

COLLECTION STRATEGY MK&G

Effective: 18.03.2024

Preamble

The Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg (MK&G) is a permanent and publicly accessible institution in the service of society and its development. In terms of the collection, our aim is to collect, preserve, research, present and communicate tangible and associated intangible cultural heritage with regard to design issues.

The collection strategy has been developed in 2022 by the team of the MK&G. It is based on the history of the museum and aims to realise the following vision within the framework of collection development: We challenge ourselves and all of you to question and rethink the design of the world together.

The collection strategy delineates the historical bases, the shared approach towards the extension of the collection and the strategies of the individual collection areas. The collection strategy serves as a directive for the acquisition as well as the transfer of collection items in the form of donations, bequests and permanent loans. Both internally and externally, it is the basis for each conversation, each discussion and each decision about how we want to extend the collection in a meaningful way.

In the future, collecting and preserving at the MK&G must also reflect sustainability and the goal of climate neutrality. This also includes questions around processes of deaccessioning, which have yet to be clarified. The collection strategy is the basis for initiating this long-term process.

Next to guidelines and criteria, the collection strategy also allocates responsibilities for the further development of the collection strategy and reflects the state of knowledge as of March 2024. A regular revision and evaluation (practice check) is planned every two years.

Historical basis

The MK&G was established in 1877 on a civic initiative. The commission that convened in 1868 for the procurement of an industrial museum justified its necessity in "promoting specialised education, expanding gainful employment, increasing the economic prosperity of the commercial population and stimulating the sense of interaction between the liberal arts and industrial activity in all circles".¹

¹ Translated by the translator of this document, orig. „Förderung der Fachbildung und Erweiterung der Erwerbstätigkeit den wirtschaftlichen Wohlstand der gewerbetreibenden Bevölkerung heben und den Sinn für das Zusammenwirken der freien Künste mit dem gewerblichen Schaffen in allen Kreisen neu beleben“. Justus Brinckmann, Das Hamburgische Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Leipzig 1894, p. III.

The core mission of the MK&G was to preserve the artistic-technical heritage of humankind in the form of decorative arts products and to keep cultural knowledge alive through comparative observation.² The museum and its collections thus became a mirror of society by placing the history of technological, applied arts and artistic developments in a socially shaped reference frame with the present and the future.

The profile of the MK&G, which was developed during the period in which the museum was founded, has been and continues to be put to the test. The fact that flexibility characterised his work from the outset is demonstrated by the annual reports on the development of the museum published by the founding director Justus Brinckmann until 1910.

To this day, the MK&G owes its vitality to its continuous change. As the museum director Max Sauerlandt stated in 1929, it has **“like a natural organism not been made but grown [...]. Nothing of rigidity or system clings to this vitally evolved creation; each new generation can, indeed must, give it a new shape without compulsion [...], for life can only express itself [...] in continuous further development and transformation.”**³

Approach

Since 1999, the MK&G has been a foundation under public law and is one of the most important museums of design in Germany. Its collection ranges from antiquity to the present day and encompasses the European, Islamic, North American and East Asian cultural areas. The individual areas of collection are Ancient Art and Antiquities, Book Art, European Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Photography and New Media, Graphics and Posters, Islamic Art, Applied Arts and Design, Fashion and Textile, Musical Instruments and East Asia.

The museum sees itself as a site for discourse and considers the question of how our world is designed as one of the most important topics of our time. The MK&G assembles everyday culture, art and design on a special artistic level. From the very beginning, its collection has been exemplary for the manufacturing industries. As such, the collection constitutes a significant repository of material and visual culture which is being examined with regard to historical and contemporary design solutions. To this end, it is of central importance that the extension of the collection reflects current discourses and complements significant current discourses with historical reference points in order to make cultural and social issues and the resulting designs visible. From the Hamburg location, the way that the collection is extended reflects global developments and transcultural entanglements.

The collection is extended with reference to the existing collection as well as to the additions of new, contemporary exhibits and artefacts, that are relevant to questioning and shaping the world. In historical perspective, objects from European, East Asian and Islamic art and design

² *ibid.* p. IV.

³ Translated by the translator of this document, orig. „wie ein natürlicher Organismus nicht gemacht, sondern gewachsen [...]. Dieser lebensvoll erwachsenen Schöpfung haftet nichts von Starrheit oder System an, jede neue Generation wird ihr ohne Zwang [...] eine neue Gestalt geben können, ja geben müssen, denn das Leben kann sich nur [...] in beständiger Weiterbildung und Umformung äußern.“ Max Sauerlandt, Das Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg 1877–1927, Hamburg 1929, p. 7.

traditions are still acquired. Pre-modern objects from Oceania, South and South East Asia, Central and South Africa as well as North and South America are not acquired. This restriction does not apply to contemporary objects. The collection dates back to the late Neolithic cultures (3rd millennium BC) in the area of East Asia and to the early Neolithic period (7th millennium BC) in Antiquity.

The collection and its extension assist the MK&G in the task of scrutinising and rethinking the design of the world together with its visitors. The MK&G is also aware of its educational duty towards future generations. This not only requires an extension of the collection to include digital products, but also to collect in a diversity-oriented way in order to adequately represent a post-migrant and inclusive society and to specifically add female and gender-diverse positions to the previously predominantly male canon of material and visual culture, insofar as this is possible.

Digital developments in design pose new challenges to the act of collecting, both in terms of the collected items themselves and in terms of the structures and archiving practises. So-called “born-digital objects” (objects and processes that exist exclusively in digital form) not only require new forms of sustainable indexing, archiving and communicating of their often ephemeral and fluid content, they also call for a specific curatorial and academic expertise that is not currently present at the MK&G and is to be expanded in the future.

It should also be considered whether the task of collecting in a diversity-oriented manner should be promoted by a suitable advisory board of experts.

At the MK&G it is mandatory to research an item’s provenance. Before every accession the provenance must be examined with a special consideration of the Nazi core period from 1933 to 1945, but also with regard to the confiscation of cultural property in the Soviet occupation zone and the GDR as well as looted property from colonial contexts. Only items whose provenances are classified as unobjectionable by the 1970 and 1972 UNESCO conventions and the ICOM guidelines are integrated into the collection. The MK&G is committed to transparency and will disclose any incriminating contexts within its existing collection. This also includes the financing of historical acquisitions by patrons who obtained their assets from colonial structures or other contexts of injustice, as well as acquisitions in the context of colonial or military expansions throughout history. It also applies to objects that have been passed on unlawfully without the permission of the copyright holder, e.g. photographs that enter the art market when picture agencies are dissolved.

For all new additions to the collection, both the context of acquisition and the sources that provide information on the object’s biography must be documented.

For new acquisitions, the conservational state of an object must be examined and assessed.

Furthermore, it is necessary to review the new addition’s placement within the collection. Objects should only be purchased with the prospect of being exhibited or used in the near future. The collection is intended to convey historical and contemporary design perspectives and to promote communication with MK&G’s visitors both on site and digitally. In any case, it

must be ascertained whether the spatial capacities for accommodation are available or can be created.

All acquisitions and donations are inventoried in accordance with the inventory guidelines as soon as possible. The MK&G endeavours to record new accessions in the museum's database and - as far as the rights of use permit - to make them accessible to the public in the [MK&G Collection Online](#).

If a new addition to the collection is subject to copyright, agreements on the transfer of rights of use in accordance with the museum's Open Source Policy should be concluded wherever possible.

Twice a year, acquisition proposals are presented and discussed by the collection managers and the director. If new acquisitions are related to the content of several collections, the collection managers coordinate with each other in advance and decide to which collection area a new acquisition will be assigned.