

“Doing History”: An Observation of Inclusive Museum Practices in the Netherlands

邱君妮 (Jenny Chun-ni Chiu) *

“Developing a Museum Methodology: Collaborative Activities with 'People from Different Perspectives' in Historical Exhibitions”

To achieve diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI), museums worldwide are recognizing the need to incorporate “multiperspectivity”. This involves representing history through a more comprehensive range of voices, fostering self-expression, and encouraging people to participate in inclusive, co-curated museum activities. By transitioning to a more inclusive and participatory approach to co-curate cultural heritage, museums aim to deepen their relationship with society as a whole. This growing awareness has also sparked calls for an ethical reconsideration of museum methods of collecting, exhibiting, and providing learning programs. To effectively and reliably embrace “multiple perspectives” in practice, museums must first develop a methodology for reconsidering existing

* Project Researcher, Tokyo University of the Arts
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viewpoints. This calls for exchanges among diverse stakeholders, including both domestic and international perspectives, as well as input from experts and non-experts, to move from a dualistic approach to a pluralistic one.

Since 2000, the Netherlands has spearheaded the “Shared Cultural Heritage” initiative as part of its international cultural policy.¹ This initiative aims to enhance the preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage formed during its colonial history. One practical measure within the program is the Shared Cultural Heritage (SCH) programme.² SCH involves collaboration between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Cultural Heritage Agency, the National Archives, Dutch Culture, and diplomatic missions abroad, as well as relevant national and international organizations and NGOs. It also involves close cooperation with countries that have historical ties to the Netherlands to work jointly on cultural heritage projects.

As part of the SCH initiative, the Cultural Heritage Agency has hosted an annual training program called “Sharing Stories on Contested Histories (SSoCH)” since 2018. This program brings together young museum and cultural heritage professionals from the Netherlands and partner countries to engage with shared challenges through reflection. It aims to explore how the Dutch engage with international cultural heritage topics that may be considered “contested”. By collaborating and learning from one another, museums can leverage cultural heritage to address societal challenges. The author of this article had the opportunity to participate in the SSoCH training program held in the Netherlands from December 1st to 13th, 2019.³ As a result of this training, the author began

1 Priorities of the Netherlands’ international cultural policy, Government of the Netherlands, <https://www.government.nl/topics/international-cultural-cooperation/international-cultural-policy/priorities-international-cultural-policy>, 2024/01/31.

2 The Shared Cultural Heritage programme has shifted towards the International Heritage Cooperation Programme in 2021 in order to better address the shared challenges faced not only by the Netherlands but also by partner countries. About the programme, Cultural Heritage Agency, <https://english.cultureelerfgoed.nl/topics/international-heritage-cooperation/about-the-programme>, 2024/01/31.

3 Regarding the SSoCH training program in 2019, please refer to the report below: 邱君妮, 2020。博物館のデ
コロナイゼーションについて: オランダ研修からの考察, 博物館研究, 55(6): 19-23。

research into how museums approach the sharing of “multiperspectivity” in the Netherlands.⁴

This experience was a personal ‘eureka moment’, sparking a deep interest in researching the approaches that museums are taking to create a safe space for sharing “multiperspectivity” and an interest in related movements in the Netherlands. This article provides an overview of this by introducing case studies, one of which is the National Museum of the Netherlands (Rijksmuseum).⁵ The purpose is to delve into how the museum leverages its collection and exhibition practices to engage in inclusive and co-curated activities.

A Trend to Share “Multiperspectivity” in Museums as a Method to Create Safe Spaces for All

Looking at international trends in museums, there has been a focus on exploring the potential for museums to serve as “public places” that provide “safe spaces” for people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and genders to engage in museum activities. The movement towards DEAI has been a key priority for museum-related organizations since the 2000s.⁶ DEAI is an acronym that stands

4 The following data is based on the on-site research conducted in March 2023 supported by the Embassy of Japan in the Netherlands, Tokyo, and in December 2023 supported JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP23K12320. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the author’s organization, JSPS, MEXT or Embassy of Japan in the Netherlands.

5 Special thanks to Jinna Smit from the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands; Eveline Sint Nicolaas, Senior Curator of History, and Milou Francisca, Curator in Training, from the Rijksmuseum; and the many others who provided their insights during the visit.

6 In order to clarify the role that museums should fulfil in response to the needs and challenges of modern society, it is important to consider these international trends. Museum-related organizations such as ICOM (International Council of Museums), AAM (American Alliance of Museums), MA (Museums Association), play a crucial role in understanding these trends, as they generally share knowledge and expertise about museums, including global trends and the challenges they face, through their member networks. These organizations also raise important issues in the museum world, contribute to the development of museums, and have a significant impact on museums worldwide (邱君妮・2022: 42).

for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion, and is by no means a new concept; it has been around since the 1970s, already been mentioned in discussions such as New Museology, Ecomuseum, etc.

ICOM (International Council of Museums) does not use the term DEAI, but has been promoting DEAI since 1998 through various activities such as training, conferences, and publications. They have made efforts in this regard. For instance, in 1998, ICOM conducted a training course on the topic of museum of diversity. Additionally, the 2007 ICOM Vienna Conference passed a resolution on “Accessibility of Information and Communication”, which aimed to foster intercultural dialogue (ICOM, 2007: 4-5). During the 22nd ICOM General Conference in Shanghai, China in 2010, the “ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter” was adopted (ICOM, 2010: 3). It is worth noting that the 23rd ICOM General Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, passed the “2013 Gender Mainstreaming Resolution” (ICOM, 2013: 4-5). Furthermore, the theme of the 2020 International Museum Day was “Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion”.

Since 2016, there have been discussions about revising the ICOM museum definition. A proposed definition incorporating DEAI thinking was presented at the 25th ICOM General Conference in Kyoto, Japan, in 2019 (ICOM, 2019: 2):

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

However, concerns were raised about the universality and appropriateness of the process used to develop this definition, leading to its postponement. In response, ICOM reevaluated the proposal and implemented methods that allowed for member participation. Consequently, a new ICOM museum definition was adopted at the 26th ICOM General Conference in Prague, Czech Republic in 2022.

One major initiative related to DEAI is the AAM (American Alliance of Museums). AAM introduced the “AAM Diversity and Inclusion Policy (American Federation of Museums Diversity and Inclusion Policy)” on February 26, 2014.⁷ In 2017, AAM established the “Working Group on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion”. That year, the annual conference was held under the theme “Gateways to Understanding: Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums”. AAM published “Insights from the American Alliance of Museums Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Working Group” in 2018 (AAM, 2018). Additionally, in 2019, AAM published “LGBTQ Welcoming Guidelines for Museums” (AAM, 2019), and re-edited representative papers on DEAI to release “Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums” (Cole & Lott, 2019). This book provides 16 practical examples. Furthermore, AAM offers DEAI training to its members, is considering implementing a DEAI into the museum accreditation system, and actively promotes the use of DEAI in museums throughout the United States (AAM, 2022).

AAM’s “Insights from the American Alliance of Museums Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Working Group” report emphasizes that all museum organizations, regardless of their size or area of expertise, should implement DEAI. The report highlights the importance of addressing historical inequalities such as racism, meritocracy, sexism, heterocentrism, xenophobia, and all other forms of inequality. It states that individuals who have been marginalized should be fully included, enabling them to work in museums and engage with them in various

7 Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion. AAM, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/diversity-equity-accessibility-and-inclusion/>, 2024/01/31.

ways. The report also emphasizes that museum professionals should first confront their own unconscious biases as an important initial step in implementing these activities (AAM, 2018: 4-5).

These developments within ICOM and AAM emphasize the significance of an inclusive, co-curation methodology that incorporates input from individuals with diverse perspectives to achieve DEAI in museums. Particularly when reevaluating unequal historical exhibitions, it is crucial to establish a methodology for museum activities that encompasses “multiple perspectives” to overcome unconscious bias, foster dialogue among all stakeholders, and encourage collaborative work. Moreover, it is hoped that addressing these issues through museum activities can contribute to the transformation of our society towards greater equity on an international scale.

Decolonizing Museums through Exhibitions as a Participatory Approach

With the emergence of the New Museology movement and other related movements proposed since the 1970s, there has been a growing demand for museums to be more open to society (e.g., Cameron, 1971; de Varine, 1992; Vergo, 1989). As a result, many researchers have focused on “participation” as an approach. It is also important to pay attention to discussions that incorporate the interpretations of source communities regarding museum collections (e.g., Bell, 2014; Boast, 2011; Brown & Peers, 2003; Clifford, 1997; Cole & Brooks, 2017; Janes, 2009; Karp et al., 1992; Phillips, 2011). In these discussions about the relationship between collections and source communities, it is common for source communities to provide different interpretations from those of museums, shaping their own identities through participation in museum activities. It is also recognized that by working with museums, they can address issues within local communities and meet their needs. Brown and Peers (2003: 3) emphasize that museums are no longer the sole authority for interpreting objects and must take

into account the perspectives of source communities. Furthermore, research on the decolonization of museums has been influenced by poststructuralism and postcolonial theory. Since the 1980s, there has been extensive research, particularly in the fields of museum anthropology and art history, along with studies on the evaluation of historical exhibitions (Chwatal, 2018; Mackenzie, 2009; Wali & Collins, 2023). Additionally, in recent years, increasing attention has been given to efforts to review museum activities through exhibitions (ICOM, 2022). Engaging in discussions about conflicting historical interpretations is also an essential process for museums to fulfil their role as inclusive forums for multiple perspectives.

An example of this is the semi-permanent exhibition “Afterlives of Slavery”⁸ held between November 2017 and May 2021 at the Tropenmuseum.⁹ Tropenmuseum is an ethnographic museum in Amsterdam, Netherlands, founded in 1864. The museum was established to display Dutch overseas possessions and the cultures of the inhabitants of these foreign countries, such as Indonesia. In 1871, the institute initiated research to enhance profits derived from the colonies. After Indonesia gained independence in 1945, the museum’s focus shifted from solely the colonial possessions of the Netherlands to encompass various underdeveloped colonial states in South America, Africa, and Asia. The museum’s scope has continued to evolve since 1970,¹⁰ expanding to address broader social issues like climate change, gender inequality,¹¹ and more.

8 Regarding the contents of the “Afterlives of Slavery”, please refer to Afterlives of Slavery, Tropenmuseum, <https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/afterlives-slavery>, 2024/1/31.

9 As of October 4, 2023, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, and the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam merged under one name: Wereldmuseum. As a result, the Tropenmuseum is now also known as the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam. History Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, <https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/themes/history-wereldmuseum-amsterdam>, 2024/1/31.

10 History Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, <https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/themes/history-wereldmuseum-amsterdam>, 2024/1/31.

11 What a Genderful World exhibition, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, <https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/what-genderful-world-exhibition>. 2024/1/31. Gender without borders? Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, <https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/what-genderful-world/gender-without-borders>, 2024/1/31.

The exhibition “Afterlives of Slavery” centres on enslaved people and their descendants. In order to facilitate a sometimes challenging yet productive dialogue, the Tropenmuseum has gathered personal stories from both the past and the present that bring the history of slavery and its contemporary legacies to the forefront. The exhibition not only delves into the history of slavery but also explores societal movements and political activism. According to the curators of the Tropenmuseum, the exhibition addresses the Netherlands’ colonial past and its enduring presence, with a specific focus on engaging the audience with a national story in a global context (personal communication, December 2, 2019). The museum adopted participatory approaches (Figure 1), specifically “contingent collaboration,” to engage with decolonial issues and emphasize the importance of critical listening in the exhibition-making process. Wayne Modest, the Director of Tropenmuseum, explained that “contingent collaboration was a way of stating your stakes even before a project begins, it was about acknowledging where the issues are and trying to work through them, not hide from or deny them.” (Brown et al. Eds, 2022: 85-86). Contingent collaboration is a way of working together that prioritizes the well-being of all partners, with particular emphasis on the partner who is the most marginalized. With this discipline, the exhibition aims to explore questions such as: “What is our shared history of slavery: How do we deal with it today: And how can we shape our common future?” (panel text, Afterlives of Slavery, Tropenmuseum, 2019).

In 2015, RCMC (Research Center for Material Culture of Tropenmuseum) began to run a series of events focusing on the topics, including a symposium entitled “A Shared History – Conversations on the Slavery Past in the Present” in 2017.¹² The museum curators mentioned that they collaborated with scientists, activists, and artists to develop a history of slavery, and the exhibition provides a discussion platform that places the stories of the enslaved and their descendants on centre stage. (personal communication, December 2, 2019). Visitors are encouraged

12 A Shared History-Conversations on the Slavery Past in the Present, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, <https://www.materialculture.nl/en/events/shared-history-conversations-on-slavery-past-present>. 2024/1/31.

to join the discussion by leaving comments in the exhibition and using the hashtag #slavernij on social media. Through participatory displays, the exhibition asks for visitors' input and feedback. It strives to incorporate multiple voices and alternative narratives by showcasing objects that are on loan or the result of contemporary collecting, including items from public protests that happened in Amsterdam (Ouédraogo et al., 2019).



Figure 1 Visitors are invited to leave their input and feedback in the “Afterlives of Slavery” exhibition.

Photograph by the author

The “Afterlives of Slavery” exhibition can be seen as demonstrating a participatory approach as it was the pilot exhibition for the larger project “Our Colonial Inheritance”,¹³ a permanent exhibition, that opened in 2022. The permanent exhibition focuses on colonial history and its “inheritances” in the present-day Netherlands. For “Our Colonial Inheritance”, 30 one-minute audio stories were provided in which people give their vision of colonial heritage.

One of the main achievements of these two exhibitions is to explore the use of language by individuals from diverse perspectives. The experience of pain caused by colonial history varies depending on one's position, perspective, and the language used to express and recount history. For example, the term “slave” reflects the perspective of the oppressor. However, using phrases like “enslaved” or “enslaved person” changes the narrative significantly. In 2018, the Tropenmuseum

13 Regarding the contents of the “Our Colonial Inheritance”, please refer to Our Colonial Inheritance, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, <https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/our-colonial-inheritance>, 2024/1/31.

published “Words Matter” (National Museum for World Cultures, 2018), which adopted a participatory approach to reviewing terminology in the museum field. Another notable achievement is the conscious effort made to depict the long history of colonialism in the Netherlands and its ongoing impact on the lives of the Dutch. This is achieved by

incorporating multiple perspectives, not only in the exhibition itself (Figure 2) but also in the process of reflection¹⁴ for future steps.



Figure 2 Visitors are invited to leave their input and feedback in the exhibition “Our Colonial Inheritance” .

Photograph by the author

Inclusive, Co-Curation Museum Activities Developing in the Rijksmuseum

The history of the Rijksmuseum as an institute starts in 1800 in the Hague (Nationale Konst-Gallerij), and officially opened in 1885 at the present location in Amsterdam. Rijksmuseum is the national museum of the Netherlands dedicated to Dutch arts and history. Located in Amsterdam, the museum’s collection has been built up through purchases and donations. When it was established in 1885, the Rijksmuseum brought together holdings from various sources to form its major collections, with a large portion of its holdings coming from the wealthy elite. Currently, the museum has 8,000 objects of art and history on display out of a total collection of 1 million objects spanning the years 1200 to 2000.

14 CO-LAB—Afterlives of Slavery: reflecting the collaborative process of creating the Afterlives of Slavery exhibition, Tropenmuseum, <https://catalogue.boekman.nl/pub/P21-0269.pdf>, 2024/1/31.

As a national institution positioning itself as the “Dutch Museum of History and Art,” it has undergone several transformations over the past 200 years to serve the changing Dutch society better. In the 2010s, the Rijksmuseum was closed for a period of ten years from 2003 to 2013. In addition to the restoration and architectural plans, this ten-year closure was also an important period for the Rijksmuseum to shift its model and become “a museum of and for everyone”.¹⁵ According to the curators of the Rijksmuseum (personal communications, December 10, 2019; March 10, 2023), during this time, they were able to collaborate with different departments to develop methods for engaging with people from diverse backgrounds, with varying levels of training, education, and perspectives. As a result of these efforts, the museum now has a permanent chronological presentation that combines objects and paintings from the different departments. The Rijksmuseum shifted its vision to “link individuals with art and history”, and the most significant change made during the renovation of 2003-2013 was the introduction of this permanent presentation. Instead of presenting various art forms separately (painting, sculpture, applied arts, etc.), visitors are now guided through a chronological circuit that combines painting, sculpture, applied arts, and historical objects. This approach provides an overview of Dutch art and history from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

These changes have led to the museum gaining a much broader understanding of the importance of including different perspectives to achieve equity in historical narratives. After the Rijksmuseum shifted its vision to “link individuals with art and history”¹⁶ and reopened in April 2013, the work methods have continued to evolve in various exhibitions such as *Good Hope: South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600* (held from February 17 to May 21, 2017), *Slavery* (held from May 18 to August 29, 2021), and *Revolusi: Indonesia Independent* (held

15 Vision and mission, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/about-us/what-we-do/vision-and-mission>, 2024/1/31.

16 Vision and Mission, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/about-us/what-we-do/vision-and-mission>, 2024/1/31.

from February 11 to June 5, 2022) (personal communication, March 10, 2023). This transformation has allowed for the inclusion of different perspectives in the Rijksmuseum.

Slavery Exhibition-Looking Ten True Stories Through Many Voices

There are several famous slavery museums around the world, such as the International Slavery Museum located in Liverpool, UK, as well as numerous exhibitions in museums that specifically address the topic of slavery. So, what sets the slavery exhibition in the Rijksmuseum apart and makes it special: The author would like to focus on the approaches taken by the Rijksmuseum and how it has evolved as a national museum through this process.¹⁷ By adopting an inclusive and co-curated approach to museum activities, the Rijksmuseum aims to achieve a higher level of excellence in its exhibitions, thereby “Doing History” in a more impactful manner.

In February 2017, the Rijksmuseum announced that it would host an exhibition on slavery. While it is not the first exhibition on slavery in the Netherlands,¹⁸ it was the first time that the Rijksmuseum featured such an exhibition, which attracted attention. For example, “Skills, Training and Knowledge Transfer: traditional and emerging heritage professions” a document analyzed by Dr J. A. van Lakerveld, et al. (2017), was published in one of the meetings at the Council of the European Union. The purpose of this meeting was to investigate skills, training, and

17 The author was unable to visit the exhibition due to the broader measures implemented by the Japanese Government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this review article analyses research data primarily based on interviews and reports collected from December 2019 to March 2023, as well as the online exhibition version.

18 Ariese, C. E. has collected recent decolonial engagements that have taken place within the cultural realm in Amsterdam, and has pointed out that “slavery” has become a focus for contemporary decolonial engagements, leading cultural institutions such as museums to participate in the festival in various ways (2021: 123-129).

knowledge transfer in the heritage professions in Europe. In this document, the Rijksmuseum's slavery exhibition is highlighted as an exemplary case where the concept is developing through audience engagement, involvement, co-creation, and empowerment. This is seen as a positive approach to exhibition design and implementation (p. 6).¹⁹

The exhibition is about 10 different lives (Table 1) in the period of slavery, told from different perspectives, such as the people who benefited from it, suffered from it, or resisted it, rather than a simple dualistic perspective. The exhibition exhibited objects, paintings, and archival sources which was done by adopting a range of methods of interpretation, such as using maps, and oral histories to recreate experiences of lives. The objects were gathered together by international effort,²⁰ and at the end of the exhibition, visitors were invited to join the “Look at Me Now” project²¹ which was organised by two artists David Bade and Tirzo Martha, both from Curacao's Instituto Buena Bista, to give expression to their own stories through the ten new artworks. The whole exhibition and especially the reflection part at the end of Rijksmuseum's exhibition with multiple perspectives does not insist on giving the audience an answer but provides materials that allow the museum to serve as a field for thinking. Moreover, the exhibition presented ten stories, each of which is narrated through an audio tour by a person who shares a deep connection with the individual in question. This not only immersed visitors in the past and present but also allows them to experience a profound “sense of time” from various perspectives. As Sint Nicolaas (2021: 17) mentioned:

In an effort to do justice to these many voices, we have opted to have each of the

19 Skills, Training and Knowledge Transfer: traditional and emerging heritage professions, Universiteit Leiden, https://ockham-ips.nl/Portals/57/OpenContent/Files/4902/Emerging_Heritage_Professions_2017_B084.pdf, 2024/1/31.

20 Slavery exhibition at Rijksmuseum finally opens its doors, Dutch Culture, <https://dutchculture.nl/en/news/slavery-exhibition-rijksmuseum-finally-opens-it-doors>, 2024/1/31.

21 Look at Me Now, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zien-en-doen/tentoonstellingen/afgelopen/slavernij/lamn>, 2024/1/31.

ten stories told by means of an audio tour by people who feel a close bond to that specific person: In this way, we show how our society today is made up of the descendants of the people from back then.

Table 1 10 different lives exhibited in different perspectives by author according to Rijksmuseum (2021).

Story Name	Basic Storyline	Guided tour by
João	Enslaved man. Dutch colonized part of the South American country of Brazil.	Actress Joy Delima
Wally	Enslaved men. Surinamese plantation.	former world champion kickboxer Remy Bonjasky
Oopjen	Wealth in the Dutch Republic. People who benefited from the system in many ways.	Rijksmuseum director Taco Dibbits
Paulus	Young Black servant Africa origins in a Dutch household.	Researcher Annemieke van der Vegt
Van Bengalen	Enslaved people by the Dutch East India Company or its employees and transported to Batavia, the Banda Islands in the Moluccas and the Cape in what is now South Africa.	Vinod Subramaniam
Surapati	Enslaved servant waged war on the Dutch East India Company and became Indonesian warfighter.	Media scientist and lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam Reza Kartosen-Wong
Sapali	Enslaved women, people on the plantations fled to build communities away from the oppressive colonial society. From Africa to Suriname.	Sisters Susi and Simba Mosis
Tula	Enslaved people who tried to change the colonial system from the inside. Curaçao.	Arthur Kibbelaar, Strategic Advisor for Diversity & Inclusion of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Dirk van Hogendorp	White Europeans, abolitionist, and slaverholder.	Gijs Stork, whose ancestors include both plantation owners and abolitionists.
Lohkay	Enslaved women, fought again and again for her own freedom.	Jazz pianist Anastacia Larmonie

Regarding the audio tour, according to the curator of the Rijksmuseum (email correspondence with author, April 18, 2024) stated that in order to establish a stronger connection with the present, the museum sought out 10 audio guides

who had a personal connection to the 10 historical figures. The selection of these individuals was made by the museum, based on their network and sometimes by chance. The texts for the audio guides were prepared by the educational department in close collaboration with the guides. The guides were also involved in other activities related to the exhibition, such as talk shows, the opening ceremony, and interviews with newspapers. This allowed them to become an integral part of the overall production process and enabled the Rijksmuseum to reach a wider audience.

The slavery exhibition is the result of four years of in-depth research conducted by four main curators. According to Sint Nicolaas (personal communication, March 10, 2023), the intention was to form a diverse team.²² The basic strategy to actively include diverse perspectives in the process and discussions of this exhibition involved the establishment of a Think Tank, a Special Working Group, and an Advisory Group. These groups consisted of expert academic researchers and staff from other museums. Numerous workshops and meetings were conducted to facilitate this process, and always left the room that would lead to critical reflection.

“...people in many capacities engaged in dialogue around diverse themes. Every department of the museum was involved, from management to security, personnel, and communications. The resulting plans for the exhibition were discussed internally with staff and externally with Friends of the Rijksmuseum and many other stakeholders. Sometimes these were groups who were already in significant agreement; on other occasions, these were groups that had not previously reflected together on how to represent this complex, controversial history.” (Sint Nicolaas, 2021: 9)

²² Curators of the Slavery Exhibition, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/past/slavery/curators>, 2024/1/31.

After the Slavery Exhibition

The Rijksmuseum has embraced an inclusive and co-curated approach to its museum activities, as previously mentioned. An exemplar of this approach is the “Doing History” initiative following the slavery exhibition, which aims to foster a more impactful engagement with historical narratives. While the slavery exhibition remains accessible on the Rijksmuseum’s website, its influence extends beyond the digital realm. Elements of the exhibition have been integrated into the museum’s permanent collection and have also resonated outside the museum’s walls. Moreover, the exhibition serves as a catalyst for dialogue, with plans for extending and evolving these conversations beyond the exhibition’s duration.

Extra Museum Labels

Rijksmuseum has added 77 museum labels to paintings and objects in permanent exhibition, which examine their connections to Dutch colonial slavery. These labels delve into the intricate connections between these artworks and Dutch colonial slavery. Some narratives recount the harrowing experiences of individuals who, under Dutch dominion, endured enslavement and were subjected to forced labor, tragically reduced to the status of mere commodities. Others shed light on individuals who derived profit from the institution of slavery or bravely voiced opposition against it.²³

The museum labels are compiled into a booklet, offered free of charge at the museum and can also be downloaded from the Rijksmuseum’s website. This accessible resource allows visitors to further engage with the narratives presented in the museum’s exhibits, both during their visit and afterwards. By providing this booklet in physical and digital formats, the Rijksmuseum aims to ensure that

23 Rijksmuseum & Slavery, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/past/rijksmuseum-and-slavery>, 2024/1/31.

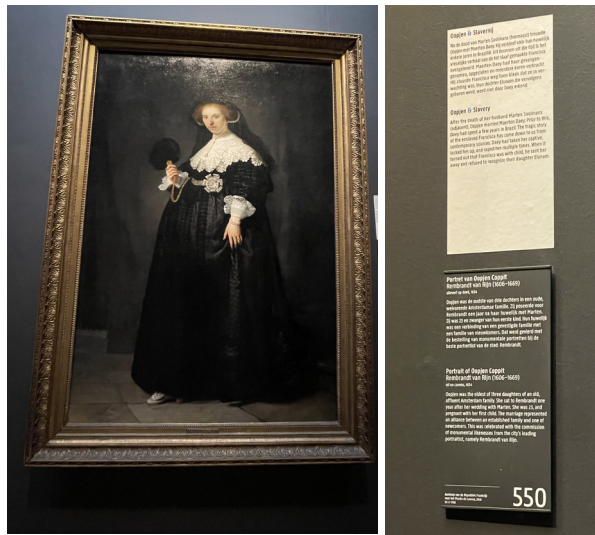


Figure 3 & 4

Two museum labels accompany the Portrait of Oopjen Coppit. The white label positioned above is an additional museum label specifically addressing the painting's connection to past enslavement, while the black label below represents the preexisting label associated with the artwork.

Photograph by the author

individuals have convenient access to the additional information and perspectives offered by the museum labels, thus fostering ongoing reflection and dialogue about Dutch colonial history.

According to the curator of the Rijksmuseum (personal communications, March 10, 2023), this process aims to carefully assess the available information and, wherever feasible, integrate new insights into the museum's exhibits. By doing so, the Rijksmuseum seeks to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of the Netherlands' complex historical narrative, thereby striving to do greater justice to its multifaceted past.

These additional museum labels are not intended as a permanent addition; after two years, the information from the 'slavery labels' will be integrated into the

regular labels.

This initiative enhances the museum experience and serves as a poignant reminder of the nuanced and often overlooked facets of Dutch colonial history. By implementing these labels, the Rijksmuseum enables visitors to contemplate the significance of museums that may have initially failed to recognize these connections (the original label), juxtaposed with the efforts of museums today to shed light on previously unnoticed aspects such as the legacy of slavery (the slavery label). This act underscores the evolving role of museums in fostering critical reflection and confronting historical truths (Figure 3 & 4).

Traveling Poster Exhibition

The United Nations Outreach Programme on the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery, in collaboration with the Rijksmuseum, and with the support of the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations and the Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in New York, hosted an exhibition titled “Slavery: Ten True Stories of Dutch Colonial Slavery.” This special edition of the Slavery exhibition was on display in the United Nations Visitors’ Lobby from 27 February to 30 March 2023. Additionally, a poster version of the exhibition is available for display at other UN offices worldwide until 31 December 2024.²⁴

The exhibition comprised fourteen posters, which are downloadable from the Rijksmuseum’s website, allowing users to print them in their preferred size and material. These posters feature ten personal stories, three introductory posters, and one world map. Each poster is equipped with a QR code that directs visitors to the Rijksmuseum website, where they can access audio stories, oral sources, poems, and music related to the exhibition, as well as a 360-degree view of the exhibition

24 Outreach Programme on the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/rememberslavery/exhibit>, 2024/1/31.

rooms and objects. An open InDesign file is also available upon request for those who wish to contribute to the exhibition.²⁵

The exhibition encouraged all interested parties to contribute objects, stories, or songs related to these historical events in their respective countries. This inclusive approach invites organizers to add local stories to the exhibition, enriching its depth and bringing greater meaning to this traveling exhibition, which seeks to connect with the origins of its narratives. As the Rijksmuseum pointed out, the aim of the exhibition “serves as a bridge to a future of universal recognition, reflection, and meaning”,²⁶ making it a catalyst for fostering dialogue and understanding across borders. Through the collective sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences, the exhibition can be expected to inspire empathy, promote awareness, and encourage ongoing discussions about the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

Exhibition Making—Inclusive, Co-Curation Museum Activities as an Approach

The development of inclusive and co-curated museum activities as an approach to decolonization in exhibition-making in the Netherlands can be traced back to the 2000s, as Ariese (2020) provides a comprehensive overview of decolonizing activities in Amsterdam over the last decade, highlighting how museums were explicitly called upon to confront their colonial legacies. The case study discussed in this article is emblematic of this broader movement, demonstrating how museums engage with their colonial pasts and work towards more inclusive and equitable representations of history.

As one of the well-known quotes by historian Yuval Noah Harar:

25 Rijksmuseum travelling poster-exhibition, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/past/slavery/rijksmuseum-travelling-poster-exhibition>, 2024/4/15.

26 Same as footnote 25.

This is the best reason to learn history: not in order to predict the future, but to free yourself of the past and imagine alternative destinies. Of course this is not total freedom – we cannot avoid being shaped by the past. But some freedom is better than none.

To learn Slavery history and to think about colonial slavery is a way to help people gain a better understanding of today's Dutch society. However, as all systems are built with the past.

The goal is to uncover an approach that challenges existing stereotypes and allows museums to present local and individual perspectives. Additionally, the article reviews the movement in the Netherlands and explores the potential for implementing an approach that embraces multiple perspectives.

Even for writers working in academia, we have to be aware of how we classify the things we see in the museum, not by the stereotypes but rather by truly considering them. Exhibitions with multiple perspectives, such as in the Rijksmuseum and Tropenmuseum, are providing an opportunity to look at and ask basic questions of objects and the shared past. Rather than providing definitive answers, exhibitions that showcase multiple perspectives provide materials that create a safe space for contemplation and understanding the “diverse truths” of history.

When exhibition making through inclusive, co-curation museum activities as a methodology for understanding diverse perspectives, it is necessary to constantly self-reflect on the fixed concepts that have been cultivated up to now and to view oneself and others objectively. However, when incorporating a wide range of participation to practice inclusive and collaborative museums, it is expected that disagreements and conflicts will arise because the tolerance for diverse ways of thinking differs from person to person. How can museums solve such issues: The solutions should be developed case by case, and sometimes, it requires organizational reform work to change power dynamics within institutions or staff training, including leveraging of digital technology and new media (Coombes

& Phillips, 2020). With this perspective in mind, we will consider sustainable methodologies for museums to influence change towards a fair and just society. Another common issue related to the movement is the prolonged time required to gather and develop perspectives through inclusive, co-curated museum activities. This can pose a challenge for current museum management practices, particularly in regards to the constraint of annual budgets.

Dialogue is not limited to conversations between people; it can also occur within a museum. It is a challenge that curator willing to share this storytelling power with different perspectives with people and accept that limitation of themselves and well noticed that the museum is not a neutral space as they are producing a version of truth about the culture it represents. But telling people that objects exhibited call be told from different perspectives. Museums provide a space for individuals to engage in dialogue, enabling them to recognize their own perceptions and unconscious biases. By leveraging the power of museum collections, we can explore history from various perspectives and shed light on current situations, issues, and limitations within the museum setting. Through the collection's influence, museums can aim to confront the visualized "reality" and provide hints and opportunities for individuals to engage in a dialogue about the future. However, museums also need to be aware that once objects go on public display, they become part of a "collective memory" in some way.

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