

Going Out What's On Around Town

Selected works

Just over a year ago newly qualified curator Robert Dingle found himself in an enviable position: he had been given the opportunity to curate an exhibition in the Longside Gallery at Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

To create it he had access to over 7,500 works of art by 2,000 artists. The resulting show opens tomorrow and contains work by some of Britain's most prominent contemporary artists.

'In December 2008 I was studying on the MFA course in Curating at Goldsmith's College in London when Caroline Douglas, the Head of the Arts Council Collection, came to talk to us,' explains Dingle. 'She told us about the Collection and about a new initiative they were starting up - Select.ac, a curatorial competition for post-graduate students to create an exhibition drawn from the Collection.'

Set up in 1946, the Arts Council Collection's remit was to support artists living and working in Britain through the purchase and display of their work. It is the largest national loan collection of modern and contemporary British art and the work contained in it can be seen in public exhibitions around the UK and all over the world.

Dingle was so inspired by Douglas' presentation and her enthusiasm for the Collection that he began to think about the kind of exhibition he would like to put on.

'There was one piece of work, A Portrait for the Selection Committee by Catherine Yass, that really inspired me and was extremely important in forming the basis of my proposal,' he says. 'It made me think about the different ways in which works for

Exhibition The Gathering: Building The Arts Council Collection, 1973-2009

the Collection were purchased.' He submitted his proposal outlining what his approach would be - to look at how and why certain works entered the Collection. 'What I was interested in was unpicking those narratives. There is a story behind each work - every piece can be traced back to an individual or a committee; a process of acquisition.'

It was this unusual approach to the Collection that appealed to the competition judges which included Penelope Curtis, the former Henry Moore Institute curator now the new Director of Tate Britain, and Caroline Douglas.

'We were looking for something challenging but achievable,' says Douglas. 'We were hoping to be challenged as an organisation and to open up the Collection to new ways of thinking. Robert's proposal stood out because it was a very intelligent and interesting approach to the Collection; it was also quite ambitious and it involved a huge body of research which was very attractive to us.'

In February last year they gave Dingle the opportunity to create the exhibition he had envisaged.

Dingle's show concentrates on the period between 1973 and 2009 and features 31 works by 21 artists including David Batchelor and Gilbert and George. With historical text and interviews, the show traces seminal moments in the Collection's history, capturing the voices of the artists and selectors involved in the acquisition process.

A major consideration was to ensure that the exhibition

contained a cross-section of the different ways in which work is acquired by the Collection - whether given as a gift by a collector, bought by particular selectors or purchased with the aid of additional funding. All these routes into the collection were explored and the stories behind each work researched and then related in the exhibition.

'It was fascinating delving into those narratives,' says Dingle.

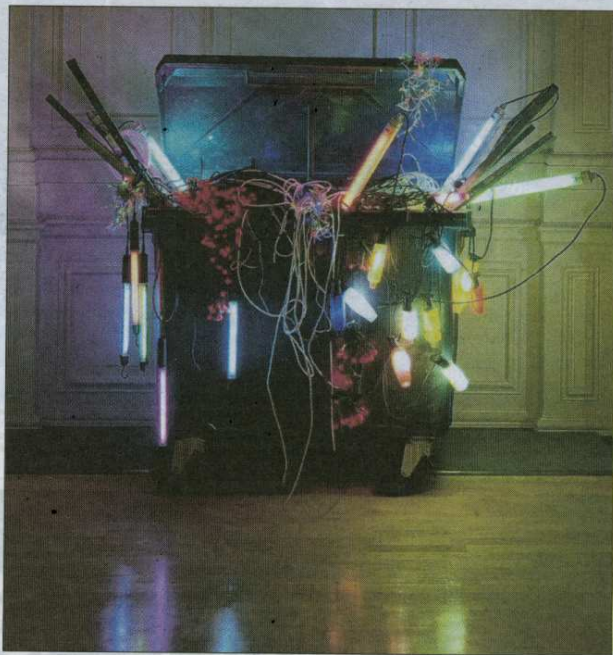
The piece by Catherine Yass which originally inspired Dingle is, of course, in the show and he considers it to be a favourite. 'Without knowing about that piece, I wouldn't have formed the idea for my proposal - and then it was amazing to be sitting talking with the artist in her studio, just a few months later...'

There is another work that has captured his imagination: John Frankland's installation You Can't Touch This, a huge gold elevator lobby, donated to the collection by Charles Saatchi.

'From the beginning of the research period I wanted to include this work in the exhibition but it is a logistical nightmare. When I mentioned it to Caroline Douglas, though, she did everything she could to make it happen and we had a lot of help from the artist who was very supportive.'

'It's a very tricky work to install technically but the fact that it's going to be in the exhibition embodies for me the skill and dedication of everyone who works at the Collection to ensure that they show as much as they possibly can.'

Tomorrow until April 18, Longside Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, near Wakefield, open daily 10am to 4pm, free entry. Tel: 01924 832631. www.ysp.co.uk



Choice artwork: David Batchelor's 'Festival' features in the exhibition