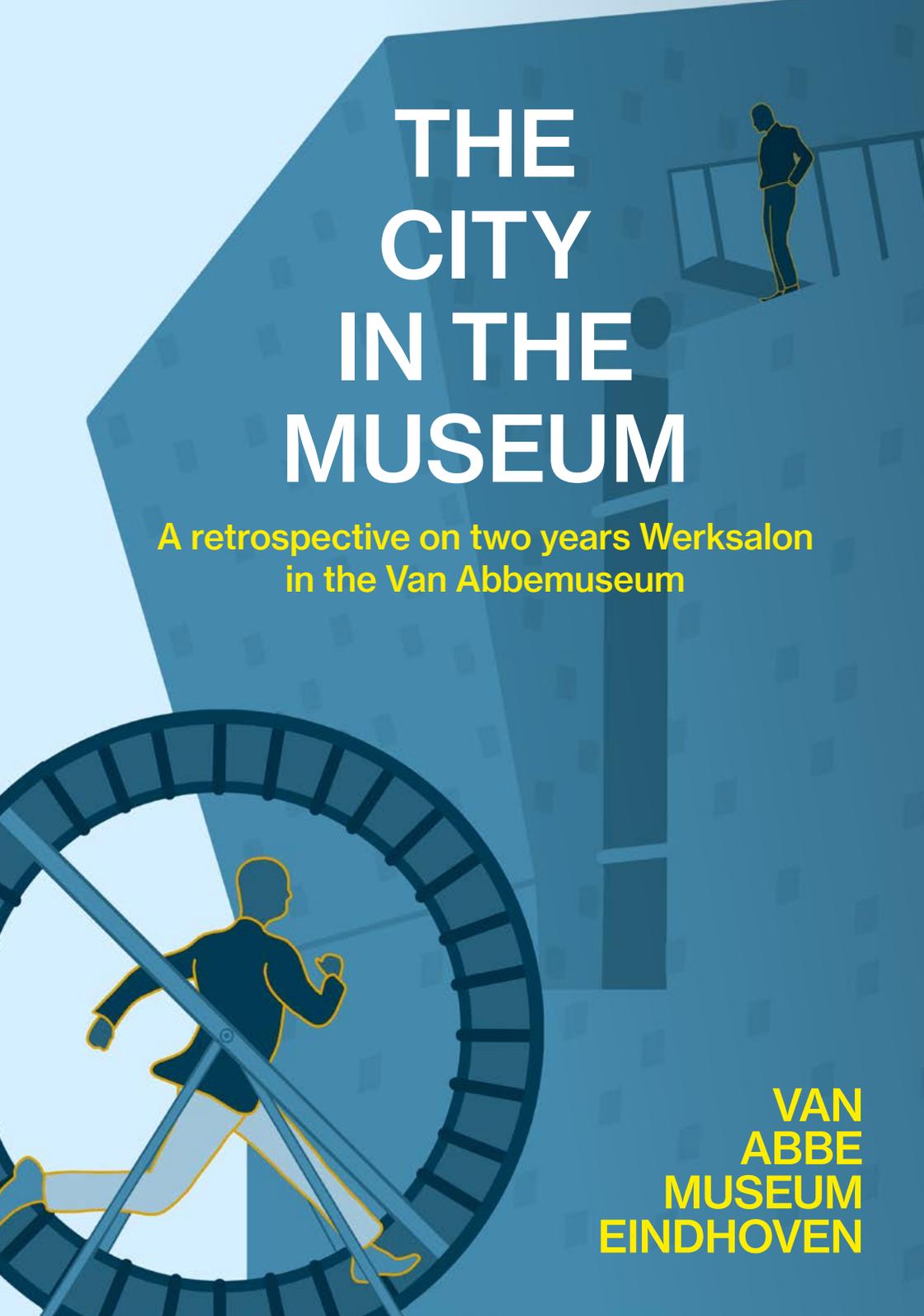


THE CITY IN THE MUSEUM

The background features a stylized, dark blue illustration of a museum building with a grid of windows. In the upper right, a silhouette of a person stands on a balcony. In the lower left, a silhouette of a person is running on a treadmill. The overall color palette is shades of blue and yellow.

A retrospective on two years Werksalon
in the Van Abbemuseum

VAN
ABBE
MUSEUM
EINDHOVEN

THE CITY IN THE MUSEUM

A retrospective on two years
Werksalon in the Van Abbemuseum

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why a Werksalon?

Before we look back in this booklet at two years Werksalon in the Van Abbemuseum, we dwell on its origins. What caused the museum to collaborate with the city in this way? Curator of Collections Steven ten Thije wrote an essay in 2017 on the 'Straatwaarden' project led by Reinwardt Academy. It is a nice summary of the pursuit of the Van Abbemuseum to find connections with Eindhoven, and the meaning of art for city residents. This is the [link](#) where the complete research can be found.

WORKING IN THE WERKSALON OF THE VAN ABBEMUSEUM

For the Van Abbemuseum, art is an explicitly social matter. This does not mean that all art needs to have a social message. Art can just as well just be art. It means that whatever art we show or collect, we are aware that these pieces exist in a public domain. Which can take on many shapes. Whether a work of art is abstract or concrete, asks a philosophical question or presents a very clear story, all these experiences are unique and layered and can enhance the world-view of people's lives. It is this dialogue between these experiences that determine the public domain for us. The core of our policy is making sure we connect the art and the diverse people who use the museum.

In the ten years that I have had the pleasure to work for the Van Abbemuseum, I have also seen up close that things change. What stands out is our increased attention to building up an active relationship with our visitors. Our significance is as much determined by our connection to our audience as the things we show. No matter how beautiful, relevant and tantalizing the art is, if the visitors do not find a connection to it will not hit the mark.





While I am writing this, it strikes me how wholly unoriginal this observation is. It is a cold-hard fact. Of course, art can only be valuable within the life of a visitor or user. The more pressing questions could be: why did it take you so long to realize this? The answer is, somewhat cryptically formulated, that the meaning of meaningfulness has evolved in the past few years. Ten years ago our audience was just as dear to us as they are now, just not in the exact same way as the past five years. In exaggerated terms, we wanted the audience to find the same kind of meaning in the museum as we - the museum staff - did. More and more we are letting go of this notion. We have observed that the museum has become more meaningful as the dialogue between the world-view of our users and the collection of the museum became more active.

At the core of this shift lies a hefty dose of self-reflection, combined with (or inspired by) new insights into the composition of our audience. This self-reflection stems from a question: how does your knowledge as an art professional relate to the perception of your users? Especially considering they are experts in their own right, only regarding completely different matters. Stumbling upon this question was part of a long journey. Personally, I have had the paradoxical feeling that while learning more about art, I was less and less able to share this knowledge. A political and public dimension was added to this private feeling when, in 2011, the Rutte I government slashed the cultural budget. My own personal struggles seemed to coincide with a kind of collective affliction of all art

and cultural professionals in the Netherlands. We could only defend the public interest of the thing that was so dear to us by screaming and marching in defence - with little success. What added to the confusion for me was realizing that the art I cared for, and the art that was given a platform by the Van Abbemuseum, was often oriented on society and politics. Art that was specifically committed to contributing to society was met by a lacklustre response from society itself. The longer we pondered, it became clear to us that our blind spot was the insufficient role the user played in our critical, socially engaging museum practise.

Explaining where the shoe pinches is easy, relieving this is difficult. In his famous essay 'The emancipated spectator', French philosopher Jacques Rancière described our issues in clear terms. The trap we tumbled into was the trap of our own expertise. Art that is critical of society runs the risk of leaving little room for the spectator to make their own judgement. The critical work of art is based on an analysis of reality and shares a conclusion based on that analysis. Noble the intentions might be, presenting such art easily turns into a kind of sermon. As for conservators, mediators and communication staff, it is mainly the explanation that remains; the public can do little more than reject or accept it. Of course, this is a rather black and white view of our practice, but at the heart was this constantly repeating tension. Your message is: 'Emancipate!' while at the same time saying: 'But only listen to me

specifically!' Not much room is left for forming one's own opinion and emancipation.

Although this situation of itself is enough for more frustration, what really broke the camel's back was another insight. Besides the fact that the relationship between the museum and the public was rather didactic, with the museum as an all-knowing lecturer and the public as an uninformed pupil, what also became obvious was the very specific physical and socio-demographic characteristics this all-knowing lecturer had. In a city with, by now, more than 160 different nationalities and all different kinds of sexualities, cultures and educational backgrounds biking together. In comparison we, as the museum, are a rather homogenous, white and college-educated club. Especially, the artistic staff was anything but a reflection of our society. Our perception was, therefore, specialistic and restricted in a socio-demographic sense. Not only we noticed this, but groups that were not represented in our staff also spoke up, in increasingly clear ways, about how limited the collection of museum professionals was. Adding Kees Vuyk's research 'Oude en Nieuwe Ongelijkheid' (Old and New Inequalities) to this, and it was clear that cultural institutions like museums run the risk of solely servicing a homogenous group of white, academically-trained citizens, which in turn leaves out large portions of society who feel estranged from public institutions which could be so beneficial to them.

We were (and are) faced with a double challenge. Partly, a question of how do we share our knowledge without becoming an eternal wiseacre. But also, the missing knowledge and life experience in the museum. If we wanted to grow, it was time to address both points. The answer does not yet exist, but the problem-solving direction we are exploring, which is in line with terms used in the Straatwaarden research, namely 'heritage-making' and 'co-design'. The Van Abbemuseum coined its own term for this: 'constituent museum', thanks to the European museum confederation. At the heart of this is a restructuring of the museum around a visitor who becomes user/co-creator, instead of just being a receiver, also becoming a producer. The knowledge the museum has is no longer the sole starting point of the program, but it is linked to groups from society with their own, relevant perspective. Together with the users, the museum (the conservator and mediator) finds a relevant program. This helps us to program not just for the audience, but with them in a comparable role as that of a 'constituency' in the Anglo-Saxon politic system.

What does this mean in concrete terms? For us: a search for a new way of working. Our lab for this research is named 'De Werksalon' (The Work salon), on the first floor of the new building. For three years we have been working with different groups from the city trying to put flesh on the bones of the above-mentioned ideals. Although we are still in the middle of the experiment, we have already learned multiple lessons. The first being, turning the classic relationship between mediators and substantive staff upside down. Mediators and, in our case, conservators like me have to work closely together. The expertises of good communication and dialogue have to be connected to the knowledge that we have of art and the collection. Everything will only function if these parts are present. Besides that, we noticed that the groups tend to be more creative if the frame is well established. Too much freedom creates confusion. For example, with every group, we create a banner with a slogan that in essence determines the program for this specific group. This practical frame helps the groups to make choices and reach results.

We are very pleased with the amount of time we have given ourselves. A timespan of three years creates the opportunity to learn with repetition. Doing something three times will prevent things from being an incident and give them room to stick. At the same time, the finiteness gives rise to a next, bigger step. Finally, we have come to realize how much time such a development takes. I work intensively with two colleagues - Loes Janssen and Hilde van der Heijden - on this project, and we are supported, at all times, by two interns. Resembling a small army of labour force for a relatively small amount of groups - no more than three at once. At first, this worried us - is this project too labour-intensive for a relatively small impact? - but now we notice our increased effectiveness in guiding the process. Slowly we can see a new kind of museum on the horizon and although it will definitely take a few more years, we increasingly feel it is possible.

What is the next step? In essence, the common thread in this whole process is: controlled release. Transferring knowledge and perspective requires sharing and transmission. This requires the whole museum team to embrace this mentality. From the library, archive and collection to technical services, everyone's practice changes by this way of working. Surveying every change in one go, and seeing how they relate, is impossible. The only way to learn is in practice. The next step? We mostly have to take this step. After that, we will see.



this booklet: Looking back together with participants

Which stories do the city residents want to tell in the museum? What if they are temporary curators? To find the answer to that it had been decided, during the preparations of the collection presentation 2017-2020, to clear out a whole floor to work with the 'constituencies' or rather groups of the city; the Werksalon. The goal: design an intervention that adds a perspective to the collection presentation 2017-2020.

THE WERKSALON IN SHORT

- Curators and educators worked together.
- Every group made a banner with a quote, statement or motto. This banner was hung in one of the exhibition rooms. Besides that the group presented itself in the Werksalon through a wooden panel with text, image and sound.
- In the first season, we organized an 'Eind(je)feest' in June: a day by and for the groups and their networks. In the second season, this included multiple separate final presentations on different days.
- What the groups presented exactly was up to them; an activity, an exhibition, a lecture, inside or outside the walls of the museum.

The Werksalon was not only the title of this project, it also received a physical place in the building. It became a lab, a space in which we could learn more about inclusion, cooperation, the city and what moves Eindhoven. There is no specific Werksalon method or roadmap for an inclusive museum. But lessons were learned and lots of questions were asked. That is what this booklet focuses on.

This publication is a retrospective of two years of the Werksalon. The groups, with whom we worked together for 8 months each, are at the centre. Occasionally, other temporary programs overlapped with the Werksalon significantly enough for them to be mentioned here when relevant.

Forming the basis of our retrospective are interviews with a number of collaborators in the workshop. In the following chapter, we will introduce them.



NOT KNOWING IS THE WORST
'M FINE WITH BEING ALONE
CLEAN UP OUR ACT
IF THERE IS PEACE, HOW CAN
CAN IT BE
IS IT SO BAD TO BE DIST

the groups season 2017-18

another question → to
know what you
what you know

News
Information
Left it is important to
know what's going on.
Opinions
Perspectives
Left having your
own opinion is good

• No one will have the same
opinions or views on a topic
- importance of communication
is key.



DO -
DON'T?
BLEND,
BEHAVE,
BELONG



Expats Spouses Initiative

When expats come to work in the city, their spouses often move with them. The Werksalon group International Locals consists of a number of these partners. In the museum, they examined what it takes for one to feel at home in a city.

- First interlocutor and spokesperson from the group: Kavitha Varathan. Important booster/creator within the group: Jody Vingoe. Participant and project manager/workshop leader: Marianna Faccenda
- Interviewee: Marianna Faccenda

Werksalon final project: activation of one of the works in the collection presentation; [Politisch \(NR. 36, 1 Werksatz\), 1967 by Franz Erhard Walther](#). The work invites people to become part of the sculpture by performing a specific action, using a number of cloth constructions. As visitor, you are no longer a spectator but a user. During the activation of this work, you experience contrasting feelings of togetherness and distance. The International Locals were trained to activate the work and to work with the visitors.



Queering the Collection

The goal of the project Queering the Collection is to make the museum more inclusive for those who do not feel represented by the hetero-normative structures of society. Queering is a lens through which prevailing stigmas can be unmasked. A community grew out of this project who, since 2015, have organized workshops, events and book clubs in the museum.

Interviewees:

- Olle Lundin (coordinator Queering the Collection)
- Malou van Doormaal (active member of the group and organizer of Drag-Up events)
- Luca Soudant (curator of, among others, Qtopia Queer Arts festival Nijmegen, workshop organizer during Eind(je) party, June 9, 2018)

Intervention at the end of the season: workshop 'Learning with Queer Artists'.



ALL
GENDER
IS
DRAG,
ALL
CURA-
TION
IS

Soroptimists

The Soroptimist-club Eindhoven became involved with Werksalon in March 2018. This group is part of Soroptimist International, the largest international volunteer service organization which is committed to supporting human rights and the position of women and girls. They are interested in the position women occupy within art, which, in their eyes, is far from equal to the position of men. What are the challenges that women in art face today?

This group used the space to invite their network. During the Eind(je) party they provided a tour focussed on women in art and selected works from the depot to be exhibited. They selected posters created by the Guerilla Girls.

Agents of Change

The project 'Agents of Change' started in Eindhoven in 2015. Agents of Change connects different social initiatives within the city, while also shining a light on the challenges that are a part of starting and maintaining these social initiatives.

Four social designers run the project and have mapped out as much local initiatives as possible. They provided a broad local context to what's happening in the city, and often assembled their network in the Werksalon.



De Groene Gasten

**YOU FLY,
THEY FLEE.
YOU FLY,
MORE
REFUGEES**

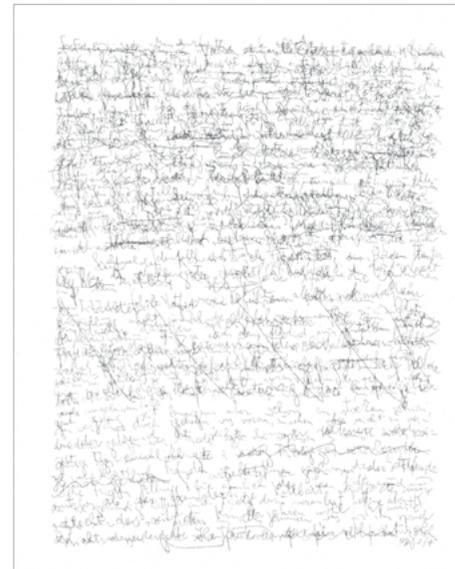
The Groene Gasten consist of young professionals in Eindhoven who are actively committed to making a positive contribution to the climate. According to the Groene Gasten, we will not become more sustainable by small actions such as avoiding the Primark or cleaning a beach. Sustainability starts with a change of attitude, which in turn changes our daily habits. Not just (technological) developments are needed, but also different behaviours and a new culture.

Interviewee:

- Fiona Jongejans, spokesperson

Intervention after the Werksalon season concluded: The Groene Gasten selected an artwork and had it installed in the collection presentation. Pertaining to [The Trial and Judgement of Franz K, 2006](#) by Pavel Büchler. The artist has indicated that this drawing can be exposed to unfiltered daylight, slowly dissipating the work. Contrary to common museum practices, in which works of art are preserved for as long as possible. The Trial invites a behavioural change regarding the artwork.

Besides selecting this work, the Groene Gasten organized four dialogue sessions in the People's Parliament of Rojava. By means of different themes (humour, free will, overview effect) they invited artists, philosophers and theatre-makers to share their views on issues put forward by the Groene Gasten. Based on their recitations or performances, a conversation with a public ensued.



The Trial And Judgement of Franz K, 2006
Pavel Büchler, handwriting on carbonless copy paper. 27,8 x 19,4 cm, acquired in 2006

The Van Abbemuseum choir

The Van Abbemuseum choir was established in January 2013 by conductor Willy de Rooij. The choir sings at different locations, in all sorts of languages. One of the frequent locations is the Van Abbemuseum. The choir consists mainly of volunteers and staff members of the museum.

Singing in the museum helps to explore the relationship between art and music in a sensory way. Sometimes, singing brings you closer to a work of art or gives you a new experience. Above all, music has the power to connect people.

In 2018, the choir presented a musical tour in the museum in which five new compositions, created by artists of the Van Abbe collection, were performed. The compositions were acquired and are now part of the collection.

Within the Werksalon the choir played a connecting part; events in which the groups came together were always provided with a musical link. Whether it was the Eind(je) party in June 2018, the New Year's reception in early 2019 or World Refugee Day in June 2019 the choir was an indispensable and festive element. Everyone knew the choir.



the groups
season
2018-19

STRIJD MET JEZELF
SELF STRUGGLE

مبارزه در مقابل نفس
جهاد نضال النفس

ARE WE WILLING
TO UNDERSTAND
EACH OTHERS'
STRUGGLES?

TAKE A
PICTURE

OR

LIVE

MON

Clients Vluchtelingen in de Knel

'Jihad al Nafs', Arabic for 'an inner struggle'. The Werksalon group Vluchtelingen in de Knel (Refugees in a bind) proposes that everyone is at odds with themselves. The group draws attention to this universal human trait.

Interviewees:

- Anouk Willemsen-Habanakeh, legal social counsellor and spokesperson for the group
- San Sigithan, participant

Intervention at the end of the season: [photo exhibition](#) with a specific visual narrative regarding the past, present and future, developed by trainer future orientation Rieneke de Man and several guest photographers. A [theatre performance](#) on the bureaucracy in which refugees find themselves trapped, by Gehring and Ketelaars. Musical performance by Joseph Kivumbi and the Van Abbe-museum choir. The program, in its entirety, was held on June 20th 2019, the World Refugee Day.

**JIHAD AL NAFS
| STRIJD MET
JEZELF | SELF
STRUGGLE.
ARE WE
WILLING TO
UNDERSTAND
EACH OTHER'S
STRUGGLES?**

#stayconnected2life

**WOULD YOU
TAKE A
PICTURE
OR ENJOY
THE MOMENT?**

Students International School Eindhoven

What does it mean to be present in the current society? The Werksalon group #Stayconnected2life explores the challenges of being present in both the online and offline world.

Interviewee:

- Anniek Adriaens, ISE teacher and coordinator of the group

Intervention at the end of the season: [meme-workshop](#) in the museum. Students devised their own workshop in which participants created memes corresponding to artworks. They ran the workshop themselves and were guided, during this process, by Chantal Lenting, a maker and social media expert.



what's in it
for us?



The groups worked in distinctively different ways. For one, their mission was clear the second they started the project; for others, the end goal became clear along the way. This goes to show that working with groups requires customization. The museum adds a different benefit each time.

'I had hoped it was more radical, but maybe that is my own impatience talking. This was an investigation into the way relations work. You have an institute and you are part of it. I have so many crazy ideas I still want to carry out. I had expected more involvement from the museum. Not so much 'here is a space for you' but more 'here is your budget, we provide our knowledge and the rest is up to you...'

Malou van Doormaal, participant Queering the Collection and organizer Drag-Ups

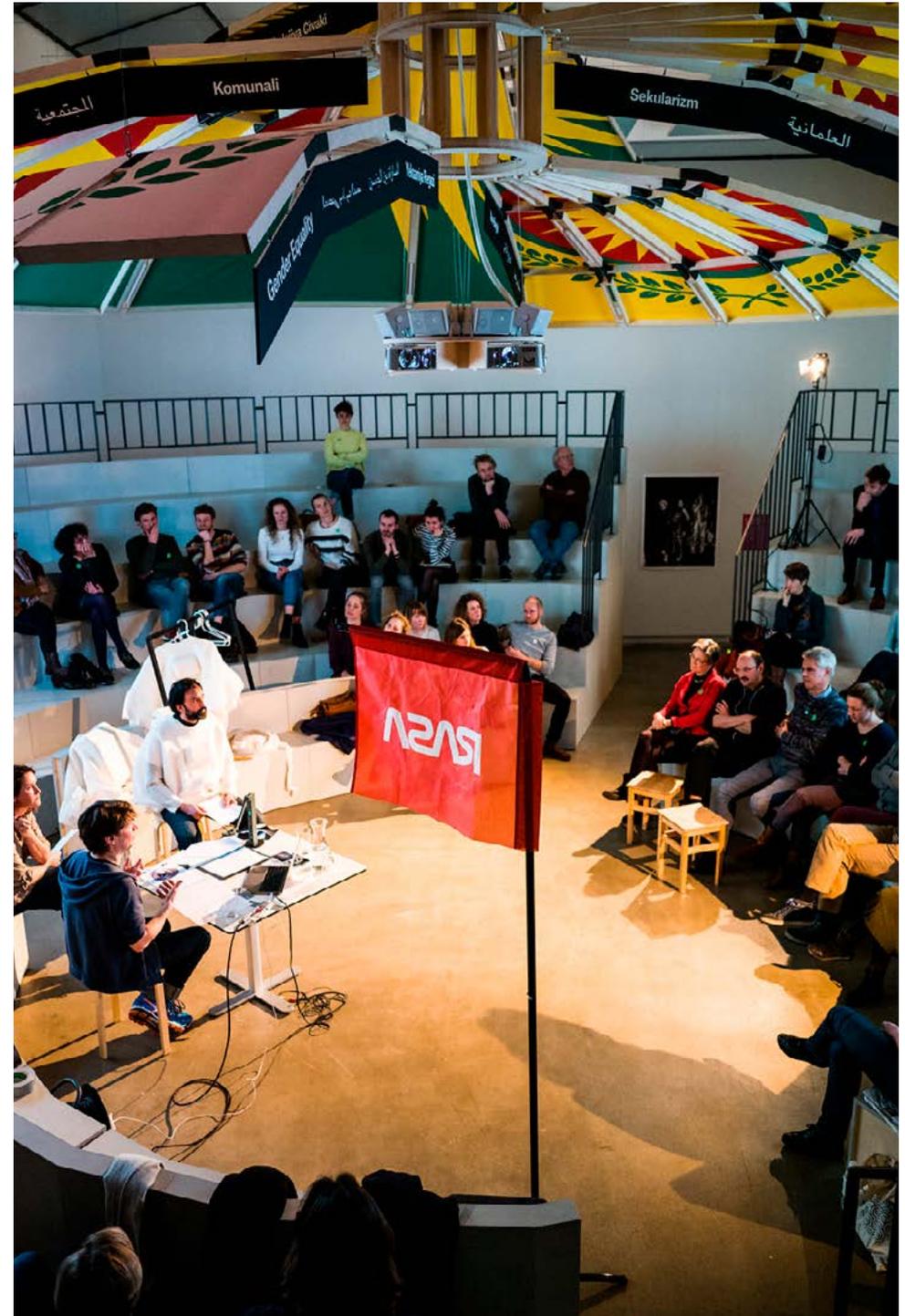
For groups like Queering the Collection the transition to the Werksalon was a logical one; they already gathered at the museum for events, book clubs and more. The same goes for the Van Abbemuseum choir. Since these groups felt at ease in the museum, they underwent a completely different trajectory. The Van Abbemuseum choir's intervention was not instigated by the Werksalon, but by a curator of the collection (in honour of their 5th anniversary, several artists of the collection composed a piece especially for the choir). Yet they were a vital, cheerful and connecting factor in all Werksalon events and meetings. Their part should not be underestimated.

The Queering the Collection group organized extra events throughout the season, including the Drag-Ups, which helped to expand the network while setting a daring precedent in the programming. Having a familiar group created a pitfall for the museum, which ended up spending less time guiding and inspiring the familiar group; after all, they knew their way around. Down the line, the group indicated they missed a deepening and responsibility. During the Werksalon period we, as a team, did not give enough attention to this.

Some groups were already established around the city regarding certain goals, like the Expat Spouses Initiative. This foundation aims to increase the opportunities for suitable employment for partners of expats. For them, the museum added an extra channel through which members could come in contact with a big organization in Eindhoven.



Fiona Jongejans, Groene Gasten: *'We already knew each other, because we are all involved with sustainability in Eindhoven. During a first orientation conversation, we enjoyed talking about these subjects in a quiet and different environment, without working towards a solution. We appreciated the fact that the museum tried to reinvent itself. I am a designer and therefore always looking for reinvention, re-exploring the field. I really enjoyed noticing that the museum does the same and gladly wanted to be a part of that.'*



The event 'Stadsastronauten' on February 7, 2019, photo's Boudewijn Bollman

Anniek Adriaens,
International School Eindhoven:
'We were already well acquainted with the Van Abbemuseum since we have a yearly program for graduate classes in the museum. One time, during a conversation it came up, and immediately it sounded like fun to join. The idea behind it spoke to me; the museum contemplates on their role. You need others to add new perspectives. And it was nice for us as well, because we exist in a bit of a bubble here. The campus provides everything; friends, sports and other extracurricular activities.'

Tom Zoon:
'I choose this post because I personally think it is really funny! Social media is not only about followers and likes, but also about humor and posts that make you laugh!'

Sanyukta Kollur:
'This image is a meme, a joke about bros and it shows how weird millennial and Gen Z humour is now. Memes are common around the internet and most of the time, you need to have previous context to understand the full joke. Bro memes are common and break the stereotypes of 'bros' being emotional while at the same time, retaining some sense of masculinity.'



Anouk Willemsen Habanakeh,
legal social counsellor and
mentor Vluchtelingen in de Knel:
*'We wanted to join because
the museum provides us
with a platform. For our
foundation, it is important
to have recognition, to show
this is about people and
not an anonymous group.
Besides that, it gave our
clients a goal, something to
work on, something to learn
from. Which is something
they rarely get a chance
to do.'*



Part of the photo exhibition 'Ongezien', presented on June 20, 2019,
photo Niek Tijssse Klasen



the daily reality of running a Werksalon

What do you encounter when you clear out a whole floor solely for collaborations with groups from the city? The Werksalon presented the museum with a clear view of itself. We became aware of our habits, and the expectations and limitations of the building and space. This chapter contains a few observations and lessons.

THE TEAM

Within the museum we worked with a fixed team of 3 people:
Steven ten Thije, conservator collections
Loes Janssen, mediation
Hilde van der Heijden, project-coordinator

Besides that, we continuously had two interns working for periods of 6 months each, who have helped tremendously with the practical work.

External artist / makers were often indispensable to help shape the group project.

COMMUNICATION TO VISITORS

30% of the time the Werksalon was occupied by groups, the other 70% it was empty. Visitors often found themselves in an empty space in which texts and images regarding the groups and the Werksalon space were presented, yet they could not experience the reality of it. Besides that, the space was often rented to companies and institutions at the expense of hospitality for group members who wanted to stop by spontaneously. This is not completely in line with the vision of the project; becoming accessible to all kinds of city residents. Besides that, events that were organized by the groups for a wide audience did not get a clear enough feature within the programming of the museum.

Fiona Jongejans, Groene Gasten:

'It continuously proved to be difficult to explain to people what the Werksalon is. In every invitation we sent, we had to explain who we were, that we were one of the Werksalon groups. This was rather complex.'



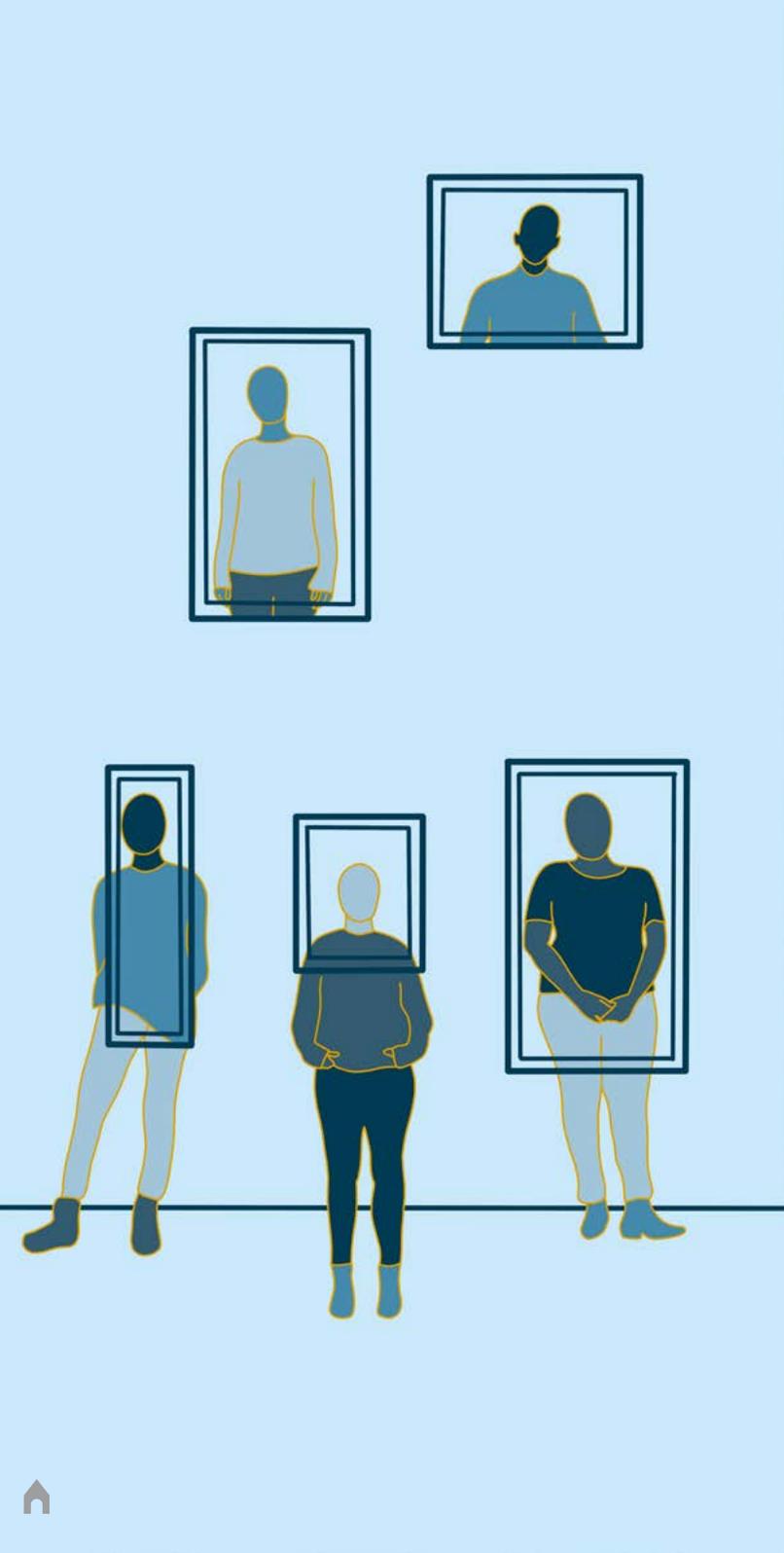


EXCITED FOR LANGUAGE?

Language dominates the academic worlds. When the museum tries to contact the public, this is often achieved through text. We use words to try and find out what moves others. Sometimes language and conversation are the very thing standing in the way. This became clear in the collaboration with Vluchtelingen in de Knel. We found connection through cooking and eating together.



Wednesday afternoon, the main exit of the museum welcomes the first people with a pram loaded with pans and bags; our lunch. While a buffet is created from all the food people brought, a participant arranges boxes with paint and piles of textile. After a short demonstration we tie-dye our own t-shirts and scarves. No mention of the banner we are creating today, the text that will be displayed on this banner, few words are spoken in fact. But after half an hour the space is filled with bright faces, there is laughter and ooh's and aah's are called out at every new creation proudly displayed above us.



THE MAKER / ARTIST IN THE WERKSALON

We asked the Werksalon groups to add a story to the collection presentation. A sizeable assignment. Too big, as proven in the first season. The curator had to play a big part in connecting the art and the themes of the group. Besides that, The Expat Spouses conceived a creative presentation in the Werksalon themselves; designer Jody Vingoe, part of the group herself, made drawings based on the stories of her fellow expat spouses and shaped them further in a local screen printing studio. Inspiring us to connect a maker to each of the groups in the second season. Together with the maker, groups would work towards a concrete final product. Chantal Lenting created, together with the students of the International School Eindhoven, a social media/meme workshop. Anoeska arranged a photography course in the museum for Vluchtelingen in de Knel, resulting in an exposition.

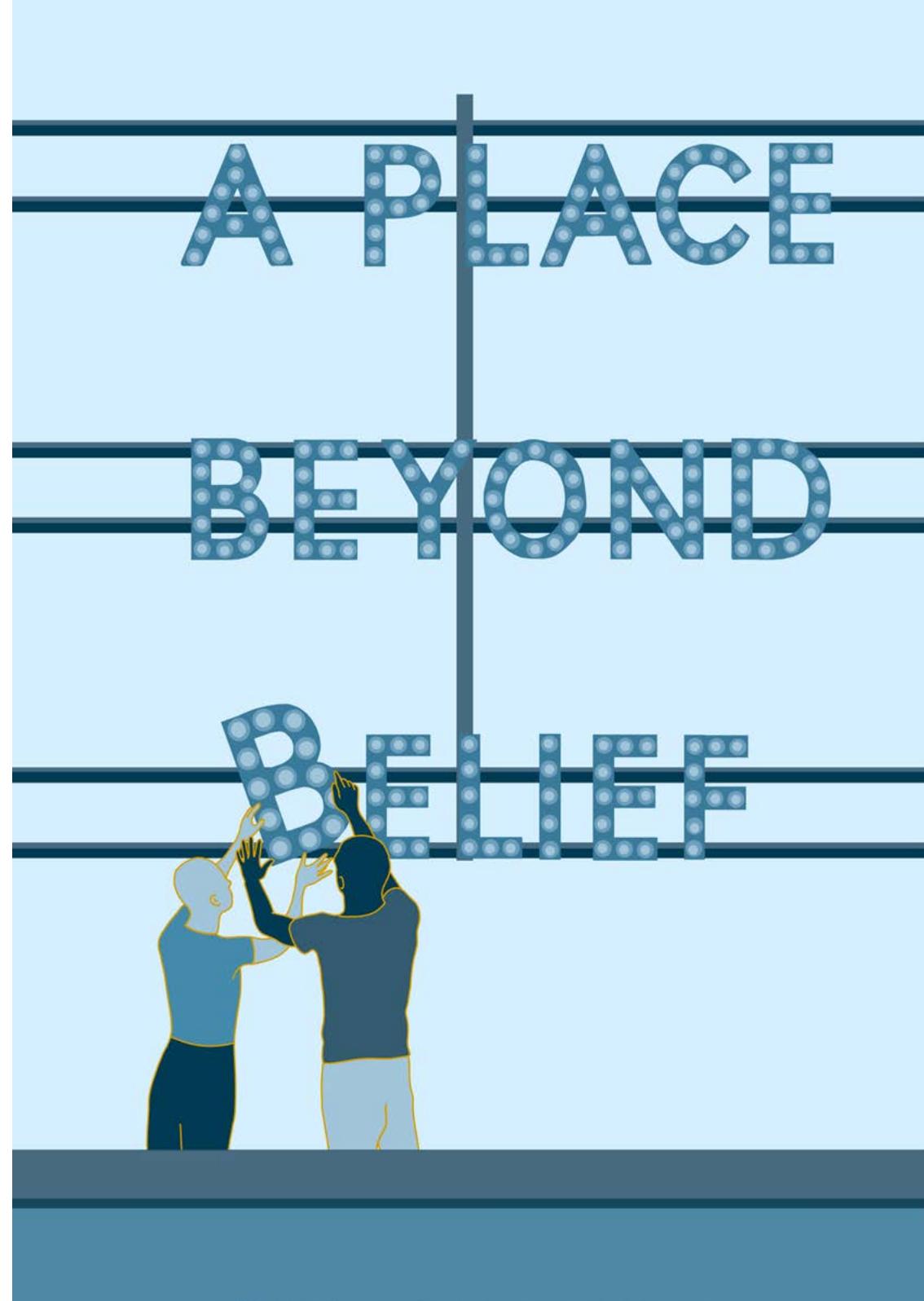
RELATIONSHIPS FIRST

The Van Abbemuseum wishes to come into contact with people who, in their own environment, do not often cross paths with art and a museum. A good example is the undocumented refugees, which we came into contact with through Vluchtelingen in de Knel. We would never have been able to stay connected with them for eight months without Anouk Willemsen-Habanakeh, the legal social counsellor of the clients. It is not as simple as setting a date, making an outlook appointment or sending a text. Every Friday, when people collected their allowances at the foundation, Anouk would notify them of the next time we would meet and, if needed, rung them up the day before. The museum, with its heavy doors, silence, rules and guards, continued to be an intimidating place for a lot of people. The system that declined them feels just as present here. They trusted Anouk. She knew how to reach them and how to reduce barriers in order for them to visit the museum. 'From the start, I've been recruiting clients, I actively approached them to involve them, ending up with a group of about twenty people,' she said.

BALANCING INSTRUCTING AND LETTING GO

The first season, the museum intended to listen, not do too much 'on our terms'. But for many groups this freedom was detrimental, a clear direction was only found nearing the end. In the second season, we used a schedule, some clear steps and deadlines that the groups followed. However, some groups required more guidance than others, depending on the complexity of the final presentation and the nature of the group members.

Anniek Adriaens, International School Eindhoven:
'For me the end goals were clear, but it was hard to communicate them to the students. Our group members shifted quite a bit, because of this not everyone experienced everything from the beginning. Especially in the first half of the season everything had a really open nature. And I notice that high school students do require more boundaries. You have to find a balance between 'I direct' and 'I will let you find out yourselves'. In the second half things continued more smoothly. A maker was added with a clear goal, namely creating a workshop surrounding the theme and the banner of the students. The two interns also helped immensely with this. Structure ends up being very important, although you do not want to spell it out for them. Teenagers want, on the one hand, to do the opposite of what you tell them, but at the same time they don't feel safe if they are given complete freedom.'



MULTIPLE PARTNERS, MORE IMPACT

On World Refugee Day 2019, June 20, the interest was overwhelming. Over 400 visitors poured into the museum. The result of lots of involvement during the months in which the clients worked with the museum. During the Werksalon process, another project was up and running: the Living Room | The right to be a host, a tearoom for visitors at the main entrance of the museum. Volunteers with a migration background, found in co-operation with Eindhovense Huiskamer, served Afghan tea and bites to visitors. Not just Vluchtelingen in de Knel but the Huiskamer and local youth homes became involved, and through them the policymakers of the municipality. Everyone who was even slightly connected to this group was present.



Reaction visitor Harry de Mulder:
'Yesterday I attended the impressive day of the Refugees in the Van Abbe. It made a big impression on me. I think it is very good that the Van Abbe, together with refugees in Eindhoven, draw attention to their position in our society. The photography exhibition of the refugees really held up a mirror for us, this was very moving. I think it's important that the story of these refugees can be seen by everyone. They deserve it.'



NEW ROLE OF THE MUSEUM PROFESSIONAL

Every trajectory was different, and every end presentation unique. Besides that, working with these 'new' groups requires a different approach as opposed to organizing a regular public program. Because of this, the Werksalon became a stepping stone for more research to the roles and structures within the museum.

In the Werksalon the curator is not only managing the presentation, they also mediate between the collection and the group. Working with vulnerable groups who are unfamiliar with the museum sometimes requires pedagogy besides didactics.

What do we require of a 'public worker' if collaboration with the city becomes a driving force of the museum, maybe even being a representative of a specific group? For Olle Lundin this is a work in progress. He was hired by the museum to highlight queer perspectives, based on his design background and also because he identifies as queer himself. Sometimes he struggles with the professionalization of a part of his identity. Besides that, he has trouble relating to the art collection without an extensive art background.

Our experiences surrounding the Werksalon made us rethink the roles of museum employees. Which qualities does a museum professional need in order to connect the art collection to the city? And which expertise do you need to bring from outside to the museum?

Olle Lundin, coordinator
Queering the Collection:
'I have little experience with archives or with correct descriptions and context of artworks. To some extent that is an asset. To me the individuals we work with, the stories that come out of the conversations and the engagement we work for in the museum is more important and fun. On the other hand maybe more art history would have been good. I was brought in as a spokes- person to represent the Queering the Collection community. It was interesting and strange to professionalize a part of my identity, something I am still struggling with. I have a strong sense of belonging to the LGBTQI community in many ways. Being bisexual and living in a straight relationship currently is an argument that I could and should do more to voice all the intersectional aspects of the queer communities.'



the dream of inclusion

The Werksalon is a space to actively research inclusivity and collaboration. The Van Abbemuseum wants to be a diverse museum, a museum where there is room for multiple perspectives in a building. But sometimes these well-meant inclusivity intentions result in alienation and even exclusion.

SAFE SPACES IN THE MUSEUM

What makes a group a group? Some groups form out of a collective feeling of injustice, a (painful) past of oppression, or shared experiences of exclusion, being seen as 'weird'. A safe space, where these things are seen as valid, is often all the group really needs.

The moment museum employees want to impose rules (all coats and bags in the lockers, leave an empty and clear space at 17.00h) or try to chime in during conversations, this can be seen as arrogant or unrespectful. If the museum wants to make events widely accessible, wanting to be a place where people learn about other ways of thinking and living, that can cause friction with the group's need for safety.

In the Werksalon, a workshop is held on futuristic language and literature in response to a temporary exhibition. A number of participants are people of colour with an academic background. The white speaker and fellow organizer of the workshop say '...and...are part of my tribe...'. Several participants exchange indignant looks. There is unrest within the group. Later, I am told that the word 'tribe' should not be used by white people; they claim something that is not part of their culture. The speakers' grandmother is part of the indigenous people of Canada; she uses this term purposefully and, in turn, feels hurt and excluded.

The Queer community occasionally had a need to create a safe space, but this sometimes conflicted with the museum as a public space.





Luca Soudant, participant Queering the Collection, workshop supervisor during Eind(je)feest 2019

'I think the museum should be a place for different people to meet. In safe spaces learning moments are directed or made political, because of this people actually learn nothing because they are scared to say the wrong thing. It is a beautiful thing when people can talk to each other about their ideas, whatever motives or backgrounds you have. It can still happen that someone says something hurtful.'

Luca Soudant, participant Queering the Collection, workshop supervisor during Eind(je)feest 2019

'If you, as a queer person, know it is not a safe space, you can open yourself up to this and prepare. Therefore, as a museum you can frame it like this and be transparent about it. Even just this clarity in communication is of great importance. The most intense or painful experiences arise when you are caught off guard.'

Luca Soudant (workshop supervisor of the Queer community) believes that the museum can provide a platform for the queer community and thus also contribute to them meeting people with little experience on queerness. This stimulates visibility and emancipation. He also thinks that some people are not ready for this. They mostly need a safe space. The museum acts as a place where people can become more resilient, a space for empowerment. 'Those two subjects (meeting and safety) can co-exist, but this needs to be communicated transparently beforehand: is this an event for a wider audience? Or is it an event specifically for the group?' Luca states. At the same time, Luca questions the role of a safe space.

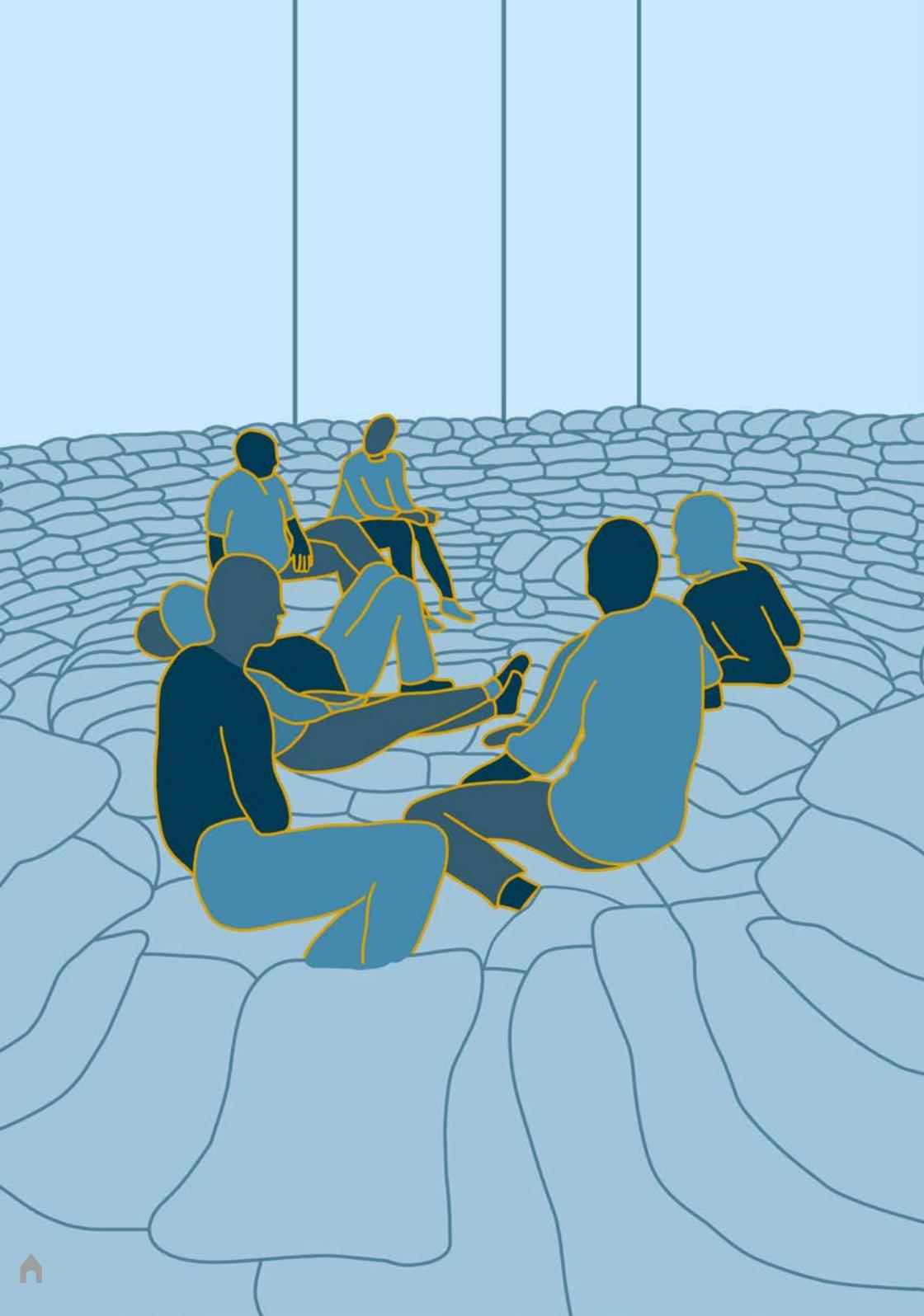
Malou van Doormaal, participant Queering the Collection:

'I actually don't think the museum is less suited just because sometimes people look at you a little funny. We queer people simply find ourselves in a non-queer world. How can we involve this world with the questions we have? I don't want to be judged. But I have also noticed that the people who work here can learn a lot. After a while, they knew who we were. That would be a dream of mine; doing a drag-up with all the employees of the museum.'

During the closing event with the clients of Vluchtelingen in de Knel, having as much people learn the personal stories of the undocumented refugees was actually desired. San Sigithan (participant through Vluchtelingen in de Knel) thinks the museum should be a place where you strike up a conversation with people who you do not understand through art:

San Sigithan, participant photo workshop Vluchtelingen in de Knel:
'A museum is a platform to let different people meet and talk. To break chains but not in a typical way, because art is the medium and art is visual. Art gives you space to connect in a different way.'





Fiona states she felt, halfway through the project, that she was working for the museum: *'We organized events, invited our network, something we would normally be paid for.'*

INCLUSIVE AND EQUAL

Within the museum, the public is seen less and less as passive consumers, and more as users. Meaning that the citizens can use the public collection from their own perception and get stimulated to actively use their citizenship. The groups in the Werksalon were invited to mobilize the collection and use this to tell their story. A beautiful idea, but quite complicated in practice. The groups required time to learn about the collection, to transform their ideas into plans and organize their activities. When is the collaboration between the museum and the groups equal? Striving for openness, transparency and inclusion can create the myth that groups hand over their ideas for free where other people in the museum get paid. As the museum, you can support or guide the groups, but you do not want to impose. It must be their own thing. Every group has to consider: what do I invest and what do I get in return?

At first, the content and deep conversation were more important to her as opposed to producing events. She states that they have changed and that the Groene Gasten have decided to focus on gatherings.

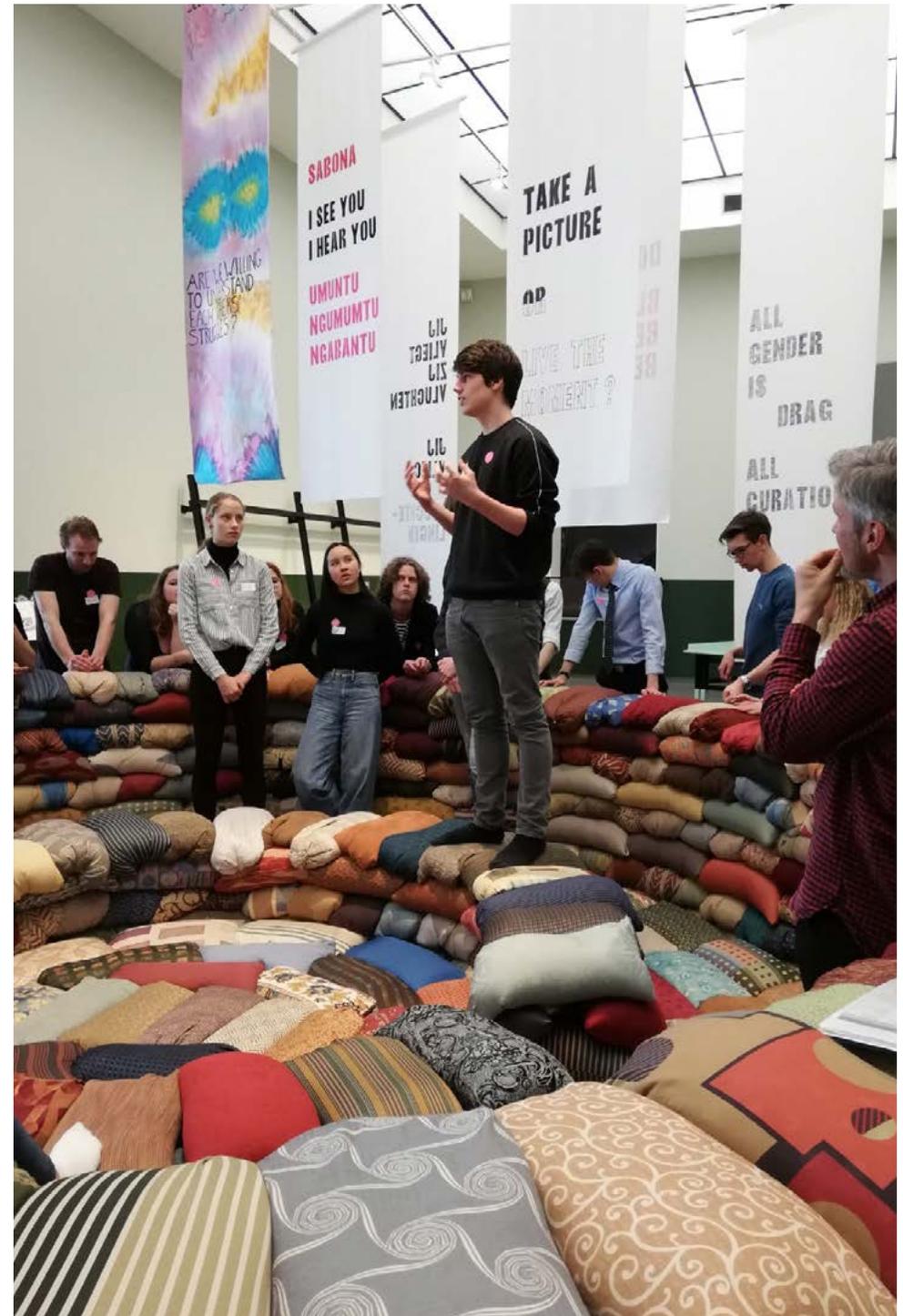
'You all still have a full-time job. This is something you do besides that. If it adds too little to your daily practise, it costs too much energy and becomes an obligation. It was a search; how can we participate, have the conversation we seek, but don't lose our energy by arranging practical matters?'

Luca has asked the Queer community if people received payment for their activities:

'That's when the only white cis man raised his hand. I thought: there's a problem here. As a group, we talked about it. On one side it isn't about money, on the other the need for money is a reality. Sometimes people need to get paid for their knowledge. Whether that knowledge comes from a master's degree or from a body that moves in the world.'

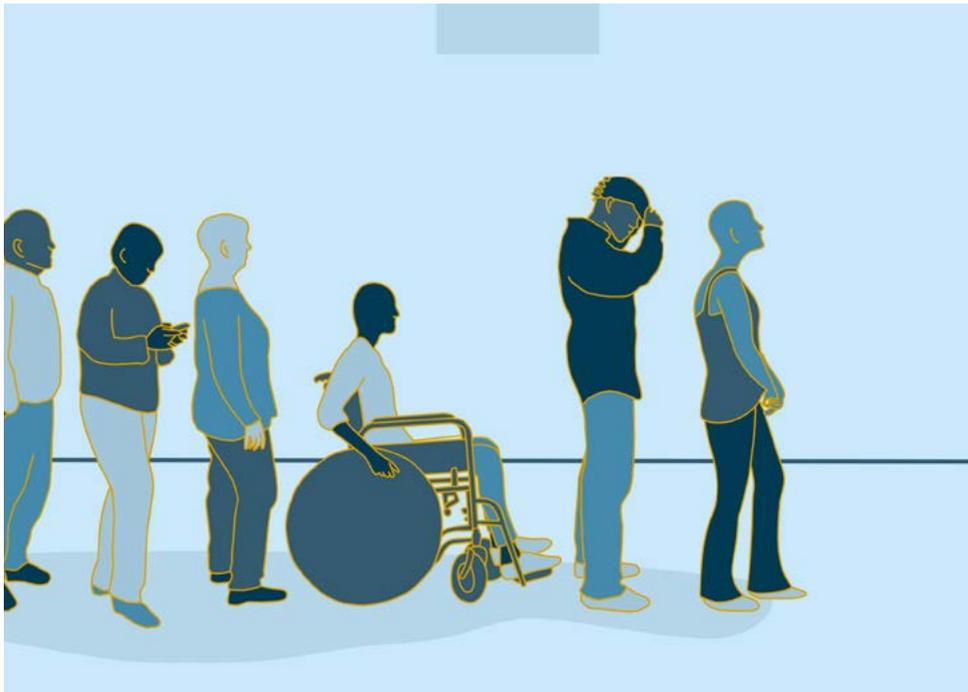
Based on conversations with the Expat Spouses, Vluchtelingen in de Knel and the International School there seemed to be no such inequality within these groups. In an interview with Marlou van Doormaal the importance of giving people a sense of ownership came up.

'If you want to bind people to you, you have to give them influence. As soon as they feel a certain ownership of what happens here, I think the museum will become more accessible. In fact, we should get more information regarding the agenda, this way we can estimate how we relate to this and what we can organize ourselves.'



WHEN HAS INCLUSION (PARTLY) SUCCEEDED?

During, but especially after, the Werksalon trajectory we asked ourselves how can we truly become more inclusive and accessible. We worked closely together with a group for an extended period of time, but it often turned out to be hard to keep the network active. Can we make inclusion the core of our organization?



Olle Lundin, coordinator
Queering the Collection:

'The bigger question behind the Werksalon is 'what does it mean for a museum to be inclusive?'. To me that is about how you welcome and host people inside an institution. That goes for hosts, tour guides, for all the staff. And we didn't have much impact on that, I guess. I do think we had great programming and the drag-ups were a great addition to the Thursday evenings. But is that inclusion or a clear programmatic intervention. Looking back, if we had defined more ambitious goals and projects, we would have focused more on interacting with the museum-guides and hosts; taking them into the LHTBQI world, work with queer hosts and guides, see how we can give some permanency to the interest. But I think those are things that we are realizing now, it's a process and it will take a long time.'

Malou van Doormaal, participant
Queering the Collection:

'Come on! In Ghent they say: not everything is for everybody, but we do have something for everyone. I don't think everyone can always feel at home in the museum, that is a utopia. Maybe progress has been made when people think: oh, I might be a bit queer myself. Identity thinking is so limiting. If we can let visitors think less in binaries and rigidly, then you've really achieved something.'

In the Werksalon we investigated how people wanted to use the museum and the collection for their own benefit. For some groups the collection pieces were inspiring, for others it was the building that held meaning. What was the impact of that connection with art and the building? And in what way did the museum environment and the art collection add value to the collaboration between the groups?

IMPACT OF ART

Art can exist to help us reflect, distancing us from the chaos of our daily lives or confronting us with societal themes. Sometimes art has the ability to tell us something without words. During a conversation with San, he mentioned how art helped the group to share stories that were too sensitive to put into words. San tells us that his vision of art has changed; it is now intertwined with every aspect of his life.

San Sigithan, participant
Vluchtelingen in de Knel:

'I think life is a kind of art. Everyone has a different inspiration. And everyone has a unique story and a unique problem. That is what the Werksalon does: to make this kind of art visible. We have to recognize each other's problems. That's the platform we try to make here. I think that is art. To understand each other's inspirations and problems.'

Aniek also mentioned the added value of the art collection. The collection inspired the students to create their work.

Anniek Adriaens, teacher International School Eindhoven:

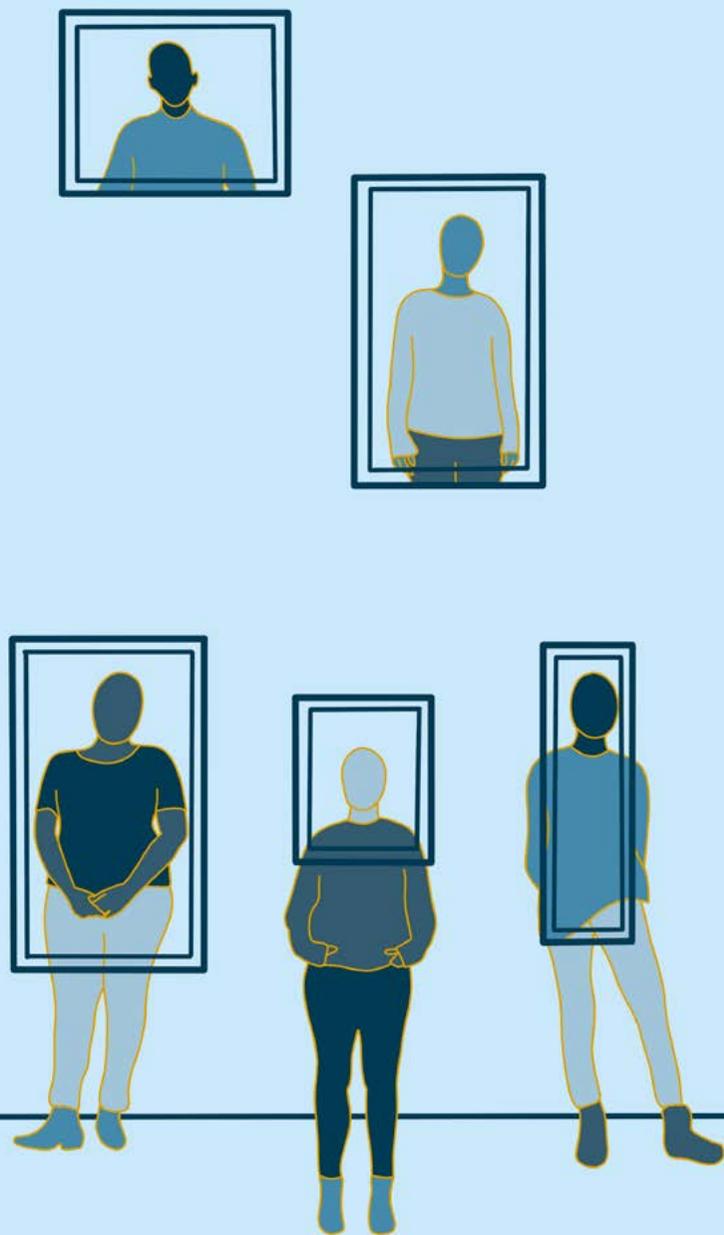
'Many assignments started with a question for the students, after which they walked around the exhibition to find associations through artworks. This really helped them. I was impressed with the second part of the trajectory, the activities really pushed them to explore the space, they made connections and had to think about the reason why. And in the end, they participated in test-workshops with all sorts of people who work in the museum, that's super educational since they were introduced to the perspectives of others.'

By having conversations about the artwork Politisch of Frans Erhard Walther, the Expat Spouses were able to strike up conversation with all sorts of people on themes that mattered to them.



Marianna Faccenda, workshop supervisor International Locals:
'I think with our workshops we brought people into the museum who never would have come otherwise. And that is good. Once people have seen the museum, then they can say they are just not interested, but at least after their experience they can form an opinion. The last time I guided the workshop and gave a short lecture about the artist and the work, there was a girl who came up to me and said she was quite disappointed. But that's ok. She thought about it, she tried. So yes, let's do more to give people this experience.'





THE CHALLENGE OF ART

Some groups were pushed out of their comfort zone more so than others. The Expat Spouses learned how to activate a work of art without much prior art knowledge. The refugees learned to depict their own stories through photography, as opposed to hiding them. The students learned how to lead a workshop for adults, where normally the roles are reversed. For the groups that were already comfortable working autonomously, like Queering the Collection and the Groene Gasten, the Werksalon was less of an experiment and more of a continuation of their existing process.

'Is the goal of the Werksalon to attract a new audience?' is a logical and frequently asked question. Thinking in terms of target audiences and targets is something we were able to let go of in the Werksalon, to a certain extent. The idea was to ask the local residents: 'In what way are the collection, the museum, the expertise and the facilities useful to you? How can you make use of the Van Abbe-museum? What story do you want to tell?' Impact exists on many levels; for the group, for the individual within the group, for the museum. Sometimes there is an impact on the level of consciousness, sometimes on the amount of museum visitors.

In the end, the Expats Spouses Initiative activated the artwork 'Politisch #36' by Franz Erhard Walther. The theme of this work was such a good fit to the theme of the group (social connection, group or individual) making this a logical conclusion. A few members of the group received training by museum employees, temporarily making them part of the museum. They learned about the work, the artist, became a certain kind of stewards of Politisch and worked with museum visitors.



During the activation of Politisch an internal discussion arose. The work invites people to become a sculpture themselves by performing certain tasks with the help of a few textile constructions. During the activation of the work, you experience contrasting feelings of togetherness and distance. According to the collection department, you cannot activate this work to express your own story. An instructor is required. A set of distinct instructions exist that you have to perform in order to experience those feelings. These guidelines withheld certain members of the Expat Spouses to guide the activation. It suddenly seemed much more complicated and inaccessible to use the work in order to tell a story. The complexity of it is somewhat paradoxical, since Walther specifically wanted to stimulate participation with this work. Who decides in what way an artwork should be used? And who decides on the meaning of the work? This situation shows that art is dynamic: everyone appoints meaning to it differently.

IMPACT ON PERSONAL LIVES

The group VidK clients received a photography course in the museum during which they were asked to capture their past, present and future in images.

San Sigithan, participant workshop fotografie:

'We spent a lot of time in the museum: twice a week almost the whole day for a period of 7 weeks. But for us, this is a wonderful opportunity to do something with our time. We basically do nothing, are not allowed to do anything. And at the same time we learned so much.'

On June 20, 2019, International Refugee Day, they exhibited their photos. For some members, this instigated big changes. San tells us how the Werksalon acted as a platform from which he could open up.

'It had a great impact on my life. It was the first time in my life that I talked about my desires or the things I wanted to do in my life. I am happy for that.'





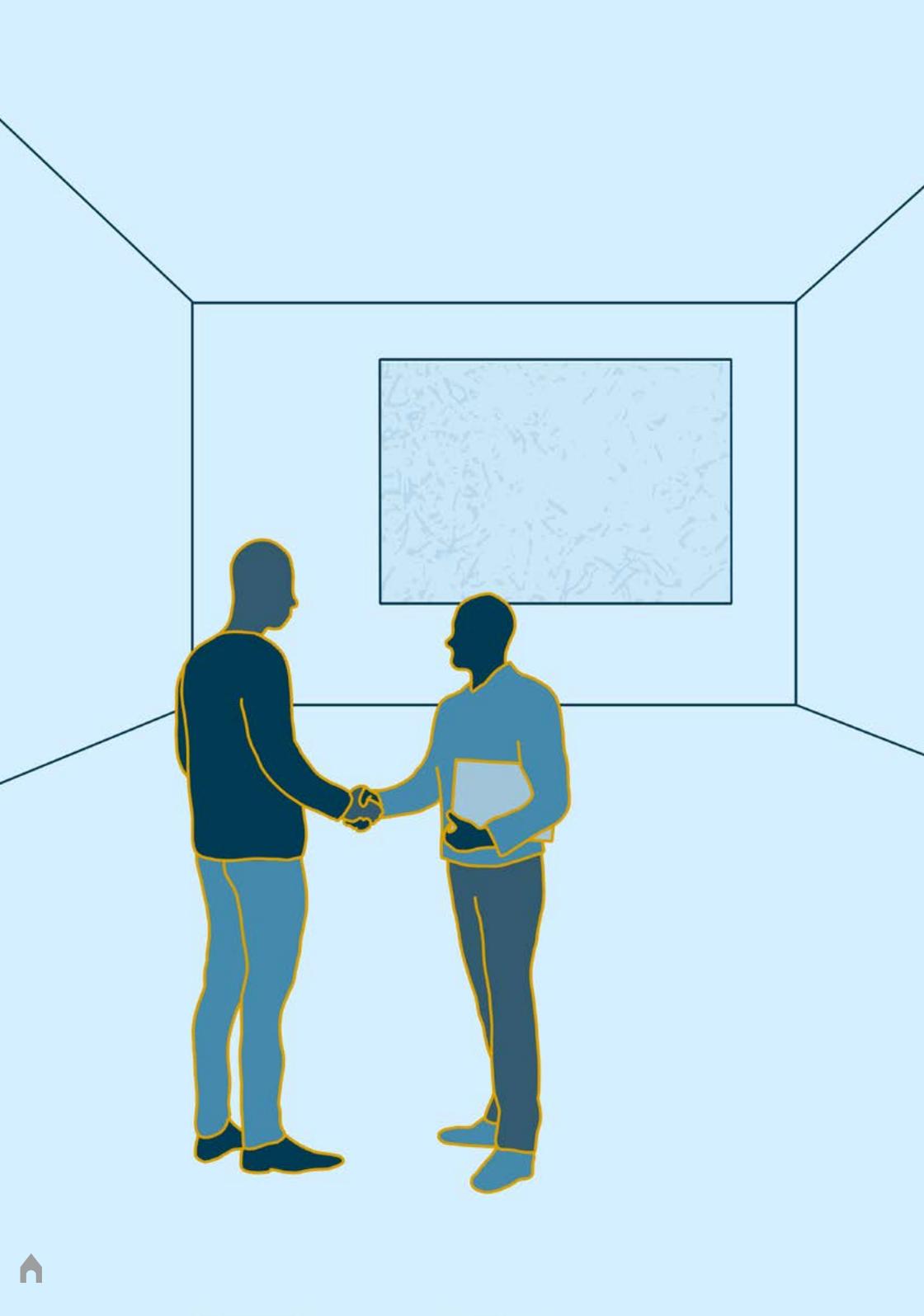
Marianna, participant of 'International Locals' (Expact Spouses Initiative):
'I was asked to be a leader of the group. And I said yes, but I'm not sure if I can. And then you discover so many new things.'

Ron Vogels, Living Museum Eindhoven:
'It is truly amazing that my work can suddenly be seen in the Van Abbemuseum! There was a man who has, since then, already bought two of my large canvasses.'

Besides the established groups, a short collaboration began in the spring of 2019 with 'The Living Museum Eindhoven' and NEOS (Assistance and shelter for homeless people, among others). Amateur artists exhibited their work in the Werksalon. During the evening of the exhibition, more than 300 people visited.



spring 2019, exhibition The Living Museum and NEOS.



IMPACT ON THE GROUP AND THEIR GOALS

The Groene Gasten consist of professionals who are committed to the climate. 'In the museum I can step out of my so-called hamster wheel and I can take a look at what it is that I'm doing.' If your daily work consists of activation, creating awareness, organization and design, you are less inclined to do the same in the museum. Precisely the expertise in the field of art and the reflections were of added value.

Fiona notes that the museum, as a location, has a certain ambiance. The space creates a distance from the daily hustle. It is a kind of no-man's land. She told us she received a lot of support from Steven, dubbing him the seventh Groene Gast. He was always present and added ideas as a curator. This had tremendous added value to Fiona. There seems to be an equal collaboration, in which a curator uses their expertise to support the goals of the group.

Fiona Jongejans:

'With that we made it really tantalizing and just different from what we would've thought of ourselves. He has such a different way of thinking and such an encyclopedia of knowledge. This always makes our conversations very rich. We experienced that as very valuable. As a group we share the theme of sustainability, and we wanted to think about that in a philosophical way. We were looking for a different point of view. Steven really brought that.'

The group Queering the Collection is critical of the museum and the Werksalon. Since they have a history of organizing events for their constituency and already communicate this through their own social media channels, they 'needed' the Werksalon less. Autonomy and the need for a safe space sometimes did not seem to match up with the idea of meeting, during which you tell others how you experience the world. The collaboration of the past years has made the group more critical and inquisitive.

Malou van Doormaal:

'I see a lot of potential in the involvement of the group members, that is unbelievable really. That everyone wants to investigate from their own practise. I am really impressed by my fellow group members in this. This is incredibly valuable. And it is incredibly valuable that the museum has brought us together as a group.'

According to San, one of the clients of Vluchtelingen in de Knel, more could have been achieved if, on June 20th, more people with no sympathy for the denied refugees had visited the museum.

San:

'I think most people who came to the programme on 20 June, were already supportive of the foundation and the work they do. But I would have been interested to talk to people who don't understand me. Someone might hate me because I still live here as a rejected refugee. But then I want to understand why this person hates me. And I want to break that chain of hate, not in the typical way, but through art and conversation. It would give both of us the chance to connect and understand each others demons. Like we wrote on the banner.'

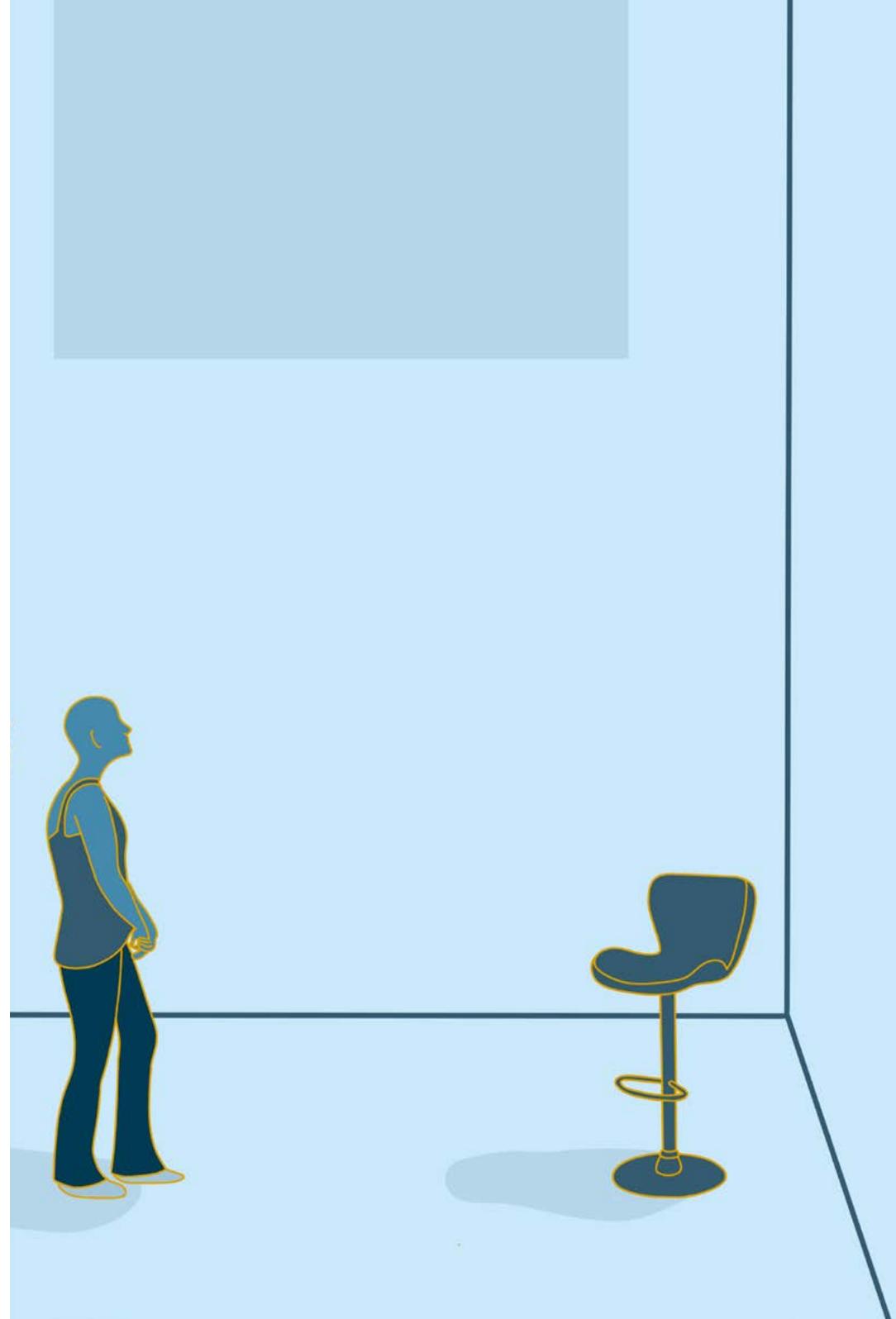


IMPACT ON THE MUSEUM

Malou van Doormaal:

'In the beginning, I did notice that the people at the entrance or the security hesitated a little. Quite a lot of people showed up for the Drag Up's, all of them queer people. I noticed they were sometimes stared at by museum employees because of their appearance. Sometimes I detected rudeness towards them. From that point on, we received our guests ourselves at the entrance. After a while, the people in the museum know you, they are used to it. It is no longer 'o, what is happening here', but 'o, those are the people of the Drag Up'. They are able to place us now.

And every time I ask: hey, will you join us sometime! Sometimes they said: maybe one day. So the trust has increased. It is exciting and vulnerable, but at the same time playful. And there is an infectious quality to it. And what I really enjoyed is that at some point one of the security guards said: 'Oh by the way, I still found some glitters in the museum the other day'. There is a safe filled with remotes and such, but they had stuck the glitters they found on them. How amazing is that?!



epilogue

The Werksalon originated out of a curiosity for new perspectives and a need for more voices to be heard. In Eindhoven people have 160 different nationalities and all manner of culture, educational backgrounds and sexualities after all. The museum belongs to the municipality, the collection of the city. What happens when we listen to the people that do not know the (un)written rules of the museum? What would they add to the museum?

OUR OWN WORDS

The Werksalon seemed to be a first step in giving the residents of Eindhoven more ownership. In this conclusion you might hope to read whether this has been achieved. Whether it has become a home for a multitude of residents in the long term, we do not yet know. We reflect on experiences of a shorter term. But this evaluation is not aimed at labelling the Werksalon as either a success or failure. We wanted to investigate how those involved experienced the collaboration and look back with a critical eye.

Joris Luyendijks book 'Kunnen we praten' (Can we talk) was one of the indicators of the Werksalon. Luyendijk spoke to Dutch people who had lost faith in the traditional political parties. He wanted everyone to freely share their points of view, including those with whom he normally would not sit at the conference table. This allowed for a diverse representation. Even during the creating of this publication, we continued to be inspired by him. As you might have noticed, this booklet contains quite some quotes. We had talks with different people and tried to remain faithful to their words.



QUESTIONS

In our evaluation, a distinction can be made between the questions that arose because of the process and the concrete lessons for the future. Some questions pertained to more practical situations. Can you, for example, rent out a city space to a business? And whether or not you should ask the Werksalon groups to stow away their bags in the lockers and not bring drinks and food, like regular visitors.

Theoretical questions also arose. The discussion that was sparked during the project of the Expat Spouses Initiative, with the activation of Franz Erhard Walther's work, questions how an art professional relates to the experience of the visitors. What happens to the art historical meaning of a work when it is used for a contemporary issue? Does it receive a new and different meaning? An important question for the museum field is: what do we expect from museum professionals as museums continue to have more in common with institutions from social domains? And a question that pertains to equal relations: at what point do constituencies do volunteer work because the museum is not

capable to compose a diverse workforce, and at what point is there an equal relationship where both parties benefit equally? We have yet to find concrete answers, but these are the questions that we could keep in mind from the beginning in order to stay sharp and attentive.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

Besides these questions, we have come to many conclusions. Collaborations with new groups tend to be set up with the idea 'together in dialogue' in mind. What does this mean? Sitting together to debate on certain topics? By way of collaborating with Vluchtelingen in de Knel and Expat Spouses Initiative, we realized that sometimes words can stand in the way of real contact. Working on something together achieves more connection as opposed to having a classic debate or conversation.

What this connection meant was the next question. We mostly focus on the connection between the museum, the collection and the group, but

within the groups there was little contact. Some participants missed having gatherings. We have worked from a constituency model to group identity. But identities are multifaceted, and there is so much within us through which we can connect. Besides, it is still not clear if Eindhoven is best represented by this. Is our society too individualistic to be divided into groups? Is this really what the city consists of? It might be interesting to work from universal themes that connect people instead of distinguishing them in the future. Themes such as grief, birth, loneliness, love, hunger and migration. Themes that are often the motives for creativity and art.

Steven ten Thije wrote in his essay that too much freedom causes confusion. By first creating a banner with every group, we wanted to give them, and ourselves, a framework for a practical implementation. It definitely added to the purposefulness of the collaboration, but it was not always enough to actually create a story that connected art and people together. Let alone this story being easy to communicate to Werksalon

participants and museum visitors alike. The mediators and curators are necessary in order to connect the groups, keep a structure and facilitate with their in-depth knowledge on the collection.

Another important lesson we learned regarding frameworks pertains to inclusivity. From conversations with Luca, it became clear that for groups who feel unsafe in society, it is not always best to meet others if they are not able to relate to the issues of the group members. The museum and the groups should, in advance, decide what their concerns and visitor goals are with a certain activity. When this is clear from the start, a group can mentally prepare for this. This also shows that the museum can not be inclusive at all times, or in the words of Malou 'not everyone can feel at home at any given moment in the museum. That is a utopia'. It would be great if the museum would be able to say '[*Nothing for everyone, something for everybody*](#)'. It transforms inclusivity into an act, a way of working, not something you identify yourself with.



THE MUSEUM AS SYMPATHETIC EAR

As Steven ten Thije wrote in his essay the museum becomes more meaningful as the dialogue between our visitors and the museums' collection becomes more active. As museum staff we definitely noticed this and from our conversations it appears that the collaboration between the groups had a positive impact. The balance between listening, guiding, making and sharing had its own tempo and dynamic in every group.

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer once wrote that everyone has a hidden background filled with assumptions and biases. He called this a horizon. When people have a sincere encounter, the horizon broadens and widens. Biases are abated and worlds grow. Often times we do not have the peace and space to broaden each other's horizons. The museum could be a place where that peace and space is offered. A museum where the city enriches the collection with their own perspectives and the museum provides inspiration, a sympathetic ear and knowledge.

FINALLY: A QUESTION FOR YOU!

We do not consider ourselves experts on diversity and inclusivity. We have made an attempt to figure out how to create a more diverse museum, but we are not there yet! Do you have your own ideas, do you want to exchange knowledge and experience with us, or do you completely disagree with us? Write to us! We would love to talk.

educatie@vanabbemuseum.nl



colophon

2 YEARS WERKSALON

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thanks to

All participants of the Werksalon
and all the people we were allowed to
interview in order to look back together.

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