



Government Art

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It will come as little surprise to the public that the government owns a substantial portfolio of art. Given that museums and galleries such as the British Museum and National Portrait Gallery form part of the public sector, neither is it surprising that some such works of art are of significant value, and few would begrudge the government holding on to objects of genuine cultural and historical significance for the public.

However as this research reveals, the public sector's art collection extends far beyond the most famous galleries and museums, and very little of it is on display to the public at any one time.

Much of this art may have been bequeathed to the government specifically to be put on public display and selling it off would be inappropriate. However at a time when savings need to be made across the board, it's important that public bodies assess what they do and do not need to hold on to and act accordingly.

The key findings of this research are:

- Government art is worth at least £3.5 billion
- Less than 3 per cent of this art is on display.
- The most valuable item found is Henry VIII's armour for field and tournament, acquired by the Royal Armouries in 1649 and now worth an estimated £53.55 million.
- The most valuable item other than those held by museums and galleries is *Lancashire Fair: Good Friday, Daisy Nook*, by L S Lowry, held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Originally purchased for £120 in 1947, it is now worth an estimated £3,500,000.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

Organisation	Total Number	Total on Display	Proportion on Display (%)	Total Value (£)
Non-departmental Public Bodies	234,931	12,346	5.31	306,240,875
Departments	16,225	11,390	70.20	127,437,775
Devolved Administrations	340	285	83.82	89,300
Museums Galleries	2,348,461	82,416	4.16	760,166,689
Local Authorities	5,479,772	40,675	1.47	2,274,369,974
Total	8,079,729	147,112	2.95	3,468,304,613

- L S Lowry's *Lancashire Fair: Good Friday, Daisy Nook*, has seen its value increase by 3 million per cent. Bought in 1947 for £120 it is now owned by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport and worth an estimated £3.5 million.
- Local authorities in the United Kingdom owned at least 5.5 million works of art with an estimated value of £2.3 billion.
 - Manchester City Council owned a total of 46,347 works of art with a total value of £374 million of which 1,017 are on display
 - Of the 864,100 works owned by Carlisle City Council, just 155, 0.02 per cent of the total, were on display
 - North Hertfordshire District Council has an art collection of "over a million items"
- Non-departmental Public Bodies, aside from those whose function is largely or entirely that of a museum or gallery, owned at least 234,931 works of art with an estimated value of £306,240,875.
 - Arts Council England owned a total of 7,765 works of art with a total value of £138,061,354, of which 859 are on display
 - Of the 201,030 works owned by The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, just 876, 0.4 per cent of the total, were on display
- Other works of art held by government organisations include:
 - *Dolbadarn* by J M W Turner, purchased by the National Library of Wales from Sotheby's in 1998 for £210,500, now worth an estimated £350,000
 - The British Council owns two works by Lucian Freud: *Girl with Roses* and *Naked Girl with Egg*, bought for £158 in 1948 and £21,000 in 1982 respectively. The British Council refused to provide current values for either.
 - A pair of chandeliers worth £800,000 owned by the Crown Estate
 - A Scottish silver-gilt ceremonial mace worth £10,000 owned by the General Medical Council
 - A Geoffrey Dashwood Owl worth £100,000 owned by the Financial Conduct Authority

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Government Art

Much of the work held and displayed by central government departments is owned and managed by the Government Art Collection (GAC).¹ Despite pressure on Whitehall budgets, GAC has continued to purchase works of art.

Table 2: Works of art purchased by the Government Art Collection since 2010-11

Financial Year	Number Purchased	Value of Purchases (£)
2010-11	41	201,399
2011-12	4	1,540
2012-13	1	40,000
2013-14	76	118,385
Total	122	361,324

Table 3: 10 most valuable works of art purchased by the Government Art Collection since 2010-11

Value on Acquisition (£)	Year Acquired	Description
40,000	2012-13	Mel Brimfield - 4'33" (Prepared Pianola for Roger Bannister)
22,500	2013-14	Jim Lambie - Metal Box (Hong Kong)
21,150	2010-11	Goshka Macuga - Oak
18,000	2010-11	Boyle Family - Chalk Cliff Study
18,000	2010-11	Pablo Bronstein - Design for Fireworks in the Chinese Taste
12,000	2010-11	Susan Derges - Gibbous Moon Cloud-Alder
11,985	2010-11	Clare Woods - Grim's Ditch
9,500	2010-11	Michael Stubbs - Fireeye Elevator
9,180	2010-11	Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard - Kiss My Nauman
7,800	2010-11	Pablo Bronstein - Magnificent Rural Outbuilding

¹Numbers and values of works held by the Government Art Collection are included within the response from the Department for Culture Media and Sports.

For Non-Departmental Public Bodies, aside from those whose function is largely or entirely that of a museum or gallery²:

Table 4: 5 Non-Departmental Public Bodies with the largest art collections

Organisation	Total owned
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew	201,030
British Council	8,658
Arts Council England	7,765
House of Commons	4,740
Bank of England	3,426

Table 5: 5 Non-Departmental Public Bodies with the largest art collections by value

Organisation	Total value (£)
Arts Council England	138,061,354
British Council	129,386,662
The Crown Estate	29,000,000
Bank of England	4,780,550
Sport England	826,700

Table 6: 5 Non-Departmental Public Bodies with the lowest proportion of their collection on display

Organisation	Proportion on display (%)
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew	0.4
Bank of England	1.5
General Medical Council	3.9
NHS Business Services Authority	5.1
Arts Council England	11.1

²Many of these bodies may have some gallery function in addition to their primary function, but they are not dedicated gallery organisations.

For Non-Departmental Public Bodies whose function is largely or entirely that of a museum or gallery:

Table 7: 5 museums or galleries with the largest art collections

Organisation	Total owned
Victoria and Albert Museum	1,197,637
National Portrait Gallery	331,100
Natural History Museum	300,150
National Library of Wales	80,000
Royal Museums Greenwich	74,007

Table 8: 5 museums or galleries with the largest art collections by value

Organisation	Total value (£)
Royal Armouries	383,699,333
National Museum of Wales	175,000,000
National Army Museum	66,158,161
Imperial War Museum	56,732,119
Royal Museums Greenwich	48,715,315

Table 9: 5 museums or galleries with the organisations with the lowest proportion of their collection on display

Organisation	Proportion on display (%)
National Army Museum	0.1
National Library of Wales	0.3
Royal Museums Greenwich	0.4
National Portrait Gallery	0.4
Museum of London Group	1.9

Table 10: Most valuable works of art

Organisation	Current Value (£)	Description
Royal Armouries	53,550,000	Armour for field and tournament of King Henry VIII
Royal Armouries	42,000,000	Henry VIII's foot combat armour
Royal Armouries	42,000,000	Silvered and engraved armour
Royal Armouries	42,000,000	Armour of King Charles I, made for Henry Prince of Wales
Royal Armouries	31,500,000	Henry VIII's tonlet armour, made for the Field of the Cloth of Gold tournament
Ministry of Defence	20,000,000	Marine timekeeper
Ministry of Defence	10,000,000	Marine timekeeper
Ministry of Defence	8,000,000	Marine timekeeper
Ministry of Defence	8,000,000	Marine timekeeper
Ministry of Defence	6,000,000	Marine timekeeper
The Crown Estate	5,000,000	Unknown
Royal Museums Greenwich	3,500,000	Painting
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	3,500,000	L S Lowry - Lancashire Fair: Good Friday, Daisy Nook
The Crown Estate	3,000,000	Unknown
Royal Museums Greenwich	2,000,000	Painting
The Crown Estate	2,000,000	Unknown
National Army Museum	1,805,000	Benjamin West - Major-General The Honourable Robert Monckton, at the Taking of Martinique
Royal Museums Greenwich	1,700,000	Painting
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	1,500,000	Sir John Lavery - High Treason, Court of Criminal Appeal: the Trial of Sir Roger Casement 1916
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	1,200,000	Ahmad - Fath 'Ali Shah (1797-1834) 2nd Qajar Shah of Iran

Table 11: Works of art with the highest growth in value

Organisation	Date acquired	Value on acquisition (£)	Current value (£)	Description	Real-terms increase (%)
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	1947	120	3,500,000	L S Lowry - Lancashire Fair: Good Friday, Daisy Nook	2,916,567
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	1953	54	1,000,000	L S Lowry - The Procession Passing the Queen Victoria Memorial	1,851,752
Bank of England	1939	103	350,000	Peter Tillemans - London from Greenwich Park	339,706
Science Museum Group	1952	250	600,000	Unknown	239,900
Department of Finance & Personnel	1963	60	85,000	William Conor - unknown	141,567
Department for Culture, Media & Sport	1978	4,400	1,000,000	Frank Aurbach - Mornington Crescent	22,627
Bank of England	1944	3,990	900,000	Samuel Scott - The Building of Westminster Bridge	22,456
Department of Finance & Personnel	1971	105	20,000	Colin Middleton - unknown	18,948
Bank of England	1941	4,620	600,000	Antonio Joli - Westminster from the River	12,887
National Army Museum	1961	4,400	540,725	John Wootton - King George II at the Battle of Dettingen	12,189

Local Authority Art

In the East Midlands:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Lincolnshire County Council - 7,351 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Derby City Council - £80,000,000
- Newark and Sherwood District Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 0.30 per cent

In the East of England:

- The council with the most pieces of art was North Hertfordshire District Council - "over 1 million items"
- The highest value art collection was held by Hertfordshire County Council - £26,000,000
- Luton Borough Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 3.0 per cent

In London:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Hounslow Borough Council - 40,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Waltham Forest Borough Council - £35,255,000
- Ealing Borough Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 0.79 per cent

In the North East:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council - 80,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Newcastle upon Tyne City Council - £104,500,000
- Newcastle upon Tyne City Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 5.1 per cent

In the North West:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Carlisle City Council - 864,100 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Manchester City Council - £374,200,000
- Carlisle City Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 0.02 per cent

In Northern Ireland³:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Down District Council - 10,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Banbridge District Council - £1,098,943
- Fermanagh District Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 3.225 per cent

In Scotland:

- The council with the most pieces of art was City of Edinburgh Council - between 450,000 and 500,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by East Ayrshire Council - £57,500,000
- Renfrewshire had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 0.69 per cent

In the South East:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Maidstone Borough Council - 600,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Southampton City Council - £200,000,000
- Buckinghamshire County Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 0.04 per cent

³Councils in Northern Ireland are as they were before the restructuring of April 2015 as the requests were sent before the change.

In the South West:

- The council with the most pieces of art was North Devon Council - 80,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Bristol City Council - £91,000,000
- Bristol City Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 0.87 per cent

In Wales:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Wrexham Council - 15,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Cardiff Council - £36,141,715
- Carmarthenshire Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 4 per cent

In the West Midlands:

- The council with the most pieces of art was Birmingham City Council - 800,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Birmingham City Council - £200,000,000
- Birmingham City Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 0.71 per cent

In Yorkshire and the Humber:

- The council with the most pieces of art was North East Lincolnshire Council - 60,000 items
- The highest value art collection was held by Leeds City Council - £150,000,000
- Harrogate Borough Council had the lowest proportion of its collection on display - 1.0 per cent

Table 12: 5 local authorities with the largest art collections

Organisation	Total owned
North Hertfordshire	1,000,000
Carlisle	864,100
Birmingham	800,000
Maidstone	600,000
Chichester	500,000

Table 13: 5 local authorities with the largest art collections by value

Organisation	Total value (£)
Manchester	374,200,000
Birmingham	200,000,000
Southampton	200,000,000
Leeds	150,000,000
Newcastle upon Tyne	104,500,000

Table 14: 5 local authorities with the lowest proportion of their collection on display

Organisation	Proportion on display (%)
Carlisle	0.02
Buckinghamshire	0.04
Birmingham	0.07
Southwark	0.09
Newark and Sherwood	0.3

Sources and methodology

The Majority of the information was obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

Further details of work purchased by the Government Art Collection were obtained from their Annual Report and Acquisitions Lists.⁴

When calculating the proportion of art on display for each type of organisation, only organisations where information on both the total number of items held and the total number on display were available.

Total values for collections were often not available. Many government organisations do not insure total collections and those with substantial archives do not necessarily have comprehensive and up to date lists of values.

In cases where values for whole collections were not available, organisations were asked for the total of the values they do hold. This was usually only for a small proportion of the collection, for example where items had been insured while being leant out, and our total figure is therefore likely to be a significant underestimate.

A number of organisations refused to provide valuations for high value items under section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act - Law Enforcement, arguing that it would increase the risk of crime relating to the items.

Where values were provided for individual items, these were only included if the valuation was sufficiently recent which was defined as being within the last ten years.

A distinction has been drawn between organisations whose prime purpose is as a museum or gallery and other bodies who own art. Many of the organisations who are not primarily galleries display their work themselves or lend them to galleries. Where this is known to be the case, it is included in notes.

Councils in Northern Ireland are as they were before the restructuring of April 2015 as the requests were sent before the change.

⁴<http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/reports.html>