

A Purgatory Before Paradise.

I do not use the word unique lightly but I know of no other organisation that resembles CAS. Thousands of friends' groups flourish internationally and many museums only survive because of their support and purchases. However, only CAS allies itself with all the museums and galleries in the country that collect contemporary art and not only gives them outright gifts but seeks support and funding for them.

I have never found another like it.

Contemporary

Art

Society



Henry Moore, *Recumbent Figure* 1938, stone, presented to Tate Gallery, London, 1939

"What is wanted is an intermediary, a suspended state of being or probation, a Purgatory of art before the Paradise of national collections is reached."

D.S. McColl,
Contemporary Art Society
founder member

The gift of a painting by Francis Bacon to Huddersfield or a sculpture by Mona Hatoum to Coventry are just two of our major achievements, highlights among another 5000 gifts to museums and institutions over 90 years.

The first Picasso, first Henry Moore and first Damien Hirst to enter the Tate were also CAS gifts. When the art world was a different place, CAS was also able to present substantial works – including a Stanley Spencer to MoMA in New York and a David Hockney to the Art Gallery of New South Wales – to introduce British art to public collections around the world.

At home, gifts were made beyond museums to town halls and universities, wherever contemporary art could be shown to a new audience.

Throughout its distinguished history, CAS has wisely and carefully allied itself with those who could best and most powerfully further the cause of contemporary art collecting.

At first it was supported exclusively by private collectors and the roster of CAS committee and members is very distinguished indeed. An entirely voluntary body with strong professional links to the Tate, CAS later employed, after the ex-officio help of Jim Ede, Denis Matthews from 1956, Pauline Vogelpoel until 1982 and then Petronilla Silver until 1993, as its directing force. To be only the fourth person employed by CAS over 90 years to give a lead is an honour of which I am very conscious.

Individuals have defined and shaped CAS from its beginning in the Bloomsbury drawing room of Philip and Lady Ottoline Morrell.

Her energy as a patron and Roger Fry's commitment as a critic and curator created the independent but very partial stance that CAS adopted towards young artists such as Augustus John and Eric Gill. Such tastes were not always immediately popular.

Another founder member, the Tate curator D.S. McColl, later wrote about the creation of CAS:

"What is wanted is an intermediary, a suspended state of being or probation, a Purgatory of art before the Paradise of national collections is reached."

Purchases still sometimes wait before their worth, like wine, is "proved" although very few purchases have ever been rejected, sold or given elsewhere.

Curators have consistently been a part of the way CAS has developed its ideas and direction. The Directors of the National Portrait Gallery and the Whitechapel Art Gallery were founder members but staff from member museums have rarely served on the committee. Artists, too, have only occasionally been CAS committee members.

Today, CAS staff work closely with curatorial staff at all levels in member museums and have successfully raised funds to enable curators from under-funded museums to travel more widely.

Why have we decided that our gifts, though vital, are not sufficient on their own?

The art world has changed its scale, locales and pace in the last 90 years. CAS gifts are selected from a wider and more diverse base than ever before and, almost in direct proportion, curators have less funds and time to enable them to understand the circumstances under which these works are made.

In order to display, look after and explain these works with sensitivity and skill, curators need to be familiar with myriad ways of working, so CAS uses its knowledge to introduce curators to artists, galleries and museums beyond London and overseas.

In turn, curators are able to give museum visitors a more thorough understanding of CAS gifts in their collection to everyone's benefit.

By purchasing video and film work, wall drawings, installations and crafts in all possible materials, CAS can help museums

to push their boundaries, as the purchasers for CAS investigate new directions and take risks on behalf of collections around the country.

However, CAS has never had a policy of mere novelty although, as Lord Croft pointed out in 1979, to buy "safely" would be a denial of our independence. Paintings, drawings and sculpture are still our mainstay.

Our new fundraising programme for 2001-2004 will be called "Catching Comets." CAS has always worked hard to ensure that, in its adventurous purchasing, it manages to catch comets by the tail as artists' careers take off.

CAS remains proud of the range of works that it has presented to museums and is delighted to be a conduit for gifts or bequests of work by distinguished and established artists whose work may have been purchased at an earlier stage in their career. Youth, however, is no criterion for CAS purchases, although competitive prices remain an essential guideline and purchases must have been recently created.

In the late seventies, CAS needed to find extra ways to augment its income and develop more of a power base. At Pauline Vogelpoel's suggestion, and with the added skills of Nancy Balfour and Caryl Hubbard, CAS began to involve the corporate sector in its activities, developing another new set of allies.

As clients, companies like ICI, de Beers, NatWest, Unilever, Glaxo Wellcome, BUPA, The Economist and Seagram's, not only provide Contemporary Art Society Projects with very welcome fees but also a whole new audience for contemporary art.

Working closely with corporate clients, CASP can help to introduce new ideas to both staff and the company's clients using art as a powerful tool of communication.

As all CASP's work is non-profit-using, companies can have the added value of working with an organisation of 90 years'

experience introducing contemporary art to new audiences but also directly benefiting the nation's museums.

Through the sponsorship of Sainsbury's plc and, most recently, Hewlett Packard, CAS' annual art market, now known as *ARTfutures*, flourishes in its campaign to bring the pleasure and ease of collecting contemporary art to an ever wider and more curious audience. Monthly bus tours, CASt, take CAS members and the general public to those new and hard to reach venues that keep on appearing.

These public events introduce people to all the newest ideas in contemporary art, supporting many artists without dealers and those who live outside the London art world.

For those who become individual members of CAS, the opportunity to travel further and more deeply in to contemporary art is made easy. Collectors and enthusiasts alike are introduced to the newest and most fascinating aspects of contemporary art and collecting through specially organised visits to private collections, museums, galleries, art fairs, lectures and studios.

The subscriptions and support of CAS members are as vital to CAS today as they were at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, today CAS must also ally itself, carefully and strategically, with public and private funding bodies.

The landscape of the art world has altered since 1945 away from a scene of private to public patronage and CAS has kept its independence while benefiting from happy partnerships in this area.

The Arts Council of England makes a regular grant to CAS to enable us to develop closer and more useful partnerships with member museums. The culmination of this has been CAS' idea of the Special Collection Scheme (SCS) funded by the ACE Lottery.

Fifteen member museums are partners in this national scheme which enables each of them to develop collections of

contemporary art and craft. The SCS also provides funds for curators to travel within this country and overseas to learn new ways of displaying and interpreting their collections, as well as discovering artists new to them. CAS provides guidance and advice while organising many of the visits for curators. The entire scheme has a budget of £3.5m of which £2.5m is a Lottery grant and £1m is matching funding from the museums and CAS.

Although very time-consuming, none of this diminishes our work to raise funds for purchases for all of our member museums. SCS is a result of a closer working relationship with many of them and is recognition that, while vital, our gifts every four years cannot always make a sufficient impact on their own. Advice, advocacy, lectures, loans, organised visits, links with private collectors in the region – all these are ways of helping museums that CAS actively undertakes.

The Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Elephant Trust have all helped generously to support purchases, new museums joining CAS, curators' trips, education programmes and CASt. Full details are published in each Annual Report.

The Henry Moore Foundation has been a generous supporter, providing grants since 1983 for the purchase of substantial sculpture, most notably to mark the centenary of Moore's birth in 1998. CAS presented the Tate with their first work by Moore in 1939; in 1967 the sculptor sold *Knife Edge – Two Piece* to CAS at cost so that it could be presented to a major public site. It now sits opposite the House of Lords, regularly featuring on news broadcasts.

Such long term good relations with artists is important to the survival of CAS.

Artists are the inspiration for all the work that CAS undertakes and we are honoured that both Sir Anthony Caro and Bridget



Basil Beattie, *Witness VI* 1992, oil and wax on cotton duck, presented to Swindon Museum & Art Gallery, 1996

Riley are our Artist Patrons.

Our Vice Patrons include many who have given their time and expertise unstintingly to CAS for many years. The Viscount and Viscountess Windsor provide a splendid link with the very first committee of which his grandfather, the Earl of Plymouth, was a member.

The Royal Patron has been Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother since 1947, whose collection members were invited to visit to mark the golden anniversary.

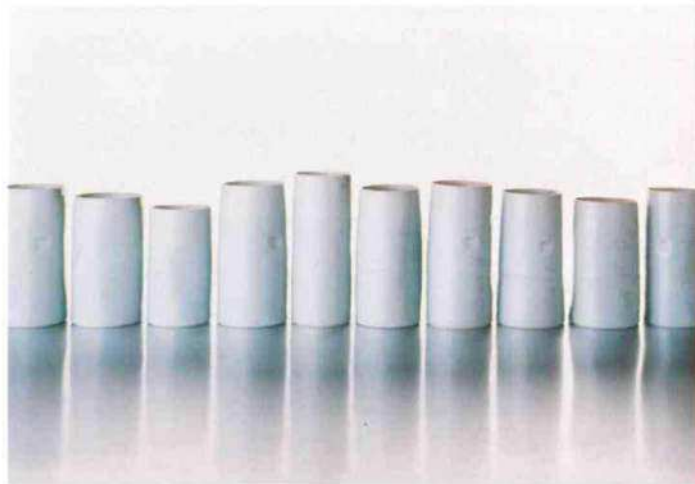
In 1990, a history of CAS' first eighty years was published as an illustrated series of essays. Introduced by Sir Alan Bowness, a CAS committee member and purchaser on many occasions, this was published at a time when the most important gifts to CAS had been one hundred works bequeathed by Sir Edward Marsh in 1953. Marsh also presented many other works during his lifetime, often bought with the profits of his memoir of Rupert Brooke.

Edward Marsh was Winston Churchill's Private Secretary for over twenty years



Damien Hirst, *Forms Without Life* 1991, melamine, wood, steel, glass and assorted sea shells, presented to Tate Gallery, London, 1992

CAS has never had a policy of mere novelty although, as Lord Croft pointed out in 1979, to buy "safely" would be a denial of our independence. Paintings, drawings and sculpture are still our mainstay.



Edmund De Waal, *Cupboard Cargo* 1999, porcelain, presented to Cartwright Hall, Bradford, 2000

"To buy an old picture did nobody any good except the dealer; whereas to buy a new one gave pleasure, encouragement and help to a man of talent, perhaps of genius. I still don't see how anyone can hesitate between the two."

Edward Marsh

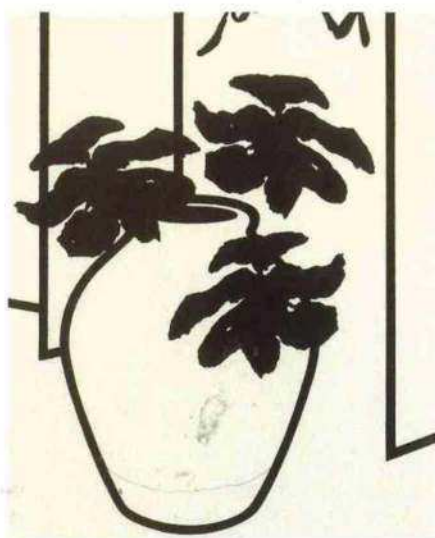
and became a collector of contemporary art in 1911 when he first encountered the work of Duncan Grant:

"To buy an old picture did nobody any good except the dealer; whereas to buy a new one gave pleasure, encouragement and help to a man of talent, perhaps of genius. I still don't see how anyone can hesitate between the two."

He was a committee member from 1917 to 1953.

Winston Churchill called Eddie Marsh "a deeply instructed champion of the arts" and this epithet fits equally well the other great benefactor to CAS.

Nancy Balfour was American Editor of *The Economist* until 1972 at which point she devoted even more of her time to collecting contemporary art, supporting artists' interests and, above all, to CAS. Appointed to the committee in 1966, she became its one and only President on her retirement as Chairman in 1982. Like her distinguished predecessors, she made gifts of works of art throughout her life to CAS (such as a sculpture by David Nash, now in the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth).



Patrick Caulfield, *Cream Glaze Pot* 1979, gouache on card, presented to Leamington Spa Art Gallery, 1988

She also widened CAS' entire scope of reference. She actively involved herself in committee work throughout the country, including the Crafts Council and the Regional Committee of the Arts Council enabling CAS to generate a great deal of necessary support. She worked behind the scenes with and for artists to support studio provision, public art and research programmes and Anglo-American co-operation. All of these links have been invaluable to CAS. For her eightieth birthday in 1982 she asked that her gift should be funds to enable the Tate to catalogue CAS' archives.

She collected widely, not grandly and with a passion. She bought steadily and cleverly from the mid-1940s for fifty years, with a particular skill in acquiring sculpture. She acknowledged that she sought sculpture out but waited for paintings to come to her. As a result she had a very important collection of sculpture from Henry Moore to Alison Wilding (whose first work she purchased) but also excellent examples of paintings by William Scott, Howard Hodgkin, Patrick Heron, Frank Auerbach, Gillian Ayres and Bridget Riley amongst very many others.

Nancy Balfour died in 1997 and left her collection of 350 works to CAS. She was a woman of strong opinions, strongly expressed, but bequeathed her collection with no further instructions. Under her guidance, CAS had constantly developed and extended its links both with museums and individual members and she was confident that her gift would be used to its fullest advantage.

Many small or slight works from her collection are now in the collections of CAS members, partly as a fundraiser, but, much more importantly, a constant reminder of the importance to CAS of its membership and of private collectors in general.

Some works have been sold to raise further funds but CAS has presented 100 works to museums throughout the country as a lasting tribute to Nancy Balfour's memory. These include an early portrait by Victor Pasmore, now in the Tate, and a portfolio of prints in honour of Mark Rothko, now in the British Museum.

The continuing support of Nancy Balfour's family is warmly acknowledged, as is their further generous gift that enabled CAS to create the post of Nancy Balfour Fellow of Contemporary Art for one year.

A new history of CAS waits to be written that will take up the story from the last years of the twentieth century. The roles of all those who have guided CAS including Caryl Hubbard, Adrian Ward-Jackson, Robert Cuming, David Gordon and Oliver Prens as Chairmen and many buyers, amongst them the late Cecily Lowenthal, Robert Hopper and Peter Dormer, need to be recorded.

The Special Collection Scheme will be seen to make a real mark on the map of national collecting, fulfilling CAS' original aims and ambitions.

Gill Hedley | Director

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