

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

Collections Policy

Revised 2021

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

I. Introduction

The Collection Policy has been developed in accordance with the standards established by the [American Association of Museums \(AAM\)](#) the [Association of Art Museum Directors \(AAMD\)](#) and [The Society of American Archivists](#). These policies and procedures have been approved by the Museum's Board of Trustees.

Mission Statement

To inspire all current and future generations, the Museum preserves, presents, and advances the artistic legacy of Georgia O'Keeffe and Modernism through innovative public engagement, education, and research.

Vision

The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum is the preeminent source for accurate information and scholarship about the artist, her aesthetic, and her place within the context of American Modernism. The Museum will continue to provide knowledge, inspiration, and stimulation to its audiences.

History

The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, opened to the public in July 1997, eleven years after the death of its namesake artist. A visit to the Museum offers insight not only into O'Keeffe's art, but also her creative process, and the light and landscape that inspired her. In addition to the main Museum campus in Santa Fe, the O'Keeffe Museum maintains O'Keeffe's two homes and studios in northern New Mexico, a research center and library, and a variety of collections relating to O'Keeffe and the history of American Modernism.

In 2006, the Museum took responsibility for the care and preservation of O'Keeffe's Home and Studio in Abiquiú, New Mexico. O'Keeffe's first home in New Mexico, about 30 minutes northwest of Abiquiú, at Ghost Ranch, is also owned and cared for by the Museum though it is not currently open to the public. In 2018, the O'Keeffe Welcome Center was opened to the public in Abiquiú. All O'Keeffe Home and Studio tours commence at the Welcome Center and visitors have the opportunity to learn more about O'Keeffe's properties and Northern New Mexico.

The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Research Center opened in July 2001 to house offices for staff and fellows, and The Michael S. Engl Family Foundation Library and Archive.

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II. Authority and Responsibilities

Duties of the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee have the following powers with respect to the collection:

The power to accept or decline gifts or bequests of objects, and authorize the purchase of objects, is vested in the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee upon recommendation of the Collections Committee.

The power to deaccession objects for sale, exchange, or other means of disposal irrespective of market value is vested in the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee upon the recommendation of the Collections Committee.

The Board delegates the governance and oversight of the collection, and these specific powers, to the Collections Committee (the "Committee"). The vote of the Committee is effective without further action by the Board, with the exception of deaccessions, which must be approved by the full Board. All actions of the Committee will be reported to the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee. The Committee may seek the board's consent before taking actions of extraordinary significance. **Donations offered by a member of the Board of Trustees shall require an approval by the full Board of Trustees.**

Daily responsibility for the collection is delegated to the Director and the Deputy Director for Collections and Engagement, who in turn delegate to the appropriate professional staff of the Museum.

III. Purpose of the Collections Policy

This Collections Policy (the "Policy"), is intended to document the policies that guide the development and care of the Museum's collection consistent with the mission of the Museum and with professional museum standards. Detailed procedures implementing this policy may be found are attached as appendices.

Through this Collections Policy, the Museum ensures that:

- its collections are accounted for by annual inventory and documented in the collections management databases;
- its collections are protected, secured, cared for, and preserved;
- acquisition, deaccessioning, and loans of collections are conducted in a manner that conforms to the Museum's mission, complies with applicable law, and reflects the highest ethical standards;

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- disposal of collections through sale, exchange, or other means is solely for the advancement of the Museum's mission;
- access to the collections and collection information is permitted and appropriately regulated, and collection-related activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.

IV. Collections

Scope of Collections

The primary collecting mission of the Museum is to acquire exemplary works of art by Georgia O'Keeffe. Additionally, the Museum seeks to acquire objects and materials relating to the artist's life. These collections shall be used to foster interest in the art and life and Georgia O'Keeffe through education and exhibition programs that explore her contribution to the history of Modernism.

Fine Art Collection

The Museum holds the world's most extensive collection of works of art by Georgia O'Keeffe. The Fine Art Collection includes oil paintings, watercolors, pastels, charcoal and pencil drawings, as well as sculptures in clay, plaster, wax, bronze, and aluminum. From the artist's juvenilia and student work, to her latest works on paper, the Fine Art Collection chronicles her achievements over eight decades (1901-1984). In addition to paintings and drawings, photographs comprise one of the special strengths of the Fine Art Collection, including a notable group of works by Alfred Stieglitz. Paintings and drawings by modernist contemporaries of O'Keeffe's are also represented in the collection, as well as works in a variety of media by artists featured in the Museum's exhibitions.

Library and Archive

The library and archive support the Museum's exhibitions, collections, and related activities through research services and resources with an emphasis on studies of Georgia O'Keeffe and her contemporaries, related regional histories, and the history of Modernism. The collections contain O'Keeffe's personal books and archival materials and research materials including but not limited to: exhibition catalogs, scholarly publications, vertical (subject) files, criticism files, pamphlet files, correspondence, photographs, ephemera and audiovisual material. Additionally, the archive includes records of the institution that document the Museum's history and activities.

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Historic Properties

The Museum's unique treasures are the two homes, the Abiquiú Historic Home and Studio and the Ghost Ranch Historic Home, where the artist lived and worked for more than forty years, along with their modernist furnishings and other contents reflecting her day-to-day life.

Personal Tangible Property Collection

This collection consists of O'Keeffe's personal belongings and includes clothing (including garments, shoes, scarfs, handbags), art materials (including paint brushes, pastels, oil paints, jars of pigments, charcoals, frames and assorted papers), and source materials (including rocks, shells and bones).

Non-Accessioned Collections

Non-accessioned collections consist of objects that do not have the aesthetic and/or historical merit requisite for inclusion in the accessioned collections, and may be for hands-on use. These can be used by the Conservation, Education, or Research Collections and Services Departments, or disposed of by various means including private sale or sale at auction, and even authorized destruction.

V. Policies

Acquisitions (Bequests, Gifts, Purchases)

Acquisition is the act of acquiring an item or object for any of the museum's collections.

Accessioning is the formal act of legally accepting an object or objects to the category of material that a museum holds in the permanent collection.¹

All acquisitions must meet three primary conditions: a) Is the object relevant to and consistent with the purposes and activities of the Museum? b) Can the Museum provide the object with proper storage, protection, and preservation under conditions that comply with professional museum standards and that ensure their care as well as access for Museum purposes? c) Can title to the object be obtained free and clear?

Acquisitions must be relevant to and consistent with the Museum collection and exhibition purposes and activities that are outlined here and reiterated in the Museum's bylaws. Before objects are acquired, the Director and the Deputy Director for Collections and Engagement must determine that the Museum can effectively store,

¹ From AAM's [Developing a Collections Management Policy](#).

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protect, and maintain the objects according to standards established by the AAM. Except under unusual circumstances, acquisitions should come to the Museum with no restrictions on future use, sale, copyright, or exhibition. Whenever possible, the Museum shall secure copyright as well as full title.

Purchases and the acceptance of gifts and bequests into Museum collections are the responsibility of the Director and Museum staff, who are authorized to accept or acquire objects valued up to \$10,000 without prior board approval. Individual acquisitions valued over \$10,000 require the endorsement of the Collections Committee. Value can be established by a donor or staff estimate, but such estimate is not a valuation and cannot be used for defining a charitable contribution.

When time does not permit the advance approval of acquisitions above \$10,000 at one of the Committee's regular meetings, a quorum of the Committee (as defined in the Museum's bylaws) has the authority to proceed by either telephone or email vote. Such acquisitions will be presented at a subsequent meeting.

During each calendar year, the Director and the Deputy Director for Collections and Engagement have the authority to accept gifts valued above \$10,000 during the period between the last meeting of the Collections Committee for the year and December 31. Gifts accepted during this period will be known as "Year-End Gifts" and will be subject to the same standard of quality, strategic importance, condition and provenance as all other acquisitions. Year-End Gifts shall be reported to the Collections Committee at the Committee's first meeting of the next calendar year.

Promised Gifts

Promised gifts will be presented to the Collections Committee for approval as an acquisition at the time that the promise to give the object is offered. A legally binding promissory document will accompany the gift. The object will not be accessioned until the gift has completed full acquisition process.

Fractional Gifts

Fractional gifts are accepted only if the remainder is a promised gift accompanied by a legally binding promissory document. Such promissory agreements must contain provisions requiring that the Museum will take possession of the work as required by law and in keeping with the Museum's mission. All fractional gifts shall be concluded within a ten-year period with the Museum receiving 100 % ownership.

Jointly Owned Collections

In some circumstances, it may benefit the Museum to share ownership of a collection object with another institution. All proposals to share ownership must be approved by the Collections Committee, which should carefully consider all of the proposed terms of joint ownership, including but not limited to, each owner's responsibility for storing and

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conserving the object, sharing the costs (if any) of the acquisition, and allocating rights of exhibition and publication.

Bequests

The Museum is under no obligation to accept a bequest of personal property for the permanent collection. Bequests will be considered in the same manner as gifts and the Museum may choose to accept only a portion of the bequest if the object(s) do not meet acquisitions criteria. Objects that are not considered for the permanent collection may be taken in as Non-Accessioned Objects. Bequests of personal property may also be disposed of by sale. The use of proceeds from such sale are at the discretion of the Director and Chief Financial Officer.

Deaccessions

As stated by the AAMD, both the deaccessioning and the disposal of collections from a museum's collection require exceptional care and should reflect policy rather than a reaction to the exigencies of a particular moment.

https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Policy%20on%20Deaccessioning%20website_0.pdf

For exceptional acquisitions and upgrades, however, it is appropriate to deaccession related collections. Proceeds from deaccessioned collections are used only to acquire other works of art. Income on invested proceeds from deaccessioned collections can be used for direct care of the collections, per section VII. Direct Care, below. Judicious deaccessioning can improve the quality of the collection without compromising its depth, breadth, or historical integrity.

Deaccessioning occurs only if an object is no longer essential to the Museum's collections, if its sale will improve the collections, and if the sale is in the interest of the public, public trust and scholarly or cultural communities the Museum serves.

Fine Art and Personal Tangible Collections can be deaccessioned only upon the recommendation of the Museum Director and Deputy Director for Collections and Engagement, with a majority vote of approval by the Collections and the Executive Committees. The preferred method of deaccession is through public auction. Objects deemed to have severe and deteriorating conditions may be disposed of with appropriate documentation of disposition or destruction.

Deaccessioning cannot occur if it conflicts with the interests, objectives, and legal status of the Museum. Objects cannot be deaccessioned to a member of the Board of Trustees, the Museum staff, or to their representatives, agents or families.

Before deaccessioning a work, it must be determined through all reasonable efforts that the Museum is legally free to deaccession the work. Objects to which conditions or restrictions apply cannot be deaccessioned until reasonable efforts are made to

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comply with them. Where conditions or restrictions apply regarding the use or disposition of an object, the Museum proceeds as follows:

- It will observe mandatory conditions or restrictions unless deviation from their terms is authorized by a court of competent jurisdiction.
- Considering the monetary value of the works in question, if an object was given to the Museum by an individual, and it is practical and reasonable, the Museum will make reasonable efforts to notify the donor if it intends to deaccession a gift within a ten-year period from the date of receiving it or within the donor's lifetime, whichever is less.
- If there is a need for the clarification or interpretation of conditions or restrictions on works, the Museum will seek the advice of its legal counsel.
- The Museum will maintain complete documentation of deaccession transactions that will be retained in Museum files in the office of the registrar.

It is important that the deaccessioning of objects should not limit scholarly knowledge of them. When objects have been removed from the Museum's collections, the Museum will retain files on these objects and make them available to scholars on request.

Within the library and archive collections, many materials are cataloged but not accessioned, and are processed according to standard procedures and best practices, which may include the authorized disposal of select materials.

Appraisal and Authentication

Museum employees are not allowed to appraise or authenticate objects for any external entity. Appraisals are provided by qualified appraisers. The Museum has a longstanding policy not to provide appraisals to donors. Under current IRS guidelines, the Museum cannot act as a qualified appraiser because of inherent conflict with its role as a donee. If a donor asks for assistance in locating an appraiser, staff may direct donors to professional organizations for appraisers and auction houses. More than one name must be given. Museum employees are not allowed to authenticate an object for any external entity.

Capitalization and Collateralization of Collections

The Museum shall not capitalize or collateralize collections or recognize as revenue the value of donated works.

VI. Care of Collection

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The Museum is first and foremost a repository of works of art, whose mission centers on the care of works of art in its collections. The Museum shall preserve works of art in accordance with the highest standards of conservation. The Museum shall provide a safe and appropriate environment for the collections, with effective security and environmental control, for the benefit of present and future generations. The Museum shall maintain an Emergency/Disaster Plan. The Museum's preservation standards shall be maintained for collections on loan to the Museum or borrowed from the Museum.

The Museum's Conservation Department is charged with the long-term preservation of the collection through conservation treatment and shall maintain exact documentation of the examination and treatment of artwork. The Museum recognizes the importance of scientific research in the examination and analysis of works of art in its collection. The Museum's Conservation Department is responsible for the technical examination of the Museum's collection and for the development of long-term preventative conservation strategies and methods.

One of the Museum's primary goals is to provide safe and stable environments and settings for works that ensure their preservation. It does this by evaluating and revising its operating procedures for collection care, conservation, and management on an ongoing basis.

VII. Direct Care

The care and stewardship of the collection is one of the most fundamental responsibilities entrusted to the Museum by the public. To uphold this responsibility the Museum devotes substantial resources to the direct care of the collection. Notwithstanding any other provision of the Museum's Collection Policy, and in accordance with the guidelines of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the law, all proceeds received from the disposition of deaccessioned artworks may be used for the acquisition of art or direct care of works in the collections, and the following policy will govern the Museum's use of said funds. For the purposes of this policy, and according to AAM, direct care of collections means "to invest in the existing collections by enhancing their life, usefulness or quality and thereby ensuring they will continue to benefit the public." The Museum may use income generated from the proceeds of deaccessioned art for costs associated with the conservation, preservation, registration, maintenance, storage, and safeguarding of collections, including analysis, treatment, inventory, research, framing, documentation, the related information technology required to assure full documentation, and the provision of safe and secure, climate-controlled storage and museum spaces. These costs can include, among other things, a share of salaries for staff primarily engaged in direct care, as well as direct care activities by

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outside vendors and contract staff and the materials, equipment, systems, and facilities used in connection with direct care activities outlined by this policy. Examples of these activities include:

- Conservation
 - Condition Reporting and Documentation
 - Analysis
 - Treatment
- Preservation
 - Documentation
 - Research
 - Archival processing, cataloging of materials
 - Framing, micro-chamber supplies
- Registration
 - Inventory, location tracking
 - Related information technology
- Maintenance
 - Historic Properties repairs and restoration
 - Direct care of collection contents within the Historic Properties
- Storage
 - Safe and secure, climate-controlled storage and museum spaces
 - Housing & storage mounts
 - Related supplies and allocated salaries

The identification of direct care expenses classes (for which income on proceeds from deaccessioned collection objects may be used as outlined in this policy) shall be defined by a committee consisting of the Director, Director for Collections and Engagement, Curator of Fine Art, the Head of Conservation, Registrar/Collections Manager, Head of Research Collections and Services and the Chief Financial Officer. In addition, this committee shall develop a recommendation as to the appropriate and allocable share of salaries and facility costs associated with direct care activities outlined above. The recommended direct care expenses and allocable share of salary and facility expenses shall be presented to the Committee and then the Board of Trustees for review and approval. Once acceptable expenses are established and approved, the Museum's Chief Financial Officer will confirm that specific proposed direct care expenditure comply with this policy and any applicable accounting requirements.

At the end of each fiscal year, staff shall provide the Collections Committee with an annual summary of incurred Direct Care expenses and projected expenses for the upcoming year, specifically noting any proposed changes.

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VIII. Emergency Plan

As part of its regular operations, the Museum has prepared a comprehensive and effective Emergency Plan, which outlines response measures to protect visitors and staff, to prevent destruction and reduce damage to its collections, documentation, and facilities in the event an emergency occurs.

The plan's prime objectives are: (1) to provide for the safety of human life and (2) to avoid the loss of property and resources. In the plan the Museum addresses the safety and preservation of its collections and equipment, facilities, the security of its vital records, and the restoration of normal activity. The Senior Director of Operations and the Conservator are responsible for overseeing and implementing these policies, in consultation with conservation and curatorial staff. This plan shall be reviewed and revised annually and all appropriate staff will receive regular training to ensure they understand the plan and are prepared to implement emergency measures when necessary.

IX. Collection Documentation

The Museum, through its curatorial, registrar, conservation and research collection and services departments, shall maintain accurate, up-to-date records on the acquisition, identification, location and condition of all objects in the collection, as well as ongoing activities such as exhibitions, research, and correspondence with donors, artists, and scholars. All records created and received in the transaction of the Museum's proper business are the property of the Museum and must not be dispersed or destroyed except in accordance with its records retention policy.

X. Access to the Collection

It is fundamental to the Museum's mission to provide access to the Museum's collection and promote appreciation of its significance. Among the primary means for achieving this goal is the presentation of exhibitions of its own works and those borrowed from other owners. The Museum shall support and encourage awareness and understanding of the life and art of Georgia O'Keeffe by disseminating information through the development of publications, programs, and its website for the public. These will draw upon its collection and research as primary sources for stimulating engagement and promoting familiarity with the life and art of Georgia O'Keeffe in its historical, cultural, and material contexts.

The Museum shall provide additional access to its collections through loans to other institutions. The Museum shall support continuing scholarly investigation and research in

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order to document, publish, and advance understanding of the Museum's collections as well as contribute to broader academic and public discourses.

Access to secure collections storage shall be limited to the minimum number of staff whose official duties require frequent and regular access. Staff who do not require such access will not receive access and/or keys to collections storage. Additionally, access will only be granted to those who have official Museum credentials. Individuals, including guests and vendors, that do not have official Museum credentials should be escorted at all times when in collections storage. Access to secure collections storage shall be requested through the Registrar and approved by the Deputy Director of Collections and Engagement. The Registrar and Head of Security will maintain approved access listings.

XI. Insurance

The Museum maintains a comprehensive insurance policy covering its collections both while they are on the Museum's premises or on loan to other institutions. The Museum also carries comprehensive, wall-to-wall insurance on all loans coming into the Museum from other institutions and private lenders. The estimated market value of Fine Art Collection will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

XII. Ethics

The Museum has adopted and adheres to the AAM's [Code of Ethics for Museums \(2000\)](#), as well as those codes of ethics endorsed by the [International Council of Museums](#), the [Association of Art Museum Directors](#), [Association of Art Museum Curators](#) [Foundation Professional Practices for Art Curators in Nonprofits](#) and other professional groups. As stated in AAM's *The New Museum Registration Methods*, the basic tenets of these codes prohibit staff from using their positions for personal gain through such activities as dealing, accepting commissions or gifts of more than trivial value from dealers or other vendors, personal collecting that competes with the museum, appraising or authenticating objects for fees, acquiring stolen or contravened property for the museum, or deaccessioning objects to provide for purposes other than enhancing collections.

XIII. Loans

The Museum encourages and fosters loans to institutions and museums who are planning exhibitions that enhance public understanding of the life and art of Georgia O'Keeffe. It is the responsibility of the curatorial staff, in conjunction with the Committee, to maintain a balanced exhibition and loan program that ensures the quality of

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Museum exhibitions, supports worthwhile projects at other institutions, and safeguards the collection.

The Museum has adopted and follows the AAM *American Art Museums Guidelines on Exhibiting Borrowed Objects* and has incorporated these guidelines in its loan and exhibition procedures.

Loans Outgoing

Loans of the Museum's collections are limited to recognized professional museums whose facilities meet standards set by the Museum. The primary consideration for loans to other institutions is that their utilization in exhibitions by that institution will make a meaningful contribution to the public understanding of Georgia O'Keeffe and American Art. Criteria for evaluating the desirability of loans include but is not limited to: educational and scholarly value, original research contributions, publication of scholarly catalogues, audience reach and diversity and expected attendance. Loans will undergo careful scrutiny, especially for sensitive material such as pastels or watercolors, to be certain that the preservation of the collection and the primary goals of the Museum are not compromised.

Loan requests must be made in writing; at least 6 months in advance of the date works are needed. They must be recommended by the Museum Director, Deputy Director for Collections and Engagement, and curatorial staff (curator(s), conservator, and registrar), who present them to the Collections Committee for approval. The Committee or Museum Director reports approved loans to the Board of Trustees. All loan requests received but not recommended by the Director and curatorial staff will be reported to the Collections Committee.

Objects cannot be considered for loan until their condition has been determined as fit for travel by the Conservator and approved by the Director and Deputy Director for Collections and Engagement. Borrowers understand that loaned objects must be returned in the same physical condition in which they are received. Other institutions will not clean, repair, retouch, unframe, or otherwise alter the objects, except with written permission of the Registrar. Any damage must be reported immediately to the Museum, whether it occurs in transit or on the borrower's premises and regardless of responsibility.

Loans Incoming

The Museum recognizes the significance of borrowing from other collections for exhibitions and examination. These are objects that complement those in the Museum's permanent collection or that help to achieve specific exhibition, educational or research goals of the Museum. Objects selected for loans should be in favorable condition for transport and display. The Director will have final approval for incoming

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loans. All incoming loans shall be reported to the Collections Committee. Each object borrowed must have an incoming loan agreement which specifies the duration (beginning and ending dates) and purpose of the loan. Long term loans (loans of a duration of two years or more) will be reviewed every two years. The Museum will not alter the original condition of the object (matting, framing, or conservation) without prior permission of the lender. Objects on loan will be treated with the same care as the permanent collection and will be stored only in secure collection storage and monitored with the same diligence as the permanent collection. Objects on loan will be packed and shipped as received, unless different arrangements are made with the lender.

XIV. Review/Revision

This written policy presents a formal statement of the current collection management goals of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. This policy will be reviewed and revised every three years and, as necessary, revised to align with the Museums strategic priorities and reflect the best professional practices in the field. The curatorial and collections staff and the Collections Committee are responsible for the periodic review and revision of the Collections Management Policy.