

Bulletin 391
Tropenmuseum

Tropenmuseum for a change!

Present between past and future. A symposium report

Daan van Dartel (ed)

This bulletin is dedicated to Susan Legêne,
head of the Tropenmuseum's Curatorial Department from 1996 to 2008
and responsible for the refurbishment of the museum's major departments
during that period

Contents

5	Foreword
	<i>Lejo Schenk</i>
7	Introduction
	<i>Paul Faber and Daan van Dartel</i>
12	1 Refurbishment: The Tropenmuseum for a change
	<i>Susan Legêne</i>
13	Transnationalism
14	Process and product
16	Past exhibition practices
18	Who speaks for whom?
20	Regions and themes
23	2 Revisiting the Tropenmuseum
	<i>Rhina Colunge</i>
23	Fifteen years of change
25	Lack of continuity and some chaos in the display
32	Dichotomies: them and us; past and present; art and artifact
37	Dialogue and the joy of making connections
40	3 The symposium: Statements and discussion
40	A. Museum discourse: Museum policy
	<i>Paul Faber</i>
40	Statements
50	Discussion

55	B. Social discourse: Interaction between museum and society
	<i>Alex van Stipriaan</i>
55	Statements
57	Discussion
62	C. Collection discourse: Contemporary collecting
	<i>Mirjam Shatanawi</i>
62	Statements
65	Discussion
70	D. Presentation discourse: Public and presentation
	<i>Paul Voogt</i>
70	Statements
73	Discussion
79	4 Towards the change: Summary of thoughts
	<i>Daan van Dartel</i>
79	Role and function
80	(Re)presentation
82	Addressing the contemporary
83	Recommendations
86	Notes
88	Media coverage
91	List of participants
94	About the authors

Foreword

At the end of 2007, the Tropenmuseum decided to organise a symposium in order to mark the completion of our most recent reorganisation of the permanent exhibits. The invitation that was extended to dozens of colleagues from around the world to comment candidly on what had been done and how it could have been done differently in their view felt a little like putting our heads on the chopping block. If we harboured any thought that a museum such as the Tropenmuseum would elicit nothing but indifference from the heritage world, we were soon forced to revise our thinking. The intensity of the guest speakers and the participants in the corridors on 11 December, and particularly the robust debate during the four workgroups on 12 December, revealed how the Tropenmuseum very much appeals to a wide range of people with very different backgrounds. The dozens of participants from the workgroups came forward with many plans and questions, opinions and statements, expressions of approval and the aforementioned points of criticism. It was also clear that they often genuinely disagreed with one another.

All of this is significant. It goes to show that what the Tropenmuseum is and does has a strong contemporary relevance for many people. Although one or two people commented that the Tropenmuseum can aspire to nothing more than being a closed-off museum of colonial history, the majority took a decidedly different view. Certainly, the museum's colonial roots have many relevant offshoots to put out now and in the future. The decades over which objects were collected, presented and alluded to after the colonial era are of equal value at the very least. In the end, the way in which the past and present is dealt with will be key to the museum's relevance: its relevance to the public and society at large, its relevance to cultural science and its relevance to the many cultures, population groups and individuals that are represented in one way or another inside the institute.

This awareness is permanently fed by the fact that the Tropenmuseum is a part of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) which will celebrate its centennial in 2010, an

international knowledge centre in the fields of health, information, culture and socio-economic development. This distinguishes the Tropenmuseum from virtually every other museum in the world. It leads to a permanently fixed international perspective and a continuous search for social relevance.

It is this profound relevance that makes the position of the Tropenmuseum both very complex and extremely challenging and priceless, particularly at a time of large-scale changes in the areas of migration, cultural hybridisation, technological revolutions, social shifts and continually changing intercultural and international relations. Despite the apparent calm that a museum radiates almost by definition, the Tropenmuseum is constantly on the move. Few suggestions have been made with which the museum has had no experience. Its palette of activities is wide-ranging. The themes it focuses on in the exhibitions are all as diverse as the presentation methods it uses. The digital revolution at the museum has been progressing steadily for years. In the past year alone, following the symposium, the museum worked on developing a virtual cultural centre, thousands of photographs were made available via Wikimedia for public participation, and its modern art policy was given a more defined shape through a solo exhibition by Heri Dono. Current social issues are even now being addressed in the Marron exhibition, and TM junior has opened an exhibition on China in which game technology and interactivity are the centre of focus. The Vodou exhibition also went on tour, which got the Tropenmuseum actively involved in founding a museum in Haiti. The Tropenmuseum is involved in the development of a museological course in Yogyakarta and the founding of cultural houses in Surinam – the list goes on and on. The comment made by Kitty Zijlmans on the first day of the symposium to the effect that ‘we are certainly not finished and should actually start all over again’ is therefore unjustified. If there is one museum that is keenly aware that we can never afford to rest, then it is the Tropenmuseum. A symposium such as this one is a brief, artificially created interlude, a moment of reflection to be followed by a move forward under full steam. We are grateful to all participants for choosing to share this moment of reflection with us.

Lejo Schenk
Director of the Tropenmuseum

Introduction

Paul Faber and Daan van Dartel

On 11 and 12 December 2008, the Tropenmuseum organised an international symposium to bring to completion a reorganisation of the exhibitions that had taken more than 15 years. At the same time, the symposium wanted to launch a discussion on future renewal. The Tropenmuseum is keenly aware that a museum must continually change in order to keep up to date and remain relevant. To give the coming reorganisation a solid foundation, a number of colleagues from the international cultural heritage field were invited to analyse the current museum critically and to find common denominators for the next phase. This document serves as a record of the most important discussions held and conclusions drawn. In our view, it provides a useful instrument to sharpen our thoughts, and many other museums may benefit from it as well. The very wide range of discussion topics will be familiar to many museums, particularly the so-called ethnographical or anthropological museums.

A museum cannot think about its future without taking its past into consideration. The current Tropenmuseum has its roots in the 19th century. The forerunner of the Tropenmuseum was founded in Haarlem in 1864 as the world's first Colonial Museum. Its purpose was to familiarise the Dutch public with its colonies and the products these produced. The knowledge on this subject was limited and large commercial opportunities were at stake. The museum collected crops such as rubber and rattan for research and presentation, as well as indigenous products that were made from these raw materials. Increasingly, ethnographic objects made their way into the collection. The museum, therefore, was actually a trade museum that also focused on certain cultural phenomena.

This characterisation remained valid for the much larger Colonial Museum that opened in 1926 in the current building in Amsterdam. The museum explained how a tobacco plantation worked, and enabled visitors to see and hear a gamelan orchestra. The objects and presentations not only spoke about the practices and customs of the inhabitants of Indonesia, Suriname and the Antilles, but today also give insight in the

mindset and perspectives of the collectors and the museum staff, including the staff of the Koloniaal Museum (Colonial Museum) of which it was a part.

Following this pre-war, colonial phase, the Tropenmuseum transformed itself radically several times. After Indonesia gained independence, the institute and museum also went through a process of decolonisation. In 1950 the museum was finally renamed the Tropenmuseum. It focused on new regions of the world such as Africa, South America, Southern Asia and the Middle East. An affinity with contemporary issues developed in combination with a growing socio-economic and cultural focus. The dominant vision shifted to the phenomenon of development assistance, later referred to as development cooperation. In the 1960s the museum began to acquire collections based on the daily lives of the local populations. In the 1970s, the museum was radically transformed into an information centre on the Third World. Development issues dictated the structure of permanent exhibitions. The exhibits were not as much focused on objects as they were on stories and argumentations, for which photographs, texts and audiovisual presentations became important. Issues such as slums, health care, unemployment or the move of people from countryside to city dominated. The recreation of living environments became the exhibition strategy to help the visitor imagine the daily lives of common people in Thailand, Mali or Peru more easily. The current exhibit on Western Asia and North Africa still provides a view onto this approach.

State-of-the-art presentation techniques and the representation of contemporary social issues were in fact a feature of the museum as far back as the 1920s. But its socio-political role changed radically: colonial paternalism and national economic gain were replaced by the action-orientation of international solidarity movements.

The Tropenmuseum was never an art museum, even though it certainly collected art objects. Still, interest in art grew, particularly the modern expressions of art, as evidenced by a symposium organised in 1985 around the still very relevant theme of cultural anthropology museums and modern art, and various art exhibitions from this period.

Finally, in 1995, the most recent reorganisation began, of which this bulletin is the completion mark. Once again, after 1950 and after 1974-79, the museum took stock of its history, character and identity. It pondered new international relationships and focused on the changing demands, wishes and possibilities of a public with a different composition. In the latest reorganisation, the museum focused primarily on art and culture. The objects became important again, but stories still took centre stage. Special attention is given to the multiple histories that are associated with the objects. Intercultural exchange and mutual influences can be found everywhere in the current exhibits. Also, the role of the collector or, better, the collecting culture has become increasingly important and is demonstrated more clearly.

Much has changed in the techniques of presentation as well. The recreated environments have disappeared or have been given a different character because they tell more than one story and make different interpretations possible¹. Audiovisual material and interactive and cross-media IT technology play an active role in providing information, by contextualising and involving the visitor.

In 2009 the Tropenmuseum completed the phased renovation of its permanent departments, a renovation in which it continually re-evaluated itself in light of the latest museological concepts. Through interesting temporary exhibitions, the museum imparts its message, counts the annually growing number of visitors, and attracts the interests of colleagues worldwide. With some pride we think we can say that the Tropenmuseum is among the best museums worldwide with respect to focusing on new insights and the actual application of new techniques.

The history outlined above drives home the fact that a museum such as the Tropenmuseum will never be finished. It must continually re-evaluate its existence and identity, especially since the world around us is changing so quickly and fundamentally. At the same time, with every change the museum always takes its own history along as a unique part of its cultural heritage, may it be for better or for worse.

New challenges are numerous. A living museum must continue to collect. It has an existing collection to work with that must be renewed and added to, or even disposed of. Should the museum collect modern art, as well as popular art and design, or not? How do new collection strategies change the role and significance of the traditional ethnographic objects? How can the existing collection address current social issues? In 2003, UNESCO formulated the Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Does the Tropenmuseum have a task to fulfil in this context or is its value to be found as a bastion of tangible culture?

The composition of the audience is also continually shifting with respect to culture, age, knowledge and expectations. Immigration in particular has radically changed the relationship between the respective cultural backgrounds of the public and of the collections exhibited. In the past, the museum was a place to learn something about a faraway world. Now it can be a place for many Dutch citizens to see something about the cultural backgrounds of their parents and grandparents. What role should the museum take on in this context: as a facilitating instrument in a multicultural society, an advocate of cultural diversity, a 'Kunstkamer' for world culture, a knowledge centre for roots cultures, or an attractive, stimulating entertainment centre? Does the museum give insight into cultural changes, create greater understanding of other cultures, shed light on abuses, or can it even help to solve social and cultural problems?

Because of worldwide developments in digitalisation, a virtual world public now exists alongside a physical audience, that learns about the museum, its exhibits,

objects and the knowledge these impart via the worldwide web. Opinions about accessibility to cultural heritage institutions for citizens the world over are prompting a re-evaluation of the function, the role and the usefulness of an anthropology museum such as the Tropenmuseum. Due to the same digital revolution, the uniqueness of the former anthropology museum as an institution of specific knowledge has been diluted. The world is becoming ever smaller and can be reached via television, the Internet and by aeroplane. All of these developments touch the core of the museum. The term *ethnographic museum*, with its 19th century origins and connotations, is no longer preferred in practice, but neither is it an art museum. The name *Tropenmuseum* now too sounds a bit strange and outdated, just as later concepts such as the 'Third World' and 'non-Western culture' have become obsolete. So what kind of a museum is it then? All of these questions raise a central question: what is the social role and position of the anthropological museum at this point in time?

These questions touch the larger dilemmas with which contemporary museums struggle. Some say that ethnographic museums are in crisis, that they are *passé*. Others talk about exciting challenges and new opportunities. The Tropenmuseum is currently discussing its own meaning. The many issues being reviewed are providing potential significance to the museum. They point to the fast-moving, worldwide social changes that the museum must take into account and wants to be part of. The Tropenmuseum is keen to engage in this discussion and thinks it should be conducted in an open and wide-ranging forum. In this context, the symposium of 11 and 12 December 2008 was organised so that the many professionals who attended could discuss these issues with us. The bulletin follows the structure of the symposium, sometimes fairly literally, and sometimes in a compromised form.

In the first chapter, the former head of Museum Affairs and current professor of 20th century history, Susan Legêne, discusses the history of, and choices made for, the most recent reorganisation. She does this while focusing on five perspectives: the Tropenmuseum as a representative of transnationalism; the reorganisation as a process and a product; former exhibition practices; the question surrounding representation, who speaks for whom?; and, finally, the predominantly regional focus as a starting point to address the existing ethnographic canon.

The second chapter is the analysis of museologist Rhina Colunge of the discussion between anthropologist Dr. Henrietta Lidchi, Keeper of World Art at the National Museums of Scotland, Jyotindra Jain, then professor of art history at Indira Gandhi University in Delhi, and Okwui Enwezor, art critic, curator and writer. They discussed the current exhibits from the perspective of their respective professions and, in addition to positive reactions, gave sharp criticism of the approach chosen. Colunge identifies two major lines in this debate: the lack of chronological continuity and the apparent chaos in the exhibitions, and the problematic dichotomies which a anthropology museum is confronted with: them and us, past and present, art object and functional object.

For the second day of the symposium, the Tropenmuseum invited a number of professionals from the international cultural heritage field to meet for a discussion on four related dilemmas within the ethnographic museum world. Firstly, the general problems surrounding the ethnographic or anthropology museum as an institute were dealt with. Under the leadership of the curator for Africa at the Tropenmuseum, Paul Faber, the function and role of a museum like the Tropenmuseum was discussed in general terms. How should the Tropenmuseum confront social, cultural and technological changes? How should museums work towards creating greater understanding between different cultures? What is the ideal future profile of our museum?

In the second session, Alex van Stipriaan, curator of Latin America and the Caribbean, led the discussion on the social significance of anthropology museums in today's multicultural society. This significance is not limited to the involvement of target groups in different museum products, but extends to the possible role of museums in generating a more critical attitude towards the media, of which museums are also a part.

Mirjam Shatanawi, curator for the Middle East and North Africa, wanted to know what those attending her session thought about the collection policy of the Tropenmuseum. In addition to a robust discussion on the pros and cons of collecting and showing modern art, the problem surrounding the collecting of intangible cultural heritage was also discussed.

Finally, Paul Voogt, then head of Public and Presentation, chaired the session on the approach to future exhibitions and educational projects. In the museum world, the staging of living situations, or the recreation of environments, and rituals from non-Western cultures is often seen as an undesirable remnant from the colonial era. But what does a museum do if the audience likes these things best?

There are a number of trends in rethinking the future of the modern anthropology museum that endorse the vitality of, and the need for, such an institute. The final conclusion is meant to combine the many discussion points, issues and solutions into a single clear overview.

1 Refurbishment: The Tropenmuseum for a change

Susan Legêne

In the following pages, I will present a story about the refurbishment of the Tropenmuseum during the past decade and more. I will summarize the deliberations and decisions behind the restructuring of the museum, and why the museum now stands as it does. The beautiful drawing on the invitation card to the December 2008 symposium of the Tropenmuseum, by Chris Buzelli, expresses a basic premise: the museum is a public space, open to the public, inviting people to come in to marvel and wonder in a situation where all existing relationships are open to change: change among the visitors as well as between the visitors and the objects on display.

When we worked at the refurbishment – gallery by gallery – we often tried, in our mind's eye, to perceive the museum exactly like Chris Buzelli's bright and open house. Basically, as an *empty* space that we gradually would restructure according to the latest views and fashions, maybe like the Umm Kulthum retro café from Cairo that we reconstructed in the museum (See plate 1).

However, such a situation does not exist. Even established museums that close their doors and reopen them after some years, with a renovated building and with a complete make-over of their permanent exhibitions, even such museums do not make a new start. For that, the institutional background of our museums and their place in the cultural landscape of (in this case) the Netherlands, is too strong.

I will not discuss current museum developments in general, but instead focus on the Tropenmuseum. I will give a brief overview of the history of the museum, and the process approach to the reconceptualisation of the semi-permanent galleries. My argument elaborates on five statements:

The first is concerned with **transnationalism**: the Tropenmuseum, throughout its history and within ever-changing political coordinates, has provided a voice to transnationalism in Dutch society, with authoritative images, and with lasting material forms and representations. This happened in contact with communities abroad, for better and for worse.



Susan Legêne.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Concerning **process and product**: the process approach to the renewal of the semi-permanent exhibitions has provided the museum as a whole with a specific quality.

Then, on past exhibition practices, I would like to stress that the critical evaluation of collecting and exhibition practices of the past has been essential to the renewal of the museum.

The most important question that we had to answer in this respect has been: **who speaks for whom** and with what means? In order to address this question, the predominantly **regional focus** of the museum proved to be a vital starting point for changing the existing ethnographic canon.

And finally, the museum cannot just select its audience according to its own choice and preference; the visitors have to be able to understand what the museum wants to tell and why these stories matter.

Transnationalism

Throughout its history, and within the changing political contexts, the Tropenmuseum has provided transnational imagination and aspirations in Dutch society with a voice, with convincing images, material forms and representations. Most relevant in this respect, of course, are exactly these changing political contexts. How did these affect the museum and its international relations?

In general, the history of the museum can be divided into five periods.

The museum started in the nineteenth century (1858/1864-1910) during the rise of imperialism. It was a time of exploration and exploitation. This brought a growing awareness that the Dutch nation was going to be more than just a European continental state.

The second period (1910-1945) saw the establishment of the museum as an expression of the self-confident colonial elite that pursued a so-called ethical policy. This was an approach of colonialism based on a mix of enlightenment ideals *and* repressive actions. The museum was an expression of these policies.

The third period (1945-1970s) was the post-war and post-colonial time of national crisis. De-colonization implied a growing awareness that from now on the Dutch nation was on European territory; it was a time of reconstruction and national and international reorientation, of which Dutch society is still trying to understand the implications.

However, during the 1970s, the Dutch welfare state also developed and labour immigration policies were implemented. It was relevant to the Tropenmuseum that these internal public welfare policies were combined with a broad political commitment to international development cooperation with the so-called Third World. This happened within the context of UN policies, as well as in bilateral relationships. During these years, the Tropenmuseum also founded its children's museum, the Tropenmuseum Junior. Since the 1970s, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs/ Development Cooperation became the main donor of the Museum.

Finally, from the 1990s onwards, we have been talking about globalization and the rise of cultural diversity within Dutch society. International cultural policies developed from a focus on top-down development cooperation to a discourse on shared Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development and climate control, as well as common heritage and cultural exchange.

This historical overview illustrates the changing position of the museum in relation to internationalism in Dutch colonial and post-colonial society. From colonial museum to Tropenmuseum – broadening the regional focus from the former colonies, now also including the Middle East and North Africa, India, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America. (See plates 2,3)

Process and product

The second issue I want to raise is the process approach of the renewal of the semi-permanent exhibitions. Early on in this process, the Ticuna people in Brazil had been asked whether they would allow a cultural anthropologist to record the initiation rituals of a young girl and to purchase all the artefacts related to that ritual. The Ticuna agreed, and some of them also came to Amsterdam to exhibit these artefacts in an exhibition on the Amazon tropical rain forest. This exhibition actually preceded

the refurbishment of the Latin America galleries. The Ticuna objects are now on permanent display in the Latin America galleries, together with a video that shows the rituals concerned.

This display is just one illustration of how, thanks to the long process of refurbishment, the museum was able to incorporate new activities, relationships with source communities and technical developments in the new displays, while constantly refining the overall starting points.

In short, and also with hindsight, we can say that the guiding principles were to become the following:

1. The refurbishment acknowledged the whole institution of the Royal Tropical Institute; the museum is part of that institution and develops its mission in line with a cultural policy that also feeds back into the semi-permanent exhibitions.
2. The building is not just a location. It is relevant to the exhibitions, and the semi-permanent exhibitions also interact with the temporary exhibition programme, including the Theatre and the Tropenmuseum Junior programme.
3. Objects and images from the museum collections lead to the stories that the museum wants to present, and are not simply illustrations.
4. New collection acquisitions have to relate to the existing collections, but at the same time they also have potential and experimental meaning for new acquisition policies, both concerning content and in collecting practices. Examples of this include popular art, modern art, popular culture, fashion, design etc.
5. The relationship between the objects and the stories told in the exhibitions has to be transparent and multilayered. Objects embody more histories than the specific story of the display concerned. In this respect we tried to develop display strategies with objects as carriers of intangible heritage
6. The semi-permanent exhibitions have to be interesting for all visitors, but each gallery can address specific target groups as well.

Of course, these starting points were not that clear from the start. They gradually became more and more explicit over the last fifteen years. This happened in interaction with changes in Dutch society, such as the changing age structure of the population; the emergence of various transnational communities in the Netherlands; the revival of religion in public life in general, and the emergence of Islam in Dutch society, challenging the easy religious connotations of ethnographic objects; a widely-felt crisis in the Dutch education system, which also resulted in the formulation of new roles for museums, and finally the growing role of ICT in a globalizing world.

This last innovation, ICT, has not only been most relevant to the final form of the displays and the audio-visual applications. It has been of crucial importance for how the museum was able to approach its own collections and collection histories. Over the past decade, the complete collection documentation has been digitized and made accessible in a collection database, including digital images of the objects and hyper-connections between collectors, objects, photographs, sound collections and

documents. This major development has provided a crucial input for the refurbishment process. And it has stimulated the museum to work on a programme to re-establish international connections with what I call ‘source communities’.

Past exhibition practices

Establishing new connections with source communities abroad and various target groups in the Netherlands has been the most critical issue of this refurbishment programme. It has been our ambition to create new connections between the institute, the building, the collections, Dutch society and people of the communities from where the collections came and still come, *beyond* the ethnographic canon that people know so well.

In order to be able to work on these new connections and interpretations, we needed a critical evaluation of collecting and exhibition practices of the past, and how people had benefited, suffered, or otherwise related to this exhibition practice.

The Tropenmuseum as an ethnographic museum always seems to have put its collections of material culture on display, while assuming the original context within which these objects once functioned. The Ticuna display is a recent example, but the



Statue of Papua man and boy, Koloniaal Museum,
Amsterdam, 1903.
(KIT Tropenmuseum, inv. no. 1000395)

same was the case, for example, in the Indian village of the 1970s, the Islam exhibit of the 1950s, and the Queen Wilhelmina celebration of the 1930s.

What interests us here is the direct relationship between objects on display and people on display. One early, and therefore very clear example, is the display of a Papua man and boy.

This display illustrates how, from the start of the Koloniaal Museum, physical anthropology and cultural anthropology were two branches of the same discipline. On the left of this display one can see skulls and facial masks, on the right the attributes of hunter-gatherers. The two people in between represent the subject of both physical and cultural anthropology. The museum combined the two throughout its displays; it thus essentialized differences between people that were based on a peculiar mix of physical and cultural markers of difference in a colonial context.

One can also recognize this mix in the photograph of the various people who, since 1898, had become colonial subjects of Queen Wilhelmina.

Their dresses, weapons and other attributes refer to cultural communities; at the same time, they also refer to collectibles. The museum collected not just one shield belonging to a Nias warrior, but many shields; not just one beaded bag from



Absent Queen Wilhelmina and her colonial subjects,
Koloniaal Museum, Amsterdam, 1938.
(KIT Tropenmuseum, inv. no. 10000091)

Kalimantan but several decorated bags; not just one staff of a Batak medicine man, but as many as possible – and collecting related to converting, conquering, educating, loving, hating. The expertise of the museum was founded in the creation of such series of collectibles, of recognizing and understanding the meaning of sameness or variation in objects, and in representing such essential markers of difference to a Dutch audience.

Such photographs of previous exhibitions also reveal another feature of this ethnographic exhibition practice, which is: the presentation of these other people in a kind of timeless present. The photograph of the Papua man and boy was taken in 1903. Today, more than a hundred years later, their waxed statue is still present in the museum storage rooms. In the case of the people around the throne, you can see that the emphasis in the display was not put on the change in their situation, but on their static traditional society, even though they just had gone through major historical changes by becoming colonial subjects of the Dutch colonial empire.

Until recently, objects and photographs on display in the museum were not labelled with dates unless they were classified as archaeological objects that referred to the ancient past, excavated and dated by western academics. The case of the recorded initiation ritual of a young Ticuna girl illustrates how complex this relationship between representation and change is. The young girl must by now be grown up; however, in the museum she is forever young. Her story has been captured in a display with objects that do not change. It is the museum that has to make its visitors aware that they are looking at something that happened once upon a time to a specific group of people.

Who speaks for whom?

Based on these reflections concerning the display strategies of the past, we decided to create one place in the museum where the history of collecting as such would be told, by means of a radical reversal of exactly this image of the Queen and her Colonial Subjects.

In this colonial theatre, instead of the ethnic types that surrounded the Queen's throne, we constructed a display of some historical archetypes of people who contributed to the very creation of these images of otherness. In this section of the museum, *their* stories are being told; not about others but about themselves in their relationship to these others. And as founders of the museum, they also speak *for* the museum about the past of its collections.

It is just one illustration of our approach to the historical aspects of collection histories, in which we try to challenge past notions of authenticity and tradition, of representation and self-presentation that are so deeply rooted in this ethnographic practice. We try to connect these concepts to the specific interventions of the collectors themselves, throughout the different periods of the museum's history up

until today. It is one of the means of getting beyond the dominant interpretations that are fixed in the existing collections.

One of these concepts refers to auto-ethnography, and the question concerning whose values and whose views are expressed in the existing collections. The photograph of the Papua people who contribute to the anthropologists' image of their culture is just one of the examples of such self-presentation (See photographs below and plate 4 and 5). It is with this concept that we try to create a balance of views. Especially now when so many museums are using the concept of universal value to legitimate ownership of precious and rare objects that were collected in colonial times, we need to understand – and explain to our visitors – how objects were collected in the past, with and without the consent of the people in the source communities. And also how society changed in the process of these exchanges.

Auto-ethnography acknowledges the importance of the exchange of cultural information, *also* in colonial times. Throughout the museum, such stories can be seen, read and heard, in many voices. Hundreds of stories are being told with a great variety of means. Collectors' stories, curators' stories, stories from the people whose



Dugout canoe with Papua men, 1926.

(KIT Tropenmuseum, inv. no. 60041094)



Le Roux photographing the men in the canoe, 1926.

(KIT Tropenmuseum, inv. no. 10008109)

collections are on display, stories from storytellers from many parts of the world, dominant stories, subaltern stories etc.

Art, popular art, and popular culture have been used as new ways to present many perspectives. By Marcel Pinas for example, who created an installation that challenged the existing combination of physical and cultural anthropology by connecting this to slave history on the one hand, and to recent DNA research into genealogy on the other (See plate 10). Paul Weinberg in South Africa and Sunil Umrao in India filmed religious and other festivals that are now on display in the museum. Nandini Bedi recorded daily life in India, based on semi-staged interviews, in short documentary films. Fashion designer Assa Sylla in Mali created beautiful dresses that were presented in a fashion show, Morshed Torabi performed the story of Laila and Majnun in Coffeehouse Azeri in Teheran, before the dresses, the storypainting and the films were sent for display to our museum. So you will see and hear many views and voices, when you visit the museum.

But, of course, we know that whoever has the floor in the museum, in the end it is the museum that conducts the show, and we have tried to be transparent in that respect. In order to push this topic of who speaks for whom, and with what means, as far as possible, we even used a computer-animated figure that takes the role of a *Sutradhar*, as an interpreter of the museum's story on India.

I would like to make two more remarks about this issue of who speaks for whom and with what means. The first is that we have been looking for ways to have the objects speak for themselves. In the Africa gallery for instance, masks and costumes are presented in a display that emphasizes that these are not the autonomous art objects they became in western art museums, but that they were – and still are – part of a performance practice.

The second remark refers to the last exhibition that the museum added to the semi-permanent galleries: the *Traveling Tales*. It was really something unique for the museum that so many artists – Dutch as well as recent immigrants – accepted our invitation to perform contemporary Dutch storytelling for this exhibition. Their performances create a direct link to the museum's statements concerning the intangible heritage. They also indicate that the Tropenmuseum today considers Dutch society to be an integral part of the story it wants to tell, not only about the past, but also about today, and beyond notions of self and other.

Regions and themes

Let me end by briefly introducing the various exhibition themes of the refurbished Tropenmuseum. On the first floor you will find the exhibition called *Eastward Bound!*, with a display of the core collections of the museum related to the art and culture of South and Southeast Asia and Oceania (see plate 14).

The *textiles* exhibition deals with the notion of authenticity and hybridity, and this theme recurs in the exhibit on Southeast Asia (See plate 6). Both exhibitions approach this theme in a diachronic way; historical collections and contemporary objects are combined.²

In the temporary exhibitions – as was the case with *The Beads go on* or with *Indonesia 24 Hours* – contemporary culture is emphasized, and the museum is especially interested in how contemporary culture connects to the historical collections. The exhibition on New Guinea places the collections of the museum in the historical context of the time of their acquisition (See plate 7). Whereas the exhibition *Round and about India* has chosen the perspective of present day India (See plate 8), and how both objects and people travel through time and space, with their stories. Also on this floor is the aforementioned exhibition on Dutch colonialism.

On the second floor, three exhibitions are ready now. The exhibition on North Africa and the Middle East focuses on the many relationships between these regions and western society: through science, religion, culture and history. In the display one can see how the museum tries to contribute to a critical awareness of the distinction between religious objects and cultural objects, in a discussion on the rigid notions of Islam that exist in our society (See plate 9). The exhibition on Latin America combines a historical perspective with a cultural one. Histories related to pre-colonial times and to legacies of colonialism, the position of first-nation people and Afro-American legacies of the slave trade, slavery and indentured labour are presented both with historical objects and with reference to contemporary culture. The exhibition relates to the 1970s display on development issues, in how it stresses the vital mix of cultural and religious responses to pressure in society. The Africa exhibition, in a way, also relates to the 1970s display, in its intention to create a representation of African art and culture that does not ignore the problems that exist in many places, but stresses the creative drive of people throughout the continent. The fixed images of Africa are historicized by means of both historical films and photographs and new ones (See plate 11).

On the light hall floor, two other exhibitions are part of the semi-permanent displays: one educational exhibition on man and environment, and the exhibition on intangible heritage, called *Traveling Tales*. The first exhibition opened around 1996. At that time, it was quite innovative in its use of computers and its educational focus (See plate 12). However, the lessons learned in that exhibition provided input for the development of the other exhibitions with respect to what the museum should *not* do. In other words, not to teach the audience a lesson.

In that respect, the exhibition *Traveling Tales*, which has been developed in close interaction with the Tropenmuseum Junior, starts from the opposite viewpoint. It invites and allows the visitors to do what they like: lie down and sleep, play and compete, or just sit down and listen to stories. The hope is that this display gets the

visitors into the right mood for the other exhibitions, where, basically one could make the same choices (See plate 13).

And towards the end of 2009, the museum hopes to have finished the final semi-permanent exhibition, about music.

This short, *guided tour* has shown that the basic structure that the museum offers to its visitors is a regional grid, the grid that was developed after 1945 and that has been the basis for the organization of the expertise of the museum for a long time as well. It is intersected with themes related to colonial history, environmental issues, textile traditions, storytelling, and (at the end of 2009) music.

Through both the regional and thematic exhibitions, the museum has been working on new views concerning the relationship between ethnography and art, concerning the meaning of the concept of popular art and the relationship between intangible heritage and museum collections, not only for museum visitors but also for people in the countries from where the collections originated. The regional grid has offered a starting point to *meet* but also to *challenge* visitor's expectations, and to develop an active international policy with these source communities. It offers a starting point together to shape new expectations for the future museum.

2 Revisiting the Tropenmuseum

Rhina Colunge

Fifteen years of change

Fifteen years ago the Tropenmuseum decided for a change in its ethnographic museological landscape and began the challenging enterprise to renew its permanent exhibitions. Throughout this difficult process, it continued to stay open to its audiences, not only as a building, but as an institution accessible to new ideas. It continued to stay available to other institutions such as museums and universities, and it remained aware of the changes society had undergone during these 15 years. This responsive attitude was reinforced once more by means of the symposium ‘Tropenmuseum for a change’, which emphasised the self-critical and dialogical position of a museum with a not altogether uncontroversial collection. This essay is based on the panel discussion of December 11th, with speakers Jyotindra Jain, Henrietta Lidchi, and Okwui Enwezor.

I would like to report some reflections on this symposium, as well as some museological issues related to the social and cultural changes resulting from higher mobility at a global level. These changes impelled the Tropenmuseum to initiate a renewal process and its link to its historical collection.

Writing this essay was also a challenge for me, first because it is difficult to evaluate the evolution of a museum based only on the permanent exhibition. And if it is true that the permanent exhibition is the imprint of a museum, temporary exhibits, educational activities, projects, and – in the case of the Tropenmuseum – the Tropenmuseum Junior (as an ethnographic museum for children) are also issues to be considered when discussing the achievements of such an institution. Additionally, there is the ‘intentional framework’, the latest museum collection policy, which according to Jyotindra Jain implied positive changes to, and inputs in the European museum landscape, such as the willingness to put an emphasis on contemporary objects as well, the awareness of the relationship between popular art and culture,



Discussion panel, led by Kitty Zijlmans: Okwui Enwezor, Henrietta Lidchi and Jyotindra Jain.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

and the relationship between culture and migration, the inclusion of religious folk culture, intangible heritage, and contextual information in films, amongst other things.

It is stimulating to write an essay about the symposium at the Tropenmuseum as it dealt with a very wide palette of themes, intrinsically related to each other, and which would be food for thought not only during a whole conference but for a whole cluster of research. In this way, many questions raised at the symposium offered sometimes contrasting answers or points of view, not only related to the Tropenmuseum itself, but also to ethnographic museums in general. Many issues had no clear-cut solutions, and museums per se have to deal with a range of dichotomies and sometimes even contradictions. It is in this context that Okwui Enwezor dared to say out loud something that many had already been asking themselves, on '*the obsolescence of the ethnographic scene*', which implies the danger of becoming obsolete. Obsolete, no more in use, outdated and unnecessary? Is this the case for ethnographic museums? What are the ideas that lead us to give ethnographic museums this adjective? The 'problematic' areas mentioned in the symposium can be grouped as follows:

- Lack of continuity and some chaos in the display.
- Difficult dichotomies: Them and us, past and present, art and artifact.

Lack of continuity and some chaos in the display

Museums in general seem to become obsolete when the information they intentionally or unintentionally present has an essentialist impact as mentioned by the invited guest George Abungu.

‘An example is Africa. Does the exhibition represent Africa? And if so: what is Africa? Why is Northern Africa separated from the rest of the continent? These are issues we need to look at. The other issue is the issue of exoticism. I see that there is an attempt to move away from displaying the exotic by bringing in contemporary chaos, so that it makes it acceptable and raises not too much criticism.

There is hardly any connection in the Africa exhibition between the presentation of the contemporary popular urban culture, and the ceremonial world from the beginning. But here they are representing Africa. There is a need to connect’ (George Abungu).



(Photo KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

This is especially a pitfall for ethnographic museums, because traditionally they have been organised in different geographical (or rather geopolitical) areas, which represent a European ‘mapping’ of the world, different mental maps, which may be expressed as a variety of tropes.

Ethnographic museums have a historical colonial background, and therefore a strong ‘outsider’ point of view. An outsider point of view, regarding not only the process of ‘collecting’, but also the process of cultural ‘production’ in relation to the objects.

The panel and some members of the audience referred frequently to the ‘gaps’ in each gallery, and these gaps were related to the perception of a geographical region, as well as the apparent ‘chaos’, which is how some visitors described the diversity, but

'Earlier the issue has been raised as to how an ethnographic museum can tackle the issue of the comparative exhibition versus one that recognizes cultural specificity. I think that issue ignores the way in which knowledge is classified: i.e. in geopolitical terms. That in fact what remains as the basis of the display of the colonial categories is the way the world has been mapped through colonial authority.

Dr. Abungu raised the question of the idea behind the separation of North Africa from Sub-Saharan Africa. If that is not a *trope*, then I don't know what a trope is' (Ciraj Rassool).



(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

especially the contemporary aspect within each geographical area of the permanent exhibit. The examples mentioned were linked to wide geographical areas and also to the division itself into these areas: the same categorization of Africa as a continent vs. India (mentioned by George Abungu), the division of Africa into North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (commented by Ciraj Rassool) or even how maps were placed in each gallery, as commented on by Henrietta Lidchi.

It was also interesting to hear some general impressions or perceptions, such as the 'spiritual Indonesia', the 'popular' related to India... and the 'contemporary chaos' in Africa. It does not imply that these labels were planned by the museum, but it may indicate that a geographical division of the galleries creates these kinds of 'labels' for each region, as well as expectations of linear stories about each of them, expectations of overarching stories with a concept of spatial and temporal travel... expectations that don't always seem to be fulfilled for the visitors 'coming from' or closely related to these geographical regions.

One of the most typical examples was India, where popular culture and contemporary art production were, according to Jyotindra Jain, the main subjects. He recognised the important role of the Tropenmuseum, being a leader in the integration of popular culture, as part of its collection and exhibit; nevertheless, he revealed aspects that we

‘Regarding the notion of time and place, I think it is always intriguing to notice where maps are located. In the Africa gallery the map is located as you go in, and it is, in a sense, framed by a series of visual images that tell you that what you think of Africa is something that is being actively deconstructed. And the whole pacing of that gallery does that: using modern art to go into other areas of the gallery. In the Indian display, on the other hand, the location of the map is almost out of sight, and you have an interpreter, and the interpreter becomes the authorial voice’ (Henrietta Lidchi).

could not see directly in the exhibit, such as the role that the mass distribution of popular art played in the ‘Hindu’ identity of a culture that is more than Hindu: ‘... *the mass production of popular art, joined to the apparition of new media made accessible Hinduism to all castes and gave a visual unity to a society that actually is multicultural (Hindu nationalism). It is to greet that the Tropenmuseum recognised the importance of popular culture; but it is still missing the explanation of its central position in Indian society regarding social and political changes*’.³

Similarly, he mentioned the problem of including contemporary art as an artefact to identify a culture, instead of the individual — the individual stories behind the pieces of contemporary art.

‘A second important point pertains to the notion of “contemporary”. If the ethnographic museums are concerned with all aspects of cultures or the society they represent, can they leave out the art of that society to be taken care of by the art museum? Can we separate “art” from “artefact”? Even if one was to agree that contemporary global art is a world by itself and therefore could be dealt with as a separate category by the art museums, the question still remains as to what happened to the art of the ethnic groups after the decline of their tradition-based production of artefacts [their post-ethnic period]’ (Jyotindra Jain).



(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Moreover, he invited us to reflect about possible similar representation and interpretation problems in other galleries. As he asked about the 'depth dimension' of cultural phenomena, I reflected upon this dimension in the Latin America gallery, since I am originally from that region.

Two very contrasting images and two phrases are very conspicuous as one visits the Latin America gallery. First, the association of Latin America in the exhibition text with 'a big heart for love and passion' and secondly, the subtitle of the gallery as relating the continent to 'change and tradition', are very noteworthy. As corresponding images to these texts, one perceives the tension between the distanced representation of the 'Pre-Columbian' and the contemporary in Latin America. The Pre-Columbian is contextualised mainly as a scenario, but not as an approach to understand those cultures; as for example their relationship to nature and environment, the social structures and dynamics, among others. On the other side one has the contemporary chaos, sometimes also related to the tension between love and hate⁴ according to the exhibit. Are passionate feelings such central issues in Latin American culture? How does one address the theme of 'change and tradition' in Latin America without avoiding a subject that is a difficult but a very important historical issue in Latin America: the so-called 'encounter of cultures'? Can a European grasp the dimension of this encounter and its even contemporary socio-cultural and economic consequences by visiting this gallery? How to deal with issues with which Dutch society does not have a direct historical relationship? As guest Valentijn Byvanck questioned: *'are these [other] problematic pasts going to be less successful, or less convincing?'*

And I would add the question, if we are to reflect upon this problematic past, is it relevant in a way for European society? Is it important for the Latin American community living in the Netherlands? (Perhaps not...?) Is it possible to reflect on this topic or similar encounters in other cultures departing from the objects of the collection?



Valentijn Bijvanck.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Perhaps part of the answer is an example of a temporary exhibit, currently no longer present in the permanent exhibition of the Latin America gallery: the exhibit 'Che! A Commercial Revolution'. Probably this was a much more telling link between history and also its relationship with the movement of objects, subjects and ideas. Such an exhibit has the potential to represent more clearly the contemporary in Latin America than a very fast lineal trip with the impression of overloaded scenarios, which could be the European perception of a mega city in Latin America, (at least this was my impression of the Latin America exhibit in the Tropenmuseum). Would the 'Che' exhibit have been able to involve the 'European' cultural consumption and production in the dialogue between cultures with greater success than a chronological linear exhibit? In a way, thematic exhibits can also address an important issue that Henrietta Lidchi referred to as one of the most promising tropes in ethnographic museums: *'the sheer quantity of things and objects that have moved and how they have been transformed (...) the notion of connections and how these things are deeply linked, and linked in a sense through the vehicle of one place'*.

These movements, as she and Okwui Enwezor restated many times, implied also movements of people and ideas (hence, from my point of view, these movements entailed also a dynamic dialogue between cultures). Now, if indeed movement of people, objects and ideas is one of the most important ethnographic issues, I wonder if exhibitions arranged according to geographical areas make any sense these days.

In addition to continuous movement and change, a relevant problem emphasised by many, when referring to each area, was the lack of continuity in the display, the feeling of many gaps in each 'story' and, lastly, the false impression of equivalency between ethnic, cultural and geographic unities in a rather constantly changing world. In this way, a member of the public posed the question of whether it was possible to reorganize the whole exhibit according to themes and not regions. This proposal sounded interesting but risky: Henrietta Lidchi drew our attention to the possibility of losing the right kind of cultural texture, or creating a multicultural soup by suppressing the geographical divisions. Furthermore, Jyotindra Jain pointed out the risk of generalizing too much and *'obliterating cultural specificities'*, and that it could result in the writing of a general history of man, because of the search for commonalities. The thematical reorganization of an exhibition would also mean a very difficult methodological question, posed by Henrietta Lidchi, which is related to the level at which the representation will operate. And it is indeed a difficult task to choose a theme or themes that can be overarching and at the same time express diversity, themes that can have the same grade of relationship that can create a similar level of connectivity between a very diverse audience, objects and creators of cultural productions.

Are there perhaps other possibilities besides a 'history of man' that still allow the suppression of geographical areas? Is the risk of a multicultural soup greater than the risk of creating generalised ideas or even clichés about other cultures, (which is a risk

not only for the Tropenmuseum, but for many ethnographic museums)? What expectations does a museum have to fulfil? The expectations of the local visitors? Are these expectations similar among visitors? Is the recognition of each culture with certain 'typical' associations part of these expectations?

Would it not be also very motivating to recognize the same needs, steps in life, pains and joys, in a dialogue with others? Would it not be very positive to sense the connection through, or despite, the difference? It would not be about making a

'We can ask ourselves how much of displays is about making other cultures recognizable? We recognize Africa through its variety and the diversity of its popular music; we recognize India through Bollywood; we recognize the Middle East or North Africa through notions of religion and Islam. So the question we must pose ourselves is whether this is enough, or whether it is effective. Was that what we were trying to do? Are we trying too hard to make a bridge with audiences, and is it successful?

Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblet makes an interesting distinction between consent groups – people who are familiar with, and have empathy with, an object that isn't part of their culture – and descent groups – people who recognize that object from within their culture. This is an interesting distinction because we often presume – at least this is a live issue in the UK – that everybody's interpretation is equal. And, in fact, I would argue, it isn't. It doesn't work that way. Our representations, our images of other cultures contain a lot of shorthands; in the midst of which are firmly placed exoticisms. And that's why the colonial exhibition at the Tropenmuseum feels deeper and more grounded: it is about memory and it is about the subjectivity of people in this country who have a problematic engagement with their past. Rather than the representation of something that people will recognize or will be able to decode. And that is at least one of the sources for our liking of contemporary art, because often you can decode a contemporary artist's messages or narratives about, for example, Aids or the environment, even if you don't get any specific cultural references' (Henrietta Lidchi).



(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

history of man, but rather about bridging past and present, here and there through a dynamic dialogue. It would be about developing an empathetic view of other cultures; to feel (more than to notice) that despite the great variety of textures and colours in the tangible and intangible cultural production, our human condition and predicaments can create a connection; not a paternalistic connection; but a connection at an equal level among different, similar and evolving cultures.

Certainly, thematic exhibitions per se cannot solve the problem of gaps in the story, and a clear example is the gallery of 'man and environment', which is still very strongly geographic or geopolitically oriented, creating an authorial educational voice. Is educational per se 'boring' for the audience? Is the problem a methodological problem, to be solved through learning from other disciplines of museums, such as the architecture museums mentioned by Okwui Enwezor? Or is it also a philosophical problem? Or is there also a gap in this process of awareness development? Perhaps what is missing in this gallery is the active agency that each society has to change and relate to their environment; in the case of the exhibit, it lacks not only the voice of the represented cultures, but also their knowledge about their own environment and their relationship with it. Objects can hold many stories about this relationship and the wisdom of some cultures in environmental issues.

Okwui Enwezor did not discard the idea of moving out of the geographical division of the galleries completely, although he also disagreed with the idea of a 'history of man' exhibition. He rather mentioned 'microcosmic' exhibitions, 'more condensed' subjects, or moments of production '*... in which the museum can convey the richness of the imagination behind these particular objects*'. I think that this condensing process does not imply exclusively a process of syncretism, but mainly a process of reflection on very specific human predicaments. Theoretically, it sounds very interesting, but is it practically possible '*to move away from displaying the exotic [...without...] bringing contemporary chaos*'? To some extent, exoticism implies a certain way one culture is represented for another, maintaining an 'outsider' perspective, which creates a barrier instead of connecting subjectivities.

Would it be possible to eliminate the 'exotic' if a part of the cultural material production of Europe were to be included too? Would it be possible to initiate a dialogue among represented subjects and authorial voices not only by breaking the geographical division, but also integrating European elements or protagonists within the exhibit? Probably this dialogue can be possible just between 'subjects': objects, which have a story to tell, a story often full of dichotomies and with many biographies, many protagonists and tenses. In this sense, it is true that many objects have a colonial past, but it is also true that they had a life *before* this colonial past; just to mention an example. An object has many entangled stories in its biography; an object (for me either artefact or art) has the potential to tell very different stories, exactly as a person can talk about his/her life, and his/her different array of experiences and perhaps even

metamorphosis. The important issues in the museums are; which part of the story are we willing to tell, or to hear, at which moment do we need a translator to help us to understand it better, which part of the story can make a difference in the way we relate to Others, who can act as mediators, etc?

Dichotomies: them and us; past and present; art and artefact

Is a dialogue between cultural subjects possible despite the apparent dichotomies of 'them' and 'us'; 'past and present'; 'art and artefact', which is embodied in the nature of ethnography? Ethnography should describe differences and commonalities between ethnic/cultural groups, and if we look at the diverse definitions of ethnography, its goal should be *'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world'*⁶. We live in a world that is very different from the one into which ethnography and museums as institutions were born... and as Okwui Enwezor rightly pointed out, the Other in our discussion is no longer 'over there' but 'over here'. As a very illustrative example of the other being here and now, as an active agent in 'western' societies, he mentioned the case of Obama as President of the United States of America, whose father was even a colonial subject in that country. It is indeed a very striking example of the changes happening in societies, and their transcultural and intercultural processes. Nevertheless, we can not ignore other cultural groups that live on the periphery of the periphery⁷, who have contact with the economic centres, and nonetheless decide for their own cultural production and to preserve the cornerstones of their worldview. Are we still able or willing to understand them, and to include them in the dialogue? Are they still important for ethnographic museums? Or are only the 'Others' living 'here' relevant today? In the middle of a high-tech, 'transcultural world', the concept of Wade Davis on the diversity of existing 'ethnosphere'⁸ struck me: a richness of cultures that did not have to be seen as 'exotic', and that have an abundant baggage of knowledge that is worth getting to know better and which is also so important to include in the museums agenda, as well as the voices of the Others living here.

If museums are not only entertainment institutions, but also educational ones, is there anything we can learn *from* and not only *about* other cultures? Perhaps in this way we can learn that there are more than linear conceptions of time and that time itself is a cultural creation. Do we need to be anxious about grasping the contemporary? No, I do not think that collecting and presenting the contemporary is unimportant, but does it have to be the main goal of a museum (be it ethnographic or not)? Can we have a concept of contemporary without a historical concept? As Okwui Enwezor himself pointed out with respect to contemporary artists, they are also historical subjects; they were not born as adults.

‘When we look at the post-1990 period, what has emerged is the slow de-contextualization of these [...] artists from so-called tradition, and the placement of these artists within a post-historical context. In a sense, these artists have to by-pass the entire notion of the canons of art that had been put together within our specific ideas of internationalism. And this is a very deep and problematic issue, that museums of modern and contemporary art have to grapple with: how not to see these artists as post-historical, but how to precisely see them as historical artists in the context of the old canon that is unable to accommodate them.

And I have this problem with the idea of global art, because, in a sense, global art is only an economy of circulation. And it has a certain timeframe in which it is configured, and that timeframe is not represented in the collections of museums, is not represented in a canonical reflection of those museums, but only in the context of the contemporary. So the artist has no historical pedigree, as if he or she was born fully grown’ (Okwui Enwezor).



(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

I think that is also the case with cultural production; the contemporary cultural production is also a result of a series of historical processes. Which may be the best methodology to represent time? How can the museums be historical and contemporary, without showing gaps in this intended linear construct? Perhaps museum ‘authors’ can also learn from other cultures and be open for an understanding and representation that do not always have to be linear, but which can highlight more the links and connections between actors, causes and consequences, or simply emotional connectivities. Here we can return again to Okwui Enwezor’s suggestion to condense subjects of the exhibition. Can contemporary artists be more successful than the museum curatorial staff at ‘condensing’ different cultural and temporal elements? I think it is an interesting point of view, but I am wondering if

the 'new maps of knowledge', created by contemporary artists would then be accessible for everybody: the elderly and children, very highly literate and not so literate audiences, as should be the aim of every museum. Will everybody then have the feeling that museums are accessible for everybody, not only physically but also at a cognitive and perceptive level?

Reading an article on the exhibit 'Urban Islam', a statement by one of the curators of the Tropenmuseum particularly struck me: *'Through the exhibition we argued to approach religion and society from a human perspective.'*⁹ This human perspective hidden in the objects makes them 'subjects' and this is what makes collections so special, no matter if they consist of pre-Columbian art/artefact pieces; popular culture from India, or contemporary art from Africa. This human element is perhaps the ability to give objects the opportunity to talk, it is the aura of objects in museums, their *museality*, which awakes once more our sleeping intuition to understand ourselves and understand other cultures despite differences, or because of them. Perhaps we have to discover that this 'human side' of the objects can be more enriching than trying to separate art from artefact, or attempting to deal with different 'labels' to classify the cultural objects in a certain specific pigeonhole (for instance all the theoretical 'posts' and 'posts-posts').¹⁰

This turning back to the object as the subject can also question our relationship to it, as Legêne pointed out at the 2007 ICOM conference on universal collections: *'...that we possess the object does not mean that we are able to relate to the object'*¹¹. How we relate to the object makes us see it as art or artefact; and, interestingly, artefacts were called 'objects' during the symposium whereas when the discussion was about art, it was usually referred to as 'subject'¹². Can we deduce that in this case we are most able to relate to contemporary art, or use it as a temporal and geographical bridge to other cultures? Can contemporary artists act as translators or interpreters between cultures if the right methodology is employed? Or are we giving too much interpretative control to 'very *articulate syncretic artists*'? (Henrietta Lidchi). How can we work with objects in a way that they can also be perceived as subjects, even if they are not contemporary? I found Henrietta Lidchi's remark concerning the relevance of levels at which one can communicate a message to illustrate the museum's ideas very interesting, and I was wondering if they always have to be the *museum's* ideas.

In the case of the India gallery, Henrietta Lidchi drew our attention to her perception of many perspectives at once in the stories; these are different stories that are difficult to qualify as equivalent (and where the curatorial knowledge is naturally also framed within these many levels). I thought that perhaps the problems in this gallery are not so much the many levels and multiple perspectives, but the presence of an interpreter as authorial voice that was not so authentic, not only because it was not a person, but mainly because it did not allow the objects themselves to 'speak', it spoke louder than

them. This effect added to other moments in which a recreated context seemed to overshadow the object¹³, as Henrietta Lidchi mentioned: *'If the object is no longer the evidence but the metaphor... then the evidence can be found in the quality of the experience'*, implying that the information we acquire, what we perceive, is not the object or its museality but a context created by the museum. And I believe that objects can also be an experience, if we are able to relate to them. The immediate question is naturally, how to relate to the objects?

Do we always need to use new technologies to hear the stories every object has to tell?

It is a very difficult balance to find, in which new technologies support the story of the object; or they even become a musealised object themselves, as is the case of some of the audiovisuals in the Africa gallery mentioned by Henrietta Lidchi. But do we need them to support stories that are intangible, as is the case of the storytelling gallery, or do they indeed rather distract from the dialogue with the story itself? Can objects speak by themselves? And on this point, I would agree with the slogan of the Tropenmuseum campaign, that *'every object has a story to tell'* and I would say, it is not only an object; it implies a subject behind it, sometimes a collective subject, that is alive, no matter how old the object is.

As already mentioned, it was interesting to notice, how, when contemporary art was discussed, the conversation was always about people and subjects/agents; but when historical collections were discussed, the discussion was about 'objects'. Perhaps they do need so much help and artificial contexts to speak aloud; perhaps we have to stop

'We are all working with the canon, and with the collections we have, and it seems to me always a shame to ignore the historical collections we have, in favour of the contemporary, which sometimes says the things that we want to say as opposed to the objects that we have that often don't... one of the questions I have is: "Does this exhibition look the way it looks because of the institution that it is in, or didn't they have the collection that they wanted in order to say the things they wanted to say?" And there are areas where you can understand the depth of collections. For instance in the Papuan material, there is a depth of collection, but there is also a historical break. So, in a sense, there is no present continuity expressed in that display. That is properly a kind of ethnographic moment. And in other displays, for instance in the display on North Africa and West Asia, it is not an object-rich display. Which is not to say that it is not an effective display. It is about sitting in the Um Kulthum café, it's about wandering through people's houses, about the vernacular and the everyday. But it isn't about the objects. And that raises questions. Mainly: if you're not using the objects, why have them in the first place? Because then the object is basically just a way of illustrating your idea rather than something you're working with. And if we value our historical collections, they should be the objects of work, and we should use them to work with' (Henrietta Lidchi).

just 'owning' the objects, and begin awaking our sensibility to 'relate' to them¹⁴ despite the difference with respect to their cultural production?

Here I return again to an interesting statement made by Henrietta Lidchi: '*...our identities are more complex and they are evolving in a way that our historical objects don't really evolve, because they were not collected for that purpose, they were collected to do precisely the opposite*'. It may be important to question not only why they were collected, but also why they were produced; and not to diminish the value the object also has or had for the producer or creator. And here it once again a question of the problems of 'them' and 'us'; and of the contemporary; and I believe that even if some objects of historical collections can not be classified as part of a contemporary cultural production, their 'inner' spirit is contemporary, that which inspired their makers, their motivations are contemporary; and we share the same needs, the same motivations (if not expressed through the same objects), fears, needs of rituals, needs of acknowledgement, needs of joy, etc. And these are the elements which can be used to create connectivity and at the same time to recognize the difference, not only in the form as a superficial cultural expression but also in their 'inner' value. And that could mean an important dialogue of subjectivities.

Is it methodologically possible to have a dialogue instead of an authorial voice? A possibility would be to switch our perception about the objects (either historical or contemporary) and their source communities, to active subjects (which I think is already happening at the Tropenmuseum to a great extent), and to include more points of view in this dialogue, not only in the exhibit, but also in the process of its making. The question by moderator Kitty Zijlmans about the inclusion of the European, or at least local, collections in the museum was a very pertinent question in this respect; as it would serve a twofold aim: first, it would open the possibility of a dialogue within the collections itself; and second it would demand more reflection on the authorial voice as a truly interdisciplinary and intercultural team. A European inclusive approach would be rather an interesting alternative to national/regional museums with regard to '*the congratulatory approach to representing nations and regions – how well we're doing and can get along – continues to be a desirable goal of a majority of museums and, in many cases, is directly linked with the understandable "athletes' pressure" to stage a positive performance in and outside the nation*'¹⁵.

It certainly would be a very challenging enterprise, although absolutely not new, to have a museum of cultures, instead of a museum of tropics, or a museum that is structured in geographical/regional areas. Nonetheless, it would mirror closely the contemporary changes, where different cultures interact constantly with each other. Reading a text from Peter Weibel also inspired me to think about the risks of the creation of cultural identities, as separated identities: '*Cultural identity becomes a field of competition instead of cohabitation*'¹⁶. He discussed local art museums, but issues he

mentioned are also the ones creating dilemmas at ethnographic museums in cosmopolitan cities: globalisation, new migration flows, new economy systems, new hybrid societies and the like. Hence, despite the orientation to classify in pigeonholes and attach labels with definitions, interdisciplinary work among different types of museums can help to find new solutions for not only ethnographic museums, but also art and cultural historical museums; regional and national museums; and even other cultural institutions.

‘When I look at the African section, I must confess, I absolutely do *not* see Africa in the way the exhibition was designed. Or when I look at the ecosystems section – where you have the tension between nature and culture: on the one hand pristine ecosystems, and on the other hand the problems of the shanty town – I believe that architectural exhibitions have done that kind of study much better. So the question is: what can ethnographic museums learn from all these other disciplines? I think that ethnography has to be interdisciplinary in terms of the ways it uses the objects, and tells the stories through the objects’ (Okwui Enwezor).

Interestingly, the section of the exhibition, which was qualified as one of the most successful by many members of the panel and the audience, is the section on colonial Dutch history. Many agreed that it was indeed the relationship with this specific part of their ‘own’ history that makes it more authentic, honest and congruent. It was, in a way, just one ‘perspective’, which perhaps also made it easier to take decisions regarding techniques and methods of representation. It would be interesting to know more about the process of creation of this exhibit, and the participants involved in it.

Dialogue and the joy of making connections

Throughout the discussion about the different dilemmas and problematics of the ethnographic museums, some keywords and expressions were mentioned more than once, such as connection and connectivity: ‘to speak fully to an audience’.

And it is precisely this audience, which was partially missing at the symposium, whom I decided to observe in the days following it. The most touching experience was the one of a four-year-old boy, who stayed at the museum for many hours and who experienced JOY, despite ‘gaps’ in the continuity of history, or any kind of chaos. I do not know if this joy is related precisely to the *‘working through of ideas, which are all so familiar’* (Henrietta Lidchi). I would rather say that many things were completely new for him in appearance, but in a way already known as a source of emotions. In the case of the Tropenmuseum, I decided not only to see the collection, the kind of representations, its gaps or pitfalls... but mainly to observe the audience; and I had

‘To go back to the question about the tropes: recently I’ve done some work on the links between Scotland and India. Dundee had one of the largest jute industries in the world, exporting all its jute to India. The means by which it could do this was by importing whale oil from northern Canada. So, that creates a very direct and important link between the Inuit and India. Now, if you ask people about Scotland and Dundee, this Inuit/India link is not the first thing that comes to mind. Those of us who live in the current world have a great notion about travel and globalization and the movement of objects and people. And in a way that is one of the most powerful tropes: the sheer quantity of things and objects that have moved and how they have been transformed. And that is something I felt missing sometimes in the galleries of the Tropenmuseum: you know that it is a transformed object that it is being presented. Sometimes it discloses itself, but that does not always happen, and it may be that the single most interesting thing about it is the fact that it is an engineered, cross-cultural thing. The important thing then is how it is connected. And that is actually a much more compelling ethnographic trope: the movement of culture and material and people’ (Henrietta Lidchi).

the impression that most of them enjoyed it. I cannot say which message they took back home, or if they ‘learnt’ something new¹⁷; but if they experienced joy, they experienced one of the basic prerequisites not only for learning, but also for approaching ‘Others’, and for beginning an open dialogue with them.

The fact that joy is an important positive factor at the museum does not at all mean that colonial history has to be abolished as part of the exhibition. I think the presence of the contemporary implies a reflection about the past. This reflection also has to be a peacemaking reflection with one’s own history and on the others related to this history¹⁸. Accepting one’s own colonial history is a first step, but absolutely not the last. It is not about finding ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ in history, but about accepting it as a reflection for the future, as an explanation of other developments, but also as an opportunity to know ourselves better and to initiate a dialogue between equals with others.

This dialogue begins within the museum and its interdisciplinary work with other institutions, which will provide it with new methodologies to deal with the many contemporary dilemmas. Moreover, this dialogue has a further radius of action, because it implies a dialogue with the communities who may have a close relationship to the objects. It is also a dialogue on the representation of the exhibits, and a dialogue with the different communities/audiences among them. There was this interesting statement at the symposium, of the society, *‘who came knocking at the museum’s doors’*; which was rephrased by Jyotindra Jain as *‘the university’* doing that. And I think it is a very positive aspect if both society and university (including its diverse disciplines) could find a common forum to develop new vehicles of interpretation, to facilitate dialogue, the interchange of knowledge and new perceptions of one’s self, and the Others through their/our cultural production.

As simple as it can be, one of the remarks that can be most valued after the symposium was the remark of invited guest Nina Simon, about being authentic in the dialogue. And at this point, I think it is relevant to remark that the organization of such a symposium in order to review its own work is a very authentic sign of the Tropenmuseum of a dialogical approach and self-criticism.

And no, I do not think ethnographic museums are obsolete, although they (as all different socio-cultural institutions) are always at risk of being obsolescent, if they do not keep evaluating themselves, their relationships with their different communities, and keep changing. Museums with a great cultural legacy are nowadays probably more important than yesterday, because they have the potential to help us to develop our intercultural competence, which is a key competence for the pacific coexistence of social and cultural groups.

So, I think a better adjective for the work at ethnographic museums would be: challenging! Museums, either ethnographic, art, regional, or national museums are a fascinating challenge for all the parties collaborating in its transformation.

I would like to thank Daan van Dartel (Tropenmuseum) and Imogen Mowday (Pitt-Rivers Museum) for their comments on my text.

3 The symposium: Statements and discussion

In order to structure the discussions of the second day of the symposium, each chairperson wrote a small essay in advance on the existing problematic issues surrounding a certain aspect within the ethnographic museum scene. These essays were distributed among the participants of all sessions.

A. The Museum discourse: Museum policy

Paul Faber

Statements

The Tropenmuseum is ready for 2009 but will it be able to function properly in 2019? And what about 2029? Participants in this session have been invited to reflect about what kind of general policy the museum needs in the coming decades. The purpose here is to think about general strategy: the general character of the (former ethnographic) museum as an institution.

Globalisation

The context of the Tropenmuseum in 2008 is different from that in 1978. Far fewer people travelled outside Europe then. The Tropenmuseum offered a tour around the world, with objects, images, environments, smells. Today, global tourism is common. In addition, migration has transformed the population of Amsterdam and the Netherlands. More than half of Amsterdam's schoolchildren are of non-Dutch origin. There are people of more than 110 nationalities living in Amsterdam. Changes like this are happening around the world: migration, global communities, multicultural and multilingual communities are growing. Finally, television, Internet, newspapers



Plate 1
Umm Kulthum café, West-Asia/North
Africa exhibit.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2007)

Plate 2
Bamboo room, Colonial Museum,
Haarlem, 1912.
(KIT Tropenmuseum, inv. no
60040407)





Plate 3
Curiosity cabinet in the Netherlands
East Indies display
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2007)

Plate 4
Dugout canoe with Papua men, 1926.
(KIT Tropenmuseum, inv. no.
60041094)





Plate 5

Wax doll of Le Roux taking the picture shown in Plate 4.

Exhibition Netherlands East Indies.

(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2007)



Plate 6
Textiles from Indonesia.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2005)

Plate 7
Oceania Exhibit.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2007)





Plate 8
Round and About India.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Plate 9
West Asia/North Africa.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2004)





Plate 10

Art by Marcel Pinas, 2007.

(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)



Plate 11
Africa.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2007)

Plate 12
Man and Environment.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 1999)





Plate 13
Traveling Tales.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2009)

Plate 14
Colonial Theatre of historical
archetypes. Exhibition Netherlands East
Indies.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2007)



and magazines, schoolbooks and feature films: most people have a far more global perspective than people used to have. The museum is just one of many instruments that provide information about culture.

Deliberations

- Our public is changing fast, as is the world that we (re-)present, and the relationship between them. What are the consequences for our museum? Should we address these new changes specifically. And if so, how? Is today's geographical division of the museum appropriate for this challenge?
- Should we make changes to our staff?

Mind the Gap: How to balance history and the present?

Museums like the Tropenmuseum began as colonial institutions. They are the result of an unequal power balance. Relationships between the peoples involved have changed over time, yet they are still unequal. Over the last fifty years, the Tropenmuseum has abandoned its colonial dimension, while maintaining its non-Western or non-European focus. At the same time, the museum has tried to maintain contact with contemporary society, collecting contemporary popular culture and modern art. In terms of artistic value and historical importance, the early (colonial) collections are unique and important. The gap between our vast historical collections and the contemporary expressions of art and culture is growing; even when (or because) modern artists often refer to so-called traditional elements. Masks and ritual objects are increasingly remote from the world of today's global urban citizen.

Deliberations

- How to confront this inevitable split? Should the Tropenmuseum accept its place in history and focus on being a historical museum, preserving, disclosing, reinterpreting and sharing? Should we create a meaningful combination as a roots museum. If so, how?
- Should we lock away the past and become a museum for contemporary world art and culture? If so, what about our responsibility as keepers of history and culture? After all, every contemporary object eventually becomes old.

Summary: What future for ethnographic museums?

All these questions are linked to one basic question: Is there a future for the ethnographic museum in transition, and what is it?

Deliberations

- Can we maintain our non-Western approach or should we focus on being an institution for world culture? Should this entail becoming an art museum, or a cultural-historical museum, focusing on wider issues of social and cultural relevance, or can we find fruitful ways of collaboration with other types of museums?
- Will geographical divisions remain relevant, or should we think thematically. If so, what themes would be important? Would we lose something in the process as well? What kind of staff would we need to run this museum: do we need experts in various sub-collections? Do we need culture brokers, or knowledge managers, or do we outsource our knowledge base altogether?
- What do we collect? Will this require us to formulate an entirely new mission statement?¹⁹

Discussion

Participants:

Paul Faber (moderator), Henrietta Lidchi, George Abungu, Anna Schmid, Kitty Zijlmans, Christine Stelzig, Mona Suhrbier, Robert Kluijver, Frank van Vree, Susan Vogel, Frits Spangenberg, Peter van Mensch, Laura Broekhoven, Irene Hübner, Arjen Kok, Susan Legêne, Ulf Dahre, Okwui Enwezor.



Museum discours.

(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Reflections by Susan Vogel

Susan Vogel kicked off the discussion by presenting her perspective on the issues raised above. She emphasized that any museum should first and foremost enter into a dialogue with its public. Hence the fact that the composition of the Dutch population (and the population of Amsterdam in particular) has changed has implications for the museum. If more than half of the Amsterdam schoolchildren are of non-Dutch origin, this means that they represent an important part of both the current and future visitors. The Tropenmuseum will need to deal with this. It implies, amongst others, that the Tropenmuseum needs to focus more on the areas where the present population comes from, such as North Africa. Having said that, it does not mean the museum should change its course drastically. The museum's collection and building should remain its foundation – the future should be based on what's already there.



Susan Vogel.
(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Further, Susan Vogel stressed that the museum should be aware of the institutional context in which it is embedded, and should look for its niche within this context. For example, in the Netherlands there is no institution that presents African art as art. According to her, this implies that the Tropenmuseum should fill that gap, by creating a 'masterpiece gallery'. This should not be an exhibition of contemporary art, as contemporary art museums are going to be better in doing that. Instead, it should focus on the objects, knowledge and expertise that is already available in the museum. Setting up a masterpiece gallery would mean putting the most celebrated objects in a separate gallery. It is a way of acknowledging the best pieces of the collection.

Reflecting on the museum's current exhibitions, Vogel found the exhibition on Dutch colonial history in Indonesia the most interesting. It is the residue of the first

contacts and conflicts of the Dutch overseas. The exhibition presents a story about the objects, and this approach could be applied to objects in other galleries too, even those of after 1950. Vogel is in favour of a personal display of objects, which includes stories about the artists who made the work, who used the object, how people perceived the object at different points in time, etc. The information provided should be personal and highly specific, down to idiosyncratic details, because these details are revelatory. The personal stories that belong to objects are interesting and humanizing.

After Susan Vogel's introduction, the discussion went in many directions. Below the main points are grouped under the following five headings: (i) *The changing context*; (ii) *Art or ethnography?*; (iii) *Object or story?*; (iv) *A masterpiece gallery*; and (v) *The future*.

Changing context

The various discussions on the changing context of the museum yielded two broad types of perspectives. On the one hand, there were participants who stressed that globalization has changed people's perceptions of the outside world, and has broadened their basis for understanding. Eating habits are used as an example. Okwui Enwezor said: *'It took me a long time before I could eat sushi – that too is cultural travel'*. These are small steps towards a better understanding of other parts of the world. Moreover, it was stressed that cultural understanding is not only influenced by the people from Europe visiting their places, but also by the migrants who come here. Both people and information increasingly travel around the world, and this changes people's sensitivity for other cultures.

On the other hand there were participants who emphasized that globalization does not necessarily result in improved understanding. According to Mona Suhrbier, we should not forget the people who are *not* travelling around the world. Moreover, Robert Kluijver warned that we can not assume that people who have visited places outside Europe as tourists will actually have an improved understanding of other cultures. Related to this, Henrietta Lidchi warned that the Tropenmuseum should not reproduce people's perceived ideas. Instead, the goal of the museum should be to take people somewhere else intellectually.

Two other implications of the changing context were highlighted. First, the changing composition of Dutch society implies that an increasing number of people from different origins will come to the museum looking for representations of themselves. The museum would be wise to adjust to this new group of (potential) visitors and their expectations. Second, globalization also implies that the Tropenmuseum should look for relations and collaboration with other museums all over the world.

Art or ethnography?

George Abungu asked whether there is a distinction between art and ethnographic objects. There may be a tendency to classify objects that come from Africa as ethnographic objects, while European objects are seen as art. Participants seemed to agree that there is no clear divide between the two, that there is a continuum, and that the distinction may not be important for the Tropenmuseum. According to Kitty Zijlmans, the difference between art and ethnography is subjective, and mostly related to the disciplinary divide between anthropologists (who used to make up most of the staff of the museum) and art experts.

Some participants objected to the term Ethnographic Museum because it has a colonial connotation. Others, however, stressed that there is nothing wrong with ethnography, as long as the western dominance (and arrogance) is removed.

The role of the contemporary in the Tropenmuseum was also briefly discussed. A possible way for the museum to include contemporary art is by inviting contemporary artists in a programmatic way. This does not mean that the museum should collect contemporary art, but could invite artists to give their interpretations of history and of the continuing contact between different populations.

Object or story?

Peter van Mensch triggered some discussion with an anecdote. Drawing from his experience working at a Zoology museum, he gave the example of a distribution map of the places where the skulls and skins of the African Golden Cat have been found. Contrary to what an observer of the map is likely to think, the map does not represent the habitat of the animal, but the travelling routes of European collectors. Mensch then proposed that the Tropenmuseum could change its name to the 'Museum of Traveling'. In this museum the general narrative could be the traveller and the traveller's perception, which can easily be connected with the contemporary world, as we are still travelling to other places and other people travel to our places.

Alternatively, the Tropenmuseum could do away with all the designs and contextual stories, and simply turn the Tropenmuseum into one large storage room, with unique objects, with labels attached. There seemed some agreement that returning to the raw material could be more novel than fancy displays.

Does the museum need to choose one particular approach? That is, either displaying objects as building blocks of a story that is being told to the visitor (the context and the story become more important than the object itself) or displaying decontextualized objects, in which each object has its own voice? None of the participants in the

discussion spoke out strongly in favour of either approach. Several participants were charmed by the idea of a storage room, while at the same time most participants seemed to agree that the exhibition on the colonial heritage was among the best of the museum. There seemed to be a consensus that the museum should avoid 'over-contextualizing'.

Throughout the discussion, different participants highlighted different elements that were considered important in the design of galleries. Henrietta Lidchi, for example, mentioned that surveys in Edinburgh have shown that visitors are more interested in 'facts' about objects than the stories about the collector of the object. She claimed that, at least from the perspective of the Anglo-American visitor, the stories surrounding objects are secondary to the object itself. She also gave the example of the British Museum, where a survey showed that visitors preferred to browse decontextualized objects in the freely accessible parts of the museum, while they preferred 'full stories' in the temporary exhibitions, which are not for free. According to Laura Broekhoven, visitors want more 'objective' information about cultures (e.g., the Maya society), and that it is the task of the Tropenmuseum to provide this type information. George Abungu noted that, walking through the African gallery in the Tropenmuseum, one would think that Africa is full of ceremonies, festivals and kings in beautiful clothes. According to him the Tropenmuseum should also make an effort to represent daily life, and the *'little ones who have no voice'*.

A masterpiece gallery

Related to the issue of presenting objects with or without context, Susan Vogel's proposal to create a 'masterpiece gallery' was discussed. Some argued that the classification of an object as a 'masterpiece' is subjective. According to Irene Hübner, the solution to deal with this may be to create a gallery of masterpieces that includes explanations to the public regarding the way the collectors' perception of the object has changed over time, and how it ended up being a 'masterpiece' today. Related to this, Frits Spangenberg mentioned that there has been a transformation from a collective society to an individualist society and that this has implications for the way masterpieces are presented. In a collective society we obey the authority that classifies an object as a masterpiece, while in the individualist society individuals themselves decide what is the masterpiece. It implies that different audiences have their own values, and want to make decisions themselves – 'your masterpiece doesn't need to be my masterpiece'.

The future

The discussions made clear that there is no way that the changing context, both in the Netherlands and in the world at large can be neglected. The composition,

expectations, and experiences of visitors are changing and the Tropenmuseum will need to keep on adjusting to this. If the museum is going to listen to all participants, it would need to find a balance between object and context; facts and interpretation; education and discussion; personal reflective stories and socio-historical accounts. It would need to build on its historical foundations, while at the same time involving contemporary artists, who can help to interpret history. The Tropenmuseum would need to keep on reinventing itself in a progressive way, but without discarding its history and experience. Clearly, in this balancing act the museum can not be everything to everybody, and sometimes choices need to be made.

B. Social discourse: Interaction between museum and society

Alex van Stipriaan

Statements

Museum, history and future

In the 1970s and 1980s, museums became aware of their local and global surroundings. They assumed a responsibility to educate the wider community about inequality in the world at large, as well as international cooperation. Meanwhile, they disguised their beautiful old collections, tainted with the questionable heritage of their country's colonial past, in large evocative exhibitions about everyday life and art around the world.

In the 1990s, the intrinsic beauty of these collections and their colonial background were rediscovered during a period of reflection. At the same time, the museum began to focus on the society in which it existed: society was knocking on the door – its chaotic noise had become audible inside the museum.

The Tropenmuseum has responded to all this with several initiatives: exhibitions on both universal and specifically anthropological themes and on risk-taking; controversial social and political themes were organised, in addition to events, outreach programmes for minorities and special school programming. Meanwhile, the museum staff is involved in international projects, including museum and community development.

So what is the museum's relationship to society? The collections, which are an intrinsic part of the relationship with cultures from the southern hemisphere, are largely historical and becoming more so. The stories they tell are about the past of these societies, often from a colonial perspective.

Deliberations

- This leads to an older, yet increasingly pressing dilemma: should the museum reach out to the outside world, or should the museum bring the outside world inside? Although the answer is probably both, it would be interesting to discuss what the balance should be, how this should be established, what part of the outside world we wish to relate to, how and whether the largely historical, colonial collection might serve as a challenging and attractive ingredient with which to build this new relationship, or whether it is a liability?

Museum, society and truth

The historical collections tell anthropological, if not colonial truths. And although the museum is now self-reflective, it remains an institution concerned with knowledge and truth: how people once lived, developments today; what objects were used for; how to compare one cultural phenomenon with another.

In the outside world, truth is the ultimate contested issue. Relativists, liberals and fundamentalists have their own truths, which naturally conflict. Political leaders do not seem so trustworthy anymore. Yet the museum remains steadfast in its role as an educator of truths about cultures other than its own.

Does the museum become a more truthful, trustworthy and representative place when the social and political turmoil of the outside world – the world in which it is situated and the world it presents – enters within its walls? And does the public want that? Maybe some potential visitors want to be culturally and historically recognized, but most are probably not looking for the kind of turmoil they see on television, in the street or at work, whether in their own society or others.

Deliberations

- Should the museum discuss and pose questions? If so, who should pose these questions and how? Should the museum present different stories and options regarding particular themes and objects, allowing the public to make up their own mind?
- Should the museum ask confusing questions in order to stimulate visitors to find their own answers? Should the museum present contrasting stories and views (Afrocentrists/Eurocentrists, Israelis/Palestinians, male/female) and present debate and mutual comments in an attempt to provide answers? How can the museum achieve a balance between education, debate and entertainment when reaching out to society?

Museum and representation

The museum attempts to provide an alternative to Eurocentric visions and presentations by inviting representatives from various stakeholder communities in the

Netherlands and elsewhere to help provide context, tone and perspective in specific exhibition projects. The feedback these representatives give is often critical about the museum's narrative: they tend to cling to their own truths. This is not always reflective of the turmoil in their society: they often try to present a positive vision of their society.

What about the opinions and truths of opposing societies? Should they be represented too? What do different peoples in the southern hemisphere think about each other? What do people in Holland think about other peoples. For example, African-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch, Islamophobes and Muslim migrants? Should they all be represented equally in the museum?

What does broader representation and the incorporation of representative views of Dutch society, tropical societies and the world in general imply for the museum's own microcosm? How representative should the museum community be? Should staff and public, the collections and exhibitions be more representative, and if so, of whom and what? Cultural difference is celebrated in the museum, while outside immigrants and their descendants are encouraged to integrate and assimilate into the mainstream dominant culture.

Deliberations

- Should the museum's staff be drawn from more diverse population groups? Perhaps. Does this depend on the person's mindset or is cultural and ethnic background equally or even more important? Is the museum more truthful, reliable and representative if the outside world enters the museum? Is reflecting and representing social and global diversity the same as interacting with other societies? Who is interacting with whom?
- Should the museum's public reflect the demographic composition of Dutch society at large and if so, how can this be attained? Should the museum attract white Dutch yuppies to the same events as lower-income migrants from Turkey, and will the latter come to projects featuring Surinam or Brazil?
- Should museums participate in hot social, cultural and political debates? Is it possible for a museum to avoid this? If the museum participates, should it speak with a single voice, or with several voices, and if so how? Can a museum have various voices and still be trusted?

Discussion

Participants:

Alex van Stipriaan (moderator), Christina Kreps, Anne Bamford, Annette Schmidt, Fer Hoekstra, Nina Simon, Valentijn Bijvanck, Arnoud Odding, Klas Grinell, Ciraj Rassool, Paula Santos, Leontine Meyer, Adi Martis, Anne-Marie Boer, Per Rekdal, Wim Manuhutu, Helen Mears, Els van der Plas, Bambang Purwanto, Willem Velthoven.



Social discourse.

(Photo: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Museum, history and future

In order to – in the words of Alex van Stipriaan – *spice things up a bit*, the discussion on each theme was introduced by one of the guests.

In her introduction, Christina Kreps stated that equilibrium is key. ‘Should the Tropenmuseum go into the street, or should the street go into the Tropenmuseum? Should the Tropenmuseum merely reflect changes in society, or should it be an agent of change? It’s all a matter of balance’. According to Kreps, the Tropenmuseum is unique because it has always been a socially ‘engaged’ institution. Even in the Colonial Era the engagement with colonised countries was essential. Later this engagement was transferred to the field of development assistance; the museum created awareness. ‘The Tropenmuseum is a leader in social engagement. That is important and unique’. It is important that the museum recognises its own status as a leader, also in the academic field. If the museum turns to the street too much, it might lose this position of leadership.

After this kick-off, Willem Velthoven added some more spice to the discussion. Living right behind the Tropenmuseum, Velthoven encounters huge discrepancies between the public discourse of the museum and the daily practice. ‘The neighbourhood around the museum has a valuable ethnic mix. People from all parts of the world are the neighbours of the museum, but the museum is closed to them’. According to Velthoven, the museum has never contacted him, or reached out to him

as a citizen of the same neighbourhood, but only in his capacity as a museum expert. All this experience, right there on the doorstep, remains unused. 'And when I come to the museum, and I go to the toilet, the only thing the museum communicates is that I should wash my hands'.

Immediately after Willem Velthoven, Els van der Plas stirred up the fire some more. She feels that the Tropenmuseum should again be a historic colonial museum – even changing its name in that sense. On that basis, the Museum can start a dialogue with its stakeholders, such as its neighbours. The whole building of the Royal Tropical Institute breathes its colonial past, don't hide that. 'The efforts of the Tropenmuseum to be "hip" and "modern" is irritating. The exhibitions don't communicate with the visitors. The museum's own collection is wonderful, put it on display!' This is not, Van der Plas reiterates, in contradiction with the possibility to also show contemporary art. 'It's all about mentality and attitude'.

After these two contributions, many participants raised their finger to be heard. Contribution focussed mainly on the role of the museum within its own neighbourhood and the way to deal with the colonial heritage of the Tropenmuseum.

Paula dos Santos confessed that she had been disappointed the day before, during the first day of the symposium, because none of the special guests had gone into the social role of the museum. There was talk on who visited the museum and why, but the social role of an ethnographic museum goes beyond that, Santos argued. Even if the exhibition is limited to colonial artefacts, there is a contemporary message that should be made explicit. Because showing objects from the colonial era can never be more than a means for a social objective.

Klas Grinell thinks that an answer could lie in defining the 'us' that the Tropenmuseum often refers to. Who are these 'us'?, he asked. How was it, for example, to be on the other side of the colonial relationship? 'That would be something I'd be interested in'. Also Grinell is not too happy with the strict separations in groups of stakeholders: neighbours, specialists, donors, visitors, etc. 'Don't forget that, for example, neighbours can also contribute to valuable scientific knowledge.'

Valentijn Bijvanck does not agree with the colonial focus of the Tropenmuseum that Els van der Plas advocates. According to him, focussing on the colonial past would amount to losing the appeal to a growing part of the population, and also losing sight of the last 50 years of Dutch relationships with the rest of the world. Addressing Van der Plas directly: 'I don't think you are irritated by what's on display in the Tropenmuseum, you are irritated by the tone of voice, the museum uses'. Bijvanck thinks the museum should prioritize modifying the entrance of the museum. The Tropenmuseum should be open towards its surroundings. At the moment it is not. It is a highly closed building that is almost scary to enter. 'Make the Tropenmuseum entrance an open space'.

Per Rekdal, on the other hand, is happy with the distinctive course the Tropenmuseum has chosen compared, for example with the Rotterdam or Leiden ethnographic museums. 'The Leiden museum is like a Rolls Royce, beautiful, perfect

almost, but not very pleasing to drive in. The Tropenmuseum however, is chaotic. One can see that it is not finished, it still needs work. That gives it a dynamic feel. I like that'. In addition, the Tropenmuseum should be about the world and all its cultural diversity. So the focus should not be the immediate surrounding of the museum or even Amsterdam as a whole. That is the approach Rotterdam has chosen. Let the Tropenmuseum be different!

Bambang Purwanto does not agree with the praise the Indonesian part of the exhibition received from many of the participants. He does not get a feel of Indonesian history when walking through the exhibition. The colonial history is not the point of interest of many visitors. To which professor Jyotindra Jain replied that it is not a matter of being a colonial museum or not, it's all about *how*. What do you do with colonial objects? How do you exhibit 'living objects'? According to Jain there is a huge gap between colonial and contemporary; this gap should be bridged.

Museum, society and truth

Adi Martis kicked off the discussion by briefly sketching the changing society of recent decades and the adaptations of ethnographic museums. After the 1990s, it became clear that migrants in the Netherlands were here to stay. They are not necessarily interested in the colonial history of the Netherlands, as the majority are not from former Dutch colonies. The Tropenmuseum however does have a mission towards these immigrants. As they are not usually from the elites in their country, they often have limited knowledge of the history of their country of origin. Providing these immigrants with information on their own historical background will in fact aid their participation in Dutch society, Martis stated. Furthermore, Martis argued that the Tropenmuseum should actively engage in the public debate in the Netherlands. There is no need for the Tropenmuseum to speak with a single voice. Inspired by the current Voodoo exhibition in the museum, Martis suggested staging an exhibition on Caribbean religions. That would attract a variety of visitors: inhabitants of Caribbean descent, migrants from African countries, as well as more affluent citizens of Amsterdam that might be interested in New Age implications of these religions. Additionally, combinations with contemporary art can easily be fitted in such a concept.

Wim Manuhutu was the first to react to this introduction. He went back to the role of the Tropenmuseum as an open space, referring to the image of the open building on the invitation to this symposium. He feels that the museum should turn towards the street; reach out to its transnational environment. Making the Tropenmuseum just a colonial experience will mean losing some 50% of the migrants in the Netherlands as potential visitors. Instead, these people should be invited to the museum and asked to comment on it, for example on the Oostwaarts! exhibition on Dutch colonial life. Asking for comment from different stakeholders does not mean rendering your

expertise. In the same line of thought, Manuhutu feels that the Tropenmuseum should be prepared to be critical towards its own operation. If the museum wants to be leading in transnationalism, what does that mean for the Tropenmuseum as an institution? Who should be in the board? Who should be staff members?

The Tropenmuseum is hardly 'extramural'; it engages insufficiently with its immediate surrounding, Willem Velthoven added. 'Why not engage more with the Dapperbuurt?' But also engaging more with the Hortus Botanicus and the Artis Zoo would provide a context to the Tropenmuseum. The historical context is already embodied in the building of the Royal Tropical Institute.

Following up on this thought, Anne Bamford warned against addressing the supposed identities of (potential) visitors. She referred to an experience of a failed cultural project once executed by Unesco in a refugee camp, where the UN organization wrongly assumed that all refugees could be addressed as all having the same identity. An ethnographic museum often tends to 'freeze' the cultural identity of people: 'this is what it means to be an Indonesian'. 'That is not how it works'. The question is, she concluded, how can the visitors connect to the objects they are confronted with. That is never one-dimensional.

Paula Santos repeated her earlier contribution: 'Very interesting, these observations, but what I miss is the social discourse. We talk a lot about how and what, but what is missing is the *why*. What is our goal? The Tropenmuseum should act in harmony with its goal. Make the social dimension of the museum explicit!'

Some discussion then followed on the social task of an ethnographic museum. Some participants warned that the message should never be too obvious, in order not to be patronizing to the visitors too much. Others touched upon the thin line between authority and message. Historically speaking, ethnographic museums are highly authoritarian. Conveying a clear message could erode this voice of authority, but that risk could be worthwhile.

In the discussion of the task and position of museums, it is often forgotten that the museum is not the only actor in the field. A museum should have an added value. For example: newspapers have a clear duty to voice contemporary developments. A museum does not need to be contemporary to be relevant. Klas Grinell: 'The Tropenmuseum could say: this is us, this is our collection. For contemporary art, go elsewhere.'

Museum and representation

Ciraj Rassool was invited to respond first. The crux of the matter, Rassool claimed, is not geographical, but rather political. It's all about the engagement of the Tropenmuseum. The value of the museum is not in the objects it puts on display, but on its methodology. The Tropenmuseum can never get rid of the fact that it has a colonial

past. It is only when recognizing this past that it can ever succeed in being post-colonial. How to be post-colonial with a colonial collection? The exhibition *Oostwaarts!* actually shows that this is possible. Especially when the history of collecting the objects is put at centre stage. This leaves fundamental questions on the relationship the Tropenmuseum should engage in, and the people it employs. Being multicultural is a dangerous path, Rassool opined, for it stresses the differences between people. Instead, the Tropenmuseum should focus on citizenship and on the relationship of the Netherlands with the rest of the world.

Reacting to the questions raised and the introduction by Ciraj Rassool, Wim Manuhutu stated that in recent years the Netherlands has become more closed, as it is debating and searching for its own identity. In this debate the voice of the Tropenmuseum has hardly been heard. The museum should engage more in the public debate; be more visible.

Getting back to the discussion on the earlier questions, Arnoud Odding thinks that this silence is perhaps out of fear of losing its authority. 'Fear of losing your authority will no doubt result in just that: the loss of authority. Don't be afraid of extreme relativism, because relativism contains more truth than just speaking with one voice'.

Others stress that knowledge is not just something that come from universities: there are multiple forms of knowledge. It is important to be multi-vocal. It's not enough to speak with the voice of authority; it is much more important to be authentic. This causes some participants to express the opinion that the Tropenmuseum should not be afraid of being open about the contradictions and differences in the opinion of experts. Quite on the contrary: it would be very interesting to create different visions on history and to place the collection of the Tropenmuseum at the very heart of the permanent exhibitions.

C. Collection discourse: Contemporary collecting

Mirjam Shatanawi

Statements

Background

The Tropenmuseum is currently undergoing a transformation from a strictly ethnographic museum into a cultural-history museum focussing on the art, culture and history of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is part of a wider trend in which art museums and historical museums are taking on characteristics of ethnographic museums, and vice versa. Collection policies seem to be at the heart of this process, since the permanent collections, partly established in colonial times, embody notions of cultural difference that are now being contested. The eclectic nature of the Tropen-

museum collections forms a major challenge; while half of its collection dates from the colonial period, the rest was collected after 1950 and reflects themes that were popular in museum presentations then but are now shunned, such as poverty reduction or health care in the Third World. The recreation of complete slum areas and villages inside the museum, an approach popular between the 1960s and 1990s, has left us with storage rooms full of plastic baskets, inventories of grocery shops and self-made furniture. The result is an enormously varied collection which comprises precious art works as well as seemingly trivial everyday objects and a wide range of mediums: photography, painting, woodwork and textiles (the collection can be consulted online at <http://collectie.tropenmuseum.nl>).

The debate about collection policies in the Tropenmuseum takes place in the context of a changing museological landscape. In their search for re-evaluation, some former ethnographic museums in Europe have made radical choices: they no longer consider their collections to be the foundation for exhibitions (Museum of World Culture, Göteborg) or they deliberately retain their colonial model (Quai Branly, Paris). The Tropenmuseum however, has opted for slow-paced change, re-interpreting the existing collections and complementing them with contemporary art, popular culture and intangible heritage (see the recent publication 'Collecting at cultural crossroads: Collection policies and approaches 2008-2012'). It has also written new ethical guidelines for the acquisition of ethnographic objects, in addition to the UNESCO Convention of 1970.

Dutch museum collections (Collectie Nederland)

Meanwhile, Dutch museums of modern and contemporary art that used to focus on Western art are now developing an interest in the rest of the world (e.g. Van Abbe Museum, Stedelijk Museum, FOAM, Groninger Museum). Multiculturalism has challenged museums of Dutch history to provide greater cultural diversity in their presentations (e.g. Amsterdam Historical Museum). As a result, ethnographic museums now no longer have a monopoly on non-Western culture, and have been pushed to the fringe. In reaction, the various Dutch ethnographic museums have sought closer collaboration in the Foundation of Dutch Ethnographic Museums (SVCN). Meanwhile, the focus on new methods of collecting (intangible heritage) and mediums (contemporary art) suggests that the Tropenmuseum should draw closer to other museums and institutions in the Netherlands, such as art museums and institutions presenting audiovisual heritage, e.g. Beeld en Geluid [an institute for Image and Sound].

Deliberations

- Are the existing collections and their discursive histories an impediment or a foundation for change? Can or should they be used to explore new social realities?

- To what extent can collection strategies contribute to the re-evaluation of the place of non-Western cultures in Dutch society? Can they challenge the basic premises of the ethnographic museum and the socio-political structures that underpin them?
- Should the Tropenmuseum freeze its development and become a museum of the colonial past, as some argue? Should it try to expand its collections of antique masterpieces? Or should it continue to focus on contemporary collecting?

Contemporary art

Presenting and collecting contemporary art enables the Tropenmuseum to maintain a connection with the modern world. Theoretically speaking, the individual-based nature of contemporary art also enables the Tropenmuseum to create a platform for diverse opinions, including those that challenge the museum and the discourses in which it is rooted. From this perspective, the inclusion of contemporary art may be one of the more constructive ways to promote change in ethnographic museums. Yet if the underpinning paradigms are not addressed, it may also result in the confirmation of fixed boundaries. At a basic level, the universalist claims of contemporary art run counter to the conventional line of reasoning of the ethnographic museum and the organisational models on which it is built. The present-day structure of the Tropenmuseum, with the museum divided into distinct geographical regions, each with its own curator, permanent exhibition space and collection, increases the risk of essentializing its subject. It seems that collecting contemporary art may either provide a tool for change or re-affirm fixed boundaries. All museums face dilemmas such as these in today's increasingly globalised art world. Interesting enough, there seems to be a division between the type of art and artists featuring in contemporary art museums and Biennales (conceptual art, installations, video and photography), and what is collected by ethnographic and 'universal' museums such as the British Museum and the Tropenmuseum (decorative and narrative art, painting, sculpture). Much of the debate in the Tropenmuseum concerns its position in this dichotomy.

Should the museum confine itself to collecting works by artists with a non-Western background, as it has up to now? Or is ethnicity no longer a criterion for selection? Should the museum collect works by artists that are ignored by regular art museums, i.e. 'non-Biennale Art', as distinct from contemporary art museums? Should it be a platform for neglected art and artists? Or should it do the opposite and join in with current developments in the art world? And what are the theoretical implications of these choices?

Deliberations

- Should the Tropenmuseum collect contemporary art? If so, what kind of art should it collect? Does the inclusion of contemporary art in an ethnographic museum challenge its *raison d'être*?

Intangible heritage

Following UNESCO, the Tropenmuseum is directing its research to the meaning of the concept of intangible cultural heritage for its own collection policy. The problems around collecting intangible heritage are immediately clear upon reading the purposes and definition as formulated in the 2003 UNESCO Convention (see <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich>). Although intangible heritage is not an independent thematic collection area for the Tropenmuseum, it is an explicit element of its collection policy. Currently, the Tropenmuseum is experimenting with the use of intangible heritage in its permanent exhibitions, while at the same time searching for meaningful ways to collect and preserve intangible forms of heritage [please read 'Collecting at cultural crossroads: Collection policies and approaches 2008-2012', pp. 42-4, for a summary of the Tropenmuseum policies regarding intangible heritage]

Deliberations

- How can the Tropenmuseum work with intangible heritage?
- What media can or should the Tropenmuseum collect if it wants to keep presenting the contemporary? Or is it no longer possible to catch the modern world in objects? How can global developments in the field of intangible heritage be made useful for the Tropenmuseum?

Discussion

Participants:

Mirjam Shatanawi (moderator), Els van der Plas, Klass Grinell, Paula Dos Santos, Kitty Zijlmans, Susan Vogel, Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, Arnoud Odding, Henrietta Lidchi, Okwui Enwezor, Jyotindra Jain, Ciraj Rassool, Bambang Purwanto, Kees Zandvliet, Susan Legêne, Laura Broekhoven, Barbara Plankensteiner, Arjen Kok, Fer Hoekstra, Christina Kreps, Anne-Marie Boer.

In her introduction, moderator Mirjam Shatanawi stressed the fact that the Tropenmuseum collection is not only a colonial collection, as many of the participants seemed to think. Many objects entered the museum after the 1950s and are post-colonial in time. They are not, however, post-colonial in thought, for the ideas behind the collecting of them were directed by discourse concerned with developmental relations, which Shatanawi considers to be a prolongation of the colonial discourse. She was interested in the ideas on how to deal with this discursive past.



Collection discourse.
(Photo KIT Tropenmuseum, 2008)

Contemporary art

To kick off the discussion on contemporary art, Els van der Plas stated that the core business of the Tropenmuseum is defined by its historical surroundings. The Tropenmuseum must, in its exhibitions, always refer to the colonial history of the Netherlands. Turning it into a World Museum would be tantamount to losing its added value. Everybody knows nowadays what India looks like. We don't need to go to the Tropenmuseum to see India; we can experience it for real, for ourselves. By being a museum of colonial history the Tropenmuseum can refer to other colonial situations and colonial attitudes. Colonialism in fact is a current issue. To illustrate this point, Van der Plas referred to the election of Barack Obama as US president: 'A fact that has everything to do with colonialism'. The task of the Tropenmuseum is to link its collection with current situations of colonialism. So, in short, the Tropenmuseum should not, as a principle, turn to collecting and/or exhibiting modern art. It should only do so when this is relevant to its mission as a museum of colonialism. Museums of modern art, however, should collect art from non-Western countries. For the Tropenmuseum, its own collection must be the focus of attention. 'Be clear about this choice!' Van der Plas concluded.

A short discussion followed concerning exhibiting vs. collecting. Many of the participants warned the Tropenmuseum against building up a collection of contemporary art. Susan Vogel for example complained that 70 percent of museum

collections is stored, only 30 percent is displayed. 'Furthermore, if ethnographic museums start collecting modern, non-Western art, they let modern art museums off the hook. Contemporary art belongs in modern art museums, this also goes for non-Western modern art.'

Arnoud Odding opined that collecting modern art is not compatible with the social agenda of ethnographic museums. Provokingly, Odding added that the modern art world, in his opinion, is mainly a hedonistic sub-culture.

This, of course, stirred the indignation of 'super-curator' Okwui Enwezor. He agreed that museums like the Tropenmuseum should not engage in collecting modern art, but they should exhibit modern art. In fact, ethnographic museums have a distinct role to play in 'universalizing' modern art. Current exhibitions in ethnographic museums are often no more than a collection of curiosities, from which it is hard to deduce any scientific reasoning.

He praised the courage of museums like the Tropenmuseum to try and portray a country like India, but to succeed in this effort to him seemed impossible. Enwezor compared this to the idea of Europeans witnessing a narrative about Europe in Nigeria. 'They would laugh out loud'. This does not mean that museums like the Tropenmuseum are irrelevant: it's all about the choices that are made. Enwezor ended this contribution to the debate with the heartfelt cry that the Tropenmuseum should get rid of its 'racist dioramas', by which he meant the 'environment' approach in exhibiting techniques. Legêne replied to this that the environment approach is not a problem in itself, but rather in the intention behind it. The exhibit on colonialism used environments to make people aware of their awkwardness.

These last remarks provoked a response by Ciraj Rassool, who related the experience of the Bushmen diorama in the South African Museum in Cape Town. This diorama was closed after the abolition of apartheid, but according to Rassool the option to make the diorama part of the discourse of race relations would have been very interesting. It is important to think about ways in which to show knowledge. Is it possible to show culture in its context, like the diorama is supposed to do? Enwezor shared an article he had read in *The New Yorker* about a game park with 'real' people in South Africa, where visitors could see 'real' Bushmen living in 'real' Bushmen villages. A problem arose when one of the Bushmen employed started hunting in the game park (in the way that Bushmen had hunted throughout history), and he was fired for this reason.

Others were less strict about the need to dispose of the dioramas. Kees Zandvliet, for example, confessed that he was not a fan of dioramas, but the possible racist connotations of some (older) dioramas should not be confused with the actual mission of the museum itself. He compared it to the purchase, some years ago, by the Rijksmuseum of a national-socialist painting. The purchase was criticized, but it did not mean that the Rijksmuseum could be accused of national-socialist sympathies. 'Dioramas portray old way of looking at things. We can show that it all depends on the way this is done'. To Els van der Plas, the building of the Tropenmuseum itself is

a kind of diorama, and should be put at centre stage, by stripping away everything that obscures the view of the building. To finish off the discussion, Susan Legêne related the Dutch reaction to an Indonesian diorama of Dutch KNIL soldiers with their victims at their feet. This image made it possible to put the issue of Dutch war crimes onto the agenda of national debate in the Netherlands.

Intangible heritage

In his 'kick-off' contribution, Arnoud Odding shared his experience of visiting a museum in Flanders where some big paintings by Dutch/Belgian masters were displayed. A discussion ensued with the director of the museum about the worth of these old paintings. The director stated that the worth was universal and eternal, whereas Odding maintained that the universal value of the paintings was no more than that of the paint and the canvas. The only thing that makes the paintings valuable for us is that we know the history and context of the works of art. Later, Odding conducted a small survey on the value of art, and to his surprise a majority agreed with the idea of the Flemish museum director. In Odding's view, however, objects are not culture, they merely represent culture. Culture is the meaning behind an old ceremonial mask. Culture is not an object, it is not even language, but it is meaning. Therefore it is not enough to show objects from other cultures, but this has to be done with context. Ethnographic museums should ultimately show the relativity of one's own culture. And, to fire up the discussion, Odding suggested it would be worthwhile for the Tropenmuseum to build a permanent exhibition about the relativity of 'universal' human rights. Christina Kreps subsequently corrected the statement by Odding that objects cannot be culture *per se*. To some cultures, religious objects are sacred; they do not merely represent the divine, they *are* the spirit they worship.

New technologies (for example digital recording) make it possible to collect intangible heritage more systematically than before. Together with tangible objects, this enables us to tell a much more complete story of objects and cultures. There is a contradiction, however: collecting intangible heritage is only possible if the intangible is made tangible. To one of the participants, this is paramount to destroying the intangible heritage. Others disagree with this radical viewpoint. Anne-Marie Boer, for example, collected the songs that Moroccan labourers in the Netherlands brought with them. 'This was virtually the only thing they brought with them: their music. By collecting and recording these songs nothing was destroyed; if anything, it was preserved'.

The discussion swiftly turned away from the topic at large, intangible heritage, and concentrated on collecting and the meaning and function of the current collection of the Tropenmuseum.

One participant identified a huge gap between the objects in the collection and the people visiting the museum. One of the goals of the Tropenmuseum is, in fact, to

discover the links between the objects and the present visitors. This is the essence of re-documenting the collection. This is not a linear process, Henrietta Lidchi stressed, it is a matter of moments ('dots in time'), but through identifying enough of these connecting moments, the link can be made.

The mission of collecting often results in long, personal relationships between collectors and members from source communities. Laura Broekhoven: 'Collecting is, to a high degree, an individual, particular enterprise; discrepancies arise when these particular enterprises are displayed in a universal setting'. For moderator Mirjam Shatanawi, this raises questions concerning the term 'source community', both in relation to the collectors and in relation to the scattering of communities in the process of globalisation.

An important function of museums like the Tropenmuseum is to arouse the visitors' curiosity. In order to do that, Klass Grinell stressed, the Tropenmuseum should go back to the pre-museum notion; back to the collection of curiosities we once were. We must allow the visitor to fill in the images we provide.

Okwui Enwezor ended the discussion by remarking that ethnographic museums are interesting if they deal with changes and transformation. 'Therefore the Tropenmuseum should not stick to its own collection, but rather open up to other topics. In fact the temporary exhibitions are a model for the rest of the Tropenmuseum'.

Dutch museum collections

Kees Zandvliet, from the Amsterdam Historical Museum (AHM), was asked to initiate the discussion on this topic. He explained how he dealt with new issues, while preserving the historical, and Amsterdam-based character of his museum. One of the new issues is migration. The latest important acquisition of the Amsterdam Historical Museum is a 17th century painting by Jacob van Ruisdael, entitled *View on Amsterdam*. What is interesting about this picture, Zandvliet explained, is that it shows a synagogue and thus refers directly to earlier migration flows towards Amsterdam. An even earlier (17th century) painting recently acquired by the AHM links with migration patterns from the rural areas of the Netherlands toward the city of Amsterdam. Also, the acquisition of street art, made immediately after the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, referred to the social problems related to mass migration. In other words, Zandvliet concluded, museums should not stick too much to their traditional boundaries. These boundaries still exist, but they have lost their relevance. Zandvliet advocated multi-focussed approaches. This is only possible if museums look for new curators. The traditional backgrounds of most curators do not help museums much further in their outward-looking quest for innovation. And referring directly to the Tropenmuseum, Zandvliet concluded that the Tropenmuseum should engage in modern art and explore new boundaries. A bonus is that prices for art are dropping fast!

Immediately after the introduction, Els van der Plas, with a sigh, suggested that maybe the Tropenmuseum should merge with the Rijksmuseum! Without going as far as a merger, Susan Legêne, explained the idea of collaboration between the big five museums of Amsterdam within a new exhibition space in the Zuid-as project, on the outskirts of Amsterdam. Although some museums reacted reservedly to this possibility (arguing that art has a place in the centre, not in the urban fringe), many stakeholders saw huge possibilities in such a co-operation. Legêne noticed that it was striking that the relevant historical and ethnographic museums were in favour of the plan, but that it was the art museums that rejected the collaboration.

The idea of inter-museum co-operation was also appealing to Henrietta Lidchi, as it provides the opportunity to look beyond the borders of your own collections: you can show more perspective. Collecting and owning together with other museums can also be an appealing option: 'After all, we share the same objectives, there is no need for competition. We are a public service. We should pool our expertise and enthusiasm'. Els van der Plas, member of the board of the Stedelijk Museum, thinks this type of co-operation is a wonderful idea. Museums sometimes overlap, for example, the film the Dutch artist Renzo Martens made about development aid in the Democratic Republic of Congo could just as easily have been shown in the Tropenmuseum as in the Municipal Museum. According to Els van der Plas, the Tropenmuseum is ideally suited to play an important role in such a inter-museum co-operation: 'You are in the right spot, you have the knowledge and expertise all museums are looking for'.

D. Presentation discourse: Public and presentation

Paul Voogt

Statements

The Tropenmuseum's environment (mainly Amsterdam and surroundings) has changed dramatically over the last decades. It has responded to this changing environment by overhauling its permanent exhibitions and providing a more historical perspective, in which major themes include colonization, decolonization and migration, and in which history and ethnography combine with modern art and expressions of popular culture.

The Tropenmuseum has also adjusted its policy on temporary exhibitions. Today, more than ever, these target specific groups. It has also changed the way in which exhibitions are made: they are now produced by project teams, representing different fields of expertise and taking into account the interests of (potential) visitors.

Audiovisual and multimedia installations have become increasingly prominent. The full potential of the Internet and cross-media approaches has yet to be discovered.

The policy changes of recent years have had a significant effect: numbers of visitors have risen considerably, from around 120,000 in 2000 to around 200,000 now. About a third of our public is under 18, while the average age of adult visitors is about ten years younger than in Dutch museums at large (35, as against 45). We attract considerable numbers of Dutch visitors with an immigrant background, varying in relation to the theme of the exhibition. This is a healthy situation – for the moment. But how should the Tropenmuseum adapt in order to be ready for the future?

Target groups

The population is constantly changing: the percentage of people with a non-Dutch background is continuing to increase. The average age of the population is also increasing. The older section of the population has plenty of time for leisure. Younger people have less time to spare, and prefer to spend this doing things other than visiting museums. Some of Amsterdam's leading museums – Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum, Scheepvaartmuseum – will be reopening in the next few years, after extended renovation projects.

Deliberations

- How will this effect the Tropenmuseum's strategy? At present, the museum attempts to appeal to everyone, but maybe a specific choice would be better: the young, ethnically diverse population (especially families with children) or white Dutch senior citizens, perhaps. Are the demands of these two groups mutually exclusive? Or is a third way possible? A new inclusive museum. A museum in which heritage is not presented in a segregated way, but integrated. A museum in which regional displays (Africa, Middle East) are replaced by thematic presentations about cultural encounters; in which separate corners for white and black heritage make way for an all-encompassing story that transcends diversity.
- Would that attract both young third-generation Moroccan families as well as Dutch senior citizens?

Presentation

'There is a story behind everything' was the slogan the Tropenmuseum ran in a recent publicity campaign. The museum does not present objects for their own sake, but in order to tell a story. An object's context says more than the actual object. Every available means should be used in order to tell a good story: ethnographic antiquities,

as well as contemporary art objects, and everyday expressions of popular art, photographs, videos, music, games – anything goes. This kind of exhibition is compact. So compact, that visitors may find it hard to grasp the ideas the exhibition makers are trying to convey.

Deliberations

- How best to proceed? Develop the current approach further? Keep contemporary art separate? Are exhibitions sufficient as a core activity, or should the museum become a centre for debate, like Gemak, the new art institute in The Hague (a challenging blend of contemporary art and politics)?
- And what should we do with our traditional collections? Should we give them new meaning by presenting them in a new and fashionable style? The folk costumes at the Zeeuws (Zeeland) Museum in Middelburg are now presented as fashion, with all the glamour of a hot fashion collection, an approach emulated by other Dutch museums (especially Enkhuizen's Zuiderzee Museum) and which may well be echoed in the new National History Museum. Is this a suitable model for the Tropenmuseum?

Museum and new media

In today's digital age, children spend almost as much time in the virtual world as in the real world. What are the opportunities and dangers of the Internet? Will (young) people still come to museums if everything they offer (and more) can be accessed on the Internet? Do we still want them here, or is a virtual visit as valuable as a physical visit? What does Museum 2.0 entail: will the museum website be a platform for social interaction? Is it a way to empower the visitor? The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia considers exhibiting objects that receive the most hits on their website in the museum itself. What about the museum building?

Deliberations

- The Tropenmuseum offers a mix of media, but does it exploit its full potential? Can different media be made to interact to make a visit even more worthwhile?

Edutainment

The Tropenmuseum offers a range of educational activities for the young, of which Tropenmuseum Junior is the most prominent. It offers a combination of museum, theatre, workshop and games to create an environment that makes a lasting impression on children. It is extremely popular, but intensive and it has only a limited capacity. Other museums that target children, like the Spoorwegmuseum (Railway Museum) in

Utrecht, the Beeld & Geluid (Sound & Vision) Experience in Hilversum and Nemo (Science Museum) in Amsterdam have more or less left the museum universe and become theme parks with a huge capacity.

Deliberations

Are there two – mutually exclusive – venues for the future, one intensive and educational for a limited audience and one open and entertaining, with a far larger capacity? In culinary terms: is there space for slow food beside the rapidly expanding fast-food world? Or is this an unfair comparison and should we look for presentations that combine these extremes?

Discussion

Participants:

Paul Voogt (moderator), George Abungu, Robert Kluijver, Anna Schmid, Anne Bamford, Valentijn Bijvanck, Wim Manuhutu, Frank van Vree, Frits Spangenberg, Nina Simon, Willem Velthoven, Annette Schmidt, Per Rekdal, Peter van Mensch, Irene Hübner.

Target groups

Frits Spangenberg was asked to reflect on this topic. As a starter he asked the participants what percentage of the Dutch and the American populations would agree with the statement *'The man is the boss in the house'*? According to Frits Spangenberg, the answers (27% and 60% respectively) reveal the value systems in these two countries.

Another example would be the expression *'Your family members are your best friends'*, which, according to Spangenberg, can be explained as an illustration of low social mobility. Spangenberg used these examples to indicate that it is not only gender, age, and income that determine people's interests and behaviour, but that there are underlying patterns that are more interesting and relevant. These patterns are fascinating, but also dangerous. For example, we may find a pattern of youngsters being status-oriented, materialistic, and preferring violence over beauty. But by emphasizing this pattern, we may also misjudge many youngsters with different interests. The main question, according to Spangenberg is: What drives people? This question is relevant, because the museum wants to entertain its audience, while entertainment is different for different groups and individuals. The museum needs to make choices. *'If the museum wants large numbers, they should present violence, blood and excitement...'*

Spangenberg's statements triggered a lively discussion. Per Rekdal gave the example of a museum in Norway that was specifically set up to attract youngsters. Despite their targeted efforts, the youngsters did not come, because a museum was not on their priority list. *'Even if the Tropenmuseum were to offer more blood, this group of youngsters would still not show up, because they can find more spectacular blood elsewhere. The museum should thus not try to attract those interested in blood, but those interested in what the museum has to offer.'*

Various participants were eager to emphasize that the perception of youngsters as one category is a huge mistake made by many media organizations. Frank van Vree argued that there may not be that many differences between old and young people, but that behavioural patterns seem to depend more on education and background.

The example of the *Dappermarkt* (a popular daily market, located only a couple of hundred metres from the Tropenmuseum) was then brought up by Paul Voogt. He posed the question of whether the visitors of the market belong to the target group of the museum. According to Willem Velthoven, this is very much the case. People go to the market as a leisure pursuit, and they are not there to experience blood and violence. The market is interesting – you can see, touch, hear, and eat things. This is very close to the experience the museum has to offer. When it rains, the museum is the perfect place for these people to go, as an alternative to the market. The museum should try to pull those people in, for example by providing the market salesmen with plastic bags with a Tropenmuseum advertisement.

In the same vein, several participants argued that the museum should try to lower the threshold for people to get in. Frits Spangenberg referred to a research conducted among people passing the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam on a daily basis. Many of these people thought the Rijksmuseum was a spooky building – a building that must be like a maze with dark corridors inside. In other words, people had had their own unattractive perception of the building. Two people were given a free tour, and they couldn't believe what they saw.

Nina Simon gave the example of the Spy Museum in Washington DC. That museum became hugely popular, because they successfully addressed the 'threshold fear'. They had staff on the street, inviting the audience into the museum. Just getting people in, however, is not enough. Once you have them in, you have to keep them in. The museum should think about how to make the audience feel secure and comfortable. Therefore the attitude in the museum needs to be one of hospitality and service – making guests happy.

Does that mean the museum should think about what people will want to see, and then adjust its exhibitions accordingly? Annette Schmidt argued the museum should not be guided too much by what it thinks the audience wants to see. She illustrated

this with an example. The National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden at times tested exhibition proposals on the public and then selected the one that came out as most popular. Afterwards, however, they found out that these exhibitions were no more popular than the exhibitions that were developed without the public being consulted.

Presentation

Valentijn Bijvanck was invited to reflect on the topic of presentation, based on his experience as director of the 'Zeeuws Museum' – a relatively small regional museum in the Netherlands. According to Bijvanck, a regional museum deals with identity. The audience expects the museum to tell the history of the region and to show objects in their historical context. Regional museums tend to claim the responsibility to represent the people that live in the area. But, if you ask the people, the representations in the museum seldom match people's own perceptions. The museum wants to tell people something about their identity, but what is that identity? This question may be too complex to answer, particularly because there is not just one identity, but many.

The Zeeuws Museum tried to solve this dilemma by initiating various projects. One of these projects dealt with the museum's rich collection of regional dresses. In an average regional museum you would see puppets wearing these dresses, with a label explaining the origin of the dress – an educational approach. The Zeeuws Museum, however, wanted to use the collection for a different type of cultural production, giving new meaning to the collection. They invited students from art academies to design new clothes inspired by the old collection. The museum also organized a fashion show with young people on the catwalk showing traditional clothing combined with modern clothing. The relevance of the traditional collection was emphasized by connecting it to modern culture. Many visitors appreciated the approach, but there were also people who considered it a heavy loss. According to them, a museum has no right to use the cultural heritage as raw material for new culture. As such, the project also made enemies.

Anne Bamford gave more examples of uneasy encounters, such as the perceived abuse of aboriginal patterns in Australia, which created outrage, but also created debate; and the pregnant teenagers that were invited by the Tate Museum to look at a painting of a pregnant teenager. She agreed that such uncomfortable encounters are often useful, because they create discussion and interest.

Bijvanck argued that the Tropenmuseum should follow a similar approach. According to him, the Tropenmuseum is still too disciplined and too pedagogical, and does not seem to dare to take a more dangerous path. The key word should be 'urgency'. First,

the Tropenmuseum should find out why and for whom it operates. Second, the museum should find out what matters its audience considers urgent. As such, the museum will become part of the public, for reasons that are already in the public. *'Look at the topics that interest people and how these relate to your institution. Then choose a topic and put all your energy into it. Sometimes in a friendly manner, sometimes in an unfriendly manner'.*

The Tropenmuseum's exhibition on the Islam is an example of a more courageous approach. For this exhibition, young Muslims were involved from the very beginning, which helped to create a buzz in their own group. During the exhibition there were live debates about what it means to be young and a Muslim. The exhibition was successful because it reached its target group and generated discussion. According to some, however, the exhibition lacked actual objects, which may have disappointed the more traditional audience of the museum...

According to Nina Simon, this is the reason why a museum should not always develop its exhibitions from the perspective of the traditional audience. It would be good if the museum dared to make choices and say: *'this part of the museum is no longer for the traditional audience'*. However, as Per Rekdal noted, the problem with bringing in new audiences is that they may come for only one particular occasion. If you want to keep them, you may need to make really drastic and structural changes to the museum.

Museums and new media

Nina Simon was invited to reflect on these questions based on her experience with Museum 2.0, which is all about interactive relationships and bringing dynamics to the museum. *'In a traditional museum the stories are frozen in time; the time of the latest refurbishment. The conversations, however, are always changing, and these conversations should have a place in the museum too.'* The museum would need to ask itself what type of relationship it wants to establish with the visitors. The museum needs to make choices. For example whether it wants the interactive displays to be pedagogical or whether they are meant to provide visitors with the opportunity to make up their own meaning. Importantly, the museum should be honest when making such choices, because the audience will notice when the attempts for interaction are not authentic. In other words, the museum should decide whether it really wants interaction, and if it does, it should pursue interaction in a genuine way. The Internet is a safe place to start and provides opportunities to experiment and learn. However, if the museum wants true interaction, it should not be limited to the Internet. Instead, the same attitude should be brought within the walls of the museum.

According to several participants, the current section for children in the Tropenmuseum (Tropenmuseum Junior) is a good example of how interaction can be integrated, but the rest of the museum is lagging behind. *'The rest of the museum is full and preprogrammed – it gives you the feeling that no one is listening to you'*. The opportunity to engage in conversation should thus not be limited to Tropenmuseum Junior. Creating more possibilities for interaction in other parts of the museum, however, may present the museum with a practical problem, as it will demand more space.

Another issue, raised by George Abungu, is how to apply new media in the museums in the Third World, where there are no fast Internet connections? According to Nina Simon there are plenty of alternatives for creating interactive moments, for example through the use of mobile phones. Moreover, the Post-it may very well be the best technology for having conversations in any museum. Post-its give people the opportunity to be heard. Willem Velthoven, responding to the question of whether someone would actually be listening, said: *'It deepens my experience when I get invited to share my thoughts, even when no one is listening'*.

The group also briefly discussed the social networks that are increasingly popular on the Web. Some of these networks are centred on specific topics, places and events, and there are already examples of communities that have gathered around existing objects, adding a social element to these objects. The Tropenmuseum may be able to create or make use of such networks, for example by creating virtual communities around its own objects or galleries. In such communities the visitors essentially become each other's audience.

Edutainment

According to Peter van Mensch, there is no conflict between education and entertainment. The museum should be about experience, and experience is entertaining and educational at the same time. Moreover, he stressed that experience is not restricted to the objects displayed in the museum, but is also related to the website, the building, the people behind the counter, the lockers, the restaurant, and the Christmas tree...

Anne Bamford reflected on the issue of education by presenting the following ten points that are deemed essential for the Tropenmuseum to be of true value from an educational perspective:

- 1 The museum needs to be accessible, both in physical and emotional terms.
- 2 The museum should open its doors for *real* collaboration, not just lip service.
- 3 The museum should opt for 'shared planning', i.e., talking with schools and children while developing projects.

- 4 The museum needs to have flexible structures, because inflexibility kills creativity.
- 5 The museum should be different from other museums – it needs to be local.
- 6 The museum should always be reflective.
- 7 Everyone who works at the museum should have opportunities for professional development.
- 8 The museum should actively choose what it wants to perform, realizing that such choices are political decisions.
- 9 The museum needs a structure for evaluating what it does.
- 10 The museum needs to consider all forms of language it uses to communicate with its audience. This does not only include images, sounds, and written language, but also the service and the quality of the coffee...

She stressed that having positive scores on eight out of ten points is not enough. *'It only works if you are overall healthy but just don't stop chain-smoking.'*

Frank van Vree shared his fear that our thinking about education is too simplistic. He stressed that education is a long and complicated process and that we shouldn't think that education can be a quick fix. It takes years for an individual to develop a genuine interest in something. A voucher for every high school student to visit a museum or a cultural event will simply not do. According to him the museum needs to offer young people a place to explore things – finding a balance between being loud and silent. Valentijn Bijvanck reacted: *'If you want to be loud and silent at the same time, be present! That is exactly what the Tropenmuseum should try to be.'*

4 Towards the change: Summary of thoughts

Daan van Dartel

The debates during the symposium raised many questions, some of them already thoroughly having been discussed and dealt with within the museum walls, others more daringly formulated, and some new. The discussions led to some general thoughts, that are summarised in the following.

Many issues are bothering the current ethnographic museum world, and there are no simple answers or directions to be taken. Issues of (re)presentation, of role and function, of collecting the contemporary and of the validity of a so-called ethnographic museum in a continuously changing world challenge the existence of these types of museums, actually of all types of museums, for they have similar problems as well. The earlier role of museums as cultural and scientific authorities is waning. Ethnographic museums can no longer take the course they have been taken up till now. Also because of technological advances, a new era has begun that forces them to become relevant institutions again, supporting the wellbeing of society at large. As Okwui Enwezor dared to say out loud, this will prevent the obsolescence of the ethnographic museum and make its existence of great importance for societal development in the 21st century.

From all the different and often divergent opinions and views on the future of ethnographic museums that were expressed in the Tropenmuseum for a Change debate, some general points of relevance can be deduced. They concern approaches to pressing issues that are relevant to museums today.

Role and function

Whereas in early times the role of the anthropological or ethnographic museum was largely to inform people about the rest of the world and to address the innate need for curiosity, today these needs can be fulfilled mostly, and often better, through other media. It is, however, still part of the museum's mission 'to take people some-

where else intellectually' (Lidchi), but there is more at stake. The discussion on the role and function of ethnographic museums is a difficult one and solicits as many different views as there are people.

In order to answer the question on the role of the Tropenmuseum in its direct neighbourhood, Amsterdam or even the Netherlands at large, it should think about what it actually wants itself. If enhancing visitor numbers is most important, the future may not be so complicated, except that coming up with new blockbusters again and again may cause several headaches. However, the general idea is that the Tropenmuseum should be more than an exhibition factory.

In general, the Tropenmuseum could participate more in the social debate within the Netherlands. In doing so, it should not be afraid of uncomfortable encounters to open up this debate. The Tropenmuseum should engage more with the audience in a dialogical way, and take on a more interdisciplinary approach towards its exhibitions and collections. As a result of these co-operations, the museological landscape becomes as diverse and attractive as possible. It needs to take into account that this public is changing rapidly, and address the consequences of these changes now. The role of Internet and Web 2.0 are essential in this, and will transform the museum into a knowledge-managing institution, instead of the traditional knowledge-creating institution.

Museums can function as meeting places, as 'edutaining' experiences and as lieux des memoirs for different audiences. Knowing who these audiences are and what they want is therefore a necessary but complex prerequisite, for target groups are never one-dimensional, but consist of many different identities. How these relate to the objects and subjects in the museum is a key question. The role of museums in the UK is traditionally more socially oriented, and Dutch museums should discuss whether this would be a desirable model for them, for it would require a big change in thinking on museum functionalities and in organisational culture.

The Tropenmuseum needs to think about the relationship it wants with its public. The museum as it functions today is completely closed and programmed; what type of interactivity via the Web but also inside its building does it actually want itself? Another prerequisite for a successful future is the concepts of comfort and hospitality. People should feel welcome and comfortable in the museum. Hospitality and service are key to this, as are general facilities and physical and social accessibility.

(Re)presentation

From the beginnings of anthropology as a science and the development of anthropological museums, the issue of representation has been problematic. In academic anthropology, diaries of scientists opened up new insights into the mechanisms of representation. In museum anthropology, however, these aspects still remain largely hidden. Museums in general are still authoritative in nature; they are believed to present THE truth.

Problems that now come to the fore are concerned with basic underlying assets of ethnographic museums, which have to do with problems of representation, such as the division of exhibitions and collections in geographical, or rather, geo-political (Rassool) areas, which can be seen as remnants of the colonial period. This does not mean that geographical divisions should be abandoned immediately, for thematic presentation has its own problematic aspect of obliterating cultural specificities (Lidchi, Jain). The inclusion of the authority or agent, in this case the European museum, might offer possibilities of opening up the dialogue (Zijlmans).

Secondly, the idea – and this concerns all museums – that cultures, or any other subjects for that matter, can be represented truthfully at all, must be abandoned. Micro approaches and idiosyncratic stories or themes (Enwezor) are the best a museum can do, for there are too many views that cannot be included, and to avoid essentialism. The Tropenmuseum should not want to try to tell everything (Bijvanck). This new approach could result in an authority based on authenticity (Lidchi), rather than on truth. Visitors should be given tools to come to conclusions themselves, rather than be offered final and uncontested truths. There is no truth, as it is in the eye of the beholder, and a museum should support visitors in creating the truth that is relevant to them. The development of critical views should be the first objective of museums at large. For the general visitor that is said to be more inclined towards the larger canonical stories, new technological developments could make it possible to include them in the micro approaches.

Many publications have been written on the subject of the Other, which is actually problematic not only for ethnographic museums – think of historical museums, whose Other is placed in time. It is interesting to note that the Other is, as Enwezor stated, no longer over there, but over here. How other is that Other still today? And what should be presented on and to him? His daily life, with attention to the ‘little ones which have no voice’ (Abungu), or his artful expressions in different forms of art and craftsmanship? Is the so-called ethnographic museum a cultural-historical museum aimed at historically-grown relations, and can such a cultural museum also be contemporary? It was suggested that Tropenmuseum should be transformed into a museum on travelling, in which cultural encounters are given a key role.

As to the actual content of museum presentations, opinions varied. Many argued for the object as the unique selling point of museums, whereas others subscribed to the importance of the stories that are attached to it, and yet others to the social role of museums. For now, the Tropenmuseum seems to have chosen for the second, with objects as vehicles and not the undisputed subject of the museum. Another aspect to this discussion entails the question of the involvement or influence of the visitors on museum products. The most desirable is a combination of offering recognition as places of collective memory and of satisfying feelings of curiosity that are an innate human condition. This made some people remark on the possible high level of interest that people might have in storage room presentations.

Addressing the contemporary

A major part of the discussions dealt with the colonial character of most ethnographic museums, especially the Tropenmuseum. The building itself exudes the colonial predicament and a major part of the collections date from colonial times. Opinions differed greatly, however, in the meaning of this largely political heritage for the museum today. In general, the idea that the Tropenmuseum should retain a link to its colonial past in its collection and presentation policy prevailed. In this scenario, the colonial collections remain the core of the uniqueness of the museum's identity. This does not mean that presentations remain focussed on history, or that collections can not be renewed (van der Plas). Old collections and methods of presentation such as dioramas, can be used as techniques to illustrate certain discourses at a certain time in history and place, which still affect thinking on contemporary international relations in the world at large. In this view, new acquisitions should have a link to this colonial basis of the museum. However, the Tropenmuseum now is much more than its colonial past, and has other defining periods in its history. It also has important things to say about areas other than former colonial ones, which support its role as a museum on the world and its cultural diversity (Rekdal). Also, some of the earlier mentioned new audiences might not be so interested in this colonial past, which is not part of their collective memory.

Contemporary and popular art are popular means to address the contemporary in museums. This must be done with caution, however, for art could then become 'the easy way out'. During the symposium, the general opinion was that modern art can and should be used as part of presentations, but does not have to be collected in museums such as the Tropenmuseum. According to Okwui Enwezor, presenting contemporary art in ethnographic museums could help in universalizing modern art, making it more accessible to a larger audience. The collecting of art should be left to modern museums, that 'should not be let off the hook' (Vogel), and that are struggling to fit non-Western art into their predominantly Western global art discourse. Again, interdisciplinary cooperation is essential. An often-used method in addressing the contemporary is to invite artists to reflect upon collections and presentations. This can work, but it is important to realise that they too are a certain authority. Artists too are producers of culture in that case, as are museums themselves that make exhibitions from bits and pieces, without recognizing and expressing their agency. With artists, however, the latter is obvious.

To develop into a viable and relevant institution for the 21st century, each ethnographic museum will have to find its own approach, taking its strongest feature as a starting point. This decision or choice should be made in collaboration with other identical, and with different, heritage institutions. Hopefully, this will lead to a gain in innovative and supporting cultural institutions, which can enrich the museum landscape of the world. The Tropenmuseum for a Change symposium, this report

and the recommendations offered by the symposium's participants, will hopefully deliver a valuable contribution to this development.

Recommendations

At the end of the discussion sessions, participants were asked to contribute some recommendations for the future:

- Understand how you as a museum are unique as a museum and how you operate in a national context.
- Try to be as inclusive as possible, without diluting what you hold in trust.
- Be guided by your task to service the community.
- Change the geographical representation. The cultural dimensions have a lot of power to go further. Use the collections from perspectives of today.
- Try to include interdisciplinary and intercultural research, and exchange and tap into scholarly thinking about other cultures.
- Be self-confident enough to say this is what we can do and this is what we can not do. Do not try to do everything, but focus.
- Try to remain the open and reflective museum that you already are. And, find the balance between representing objects and people.
- Continue along the same path. Make more space for knowledge and insights (instead of experience and experiment).
- Find ways to raise true fascination among your visitors, leading to sincere interest in encounters with other cultures, in the past and present. Be a museum of encounters.
- Recognize your masterpieces as such, because they are the patrimony of other peoples.
- Use the knowledge and experience of the past to look into our common future.
- Your staff should not necessarily represent the cultural diversity of our society, but look for other ways of including different perspectives instead.
- You will need to define what your local public is, and you may need to address the 'nostalgia market' of migrants. Also, try to ensure the engagement of the source communities.
- Tackle problems by joining forces with other museums in the Netherlands.
- Find out why you are so successful. Why are people enjoying it? Look at the positive side.
- You have to look into the consequence of demographic changes in the society. Do not try to be a classical ethnographic museum, amusement park and art museum all at the same time.
- There is an excess of material here and deficits elsewhere. Think of how you can share your collections globally. How can your collections be mobilized for

audiences elsewhere. Think of redistribution, sharing, and setting up satellite models.

- Don't forget that even among the 'real Dutch' there is much diversity.
- Make a choice, justify it, and be clear about it.
- Find the other in ourselves
- The Tropenmuseum has been too quiet. We need more noise, more 'accidents'.
- Dare to show the small, but do it precisely, and with lots of detail.
- Transform into a network museum. Be politically incorrect.
- Stage an exhibition on 'the making of the Caribbean'.
- Show the dilemmas of running an ethnographical museum.
- Be a leader, and dare to be an authority. Don't confuse this with being authoritarian.
- As an institute, try to look in the mirror
- Try to tap into the amazement of walking through the Tropenmuseum exhibitions for the first time, and without expert knowledge.
- The Dappermarkt attracts more visitors than the Tropenmuseum: try to pool resources with their marketing department.
- Change the entrance of the museum and its name. Look around in the neighbourhood.
- Try to bring political turmoil into the museum.
- Don't change the cultural diversity of the museum, related to its colonial past.
- Make the old methods of collecting part of the exhibition
- Integrate Dutch and European history into the ethnography
- If you don't collect, you don't move
- Keep on collecting, if possible together with others
- Ethnographic museums often have a history in music, knowledge on collecting music needs to be enhanced
- The Tropenmuseum needs to be creative instead of self-confined.
- Seek unusual partnerships
- Don't go with the flow
- Collecting is not the only, nor the most important, way forward
- Collecting modern art is not a goal in itself. However, it is interesting to use the strategic value of modern art. Modern art poses questions that can be relevant to the Tropenmuseum.
- Make the multi-focal approach accessible to outsiders
- Objects are important carriers of 'meaning'. Look for new curators who are able to find new meaning in the collection.
- Be playful
- Let the collection tell the story of people in motion
- It's important to preserve the Dutch interpretation of the collection. This interpretation can be amplified by letting people from other art disciplines look at the collection
- Don't be afraid: look at the collection with new eyes

- There is no point in collecting the whole world. Dare to choose.
- Try to find a way out of the 'problem of abundance'.
- Don't be afraid of modern technology – in the end people want to see real objects.
- Trust!
- Make use of the visual power that you have in your museum.
- Remember that fascination is key. And, keep your standards high.
- Education should be the core business of the museum.
- Go for less art and more ecology and history.
- If you want to get a new audience outside the core audience, you will have to involve them.
- Keep on evaluating your own work, and maintain your self-reflective attitude.
- Consider starting a 'do-it-yourself museum': Put pictures of your objects in small boxes and ask your public to gather boxes and make their own museum with the objects they find inside. Everyone needs to decide what to keep and what to throw away. Every individual becomes responsible for his or her own museum: what to keep and what to throw away; what to present in galleries, and how. This will give your visitors an idea of what it is like to be a museum.
- Look for interaction. Give your visitors the jobs that are real and that are of value to you. The most fun jobs are your own jobs, like opening boxes, and writing labels.
- Stay connected. Keep on experimenting and keep on organizing conferences such as this one.

Notes

- 1 In the exhibition *Eastward Bound* (Oostwaarts) we see environments return: there is a collection of curiosities, there are wax figures, a street shop, etc. Here the recreation is used to impart the spirit of the time. Thus recreating scenes becomes a presentation technique that point to earlier exhibition methods.
- 2 At the time of publication of this bulletin, the textiles exhibit has been dismantled
- 3 Argumentation Tropenmuseum: The curator of this particular exhibit never intended to focus on the role and development of popular art in contemporary Indian society. The popular art in this display is illustrative and used to provide explanations and tell stories, as stories are the central subject of the whole exhibit. The social implications of popular culture are another and different story.
- 4 Although geographically correctly included with Latin America, I do not mention here the very important part of the gallery related to Surinam, as it is difficult to relate to as being culturally part of Latin America. Nonetheless, I would like to point out a very important aspect of this part of the gallery, which is thematically relevant to the whole Latin America: the very important historical and cultural relationship to Africa.
- 5 Rephrased from George Abungu at the symposium on December 10th, 2008.
- 6 Malinowski, Bronislaw (1922). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.
- 7 Because for some Quechua woman from the Andes, it would still today be a far away trip just to travel to the capital city of the Cusco region...and although they have contact with this centre, they are still at the periphery of this system.
- 8 TED Conference, Monterrey, January 2007. Video also available at: http://www.ted.com/index.php/speakers/wade_davis.html, accessed on April 2008.
- 9 Shatanawi, 2007. 'Curating for a Change: Contemporary Art at the Tropenmuseum Today'. In: Guest Author of April 2008. Available at: http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_author_1_p1, accessed on December the 18th, 2008
- 10 And that also includes art and contemporary artists; Jyotindra Jain pointed out 'that it would be impossible to segregate the ethnic from the post-ethnic-in most cultures as both permeate into each other inseparably', and he posed the question 'What would make a museum "ethnographic" in the post-ethnic era of the societies that are represented in the Tropenmuseum?' Do we really live in a post-ethnic era? Can we talk about museums of culture, or a museum of tropes (Ciraj Rasool, Henrietta Lidchi), instead of museums of ethnography?
- 11 Legêne, Susan. Heritage and the politics of nationalist discourse. Paper presented at the ICOM 21st. Conference 2007. Museums and Universal Heritage.

- 12 I personally believe that in both cases we are actually talking about very human subjects.
- 13 At this point, I found some examples of the Latin America gallery equal problematic: the pre-Columbian walls are unsuccessful as scenarios; first because they are, as a presence, more important than the objects, which appear completely decontextualised; and second, in creating a similar claustrophobic perception, as mentioned as problematic in the Africa gallery.
- 14 I found it very important to differentiate between 'owning' cultural objects and relating to these objects, made by Legêne, Susan. Heritage and the politics of nationalist discourse. Paper presented at the ICOM 21st. Conference 2007. Museums and Universal Heritage, 2007: 3.
- 15 Gosselin, Viviane, at <http://www.namu.se/> - accessed on 10th January 2009.
- 16 Weibel, Peter, at: <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/participation/7>, accessed on 12th January 2009.
- 17 Surely a complete Visitors Studies programme will analyse these issues much better.
- 18 In this case, also museums in the periphery can act as instruments to make peace with the own colonial history too; and through doing that, gain agency for contemporary action.
- 19 Current mission statement: The Tropenmuseum presents, studies and promotes knowledge about interaction between cultures. It provides experience and experiment for a broad and diverse audience, whereby all museum methods are put to use: exhibitions, collections and expertise, publications, the historical building, educational and other activities. The Royal Tropical Institute's Museum is active internationally in the field of culture and development.

Media coverage

Volkskrant, 20-12-2008 (p59)

The Debate in: the world

About:

Can an ethnographic museum impart anything about the cultures exhibited in its display cases?

By: Okwui Enwezor, Jyotindra Jain, Henrietta Lidchi, Fouad Laroui, Kitty Zijlmans, and Janwillem Schrofer.

Where: Royal Institute for the Tropics and Felix Meritis, Amsterdam

'Xenophobia returns to the World of the Visual Arts'

The building speaks for itself, said the Nigerian-American art critic and curator Okwui Enwezor as he pointed to the magnificent colonial hall in the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. The imposing building was intended to represent the grandeur of the colonial empire. That is why it is, in itself, a good object for the Tropenmuseum housed there: an ethnographic museum such as this should focus on the ethnographic perspective taken in the Netherlands and the role that it still plays – sometimes clearly, often just under the skin.

Enwezor was invited by the Tropenmuseum to come and share his view of the renewed exhibits in the exhibition halls. In an interview in the Volkskrant, 6 December, he already said that ethnographic museums can only be useful if they lead to deep self-reflection in those countries that once had a colonial empire.

Now in Amsterdam, too, he revealed his abhorrence for the 'outdated' manner in which 'the others' are viewed, referring to those interesting foreign peoples with their strange customs and fascinating primitive art objects. The Africa department these days is very lively and varied. But Enwezor said that he recognised nothing from his native Africa.

The Indian scholar Jyotindra Jain from Nehru University in New Delhi also said that he felt very much like an outsider in the India department. He thought that the use of Bollywood films to tell the museum 'story' was somewhat appealing, but questioned whether it revealed the true heart of India past and present. He felt it had been introduced, or rather dragged in by the head and ears, as 'an afterthought', to appeal to the audience.

Enwezor pointedly put forward the question: Is an ethnographic museum able to impart any real knowledge about the cultures on exhibit in the display cases? He had considerable doubts about it. 'Place and time are too divergent.' What do all of these far-flung locations have to do with the

Netherlands? How do historical artworks and contemporary, recreated shops from the Third World relate to one another?

These 'time leaps' do create a mild form of excitement, he thought, but an ethnographic museum actually says precious little about the present. It is only in a historical context that an exhibition can create real contrast. That is why the exhibition on the Dutch colonial past in Indonesia appealed to him most.

Jain agreed with him. And Henrietta Lidchi, head of the 'world cultures' department at the Scottish National Museum, and a former employee of the renowned British Museum, also found the department on Indonesia the most successful. In her view that was in part due to the fact that the public in Europe feels personally involved in the colonial history. It elicits confusing emotions and is therefore more interesting than a simple focus on foreign cultural expressions.

Yet the Tropenmuseum was now struggling to free itself from the traditional approach to making ethnographic exhibitions, as the critical guests were well aware, and they praised the museum for it. Jain appreciated the break made with the colonial fascination for 'authenticity', e.g. the view that primitive people simply are static and remain so. This museum does this primarily by adding expressions of modern and popular culture, he concluded, but where is the connection? He talked about the enormous changes that had occurred in Hindu religious art as a result of 'the mass production of Hindu images'. In the past, this art had been reserved for specialists. Now thousands of artists produce often uniform images, posters and prints with the aid of modern media and under the influence of global mass culture.

The globalisation of local cultures was the theme of the Globalisation lecture that Enwezor gave a day later at Felix Meritis in Amsterdam. Another building that tells a story due to its history, commented Enwezor. He had just been told that it had been founded as a temple to the Age of Reason and that the building had been pelted in 1956 by anti-communist demonstrators because the CPN [Dutch Communist Party] was housed in it (this was the year of the Hungarian uprising). Enwezor took the opportunity to voice a warning about 'the return of xenophobia in the art world'.

In the 1990s, following the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the start of unbridled globalisation, young artists and curators from the non-Western world ('though I hate the term and its negative implications') seized their opportunity – just like he had done so brilliantly. Their vision had now invaded the large exhibitions and biennales of the former Western art elite. But this atmosphere of optimism seems to be coming to an end due to the attacks of 11 September 2001. 'All those critical artists are disappearing from the stage.'

Is it so bad? Janwillem Schrofer, Director of the National Academy of Visual Arts in Amsterdam, showed films about the studios of his students – you could not imagine a more international and diverse group of people. Kitty Zijlmans from the University of Leiden recently published a bulky volume on World Art Studies – not the study of 'world art', she said, because she thought this to be such a patronising Western hobby – but rather the flourishing studies of art from all over the world.

The writer Fouad Laroui pointed out that, in literature, the 'post-colonial' (in the words of Enwezor) voice had been prominently present for a long time. So why are the visual arts lagging behind? Is the distinction still useful, he asked further? In his book for the Snap Judgments exhibition, for example, Enwezor talks about the photographer Yto Barrada. She grew up in France – so what makes her a Moroccan artist?

The search for identity should not be the guiding light for curators, answered Enwezor. Change and confusion brought on by migration is much more interesting. As an example, he highlighted the British pavilion at the Biennale of Venice (2002), designed by Chris Ofili, an artist from Manchester with Nigerian parents. At the front of the building (stairs, pillars) he flew the British Union Jack, though now in the African colours of red, black and green. That is the direction to take.

This is all good and well, but the test remains: would ethnographic museums outside of Europe have a fundamentally different, and better approach?

Take the museum for Asian Cultures in Singapore. Recently renovated, reorganised, modernised to the hilt. There are countless extraordinary things to see and there is much to learn. There are special, playful areas for children, with fun seats inspired by the culture displayed in the appropriate museum department, educational games, pleasant music and informative computer programs. It actually reminds one of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, although it is 'only' about the many Asian cultures. Even the building is similar: a former palace of the British colonial administration.

Wim Bossema

List of participants

George Abungu

Okello Abungu Heritage Consultants
Nairobi
Kenya
g.abungu@mac.com

Paula Assunção dos Santos

Course coordinator MA
Reinwardt Academie
Amsterdam
p.dossantos02@ahk.nl

Anne Bamford

Director Engine Room
Arts Education
Wimbledon College of Art
London
a.bamford@wimbledon.arts.ac.uk

Valentijn Bijvanck

Director Zeeuws Museum/National Museum
Middelburg
v.bijvanck@zeeuwsmuseum.nl

Annemarie Boer

Exhibition manager
Museum
aboer@museum.nl

Laura Broekhoven

Curator Latin America
Museum Volkenkunde Leiden
laurab@volkenkunde.nl

Ricardo Burgzorg

Director Überblick
Den Haag
info@uberblick.com

Ulf Dahre

National Museums Denmark
Ulf.J.Dahre@natmus.dk

Okwui Enwezor

Dean of Academic Affairs and Senior Vice
President
San Francisco Art Institute

Paul Faber

Curator Africa
Tropenmuseum
Amsterdam
p.faber@kit.nl

Klas Grinell

Curator
Museum of World Culture
Gothenburg
klas.grinell@varldskulturmuseet.se

Fer Hoekstra

Curator
Nijmeegs Museum Volkenkunde
F.Hoekstra@maw.ru.nl

Irene Hübner

Director Afrika Museum
Berg en Dal
i.hubner@afrikamuseum.nl

Jyotindra Jain

Professor
Faculty of Arts
Indira Gandhi University
Delhi
jyotindrajain@yahoo.com

Robert Kluijver

Curator
geMAK
Rkluijver@gemeentemuseum.nl

Arjen Kok

Advisor
Instituut Collectie Nederland
Amsterdam
arjen.kok@icn.nl

Christina Kreps

Director Museum Studies/Museum of
Anthropology
University of Denver
ckreps@du.edu

Susan Legêne

Professor 20th century Dutch History
Amsterdam Free University
s.legene@let.vu.nl

Henrietta Lidchi

Keeper of Ethnography
Museum of World Cultures
National Museums of Scotland
H.Lidchi@nms.ac.uk

Wim Manuhutu

Director Manu2u
Utrecht
w.manuhutu@manu2u.com

Adi Martis

Professor Art History
University of Utrecht
Adi.Martis@let.uu.nl

Peter van Mensch

Lecturer Erfgoed
Reinwardt Academie
Amsterdam
mensch@ahk.nl

Leontine van Mensch-Meijer

Lecturer Museology
Reinwardt Academie
Amsterdam
l.meijer05@ahk.nl

Arnoud Odding

Director Museum of Glass
Leerdam
arnoud@odd.nl

Els van der Plas

Director Prince Claus Fund
Amsterdam

Barbara Plankensteiner

Curator
Museum für Völkerkunde
Vienna
barbara.plankensteiner@ethno-museum.ac.at

Bambang Purwanto

Head Graduate/ Post Graduate Program
Head Centre for Southeast Asian Social Studies
Gadjah Mada University
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
b.purwanto@mailicity.com

Ciraj Rassool

Professor
University of Western Cape
South Africa
crassool@humanities.uct.ac.za

Per Rekdal

Director Kulturhistorisk Museum
Oslo
p.b.rekdal@khm.uio.no

Anna Schmid

Director Museum der Kulturen
Basel
Anna.Schmid@bs.ch

Annette Schmidt

Curator Africa
Museum Volkenkunde
annettes@volkenkunde.nl

Mirjam Shatanawi

Curator North Africa and Middle East
Tropenmuseum
Amsterdam
m.shatanawi@kit.nl

Nina Simon

Web 2.0 consultant
USA
nina@museumtwo.com

Frits Spangenberg

Director Motivaction
Amsterdam
f.spangenberg@motivaction.nl

Christine Stelzig

Acting Director
Curator Africa Department
Museum der Weltkulturen
Schaumainkai 29-37
60594 Frankfurt a.M.
christine.stelzig@stadt-frankfurt.de

Alex van Stipriaan

Curator Latin America and the Caribbean
Tropenmuseum
Amsterdam
A.v.stipriaan@kit.nl

Mona Suhrbier

Curator South America
Museum der Weltkulturen
Schaumainkai 29-37
60594 Frankfurt am Main
mona.suhrbier@stadt-frankfurt.de

Willem Velthoven

Director Mediamatic
Amsterdam
willem@mediamatic.nl

Susan M. Vogel

Professor Art and Architecture
University of New York
smv2105@columbia.edu

Paul Voogt

Head of Public and Presentation
Tropenmuseum
Amsterdam
(now at Naturalis)

Frank van Vree

Professor Journalism and Culture
University of Amsterdam
F.P.I.M.vanVree@uva.nl

Kees Zandvliet

Amsterdam Historical Museum
keeszandvliet@ahm.amsterdam.nl

Kitty Zijlmans

Professor World Art Studies
Universiteit Leiden
c.j.zijlmans@leidenuniv.nl

About the authors

Rhina Colunge, BFA Graphic Design (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú), MA in Museology (Reinwardt Academy, Amsterdam), MA in Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas (University of East Anglia, Norwich). She is socio-museologist by vocation, working at the University of Kiel. Her area of interests are the Americas, especially the Andean Region.

Daan van Dartel, MA in Anthropology and Museology, is collection researcher at the Tropenmuseum and museum anthropologist. She works on exhibitions and publications and is interested in the larger museological issues. She organised the symposium *Tropenmuseum for a Change!* (December, 2008).

Paul Faber is art historian and Senior Curator for Africa at the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam. He has been involved in many exhibitions and publications on a number of subjects of world art and culture like: *Art from another world* (Rotterdam, 1988), *Sranan, Culture in Suriname* (Rotterdam, 1992), *Visual art in Suriname* (Amsterdam, 2000), *Family stories from South Africa* (Amsterdam, 2002), *All about evil* (2004), *The dramatic history of the Congo as painted by Thsibumba Kanda Matulu* (2005), and *Vodou, Art and Mysticism from Haiti* (2008). He participated in several museum projects in Africa.

Susan Legêne is professor of political history at VU University of Amsterdam. From 1997-2008 she was Head of the Curatorial Department of the Tropenmuseum and since 2004 also professor by special appointment of cultural history of the Netherlands at the University of Amsterdam, for the Royal Antiquities Society. She is a historian by training.

Mirjam Shatanawi is Curator for the Middle East and North Africa at the Tropenmuseum. She has curated several exhibitions for the Museum, including *Urban Islam* (2003), *Inside Iran* (2006), and *Palestine 1948* (2008). Although trained as an Arabist and historian, she has a special interest in the popular arts and cultures of the modern Muslim world. Her current research interests centre on the reception of Islamic art and culture in European museums.

Alex van Stipriaan, historian, is professor of Caribbean History at Erasmus University Rotterdam and the Curator for Latin America/Caribbean region at the Tropenmuseum. He has written many publications on Suriname and what is known today as the Black Atlantic, i.e. the connected histories of West- and Central Africa, Afro-America, and Western Europe. He is the co-producer of the exhibition *The Art of Survival* (Kunst van Overleven) at the Tropenmuseum in 2009.

Paul Voogt, MA Anthropology (University of Amsterdam), MBA (Henley, UK), is deputy director of the natural history museum Naturalis in Leiden. Until 2009 he was Director of Public Programmes at the Tropenmuseum, where he combined responsibility for exhibitions and education programmes in Amsterdam with international heritage projects. He has been active in the field of culture and development.

Colophon

Bulletins of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)

The KIT Bulletin Series of the Royal Tropical Institute deals with current themes in international development. It is a multi-disciplinary forum for scientists, policy makers, managers and development advisors in agriculture, natural resource managements, health, culture, history and anthropology to present their work. These fields reflect the broad scope of the Royal Tropical Institute's activities.

Information

Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)
KIT Tropenmuseum
Mauritskade 63
1092 AD Amsterdam, The Netherlands
T +31 (0)20 5688 414
E info@kit.nl
www.tropenmuseum.nl

Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)
KIT Publishers
P.O. Box 95001
1090 HA Amsterdam, The Netherlands
T +31 (0)20 5688 210
E publishers@kit.nl
www.kit.nl/publishers

© 2009 KIT Publishers, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

This is an open-access publication distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ISBN: 978 94 6022 0388

ISSN: 0922-7911

NUR: 761

Publication coordinator Arlette Kouwenhoven
Reporting WiW Global Research & Reporting
(Roeland Muskens en Koen Kusters)
Editing Deul/Spanjaard Boekproducties,
Groningen, The Netherlands
Design Studio Berry Slok, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands
Cover Chris Buzelli
Printing High Trade BV, Zwolle,
The Netherlands

Printed in Hungary

Correct citation

Dartel, Daan van (ed), *Tropenmuseum for a change! Present between past en future. A symposium report.* Bulletin 391, Amsterdam, KIT Publishers.

Keywords

Museums, museum studies, ethnography, anthropology, collections, art, representation, colonialism, Susan Vogel, Okwui Enwezor