SZINE

STEDELIJK MUSEUM

#1
2021

FUTURE
ORIGINS

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Starting in 2021 Stedelijk Studies is in the process of developing from a peer-reviewed journal to a broader knowledge sharing platform. Coming out of the Research and Publication department the research that is done in the museum is mainly shared through the StedelijkStudies.Com website. As part of this broader ambition of engagement with interested parties the idea was born to start an Szine that would tackle the more pressing and urgent contemporary matters surrounding the museum. With that in mind Szines are called into being as case studies around questions coming from within or outside of the museum whether these are of aesthetic, ethical, political or other nature.

Szine nr. 1 – Future Origins is the first issue to be published by Stedelijk Studies. It starts by looking at the origins of the museum and mirroring that in its future prospects. With the hope and yearning akin to that of the museum founders our generation of custodians aims to safeguard cultural heritage for future generations. To protect and fully understand this legacy that is embodied in the museum and its objects, it is useful to engage with the cultural environment in which this heritage is constructed. Delving into this history creates a space that allows us analytical and interpretive engagement which provides tools to expand into the future while acknowledging the museum's origins.

Looking into the origins of the museum cultural historian Nancy Jouwe wrote the essay *The Stedelijk: A Museum in Imperial Amsterdam*. The essay is based on research done by Stedelijk Museum's senior researcher Maurice Rummens and read through Jouwe's extensive research on the Dutch role in the history of colonialism. This essay is mirrored in a conversation about the future between Yvette Mutumba who is Curator-at-Large at the Stedelijk and the co-founder of Contemporary And (C&) and Stedelijk Museum director Rein Wolfs. Together these two writings point towards the contemporary position of the museum in which it embraces its heritage while moving forward.

Charl Landvreugd
Editor-in-Chief, Stedelijk Studies

THE STEDELIJK: A MUSEUM IN IMPERIAL AMSTERDAM

Nancy Jouwe

As the first Dutch queen, eighteen-year-old Wilhelmina, was inaugurated in 1898 in the capital city, a Golden Coach was presented to her as a gift by the people of Amsterdam. How much the “people” (referring to common folk with little to spare) really contributed, seemed irrelevant. It was the gesture, all these donated *kwartjes* (twenty-five cent coins), that provided the image of common folk demonstrating their nationalist pride in the kingdom, embodied by Wilhelmina. Her stepping up to the plate was a necessary incentive, since the popularity of the House of Orange had waned considerably under her father, William III.[1]

Members of the Van Eeghen family, upon seeing the Golden Coach pass by, would remark: “Look, there goes uncle Jan’s coach” (*Kijk, daar gaat de koets van oom Jan*).[2] And so it was the Van Eeghens who played a key role in compensating for the insufficient budget—which the people’s *kwartjes* could not offset—thus realizing and financing the Golden Coach, this opulent display of royal and colonial nationalism.

The Van Eeghens were among the elite families who were crucial in upscaling nineteenth-century Amsterdam. Christiaan Pieter van Eeghen (1816–1889) and his heirs, including sons Pieter and Jan Herman van Eeghen, together with the very wealthy dowager Sophia Adriana Lopez Suasso-de Bruijn, were fundamental in establishing the Stedelijk Museum.[3] Their contributions, both monetary and material, provided the necessary financial boost and material core for the founding of the Stedelijk Museum, which opened its doors at the Paulus Potterstraat in 1895. This article will explore the museum’s beginnings, in relation to its main benefactors and within the context of nineteenth-century imperial Amsterdam.

A royal and imperial nation

The long nineteenth century, often seen as starting in 1789 with the French Revolution and ending with World War I in 1914, was dynamic and difficult.

Dynamic, because the Netherlands saw a period of "modern economic growth," boosted by a growing infrastructure including railways and communications—especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Cities like Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht had significant increases in population, as did Amsterdam, which experienced a growth spurt between 1849 and 1899 that doubled its inhabitants to 510,000. In part, this was directly connected to better hygiene (cholera was rampant in the early and mid-nineteenth century). With this, a boom in communication and mobility exposed Amsterdam's citizens to new levels of information dissemination.

Difficult, because there were major constitutional shifts. The young Kingdom of the Netherlands had to grapple with the secession of Belgium in 1830 and the establishment of a political community that claimed parliamentary responsibility over William II, its second king, in 1848. That same year, the nobility was constitutionally abolished (but its members could still carry their titles in daily life). The constitutional amendment of 1887 allowed a greater portion of men to vote, whereas women were now barred from suffrage. Moreover, the kingdom welcomed its first political party in 1879: the Anti-Revolutionary Party, or ARP ("anti-revolutionary" referred to their opposition to the ideals of the French Revolution).

Pressured by abolitionist movements in Great Britain and France, the Dutch were one of the last European countries to abolish slavery in their colonies: in the Dutch East Indies in 1860 and in the Dutch Caribbean in 1863. This was only possible after compensation for "loss of property" was fiercely negotiated by its stakeholders, like Gijsbert Christiaan Bosch Reitz (1792–1866), a member of the Amsterdam elite.[4] Systems of indentured labor were set up or continued in the colonies to keep production going, but not until after many people who had been emancipated were forced to work another ten years on Surinamese plantations, until 1873.

In 1883 an enormous display of colonial grandeur took place—right between the locations where the Rijksmuseum, already under construction (1885), and the Stedelijk Museum (1895) would open—on an outdoor area currently known as Museumplein: the International Colonial and Export Exhibition (fig. 1). The outdoor exhibit ran from May to October 1883 and attracted 1.5 million visitors. It was a private initiative by businessmen, but received support from the municipality. Part of this colonial exposé was the "showcasing" of Javanese and Surinamese people in "village" settings. It helped create an atmosphere of colonial grandeur and pride, and put imperial Amsterdam on the map.[5]

King William I and his son and grandson had ruled during the greater part of the nineteenth century, and from 1890 the queen regent Emma handled royal business until the inauguration of her daughter, Wilhelmina. It was the first time a woman would take on this difficult yet powerful role, which came at a time when the feminist movement was gaining momentum in the Netherlands. Several prominent feminists would approach the queen because they admired her.[6]

The young queen began using the coach in 1901, two years after it was gifted to her, when it was formally handed over and used for the royal wedding. The Golden Coach displays several visual references central to the Dutch kingdom: religious symbols, references to the past and present, and the Tribute from the Netherlands panel, which appears on the right side of the coach. The now infamous left panel of the Golden Coach is called the Tribute from the Colonies and depicts Black and Brown people making offerings to a white woman seated on a throne (fig. 2). These Asian and scantily dressed African colonial subjects place "treasures and produce" at the feet of the "Dutch Maiden."

Not only did the Van Eeghen family provide the larger part of the amount needed, but Jan Herman van Eeghen (1849–1918) was also a commissioner at the Spyker factory, which was responsible for the elaborate and expensive production of the Golden Coach.[7] An opinion piece in *The New Yorker* by Timothy Ryback, director of the Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation in The Hague, described the panel in 2016 as follows:

> The central image is of a statuesque woman seated on a throne, with two black figures in supplication before her. One kneels in reverence, hands clasped and head bowed as if in prayer. The other prostrates himself, back bent, head lowered, with his right arm outstretched over clusters of bananas and other produce offered as homage to the allegorical queen. It is an appalling sight.[8]

At the time, this display of colonial prowess fitted with the nationalist propaganda. The inauguration in Amsterdam also included a celebration of the Golden Age, the seventeenth-century era wherein the Dutch Republic—in large part thanks to its colonial expansion in Asia, Africa, and the Americas—gave science, mapmaking, art, and trade such a boost that the Dutch were among the most acclaimed in the world. It was presented as a glorious past which resonated with the whole population.[9]

This pride in being an imperial nation was also expressed through siding with the Boers (who were of Dutch origin) in their fight against the British in South Africa. The Second Anglo-Boer War (triggered by the discovery of gold and diamonds) took place from 1899 to 1902. This spurred Wilhelmina, a year after her inauguration, to write a letter to her English counterpart, Queen Victoria, expressing her sympathy for the South African Boers, a sympathy equally felt by many Dutch citizens.[10, 11]

The Stedelijk Museum would organize a pro-Boer exhibit in 1902, right after the end of the Second Anglo-Boer War. The exhibit was quite popular, and especially near the end it became extremely busy. It was decided to prolong the exhibit, which the Stedelijk had produced in cooperation with the Haagsche Pro-Boer Vereeniging (Pro-Boer Association of the Hague). Of the 5,000 objects previously exhibited in Scheveningen, a selection of approximately 1,500 works of art was shown. Proceeds from the sale of lottery tickets benefited Boer widows, orphans, and other victims of the war in South Africa. Those who bought lottery tickets could win works of art by well-known Dutch artists, as well as Belgian, German, French, Danish, and Hungarian artists. The exhibition also included a reference to the Boers:

> The well-known sculptor A. Carlès recently sent an excellent bust of President Kruger, who posed for him this summer. The attractiveness of the exhibit is greatly increased by this submission, so in order for many more to have the opportunity to admire it, the exhibit will remain until January 20.[12]

Paul Kruger, whose ancestors came to the Cape Colony to work for the VOC in the eighteenth century, was greatly admired in the Netherlands, and Carlès did not have to travel to South Africa to work with him. Queen Wilhelmina had ordered a Dutch warship to extricate Kruger so he could be transported to Europe after the Boers lost the war. This reflects how the nineteenth century was a century of nation building, fused with imperial nationalism and fed by intertwining political, art, and business communities.

The Van Eeghen family

The Van Eeghens were key players in adding grandeur to nineteenth-century Amsterdam; not only were they instrumental in the creation of the Golden Coach, they also donated the Vondelpark, which opened in 1865, to the city and were closely involved in the beginnings of the Stedelijk Museum. In addition, like many other genteel fellow townsmen, they also supervised the development of the Colonial Museum (now the Tropenmuseum).

The trading company Van Eeghen & Co. was founded in 1662 by Jacob van Eeghen, who was a Mennonite and had fled Flanders because of his religious background.[13] The company traded in wool and linen, and later in grain, fish, and salt, and set up a shipping enterprise and a bank named Oyens & Van Eeghen. They diversified through coffee, tea, tobacco, and spices, typical colonial products from the Dutch East Indies.[14] The Van Eeghen company operated globally by the nineteenth century, including in North America, where they owned (and later sold) 1.4 million hectares of land.[15]

Christiaan Pieter van Eeghen became head of the family business and was apparently a strict, even authoritarian man with a strong predilection for art and cultural heritage.[16] In the mid-nineteenth century, many objects of cultural historical value were sold on the international market and monuments were torn down. This gave Van Eeghen the incentive to found the Royal Dutch Antiquarian Society in 1858, the goal of which was to preserve national cultural heritage.[17] William III, impressed by the initiative, offered the predicate “royal.”

Christiaan Pieter loved visiting museums and would bring his children with him—who ended up being exhausted after hours spent in museums, churches, and heritage sites, whereas their father tirelessly continued (figs. 3-5).[18] But the visits must have instilled something, because his heirs, including his son Jan Herman, offered 150,000 guilders (equivalent to 1.8 million euros today) to build a museum at the Paulus Potterstraat/Van Baerlestraat in 1891. Four years later, on September 14, 1895, the Stedelijk opened its doors. The committee that oversaw the construction of the museum included Pieter van Eeghen (1844–1907), eldest son of Christiaan Pieter and an Amsterdam council member, making him one of the few Van Eeghens with a political yet strategically filled post.[19,20]

It was not just money that the Van Eeghens offered. They had also assembled quite a collection, which was given to the Association for the Formation of a Public Collection of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam, better known by its Dutch acronym, VVHK, or “the association with the long name.” Christiaan Pieter van Eeghen gathered part of his network at his house in 1874, an occasion which marked the initiation of the VVHK. Its members consisted of an imposing elite group. This included individuals with ties to colonial revenue, such as Jan Six, who was married to Hieronyma Bosch Reitz, the granddaughter of Gijsbert Bosch Reitz, the slaveowner who, preceding the emancipation of 1863, fiercely lobbied for compensation for the slaveowners.

The VVHK followed earlier initiatives of similar associations founded in Rotterdam, Dordrecht, and The Hague. In its statutes was stated that its aim was to assemble a public collection of art, mostly paintings, preferably by living artists from the Dutch School.[21] Their growing art collection was put on show in a building complex at the Oudemanhuispoort and consisted of Romantic paintings. In subsequent years, other locations were founded, including the Rijksmuseum, just opened in 1885, which showed works from the Hague School and, in later years, also the Amsterdam Impressionists. As the collection entered the Stedelijk in 1895, it contained 87 paintings and a number of works on loan.[22] In those early days, these works were shown in a permanent display of visual art on the second floor of the Stedelijk.[23] Emphasizing the importance of a museum as a key asset to the city seemed to be a family trait. Samuel Pieter van Eeghen (1853–1934), who led the Van Eeghen company from 1880 onwards (he shared a forefather with Christiaan Pieter and Jan Herman van Eeghen), was one of the donors whose financial gift helped fund the building of the Colonial Museum (later the Tropenmuseum) and Tropical Institute.[24] His travels to Java, Celebes, (now Sulawesi) and the Moluccas apparently fed his interest in colonial heritage. When Van Eeghen visited the king of Solo, the king called him Toewan (Sir) Amsterdam, since the surname was too difficult to pronounce.[25] An apt name, not just for Samuel Pieter but for the whole family.

Dowager Sophia Adriana Lopez Suasso-de Bruijn

The house at Kloveniersburgwal 76 must have looked like a repository or packed warehouse. Dowager Sophia Adriana Lopez Suasso-de Bruijn (1816–1890) continued to live there after her husband, *jonkheer* Augustus Pieter Lopez Suasso (1804–1877), had passed on (fig. 6). By all accounts, she loved to shop for special jewelry. Her husband had a similar propensity, but restricted himself to coins and tokens and as such was more the collector, whereas his wife seemed, bluntly put, a hoarder, especially after her husband’s death. Having become a widow, she was joined at the canal house by her two sisters, which meant they could go shopping together. The siblings came from a South Holland family that had lost prestige during the French occupation. It seems that Sophia had been a maid in the family. Her future father-in-law apparently did not agree with the marriage, which is probably why it was officiated in Amsterdam after his death.[26]

Sophia Suasso carried the title of dowager because she had been married to a nobleman. Augustus Pieter Lopez Suasso was a member of a wealthy and old family, dating back to the seventeenth century banker Antonio Lopez Suasso, who lived in the Netherlands. Antonio’s son, Francisco, who lived at the Korte Voorhout in The Hague, inherited half of his father’s capital, which consisted of shares in the East India Company. Francisco used his capital to finance the ambition of stadtholder Willem III to invade England in 1688.

Under the heading of the Sophia Augusta Foundation, the collection of Sophia Suasso became part of the Stedelijk Museum after her passing in 1890. According to her will, it had to be

made available for public viewing. But it took a while for the Suasso Museum, as the Stedelijk was called in its early days, to organize the eclectic collection. It first needed serious sorting and curation because of the lack of coherence. Aside from heirlooms from the Lopez Suasso family, including several paintings of ancestors, the dowager had collected (often in duplicates) silver toys, hundreds of jewelry items, snuff boxes, traditional costumes for dolls, shoes, clothing, and furniture—all of which amounted to a collection of 3,900 objects.[27]

Nicolaas de Roever, archivist of the city of Amsterdam, became the custodian of the collection and came up with the idea to create rooms containing different styles.[28] After his death, curator Jan Eduard van Someren Brand took over. He called the collection a "mess, full of surprises."[29] The aforementioned Pieter van Eeghen, Amsterdam council member and part of the committee overseeing the building of the Stedelijk (and seated in various other influential committees) became very hands-on. Van Eeghen arranged for paneling donated from different canal houses that had been demolished to be integrated in the museum, such as a beautiful ceiling painted by Jacob de Wit in 1748 in one of the rooms. When queen regent Emma visited the museum in 1896, she personally handed Pieter van Eeghen the Order of the Netherlands Lion.[30] But the collection of the Sophie Augusta Foundation would not be open to the public until 1900. For the price of one guilder, which was stipulated in the dowager's will, visitors could wander through the eleven themed rooms on the ground floor. In the early 1970s, the collection was moved into the museum's depot and later transferred to the depot of the Amsterdam Museum, where it currently resides and is regularly exhibited.

A philanthropic elite in Amsterdam

The money that Jan Herman and Pieter van Eeghen and their siblings inherited came with a wealth of economic, social, and cultural capital provided by both parents and grandparents. Their mother was Catharina Huidekoper (1822–1879) (fig. 7), while their maternal grandfather was Amsterdam mayor Pieter Huidekoper, who had married Sara van Eeghen.

It was not just savvy business acumen that provided the family's wealth. A typical, often-mentioned family trait of the Van Eeghens was frugality.[31] This is probably linked to their adherence to the Mennonite faith, which dictated that a balance in the world, created by God, was of the utmost importance and should not be disturbed. This is apparently why patriarch Jacob van Eeghen steered clear of the East India Company's trade in shares and arms, and even seemed to be opposed to slavery.[32] Their frugality made for an immense family fortune which gave them the freedom to become staunch philanthropists in the nineteenth century. But to see this as sheer altruism would be too simple—it was also good for business.

For dowager Sophia Lopez Suasso, who remained childless, other reasons might have played a role. Apparently, handing over her fortune, including the collection, to the municipality of Amsterdam was a move intended to plague her in-laws.[33] Yet she found it important to have her collection displayed, so she must have had her own vision of its importance and worth, or even educational value.

These elite families—a mix of old and new wealth—often held extensive investments in the Dutch East Indies, and certainly those with old money (if they played it well) had a head start on others. The Van Eeghens are a prime example. Their decisions reflect an Amsterdam patronage developing in the nineteenth century that, thanks to their capital, could move with the shifts in the colonial economy and modern communication and mobility. This set the tone for envisioning a city that could compete with Paris and London, with a grand park and a public display of art and national cultural heritage. A sense of national pride was showcased and nurtured, infused with imperial prowess.

The Dutch elite has mostly been considered within a national framework rather than a transnational framework, the difference being that the colonies were not considered an aspect that needed careful consideration. By placing European metropoles and their colonies together in an analytical framework, an imperial space emerges that helps unearth social and cultural phenomena not considered previously.[35] When we use this lens, we can reconsider some of the tendencies of the Van Eeghens and Lopez Suasso. By creating a cultural and economic boost to the city, they were creating cultural capital for themselves as well. In order to achieve this, they also used objects as a way to grow and sustain cultural capital. The lives of these objects and the interaction between them and various people reveal a habitus wherein this takes place.[36 , 37]

All this happened in Amsterdam due to its practice of religious tolerance, which offered people like the Van Eeghens and Lopez Suasso a space to establish themselves and build a wealthy life in their new surroundings with the help of colonial investments. As a colonial practice, this meant that profits were made at the cost of countless enslaved people and indentured laborers, wherein indigenous livelihoods and environments were disrupted. Yet both of these elite families gave back lavishly to their city, thus building and contributing to a "modern, imperial" Amsterdam. The Stedelijk Museum is a prime example.

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More background information on the museum's material origin can be found online in Stedelijk Studies Journal nr. 11

1 This article was commissioned by the Stedelijk Museum. Special thanks to Charl Landvreugd and Maurice Rummens, who conducted a significant amount of preliminary research.

2 See https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/de-gouden-koets-staat-nu-in-een-museum-maar-komt-hij-daar-ooit-nog-wel-uit~b837bc30; see also https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Herman_van_Eeghen.

3 The spelling of Sophia Lopez Suasso's name has been preserved here as it appears in her will and on the plaque in the Stedelijk Museum. In genealogical publications, the Portuguese spelling is used: Lopes Suasso ("Lopez" is Spanish). In the national and city archives, both spelling variants appear.

4 See Mitchell Esajas, "Een Amsterdamse lobby voor 'herstelbetalingen' voor plantagehouders," in De slavernij in Oost en West: Het Amsterdam onderzoek, eds. Pepijn Brandon et al. (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2020), 335–343.

5 See Marieke Bloembergen, De koloniale vertoning: Nederland en Indië op de wereldtentoonstellingen (1880–1931) (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2002). For a decolonial reading, see Timo Demollin, Visit (1883–2020): Notes on Museumplein's exhibitionary complex across coloniality and modernity (Amsterdam: Timo Demollin, 2020).

6 Maria Grever, "Koningin Wilhelmina en het feminisme," Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies 2, no. 3 (Amsterdam: AUP, 1999): 4.

7 Annemarie de Wildt, De Gouden Koets: Een Amsterdams geschenk (Zwolle: WBooks, 2021), 43.

8 See https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/race-colonialism-and-the-netherlands-golden-coach.

9 Friso Wielenga, A History of the Netherlands (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 190.

10 See https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/de-wrok-tegen-het-perfide-

albion~b79a338a.

11 This was not uncommon. Even in emancipatory social movements, a similar colonial position was heard. Probably the most famous feminist of the time, Aletta Jacobs, while on tour in South Africa and various parts of Asia in 1911–1912, vehemently opposed miscegenation. The superiority of Europeans had to be maintained and hybrid colonial subjects should be approached negatively because they threatened the colonial order. See Ena Jansen, https://atria.nl/aletta-jacobs/de-koloniale-stem-van-aletta-jacobs.

12 As quoted in De Telegraaf, January 9, 1903 (translation mine).

13 "Oudste familiebedrijf overweegt vertrek uit de stad," Het Parool, April 9, 2010.

14 See https://managementscope.nl/magazine/artikel/143-Eeghen-handelshuis-familiebedrijf.

15 See https://mtsprout.nl/management-leiderschap/succes-familiebedrijf-eeghen-350-jaar.

16 See https://hart.amsterdam/nl/age/54025; https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/491282/in-elke-museumzaal-een-uitgeputte-dochter.

17 They now have 35,000 objects, ranging from paintings and books to medals. The larger part is on loan to various Dutch museums, in particular the Rijksmuseum; see https://geheugen.delpher.nl/nl/geheugen/pages/instelling/Koninklijk+Oudheidkundig+Genootschap.

18 See https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/491282/in-elke-museumzaal-een-uitgeputte-dochter.

19 R. W. P. de Vries, "Levensbericht van Pieter van Eeghen," Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde (1908): 105.

20 See http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/nnbw/#source=1&page=402&accessor=accessor_index.

21 See Fleur Breitbarth, "De Vereeniging tot het Vormen van eene Openbare Verzameling van Hedendaagsche Kunst, 1874–1978: Een onderzoek naar het netwerk van de bestuursleden van de VVHK in de periode 1874–1909" (master's thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2002), 15.

22 Initially, the Stedelijk did not have its own collection, as this was owned by the VVHK. It was not until 1949 and 1962 that the VVHK would donate its collection to the municipality.

23 Breitbarth, 16.

24 See https://www.amsterdamhv.nl/wiki/mauritskade62.html.

25 Martin Bossenbroek, Holland op zijn breedst: Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900 (Amsterdam: uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1996), 90.

26 John Jansen van Galen and Huib Schreurs, Het huis van nu, waar de toekomst is: Een kleine historie van het Stedelijk Museum (Naarden: V+ K Publishing, 1995), 8.

27 See https://hedendaagsesieraden.nl/2018/06/12/sophia-lopez-suasso-de-bruijn.

28 A description of the collection by room can be found in Gids voor de bezoekers van de Sophia Augusta-Stichting in het Stedelijk Museum (Haarlem: H. KLeinmann & Co., 1906); see https://hart.amsterdam/image/2016/5/19/1906_gids_bezoekers_sophia_augusta_stichting.pdf.

29 J. E. Van Someren Brand, "De Sophia-Augusta Stichting in het Stadsmuseum van Amsterdam," Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift 11 (1901): 190.

30 De Vries, 107.

31 See https://trends.knack.be/economie/bedrijven/jeroen-van-eeghen-van-eeghen-co-soberheid-zit-in-onze-genen/article-normal-1448219.html.

32 See Cordula Rooijendijk, Vrije Jongens: Een geschiedenis van de Nederlandse handel (Amsterdam/Antwerp: Uitgeverij Atlas Contact, 2014), ch. 7.

33 J. W. Holsbergen, "Ooit was het 'Stedelijk' het Suasso Museum," Het Parool, August 25, 1984.

34 Bossenbroek, 112–113. As Bossenbroek points out, due to economic liberalization after the 1870s, a new investment craze involving the Dutch East Indies ensued. In this lucrative race, those with old money and centuries of experience often benefited from their existing networks, knowledge, and capital.

35 This has been argued by Caroline Drieënhuizen in her dissertation "Colonial collections, Dutch Prestige" (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2012), on the Dutch colonial elite and their assembling of material culture. In her analysis, Drieënhuizen uses the concept of " imperial space" from historian Frederick Cooper.

36 Drieënhuizen, 322.

37 As Pierre Bourdieu argues ('The forms of capital' in Richardson, J.G. Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, Greenwood, 1986, p.18.), habitus is the socialized appropriation of knowledge and customs in certain environments. It is a social construct, attached to a person's identity, which ensures their inclusion or exclusion. A person's family is the first factor in shaping their habitus.

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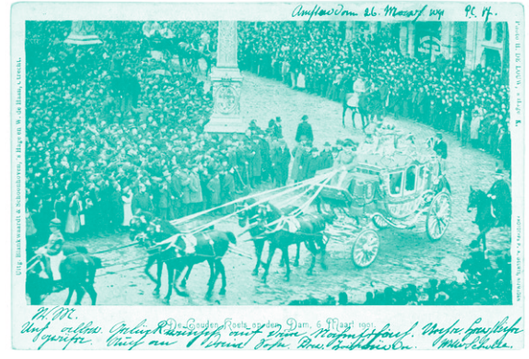

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1 The 1883 International Colonial and Export Exhibition in Amsterdam, photograph by Pieter Oosterhuis (Amsterdam City Archives).
Shown here is the Dutch colonial pavilion with a statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the fourth governor-general of the Dutch East Indies for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). For many he (still) embodies a sense of pride in the Dutch "Golden Age." But his legacy also received criticism. Coen burned down the city of Jakarta in 1619 and—on its ashes—founded Batavia, the capital of the colony. In the Moluccas, he decimated the indigenous population of the Banda Islands in 1621, in order to establish a monopoly on the production of nutmeg and mace, priceless colonial commodities at the time.

2 The Golden Coach on Dam Square with the left panel visible. The picture was taken during a visit by the queen and her husband, March 6, 1901 (Amsterdam City Archives).

3 Portrait of Christiaan Pieter van Eeghen (1816–1889), photograph by Louis Wegner, 1857 (Amsterdam City Archives).

4 Portrait of Jan Herman van Eeghen (1849–1918), photograph by Louis Wegner, 1857 (Amsterdam City Archives).

5 Portrait of Pieter van Eeghen (1844–1907), photograph by Louis Wegner, 1857 (Amsterdam City Archives).

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6 Portrait of Sophia Adriana de Bruijn (1816–1890), painted by Thérèse Schwartze, ca. 1889–1890 (Amsterdam Museum).

7 Catharina Huidekoper (1822–1879), photo by Louis Wegner, 1857 (Amsterdam City Archives).

8 Exhibition ‘In the Presence of Absence’, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2020. Gallery view of Timo Demollin’s installation Visit (1883–2020),which comprised old prints of scenes from the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition of 1883 in the open area of Amsterdam now known as Museumplein. The prints were on loan from the Stedelijk library and displayed at various locations throughout the museum. This world fair featured displays of not only objects, plants, and animals, but also members of colonized communities from what were then Dutch colonies. In consensus with the artist, the curators of In the Presence of Absence took the decision to omit from the exhibition four prints displaying stereotypical representations of these communities and their living environments. Demollin had substituted these images with inventory numbers that could be used to consult them in the museum library. Photo: Peter Tijhuis.

9 For the duration of the exhibition ‘In the Presence of Absence’, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2020, the original ground plan indicating the location of the various pavilions making up the world fair of 1883 has been added to the timeline next to the stairs leading down to Stedelijk BASE, where the permanent collection is displayed. The timeline shows milestones in the history of the Stedelijk Museum, such as landmark exhibitions and the establishment of the Stedelijk, which opened on Museumplein twelve years after the colonial world fair. Photo: Peter Tijhuis.

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10 Gallery view exhibition *Kirchner Nolde: Expressionism. Colonialism*, Stedelijk Museum, 2021, works by Kirchner and Djang, Leopard stool by an unrecorded artist, Bamileke People, Cameroon.

11 Gallery view *Tomorrow is a Different Day, collection 1980–now*, Stedelijk Museum, 2021, works by Willem de Rooij, purchased with the generous support from the Mondriaan Fund, 2011, and El Anatsui, Stedelijk Museum, Kunstmuseum Bern, acquired with support of the Rembrandt Association (courtesy of its Titus Fund, Coleminks Fund, van Rijn Fund, Post-war and Contemporary Art Fund), Mondriaan Fund, BankGiro Loterij, Stiftung GegenwART, with special thanks to the SIGG COLLECTION, 2020.

Photos: Gert Jan van Rooij.

CHANGING AND LEARNING. A CONVERSATION BETWEEN YM AND RW

Amsterdam and Berlin, September 27, 2021
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Yvette Mutumba (YM) is artistic director of Contemporary And (C&)and currently Curator-at-Large at the Stedelijk.

RW Reading the text by Nancy Jouwe, I was wondering about the title's context. I am curious why the terminology "Imperial Amsterdam" was chosen.

YM I understand this term in a way that these families Nancy describes, who were deeply entangled in colonial trade and enslavement, wanted Amsterdam as a city to reflect their success overseas. I understand her in the sense that this is the imperial aspect. Maybe not like German imperialism, where the colonies were owned by the imperial government, but more as an ambition to show off the fruits of their very individual colonial endeavors. This is interesting because Nancy's text shows how this distinguishes the history of the Stedelijk Museum from histories of other national art museums, as it arose from private initiatives.

RW That's exactly what I was wondering, and what I consider to be the difference between the Dutch situation and, for instance, the British and the German situation.

The Netherlands was politically speaking always opposite to something like an imperialist state in terms of a Kaiserreich. The term “imperial” in connection to Amsterdam is therefore an interesting one. When looking at the city’s concentric canals, the first one, closest to the city centre, is called the Singel, then comes the Herengracht, the Keizersgracht, and the Prinsengracht. The Herengracht is more important than the Keizersgracht because at the time the merchants, the trading families, were more influential than Kaisers (Emperors).

YM It is also partly a different history in comparison to Germany, because the whole history of enslavement that comes with it is different and plays a very specific role, as it also does in the British context.
I found it salient that Nancy connects the concept of the colonial exhibitions with the origin of the museum, because it is something that is a repeating story in a broader European context: big colonial shows were everywhere, in Paris, Berlin, Brussels, London… So it has always been about grandeur, showing off wealth and power gained through the exploitation of the colonial territories overseas.
I think it’s particularly interesting that through Nancy’s text this connection is being made toward an *art* museum. Usually we talk about it in the context of ethnographic museums, like the British Museum, the Humboldt Forum, and so on. Now the Stedelijk was placed into that historic context, in addition to the Tropenmuseum.

RW That is perfectly true. The patricians were also mentioned here as being very important for the funding of the Tropenmuseum, the city’s ethnographic museum. These questions also pertain to today’s questioning of the International Colonial and Export Exhibition held in 1883 on the same ground as where the Stedelijk was later built. It’s something which was also thematized in the 2020 iteration of the Municipal Art Acquisitions exhibition, where one artist, Timo Demollin, showed documentation of this colonial exhibition (fig. 8). It is also mentioned in the exhibition on Kirchner and Nolde in the context of colonialism, which is on view at the museum now, where attention is among others drawn to the *human zoos* staged there. It’s important that the Stedelijk is aware of this history and knows that it is placed in a challenging tradition in that sense. Which is not a tradition which we prefer but it’s the one that we must grapple with.

YM I would say that it’s crucial that the Stedelijk becomes a sustainable part of that narrative. So that the engagement is not only in these temporary exhibitions or in a text, but that it is something that is continuously accessible.

RW I think we should do something concrete and make it visible in the museum itself.

YM For institutions like the Stedelijk, there are ways to deal with it progressively and in a self-conscious way. Other museums have tried, mainly ethnographic museums, which have these moments at the entry of their permanent exhibitions where they present texts about the histories of the museum.

RW Down in the basement of the museum, the Stedelijk has a timeline summarizing its history. During the run of the above-mentioned Municipal Art exhibition, the same artist added a text referencing the Colonial Exhibition that was held on the same spot where the Stedelijk was later built (fig. 9). It might be worth considering whether a sign like this could be made more permanent. We are currently in the process of bringing the museum’s collection presentation back into the old building. This means we could also consider installing a new timeline in the old building that includes a reference to this.

YM Exactly. I believe people are not aware where they are, like literally, on which ground. It’s not common knowledge that the colonial trade exhibition was held there, and how the Tropenmuseum, the Rijksmuseum, and the Stedelijk are all connected. It is important to understand this local history is intertwined with global colonial connections. And without these connections, all the money flows that enabled the establishment of those museums wouldn’t have happened.

RW Which also brings us to the aspect that the ethnographic museum, as we call it in this historical sense, and the art museum are not actually that different. This is particularly pressing at the moment, because we are in the midst of discussions surrounding the Kirchner and Nolde exhibition, wherein exactly this question is being posited regarding whether the Stedelijk still wants to be an art museum. People point and say, “Watch out! If an art museum starts to show ‘ethnographic objects,’ as they call it, then this will be the end of the art museum.”

YM It is interesting that it is perceived as a major problem, that the ethnographic objects are part of the show. There's a lot of context providing a coherent argumentation about why this is the case.

RW This seems to be a severe problem in terms of expectations for many people who come to the museum with the wish to see artworks and who don't come to an art museum to see ethnographic objects.

YM But they're closely connected to the art shown and, in addition—and this is very important—they are also art objects in their own right.

RW They are. This is what we want to make more clear. That it is not only material culture, but among them are a lot of artworks—also when it is so difficult to identify the artists that made them.

RW Some critics complain they are unable to see the artworks as artworks in the exhibition and, interestingly, they don't say a word about the quality of the outer-European[1] works in the exhibition.

YM The backlash shows how important that exhibition is, and how important it is to talk about this. Still it's a shame there is this kind of backlash, but it's also good that the museum stands by having this exhibition and showing these works. People need to understand that so-called icons like Kirchner and Nolde have much more to them than being great painters. There's no way around it.

RW Yes. Exactly true. That is what we also want to say with this exhibition. This is a very specific, research-based exhibition that was founded on the shared knowledge of experts, many of whom are from outer-European cultures. There are many outer-European works from Nolde's own collection in the exhibition as well. It makes sense to show his large collection after 50 years of not being seen.

YM What do you think? Do you have a sense of where these reactions are coming from? Why fear seeing those ethnographic objects in the museum?

RW It's like losing the myth; the disappearance of the myth of the genius artist who was able to create an artwork all by himself, out of the blue. It's the danger of the disappearance of hierarchy. This is very clear. It's all about hierarchy, in the sense that we have the large photographs of outer-European people, much bigger than the paintings of Kirchner and Nolde—a reversal of hierarchy. This makes clear that the world order is a bit different than many of us probably would like to think. There is a confronting element. I have a feeling that when you get the "courage" to visit an art museum, you should be able to cope with this kind of challenge.

YM Absolutely. This relates to the collection of the museum in general. I am referring to the conversations we had more than once, around this idea of hierarchies and icons in the museum's collection and how to handle this. I always like to provoke, saying they're either all icons or there are no icons. I know you take a different perspective. But this is about trying to break certain expectations and ideas around the collection in the way it is being rethought and newly presented.

RW The idea of an art museum seems to be that it's all about hierarchy and making clear to the audience what is important and what is less important, what is the best and what is second, and so on, until we reach the last. It's about aesthetic judgments, almost organized like a tournament. Interestingly enough, if you see a painting by Kirchner and then a work made by an outer-European artist during the same period, the question is raised whether one is better than the other. It becomes confronting precisely because we have such extremely strong outer-European objects in this exhibition as well (fig. 10).
I must say, I'm still a fan of Kirchner, more than I'm a fan of Nolde, by the way. Kirchner is one of the artists that I never forgot when I visited the Stedelijk when I was a child. We won't "cancel" Kirchner and we will still see him as an influential artist, but we have to get rid of this hierarchy. I think we tried to make that clear already in the new collection display. Yet it remains difficult to really get rid of this kind of hierarchy.

YM Also for me. I was educated in a European context and studied European and American art history, simply because that's what was offered in Germany at the time. We are all coming from a perspective where we have a very specific idea of what has aesthetic value, what is quality and what is not. This is something that museums, curators, but also anyone who is visiting has to constantly ask themselves, whether that's actually true or not, because we come from this universalizing idea of

1 The term "outer-European" was coined during the expert meetings prior to the opening of *Kirchner and Nolde: Expressionism, Colonialism*. Because the designation "non-European" can in a sense be nullifying in certain contexts, a more neutral term was sought.

modernism and we have to somehow unlearn it.
This can't only happen by bringing in experts, like for Kirchner and Nolde. We also have to keep ourselves in check, in the sense that if something maybe does not look the way we think it should, it doesn't always mean it's bad art. I encounter this in my practice with magazines [CONTEMPORARY AND (C&), CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) AMÉRICA LATINA, ed.], where we publish texts by people from really diverse contexts. Someone from Kampala, for example, might write a review in a very different style than someone from Amsterdam. That doesn't necessarily mean it's a bad review, just not what I'm used to reading. I think this is something super important, when looking into the future, to be aware that we always have to take a step back and look, then continue, step back again, and so on. It's a continuous process. This can't be solved by simply doing one workshop or talk or whatever. It has to constantly be a topic for everyone concerned with debates around collections as well.

RW Yes, that's true. We are in a period of change. I have been at the Stedelijk for almost two years now, and I recently found out that I started differently than where I am now. I now know I'm a change director of sorts, because it's necessary to shift the scope and self-esteem of the museum at this moment in time. It can't be about just producing top-ten exhibitions anymore. We are still doing big exhibitions and very different exhibitions, but we have to think about the museum as something which has a lot of societal relevance, which also has political relevance. This is something we are increasingly aware of. So let's try and go for this change. We'll get critique, that's for sure.
But you asked why this happens here at the Stedelijk more than at other museums. There has always been more critical focus on the Stedelijk, but there is now slightly more critical focus on the Stedelijk at the moment because we are doing something that does not fit in the traditional framework, but we can cope with this.

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YM In connection to this specific public interest in the Stedelijk, I would like to talk about the collections. I was wondering about

the issue of accessibility, in the sense of going beyond public presentation. What I mean are those parts of the collection that are never shown, although they might also be relevant or interesting because they're problematic for various reasons. Museums with ethnographic collections have started to have accessible storages, inviting the audience to be part of that museal underbelly. Is this something that would work for the Stedelijk?

RW I see the necessity, especially for ethnographic museums. Some art museums are also currently opening up their depots, such as the Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. But I do not think the Stedelijk should do this. For the time being, I would still like to leave the selection of what is shown up to experts. This group of experts should, however, become more diverse. We have started to build a new curatorial team with new expertise. Before we give the whole curatorial process to the audience, we should first expand and extend our curatorial expertise within the museum itself.

YM I was not necessarily even thinking about going that far. It was more about the literal accessibility, so that you have, for example, guided tours through the storage. Not necessarily in the sense that people curate or choose, but see what's there. That way they can get a better idea of why certain things are shown or why certain things take long, or why you feel like this needs to be contextualized and other things not.

RW That's true. We all need more transparency. At the same time, we do need the storage as a back office, where we need to keep up the necessary conservation and preservation conditions, which are not always compliant with visitor's traffic. The need to get as much as possible of the collection online, under the valid copyright conditions and restrictions, is kind of a workable alternative.

YM I think so. It would help people feel like they're more involved. I think this transparency can be useful in various areas, because I know, from my experience, that particularly younger artists often do not understand why they only get a certain fee or why this fee is so low and/or non-negotiable, or why certain organizational procedures take quite long, etc. It's often connected to the fact that they don't know about the processes. They maybe don't know that, for example, the Stedelijk might need a year to finalize

a decision to pay a higher fee. I think communicating things can actually help make dialogues much more constructive.

RW The Netherlands is quite far in terms of fair practice codes and very transparent about the fees, but artists don't always know this. Here, it is a matter of making people aware of these principles.

YM I wanted to come back to the question of money in general. I read about the Diversity & Inclusion Code, which includes a renumeration policy for projects. I think you quoted that when talking about the Stedelijk's acquisition policies. What were your plans a year ago, where do you feel the museum now stands, and where should it go or where it will it go?

RW Well, one of the key statements we made is that we want to spend at least 50% of the acquisition budget for works by artists of color, or artists with a biographical background not based in Western Europe or North America. We wanted to start this year, but it was already in practice last year. Of course, there's always a difference between what is purchased and what is donated. However, the donations are tending to change already, to fit into this new policy. The new criteria are becoming clear to the people around us.
It must be said, of course, that this is also part of a general art market change. This is something we have to be careful with, but still, it's changing our system.

YM Of course you could also say 100% for everyone else, considering that for many decades it was nearly 100% white, mainly male, European/US artists.

RW Now we say "at least 50," and we formulated this for a period of four years, to match the subsidy. Last year we even discussed making it 100%. I rejected this, because I don't want to become completely exclusive.

YM So you think 100% would be too exclusive toward the other direction, basically?

RW I think so, yes. I know you're not completely in line with that, but I also have to think about the continuation of the museum. There is some pragmatism in that sense, but we need pragmatism to survive.

YM I get it. But I still question it. Because we see how the press or other members of the public react to certain exhibitions, I

wonder how far this also applies to those who are close to the museum, such as donors or stakeholders.
Is it also an issue of becoming more dependent on certain stakeholders, the more money or works they give to the museum?

RW Some people close to the Stedelijk told me it's great to have these negative critiques because it makes the museum stronger and it's befitting of the Stedelijk. I don't see the museum's stakeholders abandoning the museum so easily. I don't see too much dependence in that sense. When you're too dependent, you have to say no. I have a very good feeling about our donors.

YM Which I guess is a good sign, because that means they are also open to these changes.

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YM In a way, the Stedelijk is really specific. In the German context it is more rare that people react and write with similar intensity and emotion. Specific exhibitions are hardly dissected in a similar way as the shows at the Stedelijk. That really shows a big potential for the Stedelijk to actively contribute to current debates. It shows the potential of how far the museum can really change things and have an impact. This brings us to the debates around how European museums today have to reposition themselves. There's this question of how political that can or should be. When I went to an international symposium on the Future of Museums, many participants argued that the museum is not political, or can't be political. I find that very interesting, especially in current times.

RW Yes, I think the museum is political. The museum is not a political party, but a political arena. I think the newly proposed definition by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is very suitable in making clear that the museum is about discursivity and political questions. When I started here, I wanted to make it very clear that the museum also takes a position. I have since become a bit more careful.

YM Why?

RW At the moment, the museum policy is that we take a position on matters brought up by the art itself, or matters that belong

to the history or DNA of the museum as such. For instance, the part of the museum's history that involves systemic racism makes it necessary to express an opinion about racism and about the questions we're discussing currently. It was necessary to come up with a statement after George Floyd's killing and what happened afterward. Also, the gender debate is crucial for a museum to take a position on, due to the exclusion of female artists in the past.

We may have to be a bit more careful with expressing opinions about other matters, I feel, because we are not a political party. Ideally, our opinion would manifest through showing works by specific artists or organizing thematic exhibitions before we write a big statement in a newspaper about what we think.

YM I agree that to create exhibitions and programs is much more effective than making these statements. You might know that last year I was very critical of the responses by many European institutions toward the George Floyd moment, as we can call it, because I felt like it was a very tokenistic reaction. Posting a solidarity statement on Instagram doesn't mean anything, because it doesn't really have an impact, apart from maybe people liking that post, but what does that even mean? A long-lasting, deeper impact can only come through showing relevant artworks.

RW With the exhibitions and the acquisition policy.

YM Absolutely. It also remains to be seen how far other museums can or want to really commit to going beyond these statements. "Decolonization" is regarded as a zeitgeist. This is very problematic, because obviously systemic racism has been there for centuries. I think there's a lack of sensitivity toward a real understanding of that. This moment last year was revealing because with all these institutions pledging their solidarity, it became clear they hadn't done so before. It was just showing how ignorant most of the institutions had been throughout the past decades.

This also leads to another point: the question of power. When we say there's this political ambition in a way you described it, political also means the institution has a certain kind of power.

RW Power comes with a responsibility to make a change. That also means we can change the exhibition policy, as well as the way we make collection displays. The third important thing is

changing our recruitment policy. This is something which we were very keen on from the beginning, when I started to work here, in order to come to another kind of power dynamic within the museum. We have to rely on shared expertise. We have to make new decisions with a staff that is different from the staff it used to be, because changes need to come from within. We can't just make decisions as a white staff anymore.

We can do something about the power hierarchy between museums. We can also work together with much smaller institutions, for instance.

YM Exactly, this is a super important point: collaboration with smaller institutions, also internationally, who might have shared ideas. That can be anyone, really, on the same level and without any power relations. It's icrucial that the Stedelijk thinks about this, as there are more and more similar initiatives coming up.

RW We have to be careful that it's not capacity building for something else or for something bigger, like instrumentalizing it.

YM Exactly. That can easily happen if you are a big institution like the Stedelijk. It is therefore relevant to keep that in mind for collaborations. I know you already have the idea to bring back the SMBA, the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, the museum's former project space. This, I guess, also opens up the opportunity for new kinds of collaborations for the Stedelijk, because it is maybe a bit more flexible in how it can operate.

RW That's the idea, yes, to play with different power possibilities without thinking about power. There are some really interesting strategic alliances between museums and art centers.

I recently spoke to a director of a smaller museum whom I know very well. She said she was interested in working with the same artists as we are, but she said, "But we are too small, probably." I said, "No, this is not the case.

We don't think in these kinds of hierarchies anymore." We have to work big and small. In the end, what counts is the quality of sharing knowledge and sharing expertise and coming up with an output which serves the art and serves society.

YM Yes, absolutely. I would like to come to a final point, which is the aspect of failure. I'm not necessarily talking about failure in the sense of the Stedelijk having failed to be more inclusive all these past decades. I'm referring to it as part of the current process of repositioning. It's necessary to think about failure as

something that can be productive. I guess it's also connected to the issue of transparency.

RW I believe in failure, and I believe in the necessity of failure to be able to learn. We should be a learning institution. We can't be an institution that knows it all. We can't be sure about anything. We are not here to set up exhibitions that mark the end of the possibilities out there. We are supposed to organize exhibitions that open up sites into other futures and into different worlds.

YM Yes, I think it is so important because for a long time museums have played that role of an institution where everything you see in the space, read on the wall or in the catalog, is the absolute truth. The institution has this kind of power. Now it's become increasingly clear that this can't be right, because the museum is not only a building, it's people. People with very specific ideas or subjectivities, and that needs to be taken into account, to humanize the institution.

RW I'm perfectly with you when you speak about humanizing the institution. We have to think in the human scale. That's also why, for instance, performance art became increasingly influential these last years. When I started working in museums in the 1990s, I developed this idea about performing the museum, making the museum work in a human way, and bringing more human capital into museums.

We have to work on human potential and human capital. That means we should try to move budgets away from logistics and toward human efforts.

YM Yes, that's a crucial point as well.

RW Then I come back to the idea that people always have an opinion about the Stedelijk. It's been said that the Stedelijk is a bit like a human being in some way. This is something we can use to our advantage and develop further. A human being in 2021 is a completely different person than 70 years ago. We believe in multiple identities, people who are built on different attitudes and different strategies.

We came up with a title for this new collection display, Tomorrow is a different day, which is not completely correct English because it should be "Tomorrow is another day," but we wanted to make clear that we don't know tomorrow yet and that it will be different from today. Not only will it be something else, it will also be different. We need the capacity to grow with this difference

(fig. 11). That is about humanizing the institution.

YM I think that's also a way to humanize the institution, making clear there's that openness to exchange and have a conversation. This means you're not only providing answers but also posing questions and inviting artists who are dealing with certain questions in their own way.

RW We wouldn't be providing them; we would still be in that hierarchical relationship. We should not. We are also a knowledge institution, an educational institution, and education is not about hierarchy anymore. We know we have to change, but not everybody wants to change and not everybody wants to change with the same speed. Even within the museum. It's an internal debate and also an internal conflict every now and then.

YM Of course, but I guess it has to be, because I really believe in the productiveness of conflicts like this. Everyone has their own pace and might be overwhelmed with certain things, and others will be less so.

RW We need the conflict system in a way, but not too much, because otherwise an institution on a scale like this is not able to move.

The speed of a bigger museum like the Stedelijk is completely different than the speed of a smaller art space. Maybe, in a museum like this, the change you want to make gets implemented at the moment you're leaving again.

YM Our goal must be that, at a certain point, we are no longer necessary. So we have to disappear, because everything we needed to address is just so normal.

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