SOAS Gallery Information Policy

Document type:	Policy		
Document number:	LIB-084	**Version**	01
Department:	SOAS Gallery, Library Services		
Approved by:	Executive Board		
Date approved:	06/03/2025	**Review Date**	06/03/2028
Publication:	SOAS website		
Related Documents:			

Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.

1.   Introduction

This Policy and the associated procedures apply to information management in relation to the SOAS Object and Artwork Collections managed by the SOAS Gallery and which do not form part of the SOAS Library Special Collections or other collections held by SOAS.

1.1   SOAS Gallery's (thereafter "the Gallery") Statement of Purpose is to support the mission of SOAS, University of London, which is:

To be a leading centre of excellence in research and teaching relating to Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

This mission represents the primary objective of the University, as outlined in its 2024/25 Constitutional Documents, Article II, which are accessible on the SOAS website.

The Gallery and its collections exist to support this mission, driving any future activities. The Gallery will uphold this mission preserving, promoting and providing access, including sharing knowledge to its objects and cultural collections.

Our vision in achieving this mission and statement of purpose is to preserve, maintain and enhance the collections in a sustainable way, to make the best possible use of them not only for scholarly research and teaching, but also as a source of knowledge exchange within SOAS and with any external partner schools of education.

1.2   This policy has been written in accordance with the Gallery's Statement of Purpose and the Collections Development Policy. All Collections staff are given copies of the relevant Collections policies and procedures as part of their induction to agree to and follow. This policy will be put into action and should be read in conjunction with the Gallery's Procedures (see article 6).

1.3   Effective and good documentation of the collection will ensure that:

- Objects can be requested for research by researchers, scholars, or any member of the public.

2.   Aims and Objectives

2.1   The SOAS Gallery Information Policy sets out that SOAS will maintain professional, Spectrum compliant standards in collection information and documentation to the highest standard that is achievable. It outlines how we will strengthen the following:

- Access to the collection for as many people as possible;
- Consistent standards in procedures and processes;
- wider and broader range of users can access the collection;
- Cooperation between institutions for loans and research is better facilitated;
- Objects are appropriately cared for and professional standards may be met;
- Security of objects and data through accurate and backed up information;
- Legal accountability for the collection and loans-in which are in our care.

3.   Definition

3.1   Collections information is all the information the Gallery has collected, created, held and maintained about the collection, whether owned or on loan to us. It may be paper documentation and images or in digital format. This information can include a broad range of knowledge, such as ownership and legal title, interpretation, stories, born-digital items, research, condition, medium, size of an object etc.

3.2   Collections information divides into several categories: for acquisitions now owned by the Gallery (known as 'accessioned' items); for loans-in for a specific exhibition or agreed period; for the teaching/handling collection; and for yet un-accessioned items which may later be accessioned, reviewed or disposed of. See Glossary for definitions.

4.   Principles

4.1   The Gallery is fully accountable for all artworks and objects that enter its collections for loan, donation or otherwise. This includes all accessioned and un-accessioned items.

4.2   The Gallery will create and maintain up-to-date and accurate information to recognised museum and Spectrum documentation standards.

4.3   The Gallery will ensure that legal ownership is obtained and recorded according to the Acquisition Primary Procedure in Spectrum 5.1 and where necessary, that copyright or permitted use is agreed at the time of acquisition and recorded for all newly accessioned items and that due diligence paperwork is created and maintained in line with the SOAS Gallery Collections Development Policy.

4.4   All objects will be documented, and records updated so that we can maintain accountabilities for all items in our care

4.5   We will undertake regular review of the collection management systems in place to ensure they are fit for purpose and that they meet amendments to standard practices, such as Spectrum compliancy.

4.6   We will also ensure information is appropriately safeguarded against obsolescence of the systems.

5.   Specific Ethical / Legislative Considerations

5.1   The Gallery will ensure compliance with relevant legislation, particularly the Freedom of Information Act (2000), UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act (2018) and SOAS's policies.

6.   Minimum standard: The nine primary Spectrum procedures

6.1   The Gallery will record sufficient information about items in its care to be able to identify and locate them. All documentation will conform to standards set within the following Spectrum primary processes:
- object entry.
- acquisition and accessioning.
- location and movement control.
- inventory.
- cataloguing.
- object exit.
- loans in (borrowing objects)
- loans out (lending objects)
- documentation planning.

6.2   An acquisition record will be created in the Collections Management System, with a record of the item also listed in the Accessions Ledger. Key paper-based legal documentation will be stored in the object's file.

6.3   **Location & movement control:** The information for object moves will be recorded within the collections management system. The system allows for a history of object moves to be maintained. The Gallery will carry out routine spot checks and audits to ensure the accuracy of location information, as required.

6.4   **Inventory**: Inventory level records will be created which provide sufficient data to be able to identify the object from the point of acquisition and throughout its history with the Gallery. All object activity will be recorded within the collections management system, e.g. loans in, loans out and any exit and/or disposal activities.

6.5   **Cataloguing**: a catalogue record will be created after the item has been accessioned. The catalogue record will be enhanced as further research is undertaken on the object, as and when capacity permits. However, any new information discovered about the history of an item will be recorded onto the collections management system.

6.6   **Documentation planning**: The Gallery's priority is the development of a new computerised collections management system. This will enable the Gallery to identify gaps within the catalogue information, and plan an effective future programme of data enhancement, and the

continuous improvement of the quality of the data.

Any documentation backlogs will subsequently be identified, and reduced in line with available resources and immediate Gallery needs.

7. Audit, Accountability and Security

7.1 The Gallery will ensure that collection management databases are the primary tools for creating and managing collections information.

7.2 Any paper records of items and collection information will be kept securely stored and only disposed of if it has been digitised and deemed appropriate, in line with SOAS's Records Management Policy and procedures and with SOAS's Collections Development Policy. We will continue to digitise such paper copies as resources allow.

7.3 A physical Accession Register is kept up to date and securely locked in a fireproof cabinet.

7.4 All digital records are readable and are systematically converted as software upgrades are undertaken.

7.5 Entry, location, movement control and exit documentation will be maintained for all items for whatever purpose, regardless of their legal ownership status.

7.6 The systematic auditing of collections records will be undertaken by auditors appointed by SOAS.

8. Provision and Use of Collection Information

8.1 The Gallery will comply with all relevant legislation e.g. Freedom of Information Act (2000), UK Data Protection Act (2018), UK GDPR and the Environmental Information Regulations (2004) when responding to requests for information, especially confidential data such as donor information, environmental information, valuations or site details on a case-by-case basis, and in accordance with the applicable legislation and any legal agreements or conditions of gift.

8.2 Where collections data is to be accessed online or in the galleries, sensitive data such as donor details etc will be removed / not available.

9. Glossary

Accessioning means the process of formally recording the admission of a new object or group of objects that have been acquired legally and owned by into the Collection.

Artwork means works on paper, paintings, sculpture, fine art photographs and occasionally contemporary works in various media.

Collections Management System (CMS) is a digital software used by Collections staff to aid in the documentation and cataloguing of museum objects. The CMS SOAS is going to be using is Epexio.

Deaccessioning means the process of formally removing an object from the Collection, according to a specific legal and ethical process set out in the Colls Dev Policy.

Object means any item not considered an artwork which forms part of SOAS's Collection: permanent (recorded in the accession register); support; t temporary (e.g. a loan); or those used for educational handling.

Responsible Officer means the Head of Galleries & Exhibitions or the Collections Officers or relevant deputy of either.

SOAS Object and Artwork Collection or **'the collection'** means all objects, artwork and artefacts that relate to Africa, Asia and the Middle East held by SOAS which are managed by the Galleries & Exhibitions Office, and which do not form part of the Archives & Special Collections held by the SOAS Library.

Spectrum means the recognised UK museum industries collection management standard and is used by all Accredited Museums. All Accredited Museums must meet the Spectrum standard for its 9 primary procedures.