1 Provenance and Authenticity.



ACQUISITION AND ACCESSION POLICY

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24 August 2023

3.2. Acquisitions of all works of art must be in accordance with financial delegations.

3.3. Gifts

3.3.1. Outright Gift

Any donation of art by an individual or organisation that is accepted by the NGV is categorised as a gift. To make a valid gift, there must be a clear intention on the part of the donor to transfer title and possession of the property. It is essential to the validity of such a gift that the transfer of both possession and title shall be absolute and unencumbered. The donor is required to sign the NGV's standard deed of gift, evidencing the donor's full transfer of title and possession, and providing the NGV with a range of warranties and indemnities.

3.3.2. Pledged Gift

A donor may undertake to pledge a gift to the NGV. A pledge is a commitment to the NGV where part or all of the receipt of the gift is deferred until an agreed date(s) in the future.

3.4. Purchase

3.4.1. Dealers, shops and private individuals and companies

Works of art may be purchased for the State Collection. Although warranty of title is implied in every sale of a work of art, wherever reasonably possible, a purchase agreement in the NGV's standard form should be executed. This agreement sets out the various warranties that the vendor gives that they convey good title, free from encumbrances.

3.4.2. Auctions

Works of art may be purchased through auction. In these cases, however, the auction house generally provides little by way of warranty (except in relation to the way they have described the work). The NGV must undertake research and due diligence as outlined in section 5.1 Provenance and Authenticity. Also, purchases are made on the auction house's terms and are not formalised through the NGV's template Purchase Agreement. The auction terms are laid out in the auction houses' conditions of sale, which the Gallery will obtain prior to any purchase at auction.

3.5. Bequest

The decision whether or not to accession a work(s) of art offered through bequest is determined according to the NGV Collections Strategy and all other clauses of the Acquisitions and Accessions Policy.

Bequests of works of art do not have to be accepted. All, some, or no works of art may be accessioned into the State Collection or accepted for acquisition and non-accession.

3.6. Commission

The NGV may commission an artist to produce a work of art for the Collection. The terms and conditions of the commission will be stipulated in the commissioning agreement. The contract must contain clauses to ensure that the execution of the contract effects the transfer of both



ACQUISITION AND ACCESSION POLICY

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24 August 2023

possession and title to the NGV and that this transfer is absolute, unencumbered and free of restrictions.

3.7. Other Processes for Acquisition

3.7.1. Permanent Joint Ownership

The NGV recognises the increasing frequency of this form of ownership and its potential benefits. Accordingly, the NGV may undertake to jointly acquire an artwork with another collecting institution. Any transactions involving binding terms for permanent joint ownership of an artwork must be reviewed and approved by the Council of Trustees and must ensure conditions for shared possession, preservation and conservation, storage conditions, display, outward loan, freight packing and handling and other considerations for collection management and access are agreed.

3.7.2. Other forms of acquisition may be considered by the Council of Trustees from time to time and on a case by case basis, including but not limited to acquisition of unclaimed property in accordance with section 16 of the Act. Other forms of acquisition will be considered with reference to the terms of this Policy.

4. Conditional Acquisitions

Conditional gifts, pledges or bequests will be discouraged. Donors of works of art will relinquish all rights to the work donated, except in exceptional circumstances in which an exemption is granted by the Council of Trustees.

5. Considerations in the Acceptance of Acquisitions

When considering acquiring a work of art, the NGV will be open and transparent in its documentation of decision-making and will practise and demonstrate high standards of professional due diligence.

5.1. Provenance and Authenticity

The NGV fully supports the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970 and acknowledges that Australia is a signatory to the Convention. The NGV also recognises and is bound by the terms of the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act (1986)* (Cth).

To establish the provenance and authenticity of the work of art and the veracity of the title held by the donor or vendor, the NGV will undertake thorough research and due diligence before proposing a work of art for acquisition or accessioning according to its established procedures. The Gallery adheres to Australian and international museum best practice in this matter, including the Australian Government's *Australian Best Practice Guide to Collecting Cultural Material*, Museums Australia Inc's *Code of Ethics* and *Continuous Cultures Ongoing Responsibilities: principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage* and the ICOM *Code of Ethics for Museums*.

5.2. Condition and care



ACQUISITION AND ACCESSION POLICY

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In acquiring any work of art, the Gallery will also take into account limitations on collecting imposed by a range of factors, including:

- the condition, preservation and/or long-term care of a work of art and if necessary conservation measures are not feasible, a work of art will not normally be acquired
- issues and costs associated with the freight and packing, as well as long-term storage, preservation, documentation, display and outward loan.

5.3. Conflict of Interest

All acquisitions of works of art by any method from Trustees or employees of the NGV and their related parties must be disclosed to and minuted by the Council of Trustees as part of its accepted accessioning process for the State Collection. Trustees and employees must exclude themselves from any discussion or decision by the Council of Trustees in relation to acquisitions in which they or their related parties are involved and this exclusion will be minuted.

Definitions

Accession

The process which formally acknowledges a work of art as part of the State Collection and, prima facie, a work to be held in perpetuity.

Acquisition

The process of obtaining legal title to a work of art. Works may be acquired through various methods, including but not limited to gift, purchase, bequest, or commission. Works of art may be acquired for the purpose of accessioning into the State Collection, or acquired and not accessioned.

Bequest

A gift or form of pledge made to the NGV, forming part of a Donor's will, to be received under a will following the Donor's death.

Chattel

An item of tangible movable or immovable property excluding real estate.

Commissioning

The process where the NGV contracts an artist to create a work of art. Not all commissioned works of art are acquired for the State Collection and the terms of the Commissioning Agreement will stipulate the parameters and requirements for each party to the contract.

Deed of gift

A formal, legally binding document that establishes that title to a work is given to the NGV as a gift. The NGV's template deed of gift outlines the terms and conditions of the gift and its acceptance.

Donor



ACQUISITION AND ACCESSION POLICY

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An individual, organisation or group who has made or is proposing to gift an artwork or chattel to the NGV.

Due Diligence

A comprehensive assessment of an artwork to assess its ownership and provenance and to identify any gaps in these.

Gift

The transfer of legal title in a work of art without consideration.

Pledge

A gift commitment made where receipt of the gift is deferred until an agreed date(s) in the future.

Provenance

The history of ownership of a work of art from the time of its discovery or creation to the present day, which assist in the assessment of authenticity and ownership.

Purchase agreement

A written contract which outlines the rights, obligations and undertakings of the buyer and seller of a work of art and outlines the terms and conditions of the sale and the transfer of both property and title.

State Collection

The Collection of formally accessioned works.

Legal title

The legal right to ownership of property.

Breach of policy

In the case where this or related policies are breached, resolution will be according to the NGV Performance and Discipline policy.

Further information

Commonwealth

- Customs Act 1901
- Income Tax Assessment Act 1997
- Personal Properties Securities Act 2009
- Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986
- Biosecurity (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Act 2015

Victorian

- Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006
- Dangerous Goods Act 1985
- Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981



ACQUISITION AND ACCESSION POLICY

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- Firearms Act 1996
- Freedom of Information Act 1982
- Goods Act 1958
- Heritage Act 2017
- Human Tissue Act 1982
- Information Privacy Act 2000
- National Gallery of Victoria Act 1966
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Public Records Act 1973

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Next review due

3 years