

museum
National Museum of Ireland
Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

*Art and Industrial Division
Acquisition Strategy*

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Collections Acquisition Strategy of the Art & Industrial Division

This strategy operates within the framework of the NMI **Collections Acquisition Policy** as determined by the Board of the National Museum of Ireland.

1 General background

The Art and Industrial Division is responsible for over half a million artefacts representing Irish (decorative and) applied arts and Ireland's economic, social, industrial, political and military history, over the last three centuries. The division also holds large and diverse collections of non-Irish material, primarily decorative and applied arts objects, most of which were acquired in the years following the establishment of the Museum in 1877 and or by the transfer of items from earlier museums and other institutions.

The objects in the Historical Collections are defined by their relevance to documenting events, movements and people from Ireland's political and military history. Collections in this area include arms and armour, militaria, flags, uniforms, transport, as well as graphic and illustrative material, manuscripts and documents. The collections of Irish numismatics, philately and scientific instruments also reflect the political, social and economic history of the country. The Division is responsible for a significant quantity of material relating to the 1916 Easter Rising and subsequent political and social events. Many of the relevant artefacts were collected at the time of the 25th anniversary of the Rising in 1941 and also at the 50th anniversary in 1966. Latterly the focus of the Historical Collections has widened to include Irish social and cultural history, particularly in the 20th century, and a contemporary collecting strategy has been developed to address recent events and changes in Irish civic and social life.

The Division also maintains collections of Irish, European and Asian Decorative Arts, which give an understanding of international design and culture as they relate to Ireland and Irish design. The fine and decorative art objects in the collections include glass, ceramics, furniture, musical instruments, metalware, textiles, dress and jewellery. The primary focus for these collection areas now and into the future, is to acquire the work of Irish designers and manufacturers, items made of Irish materials, and artefacts that are otherwise significant in an Irish context. Since 2003, a collaboration with the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland has enabled the Museum to collect contemporary high quality works from Ireland's leading designer-makers through the NMI/DCCOI Joint Purchase Fund.

2 Art and Industrial Division Acquisitions Strategy

The role of the Art and Industrial Division is to maintain Ireland's heritage in decorative and applied arts as well as its political, cultural, military, economic and social history. The Division aims to promote a wider understanding of Ireland's decorative arts and cultural and historical heritage, and to reflect that heritage within the context of Ireland's contribution to European and international cultural history.

The Division acquires objects for the collections primarily by way of donations and by acquiring through purchase where appropriate. The division will borrow objects for exhibition purposes only and for a clearly defined period, (most usually the duration of an exhibition). Across the collections, a universal area of focus with regard to acquisition is to identify and fill gaps while at the same time recognising the need to avoid unnecessary repetition. Due consideration should be given to every proposed acquisition with regard to the implications for resources, particularly in terms of storage requirements, conservation and documentation.

3 Individual Collections and Acquisition Strategies

3.1 HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS

3.1.1 *Arms and Armour – Collection*

The collection primarily consists of edged weapons, including swords, daggers, bayonets, pole-arms, some crossbows and clubs; and pistols and longarms, including flintlocks, percussion and semi-automatic weapons. The collection is mostly weapons of Irish and English manufacture dating from the 16th to the 20th centuries and with some examples from Europe and the USA. There is also a sizeable number of non-Western muskets and swords collected in the 19th century. There are also a number of cannons.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect specimens of Irish manufacture, including accessories and documents, which represent the work of Irish weapon makers since c.1600 AD; pieces which illustrate stylistic development and technical innovation, the work of Irish makers living and working abroad, and material of Irish significance relating to individuals or events in Irish history and/or related to the activities of the Irish abroad.

3.1.2 *Military History - Collection*

The collection consists of documents, books, personal papers, uniforms, medals and ephemera related to Irish soldiers in the British, Irish and foreign armies. The largest part overall is the uniform collection, including items of headdress, the earliest of which dates from the 1780s.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect material relating to Irish soldiers who have fought in armies at home and abroad from 1550 AD to the present, material of Irish significance relating to individuals or specific events in Irish military history and material relating to the Irish soldier in the 20th and 21st centuries.

3.1.3 *Flags - Collection*

The collection consists of fifty flags (mostly military/yeomanry) dating from 1641 to the present.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect flags relating to Ireland's past, in particular military flags carried by Irish soldiers at home and abroad.

3.1.4 *Easter Week - Collection*

The collection consists principally of material acquired following the twentieth anniversary of the Rising in 1936. The collection contains a number of key documents and manuscripts relating to the Rising and its leaders, for instance, three copies of the Proclamation of the Republic, and two copies of Pearse's order to surrender. The immediate aftermath of the Rising is represented in the collection, with items produced in and related to internment camps and prisons. The collection also covers the period up to the end of the Civil War, and incorporates commemorative material produced up to the present day.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect objects that illuminate the Independence period, while simultaneously avoiding undue replication of objects already represented in the collection, and more specifically material produced in the camps and prisons between 1916 and 1924.

3.1.5 Historical - Collection

The collection is strong in material such as medals, documents and personal memorabilia relating to the Volunteer movement of the 1780s, the Act of Union, the movement to Repeal the Act of Union, and the Land War. The collection is weak in other important areas, such as the Plantations, the Famine, Ireland of the 1920s to the 1940s, and generally in objects that tell the social and economic story of the 'building of Ireland' in those decades.

Acquisitions Strategy

To collect objects that tell the social, economic and political story of Ireland's history from the seventeenth century onwards. The aim is to broaden the Historical Collection to include items that tell of the 'quiet revolutions' in social and economic history, as well as those political events that traditionally demand the greatest attention in terms of research and acquisition.

3.1.6 Transport Collections - Collection.

The collection consists of fifteen 18th and 19th century carriages, including the Chancellor's coach and Daniel O'Connell's triumphal carriage, as well as contextual material (schedules, models, photographs, drawings) related to 19th century railways. The carriage collection, mainly representing the vehicles owned by the landed gentry, complements the transport collection of the Irish Folklife Division.

Acquisitions strategy

There is a limited active acquisitions programme for this collection at present. However, the focus is on filling gaps where resources allow.

3.1.7 Scientific Instruments – Collection

The collection consists of objects relating to surveying, navigation, weights and measures, measurement of time, astronomy, drawing and communications mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries; and a large telecommunications collection from the 20th century. There is a small collection of other 20th century material.

Acquisitions strategy

The strategy is to collect objects which represent the development of the scientific instrument trade in Ireland and which illustrate the excellence of Irish makers, innovators, and inventors.

3.1.8 Philatelic and Postal History - Collection

The 'Duke of Leinster' bequest of some 18,500 stamps and related material forms the core of the collection, which spans British and Irish philately and postal history. The collection also includes covers and proofs, and a selection of Mulready caricatures. Of particular note is a series of British Departmental stamps in unique mint blocks of four, and an example of the Western Australian 4d. blue of 1854 with the frame inverted in relation to the central swan. Of the remainder of the collection, the vast majority comprises Irish and world stamps, sheets and first-day covers, issued by the Universal Postal Union, Berne, Switzerland.

Acquisitions Strategy

To continue to collect, through the Universal Postal Union, and to fill in the gaps in the existing collection of Irish philatelic material.

3.1.9 *Numismatics - Collection*

The main body of the collection is Irish minted coins from the Viking period to the present. The Irish collection is in two elements, a systematic chronological collection and a body of hoard material. The numismatic collection also includes a considerable body of Roman, English, European and Asian coins, which may occasionally be used to provide contrast or comparison.

There is a large collection of Irish medals covering such topics as history, politics, agriculture, sport and education as well as tokens, banknotes and associated numismatic material. The collection also includes a small group of around 100 seals.

NUMISMATICS – Acquisitions strategy

To collect material of Irish origin and significance taking into account condition, provenance and extant examples in the collection. Hoards (whether of Irish or foreign material) are always collected, except where composed of the very commonest pieces, where the decision may be to record rather than acquire. The Irish chronological collection is augmented by denomination, style and provenance.

3.2 DECORATIVE AND APPLIED ARTS COLLECTIONS

The collection has particular strengths for individual designers, most notably Eileen Gray. The Division aims to broaden all Decorative and Applied Arts collections through acquisition of examples of work from other modern designers in or from Ireland, particularly from the Kilkenny Design Workshops.

3.2.1 *FURNITURE – Collection*

The furniture collection comprises a wide range of material dating from the 16th century to the present. It is mostly representative of the 18th and 19th centuries and covers a wide range of makers and firms. The collection is mostly comprised of Irish, English and other European made material.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect material of Irish manufacture to order to develop a representative collection of furniture, wood-work, decorative wood-work and related material from c.1500 AD onwards; pieces representing known makers, stylistic development, models, drawings and technical development. It is also the strategy to collect material of Irish significance relating to individuals or events in Irish history, from Irish houses and demesnes or related to the activities of Irish designers and makers at home and abroad.

3.2.2 *Eileen Gray Collection – Collection*

The collection was acquired in four separate phases since 2000 and represents the bulk of Gray's personal archive, representing all aspects of her work as a designer and architect. The collection illustrates the many different disciplines, which interested and inspired Gray throughout her life, artwork, sculpture, photography, lacquerwork, design and architecture.

Acquisitions strategy

To build on previous acquisitions to develop a representative collection of personal ephemera, artwork, lacquerwork, graphic design, photography, carpet design, furniture design, architectural and other related material to illustrate Gray's stylistic and technical development; and material relating to individuals and events, which influenced her.

3.2.3 *Musical Instruments – Collection*

The collection includes mostly Irish, British, Italian and French made instruments. The collection of Irish harps is internationally significant covering several centuries from the 15th to the 19th centuries. There is a harpsichord and piano collection dating from the 16th century to the 19th century. There is also a small group of stringed instruments, by national and international makers from the 18th century company onwards. The musical instrument collection is weak on 20th century material.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect Irish made instruments for both their musical and historical/contextual value. To identify gaps where the collection is weak and to acquire pieces to fill that gap where appropriate.

3.2.4 *Ceramics – Collection*

This ceramics collection was originally acquired to influence and inspire local ceramic industries and to illustrate the evolution of fine ceramics, e.g. Continental European, and British porcelain, Italian Majolica, French faience, Dutch delftware, Hispano-Moresque ware etc. The collections also includes Irish delftware, Belleek porcelain and Carrigaline pottery and a growing collection of high quality contemporary Irish/Irish-related craft works.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect historical and contemporary pieces of Irish manufacture or of Irish significance which help to document industrial and artistic developments relating to ceramic manufacture and design.

3.2.5 *Glass – Collection*

The glass collection consists of Irish, American and European glass dating from the 18th to the 21st centuries. In an Irish context the museum's collecting in previous years focused on the industrial manufacture of Belfast, Cork, Dublin and Waterford from the late-18th to the mid-19th centuries. Current collecting has branched out to include examples of quality Irish and/or Irish related contemporary glass manufacture and design.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect historical and contemporary works of an Irish manufacture or significance, to illustrate the industrial and artistic development of the medium.

3.2.6 *Metalwork - Collection*

The principal element of this collection is the Irish silver collection, which ranges in date from c.1500 AD to the present (and which contains over 2,800 pieces). A number of important pieces have been acquired at auctions abroad in recent years. There are also smaller collections of pewter as well as enamel, brass and ironwork. The non-Irish elements of these collections are not active, except those collected for context.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect Irish material, with an emphasis on style, maker and provenance, taking into account function, period, geographical provenance and extant examples in the collection. In the case of ironwork physically large objects are not normally acquired because of storage difficulties.

3.2.7 *Costume – Collection*

The dress collection is mainly comprised of examples of Irish and English dress, predominately-female dress, from the mid-18th century to the present. Irish fashion designers of the mid-20th century are

well represented and in recent years a small collection of late-20th century Irish designer menswear has been acquired. The collection also contains examples of religious vestments, court dress, legal and academic robes and a small number of non-military uniforms.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect dress of Irish design or manufacture, and/or made of Irish fabrics or of otherwise Irish significance from 1600 AD to the present, taking account of condition and with cognisance of the existing collection; to collect other material and ephemera relevant to the design, production, marketing and consumption of Irish designed/manufactured clothing.

3.2.8 Costume Accessories – Collection

The collection of costume accessories including hats, shoes, bags, gloves, hosiery, shoe-buckles, parasols and fans and other small objects carried on the person.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect pieces of Irish manufacture or with an Irish connection from the 1600s to the present and contemporary pieces reflecting the quality and innovation of Irish design and manufacture.

3.2.9 Jewellery – Collection

The collection consists mostly of good-quality costume jewellery ranging in date from the 18th to the 20th centuries. It also includes pieces of early 20th century Arts and Crafts, Celtic Revival and contemporary Irish jewellery. There is also a large collection of carved cameo and intaglio seal stones and a good collection of Tassie glass pastes.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect pieces of Irish design and/or manufacture or with an Irish connection; Irish hallmarked jewellery, particularly of pre-20th century date; and contemporary pieces reflecting the quality and innovation of Irish design; also to collect other relevant material and ephemera relating to the design, production, marketing and consumption of jewellery in Ireland.

3.2.10 Textiles and Soft Furnishings - Collection

This diverse collection consists of carpets (mainly Irish-made), tapestries, curtains, embroideries, samplers, needlework sample books, quilts, fabric fragments and lengths, and equipment. There is small number of pattern designs and sample books relating to Irish textile production. The Irish silk and poplin industries of the 19th and 20th centuries are represented, and there are good collections of Mountmellick embroidery work and examples of Irish sprigging/whitework,

Acquisitions strategy

To collect examples of the textile manufacturing industries of Ireland, taking account of condition and with cognisance of the existing collection; to collect other material relevant to the design, production, marketing and consumption of Irish textiles and Irish textile design.

3.2.11 Lace – Collection

The collection consists of over 1,500 items of Irish and European lace ranging mostly from the 17th century to the early 20th centuries. The collection of Irish laces and lace designs is strong from the late-19th to the mid-20th centuries, with specimens purchased directly by the Museum from lace schools, lace co-operatives and Industrial Exhibitions across the country.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect pieces of historic and contemporary Irish lace with good provenance, which illustrate high quality in terms of design and execution; and other material relating to the design, production and marketing of Irish lace.

3.2.12 Toy, Dolls and Accessories – Collection

The toy collection consists of a large collection of Irish, English and European dolls, a small collection of doll houses with fittings, and a small collection of toys including board games, tin plate and clockwork toys, mostly dating to the 20th century.

Acquisitions strategy

To collect toys of Irish origin and/or significance, examples of past and contemporary Irish toy production and representative examples of popular/iconic toys available in the past to children in Ireland.

3.2.13 Asian Collections – Collection

This collection consists of around 7,000 objects, mostly acquired in the early decades of the museum's existence. Asian objects are not now treated as a distinct collection; objects are kept within the existing collection areas of arms and armour, textiles, metalwork, glass, ceramics and musical instruments.

Acquisitions strategy

There is no current strategy to develop regional collections of overseas decorative or applied arts from specific countries except where it might relate to newer communities in Ireland and where such collecting would reflect changes in Irish society.

3.2.14 Fine and Graphic Art - Collection

This collection consists of some 200 watercolours and drawings by Irish and European artists, mainly compiled prior to the 1920s.

Acquisitions strategy

It is not museum strategy to collect further examples, except in the context of other NMI collections.