



Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection

Summary of the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on Tuesday 1 October 2013 at the Government Art Collection

Present

David Verey (Chairman)

Iwona Blazwick, Penelope Curtis, Penny Johnson (GAC), Sandy Nairne, Nicholas Penny, Clare Pillman

GAC: Julia Toffolo, Clive Marks

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from David A. Bailey and Andrew Renton.

2. Introduction

The Chairman noted the importance of the Collection to the projection of Britain at home and abroad. He said it was important for works of art entering the Collection to be of high quality, that the Collection should be acquiring works on a regular basis and that a way needed to be found to increase the current purchase budget. The Chairman then asked members for their comments and views on how this can be done or to suggest other ways the Collection could add to its pool of works available for display.

The Director outlined the contents of her paper on future status and funding of the Government Art Collection: a vision of the GAC as a unique and rich collection which can add value to the notion of a Great Britain, using the photograph of the G8 Summit at Lough Erne in June 2013 showing world leaders in front of GAC works of art. The Director emphasised that the GAC can continue its long-held role of making use of the platform provided by government buildings across the world to promote British art and an image of the UK across the globe, thereby becoming an ever-more recognised asset for the UK.

3. Options for future acquisition funding

- Sandy Nairne said that the GAC should remain within government. It should continue its role of representing the nation and not be afraid to stress that this is a national not necessarily public role. If it had to attract 'friends' they would need to understand and support its role. He did not feel that charitable trust status was the way to go.
- Iwona Balzwick cautioned against ignoring the Collection's public role, citing the impact of its recent exhibition. She noted how this had drawn a wider as well as regional demographic and felt that this could be built on by displaying it in different ways. She highlighted the difficulties in attracting 'patrons' as such individual were a small group which received requests from many organisations. In the context of the GAC's role, patrons might also misunderstand what influence a donation might have. Iwona suggested that perhaps gifts from artists or artists' estates might be encouraged, especially from those whom the GAC had already supported.
- Penelope Curtis highlighted the two issues of funding for acquisitions and status contained in the Director's paper. She noted that the GAC is seen as neutral and provides advice which is accepted by Ministers, Ambassadors etc. On the issue of acquisitions she felt that encouraging donations from artists or their estates was the most neutral way of raising the status of the Collection.
- Nicholas Penny asked if the GAC had to be considered as a permanent collection which never disposed of anything. Perhaps if works bought early in artists' careers were moved on to the other national collections the GAC would acquire a higher reputation and might expect to receive more

gifts. He felt that it might be possible for the GAC to borrow more works from the national museums and that loans from artists' estates especially might be a fruitful avenue to explore. He suggested that the name Government Art Collection may put people off donating or funding.

- Sandy Nairne agreed that some fluidity in curating might be attractive and suggested that the British Business Embassy (BBE) at Lancaster House, where works from the Collection and loans were combined, was a good model.
- The Chairman suggested that there might be some porosity between public collections, allowing, for example, one institution de-accessions a work to enable another to accession it. He also offered that perhaps international donors living in the UK on a full- or part-time basis might be prepared to furnish the British Embassy or Consulate in their home country with works of art from the UK. A charitable trust, he felt, would provide a buffer between the donor and GAC and address any accusations of donors seeking undue influence.
- Clare Pillman said that DCMS/GAC could not itself undertake fund raising. Additionally, monies coming into the department would necessarily, at present, be paid into the Exchequer. If the GAC raised money it would need a vehicle to manage it, thereby adding to costs. She felt the BBE model was a good one and that the GAC should be bound to Government as there was little public support for purchasing works of art as a charitable exercise.
- Sandy Nairne said that the GAC should be looking for somewhere in the region of £500,000 to enable it to maintain a credible presence against competition for acquisitions. He also supported the artists' estates suggestion and felt there might be opportunities in making a tactical alliance with an art charity e.g. The Art Fund and/or the Contemporary Art Society (CAS).
- Penelope Curtis highlighted the two aspects of the Collection's work i.e. its long-term core business and occasional special projects, and noted that they need to be examined separately.
- Iwona Blazwick agreed that exploring links with the Art Fund and the CAS was an option and it might help if particular works were targeted for acquisition. She also noted that there were a lot of arts collecting agencies doing work in London and asked if there was any way the Collection could get involved in Government initiatives. The Director noted the GAC's links with UK Trade and Industry and the GREAT campaign.
- Clare Pillman suggested there was a possibility that the GAC could benefit from such initiatives as Acceptance-in-Lieu, as the Collection had a public aspect and that any work of art could be placed on public display for e.g. five years out of twenty, thereby meeting access requirements.

4. Accommodation

There was some discussion about future options for the location of the GAC including Blythe House, local authority premises and government-owned buildings, the latter being favoured as providing security of tenure and running cost savings.