

## Collections Access Policy August 2019

### Access Statement

The New Art Gallery is committed to ensuring its Collections are as accessible as possible to all and to promoting the social value of museums to the wider community. The Gallery continually seeks to develop ways of promoting access and inclusion through its Collections management and programming, which has a people-centred approach and open ethos, with an emphasis on developing community participation, collaboration and co-production and a commitment to trying to reduce barriers to access.

### Physical Access

- The New Art Gallery was purpose built, designed by Caruso St John Architects, and opened to the public in February 2000. The Gallery is spread over 4 floors and has ground floor access from Walsall town centre. The Gallery is a 3 minute walk from Walsall Train Station, and a 5 minute walk from Walsall Bus Station, with a range of car parks in the close vicinity, and disabled parking bays adjacent to the Gallery. The galleries and facilities are spacious and accommodating, with disabled access throughout, and lifts to all floors. The Gallery has accessible toilet facilities on three floors, baby change facilities and is breast-feeding friendly. We welcome Assistance Dogs, and can provide water on request. The Gallery has two manual wheelchairs which are available for visitor use. There is a hearing loop fitted at the Gallery. There is also free Wifi throughout the building, and a public reference Art Library. School group bookings are accommodated in our Activity Rooms and we have a bookable Lunch Room, which can also be used as a quiet space, adjacent to our Family Gallery on the ground floor. Detailed visitor information is provided on our website: <https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/visit/>
- Entrance to the Gallery, its Exhibitions and Collections are Free. We have a welcoming Front of House team, on duty throughout the building, and a staffed Reception desk on the Ground Floor, from where visitors can be signposted to everything on offer in the building, and pick up dedicated Gallery guides for all floors. There is also a dedicated Comments Book on the Reception desk for visitors to make suggestions which can inform access improvements.

- Floors 1&2 are the dedicated Collections spaces, built around the presentation of the prestigious Garman Ryan Collection. A large double height Main Hall welcomes visitors, with 5 themed smaller galleries on each floor, an Archive Gallery on Floor 1, and a Temporary Exhibitions Gallery on Floor 2. There are maps available, and all interpretation, guides etc are available in Large Print. There are integrated benches in most rooms, alongside movable stools which visitors are welcome to borrow to take around with them.
- The Collections spaces have an annual re-hang to refresh displays, which usually occurs during quieter periods, and the closure of the Collections spaces is limited to 2-3 weeks, once a year, advertised in advance on our website. Gallery changeovers are staggered so that there is always something for visitors to see on other floors.
- Each year's themed Collections exhibition programme has a dedicated Guide and Events programme running alongside. In recent years these have included a People's Choice exhibition selected by members of the public, an Art and Wellbeing project, and Sculpture in Focus, celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jacob Epstein (1880-1959) and sculpture in all its forms.
- Interpretation is provided in a variety of different formats, from exhibition guides, wall panels and individual labels, which provide condensed information in plain English. We offer Large Print interpretation as standard. We can also provide other formats for example, Audio Descriptions on key works in the Collections, and offer Audio Described and Touch tours as part of our dedicated events programme, as well as on request. The Gallery also produces dedicated Art Trail bags, which provide in particular families with opportunities for sensory experiences and activities in connection to artworks on display, and dedicated Education workshops which focus on exploring different aspects of the Collections with young people and families. Artist or Exhibition films are developed, when additional funding is available, and these have subtitles integrated as standard. Our knowledgeable Gallery Assistants are also on hand to answer questions and take visitor feedback. There is a dedicated publication on our Garman Ryan Collection, produced on the opening of the Gallery, and a variety of other Collections related publications available for purchase in our Shop and for reference in our dedicated Art Library.
- Our Collections spaces hold around 250 objects at any one time. This is approximately 7% of our holdings on display at any one time. In addition we lend, on average, approximately 10 works to select external exhibitions per year, and also have works on display in Walsall Council offices.
- Members of the public are welcome to book an appointment to view any works not currently on display, subject to staffing availability. This will be facilitated either by access to our Collections Store or Archives, or if logistically possible, in our Art Library.

## Digital Access

- Information on our Collections is available via the Gallery website: <https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/collections-library/>
- Our Collections are also accessible to the public digitally via our TMS collections management system through the E-Museum portal on the Gallery website. Here the public can search information on particular objects, including artist and artwork information, whether the work is on or off display, and any relevant label texts, as well as seeing a visual overview of our holdings. The database is accessible in our Art Library, where there is free internet access, and Front of House staff on hand to assist with queries and research support.
- Information, including digital exhibition guides, and subtitled exhibition films, are also available via the Gallery website, which also has a Virtual Gallery building tour available on the homepage.
- Information requests and queries are answered by the Collections Curator via email, and their contact details are available on the Gallery website Contact and Collections pages.
- Successful trials of livestream tours via our Periscope and Twitter platforms have taken place in 2019, which will be built upon in terms of providing greater digital access to our Collections programme. These have a wide reach and democratise access and the potential to tap into new audiences from across the world.
- Audio Descriptions have been developed, following Vocal Eyes training, on key works in our Collections, which are accessible via our E-Museum platform and Gallery YouTube channel via the website, which can be built upon and added to each year.
- Works in oil from our Collections have been published on the Art UK website, which acts as another digital signpost for our Collections. <https://artuk.org/>
- Our Collections are part of the Midlands Art Papers initiative, developed in conjunction with the University of Birmingham. Individual research articles produced by academics feature on the Midlands Art Papers portal via the University of Birmingham website. This is a growing annual publication which was launched with an exhibition and conference at the Gallery in 2017 and promotes access to, and knowledge of, Collections throughout the Midlands. It also has a dedicated social media presence. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/lcahm/departments/historyofart/research/projects/map/index.aspx>

## Intellectual Access

- Through collaborations with University partners, such as the University of Birmingham and the University of Wolverhampton, we develop academic research and access to our Collections. In partnership with the University of Birmingham and Liverpool John Moores University we are a founder member of the British Art Network Subject Specialist Group on Post-war British Painting, along with the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, which will enable us to share information on our Collections and work on joint projects and conferences.
- Our Collections Curator is also involved in networks such as the Contemporary Art Society Members Network and attends Arts Council Curators Days to explore Collections related opportunities and expand the knowledge and promotion of our Collections. The Collections Curator is an Associate of the Museums Association, and regularly keeps abreast of the latest developments in the museum sector, and attends conferences, such as the Collections Trust annual conference, to ensure our Collections continue to be relevant and respond to the latest sector-wide initiatives and campaigns.
- The Gallery also works closely with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery on access to our jointly owned Art Fund International Collection, and with other regional museum partners, as well as Nationals including Tate, the British Museum and the National Gallery. Recent partnership projects the Collections Curator has developed with Nationals include a Tate Ferryman Bursary to borrow Epstein's iconic *Jacob and the Angel* for our year of celebrating Sculpture to contextualise his work in our Collections; a Rodin spotlight tour with the British Museum highlighting cross-overs with our Collections; and a Holbein Masterpiece on Tour project, which democratised the display of his work in our Family Gallery setting alongside works of a similar theme from our Collections. Initiatives such as these promote new ways of seeing and displaying our Collections.
- Interpretation to the Collections is provided in easy to understand language and tries not to assume any prior knowledge. Interpretation is offered for a range of audiences, from children and those with sensory impairments, school and University groups, as well as older adults. We try to offer different levels of access and interpretation opportunities, which work unobtrusively alongside each other.
- Researchers and members of the public are welcome to use the reference Art Library on our Mezzanine, which houses a range of information on works in our Collections. There are also dedicated Resource Areas on Floors 1&2, with a range of related publications and information folders.

- The Collections Curator uses a range of methods for exhibiting the Collections, often involving co-productions with particular groups, for example in recent years dementia specialists, care homes and dementia cafes worked on the Scenes of Walsall exhibition; a Young Writers Group produced interpretation for a Quentin Blake inspired exhibition and Walsall Arboretum Poetry Group created responses to the People's Choice exhibition.

### Promoting Participation and Reducing Barriers

- The Collections Curator is a West Midlands Museum Development Equality and Diversity Champion, a member of the Age Friendly Museums Network, a Dementia Champion and part of the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance West Midlands steering group. The Collections Curator strives to develop related access projects throughout the Collections programme and promote the participation of all protected characteristics.
- The Gallery is a certified West Midlands Autism Friendly venue, with the Collections Curator and Front of House staff trained in supporting visitors on the autistic spectrum. Autism West Midlands worked with us on an Access Audit and we responded to the feedback. The Gallery can provide a quiet space if required in our dedicated break room (by the Family Gallery on the Ground floor). As part of the Collections programme, an event is programmed each year promoting Autism Awareness, for example an early weekend relaxed opening during Autism Awareness week. We also developed with Autism West Midlands a Virtual Gallery tour, available on our website homepage, to allow visitors to familiarise themselves with the building layout prior to visiting.
- The Gallery is developing, in conjunction with Creative Health CIC, a CreateSpace project, encouraging older adults to make space for creativity in their daily lives. The 18 month project culminates at the end of 2020, when the Gallery will host a conference and exhibition, showcasing how the participants have developed and been inspired by the Collections. Participants have dedicated access to Collections works, talks and tours, and explore related themes and artistic practice, and have the opportunity to co-curate the exhibition, write interpretation and responses to the works and share their journeys. This initiative also provides the opportunity for participants to meet and interact with Gallery staff, and provide both a social and intellectually stimulating activity. It has in addition created a volunteer opportunity for a long-standing visitor with learning difficulties, encouraging them to get involved in the Collections programme and have valuable work experience. It aspires to have an ongoing legacy and develop participants to continue their relationship with the Gallery and to continue using the Collections for health and wellbeing.

- The Gallery has worked on several initiatives with Art UK, including being the first pilot for the Masterpiece in Schools project, when our Monet painting visited a rural Shropshire Primary school for the day in 2013. This has then been followed up in 2019, celebrating sculpture by an Epstein bust going to a primary school and deaf unit in a deprived area of Birmingham. Never having visited the Gallery before, or having access to culture, this provided the opportunity to take the Gallery to them, and then encourage an ongoing relationship with reciprocal visits to the Gallery. It also allowed national media exposure of our Collections. We will seek to continue building these relationships and to take part in future similar initiatives.
- The Collections Curator worked with Vocal Eyes to develop visually impaired awareness training for the Front of House team, and developed dedicated Audio Description and Touch Tours for the Collections. We programme several events a year accessible to a visually impaired audience, and also offer pre-booked tours.
- The Collections Curator and members of the Front of House team participated in Dementia Friendly training, and the Gallery has Dementia Friendly status. As a result there have been Collections projects involving care homes and dementia cafes, reminiscence sessions and other access opportunities, and an exhibition project with community participation and input from dementia specialists. This is an area we would like to continue to develop as part of the Collections programme. We are also an Age Friendly venue, committed to the Family Arts Campaign's Age Friendly standards.
- The Gallery promotes the use of its Collections for the benefit of Health and Wellbeing, and have used the Collections in a variety of programmed events around areas such as Mindfulness, Yoga, Mental Health tours and in initiatives such as 'Feelgood Fridays' and 'Sketching Sundays'. The programme tries to provide access for all ages and abilities, including Childrens' tours and workshops, reminiscence sessions and Audio Description and Touch Tours. We have also trialled BSL tours and access for the deaf and hard of hearing.
- The Gallery offers behind the scenes Store Tours as part of the Collections programme, allowing opportunities for greater access in a controlled environment.
- The Gallery has an open access reference Art Library, with a range of catalogues, magazines, and information on our Collections, and also free computer and internet access with staff available to help answer queries and support access to the online collections database.
- We are happy to respond and develop our offer in response to audience needs and individual access requirements.

## Limitations on Access

The main limitations are in terms of capacity and funding, however the Gallery strives to do what it can under limited resources and prevent barriers to access existing across the organisation.

We strive to maintain free services and activities where possible, and to keep charges at a minimum to reduce financial barriers to participation, however may have to charge to enable activities to run on a cost-neutral basis.

## Future Priorities/Ambitions

- To continue to develop the Collections database, expand its content and online access to our Collections
- To develop further Audio Descriptions accessible via our website and Livestreaming tours accessible via social media channels
- To expand the legacy of the CreateSpace project and embed participation in the wider Gallery programme, for example in Collections volunteering opportunities
- To establish a regular community consultation focus group for input in decision making around the Collections programme, contribution to interpretation etc
- To develop and respond to regular evaluation feedback from users to improve Collections access and respond to audience needs
- To seek opportunities to encourage under-represented groups to get involved in the Collections programme, in particular ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and those with a low income
- To expand partnership working with local community groups on Collections projects
- To ensure the Collections development and programming reflects and responds to the experiences of our wider community
- To develop work experience opportunities for under-represented groups at the Gallery and encourage museum workforce diversity in the sector
- To expand the participation of families and young people with our Collections
- To embark on further Collections training initiatives with the Front of House team

- To continue to improve access opportunities in our Collections Store
- To seek funding opportunities – eg continue to make regular applications to Art Fund and the Contemporary Art Society to expand the scope of our Collections, the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, the Henry Moore Foundation, and apply for Designation for our Collections
- To continue to seek pertinent Loans to highlight aspects of Collections (such as the Rodin and Holbein projects with National partners)
- To produce a new up-to-date Collections publication, showing the development of the Collections over the last 20 years

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August 2019

**This policy should be reviewed at least once every 5 years**