



**THE BARBER INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**

EXHIBITION POLICY

July 2014

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The Barber's Mission

Our mission derives from the far sighted vision of our founder, Lady Barber, who established the Barber Institute of Fine Arts 'for the study and encouragement of art and music'. The jewel in the cultural crown of the University of Birmingham, the Barber uses its world-class collections to create inspirational opportunities for learning and enjoyment for students, staff and the wider public.

Context and Policy Principles

The Barber's primary activity is the public display and interpretation of its outstanding permanent collections in the gallery setting purposely designed for it. Supporting this core function, temporary exhibitions and displays have played an important role in the life of the Barber since 1998. The primary aim of the exhibition programme is to create opportunities for visitors to increase their understanding and enjoyment of the permanent collections and, for this reason, the exhibition programme is currently generously funded by the Henry Barber Trust, and admission is always free. This is a different model to many other museums, and implicit in this are particular responsibilities towards the proper fulfilment of HBT's charitable purposes.

Temporary exhibitions can have many other benefits – they can encourage new and repeat audiences, increase public profile, promote partnership working, and cultivate stakeholder relations, but, as motives for any exhibition, these benefits will be considered in relation to a proposal's ability to advance visitors' understanding and enjoyment of our collections (ideally these motivations will be mutually reinforcing). Priority is therefore given to exhibitions and displays which focus upon particular aspects of, or individual works in, the Barber collections, in particular, those which provoke and present new research on the collections and/or show works in a different light.

As it is not in the Barber's remit to acquire contemporary art, there is also a useful role for contemporary loan exhibitions, providing they respond in a meaningful way to the permanent collections. Similarly, areas not well represented in the permanent collection (for example, later twentieth century art, non-Western art) may be explored via the exhibition programme, again providing there is a real dialogue with the permanent collections. It follows that the Barber is never used simply as a location for touring art-related shows and/or individual artists seeking a regional or campus venue. The content and presentation of exhibitions and displays must always be of the quality commensurate with our pre-eminent collections and our identity as a University art museum of international standing.

The majority of exhibitions and displays will arise from Barber staff and/or direct invitations to and partnerships with other curators and institutions. Collaborations with the History of Art faculty at the University of Birmingham are actively encouraged, as are projects with other University faculty, provided that the proposal accords with our policy. We only consider uninvited proposals if they clearly fulfil our stated policy. All proposals, internal and external, should be sent to the Director in the first instance, who will be advised by the Head of Collections and Learning.

Programme and Schedule

The programme is agreed at termly meetings chaired by the Director or Head of Collections and Learning. These meetings also include the Head of Operations, the Communications and Marketing Manager, the Learning and Access Officer, the Exhibitions and Loans Officer and the Administrator. The programme must embody and promote the Barber's distinctive identity and mission whilst allowing for an appropriate diversity of approaches reflective of our target audiences. Resource constraints (budget and human) will be realistically assessed, and consideration given from the earliest stages to Learning and Access activities and involvement.

Temporary exhibitions usually occupy the Lady Barber Gallery (although the primary galleries have been used, and may be more appropriate for some 'in-focus' projects) and the Coin Gallery. Smaller displays are shown in the two Print Bays. The calendar generally sees three exhibitions per annum in the Lady Barber Gallery – a spring slot (Feb to May), a summer slot (June to Sept), and an autumn slot (Oct – Jan), with the summer usually reserved for the History of Art MA curating project. The Print Bay displays generally coincide with the Lady Barber Gallery and draw primarily on the Barber's own prints, drawings and miniatures; they therefore play an important role in bringing to the public sections of the collections which cannot be shown permanently for practical and conservation reasons. The Coin Gallery exhibition normally changes annually and again draws primarily on the Barber's own collections, similarly making available and interpreting works which by their nature are generally stored out of public view. The modest size of the Print Bay displays makes them ideal for using as a work-learning activity for interns, the training of early career professionals being an important aspect of the Barber's activities. Exhibitions in the Lady Barber Gallery (or similar) will generally be scheduled at least two years in advance, those in the Coin Gallery nine months to a year in advance, and displays in the Print Bays four to eight months in advance.

The Director has ultimate responsibility for the content and presentation of all exhibitions and displays; the Head of Collections and Learning has responsibility for the exhibition and display programme and the planning and development of individual shows.

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