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## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Title of paper:** NMeM Cultural and artistic photography collection

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**To the Board for:** Consultation      Briefing      Report      **Decision**

The Board is asked to consider the recommendation to rationalise the Photography Collections held at the National Media Museum.

### Summary/key points

In a time of difficult priority decision making, there is a strong case for phasing out the Media Space programme and de-accessioning the *artistic & cultural* photography element of the NMeM collection and transferring it to the Victoria & Albert Museum, whose ambition is to create an International Photography Resource Centre. The *science & technology* photography collections would remain at the NMeM.

The artistic & cultural collection includes significant photographic material such as: the Royal Photographic Society Collection, the Fox Talbot Museum Collection and others. These are important historic collections, detailing the development of photography in British history, including photographs (prints, daguerreotypes, negatives and glass plates), 3D objects (cameras) books and archives. A table of the collection is in appendix 1. This list provides a high level approach to understanding the nature of the photographic material, and has served to establish the starting point for discussion about de-accession. If the proposal is agreed, further analysis will ensure that any STEM related material that is particularly relevant to the NMeM future vision and Masterplan is considered for retention.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Royal Photographic Society collection would form part of the gift and will be offered in its entirety, and we will avoid splitting existing collections.

The science & technology collections proposed to remain Bradford would be the Daily Herald Archive and the Kodak Collections. Also proposed to remain is the Impressions Gallery Archive, due to the strong relationship and relevance to the Impressions Gallery in Bradford.

## 1.0 Introduction

As part of the Science Museum Group collections review, there has been evaluation of the most appropriate place to hold the various types and themes of collections.

The *science & technology* photography collection remain relevant to Science Museum Group and specifically to the NMeM. The *art & cultural* photography collections no longer fit with the aspirations of the Museum and the focus on STEM.

## 2.0 Process

The Board of Trustees requested a review of the proposed photography reading room in Media Space at the Science Museum. The cost to build the reading room, transport and catalogue the collections is £2.2m, with annual operating costs of at least £145k.

Simultaneously the NMeM reviewed its purpose and aspirations under its Masterplan development. This focussed on the importance of STEM to the museum, the community and to Bradford stakeholders.

The Board of Trustees gave a delegated group the responsibility to find an alternative home for the art & cultural photography collections. Led by Professor Ludmilla Jordanova the group includes Ian Blatchford, Jo Quinton-Tulloch and Judith McNicol. The group followed due process of noted meetings, evaluation of criteria and debate to eliminate conflicts of interest.

The two leading national museums in this field, the Tate and the V&A, were the given the opportunity to express interest in the collections; both responded enthusiastically.

## 3.0 Criteria

The criteria below gave the basis for the submissions from the Tate and V&A.

- ☐ Physical ability to care for the collections in the best facilities.
- ☐ Enable access to the collections (including 3D objects and archives) for scholars and the public through reading room facilities and exhibition programmes.
- ☐ Major gains in the cataloguing quality and digital accessibility of the collection
- ☐ Alignment with existing collection, exhibitions programming and scholarship of the new institution
- ☐ A serious intent to further develop the collections through acquisition.

## 4.0 Responses

Fundamentally the responses from the V&A and Tate were quite different.

The Tate would use the photography collection to complement the richness of their British art collections from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century at Tate Britain. The access and display is based on photography as an art form.

The V&A proposal joins together their large existing holdings of photography with ours to create the greatest collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century photography in the world. This will be of benefit to the public and to scholars. The V&A proposals for display and access locate the photography collections within the context of the histories of decorative and applied arts.

### 4.1 Physical ability to care for the collections

The V&A proposal shows an impressive record of curatorial expertise across the history of photography. It appears they have the appropriate expertise in place to take on the SMG collection.

The scale of the SMG collection is such that whichever institution is chosen, it seems certain that extra staffing will be required, and both acknowledge this.

The V&A proposes to explore knowledge and skills transfer from existing SMG employees.

The Tate has a dynamic and highly effective champion of photography. [REDACTED]

The Tate would be able to immediately take some of the photographs into their existing state-of-the-art store at Tate Britain, but there has not been confirmation that there is space for all the photographs or the other areas of the collection (3D objects, daguerreotypes, negatives and glass plates, books etc).

The V&A propose to use existing temperature controlled storage at Blythe House for the immediate housing and then incorporate these collections in their North East Quarter development at the South Kensington site. Also, the V&A would use the new facilities built from any relocation from Blythe House.

#### 4.2 Access to the collections

The V&A vision for an International Photography Resource Centre aligns with the ideas that were in development for the Media Space reading room. The V&A will double the permanent gallery space for photography, to create a showcase for the NMeM collection.

The Tate's fundamental policy of integration and cross-media presentation appear not to include the other items in the collection such as photographic equipment. This gives rise to the question of what will happen to the non-photograph items in the collection.

Both propose to include the collection in their touring programmes across the UK; and the V&A have specifically mentioned that they will honour any existing commitments for the collections in touring or loans.

#### 4.3 Cataloguing and digitisation

The V&A have very real existing traction with detail of the current operation and processes and procedures. [REDACTED]

#### 4.4 Alignment with existing collection, exhibitions programming and scholarship

The V&A response are comprehensive and impressive, with a well-established programme and affiliations in place, which can serve and be served by the NMeM collection. The V&A proposal is strong on ambition and also sets out firm and reassuring foundations in terms of their proven expertise and their exhibition and publishing history.

The V&A have also given ideas for an exhibition programme that covers photography technique, applied photography in advertising, social history relating to childhood – plus many more.

The Tate references these important aspects, although currently the details are not worked into exhibition ideas. Although the Tate are keen that the collections would be available to their 34 national Tate Plus partners, in addition to the programmes for Tate St Ives and Liverpool.

#### 4.5 Develop the collections through acquisition

The Tate has an impressive acquisition strategy, supported by a dedicated acquisition committee, with thirty global members and annual budget of [REDACTED]

The V&A Photograph Acquisition Group was created to expand and diversify the collection, with enthusiasts, collectors and curators as members. The group generates £120,000 pa to purchase photography.

#### 4.6 Scoring

In evaluating both proposals the below scoring was agreed by the group.

Criteria	Tate	V&A
Care for the collections	■	5
Access to the collections	■	4
Cataloguing and digitisation	■	4
Alignment and scholarship	■	5
Collections acquisition	■	3
Total	■	21

#### 5.0 Evaluation

There are compelling arguments for both responses, but with fundamental differences, [REDACTED]

The rounded decision for the Science Museum must be the completion of the history of British photography. Our responsibility is to evaluate the use and access of the collection beyond art, but also taking into account applied photography (e.g. in advertising, fashion and industrial design), the scientific and technical development of photography and the importance of Britain in the global development of the medium.

It is important that the collection remain as one - the equipment, negatives, books and the photographs. The V&A have given this assurance.

Although the rationale for the transfer of the collection is not financially driven, in this difficult financial climate, any financial impact must be assessed. The V&A are clear that they will not give or take any money as part of the transfer. [REDACTED].

To assist in the process Michael Wilson and Philippe Garner were approached for their views on the proposals and both agree with the recommendation.

#### 6.0 Impacts and uncertainties

The impacts of this proposal will be wide reaching; colleagues, stakeholders, Media Space, donors, Bradford City. Once the final decision is made these uncertainties can be firmed to enable considered communication.

There are also uncertainties about the timescales to transfer both knowledge and the collection that will need clear planning in due course, if there is agreement to this proposal.

#### 7.0 Next steps

If approved there will be further analysis of the proposed collections; development of a full programme for the transfer and communication led by the National Media Museum. The precise timing of any announcement will need careful consideration, in consultation with the V&A and other key stakeholders.

Further detailed discussions would be required about specific elements of the collections, especially where parts of the collection overlap with other areas of the SMG (e.g. Herschel Collection). Also discussions about specific items in the collection that would be available to NMeM for display on long-term loan.

## **Appendix 1. Collections proposed for transfer**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Approximate volume</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Provenance</i>
Royal Photographic Society Collection	270,000 images, on paper, glass, metal, cased images, negatives, held as prints and albums, 26,000 books and periodicals, 10,000 items of archival materials and 6,000 pieces of camera equipment	Mixed	From 1830s -present	Purchased from the RPS in 2003
Fox Talbot Museum	6,000 prints and negatives, and a small number of cameras	1830s-1877	19 <sup>th</sup> Century	Acquired by the Science Museum from [REDACTED] and Laycock Abbey in 1937 and transferred to NMPFT in 1980s
Kraszna Krausz Collection	6,000 rare books, images and a small number of cameras	Art photography books	1929 -1979	Donated to the museum in 1990 by Focal Press
Lewis Morley Archive	2,000 prints and 20 boxes of ephemera and archival material	Commercial portraiture	Post-1945, may from 1960s	On loan from 2014 from the photographer's estate and US-based collectors, intended to convert loan to donation in 2015
Shelter (Nick Hedges) Archive	1,900 prints	Social Documentary	1968 -1972	Donated by photographer, early 1980s

Ricketts Collection	1,000 prints, 84 albums and 19 books	Predominantly ethnographic and topographical	19 <sup>th</sup> century	Acquired by NMPFT from [REDACTED] in 1990
Tony Ray-Jones Archive	710 prints, approx. 5,000 negatives, contact sheets and ephemera	Contemporary photography	1960s and 70s	Donated in 1993 from [REDACTED]
Sun Life and ICI awards	300 prints	Contemporary photography	1980s -1990s	Acquired in the late 1980s and early 1990s from competition entrants – NMPFT administered these competitions on behalf of the sponsors
Herschel Collection	294 prints, negatives and cased images	Largely portraits	1860s	From the Science Museum collection, some of this is still retained in the SCM Astronomy collection
Ellis Daguerreotypes Collection	159 cased images	Topographic views of Italy	1840s	From Science Museum collection
Photographic Advertising Collection	20,000 prints, and a substantial body of ephemera and archival materials	Commercial stock photography	1920s -1950s	Acquired by NMPFT in 1997
Zoltan Glass Archive	10,000 negatives and contact sheets	German industrial and British commercial	1930s-1960s	Acquired by NMPFT in 1991

Walter Nurnberg collection	2,300 prints and 10,000 negatives	British industrial photography	1930s – 1970s.	Acquired by NMPFT in 2003
National Media Museum Collections	Approx. 20,000 prints	Mixed – detailed discussion required	1830s-present	Acquired directly from photographers by donation and purchase since 1983