

Contemporary Collections and Collecting in Scotland Series –
Event Three
January 20 2010

Plenary Session – Introduction

Thank you all for attending this third session in the *Contemporary Collections and Collecting in Scotland Series*. This is the last in three linked events that we initiated last May. I am Tina Fiske, and I am going to give a short introduction, and then will hand over to Judith Winter, Deputy Director and Head of Programmes here at Dundee Contemporary Arts. Judith will do a brief welcome and then introduce our guest speaker this morning, Gerrie van Noord.

The *Contemporary Collections and Collecting in Scotland Series* has been organised as part of the second **Research and Development** phase of the **National Collecting Scheme Scotland**, which began in July 2007 and will conclude this coming March. The Series has been a key dimension of the initiative's Phase 2, through which the Scottish Arts Council engaged a further partner in the form of the University of Glasgow. As its naming suggests (and perhaps more clearly than its English counterpart – the Special Collections Scheme), the NCSS or 'National Collecting Scheme for Scotland' was generated as an initiative with 'national' ambition written into it. I am as mindful now as at the start that here is a chance to consolidate a collecting infrastructure in relation to contemporary art in Scotland.

The idea for a *series* of events came out of a meeting I had in November 2008 with Amanda Catto and Stephen Palmer of Scottish Arts Council. We ourselves had interim questions about the NCSS model and the ways in which its various parts might move forward. Along with the curators we were also at that time increasingly conscious of the NCSS's position within the evolving context for collections of contemporary art in Scotland. Indeed, when I came into post in summer 2007 the situation around NCSS was already changing and it has continued to do so with the successive launches of *Art*

Fund International, ARTIST ROOMS, and the Contemporary Art Society's *National Programmes*, and more broadly with the impact of a global banking crisis and economic recession.

Alongside this in June 2008, Arts Council England took the lead on the formation of a *National Strategy for Public Collections of Contemporary Art*, which currently remains in draft form. Considering whether a comparable strategy document here in Scotland would be beneficial, or whether a different approach generated from the sector would work, the Scottish Arts Council resolved to address this issue through its on-going commitment to the NCSS, as an initiative with national ambition. Thus, this Series came to fruition as a way to structure part of the remaining programme for NCSS Phase 2; firstly as a means to investigate - in a more joined-up or collective way – the wider picture regarding contemporary collections and collecting in Scotland, all the while thinking about what it might mean for NCSS itself; what might be unique to it within this evolving field; what opportunities the context might offer; or how something new might develop in the future.

In the process of the Series so far, outcomes that we hoped for – for instance, bringing together and engaging organizations and individuals who have a stake in the collecting of contemporary work, and initiating and sustaining productive critical discussion about the future of public collections of contemporary art in Scotland - have gone some way to being met. Over the three events, 76 individuals will have participated, among them 41 organisations represented and coming from Orkney, Aberdeen, Perth, Dundee, Stirling, London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley and Selkirk. Furthermore, the Series has itself motivated new research and dovetailed with developing research elsewhere.

Today's event has three elements. The guest talk and plenary meeting will take place here at Dundee Contemporary Arts and then at 3pm we'll move down to The McManus for a short tour of the Redevelopment. It has been deliberate that the venues for these three events have been non-collecting organisations – Tramway, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, DCA – not

least to challenge in a very literal way some of the boundaries between 'collecting' and 'non-collecting' contexts. There is a great deal that flows across this distinction in terms of objects, critical engagement, expertise, and increasingly audience – as we saw at Tramway in May (Bruce Nauman/Artist Rooms); but also in terms of research and the critical consideration of models of collecting. We open the programme for today with a presentation by Gerrie van Noord, a well-respected producer and curator, and currently co-Director of the Artist Pension Trust London operation. As I hope Judith will expand on later in the plenary meeting, DCA is currently one partner in a new PhD with the Institute for Capitalising on Creativity at the University of St. Andrews, and in this vein, it is wonderful to bring Gerrie to DCA to talk about a collecting model of growing influence and interest, and to connect with DCA's own agenda as an organisation.

The plenary meeting, which Moira Jeffrey has agreed to chair, is an opportunity to build on the May and October events and to produce a more complete understanding of recent developments and current positions regarding the promotion, development and use of contemporary collections. It is also an invitation to you to envision, hopefully boldly, what shape future strategic development and future investment could take, where these should be focused, and where they could be led from? As part of the conclusion to Phase 2, I am tasked with developing recommendations for how a Phase 3 might look like, and I invite your experience, expertise and vision for this.

I am delighted, however, that we will conclude this Series in the context of the public collection – in this instance, The McManus – not least to underscore the importance of the principle that the NCSS currently and uniquely seeks to secure: *that an infrastructure of public museums and galleries across Scotland be enabled to build collections of contemporary art that can sit at the heart of what they offer.* As you will also know, The McManus is at this time engaged in an intense period of installation, and I am extremely grateful to Anna Robertson and to John Stewart-Young for enabling the tour this afternoon.

For me, it is that very principle, which is at stake with the future of the initiative. This is as distinct from designing an infrastructure of *access*, such as ARTIST ROOMS arguably seeks to do; although that is not to negate the latter. In fact it is my firm belief that collections could be much better understood and promoted as mediums for exchange or as entities across which things are exchanged – be it goods, or knowledge, experience or more complex notions such as identity. ARTIST ROOMS might well be exemplary of that. Aside from how we understand exchange as an economic gesture, it is also a social gesture. Indeed the civic fabric is based in and bound by exchange. Exchange generates relationships and bonds that are ways of negotiating and knowing the world as well each other, and these have become critical ideas for me in thinking about not only collecting models, but also models of ownership and of use of collections.

One of the most striking images, I think, from the Series is the model of evolved ownership that Antonia Maria Perello outlined at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA). Legally overseen by a consortium – City, Region, and a private foundation formed from civil society - originally, the private foundation alone had responsibility for resourcing the development of the collection. As of 2008, several levels of Government including the culture ministry also now specifically support new acquisitions, which as a consequence go on to bear the most incredibly long credit lines. Yet, along with various recent joint acquisitions made with peer institutions, MACBA seems increasingly to be moving away from a notion of ownership that is self-contained or self-sufficient to one that is *relational*. Thus, the collection is not a monolith held under the banner of a brand; rather the collection becomes a nexus; a meeting or binding place.

And with that, I had over briefly to Judith.

Briefing Statistics

NCSS Phase 2

- Just under **£150,000** available to support the acquisition of **53 objects/works, by 25 artists.**
- Research partnership with University of Glasgow supported by four grants totalling **£59,803.49**. This includes the **£5,000** for Kirstie Skinner, and has also supported the delivery of the *Series*.
- Independent research & travel awards for curators approx **£12,000** made towards this.

ACE – Draft National Strategy for Public Collections of Contemporary Art

Six interdependent objectives

To make the case within the sector, and externally, for the public value of collecting contemporary art

To encourage greater regional, national and international partnership working across the museums and visual arts sectors, including between national bodies, to maximise resources and share knowledge

To encourage the dynamic and effective use of collections, including maximising loans and touring exhibitions, promoting best practice in new ways of interpreting and presenting collections and stored collections, and using digital technology to reach and engage new audiences

To provide the necessary infrastructure and services to support acquisition, display and use of contemporary art

To enable the work force to develop the necessary vision, skills and training to encourage good practice and curatorial risk, and to provide opportunities for research and ongoing professional development

To secure increased and sustainable investment in collections of contemporary art