

COLLECTION STRATEGY MK&G

Effective: 19.03.2025

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 was developed in 2022 by the team of the MK&G and last revised in 2025. 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 2025. 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 Europe. Its versatile collection covers a period from 9000 years ago up to the present day. The individual areas of collection are Ancient Art and Antiquities, Book Art, European Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Photography and New Media, Graphics and Posters, Applied Arts and Design, Fashion and Textile, Musical Instruments, East Asia and SWANA (Southwest Asia North Africa).

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

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.

world. In historical perspective, objects from the art and design traditions of Europe, East Asia and SWANA (Southwest Asia North Africa) are still acquired. Pre-modern objects from Oceania, South and Southeast 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 (third millennium BCE) in the area of East Asia and to the early Neolithic period (seventh millennium BCE) 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 practices. 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.

Collection areas

It is our aim that objects are assessed in accordance with the approach formulated above and the criteria below. In addition to assessment criteria such as material completeness, authenticity, reference value, symbolic value, commemorative value and documentation value, the integration into and reference to the existing collection are central aspects in our decision-making process. The individual object groups of the existing collections are assigned to the criteria of active, passive and completed collecting.

Objects that are intentionally acquired to compensate for the desiderata of an existing collection, that actively add a new facet to the collection or that are purchased as part of current exhibition or research projects belong to **active collection groups**. Active collecting includes the search for relevant new acquisitions and is based on the current scientific analysis of a collection, its future thematic orientation and current discourses.

Passive collection groups are only extended in justified cases, for example if an object serves as a meaningful addition to a collection. Both the uniqueness of an offer, for example a donation that fits the collection profile, as well as the consolidation or contextualisation of existing narrative threads, can be criteria for inclusion.

Completed collection groups are, for example, historical collections that cover the essential aspects of a group of objects or a particular timeframe. One criterion of completeness is that a new acquisition would not constitute a gain of knowledge. The status of completeness can also be imposed if the general conditions on the art market develop in such a way that acquisitions violate the ethical principles of the MK&G, for example if most of the art traded is looted. Here, the emphasis in handling the collection is on cataloguing and research.

The collection of the MK&G is manifold. Each area is managed by an expert. In the following, the special features of the respective collection areas and their focal points are described by the respective collection managers. Inclusion in the collection must be carefully considered, as the responsibility for the 600,000 inventory numbers that are already in the collection represents a major challenge.

Ancient Art and Antiquities

The collection Ancient Art and Antiquities comprises more than 6,500 objects spanning the period from the seventh millennium BCE to the seventh century CE. Artworks and everyday objects from numerous ancient cultures are represented in the collection, e.g. ancient Egyptian, Near Eastern, Minoan, Mycenaean, Greek, indigenous Italic, Etruscan, Roman, Assyrian, Persian and Sassanid.

The thematic focuses include Greek ceramics from Athens and southern Italy, Etruscan art, Roman portraits, ancient jewellery and objects from Greco-Roman Egypt.

In a national comparison, the collection is one of the best after Berlin and Munich and it includes a number of top pieces with an international reputation.

In light of the need to contain and combat looted excavations and illegal trade, the collection will only be extended selectively and cautiously. The aim is to work closely with the countries of origin. In this context, the possibility of complementing the collection through long-term loans is being examined.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Antique imagery — Individual objects 	

Book Art

Since the museum was established, book art has been one of the collection areas of the MK&G. Currently the collection of book art comprises a few thousand works and covers a period of roughly eight centuries, starting with a few medieval manuscripts and covering mainly printed works from the incunabula to contemporary artist's books. Thematically, it can be described as a kind of cross-sectional collection that documents the diverse aspects of book design and book art: typeface design and typography, illustrated books, artistic and often hand-crafted bookbinding, the modern painter's and artist's book. As such, the collection exemplifies a broad spectrum of diverse styles and approaches and could, in principle, be extended in all sections.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — History of type and typography (Treatises on type design, writing master books, image-text relationships, emblemata, etc.) — Selected artist's books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Book illustrations — Bookbinding art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Atlases — Hymnbooks

European Decorative Arts and Sculpture (Middle Ages until Classicism)

Comprising around 30,000 works, the internationally acclaimed collection impresses with its wide range of high-quality objects. It includes medieval sculptures and carvings, church treasures and liturgical altar objects, objects from Renaissance cabinets of curiosities, Baroque sculptures, terracotta models, bronze statuettes and ivory art, scientific appliances, metalwork and goldwork, historic cutlery, European faience and porcelain, glasses, folk art, furniture and period rooms.

The extension of the collection is directed towards the acquisition of high-quality unique pieces. The aim is to condense existing narrative strands by strengthening and constantly re-contextualising the existing inventory. This also includes new acquisitions that serve the museum as an active, cross-generational, culturally preserving repository of knowledge.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Gold work from 17th century Hamburg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Rare, outstanding individual pieces in the individual sections of the collection — Acquisitions and donations that complement and strengthen existing collection focuses and introduce new innovative aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Folkloristic objects from the Elbe marshes — Historic cutlery — Scientific appliances

Photography and New Media

Already towards the end of the nineteenth century, the museum was the first in Germany to embrace the medium of photography, thereby assuming a pioneering role. The MK&G has been acquiring photographs as independent works since 1890. The collection is considered the oldest in a German museum and is of international importance. It has been continuously extended, from 1952 to 1975 in cooperation with the Landesbildstelle, from 1976 as part of the Applied Arts and Design department, and from 1988 as an independent department.

With over 70,000 objects, today's collection illustrates the history of photography from its beginnings to the present day. The focus is on daguerreotypes from the 1850s and 60s, the 'Juhl Collection' from the turn of the century, the 1950s to 1980s and the present day. In addition to artistic positions, it also includes documentary, scientific, advertising and reportage photographs. The photographs are primarily from Germany, Europe and the USA, with a non-European focus on Japanese photography.

Contemporary photographs will help to make the historical collection relevant to today's issues. They will be selected with regard to their engagement with the medium of photography and the uses and functions of photography today.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Works of photographers that complement the historical collection — Contemporary photography to update the collection inventory — Applied photography (Advertisement, Fashion photography, reportage) — Photography as a medium of communication (Photo jewellery, forms of presentation like photo albums, shots by amateur photographers, the use of photography in social media) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Daguerreotypes — Travel photography — Scientific photography — Architectural photography — Reproduction photography — Pictorialism — Portrait photography — Abstraction and experimental photography — Japanese photography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Collection of cameras

Graphics and Posters

The collection comprises around 400,000 works, including political, cultural and tourism posters, typeface design, product advertising and corporate design. The focus lies on designs from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Next to canonical works, there are numerous bundles that illustrate lesser-known aspects of graphic design history, such as early colour and screen prints, feminist posters and zines as well as flyers from the beginnings of techno culture. The extension of the collection focuses on contemporary designs by designers working in Germany.

In addition, selected sections of the collection are complemented by FLINTA* (German abbreviation that stands for women, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans and agender people) and international positions. The decisive factor in the selection process is the relevance and quality of the design, not the cultural-historical significance of the works.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Works by FLINTA* — Feminist graphic design — Works by post-migrant designers — Works that deal with design software and printmaking in a progressive experimental way — Type design and type specimen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Bequests — Works with a connection to Hamburg's design history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Artistic graphics and drawings — Artist posters — Advertisement

Applied Arts and Design (Biedermeier until contemporary)

The collection dates back to the time when the museum was founded and includes art objects and cultural artefacts from the Biedermeier period to contemporary times. It comprises around 15,000 artefacts ranging from furniture, jewellery, ceramics, porcelain, glass, glass art, sculptures and statuary to technical and electrical appliances, household goods and toys. Period Rooms offer insights into the living and working environments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to complement the design historiography, special attention is paid to historical designers who have so far been mistakenly omitted from the canon. In addition, contemporary design is a focal point of the collection, which is constantly being extended. In the light of the increasing globalization of design, the aim is to acquire works by international designers and previously neglected contexts and origins.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Contemporary design objects from an international context by designers from the Global South and post-migrant designers a.o. — Reference pieces from the 20th and 21st centuries, e.g. from Italian design to speculative design — Contemporary design projects with a focus on social design and sustainability — Applied art by contemporary artisans with a special focus on participants of the MK&G fair as well as JPG awardees — Furniture and design objects relevant to the city of Hamburg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Art nouveau furniture and objects — Porcelain, ceramic and glass objects as well as jewellery art made before 2000 — Modern art and art objects — Furniture and design objects from the 20th century from the GDR or an Eastern European / Soviet context — Rare and significant Bauhaus or Art deco furniture and objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Everyday objects from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries which do not classify as art or design objects — Historicism (Art, applied art and objects) — Paintings and sculptures — Toys — Electronics

Fashion and Textiles

The collection comprises around 25,000 objects from around 1700 years. It includes tapestries, carpets, fabrics, textile printing, lace, Coptic textiles, Japanese and Chinese garments as well as traditional costumes and folkloristic textiles from the Hamburg region. It includes around 15,000 items of women's, men's and children's clothing, underwear and accessories. One focus is on contemporary fashion design from Europe and Japan. Established fashion labels from Great Britain, Belgium, France and Japan as well as young avant-garde labels from Germany, Austria, Belgium and Great Britain have been collected.

In the future, the representations of fashion should be diversity-oriented, include perspectives from the Global South and reflect the German post-migrant society. New acquisitions will be accompanied by interviews with the designers about their work and the garments.

The aim is to diversify the collection and extend it at its intersections with art and with positions on sustainable production such as Cradle2Cradle and upcycling.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Works that enable a re-contextualisation and classification of cultural appropriation and transculturality — Works that deal with new techniques and sustainable technologies in an experimental way — Contemporary design of textiles, carpets, tapestries — Works at the intersection of fashion and art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Donations that complement existing focuses of the collection or enable re-contextualisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Coptic textiles — Paraments

Musical Instruments

At the moment, the collection comprises around 500 instruments from the field of Western culture from the Renaissance to the present day. The establishment of the collection began in the 1890s with the acquisition of high-quality historical instruments by the Händel scholar Friedrich Chrysander, including baroque stringed instruments from the workshop of Joachim Tielke. In the course of the twentieth century, the collection was extended through donations and purchases. The acquisition of the harpsichord by Christian Zell in 1962 was outstanding. In 2000, the couple Prof. Dr. Andreas Beurmann and Heikedine Körting-Beurmann donated over 60 mostly playable historical keyboard instruments to the MK&G. Another extensive donation in 2011 consisted of around 250 stringed and plucked instruments from the collection of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Hanneforth. Additions to the various focal points of the collection only make sense in certain areas. The playability of an instrument is not a criterion for acquisition.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
	Top-class individual items, in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Instruments from Hamburg workshops — Keyboard instruments, insofar as they are a relevant addition to the extensive collection — Technically, structurally and creatively innovative instruments — Instruments of particular cultural and historical relevance — Brass instruments, primarily from before 1900 and/or from Hamburg workshops — Percussion instruments, primarily from before 1900 	

East Asia

The MK&G collects East Asian art since 1873. Today, the collection comprises more than 14,000 works from China (approx. 2,600), Korea (approx. 60) and Japan (approx. 11,400), ranging from Neolithic ceramic vessels from the third millennium BCE to contemporary video art.

The focus is on colour woodcuts, ceramics, lacquers, paintings and sword ornaments from the Edo period (1615-1868), katagami and bamboo baskets from the nineteenth century as well as porcelain from Chinese imperial workshops and cloisonné. The historical collection is mostly completed, existing gaps are to be closed through donations and acquisition opportunities. It would be desirable to expand the collection of Korean works. The collection strategy focuses on contemporary works, whereby the connection to the art and craft traditions of China, Korea and Japan is decisive. Objects from other Asian countries are only added to the collection in exceptional cases if there are thematic connections.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Historical Korean and contemporary visual cultures — Japanese colour woodcuts from 1900 — Historical Korean and contemporary ceramics — Specific historical Japanese, Korean and contemporary lacquerware — Contemporary Japanese bamboo art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Painting — Japanese colour woodcuts and printing blocks — Woodcut books — Historical ceramics — Glass — Metal ware: ritual vessels; bronze; jewellery; cloisonné; Japanese sword ornaments — Historical lacquerware — Historical Japanese bamboo art — Carvings and stone cuttings (Jade, horn and bone from the Ming Dynasty, netsuke, jewellery) — Sculptures (particularly Buddhist) — Furniture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Dyeing stencils (Katagami) — Snuff bottles — Metal ware: coins, Chinese belt buckles

SWANA (Southwest Asia North Africa)

The SWANA collection consists of around 1,000 works from Southwest Asia and North Africa as well as historical cultural areas in southern Spain, West Asia and India with Arabic, Turkish and Persian influences. Objects date from the emergence of Islam in the seventh century to the present day.

The historical collection focuses on architectural and vessel ceramics and is completed. New acquisitions of pre-modern works are currently not possible because the art market is almost exclusively dominated by looted art and even in the case of acquisitions and donations from private collections, a colonial acquisition context cannot be ruled out.

Collecting is oriented towards contemporary art, whereby a reference to the art and craft traditions of the SWANA region and its diaspora is decisive. The focus is on the combination of high-quality traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design or transcultural design, as well as objects that criticise orientalism and challenge perception.

PRIORITISATION WITHIN THE COLLECTION AREA

Active	Passive	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Contemporary handcrafts (Focus: ceramics) — Contemporary visual cultures 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Historical vessel ceramics (Iran, Central Asia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey) — Historical architectural ceramics (Iran, Central Asia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Spain) — Historical glass (Iran, India, Egypt) — Historical metal ware: vessels, statuary, jewellery (Iran, India, Turkey) — Historical book art (Iran, India, Turkey) — Historical architectural elements (India)