

Centraal Museum

Symposium – ‘The studio model; participation in the museum’

March 2014 – Edwin Jacobs

Introduction

Participation and education are spearheads of the Centraal Museum's Mission Statement. Three years ago the Centraal Museum introduced a new exhibition concept: the Studio. Over the next two years the Mondriaan Fund is providing financial support for four Studios.

The Studio is a model in which from the very beginning of the process of organising an exhibition, we explore how the visitor can play an active role in experiencing the exhibition. We have developed Studios in the following exhibitions: Fashion for Thought/Alexander van Slobbe, Rietveld's Universe, Bloemaert, God Save the Queen, Blue Jeans, and Peace Was Made Here – The Treaty of Utrecht 1713. In these exhibitions visitors had an opportunity to make one of Alexander van Slobbe's designs in the dressmaking studio, to build one of Rietveld's ingenious designs, to experience the punk years of the 1980s through interactive installations, and to develop a greater understanding of the interests of the eighteenth-century diplomats at the Treaty of Utrecht by entering into negotiations themselves and exploring contemporary approaches to peaceful coexistence.

The combination of exhibition and Studio in a single concept is unique: the activities take place in the exhibition itself rather than in separate education spaces, as in other museums. In this way the exhibition has a more far-reaching significance because visitors participate actively in the exhibition/Studio and make a connection with their own knowledge and interests. Our starting point is always the content of the exhibition, the target audience and core message in combination with specific learning outcomes in relation to the exhibition's theme. Key concepts are knowledge and comprehension, skills, attitudes and values, pleasure, inspiration, activity and behaviour. Our findings show that a visit to the Studio results in a heightened intention to learn and a more positive visitor experience, leading to increased repeat visits. The Studios also encourage interaction between visitors of all ages. Learning outcomes are continually evaluated during the exhibition period. Over the next few years the museum will continue to explore the Studio model and opportunities for new educational partnerships outside the museum, including internationally.

Aim

Led by Edwin Jacobs the focus this day will be about exchange of ideas followed by an active workshop lead by the team of Barbur for participants in the museum and develop new insights. We have two concrete goals.

To organise a conference (september 2014) about new ways of working in museums, to share our experience of the Studio model, discuss and inspire new approaches. The title 'conference' could be misleading. We are aiming on an active sit in.

To organise a workshop as a part of the conference. The workshop is led by the team of Barbur from Jerusalem.

Specific concrete aims:

- 2 ideas that create a participative museum;
- 2 ideas for participation based on a work of art or historic item;
- 2 ideas for 'do it' after you've visited the museum;
- 2 ideas for involving visitors in a positive way with the museum; inspire and stimulate creative thinking by the visitor (for the museum).

In the workshops will be room for discussion.

Who is the symposium aimed at?

The symposium brings together experts to discuss the future role of museums.

Audience/participants: students and lecturers from the Reinwardt Academie, Sandberg Instituut, MA courses of the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht and the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, museum studies and curatorial students; grant-giving bodies and foundations; directors, curators, education and marketing staff of other museums.

Speakers

Speakers will be:

- Laurent Lebon, director of Centre Pompidou Metz. Lebon's museum policy is about the basic policy of Centre Pompidou in the 70's;
- Noortje Marres: senior lecturer Goldsmith's London: mapping participatory museums and social effects;
- Hans Ulrich Obrist: director of Exhibitions at the Serpentine Gallery: Do it, a long term project based on do it yourself by professionals and the audience;
- Ronit Eden: curator and architect: participatory based on urgency and reflecting the policy of Barbur, Jerusalem.
- Maria Hlavajova is the founding director of Basis voor Actuele Kunst, Utrecht (NL). Future Vocabularies: collections and co-participation of artists and audiences.

Reader: partnership with Metropolis M

Our experience is that such events, including the annual Museum congress, are mainly attended by marketing and education colleagues. By working together with the artmagazine Metropolis M we hope also to appeal to curators, museum directors and other art experts. Metropolis M sees the partnership as an opportunity to take a fresh look at its own product.

DRAFT: THE MUSEUM AS WORKSHOP: A READER
March 2014

While art museums are flourishing as tourist attractions and breaking visitor records year after year, their legitimacy is nonetheless a topic of heated debate. In political and cultural circles, the future of the museum in our rapidly changing society is in question. Continuing financial support, private or public, can no longer be taken for granted. Museums are expected to attract a broader visitor base and thereby develop new, independent sources of income.

There are also conceptual reasons for museums to reconsider their own operation. Museums today are working towards a conceptual realignment, away from inherited twentieth-century models with their underlying modernism. Furthermore, many museums have proven unable to fully adapt to globalization and the resulting demographic changes in Western cities. Museums are searching for appropriate ways to echo, within their own walls, the growth of the multicultural society in their cities, and to promote mutual understanding among people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Thus far, many museums have responded to these issues by mounting a larger number of exhibitions. Others have broadened their range of activities and invested in an interdisciplinary profile with numerous cross-over events. Still other museums have sought realignment through new coalitions that allow them to contribute collectively to political and social debate.

The Central Museum has chosen to invest in a programme focused on the relationship between the artist and the public: the museum as workshop.

In this programme, the museum presents itself primarily as a site of production rather than reflection. Not only do artists use the museum as a studio, creating works of art there, but visitors are also given the opportunity to experience art in a new way, learning by doing.

The goal of this reader is to foster debate on this workshop model from a broader perspective. What are the pros and cons of striving towards a more participatory museum experience? Can art museums learn from best practices in other disciplines? Time and again in recent decades, artists have raised the issue of participation. What lessons can be drawn from those experiences? How do artists look at the participatory experience of art in an institutional context like that of the museum?

In this reader, authors from diverse fields discuss arguments for and against the museum as workshop. In a special series of columns, various authors have the opportunity to spotlight their alternative conceptions of the museum.

Planning

March - May: organisation, interviews and Metropolis M reader

June: invitation, production Reader

September: conference

Future development

In recent years the Centraal Museum has employed the Studio model to involve visitors actively in the exhibition content. This has reaped significant rewards for visitors and for the museum. The museum will continue to redefine its role over the next few years in the light of Steven Corner's *Rethinking the Museum*.

We will continue to explore the possibilities of the Studio model and focus on developing the talents of visitors and the Studio staff, the professional development of artists and designers and our own staff. We are exploring new national and international partnerships.