Intention in Acquisition

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Coding Our Collection: The National Gallery of Art Datathon
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Acquisition History

This page shows how acquisitions have changed over time at the Gallery. We can explore acquisition by the gender or nationality of the artist, the type of object, or whether the object was purchased or donated. Scroll down to explore the data and see our key takeaways!
“Does limited storage and the size of our collection limit how much we now collect?”

- **Mission Statement - 2. Collection**
  - “The Gallery limits its active art collecting to paintings, sculpture, and works of art on paper, from the late middle ages to the present, from Europe and the United States. Trustee policy allows the Gallery to accept, in addition, other significant works of art in conjunction with major donations in the primary areas of the Gallery's collections.”

- The Gallery was gifted its first work in 1937
- The Gallery **does not deaccession** any works of art*
- Fewer than 20% of works coming into the museum were directly purchased, the vast majority instead come from donations

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*The Gallery does deaccession print works in the sole case that a print of higher quality is acquired

Source: National Gallery of Art website, “About the Gallery,” https://www.nga.gov/about.html
Growth of the collection across various categories

Size of Collection

This plot shows the growth of the collection across various categories.

View by:
- Artist Gender
- Artist Nationality
- Department
- Object Classification
- Method of Acquisition

Source: National Gallery of Art Internal Collection, excludes Index of American Design
“Can we see a point where we begin to acquire more works by women artists?”

Source: National Gallery of Art Internal Collection, excludes Index of American Design

*A matching algorithm was run using a gender API (https://gender-api.com/) as a reference to redefine unknown artists as male or female; Unknown artists are corporations, couples, anonymous artists, and named artists with which the matching algorithm did not have 95% confidence to redefine as male or female.*
“When did we start collecting significant amounts of American art?”

Prosportion of works of art by artist nationality

In 2014, North-American passes European as the most represented nationality.

Source: National Gallery of Art Internal Collection, excludes Index of American Design.
“How has the collection grown across different **media** over time?”

Source: National Gallery of Art Internal Collection, excludes Index of American Design

*Works classified as Technical Material not included; Media Art works assigned to Photography, Portfolio and Volume assigned to Print, Decorative Art assigned to Sculpture
Proportion of works by gender in the entire collection and by media type
What are the differences between purchases, donations, and highlights? Can we see intentionality in recent acquisitions?
The Gallery has selected 75 highlight pieces on its website.

Our group considers how these pieces compare to the average mix in their collection.

Example: 63% of highlighted pieces are paintings, though paintings make up just 3% of the collection.
Comparison of highlighted pieces to the entire collection by media and acquisition types

Source: National Gallery of Art Internal Collection, excludes Index of American Design
Media types acquired by The Gallery’s five directors, including both purchased and donated works

Source: National Gallery of Art Internal Collection, excludes Index of American Design
Questions?

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