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National Museum of Ireland  
*Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann*

# Contemporary Collecting Acquisition Strategy

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## Contemporary Collecting Strategy

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

Contemporary Collecting has always been part of the acquisition remit of the National Museum of Ireland (NMI), particularly in two out of the museum's four curatorial divisions – Art & Industrial Division and Irish Folklife Division. The Decorative Arts collection (forming part of the Art & Industrial Division) of the National Museum of Ireland has since its establishment, been divided into different categories according to medium, *e.g.* ceramics, furniture/wood-turning/musical instruments, glass, jewellery/accessories and metalwork/silver. This division of different collection types is in operation in most national museums of decorative/applied arts internationally.

In 2003 the Contemporary Collection of Design and Craft (CCDC) was established by the National Museum of Ireland and the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI) to collect contemporary high quality works from Ireland's leading designer-makers to be held in perpetuity by the NMI. The collection is jointly funded by the NMI and the DCCI. Work is selected by NMI curators with advice from DCCI, so as to complement and enhance the NMI's existing collection of Ireland's portable heritage.

Following the 2018 *Repeal the Eighth Referendum* a number of objects were acquired by the Art & Industrial Division, in order to preserve today from loss and destruction (due to their sometimes ephemeral nature) what are in effect future historical objects. This is part of a longer tradition of contemporary historical collecting that is best exemplified by the Easter Week collections (of the Art & Industrial Division), which span the full Irish revolutionary era of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, from c.1912- c.1923.

This Strategy has been developed to ensure that NMI collections remain representative of recent developments in Irish society, and to allow the more recent periods of our history to be collected, curated, interpreted, and available for study in the future.

### 2 Criteria for Collecting

For the purposes of contemporary collecting of Ireland's portable and natural heritage, in addition to the criteria detailed in the **Collections Acquisition Strategy** of each Division, it is proposed such policy will identify non-archaeological artefacts based on the following criteria:

1. in danger of being irreparably lost;
2. represent and record important historical events;
3. have multiple meanings for different segments of Irish society;
4. are judged to have unusually high quality;
5. fill important gaps in existing collections;
6. illustrate important expressions of human creativity;

For natural history specimens, in addition to the criteria detailed in the **Collections Acquisition Strategy of the Natural History Division**, priority should be given to those that are in danger of being irreparably lost;

1. fill in evolutionary lineages not yet represented in NMI collections;
2. generate material for new kinds of analyses and understandings;
3. continue temporal continuity by sampling the Irish fauna over long periods of time
4. collect from temporary geological exposures

### 3 Categories of Contemporary Collecting

NMI recognises six categories of contemporary collecting:

**3.1 *Representative and interpretive collecting.*** Representative collecting involves identifying objects that can stand for a larger universe of items of which they are a part. This is based on the prerequisite that less is more, and focuses primarily on the unique or prototypes.

**3.2 *Decision-making collecting.*** Decision-making collecting involves gathering complete and detailed information on what other cultural institutions or museums already have in their collections. It addresses the resources available to maintain new acquisitions, and the level of significance of proposed acquisitions.

**3.3 *Expanding the voices in collecting.*** Expanding the voices in collecting involves response to the considerable discussion within the museum community about the representation of diverse national populations in collections, and about whether the people who typically make acquisition decisions adequately speak for all of society. Three factors have prompted this interest: concerns that collections do not adequately reflect all socioeconomic groups; underrepresentation of particular ethnic groups; and the desire to increase engagement with NMI and its collections by those groups who may not have felt included in museums in the past.

**3.4 *Co-ordinated collecting.*** Co-ordinated collecting involves collaboration between cultural institutions and museums, in order to deal with resource constraints and ensure that critical scientific and cultural evidence is collected and preserved even if external to the National Museum of Ireland.

**3.5 *Community-based collecting.*** To promote preservation and documentation of artefacts by community members, organisations, and businesses, which reduce the burden on collecting institutions to gather everything of interest themselves. Such a system might involve establishing a database to track collections held elsewhere; conducting oral histories that can be digitised and training the community on how to preserve artefacts (e.g. NMI's iCAN and LGBTQ projects). NMI will endeavour to liaise with other organisations who are also collecting in this area, such as the National Library of Ireland.

**3.6 *Alternatives to three-dimensional collecting.*** Collect a variety of sources in addition to objects in order to provide a more comprehensive record. These include photographs, videos, laboratory and industrial records, trade literature, personal statements by participants, etc. The most frequently cited examples in this area of collecting pertain primarily to the vernacular, *i.e.* Folklife.

### 4 Management of Contemporary Collecting

All artefacts (using the above criteria) coming into the NMI under contemporary collecting may reside in any of the four curatorial divisions, be termed *Contemporary Ireland* and be subject to a contemporary acquisition review committee every three years. All curatorial departments,

conservation, registration and education are to have representatives on this contemporary acquisitions review committee. The date range of the *Contemporary Ireland* collection will be from the year 2000 to the present.