

## Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition policy (revised 2016)

### Introduction

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is one of the most significant university art museums in the UK. It is located on the campus of the University of East Anglia in the city of Norwich. The Sainsbury Centre opened in 1978 after Robert and Lisa Sainsbury donated their art collection to the university. The museum is situated in an extraordinary building by Norman Foster which was his first major public work and now considered a seminal work of the second half of the twentieth century. The Sainsbury Centre is the largest art museum in the region and serves the university community of staff and students, the city of Norwich and the wider region of East Anglia. Because of its remarkable collections, building and exhibition programme, the Centre attracts national and international attention.

### Context and Collections

The Sainsbury Centre collections include works dating from prehistory to the late twentieth century from across the globe. There are a significant number of works by acknowledged masters of European modern art such as Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Francis Bacon, Jacob Epstein, Jean Arp, Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti, Amedeo Modigliani and Paul Gauguin. These works are displayed alongside major holdings of art from Oceania, Africa, the Americas, and Asia, the ancient Mediterranean, classical cultures of Egypt, Greece and Rome, and Medieval Europe. The Centre holds a notable and significant collection of twentieth century studio ceramics which represents one of the UK's principal collections. Alongside the Sainsbury Collection sit two further major collections: the Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau, and a collection dedicated to Abstract and Constructivist Art and Design. The international perspective of the museum is a defining feature and the three principle themes of the institution are ancient, modern and international art. The display of art across time and place is at the core of the museum's identity and embodies the notion that art is a universal global phenomenon. The collections are displayed across the ground floor of the building in flexible open-plan spaces juxtaposing works from different periods and cultures. The principle permanent display is called the Living Area and reflects the attitude of Robert and Lisa Sainsbury who believed that art should be viewed, not in isolation, but rather as an integral part of everyday life. They also wished to challenge museum orthodoxy, allowing visitors the freedom to explore works of art without generic prejudicial viewpoints, while creating a relaxed social environment so that art became integrated into everyday experience. Alongside this display is the East Gallery, a flexible collection display area where there is a greater emphasis on thematic, didactic or survey presentations of works from the collections. In addition, works on loan that relate to the collections or artist interventions can be integrated into the displays.

## Exhibition Programme and our audience

The Sainsbury Centre organises a changing programme of temporary exhibitions of art historical relevance to the collections and the principle themes of the institution.

The exhibition programme typically relates to, or informs and expands elements and key themes of the collections. There is a desire to show the highest quality art, whether it is ancient, modern or international art, photography, architecture or design. There is an ongoing commitment to contemporary practice. We invite our academic colleagues from across the university campus to explore inter-disciplinary approaches to art and culture and look to represent this in our programmes.

As well as exhibiting historical art, we are committed to contemporary art, bringing the work of artists with both established and emerging international reputations to East Anglia. We aim to make our exhibitions accessible, exciting and stimulating to a broad range of audiences including university students and staff as well as general visitors. The Sainsbury Centre is committed to encouraging visitors to the museum and also to experience the university campus as part of a commitment to public engagement.

We use a broad range of criteria to assess the suitability of an exhibition project which includes the following:

- Popular and accessible
- Collections-based (contains works from the collections) or Collections-related
- Collaboration with the university
- Touring capability
- Unique research
- Diversity
- Artistic excellence
- Target audiences
  - academic students as well as staff
  - general visitors – regional, national and international
  - HE/FE, schools, families, young people

We aim to create a balanced and broad programme consisting of exhibitions that may appeal to a broad audience with popular appeal (blockbuster), as well as more focused projects that we may have a desire or responsibility to programme, or which are the result of a specialist research project. This will typically be reflected in the respective funding stream created to support the project.

The exhibition programme covers the broad themes of the institution – ancient, modern and international art – but there are also specific subject areas that we aim to explore in

exhibitions. Modernity and, more specifically, Modernism is the overarching point of reference. The building and the university campus are seminal examples of several phases of modern architecture and design. The programme aims to investigate the effects of modernity on art and culture, the making of art and the circumstances of collecting art. The collections deal in varied ways with modernity in visual culture – either art made in the modern period or art collected through a modern sensibility – notably the way in which art of many civilisations outside the European canon were encountered and embraced in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Exhibitions that explore and expand our understanding of this phenomena but also explore ancient art from across the world are an important area of work.

Exhibitions that explore artistic practice and, in particular, challenge established genres, definitions, and preconceived ideas of art and design practice, are encouraged. There remains a strong ethos supporting the idea of the art object and the processes of making art from established practices such as sculpture and sculptural form, painting and drawing, printmaking, ceramics and photography. However we embrace new forms of art practice such as film, video or performance. Design practices and architecture are embraced to create a wider perspective and integrated approach to the visual arts. More specific themes include:

- Twentieth century European Art including the Paris avant-garde and post-World War II École de Paris
- International Modern Art of the twentieth century with a focus on both figurative and abstract art practices
- Post-World War II international abstract and constructivist art including integrated design practice
- Drawing practice
- Ceramic art from post-World War II and contemporary practice
- Post-World War II sculpture with a particular focus on British artists
- European ancient art
- Ancient and classical works of Europe and the Mediterranean region
- Ideas that relates to or compliments existing artefacts/objects or that present strong formal qualities associated with notions of European sculptural forms, figures or vessels, for example, Oceania, Asia (principally Japan, India and China), Africa (more specifically sub-Saharan west Africa), The Americas, Mesoamerica or pre-Columbian art and Native North American art
- Art, design and architecture from the nineteenth century until the present with a particular focus on the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Modernism, Post Modernism including practice that relates to the building and more recent practice

## Associated programming

Integrated into the exhibitions is a public programme of education and learning aimed to inform and engage all our audiences. This work aims to build bridges between the curatorial agenda of the Centre, its associated research institutes and wider academic and research activity across the university as a whole.

As a university art museum, the overriding aim is to produce scholarly and yet fully accessible programming and reach the widest possible audience regionally, nationally and internationally. We wish to promote and enhance the understanding and enjoyment of the visual arts. We organise a seasonal programme involving thoughtful engagement between people and things: talks, discussions, training and professional development, practical ideas and skills-based workshops in gallery and studio, performances and readings, film programmes, and young people's events. We also host academic conferences, subject-focussed study days, and colloquia.

## Recent programme

In recent years the Sainsbury Centre has hosted a number of ground-breaking exhibition projects. Recent highlights have included:

- *Masterpieces: Art and East Anglia*, which celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the university
- *Reality*, a survey of Contemporary painting in Britain which toured to the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool
- *Francis Bacon and the Masters*, a remarkable collaboration with the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg
- *Alberto Giacometti: A Line through Time*, a re-examination of the artist Alberto Giacometti in the fiftieth anniversary year of his death
- Other projects have included monographic presentations of artists such as Thomas Houseago, John Virtue and Bill Viola, and a series of shows examining the legacy of Art Nouveau including the recent survey of Alphonse Mucha. Thematic touring exhibitions that relate and inform the collections such as *Magnificent Obsessions*

## Project development

Exhibitions are initiated and developed by the Sainsbury Centre team and this is often done in collaboration with artists, external art historians, academics, gallerists and other institutions. The Sainsbury Centre aims to tour its programme wherever possible and, on occasion, is the venue for shows developed by national and international partners. The team

at the gallery undertakes ongoing research into art historical and contemporary practice to produce a programme of outstanding quality and depth. Proposals are considered by the Programming Group at meetings held monthly.

### **Exhibition spaces and timings**

The temporary exhibitions are held principally in two locations. First, a major temporary exhibition suite of galleries on the lower level which constitutes 820 square metres across four spaces. This is one of the largest exhibition suites outside of UK National museums. In addition there is the Mezzanine Gallery which has 495 square metres of flexible open plan space. There are usually two major exhibitions per year which open in the Lower Galleries in the autumn and spring. In addition, two projects per year are also housed in the Mezzanine Gallery. In the East Gallery we periodically programme small displays that relate to and inform the permanent collection displays or intervention display. The Sculpture Gardens are also programmed periodically for specific projects. There is a desire to create a campus wide sculpture park for the university and this will expand incrementally. Exhibitions tend to run for between 3–5 months, which is the standard and accepted time frame for the loan of works by national and international partners. Smaller in focus exhibitions/interventions can be short or indeed longer. Wherever possible, exhibitions are opened to coincide with university terms or public partnerships. Major exhibitions tend to open either in the spring or autumn and are naturally aligned to the art world calendar so that we are able to negotiate and facilitate loans. The Sainsbury Centre has a published Facilities Report outlining the temporary exhibition suite showing that the spaces meet both Government Indemnity Insurance Scheme (GIS) and National Security Advisor standards.

### **Exhibitions Proposals**

The Sainsbury Centre accepts exhibition proposals submitted for the attention of the Exhibitions Coordinator. They will be discussed by the Programming Group and a decision on whether to pursue a project will be taken.

The majority of exhibitions are self-initiated by the Centre but also by direct invitations to artists, curators and institutions. They are typically several years in the planning, not least because most institutions require up to one year advance notice of a loan request.

However, we welcome exhibition proposals from artists, art historians or curators, with a short statement and summary of the proposal with explanation of how it will meet the criteria described in this policy document and how it will be funded. The content of the exhibition should be described, preferably with an illustrated contents list and a provisional budget including projected visitor numbers, economic and social impact, research and education potential. Original artwork should not be submitted, as The Sainsbury Centre cannot be held responsible for work that goes astray. Artists or guest curators who are invited to work with the Sainsbury Centre team to deliver a project will be bound by a contract setting out the agreement by which the project will be delivered.

## **Due Diligence and exhibition financial planning**

A process of due diligence is undertaken by the Sainsbury Centre before any work of work of art is borrowed and displayed. The Sainsbury Centre adheres to all established national and international standards concerning the loan and display of works of art. We undertake a checklist designed to ensure that all possible checks have been carried out in order to ascertain that the lender has legal title to the work and to compile a full provenance record to mitigate risk. The Sainsbury Centre is able to provide Immunity from Seizure provision in accordance with UK Government legislation. The Sainsbury Centre aims to retain creative freedom and to produce exhibitions that are innovative, exciting and challenging as well as informative. We also aim not to cause offense, whether morally, culturally or politically, and to be respectful of the views and opinions of our audiences. The Sainsbury Centre team develops exhibition budgets based on a number of criteria including popular appeal and susceptibility for funding whether through sponsorship or grant. The Finance sub-Committee of the Sainsbury Centre Board monitors the financial viability of the programme and advises the Board.

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