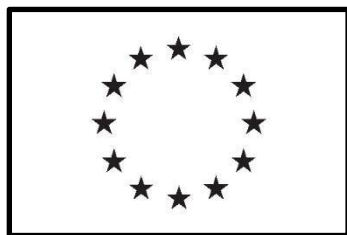# ECHOES

EUROPEAN COLONIAL HERITAGE MODALITIES IN ENTANGLED CITIES

Amsterdam Museum Report #1

Amsterdam Museum(s): In Search of a History, an Identity, and a Future

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Introduction

This report was developed within the Horizon2020 project *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* as part of its work package 3 on '*City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts.*' This work package conducts in-depth, qualitative, comparative analyses of three city museums, each representing distinct positions within colonial history. The Amsterdam Museum forms one of these three case studies. The aim of this first report on the Amsterdam Museum is to reconstruct the evolution of the museum and illustrate the current state and positionality of the museum. This analysis is placed within the context of the history of the city of Amsterdam and consists of research into the museum's position, priorities, policies, problems, and opportunities, which are shaped by both external influences (*e.g.* relationships to city authorities, national or local politics, developments within the national museum sector, or the particular features of the city) as well as internal processes and values. Thus, this report provides a preliminary case study of the Amsterdam Museum from a post-colonial perspective in order to understand how the museum is positioned within the colonial pasts of Amsterdam and how, in turn, these pasts are represented in the museum.

The Amsterdam Museum provides a case study from a city museum located in Western Europe. The first reports on the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum (Pozzi 2019) and the Museum of Warsaw (Bukowiecki 2019) prepared in parallel present case studies of city museums from two different geo-political zones (East Asia and Central and Eastern Europe). The research on all three of these case studies is on-going and will result in two more sets of reports, which will jointly form a nine-part final report of the research conducted on city museums within ECHOES. As the research is still in progress, the results presented in this report should be treated as preliminary and may be changed or expanded due to new findings.

The report begins with a brief history of the city of Amsterdam, which focuses on the development of the city and in particular the colonial framework in which this development should be placed. After illustrating the context of the history of the city of Amsterdam, the report sketches the current state of the museum sector in the Netherlands and the position of museums in Dutch society and politics. The core of the paper is formed by an analysis of the Amsterdam Museum. This analysis begins with a history of the museum, from its foundation as the Amsterdam Historical Museum in 1926 until its rebranding as Amsterdam Museum in 2011. After discussing the history of the museum, the current state of the museum is investigated, including its current organizational structure, its staff, its mission, its strategic partnerships, the collections, the permanent and temporary exhibitions, and the visitors. Finally, the report presents preliminary reflections of examples of (dis)engagements with colonialism at the Amsterdam Museum, based on the ECHOES methodology centered on four modalities for practicing colonial heritage: removal, repression, reframing, and re-emergence (Kølvraa 2018).

Amsterdam's History: From Aemstelledamme to IAmsterdam

Amsterdam's history begins with a dramatic climate event (Gawronski & Kranendonk 2018). Towards the end of the 12th century, a series of storm floods completely changed the landscape around the mouth of the river Amstel. Previously, farmers had settled near this area and used it seasonally or temporarily, but the river mouth itself remained uninhabited marshland. However, the storm floods had created a new waterway, called the IJ, cutting through from the inland sea, first called Almere and later named Zuiderzee, all the way to the river Amstel. Suddenly, the Amstel river mouth was connected via the Zuiderzee to the North Sea. Soon after the major flood of 1170, the settlement of Amsterdam was founded as two streets of houses on dykes along opposite sides of the river (*Ibid.*: 27). From the beginning, the settlement focused on trade and crafts – rather than fishing or agriculture – and soon a dam was built over the river which became the mercantile center. The settlement grew rapidly as a result of maritime trade, for instance with the Baltic Sea. Known at the time as Aemstelledamme (literally: the dam on the Amstel), the city received its toll privileges in 1275 and its city rights in 1300 or 1301 (SA 2016). Near the end of the 16th century, the city had expanded into a horseshoe-shape around the dam square and had a population of c. 60 000 (AM 2013b: 19).

The city experienced explosive growth in the 17th century, a period known as the Dutch 'Golden Age' (Helmers & Janssen 2018a). However, the wealth and prosperity of this 'Golden Age' was largely achieved at the expense of the lives and efforts of peoples living elsewhere in the world, whose enslaved or forced labor led to the extraction, processing, and transportation of valued natural resources overseas. Thus, this 'Golden' period should be seen within a wide, dark frame of exploitation, domination, violence, genocide, slavery, environmental destruction, *etc*. (*cf.* Vanvugt 2016). Under the banner of mercantilism, exploitation also occurred within the Dutch Republic. Despite the creation of various welfare institutions, such as Old Men's houses, orphanages, and poor houses, the many impoverished or otherwise marginalized were also frequently exploited, for instance as cheap or disposable seafaring labor. Only a small, select group of persons could be said to have truly benefitted from this 'Golden Age.' They invested part of their wealth in the arts and the skills of contemporary Dutch artists. These artists are still considered to have been exceptional and this period is well-represented in Dutch art history and historical art collections (Atkins 2011; Helmers & Janssen 2018b; Kiers & Tissink 2000).

The relationship between the city of Amsterdam and maritime trade had become even more prominent in the 17th and 18th centuries. During this time, the city was expanded in a number of construction phases, during which the World Heritage Listed Amsterdam Canal Ring was created (in four phases, 1578-1665; Feddes 2012; Vlaardingerbroek *et al.* 2016). The city's population also increased dramatically, first to 120 000 in 1625 and then to 200 000 by 1662 (AM 2013b: 21 & 23)[1]. In direct relation to the physical expansion of the city and its population growth, the city increased its role and investment in maritime trade. The Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC) was founded in 1602 and the Dutch West India Company (*West-Indische Compagnie*, WIC) in 1621 (Gaastra 2002; den Heijer 2013). The role of the VOC and the WIC in the history and development of Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic more broadly cannot be understated. Indeed, the date of the foundation of the VOC is often taken as the start of the Dutch

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[1] The last great plague epidemic in Amsterdam struck in 1663-1664 and took the lives of just over 21 000 persons, or more than 10% of the population (Mooij 2001). However, the population of the city continued to grow and had reached the same number by the end of the century (AM 2013b: 25).

'Golden Age.' These two trading companies were major players in the Dutch colonial project. Beyond 'simply' trading, these companies founded trading posts, towns, and cities, created and managed plantations, engaged in military operations on land and on sea, and were the de facto representatives of the Dutch Republic in many overseas territories.

The symbiotic relationship between the colonial system and the city of Amsterdam continued in a mutually entangled interplay of causes and effects over the centuries. The canal ring expansion was financed largely through profit gained from maritime trade, particularly through the VOC and WIC. At the same time, the canal ring was designed and built to support and extend that same colonial trade system. The North-Eastern part of the canal ring consisted of a series of wharves, shipyards, and docks. The entire North of the city looked out onto a sheltered harbor where ships could moor alongside long rows of poles. Many of the canal houses on the ring were built as living spaces for wealthy merchants and the attics were used as storage for trade goods. Not long after the foundation of the VOC, a council of merchants decided to build a bourse, which was completed in 1611 (van den Heuvel 2018). Beyond a trade in goods, work contracts, and insurances, the bourse also functioned as a stock exchange for stock in both the VOC and WIC. Although enslaved persons were not directly sold at the Amsterdam bourse – but the products of their labor were – both the WIC and the VOC were directly involved in the slave trade and owned enslaved persons (Balai 2013; Hondius *et al.* 2018; van Rossum 2015). The colonial project, the slave trade, and the plantation system were major contributors in the development of the city and its population. In fact, the city of Amsterdam was co-owner[2] of the *Sociëteit van Suriname*, a private company which managed the colony of Suriname in terms of organization and administration (Balai 2011; Balai 2013; Fatah-Black 2015; Fatah-Black 2018). This organization also included matters such as sending settlers and planters to Suriname or taking care of the 'supply' of enslaved persons to the plantations. Thus, the city and the colonial empire grew hand in hand.

However, the decline of the city and the colonial system was also mutual. The latter part of the 18th century marked a period of decline for Amsterdam which was closely tied to maritime trade and the colonial project (Brugmans 1973). The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784) is often attributed as one of the main causes for the decline, bankruptcy, and dissolution of both the VOC (1798) and the WIC (1792). Much of this war was fought out at sea over colonial territories and/or involved the capture of Dutch ships and their goods. The war and its blockades led to massive losses for both companies. With the English having taken over several colonies and years' worth of products and profits, there was no prospect that the VOC or the WIC could become profitable again and after years of increasing debts both companies were dissolved (Gaastra 2002; den Heijer 2013). Additionally, just before the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, due to an economic decline, there was a stock market crash in Amsterdam in 1773 (Fatah-Black 2015: 145). This crash directly led to the bankruptcy of many plantations in Suriname (Ibid.: 116), impacting not only those living and working on the plantations, but also resonating in the colonial system and slave trade more globally, resulting in a global shift in the balance of colonial powers. In 1795 the *Sociëteit van Suriname* was nationalized. The ensuing war with France and the annexation by France led to further stagnation of Amsterdam in terms of politics, economics, development, and population (180 000 inhabitants in 1815; AM 2013b: 27). The Dutch abolition of slavery took place in 1863 but

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[2] The *Sociëteit van Suriname* was co-owned by the city of Amsterdam, the WIC, and the Van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck family (Fatah-Black 2015: 20).

was followed by a period of 10 years in which the freed slaves were forced to continue working on the plantations for pay (Fatah-Black 2018).

Around the middle of the 19th century, industrialization gave a new impulse to the development and expansion of Amsterdam. The population growth of the city during the 19th century was explosive: by 1877 Amsterdam had 320 000 inhabitants and by 1903 it had grown to 540 000 (AM 2013b: 31 & 33). Civil engineering projects such as the construction of railways and the reclamation of land from various lakes required substantial manual labor and drew people to the city from rural areas. However, the city itself in terms of housing had not kept up with this explosive population growth. Amsterdam during the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century was overcrowded and there was a large, impoverished lower class. Subsequently, the early 20th century saw the construction of many new neighborhoods and housing projects, predominantly for the lower middle-class (Feddes 2012). Prior to WW2, the city's population had increased to 800 000 (AM 2013b: 37).

The Second World War particularly impacted Amsterdam's Jewish population, which had numbered 77 000 in 1941 (Tammes 2017). The first *razzia* (raid) took place in early 1941 to which the population of Amsterdam reacted with a general strike, now commemorated as the *Februaristaking* (February Strike). This strike was violently broken, with several deaths and many injured. Razzias continued sporadically, until by the summer of 1942 the large-scale deportation of Jews via the transit camp Westerbork to concentration and extermination camps abroad began. In September 1943 the last razzia took place in Amsterdam and the city was declared 'Judenfrei.' Less than 19 000 Amsterdam Jews survived the Holocaust, many of whom emigrated following the war.

The post-WW2 geo-political decolonization and industrial migration also greatly impacted the city of Amsterdam. Although the city had been visited and inhabited by internationally diverse persons for centuries, the cultural diversity of the city's inhabitants became more pronounced following the end of WW2. In the immediate post-war period, guest laborers from Spain and Italy moved to Amsterdam, followed by laborers from Turkey and Morocco in the 60s and 70s. As a result of the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949), during which the Dutch tried in vain to forcibly maintain their colonial position and which ended with a deep rift between the Netherlands and Indonesia, many Indonesian Dutch were forced to 'repatriate' to the Netherlands (Bosma 2009). In the two decades after WW2, c. 300 000 Indonesian Dutch emigrated to the Netherlands, although the term 'repatriation' is largely symbolic as many of them had never lived in the Netherlands before. Surrounding the independence of Suriname in 1975, many people from Suriname moved to Amsterdam, settling primarily in the Bijlmer neighborhood. Conflicts arose as the city tried to restrict certain neighborhoods and streets from settlement by Surinamese migrants (Heilbron 2017).

Today, the city of Amsterdam has a population of just over 850 000 with 180 nationalities represented (as of 2018; OIS Amsterdam 2018a: 8). This population is very diverse, with 31% having been born abroad and a further 22% who were born in the Netherlands but whose parent(s) was/were born abroad (OIS Amsterdam 2018a: 15). Significant Surinamese and Antillean communities, for instance, still reflect direct colonial ties. The diversity of the city is further impacted by tourism. The city was visited by c. 9 million tourists in 2018, staying an average of two nights (IOS Amsterdam 2018b: 15). As a result, the actual 'population' of Amsterdam fluctuates from day to day.

The image of Amsterdam towards the rest of the world was largely based to two stereotypes. Firstly, a positive perception of the 'Golden Age' history of the city, with aspects such as the Canal Ring architecture and the celebrated 17th century artworks. Secondly, Amsterdam as a tolerant and open city, an image which grew out of the protest and peace movements of the 1960s and was supported through liberal policies and laws in terms of drugs and prostitution. These two images are now in opposition with each other due to a greater awareness of the dark frame in which the 'Golden Age' should be placed. Around the turn of the 21st century, the city engaged in a process of rebranding by focusing on three key values of the city: creativity, innovation, and the spirit of commerce (Berenschot 2004). This led to the creation of 'I amsterdam' which combined this slogan or motto with a mission, a brand, a graphic design, and a marketing campaign. The giant 'I amsterdam' logo sculpture later placed outside the Rijksmuseum, became a major draw for tourists and a public photo opportunity. Although the motto was meant to make both Amsterdammers and visitors feel included in the ongoing creation of an Amsterdam identity, the marketing campaign seems to have been primarily successful with tourists. Indeed, the logo has been the focus of critical artworks and the municipality ultimately decided to remove the sculpture in 2018 (de Wildt 2018).

Amsterdam exists today within a paradox of tolerance. The city is widely known – and wants to be known – as a tolerant space where people of all kinds are welcomed, and it places this tolerance in a long historical frame from providing refuge for Sephardic Jews and other religious refugees in the 16th century, until becoming the first city in the world to conduct a same-sex marriage ceremony in 2001 (AM 2013a). Yet, alongside this long history of tolerance there have also always been cases of intolerance, conflicts, xenophobia, racism, *etc.* However, in most of these cases the myth of tolerance is then employed to silence or hide points of tension. In other words, any hint of conflict is swept under the carpet under the guise of 'tolerance.' Indeed, there have been attempts to frame the abolition of slavery under the mantel of liberty (AM 2018b). This has made it difficult to discuss contentious issues, such as Amsterdam's colonial past and its legacies of slavery and colonialism. The annual protests surrounding the celebration of Sinterklaas and the racist representation of his helper 'Zwarte Piet' highlight the difficulties in challenging intolerance (Wekker 2016). Despite these challenges, more awareness has been created about the dark history of Amsterdam, particularly in terms of its slavery history, for instance with the publication of a Slavery Heritage Guide (Hondius *et al.* 2018). Ultimately, the history of Amsterdam shows the many entangled relationships through which colonialism and the city impacted each other over the course of centuries. Some of these entanglements continue into the present day, or can be identified in more or less visible ways. Today's Amsterdam still exists within a colonial frame.

Museums in the Netherlands: Publicly Treasured, Politically Disregarded?

As elsewhere in the world, cabinets of curiosities and (private) collections of cultural and natural objects were not uncommon in the Netherlands. For instance, the painter Rembrandt van Rhijn is known to have had a collection of objects which he used as inspiration or models for paintings[3]. The first 'modern' museum in the Netherlands, *i.e.* a collection of objects which is made accessible to the public for their education and entertainment (*cf.* Bennett 1995), was Teylers Museum in Haarlem, which opened in 1778 (Weiss 2013). This museum brought together a collection of art and science, most notably drawings, scientific instruments, minerals, fossils, and books. Over the course of the 19th century, other museums were founded throughout the country, including many national museums. Most of these early modern museums contained collections which brought together nature and culture, art and science, and the historical and the contemporary.

The cores of the collections of these museums were often either personal collections, the result of scientific studies, or due to national efforts. However, many of the collections resulted in one way or another from the colonial project. Colonial officers, missionaries, travelers, traders, natural scientists, anthropologists, and others engaged in the sporadic or systematic collection of objects from the colonies. Ethnographic museums even published instructions to colonists on how to collect objects (van Dijk 1992). These collections were added to, or formed the basis of, many of the early modern museums in the Netherlands. The 1883 world exhibition held in Amsterdam, called the 'International Colonial and Export Exhibition,' was the reason for intensified colonial collecting, specifically in the Dutch Indies (Indonesia). Focused on trade, products, and production, the World Exhibition also contained ethnographic, archaeological, historical, and arts collections, as well as the highly problematic displays of living persons exhibited as cultural or 'racial' curiosities (Corbey 1993; Schuurmans 2013). Objects collected for the World Exhibition found their way into museum collections, *e.g.* the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (Leiden) and the former Ethnografisch Museum Artis (Amsterdam).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the number of museums in the Netherlands has been growing. Museums have become more specialized and differentiated than the early modern museums were. Generally, their collections have become more specific and there is also greater diversity in terms of museum ownership. Aided by the fact that the term 'museum' is not a legally protected entity in the Netherlands, many private and grassroots museums have been founded. In 1994-1995 all of the national museums in the Netherlands underwent privatization (Engelsman 2006). Although the museums still operated thanks to governmental subsidies, they were now no longer directly state institutions, meaning that staff was employed by the museum (and not as civil servants under the Ministry of Culture) and various decision-making processes were shortened. This model was subsequently implemented by various local and provincial museums. Under the new museology (Vergo 1991), museums have been ever more strongly positioning themselves also in the Netherlands as social actors. Thus, alongside internal reorganizations and changes to collections and collection policies, the exhibitions and public activities of museums have also transformed significantly over the last few decades.

Today, the Netherlands is home to many museums. Particularly in the cities, some of these museums have shared histories, collections, and sometimes even staff. These cases are the result of often complex institutional trajectories in which museums have merged into or split apart from a joint organization. As a whole, the Dutch museum field has a long history of collaboration. The

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[3] A replica of this cabinet is on display at the Rembranthuis Museum in Amsterdam.

Dutch Museum Association (*Nederlandse Museum Vereniging*, NMV) was founded in 1926 as a regular meeting of museum directors. In 2003, the Foundation of the *Museumkaart* (museum card, more on this below) was merged into the NVM which subsequently developed to become the overarching organization of Dutch museums. In 2014, the NVM merged with the Association of National Museums (*Vereniging van Rijksmusea*, VRM) and was renamed to *De Museumvereniging* (MV). As of 2018, MV has a membership of 487 institutions, of which 450 are museums (MV website FAQ). All museums that wish to become members of the MV will need to be registered in the Dutch Museum Register (founded in 2000). To be eligible, museums must qualify as a 'museum' in accordance with the definition by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and also fulfil the quality demands of the Dutch Museum Register. This means that, strictly speaking, commercial institutions or exposition spaces without any collections of their own do not qualify. All members of MV can choose to participate in the museum card. This initiative was developed by Dutch museums in 1981 and currently over 400 museums in the Netherlands participate in the museum card (SM 2017). Any person can pay an annual fee[4] to be a museum card member, in turn gaining free access to all 400+ participating museums. Membership of the museum card continues to grow. The annual report from 2017 shows that there were just over 1,35 million museum card holders[5], together having made 8,7 million museum visits (or on average 6,6 visits per person in a year) (SM 2017). In total, Dutch museums saw 31 million visits in 2017, of which 30% were made by foreign visitors (SM 2018). The museums in the provinces of North-Holland and South-Holland, where cities such as Amsterdam, the Hague, and Rotterdam are located, are overrepresented and account for two-thirds of all museum visits.

Dutch museums are thus strongly tied together on a national level through the MV which facilitates not just the museum card, but also other promotional campaigns to draw visitors to museums, as well as works for the professionalization of the sector. MV engages with Dutch museum staff by offering training programs, organizing conferences and workshops, designing the collective labor agreement for the sector, as well as presenting awards. As of 2017, the Dutch museums in MV have almost 40 000 staff members in total, 27 000 of which are (unpaid) volunteers or interns (SM 2018). Besides the MV, many Dutch museums are also members of ICOM. The Dutch chapter, ICOM NL, which consists of museum staff or others working in the field of museology, is the third biggest national committee within ICOM with nearly 3700 individual members in 2017 (ICOM-NL 2018). Through ICOM, and particularly its international committees which are mostly dedicated to different types of museums or museum activities, Dutch museum staff are active on an international scale. It is common practice for Dutch museums to cooperate nationally and internationally with object loans, conferences, programs, activities, or travelling exhibitions. In Amsterdam, c. 50 museums are connected through a joint foundation, *Samenwerkende Amsterdamse Musea* (collaborating Amsterdam museums). Within the *Overleg Amsterdamse Musea* (meeting of Amsterdam museums), founded in 1994, these institutions meet every four months to discuss matters of relevance to museums in the city of Amsterdam.

Although Dutch museums are generally well-visited and valued by the public, and their collections are treasured, they have struggled over the last decade financially. The 2008 global financial crisis and the ensuing European debt crisis also significantly impacted the Dutch cultural

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[4] As of 2019, the museum card costs €64,90 for adults and €32,45 for children (until the age of 18). The card is valid for a year and there is no limit on how many visits you can make with the card.

[5] This is quite significant, as the Netherlands has a population of just over 17 million. Of course, some museum cards are purchased by non-residents.

sector. Although initially changes were only noticeable in the decline in foreign visitors, in 2012 the government announced major budget cuts, reducing its 2013 subsidies for the cultural sector by 200 million euro (NRC 2012). The government thereby pushed museums to find additional sources of income in order to survive. These severe budget cuts had immediate effects on the museum sector in the Netherlands. Especially smaller museums were faced with closures and forced to fire staff. In the case of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, survival of the institution was only achieved through a merger with two other ethnographic museums (Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden, and Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal) into a National Museum of World Cultures in 2014. The government had announced that it would entirely eliminate the subsidy of the Tropenmuseum, unless the museum would merge (Kammer 2014). Thus, the crisis also resulted in this and other institutional mergers. The pressure on museums to find other sources of funding alongside (or instead of) government subsidies, led to a number of changes. Some museums hired new directors and a noticeable trend was that these new directors had backgrounds in other fields such as events management. Museums increased their efforts to attract (paying) events to their buildings, providing a venue for non-internally organized events and private functions. Of course, in this financial situation, the pressure for museums to increase their visitors and thus their income from entry fees also grew. As a result, although many museums were forced to reduce their amount of paid staff, new marketing & communications positions were announced. In 2017, for the first time, museums' own sources of income were greater than the amount received in subsidies (SM 2018). This shows that Dutch museums (on average) are managing to compensate for their reduced governmental support. Although the financial crisis has been more or less overcome in the Netherlands, and visitor numbers have been steadily increasing on the whole, the cultural sector has not yet recovered financially. Especially some of the small to mid-sized museums are still operating at a deficit (SM 2018).

Another effect of the financial crisis and the political pressures for individual museums to prove their continued right of existence has been a strong branding or rebranding of museums. In order to be considered relevant for continued subsidies, many of the smaller and mid-sized museums had to prove that they offered something unique and different from other museums. Sometimes coupled with newly hired directors, museums thus worked to create stronger separate identities and mission statements. At the same time, they defined more clearly which specific audiences they were targeting. In some cases, rebranding was related to local or tourism marketing campaigns (*e.g.* the 2004 'I amsterdam' campaign, Berenschot 2004). These branding processes were also necessary in the competition between museums to draw visitors, to be able to more clearly demonstrate to visitors why they should visit one museum rather than another. Branding processes were generally beneficial in terms of more clearly defining the missions, policies, and audiences of museums. However, the pressure for increased visitor numbers has led to greater competition between museums. In addition, it has perhaps become more challenging for museums to present contested topics, as these might lead to controversy or be less attractive to a majority of potential visitors. Yet again, a positive effect of this drive for visitor numbers might be the increased efforts to improve the inclusivity of museums.

The Amsterdam Historical Museum

Figure 1: The Amsterdam Historical Museum in De Waag. Photo by: unknown, November 1926. Image: Amsterdam Museum.

The Amsterdam Historical Museum (*Amsterdams Historisch Museum*; AHM) was officially opened to the public on 2 November 1926 (Kistemaker 2001). The museum was located in the historical building *De Waag* on the Nieuwmarkt square (see Figure 1). Originally built as a gate house in 1488, the building in the middle of a busy market square served as a weighing-house from 1612 until 1819. Besides a weighing-house, De Waag also housed the meeting rooms of several guilds. Over the course of the 19th century, the building had many different purposes and was used as office space for various committees, as a workshop, and also housed an anatomical museum and the city archives. In 1926, the newly founded Amsterdam Historical Museum settled in De Waag. The AHM also provided space in a tower room on the second floor for the exhibition of objects of the Society for Jewish Studies (*Genootschap voor de Joodsche Wetenschap in Nederland*) which lead to the foundation of the Jewish Historical Museum (*Joods Historisch Museum*) in 1932 in the same space (Ostow 2005).

The earliest collections of the Amsterdam Historical Museum were, however, formed long before the creation of the museum institution (Kistemaker 2001). The AHM, upon its founding, became the custodian of a diversity of collections of objects owned by or gifted to the municipality of Amsterdam. As such, objects held within municipal buildings, such as the city hall or public social institutions such as orphanages and correctional facilities, became part of the AHM's collection.

The city hall, for instance, had housed a historical collection since the 16th century, which was constantly expanded. In 1806 a cabinet of curiosities was assembled in the city hall for which a written guide was published. Besides collections from municipal buildings, the AHM also holds collections gifted by private collectors to the city. The Willet-Holthuysen donation (1895) is a major example, including an extensive library of art-historical books, as well as their entire canal house with the stipulation that the house remain open to the public as a museum. Thus, alongside smaller art historical objects, the AHM's collections include furniture and furnishings (*e.g.* interior ceilings or fireplaces), as well as massive group portraits, often from guilds and civil or military groups.

Prior to the creation of the AHM, these municipal collections were largely scattered (Kistemaker 2001). Some of the objects were placed in municipal buildings, but these were not always open to the public. Others could be viewed in municipally-managed museums such as the Museum Willet-Holthuysen (1896) and the Stedelijk Museum (also 1896). Yet again other objects were placed in the national museum, the Rijksmuseum (founded in 1800 and moved to its current location in 1885), through long-term loans, most famously Rembrandt van Rijn's *Nachtwacht* (The Night Watch, 1642). Many other objects were held in storages, partially together with the municipal archives. Ideas to create an Amsterdam Historical Museum emerged prior to the First World War, particularly as the head of the Stedelijk Museum (litt.: the city museum) wished to focus the museum more on (modern) art and hoped to create a new institution for the collections of historical objects related to the city (which he referred to as '*Amstelodamensia*'). Plans were placed on hold during the war, but were voiced again in the 1920s and gained both public and political support following the temporary exhibition held in 1925 for the 650th anniversary of Amsterdam. This anniversary exhibition was organized as a collaboration between the Stedelijk Museum and Rijksmuseum and showed a wealth of objects related to the city and her history. The success of this exhibition was the main reason for the creation of the Amsterdam Historical Museum in 1926. The AHM fell under the management of the Stedelijk Museum and its director, although the AHM had its own head curator and advisory committee.

Already early on, De Waag was deemed unfit to house the AHM. As a fairly small building, it was not possible to display many of the larger objects in the museum collection. Certainly, compared to the large purpose-built museums such as the Stedelijk Museum and the Rijksmuseum, the setup of the AHM in De Waag was perceived to be lacking. Already prior to the Second World War a new prospective museum location was under discussion, namely the civil orphanage (*burgerweeshuis*) located next to the Kalverstraat (Kistemaker 2001). The buildings were finally purchased by the city in 1962 with the express purpose of housing the AHM. As part of the process to move the museum, the institution was also made less dependent on the Stedelijk Museum and now received its own director in 1963. A division of collections and collection policies was also agreed upon. Roughly speaking, any objects pre-dating 1890 fell under the mandate of the AHM, while the more modern objects were kept by the Stedelijk Museum. The moving of objects from De Waag began in 1968 and a number of trial exhibitions were already held at the new museum site. The AHM was officially re-opened in the former civil orphanage in 1975 after extensive renovations to the building complex.
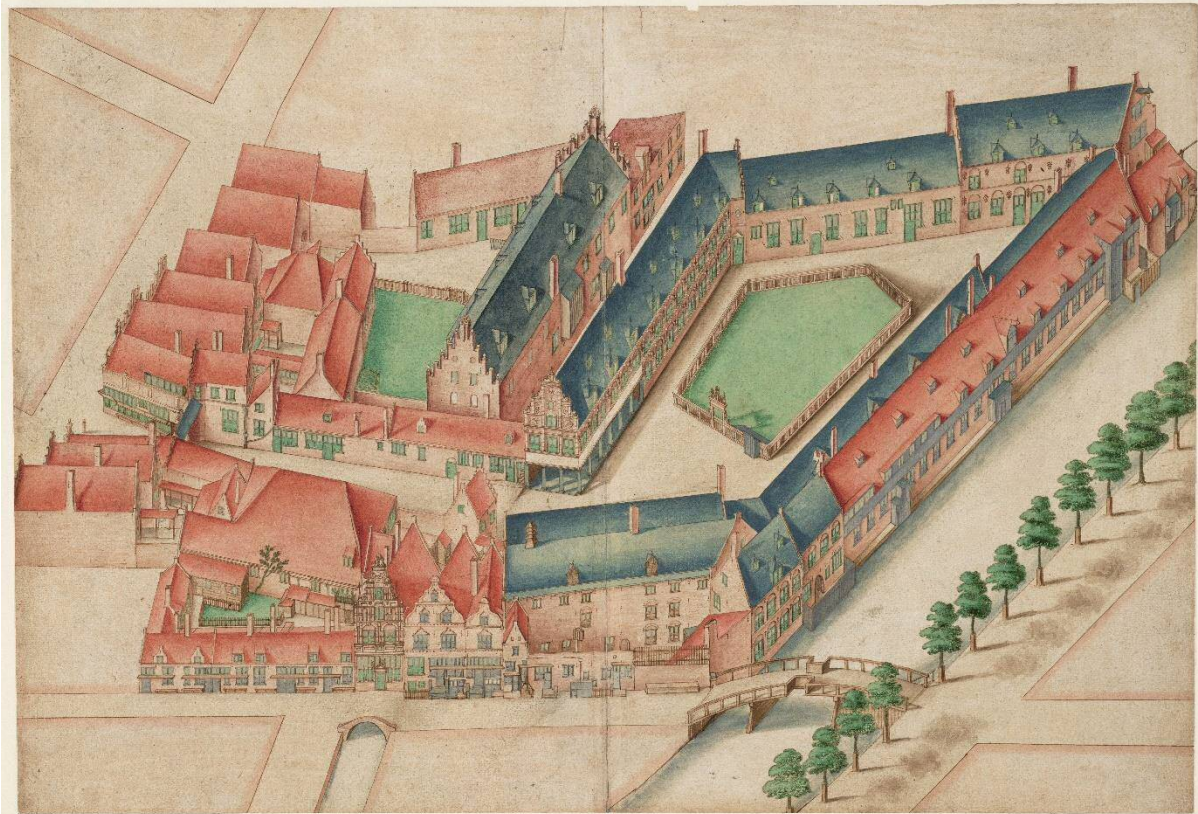
Figure 2: Birds' eye view of the civil orphanage as seen from the North. On the left the boys' courtyard, on the right the larger girls' courtyard with a bleaching field. Drawing by: Balthasar Florisz. Berckenrode, c. 1631. Image: Amsterdam Stadsarchief inv.nr. 367.A/117.

The buildings of the civil orphanage had first been built for the St. Luciën nunnery and the Old Men's house (*Oudemannenhuis*) (GA n.d.). In 1580 the nuns were moved to housing nearby and the civil orphanage moved in. Over the first few decades the complex was changed a number of times with the addition of new wings and entry gates. As a result of several epidemics of the plague in the early 1600s, the number of orphans had increased noticeably and the facilities of the orphanage were insufficient. Thus, in 1632 the civil orphanage expanded into the buildings of the Old Men's house, which lead to a large-scale rebuilding and renovation of the entire complex. The style of the majority of the current façades dates to this time period. The orphanage was designed as a closed entity (see Figure 2). A gate from the Kalverstraat gave entry to the boys' courtyard where the boys had their sleeping quarters and dining room in the main building, as well as a school room and a workshop for woodworking. A separate gate from the St. Luciënsteeg gave entry to the girls' courtyard, where the youngest children and the older girls had their sleeping quarters, dining room, and school room. In the buildings surrounding the girls' courtyard one could find the laundry room, kitchen, storage rooms, butchery, bakery, hospital, and the regents' room. The boys' courtyard and the girls' courtyard were separated by another gate and between the boys' main building and a wing of the girls' building there was a ditch which functioned as open sewage canal until it was filled up in 1865. This history of the museum and of the civil orphanage can today be viewed freely in the boys' courtyard, displayed in the former orphans' cabinets.

Figure 3: Renovations of the civil orphanage. View of the former ditch towards the North. Photo by: Jac. de Nijs, 2 Oct 1967. Image: Fotocollectie Anefo, Nationaal Archief, inv.nr. 920-7504.

After the civil orphanage moved to a new building in Amsterdam in 1960 and the municipality purchased the complex, extensive renovations were undertaken to turn the buildings into a museum (Kistemaker 2001). The buildings surrounding the girls' courtyard and the main building in the boys' courtyard kept their façades but were internally completely rebuilt and redesigned (see Figure 3). The former ditch was redesigned as a covered, public gallery that could be visited free of charge and which provided space to display some of the larger group portraits in the collections (see Figure 4). Part of the work of reopening the AHM were the extensive negotiations with other museums, in particular with the Rijksmuseum, surrounding the long-term loan of objects (Middelkoop 2001). The AHM requested part of its own collections back from the Rijksmuseum, as well as negotiated new loans for items from the Rijksmuseum's collections, particularly for items that had a significant connection to the history of the city. The museum's collections were also expanded by the creation of the municipal archaeological service in 1973, by which the museum was made responsible for all archaeological finds in the city (Kistemaker 2001). Once reopened, the AHM's permanent galleries largely chronologically detailed the history of Amsterdam, focusing strongly on the 'Golden Age' (17th century) and not including any contemporary history. In the early 1980s, the AHM became completely independent from the Stedelijk Museum in terms of staff, resources, and collections. Besides permanent exhibitions, the AHM has a long experience with creating temporary exhibitions. While located in De Waag, the AHM held 91 temporary exhibitions (1926-1968), with another 270 exhibitions held by the museum's 75th anniversary (1968-2001) (Klaversma *et al.* 2001). Just in 1988 alone, as many as 15 temporary exhibitions were held. At Museum Willet-Holthuysen, a further 75 temporary exhibitions were mounted (1932-2001).

Figure 4: *Schuttersgalerij* of the Amsterdam Historical Museum in the former ditch between the boys' main house and a wing of the girls' house, seen towards the North. Photo by: G.J. Dukker, 1975. Image: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed inv.nr. 195.411.

The museum finished its last major renovations in 2011, a feat that was accomplished without having to close the museum for a single day (AM 2012). Among others, this series of renovations resulted in a new main entrance to the museum, which in turn lead to different pathing and gallery design. A new permanent exhibition was developed, *Amsterdam DNA*, which was accompanied by an audio tour in multiple languages and various interactive displays (AM 2013a). The museum was rebranded entirely, with a new logo as well as a new name: Amsterdam Museum (AM). Many of these changes aligned with the general branding strategy of the city of Amsterdam at the time. As mentioned, under the slogan 'I amsterdam,' the city was focusing strongly on including tourists in the creation of Amsterdam's identity (Berenschot 2004). The naming of the AM and the design of *Amsterdam DNA* – an exhibition that presents the highlights of Amsterdam's history in c. 45 minutes – can be seen within the same branding strategy.

The Amsterdam Museum: Restructured

At the time of writing, the Amsterdam Museum is undergoing a new series of changes. This time, the changes are primarily internal in terms of organizational structure, mission, and purpose. Two of the main changes are the task-based approach to staff positions as well as a project-focused and longer-term mode of working. By describing staff positions or roles in terms of the concrete tasks they are expected to fulfill, there is greater clarity in the responsibilities of individual staff members as well as departments overall. Secondly, the museum will now be working through 'projects,' which enables longer-term planning of big projects, such as exhibitions, as well as the development of annual plans for programs. A main aim of the project-based approach is to reduce work pressure on the staff by providing more clarity and oversight over their work and the ability to plan their work in a less ad-hoc fashion. These changes have impacted the (future) activities of the museum. One of the museum's core activities is temporary exhibitions. Exhibitions have already been planned following the new schedule for 2019, 2020, and tentatively for 2021. All exhibitions are thematic and investigated from different angles and time periods, up until the present day, and rely on core objects from the collections. Other activities, such as public programs, are designed in broad strokes a year in advance and then detailed.

The Amsterdam Museum is complex in terms of the museum sites or partner museums which fall under the same institutional organization. The Amsterdam Museum staff is directly responsible for all museum activities that take place in four exhibition sites, namely: the Amsterdam Museum (the former civil orphanage buildings), the Museum Willet-Holthuysen (a stately canal house with period rooms), the Cromhouthuis (another stately canal house which is in the process of being refurbished and re-branded as a 'house of collectors' in early 2019), and the *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age* exhibition at the Hermitage Amsterdam (opened in 2014 as a partnership with the Hermitage Amsterdam and the Rijksmuseum, displaying more than 30 large group portraits). Each of these exhibition sites has its own distinct characteristics and limitations. The collections of the AM are displayed across all four sites, with the rest stored in the Collection Centre in the north of Amsterdam. In addition, the Amsterdam Museum is in partnership with the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder (OLHOS), a 17th century Catholic church hidden in an attic. AM and OLHOS have separate staff and collections, although they collaborate on projects, programs, exhibitions, and grant applications and frequently exchange expertise as well as share the same intranet. A similar partnership exists between the AM and Bijbels Museum (BM), a museum which is located on the upper floor of the Cromhouthuis. The BM is undergoing major changes in terms of organization, mission, and activities and its collections are currently being completely deaccessioned. Formalized in 2014, the collaboration of the Amsterdam Museum, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, Cromhouthuis, Bijbels Museum, and Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder is called Amsterdam Heritage Museums (AHM 2016).

Although the Amsterdam (Historical) Museum has changed since its foundation in 1926, its focus has always been on the city of Amsterdam and its history. This is also reflected in the current mission statement of the museum: "the Amsterdam Museum brings the history of Amsterdam to life and provides insight into the identity of the city; the museum challenges inhabitants and visitors to deepen their relationship with the city."[6] In the past, the focus of the museum has been strongly

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[6] Translated to English by the author. The mission statement in Dutch is: "Het Amsterdam Museum brengt de geschiedenis van Amsterdam tot leven en geeft inzicht in de identiteit van de stad; het museum daagt bewoners en bezoekers uit hun relatie tot de stad te verdiepen."

historical and generally chronological. Certain periods of the history of the city, most prominently the 'Golden Age,' have been overrepresented, while especially contemporary history or current-day events have been largely absent. This balance has changed with the present permanent exhibitions and has also been reflected in the temporary exhibitions over the last decade. Although *Amsterdam DNA* (2011) is chronologically ordered along the basis of a graphically stylized timeline, the exhibition also has a thematic component by tracing the four characteristics of free-thinking, citizenship, creativity, and entrepreneurship (closely related to the key values of the city of Amsterdam, mentioned above). The other permanent exhibition, *World – City* (opened in 2018) takes a thematic approach to explore the relationship between the city of Amsterdam and the world, looking at the different relationships that have existed throughout time and the ways in which this relationship was built, maintained, and changed. The two permanent exhibitions, but especially the temporary exhibitions strive to relate the history of the city to the contemporary city and to be of relevance to the present-day and to imagining the future. Finally, the Amsterdam Museum also has a permanent exhibition specifically for children and families, *The Little Orphanage* (*Het Kleine Weeshuis*, 2011). This highly interactive and engaging exhibition was designed together with a focus group of families and developed with their feedback in several test phases (AM 2012).

Besides the core activities of curating permanent and temporary exhibitions in all four exhibition sites of the Amsterdam Museum, the museum is active by running different educational and public programs as well as organizing events. As of January 2019, there were already 120 special events scheduled for the year to take place in the various locations of the Amsterdam Museum. In addition to these events, there are regular programs such as group tours for school classes and visits by specialist groups or students to the collection center. The museum not only has a public website with general information for visitors, but also runs an online information platform called *hart.amsterdam* which aims to tell the story of Amsterdam. This online platform is managed by the museum but is publicly open for anyone to contribute to. It often functions complementarily to other museum activities by presenting, for instance, photo albums of museum events, blog posts about changes in the museums, additions to the collections, or oral histories about the city. It is also an unsystematic, qualitative visitor survey tool by enabling museum visitors and non-visitors to comment on museum activities. However, anyone is free to add other information broadly about the story of Amsterdam, even if this does not directly relate to the museum. The hart platform is linked to the online catalogue[7] of the museum, hosted through the Adlib Information Systems software. The collection is also available for exploration via an iOS app.

Certainly, caring for the collections is another one of the core ongoing activities of the Amsterdam Museum. The museum's collections consist of over 100 000 objects, from the Middle Ages until the present day. The collections are diverse in type of objects, including furniture and furnishings, photographs, household items, scale models, paintings, clothing and fashion, toys, and weaponry. The overwhelming majority of these objects (~95%) are held in the Collection Center, a storage facility opened in 2011 and designed specifically for the Amsterdam Museum's collections. In the collection center, objects are primarily separated by type of material (*i.e.* paintings or clothing or metals) to ensure proper preservation conditions. Within the separate conservation areas (*e.g.* the clothing hall), objects are sorted rather eclectically, often guided more

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[7] The collection can be accessed online in two places. The simple search version, or '*beeldcollectie*' can be accessed through: https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/232315/beeldcollectie. The research version can be accessed through: https://am.adlibhosting.com/amonline/advanced/search/simple.

by considerations of spacing than by any other criteria such as chronology, color, or maker. The collection policy is currently being revised to ensure that the museum continues to be able to tell the story of (the entire) city. The museum has a policy of biographical collecting, focusing on collecting objects that carry meaningful stories about individuals and events. Inclusivity in terms of the diversity of Amsterdammers being represented is very important, as is collecting items from contemporary events such as festivals or demonstrations. The museum aims to represent the extraordinary stories of Amsterdammers that are tied up with very ordinary objects.

Of the four exhibition sites of the AM, the Amsterdam Museum receives the most visitors, followed closely by the *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age* exhibition at the Hermitage Amsterdam, then the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, and the least visitors are received at the Cromhouthuis/Bijbels Museum. As an example, in 2015 the Amsterdam Museum received 205 000 visitors and the *Portrait Gallery* exhibition 199 500 visitors. In total, including the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, the joint organization of the Amsterdam Heritage Museums received 627 000 visitors in that year (AHM 2016). In the same year, the museum also tracked online visitors and participants, namely visitors to the various websites, followers on the social media platforms of the different museums, as well as participation in terms of uploads (mainly Flickr photos, posts, blogs, and tweets), comments, and likes (AM 2015). Of a total of 4,6 million online 'visitors,' the vast majority (3,8 million) are spectators who visit or view the Amsterdam Museum's main website and social media accounts. Content creators, *i.e.* those who upload their own media, are much rarer (2 367 uploads in 2015). However, these statistics are likely to have changed, including more content creators, particularly due to the many visitors now tagging their own photos at the museum on Instagram[8].

The Amsterdam Heritage Museums' business plan for 2017-2020 shows the present marketing strategy of focusing on four main audience groups: Amsterdammers, cultural tourists, culture lovers, and families (AHM 2016). For the first group, the museum wishes to be present and accessible in multiple locations throughout the city (see more on this below), to ensure that these Amsterdammers recognize themselves in the museums, to support opportunities for them to meet other Amsterdammers, and to surprise them with new knowledge and insights about the city. Cultural tourists (both from the Netherlands and abroad, often here on short trips) are expected to have less previous knowledge of Amsterdam, so the museum aims to develop surprising presentations and products for them with a low threshold of entry. The third group of culture lovers consists of people who regularly visit museums and often choose to visit a museum because of a particular exhibition or event; this audience group is looking for something specific and deeply engaging. Finally, whether they are visiting the city or locals, the museum is particularly keen to engage with families by providing special family exhibitions in several of the museum sites, as well as through dedicated public programming.

The Amsterdam Heritage Museums aim to deliberately change their presentations and products to attract more Amsterdammers (and of more representative and diverse backgrounds) than they have in the past, focusing strongly on improving the inclusivity of the museums (AHM 2016). This desire to improve the inclusivity of the museum can be seen in the formation of two projects or teams: New Narratives (also discussed more in the next section) and 100%Welkom. The events organized by the New Narratives team aim to uncover, show, and debate new or alternative narratives in relation to the museum's collection, often by encouraging or inviting voices from

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[8] Although it must be noted here that some pictures tagged as being at the 'Amsterdam Museum' are in fact from the Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum, or other Amsterdam museums.

outside the museum. The work of the 100%Welkom team is directed at improving accessibility to the museum. Although the goal is to make the museum generally more accessible to all, in the first phase the team is working to be more inclusive towards visitors with disabilities, for instance by developing written versions of audio tours, by improving wayfinding and access to elevators, or by offering tours in sign language and/or with a writing interpreter.

While online and on-site visitor numbers are important metrics, the museum is mostly interested in evaluating whether the mission of the museum is being fulfilled and its specific goals are being met. In 2017, the museum conducted a long-term visitor study at the main site of the Amsterdam Museum (AM 2017). From March until December, 543 visitors based on a random sample selection filled out an extensive questionnaire. The goal was to be able to assess in more detail the profile of the visitors of the museum, their appreciation of the museum, the impact of different marketing outreach approaches, and the extent to which the goals of the museum mission are being met. The survey results show that the AM is visited mostly by visitors from abroad (70%), then by persons from the rest of the country (18%), and that 12% of the visitors are from Amsterdam. The biggest group of museum visitors are young people from abroad (aged 18-30). The survey also showed that most visitors go to the museum in a social setting, together with their partner (35%), with family (22%), or with friends (18%). In terms of the appreciation of the museum, although generally visitors found the museum to be 'good' or 'excellent,' visitors from abroad were more satisfied than Dutch visitors. Thus, the strategy of the museum to work towards being more inclusive and relevant for Amsterdammers seems justified. Interestingly, the survey results showed that visitors who chose to use the audio tour were more pleased than those who did not. In terms of accessibility for visitors with physical disabilities, the survey results were negative on average, part of which is a result of the structure of the orphanage buildings (with labyrinthine rooms and wings, an underground passage, stairs and hard-to-find elevators).

The core of the questionnaire was dedicated to finding out how the museum is meeting its goals by asking respondents to (dis)agree with statements (AM 2017). The survey specifically measured four goals: 1) The museum brings the history of the city to life, 2) The offerings of the museum offer new insights, 3) The museum is inclusive, and 4) The offerings of the museum lead to debate, dialogue, and conversation. From the results, it seems that the first goal is being met, as visitors indicated that the museum and its temporary exhibitions evoked emotional responses. In terms of new insights, respondents agreed that they had learned a lot about Amsterdam (more so with foreign visitors than Dutch visitors or Amsterdammers), but were more divided on whether their visit had changed their opinion on specific issues. This result shows similarities with other visitor studies which indicate that although visitors may learn new things, they may use this knowledge to confirm preconceived notions about topics rather than to change their opinions (*e.g.* Smith 2015). To measure inclusivity, one of the statements was "I recognize myself in the offerings of the museum" (AM 2017). Results show that most respondents indicated that they positively agreed or felt neutral about the statement. However, some respondents totally disagreed with the statement, which was noted as a point of concern in the report. In terms of "Feeling welcome in the museum," respondents overwhelmingly totally agreed (78%), with foreign visitors feeling most welcome and older visitors feeling least welcome. Finally, respondents were asked whether they would talk to anyone about any of the topics presented in the museum (half indicated they would definitely do so) or if they were planning to post something on social media (16% said yes). It appeared that most visitors share information with people they already know after their museum visit, rather than end up in a conversation with a stranger during their museum visit. Certainly, the

generally enforced or accepted museum etiquette of quiet visitation plays a role in this, with the exception of events or tours where conversation is purposefully encouraged.

Now the Amsterdam Museum is moving on with plans for new reconstructions or renovations as well as working towards its strategy of inclusivity for Amsterdammers. As mentioned, the Cromhouthuis is being reinstalled in early 2019 (scheduled to be completed in March 2019) with items selected to showcase the private collections of Amsterdammers, primarily from the 18th and 19th century. Adjustments are also being planned for the *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age* exhibition in the Hermitage Amsterdam, primarily in terms of panel texts and the inclusion of new or the replacement of current paintings. The building of the Amsterdam Museum has again become the focus of conversations on how the museum could be better structured for visitors. Currently, architectural firms have been tasked to propose renovations or reconstructions to the building complex which could improve accessibility to and pathing within the museum. Finally, as a main step towards greater inclusivity for Amsterdammers, the museum is working on better municipal outreach, by collaborating with cultural institutions outside the city center (*e.g.* libraries, galleries, and museums) for temporary exhibitions, as well as by designing plans for the creation of a new branch of the museum in the West of Amsterdam. The vision is to develop the Amsterdam Museum into a network of museums and pop-up exhibitions that are visible and accessible throughout the whole city.

(Dis)engaging with Colonialism at the Amsterdam Museum

Amsterdam developed and continues to exist today within a colonial frame. As such, colonialism and related topics are inevitably entangled with the city, the municipal collections, and the cities' museums. The question is what shape these entanglements take on in the particular case of the Amsterdam Museum. This section provides preliminary insights into the modes in which the Amsterdam Museum as an institution, the different exhibition sites, and the museum staff deal with the history of the system of colonization and its continuing effects. The analysis is based on the methodology developed within the ECHOES project, which is centered on four modalities for practicing colonial heritage: removal, repression, reframing, and re-emergence (Kølvraa 2018).

Within the main exhibition site of the Amsterdam Museum, the colonial era and colonialism are present in both permanent exhibitions. In *Amsterdam DNA*, colonization, slavery, the plantation system and the trans-Atlantic slave trade feature most visibly in the so-called 'Golden Age' room (covering the period 1600-1700 in the exhibition's chronological timeline). In the other galleries of the exhibition, colonialism is largely repressed by being unspoken or only visible in the sub-text or the margins. In the 'Golden Age' room, formally titled "Centre of the World," different modalities of engaging with colonialism clash with each other. For instance, the central video display coupled with the audio tour can be read as a mode of repression. The 'Golden Age' is represented in heroic terms, and the system of slavery is positioned within a positivistic spirit of entrepreneurship rather than shown as dehumanizing exploitation. The audio tour proudly says:

> The 17th century is Holland's Golden Age. With their fast ships, Amsterdam's merchants dominate world trade. Scandinavia, East Indies, Japan, America, Suriname, the Ottoman Empire. This is Australia, just discovered. The coast is already outlined. The rest is yet to come. The Dutch East India Company is the world's first multi-national. Amsterdam's bourse is a precursor of today's Wall Street. Amsterdam's merchants deal in everything: grains, gold, porcelain, sugar, tea, opium, and slaves. As long as it earns money. The city co-owns Suriname, where Africans are forced to work as slaves. Science, shipping, art: everything Amsterdam touches turns to gold.
>
> AM English audio tour, 2011

Yet, there is also reframing, particularly in some of the text panels in this room. The painting *The Herengracht Bend* (Gerrit Berckheyde, 1685) depicts one of the wealthiest parts of the Amsterdam Canal Ring, which had just been built. However, a new label text concludes by not only describing the wealth and development of the city, but also by underlining how this wealth had been accumulated: "Some of those who bought houses here in Amsterdam made their fortune by selling and exploiting people on the other side of the world" (AM Canon van Nederland label text).

Another part of the 'Golden Age' room has been alternatively perceived as reframing or as repression. Embedded within the timeline is a diorama with a digital projection. The diorama depicts a 17th century plantation in Suriname, while the digital projection within the diorama shows the plantation owner, an enslaved woman in the act of serving him food, and their son, with an audio conversation (see Figure 5). This diorama has seen some controversy as opinions of and emotional responses to the diorama by both visitors and museum staff have differed considerably from highly positive to extremely negative. Some people have had strong negative responses to the diorama and feel that it is repressive in dealing with the system of slavery by showing subservient relationships. Some people have wanted the diorama to be removed and have strongly rejected it, preferring to have a diorama that shows resilience towards oppression. However,

others have reacted very positively and instead see the diorama as successful reframing. These persons say that they appreciate that the enslaved persons are given a voice and are individualized in the diorama, with the son showing resilience through a minor act of rebellion. They also feel that the enslaved are being made visible in a way that is still relatively rare in such museums and find the representation to be empowering for that reason.
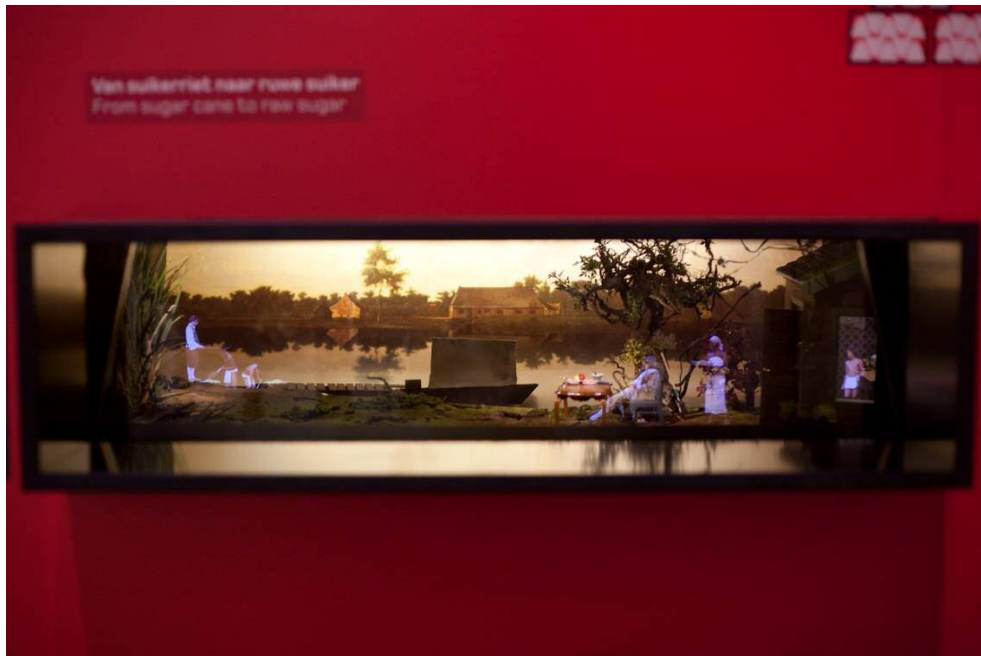

Figure 5: Plantation Suriname diorama in the Amsterdam DNA exhibition. Photo by: Caro Bonink, 16 May 2012. Image: Amsterdam Museum repr.nr. BC_00888_026.

Thus, we can identify the modes of repression, removal, and reframing in the 'Golden Age' room of the permanent exhibition *Amsterdam DNA*. Some of the contentions related to colonialism are well-known to the staff or have been debated internally among the staff. Some displays or texts that have been the focus of contention are in fact the result of choices that were made by staff after long discussions. Yet, such discussions or dilemmas are not always apparent to visitors.

The two canal houses of the Amsterdam Museum – the Museum Willet-Holthuysen (MW-H) and the Cromhouthuis (CHH) – also provide interesting case studies for heritage practices in relation to colonialism. Both houses are located on Amsterdam's World Heritage Listed Canal Ring, on the *Herengracht*, and date to the end of the 17th century. They present visitors with a fairly one-sided view of the lives of the wealthy upper class of Amsterdam. Entering these museums is a step into another time and an encounter with exorbitant wealth and decadence. Both houses still have a strict division between upstairs (the owners) and downstairs (the servants), which manages to only hint at the lives and narratives of the servants who remain invisible in the stories of the museums, similarly as they would have moved through the house largely imperceptibly through hidden passages and small doors. The lives of the owners of the houses are interwoven into the museum narratives, present in every room, visible even in the museums' names. The servants who worked in the houses remain entirely anonymous to the visitors. Additionally, there is little to no mention of the source of the wealth that led to the building of these houses or to creation of the collections of their owners. It is questionable indeed whether everyone feels welcome to visit these museums, or whether visitors of all backgrounds could feel represented or included in these spaces and stories.

Finally, this reflection turns to programs, and particularly to those developed by the New Narratives team. The work of the New Narratives team, although driven internally from the AM, can be seen as various re-emergence practices. New Narratives began as an initiative in 2016 alongside the temporary exhibition *Black Amsterdam*. The original idea, developed by the guest curator of the exhibition, was to invite external experts to give tours of the exhibition during which they were encouraged to present new, critical narratives. A desire for increased multi-vocality guided these New Narrative Tours from the side of the museum. Although the initiative for the tours continues to lie with the museum, this community engagement practice was felt to be a success. As part of the New Narratives Program Plan for 2018-2022, the collaboration with the ECHOES project (mainly with the author) was included, as well as the development of new events and online outreach through blogs and posts (AM 2018c). At the end of 2018, the team organized the first New Collection Narratives event, a public evening in which one object from the collection is the focus for discussion and reflection from different angles.

For this first New Collection Narratives event, the painting *Plantation Waterlant*[9] (Dirk Valkenburg, 1706-1708) was selected, showing a plantation in Suriname from the water. The aim of the event was to openly discuss which stories the museum tells about this painting. For this purpose, several (previous) label texts were reprinted and shared with the attendees, and the group also went to see the painting in its current context with its current text. Following a visit to the gallery, a discussion was facilitated with all participants to think about the artwork, the stories that could be told about it, and what the museum can do to tell these stories to visitors. In preparing for the event, one of the conservators had engaged in additional (archival) research into the painting, specifically exploring the archival documents related to the owner(s) of the plantation in order to try to individualize and improve the visibility of the enslaved persons working on the plantation at the time of the painting. This new research was also published in a blog post following the event (van der Molen 2018). Ideally, this kind of research and feedback will lead to concrete changes within the museum and its activities, so that the input from external interventions has the potential to result in re-emergence.

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[9] This painting was also used to develop the décor of the diorama mentioned above in the 'Golden Age' room of *Amsterdam DNA*.

Conclusions

This first report on the Amsterdam Museum presented the preliminary results of one of the three case studies within the ECHOES project focusing on city museums and colonial pasts. The report began by providing a contextual background to the case studies by means of describing the history of the city of Amsterdam and the current state of the Dutch museum sector. This illustrated on the one hand the wide and dark colonial frame in which Amsterdam and the Amsterdam Museum have developed and on the other hand the long search for an identity which the city and the museum have been mutually engaged in. The report then described the history and evolution of the Amsterdam Museum from its foundation in 1926, showing how the focus of the museum changed over time alongside developments in the wider museum sector and within the city. The core of the report is formed by an analysis of the current state of the Amsterdam Museum, which reveals a symbiotic relationship between changes in the museum sector, internal organizational changes, changes in the branding and identity of the city, and all of the resulting museum activities and products. Finally, the impact of the new museology and post-colonial theories is preliminarily explored with a reflection on a few selected examples of (dis)engagements with colonialism within the Amsterdam Museum.

As mentioned in the introduction, this report is written parallel to similarly framed and structured reports on the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum (Pozzi 2019) and the Museum of Warsaw (Bukowiecki 2019). In the following two years of the project, the researchers of ECHOES' Work Package 3 will focus in more detail on the museums and their use of decolonial heritage practices. The second set of reports will focus in greater detail on the various (dis)engagements with colonialism, based on critical assessments of the museums' collections, exhibitions, programs, and events. This analysis will be based on the above-mentioned ECHOES methodology centered on four modalities for practicing colonial heritage: removal, repression, reframing, and re-emergence (Kølvraa 2018). This second report series will also rely on interviews with museum staff. Finally, the third set of reports will engage predominantly with the receptions of the museums' displays and activities through various visitor studies. Naturally, all of these reports will continue to frame the case studies within a broader context of other heritage practices in the respective cities, at other museums, galleries, in ephemeral heritage events, and within the public space. Thus, the aim is to ultimately collect these nine reports into a qualitative, comparative analysis of the ways in which these city museums work through their cities' colonial pasts and thereby to identify diversified modalities and challenges for the representation of (de)colonial heritage in the contemporary world.

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