

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

PROJECT TITLE			
Collecting Contemporary Art for the Nation: Building the Arts Council Collection, 1950-1989			
LEAD INSTITUTION			
Name of HEI institution	University of Leicester		
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION			
Name of organisation	Arts Council Collection		
Website	https://artscouncilcollection.org.uk/		
Project:			
<p>How do you collect art that is ahead of its time? Over 1950-1989, the Arts Council Collection committee acquired artworks by artists who became important to other national collecting institutions often only much later. This project explores the committee’s support for avant-garde movements and for equity of representation.</p> <p>Established in 1946, the Arts Council Collection is a national collection consisting of over 8000 modern and contemporary artworks by 2300 artists. This project examines the growth of the Arts Council Collection through new archival research into four decades of the collection’s acquisition history between 1950 and 1989. It aims to explore acquisition strategies prioritising avant-garde movements (including British Constructivism, the British Black Arts Movement and feminist art practice), regional art collectives and equity of representation of diverse ethnicities and gender.</p> <p>Building on recent research exploring relationships between art practices, art movements and acquisition histories such as the Black Artists and Modernism project (2015-2018), this project examines for the first time four decades of the acquisition history of a single national collecting institution, the Arts Council Collection (ACC). Under-researched as a collection, the ACC is a timely subject not only for reasons to do with longstanding social and political questions around national acquisition policy formation, but also because the ACC is moving both its art collection and archive to one site in Coventry over 2024-26, making archival and collection-based research possible in one place for the first time. Applicants will need to have a knowledge of, or substantial interest in, 20th-century and/or contemporary art history and/or a familiarity with artist archives or art museum collections.</p>			
Process:			
<p>The main research question this project raises is: how were national art collecting interests defined in the Arts Council Collection between 1950 and 1989, particularly in relation to avant-garde movements and equity of representation of diverse ethnicities and gender? Additional questions include: What can the ACC archive tell us about the behaviours and attitudes of the acquisition committee during this period? What does the archival material reveal about ACC’s acquisition history and how it responded to regional artist-led activities and organisations?</p> <p>To answer these questions, the successful applicant will use archival historical methods to explore how lesser-known stories of British artistic practice are embedded in the ACC. More specifically, the approach to the project involves documenting the activities of the evolving Arts Council Collection acquisitions committee, charting the works that were collected, and mapping these acquisitions against social, political, cultural and art historical</p>			

trends over four decades (1950-1989) to explore the committee's early support for avant-garde movements and for equity of representation. Applicants should have or be willing to acquire archival research skills.

Place:

The successful applicant will gain extensive academic and professional curatorial skills from the co-designed project and supervisory team consisting of Stacy Boldrick and Isobel Whitelegg in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, globally renowned for its innovative, interdisciplinary research in art organisations and the broader museum sector, with Naomi Vogt in History of Art at the University of Warwick as the third academic supervisor and Alona Pardo, the practice-based supervisor, at ACC.

Based at ACC for between 3 and 18 months to undertake physical archival research for the PhD project, with the timeframe to be decided in the first year of the project (2025/6), the researcher will contribute to Team research project review meetings, undertaking the collation of research data and compiling information for project report. They will work within the area of specialism of 20th-century British art and/or collections histories to develop and create a comprehensive timeline of acquisitions and committee members from 1950 to 1989.

Main Duties and responsibilities will include: collecting research data (this may be through a variety of research methods, such as archival work, literature reviews, and research interviews); analysing research data ; presenting research outputs (in writing and orally), ensuring full and accurate references are included; engaging in review and feedback processes; overcoming problems that may affect the achievement of research objectives and deadlines; planning and managing their own research and administrative activities in an efficient and timely fashion; promoting equality and value diversity, acting as a role model and fostering an inclusive working culture.

Person:

The successful candidate will have knowledge about and some experience of conducting primary archival research (essential), of working with 20th-century and contemporary artistic archives (desirable), an understanding of the wider historical, political and cultural context of 20th-century British art and be committed to developing new inclusive and diverse perspectives on the collection.

(750 words)

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE. Please email the lead university supervisor if you want to find out more about this CDA project.

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Dr Stacy Boldrick
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	<i>slb89@leicester.ac.uk</i>