



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

# Sydney University Museums

# COLLECTIONS GUIDELINES

## SECTION 2: ACQUISITION

Macleay Museum  
Nicholson Museum  
University Art Gallery

## **SECTION 2: ACQUISITION**

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### **2.1 Overview**

#### 2.1.1. Definition

Acquisition refers to the process by which Sydney University Museums (SUM) obtains material for its collections. Acquisition is defined as the transfer of ownership of property to SUM, which may be by outright donation, donation under the Cultural Gifts Program, bequest, purchase, field collection, commission, or other transfer of assets. Acquired material is then officially incorporated into the collections through the accessioning process.

#### 2.1.2. Purpose

In accordance with its Mission Statement, Sydney University Museums shall strive to build on and refine its existing collections in the fields of history, natural history, science, ethnography, archaeology, and the visual arts. These acquisition guidelines establish the intellectual and administrative principles that support the collection of cultural and scientific material by Sydney University Museums. It defines the structure, standards, collecting principles and priorities of SUM collections.

#### 2.1.3. Objectives

The objective of these guidelines is to enable Sydney University Museums to align its acquisition activities with the National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries, which state that:

- The museum develops its collection to reflect its unique purpose and the significant stories and interests of its diverse and changing communities. (Standard C1.1)
- The museum knows the significance of its collection. (Standard C1.2)
- The museum aims to have unconditional legal ownership of its collection. (Standard C1.3)

#### 2.1.4. Scope

This acquisition guidelines cover the permanent collections of Sydney University Museums. Except where specifically mentioned, it does not pertain to the education collection, the custody collection, or collection-related assets (reference library or other unaccessioned assets).

Files, documents, images, and sound and vision recordings associated with material held in the collections, are handled as part of overall collection documentation and are referred to in section 4.0 of these guidelines.

### **2.2 Permanent Collection**

#### 2.2.1. Definition

The permanent collection includes all objects or specimens that are formally accessioned into the collections of SUM. Material in this category is selected for its utility in fulfilling the exhibition, research, and teaching functions of SUM as informed

by its Mission Statement and will conform to the qualitative criteria outlined in sections 2.3 and 2.4 below.

#### 2.2.2. Standard of Care

The permanent collection is maintained for permanence, and SUM will apply the highest standards to its research, documentation, inventory control, and physical care. This collection is subject to all aspects of the collection guidelines and procedures, and strives to meet all professional standards for documentation, dissemination and research. Objects or specimens in this collection will require formal deaccession procedures if proposed for removal from the collection.

### 2.3 Selection Criteria

To be eligible for acquisition into the permanent collection, an object or specimen must have value in relation to both the essential and specific selection criteria outlined below, and must also fall within the defined collecting priorities outlined in section 2.4.

#### 2.3.1. Essential Criteria

- Significance: The object, specimen or collection has historic, cultural, social, aesthetic, scientific or technological significance that relate to the priorities advanced by Sydney University Museums.
- Provenance: The origin and/or subsequent history of the object, specimen or collection can be documented and authenticated according to current internationally acceptable convention.
- Representativeness / Rarity: The object, specimen or collection is unique or relatively rare, a fine example of its type, or not well represented in SUM holdings.
- Interpretive Potential: The object, specimen or collection has high display and / or research value.
- Completeness / Condition: The object, specimen or collection is suitable for exhibition, long-term storage and preservation with minimal resource outlay.

#### 2.3.2. Specific Criteria

- Material consistent with the SUM long-term purpose to document and interpret the history of teaching, learning, research, and community engagement at the University of Sydney.
- Material relating to one of the established permanent collections that would enhance existing holdings or be useful for comparative research.
- Material not related to the above but important because of its uniqueness or other exceptional quality and where there is a danger of loss or destruction.

### 2.4 Collecting Priorities

Lastly, material must conform to the collection area priorities outlined below.

These collection areas are organised broadly along existing curatorial responsibilities and media, and are devised to direct future acquisitions. SUM acknowledges that its current

holdings include some valuable material that falls outside these collection areas, as well as material that fall across them, and recognises the value of such interdisciplinary collecting.

#### 2.4.1. Antiquities Collection

The antiquities collection comprises more than 25,000 artefacts from Egypt, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, the Near and Middle East, and Europe. At its core is the collection of Charles Nicholson, donated to the University in 1860. Since then the collection has grown significantly through excavation, donation and purchase.

SUM aims to acquire material that develops the current collection, building on its strengths and especially addressing its weaknesses. An item will be considered for acquisition if it meets one of the following criteria:

- Antiquities from Greece, Italy, and other parts of the Mediterranean influenced by those cultures; Egypt; Near East, especially ancient Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey; and Cyprus.
- Material from other University departments that may broaden SUM studies in archaeology or link the existing collection to archaeological research conducted by the University.

SUM is committed to the further development of this collection according to the highest ethical standards and in compliance with all applicable laws and agreements including State and Federal law regulating the protection of environmental and cultural heritage, international agreements between Australia and other countries, the UNESCO Convention, the CITES Convention, the ICOM Code of Ethics, and the Museums Australia Code of Ethics.

#### 2.4.2. Ethnography Collection

The Macleay Museum ethnographic collection comprises close to 6000 cultural objects. The collection includes material from all continents of the globe and represents numerous cultures. The collections embody the experiences, knowledge, relationships and beliefs of the people who made, used, traded and collected them. A number of items in the collection are unique and many are both culturally and historically significant.

Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Pacific Islander cultural objects are the strength of our holdings. A third of the current collection dates from the mid-late 19th century and was acquired by W J Macleay and collectors who worked on his behalf. Material of more recent manufacture has come into the museum via transfer from various University Departments and private donors, many with a relationship to the University. The collections document the distinctive characteristics and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait and Pacific Islander peoples into the mid-20th century. Collection development will be focused on building or extending the breadth of existing areal and thematic strengths of the collection.

##### Areal strengths

- Aboriginal Australia; New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia
- Torres Strait Islander; Torres Strait Islands
- Pacific Islander; Papua New Guinea, West Papua and Papua (Indonesian New Guinea), Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Caroline Islands

Thematic strengths

- Early Encounters. Cultural objects dating from the 19th and early 20th century with particular emphasis on cross-cultural trade and exchange and regional diversity.
- Continuity and Change. Cultural objects dating from early – mid 20th century especially where they inform on negotiation with colonial administration, academic research and the defining of cultural and national identities into the post-colonial era.
- Living History and Culture. Contemporary cultural objects (mostly where offered as gifts) and intangible cultural heritage from relevant present day cultural communities in respect to their interest and interactions with the existing collections and/or in relation to exhibitions and public programs.

2.4.3. Historic Photograph Collection

The historic photograph collection (HPC) comprises over 50,000 items relating to the history of photography in Australia and the Pacific.

The main collection areas are the University's history, early professional and amateur photographers, ethnographic photographs, and images of working, social and home life in New South Wales and Australia. The collection consists of a range of formats, is primarily black and white, and dates from the mid-19th century. The University material is largely lantern slide teaching collections.

SUM aims to acquire material that builds on its current strengths. An item will be considered for acquisition if it meets one of the following criteria:

- Items that relate to the University.
- Items that add to or enhance the existing collection.
- Images of Pacific and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the colonial era.
- Examples of rare photographic processes.
- Photographs relating to an individual who worked or studied at the University.
- Images by noted photographers.

2.4.4. Scientific Instruments and Apparatus Collection

The scientific instruments and apparatus collection of some 2,000 objects primarily consists of scientific instruments and equipment used by departments of The University of Sydney. The collection reflects the history of science teaching and research at the University within the context of the evolution of scientific practice, and the changing materials and equipment in the progress of science. Most of the collection dates from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century.

Microscopy, measuring and calculating instruments, and teaching aids such as wax embryology models, are significant collection strengths. SUM also holds a technology collection comprising mainly of audio-visual equipment, lighting and office equipment and timepieces as well as a representative collection of photographic equipment associated with the Historic Photograph Collection.

SUM aims to acquire material that develops the current collection, building on its

strengths, and showing the evolution of scientific equipment and techniques, with particular and strong relevance to science as taught or practiced at the University. An item will be considered for acquisition if it meets one of the following criteria:

- Microscopy: objects that reveal the history of microscopy especially as practiced at the University.
- Scientific instruments or equipment used to teach or practice science at the University.
- Objects that demonstrate the evolution of scientific practice.
- Objects that provide a better example of an existing collection item.
- Items associated with a particular scientist of relevance.

#### 2.4.5. Natural History Collection

The natural history collection is the foundation collection of the Macleay Museum and consists almost entirely of zoological specimens with most major taxonomic groups represented. It was largely assembled by three generations of the Macleay family before 1900 with the oldest specimens dating to the mid-1700s. The collection has world-wide coverage, with strong representation from Australia, South America, Southern Africa and New Guinea. Across the natural history collections there are approximately 10,000 type specimens, the majority within entomology.

The natural history collection is ostensibly a closed historical collection, where only highly exceptional or rare zoological material will be considered for acquisition.

#### 2.4.6. Visual Arts Collection

The visual arts collection represents a range of media and currently consists of some 7,000 works.

SUM aims to acquire artworks that build on its current strengths, contribute to a more comprehensive historical overview, and link the existing collection to more recent contemporary art practices and developments. Artworks will be considered for acquisition if they meet one of the following criteria:

- Art within the context of the University: Formal portraiture comprises a significant historic component of the art collection. The University maintains this tradition through the commission of chancellor and vice-chancellor portraits.
- Australian painting: Works of significance for Australia that are related to local landscape, history and culture.
- Indigenous Australian art: Works with particular significance for the Australian community that enhance an understanding of Indigenous cultures and that complement the interdisciplinary holdings in SUM collections.
- Modernism: Works that reveal how artists have engaged with international avant-garde movements particularly over the last century. Works that enhance an understanding of the Power Bequest collection acquired from 1967-1990 and the work of J.W. Power (1881-1943).
- Asian art: Works that enhance the M.J. Morrissey Bequest in memory of Professor A.L. Sadler. Focus will be on prints, ceramics and sculptural media.

- Contemporary art: Works that enrich an understanding of the best contemporary practice with a focus on emerging art, particularly focused on Sydney, and University alumni. Works that engage with the major academic disciplines and foster interdisciplinary exchange.
- Public artworks that enhance the University's built environment, history and culture: Large sculptures or temporary site-specific artworks.

#### 2.4.7. University General Collection

Sydney University Museums holds a collection of material relating to the history of the Macleay Museum, Nicholson Museum and University Art Gallery. This includes objects with strong associations to collectors – notably the Macleay family (Alexander, William Sharp and William John Macleay), and Sir Charles Nicholson. The collection also includes objects relevant to the University of Sydney as an institution and complements the holdings of the University Archives. Items in this collection represent a variety of media, including visual art, furniture, decorative art, numismatics, and memorabilia.

A University General Collection item will be considered for acquisition if it meets one of the following criteria:

- Does not fit the collecting priorities of the Antiquities, Ethnography, Historic Photograph, Scientific Instruments and Apparatus, Natural History, or Visual Arts collections
- Related to the history of the Sydney University Museums' collections or collectors, or the history of the University of Sydney
- Expresses a significant aspect of the heritage of Sydney University Museums or the University of Sydney
- Provides a better example of an existing collection item

## 2.5 Acquisition Ethics

- 2.5.1. The acquisition of objects or specimens by SUM staff members will always be practised in accordance with the standards of the University of Sydney's Code of Conduct and University ethics relating to animal and human research.
- 2.5.2. SUM will abide by State and Federal law regulating the protection of environmental and cultural heritage and international agreements between Australia and other countries. All collecting activity will be in accordance with the UNESCO Convention, the CITES Convention, the ICOM Code of Ethics, and the Museums Australia Code of Ethics.
- 2.5.3. SUM will only acquire collections having a fair, legal and ethical provenance. SUM staff will undertake due diligence to establish the legal status of an item under consideration for acquisition, making every reasonable effort to investigate, substantiate, or clarify the provenance of the item.
- 2.5.4. SUM does not seek to acquire material reasonably suspected to have been stolen, obtained through improper means, or illegally imported into Australia. Documentation or substantial evidence will be required to ensure material has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin and / or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned, in violation of that country's laws.

- 2.5.5. Collecting of Australian Indigenous material will be in accordance with the national Museums Australia Indigenous heritage policy, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities* (2005).
- 2.5.6. SUM respects the moral rights of the creators of works acquired for the collections by ensuring the integrity of use and proper attribution of those works. SUM will adhere to the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968* (amended 2005), the NAVA *Code of Practice for the Australian Visual Arts and Craft Sector* (2004), and the Australian Copyright Council guidelines (2005).

## **2.6 Ownership and Custody Standards**

- 2.6.1. Objects and specimens will be acquired through gift, bequest, purchase, field collection, commission, or other transfer.
- 2.6.2. SUM will acquire collections only if it can provide adequate resources to protect, document, conserve, store, research, exhibit and interpret those objects, as applicable, in accordance with the highest professional standards.
- 2.6.3. SUM will have first right of refusal to accept into the collection objects or specimens from a University faculty or administrative unit that are no longer required by that faculty or administrative unit.
- 2.6.4. SUM intends that all objects or specimens in the permanent collection shall have permanency in the collections as long as they retain their physical integrity, identity, authenticity, and documentation, and remain relevant to the stated mission of SUM.
- 2.6.5. SUM seeks to obtain clear legal title for all objects acquired for the permanent collection. All objects or specimens entering the collection shall be accompanied by a legal document transferring clear legal title of ownership to SUM.
- 2.6.6. Where appropriate, SUM will seek to acquire all intellectual property rights associated with collections material at the time of acquisition. SUM will conclude a clear agreement with the owners of material or the transferring party on the nature of the acquisition, including the status of any associated intellectual property rights.
- 2.6.7. SUM will only acquire material on a conditional basis in the most exceptional circumstances when the long-term advantage to the University is unequivocal. Restrictive or conditional donations will require the written approval of the delegated officer under the University's Finance and Accounting Delegations policy. In most circumstances this will be the SUM Director. Such donations must be accompanied by a legal document that conveys any restrictions or conditions. A reasonable date will be set for their termination and the conditions under which their force may terminate will be determined at the time of the acquisition. SUM will strictly adhere to the restrictions unless a change is authorised by a court of competent jurisdiction.
- 2.6.8. Where SUM has conditional ownership of a collection item, it will have a plan in place to gain title to it or an appropriate written agreement that is reviewed regularly.
- 2.6.9. With regard to the material culture of Australian Indigenous communities, SUM may hold material in its custody collection on behalf of traditional owners rather than seek the transfer of ownership. In the event that source communities or their representatives seek the return of material held in custody by SUM, the University's repatriation policy and procedures will be followed.
- 2.6.10. Objects or specimens found in the collections without documentation, or material associated with unresolved unclaimed loans, will be tracked as unaccessioned assets

until such time as the University is able to demonstrate superior rights of possession in accordance with the *NSW Limitation Act 1969* and through reasonable steps to identify owner or heirs or other possible claimants. At such time, material will be eligible for accession or disposal.

- 2.6.11. SUM will not accept abandoned objects or specimens left on museum premises, except under extreme circumstances and only with the written approval of the SUM Director. As clear title cannot be ascertained over abandoned material, the object or specimen would be subject to the same provisions noted in section 2.6.10.
- 2.6.12. Material bequeathed to SUM is subject to the acquisition guidelines defined in this document. All bequeathed material should be approved for acquisition prior to SUM being designated as beneficiary. SUM is not legally bound to accept material bequeathed to it, unless by prior agreement, and reserves the right to decline a gift or bequest if the material is outside collecting guidelines, or the costs of its transportation, installation, storage, or conservation are prohibitive.
- 2.6.13. Donors of material that may not be accessioned into the permanent collection must agree to the location of the material in the education or custody collections, or to its status as an unaccessioned asset, and understand that the material may be used in educational programs or disposed of through repatriation, transfer or sale.
- 2.6.14. SUM aims to know the significance of its collection. Decisions about acquisitions are informed by significance assessments following the Collections Council of Australia significance guidelines, *Significance 2.0: A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Collections* (2009). Significance assessments will form part of the permanent collection records (see Documentation section 4.0 of these guidelines).
- 2.6.15. SUM will cooperate with other museums, galleries, historic preservation organisations, libraries and agencies with similar or overlapping interests and collecting policies, in order to avoid duplication and where possible, to develop an integrated plan for preservation, research and interpretation. Where material offered to SUM would be more appropriately located in other collecting institutions, donors or vendors will be referred to those organisations.
- 2.6.16. All items acquired for SUM permanent collections will be accessioned and catalogued in a timely manner.

## **2.7 Implementation**

### **2.7.1. Funding**

The majority of SUM collections are acquired through donation, bequest, or transfer. Limited funding for purchase is available through endowments established for the development of certain collections. Until such time as dedicated acquisition funds are made available, growth of the collections will occur through the generosity of donors.

### **2.7.2. Responsibilities**

For the purpose of acquisition, curatorial staff are relied upon for a judgment of significance and provenance in their specialist fields. Advice from external experts may be sought where necessary. Objects or specimens proposed for acquisition will be assessed by the relevant Senior Curator with reference to the Collecting Priorities and in consultation with the Collections Manager.

Proposals for acquisition will be submitted to the SUM Director for consideration and formal approval. The SUM Director must give written approval for every acquisition

and, in accordance with the University's Finance and Accounting Delegations policy, will refer specific cases for final approval to the Vice Chancellor or University Senate, dependent on delegation authority.

#### 2.7.3. Documentation

Complete records must be kept of all acquisition decisions, including material that is not accepted for the collection. For material acquired into the collection, records will include assessment of significance, condition reports, transfer of legal title, provenance verification, and any related correspondence, research, and images. Documentation of acquisition and accession activity is detailed further in section 4.0 of these guidelines and will proceed in accordance with the University's Recordkeeping Policy and the SPECTRUM Documentation Standard.

#### 2.7.4. Reporting

In accordance with University formal reporting requirements, SUM reports to:

- Office of the Provost on a regular basis regarding statistics on visitation, teaching use of collections, research enquiries, internship and other student participation, loan activity, and new acquisitions.
- Internal Audit Office on an annual basis with a "Certificate of Verification of Heritage Assets" for all collections within its care, including a listing of new acquisitions.
- Risk Management Office on an annual basis to confirm updated values, including new acquisitions, for correct insurance coverage.

#### 2.7.5. Review

The SUM Collections Acquisition Guidelines will be reviewed every five years.

## 2.8 Related Documentation

#### 2.8.1. University References

Archives and Record Management Services. (2000). *University Recordkeeping Policy*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Finance and Accounting Department. (2007). *Finance and Accounting Manual Delegations for Specific Activities and Financial Delegations*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Human Resources Department. (2008). *Code of Conduct*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Macleay Museum. (1996). *Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Research Office. (no date). *Ethics (Human Research Ethics and Animal Ethics)*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

#### 2.8.2. External References

Australian Copyright Council. (2005). *Galleries & Museums: A Copyright Guide*. Redfern: Australian Copyright Council

Commonwealth of Australia. (1968). *Australian Copyright Act 1968 (No. 28, as amended 2007)*. Canberra: Office of Legislative Drafting and Publishing.

Commonwealth of Australia. (1999). *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC 1999). Canberra: Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

Commonwealth of Australia. (2005). *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act (Act No. 11 of 1986, as amended 2005)* (PMCH 1986). Canberra: Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

International Council of Museums. (2006). *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. Paris: ICOM.

International Union for Conservation of Nature. (1975). *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna* (CITES).

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National Association for the Visual Arts, Ltd. (2004). *The Code of Practice for the Australian Visual Arts and Craft Sector*. (2nd ed.). Potts Point: NAVA.

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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (1970). *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*. Paris: UNESCO.