

CRAFTS STUDY CENTRE

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Temporary Exhibitions policy

Purpose of report

The Crafts Study Centre has delivered an active programme of temporary exhibitions since opening to the public in 2004. Current market research indicates that audiences attend in order to see a diverse programme and that the mix of modern with contemporary craft exhibitions is both appropriate and effective. This report seeks to give a policy statement for the benefit of planning and artistic direction (an internal use) and for the benefit of craft artists seeking to understand the approach of the Centre when they approach the Centre with an exhibition proposal. The policy aims to make the selection process transparent as well as clear.

The development of a policy

From the outset of the establishment of the Crafts Study Centre as a public museum at the University for the Creative Arts, decisions had to be made about the most effective use of the two exhibition galleries at the Centre's disposal. The presentation of the Centre's core collections was an important feature of the early discussions, but it was also felt that the Centre needed to continue its long standing work with contemporary practitioners, especially in relation to its status within a specialist Higher Education Institution. A pattern was quickly established whereby the ground floor gallery (The Tanner Gallery) was devoted to a long term exhibition based fundamentally on the exposure of the Centre's permanent collections (the *raison d'être* of the Centre) and the first floor gallery devoted in the main to contemporary craft exhibitions. Some four or five exhibitions are held per year in the contemporary gallery.

The delivery of this programme, balancing presentations of modern with contemporary shows has provided the backbone of the approach to temporary exhibitions ever since. Five or six exhibitions per year place heavy demands on a small staff with modest resources. To increase the number would reduce capacity in key areas elsewhere and whilst the number of exhibitions is fewer than in comparable organisations such as Contemporary Applied Arts or The Devon Guild of Craftsmen, most companion organisations do not have responsibility for a permanent museum collection.

The Centre has undertaken market research and this has demonstrated that there is a good level of satisfaction with the twin approach, and in addition, that visitors do in the main return to visit in order to see new exhibitions. The programme is the life blood, as it were, of developing an audience. The chance to see significant work by emerging and established contemporary practitioners is also welcomed. There is no discernible criticism with the approach of a year long exhibition based on the permanent collections, and visitors enjoy the chance to return to look in depth at these, often intentionally 'crowded' and well interpreted shows.

A temporary exhibitions policy for the Crafts Study Centre

The new policy seeks, then, to build on the custom and practice of the first four years of operation, seeing in the model an appropriate and sustainable and innovative way of presenting contemporary and modern crafts both in order to enrich understanding of the Centre's core collections and to set them in the context of significant and vital contemporary craft practice.

Policy statement one

The Crafts Study Centre will hold one intensively-researched and interpreted exhibition per year in the Tanner Gallery focusing on the presentation of the Centre's permanent collections, and seeking thematic approaches to the history and development of these modern and contemporary craft collections, as well as studies of the contribution to the collections by individual craft artists whose work is represented.

Policy statement two

The Crafts Study Centre will hold four to five exhibitions a year in the contemporary exhibitions gallery and focus this programme on contemporary craft practice. There will be a special focus on individual craft makers, enabling both emerging and established artists in the UK and internationally to shape an exhibition of their recent work. Over the period of the policy, it is intended to present craft work of a wide variety of mediums (more than those represented by the Crafts Study Centre's collections). A 'season' of exhibitions grouped together, based on exploring a particular subject or medium, will be incorporated into the pattern of exhibitions on occasion. Partnership opportunities will be sought in order to develop innovative collaborative presentations of craft work (for example through the urban FIELD consortium). The exhibition programme will address the widest parameters of craft practice. The programme will seek to represent a culturally diverse view of craft.

Policy statement three

The Crafts Study Centre will balance this approach in order to accommodate differing approaches where there are significant reasons (for example to pursue research or celebrate makers who have had a particular relationship with the Centre's history and development). Modern craft exhibitions may, on special occasions, be held in the contemporary gallery; a contemporary exhibition could feature in the Tanner Gallery, and there may be rare occasions when both galleries are used for a single exhibition.

Policy statement four

The Crafts Study Centre will seek to focus temporary exhibitions on craft work that is innovative, exceptional and of high quality, and show work that develops a wider understanding and enjoyment of the crafts, in order to develop the Crafts Study Centre's reputation as a nationally significant venue for contemporary and modern exhibitions and its strategic role as a specialist craft venue.

Policy statement five

The majority of the exhibitions put on at the Crafts Study Centre will be curated by staff, and it is the special responsibility of the Director of the Crafts Study Centre to act as the artistic director and executive officer of the programme. The Crafts Study Centre will also seek to work with individual artists as curators of its exhibitions on special occasions. Hire shows of contemporary craft will feature on average once a year from known providers such as The Devon Guild of Craftsmen, Think Tank, Tate St Ives, Ruthin Craft Centre and others, and there will be a preference towards supporting touring exhibitions generated by the urban FIELD partnership. The Crafts Study Centre will also seek to develop particular exhibitions and adapt them for touring purposes, where additional resources and partnership support can be found to meet the additional costs of these special exhibitions.

Policy statement six

The Crafts Study Centre will endeavour to take an international approach to programming, dependent of generating the resources required to work with craft practitioners based in other countries, and will make special efforts to introduce an international dimension to the programme in 2012.

Conclusion

The Crafts Study Centre's exhibition programme is planned some two year's ahead. Proposals will be put before the Management Group of the Crafts Study Centre on an annual basis for confirmation. The Director has the executive authority to accept or reject exhibition proposals in advance of this annual meeting.

This policy statement will be noted in addition by the Trustees of the Crafts Study Centre and the University's Exhibitions Planning Group in 2008.

Professor Simon Olding
3 June 2008