

**WHITNEY**

**COLLECTION  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
2023**



On cover: Installation view of  
*The Whitney's Collection: Selections  
from 1900 to 1965* (Whitney  
Museum of American Art, New  
York, June 28, 2019- ). From left to  
right: Rosalyn Drexler, *Marilyn  
Pursued by Death*, 1963; Jackson  
Pollock, *Number 27*, 1950,  
1950; Edward Clark, *Winter Bitch*,  
1959; Andy Warhol, *Elvis 2 Times*,  
1963. Photograph by Ron Amstutz

**Whitney Museum of American Art**  
Collection Strategic Plan, 2023

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# MISSION STATEMENT

The Whitney Museum of American Art seeks to be the defining museum of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American art. The Museum collects, exhibits, preserves, researches, and interprets art of the United States in the broadest global, historical, and interdisciplinary contexts. As the preeminent advocate for American art, we foster the work of living artists at critical moments in their careers. The Whitney educates a diverse public through direct interaction with artists, often before their work has achieved general acceptance.

# VALUES STATEMENT

The Whitney Museum of American Art was founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930. An artist and philanthropist, she believed that artists were essential to defining, challenging, and expanding culture. The Museum became a site where artists and audiences engaged openly with untested ideas. Today, this history informs who we are and how we serve our public.

The Whitney believes:

- in the power of artists and art to shape lives and communities;
- that we must be as experimental, responsive, and risk-taking as the artists with whom we collaborate;
- in creating experiences that engage and raise questions for our audiences, and, in turn, learning from our audiences;
- that our work embraces complexity and encourages an inclusive idea of America;
- in the importance of history: that the past informs our present and that contemporary art can help us better understand our past and realize our future;
- that we must lead with expertise, debate, self-reflection, and integrity;
- that the Whitney thrives because of relationships—among artists, audiences, staff, and board alike—forged from dialogue, premised on respect, and committed to a shared purpose.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Whitney Museum of American Art's 2017 Strategic Plan called for the creation of the Museum's first-ever Collection Strategic Plan (CSP). In 2019, a generous grant from the Henry Luce Foundation made possible a three-year study resulting in the present document. Drawing on expertise and input from across the Museum and on collaboration with peer institutions, this process has addressed key questions such as what the phrase "American art" means; how we understand the Museum's relationship to living artists; and how the Museum charts its future in relation to its history, its many constituent communities, and its equity and inclusion work. This white paper serves both as a record of this process of self-reflection and discernment, and as a resource to aid the future codification of these reflections into recommendations that will guide how the collection is used, priorities for building it, considerations around its growth as well as around deaccessioning, and plans for engaging with living artists.

# INTRODUCTION

## About the Whitney Collection

The Whitney Museum of American Art was inaugurated in 1930 with a founding collection of nearly one thousand works donated by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. This collection, largely comprising works by living American artists, formed the core of the new institution, which grew out of Whitney's dedication to supporting the artists of her time. As stated by Hermon More, the Whitney's first curator, in the Museum's inaugural collection catalogue:

"The idea back of this institution and its predecessors is based upon the belief that America has an important contribution to make in the arts, that in order to make this contribution effective, a sympathetic environment must be created in which the artist may function to the fullest extent of his powers. Motivated by such a belief it is natural that the Whitney Museum of American Art should be primarily concerned with the work of living artists."<sup>1</sup>

In its inception, the Whitney's collection was built as a means of supporting living artists and as a form of advocacy for contemporary American art—a pioneering proposition at a time when much of the attention of institutions and collectors of contemporary art was focused on the European avant-garde. The Museum served as a critical platform and offered vital support for many artists, especially those within the Whitney's downtown Manhattan milieu, and its collection grew in relation to the careers of the artists whose work it promoted. Today, the concentrations in the collection from the early decades of the twentieth

century serve as a record of the particular artist communities that were championed by Mrs. Whitney, as well as Juliana Force, the Museum's inaugural director, and More, the first curator. A commitment to the art of its time has remained central to the Museum, as highlighted in its current mission statement, which calls out the institution's support of "the work of living artists at critical moments in their careers."<sup>2</sup>

Today, the Whitney continues to maintain a belief in growing a collection that is focused on American art and centers living artists, but the reasons for doing so—and indeed many of the considerations and complexities that such work entails—have shifted. After more than nine decades, the Whitney's collection has grown substantially. Once-contemporary works now serve as a historical foundation, which the Museum continues to expand through key acquisitions while also supporting new generations of artists. As of June 2023, the Whitney's collection included 27,152 objects. Of these holdings, the medium breakdown is as follows: 8,157 (30%) prints; 6,954 (25.6%) drawings; 6,843 (25.2%) photographs; 2,554 (9.6%) paintings; 1,691 (6.2%) sculpture; 833 (3.1%) film, video, or new media works and/or installations; and 125 (0.5%) other media. This collection, whose foundational objective was to showcase the art of a specific moment, now represents over a century of artmaking and grows incrementally larger every year.

1. Hermon More, "Introduction," from *Whitney Museum of American Art: Catalogue of the Collection* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1931), 9.

2. Whitney Museum of American Art, "Mission Statement" (2017).

# 2017

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**May 2017**  
Board approves Whitney  
Strategic Plan

# 2018

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# 2019

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**June 2019**  
Henry Luce Foundation awards  
grant for Collection Strategic Plan

# 2020

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**December 2019—August 2022**  
CSP research phase  
(nearly three years)

# 2021

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# 2022

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**September 2022**  
CSP public symposium

# 2023

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**July 2022—Fall 2023**  
White paper writing/editing

**Fall 2023**  
Final report

## Toward a Collection Strategic Plan

In May 2017 (two years after the Museum's move to 99 Gansevoort Street), the Whitney issued a strategic plan that outlined eight critical goals for the Museum as it considered its new position in the downtown New York landscape. This plan articulated opportunities and responsibilities facing the institution in its expanded form, considering not just its enlarged collection galleries but also its staff and audiences. One such goal centered on art, with a primary objective to "articulate a collection strategy." This strategy would play an essential role in setting forth recommendations around collection growth, development, care, scholarship, and display, aligned with best practices and the aspiration for the collection to serve as "a gateway for audiences, artists, and the Whitney's program."<sup>3</sup>

While the present CSP took its impetus from the 2017 strategic plan, it also drew upon the foundational collection research undertaken during a previous project, the Whitney's Collection Documentation Initiative (CDI; 2008–15). This initiative, supported by the Henry Luce Foundation, endeavored to catalogue, photograph, and properly house the Museum's full collection prior to the move downtown. With this essential preparatory work, as well as that of a corollary project focused on the Museum's time-based media work—the Media Preservation Initiative (MPI; 2018–present)—the potential for deeper collection research was established.

In 2019, the Museum began laying the groundwork for a multiyear research project to realize a strategic plan for the collection. Through a generous grant, again from the Henry Luce Foundation, a core team of Whitney staff members and hired project researchers embarked on this three-year, cross-institutional project in December 2019, with an aim to understand the origin, scope, evolution, use, limitations, and impact of the Whitney's collection. This CSP is a vision for the future of the Whitney's collection that is informed by the institution's history and enriched by a desire to make its holdings useful, dynamic, and relevant today and into the future.

The project timeline at left traces the full arc of this process. At the outset of the CSP research phase, the project team outlined a set of key outcomes that drove the process of inquiry and assessment:

- Recommendations for defining "American" in our collecting

3. Whitney Museum of American Art, "Strategic Plan: Executive Summary" (2017), 15.



- Guidelines for acquisition processes and collecting practices
- Aspirations around our engagement with living artists
- A robust definition of “collection use”
- A sustainable long-term model for the collection’s projected growth
- Updated guidelines around deaccessioning
- A set of acquisition priorities for future collecting

The research around these intended outcomes began in December 2019, with a focus on one or two areas at a time. Internal working groups were established around key topics such as “The ‘American’ Question” and “The Composition of the Collection” and met regularly to discuss research into the Whitney’s history and current practices. These groups, which consisted largely of members of the Curatorial department, also invited feedback from outside scholars, artists, and peers who shared meaningful insights with our groups, challenged our assumptions, and prompted further inquiry. For some of the other intended outcomes, the CSP project team participated in cross-departmental working groups dedicated to specific topics like collection growth and storage, for example, or artist questionnaires. The whole Whitney staff helped this project take shape, whether through such working groups, in one-on-one conversations, or in dedicated sharing sessions.

The outcomes listed above have now been recast as separate sections in this document, although there are many throughlines between these, and cross-references are noted where possible. For each of these topics, the CSP team intentionally sought to balance practical concerns with more philosophical ones. For example, the section on collection use includes recommendations around display and loans but also expands the way “use” is defined in order to encompass engagement through research, scholarship, and programming. The topic of collection growth acknowledges the very real challenges of limited storage capacity but also seeks to consider what responsible stewardship might look like at the Whitney and the possibility that more is not always more.

In considering questions like these for each section, a certain ethos of the Whitney collection emerged and helped guide the recommendations. Some of the core beliefs and broad, directional ideas that underpin the CSP follow.

First and foremost, the Whitney’s collection is particular, and that particularity is widely seen

as a defining virtue of the institution. The collection is one of very few expressly devoted to the art of the United States, however broad and ever-changing the definition of that purview might be. This has made the collection an essential cultural repository of ideas deemed important to artmaking at any one time in the US, whether socially, politically, formally, or even technologically engaged. As it has followed the changing tides of ideas, the Whitney has collected without any one particular orthodoxy in mind but instead has built its holdings as a reflection of various artistic modes of interest. The Whitney’s consistent support of living artists—and often emerging or untested ideas—has contributed to a spirit of risk-taking within the collection that offers a dynamic picture of artistic practice, a quality the Whitney identifies as a strength. The Whitney’s long-running series of Annuals and Biennials—exhibitions that survey the field of contemporary art at regular intervals—continue to bring critical attention to new work and often prompt acquisitions. When collecting the work of living artists, one does not always have the benefit of hindsight to know what the artist’s most resolved or influential work might be, so the Whitney’s collection often captures early “breakout” stages.

The Whitney’s series of thematic collection displays over the past decade has demonstrated the range of narratives that can be richly explored through its collection. This series began at the Breuer building with experimental dives into the collection, such as *Real/Surreal* (2011–12) and *Sinister Pop* (2012–13), in the run-up to the move downtown. It expanded into the full-museum inaugural exhibition at 99 Gansevoort, *America Is Hard to See* (2015), and has continued through shows such as *An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney’s Collection, 1940–2017* (2017–18), *Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019* (2019–22), and *Refigured* (2023). These collection exhibitions have offered opportunities to play with new narratives, contend with canonical histories, and further grow the collection with strategic, punctuating acquisitions.

A fundamental question has persisted throughout this collection strategy research: Why maintain—and further develop—a collection of objects? The fact that we already have a significant collection is arguably not adequate justification for continuing to do so, particularly in light of the present-day costs associated with collecting and storing works of art, as well as important issues around environmental impact and how the Museum uses its resources to deliver on multiple aspects of its mission. Our decision to

continue to care for and build this collection is laden with responsibility and opportunity costs, which were perhaps less acutely present for Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney when opening the Museum with just under 1,000 objects. Given all of this, what today undergirds our commitment to growing and refining the collection, as well as to expanding its narratives and thinking critically about it?

This project has reinforced an institutional belief in the power of the “object” in all of its material and conceptual specificity, even if existing sometimes in less immediately tangible forms (such as linguistic or digital). We believe in the artwork, first and foremost, as the creation of the artist, who endows it with specific formal properties that allow for its possible meanings and that merit preservation. Even as we acknowledge a growing audience for the Museum and its holdings through reproductions, publication, and digital platforms, the artwork itself holds distinct characteristics. It is something still best experienced in person, understood materially, and appreciated in all of its “thingness.” As part of our collection, it takes on the status of a “record” or evidence of the time when it was made, an artistic conjecture that Museum staff at some point considered worthy of preserving for the future. Undoubtedly, a record could be built through writing or images alone, but to house objects, together, within the physical and intellectual framework of the Whitney and in shared service to collective histories is a singular project. By collecting objects based on their merits—however defined and often redefined—we affirm a belief in the power of an artist’s creation, the role it plays in shared narratives, and the immediate experience it offers in real, physical space.

The Whitney continues to support living artists today by collecting their work, preserving it in perpetuity, and offering a contextual frame through which it can be seen within broader, historical narratives. In doing so, we recognize the power of history to shape our understanding of the present moment; likewise, contemporary artists and their work often open our eyes to the past, bringing new understandings and interpretations to established histories.<sup>4</sup> We recognize that the Museum must work in relation to shifting artistic practices, an evolving field, and the availability of not only artworks but also

the funds to acquire them. In this work, the institution must consistently weigh priorities and allow space for dynamic and critical exchange. The Whitney demonstrates its commitment to living artists through exhibitions, programming, studio visits, and ongoing dialogue, and, as part of this exchange, seeks to collect works by artists who have been part of our program, past and present, as a means of establishing a record of the Museum’s activities, from Annuals and Biennials to the performance and film programs. The fact that we and our audiences benefit from and find meaning in the historical legacy conveyed to us by our predecessors underscores the importance and promise of this activity, as well as our responsibility to the future.

As a major US institution dedicated to American art, the Whitney recognizes that the definition of “American” art and, more importantly, the objectives for continuing to pursue this focus, are ever-changing. The Whitney operates from the vantage point of New York, which carries opportunities and challenges. The earliest parts of our collection, for example, skew heavily toward New York-based artists, owing to the more immediate communities that the Museum’s founders sought to support. While we embrace the richness of our local site, a subject that has been a consistent strength within our collection, we recognize that many communities living and working here have nonetheless been overlooked.

As we consider the “American” question today, we actively seek to strategically broaden our collecting within the US and its borders, so as to meaningfully expand existing narratives and to surface new ones through our holdings. We will continue to pursue research into other centers of artmaking beyond New York in order to represent the narratives we seek to tell in the collection. Focused efforts around Indigenous, Latinx, Black, and Asian American artists—whose works have been starkly overlooked within the context of “American” art due to factors ranging from bias to systemic omission to outright racism—are of prime importance as we approach our collecting today.

Finally, this plan was developed between late 2019 and early 2023, a period in which the US experienced not only a global pandemic but also a cultural reckoning that permeated all aspects of contemporary life. In addition to the devastating losses caused by the Covid-19 health crisis, acutely felt in a major city like New York, the pandemic forced temporary museum closures that caused crippling financial distress. Museums are just beginning to regain attendance after precipitous drops in visitorship

4. See also the Whitney’s values statement for a similar articulation of a belief “in the importance of history: that the past informs our present and that

contemporary art can help us better understand our past and realize our future.” Whitney Museum of American Art, “Values Statement” (2020).

and tourism, but, during the dark period, museums were prompted as never before to reflect on why they matter and what, if anything, is lost when audiences are no longer able to experience artworks and the museum itself directly. Certainly, this unprecedented experience has impacted this plan.

Likewise, the Whitney's ongoing work around equity and inclusion took on renewed urgency and primary institutional importance in the wake of rising hate crimes, senseless murders, and unsettling debates that brought questions of race, gender, sexual orientation, and power to the fore in recent years. Although the Museum's 2017 strategic plan has established equity and inclusion (E&I) as a critical institutional priority, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and other protests in the summer of 2020 propelled this work forward, with a focus on staff, the program, and the collection, as well as audiences and community, governance, and patrons. The Whitney's E&I plan, established in June 2022, was forged alongside the research for the CSP, and the numerous shared priorities across the two documents underscore the Whitney's commitment to being a more equitable and inclusive institution that calls upon the participation of its entire community. Additionally, as part of its research, the CSP team participated in several cross-institutional working groups and convenings specifically dedicated to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) goals in relation to museum collections. These discussions provided a collegial space for curators and other stakeholders at museums across the country to share strategies, challenges, failures, and successes in their own collection work with regard to DEAI initiatives.

This Collection Strategic Plan is not simply a product of the research undertaken over the past three years; it is also deeply inflected by the cultural moment in which it was written. It exists intentionally as a dynamic living document, one that will evolve from our experience and against the backdrop of our history and present. Now, in fall 2023, the CSP exists in the form of the present document, and our everyday work at the Museum is inflected by the principles, beliefs, and recommendations it sets forth. It is intended to be reviewed and revised by curatorial staff in consultation with the Museum's director, as needed, at regular increments (at least every five years) going forward.

# THE “AMERICAN” QUESTION

## History of Collecting Guidelines

The founders of the Whitney Museum of American Art dedicated themselves to building an institution that would collect and exhibit the work of living American artists, a mandate whose bounds have been questioned and reinterpreted throughout the Museum’s history. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the stakes of such a project were high: The field of American art was still inadequately studied and underappreciated, with far more attention given to European artists. These were the conditions within which Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney inaugurated the Whitney Studio in 1914, the Whitney Studio Club in 1918, and later the Whitney Studio Galleries in 1928—all precursors to the Museum’s 1930 founding. As stated by Juliana Force: “This Museum will be devoted to the difficult but important task of gaining for the art of this country the prestige which heretofore the public has devoted too exclusively to the art of foreign countries and of the past.”<sup>5</sup> Through her advocacy and creation of tangible systems of support, Mrs. Whitney highlighted the work of artists practicing in the United States and brought critical recognition to their work.

Nearly a century later, art of the United States no longer carries the lesser status it once suffered; however, the very definition of “American”—and the eligibility to belong in the context of the Whitney’s collection—remains crucial, if contested. At the crux of this questioning lies an important point about terminology. Upon the Museum’s founding, “American” was intended to signify “of the United States,” not the hemispheric definition of that term, comprising all of North, South, and Central America. Although

for many the word “American” still denotes things pertaining to the US, that term has rightly and increasingly come to describe the Americas more broadly. Following this expansive thinking, the Museum has at times questioned whether its scope *should* in fact encompass the Americas, so that its purview might more clearly correlate to the broader understanding of “America.” Ultimately, the Whitney has maintained its focus on the art of the United States, while nevertheless continuing to use its original name and taking greater responsibility for clarifying its intentions in its institutional statements and collecting practices.

Even within the bounds of art “of the United States,” the definition of an “American” artist has changed for the Whitney over time, through a succession of directors and against the backdrop of a shifting cultural and geopolitical landscape. Inevitably, these changing guidelines have inflected the development of the collection, and we acknowledge that numerous biases and systems of cultural power have influenced its formation with regard to who has been recognized as “American” and who has not. Upon the Museum’s founding and into the late 1940s, the Whitney’s policy with regard to collecting “American” artists was kept intentionally broad. In 1931, Hermon More explained of the institution’s objectives: “In limiting the scope of this Museum to American art we place the emphasis primarily on ‘art’ and secondarily on ‘American.’”<sup>6</sup>

5. Juliana Force, “Forward,” from *Whitney Museum of American Art: Catalogue of the Collection*, 8.

6. Hermon More, “Introduction,” from *Whitney Museum of American Art: Catalogue of the Collection*, 10.

When More took the helm in 1948, becoming the Museum's second director, he noted that the Whitney takes "a rather liberal view of nationality," adding that citizenship is not a factor, only that the artist "have been in the United States long enough to become identified with the art of this country."<sup>7</sup>

Over the next four decades, as the Whitney gained a foothold within the New York museum landscape and began to distinguish itself through its mission and purview, the Museum regularly shifted its definition of an "American" artist, variably tightening and loosening its guidelines for the collection. Merely two years into his directorship, More changed his tune, noting that American art would be defined "as liberally as possible as far as exhibitions are concerned," but "the Permanent Collection should be devoted exclusively to the work of American citizens, in order that the purpose with which the Museum was founded would not be meaningless."<sup>8</sup> The Whitney's next director, Lloyd Goodrich (who served from 1958 through 1968), dismantled the citizenship requirement for the collection and focused on US residency, a position that John I. H. Baur (who took on the directorship from 1968 through 1974) upheld. Thomas N. Armstrong reversed the policy yet again when he became director in 1974, maintaining through 1990 a requirement that only works by US citizens could enter the Whitney's collection. During Armstrong's tenure, the Whitney went so far as to deaccession works by some non-US citizens, including Roberto Matta, already represented in the collection.

From the 1990s through today, beginning with the directorship of David Ross, the Whitney has tried to define "American" artists in terms that move beyond administrative markers and focus instead on a relationship to the United States through residency. The current Collection Management Policy (revised 2017) states its adherence to a 1958 statement put forth by Goodrich: "Foreign birth and citizenship are not considered: only whether an artist's career has been identified with this country." As part of this same policy, the criteria for collecting an artist's work is described thus: "An artist may be either an American citizen or may have produced a significant body of work while living in the United States." While

these criteria offer some clarification, the policy is inherently—and intentionally—subjective regarding how one might define a "significant" body of work. In addition, a definition based in questions of residency draws attention away from pressing issues under consideration in our collection today: How can we better represent communities *within* the United States who, due to biases and lack of support, are now gravely underrepresented within our collection of "American" artists? How do we take on the responsibility institutionally, as a museum of "American" art, of representing Indigenous, or Native American, artists, whose work has been largely absent in the collection for decades? Or, how, in the case of Latinx artists, do we acknowledge individuals who have formally immigrated to or are temporary residents of the US, but may have been previously regarded by the Whitney as "Latin American?" The paragraphs that follow seek to outline our approach to the "American" question today.

### Approaching the "American" Question Today

The Whitney collects and displays art made by artists who live or have lived in; work or have worked in; or who were originally from the United States, including Indigenous artists whose sovereign nations' land has been crossed by US geopolitical borders.

We acknowledge that the term "American" is inherently complex and demands consistent interrogation. We seek therefore to utilize a capacious understanding of this term so that our collection best reflects the diversity of the US. We recognize that such a definition requires considerable reflection, discussion, and discernment on the part of the Curatorial Committee.

We are committed to addressing biases and omissions in our collecting history so as to productively expand the narratives we share, and we advocate for an emphasis on collecting that reflects a range of demographics and individual practices locally and nationally.

### Collecting Considerations

At times, the Whitney has engaged in debates over acquiring works of art that are worthy of the collection for their conceptual and aesthetic value as well as their resonance with our holdings, but which may not easily be classified as "American," according to the Museum's general usage.

Given the differing functions of exhibitions and collections, guidelines for bringing works into the Whitney's collection may vary from those that define

7. Hermon More to Justus Bier, October 26, 1948. Early Museum History files, Series II, 1940–1949/50, box 7, General Administrative Correspondence, 2.6.4, Correspondence A–Z. Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Archives, Whitney Museum of American Art.

8. Hermon More to Gitou Knoop, April 24, 1950. Early Museum History files, Series III, 1950–59/60, box 11, General Administrative Correspondence, 3.18.1, Offers of Works of Art. Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Archives, Whitney Museum of American Art.

its temporary exhibition program, where broader considerations of "American" art and artists can be readily and provocatively explored and challenged. Engagement with content or subject matter that draws upon "American" histories and/or considers "American" topics may augment relevance to the collection but should not serve as a primary justification.

The following scenarios address common cases raised in acquisition discussions around this "American" question. When such scenarios arise, the Curatorial Committee, in consultation with the director, should follow the guidelines and questions below in the discussion and decision-making process.

- If a proposed work pre-dates an artist's residence in the US or was made after they left the US, the Whitney should prioritize work made during the artist's time in the country.
  
- If an artist's residence in the US or intersecting Indigenous lands has been very limited:
  - Has the artist had dialogue with and/or impact on art and artists in the US?
  - Is there meaningful resonance of the work with other objects in the Whitney's collection, including adding strength to an existing area of focus?
  
- If an artist has not resided or worked in the US or intersecting Indigenous lands:
  - Are there exceptional considerations (e.g. proximity to US borders) in a particular case that suggest it should be evaluated differently?

# HOW WE BUILD THE COLLECTION

As with most collecting institutions, the Whitney's holdings reflect the interests of many individuals, from curators and directors to the patrons who have long supported the Museum. Of the more than 26,000 objects held by the Whitney today, approximately two-thirds are gifts to the collection, forming a critical foundation. Other works have been purchased by the Museum through the support of individual patrons; through the Director's Discretionary Fund and other modest endowments; and, beginning in 1956, through established committees like the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art and its subsequent iteration, the Acquisitions Committee, established in 1966. In the decades that followed, the Museum developed medium-specific acquisition committees, and today the Whitney has five such patron groups: the Painting and Sculpture Committee, Drawing and Print Committee, Film and Video Committee, Photography Committee, and Digital Art Committee. Each is led by a curatorial liaison(s) and meets at regular intervals throughout the year to review acquisition proposals and approve purchases using committee funds.

## **Acquisition Committees**

The Museum's acquisition committees are a key engine for targeted acquisitions. These committees support purchases of works proposed by the curators that are closely aligned with the Museum's collecting objectives. The paragraphs that follow outline the CSP's recommendations to fully utilize these committees for critical collection-building work.

At the outset of each fiscal year, the curatorial leads of the Museum's five, medium-specific acquisition

committees should meet with the chief curator and director of the collection to establish a cohesive approach across mediums, planning annual and long-term priorities particularly around goals set forth in the CSP. Such meetings are an opportunity to share research and ideas, consider funding opportunities, and organize cross-committee acquisitions, as appropriate.

During acquisition committee meetings, the respective curatorial lead(s) should regularly share the Whitney's holistic collection initiatives and goals in order to better educate committee members. Committee leads might also consider holding annual meetings that focus on specific targeted collecting areas as a useful strategy for educating members and implementing goals.

Whitney administrators, curatorial leads, and acquisition committee chairs should prioritize building more diverse committees to better reflect the diversity we seek in our collection. We aim to engage new members whose own collecting interests dovetail with our institutional goals. This work will be done in tandem with goals and practices now being established by the standing E&I Committee of the Board of Trustees.

## **Gift Offers and Procedures**

A majority of the Whitney's collection comprises gifts of artwork, and the Museum continues to receive numerous gift offers every year. Although gifts do not require the same initial financial commitment that purchases do, they—like all new acquisitions—have an impact on short- and long-term staff resources and

storage. The Whitney's 2022 analysis of staff time spent processing acquisitions and preparing them for the collection revealed a range from 40–50 hours for more straightforward works entering the collection through acquisition committees, up to 300–400 hours for more complex joint acquisitions or promised gifts (see Appendix for Collection Analysis). Our ability to commit this time to processing—and then storing and exhibiting—new works is constrained, and we must, therefore, be increasingly selective in the gifts we accept. Furthermore, gifts that come with display requirements and deaccessioning restrictions present significant, ongoing challenges and should be avoided.

Not only does the liberal acceptance of gifts of work impact Museum resources, it also affects the very constitution of the collection, possibly forming concentrations or narratives inconsistent with institutional goals. More often than purchases, gifts tend to add depth to the holdings of artists already in the collection, rather than bringing new artists into the fold. In addition, gifts tend to skew toward historically dominant artist groups (white, male, and with established markets)—a fact to consider as we think about the demographics of our collection with greater intentionality.

All of these factors should be considered when evaluating gift offers to the collection. At present, every offer is subject to an initial curatorial review and discussion at one of the Museum's monthly Gift Subcommittee meetings. If the Subcommittee has a shared interest in a work, the process continues with a conservation assessment and culminates in a final vote with the Curatorial Committee. Debate and critical dialogue should be encouraged at each stage of the process to ensure that such offers receive the same careful attention as potential purchases.

#### Solicited and Unsolicited Gifts

There are different types of gifts offered to the Museum, most broadly broken down into two categories: solicited gifts and unsolicited gifts. Gifts solicited by curatorial staff or the director are a welcome means of building the collection, given the Museum's limited acquisition funds. Such gifts can either be acquired directly from a donor's collection as a gift or through funds provided by a donor (i.e., purchase with funds). Still, special attention should always be given to the total number of works, even when an artist's work is deemed desirable (see "Collecting Decisions in Relation to 'Depth'" below).

Historically, unsolicited gifts to the collection have made up a significant portion of our annual acquisitions. In recent years, the Whitney has been offered between 200 and 350 unsolicited gifts annually and has declined approximately 70% of them. Evaluating unsolicited gifts requires particular rigor, as these works are often brought to our attention by parties outside the Museum who are unaware of our collecting goals and stewardship capacity. In the case of such an offer, the curatorial staff should approach the potential gift with the same consideration they might approach a purchase: If the artist is not yet represented in the collection, do we feel they are important to prioritize for the Whitney at this time? If the artist already has work in the collection, will the proposed gift punctuate or meaningfully expand our existing holdings? This latter consideration will be discussed in greater detail in the following section on "Collecting Decisions in Relation to 'Depth'."

Looking ahead, the CSP has established four key goals around gift offers and procedures:

1. Implement more rigorous gift acceptance reviews with clear messaging internally and externally to enable us to exercise more autonomy, especially around unsolicited gifts.
2. Impose more restrictive measures around the volume of works collected annually, effectively limiting the number of acquisitions made and gifts accepted per year (see "Recommendations for Sustainable Rate of Growth" below).
3. Prioritize cultivation of collectors and donors who can specifically support strategic collecting goals, whether through gifts of art or acquisition funds.
4. Prioritize identifying and securing gifts in line with the Museum's collecting priorities.

#### Special Considerations Around Promised Gifts

The Museum has increasingly solicited and received offers for promised gifts, which are works of art intended to enter the Museum's collection but which often remain in the custody of the donor until the gift is converted. While an outright gift is always preferable, promised gifts can be mutually beneficial for the Museum and the donor, especially in cases when priority works are financially out of reach for the Museum. The market has complicated this terrain further, as well. In some cases, collectors interested



in certain in-demand artists are offered access as an incentive to promise works to institutional collections. In others, sellers may offer “buy one, give one” deals that require a collector to purchase a work for a museum in order to acquire one for themselves.

There are important considerations to weigh when accepting a promised gift. First, although the collector must sign the formal paperwork that promises the work will be converted into an outright gift at a later date, the legal repercussions of reneging on such an agreement may not be easily pursued. As the Whitney establishes collecting priorities, it does so in relation to works presently housed in the collection and also to promised gifts. These works are considered when we evaluate other potential acquisitions of a particular artist’s work, and are included in our publicly accessible online collection. In other words, the Whitney counts on the promised gifts in its holdings to serve a certain role in its collection.

It is increasingly important when evaluating promised gifts to be clear about when a work might come into the collection (sooner always preferable to later). With this in mind, curators should take the lead in suggesting a timeline wherein the work enters the collection within a specific number of years, rather than necessarily at the time of the donor’s death. In evaluating a promised gift offer, curatorial staff should view the work and organize a thorough condition check by conservation staff whenever possible, ideally with knowledge of how the work will be presented when in the donor’s custody. All efforts should be taken to ensure that the work is safely displayed, with a keen eye to its preservation. For these reasons, works on paper offered as promised gifts should be subject to particularly intense scrutiny, given their more fugitive status and our inability to control donors’ display conditions.

### Large Gifts and Bequests

The Museum, like many peer institutions, has until recently often pursued large gifts, comprising numerous works, whether to add depth to the holdings of a single artist or area of concentration, or to reflect the collecting tastes and interests of a specific individual. Mindful of the time and costs associated with such gifts, as well as their disproportionate impact on the composition of the collection, the CSP does not generally recommend the acceptance of such gifts. When considering large concentrations of works, curators should also be encouraged to share with potential donors—when appropriate—how certain examples might better benefit the artist and public at other institutions.

In cases of large gift offers of work that include multiple artists, a curatorial team, led by the director of the collection, should examine how such additions to the collection will address areas of focus and usefully expand narratives. In rare cases when the Museum determines to move forward with such a gift, selections should be made with rigor and an eye to the following considerations: Does the gift add to the collection in a meaningful and varied way, allowing us to further our institutional collecting goals and priorities? Does the gift avoid the addition of duplicative works or works we would not be inclined to accept individually?

### **History and Reconsideration of Collecting Practices**

The Whitney has deep holdings around a small number of artists. At present, works by only fifty artists account for 42% of the total number of works in the collection, while these fifty artists account for only 1.4% of the total number of collection artists. Most of the Whitney’s in-depth holdings around individual artists were accrued through large gifts and bequests, adding hundreds of works to the collection in a single donation. A smaller number of the Whitney’s in-depth holdings were built intentionally over time, following the development of a single artist’s career, most often with an emphasis on works on paper.

At the Whitney, “collecting in depth” has most often been associated with a practice of collecting an individual artist’s work extensively, through a commitment over time and across bodies of work and mediums. This approach allows for a holistic view of an artist’s work and how their practice has evolved, and it offers unique opportunities for compelling presentations and scholarship.

The idea of “depth” suggests large concentrations of items or numbers of works. At its most extreme, it can be associated with a more “completist” approach that has been of particular interest in collections of prints, photography, and film/video, or where an institution could in fact hold a complete collection of an artist’s work in these mediums.

“Collecting in depth” can also be defined more broadly, as an approach to collecting that involves concentrations not of a single artist’s work but around designated areas: for example, places in time (1980s downtown New York), movements or stylistic trends (Minimalism), or medium-specific clusters (New York School photography, LA Rebellion films). This type of “in-depth” collecting allows for certain themes and ideas to emerge through dialogues between artists and works within a given context, and is particularly useful in relation to collection displays.

### Collecting Decisions in Relation to “Depth”

We believe that the Whitney collection is most valuable when it serves as a dynamic representation of diverse artistic practices throughout the twentieth- and twenty-first century. In order to expand and build meaningful art histories within the collection around genres, regions, and ideas, we will largely curtail the more traditional idea of “collecting in depth” that is based on volume of works by a single artist. Instead, we will prioritize adding new artists to the collection (especially those whose works have been historically overlooked or understudied, such as women and artists of color) and will especially seek out artists whose work has meaningful resonance with works currently in the collection to build out more expansive art historical constellations.

Though not our primary focus, we will consider opportunities to establish areas of focus in the collection around underrepresented artists. Such in-depth holdings seek to offer a strategic complement to existing areas of extensive depth. In these cases, we will prioritize a careful choice of representative works across a career and/or cross-medium representation that best capture interdisciplinary practices, if applicable, rather than a completist approach.

When considering acquiring more works by a given artist to the collection, we will consider whether such choices would punctuate and/or meaningfully expand our existing holdings; if so, we will focus efforts on significant and strategic acquisitions that add further dimension to existing strengths. The fact that we have other works by an artist already in the collection should offer a challenge as much as a justification for adding more.

When collecting works on paper (drawings, photographs, and prints), there are cases when bringing in a carefully honed selection of more works is preferable to fewer. Such cases include:

- Works with significant display limitations for conservation reasons (color photography, watercolors, etc.)
- Small-scale works that benefit from additional examples for display presence
- Works that are part of a series or group and are more effectively shown together as part of the larger group

The following scenarios are intended to help guide decision-making when questions arise about adding to substantial existing holdings or creating new pockets of depth. As with collecting decisions around the

“American” question, such consideration should be led by the Curatorial Committee, in consultation with the Museum’s director:

- The Museum already holds an artist’s work in depth across their career and through a range of mediums:
  - Is this work of such critical importance within the artist’s oeuvre that its addition will have significant impact on the collection, despite already strong, existing representation?
  - Is this particular artist one of a very select group whose works we want to keep building on because the artist is central to the Whitney’s history and mission and/or the Whitney is the greatest repository of the artist’s work? If so, will adding this work contribute to our ability to function as a scholarly resource around a particular artist?
- An artist is being collected at a very early stage in their career:
  - Are there display constraints related to conservation considerations (e.g., those for works on paper)?
  - Will the acquisition of a group of works allow us to represent the artist’s practice more fully, across mediums or disciplines?
  - If there is not a compelling reason to acquire multiple works from this early moment, might a more selective acquisition at this time allow for more potential engagement with the artist’s work in the future?

### Collection vs. Library Special Collections

The Whitney’s collecting purview intersects, at times, with that of its Library, specifically in relation to the Library Special Collections (LSC). An introduction to the key organizational principles follows (see Appendix for complete Library Special Collections Document).

LSC chiefly acquires printed matter (rare books, artists’ books, zines, periodicals, multiples, vinyl records, and distributed material similar in scope), as well as published digital materials (digital zines, distributed files). LSC does not acquire mediums that are represented in the Whitney’s permanent collection, specifically digital artworks, drawings, installations, paintings, photographs, prints, sculptures, and time-based media.

As part of a more integrated approach, the director

of research resources will meet quarterly with the director of the collection and the curator of prints and drawings to present on new acquisitions that adhere to acquisition scope and protocols. The director of research resources will also present an annual report to the Curatorial Committee on all LSC acquisitions. For potential acquisitions that emerge throughout the year that need further consultation, the director of research resources will work with curators and the director of the collection to assess the acquisition and its relationship to the permanent collection, the Whitney's history and collection holdings by the artist or of similar materials, and review of peer practices, as well as donor relationships if applicable.

# ENGAGEMENT WITH LIVING ARTISTS

The Museum has always been committed to collecting the work of living artists, often before their work has achieved wider acceptance. This core belief is grounded in the Museum's founding mission and in Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's fundamental goal to create and foster a support system for contemporary artists through exhibitions, acquisitions, and community-building. It endures today through regular exhibitions like the Biennial as well as through the work of the Emerging Artists Working Group (EAWG). Acquisitions are an essential way in which we routinely support artists beyond the exhibition program.

## Opportunities for Engagement

Today we recognize the importance of our engagement with artists in our program, often through the necessary interactions involved with exhibition-making. The Whitney's regular Biennial exhibitions are a constant reminder of this, but so too are the extensive solo and other group exhibitions and public programming developed with living artists, whether midcareer surveys like those of Zoe Leonard, Laura Owens, or Josh Kline, or more experimental projects developed out of the EAWG. Exhibitions like *Toyin Ojih Odutola: To Wander Determined*, *Salman Toor: How Will I Know*, and *no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria* have offered critical platforms for artists and their ideas, while also serving as an opportunity for collection-building. Indeed, the increase in the Museum's programming devoted to emerging artists since 2015 has made a notable impact on the Whitney's active collecting of their work.

In order to be more intentional in developing our relationships with artists, we seek to establish a more meaningful connection when a work enters the collection—a critical first institutional interaction for many, and one that has been previously under-considered. This introduction offers an opportunity to share information about our collection and how an artist's work fits into our collecting priorities.

We acknowledge that artists have different needs and interests in terms of their relationship with the Museum, and we thus seek to establish a foundation of clear, equitable exchange across all interactions that can then be tailored or appended when needed. To do so, we aim to improve the more transactional side of the artist-museum relationship when works are entering the collection in terms of compensation, overall clarity and transparency about the acquisition process, and through our messaging of new acquisitions.

## Acquisition and Display Guidelines

In an effort to create an equitable environment that recognizes not only the significance of an artist's work entering the collection, but also the time and investment on the part of artists when their work is being presented at the Whitney, we have established a set of acquisition and display guidelines to be followed in all cases.

Acquisition notification and benefits:

- Artists will be notified when their work enters the collection, whether for the first time or for any subsequent works that are acquired. This includes

notification when works are purchased by the Museum as well as when they are acquired as gifts.

- Artists receive an Artist Lifetime Pass when work enters the collection for the first time, as well as regular invitations to openings and member updates.
- Artists will be issued an Artist Self-Identification Questionnaire that will allow them to articulate the terms under which they wish for the Museum to communicate with them. This questionnaire will also allow artists, if they choose, to offer additional information about their identity that may be relevant to an understanding of their work.
- Artists will also be issued an Object Questionnaire alongside the Self-Identification Questionnaire. This document asks specific questions about the nature of the artwork itself, including the ideas behind it and any material considerations. It is designed to help Whitney staff best care for and present the artwork in perpetuity, according to the artist's wishes.

Display notification and benefits:

- When a work is slated to be displayed on-site as part of a Whitney exhibition, the organizing curator(s) will notify the artist in a timely manner in advance of the exhibition's opening, offering to further discuss the project and proposed context. This notification does not apply to work being lent to non-Whitney loan exhibitions.
- The Whitney will pay all living artists a participation fee when a collection work is displayed on-site at the Whitney. This fee will match that paid to artists invited to exhibit non-collection works in Whitney group exhibitions, and the amount will be analyzed annually by a working group devoted to artist compensation. In both cases, the participation fee recognizes the work involved on the part of the artist when exhibiting in a group show, whether spending time in dialogue with a curator or other staff, planning a display, or reviewing label or social media copy. This fee does not apply to artist estates.

# COLLECTION USE

## Defining Collection Use

Throughout its history, the Museum has often put an emphasis on the idea of collecting a work of art with an eye to potential future displays and exhibitions, including our loan program. Discussions of whether we might “use” a given work have implied its physical display in a gallery space. Accordingly, we have maintained a robust and regular cycle of collection displays and exhibitions. Since moving downtown in 2015, the Whitney has consistently dedicated at least two of the Museum’s four major gallery floors to the collection, as well as often utilizing more modest gallery spaces on the third floor and in the Lobby for displays of works from the collection.

Through the CSP project, however, we have expanded our understanding and definition of collection use—and the notion of a work’s “usefulness” to the collection. Given the scope of our collection, we can only rarely display the great majority of our holdings. It would therefore be a mistake to consider the likelihood of a work’s future display as the primary criterion either in acquiring it or in understanding its value within our existing holdings. While we will continue to maintain a strong commitment to exhibiting the collection, we appreciate the various ways we can employ collection works beyond display, namely for education and audience engagement; to inspire research and scholarship; for publication and digital programs and resources; and as a means of supporting living artists who might benefit materially or reputationally through their inclusion in the collection.

While some aspects of use involve the study and research of works in person or online, others are

more focused on the programmatic areas of the Museum including education, online content, and our loan program. Going forward, we will strive to better balance our definition of “use” to encompass conventional display alongside the other roles and purposes our collection serves beyond an in-gallery experience at the Whitney.

## Priorities Regarding Collection Displays and Loans

In advance of the Whitney’s opening downtown, the Museum mounted a series of thematic collection displays at the Breuer building that began with *Breaking Ground: The Whitney’s Founding Collection* (2011), followed by a suite of other collection displays including *Real/Surreal* (2011–12), *Signs & Symbols* (2012), and *Sinister Pop* (2012–13). Between 2009 and 2014, collection displays at the Breuer building included 1,580 collection works (or 4.5% of the collection). By contrast, in the five years following the Whitney’s reopening downtown in 2015, the Museum mounted twenty-one collection shows, showcasing 2,714 works—nearly double the number of works from the collection. These exhibitions have served as key laboratories for exploring collection ideas, building foundational narratives about the Whitney’s collection, and prompting essential research that has productively expanded both the Museum’s holdings and overall strategies for such acquisition work.

In addition to the Whitney’s own collection displays, the Museum has maintained a practice of traveling collection exhibitions and outgoing loans. These external exhibitions offer opportunities to display works that might otherwise not be exhibited

on-site at the Whitney and to fulfill certain long-standing display requirements around a select number of large bequests to the collection. Between 2009 and 2021, the Whitney organized seventeen traveling collection shows, only six (33%) of which were shown at the Whitney before going on tour. In a targeted effort, the Museum partnered with Art Bridges from 2019 to 2021 to present the exhibition *Vantage Points: Contemporary Photography from the Whitney Museum of American Art*—drawn entirely from the collection—at three venues throughout the US. These exhibitions included 1,280 collection works. Although the Whitney is interested in such opportunities to share its holdings, organizing these exhibitions requires a great deal of staff time and resources. As a result, staffing constraints require that these traveling collection exhibitions be pursued very selectively going forward.

The Whitney also maintains a consistent practice of sharing its collection through outgoing loans. With the move downtown, and the entire collection becoming available online, the Whitney began to receive a dramatic increase in loan requests—roughly four times the number received annually prior to 2015. Despite this significant uptick in requests, the number of outgoing loans has remained static, reflecting not a lack of interest in sharing the collection but rather limited staff capacity to oversee the lending process. The number of loan-related staff members has not changed since 2015, and many departments, including Curatorial, Conservation, and Registration, are involved in reviewing each of these requests for monthly Loan Committee meetings, whether loans are approved or not. Given these staffing-related factors, and with consideration for the care of the works in our collection, the Museum plans to maintain its loan program at the current volume, which it can effectively manage and implement with the current staffing model and at professional standards.

The Whitney will continue to prioritize the use of the collection through exhibitions on site, through a select number of traveling collection exhibitions, and through our loan program. Within these three areas, however, the priority will be on-site displays, and thus certain loans or traveling collection exhibitions may not be possible if on-site usage has already been planned. These on-site collection displays will continue to serve as opportunities for experimentation, featuring a range of transhistorical presentations framed within the broader arc of American art history; more focused projects that consider a particular

artistic strategy or discrete time period; artist-driven projects; and displays that link to performance programs and other time-based projects.

### **On-Site Collection Research**

In addition to display considerations, the Whitney's collecting helps to preserve objects for research—serving in part as a material archive—through the professional care and the stewardship we offer. In certain limited cases where we have existing strengths and extensive in-depth holdings (for example, our collections of work by Edward Hopper and Roy Lichtenstein), we will strive to serve as a scholarly repository, making our holdings visible and accessible. As such in-depth holdings are often concentrated in works on paper (drawings, photographs, and prints), we will consider how to better use these deep holdings in ways that go beyond the limited opportunities we have for exhibition, such as through research, scholarship, and classes held in the Sondra Gilman Works on Paper Study Center (WOPSC).

While some object-based research occurs at our off-site storage facility, this work takes place more regularly at the WOPSC, which houses nearly two-thirds of the Museum's overall holdings with over 19,000 prints, drawings and photographs. Since opening the new building in 2015, this research center—staffed by a full-time fellow and overseen by the Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Drawings and Prints and the Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography—has served as an important site for scholarly work. Since 2015, the WOPSC has welcomed more than 1,500 visitors, and the Museum will continue to maintain an active program of on-site object research for scholars, researchers, school groups, education-related programs, and other patrons. For a Museum with a significant historical collection, this primary, object-based research provides critical opportunities to advance new scholarship. In addition, the Whitney's robust contemporary holdings offer a range of material and formal experiments that have been particularly useful for artists and art students to study. A priority for the WOPSC going forward is to further expand programming and on-site research opportunities for artists and art students. Such opportunities are yet another way in which the Museum hopes to deepen its engagement with living artists.

### **Recommendations Around Programming**

In addition to the use of the collection in exhibitions and as a scholarly resource, the CSP recommends better

utilizing the collection as a springboard for programming and audience engagement, areas typically driven by temporary exhibitions. This programming includes education programs (online and in person), digital content, and more targeted use of social media to better surface the collection. Although the Whitney has a limited number of exhibition and display opportunities for the bulk of the collection, the CSP has identified programming as another key channel through which we can explore and share the Museum's holdings. Shedding light on parts of our collection that may not be on view would also be meaningful to the significant number of living artists represented in our holdings whose work may not be on view regularly.

If the Whitney pursued more public programming opportunities around the collection, this prioritization would require an institutional shift: Working within the current staffing structure, an increase in collection-based programming would necessarily have an impact on the amount of programming for temporary exhibitions or special artist projects.

Moving ahead, we recommend prioritizing the following ideas for collection-based programming:

- Develop consistent in-person and virtual education programs around the collection.
- Continue successful online courses begun during the pandemic, such as “Art History From Home.”
- Maintain an online repository for all recorded virtual programming and make this visible and easily discoverable on whitney.org.
- Develop artist-driven programs and initiatives around works in the collection.
- Consider programming and information-sharing around new acquisitions, both internally and externally, as a way to indicate the Museum's collecting interests and engage artists new to the collection.

### **Recommendations for Sharing Collection Research and Scholarship**

The CSP recommends that the idea of “use” should be explored and understood more ambitiously around research and scholarship, including further expansion of online resources, scholarly publications, and educational opportunities around the collection, whether works are on view or not. During the pandemic, the only area of the Whitney's website that did not lose traffic was the online collection, suggesting that there is a notable and sustained interest in the Museum's collection that is not necessarily tied to visitorship.

Other digital experiments around the collection for the website and social media have shown that the Whitney's audiences are eager for “behind the scenes” stories about what goes into collection work and acquisitions. Some peer institutions have begun to include didactic information about how their collections are formed and maintained as publicly accessible parts of their websites. The CSP recommends expanding the collection portion of the Whitney's website to feature information about how the collection was formed and how it is shaped today. Such transparency can help to demystify the process of collection formation for our public and likewise help to clarify and better support the acquisition process for artists.

Collection displays do not typically have associated publications, as many temporary exhibitions do, but there is no shortage of new scholarship developed around such projects and ample opportunities exist to surface these findings beyond short-form exhibition didactics and notes tucked away in curatorial files. The CSP recommends providing greater access to collection scholarship—be it through printed or online catalogues, podcasts, or other forms—to engage established audiences, and ideally attract new ones. Such lasting records of scholarship might also help with fundraising efforts around these projects.

Specific priorities around collection research and scholarship are as follows:

- Curator essays for collection displays: Consistently publish essays online to accompany new collection exhibitions.
- Didactic material for collection: Amplify assets available through the online collection by publishing existing didactic material, such as extended labels, with objects.
- Social media presence: Better coordinate online publishing and website content with our social media outreach and vision (e.g., consider giving a more permanent place on whitney.org to content currently living only on social media platforms).
- Spanish-English resources: Prioritize bilingual labels, audio tours, and online essays for collection works in order to generate evergreen content.
- Website collection capabilities: Improve ability to search and tag areas within the online collection so that these critical resources can be more easily utilized (for researchers, teachers, etc.)
- Joint digital media/publications/collection working group: Consider establishing a working group that



could holistically and regularly discuss ways to create effective and ongoing digital content around the collection.

There is a considerable interest around digital publishing in particular, although staffing limitations remain an obstacle to more ambitious efforts. Certain initiatives, such as publishing essays for collection displays more consistently, have been successfully folded into current workflows.

# DEACCESSIONING

## History of Deaccessioning

The Whitney has maintained a limited deaccessioning program throughout its history. With the exception of two significant deaccessioning projects in 1949 and 1980, during which the Whitney refined its collection purview and deaccessioned most of its pre-1900 holdings, deaccessioning has played a minor role in managing the collection. One other notable project, though more modest in scale, involved a group of twenty-three folk art paintings that were deaccessioned by the Whitney in 1997 as a final step toward refining its purview away from nineteenth-century art.

Between 2010 and 2020, the Museum deaccessioned only five works from the collection. In these instances, work was deaccessioned to fund a particular acquisition already identified as a critical priority, the price point of which exceeded the Museum's standard sources of funding. Although these deaccessioning projects were successful in achieving the Museum's goals, many staff members have since argued for a more proactive approach to deaccessioning, in which the collection would be reviewed and assessed more broadly in order to identify potential deaccessioning candidates without the added time pressure of an impending sale. Deaccessioning proceeds could then be used for both immediate purchases as well as to help build a recently established acquisition endowment, the likes of which has not previously existed at the Museum.

## Values and Institutional Considerations Around Deaccessioning

The Whitney's current Collections Management

Policy stipulates the Museum's criteria for deaccessioning as follows:

- The act of Deaccessioning works of art from the Museum's collections requires exceptional care, reflects a museum policy, and should preserve the integrity of the collections. Deaccessioning should be carried out with at least the same degree of prudence as is exercised in acquisitions...
- Objects in the collections should be retained permanently if they continue to be useful to the purposes and activities of the Museum; if they continue to contribute to the integrity of the collections; and if they can be properly stored, preserved, and used. Objects may be deaccessioned when the above conditions no longer exist, or if it is determined that such action would ultimately improve or refine the collections, upon compliance with all legal requirements.<sup>9</sup>

The first paragraph underscores the Museum's commitment to a thorough and diligent review process for any works under consideration for deaccessioning; the second outlines the ways in which the Whitney's policy follows guidelines set forth by the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). The process is overseen by the director of the collection, in dialogue with the Curatorial Committee and with approval from the Museum's director.

9. Whitney Museum of American Art, "Collections Management Policy" (2017), 13.

In recent years, the Whitney has made targeted acquisitions through its five acquisition committees and limited discretionary funds, but more ambitious and sustained collection-building will inevitably require enhanced funding sources. Given the Museum's modest acquisition funds in an increasingly competitive market and its firm commitment to further diversifying the collection, the CSP recommends that deaccessioning become an essential tool in realizing our long-term collecting goals.

Going forward, the Whitney should approach deaccessioning as a strategic—and not reactive—practice. A more proactive approach that will help establish an ongoing deaccessioning program will serve as an essential engine to supporting our collecting priorities. Deaccessioning will serve as a critical means to enhance our new endowment fund for acquisitions, and funds raised may also be used for near-term purchases.

Deaccessioning should continue to proceed in a thoughtful and limited fashion and should follow AAMD guidelines and our own Collections Management Policy. In assessing potential candidates for deaccessioning, curatorial staff should consider whether:

- The object is not relevant to or consistent with the Museum's purposes and activities.
- The object no longer retains its physical integrity, its identity, or its authenticity (as demonstrated by a conservator's report or curatorial research).
- The object cannot be adequately cared for in a professionally acceptable manner.
- The object is an unnecessary duplicate of other objects in the collection, including objects which are repetitive of similar themes in a similar medium.
- Deaccessioning of the object, under specified circumstances, would ultimately improve or refine the collections.

Of these criteria, the last two points are the most germane to current considerations. The Whitney is dedicated to continuing to build and maintain a useful, dynamic, and diverse collection, and any deaccessioning efforts would be pursued expressly to support collection refinement. We will assess an object's "duplicative" nature in direct terms (for example, a second or third impression of the same print) but also with respect to areas of great depth in the collection. There are cases in which multiple examples of work from the same artist, same period, or same subject exist in our holdings, and

in these instances strong examples represent an artist's work far more effectively than others. Moving forward, the CSP recommends targeting for deaccessioning review those areas of weakness within great strengths of the collection. In so doing, the CSP also advises that the Whitney avoid deaccessioning works by living artists whenever possible, as well as the sole examples of an artist's work in the collection. Any exception, such as a condition issue that might make a given work no longer usable, should be considered with the utmost rigor and care. Finally, given their lack of adequate representation throughout our collection, the CSP recommends that the Whitney avoid deaccessioning works by women artists and artists of color.

# FUTURE GROWTH

## History of Collection Growth

Since its founding in 1930 the Whitney has continued to actively collect artwork for its collection, and it remains committed to growing its holdings. The rate of collection growth in the Whitney's early years, however, was markedly slower than it has become more recently. During the Museum's first decades, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and Juliana Force decided upon all acquisitions entering the collection, and this process continued until their respective deaths in 1942 and 1948. It was only after 1948 that the Whitney began to accept gift offers. Additionally, during the 1940s, the Museum reevaluated its mission and refocused its collection on twentieth-century American art, leading to the deaccessioning of its collection of nineteenth-century works in 1949 (see Deaccessioning above).

The Museum's move to the Breuer building in 1966 coincided with the formation of the first formal Acquisition Committee and the significant growth of the Museum's profile and its collection. In 1970 the Museum's collection nearly doubled in size with the Edward Hopper Bequest of 3,149 works from the artist and his wife Josephine Nivison Hopper. This period marked an increased pace of collecting, sparked in part by the formation of the Museum's medium-specific acquisition committees and its greater acceptance of gifts. In the 1980s the Museum acquired 1,590 works; in the next decade that number rose to 4,066. Since that time the number of acquisitions by decade has steadily increased, with 4,191 works acquired in the 2000s and nearly 6,000 in the 2010s.

The Whitney's collection has continued to grow rapidly by year following the Museum's move to 99 Gansevoort. From 2010 to 2020, the Whitney's collection grew over 30%, with a range of approximately 400–800 acquisitions per year. Acquisitions have entered the collection through a variety of channels and span all mediums. Over this time period, the Museum has acquired 3,876 works; gifts, promised gifts, and works purchased with funds constitute 72% of these acquisitions, a reminder of how gifts can disproportionately change the constitution of the collection.

## Staff Demands and Cost Associated with Collection Growth

In order for the Whitney to responsibly plan for the future growth of its collection, it is crucial to understand how current rates of collection growth will impact the Museum in years to come. To study the Whitney's collection growth, the Museum's Strategy department analyzed annual rates of growth between 2015 and 2020 to determine an illustrative year of growth, which averaged to 412 objects. This annual growth rate was modeled over the next twenty years through four scenarios: maintain current growth, reduce it by 25%, reduce it by 50%, or reduce it by 75% (see Appendix for Collection Analysis). The intention of this exercise was to project the collection's potential growth and to see how changes to the Museum's collecting practices might affect the size of the collection overall.

In addition to modeling future growth, the Strategy team assessed the staff time and costs associated

with growth. This study—which took shape as a robust listening tour with twenty-six staff members who oversee various parts of the acquisition process—examined collection processes, mapped current resourcing dynamics, and considered how existing mindsets about the acquisition process might be reframed going forward (see Appendix for Collection Analysis). By reviewing a set of five illustrative acquisition “journeys”—from initial research to presentation to purchase paperwork, ratification, and storage—this detailed report shed light on the significant impact acquisitions have on the Museum’s workflows and resources, even when a work is offered as a gift and no purchasing funds are used. Over the past decade, especially as acquisition rates have increased substantially, the Museum has made efforts to try to streamline systems and standardize processes, but the human resources involved in the acquisition process are strained, leading to delays and mounting backlogs.

### **Recommendations for Sustainable Rate of Growth**

In order to address these “pain points” while still maintaining the professional standards of care and stewardship to which the Whitney is committed, the CSP recommends reducing the overall rate of acquisitions to a range that allows us to build the collection with intentionality and also recognizes the budget and staff time involved in stewarding the collection effectively. The Whitney should strive to keep the number of annual acquisitions in the vicinity of 250 works per year, which is significantly lower than the illustrative year based on the Whitney’s 2015–2020 collecting but close to the annual rates between 2020 and 2022. During these recent years we have learned that this smaller number of objects could nonetheless make a critical impact and achieve our goals with greater clarity and effectiveness. Setting an approximate annual target helps to focus our efforts on the most meaningful acquisitions, manage the complex and time-consuming work acquisitions require, partly alleviate long-term storage concerns, and encourage us to turn down unwanted gifts. By contrast, continuing to grow the collection at the 2019 rate of 879 works, for example—a year that included not only a standard flow of acquisitions but also a large, single-artist gift—would put unmanageable strain on current staff and storage. To keep up with this rate of collecting and manage current processes, the CSP recommends adding one full-time staff position within the Documentation department to help oversee acquisition processing and ongoing

collection work. If the Whitney wishes to increase the number of annual acquisitions in a given year beyond the range of 250 works, the CSP recommends that the Museum prepare accordingly with concomitant staffing and budget dollars.

# COLLECTING PRIORITIES

As part of the recommendations set forth by the CSP, the Whitney will continue to grow its collection, seeking to do so with heightened focus and intentionality. We recognize, however, the impossibility of prioritizing all collection areas, having neither the financial resources nor the storage or staff capacity to do so. Instead, we will develop the collection with rigor and care, acknowledging the significance of each acquisition as we expand our holdings in ways that reflect the Whitney's values today, forging important groundwork for the years to come.

What follows is a set of priorities, culled from myriad areas of research, that we identified during the development of the CSP from 2019 to 2023, acknowledging that there are other areas of interest that we expect to receive further attention in the future. For example, the present document does not articulate collecting priorities around specific mediums and therefore omits setting priorities around performance or digitally based work—two areas of significant interest to the Museum and of notable curatorial and programmatic expertise. Developing the collection around performance—an area where we have done limited collecting thus far—remains a future consideration. By contrast, over the past several years, we have been building our collection of digital art systematically—with acquisition support from our Digital Art Committee—and this remains an area in which to actively collect. The enhancement of this focus area occurs in conjunction with a greater emphasis on digital art in the Museum's exhibition programming and institution-wide initiatives.

## Objectives for Key Areas of Focus

Throughout the Museum's history, particular areas of collecting strength and focus have developed, notably around mid-century photography, pre-war social realist work, our in-depth collection of work by Edward Hopper and, more recently, our leading collection of time-based film and video work. These collecting areas have developed over time and in varying ways but remain important cornerstones of the collection. While the work of the CSP has underscored the importance of developing new collection strengths, we value these existing ones and continue to think carefully about the relationship between these areas and future priorities. If a collection area is not identified as a priority for future collecting, this does not reflect a lack of institutional interest. Rather, it is precisely because some areas of the collection are already so well-represented that we have turned our priorities to areas in need of future growth.

Fueled by our mission and by the narratives we wish to further develop within our holdings, the Whitney has established six areas of focus for collection-building that we will prioritize over the next five to ten years. These areas are based on the Whitney's foundational aspirations (e.g., the support of living artists) and—perhaps more significantly—on demographic research that revealed the stark underrepresentation of women and artists of color within our holdings. These collecting priorities include:

- Emerging artists
- Indigenous artists
- Latinx artists

- Asian American artists
- Black artists pre-1970
- Women artists pre-1970

These six priority areas have myriad intersectionalities and this list is not intended to limit a fuller understanding of artists' identities but rather to point to broad areas of artmaking in which the collection is underdeveloped. Overall, these areas represent the Museum's commitment to further diversifying the collection. While this work has been a focus for several years, artists of color still constitute only 7% of the total artists in the collection, with women artists representing merely 16% (see Appendix for Collection Analysis). Given the considerable work still to be done, these priority areas for developing the collection will continue to evolve over time, and new insights will grow directly out of this research.

### Process and Methodology

These six areas of focus were defined and developed in close collaboration with the curatorial department as well as through input from outside scholars and our institutional participation in larger convenings with academic and museum colleagues.

These areas correspond to a range of existing holdings—some more developed than others—and build upon varying degrees of prior collection research. For the areas involving emerging artists, Indigenous artists, and Latinx artists, the Museum has been engaged in focused research and thinking for several years, building on the consistent work of the Biennials and the internal working groups for emerging artists (EAWG, established in 2015) and Indigenous artists (IAWG, established in 2017). Our ongoing dedicated Latinx research has been led since 2017 by Marcela Guerrero, the DeMartini Family Curator, and in collaboration with a field-specific fellow since 2019. The other priority areas—Asian American artists, Black artists pre-1970, and Women artists pre-1970—have not been supported by dedicated research initiatives at the Museum; however, important work has been realized through independent curatorial research and in conjunction with our collection exhibitions. Critical foundational work in these areas was a significant part of the lead up to the 2015 opening of the Whitney's downtown building, with many new acquisitions featured in the accompanying inaugural exhibition *America Is Hard to See*.

To develop the following recommendations, research in each area was spearheaded by participants in

existing working groups or by CSP team members who pursued independent research and collected departmental feedback. For two of these areas—Asian American artists and Black artists pre-1970—the CSP team commissioned feedback from external scholars operating at the forefront of their respective fields: Marci Kwon and Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, co-founders of the Asian American Art Initiative at Stanford University, and LeRonn P. Brooks, curator at the Getty Research Institute and its African American Art History Initiative.

At present, the Museum does not systematically collect demographic data for artists in the collection. We are in the process of developing an Artist Self-Identification Questionnaire that will allow for self-identification through as many intersectional identities as applicable. The CSP recommends that after this questionnaire is finalized, it be shared with all artists entering the collection, who will then have the chance to periodically update their responses. The CSP also recommends that the Museum survey all living artists already in the collection so they may have the opportunity to share this data even if our new policy post-dates their entry into the collection. Since this research precedes a finalized questionnaire, we have assigned identity-based information as responsibly as possible, based on citations from at least three interviews/articles that state traits of an artist's identity. While imperfect, even this preliminary and schematic data reveals stark inequities for representation in the collection, indicating the significant work to be done. Going forward, we will seek to incorporate self-identification data into our research but will continue to follow the current research-based methodology for artists who choose not to fill out the questionnaire and for deceased artists who are unable to self-identify.

The sections that follow—each dedicated to one of the six priority areas—aim to articulate the critical importance of developing these areas of the Whitney's collection. Each section offers a brief analysis of the respective collecting area as well as key historical background and context that helped shape the recommendations for our path forward. Separate internal working documents for each area include more specific recommendations for the collection and are used and updated regularly by curatorial staff.

### Emerging Artists

While a focus on the contributions of American artists was essential to the Museum's founding, the Whitney also emphasized its support of contemporary art and

artists from the beginning. As stated in the Whitney's 1937 collection catalogue: "The Museum is concerned primarily with the work of living artists... Our chief concern is with contemporary art. We conceive the Museum's most important function to be, not that of merely conserving a tradition, but that of playing a part in the creative processes of our own time."<sup>10</sup> This ethos of support for living artists, and emerging artists in particular, is a collecting focus and programmatic strength the Whitney should continue to prioritize, and it is consistent with the renewed institutional focus in this area since the opening of the new building in 2015. In addition to being an essential aspect of our founding and institutional DNA, it is notably connected to our ongoing presentations of Whitney Biennials, which routinely and critically survey the landscape of contemporary art.

#### Methodology and Terminology

The term "emerging" has often been associated with an artist's age or the early stages of an artistic career, but the Whitney uses this term to reflect an artist's rising visibility in the fields of contemporary art and culture. A constellation of additional terms may also be used in the future when defining this aspect of the collection and program, including but not limited to "early career," "emergent," and "overlooked," as appropriate.

#### Historical Background

Artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney founded the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1930—and the preceding Whitney Studio, Whitney Studio Club, and Whitney Studio Galleries in 1914, 1918, and 1928 respectively—with the express purpose of supporting and exhibiting the work of living American artists. From her personal experience, Whitney recognized the challenges American artists faced in exhibiting and selling their work in an art market largely dominated by their European contemporaries. Beyond acknowledging the contemporary contributions of American artists, the Whitney Museum noted from the outset a desire to introduce new voices to the field, an emphasis that we might consider today as an interest in "emerging artists." As outlined in the 1937 Catalogue of the Collection:

It has always been the Museum's aim to give early recognition to new talent. While realizing fully the importance of maturity and established reputation,

we desire also to keep our doors open to the leaders of the future. In every exhibition a considerable proportion of the work has been by artists who have not been represented in the Museum before. In this way we hope to keep in touch with every vital manifestation of contemporary art.<sup>11</sup>

This commitment to the contemporary, and with it new and emerging artists, has defined the Whitney's exhibition history and collecting practices since the Museum's founding, most notably, the Whitney's Annuals and Biennials which began in 1932 and continue to this day. While the nature of the Biennial has changed over time, the exhibition has become synonymous with current trends in contemporary artmaking in the United States and remains an important platform for emerging artists.

Alongside Annuals and Biennials, the Whitney continued its commitment to showcasing new art and ideas through dedicated exhibition programming. With the move to the Breuer building in 1966, the Museum began a fast-paced series of lobby gallery exhibitions focused on the work of younger and/or emerging artists. These solo exhibitions, which rotated every two months, featured the work of then-emerging artists like Vija Celmins, Melvin Edwards, and Kenneth Price. These efforts were additionally augmented by dynamic film and performance programs (e.g., the New American Filmmakers Series, curated by John Hanhardt) that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and helped to solidify the Whitney's role as a pivotal player in cross-medium dialogues around contemporary art.

Many of these programs took place at the Whitney's branch museums, the first of which opened in 1973 and the last of which closed in 2008. Located throughout the City and the Tri-State area, branch museums like Philip Morris/Altria afforded the Museum additional space to explore and present the work of younger, less-established artists. In addition, the branch museums served as a home for the Whitney's Independent Study Program (ISP) and as a key site for rising curators, like Thelma Golden and Lisa Phillips, to workshop emergent ideas beyond the Breuer building.

With the closing of the Whitney's final branch museum and in advance of the move downtown, the

10. Juliana Force, "Aims and Activities," in *Whitney Museum of American Art: History, Purpose, Activities (Catalogue of the Collection to June, 1937)*

(New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1937), 5–6.

11. Force, "Aims and Activities," 6.



Museum began to increase its programmatic interest in emerging artists at the Breuer building outside of the context of Biennials. Intermixed with solo exhibitions of well-known American artists such as Edward Hopper, Richard Artschwager, and Glenn Ligon were shows featuring the work of younger artists like Trisha Baga, Stewart Uoo and Jana Euler, and Sara VanDerBeek. This impulse indicated a shift in the way the Museum would consider and present the work of emerging and less-established artists with its move downtown.

### Recent Initiatives

In 2015, just before the Museum's opening at 99 Gansevoort Street, the Whitney inaugurated the Emerging Artist Working Group (EAWG)—a small, in-house think tank of curators and educators focused on the Museum's engagement with emerging artists, both through the exhibition program and the collection. The new downtown location, near the high concentration of commercial galleries in Chelsea, Tribeca, and the Lower East Side and notable non-profit spaces such as The Kitchen, White Columns, and Artists Space, placed the Whitney squarely within the ecosystem of New York's contemporary art world. The site also renewed the Museum's dialogue with its own downtown history as well as the legacies of numerous artist communities that grew out of lower Manhattan. The EAWG's work has yielded a series of emerging artist projects and exhibitions that have strengthened the Whitney's commitment to emerging artists and untested ideas alongside its ongoing engagement with more established artists and thematic shows drawn from the Museum's collection.

Since the Museum's move downtown, the Whitney has mounted over twenty-one projects exclusively focused on emerging artists, with over seventeen more that have featured the work of emerging artists. Together, these projects and shows have composed 42% of the Whitney's total programming (solo, group, and collection exhibitions, performances, and Artport commissions) since the move downtown, which denotes a significant increase in this type of programming in comparison to the five years prior to the move. In addition, the EAWG launched a series of online essays devoted to emerging artist projects on the Whitney's website and has worked with various departments across the Museum to conceptualize public programming, patron events, and educational courses focused on and in dialogue with emerging artists and their work.

This increase in the Museum's programming devoted to emerging artists has had a notable impact

on the Whitney's active collecting of this work. While collecting the work of artists early in their careers has always been an important part of the Whitney's mission and values, this increased engagement has augmented the number of works by emerging artists both considered by the Museum's acquisition committees and offered as gifts.

### **Indigenous Artists**

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work to build a more equitable collection that robustly includes work by Indigenous artists—both historical and contemporary.

### Collection Analysis

The Whitney's lack of representation of Indigenous artists in the collection and exhibition program has been particularly stark. As of July 2022, Indigenous artists account for fewer than 1% of all artists in the collection, making this area a key priority of growth for the Whitney. Works by Indigenous artists still make up less than 0.5% of the collection overall, and the majority of these works (nearly 70%) entered the collection after the Whitney's move to 99 Gansevoort Street in 2015.

### Methodology and Terminology

In using the term "Indigenous," we refer to its broad application beyond the American context, following the definition set out by the First Nations and Indigenous Studies program at the University of British Columbia:

Indigenous is a term used to encompass a variety of Aboriginal groups. It is most frequently used in an international, transnational, or global context. This term came into wide usage during the 1970s when Aboriginal groups organized transnationally and pushed for greater presence in the United Nations (UN). In the UN, "Indigenous" is used to refer broadly to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement, and settlement of their traditional territories by others.<sup>12</sup>

12 . First Nations and Indigenous Studies UBC. "Terminology." Indigenous Foundations. <https://>

[indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/).

The terms “Native American” and “American Indian” are generally acceptable, though it is essential that the name of a specific nation be used when identifying an individual or individual nation whenever possible. Individuals may also have specific preferences that should be honored over any institutional standards.

#### Historical Background

Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney founded the Whitney Museum in 1930 driven by the belief, as Hermon More wrote, “that America has an important contribution to make in the arts” (see “Introduction” in this document). But this dedication to “American” impact did not account for the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous peoples within the present-day United States.

In the earliest years of the Whitney’s collection, only one work was created by an Indigenous artist: Nancy Elizabeth Prophet’s *Congolais* (1931), purchased by the Museum in 1932. Another work by an Indigenous artist would not enter the collection until twenty-five years later, when George Morrison’s *The Antagonist* (1956) was acquired in 1957, a year after Morrison’s inclusion in the 1956 Annual Exhibition. Overall, the Whitney only acquired thirty-two works by ten Indigenous artists prior to the Museum’s move to 99 Gansevoort Street, over eighty years of collecting. This marked oversight of the contributions of Indigenous artists in the Whitney’s collection is matched by a lack of representation in the Museum’s exhibition program as well. The Whitney did not mount a solo project of work by an Indigenous artist until 2017, when it presented an exhibition on Jimmie Durham (who identified as Cherokee). Several other exhibitions followed, featuring key figures such as Alan Michelson (Mohawk member of Six Nations of the Grand River), Andrea Carlson (Grand Portage Ojibwe), and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation)—all of which took place after the Whitney’s move downtown, in 2019, 2021, and 2023, respectively.

#### Recent Initiatives

Durham’s exhibition, *Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World* (2017–18), which traveled to the Whitney from the Hammer Museum, revived longstanding debates about the artist’s self-identification as Cherokee, and about Native American tribal sovereignty. These conversations sparked the formation in 2017 of the Whitney’s Indigenous Artist Working Group (IAWG), a small internal think tank of curators and educators convened in order to learn about the field of Native American art and to think critically and

collectively about the place of Indigenous art in the Whitney’s collection and program. Since the formation of the IAWG, the Whitney has made more intentional efforts to engage with Indigenous communities and scholars; collect and exhibit works by Indigenous artists; and address questions around the Museum’s site.

As part of the work of the IAWG, the Museum has engaged with several leading scholars and curators of Native American art, initiated conversations with critical voices in the Native artist community, and participated in relevant symposia, exhibitions, and events. For the CSP’s 2023 public symposium, *Making Collections Matter*, the team invited Candice Hopkins, executive director and chief curator of the Forge Project, to share her work with Forge and reflect on the ways museums can reconsider their engagement with Indigenous communities and the objects they steward. The Whitney has also continued to grow its community partnership with the American Indian Community House in New York, including hosting the Community House’s monthly social and offering special tours for their members. Finally, the IAWG worked with Lenape elders over several years to develop a land acknowledgement that was published on the Whitney’s website in September 2022.

Looking ahead with regard to collection development, the CSP (in conjunction with the IAWG) has considered what fundamental understandings are required for productively collecting the work of Indigenous artists. This began with clarifying language, defining key terms, and rethinking how we speak about work in our collection, including expanded ideas of care and dialogue. We have considered two different methodologies for approaching building a collection of art by Indigenous artists—chronological and place-based—and propose using both models as we move ahead. A chronological methodology is rooted in our current understanding of museum collections, displays, and art history and encourages the development of holdings across time periods and generations; place-based methodologies, on the other hand, allow us to start where we are, considering the importance of communities and local histories. As we continue to build this critical but profoundly underrepresented area of the collection, we seek to do so through ongoing dialogues and a holistic approach.

#### **Latinx Artists**

As a museum of American art in the United States, and one located in New York, a city whose population is 28% Latinx, the Whitney is dedicated to

addressing the historical exclusion of Latinx artists from its collection and program. The Museum seeks to improve its representation of Latinx artists with care, expertise, nuance, and by applying a methodology that follows the lead of artists and experts in the field of Latinx art and allows for a capacious and complex definition of Latinx.

### Collection Analysis

As of July 2022, artworks by Latinx artists constitute roughly 1.7% of works in the Whitney's collection, and Latinx artists make up 3.5% of artists represented in the collection. Since 2015, the Whitney has acquired over 250 new artworks by Latinx artists; these recent acquisitions account for more than half of all artworks by Latinx artists in the collection. Additionally, the percentage of Latinx artists per Whitney Biennial has continued to rise, with 12% in the 2017 Biennial (the first in the new building); 15% in 2019's iteration; and 22% in 2022.

### Methodology and Terminology

Developed originally in the early 2000s, the term "Latinx" was predominantly adopted by members of the LGBTQIA+ community to replace "Hispanic," "Latino," "Latina/o," and "Latin@" and to purposefully break with the male/female binary inherent to the Spanish language. In Spanish, nouns are either masculine, generally indicated by an "-o" ending (Latino), or feminine, indicated by "-a" (Latina). With Latinx, "-x" is used to connote an unspecified gender. In 2018, the term Latinx entered Merriam-Webster's dictionary, where it was defined as an adjective meaning "of, relating to, or marked by Latin American heritage: LATINE" and "used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latina or Latino."<sup>13</sup>

In building our own framework internally, we looked to the artist Teresita Fernández, who offered the following explanation when asked about her use of the term "Latinx" in an interview with the Ford Foundation's Margaret Morton:

It is quickly gaining mainstream use as part of a "linguistic revolution" that aims to move beyond gender binaries, and is inclusive of the intersecting identities of Latin American descendants living in the US. The term implies a new conversation, one that purposefully seeks to address the intersectionalities that Latinxs represent across race, class, and nonbinary gender. As an inclusive term, it also gives a very specific space to young Latinxs.<sup>14</sup>

As any term that encompasses large groups of people under one category, the concept "Latinx" is not without detractors. At the Whitney, we recognize the history of the term and acknowledge that while it has been deployed successfully in activist circles, the term—and the intentions behind its use—might be seen with skepticism when applied in the context of a mainstream museum such as the Whitney.

With this in mind, the CSP proposes that the Museum's approach should follow the lead of artists and lean into the intersectional and fluid nature of the term itself. Our approach is to respect artists' self-identification in terms of cultural and ethnic background, which in the case of Latinx artists tends to be defined by one's family's country/countries of origin (e.g., "Salvadorean" or "Mexican and Puerto Rican"), and only use the category of "Latinx"—as defined by Merriam-Webster—in the aggregate.

### Historical Background

Since the Whitney's founding, the Museum has presented fifteen solo exhibitions focused on Latinx artists. The first of these projects—featuring the work of Rafael Ferrer—took place in 1971–72 in the lobby gallery of the Breuer building. Several more decades would pass before the next exhibition to focus on the work of a Latinx artist, in 1991, ending a twenty-year period during which no works by Latinx artists were acquired by the Museum or exhibited outside of Biennials. Ten of the remaining twelve shows took place through the 1990s and early 2000s; the majority of these were exhibited at the Whitney's branch museums or in smaller gallery spaces throughout the Breuer building.

Shortly after the move to 99 Gansevoort Street, the Whitney mounted a retrospective exhibition of work by Carmen Herrera in 2016, marking the first solo exhibition of a Latinx artist since 2004. In the following years, the Whitney has steadily exhibited the work of Latinx artists through solo, group, and Biennial presentations, which has led in turn to an increase in acquisitions of both historical and emerging work by Latinx artists.

13. Merriam-Webster. "Latinx." Merriam-Webster.com. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Latinx>.

14. Margaret Morton. "The future of the arts is Latinx: Q&A with artist Teresita Fernandez." Ford Foundation (2016). <https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/stories/the-future-of-the-arts-is-latinx-qa-with-artistteresita-fernandez/>.

### Recent Initiatives

After the Herrera exhibition, which prompted the Museum to think critically about its future representation of Latinx artists in the program and the collection, the Whitney's Nancy and Steve Crown Family Chief Curator Scott Rothkopf sought to add expertise through staffing. In 2017, the Whitney hired Marcela Guerrero, the Museum's first-ever Latinx curator. In addition to her expertise in Latinx and Latin American art and artists, Guerrero brought a keen commitment to reshaping the Whitney's telling of "American" art history, both through its collection and exhibition program.

Having a specialist on the curatorial staff has brought about significant growth in the representation of Latinx art and artists at the Whitney, and the way the Museum thinks about its audiences. Guerrero has curated two significant group exhibitions focused on the work of emerging Latinx artists: *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art* (2018), and most recently, *no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria* (2022–23), the first survey of Puerto Rican art at a major US museum in fifty years. In addition to these exhibitions, Guerrero has helped to steward a number of significant acquisitions, collaborating with other curators in the department to add more than two hundred works by Latinx artists. A field-specific fellowship in US Latinx art, established in 2019, provides additional support within the curatorial department. Finally, the Whitney now hosts a Latinx Art, Artists, and Audiences Working Group, which considers Latinx initiatives across all of the Museum's functions. Important ongoing initiatives include the development of bilingual didactics for all of the Museum's exhibitions, a major milestone that reflects the Whitney's desire to better serve the city's significant Spanish-speaking communities.

### **Asian American Artists**

The CSP has identified gaps in the collection of work by Asian American artists and calls for a renewed engagement with this research area. The CSP enlists the term "Asian American" in a multivalent sense rather than as a fixed or essentializing idea.

### Collection Analysis

As part of the CSP work, the Museum conducted an internal review of its holdings by Asian American artists in the collection. As of July 2022, artists of Asian descent represented 3.6% of all artists in the collection, and works by these artists account

for 1.9% of all works in the collection. Finally, of the artists of Asian descent represented in the Whitney's collection, artists of East Asian descent far outnumber those with roots in different regions such as South and Southeast Asia.

### Methodology and Terminology

The CSP recognizes that current discussions in the field have evolved over the last few years, with new projects like the Asian American Art Initiative of the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University providing novel groundwork for methodological and terminological approaches. At the outset of this initiative, the CSP adopted the term "Asian American," but shifted in 2022 to "Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)"—a term that is still commonly used today—only to revert to "Asian American" at the recommendations of Marci Kwon, Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, and other key thinkers in the field. The CSP now uses "Asian American" as a capacious term while acknowledging that future shifts in the field will continue to hone the Museum's engagement with relevant terminology, methodologies, and categorization.

### Historical Background

The Whitney acquired its first works by artists of Asian descent—one by Isamu Noguchi and eleven by Yasuo Kuniyoshi—as part of its founding collection and through early purchases. The Museum did not host any exhibitions dedicated to Asian American art, however, until 1948, when the institution organized its first-ever exhibition of a living artist, a retrospective of the works of Kuniyoshi. Twenty years passed before another exhibition—a solo show in 1968 on the work of Isamu Noguchi—offered Asian American representation. These two exhibitions, featuring work by Japanese Americans with ties to New York, underscored the Museum's early inclination toward artists with ties to East Asia.

These geographic leanings during the Whitney's first few decades can be partly understood in the context of American events: the anti-Chinese and anti-South and Southeast Asian immigration quotas established in the nineteenth and twentieth century exclusion and immigration acts remained in place until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 loosened these restrictions. Soon after, in 1968 (the year of the Museum's Noguchi exhibition), student protesters at the University of California, Berkeley would coin the phrase "Asian American" as a term that celebrated rather than diminished people with

multivalent Asian diasporic trajectories, opening up conversations to better include communities from different geographic backgrounds.

The expanding discourse on Asian American identity in the 1970s and 1980s undergirded new collection and exhibition strategies at the Museum, especially programming by curator John Hanhardt. In 1979, for example, Hanhardt organized *Shigeko Kubota/Taka Jimura: New Video*; the display of Kubota's work made this the first show at the Whitney highlighting work by a Japanese American woman artist. In addition, in 1982 Hanhardt curated a showcase of works by Korean American artist Nam June Paik. The Museum marked its first presentation of work by an Asian American artist with roots outside of East Asia in 1986 with *Images of Culture: The Films of Trinh T. Minh-Ha*, curated by Lucinda Furlong.

From the 1990s onwards, Asian American representation in all aspects of the Museum's activities would increasingly garner attention—and public critique. Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network, an important collective of New York-based artists and thinkers, famously wrote a letter to the Museum's director David Ross in 1991 criticizing the lack of Asian American artists in the Biennial of the same year. In response, Ross invited the group to meet at the Museum, and, in 1993, the subsequent Whitney Biennial included a record number of works by artists of Asian descent. A year later, Eugenie Tsai, a member of Godzilla, was hired by the Museum as a curator; Tsai would organize several important exhibitions devoted to Asian American artists, including *Multiple/Dialogue: Nam June Paik & Ik-Joong Kang* (1994); *Evidence of Memory: Tomie Arai and Lynne Yamamoto* (1996); and *Whitney Philip Morris: Wall Drawings by Byron Kim* (1999).

#### Recent Initiatives

Important exhibitions organized by the Museum since 2000 have continued to expand representation of the diversities and pluralities of Asian American art and artists. In 2000, *Shahzia Sikander: Acts of Balance*, at the Whitney's Philip Morris branch, represented an institutional milestone in featuring work by an artist from South Asia, and other exhibitions and projects followed, most recently *Salman Toor: How Will I Know* (2020). The majority of the Museum's exhibitions and projects in recent years have featured artists of East Asian descent, including Yuji Agematsu, Ruth Asawa, Christine Sun Kim, Josh Kline, Takehisa Kosugi, and Do Ho Suh, among others.

Over the last few years, Asian American discourse has gained renewed scholarly attention, leading to a number of notable initiatives, publications, and actions to which the CSP has looked for examples, ideas, and relevant models. Such initiatives include the Asian American Art Initiative (AAAI) at Stanford University, founded by scholar and faculty member Marci Kwon and Cantor Arts Center curator Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander. This program, which aims to be the leading academic and curatorial center for the study of Asian American and Asian diasporic artists, was launched in 2021 and has already amassed important archives, including the holdings of Ruth Asawa and Bernice Bing; organized a major symposium in fall 2022, *IMU UR2: Art, Aesthetics, and Asian America*; produced the online catalogue raisonné for Martin Wong; and presented the exhibition *East of the Pacific: Making Histories of Asian American Art* (2022–23) at the Cantor. Kwon and Alexander served as external reviewers of this section of the CSP project, assessing the Whitney's collection and providing critical feedback as leading scholars in the field.

Looking ahead, the CSP recommends developing the Whitney's holdings of works by Asian American artists according to a set of broad strategies. These include: challenging the idea of a single "Asian America" and assumptions of cultural nationalism; interpreting and making visible a complex series of immigration and diasporic narratives; interrogating "Asian American" as a term that considers the United States' historically restrictive, anti-Asian immigration laws that have often made obtaining legal paperwork impossible (e.g., the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 Immigration Act); and observing and illuminating a set of connections among East, Southeast, and South Asia and the Americas, with room for future engagement with historically overlooked regions like the Pacific Islands and the Middle East (i.e. West Asia) as conversations continue to evolve.

#### **Black Artists Pre-1970**

The CSP has identified a critical underrepresentation of pre-1970 work by Black artists in the Whitney's collection and has determined that the Whitney's current holdings prevent the Museum from telling an inclusive story of American art. In order to account for the integral and essential contributions of early twentieth-century Black artists to the histories of American art that the Museum strives to impart, the Whitney is dedicated to making this an area of collecting focus and responsibility.

### Collection Analysis

As of July 2022, the Whitney's collection analysis showed that 3% of all works in the collection were works created by Black artists and just over 6% of artists in the collection are Black. Our findings further revealed significant underrepresentation of works by Black artists before 1970. Of the pre-1970 artworks in the collection, only 1.3% were works by Black artists (compared with 21% of our holdings of artworks made between 2010 and 2022). Given this assessment, the CSP team determined that the development of the pre-1970 collection of works by Black artists should be prioritized.

### Methodology and Terminology

Throughout its recommendations and research, the CSP uses the term "Black" to refer to artists of African (including Afro-Latinx and Afro-Caribbean) descent. This term has been consistently used by artists and key art organizations (including the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition [BECC] and Black Arts Movement) beginning in the 1960s. The term has also been used by the Whitney in notable exhibitions such as *Contemporary Black Artists in America* (1971; see historical background below) and *Black Male* (1994–95).

### Historical Background

The Whitney's relatively scant holdings of works by Black artists made before 1970 is a result of many converging factors of racial bias within both the Museum and the field of art history. Of particular significance in the Whitney's specific history with Black artists was the emergence of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC). The BECC formed in 1968 around an initial site of protest: the Whitney's survey exhibition, *The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America*, curated by William C. Agee, which failed to include any work by Black artists. The organizers called on the Whitney (and other NYC museums) to rectify the lack of representation of Black artists in its program and collection, but also of Black curators and museum professionals within the institution.

Pressure on the Museum from the BECC during this period led to the first-ever solo exhibition of a Black artist at the Whitney, *Alvin Loving: Paintings* (1969–70), curated by Marcia Tucker. This was followed by a series of solo exhibitions of Black artists in the Breuer building's lobby gallery from 1970 to 1973. Though these efforts marked a significant shift in the representation of Black artists at the Whitney, the gains were limited. These exhibitions of Black artists

were held exclusively in the lobby gallery—an insistent symbol of artistic segregation and devaluation—and director John Baur did not hire a Black curator as part of the Museum staff despite pressure from artists and protestors. In 1971, the Museum's *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition, organized by curator Robert Doty, drew further protest for its failure to consult Black curators, spurring many exhibiting artists to withdraw from the exhibition and prompting the organization of a counter-exhibition by the BECC (*Rebuttal to the Whitney Museum Exhibition: Black Artists in Rebuttal*, 1971).

Immediately following this 1971 controversy, the Museum's negotiations with the BECC dissolved. Nonetheless, the period marks an important phase in the Whitney's relationship with showing and collecting work by Black artists. The lobby gallery exhibitions represent the Museum's first efforts to collect the work of Black artists and key works were acquired out of this program (including ones by Malcolm Bailey, Frank Bowling, Fred Eversley, Marvin Harden, Alvin Loving, Robert Reed, and Alma Thomas). Yet there were no systematic collection efforts in place, a missed opportunity that resulted in the Museum not acquiring works from several other artists shown at the time. Several years later the Whitney organized its first historical survey of a Black artist: *Jacob Lawrence* (1974). It would be more than a decade until the Museum hired its first Black curator, Thelma Golden, in 1988—twenty years after the start of the BECC protests.

### Recent Initiatives

As part of the planning for *America Is Hard to See* in 2015, the curatorial department created an "Acquisition Research Diversity Initiative" on Black artists. Unlike some of the other collection initiatives undertaken in the planning for this exhibition, the Museum relied on research efforts of existing curatorial staff rather than engaging external consultants. The occasion of this project led to several targeted acquisitions of key works by historical Black artists, including Melvin Edwards, Jack Whitten, Elizabeth Catlett, and Eldzier Cortor, whose work was not represented in the collection even though it had been included in prior Whitney exhibitions.

More recently, the Museum has strategically deaccessioned duplicative works by artists already well-represented in the collection with the express aim of raising funds to diversify its holdings of pre-1970 artwork by Black artists. In 2015, the Whitney used proceeds from the sale of an Edward Hopper

watercolor to fund the purchase of Archibald John Motley, Jr.'s *Gettin' Religion* (1948) on the occasion of the Museum's Motley survey. In 2018, the sale of an Adolph Gottlieb painting helped fund the purchase of Norman Lewis's *American Totem* (1960). Through acquisition committee purchases from 2015 to the present, there have been a number of other key acquisitions of pre-1970 artworks by Black artists, and targeted acquisitions in this area continue to be a major priority in collection development.

In developing its recommendations and approach to this research area, the CSP team looked to existing research initiatives that are building key resources around the contributions of Black artists to American art history. LeRonn P. Brooks, curator at the Getty Research Institute (GRI), shared insights from the GRI's ongoing African American Art History Initiative (AAAH), which seeks to be a center for the study of African American art history. Founded in 2018 and led by Brooks since 2019, the AAAH focuses on the history, practices, and cultural legacies of artists of African American and African diasporic heritage through developing library and archival resources, producing oral histories, and promoting dialogue and partnerships through exhibitions, publications, and public programs. Such initiatives are building knowledge and resources that aim to reshape how American art history is told.

### **Women Artists Pre-1970**

The Whitney recognizes the contributions of women artists as essential to American art history. To build a more diverse and inclusive collection, the CSP underscores the need to better represent the work of women artists pre-1970 to correct legacies of omission and gender bias, especially in the prewar period. The Whitney acknowledges this category as inherently intersectional, occupying a range of lived experiences, material practices, and geographic considerations.

### Collection Analysis

The findings from the Museum's June 2022 study determined that only 16.4% of works in the collection were made by women artists, and the majority of these works are dated post-1970. In fact, there are 2.5x more works by women artists in the Whitney's holdings after 1970 as there are before, further acknowledging the importance of focusing on building this earlier period in the collection.

### Methodology and Terminology

The CSP uses the term "women artists" as an expansive

term that is inclusive of trans women and acknowledges gender identity as an individual's reality and not a personal choice. The term "female-identifying" was initially adopted with the intention of being more inclusive; however, after consulting best practices in the field of gender and sexuality studies and data demographics, the CSP team ultimately determined "women artists" to be the most appropriate term to reflect history (the Women's Rights Movement, Womanhouse, etc.) and present concerns.

### Historical Background

The Whitney Museum of American Art was established in 1930 under the leadership of two women: the Museum's founder, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, and its first director Juliana Force. The Museum's founding collection grew out of Mrs. Whitney's personal holdings of approximately four hundred objects, which she and Force would augment to 998 in advance of the Museum's official opening in 1931 on West Eighth Street. Of these initial 998 works, 11% were produced by women artists. In turn, of the total 226 artists represented, 17% were women. These numbers are similarly reflected in the Whitney's First Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting (1932–33), in which twenty of the 157 artists shown were women.

From the Museum's founding until 1970, the Whitney organized only seven solo presentations of work by women artists. The first was a 1943 memorial display of works by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, following her passing the year prior. The Whitney would not mount another show focused on the work of women artists until a decade later, in 1953, with concurrent retrospective exhibitions of Loren MacIver and I. Rice Pereira. The next solo retrospective of a woman artist would not occur until 1967 with an exhibition of the work of Louise Nevelson; this would be Nevelson's first museum retrospective and undoubtedly influenced her 1969 gift of seventy-one works to the Whitney. Nevelson's retrospective was followed by exhibitions of work by Helen Frankenthaler (1969), Nancy Graves (1969), Georgia O'Keeffe (1970), and Lee Lozano (1970). By the time of their respective exhibitions, both Nevelson and O'Keeffe were in their eighties, while Graves was the youngest artist ever to have exhibited at the Whitney.

In May 1970, the Whitney entered into a series of conversations with the Women Artists in Revolution (WAR); Art Workers' Coalition (AWC); and Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation (WSABAL) to discuss the Museum's lack of representation of

women artists and artists of color. These conversations grew out of earlier protests and actions at the Whitney and other museums across the city, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, led by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) and AWC starting in 1969 (see historical background on Black artists pre-1970, above).

In these conversations and in additional protests that followed, WAR, AWC, and WSABAL's key demand was that the Whitney's next Annual Exhibition include 50% women artists. Of the 142 artists in 1969's Annual Exhibition of contemporary American paintings, only eight artists had been women, a statistic that became a rallying cry for better representation between the sexes. In support of these efforts, art workers and activists Poppy Johnson, Lucy Lippard, Brenda Miller, and Faith Ringgold formed the Ad Hoc Committee of Women Artists and began an extensive letter writing and organizing campaign to urge the Whitney to meet this demand. When the next Annual (focused on sculpture) opened in December 1970, twenty-one (20%) of 103 artists included were women—nearly a 15% increase from the previous year's exhibition. While this increase showed an improvement from previous Annuals, WAR, AWC, and WSABAL continued to assert the need for better representation and parity between the sexes, noting that “there is no reason to believe that twenty-one per cent [sic] is a fair representation of the number of women artists doing good work in this country, any more than five per cent [sic] was.”<sup>15</sup>

### Recent Initiatives

The Whitney's interest in improving its collection holdings and programming around women artists runs alongside numerous external efforts in recent years by peer institutions. These initiatives span both collection-building and exhibitions and have grown out of continuing calls for museums to be more transparent and accountable to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion work. Some notable examples include the Brooklyn Museum's *Year of Yes* in 2017, which centered women artists through a suite of exhibitions; the Baltimore Museum of Art's public pledge in 2019 to only acquire works by women artists during 2020; and the 2022 Venice Biennale's prioritization of women artists and, through them, a matrilineal reframing of canonical narratives. Groundbreaking exhibitions such as the Brooklyn

Museum's *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85*, as part of the *Year of Yes*, and the Hammer Museum's *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* (2017) added tremendous scholarship to art historical accounts of women artists of color, offering critical reorientation of conversations around race, political action, and aesthetic production during a period so often defined by the primarily white second-wave feminist movement. (The Whitney's curatorial team now includes two curators who worked on these exhibitions, Rujeko Hockley and Marcela Guerrero, respectively.) These exhibitions and collection initiatives have resulted in increased recognition for the contributions of women artists, past and present, as well as notable scholarship and publications.

The last three years of the Whitney's collecting, concurrent with the CSP process, have been the Museum's most diverse. Of the 633 works collected between 2020 and summer 2022, 48.5% were produced by women. Since 2020 alone, the Whitney has made several important pre-1970 acquisitions of works by women artists, such as Anni Albers, Judy Chicago, Virginia Jaramillo, and Mavis Pusey. This said, there is still significant work to be done to better represent women artists across the collection, especially women of color.

15. “To the Viewing Public for the 1970 Whitney Annual Exhibition,” reprinted in *We Wanted a Revolution:*

*Black Radical Women, 1965–85* (Duke University Press, 2018), 123.



# PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

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Conversations:****Peer-to-Peer  
Conversations**

*July–November 2020*

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Hammer Museum,  
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Los Angeles  
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José Carlos Diaz,  
The Andy Warhol  
Museum  
Elena Filipovic,  
Kunsthalle Basel  
Thelma Golden,  
The Studio Museum  
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University of California,  
Los Angeles  
Ethan Lasser,  
Museum of Fine Arts,  
Boston  
Pablo León de la Barra,  
Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum  
Wanda Nanibush,  
Art Gallery of Ontario  
María Elena Ortiz,  
Pérez Art Museum Miami  
Mari Carmen Ramírez,  
The Museum of Fine  
Arts, Houston  
Larry Rinder,  
formerly Berkeley  
Museum of Art and  
Pacific Film Archive  
David Ross,  
School of Visual Arts  
Kitty Scott,  
National Gallery  
of Canada  
Sasha Suda,  
National Gallery of  
Canada

Herb Tam,  
Museum of Chinese in  
America, New York

**Artist-Curator  
Conversations**

*April–June 2021*

william cordova  
Stephanie Dinkins  
Robert Gober  
Tishan Hsu  
Kahlil Robert Irving  
Park McArthur  
Alan Michelson  
Virginia Overton  
Cameron Rowland

**Convenings:**

**DEAI Modern and  
Contemporary Subgroup**

*June–July 2021*

Andrea Alvarez,  
Buffalo AKG Art  
Museum  
Katherine Brinson,  
Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum  
Sydney Briggs,  
The Studio Museum in  
Harlem  
Connie Choi,  
The Studio Museum  
in Harlem  
Cathleen Chaffee,  
Buffalo AKG Art  
Museum  
Jadine Collingwood,  
Museum of  
Contemporary Art,  
Chicago  
Ruth Erickson,  
Institute of  
Contemporary Art,  
Boston  
Jenny Gheith,  
San Francisco  
Museum of Modern Art  
Lauren Hinkson,  
Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum

David Max Horowitz,  
Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum

Anna Katz,  
Museum of  
Contemporary Art,  
Los Angeles

Nancy Lim,  
San Francisco  
Museum of Modern  
Art

Aram Moshayedi,  
Hammer Museum,  
University of California,  
Los Angeles

Paulina Pobochoa,  
The Museum of  
Modern Art, New York

Pavel Pyś,  
Walker Art Center

**CSP Closed**

**Door Convening:  
*Making Collections*  
*Visible***

*June 2022*

Aleesa Pitchamarn  
Alexander,  
Cantor Arts Center,  
Stanford University

Virginia Anderson,  
Baltimore Museum  
of Art

Jessica Bell Brown,  
Baltimore Museum of Art

Jadine Collingwood,  
Museum of  
Contemporary Art,  
Chicago

Connie Choi,  
The Studio Museum  
in Harlem

Ruth Erickson,  
Institute of  
Contemporary Art,  
Boston

David Max Horowitz,  
Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum

Ethan Lasser,  
Museum of Fine Arts,  
Boston

Nancy Lim,  
San Francisco  
Museum of  
Modern Art

María Elena Ortiz,  
Modern Art Museum  
of Fort Worth

Pavel Pyś,  
Walker Art Center

Kitty Scott,  
formerly National  
Gallery of Canada

**CSP Public Symposium:  
*Making Collections*  
*Matter***

*September 2022*

Naomi Beckwith,  
Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum

Sydney Briggs,  
The Studio Museum  
in Harlem

Connie Choi,  
The Studio Museum  
in Harlem

Cheryl Finley,  
Atlanta University;  
Spelman College;  
Cornell University

Candice Hopkins,  
Forge Project

Katherine Jentleson,  
High Museum of Art

Alex Kitnick,  
Bard College, Center  
for Curatorial Studies  
(CCS)

Asma Naeem,  
Baltimore Museum  
of Art

Paulina Pobochoa,  
The Museum of  
Modern Art, New York

Pavel Pyś,  
Walker Art Center

E. Carmen Ramos,  
National Gallery of Art,  
Washington D.C.

Pilar Tompkins Rivas,  
Lucas Museum of  
Narrative Art

Jamaal Sheats,  
Fisk University  
Amy Whitaker,  
New York University

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*December 2022–*

*January 2023*

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Getty Research  
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Marci Kwon,  
Stanford University

Xin Wang,  
New York University

Amy Whitaker,  
New York University

# APPENDIX

# WHITNEY

## APPENDIX: Collection Analysis (Excerpts)

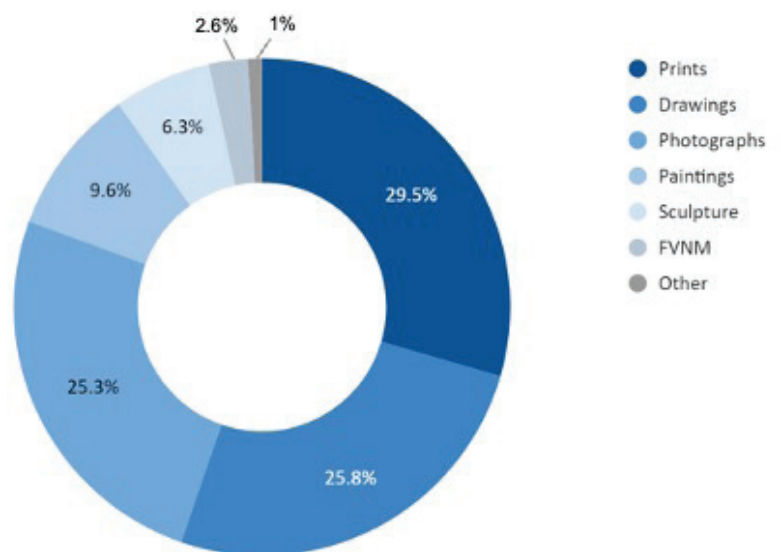
Conducted 2021–2023

### Current state of the collection

*By medium*

The Whitney's collection comprises **26,641 objects**, across various media:

● Prints	7,857 (29.5%)
● Drawings	6,871 (25.8%)
● Photographs	6,745 (25.3%)
● Paintings	2,554 (9.6%)
● Sculpture	1,691 (6.3%)
● FVNM*	682 (2.6%)
● Other†	241 (1%)

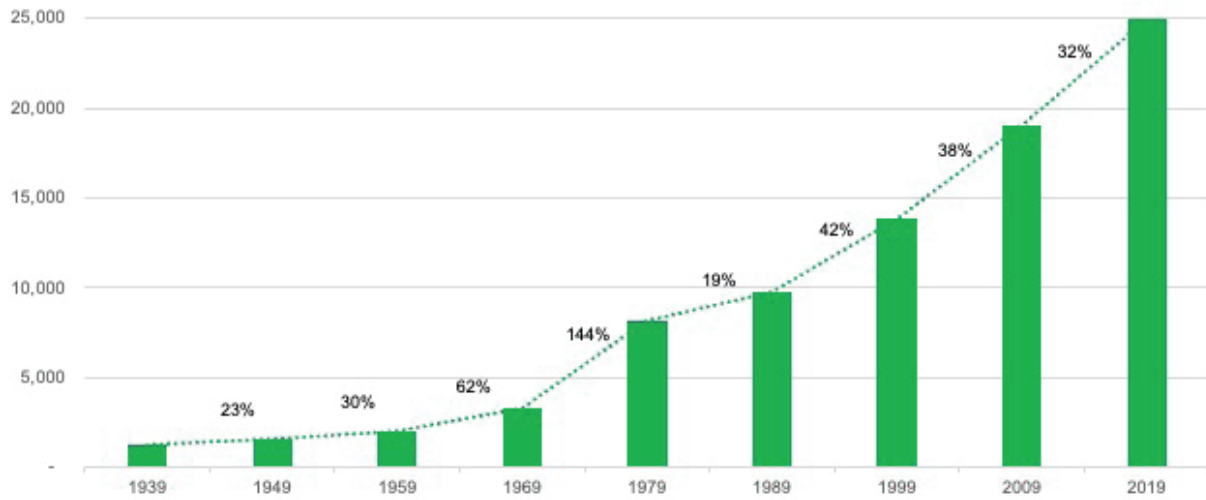


\*FVNM: film, video, and new media.

†Other categorization includes works classified as Books, Costume and Jewelry, Decorative Arts and Utilitarian Objects, Installations, Performance Arts, Plates, and Textiles; data from December 2022.

## Collection size over time

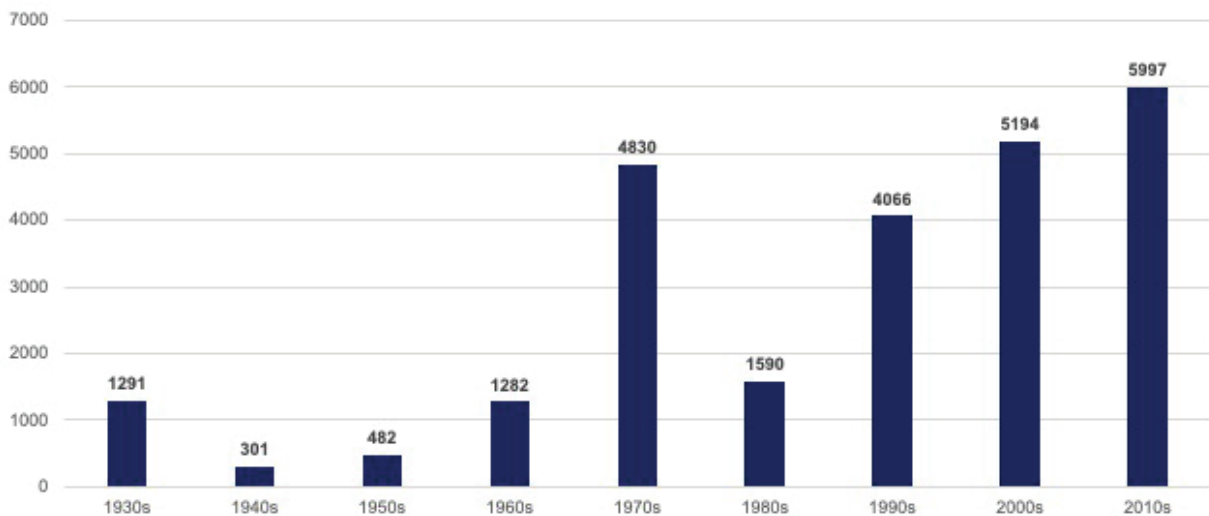
*End of decade collection size*



Figures do not account for deaccessioning as this has not historically accounted for large changes in the size of the collection.

## Gifts and acquisitions

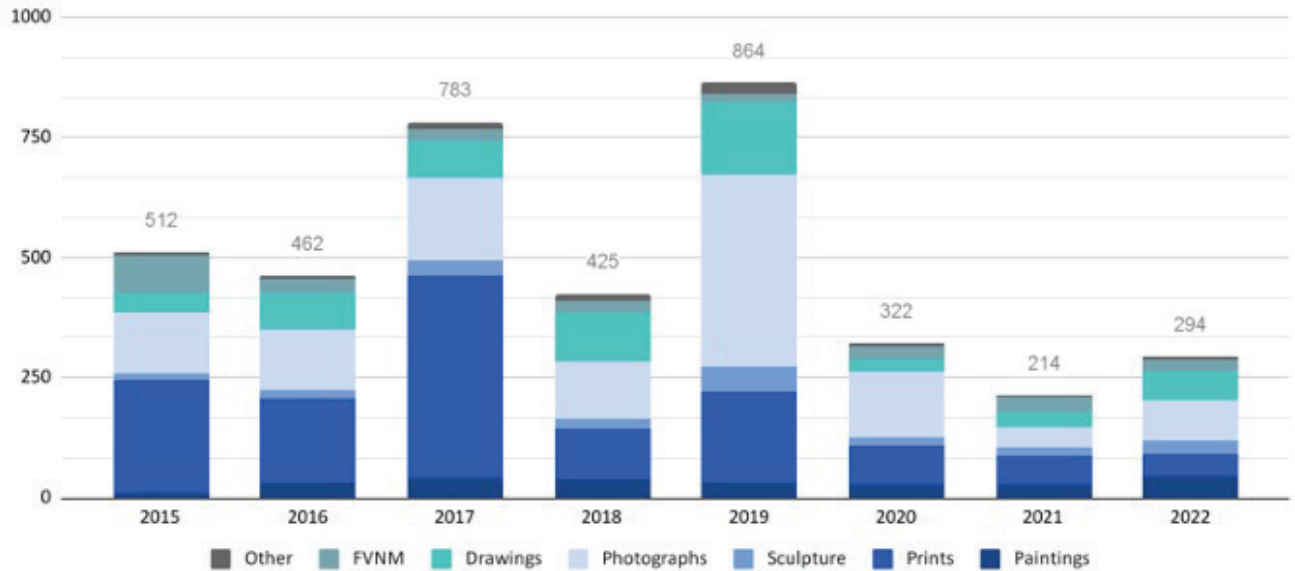
*By decade*



1970s figure includes Edward Hopper bequest of over 3,000 objects; data from December 2022.

### Collection growth since 2015

99 Gansevoort Street



Data from December 2022.

### Collection growth since 2015

99 Gansevoort Street

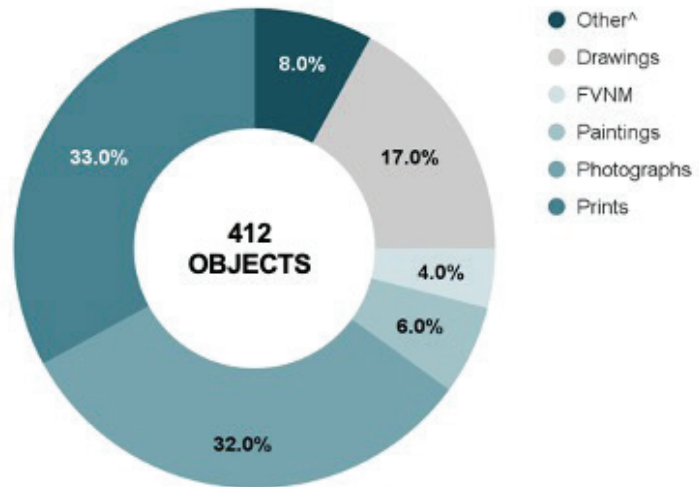
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
<b>Acquisition Committee Purchase</b>	211	146	49	158	53	160	104	76	<b>957 (24.7%)</b>
<b>Gift</b>	240	247	253	189	761	91	71	163	<b>2015 (52%)</b>
<b>Promised Gift</b>	8	26	26	15	9	24	14	8	<b>130 (3.4%)</b>
<b>Purchase with Funds*</b>	46	37	408	55	20	28	19	36	<b>649 (16.7%)</b>
<b>Director's Discretionary Funds</b>	1	2	5	8	13	8	0	11	<b>48 (1.2%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>783</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>3876</b>

\*Purchase with Funds excludes Director's Discretionary Funds. Works acquired through other channels (e.g. commission) are reflected in totals, but not pictured; data from December 2022.

## Illustrative year of growth *By medium*

### **Methodology:**

- Average of percentages by medium between 2017 and 2019
- Includes all objects (gifts and purchases)
- Removed large scale single donor gifts (e.g. bequests, major gifts, etc.)



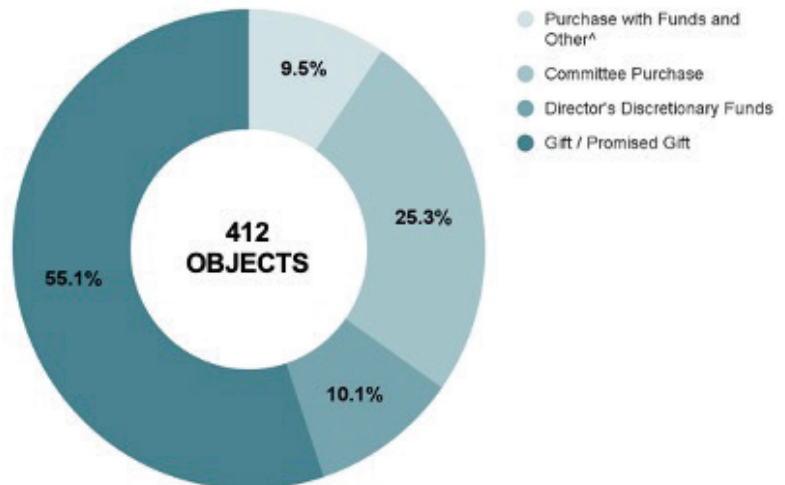
*Removed large scale single donor gifts; data from June 2021.*

*^Includes objects classified as Books, Plates, Textiles, Sculpture, Decorative Arts, Utilitarian Objects, Installations, Performance Arts, and New Media.*

## Illustrative year of growth *By acquisition channel*

### **Methodology:**

- Average of percentage by channel between 2017 and 2019
- Removed large scale single donor gifts (e.g. bequests, major gifts, etc.)

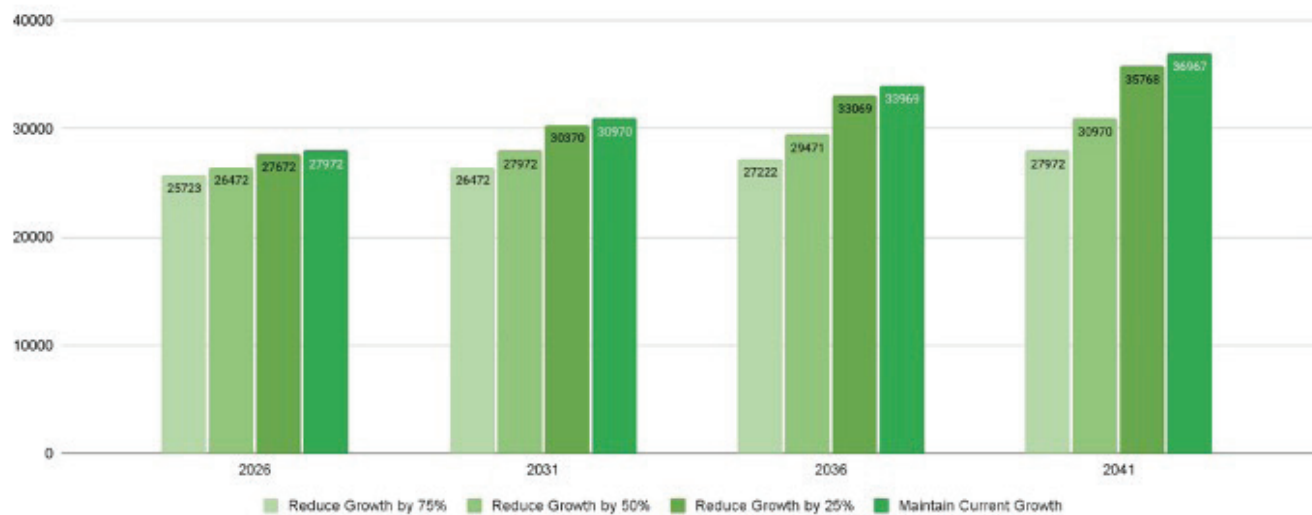


*^Includes objects classified as Books, Plates, Textiles, Sculpture, Decorative Arts, Utilitarian Objects, Installations, Performance Arts, and New Media; data from June 2021.*



## Potential future growth of the collection

4 scenarios, measured every 5 years



*"Current Growth" is measured at the illustrative growth rate of 412 objects per year. Does not include any major gifts, bequests, or purchases with "special" funds; data from June 2021.*

## Acquisition Journey Analysis Summary

Over the last decade, the Whitney's collection has **grown over 30%, with a range of ~400–800 acquisitions per year**. Despite this growth, there have been minimal shifts in collections staff or processes during this period. As a result, the Strategy team partnered with the Collection Strategic Plan team to examine our collection processes, understand existing mindsets, and map current resourcing dynamics.

Acquisitions can take between **half a year to five years across seven process steps**, with complexity varying by journey type. These acquisitions also take a **significant amount of staff time**, ranging from 40–80 hours for more straightforward Acquisition Committee works to up to 300–400 hours for highly complex and bespoke Joint Acquisitions or Promised Gifts. Typically, **Joint Acquisitions are the most complex** and require the most investment from both a staffing and financial perspective.

Additionally, **key pain points** have surfaced from discussions with key stakeholders & staff. While the pain points vary across journeys, common areas include difficulties tied to **how "case-by-case" the work is, complex systems & processes, and under-resourced roles**. While staff have already explored areas for efficiencies & best practices, it is clear that additional steps are needed to support this area of work.

The **recommendations** emerging from these discussions fall into the following buckets:

- **Collecting Practices:** Slow growth
- **Mindset Shifts:** Re-frame internal narrative
- **Process & Guideline Changes:** Standardize & limit exceptions
- **Staffing Support:** Add or adjust necessary resourcing

## Acquisition Journey Analysis Overview

Through this project, we aimed to gain a more holistic, robust understanding of how the Whitney acquires art for its collection, giving us the information to implement more streamlined operational processes, improve resourcing and support, and pace acquisitions more intentionally.

### Our Approach:

Based on internal interviews and additional references, we mapped 5 illustrative journeys by acquisition channel, from initial research to steady state storage, including:

- All relevant touchpoints, stakeholders, and financial & time investment
- Key branches by medium, with distinct dynamics and considerations for physical objects vs. FVNM



### Our Scope:

What this is...	What this is <u>not</u> ...
<p>✓ A <b>high-level overview</b> of process steps, time, and investment involved across 5 representative journeys, applicable to the majority (~80%) of acquisitions</p>	<p>✗ A precise map of <b>every possible pathway</b> that an acquisition may take when entering our collection, including one-time or rare exceptions and outliers</p>
<p>✓ A <b>synopsis of key pain points</b> as relayed through interviews and background materials</p>	<p>✗ An <b>evaluation of institutional, departmental, team, or individual performances</b></p>
<p>✓ A <b>directional estimate</b> (e.g., using anonymized and averaged salaries) of an acquisition's indirect costs</p>	<p>✗ An <b>exact calculation of every cost</b> involved in bringing in, storing, and maintaining a collection acquisition</p>

## Acquisition Journey Analysis Sources

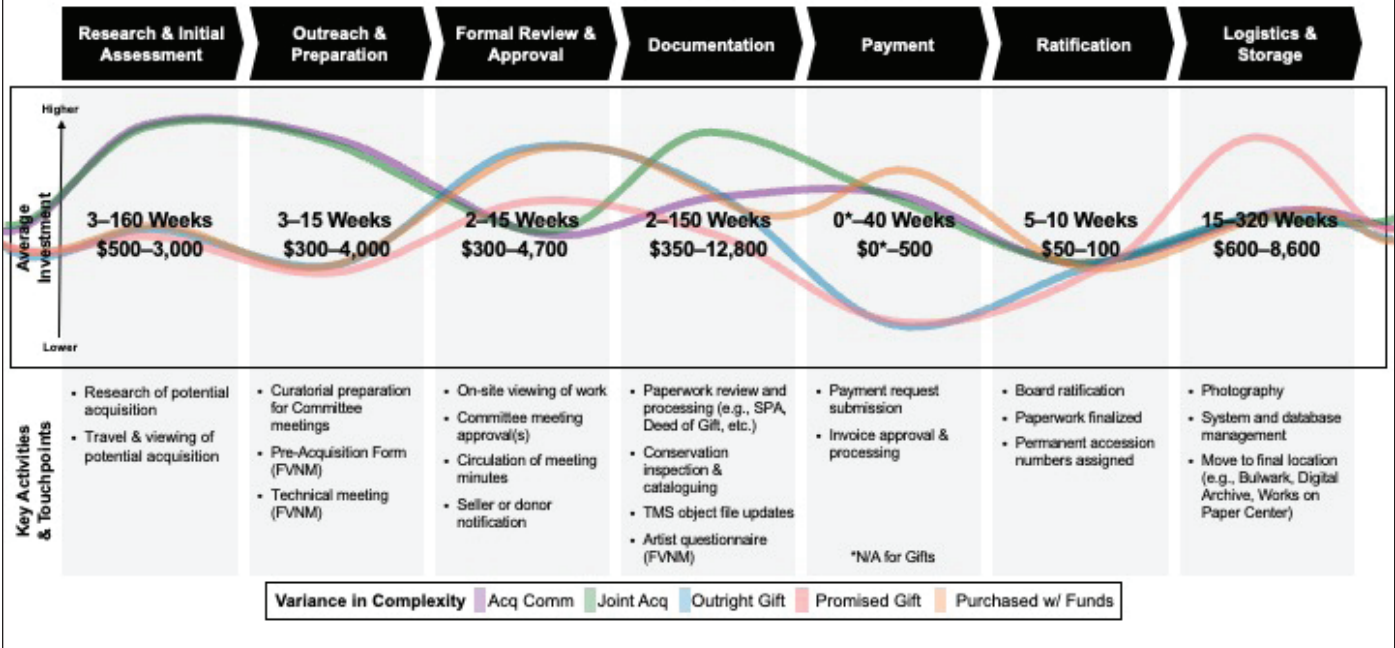
### Listening Tour of 26 Staff Members:

Department	Stakeholder	Title
Administration	Nick Holmes	General Counsel
	Kendall Galant	Manager of Strategic Partnerships
Advancement	Caitlin Green	Exec. Coordinator to the Chief Advancement Officer
	Madison Martin	Manager of Individual Giving
Art Handling	Chris Ketchie	Associate Preparator and Warehouse Manager
	Joshua Rosenblatt	Director, Exhibition & Collection Preparation
Conservation	Margo Delidow	Assistant Conservator
	Clara Rojas-Sebesta	Ellsworth Kelly Conservator of Works on Paper
	Matthew Skopek	Associate Conservator
Curatorial	Kim Conaty	Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Drawings and Prints
	Jennie Goldstein	Assistant Curator
	Chrissie Iles	Anne and Joel Ehrenkrantz Curator
	Jane Panetta	Curator and Director of the Collection
	Christiane Paul	Adjunct Curator of New Media Arts
	Roxanne Smith	Curatorial Assistant
Finance	Clemence White	Senior Curatorial Assistant
	Rory Keeley	Mgr. of Museum Admin & Exec Asst to Co-COO / CFO
Registration & Cataloguing	Jessica Pepe	Associate Registrar, Permanent Collection
	Barbi Spieler	Head Registrar, Permanent Collection
	Denis Suspitsyn	Photographer and Manager, Photography Studio
	Christopher Bernu	Cataloguer
Research Resources	Brian Block	MPN
	Savannah Campbell	Preservation Specialist, Video and Digital Media, MPN
	Majida Mugharbel	Permanent Collection Documentation Manager
	David Neary	Project Manager, MPN
	Farris Wahbeh	Benjamin and Irma Weiss Dir. of Research Resources

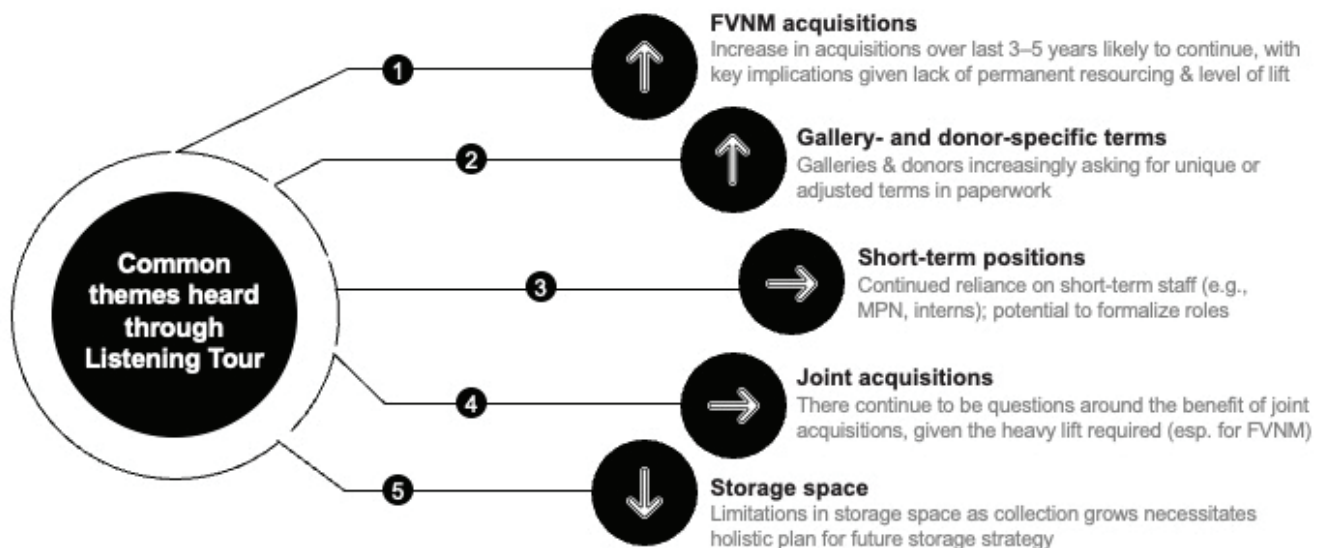
### Additional References:

- ✓ Acquisition Procedures for CAs (c/o Maggie Mugharbel)
- ✓ Acquisition Committee Funding Schedules (c/o Rory Keeley)
- ✓ Bulwark storage cost estimates (c/o Barbi Spieler, Joshua Rosenblatt)
- ✓ Shipping cost estimates (c/o Barbi Spieler)
- ✓ Gift Subcommittee Meeting (c/o Jane Panetta)
- ✓ Bulwark Tour (c/o Chris Ketchie)

## Acquisitions can take between 0.5–5 years across 7 process steps, with complexity varying by journey type



## Trends and pain points with implications for acquisition approach



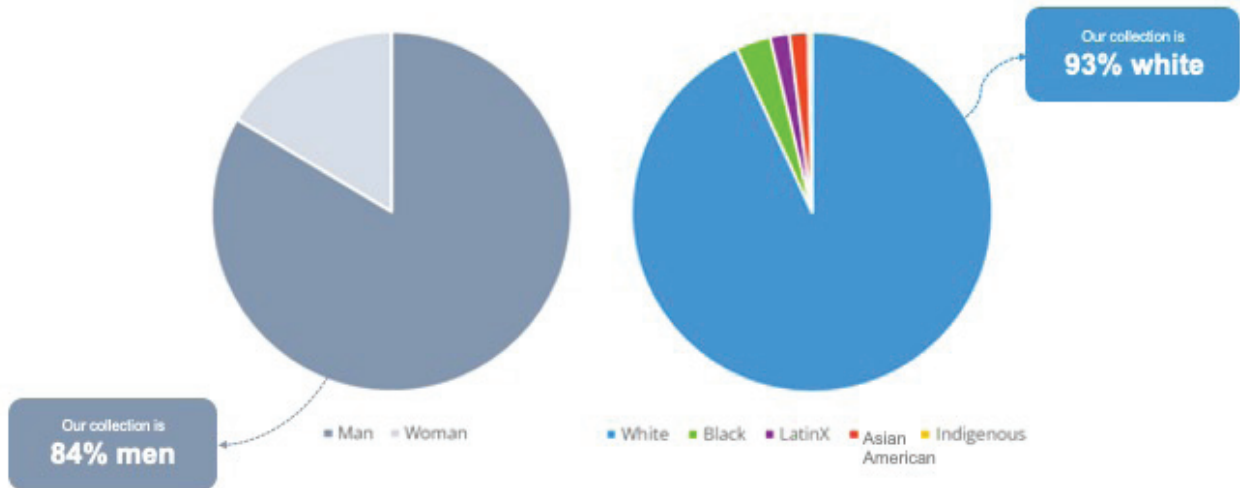


## Recommendations

Collecting Practices Slow growth	Staffing Support Add or adjust necessary resourcing	Process & Guideline Changes Standardize and limit exceptions	Mindset Shifts Re-frame internal narrative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Reduce overall rate of acquisitions</li> <li>★ Increase comfort declining gift offers, both overall and earlier in the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Consolidate fragmented or P/T work into dedicated F/T roles                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Add 1 full-time Documentation role to support permanent collection</li> <li>– Add 1 full-time Curatorial Collections Specialist focused on permanent coll. operations</li> </ul> </li> <li>★ Consider shifts in organizational structure and lines of reporting</li> <li>★ Engage consistent external resources (e.g. outside counsel)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Limit joint acquisitions to pre-approved partner organizations</li> <li>★ Limit allowable terms &amp; requirements to range of templated agreement options (no bespoke agreements)</li> <li>★ Explore digitally-based solutions and TMS improvements for standardizing and streamlining processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Prioritize permanent collection as core of the Whitney and in line with the program, through:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Budget &amp; overtime support</li> <li>– Staff comms/engagement</li> </ul> </li> <li>★ Better inform staff about acquisition processes, incl.:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Right-sizing expectations around photography, online collection, and FVNM</li> <li>– Clarifying impact of interdependencies between process steps with participants across acquisition journey</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

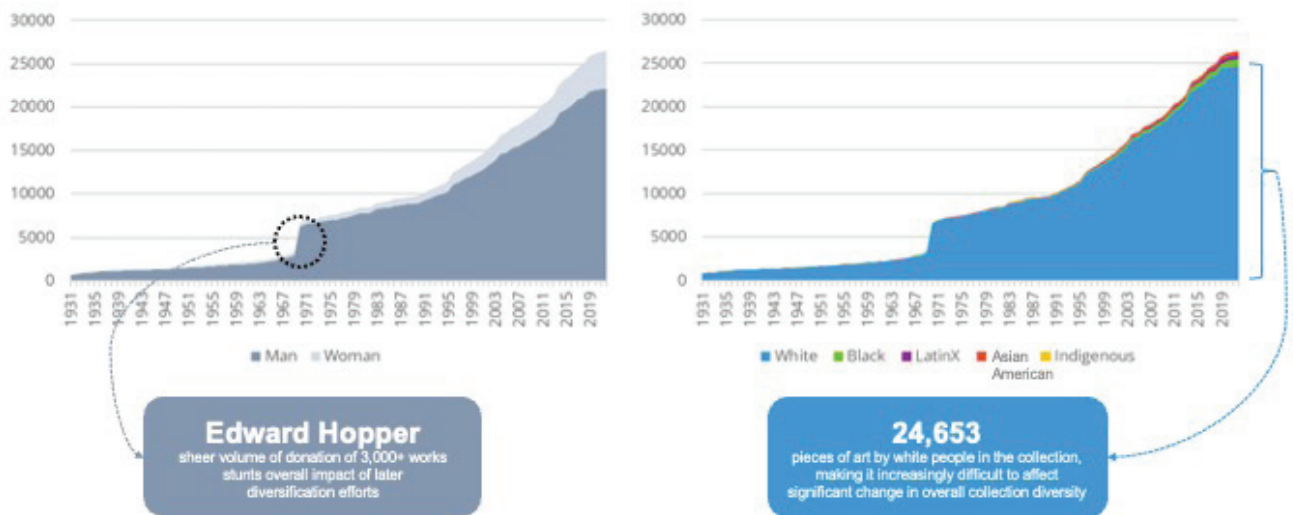
## Collection Today: Analysis by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

When looking at all 26,444 pieces of art in the collection, 84% (or 22,104) of those artworks were created by men, and 93% (or 24,653) of those artworks were created by white people. When looking at the intersection of those two identities, 79% (or 20,845) of collection artworks were created by white men.



## Change Over Time: Analysis by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

We wanted to understand how diverse the Museum's collection was at various points in time, and whether efforts to diversify had been made in past decades. Because the collection prioritized art made by white men over the course of its history, overall collection diversification may be slower than expected or desired.



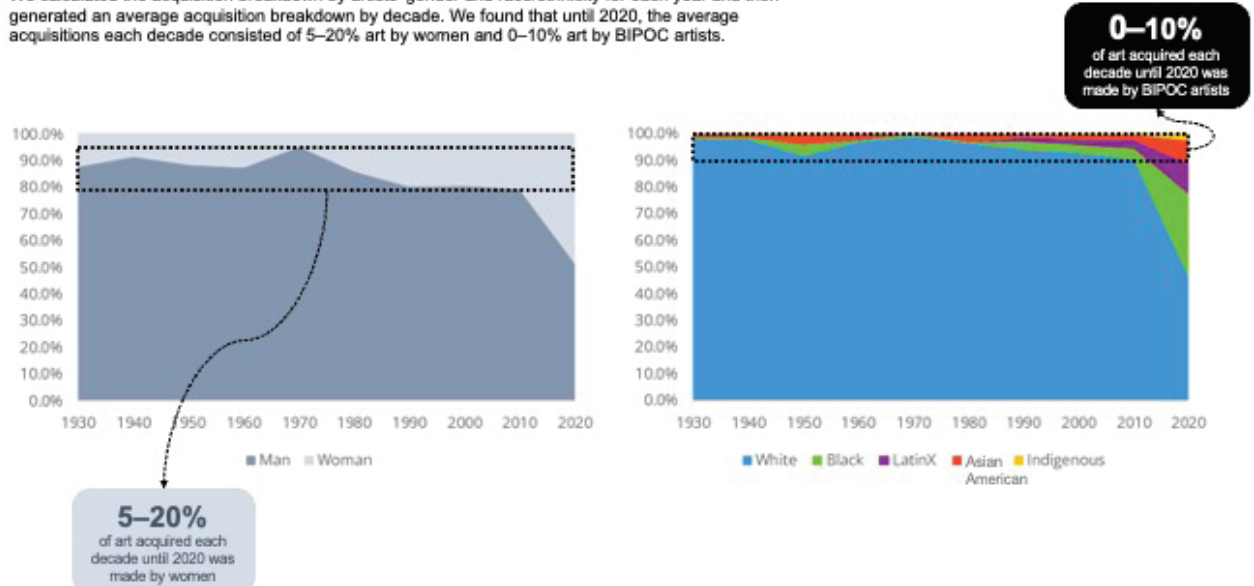
## Decade-by-decade Analysis by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

We also wanted to understand how diverse our collection is in terms of the time period the art was made within to see where there are gaps in our collection. These graphs show that almost all art made prior to 1990 was made by a man, and almost all art made prior to 2010 was made by a white person.



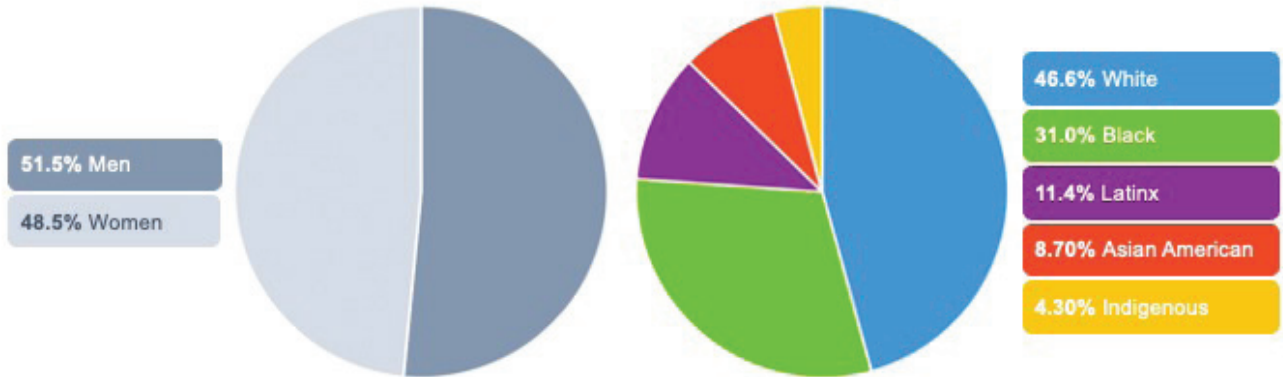
## Acquisition History Analysis by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

We calculated the acquisition breakdown by artists' gender and race/ethnicity for each year and then generated an average acquisition breakdown by decade. We found that until 2020, the average acquisitions each decade consisted of 5-20% art by women and 0-10% art by BIPOC artists.



## Our Most Diverse Acquisitions Yet

Over the past three years, the Whitney's acquisitions have been more diverse than ever before. The gender and racial/ethnic identities of the artists represented by the 633 pieces of art acquired between 2020–2022 break down as follows:



## Data & Methodology

In streamlining the curatorially-provided data and structuring these analyses in a manageable model, the Strategy and CSP teams made a number of simplifying assumptions. While somewhat flattening and not entirely reflective of the Museum's current preferred language and demographic categorization, these assumptions were necessary to conduct this work—imperfectly but hopefully productively. Here we share assumptions, decisions, estimates, calculations, and other information that may be helpful when reviewing this analysis.

- Categories for race/ethnicity (i.e., white, Black, Latinx, Asian American, Indigenous) and gender (i.e., man, woman) were chosen by the curatorial team, and analysis was conducted according to these categories. We acknowledge these are not fully reflective nor inclusive of the complexity of identities individuals hold, and recommend the Museum use more inclusive and expansive categories when gathering artist identity data in the future.
- For the purposes of this analysis, BIPOC refers to anyone who is identified as Black, Latinx, Asian American, and/or Indigenous.
- Because white artists were not explicitly identified by the curatorial team, for the purpose of this analysis white artists are identified as *any artists who are not identified as BIPOC*. This may lead to a slight overestimation of white artists.
- Because artists who are men were not explicitly identified by the curatorial team, they are identified as *any artists who are not as identified as a woman*. This may lead to a slight overestimation of artists who are men.
- The collection data and analysis model have not been prepared yet to incorporate non-binary or other gender identities. As a result, one self-identifying non-binary artist is currently included in the woman category. This categorization should not be interpreted as a conflation of these gender identities, but rather as an imperfect step on an ongoing institutional journey towards better reflecting individual identities.
- Because 0.1% of the artwork is by people with identified intersecting races and/or ethnicities, there is sometimes an extremely small under / overrepresentation of certain races and ethnicities. This should not impact directional insights and conclusions.

### Library Special Collections: Policy and Procedure

The Library Special Collections (LSC) chiefly acquires **published printed matter** (rare books, artists' books, zines, periodicals, multiples, vinyl records, and distributed material similar in scope), as well as published digital materials (digital zines, distributed files). LSC **does not acquire** formats acquired by the Collection (PC), specifically drawings, prints, photographs, sculptures, paintings, time-based media, installations, and digital artworks.

For formats that overlap the LSC and PC, such as posters and artist's books, a review of potential acquisitions will be conducted following the guidelines set below. Published matter as defined above includes digital materials and this developing collecting area will be reviewed iteratively.

While the LSC has subject and format resonance with other collections, including the General Library Collection, the Permanent Collection, and the Archives, it is distinct from these collections in its focus on the preservation and presentation of books and printed matter, as well as its capacity to provide users with direct, hands-on access to the materials themselves.

Unlike the General Library Collection, which houses widely-distributed books acquired through and used during the course of collection and exhibition research and circulated to staff, LSC is home to rarer materials as outlined in this document.

Historically, the LSC has acquired materials that fall outside of the current scope as outlined in this document, including photographs and prints, but future acquisitions will follow the collecting scope, procedures, and frameworks set below.

### Acquisition Guidelines and Procedures

The following scenarios offer specific questions intended to help guide decision-making around future acquisitions.

#### Overview

In every instance of a potential acquisition, Research Resources will consider:

- **Overall relevance to LSC:** Works should be similar in scope and type as outlined above and have meaningful resonance with existing works in LSC, adding strength to current holdings.
- **Relevance to other collections:** Meaningful complimentary resonances and distinction from other works in the Whitney's Permanent Collection (PC) and General Library Collection (GLC), while also adding overall strength to an existing area of focus.
- **Research value:** Engagement with content or subject matter around topics, artists, art movements and periods that are of interest to Curatorial staff and the Whitney's history, making the item a source of potential research, in dialog with the PC, the Archives, and the Whitney's historical and contemporary programming.

#### Published Printed Matter

In cases of published printed matter (rare books, artist's books, zines, as outlined above) Research Resources will consider:

- **Artist's intent:** If the artist creates the published printed matter to be handled, read, and used for research by the user in an unmediated way, the item will be considered for LSC; if the item was created primarily for exhibition or other use, it will be referred to Curatorial for consultation; if no creator intention can be determined, decision-making will rely on a survey of other like items in the artist's oeuvre.
- **Rarity:** Published printed matter that is rare (such as distributed material no longer readily available, editioned artists' books, uncommon exhibition catalogues, etc.) with edition sizes above



50 are typically collected if they are relevant and hold high research value; editions of fewer than 50 will be reviewed with Curatorial.

- **Price:** Due to the limitations of its purchasing budget, LSC acquisitions are generally priced below the \$5,000 mark. If an item acknowledged to be relevant to LSC is priced over \$5,000, the item will be referred to Curatorial for PC consideration. Donations and gifts are reviewed outside of their value and for research and historical purposes. For acquisitions that exceed \$10,000, a Standard Purchase Agreement (SPA) will be issued to be completed by the seller.
- **Source:** Published printed material acquired for LSC is generally purchased through booksellers or vendors who specialize in these items. If the published printed material is offered directly from an artist or gallery, additional consideration is imperative, including Curatorial consultation to consider whether LSC or PC is the appropriate context.

#### Ephemera

In cases of print ephemera (posters, broadsides) and three-dimensional ephemera (multiples, buttons, textiles), Research Resources (in consultation with Curatorial) should consider:

- **Artist's intent:** If the artist creates the work expressly to be handled, read, and used for research, by the user in an unmediated way, the item may be considered for LSC if other criteria suggest that would be appropriate; if the item was created primarily for exhibition or other use, it will be referred to Curatorial; if no creator intention can be determined, decision-making will rely on a survey of other like items in the artist's oeuvre.
- **Rarity, price, and source,** will all be considered in a way similar to acquisitions of published printed matter.
- **Research value:** Ephemera that relates to the Whitney's exhibition history and its PC artists is particularly important for this collection; *does this ephemera supplement existing research holdings in GLC, Archives, and LSC?*
- **Suitability for other institutional collections:** If after Curatorial review it is determined that these materials would *not* be retained for the PC or the Archive the item will be considered for LSC.

#### Artworks

In cases of artworks (including sketches, photographs, prints):

- **Suitability for other institutional collections:** Artworks, or unique individual works made by artists with the intent to exhibit (drawings, prints, photographs, sculptures, etc.), are not collected by LSC, and are referred to Curatorial for PC consideration
- **Artist's intent:** An exception may be made if the artist creates an artwork expressly to be handled, read, and used for research by the user in an unmediated way, the item may be considered for LSC if other criteria suggest that would be appropriate. If the item was created primarily for exhibition or other use, it will be referred to Curatorial

#### Selectors and Curatorial Consultation

Selections for inclusion in LSC are made by the Director of Research Resources and the Head Librarian, in keeping with the guidelines established in this document. As part of a more integrated approach, the Director of Research Resources will meet quarterly with the Director of Collections and Curator of Prints and Drawings to present on new acquisitions that adhere to acquisition scope and protocols. The Director of Research Resources will also present an annual report to the Curatorial Committee on all LSC acquisitions. For potential acquisitions that emerge throughout the year that need further consultation, the Director of Research Resources will work with Curators and the Director of Collection to assess the acquisition and its relationship to the Permanent Collection, the Whitney's history and collection holdings by the artist or of similar materials, a review of peer practices, as well as donor relationships if applicable.

Acknowledging that other Libraries and Museums understand their collecting scope in different ways, the Director of Research Resources in concert with Curatorial will rely on the current collecting strategies at the Museum as outlined in this document to evaluate an acquisition (for example, the Roy Lichtenstein Study Collection).

**Artist Notification**

For works purchased from booksellers, publishers, or printed matter distributors, artists will not be notified of the acquisition as these materials are purchased from vendors who are secondary sellers for the library or book market serving a larger distributive scale.

In cases where editioned published printed matter are smaller in edition than 50 and distributed less widely, artists and/or their representatives will be contacted to discuss the potential acquisition for the LSC and their interest, suitability, and consent for the LSC to be a repository for the work.

When a work in the LSC is under consideration for exhibition at the Whitney or in a Whitney-organized presentation, the artist's consent must be attained in advance through notification.

**Donor Notification**

Prior to accepting donations, donor will be notified of composition and scope of LSC in relationship to PC so that they are aware of the repository in which the materials are to be held.

**Rate of Collecting**

While typically the rate of acquisitions for LSC has been in the range of 300-500 items per fiscal year, moving forward our plan will be to dramatically reduce collecting, allowing to foster the procedures outlined in this document, with no more than 200 items per year.