

CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

ACQUISITIONS POLICY

1. Introduction

This Policy outlines the principles the Chester Beatty Library takes into account when acquiring objects for its Collections whether by donation, purchase or loan.

The Chester Beatty Library (hereinafter referred to as the Chester Beatty), continues to acquire material, to enhance or improve its holdings, along the distinctive lines of collecting established by Sir Alfred Chester Beatty. The Chester Beatty does not receive an acquisitions grant and funds for purchases are normally externally sourced. Therefore, given that rarity, high quality and good condition were the guiding principles of collection by the founder, the Chester Beatty is financially restricted in the material it can acquire.

Material acquired becomes part of the capital of the Trust and may not be disposed of without due process (see *Disposals Policy*).

The nature of the Collections and therefore the acquisition remit of the Chester Beatty are unique amongst the Irish National Cultural Institutions. However, the museum is mindful of the mutual benefit of contacting other institutions both nationally and internationally if there is the potential for overlap in pursuit of any acquisition.

2. Acquisition Principles for the Collection

- a. The Chester Beatty will always seek to ensure compliance with Irish Cultural Heritage Legislation.
- b. Only works for which legal title can be firmly established will be considered for acquisition. The Chester Beatty will not purchase or accept as a gift, bequest or loan any work of art it knows or has good reason to believe is of questionable provenance or was stolen or sold under duress.
- c. The Chester Beatty will collect when the opportunity arises in areas already represented in the Collections, taking into consideration quality, rarity and condition of the object, its suitability for display and the cost of the purchase. (See *Collections Policy* for description of the Collection.)
- d. It will be a particular interest of the Chester Beatty to collect portions of manuscripts or other works of art already owned in part by the museum.
- e. The Chester Beatty will only enter into new directions of collecting after they have been carefully evaluated for their relevance to its mission and to the nature of the collections as they have been inherited. The Chester Beatty may, however, acquire, for the purposes of providing a context for its Collections, decorative arts material of high quality.
- f. Contemporary objects and objects by living artists may be acquired if they illuminate the Collections; reflect important projects undertaken by the Chester Beatty; conform to proven areas of the founder's collecting activity; or are the product of artists working within the traditions represented in the Collections.

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- g. The Chester Beatty may commission objects for special purposes from living artists working in the traditions represented in the Collections.
- h. The Chester Beatty may maintain a modest collection of material of lesser importance and value for teaching purposes but this collection must be limited in size and must be separately catalogued from the Chester Beatty Collections.
- i. As a general rule, the Chester Beatty does not accept gifts that carry restrictions. The same criteria should be used for accepting gifts as for making purchases. All acquisitions are to be outright and unconditional. However, some conditions may be accepted for donations/bequests regarding the display of collections at the discretion of the Director/Head of Collections.
- j. All donations to the Collections are irrevocable upon their formal and physical transfer of title to the Chester Beatty.
- k. The Chester Beatty shall extend to any donor the right of anonymity.
- l. Only when funds have been identified is an object acquired.
- m. The Board of Trustees will approve standing instructions to amplify this policy as required and will define the discretion delegated to the Director in respect of acquisitions where speed of decision is necessary.
- n. The Chester Beatty must be able to house and care for the proposed acquisition according to international museum standards.

3. Acquisition Procedures

The Chester Beatty acquires holdings by purchase or donation, gift or bequest.

- a. A potential purchase or donation will be identified as a general rule by the curatorial staff and the Director will be notified.
- b. The Board of Trustees normally delegate authority and responsibility to the Director for: accepting or rejecting potential gifts or bequests; soliciting gifts of material for the collection within the terms of this policy; making recommendations and taking actions on the purchase of material in accordance with this policy. The Director, Head of Collections and appropriate Curator will advise the Board in this responsibility.
- c. The Director may decide, in consultation with the Curators and Head of Collections, which gifts offered should be recommended to the Board of Trustees for acceptance and which should be rejected.
- d. The Director in consultation with the Chair of the Board and Head of Collections has the authority to approve purchases up to €25,000. All acquisitions above this value require Board approval prior to purchase.
- e. The appropriateness of the acquisition will be discussed by the Board of Trustees with guidance from the Director and/or Curator.
- f. Works recommended for acquisition, whether by gift or purchase, must be approved by the Board of Trustees.
- g. Works acquired for study collections (non-designated collection material) do not require the approval of the Board of Trustees.
- h. Whenever possible, the work(s) to be considered should be on display at a meeting of the Board of Trustees.
- i. When a work is approved for purchase, funds will be identified and made available.

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- j. The object is accessioned, catalogued and documented according to the museum's Procedural Manual.
- k. If the work is by a living artist, whenever possible the artist should be informed and, if appropriate, sent a questionnaire to obtain background and history about the artist and the work. Every effort should be made to obtain a non-exclusive license allowing reproduction of the work for educational purposes.
- l. The Chester Beatty will normally expect to receive from the transferor any records and contextual information about an object it acquires.

4. Reference Library Acquisition Principles

Reference Library material is acquired in order to support staff research in the primary collections, and is made available for the use of external researchers. Selection is guided by relevance and academic quality, and acquisitions are predominantly in English or other Western European languages.

4.1 Reference Library Acquisitions Priorities

The Reference Library seeks to acquire material in the following areas:

- a. Scholarly publications on East Asian, Islamic and Western art, the arts of the book, historical bibliography, biography, history, religion, and other areas as appropriate to the collections.
- b. Catalogues of manuscripts and printed books relating to the primary collections.
- c. Sale catalogues relating to the primary collections.

4.2 Reference Library Donations

- a. Any donated item should meet the acquisition priorities of the Chester Beatty.
- b. Donated material should be in a good state of preservation.
- c. Donations are accepted on the understanding that the items become the property of the Chester Beatty on receipt. Transfer of ownership to the Chester Beatty must be signed off by completion of an Object Entry and Transfer of Title form.
- d. Such donations may subsequently be passed to other libraries, sold or otherwise disposed of. (*See Disposals Policy*)

5. Archives

The purpose of the Archives is to document the origin, development, activities and achievements of the Chester Beatty. In fulfilment of this mission, the Archives will collect, preserve, and make accessible records of enduring value including personal papers relating to the founder and to the Collections; and will coordinate a records management programme for the on-going records of the Chester Beatty. The organisation is subject to the Freedom of Information (FOI) act. The FOI Act is designed to allow public access to information held by public bodies, not routinely available through other sources.

Records will be processed and stored in accordance with the policies for Records Management and Data Protection following preservation protocols. The Archives are in the

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process of restructure and while the Chester Beatty seeks to facilitate specific enquiries general access will be restricted until this project is complete.

(See Records Management Policy and Data Protection Policy)

6. Approval/Revision History

This Acquisitions Policy is version 1.3, issued in November 2018 and formally approved by the Trustees on 14 December 2018. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Collections Management Team, while a full revision will take place every five years.