

Panel Discussion: Contemporary Collections and Collecting in Scotland

Introduction

Thank you all for taking the time to attend the panel discussion this afternoon.

I shall introduce myself, and then I briefly want to provide some context to this afternoon's event, before handing over to Mark and the panel.

I am Tina Fiske, and I am the holder of the post that Professor Yarrington has just described to you– that is, Research Associate attached to the National Collecting Scheme Scotland or NCSS (to give it its acronym). My post is funded by the Scottish Arts Council, and came into being in 2007 following the completion of the first phase of the National Collecting Scheme Scotland, which the Arts Council funded and the Contemporary Art Society administrated between 2003 and 2006. A core aspect of my remit has been to look at the development of the NCSS model and its sustainability alongside the further funding that SAC has available to NCSS curators for acquisitions as well as for group and individual research travel.

I am based in the History of Art department at the University of Glasgow, where I also teach. From there I work with the curators from the seven museums involved with the NCSS, within a programme that includes continued ambitious purchasing, group and individual research travel opportunities, studio visits, regular NCSS meetings and opportunities for the curators to get out to the galleries.

Today's panel discussion is the first in a programme of three events planned for 2009, through which we hope to bring together and engage organisations and individuals who have a stake in the collecting of contemporary work.

Our aim in doing is to initiate and sustain productive critical discussion about the future of public collections of contemporary art in Scotland. We recognise that issues pertaining to collections and collecting reach across a range of sector bodies, funders, organisations and individuals, and have sought to represent that here today on the panel and in the audience. Currently, there is no forum in Scotland for drawing together representatives from the various agencies and development bodies, collecting institutions, public galleries, commercial galleries, or artists. An objective of these events is to look at how this might be established, what form it might take, and what it might do.

This opening event provides an opportunity to review the current context that informs contemporary collecting, with a focus on current initiatives such as ARTIST Rooms, Art Fund International and National Collecting Scheme Scotland. It is a first public occasion to consider how they sit in relation to one another and to wider ambitions to build collections of contemporary art within Scotland.

It will be followed by a seminar in September, which will include presentations by international curators from selected European collecting institutions and organisations on how they build their collections, what relationships and ways

of working support them in doing so, and how those relationships and practices have been developed.

These we intend to provide context to a plenary session in December which will focus more specifically on issues pertaining to future support for the building of contemporary collections in Scotland; for example, what form this should take, what priorities need to be addressed, by whom, and the most effective ways to represent and address these.

Today's panel is timely for several opportunities it presents. Firstly, over the last two years the contemporary collecting landscape has evolved, a fact that is reflected in and motivated by the various current initiatives and their strategic aims.

A move towards concentrated development and partnership working is evident with **Art Fund International**, launched in November 2007 to support innovative international purchasing over five years on the part of five successful partnerships. [Slide 1 & 2] Greater fluidity and shared collections across peer institutions and sectors is also part of the ethos of Artist Rooms, as can be seen with the presence of Artist Rooms / Bruce Nauman here at Tramway. NGS Director-General John Leighton has indicated that in the future 'less obvious' non-museum venues will be encouraged to display elements of the collection. Likewise, the acquisitions programme and recently launched commissioning award of the **Contemporary Art Society**, of which I

hope we shall hear more shortly from Lucy, appear to prioritise sector contact and integrated working.

For their part, NCSS partners have made new acquisitions, supported variously by the **National Fund for Acquisitions** and **Art Fund**, a number of which reflect practice elsewhere; four works by Lucy Skaer to the Hunterian Art Gallery; a group of works by Graham Fagen, by GoMA and acquired into their collection; and works from Venice / Scotland, Henry Coombes' Gralloch in Aberdeen Art Gallery's collection.

All things considered, is it the case that the work of contemporary artists has assumed a visible, even prominent place within our museums and galleries, which is valued by those institutions and their audiences alike? That we are in this ballpark is the result of substantial strategic public and third sector investment in collections and individuals, which has left museums and galleries the richer. Yet, in the current financial climate and with local governments across the UK hard-hit, non-statutory spending by local councils will likely be minimized, and the financial constraints and working cultures under which many curators already operate will be exacerbated. It remains to be seen what impact this will have for curators, and whether the ways of working that are necessary to develop challenging contemporary collections and sources of revenue to support these are sustainable through such times.

Perhaps once again the question of responsibility for providing investment for the development of contemporary collecting across the UK falls squarely back

with the sector bodies and major funders as local authorities face stringent times. This issue has a long lineage, which I won't rehearse here, except to refer to one of the more memorable positions, which has some bearing today. When turning to the subject of the newly created Carnegie Museum of Art in his lecture *The Best Use of Wealth* (1895), the great Scottish-born philanthropist Andrew Carnegie noted:

we now come to the Art Gallery and Museum, which the City is not to maintain. These are to be regarded as wise extravagances, for which public revenues should not be given, not as necessities. These are such gifts as a citizen may fitly bestow upon a community and endow, so that it will cost the City nothing.

Now more than ever the matter of respective responsibilities across sectors, organisations and individuals looms large, not least in Scotland where this has and continues to be a period of change for sector bodies as such the Scottish Arts Council and Museums Galleries Scotland. Today might offer a starting point for thinking about responsibilities to be accepted, to be shared, and those to be fostered.

Today is most obviously an opportunity to compare and understand the various collecting models, and how these potentially fit together and aggregate for any one collecting institution to the benefit of their audiences. What are the checks and balances between them? For instance, will ARTIST ROOMS work to the advantage of those Scottish museums and galleries that are engaged in building their own ambitious collections of contemporary art? Might it help identify and develop aspiration to do so on the part of new

institutions? Its joint acquisition, with substantial investment from the Scottish Government, along with DCMS, NHMF and The Art Fund, provides a major validation of the presence of contemporary art in public museums on the part of the Government, and its influence in turn upon local government remains to be seen. Yet, should it be of concern that a major funder like The Henry Moore Foundation has committed £500,000 to the establishment of the ARTIST ROOMS endowment fund? It is a significant sum to put beyond the direct reach of a wider community of curators. Indeed, how might ARTIST ROOMS impact upon collecting elsewhere and principles of local or dispersed ownership? Mungo Campbell, Deputy Director, Hunterian Art Gallery recently noted to me:

When we first set NCSS going (long before Significance Recognition) it was clear to us all that we were going to be putting together a collection of national significance - albeit dispersed - and that it was very much to be seen as being held in common ... this is a 'National' collection in its own right.

We also have a chance to articulate the potential of closer working between the museums and visual arts sectors, as well as the commercial galleries, and identify existing threads of more sustainable ways of working. We should be mindful too that many things flow from acquisitions. It is important to reiterate that acquisitions work for organisations in all kinds of ways. Even a single, strategic well-made purchase can provide all kinds of benefits as for instance with the Pier Art Centre's acquisition of *4 +4*, 2005, by Norwegian artist Camillia Løw with support from NCSS and National Fund for Acquisitions. In

the time since the work's acquisition, Løw's international reputation has grown, 4 +4 has been loaned to DCA for its exhibition of Løw's work in 2007. That loan in turn leading to the scheduling of the exhibition *Straight Letters* at the Pier, in association with DCA. This in turn has lead to the establishment of a direct relationship with the artist, whose work the Pier Art Centre will now potentially look to represent in depth into the future.

Also important to acknowledge here is the support that artists, commercial galleries and individuals offer through making their collections or works available to museums as loans. These are vital relationships and can have real impact for staff and visitors alike. Earlier this year, a walk around SNGMA's ground floor was revealing: alongside the Charles Avery exhibition were a sequence of works all of which we noted were either loaned or gifted. The work by Douglas Gordon, Scott Myles, Cathy Wilkes and Karla Black. How can we better foster and make more straightforward these kinds of relationships?

Today's panel comprises a range of participants that is reflective of this picture, deliberately bringing together a wide range of perspectives for the first time.

Of these, **Amanda Catto** is Head of Visual Arts at the Scottish Arts Council, a position she has held since 2000. The Scottish Arts Council is the lead body for the funding, development and advocacy of the arts in Scotland. Amanda has presided over the numerous major projects such as Venice & Scotland.

Jane Robinson is Head of Museum Development for Museums Galleries Scotland - the membership body and strategic agency for Scottish museums and galleries. MGS provides funding and development opportunities, and as a strategic agency, MGS advises government, advocates on behalf of the sector and has a research and evidence-gathering role. Jane's remit is to lead the work of a team of development managers who take forward a range of initiatives that aim to improve and enhance what museums and galleries do and the products and services they provide to the public.

Lucy Byatt recently joined CAS as Head of National Programmes, and is currently working on the scoping study for Arts Council England's National Policy for Collecting. The CAS's National Programmes acquires works for 90 contemporary collections held by 63 museums and galleries across the UK and is developing a programme, The National Network, that generates knowledge and supports professional development and capacity within the sector..

Dr Simon Groom is the Director of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh, taking up post in November 2007. Prior to that he was Head of Exhibitions and collections at Tate Liverpool, and part of its senior management team. Whilst there he curated exhibitions such as The Real Thing: Contemporary art from China, as well as the Turner Prize 2007. Previously to that he was exhibitions organiser at Kettles Yard in Cambridge.

Victoria Hollows is Museum Manager for Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA). Previously, she was Curator of Art for Scarborough Museums & Gallery in Yorkshire, Exhibitions Assistant at the Midlands Art Centre, Birmingham, and worked with the Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate. She is a member of the Development Group for VAGA Scotland and for many years was an area representative for Engage, the National Association for Gallery Education, as well as a member of the Engage Scotland Development Group.

Richard Ingleby is co-owner of Ingleby Gallery in Edinburgh, which he established in the city in 1998. Last summer the gallery moved to extraordinary new premises on Carlton Road, making it the UK's largest private gallery art outside London. The gallery represents Scottish and international artists at every stage of their career including Callum Innes, Sean Scully, Peter Liversidge, Alison Watt and the estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay and has been described in the Observer newspaper as 'An impeccable commercial space that mounts international museum level shows'.

Christine Borland is one of Scotland's most successful and internationally recognized artists, and her work is represented in GMA, GoMA, Hunterian, Edinburgh City Art Centre, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Dick Institute. She studied at the University of Ulster, in Belfast and Glasgow School of Art, teaching at the latter, where she is an academic researcher. In her work, Christine explores the arena of medical practise as part of a broader interest in the systems and processes that shape our society. It has been said that through her sculptures, videos and installations 'she finds ways to cross the

imaginary line dividing the body from the self, the specimen from the individual, the doctor from the patient, in an attempt to recuperate something of the essence of being human.' Last summer she curated a group exhibition at the University entitled *Communication Studies*. Recent exhibitions have included Centre for Contemporary Art of South Australia, 2004, Fruitmarket 2006, Newlyn Gallery 2007, Simbodies and nobodies at Ormeau Baths in Belfast earlier this year.

Our chair for today is **Mark O'Neill**, who was appointed Head of Arts and Museums for Glasgow City Council in 2005. He joined Glasgow City Council's museum service in 1990 and became Head of Glasgow Museums in 1998. He originated the concept for and established the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, one of only four museums of religion in the world. His main project for the past ten years has been the Heritage Lottery funded £30 million redisplay of Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

The panellists will each speak for 7 minutes, introducing their respective organisations or positions re. contemporary collecting by public museums & galleries, and briefly outline their priorities or perspectives vis-à-vis achieving sustainable contemporary collecting. After each panellist has spoken there will be a brief opportunity to address questions to him or her.

We'll then have a short comfort break, before resuming the panel discussion and questions to the panel.

