

LATVIAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTION POLICY 2008 – 2010

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1 Aim and intended audience of this document

The Collection Policy of the Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art (henceforth the LMCA) is a public document that determines the development and management of the museum's collection. It also describes how, in accordance with the museum's strategic aims and objectives, the museum mission is to be pursued in relation to the collection in the period from 2008 till 2010.

The LMCA Collection Policy concretises the aim collection work and describes the context of the collection: it conceptually describes why, what, where, how and in which cases the museum includes items in its collection as well as how items are excluded from the collection. The LMCA Collection Policy is a flexible document that, when necessary, may be updated and supplemented at any time but must be reviewed at least once every three years.

This document is addressed to the museum personnel as well as all those involved and interested in the museum's activities – partners, sponsors, donors, visitors etc. The Collection Policy should act as a guide for any work with the LMCA collection and should also provide a basis for decision-making in relation to the LMCA collection.

The LMCA collection is formed for the benefit of society to inspire, educate, intrigue and inform society and museum visitors. The LMCA Collection Policy promotes the gathering of information about the material and non-material cultural values pertaining to the visual art processes and their context in Latvia and the Baltic region covering the time period from the mid-20th century to the present day, their acquisition, documentation, preservation, research, interpretation and popularisation.

In this way the LMCA Collection Policy also promotes the implementation of the museum's mission: to provide the opportunity to see, become familiar with, feel and understand the diversity of contemporary art, its dialectic, the interrelationships of its processes and the unique nature of the artist's persona by creating a contemporary art institution of international status whose collection would consist of high quality works of art that are preserved, exhibited and interpreted according to the highest criteria with the greatest accessibility and in a dialogue with various mutually interested groups of society

2 Aims and tasks of forming the LMCA collection

The aims of forming the LMCA collection are:

- 1) The high quality representation of contemporary art that will offer today's and future society a comprehensive overview of the significance and development of contemporary art, the identity and local characteristics of the art of Latvia and the Baltic region by encouraging the formation of a collection that will represent the most essential art processes and the finest achievements of the most important artists in the period from the mid-20th century to the present day;

- 2) To participate in the discussion and definition process of the boundaries and influence of contemporary art and culture - the gathering of information about the material and non-material cultural values pertaining to the contemporary art processes and their context in Latvia and the Baltic region, their acquisition, documentation, preservation, research, interpretation and popularisation for the public benefit;
- 3) To be positioned in the context of different and related art collections in Latvia and the Baltic region;
- 4) In the long term to become a centre of competence in Latvia for the preservation, restoration and conservation of new and the latest materials.

The tasks of forming the LMCA collection are:

- 1) To select, collect and preserve significant objects and artworks that are outstanding in terms of their autonomous quality as well as those that evidently reveal the diversity of contemporary art and in their way, a panorama of the art of Latvia and the Baltic;
- 2) To systematically collect and analyse objects that relate to the contextual information of artworks included in the collection;
- 3) In forming contemporary art history resources in the interests of the broadest society, to develop and preserve the collection as a resource for education and individual self-reflection;
- 4) To interpret history and development in the field of contemporary art;
- 5) To collaborate with contemporary art organisations of a similar profile in Latvia and abroad;
- 6) To resolve specific issues relating to the preservation of contemporary art objects in a professional manner.

3 Chronological and geographic framework of the LMCA collection

The chronological timeframe for the LMCA collection is the period between from the second half of the 20th century to the actual art processes of the present day. During the acquisition process special attention should be paid to the art events and expressions of the 1980s and 90s. If necessary, this timeframe may be expanded or contracted when including objects in the collection.

The geographic area covered by the LMCA includes the Latvian, Baltic Sea region, former USSR and the international context

4 Main categories and areas of the LMCA collection

One of the most characteristic features of contemporary art is its diverse nature – the most varied of art forms, subjects, messages, expressions and manifestations.

In this respect the LMCA collection consists of these categories of museum art object:

- 1) Painting, graphics,
- 2) Photography,
- 3) Sculpture, installations, ready-made objects,
- 4) Video works,
- 5) Other new media including documentation of art actions and performances, films, Internet art etc.,
- 6) Documents and items that provide contextual information on contemporary art and developments of contemporary culture.

Depending on the museum object's cultural historical, artistic, memorial, scientific value and its compliance with the museum mission and acquisitions policy, items are included in these collections of the LMCA:

- 1) Fundamental collection;
- 2) Ancillary collection or
- 3) Exchange collection.

The LMCA stock currently consists of these developing collections:

- 1) The Aizkraukles Bank collection for the stock of the LCMA;
- 2) The non-conformist heritage of the Soviet period collection;
- 3) Donations collection.

In terms of content, the LCMA collection is formed according to three main areas.

4.1 Works of conceptual art from the second half of the 20th century that reflect the creative changes in the use of the means of expression art and in the essence of the message

One of the main features of contemporary art is the transition from visuality to conceptualisation or from what the eye sees in an artwork to its emotional and intellectual perception that takes place in the deepest level of the viewer's consciousness. In Latvia, until the late 1980s art was dominated by the official visuality of realism in which the principle was obvious both in its depiction (in the use of the means of expression too) and in its message; divergent expressions in art corresponded to the understanding of so-called non-traditional art.

For the representation of this area in the museum's collection, the priority is artworks that transcended the unambiguity of the art mentioned above and revealed changes in both the visual language as well as its message on its path to conceptualisation.

To use a comparison with Western contemporary art, the area of this collection would correspond with the changes in art that were revealed in minimalism, post-minimalism, conceptualism, land art, *Arte Povera* and the development of other movements that began in the 1960s. Because art in Latvia and the other Baltic states developed differently, to be included in the museum's collection objects must provide an impression of this local context and experience.

Developing this collection line, the collection of LMCA incorporates the art works of e.g. Imants Lancmanis, Miervaldis Polis, Inta Ruka, Antanas Sutkus etc.

4.2 Non-conformism art from the 1960s to the 90s

In order to ensure uninterrupted continuity in the National Museums Collection and to preserve unique, irreplaceable examples of visual art whose existence outside the museum collection becomes increasingly threatened with every passing year. It is conceptually and practically absolutely essential for the historic collection to become a part of the LMCA inventory. This would include artworks that were produced up to 1991 and reflect the non-conformist creative heritage that until 1991 was not held by museums for ideological reasons and later because of financial restrictions.

One of the most widespread definitions of art uses the metaphor of art as a barometer of the spirit of the age that records the changes in a particular period, the general atmosphere as well as the subjective mood. In Latvian, as in the history of contemporary art in other (post) Soviet republics an invaluable role is played by so-called non-conformist art or artworks that transgress the official art canons and censorship (external as well the internal determined by the artist himself) and in its place creating works as expressions of an internally free personality, that do not conform to the officially defined demands.

To a large extent non-conformist art reflects and resonates the complexity of the social and socio-political situation that existed behind an officially innocent façade; these were artworks that, with the help of metaphors and a different aesthetic, did not shy away from revealing a reality that differed from the official façade often adding a critical message.

Chronologically, the works of non-conformism in Latvia and the Baltic span the period from the 1960s to the 90s. In the art of the 60s and 70s its manifestations were quite limited but were at their most expansive and ambitious in the 80s. The restoration of Latvia's independence as well as the full democratisation of the art process notwithstanding, there are outstanding examples of non-conformist art that essentially relate to the 90s too when uncompromising expressions in art were still not self-evident in both the artists' and viewers' overall perception.

In this collection line fit in artworks by e.g. Juris Boiko and Hārdijs Lediņš, Mindaugas Navakas, Andres Tolts and other artists.

4.3 A striking reflection of contemporary art processes

Today the contemporary art of Latvia and the Baltic has successfully become a part of the international art context. Many artists have acquired a considerable reputation on the wider art scene; their works in the LMCA collection would represent the finest achievement of the region's contribution providing a notion of the local specificity of the region's art and demonstrating quality equal to that of Western art.

The most exciting and brilliant expressions of art today are manifold in the sense of both the art medium and its use as well as the message and the form of expression. Currently the most interesting artworks often overstep the forms usually associated with art and integrate interdisciplinary features – visual, social, political and psychological data, expressions and knowledge, mass media strategies and a whole variety of other approaches. Today, the appropriate art for the LCMA collection provides both a representative and effective art experience as well as a critical discourse reflecting that processes and events in modern day society.

In the context of actual art expressions they are based on the so-called “post-media condition” or that the meaning, value and imagery of an artwork is no longer based on a specific type of art (painting, photograph, video work) but on the “structure of meaning” – in the aesthetic that is formed outside the specific form of art

Just to give a few examples, in this collection line belong the artworks by such artists e.g. Famous Five, Evelīna Deičmane, Gints Gabrāns, Maija Kurševa, Kristīne Kursiša, Katrīna Neiburga, Marko Mäetamm, Jaan Toomik and other.

5 Criteria for the acquisition of objects and their inclusion in the collection

Primary criteria for the inclusion of objects in the LMCA collection

- 1) The object's conforms with the LCMA profile, collection policy and the museum mission;
- 2) The object conforms to a specific LMCA collection;
- 3) The object conforms to a specific LMCA exposition or exhibition;
- 4) The object conforms to the highest criteria of professional art, its artistic and aesthetic significance;
- 5) The object's cultural historical or memorial significance;
- 6) The object's scientific or research significance;
- 7) The object's significance in a social or spiritual context.

Comparative criteria for including an object in the LMCA collection:

- 1) Capacity to symbolise or represent an area of the LMCA collection;
- 2) Potential in the LMCA interpretation;
- 3) Origin;¹
- 4) Rarity;
- 5) Level of preservation.

6 Policy relating to procedures of acquisition of objects for the collection, their inclusion in the collection and their use

The following basic principles are to be observed in all procedures relating to the inclusion of objects in the LMCA collection:

- 1) Museum objects and collections are added to the LMCA stock in the following ways:
 - a. Donations and purchases from physical and legal persons;
 - b. Transfers from public and private institutions;
 - c. Confiscations of museum items by the state;
 - d. Exchanges of museum and museum related objects;
 - e. Items included as a result of expeditions and scientific research;
 - f. Bequests, endowments and bestowals by physical and legal persons;
 - g. Items commissioned by the museum;
- 2) Items are only included if the museum can ensure suitable conditions for their preservation, documentation and supervision;
- 3) The museum ensures public access to its collection through exhibitions, the provision of information, in response to requests and in other ways;
- 4) The museum only accepts material that corresponds to the LMCA mission and helps to interpret the associated areas, events and personages;
- 5) The museum constantly reviews and is oriented towards a specifically defined collection policy avoiding acquisition of material for its own sake;

The following methods are employed in forming the LMCA collection:

- 1) Secondary research;
- 2) Recommendations of the Collection Commission;
- 3) Selection of works from exhibitions (international, group and solo shows);
- 4) Items commissioned by the LMCA;

¹ In this case origin means the object's provenance, stories about the object, its context, how it was used etc.

- 5) Selection of works in auctions;
- 6) Selection from works in the possession of artists;
- 7) Selection of works in private collections;
- 8) Acquisition of works through collaboration with other organisations and institutions.

Once an item has been accepted (after initial registration and scientific processing, having been inventoried and its topography determined, its condition examined etc.), it becomes a constituent part of the LMCA collection and the status of its use is determined. The policy and procedure for an item's removal from the collection, storage policy and procedures, digitalisation policy and other must be updated as the collection grows and work with the collection intensifies. In all its procedures the LMCA observes the regulations on collection record keeping and usage, which are controlled by the State Museums Board as determined by law. When working with the collection the LMCA observes the ICOM (International Council of Museums) Code of Ethics for Museums. (See Chapter 9 - Related Documents)

7 A brief history of the LMCA and the formation of its collection

The discussion about the need for a museum of contemporary art in Latvia has been going on among various interest groups in the public, private and non-governmental sector since the 1990s. In **2002** the Ministry of Culture commissioned a study by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art on the principles of establishing a museum of contemporary art. In **2004** the government declared the need to establish a museum of contemporary art as a priority in culture alongside the building of a new National Library and acoustic concert hall in Riga. The Ministry of Culture set up a project coordination working group that, based on the studies carried out by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art and the postulates of the Law on Museums (1997), drafted the future Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art concept and mission statement as well as defining the future museum's role in the current cultural environment of Latvia and Europe. The international architects' seminar organised by the Ministry of Culture and Riga City Council on the location of the museum in Riga decided on the former power station and the territory of Andrejsala. In **2005** the Ministry of Culture state agency *New Three Brothers* (J3B) was founded with the aim ensuring the construction and readiness for operations of the Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art and other cultural objects financed from the state budget. The agency also has a department working on forming the LCMA collection. An LCMA international commission of collection experts was set up whose basic task is to select works for the collection of the future museum. The Ministry of Culture and the Aizkraukles Bank signed an agreement on establishing a collection for the LCMA with the bank providing one million lats from 2005 till 2015 for this purpose. Commissioned by the state agency *New Three Brothers*, in 2006 the developers of Andrejsala (Jaunrīgas Attīstības Uzņēmums Ltd)

signed an agreement with the Dutch architects' office O.M.A. Stedebouw B.V. for the meta design of the museum building and the surrounding area under the leadership of architect Rem Koolhaas. In **2007** the first exhibition of the collection of the future museum took place at the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, which was accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue of Latvian art to ensure a successful show. An international scientific conference "What should the Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art be like?" was held at Andrejsala where participants discussed the basic principles of forming a collection and the unique aspects of the future museum. The Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art Association was founded in 2008 bringing together all the interested parties. The decision was taken to establish a provisional LMCA. With the support of a financial instrument of the EEA/Norway (450 000 EUR), the state agency *New Three Brothers* embarked on the project "Documentation and preservation of the non-conformist heritage of the Soviet period for the collection of Contemporary Museum of Art". After winning an international tender, French consultants *Lordeurope* have been tasked with preparing the basic technical economic concept for LMCA operations and the institutional and business plans for the first years of the museum's operation.

Further information on the LMCA collection and the history of the museum's development is also available from these websites:

<http://www.camriga.lv>; <http://www.j3b.gov.lv>; <http://www.andrejsala.lv> and <http://www.abfonds.lv>.

8 Collections similar to the LMCA collection and their formation in Latvia and abroad

In Latvia there are three important collections of visual art containing works of visual and applied decorative art by Latvian artists from the second half of the 20th century. Although all three collections reflect the same period in Latvian art, their essential qualities are different. The character of the collections has been determined by the acquisition principles:

- 1) The Latvian National Museum of Art (exhibition hall *Arsenāls*) has some 18 000 items of visual art (paintings, graphics and sculpture collections);
- 2) The Museum of Decorative Art and Design has gathered together works of professional decorative applied art from the earliest days to the present;
- 3) The Latvian Artists' Union collection contains both works of visual and decorative applied art of which the valuable painting collection deserves special mention.

Important collections, archives and data bases of Latvian contemporary art are accessible also in comparatively new nongovernmental organisations e.g.:

- 1) Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art – archive, library, collection and virtual museum/ data base <http://www.camp.lv>;
- 2) Culture and Arts Project NOASS – collection of Latvian video art from 1997;
- 3) Centre for new media culture RIXC holds a media-collection and archive on developments of new media culture;
- 4) The collection of Pedvāle Open Air Museum.

Other important contemporary art collections in countries with similar historical experience, for instance:

- 1) Contemporary Art Museum in Zagreb (*Muzej suvremene umjetnosti Zagreb* <http://www.mdc.hr/msu>);
- 2) A special collection „Arteast 2000+” in Modern Art Museum in Ljubljana (*Moderna galerija Ljubljana*; <http://www.2000p.org>);
- 3) A specially established foundation at the National Museum in Warsaw in order to support a contemporary art collection (*Fundacja zbiorów sztuki współczesnej*; <http://www.fundacjazsw.mnw.art.pl>)

There are long traditions of private collecting of contemporary art in Western European countries, and so many important collections are also publicly accessible, for instance the tree following examples.

The collection of French businessman **François Pinault** housed in the Palazzo Grassi in Venice is one of today's most important private collections of contemporary art. It contains some 2000 works, mainly paintings, sculptures, photographs, video works and installations. Together they form one of the most convincing and inspiring exhibitions of late 20th century European and American art. The works represent both the world's most outstanding individual artists ranging from Mark Rothko, Andy Warhol, Lucio Fontana, Dan Flavin and Bruce Nauman to the stars of today – Damien Hirst, Cindy Sherman, Maurizio Cattelan, Olafur Eliasson and others, as well as the most important styles and movements in contemporary art – pop art, minimalism, conceptualism, *Arte Povera* and others.

The collection of German businessman **Erich Marx** on long-term loan forms an important of the contemporary art collection of Berlin's *Hamburger Bahnhof* museum. Marx's collection has, to a large degree, influenced the image of the *Hamburger Bahnhof*. A part of the collection recently went on show in another important art institution, Berlin's *Neue Nationalgalerie*, and has been on short-term view in other parts of the world. The core of this collection too consists of works by internationally recognised artists, German and foreign, for example, Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Rauschenberg and Anselm Kiefer.

The third and the youngest and most surprising private collection that has achieved considerable international renown in a very short time is that of German businesswoman **Julia Stoschek** in Düsseldorf. The basis for the collection is

new media, mainly video art, as well as photography and installations and these areas are represented by their most outstanding artists, those already with an international reputation as well as highly promising members of the young generation for example, Marina Abramović, Monica Bonvicini, Douglas Gordon, Dan Graham, Gordon Matta-Clark, Bill Viola, Pipilotti Rist and others.

Priorities for the LMCA work in the collection area 2008 – 2010

These are the priorities for work on the collection of the LMCA over the next three years:

- Formation and expansion of the non-conformist art collection;
- To find and realise the possibilities to expand the collection with art works representing the newest tendencies and processes of art;
- Electronic database – design and implementation of the collection management system;
- Inclusion in the database of the National Museums Holding general online catalogue <http://www.nmkk.lv>;
- Researching on issues and periods referring to LMCA collection policy, strengthening of museums research and education capacity in order to better evaluate, interpret and popularise the collection;
- Collation of the LMCA internal regulations regarding work on the collection;
- Analysing the needs of preservation and conservation of the collection of LMCA, strengthening of museums capacity in this field;
- Gathering, analysis, systematisation and preservation of contextual information and items relating to artworks included in the LMCA collection;
- Setting up of a database of LMCA related artists represented in other Latvian and foreign collections;
- Collaboration with J3B, especially in relation to the implementation of the EEZ/NI project;
- Collaboration with Aizkraukles Bank;
- Collaboration with the Ministry of Culture.

Related documents

Law on Museums of the Republic of Latvia ("Latvijas Vēstnesis", 1 (3369), 03.01.2006.; with amendments till 25.Oct.2007.; see online: <http://www.mvp.gov.lv/content/view/6/7/laMng.lv>)

Regulation Nr. 956 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia „**Regulations on the National Museums Holding**” („Latvijas Vēstnesis”, 191 (3559), 30.11.2006.)

Regulation Nr. 532 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia „**Regulations Regarding Accreditation of Museums**” („Latvijas Vēstnesis”, 102 (3470), 30.06.2006.)

ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (adopted 8. Oct. 2004 by ICOM General Assembly in Seoul, see online: http://icom.museum/code2006_eng.pdf)