



# Collections review framework

## 2023-2025



Manchester Art Gallery

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## SECTION 1: Introduction

### A. The Role of Collections Reviews for Manchester Art Gallery

Reviewing collections is a core part of good collections management. Reviews do several things: one part of the review is about understanding what we have and what condition it is in, but it is a more in-depth process than this. A review is a process of reflection – does the collection meet the needs of our stakeholders and audiences today? Who is and is not represented in our artists and subjects? In what ways can an object or artwork serve a learning or engagement need? As a collection owned by the people of Manchester, does the collection's content adequately speak to their needs and interests?

Using a set of criteria devised through the expertise and knowledge of our curatorial, engagement and collections management staff, a review asks all these questions and more of every item under review. Sometimes these are asked individually, sometimes it is more appropriate to look at a group of items collectively.

Because of the size of the collection at Manchester Art Gallery (MAG) – over 50,000 items – we are reviewing the collection on a priority basis, starting with areas of the collection that have either been historically marginalised within the organisation and which we know little about, or items that were brought into the collection for a very specific purpose that they no longer serve. There are many reasons that a collection lingers without use in a gallery – it might have come into the organisation with little information about its history, it might be difficult to display because of the materials it is made from or its shape and size, or it may not have been considered 'fashionable' or relevant to the organisation's interests. Reviewing these collections as a priority will give us a more well-rounded understanding of all the collections held at MAG, how they relate to one another and the interesting ways in which we might use them for display or engagement today.

A collection review isn't just about what we have now, but understanding how we collected in the past and what we might collect in the future. The review process will tell us what is missing (the things we didn't collect historically but should now) and what is no longer relevant (reflecting ideas or interests that are no longer primary concerns of MAG, or items acquired historically without proper attention to whether they were in line with our acquisitions policy). It will also uncover insights and interesting ways of interpreting collections that have never been thought of before, because we are looking at a historic collection through a 21<sup>st</sup> century lens. We will learn new things about the collections we care for, and this will inform our displays and public programmes going forward.

### B. How Does a Collections Review Reflect our Institutional Vision and Values?

The criteria we use to underpin our collections review reflect the culture of our organisation, the values we hold and the ways in which we want to work with and for the people of Manchester. You can find MAG's Vision [here](#) and an overview of how we work with people [here](#).

The collections reviews we are prioritising just now (beginning 2023), are part of our National Heritage Lottery funded [Taking Stock](#) project, the catalyst for which has been a

programme of building repairs at Manchester Art Gallery and Queens Park Conservation studios. This project is a once in a lifetime opportunity for almost every object in our collection to pass through our hands and see the light of day. It is a moment to reflect on 200 years of art in the city of Manchester – what that meant in the past, and what that means today. The project is guided by four key principles:

1. **Knowing who we are helps guide who we can be:** The collection was created for the people of Manchester, we want to make sure that is still true today. We need to understand how our city has changed and what we need to do within the gallery to reflect Manchester's current residents who are globally connected, creative and dynamic.
2. **We will do this work together:** collaborating with our stakeholders to create a shared, transparent way of working that empowers, creates a sense of ownership for everyone working with our collections, and sparks creative joy.
3. **We can do this with understanding and empathy:** for ourselves, our collections, our community.
4. **We will look to the future:** nothing is certain. We want to give the gallery another 200 years, which means remaining relevant, sustainable and a cornerstone of life in Manchester.

Taking Stock as a project will be time limited, but the collections review process will continue, not only informing us about what we have, but shaping the future of the collection. Understanding our history and how our collection came to be in the present, will inform our collecting practices going forward.

Though the review of the furniture is included in Taking Stock, this is a piece of work that has been going on for substantially longer and has other catalysts, namely the relationship between MAG, Heaton Hall, Clayton Hall and Wythenshawe Hall –much of the furniture was acquired for display purposes but is not original to the halls themselves. Taking Stock as an overall project has provided an opportunity to frame the furniture review work within the principles listed above, and in line with our organisational direction of travel. Making sure reviews happen in relation to one another and not in isolation is key to making sure we meet our organisational vision.

### C. Potential Outcomes of a Collections Review

As a society, we are led to believe that once an object comes into the collection, it can never leave. This idea of collecting 'in perpetuity' is misleading and doesn't reflect the way a gallery looks after its collection, or the needs of its many stakeholders. The process of reviewing collections to know them better might lead to us saying 'we are no longer the right place for this artwork or object to live, we should find it a better home'. Historically, many organisations have been unwilling to be honest about whether an object should really be in their collection or not. This has led to most galleries – MAG included – having many objects in store that will never be displayed or used, but which take up valuable space,

require extensive care and conservation resources and stop us acquiring new things that would be relevant and useful.

Part of our responsibility to be a sustainable organisation which uses public funding for public benefit, is to be responsible in our collections-based decision making and recognise when we are no longer the best place to care for a collection item. In the heritage sector (galleries, libraries, archives and museums), this process is usually called 'disposal' but that doesn't usually mean that object is thrown away, rather than it will move on to a different organisation or use.

The collections review process will identify the best future use of the item/s being reviewed, which will fall into one of the following categories:

**Retain:** Most of the items we review will stay in MAG's collection. The review will identify what makes them interesting, how we might use them in the future and how they have been understood in the past. Most of the collections we hold were brought into the gallery for good reasons that are still relevant and are in a fair condition that doesn't stop us displaying or using them. The reviews will also inform our future collection care plans and conservation priorities.

**Remove:** The decision to remove anything from the collection will come at the end of a rigorous process that uses a combination of assessment against agreed criteria, expertise of gallery staff, and where relevant, additional expertise and knowledge from a variety of stakeholders outside the organisation. As part of the 'Taking Stock' project, the priority collections for review will each have a group of external stakeholders to support decision making around disposal. We will be outlining this further on our [Taking Stock Webpages](#), as these individual review projects develop.

If an object is deemed suitable for removing from the collection (referred to as '**disposal**'), then there is a clear process that will be followed. Removal will result in one of the following outcomes:

**Rehome:** Removing items from a collection has historically focused on objects going to another arts or heritage organisation that is accredited by the Museums Association (MA). However, the MA's current guidance recognises that this is not always practical and limits an organisation's ability to dispose of collections when necessary – there are a relatively small number of accredited collections, each grappling with similar issues of space and resources to care for their collections. Therefore, the priority now is to make sure that where possible, collections are rehomed in a way that keeps them in the public domain. This could see objects transferred to a wide range of organisations that offer some form of public access. This could include community groups, charities, or education settings among others.

**Rehome through sale:** Disposal is never carried out specifically for financial gain, but if all reasonable attempts to find an object another home through transfer have failed, then sale of an object is a possibility. Under the terms of the Greater Manchester Act, 1981, any funds received could only be used for future acquisitions for the gallery. Further information about the disposal of collections through sale can be found in the MA guidance [Off the Shelf: a](#)

[toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal](#), which is used by museums and galleries to guide them through the process of disposal in an ethical and legal manner.

**Reuse:** Sometimes an object cannot be found a new home in another organisation but could have a new life in a different way. This could be because an object is broken beyond repair, but the fragments might be of interest to an artist making a new artwork; or an item that could be a teaching aide for learning historic techniques but which can only be understood through the process of taking it apart to see how it was put together. There are lots of interesting and worthwhile ways in which objects can be reused if they cannot be found a home in their original form. As an organisation, MAG believes that a new life is better than no life – if we can avoid throwing away or destroying something that is no longer fit for purpose as a collections item, we will do our utmost to support creative reuse.

It should be noted that reuse of any sort is likely to be an outcome for a very small number of items compared to those retained by MAG or removed to another organisation.

**Destroy:** This is a last resort and will likely only be carried out if the object in question poses a health and safety risk to individuals or other collections items. Sometimes the chemical composition of an object breaks down or changes over time, making handling the object or breathing in gasses being let off by the object a danger to health. Other times a material used to make an object may have developed dangerous moulds or other issues which cannot safely be cleaned, and which put other nearby collections items at risk (as well as individuals handling collections). There may be occasion where an object has broken in such a way that cannot safely be repaired or creates risk and has no possibility of creative reuse.

The decision to destroy requires additional steps of scrutiny to make sure it is the right thing to do (it is irreversible), it can be done safely (because the process of destruction can be dangerous) and there are no alternative ways of storing, using or accessing the object in question. Sometimes this might involve additional expertise within the gallery, such as the conservation department, or external expertise. The entire process will be thoroughly documented.

## D. Managing Risk

Risk management is a fundamental part of good collections management practice. There are risks to individual objects, risks to groups of objects, the collection as a whole or the organisation and its people. One of the objectives of this framework is to manage risk, by setting out clearly the nature of the work at hand and the specific processes and policies we will adhere to.

Risk to collections will be managed through adherence to this Collections Review Framework, which has been created in line with the MA's *Off the Shelf: A toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal*, as well as our own policies and procedures such as our Collections Development Policy, which covers disposals and acquisitions.

The specific risks to the gallery in not following the stringent ethical guidelines set out by both the MA and our own organisational policies include:

- Loss of or damage to public trust in both our own organisation and others like it.

- Adverse publicity and long-term negative perceptions of museums, galleries, libraries and archives.
- Removal and exclusion of the gallery from Arts Council England's accreditation scheme, which is a benchmark of good practice.
- Potential loss of access to funding streams

The decision to dispose of an object from the collection is never made by one single individual but is made through a process that includes multiple people with varied expertise. All decisions must be formally recorded so that checks can be made and all decisions to remove an item from the collection (either through rehoming, repurposing or destruction) require final sign-off from the Art Galleries Committee, made up of elected members of Manchester City Council, representing the interests of our city's residents.

Our 'working with people' statement aims to mitigate risks to people, by setting out clearly what is expected of gallery staff and what is expected of the people we might work with. Each collections review has something called a **project charter**, which sets out individual responsibilities, timelines, resources and expected outcomes. Having a shared understanding of how a review works, who is making which decisions and how the process comes to completion, helps create a healthy and collaborative working relationship.

A collections review can be overwhelming and a little frightening. Taking the decision to keep an object or remove it from the collection can feel like a great weight of responsibility, even when correct procedure has been followed and there is consensus it is the right thing to do. It is important to note that not undertaking a collections review is itself a risk to the organisation: doing nothing, not taking the time to reflect on how we collect and what we have, can cause problems further down the line. All galleries and museums have limited space, and it is good practice to regularly be thinking about how that space is used. Collections cost money to store – not only does the space cost money, but items require care and possibly conservation, all of which takes additional personnel and financial resource. We have a responsibility as an organisation to be sustainable, which is not just about the environment, but about making sure that our resources can be managed in the long term and in the best interests of our stakeholders. Collections reviews are a part of this good management.

## SECTION 2: Planning a Collections Review

Every Collections Review will begin with the production of a **Statement of Significance**. This document gives a summary of the collection under review – what we know and what we don't know – the size and scope of the collection, basic contents/material types, who we might need to consult to understand it better, and what benefits the collection might have for engagement in the future.

The **Statement of Significance** used at MAG can be found at the end of this document in **Appendix 1**. This initial overview is important because it tells us how much time and resource may be needed to undertake the review, who we need to collaborate with to complete it, and where difficulties in research might lie (for example, information pertaining to the objects under review is stored in a library in another town... or country!). We may know so little at this initial stage, that the significance review is sparse, but this piece of work should inform our ideas on WHY we are reviewing that particular collection or group of objects, and what we hope to achieve through the process.

Once this overview is complete, the next stage is to produce a project plan, which will go into more detail about the scope of the review, methodology to be used, timescales and deliverables and a more detailed understanding of the resources (staff and budget) needed to complete the process. At MAG, we use an amended version of our Project Charter for collections reviews. The Project Charter is a document used to map out and plan a project and is the working document used through the life of the project (or review) to check progress and make sure the right stakeholders remain involved and informed. There are specific guidelines available for staff creating a Project Charter for the purpose of a Collections Review.



## SECTION 3: Collections Review Policy and Process

### A. Collection Review Policy

#### Why carry out a collections review?

Collections reviews are a core part of good collections management and are a cornerstone of collections housekeeping. Reviews assist an organisation in understanding the scope, condition and uses of a collection, as well as the comprehensiveness of documentation. Reviews test the robustness of procedure and policy within the organisation and are part of an organisation's overall work to remain engaged, relevant and sustainable.

#### What legal and ethical considerations will we take into account?

Any collections review carried out at MAG we will be guided by the legal and ethical considerations outlined in the following:

- Museums Association *Code of Ethics*
- Museums Association *Off the Shelf: A Toolkit for Ethical Transfer, Reuse and Disposal*
- Arts Council England *UK Museum Accreditation Scheme*
- Collections Trust *SPECTRUM 5.1*
- Manchester Art Gallery's own *Collections Development Policy*, and *Collections Review and Disposal procedures*.

#### Priority Areas for Review (2024-2027)

As part of the Taking Stock project, MAG is prioritising the following areas of the collection for review:

- Furniture
- The Rutherford Loan Scheme
- Patterns of Life
- The Old Manchester Collection

In addition, these areas of the collection will also be under review, though outside of the Taking Stock project and the time and resource commitments that project requires (and provides):

- Arms and Armour
- West African textiles and textiles produced in Manchester mills for export to West Africa.
- Objects within the sculpture and dress collections known to be in poor condition and to have limited engagement value [to be assessed against review criteria to understand if they should be retained]

Priority areas are collections that:

- Have had little or no attention from the organisation historically, meaning that our knowledge of these collections is sparse and collections management data lacking.

- Need reviewing to understand their use, purpose and relevance to audiences and the organisation today.
- Are complex due to storage and conservation needs, which need to be understood in order to care for them in the long term, and determine if MAG has the capacity to do so adequately.

#### Who is authorised to carry out collection reviews?

Collections for review have been selected by curatorial staff at MAG, based on their knowledge of the collections and an understanding of where our knowledge gaps are. Each collections review area has a project team which includes staff with curatorial and learning expertise, with further support from Collections Management, Conservation and oversight and overall accountability from MAG's executive team. The collection at MAG is held in trust for the people of Manchester, and staff have authority to act in the best interests of the collection and its stakeholders through Manchester City Council's elected members. We will be reporting on the outcomes of each review at the annual [Art Galleries Committee](#).

Each collection review has a Project Charter (a plan of the project) which includes a list of all staff authorised to carry out that specific review and their roles and responsibilities within the review process.

MAG has taken the decision to include external stakeholders in the process of collections reviews for those reviews taking place as part of Taking Stock. This is not a legal requirement, but it is important to MAG that we include voices, ideas and cultural views different from our own, so that our review processes are well rounded and representative of Manchester's residents.

#### Will we need expertise from outside our organisation?

Given the breadth and depth of MAG's collection, it would be impossible to have all expertise pertaining to a review in-house. In addition to missing academic knowledge around collections, we recognise as an organisation that our experiential expertise is limited by the makeup of the staff. As a staff team, we are not representative of Manchester's residents, who are the owners of the collection.

A collections review is not just about inventory or cataloguing; often our driving research question is around gaining a deeper understanding of use and relevance. Experiential expertise is therefore a significant aspect of the process of review, sitting alongside academic and curatorial expertise. Our ability to carry out a comprehensive review is best served when these two elements can work well together.

We recognise that each collections review has different needs. Each Project Charter will identify external stakeholders who may need to be involved in that specific review, the type of knowledge and experience they bring to the review, and the way in which they will participate in, and inform the outcome of, the review. Each review strand will be different and will include different levels of external support. Some collection reviews that fall outside of Taking Stock may not include much or any external support, though we will always include as many different viewpoints in our decision-making as possible.

### How will the results of the collections reviews be reported and made accessible to others?

MAG aims for the collections review process to be as transparent as possible, with information about the reviews available to the widest number of people. To this end we will:

- Make sure review documentation (such as this document) is written in plain English and does not use unnecessary jargon or acronyms.
- Make the collections review framework and associated policies available online, or by request via email.
- Have a dedicated [web space](#) to report on the development of collections reviews, with regular updates.
- Report on the review process at the annual Manchester City Council Art Galleries Committee, which is recorded and [available online](#).

## B. Collection Review Procedure

The following is a brief guide to the collections review procedure. The full procedure is available on request. For the purposes of making this document manageable and accessible, it has been omitted here.

### Stage 1: Planning

1. Project lead selects collection area under review following guidance in SECTIONS 1 and 2.
2. Project lead establishes project team.
3. Project lead creates a **Statement of Significance** with input from project team.
4. Project lead and project team establish clear objectives for the review and decide whether stakeholders from outside the organisation should be involved.
5. Project lead and project team produce **Project Charter**, using collection review specific guidance provided.

### Stage 2: Undertaking review

1. Audit - If the initial assessment indicates that there is not a complete inventory of the collection, or that the location information is inaccurate, an audit should be completed as part of the review process.
2. Research - should be undertaken to establish:
  - Does MAG have title to (ownership of) the object
  - What was the reason the object was acquired (if known)
  - What are the object's connections to people
  - What are the object's connections to places
  - What is the physical quality of the object
  - What is the rarity and uniqueness of the object
  - Does the object have a history of use within MAG

**Research can be supported by other members of the project team, e.g. collection management, learning or volunteers.**

3. Update MAG's collections management system (called EMu) with any new information identified in the research phase.
4. Use the **Collections Review Assessment Criteria (Appendix 2)** to complete a **Collections Review Assessment Form** for the object/s under review.

### Stage 3: Analysis and Actions

1. Review team analyse results of Collections Review Assessment Form to make recommendations regarding retention or disposal.

**NB: The Collection Review Assessment Criteria and scoring system is designed to guide decision making, but the final decision is made by the review team, using their knowledge and experience alongside the assessment matrix. The scoring system is not designed as a quantitative assessment.**

2. Record actions for each object reviewed, for example:
  - a. Retain – no further action
  - b. Retain – implement recommendations from collections care
  - c. Retain – arrange long-term loan
  - d. Remove – rehome with another accredited museum or gallery
  - e. Remove – rehome with another organisation who can provide public access
  - f. Remove – reuse for another purpose by MAG where there is a public benefit
  - g. Remove – reuse by another organisation or individual where there is a public benefit
  - h. Remove – sale
  - i. Remove – destroy (to include recycling where appropriate)
3. Review Steering Panel to meet and sign-off recommendations from review project team. Project team lead should attend meeting to answer questions.

Review Steering Panel should be made up of:

- Member of Gallery Executive Team
- Collection Manager
- Conservation and Care Manager
- Senior Curator or an appropriate member of the curatorial team (not the review lead)
- Learning Lead or an appropriate member of the learning team.

4. If the outcome of the Review Steering Group meeting is that any objects are to be rehomed or repurposed (through the disposal process), then follow the steps in the next section.

### C. Disposals Policy: Rehoming and Repurposing Collections

Our disposals policy is covered in our Collection Development Policy. 'Disposal' is the technical term for the deaccessioning of a collection item, which means its removal in the legal sense from the gallery's collection. Once this has been achieved, there are processes for finding a new home or a new purpose for that item (see below).

The disposal policy covers:

- Reasons for disposal (see SECTION 1 for further information on both reasons for disposal and methods of disposal).
- Ethical considerations and codes that will be considered as part of disposal process
- Legal constraints on ability to dispose of an object.
- Methods of disposal
- Organisational responsibilities and accountability for authorisation of disposals.

### D. Formal Disposal

Manchester Art Gallery has specific procedures for rehoming/repurposing collection. For objects reviewed and nominated for 'disposal' as part of a collection review, the following steps will be taken:

1. The Review Project Lead will produce a Disposal Proposal Form
2. The form will be sent to the Chair of the Art Galleries Committee, who has delegated approval to sign off on disposals throughout the year. Once signed off, the process of rehoming or repurposing can proceed.
3. The Review Project Lead will report signed-off objects to the gallery's Acquisition and Disposal Meeting (quarterly) for minuting (All disposal Proposals would normally go to the Acquisitions and Disposals Meeting for approval, but in light of the volume of review activity for the Taking Stock and other collection review projects, the Review Steering Panel will approve as it will meet more frequently and includes representation from Curatorial, Learning, Collections Management and Conservation plus Member of the Gallery Executive team who all sit on the Acquisitions and Disposals Panel).

## SECTION 4: Involving Outside Voices

As an organisation, MAG often works with different people outside the gallery to make sure that our work is reflective of a wide range of concerns, opinions and experiences. Involving outside voices in the work of managing the collections (such as a collections review) is, however, a new area of collaboration and something that has traditionally been led and undertaken by MAG staff.

As part of the Taking Stock project, we are exploring how we make our processes – such as collection review, disposal and acquisition – more transparent and understandable to outside stakeholders such as visitors, community groups, students and even our colleagues across Manchester City Council. One way to do this is to find new ways of including outside voices in internal processes.

The collections reviews that are part of the Taking Stock programme will be a first phase of testing this approach. Each of the reviews will work with external stakeholders in different ways. Some reviews will ask stakeholders to support decision making throughout the process, including decisions about retention or disposal. In other reviews stakeholder support might be specifically focused on questions of future use for retained objects within those collections. There will be some collections reviews where the involvement of external stakeholders is very prominent, and others where gallery staff remain the main stakeholder in the decision making. We acknowledge the depth of internal expertise around the collections and the expectation of the people of Manchester that we will use that expertise in the interests of people and the collection.

As part of our efforts to be more transparent, MAG staff have produced a ‘how we work with people’ document. The principles of this document will be applied to the collections review process. The individual review projects will take different approaches to working with external stakeholders and these will be outlined in more detail on the specific collections review web pages.

Our hope is that the lessons we learn in these first collections review projects, will inform how we involve external stakeholders in decision making around disposals and acquisitions in the future, beyond the life of Taking Stock.

**NB: The collection review process will be reviewed in 2025-2026 as the Taking Stock project comes to an end, so that we can reflect and learn from our first review projects, and make improvements as necessary.**

## SECTION 5: Decision Making

A clear framework for accountability and responsibility is crucial in a collection review. MAG is responsible for the collection owned by the people of Manchester, a privilege we take very seriously.

Collection Reviews have a number of stages of decision making within the process:

Stage 1: Collection review team use agreed assessment criteria for deciding whether an item under review should be retained, rehomed or repurposed. The assessment criteria have been created by core group of experienced curatorial, collections management and learning staff, with external support and advice from freelance consultant Jenny Durrant, a specialist in collection review and disposal work. A copy of the criteria can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Stage 2: Once an object has been reviewed, it is taken to the Collection Review Steering Panel (see Section 2 B for more details). This includes more senior staff within MAG with oversight of all collections reviews being undertaken.

Stage 3: Objects put forward for rehoming or repurposing go through the disposal process (Section 3), which has been created in accordance with Museums Association guidelines on disposals as well as their Code of Ethics. All policies and procedures are reviewed on a 5-year rolling cycle in accordance with Arts Council England's accreditation scheme. In order to be an accredited organisation (and receive funding), the gallery must meet ACE's rigorous standards of collections care and legal and ethical decision-making.

Stage 4: Once a potential disposal has been approved internally (with final approval coming from the Senior Creative Lead or Senior Operational Lead), it must be put forward to the Chair of Manchester City Council's Art Galleries Committee for final approval and authorisation. The committee's chair has authorisation on behalf of the committee as a whole, as the latter only meets once a year.

There are therefore many stages of decision-making with clear lines of accountability throughout the gallery and Manchester City Council. As legal guardians of the collection, it is the responsibility of MAG and MCC to make final decisions on disposals and be accountable for those decisions made.

## Section 6: Documentation

The following documentation (policies, procedures and plans) are used by MAG in the process of collections reviews and disposals:

Collection Development Policy

Collection Information Policy

Collection Care and Conservation Policy

Collection Management Procedures Manual

Cataloguing Guidelines

Documentation Plan

Staff Handbook Volunteers

UK Museum Accreditation Scheme [UK Museum Accreditation Scheme | Arts Council England](#)

Spectrum 5.1 UK museum collections management standard [Spectrum – Collections Trust](#)

Museums Association Code of Ethics [Code of Ethics for Museums - Museums Association](#)

Museums Association [Off the Shelf: a toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal](#)

**NB: MAG is currently in the process of reviewing and refining collections-related policy documents as part of both the Taking Stock and Collections Review processes. These documents may therefore be updated within the lifetime of this Collection Review Framework.**



## SECTION 7: Production of this Collections Review Framework

This framework was produced by a steering group drawn from across the curatorial, learning and collections management teams between October 2023 – February 2024. The group were supported by freelance consultant Jenny Durrant, who specialises in cultural heritage collections reviews and disposals. Jenny initially met with all staff involved in curatorial, learning and collections management work to gather information about specific processes already being used, concerns about undertaking reviews and ideas for how the process might improve access to collection at MAG.

From that meeting, a smaller group (the steering group) came together with Jenny's support to create this document and test the processes within it. This was not an easy task, and I would like to acknowledge and thank staff for the intellectual and emotional load that a job such as this requires. The commitment of the steering group to find solutions to complex issues and to make difficult decisions was exemplary. We don't know what the future holds and that is a weight on our shoulders as we make decisions about the collection today. But NOT making decisions – continuing to collect without review or reflection – is more dangerous. This process has been undertaken as part of our ethical and legal commitment to manage the collection in the best way possible.

My thanks to the steering group for all their hard work in creating, challenging and testing this process in order to make MAG's collection the best it can be. My thanks too to the wider team for their support and input in the early stages of development, and their willingness to take this work forward now that a framework for review exists.

Signed: Dr. Inbal Livne (Senior Creative Lead), 14 February 2024.

### Collections Review Steering Group

Philippa Milner (Collection Manager)  
Natasha Howes (Senior Curator)  
Elizabeth Mitchell (Platt Hall Lead)  
Jenny McKellar (Curator, Craft and Design)  
Kate Jesson (Curator, Modern and Contemporary)  
Hannah Williamson (Curator, Fine Art)  
Emma Carroll (Learning Manager, Schools and Colleges)  
Inbal Livne (Senior Creative Lead)

With additional support from:

Chiara Ludolini (Digital Manager)  
Amanda Wallace (Senior Operational Lead)

### Review Compilation and Finalisation

This review framework was compiled and formally authorised by Inbal Livne (Senior Creative Lead) and Philippa Milner (Collection Manager).

## **Appendix 1: Statement of Significance Template**

### **[Title of Review Here]: Statement of Significance**

### **Assessed by [Name and Job Title] at MAG, [Date Here]**

**Number of objects:** [If need be, put an approximation]

**Accession numbers of objects in scope:** [If including non-accessioned objects, note here too]

**Current locations:** [List across all sites as necessary. This is overview rather than exact shelf locations]

**Brief Description:** [Of overall collection under review]

**Size and materials:** [varied, large, small etc., works on paper, oil paintings, costume on rails]

**Condition assessment:** [this may not be known, or may only be known for some items]

**Research and background:** [what research has been done so far, where is that information located, what lines of enquiry are to be followed up. May be very limited depending on collection]

**Artistic/Aesthetic Qualities:**

**Historic Significance:** [May not be relevant to every review]

**Peer Review and Specialist Input:** [May be internal or external, may not be needed if expertise are thought to exist with reviewer. May include other forms of specialisms such as project-specific volunteers you want to involve.]

**Compare: Related Places and Items:** [including comparable collections elsewhere]

A relevant comparable collection for the works on paper is the Local Image Collection held at MCLA, and for the archaeological items the archaeological collection held at MM.

**Key Criteria through which to assign Significance:** [e.g. historic, social, artistic, community value, research value]

**Provenance:** good or bad?

**Rare?**

**What is the collection representative of?** [e.g. local history, national trends, ideas of a particular genre or medium?]

**Social and Community Impact and Value:** [May be unknown at this stage]

**Degree of significance:** [local, national, international, specific culture/community]



## **Appendix 2: Collections Review Assessment Criteria**

Collection Review	3	2	1	0
<b>1. Significance</b>				
<b>a. Connections: Place</b>	Has proven meaningful connections to a particular significant place in the Manchester region or a place which has	Has perceived connections to the Manchester region or a place which has significance for the	Valued in the past because of connections to a particular place but this is no	No meaningful and relevant connections to place.
<b>b. Connections : People</b> [donors, communities, artists, makers,	Has proven meaningful and specific connections to Manchester people or communities which remain relevant today and are demonstrable by the results of consultation or	Has perceived connections to Manchester people or communities, but not a current organisational priority.	Valued in the past because of connections to Manchester people or communities but currently not of wide societal	No meaningful and relevant connections with specific Manchester people or
<b>C. Relational Connections</b> [The significance of an individual object when we understand it as part of a group]	This object is key to our understanding of the collection, and vice versa: imagine the collection is a spider's web. If we remove this object, it's like throwing a marble through it and the spider has major repairs to make.	This object is useful to our understanding of the collection and vice versa: imagine the collection is a spider's web. If we remove this object, it's like a large fly escaping, which is	The collection context adds little to the understanding of this object and vice versa: imagine the collection is a spider's web. If we remove this object,	No discernible difference is made to the object's or the collection's story if they are separated:
<b>d. Idea, design, skill or technique</b>	<p>Considered to be of very high quality in terms of its design or skill of execution. Within the context of the object's production the maker made the best that could be made. Both the idea and the execution are excellent.</p> <p>A painting example might be WH Hunt's <i>The Scapegoat</i>: the artist has aimed for both a realistic goat and a meaningful metaphor, in which aims he is widely acknowledged to have succeeded. But it is more than that: there is magic in the witches' brew that</p>	<p>Considered to be of good quality in terms of its design or skill of execution. Within the context of its production the maker made the object well. The idea and the execution are both good, or one of these is excellent.</p> <p>A painting example, currently on display in gallery 3, might be J Moon's <i>No. 14/73</i>: the artist has aimed for clean colour contrasts that give a sense of movement and is acknowledged</p>	<p>Considered to be of fair quality in terms of its design or skill of execution. Within the context of its production the maker made the object fairly well. The idea and the execution may be both fine, or perhaps a good idea is badly made (or vice versa).</p> <p>A painting example might be F Sargent's <i>Interior of the Manchester Royal Exchange</i>. The artist has</p>	<p>Considered to be of bad quality in terms of its design or skill of execution. Within the context of its production the maker made the object poorly. The idea and the execution may be both bad, or perhaps an okay idea is badly made (or vice versa).</p>

<b>e. Rarity and or uniqueness</b>	Unique or rare: one of a kind or a rare example.	Limited edition or batch production or of a type  NB: A mass produced item might score yellow if few are available today and it has essentially	Mass produced, or equivalent in its time	Mass produced (in its time) and readily available today.
<b>2. Use</b>				
<b>a. Display: links to organisational priorities and plans for future displays</b>	Currently on display or has been on display in last 10 years and has a wide range of proven or potential display uses (i.e. proven potential to be displayed in a wide range of contexts)  Knockout visual impact or makes your eyes sparkle	Currently on display or has been on display in the last 10 years and has a more limited range of proven or potential display uses.  Has fine representative qualities or	Could possibly be used in future displays but no current plans.  Would add useful variety to a display or could be used to illustrate an interesting provenance or	Not suitable for display use.  Could literally be put on display but you know in your heart of hearts that it's not
<b>b. Learning</b>	Object would be used to explore ideas, themes, practice or processes that are currently explored and valued in learning programmes and	Object could be used to explore ideas, themes, practices or processes that have been identified through previous	Object ideas, themes, practice or process could allow examination of current societal interest, but with	Object ideas, themes, practice or process do not support any quality
<b>c. Research</b>	Object has identified research use and meets current organisational priorities.	Object/s could have research value but is not aligned with current organisational	Collected for research in the past but no longer useful for this purpose.	Unlikely to be used for research and unlikely to have potential
<b>3. Collections Care</b>				
<b>a. Condition Assessment</b>	Good	Fair. Can be conserved in house, within budget. Minor amount of work to be displayed or used	Poor condition. Requires substantial conservation or conservation from outside MAG skill set	Very poor. Loss of integrity

<b>b. Storage</b>	Storage location identified and able to provide high standard of storage conditions which are appropriate for object	Storage location identified and adequate	Space identified, but storage may contribute to deterioration.  NB: this includes items where more suitable storage has been or may be located	Not able to offer suitable storage for the item
<b>c. Condition for Specified Use</b>	Object can be used for identified use without conservation or collections care support.	Object can be used for identified use with minimal conservation or	Object can be used for identified use but requires significant	Object is unsuitable for identified use – Hazardous
<b>4. Collection Management</b>				
<b>a. Ownership</b>	Legal title confirmed.	Accession register entry noting donor or vendor details but not confirmed and no transfer of title documentation.  NB: This may also include items where legal title is	Accession register entry but no donor or vendor details and no transfer of title documentation.  NB: This may also include items	No documentation.
<b>b. Valuation</b>	Not scored, but a valuation should be carried out as part of the collections management assessment so that the financial value is understood. Each item should be individually valued for items which are likely to be worth over £500. A more general valuation can be carried out for groups of objects if they are likely to be individually valued at £500 or less.			