

## The launch of the Friends of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery's Acquisitions Database

*Since its formation in 1931, the Friends of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery have enhanced Birmingham's collections by supporting the purchase of over 2,700 acquisitions, funding conservation work and enabling the public to access and enjoy the collections. The process of collating information about these acquisitions began over 20 years ago and the database is now complete and provides a comprehensive list of all of the items which the Friends have purchased for Birmingham over the last 90+ years.*

In 2006, to celebrate the Friends' 75th Anniversary, Margaret Boniface, the then Friends' Honorary Archivist, working closely alongside Birmingham Museums' staff, set to work to complete the task of producing a comprehensive database of all the financial support which the Friends had given to Birmingham. In a talk which Margaret wrote at this time, she explained that it had been, and would continue to be, a long and complicated process as, historically, the Minute-taking had been sketchy. Other complications included the introduction, during the 1980s, of the Friends' 'Small Purchase Scheme'. This gave Birmingham Museums' Curators the opportunity to buy an item for under £100

without asking the permission of the Friends' Committee. According to the Acquisitions Database, over 90 items were purchased using this Scheme, including a number of woodcuts by the Birmingham artist Arthur Joseph Gaskin, a Cadbury's Chocolate Box from the 1920s, two jugs and a vase decorated by the ceramicist Charles H Brannam and a Confraternity Medal by John Hardman. From 1998, the Curators were required to fill out application forms for their proposed purchases and to present each case to the Friends' Committee. As a result, records for anything purchased from that time to date have been kept on file.



'Portrait of Mumtaz Mahal', Artist unknown, 1840-1890, Presented by the Friends of Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery in 1932; 1932P240, Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0; Birmingham Museums Trust | Image Details - 1932P240 Portrait of Mumtaz Mahal

At the inaugural Meeting of the subscribers to the Association of the Friends of the Gallery, which was held at the Art Gallery on Wednesday 1 July 1931, the following three items were purchased: a portrait miniature of Mumtaz Mahal; a Sardonyx Cameo by

Schmidt from the middle of the 19th century; and 'Cyclamen', a painting by Florence Engelbach from 1931. The cost of these three acquisitions came to a total of £61 – 15s – 0d.



'Cyclamen' by Florence Engelbach, 1931, Presented by the Friends of Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery in 1932; 1932P238, Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0; Birmingham Museums Trust | Image Details - 1932P238 Cyclamen

Birmingham Museums to approach other bodies for match funding and grants towards purchases. At present, we are exploring the possibility of funding an apprenticeship, which demonstrates the range of support we are able to offer.

With the assistance of staff at Birmingham Museums, a team of volunteers worked together to compile a comprehensive database cataloguing all of the instances in which the Friends had financially supported Birmingham Museums since 1931 – over 2,700! A simple version of this Acquisitions Database is available in the 'Publications' section of our website: <https://fbmt.org.uk/publications/friends-acquisitions-history/>. It is still a work in progress, as we will be adding more images using Birmingham Museums Trust's Digital Asset Resource. And, of course, the database will be updated as we continue to offer financial support to enhance Birmingham's collections!

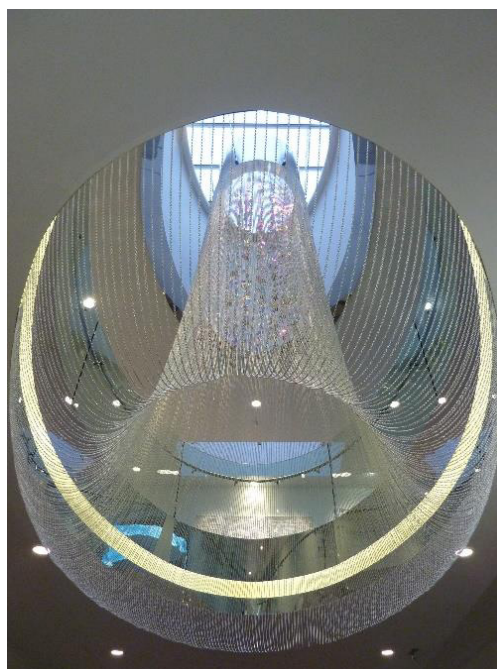
From the three items purchased at our inaugural meeting in 1931, to our commission of 'Transporter' by world-renowned artist Keiko Mukaide and engineer Ronnie Watt in 2011 to celebrate the Friends' 80th birthday and the opening of the Birmingham History Galleries, and our latest 'outright purchase' of 'Conniveo', a vinyl photographic image printed on plexiglass by contemporary artist Georgia Tucker in 2021, the Friends continue to adhere to the objectives laid out

in our Constitution: 'to support and assist Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery and to promote their use and enjoyment by the public'.

This is particularly pertinent for us when, after its partial reopening for the Commonwealth Games in 2022, Birmingham's flagship Museum and Art Gallery closed for essential maintenance works in November 2022 and will not reopen until 2024. This closure has been – and will continue to be – very disappointing for many people, but the ongoing building work is vital and will ensure that the Museum can continue to be enjoyed in full in the future. Using the resources available to us as Friends: our members and loyal supporters, our core team of committed volunteers, our new online acquisitions database, our quarterly magazine 'Artefacts' and our social media presence, it is more important than ever that we support our Museums.

We are proud that, despite the pressures which have been felt both historically and in more recent times, the Friends have continued to maintain our strong and supportive relationship with Birmingham Museums and to help them to continue to develop and care for their world-class museum collections.

**Melissa Hughes, Administrator and Editor of 'Artefacts' for the Friends of Birmingham Museums**





'Transporter' by Keiko Mukaide and Ronnie Watt, 2012; Commissioned for the Friends' 80th Birthday and presented by the Friends of Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery in 2021; 2012.0179.