

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024

(Re)production

(Re)production

(Re)production

(Re)production

(Re)production

(Re)production

(Re)production

(Re)production

(Re)production

AM X Journal



Table of Contents

About AMJournal	4
<hr/>	
<i>Diriyah Star Night</i>	6
<hr/>	
Editor's Note — Emma van Bijnen, Tom van der Molen and Liselore Tissen	8
<hr/>	
The Dialogue	10
Carlos Bayod Lucini, Adam Lowe, Tom van der Molen and Liselore Tissen	
<hr/>	
<i>Quantum Cat</i>	22
<hr/>	
Short Essays	24
Reproduction and Authenticity in Museums	26
Alyxandra Westwood and Yophi Ignacia	
The Plaster Trace — Dick van Broekhuizen	46
How We Reproduce Values	66
Emma van Bijnen and Rebecca Venema	
Dickinson (2019-2021) — Chiara Luigina Dosithea Ravinetto	84
Reproducing Traces of Trauma — Amy Louise Stenvert	100
<hr/>	
<i>Bee</i>	116
<hr/>	
The Visual Essay	118
Drawn to Old Masters — Tom van der Molen	
<hr/>	
<i>Garden of Aiden</i>	154
<hr/>	
The Long Essays	156
Reproduction and Belarusian National Identity	158
Dzianus Filipchyk and Anton Petrukhin	
Reproduction of Christianity in Rap Music	184
Lola Abbas	

Framing Chinese Architecture as Art	204
Yuansheng Luo and Thomas Coomans	
Assassin's Creed II: Freedom in Videogames	230
Roos van Nieuwkoop	
Intentional Olfactory Reproductions	248
Sofia Collette Ehrich	
<hr/>	
<i>Shard Transformation</i>	276
<hr/>	
The Polyphonic Object	278
Marian Markelo aka Okomfo Nana Efua, Boris van Berkum, Annemarie de Wildt, Markus Balkenhol, Martje Onikoyi	
<hr/>	
<i>Letters from Nature</i>	302
<hr/>	
The Polylogue	304
Jasmijn Blom, Yahaira Brito Morfe, Kim Dankoor, Darek Mercks, Peter Peskens	
<hr/>	
<i>The Vegetable Vendetta</i>	324
<hr/>	
About the Contributors	326
<hr/>	
Editorial Board	330
<hr/>	
Special Thanks	331
<hr/>	
For More On...	332
<hr/>	
<i>The Butterfly Paintings</i>	334
<hr/>	
Upcoming Editions	336
<hr/>	

About AMJournal

Amsterdam Museum Journal (AMJournal) is a (diamond) open access, peer reviewed research journal that is published twice per year on the Amsterdam Museum website (amsterdammuseum.nl/journals).

As the city museum of the eclectic capital of the Netherlands, the art and objects we show, the stories we host, and the societal issues that occupy us are complex by nature. This complexity requires a polyphonic approach; not one field or research can, or indeed should, tell the whole story. As such, rather than disciplinary, AMJournal is thematically oriented. Each calendar year, we publish editions that center on themes relevant to the cultural domain, public discourse and urban spaces, such as *War, Conflict and the City* (edition 1; October 2023), *Deconstructing Gentrification* (edition 2; July 2024), *(Re)production* (edition 3; current edition), or *Co-creating our Cities* (edition 4; forthcoming).

Whilst AMJournal strictly publishes contributions that meet its high standards, the aim is to make research publications accessible for both readers and authors. AMJournal therefore publishes peer reviewed contributions by scholars in all stages of their research careers, from outstanding master students to the most lauded full professor (and anyone in between).

In addition, we publish essays and research papers by authors from all disciplines, from legal scholars to sociologists and from historians to economists. By centering on a theme rather than a discipline, complex issues are approached from various angles; demonstrating that it is through a polyphony of perspectives that we advance academic discourses. In short, multidisciplinary research is not merely encouraged, it is at the core of the Amsterdam Museum Journal.

To support scientific multivocality and offer a platform for various disciplines, AMJournal

publishes various types of contributions:

1. *The Short Essays*: short form texts in which authors succinctly defend topical thesis statements with proofs.
2. *The Long Essays*: long(er) texts in which authors defend topical thesis statements with proofs.
3. *The Empirical Papers*: qualitative and/or quantitative data analyses, or research papers.
4. *The Dialogue*: a conversation between the guest editor and another renowned scholar in their field on questions relevant to the edition's theme.
5. *The Polylogue*: a thematic roundtable conversation with expert voices from various fields, from academic to artists, and from journalists to activists.
6. *The Polyphonic Object*: short complementary analyses by scholars from different disciplines of a single thematic object from the Amsterdam Museum collection.
7. *The Visual Essay*: a printed exhibition in which the analyses are based on images, which are then analyzed empirically and/or by means of a theoretical framework.

All contributions are published in English and written according to strict author guidelines with the broader academic- and expert community in mind. Each AMJournal edition and each separate contribution is freely downloadable and shareable as a [PDF-file](#). To further aid accessibility, for both authors and readers, AMJournal does not charge readers any subscription- or access fees, nor does it charge authors Article Processing Charges (APCs).

AMJournal is governed by an internal board of editors, which is complemented by an extensive multidisciplinary external board of editors. For each thematic edition, a guest editor joins the internal board of editors to provide guidance.



Amsterdam Museum Journal

For the third edition of the AMJournal, the editorial board invited artist Jeroen van der Most to contribute to the visual layer. Since 2010, Van der Most has been a pioneer in the digital arts. In close collaboration with the artist, the design team selected particular works from his repertoire that signify the possibilities, risks, and debates regarding the use of technology in the art world. The result is a diverse set of artistic interventions throughout the whole issue; stimulating a critical yet open discussion about reproductions.

Van der Most explains his work as follows:

"I explore technologies like AI (Artificial Intelligence) and quantum computing to challenge the essence of both art and tech. While technology is often used to exploit nature; in my work it breeds deeper connections with the natural world. I use AI to show beauty from both long lost histories as well as distant futures. In addition, I explore the 'post-AI' world; where technology transcends its role as a human tool and evolves into an independent force - urging us to rethink what it means to be human."

jeroenvandermost.com

The Diriyah Star Night



Amsterdam Museum Journal

Artist Jeroen van der Most is known for his Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated interpretations of Old Masters. One morning he made a startling discovery: a painting called the Diriyah Star Night was attributed to him in Saudi media. More astonishingly, the work had sold for a staggering \$3.2 million. The catch? Van der Most had never created the painting, nor had he ever set foot in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia

Intrigued rather than outraged, Van der Most saw this discovery as an opportunity instead of a threat. He embarked on a journey to Saudi Arabia to investigate the story, together with Dutch journalist Lex Boon. In their search for the truth, they managed to get in touch with a Saudi inventor who was managing the communications about the painting for its buyer; a Saudi princess. In a surreal turn of events, the inventor not only showed Van der Most the painting but allowed him to sign it, effectively authenticating it as his own work.

The Riddle

It's a story that seems to be a mirror for our times, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of art in the digital age. A few questions that still keep Van der Most busy are:

- What is the true meaning of this story?
- Can a 'fake' artwork indeed turn into something 'real'? Or is it merely another layer being added to an already complex artistic fabrication?
- Could it be, that in a world where anyone

can reproduce a masterpiece through AI, the only thing left to make an artwork unique and valuable is the story behind it, marked by its provenance, its mysteries, and its ability to provoke thoughts and discussions?

In his search for interpretations of this story, Van der Most invites everyone to reflect on its meaning and the questions posed above via jeroen@jeroenvandermost.com.

Longreads

This is only a short summary of the events that occurred. You can find links to longreads and a (Dutch) podcast series through this link: jeroenvandermost.com/the-diriyah-star-night



Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present the third issue of the Amsterdam Museum Journal (AMJournal), which explores the pervasive theme of reproduction. This omnipresent phenomenon intricately shapes our everyday lives in myriad ways.

In this special issue of AMJournal, we deepen our understanding of how reproduction is an inherent part of urban life. Reproductions are woven into our cultural, historical, and social fabric; we engage with them through videogames, fashion, design, rituals, music, and more. Reproductions often provoke critical discussions on opportunities and risks, making us question how we value objects and processes and what it means to be authentic.

In this issue, we present diverse perspectives, case studies, and research projects addressing this complex and urgent theme. Insights from various fields and domains are presented to you through (visual) essays, empirical papers, object reflections, and expert conversations. Ranging from research on recreating historical fragrances to pastiche in hip-hop, from dialogues with experts who have been replicating art for more than ten years to a round table discussion about the significance and impact of sampling, imitation, and AI in music. By examining the effects of reproduction on our perception, urban environment, senses, art, heritage, technology, and culture, AMJournal #3 presents a deep appreciation of how we engage with the act of recreating, now, in the past, and the future. This journal aims to serve as an essential resource for transforming the

negative perceptions surrounding reproduction, as it is through reproduction that we can sustain the creation of meaning.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all contributors and our readers for their engagement with this significant theme. Your involvement has been inspiring, resulting in the most comprehensive issue of AMJournal to date. Together, let us embark on a journey of exploration and inquiry into the roles, functions, and effects of reproduction.

Yours sincerely,

Liselore Tissen
Guest Editor

Tom van der Molen
Guest Editor

Emma van Bijnen
Editor-in-Chief

The Dialogue

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024



Carlos Bayod Lucini

Dr. Carlos Bayod Lucini, Project Director at the Factum Foundation, specializes in using digital technology for conserving and studying Cultural Heritage. He collaborates with leading museums and archeological sites globally, speaks frequently on digital preservation and facsimiles, and has taught at institutions such as Columbia University's MS in Historic Preservation program.

Adam Lowe

Adam Lowe, director of Factum Arte and founder of Factum Foundation, is a pioneer in digital preservation. Trained in Fine Art at Oxford and RCA, he established Factum Arte in 2001 and the Factum Foundation in 2009. A Columbia University professor and Royal Designer for Industry, his global projects and writings explore originality, authenticity, and cultural heritage preservation.

Tom van der Molen

Drs. Tom van der Molen is a PhD candidate in Art History, as well as senior curator and Deputy Head of Collections and Research at the Amsterdam Museum. He specializes in uncovering untold histories, focusing on migration, identity, and social change, and how these forces have shaped Amsterdam's evolving urban landscape. He is also a writer and guest lecturer at universities and cultural institutions.

Liselore Tissen

Dr. Liselore Tissen, post-doctoral researcher at Leiden University and Delft University of Technology, specializes in art reproduction technologies, ethics, and interdisciplinary research. Her Cum Laude doctoral work (2024) explored the impact of 3D-printed art on conservation and museum practice. She coordinates ethics and digital humanities at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Arts and Science.

A Dialogue on Art Reproductions between Carlos Bayod Lucini, Adam Lowe, Tom van der Molen and Liselore Tissen

In the Dialogue, AMJournal facilitates a ‘guest editor conversation’ in the form of an in-depth interview between the guest editor(s) and (another) renowned expert(s) in the field. For this edition, guest editors Tom van der Molen and Liselore Tissen invited Factum Foundation’s Carlos Bayod Lucini and Adam Lowe to discuss how digital techniques and reproductions can enable research to and conservation of cultural heritage. Tom van der Molen explains:

“With the Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation, Adam Lowe and Carlos Bayod Lucini aim to create high-resolution, accurate digital documentation of cultural heritage sites and artworks, to ensure their longevity and conservation for future generations. One exemplary case is Rembrandt’s Anatomy lesson of Dr. Deijman, part of Amsterdam Museum’s collection. Besides digitally visualizing the painting, a high-resolution 3D facsimile was made to replace the fragile original during Fondazione Prada’s Human Brains exhibition during the 2022 Venice Biennale. As we believe their dedication to working, thinking, and exploring the possibilities of facsimiles can provide us with valuable insights into the philosophical and practical challenges they face, we were eager to invite Adam and Carlos for a conversation.”

TM: Adam Lowe and Carlos Bayod Lucini work at the Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation. The foundation, founded in 2009 by Adam, aims to create high-resolution, accurate digital documentation of cultural heritage sites and artworks worldwide. The documentation serves as a record for ensuring their longevity and conservation for future generations and can also be used to produce facsimiles that are indistinguishable from the originals – unlimitedly. One exemplary case is Rembrandt's *Anatomy lesson of Dr. Deijman*, part of the collection of the Amsterdam Museum (figure 1 and 2). The digital information is visualized in their multi-layer viewers, which are convenient interfaces that allow the user to interact with the painting and gain hitherto unseen insight into the surface and material properties of the painting. This is a welcome instrument for future research and conservation, as the damage the painting has suffered from the fire now becomes clearly visible. Moreover, besides digitally visualizing the painting, in this case, a high-resolution 3D facsimile was made as a stand-in for the original during the *Human Brains* exhibition at Fondazione Prada during the Venice Biennale of 2022.¹ The reproduction replaced the original and completed the exhibition's story while the original safely remained in Amsterdam. Since this is only one example of the countless projects Factum has completed over almost two decades, we wanted to speak to Adam and Carlos. We believe their dedication to working, thinking, and exploring the possibilities of facsimiles daily can provide us with valuable insights into the philosophical and practical challenges they face. We were eager to learn about the ideas, dilemmas, and possibilities

they envisioned in their art reproduction process.

LT: You work with reproductions of many different kinds. Can you explain a bit about the techniques you use?

AL: Factum's team bridges the gap between digital technicians and artisans, and physical technicians and artisans. It is this linking between the digital and physical that is critical. People still associate digitality with being virtual. However, you can have a digital object that is still physical - it just goes through different mediations and transformations.

Factum's international team includes professionals from very diverse backgrounds. Different skills are put to work together in projects that are essentially experimental. Every project requires a specific combination of digital technologies and traditional craft techniques. Nevertheless, conventional limits among fields are usually blurred. Technicians and artisans alike operate with both digital and physical matter, in a complex process of *mediation* from material to virtual (and vice versa); and from the original to its reproduction.

CBL: Most projects begin with the non-contact 2D/3D digitization of an original artifact, employing the best possible systems and methodologies available – usually adapted or developed by Factum for Cultural Heritage applications. What



Figure 1: Process of digital documentation of Rembrandt’s Anatomy lesson of Dr. Deijman: 2021. Photograph by: Liselore Tissen.



Figure 2: Process of digital documentation of Rembrandt’s Anatomy lesson of Dr. Deijman: 2021. Photograph by: Liselore Tissen.

follows is a digital process of transformation, from raw to usable data, for say, documentation or re-materialization. The digital data can then be printed or prototyped to become material again. From the prototype, a new series of physical processes based on manual skills produce the final facsimile.

So really, everything starts with the original; by recording the surface of an object we capture its digital data. That is where the essential information lays. In many cases the goal is not to create reproductions, but to create this database of information that allows us to see the originals in a new light, and that facilitates better access for researchers, scholars, and the public. Whether the original has a flat or (partly) raised surface, in any case our aim is always to capture them with the highest possible resolution and the closest possible correspondence to the original object. Once you have this data in your computer, you can then work with it in different ways. In some cases, we will employ it towards virtual documentation only. In other cases, it can evolve into a physical reproduction. But in all these cases, we work separately from the original. That is the radical leap that we at Factum propose.

TM: Could you give us an example of a project where you created this database and a reproduction?

AL: One of the most exemplary cases is a project we did with Liselore Tissen. It

involves *The Crucifixion of Christ by the Master of Lamentation in Lindau* (ca. 1425): a medieval panel painting showing the crucifixion of Christ on the cross, with Maria and St. John the Baptist mourning next to him. The panel is richly decorated, with angels catching Christ's blood in challises, a textured blue background and golden tendrils. However, the restorer of the panel discovered the blue background is not original (figure 3). Instead, it is a sixteenth-century overpaint that is currently covering the original, golden background (figure 4).

CBL: Here, the panel's materials pose a dilemma. Should that layer be removed, or should it be considered part of the painting's history; part of the complex subject it was before? To remove the blue azurite layer and restore the golden background is against conservation ethics, since it is an irreversible action and would remove a layer of historical material. However, with the shiny golden background and the more expressive pattern in the background, the panel suddenly makes a lot more sense. Now, imagine how magical the panel must have looked, with the gold reflecting the flickering candlelight that is contrasted by the blood of Christ, which has been painted in a more matte material. This is where Factum can offer a third option: to work through facsimiles in discerning these two scenarios.

AL: Liselore approached us to make reproductions to help with the final restoration decision. The reproductions would not only help the restorer and prevent damage to the original, but would also allow for a more democratic and inclusive discussion. We made a reproduction of the original before restoration and another reconstruction of

what the background might have looked like. The reconstructions do not only provide a better understanding of the panel's materials, but also offer the opportunity to see the panel in its original context - a church.

CBL: As a result, we could present to the public a reproduction of the painting in two alternative ways. This is a clear example of how reproduction can thus enable a contactless approach to preservation. This project exemplifies how digital technology can provoke a new way of approaching the conservation of a painting. The goal of this project was to make a facsimile of the painting in two versions. One as it is now, and the other

an interpretation of the way it must have looked before it underwent a radical change in appearance.

TM: What, then, is your ultimate goal with this, if it is not attempting to reach some form of originality? Is it to make people reflect on what is authentic, and what are copies?

CBL: In this case, the purpose is the process. Since you are not working with the original directly, you can propose not one hypothesis, but five or ten different hypotheses. Simultaneously, you never transform the original forever; everything you are doing is non-invasive. It enables us to bring back, for example, a texture that has disappeared over time. Of course, there are subjective decisions. But as severely changing an artwork is against the shared code of ethics in conservation, producing facsimiles offers a way to contribute to a more democratic discussion, and to communicate about the different approaches to conservation and restoration.

AL: Within most approaches to preservation, there is a notion of returning to the original. I think this approach to preservation gives rise to certain challenges. Which



Figure 3: Facsimile of the Master of the Lindau Lamentation, *Crucifixion with Mary and Saint John the Evangelist*, c. 1425, Museum Catherijneconvent, Utrecht, inv. no. ABM s34.

Photograph by: Oak Taylor-Smith for Factum Foundation.

bits of this painting are authentic? And which bits should we look at? One important thing our method demonstrates is that originality is a process. Simultaneously, the entire process involved in making something that is a reproduction of something else helps us to better understand its complexity.

Take for example the Black Paintings by Goya (figure 5-6). This is a series of paintings created by Goya as a part of his own intimate environment. They were originally part of his house on the outskirts of Madrid, a house that no longer exists. Now, they are presented in a very different way. They reside in the Museo Prado, in their own dedicated room.

CBL: We are now working with the Prado on a way to present them closer to how Goya would have intended. Because the order of the paintings matters, as well as the way the light interacted with them, or how the images talked to each other. By bringing something back to its original context – in this case, through a hypothetical reconstruction – we allow people to have a more authentic experience even though they are not facing the original. In some cases, facsimiles can help to bridge this gap between how artworks are presented nowadays in a museum versus how they might have been in the original architectural context.² This may never have been possible without the technology to record and reproduce these paintings.

AL: It is important to make a distinction between authenticity and originality. For me, that was a major point of transformation. One of my favorite experiences was when the newly discovered Caravaggio was displayed in the Museo Prado next to their restored Caravaggio, both protected in a dark room behind glass. Afterwards, Carlos and I went to a bar where we presented a facsimile of the painting both during (figure 7) and after (figure 8) restoration. The way people engaged with it was completely different to the way they engaged in the museum. Everyone was going up to it, tapping the surface, touching it, moving it, and the facsimiles totally came alive. For me, this is the goal of what we at Factum are doing: trying to give works of art enough breathing space to come back to life.



Figure 4: *Facsimile of the digitally restored Crucifixion.*
Photograph by: Oak Taylor-Smith for Factum Foundation.

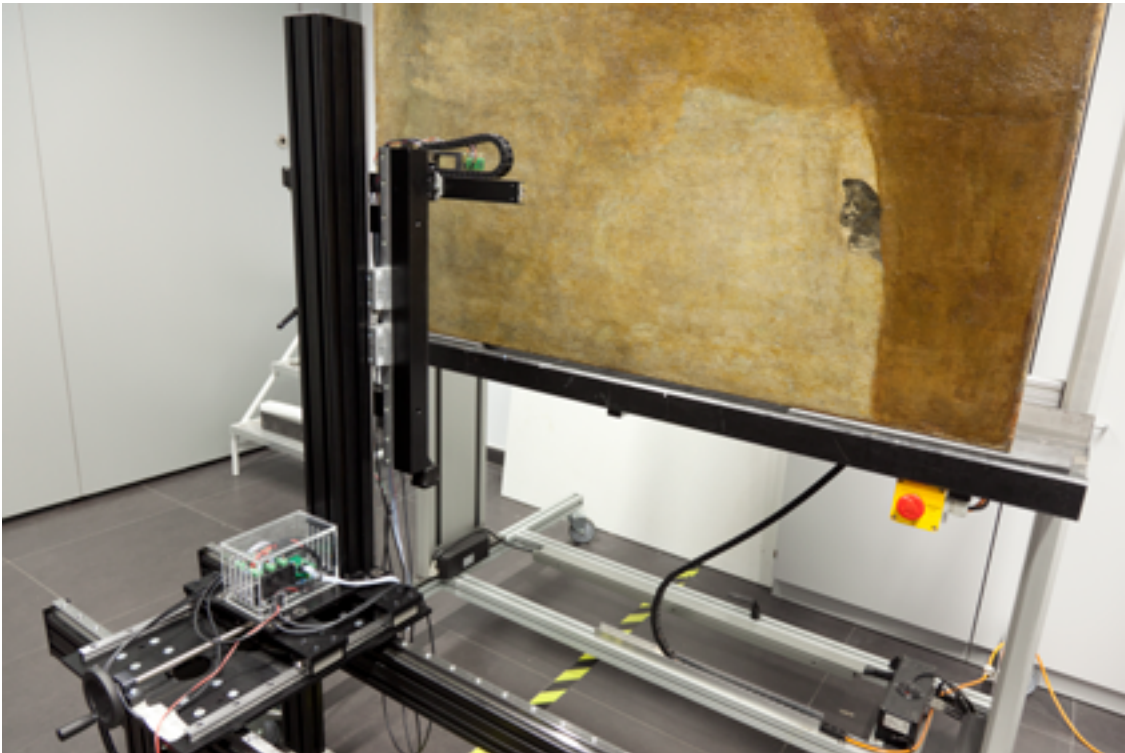


Figure 5: *The Lucida 3D Scanner recording the surface of The Drowning Dog (one of the Black Paintings originally in Goya’s house ‘la Quinta del Sordo’)*. Photograph by: Alicia Guirao del Fresno for Factum Arte.



Figure 6: *Facsimile edition of an original size detail of Francisco de Goya's The Drowning Dog*. Photograph by: Oak Taylor-Smith for Factum Foundation.

TM: As a curator, I think many of the existing concerns are about the aesthetical notion of an artwork, because in that aspect the hand of the artist is deemed important. But it seems that what you are doing is restoring all kinds of other layers of meaning to a painting.

AL: I think what Factum is doing makes the hand of the artist even more important, as we are drawing attention to the surface and to how the marks are made. Let's look at that thorny old issue of the aura, the subject of one of Walter Benjamin's most well-known essays, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935).³ In it, he expresses that art loses its "aura" (the magic the viewer feels when face to face with the original's materials, eds.) through mechanical or mass reproduction, and that through the loss of the ritual of making art, art becomes inherently political. However, I believe the aura is the surface. Reproductions, however good, rarely have the surface, unless it is added to it. Similarly, for countless original artworks we can no longer see the surface because they are either covered by bulletproof glass, or we are too far removed from them, or because they have been newly varnished – leaving us to no longer be able to see the hand of the artist. In a way, that is where our interest lies: how can we better represent the complex intricacies of the skin of works of art?



Figure 7: Facsimile of Caravaggio's *Ecce Homo* using the data recorded during the painting's restoration.

Photograph by: Oak Taylor-Smith for Factum Foundation.

LT: When I started my research people were quite hesitant to have their works reproduced. Have you seen this change over the years, and how do you see this evolve into the future?

AL: I think people are slow when it comes to confronting their prejudices and thinking about how to better engage with and study the world around us. Around 25 years ago, when I would talk about scanning an artwork and making a facsimile, people would be horrified. Now, people say: *"It's amazing what you can do; in the new context of this reproduction, this painting makes sense."* There are professional resistances. But history moves in various complex ways.

CBL: Whether you present to experts or to non-experts, the reactions we get to the reproduction of a painting are often still characterized by resistance. The reason for this, however, has changed: while some 10 or 20 years ago, the reason was that the reproduction supposedly undermined the value of the original; nowadays the usual reason for rejecting a reproduction is the opposite – they are simply too good, too close to the original. In any case, I would say the important thing is that this kind of digital technology, for recording and reproduction, is at the service of conservation. It can be integrated into the toolbox of the restorer, the conservator, or the curator. We are at that point, and it is an incredibly exciting point in historical terms.



Figure 8: Facsimile of Caravaggio's *Ecce Homo* after the painting's restoration.

Photograph by: Oak Taylor-Smith for Factum Foundation.

Endnotes

- 1 For more on the facisimiles made for Fondazione Prada's exhibition *Human Brains*, see Factum Foundation's website: factumfoundation.org/our-projects/digitisation/facsimiles-for-human-brains-it-begins-with-an-idea/
- 2 This has been done for example in the case of Rembrandt's painting 'The Anatomical Lesson of Dr. Deijman' (1656), of which only a fragment was saved after it got damaged in a fire. A reproduction of the painting is currently on display at Amsterdam Museum until April 2025.
- 3 Benjamin, Walter. 1935. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

The Quantum Cat



This art installation shows *Quantum Cat*. Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing, the cat reflects on some of the most important and polarized, ethical dilemmas of our time. Like the choice between the economy and the environment; or between safety and freedom.

The cat reflects in a specific way: from all perspectives at once. It keeps bringing forward a superposition of existing opinions regarding a dilemma. It shows us the complexity of ethical decision making and experiments with using the latest technologies in a de-polarizing way. It does this by showing us a spectrum of opinions, often other than our own.

Superposition

Quantum Cat is a digital being that was created based on quantum data. Measurements of the states of electrons in a quantum computer led to a random data stream, that decided the movements and variation in opinions of the cat. This is based on a phenomenon called 'superposition'; in which the state or position of tiny particles like electrons is undetermined, until measurements are done on them. It is as if such particles are in multiple states or positions at once. When measured, the electrons will take on an unpredictable final state or location.

The cat reflects on topics that are triggered by a system monitoring Dutch Twitter discussions. When freedom of speech for example, is discussed in the Twittersphere, it is likely that the cat will give ethical reflections on the subject. Tweets about the economy could trigger reflections on the choice between the economy and the environment. The actual texts the cat brings forward are written by an AI-system. No human wrote them, and they are not aimed to reflect the opinion of the human creators of the artwork. A custom methodology was developed for the project, in which AI impersonates a reincarnation of Socrates in the form of a cat, to create the final texts. A real-time computer system merges everything into the final digital cat, that occasionally reacts to the presence of spectators. This is made possible by a camera system that detects changes in the artwork's surroundings. Care is taken not to store any camera image data, so that the system in no

way implements any face- or body recognition techniques; and only uses crude, low-resolution camera input.

Schrödinger Cat

The artwork is inspired on the most famous thought experiment from quantum mechanics: the Schrödinger Cat, that was in a superposition state between life and death. With his contemporary version, artist Jeroen van der Most hopes to inspire thought about the rapidly developing fields of quantum computing and AI and reflect on the question whether computer-based systems could once be able to make ethical decisions...

Video

You can find a video about the project through this link:

<http://www.jeroenvandermost.com/quantum-cat>

Full project credits

Quantum Cat is an art installation by van der Most, built during an artist residency over the course of 2022 at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences' Responsible IT Research Group.

Project sparring partner

Yuri Westplat

Twitter monitoring system

Maarten Groen

Quantum data

Marten Teitsma and Quantum Inspire

AI-based creation of cat texts

Gabriëlle Ras

Ethical discussion partner

Hans de Zwart

Technical and onsite coordination

Arjan Koning

Responsible IT-expertise

Nanda Piersma
AUAS Responsible IT Research Group

The Short Essays

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024



Reproduction and Authenticity
in Museums 26

Alyxandra Westwood and Yophi Ignacia

The Plaster Trace 46

Dick van Broekhuizen

How We Reproduce Values 66

Emma van Bijnen and Rebecca Venema

Dickinson (2019-2021) 84

Chiara Luigina Dosithea Ravinetto

Reproducing Traces of Trauma 100

Amy Louise Stenvert

Reproduction and Authenticity: A Case Study on Cultural Sustainability in Museums

Authors

Alyxandra Westwood and Yophi Ignacia

Discipline

Museology, Sustainability, Education, Fashion Design

Keywords

Museums / Cultural Sustainability / Fashion / Reproduction /
Authenticity

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/ae244THw

Abstract

This essay explores the politics of authenticity and reproduction through ‘mimesis’, the use of replicas, in the museum arena as it pertains to the year-long exhibition *Knowing Cotton Otherwise* at the *Fashion for Good Museum* in Amsterdam, from October 2022 – October 2023. Sustainability practices are explored with a specific focus on cultural sustainability. In this essay, Fashion for Good Museum is highlighted as an example to discuss the topics of cultural sustainability, reproduction, mimesis, authenticity and cultural appropriation in museology. Cultural appropriation and reproduction are an increasingly prevalent occurrence within fashion and consumer culture, which has only accelerated in recent years due to the pervasiveness of the digital age (Wani et al. 2024). By incorporating a sociological approach, evidence compiled from personal conversations with collaborators from the exhibition, observations of installations and a theoretical framework exploring theories of mimesis and cultural sustainability, this essay interrogates two case studies arguing how reproduction can encourage younger generations in the context of Amsterdam to reflect on their own consumer behaviours as future stakeholders in the fashion industry. Furthermore, it explores the methods for this, through the educational programme and toolkit *Classroom of the Future: The Stories Behind Cotton* and the installation by Dr Professor Sha’mira Covington, *Curative, Confronting and Healing the Fashion-Industrial Complex*.

Introduction

The Double-edged Sword of Reproduction in the Fashion Industry – What Impact Does It Have?

When reflecting on the fashion industry and its relationship to the concept of reproduction, what instantly comes to mind is the prevalence of the counterfeit industry and appropriation. In this case, ‘reproduction’ is the action or process of copying something (‘Reproduction’ 2024) and ‘appropriation’ is the act of taking something for your own use, usually without permission (‘Appropriation’ 2024). As the global demand for luxury goods rises yearly, fashion houses lose billions in revenue yearly to counterfeit products (Communri; International Chamber of Commerce; and Homes, qtd. in Amaral & Loken 2016). Considering this, it is rather ironic to then realise that many of these brands, losing profits to imitation products entering the market, have arguably been appropriating mercilessly from different cultures for a consumer-focused market for years (Sádaba, LaFata and Torres 2020). When the roles are reversed, and profits are at stake, only then does the problem of reproduction seem to grab the attention of mainstream culture. If we consider fashion the other way round – less as a product, and more as a cross-generational tool for communication, necessity and identity – we can begin to understand the true impact garments have and continue to have globally, and why context is largely important for understanding the power of fashion. Next to this, the rise of digital and online culture has only increased the rate at which trends are consumed by younger generations. With all of this in place, one question stands out: how can we begin to shift this mode of thinking in the face of a global over-consumption crisis? Especially when fashion education streams have often facilitated a space which seeks to *uphold* the system as opposed to being critical of it. Museum education can offer a possible method for combating these structures, utilising museological display methods of reproductions to critique appropriation in the fashion industry as an extension of the classroom.

This essay amplifies and examines fashion’s link to cultural sustainability and how museum education can play a pivotal role in critically challenging a broken and toxic system such as the fashion system which often commodifies ‘cultural capital’. In terms of sustainable development, or sustainability, cultural sustainability refers to preserving cultural practices, beliefs, and heritage. It also addresses the issue of whether a particular culture will endure into the future and preserve culture as a whole (Soini and Birkeland 2014). Dr Professor Sha’Mira Covington, an interdisciplin-

ary scholar, artist and Assistant Professor in Fashion at The University of Georgia, refers to cultural sustainability as “*a companion to the environmental, social, and economic pillars of sustainability. Its focus is to maintain, preserve, and sustain traditional, indigenous, and non-western cultures in the face of globalisation and capitalism*” (2023). In the following essay, the museum’s relationship within the context of Amsterdam is examined, and how facilitating installations and accompanying educational programmes which centre awareness for consumer behaviour, can facilitate discourse on how authenticity and reproduction influence us as contemporary consumers in and of the city.

Moreover, authenticity and reproduction in the museum arena will be explored as they pertain to the year-long exhibition *Knowing Cotton Otherwise* at the Fashion for Good Museum in Amsterdam from October 2022 to October 2023. ‘Authenticity’ is referred to as the quality of being real or true (‘Authenticity’ 2024). Fashion for Good Museum is used as an example to discuss the above-mentioned topics. Before closing its doors permanently in June 2024, Fashion for Good Museum was a museum in Amsterdam for narratives on sustainable fashion and innovation with a mission dedicated to empowering, educating and inspiring its visitors on the topic of sustainability in the fashion industry. Creating space to set the record straight when it comes to the definition of what sustainability means, and the origin of various sustainable practices, was one of our biggest goals for exhibitions and programming. The museum tackled this mission in a multiplicity of ways through exhibitions as well as educational and public programmes. Activation and learning were at the centre of the museum’s approach, as it also welcomed an unusually young audience in comparison to other museums, between the ages of 18 and 35 with 20 percent of all museum visitors being students (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2022).

Museums – born from the Western colonial desire for perpetual accumulation – are spaces which have evolved to a point where they hold the ability to operate both in and outside time, awarding them a unique position for reflecting on the times that we live in (Foucault & Miskowiec 1986). Not only that, museums are also spaces that foster and bring together expertise and knowledge, as well as operate as places to imagine the world differently by bringing together various worlds. More recently, as new museology theory suggests, museums have moved increasingly away from their overpowering architecture and displays to embrace a more ‘inclusive’ and egalitarian approach, which caters more democratically to audiences (Vergo et al. 1989). New museology also suggests that objects hold not just a singular meaning but a multitude of meanings which are also dependent

on the viewer and their own individual context. In this sense, increasingly incorporating the role of the viewer in the process has also opened up the playing field for more cross-disciplinary approaches and the use of newer forms of media, which assist in engaging with a wider audience and making these interactions visible, sometimes even part of displays. As museological discourse over the years suggests, this can pose questions when it comes to the authenticity of the histories displayed if there is less negotiation on what is or is not shown. However, as Kidd suggests, an assumption that traditional museological approaches - which present a less immersive and democratic approach with audiences - also lacks in presenting a sound and complete example of histories (2007). As a result of the expansion of new museology, a trend has emerged in museums, which, as Kidd describes, attempts to 'fill the gaps' in history more fluidly and dynamically (2007). This movement is self-reflexive, acknowledging that museums, as historical tastemakers, have often displayed narratives and histories in which we have since seen fault. Public and educational programming in museums can play well into this approach of 'filling the gaps' in an informed way, turning the museum into a laboratory, where objects are analysed and called into question. In the context of the exhibition *Knowing Cotton Otherwise*, the case study for this essay, the objects in the exhibition acted as the starting point for students studying fashion and textile studies in the Netherlands, to imagine a more sustainable approach to fashion as well as gain understanding of the narratives around cotton and textile as a medium.

As depicted in figure 1, the Fashion for Good Museum provided the perfect place to collectively imagine the fashion industry and education differently in collaboration with teachers and students from four different schools across the Netherlands (Zadkine, MBO Rijnland, HKU and Saxion), as well as offer students a professional experience to enter the next chapters of their careers with purpose and criticality. During the depicted workshop with artists Farida Sedoc and Bonnie Ogilvie, the final results of the students' work from the HKU and Zadkine were displayed on the wall in context with the exhibition, as an immediate response to the objects they used as a starting point for their process. This is an example of how an exhibition can prompt interdisciplinary engagement between varying external educational institutions, and museums further expanding on this more democratic approach to display.



Figure 1: Amsterdam-based artists Farida Sedoc and Bonnie Ogilvie welcome students to their workshop: May 2023. Photograph by: Elzo Bonam.

Furthermore, in this case study, the theory of ‘mimesis’ is employed as a way of describing how art and material culture – in this case, garments and textiles – draw from and mimic the world around us according to context (Bol & Spary 2023). Plato describes ‘mimesis’, the Greek word for imitation, in the creation of art as the re-presentation of nature (‘Mimesis’ 2011). In the context of museology, mimesis is a methodology and theory that has been a source of discussion since the 1990s (Cantwell 2000; Denison Robb 1995). Especially when it comes to the possibilities it affords to expanding a multi-narrative approach to storytelling which communicates and perpetuates culture throughout creative practice. In the case of *Knowing Cotton Otherwise*, mimesis was employed through replicas, both two-dimensional and three-dimensional, that were used to embody the fashion industrial complex. Not only that, but the Fashion for Good Museum building did not provide the necessary climate conditions for borrowing from other museums or non-private archive collections. Therefore the use of replicas and imagery, copies of the original, were necessary for exploring the many dimensions of a given storyline. During the exhibition, replica fabric swatches amongst other objects were displayed, as well as imagery and videos as a way of compensating and ‘filling in the gaps’ of important narratives around cultural sustainability.

In the right context, mimesis can be a powerful tool to explore fashion narratives in a polyphonic way, also opening the conversation on cultural appropriation and authenticity important to this criticality. ‘Cultural appropriation’ means the act of appropriating or using items from a culture you do not own, particularly when you do so without demonstrating your understanding of or respect for that culture (‘Cultural appropriation’ 2024). According to Geismar, mimesis through both digital and analogue forms of display “allows us to theorise objects not just in terms of their material qualities but in terms of the social relations and political hierarchies that structure engagement with them” (2018, 106). Moreover, speaking about a topic through the multiple modes of communication such as digital representation, physical objects and, in our case, programming, can present the perfect breeding ground for more indepth critical discussion on the immaterial impact which material culture has on us as a society.

To address these topics, personal conversations and reflections with collaborators from the exhibition are examined. These conversations and reflections were recorded for our podcast during the development of our educational toolkit, which was launched in March 2024 (Classroom of the Future: The Stories Behind Cotton). This took place in the museum building throughout the duration of the exhibition. It was through the educational programme and accompanying public programme series *Salon Talks*, that we truly were able to create the most impact locally. The most interesting results were uncovered through these programmes; specifically where the blind spots or *gaps* were within Dutch fashion education when it came to a broader holistic approach to learning and breaking the loop in facilitating an unsustainable system; as well as the reaction of students when given the opportunity to collectively contribute to what they considered to be the classroom of the future.

Fashion, Education and Sustainability (Interwoven Histories of Sustainability)

Considering the increased focus on clothes as a product instead of a carrier of cultural history and narratives, it is no wonder that we have lost track of the true origin and purpose of garments and their raw materials. Fashion education plays a huge role in this, as it sets the tone for future generations of practitioners entering the job market who contribute collectively to this future. As Laura Gardner and Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran point out in their book *Radical Fashion Exercises: A Workbook*, it has been the norm that these courses often prioritise the industry standard and technical approach as opposed to creating space for students to approach fashion critically and with urgency (2023). Due to this prioritisation, it becomes a self-fulfilling

“What Covington, Gardner and Mohajer va Pesaran share here is a realisation that a radical approach to fashion education needs to be employed so we can become more aware of the lineage that clothing has in our lives, and the responsibility and impact we have as a society when it comes to clothing and fashion.”

prophecy – where students instead continue to contribute to this system, unless teachers take the position of choosing to step outside these norms and encourage criticality with their approach.

Recently, these practices have started to change, with several educational institutions beginning to prioritise a more holistic approach to fashion which interweave the four pillars of sustainability into their curriculums. According to RMIT University, the four pillars of sustainability are cultural, social, economic and environmental sustainability (2017). If you work and teach in the fashion and textile industry, the impact that overconsumption has on our planet can no longer be ignored. Although the root of these problems mostly affects the global majority, it is the West who has been the instigator of this textile climate crisis, to begin with (Covington 2023):

“The garments we make and wear – from the ubiquitous white t-shirt to cutting-edge runway fashion – have become potent symbols of extraction and exploitation. In its wake, fashion leaves behind contamination, injustice, and waste”
(Gardner & Mohajer va Pesaran 2023).

These are ramifications closely tied to Western choices which are embedded in a colonial attitude towards disconnecting products from their intention and meaning, for the purpose of profits. What Covington, Gardner and Mohajer va Pesaran share here is a realisation that a radical approach to fashion education needs to be employed so we can become more aware of the lineage that clothing has in our lives, and the responsibility and impact we have as a society when it comes to clothing and fashion.

In the *Knowing Cotton Otherwise* exhibition, we specifically focused on the amplification of lesser-known narratives surrounding the story of cotton, to show the multifaceted nature of this well-known and converted fabric. Creative director of the exhibition, Janice Deul, reflects on the intention behind the exhibition by saying in a podcast interview for our educational toolkit:

“We all know cotton as this fundamental material in our lives, however, we do not concentrate enough on the enormous price which people, the planet and the climate have [paid] and continue to pay throughout the years to make this fabric so accessible” (Ignacia & Westwood 2023).

Knowing Cotton Otherwise unfolded in three chapters over a year, each one zooming in on another topic and adding to the base narrative on cotton. For the second chapter of the exhibition, titled *Bodies of Work*, we invited Dr Professor Sha'Mira Covington, a scholar and artist with a focus on Black liberation studies within the fashion-industrial complex. Covington, who teaches fashion sustainability through Black and Indigenous lenses, curated an installation which drew on archival documentation and objects exploring cotton's relationship to 'the body' and the body as an archive. Figure 2 shows Covington's installation *Curative, Confronting and Healing the Fashion-Industrial Complex*, where she brought together both historical objects from the archive of the University of Georgia in the United States and objects from private collections, as well as fabric swatches, to explore cotton's relationship to the fashion and textile industry. The cotton industry is a better-known historical chronology that connects the history of the fashion industry to the development of our contemporary capitalist society as a whole. This relationship between the fashion/slave trade, the cotton boom and industrial revolution is well explained by Dominique Drakeford, thought-leader and entrepreneur focussing on sustainability, Black American identity and colonialism (qtd. in Barber 2022). When asked what the first thing was that came to her mind when she heard the word cotton, it was not the fabric but more so the spiritual properties associated with the plant:

"I think of it from two perspectives, I think of nature and the medicinal properties as a plant and how it's associated with female medicine, also the spiritual properties of it; my grandmother would say that it attracts positive energy and it can help us be spiritually pure by absorbing negative energy, on the other hand, I think of the transatlantic slave trade" (Ignacia, Westwood and Covington 2023).

The raw material cotton, illustrated in figure 3, is a perfect example to explain how history is interwoven with the present and future in an influential way. Dr Sha'Mira Covington relays in her text for the publication, *Cotton's Legacy, the Anthropocene, and Sustainability in the Fashion-Industrial Complex*, that the development of early capitalism is already deeply rooted in injustice from its essence with the deployment of enslaved peoples during the transatlantic slave trade particularly in the case of cotton, still one of the most ubiquitous raw materials to ever exist (Bailey qtd. in Covington 2023). Not only this, but the prioritisation that industry agricultural prac-



Figure 2: Installation view *Curative, Confronting and Healing the Fashion-Industrial Complex*, Sha'Mira Covington: 2023. Photograph by: Elzo Bonam.



Figure 3: Small silver locket enclosing a cotton sample from the 1960s. This was often used as a good luck charm to absorb negative energy. Installation, Sha'Mira Covington: 2023. Photograph by: Elzo Bonam.

tices have had on cotton as a *product* as opposed to its ramifications on the land, has led to immense ecological consequences (Merchant qtd. in Covington 2023). This is a prime example of how an industry, built primarily on profits and not in harmony with the land, can have a huge effect not only socially and culturally but also environmentally. As exemplified in figure 2 and 3, Covington's installation also brings together a combination of both archival objects and mimesis, through fabric reproductions and technical drawings, to 'fill in the gaps' of the narrative for the visitor. Also, through the choice to display industry-copied fabric swatches, Covington opens a discussion on reproduction in the fashion industry and the ethics around this when it comes to traditional practices as 'cultural capital'.

These are also important topics which Covington introduces in her curriculum as an educator. She chooses to take an approach to teaching which encourages students to be critical of the industry and its focus on decolonizing and abolition pedagogies. Remarking on this she says:

"I recognise that the [fashion] industry doesn't necessarily align with decolonization or abolition, because it's so profit-driven, but my aim as an educator is to challenge traditional fashion ways of knowing and focus on educated critique of those ways of knowing. Fashion is frankly a business-driven complex, and I approach it by restoring things like humanity and freedom as opposed to oppression" (Covington 2023).

Museums Objects and Cultural Appropriation

Circling back to the idea of reproduction, and the disconnection between garment, product and cultural sustainability, it was very interesting to then conduct a pilot educational programme that attempted to bring these elements back into contact with one another. When it comes to education, Sandra Jackson-Dumont, director of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles, expresses that museums have the potential to be 'learning centres' for people of all ages (Jackson-Dumont qtd. in Szántó 2020). Especially newly developed museums that offer a space unencumbered by the problematic collections of larger historical museums with national collections (Jackson-Dumont qtd. in Szántó 2020). Museums and the fashion industry hold a multifaceted connection to one another when it comes to the concept of reproduction and history. Both spaces contribute to an ongoing discourse surrounding the politics of reproduction and appropriation, in both negative and positive ways. On the one hand, museums are houses of material culture, spaces which amplify more hidden narratives

“We all know cotton as this fundamental material in our lives, however, we do not concentrate enough on the enormous price which people, the planet and the climate have and continue to pay throughout the years to make this fabric so accessible” (Ignacia & Westwood 2023).

of society. On the other hand, they are also large fortresses, parading and historically glorifying an attitude towards capitalising on the very cultures they also seek to protect and create space for. It is no wonder they have often been referred to as theme parks, lending a hand to the experience economy (Belting 2006). On the other hand, both museums and fashion often lend themselves to current trends, as both are reflectors of popular culture.

Reproduction, although acting as a common method for display in museology throughout history – has turned in recent years towards a conversation in museum theory which focusses increasingly on the ethics of these practices (Bol & Spary 2023; Geisma 2018). On the one hand, reproduction as a method provides many possibilities for the telling of otherwise hidden or lost narratives, but it also presents other issues when it comes to the history of appropriation or capitalising on culture. This is the same for fashion: when it is not accompanied by correct contextual information, it can quickly get swept up into the trend whirlwind, disconnecting from its true origins and meaning. The ethical implications of reproduction, or what can also be referred to in some cases as mimesis in museology, as Bol and Spary explain, can be determined by a specific set of circumstances: local, social, political and intellectual (2023).

Historian, high school teacher and activist Naomi Nagtegaal, seen in figure 4, explains that: “*History is actually just the study of people*” (2023) – i.e., all materials and objects are just evidence of the connections between people.. Museums function as spaces to explore these stories, and through the pilot educational programme *Classroom of the Future: The Stories Behind Cotton*, we also aimed at positioning the museum as an extension of the classroom, a space which was able to function almost parallel to the limitations that encumber the current Dutch education system and teachers. The project spanned a year and a half and was a collaborative effort, bringing together teachers and students from vocational (MBO) and higher education schools (HBO) with a focus on textiles and fashion across the Netherlands. The pilot consisted of four phases: a teacher meeting, two phases of practical workshops with local artists and designers where students focused on materials and narratives, and ultimately, a showcase for students to exhibit their final work in a professional setting.

It became apparent that one of the biggest topics that teachers struggled with, was not just how to weave and prioritise topics like sustainability into their curriculums, but also how to instigate topics and facilitate ‘difficult’ conversations in the classroom. As referred to above in this essay, the topic of cotton is not without its links to our collective colonial consciousness, forced labour and economic disbalance. As one of the curators of the



Figure 4: Naomi Nagtegaal during her workshop referring to the fabric swatches in Sha'Mira Covington's installation: April 2023. Photograph by: Elzo Bonam.

exhibition, Sophie Jager-van Duren, states in a podcast interview for our educational toolkit: *“There is always someone that pays the price because we all have a desire for cheap products”* (Jager-van Duren 2023). In another sense, all our choices as both consumers and practitioners are connected, and we aimed to create awareness of this. Through undertaking the pilot and workshops it appeared that although schools in the Netherlands teach about sustainability in their curriculums, they mostly focused on the environmental implications as opposed to historical or cultural links and ramifications. Inviting local Dutch artists and designers to give workshops, based on their own design practice and narratives, also opened the possibility for students to have a wider understanding of what a design process entails as well as a connection to Amsterdam's professional landscape within this field (see figure 5). One result of this was a student going on to conduct an internship at one of the collaborating brands. Returning to the topic of mimesis, in the case of Sha'Mira Covington's installation, personal archival objects presenting the spiritual significance of cotton were paired with a set of fabric swatches that were mass-produced yet depicting patterns of significance to textile history, such as ‘Malian Mud Cloth’ and ‘Ghanaian Kente Cloth’. Next to this, photographic prints of a cotton plantation ledger as well as early drawings of plans for the ‘cotton gin’, a machine used for separating the fibres of the cotton plant from the seeds (‘Cotton gin’ 2024), represented a historical timeline mapping out the parallel narrative

between both the cultural and spiritual significance of cotton juxtaposed with the commodification of cotton as an industry.

Students reacted unexpectedly during the educational programme. When asked to explore and create a design for a fabric inspired by these narratives from their own perspectives, many produced creative results that did however verge on appropriation. It was therefore surprising to us that many did not understand the concept of ‘cultural appropriation’ at all and had little to no knowledge of how this was linked to their future work in the field, both locally in the Netherlands and as future contributors to the fashion system in a wider sense. Also, many had little understanding of the link between the plant cotton and historical and modern slavery, and the link that human labour has to raw materials, resulting in the fabrics which they are familiar with. Dominique Drakeford states that people from the African continent were sought after for their advanced skills in textiles, including the cultivation of cotton plantations in America, the Caribbean, and South America, which used the expertise (forced labour) of Africans who were the sustainability experts of both agriculture and textiles; however, it was a cornerstone of the transatlantic slave trade, one of the hidden commodities that fuelled the European colonial empire (Drakeford qtd. in Barber 2022). This demonstrates how the mimetic value of a reproduction paired with a historically significant object in a museum setting can instigate collective learning as an accompaniment to general education streams. Nagtegaal reflects on this realisation:

“I think that it’s very important in a course, if you’re going to start working with a specific raw material, and [if] you are going to make this your career, that you understand what the history is, and I have discovered that most of the students from these courses do not have this knowledge at all” (Nagtegaal, 2023).



Figure 5: *Students working on their individual pieces during the workshop by The New Optimist: May 2023. Photograph by: Elzo Bonam.*

Conclusion

It is difficult to pinpoint one reason why this is exactly, but education, as Nagtegaal frames it, is “*very slow*” (2023); there are of course exceptions to this. Furthermore, the rate at which the education system as a wider sector develops and evolves is slow, with a large variety of extraneous variables. This is where the power of the museum can come in, as explained earlier through the ideas of Jackson-Dumont (Jackson-Dumont qtd. in Szántó 2020). As an increasingly flexible and dynamic space, similar to a school’s facilitatory space for learning and ideas – it has the potential to operate more experimentally. Through this pilot, we were also able to bring students of different levels together to learn from one another, as well as from across the country. Of course, the educational system is very focused on preparing students to have the right skill set to influence the future of an already functioning industry, which is highly focused on the commodification of garments as opposed to the environmental and social implications. This is how success is measured, seeing as education itself is also quickly becoming an industry (Kumar 2024). What this essay has aimed to address is the necessity for reconsideration of the industries and processes which we take for granted in our society when pertaining to the fashion and textile industries and how reproduction can assist as a tool to ‘fill in the gaps’ left by tellings of certain histories. Museums have the capability of assisting us in this, as reflectors of our collective consciousness and material culture.

Reproductions and cultural sustainability, when applied with care, can be very powerful tools to address these issues when reacquainted with physical vessels such as museum objects. The role of education in this is radical and important, and comes with a responsibility. Educational institutions such as universities, schools and museums have a prolific power to rupture systems as they offer the possibility to divert the course of the industry and society through the hands of future generations.

Reproduction as a theme has a nuanced and particularly sensitive connotation when it comes to fashion and the industry which it perpetuates. The main reason for this is the capitalising on culture due to the prominence of cultural appropriation and the counterfeit industry. However, given the right context, reproduction can in fact counteract this, acting as a method for reflecting on these very practices as exemplified in this essay. The museum context provides this opportunity, as a mediated space, with a history in practice embedded in critique. Although the conscience of museum history is heavy with its traditional single-minded approach to displaying history, the emergence of an increasingly democratic turn in methodology has greatly expanded the societal impact of museums. As such, this paves the way to not only change how we understand and interpret objects but also assist in how other organisations and societal systems, such as educational institutions, support and shape future generations.

References

- “Appropriation.” *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/appropriation.
- “Authenticity.” *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/authenticity?q=Authenticity.
- Amaral, Nelson B., and Barbara Loken. “Viewing usage of counterfeit luxury goods: Social identity and social hierarchy effects on dilution and enhancement of genuine luxury brands.” *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2016, pp. 483-495, doi:10.1016/j.jcps.2016.02.004.
- Barber, Aja. *Consumed: The Need for Collective Change; Colonialism, Climate Change and Consumerism*. Balance, 2022.
- Belting, Hans. “Place of Reflection or Place of Sensation?” Conference ‘*L’Idea del Museo: Identità, Ruoli, Prospettive*’, 14 Dec. 2006, Aula Nuova del Sinodo, Vatican Museum, Italy. Lecture.
- Bol, Marjolijn, and Emma C. Spary, editors. *The Matter of Mimesis: Studies of Mimesis and Materials in Nature, Art and Science*. Brill, 2023, doi: 10.1163/9789004515413.
- Cantwell, Robert S. *Ethnomimesis: folklife and the representation of culture*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. “Opnieuw Minder Bezoekers in Nederlandse Musea.” *Centraal Bureau Voor De Statistiek*, 23 Dec. 2022, www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2022/51/opnieuw-minder-bezoekers-in-nederlandse-musea.
- Chang, EunJung. “Interactive Experiences and Contextual Learning in Museums.” *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2006, pp. 170–86, www.jstor.org/stable/3497107.
- “Cotton gin.” *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cotton-gin.
- Covington, Sha’mira, Yophi Ignacia, and Alyxandra Westwood. “De Impact van Kolonialisme op Katoen en Design #4.” *Klaslokaal van de Toekomst: De verhalen achter katoen*, December 2023, open.spotify.com/episode/3670DWkIFsDSaHz05OokFY-?si=d6c97180383e4e04
- Covington, Sha’mira. “Cotton’s Legacy, the Anthropocene, and Sustainability in the Fashion-Industrial Complex.” *Knowing Cotton Otherwise*, edited by Uitgeverij Wilde Haren, 2023.
- Covington, Sha’mira. “Curative, Confronting and Healing the Fashion-Industrial Complex.” *Knowing Cotton Otherwise*, Oct. 2022-Oct. 2023, Fashion for Good Museum, Amsterdam.
- “Cultural appropriation.” *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cultural-appropriation?q=Cultural+appropriation.
- Denison Robb, Karyl. “Museums Creating Culture.” *Journal of Folklore Research*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1995, pp. 283–87, www.jstor.org/stable/3814319.
- Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. “Of other spaces.” *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22-27, doi.org/10.2307/464648.
- Gardner, Laura, and Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran, editors. *Radical Fashion Exercises: A Workbook of Modes and Methods*. Valiz, 2023.
- Geismar, Haidy. “Mimesis, Replication and Reality.” *Museum Object Lessons for the Digital Age*, UCL Press, 2018, pp. 105-113, doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1xz0wz.11.
- Jager-van Duren, Sophie, et al. “De Toekomst van Katoen: Duurzaamheid en Diversiteit in Mode #1.” *Klaslokaal van de Toekomst: De verhalen achter katoen*, December 2023, open.spotify.com/episode/4g0l26bAPtLvCNpQfIvu8Z-?si=4515f492a2154abf
- Kidd, Jenny. “Filling the Gaps? Interpreting Museum Collections Through Performance.” *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 19, 2007, pp. 57–69, www.jstor.org/stable/40793840.
- Kumar, Prince. “The Commodification of Education: Trends and Implications - Sociology Institute.” *Sociology Institute*, 27 March 2024, sociology.institute/sociology-of-education/commodification-education-trends-implications/#:~:text=Commodification%20of%20education%20refers%20to,education%20as%20an%20economic%20transaction.
- Marres, Noortje. *Material participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Publics*. Springer, 2015.
- “Mimesis.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 22 November 2011, www.britannica.com/art/mimesis.
- Nagtegaal, Naomi, Yophi Ignacia, and Alyxandra Westwood. “Katoen en Cultuur: Mode Onderwijs met Aandacht voor Geschiedenis en Ethiek #2.” *Klaslokaal van de Toekomst: De verhalen achter katoen*, December 2023, open.spotify.com/episode/3nf5oDEan4LFFIHRPFYIFJ-?si=5624497e48454878.
- “Reproduction.” *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, 11 September 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/reproduction.

RMIT University. "The four pillars of sustainability."

Future Learn, 2017, www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/sustainable-business/0/steps/78337#:~:text=Introducing%20the%20four%20pillars%20of,%2C%20Social%2C%20Economic%20and%20Environmental.

Sádaba, Teresa, Valeria LaFata, and Andréa Torres.

"Cultural Appropriation in the Digital Context: A Comparative Study Between Two Fashion Cases." *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, edited by Fiona Fui-Hoon Nah and Keng Siau, 2020, pp. 504-520, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-50341-3_38.

Soini, Katriina, and Inger Birkeland. "Exploring the

Scientific Discourse on Cultural Sustainability." *Geoforum*, vol. 51, Jan. 2014, pp. 213-223, 2014, doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.12.001.

Szántó, András. "Education and Inclusion: I Want There to be a Magnetic Pull." *The Future of the Museum: 28 Dialogues*, Hatje Cantz, 2020.

Vergo, Peter, editor. *New museology*. Reaktion books, 1989.

The Plaster Trace: Reading Creative Processes

Author

B.J.M. (Dick) van Broekhuizen

Discipline

History of Sculpture, Museum Studies

Keywords

Sculpture / 20th Century / Modernism / Technique / Creative Processes

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/re874VHe

Abstract

The thesis of this essay: *one can read the creative and making processes in the plaster models left by the sculptor*. Hans/Jean Arp and Mari Andriessen provide excellent examples in the Gipsotheek collection (Museum Beelden aan Zee). Although Andriessen and Arp had very different sculptural ideas, their creative and making methods were sometimes similar: working in models, reworking, taking parts they liked and reintegrating them into other models. Of course, they ended up with very different results. The plaster sculptures are mostly steppingstones on the way to a final sculpture. This emphasizes the flexibility of plaster as a material. In addition, plaster is also used by the sculptor to memorize the different stages of development. The remnants of plaster, the different states and stages of the making process, give us, the art historians, a plaster trail, not a trail of copies, but a plaster lineage of the sculpture.

Introduction¹

A London gallery owner once confided in me that museum curators tend to value plaster models from the studio because they show the artist's finger-print and because they are easy to acquire. In contrast, for art collectors, the only collectible object is the finished sculpture, whether in bronze, wood, or marble. Traditionally, he said, a sculptor works towards these final materials (Horswell 2018).² For the art dealer, the plaster is just a shimmering of the finished sculpture. One might assume a hierarchy of materials. In this hierarchy, plaster is only the material from which semi-finished models are made; bronze and marble are the materials of the finished sculpture.³ This material hierarchy could reflect the different perspectives on the love of art and the search for the finished, completed work of art. It could point to the difference between the so-called art lover and the supposedly highly theoretical museum curator. In short: the art lover wants to buy the real sculpture; the museum curator cannot buy a real sculpture due to budgetary restrictions and has to make do with theory and plaster models. In the case of the *Gipsotheek* [translation: '*Gypsotheca*'] (founded 2014), the plaster collections in the Dutch museum Beelden aan Zee in The Hague-Scheveningen, other objectives are being pursued, leading to other results, some of which I present in this paper.

The museum room, built as an accessible depot, contains about a thousand plaster studio models by twentieth-century artists. The models are not copies of the kind found in the plaster study collections of art academies or university archaeology departments. These special collections of classical art in plaster were used in an educational, didactic context, such as described in Ter Keurs (2018) and Van Rheeden (2001). The *Gipsotheek* does not only contain final plasters, as can be seen in the museums and plaster collections in Possagno (Antonio Canova (1757-1822)), in Ligornetto (Vincenzo Vela (1820-1891)), or in Copenhagen (Berthel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844)). Those *Gypsotheca*'s are monographic presentations, honouring the work of the artists involved.⁴ The plaster collections in the Museum Beelden aan Zee have a different purpose: they illustrate the creative process, as documented in plaster, as a three-dimensional sketch, an incomplete model or a transitional stage of a sculpture. Consequently, artists such as the war memorial sculptor Mari Andriessen (1897-1979), the German/French modernist Hans/Jean Arp (1886-1966), the Rijksakademie teachers Piet Esser (1914-2004) and Cor Hund (1915-2008), the colourist Fioen Blaisse (1932-2012) and the Italian-Dutch Federico Carasso (1899-1969) are represented by large parts of their oeuvre. Smaller numbers of plaster sketches by the Dutch *grande dame* Charlotte van Pallandt (1898-1997), French portrait

sculptor Charles Despiau (1874-1946), animal sculptor Jaap Kaas (1898-1972), follower of Despiau Bertus Sondaar (1904-1984) and monumental sculptor Han Wezelaar (1901-1984) are included. Sculptural themes and disciplines are well represented, including Prix de Rome winners, portraits, art medals, monumental commissions and autonomous sculpture. It should be noted that some models were never executed as final sculptures, while others were. Some models in the Gipsotheek can therefore be seen elsewhere in bronze or stone, in museum collections or in public spaces (as monuments, for example).⁵

It is possible to interpret the plaster sculpture in the Gipsotheek as a *Gruselkabinett* [translation: 'chamber of horrors'] of the artist's tragic incompetence and the museum's inability to buy 'real' bronzes, but only an incorrigible cynic would go that far. The Gipsotheek records something else, something far more interesting. It shows, in all sorts of imperfect examples, the sculptor's creative process. This leads to the general research question of this essay: how is this creative process legible in the plaster casts?

In order to answer this question of legibility, we must accept a relative lack of textual source material on the subject. Admittedly, a great deal has been written about the technical processes involved in the making of a sculpture; a standard encyclopaedia is, for example, *Principes D'analyse Scientifique: La Sculpture: Méthode et Vocabulaire* (Baudry and Bozo 1978). And, of course, there is a splendid art historical literature that analyses sculpture as art, presupposing all sorts of choices in the artist's design process.⁶ In these texts, the work of art is always presented as a finished product, and the art historian cannot always trace all the aesthetic choices, except in comparison with other finished works.

Looking at the plaster sketches in the Gipsotheek, we now have the opportunity to see the differences, the choices, in each step of the process for a work of art. The plaster sculptures are the intermediate objects between the artistic mind and the artist's making hands, which are of course strongly linked to the final result. Sculptural technique is not just about the technique of pouring hot metal into a mould, or the mysterious act of kneading clay into a sculpture. For the artist, it is about trying and trying again until it is right. The records of this process can be found in an artist's plaster collection (or in drawings, which I will not include in this study).

In general, my position could be described in part as an anthropological approach, as articulated by Tim Ingold's theory on 'making' (Ingold 2013).⁷ In his publication, Ingold does not talk much about sculpture, but by inference his book is relevant to sculptors. Ingold's work is relevant to this study because he includes empathy for the processes of making objects

“It is possible to interpret the plaster sculpture in the Gipsotheek as a *Gruselkabinett* of the artist’s tragic incompetence and the museum’s inability to buy ‘real’ bronzes, but only an incorrigible cynic would go that far.”

in his interpretation. In attempting to understand the making of an object, the combination of creative and craft processes contributes to a general understanding of the object.

One might expect some remarks on Walter Benjamin and his ubiquitous theory of technical reproduction and the concept of 'the aura' (Benjamin 1985). Benjamin does not mention the reproduction of sculpture; in fact, sculpture is even absent from his famous *Passagenwerk*. The technical reproduction of sculpture allows sculptures to be copied and placed in public space, making them known and accessible to a wide audience, thus reducing their aura. This also applies to the display of plaster casts in the Gipsotheek, which is open to the public. The creative process could be seen as the artist charging the sculpture with aura (making it more unique and inaccessible), but the technical process is a group process requiring hired specialist craftsmen and assistants (more shared, less related to the one artist person). The plaster collections show a decrease in the Benjaminian 'aura' as far as technique is concerned, and because they are on display. This is balanced by showing the artist's toil and tribulation, increasing the aura towards the final result. But Benjamin's 'aura' is not my main concern for this short essay.

In this essay I will read the sculptures and include the making and creative processes of Hans/Jean Arp (1886-1966) and Mari Andriessen (1897-1979). Both artists are well represented in the Gipsotheek (Hartog 2022; Tilanus 2003). Their work is very different, but their studio practices are similar and relatively traditional: they use plaster, they have assistants, and they always vary three-dimensional sketches to arrive at a different or better sculpture. In addition, we have many plasters at our disposal, so we should be able to follow the making process very well.

Towards a Natural Form: Arp

A very clear example of an artist working directly in plaster is Hans/Jean Arp. Museum Beelden aan Zee received 21 plasters (and one bronze) for its Gipsotheek in 2022.⁸ Arp was a multi-talent, always working, sculpting, painting, drawing and writing poetry, a giant of modern sculpture and a pioneer of biomorphic abstraction. Arie Hartog,⁹ expert on Arp and director of the Gerhard Marcks Haus Bremen, shares his thoughts on the processes of making like this:

“Scholarship still treats a work of art chiefly as a mere concretization of an idea and pays scant regard to the process of concretization. The work is situated at the end of an imaginary chain, which begins with the artist and his design or concept and ends with the realisation of the material-perhaps executed by other individuals. So, the real task is, to think afresh about this chain, focusing on what happens in between the process of production and those involved in it” (Fischer 2012, 15).

In discussing the choices in the making process, Hartog refers specifically to Rudolf Wittkower’s towering *Sculpture: Processes and Principles* (1977). According to Hartog, Wittkower sees the fundamental structure of sculpture as a dialectic of *plastica* and *sculptura*, that is, the forces of adding or subtracting material to form a sculpture (Wittkower 1977; Fischer 2012, 16). In his publication of 2022, Hartog elaborates on these practices, distinguishing four main working methods used by Arp (Hartog 2022, 24). Arp uses wet material, which he adds to a carrier material such as chicken wire or to existing plaster; he removes dry material by rasping or sandpapering; plaster can be cast; the fourth method is the montage of different plaster elements. These methods give the artist ample opportunity to correct and reassess the forms. This way of working leaves a trail of cast sculptures, parts of sculptures, copies of working models, adaptation copies, almost finished or finished models and studio plasters for the artist to keep. Arp’s way of working debunks the uniqueness (or, ‘lowers the aura’) of the work of sculpture.

Smooth Skin

Arp always strove for smooth surfaces, again a negation of the artist’s work, leaving no room for a lively, wrought skin or for characteristic scratches or traces of work as an expressive means for a sculpture. On some of the plasters, however, we can see stains and spots on the skin caused by the addition of material and its later integration into the overall form (figure 1).



Figure 1. Hans/Jean Arp, *Die Puppe des Demeter*, *La Poupée de Demeter*, *Demeter's Doll*, 1961, plaster, collection Museum Beelden aan Zee, invnr. 1732. Photograph by: Dick van Broekhuizen.

These are the remnants of added plaster material, indicating that the plaster was reworked to achieve a better form. Arp's aim was to find other, newer, more interesting forms. As Hartog reports, Arp did not use models or drawings (Fischer 2012, 23). For Arp, working on an autonomous plaster sculpture meant changing the state of the object in the flow of the creative process, resulting in a better plaster, but not a final plaster per se.¹⁰ For Arp, working always means artistic experimentation, haptic improvisa-

tion, making as an artistic process, directly on an instance of a sculpture. This process of making should ultimately result in an imitation of natural processes, so that the sculpture should end up looking like an object slowly ground down by glaciers rather than by the artist. Carola Giedion-Welcker, sculpture historian, critic and lifelong friend of Arp, alludes to this:

“All Arp’s work mirrors a state of flux. Movement is conveyed by the suggestion of growth into shape, or by the rhythms of ebb and flow. [...] [I]ndefinite primordial shapes arise, [...] which yet somehow convince us they belong to the natural world” (Giedion-Welcker 1960, XIII).

Arp produces works that belong to a primordial world, perhaps: a time when there was no culture. For Arp, as for Giedion-Welcker, sculpture is not only sensual, not only intellectual, but an *Object to be found in the Woods* (1932), as one of Arp's titles poetically explains.

Ultimately, no real thumbprint or authentic hand is recognisable in his works, because Arp wants to show natural processes that are different and independent of artistic ones. He proposes that real, meaningful forms are formed by the slow dripping of water or the abrasion of riverbeds, by the wind and weather that erode rocks over thousands of years. Arp does not want to sign his work by leaving a collection of his fingerprints. He wants to convey a sculptural meaning of centuries-old, primordial, antediluvian fossils, rather than a man-made new object. These fossils could be fruits, seeds, extinct animals, or intermediate forms of life and non-life. The title of a sculpture *Pre-Adamitic Fruit* (1938), for example, suggests this. Of course, this way of presenting a smooth-surfaced sculpture goes against the grain of the working process, but the paradox is the source of great appreciation of Arp's work.

As long as Arp did not consider a sculpture to be finished, he could sandpaper it, saw it into pieces, cover it with new pieces and layers of plaster, and constantly alter and assemble it. It was only when he gave a plaster away to friends, or donated it to a museum, that it reached the status quo of an object-not-in-use by the artist. Note my reluctance to call it a finished work, which would imply a kind of teleological process of making and reaching a final status of a plaster sculpture as a real work of art. It would be better to think of the plasters as musical improvisations, jazzy variations on themes, the musical equivalent of Giedion's flux, all lying around in Arp's studio.¹¹

“All Arp’s work mirrors a state of flux. Movement is conveyed by the suggestion of growth into shape, or by the rhythms of ebb and flow. [...] [I]ndefinite primordial shapes arise, [...] which yet somehow convince us they belong to the natural world” (Giedion-Welcker 1960, XIII).

My second example, the artist Mari Andriessen, leaves all kinds of tracings in a plaster model, showing a lively and interesting skin combined with a very clear general shape of the human figure. Andriessen worked on commission, so he had to work towards a final piece. As he is working on commission, he therefore feels compelled to finish the sculpture, working as efficiently as possible towards a final product that must please the client. His position thus differs from that of the autonomous Arp, but it still leaves a trace of readable plasters.

Mari Andriessen. The Genesis of *De Dokwerker*

A famous Dutch war memorial, commemorating the so-called February Strike against the persecution of Jews on 25 and 26 February 1941, was created by Mari Andriessen in 1950-52. It is titled *De Dokwerker* [translation: 'The Docker']. The sculpture shows a middle-aged man standing strong against the forces working against him.¹² This man, a labourer, is immovable and stands firm on his principles. The monument was unveiled in Amsterdam on 12 December 1952.

Sculpture historian Louk Tilanus presented his research on Andriessen in a doctoral thesis (Tilanus 1984). In his remarks, Tilanus did not reveal much about the process of making the sculpture, but sometimes, he makes a casual remark. The commission for *The Docker* was awarded to Andriessen in 1950, and the artist modelled a first *schetsje* [translation: 'sketch'], as Tilanus puts it, on 15 February 1950 (Tilanus 1984, 79). The Dutch term *schetsje* is endearing and informal. As Tilanus told me, Andriessen was rather quick and agile in modelling his sketches.¹³ The diminutive form of the word 'sketch' could refer to the small size of the model and the speed with which this sketch was made. It also refers to the relative ease of working with clay. Unlike Arp, Andriessen would alternate between making clay models and casting them in plaster to record them, because clay is difficult to preserve as it needs to be kept wet.¹⁴ Preserving a model or sketch is one of the traditional uses of plaster. Andriessen was used to making many three-dimensional sketches in clay. When he reached a stage of improvement, Andriessen (or an assistant) would make a plaster cast of that stage of the design. Tilanus gives general information about the genesis of *The Docker*, but he is imprecise in his technical information. Tilanus sees the development, the work on the sculpture, in Andriessen's diaries (I presume), because he clearly quotes dates and appointments of the artist with the then mayor of Amsterdam, Arnold Jan d'Ailly. The development itself, however, can only be found by reading the plasters. It is possible to distinguish between the iconographic development and the design of the general posture of the figure.



Figure 2. *Various early sketches of The Docker: 1950-1952.* Photograph reproduced from Tilanus (1984, 79).¹⁵

Losing the Symbol

In a letter from 1961 to the historian Jaap Meijer, published in a bibliophile edition in 1980, Andriessen wrote two remarkable things to his addressee (Andriessen 1980). First of all, when he reminisces in this letter, he expresses his joy at receiving the commission of *The Docker* and immediately thinks of an ideal model, a very heavy man. Andriessen is referring to the carpenter Willem Termetz, a contractor working for the artist and an ally in the resistance during the Second World War. He was a stocky man and Andriessen used him for later models and the final sculpture. There are earlier models of a much slenderer figure, a striker holding a stick, ready to fight (figure 2). In my opinion, Andriessen could not have thought of Termetz immediately after he received the commission.

Mari Andriessen was also very pleased with the figure's lack of weapon, which he said in his letter, was a sign of unarmed resistance. In his first sketches, Andriessen had included a weapon, giving the figure a more active and martial appearance. This published letter shows that the artist's memory is not entirely reliable. It is clear that Mari Andriessen initially chose to depict a relatively young man, a figure ready to fight the authorities, with a weapon, a club, in his right hand (figure 2). Later, he decided to remove the bat and change the sculpture to show a fully grown resistance mentality. The plaster in figure 3 shows the middle ground between the final design



Figure 3. Mari Andriessen, *Study for The Docker*, 1951-52, plaster, h. 64 cm., collection Museum Beelden aan Zee Gipsotheek, Frans Hals Museum Haarlem, invnr. FHM 10068. Photograph by: Dick van Broekhuizen.



Figure 4. Mari Andriessen, *Final plaster of The Docker* (left side), 1952, plaster, h. 133 cm., collection Museum Beelden aan Zee Gipsotheek, Frans Hals Museum Haarlem, invnr. FHM 10097. Photograph by: Dick van Broekhuizen.

and the figure holding the bat: a figure still holding a stick, a shovel next to his left leg, but not depicting a man in fighting mode.

To my mind, this is the first depiction of Termetz. All in all, the figure is somewhat neutral or dull, not charismatic as the final sculpture conveys, but as a worker, wearing a shovel and boots. Of course, a non-violent but unyielding striker is a powerful idea. In the sculpture in figure 3, Andriessen

“It would be better to think of the plasters as musical improvisations, jazzy variations on themes, the musical equivalent of Giedion’s flux, all lying around in Arp’s studio.”

‘transforms’ the weapon (the bat) into a sculptural topos, that of the tree trunk next to a leg (in the shape of a shovel), but this weakens the overall meaning. The truncheon, a signifying attribute, a symbol, moves away from the sculpture, becomes less important. The next step: not to depict a bat at all.

The Composition Replaces the Symbol

Andriessen, like the majority of Dutch sculptors, was very interested and impressed by the modern French figurative sculptors, such as Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol (1861-1944) and Charles Despiau, or the German masters of expressionist sculpture, such as Georg Kolbe (1877-1947) or Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881-1919). The figurative concept of an expressive body, made up of abstract forms, anatomical geometry and compositional lines that appeal to the viewer, links these artists. At the Dutch Rijks-akademie, too, the influential professor Jan Bronner (1881-1972) stimulated an awareness of sculpture as an abstract composition related to architecture. In the final rendering of *The Docker*, these influences can be seen in the composition. I include three different views in figures 4, 5 and 6.

Viewed from the front, the figure is arranged in a triangle, the most stable pose possible (figure 6). The arms are outstretched, accentuating the triangular shape. Moving to the left, the view shows a straight standing figure, supported by the right leg (figure 5). The docker's right arm is slightly outstretched and the gaze is straight ahead. If you move all the way to the right, on the left side of the sculpture (figure 4), you see the opposite posture of the figure. He is leaning backwards, his eyes are raised to the sky, his belly is protruding forward, and his left leg is pointing forward. The whole sculpture seems to be pointing at the onlookers in front of it, addressing the audience in its composition. The right side of the sculpture is stable, standing firm, the left side is composed in an arrow shape, towards us, and from this side the figure seems to be looking at the sky above. These differences in composition add up to a general perception of stability and empathy, hope in difficult circumstances, and the implacability of moral justice. In this one figure, with no attributes, just a strong pose, Andriessen expresses the abstract value of justice in a war memorial. The sculpture does not need an attribute to signify resistance, it embodies resistance. Perhaps, given the artist's Roman Catholic background, the term incarnation is more appropriate.¹⁶



Figure 5. Mari Andriessen, *Final plaster of The Docker* (right side), 1952, plaster, h. 133 cm., collection Museum Beelden aan Zee Gipsotheek, Frans Hals Museum Haarlem, invnr. FHM 10097. Photograph by: Dick van Broekhuizen.



Figure 6. Mari Andriessen, *Final plaster of The Docker* (front), 1952, plaster, h. 133 cm., collection Museum Beelden aan Zee Gipsotheek, Frans Hals Museum Haarlem, invnr. FHM 10097. Photograph by: Dick van Broekhuizen.

Andriessens Impressionistic Skin

In all of Andriessen's sculptures, including *The Docker*, the artist incorporates an agile surface, a moving skin, reworked and thoroughly worked. When cast in bronze, light catches and reflects off the skin, giving the impression of life and movement. Of course, the famous Impressionist Rodin also used this technique. The skin covers the entire sculpture and gives life to the overall architecture of the body. In his sculpture of *The Docker*, Andriessen empathises with ordinary people, not, as is usual in a war memorial, with a hero, an unknown soldier or a military leader. Andriessen conveys the heroism of ordinary people. The wrought surface conveys a thoroughly lived life, depicting a man tainted by external circumstances. Justice is reincarnated by a real human being doing his best, complete with degraded skin, not a figure as a uniformed abstraction with a polished exterior.

Conclusions

As we have seen in this short essay, it is possible, and fruitful, to try to trace the choices made by artists in their plaster sketches. This is the claim of the museum, and it is possible to read the sculptures. Although Andriessen and Arp had very different sculptural ideas, their mental working methods were similar: working in models, reworking, taking parts they liked and reintegrating them into other models; whether in clay (Andriessen) or directly working in plaster (Arp). This is an interesting conclusion for a historian of modern sculpture, since Arp is considered one of the epitomes of modern art and sculpture, while Andriessen represents the continuity of the figure, a much more traditional sculptor. It can be deceptive to rely solely on general art historical descriptors such as avant-garde, modern, traditional, figurative or abstract. In developing and working on his sculpture, Arp benefits as much from history as Andriessen from abstraction. Both use plaster as a waypoint in their creative process. Sculptural ideas are developed into models, intriguing forms are repeated and assembled into a better sculpture. The difference is: Arp reworks the plaster, disassembles it, saws and chops in it to isolate useful elements, collaging these directly into new assemblages. Andriessen always starts by working through the clay sketch, or starts a new sketch in which he makes improvements, and casts each intermediate step in plaster.

Of course, they arrive at completely different results. This only emphasises the flexibility of plaster as a material. The sculptural results are interesting in themselves. Arp's and Andriessen's sculptures have different forms, different compositions, and different skins. But they can be read,

they can be analysed. *The plaster trail is not a trail of copies, but a plaster lineage of the sculpture.* I expect more interesting results for the history of sculpture in further analyses. Of course, a visual reading of a sculpture should be embedded in biographical information about the artist and his environment, general art descriptive terms, technical information and general art theoretical ideas. These are all helpful methods, and the work of art itself serves as the central theoretical object. All this is complicated by sculptural technique, which involves all sorts of models, plaster casts, clay sketches or drawings, final models, serial casts, unique stone copies, and all sorts of different craftsmen working for the artist, all of which detract from the uniqueness, the Benjaminian ‘aura’ of the work of art. The theoretical object, the artwork, consists of the final piece combined with all of its preliminary stuff, this stuff sculpture is made of. It is very important for art scholars to be able to see the more detailed aesthetic dynamics, a history of artistic decisions, in these three-dimensional plaster sketches, not only striving for a philological sculptural ‘*Urtext*’ of the most finished sculpture, but seeing the sculpture in all its creative and artisanal richness. The Gipsotheek could very well serve this purpose as a quarry for sculptural analysis, history, and reflection.

“The plaster trail is not a trail of copies, but a plaster lineage of the sculpture.”

References

- Andriessen, Mari. *De Dokwerker*. Edited by Jaap Meijer, Carlinapers, 1980.
- Arp, Jean, and Kai Fischer. *Hans Arp: Skulpturen, eine Bestandsaufnahme*. Hatje Cantz, 2012.
- Baudry, Marie-Thérèse, and Dominique Bozo. *Principes D'analyse Scientifique: La Sculpture: Méthode et Vocabulaire*. Edited by André Chastel and Jacques Thirion, Imprimerie Nationale, 1978.
- Benjamin, Walter, and Henk Hoeks. *Het kunstwerk in het tijdperk van zijn technische reproduceerbaarheid en andere essays*. SUN, 1985.
- Descharnes, Robert, and Jean-François Chabrun. *Auguste Rodin*. Edita, 1967.
- Elsen, Albert E. *In Rodin's Studio. A Photographic Record of Sculpture in the Making*. Phaidon Press, Musée Rodin, 1980.
- Elsen, Albert Edward, and Rosalyn Frankel Jamison. *Rodin's Art: The Rodin Collection of the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University*. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Giedion-Welcker, Carola. *Contemporary Sculpture: An Evolution in Volume and Space*. George Wittenborn, 1960.
- Hartog, Arie, and Veronika Wiegartz. *Die Firma Arp: Formenkosmos und Atelierpraxis*. Gerhard-Marcks-Stiftung, 2022.
- Horswell, Edward. Personal interview with the author. 24-25 September 2018.
- Ingold, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. Routledge, 2013.
- Keurs, Pieter ter, et al. *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden Leiden: Een geschiedenis van 200 jaar*. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, 2018.
- Tilanus, Louk. *De beeldhouwer Mari Andriessen*. De Haan, 1984.
- Tilanus, Louk, and Frans Hals Museum. *De schenking Andriessen. Bronzen, gipsen en terracotta's bewaard in Het Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem*. Frans Halsmuseum, De Hallen, 2003.
- Van Rheeden, Herbert. "The Rise and Fall of the Plaster-Cast Collection at The Hague Academy of Fine Arts (1920–1960): A Personal Enterprise of the Dutch Dilettante and Classicist Constant Lunsingh Scheurleer (1881–1941)." *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol. 13, no. 2, Jan. 2001, pp. 215–29.
- Wasserman, Jeanne L. *Metamorphoses in Nineteenth-Century Sculpture*. Fogg Art Museum / Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Wittkower, Rudolf. *Sculpture: Process and Principles*. London, 1977.

Endnotes

- ¹ I would like to thank Jan Teeuwisse, Joost Bergman and Louise Bjeldbak Henriksen for their comments.
- ² I intend to use the term 'sculptor' or 'artist' as neutrals. I use the male, female or next form when I am aware of the gender of the artist.
- ³ In the twentieth century, the material for a finished sculpture could be anything from wood, to objects, to food, to plaster itself. Wood could also be considered a traditional sculptural material, for example in medieval religious sculpture.
- ⁴ A Gypsoteca, Gypsotheca or Gipsoteca is a plaster collection, the Dutch translation is *Gipsotheek*. Thorwaldsen's Museum was built in 1839-1848 as a monument to the artist, who returned to Copenhagen from Rome. After his death in 1844, he was buried in one of the museum's courtyards.
- ⁵ The visitor sees models, maquettes and sketches of famous sculptures in other places, whereby these plasters function as creative indexes for the finished sculpture.
- ⁶ Of course, an awareness of studio practice among historians of sculpture exists. An early example of this is (Wasserman 1975). This project involved art historical as well as technical research, including studio practices and casting practices. However, it is still a relatively specialised field. For Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), much work has already been done. The travelling Rodin exhibition that started in 2015 (Groninger Museum 2017), entitled *A Genius at Work*, still presented Rodin's studio practice as a new insight into Rodin's art. In the case of Rodin, this is unwarranted, see for example (Descharnes 1967; Elsen 1980; Elsen 2003). However, the studio practices of numerous other artists are still unclear or are still being researched.
- ⁷ Interestingly, Ingold includes some thoughts on the hands of the maker. The hand is capable of making things, of receiving and feeling, of working as a sensory instrument, but it is also capable of communicating, of giving back, of working as an advanced writing tool. The hand is not a tool controlled by the brain, it is an extension of the sculptor's mind. This is both a beautiful metaphor and a very real, non-literary, non-textual reality for a sculptor, both equally valid (metaphorically and in terms of making).
- ⁸ From the Stiftung Arp (Berlin-Rolandseck) (Hartog 2022).
- ⁹ Hartog is the author of Arp's catalogue raisonnée: (Fischer 2012) On Arp's studio practice: (Hartog 2022)
- ¹⁰ Of course, when working on a commission, a final design would eventually be reached, as we see in the example of the *Scrutant l'Horizon / Horizontspäher* of 1964 in the collection Kunstmuseum, Den Haag and the final bronze in the public space (Den Haag, Bezuidenhoutseweg) (Hartog 2022, chap. Louise Bjeldbak Henriksen, "Den Horizont Abspähen").
- ¹¹ If a sculpture were to be removed and placed in a friend's living room or in a museum's depot, this process of improvisation would come to an end. It is only when a sculpture is copied in bronze or stone that one can speak of final sculptures, but these sculptures could also be considered as solidified forms, confirmed by the artist.
- ¹² Preferred term for the title: *The Docker*, as this is used by the enlargement company of Bousquet in a letter dated June 2 1952, and as the term used between them to refer to this monument (Tilanus 1984, 83). *Dokwerker* is the Dutch title used by the artist himself, as Tilanus tells on p. 83. Not all of the sketches have survived. The forces are invisible, but the figure suggests pushing back against a strong headwind.
- ¹³ In conversation with Louk Tilanus, on several occasions, but certainly during a visit on the 26th of April 2024.
- ¹⁴ Firing clay to preserve it is not a common method, as firing a clay object can damage or destroy the model. A fired clay, a terracotta, is prepared for firing and does not contain an armature. Usually it could or should be considered as the final stage.
- ¹⁵ The first three are of a man with a stick. These three have been lost. Only a bronze cast of the third from the left - the smaller model, of a slender figure - survives. The fourth sculpture, a later plaster of a freestanding docker (without bat), is in the collection of the Museum Beelden aan Zee Gipsotheek.
- ¹⁶ Mari Andriessen is but one, and the only sculptor, of a well-known artistic family of Roman-Catholic composers and musicians from Haarlem.

Why Should We Be Talking About Value Reproduction?

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Authors

Emma van Bijnen and Rebecca Venema

Discipline

Communication Sciences, Social Sciences, Critical Studies

Keywords

Values / Social Norms / Inclusion / Exclusion / Communication

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/ol348FHrt

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Abstract

This conceptual theoretical essay explores how values are continually reproduced through communication and how they shape societal norms. Although we all reproduce values on a daily basis through our various communicative practices, the definitions and functions of values are frequently ambiguous and presupposed across disciplines. By drawing from communication science and social science literature, the essay reflects on the mechanisms of value reproduction, linking the process of value reproduction to issues of inclusion, exclusion, and identity. Because, what happens when we reproduce values? Who gets to reproduce and who gets to challenge the reproduction of values? Who gets included in this reproduction and who gets excluded? What is the role of media in the reproduction of values? And importantly, underlying all these questions, what exactly are values and why should we care about how we reproduce values ourselves?

Introduction

Value reproduction is researched often, but the process is often neglected. Whether at the dinner table or on social media, we engage in and talk about value reproduction more than we think; from the ways in which political candidates reinforce known ‘conservative’ or ‘progressive’ values in their campaigns to how our favorite artists challenge the values of the status quo with their latest projects. We often do not notice the values we accept as ‘normal’ until someone deviates from a common norm – dresses differently, lives differently, speaks or acts differently – or when activist groups loudly challenge established beliefs and codes of conduct. We curse them, applaud them, and may even feel emboldened when we ourselves dare to go against the grain. Although our private and public discussions often seem to feature instances when someone does something that clashes with our own values, or alternatively when someone speaks up for them and goes against reigning social norms, we often do not seem to notice the myriads of ways in which we, ourselves, reinforce and reproduce existing values in and through our daily practices.

In this essay, we ‘unpack’ such reproduction processes and reflect on the intertwining of values and social norms therein. We state that it is important to look at the reproduction of values because the social norms that dictate how we ought to be and live do not necessarily reflect general social realities. As noted by Hauksson-Tresch, when researching semiotics and homosexuality, whilst the challenging of heteronormativity still causes a stir, everyday expressions of heterosexuality are so normalized they provide us with a false image in which society is presented as sexually uniform:

“The heteronormative nature of society we live in is often not even consciously recognized by the majority of the population (Valentine 1993). The repetition of heterosexual performances in the public space, such as marriages, creates the illusion that society has always been naturally heterosexual and conceals the sexualized power relations that shaped it (Browne 2007)” (2021, 559).

In other words, the values we reproduce do not (necessarily) reflect social realities and can reinforce a false normativity that goes unquestioned. Hauksson-Tresch adds that the lack of focus on normativity can be explained, as *“the work on heterosexuality is rare because we do not deal with something that goes without saying”* (2021, 559). More broadly speaking,

the lack of conscious recognition of value reproduction – whether it concerns heterosexuality or some other social norms – is missing in academic research as well.

When it comes to the reproduction of art, culture and society, generally, research on values focuses more on ‘value clashes’ rather than ‘value reproductions’, with various disciplines studying the ways in which norms are challenged, for instance through activism (see e.g. Martinsson 2016; Plotnikof et al. 2021; Ray & Fuentes 2020). An additional focus on value reproduction in academia approaches value reproduction from a ‘product’ perspective. For instance, in art and cultural research we find studies on the reproduction of ideologies in/with cultural artifacts, such as critical reflections on the reproduction of (Dutch) colonial imagery in seventeenth century Dutch paintings and beyond, as well as the challenging of these value reproductions through current artistic activism (see e.g. the various essays in Van Bijnen et al. 2024).

Both prevalent approaches to value reproduction in academia are valid, necessary, and undoubtedly to be found in this journal edition on reproduction. However, re-starting the discussion on social norms and values from a viewpoint that stresses the complexity and the layers of (subconscious) processes of value reproduction is warranted as well (Xenitidou & Edmonds 2014). Especially, when, for example, any adaptation of a book or copy of a photograph automatically means the reproduction of topics, tropes, and themes. While we often discuss the fact that certain topics, tropes, and themes are reproduced in such ‘products’, as well as the contexts and consequences of such reproductions, we rarely focus on how we reproduce them. By deconstructing the *process* of value reproduction itself, we may be able to answer some fundamental questions on the reproduction of art, culture, and indeed societal norms: *How are values produced, reproduced and negotiated? How do values become norms? What do our norms say about us and our societies? Furthermore, who is included in the value reproduction process and who is being excluded?*

This brief conceptual theoretical essay focuses on the process of value reproduction through *communication* and highlights why we should all be talking about it, regardless of academic disciplines. As such, this essay reflects on literature from sociology, critical theory and argumentation sciences, amongst others, to elucidate the processes of value reproduction through communication and their societal implications. To shed some light on value reproductions, we illustrate three essential characteristics of value reproduction, which form the core conceptual focus of this essay:

1. Values and norms – and thus their reproduction – often remain rather implicit and unconscious but come to the fore when they are challenged and a different idea on desirability or appropriateness causes a clash or tension.
2. Our values and how they are translated to social norms are dynamic and contextual concepts; they can differ amongst social groups, generations, relationships, cultures, historic settings, spatial contexts, and so on. Thus, what is acceptable or not is changeable depending on the time, place and the social context or setting in which a value is (re)produced.
3. The (re)production of societal values is essentially linked to power relations and segmentation, meaning as a process it inherently has inclusionary and exclusionary effects.

Norms and Values

We need to define the differences and relation between values and social norms.

We all have individual intuitive ideas about what is acceptable or unacceptable to us or to others in particular settings. We know what is (seemingly) a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way of doing things, which core principles should guide our actions, or which key principles our society should strive for. At the same time, social norms and values are often left implicit, which makes it difficult to use them in public discourse and academic research. In fact, both values and social norms come with a plethora of definitions from different disciplines in the social sciences and humanities (see e.g., Elsenbroich & Gilbert 2014; Legros & Cislighi 2020), which makes it even more important to clearly define what we are talking about when we use these terms – and what we mean when we say ‘the reproduction of values’.

Values such as freedom, justice, equality, privacy, and security are basic beliefs and principles that refer to desirable goals that transcend specific actions and situations. These abstract beliefs and principles serve as the convictions based on which we make choices, evaluate our own actions and that of others (Schwartz 1992). Each individual carries with them multiple values that influence how they go through life in a way that they deem ‘good’. As such, it is based on our values that we judge something to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or something as ‘more important’ or ‘more fitting’ than something else. It is also important to note that whilst we all have multiple values, we may weigh them differently. In other words, our values form a value system or value hierarchy; thus, although you may share values with your friends or within a culture, they may be weighed differently with two people, for

example, both highly valuing ‘security’ and ‘freedom’ but one favoring the former and the other the latter (see e.g. Schwartz and Bardi 2001). Values are abstract and how they are placed in our personal hierarchies is subject to change, depending on the spatial and temporal contexts we are in. For instance, we tend to value security more when we feel threatened and may have valued freedom more when we were younger and our freedom was limited by our parents, who in turn tried to make us feel safe and secure.

While values are abstract and overarching concepts, *social norms* can be explained as codes of conduct that translate values into more concrete and specific rules of what (not) to do or how to (not) behave in a given situation or context. Hence, norms serve as frameworks by which people determine and judge which kind of behavior is ‘normal’, socially desired, warranted, and acceptable or unacceptable. Importantly, there is a conceptual distinction between different types of norms that complement each other. Researchers distinguish between *descriptive norms* and *injunctive norms* (Cialdini et al. 1991). Descriptive norms refer to what people perceive is *commonly done* within a reference group. Injunctive norms, instead, refer to ideas what *ought to be done* and to perceived acceptance or possible disapproval and punishment (Cialdini et al. 1991; Rimal & Lapinski 2008). In this injunctive sense, norms prescribe behaviors and actions and thus ensure social order, regulation and coordination of (socially desired) practices and interactions (Bicchieri 2006, 2017; Hechter & Opp 2001; Lapinski & Rimal 2005; Rimal & Lapinski 2015).

Overall, we can state that norms are one way in which values play out in our daily lives; they are the guideline instructions by which we as people seek to adhere to values in specific situations and contexts. Here, we see the fundamental intertwining of values and social norms referred to in the introduction to this essay; it underlines why it is important to take social norms into consideration if we want to unpack and understand value reproduction.

Communication and Values

Communication is the primary conduit for value reproduction.

Communication is the main conduit by which we reproduce values. To discuss the process of reproduction through communication, we first need to briefly define what we mean with ‘*communication*’ and ‘*reproduction*’ here.

With *communication* we refer to social interactions, but also for example (social) media communication, advertisement, non-verbal communication and artistic expressions. This broad conceptualization of communi-

cation as a process of encoding and decoding messages through a medium, which can be speech, TikTok, a painting or a commercial, means communication is all around us, all the time. We engage with communication from the moment we wake up and read the news on our phone, to when we open Instagram on our way to work, to when we message our colleagues that we are going to be later, and this all before we even get to the office. When we arrive, we may encode a message through the medium of an email to our boss and try to decode the message they encoded in their reply.

With the *reproduction* of values, we refer to a process that occurs constantly in our various forms of communication, often without conscious reflection. If we look at the conversations that we have with the people around us, our values are often at the basis of what divides us and the common ground that unites us (van Bijnen 2020). It is primarily through communication that people seek information and learn about social reality, social conflicts or ideals – be it in everyday life when we observe others or through interpersonal communication interactions between friends, within families, in classrooms, or via mediated communication, such as ‘traditional’ media (e.g., news(papers), TV, advertisements) or social media (e.g., X, Instagram, TikTok) (e.g., Geber & Hefner 2019; Yanovitzky & Rimal 2006). As such, the reproduction of values and social norms is inherently linked to communication and practices (Chung & Rimal 2016; Geber & Hefner 2019; Lapinski & Rimal 2005; Rimal & Lapinski 2015; Yanovitzky & Rimal 2006).

With communication being the main vehicle for value reproduction, it is not surprising that the constant reproduction of values and norms forms the implicit core of the communication sciences. Yet, like many other academic disciplines, the concept of values and their functions is often presupposed rather than examined in depth, making it important to make the implicit explicit.

How We Learn About Norms and Values

We learn about social norms and values by observing their (re)production by others.

To get an impression of what is socially acceptable or unacceptable we observe our environments. By looking at others, we familiarize ourselves with norms and values in different, yet interrelated contexts. As such, values are most often learned, communicated, reproduced, negotiated, reinterpreted through our interactions with family members, in schools, and in inter-

“In other words, if our understanding of a value gets challenged or changed because a deviation of the norm is presented, the question is whether we want to accept that deviation and adopt it, or not.”

personal communication among peers (see, e.g., Chung & Rimal 2016; Geber et al. 2019; Hogg & Reid 2006).

In addition, we learn about values through our use of (social) media. A lot of research on norms and values is conducted on ‘mediated norms and values’, which concerns the norms and values communicated through media exposure and mediated public discourses, such as TV shows, movies, series, (digital) newspaper coverage, as well as on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook or X (Geber & Hefner 2019; Gunther et al. 2006; Tankard & Paluck 2016). Communication research has demonstrated extensively that exposure to media contents and mediated public discourses essentially shape our thoughts on topics/issues. More specifically, through mediated communication we are given an impression of which topics/issues are important in our society, as the media selects for us what we should focus on (i.e., *agenda-setting*, McCombs 2014), and how to make sense of these topics/issues by the way the selected topics are talked about (i.e., *(value) framing*, Entman 1993; Lecheler & de Vreese 2019; Entman & Usher 2018; Coleman 2010). In fact, media can shape our perceptions of the prevalence of practices as well as their acceptability; this in turn can affect people’s practices, which they may adjust to what they think is considered acceptable by society (e.g., Chung & Rimal 2016; Geber & Hefner 2019; Lapinski & Rimal 2005; Nathanson 2008).

How we learn values can be done directly and indirectly. We sometimes encounter values that are communicated to us *explicitly*, for example when they are directly communicated and promoted through laws, education and so on. They are the norms that we are being taught (and told) on what is ‘correct’ and what is not. As such, the explicit norms on ‘how we as a society’ value, for example, women’s health, equality or same-sex marriage are often codified in our laws and our textbooks. However, more often, we see that values and social norms are conveyed and reinforced – and thus also reproduced – in more *implicit*, yet powerful ways (see, e.g., Bergmann 1998). In fact, values and norms are produced, reproduced and maintained by social approval/disapproval and sanctions (Bicchieri 2006; 2017; Hechter & Opp 2001; Lapinski & Rimal 2005; Rimal & Lapinski 2015). In addition, we encounter values and social norms through unspoken behavioral rules that determine what is acceptable within a society, family, friend group, and so on. Rather than being codified into prescriptive documents, such as laws or textbooks, these values are often *implicitly* communicated through certain expectations of how to act ‘appropriately’ (Homans 1974). For example, let us consider a dinner date at a generic restaurant and the implicit social norms on what is considered ‘appropriate’ in that context;

social expectations presume that a dinner date is between people from the opposite sex, dictate that one should behave ‘like a woman’, the other should act ‘like the man’, as well as how one should dress, how we ought to greet people we meet for the first time, which topics you should (not) talk about in public, and the list goes on. Depending on the cultural context in which the dinner date takes place, such notions on what is ‘proper’ are most likely not prescribed to us *explicitly*, but instead are *implicit* social expectations (repeatedly) communicated in media portrayals of dinner dates, stories by colleagues or friends, as well as what we see ourselves when we visit restaurants. The repeated exposure to a reproduced norm reinforces the social expectations we attach to places, situations and people. We have expectations on what we will encounter when we go to a church and what we will encounter when we go to a rave; we have expectations on how people will dress, how they behave, how they move, and maybe even the ‘type of people’ we expect to encounter. It is how we socially condition ourselves. It helps us (try to) fit in.

Reproducing a Value vs. Challenging a Value

What happens when a value gets (re)negotiated?

Depending on the context, we have certain expectations on how we should be, how we should talk, how we should act, and so on. Aware of these expectations, we may choose to ‘behave’ to get approval, to fit in, or simply to avoid punishment for flouting social expectations. As such, we constantly reinforce and reproduce existing norms and values in and through our daily practices and social interactions, by the way we dress, the way we talk, the books we display on our shelves, the news outlets we claim to follow and so on.

Occasionally, we may choose to rebel because we get tired of conforming or to make a point. On a larger scale, social movements often seek to disrupt the reproduction of certain values—such as those that perpetuate inequality or discrimination—by bringing attention to alternative values and advocating for their (re)adoption as we have seen, for example, in the renewed protests for the access to abortion as right to self-determination and human right in the United States. Prevailing values and norms are renegotiated when we (or others) do not meet other people’s expectations of what is desirable, acceptable or unacceptable. When socially accepted norms get tested, we can expect to see people surprised, angry, as well as pleased. We may also see the provocateur get ‘nasty looks’, they may be informed that they do not act or talk appropriately or are even told to ‘*get the*

hell out of here!' In other words, whilst a 'simple' reproduction of existing values and norms goes without further notice, they become 'visible' when they are being challenged or *negotiated*.

The question then is, do we consider it a reproduction or renegotiation of a value, if its meaning is altered due to, for example, the context in which it is reproduced? We propose that whether we can consider something a value *reproduction* or whether we consider it a *negotiation* of a value, depends on our reaction towards the challenge of an existing norm – i.e., the 'new doing or being'. As stated previously, the (re)production of a value or norm is a process that goes on without much notice or intrinsic alteration to the understanding of the value itself, as it aligns with the status quo or reinforces the status quo. However, if the new doing or being causes tension, for example others are offended, we see a negotiation of the existing norm. Whether this affects the further reproduction of that value in the future in the previous state or the altered state that includes the 'new', depends on how we deal with the tension. In other words, if our understanding of a value gets challenged or changed because a deviation of the norm is presented, the question is *whether we want to accept that deviation and adopt it, or not*.

Negotiations of values through deviations of norms happen all the time. For example, think of our understanding of 'freedom' now versus a hundred years ago; what the social value label of 'freedom' refers to now, as well as who is included in this understanding of freedom, has changed. In basic semiotic terms, when a value gets negotiated the label of the value remains the same, which is known as the *signifier*. However, the concept this signifier refers to (i.e., the *signified*) changes.¹ As such, what a specific value comes to entail can change, whether it is slowly over time or a result of more overt and immediate clashes – e.g., following protests, through the legalization of same sex marriages, or by showing the first interracial kiss on television. Moreover, various understandings (i.e., the signified) of the same value label (i.e., the signifier) may exist at the same time. Take, for example, the protection of women's health, which can mean something different when uttered by US Presidential candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. Thus, different interpretations of values may be encoded as different norms by different people. As a result, the reproduction of the interpretation of these values in their respective policies and laws may also differ greatly.

The Social Dynamics of Value Reproduction

What happens when we do not fit in?

Although this essay strictly focuses on the reproduction of values through communication as a process, we briefly want to discuss an important effect, or product, of value reproduction. Specifically, while we stressed the important role of social media platforms in processes of value reproduction and value negotiation, we also need to highlight that their role in our societies also challenges social values.

Social media platforms and their algorithms have penetrated markets, labor relations, and affect democratic practices, and so on (van Dijck et al. 2018). Here, public values such as ‘privacy’, ‘security’ or ‘fairness’ are at stake, which causes fights over regulations between individual platforms, (supra)national governments, city councils, and NGOs. These fights lead to questions such as: *What* kind of platformed, datafied, algorithm and AI-driven society do we want to live in? *What* are the values we deem worthy of protecting? (Venema 2021). Although these questions are indeed relevant and interesting, what we are considering here is not necessarily the ‘*what*’ but the ‘*who*’. More specifically, *who* do these public values include? *Whose* privacy and security are deemed worthy of consideration? *Who* is being excluded in the norms that are derived from these values? *Who* gets to challenge norms on such public values? The reproduction of values has consequences. As stated, values are encoded to present and represent social norms, which may not reflect social realities. In short, norms are exclusionary and who gets to be considered ‘good’, whose behavior is to be considered ‘appropriate’, and whose interests are considered ‘worthy’, is closely tied to social power relations.

Our (shared) values are part of our sense of self and sense of belonging. Identity is a key factor in the reproduction of values. In fact, values are the core of one's personal and social identities (Hitlin 2003, Schwartz 1994). Our sense of self and of belonging or distinction is closely tied to the values we hold and the groups with which we believe to share those values; with whom we have *common ground* (van Bijnen 2020). As humans we like to belong and prefer to choose our communities based on common ground, whether that be shared experiences (i.e., *personal common ground*) or because you share interests and values with others (i.e. *communal common ground*) (Clark 2006). Through communication, individuals and groups express and affirm their identities, which in turn reinforces the values associated with those identities. For example, cultural practices, language

“If we look at the conversations that we have with the people around us, our values are often at the basis of what divides us and the common ground that unites us” (van Bijnen 2020).

use, and symbolic expressions all serve to communicate and reproduce the values that are central to a group's identity.

Conversely, when individuals or groups are excluded from the process of value reproduction, it can lead to feelings of alienation and a sense of disconnection from society. This is often the case for marginalized groups whose values and identities are not reflected in mainstream media or dominant cultural narratives—or groups that claim to be marginalized such as right-wing populist political actors. In such cases, alternative forms of communication—such as social media, grassroots movements, or subcultures—can provide a space for the reproduction and affirmation of alternative values. The role that news media, films, advertisements, or social media platforms play in the reproduction of social norms and values cannot be overstated, nor does their role in reproduction of role models and harmful stereotypes.

Media contents and mediated public discourse can provide role models of 'normal', 'appropriate' or 'desirable' attitudes and practices (Chia & Gunther 2006; Elmore et al. 2017; Gunther et al. 2006; Liu et al. 2019; Shah & Rojas 2008; Tankard & Paluck 2016; Yanovitzky & Stryker 2001). Especially in advertisements such ideas of 'desirability' are often communicated by presenting idealized ideas of what individuals are supposed to look like, which includes stereotypical portraits of social groups, their practices or how they look. Such idealizations and stereotypes are thought to facilitate understanding by audiences as they reduce complexity in marketing messages. However, idealizations and stereotypes also (co)determine and reconfirm social norms (e.g., Berger 2015). For example, they often lead to cis-normative, gendered expectations in advertisements when they show what a society considers to be 'typically female' or 'typically male', which roles are assigned to the genders and what expectations are placed on them. At the same time, processes of value reproduction and value negotiation are essentially tied to social power structures and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, which play out in various ways.

The mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in media are guided by *selective representation* (i.e., who gets to be seen and heard), *framing* (i.e., how are people being presented), and *agenda-setting* (i.e., what issues are given attention) (see, e.g., Lecheler & de Vreese 2019; Entman & Usher 2018; Coleman 2010; McCombs 2014). Media outlets can greatly influence which values are emphasized, which are being ignored, and what faces we see on our screens and who are being marginalized. Take the media's continuous portrayal of social groups such as immigrants and asylum seekers in a

negative light; who get to be seen and heard, how they are being presented and what issues are prioritized in public discourse can reinforce existing stereotypes, thereby influencing public perception and societal values (e.g., Brantner et al. 2011; Parry 2010; Zhang & Helmueller 2017).

Being mindful of the reproduction of values in our communication, whether social interactions or through (social) media, thus matters. Being aware of value reproductions helps us better question who is being presented to us as ‘desirable’ – i.e., included in the norm – and who is being presented as ‘undesirable’ – i.e., excluded from the norm.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the reproduction of values is a complex, often implicit process deeply embedded in our daily lives and communication practices. Recognizing the dynamic and contextual nature of values and norms helps us understand their fluidity. This fluidity means that whilst we consider values and social norms rigid, they may be challenged, and contested. Mediated communication plays a pivotal role in this, not only by reflecting societal values but also by actively shaping them, often reinforcing existing power structures and excluding marginalized voices.

By deconstructing the process of value reproduction, we gain insight into the underlying mechanisms that sustain societal norms. Thus, this essay is also meant as a call to critically engage with the values we reproduce in our own lives and through our research. We should challenge ourselves to reflect on our complicity in maintaining the status quo; by becoming more aware of how we all reproduce values through our communication practices. Only by being conscious of the *process* we can better navigate and influence the social world we inhabit, striving for a society that more accurately reflects the diverse realities of its members.

References

- Berger, Arthur Asa. *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society*. Fifth edition, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
- Bergmann, Jörg. "Introduction: Morality in Discourse." *Research on Language and Interaction*, vol. 31, no. 3–4, 1998, pp. 279–94, doi.org/10.1080/08351813.1998.9683594.
- Bicchieri, Cristina. *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Bicchieri, Cristina. *Norms in the Wild. How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Brantner, Cornelia, et al. "Effects of Visual Framing on Emotional Responses and Evaluations of News Stories about the Gaza Conflict 2009." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 3, 2011, pp. 523–40, doi.org/10.1177/107769901108800304.
- Browne, Kath. (2007). "(Re)making the other, heterosexualising everyday space." *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 39, no. 4, 996–1014.
- Chia, Stella C., and Albert C. Gunther. "How Media Contribute to Misperceptions of Social Norms About Sex." *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2006, pp. 301–20, doi.org/10.1207/s15327825mcs0903_3.
- Chung, Adrienne, and Rajiv N. Rimal. "Social Norms: A Review." *Review of Communication Research*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1–28, doi.org/10.12840/issn.2255-4165.2016.04.01.008.
- Cialdini, Robert B., et al. "A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: A Theoretical Refinement and Reevaluation of the Role of Norms in Human Behavior." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 24, 1991, pp. 201–34, doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60330-5.
- Clark, Herbert, (2006). "Context and common ground." *Concise Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Language and Linguistics*, 2006, pp. 85–87.
- Coleman, Renita. "Framing the Pictures in Our Heads: Exploring the Framing and Agenda-Setting Effects of Visual Images." *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by Paul D'Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers, Routledge, 2010, pp. 233–61.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *Ferdinand de Saussure*. Cornell University Press, 1986.
- De Saussure, Ferdinand. *Writings in general linguistics*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Elmore, Kristen C., et al. "Media as a 'Super Peer': How Adolescents Interpret Media Messages Predicts Their Perception of Alcohol and Tobacco Use Norms." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2017, pp. 376–87, doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0609-9.
- Entman, Robert M. "Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 43, no. 4, 1993, pp. 51–58, doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.
- Entman, Robert M., and Nikki Usher. "Framing in a Fractured Democracy: Impacts of Digital Technology on Ideology, Power and Cascading Network Activation." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2018, pp. 298–308, doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqx019.
- Elsenbroich, Corinna, and Nigel Gilbert. *Modelling Norms*. Springer, 2014, doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7052-2.
- Geber, Sarah, and Dorothee Hefner. "Social Norms as Communicative Phenomena: A Communication Perspective on the Theory of Normative Social Behavior." *Studies in Communication / Media*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2019, pp. 6–28, doi.org/10.5771/2192-4007-2019-1-6.
- Greenhalgh, Elizabeth M., and Susan E. Watt. "Preference for Consistency and Value Dissimilarities in Dehumanization and Prejudice toward Asylum Seekers in Australia." *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 45, no. 1, Feb. 2015, pp. 110–19. doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2066.
- Gunther, Albert C., et al. "Presumed Influence on Peer Norms: How Mass Media Indirectly Affect Adolescent Smoking." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2006, pp. 52–68, doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00002.x.
- Hauksson-Tresch, N. "The rainbow flag as signal, icon, index and symbol of collective and individual gay identity." *Flags, Color, and the Legal Narrative: Public memory, identity, and critique*, edited by Anne Wagner and Sarah Marusek, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021, pp. 553–571.
- Hitlin, Steven. "Values as the Core of Personal Identity: Drawing Links between Two Theories of Self." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2003, p. 118, doi.org/10.2307/1519843.
- Hogg, Michael A., and Scott A. Reid. "Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and the Communication of Group Norms." *Communication Theory*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 7–30, doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00003.x.
- Homans, George C. *Social Behavior. Its Elementary Forms*. Harcourt, Brace & World, 1974.
- Joseph, John E., and James McElvenny. "Ferdinand de Saussure." *Interviews in the History of Linguistics*, edited by James McElvenny, vol. 1, History and

- Philosophy of the Language Sciences, no. 6, Language Science Press, Berlin, 2022, pp. 41-49. doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7096294.
- Lapinski, Maria, and Rajiv N. Rimal. "An Explication of Social Norms." *Communication Theory*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2005, pp. 127-47, doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2005.tb00329.x.
- Lecheler, Sophie, and Claes H. de Vreese. *News Framing Effects*. First edition, Routledge, 2019, doi.org/10.4324/9781315208077.
- Legros, Sophie, and Beniamino Cislighi. "Mapping the Social-Norms Literature: An Overview of Reviews." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2020, pp. 62-80, doi.org/10.1177/1745691619866455.
- Liu, Jiaying, et al. "Toward an Aggregate, Implicit, and Dynamic Model of Norm Formation: Capturing Large-Scale Media Representations of Dynamic Descriptive Norms Through Automated and Crowdsourced Content Analysis." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 69, no. 6, 2019, pp. 563-88, doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz033.
- Martinsson, Lena. "Frictions and figurations: gender-equality norms meet activism." *Challenging the myth of gender equality in Sweden*, edited by Lena Martinsson, Gabriele Griffin, and Katarina Giritli Nygren, Policy Press, 2016, pp. 187-210.
- McCombs, Maxwell E. *Setting the Agenda. The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Second edition, Polity Press, 2014.
- Nathanson, Amy I. "Socialization by the Media." *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by Wolfgang Donsbach, Wiley, 2008, pp. 4732-35, doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecs073.
- Parry, Katy. "A Visual Framing Analysis of British Press Photography during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon Conflict." *Media, War & Conflict*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 67-85, doi.org/10.1177/1750635210353679.
- Plotnikof, Mie, et al. "Repolicizing diversity work? Exploring the performative potentials of norm critical activism." *Gender, Work & Organization*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2022, pp. 466-485.
- Ray, Rashawn, and Genesis Fuentes. "Formulating a theory in anti-racism activism." *Routledge international handbook of contemporary racisms*, edited by John Solomos, Routledge, 2020, pp. 230-239.
- Rimal, Rajiv N., and Maria Knight Lapinski. "Social Norms." *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by Wolfgang Donsbach, Wiley, 2008, pp. 4706-11, doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecs066.
- Rimal, Rajiv N., and Maria K. Lapinski. "A Re-Explication of Social Norms, Ten Years Later." *Communication Theory*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2015, pp. 393-409.
- Schwartz, Shalom H. "Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values?" *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1994, pp. 19-45, doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). "Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, vol. 25, edited by Mark P Zanna, New York, Academic Press, 1992, pp. 1-65.
- Schwartz, Shalom H., et al. "Values and Intergroup Social Motives: A Study of Israeli and German Students." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 3, 1990, p. 185, doi.org/10.2307/2786958.
- Schwartz, Shalom H., and Anat Bardi. "Value hierarchies across cultures: Taking a similarities perspective." *Journal of cross-cultural Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2001, pp. 268-290.
- Shah, Dhavan V., and Hernando Rojas. "Behavioral Norms: Perception through the Media." *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by Wolfgang Donsbach, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2008, pp. 321-28, doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecb011.
- Tankard, Margaret E., and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. "Norm Perception as a Vehicle for Social Change." *Social Issues and Policy Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2016, pp. 181-211, doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12022.
- Valentine, Gill. "(Hetero) Sexing Space: Lesbian Perceptions and Experiences of Everyday Spaces." *Space, gender, knowledge: Feminist readings*, edited by Linda McDowell and Joanne Sharp, Routledge, 2016, pp. 284-299.
- Van Bijnen, Emma. *Common Ground in Conflict Mediation: An Argumentative Perspective*. 2020. Università della Svizzera italiana, PhD dissertation. *SUSI*, n2t.net/ark:/12658/srd1319166.
- Van Bijnen, Emma, et al., editors. *The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past: Curating Heritage, Art and Activism*. Amsterdam University Press, 2024.
- Van Dijck, José, et al. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Venema, R. *The Construction of Norms. Examinations of Norms for Visual Data Practices in Mediated Public Discourses*. 2021. Università della Svizzera italiana, PhD dissertation. *FOLIA*, folia.unifr.ch/global/documents/319329.
- Xenitidou, Maria, and Bruce Edmonds, editors. *The Complexity of Social Norms*. Springer International Publishing, 2014, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05308-0.

Endnotes

Yanovitzky, Itzhak, and Rajiv N. Rimal. “Communication and Normative Influence: An Introduction to the Special Issue.” *Communication Theory*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1–6, doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00002.x.

Zhang, Xu, and Lea Hellmueller. “Visual Framing of the European Refugee Crisis in Der Spiegel and CNN International: Global Journalism in News Photographs.” *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 79, no. 5, 2017, pp. 483–510, doi.org/10.1177/1748048516688134.

¹ For more on ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’, see the works by Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics and semiotics. For comprehensive reference works of his theories, see e.g., Culler 1986; de Saussure 2006; Joseph & McElvenny 2022.

Dickinson (2019-2021): Adaptation as a Vehicle for the Audio-Visual Exploration of the Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson

Author

Chiara Luigina Dosithea Ravinetto

Discipline

Literature, New Media Studies

Keywords

Biopic / Television / Poetry / Dickinson / Adaptation

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/me458Hy

Abstract

In recent years there has been a rise in tv-shows, movies and books which present an innovative approach to fictionalizing history, approaching period-drama through a more self-aware and contemporary lens. One of such works, *Dickinson* (2019), created by Alena Smith, adapts both Emily Dickinson's life and poetry in a genre-bending literary biopic for the silver screen. The show follows Emily, portrayed by Hailee Steinfeld, as she navigates life and her love for writing in an extremely constraining society. In addition, every episode engages with a different poem, which is included in the title and is used as a thematic template for the narration. This essay explores the different ways the show presents and engages with Dickinson's poetry thematically and visually, while drawing connections between the struggles faced by Emily as she finds her way as an artist and the society we live in today.

Introduction

Literary biopics, understood as biographies of authors made for the screen, face the challenging task of adapting not only the life of a writer but also their work, while simultaneously attempting to externalize the author's interiority and writing process. As Buchanan states, "*a life of reflection, observation, composition and self-abstracting literariness does not self-evidently offer the sort of cinematic dynamism and narrative pulse usually considered the staple fare of the movies*" (2013, 3). These challenges, however, have not discouraged directors and showrunners from adapting the life of writers for the screen in various creative ways. In her series *Dickinson* (2019), Alana Smith, the creator and executive producer of the show, presents an innovative approach to the biopic genre, infusing her work with postmodern, neo-historical aesthetics and feminist consciousness.¹ The comedy/drama series, which premiered on AppleTV+ on November 1st 2019 and concluded on December 24th 2021, adapts both the life and the works of the American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) as she navigates becoming a female poet in a deeply misogynistic society.

Smith stated that during *Dickinson*'s development, she consulted numerous biographies about Dickinson and even literary theory about her work (Lyall 2021). As such, at the heart of *Dickinson* lies not only the adaptation of Emily Dickinson's extensive literary work but also of the extensive scholarly work about her. The series, due to the sources used by Smith to "*compose a mosaic portrait of the character and [...] her times*", can be understood as "*an adaptation of one or more previous texts*" (Indrusiak and Ramgrab 2018, 98). Furthermore, adaptations can be created with the purpose of giving voice to people/characters that were previously marginalized and giving new relevance to the original source text (Sanders 2016, 23), which *Dickinson* attempts and succeeds in doing. The show can thus be seen as a work of historical revision, which is "*the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction*" (Rich 1972, 18). Additionally, I would argue that *Dickinson* can be further inserted into the broader Feminist Revisionist Mythmaking tradition, even if these terms are often reserved for literary texts. As Ostriker explains:

"The core of revisionist mythmaking for women poets lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth, revisionism in its simplest form consists of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them" (1982, 73-74).

The show, in fact, with its queer female lead, explores several overtly feminist themes and encourages the viewer to reconsider any notions they might have of the poet and her extensive literary work.

The following essay will analyze how *Dickinson* approaches the biopic genre innovatively. First, it will briefly explore some of the show's formal characteristics. Then, it will analyze in depth how Smith adapted Emily Dickinson's poetry and life while simultaneously exploring an array of different themes and feminist consciousness.

Fictionalization and Anachronism

Smith credits her interest in Emily Dickinson to a chance encounter during her college years with a biography on the author by scholar Alfred Habegger. It was mostly the irony that pervaded the poet's life that struck Smith, as *"Dickinson's obscurity, while she lived, was at odds with the heat of her talent; her poetry seemed desperate to connect with people, to be understood"* (Waldman 2021). Years later, while pondering the creation of her show, she returned to Dickinson, spending six years creating her genre-defying tv-series (Whiting 2024). Smith, who researched Dickinson's life in detail, wanted to present a *"metaphorical representation of [Emily's] life and body of work and what she means to us today"* (Blacker 2020, 7:58-8:07). This has led her to develop a series that *"violates every tenet of What Victorian Period Pieces Should Look Like and liberates the poet from the hair-hurt of history's tightly wrapped bun"* (Whiting 2024), as *Dickinson* can be placed among a number of tv-shows and movies that have premiered in recent years, which present a distinct attitude towards fictionalizing history. This new typology of works approaches the period-drama and biopic genre through a more self-aware and contemporary lens, as a notable historical figure and their appropriation becomes a point of entry for the directors and creators to explore modern themes.

While one of the main features of the biopic genre is the fictionalization of historical characters (Indrusiak and Ramgrab 2018, 98), the degree of accuracy, fidelity and authenticity regarding the past and the sources used to create the work remain central in the discourse surrounding historical fiction, as critics see *"accuracy as a marker of merit"* (Saxton 2020, 129). Smith, however, moves away from those notions in order to present a lead character that is a *"personification of [Dickinson's] authorial voice"* (Waldman 2021) rather than an accurate representation of the historical figure. Dickinson is often described as *"direct, impulsive, original, and the droll wit who said unconventional things others thought but dared not speak"* (Johnson 1955, 3), characteristics that bled through in her writing. Focus-

ing on the construction of her authorial voice allows the series' Emily,² portrayed by Hailee Steinfeld, to be even more rebellious than she was in real life, giving voice to an array of modern feminist beliefs (Waldman 2021).

Dickinson thus endeavours to compose the poet's authorial voice while simultaneously inviting the audience to assess Dickinson's poetry through a contemporary lens. This is done through the careful use of intertextual references, the intentional employment of fictionalization and anachronism, understood as *"any element of the dramatized presentation which the audience would recognize as belonging to an era different from the historical period in which the drama is set"* (Shanks 2022, 2).³ It is important to note that the employment of anachronism permeates the entirety of the show. Most notably, the show's younger characters present a linguistic register and mannerisms that are reminiscent of teenagers today (Russo 2021, 541). The employment of anachronism can also be seen in the *"self-conscious articulation of ideologies associated with the modern world"* (Russo 2021, 546), exemplified by the casual acceptance in the series of homosexual relationships, especially within Dickinson's young circle of friends. In fact, Emily and Sue's relationship is presented as a well-known secret amongst the younger generations of Amherst. The viewer, who might expect a harsher condemnation of same-sex relationships as the series is set in the past, is brought to apply a more contemporary perception of sexuality to the fictionalized past. This careful and constant employment of anachronism repeatedly reminds the audience of the continuity between past and present that this work aims to underline.

The setting also subtly illustrates the intertwining between the past and the present, as well as fact and fiction, which the show aims to highlight. The famous Dickinson house, now the site of the Emily Dickinson Museum, was recreated using period-accurate decorations with the addition of contemporary colours and wallpaper, making the set seem more contemporary. The production designer Loren Weeks states: *"Since Dickinson was going to be a contemporary interpretation of the poet [...] I wanted to be honest to the historical period, but not beholden to it"* (Brown 2019). This blend of historical and contemporary is especially evident in Emily's second-floor bedroom. The set faithfully replicates the furnishings of the original room, such as the desk and bed. However, it adds several decorations representative of Emily's different interests, including collages reminiscent of a teenage girl's Tumblr page (Brown 2019).

“The show, in fact, with its queer female lead, explores several overtly feminist themes and encourages the viewer to reconsider any notions they might have of the poet and her extensive literary work.”

Adapting a Poet's Life and Characters

As one of the central purposes of *Dickinson* was to portray Emily Dickinson's authorial voice, one of the most challenging aspects of creating this biopic was presented by how to adapt her poems. The series approaches this adaptation in two distinct ways. *In primis*, Dickinson's writing process and poems take physical form in the series as, while Emily writes and thinks about her work, the words appear on the screen. Simultaneously, while she is writing, a voice-over of Emily reads the words, or when she thinks about a poem, Emily mumbles along. The handwritten words, however, always quickly disappear from the screen, underlining the intangible nature of Dickinson's poetry, which transcends the simple act of putting pen to paper. Additionally, *Dickinson* adapts the poet's body of work by having every episode engage with a different poem, which is included in the title and is used as a thematic template for the narration.

The first episode of the series, for example, titled "*Because I could not stop for Death*", adapts one of Dickinson's most well-known poems while setting the stage for one of the major themes of the show: what it means to be a poet and a woman in a society that views women as having only a place in the home. The episode follows Emily as she is forced, yet again, by her mother to entertain a suitor, George (Samuel Farnsworth). She, however, promptly rejects George's advances, stating, "*I'm not gonna marry anyone [...] I have one purpose on this earth, and that is to become a great writer. A husband would put a stop to that*" (Green 2019, 05:58-6:10). George, not deterred, asks her if the reason she will not marry him is that there is someone else. To this, Emily responds that yes, there is someone else, someone he cannot kill, as he is Death. Thus, one of the recurring themes in Dickinson's poetry is introduced. She tells George, "*I'm in love with Death. He takes me out for a carriage ride every night. He's such a gentleman. Sexy as hell*" (Green 2019, 06:36-06:44). As she says this, the scene transforms. The viewer sees a dark carriage, pulled by ghost-like horses, and a completely different Emily, dressed in red, entering the carriage. However, it is not until later that the viewer becomes privy to the words Emily and Death exchange during their meeting.

The episode continues with Emily asking George to publish one of her poems. She later announces the good news to her family, expecting them to be proud of her. However, her parents' reaction is quite the opposite. Her father, Edward, becomes infuriated and states, "*wicked girl [...] we have given you too much freedom, and now you have taken advantage of our kindness [...] [and] exhibit such scandalous behaviour*" (Green 2019, 23:51-24:03). She is thus not allowed to pursue a career and publish her work simply because he

does not “*approve of a woman seeking to build herself a literary reputation*” (Green 2019, 22:37-23:41). While Emily is convinced that her purpose in life is to be a writer, her sense of worth as a writer is still profoundly bound to the opinions of others, especially her father. After the disastrous ending to the family dinner, Emily once more has a vision of a carriage, only this time, the viewer is invited to look into the conversation between Emily and Death. She is dressed in red, signaling to the viewer that she is meeting a ‘lover’ rather than the dreaded harbinger of demise.

The poem, often interpreted as a sweet meeting between the narrator and Death as she is led into eternal sleep (Johnson 1955, 222-223), takes on a new meaning in the series adaptation. The two lovers converse about what transpired at dinner, and when Emily expresses her doubts about being able to become a poet, Death, interpreted by American rapper Wiz Khalifa, states:

“[Death] My darling...you’ll be the only Dickinson they talk about in 200 years. I promise you that.

[Emily] Even if my poems are never published?

[Death] Publicity is not the same thing as immortality.

[Emily] Immortality is nothing. All it takes is being very good and well-behaved and then you go to heaven.

[Death] See, that’s not the kind I mean. Your type of immortality won’t come from you following the rules. It’s gonna come from you breaking them” (Green 2019, 26:55-27:27).

“*The Carriage held but just Ourselves - / And Immortality*” (Dickinson 1863, lines 3-4) does not, in this case, simply symbolize the narrator’s last ride together with Death. The ‘Immortality’ mentioned in the poem takes a new meaning: the immortality of the written word, the immortality one achieves when they are remembered forevermore for their work. It will, however, take Emily the entirety of the show to fully understand the meaning of Death’s words, as she first has to ‘defeat’ those who want to control her and force her to follow the patriarchal rules of her society.

The episode concludes with Emily and her father reconciling and her writing the first stanza of the poem, deliberately halting on the word ‘Immortality’.⁴ As “*literary biopics depict writers both as creations and creators, while the artists’ works are rendered both as fact and fiction*” (Indrusiak and Ramgrab 2018, 99), throughout the episode, Emily is shown first composing and then writing her poem, while experiencing visions throughout the day of the carriage carrying Death. This method of ‘double adaptation’ allows

Dickinson to create links between more or less fictitious events in Emily's life and the composition of her poems without explaining or oversimplifying her artistic process. In fact, it offers "a way of reading Dickinson's oeuvre that draws attention to the myriad of influences that she drew from the world around her" (Russo 2021, 550). In addition, the open fictionalization of a real-life historical character becomes a source of curiosity and scandal, as "there is an ontological scandal when a real-world figure is inserted in a fictional situation" (Mchale 1987, 85). By adapting their lives, these works bring these important historical and literary figures "down from the ivory tower by showing their human and flawed nature" (Indrusiak and Ramgrab 2018, 98), which allows for a deeper exploration of the character's emotions, ideas and motivations.

In addition to Death, which is a recurring theme in Dickinson's poetry and thus a recurring character in the series, Emily also repeatedly encounters 'Nobody' (Will Pullen). While the poem "*I'm Nobody! Who are you?*" is only adapted in the second season's eighth episode, in which Emily roams Amherst listening to people's reactions, invisible following the publication of one of her poems, the character 'Nobody' is introduced during the first episode of the season. 'Nobody', who we later discover is an old school friend of Emily's brother who died during the Civil War, is central to Emily's growth as a poet, guiding her through her ambiguous feelings towards fame and publication. In the final episode of the second season, in fact, the two talk about his death in the coming war, which he will join seeking fame and glory, and he tells Emily:

"You have wars to fight Emily Dickinson. But you must fight them in secret. Alone. Unseen. You must give all the glory to yourself and ask for nothing from the world. You must be a nobody. The bravest, most brilliant nobody who ever existed"
(Howard 2021, 11:27-11:58).

The verses of the poem "*I'm Nobody! Who are you?/ Are you – Nobody – too?*" (Dickinson 1861, lines 1-2) again take a new meaning, linking the feeling of disembodiment the poem evokes to the state of anonymity her poetry will endure during her life (Loving 1986, 8). The characters of Dickinson's poetry are thus personified in the show not only as representations of her poetry but also to aid Emily in her journey of growth as a poet.

Alongside the adaptation of Dickinson's poetry and the embodiment of 'Death' and 'Nobody', *Dickinson* encourages the viewer to reexamine and rethink her body of work by inserting several interactions between

“*Dickinson* [thus] endeavors to compose the poet’s authorial voice while simultaneously inviting the audience to assess Dickinson’s poetry through a contemporary lens.”

the main character of the show and a number of other historical figures, often to comedic effect, simultaneously upping the feeling of scandal the show aims to evoke and providing the viewer with information necessary to gain a deeper understanding of Emily's authorial voice. She, for example, interacts with several famous writers, such as Thoreau, Alcott, Whitman, and Allan Poe, often debating art and poetry. Emily even encounters Sylvia Plath, as she has a vision of the future in the episode "*The Future never spoke*". After Plath shows Emily and her sister a collection of her published work, Emily says "*I thought I told you to burn all my poems when I died*" to which Lavinia responds "*I knew you didn't mean it. I wasn't gonna let everyone forget my sister. And now look, in the future, you're actually famous*" (Heather 2021, 18:50-19:01). Through this encounter, the viewer becomes privy to the manner in which her poems will be published and of the future debates surrounding the poet, especially regarding her sexuality. In addition, the choice of casting recognizable figures of contemporary pop culture for these guest star roles- like Wiz Kalifa as Death, John Mulaney as Thoreau, and Nick Kroll as Allan Poe- both exemplifies the show's desire to link past to present, while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of scandal and familiarity in the viewer.

The Serialized Episodic Form

It is noteworthy to mention that this approach to adapting poetry and Dickinson's authorial voice is facilitated by the choice of medium through which the narrative is presented. I would argue that *Dickinson* falls into what Hilmes refers to as "*serialized episodic*" (2014, 27). Unlike shows of an episodic nature, in which each episode presents a separate closed narrative, like in *Law and Order*, or serials, in which a longer story that carries over from episode to episode is presented, like in *Dallas*, shows presenting a serialized episodic style have a more hybrid nature. In *Dickinson*, the narrative is explored on different levels as the series presents individual episodic narrative arcs through which the broader seasonal arc is interweaved. As Newman states, "*serials tend to focus on ensembles, with each episode interweaving several strands of narrative in alternation scene by scene*" (2006, 16). This is the central feature the serialized episodic form takes on, with the addition of each episode also having a central theme or issue that is resolved by the end of the episode but remains important for the broader narrative arc. This form, unlike film, is able to create "*dense, complex story worlds that can unfold over months, years, and even decades*" and, as such, tv-series:

“can tie viewers to characters, situations, and settings much more effectively exactly because they eschew visual pyrotechnics [of film] in favor of good writing, straightforward exposition, and the evolution of characters and plots over time”
(Hilmes et al. 2014, 27).

Thus, the serial episodic form allows the creators to explore the character's inner workings more deeply over a longer period of time.

As *Dickinson* aims to adapt poems, which, unlike prose writing, present the challenge of being both short and varied in content and themes, the serial episodic form allows Smith to adapt one poem in each episodic narrative arc, capturing their varied moods and themes, while at the same time creating overarching seasonal narrative arcs. Furthermore, the essence of each poem is not only relegated to the plot structure of the episode but also to the set and costume design choices, visually evoking each poem adapted. Moeller, the costume designer for season 2, reveals that during the creation of each costume, she considered the imagery evoked by the poem chosen for each episode by adding patterns and colours referencing Dickinson's poetry while staying true to the period's silhouette (Fraser 2021). For example, in the fourth episode of the second season, entitled “*The Daisy follows soft the Sun*”, in which Emily compares herself to a daisy that will wilt if she does not get the approval of her editor; she is dressed in a bright yellow dress with floral patterns, underscoring the imagery evoked by the poem central to the episode.

Aided by the numerous intertextual references to not only Dickinson's poetry and epistolary work but also different biographies and literary criticism about the author, the show explores Emily's relationship to her own writing, manifestation of her agency and autonomy in an oppressive patriarchal society. The show presents three different seasonal narrative arcs involving her relationship to her writing. In the first season, we see Emily tentatively establishing herself as an author, taking the first steps into publishing, as it is the only way she feels she can become a true writer. In the second season, however, she begins to question the need for fame and recognition and, consequently, the need for her poems to be published. In the third season, Emily ultimately understands that her worth as a writer lies not in the opinion of others, but within herself, and in doing so, she discovers a new depth to her art. Throughout this evolution of Emily's relationship with herself, however, one thing always remains the same: for Emily, her poems are her outlet, the way she expresses herself to the world, the medium through which she establishes and maintains her in-

dependence in a time where she had little freedom outside the confines of her room. As such, while being tangible, her work as a writer also becomes a symbol of freedom in her mind.

Conclusion

Aiming to compose a narrative around Emily Dickinson's authorial voice, *Dickinson* puts the adaptation of her poetry at its centre. However, rather than simply adapting the action of putting pen to paper, the show takes a step further, infusing everything about each episode, from the title to the content to the various settings and costumes, with Dickinson's poetry. Simultaneously, the show aims to identify, analyze and subvert any preconceptions the viewer might have about one of the most brilliant American authors while underlining "*the historical continuities between the struggle to claim a poetic voice by both historical and contemporary women writers*" (Russo 2021, 544). Additionally, the show seeks to better understand "*the truth [that], perhaps, is hidden in her poems*" (Storer 2021, 00:28-00:32), encouraging the viewer to approach her poetry with new and fresh eyes. *Dickinson* aims not to be a 'normal' biopic but becomes "*in some ways [...] a dramatization of literary theory*" (Smith qtd. in Lyall 2021). While "*everything that happens in the show has some connection to fact*" (Smith qtd. in Lyall 2021), the show takes numerous liberties in the development of the narration, inserting visions, dreams and meetings that do not appear in the historical records and adapts most of its dramatic elements from the literary theory surrounding her poetry (Smith qtd. in Lyall 2021).

This amalgamation of intertextual references, anachronisms and intentional fictionalization led *Dickinson* to stray away from authenticity models typical of historical fiction and biographical narrations while presenting a reproduction of Dickinson's poetry and life that focuses on constructing the poet's authorial voice. This has led Smith to create what Harris calls a 'neo-history', a work that "*uses [...] deconstruction to create new narratives and openly fictionalized neo histories*" (Harris 2017, 194), presenting the past and present as united instead of divided, and blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Rather than denying the unknowable nature of the past, *Dickinson* embraces and revels in its own historical 'inaccuracies', creating a new narrative surrounding the poet. This new narrative, in turn, encourages the viewer to reflect on what Dickinson and her extensive literary work can mean for us today while re-appropriating the myth of Emily Dickinson in order to create a relatable feminist and queer icon.

“The ‘Immortality’ mentioned in the poem takes a new meaning: the immortality of the written word, the immortality one achieves when they are remembered forevermore for their work.”

References

- Blacker, Ben. "Alena Smith (Dickinson) and Tony McNamara (The Great)." *The Writers Panel from Forever Dog Podcast Network*, 15 May 2020, benblacker.substack.com/p/alena-smith-dickinson-and-tony-mcnamara-fea?utm_source=publication-search.
- Brown, Elizabeth Quinn. "The Set of Dickinson Is an Ultra-Colorful Version of the Poet's Home." *Architectural Digest*, 6 November 2019, www.architecturaldigest.com/story/dickinson-apple-tv-show-set-design.
- Buchanan, Judith. "Image, story, desire: the writer on film." *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 3–34, doi.org/10.1057/9781137317230_1.
- Dickinson, Emily. "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," 1863. *Selected Poems*. Edited by Stanley Appelbaum. Dover Publications, 2014, p. 35.
- Dickinson, Emily. "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" 1861. *Selected Poems*. Edited by Stanley Appelbaum. Dover Publications, 2014, pp. 9–10.
- Finnerty, Páraic. "'You'll Be the Only Dickinson They Talk About in Two Hundred Years': Queer Celebrity, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *A Quiet Passion*, *Wild Nights with Emily*, and Apple TV+'s *Dickinson*." *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1–30, doi.org/10.1353/edj.2022.0000.
- Fraser, Emma. "How the Costume Design on 'Dickinson' Emphasizes the Sartorial Fire Burning Within." *Elle.Com*, 11 July 2021, www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/a36833852/dickinson-season-2-costume-designer-interview/.
- Green, David Gordon, director. "Because I could not stop." *Dickinson*, season 1, episode 1, AppleTV+, 1 November 2019.
- Harris, Katharine. "'Part of the project of that book was not to be authentic': neo-historical authenticity and its anachronisms in contemporary historical fiction." *Rethinking History*, vol. 21, n.2, 2017, pp. 193–212, doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2017.1315968.
- Hilmes, Michele et al. "RETHINKING TELEVISION: A Critical Symposium on the New Age of Episodic Narrative Storytelling." *Cinéaste*, vol. 39, n.4, 2014, pp. 26–38.
- Howard, Silas, director. "You cannot put a Fire out." *Dickinson*, season 2, episode 10, AppleTV+, 26 February 2021.
- Indrusiak, Elaine, and Ana Iris Ramgrab. "Literary biopics: adaptation as historiographic metafiction." *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*, edited by Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs and Eckart Voigt, Routledge, 2018, pp. 97–105.
- Jack, Heather, director. "The Future never spoke." *Dickinson*, season 3, episode 7, AppleTV+, 3 December 2021.
- Johnson, Thomas H. *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography*. Harvard University Press, 1955.
- Lyall, Sarah. "'Dickinson' Uses the Civil War to Explore Modern Divisions." *The New York Times*, 9 November 2021. www.nytimes.com/2021/11/09/arts/television/dickinson-final-season.html.
- Loving, Jerome. *Emily Dickinson: The Poet on the Second Story*. Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Methuen, 1987.
- Mittell, Jason. *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York University Press, 2015.
- Newman, Michael Z. "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative." *The Velvet Light Trap*, vol. 58, 2006, pp. 16–28.
- Ostriker, Alicia. "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1982, pp. 68–90, www.jstor.org/stable/3173482.
- Passon, Stacie, director. "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" *Dickinson*, season 2, episode 8, AppleTV+, 12 February 2021.
- Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision." *College English*, vol. 34, n.1, 1972, pp. 18–30.
- Rodriguez, Rosemary, director. "The Daisy follows soft the Sun." *Dickinson*, season 2, episode 4, AppleTV+, 15 January 2021.
- Russo, Stephanie. "'You Are, like, so woke': Dickinson and the Anachronistic Turn in Historical Drama." *Rethinking History*, vol. 25, no. 4, February 2021, pp. 534–554, doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2021.1995645.
- Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Second edition, Routledge, 2016.
- Saxton, Laura. "A true story: defining accuracy and authenticity in historical fiction." *Rethinking History*, vol. 24, n. 2, March 2020, pp. 127–144, doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2020.1727189.
- Shanks, John. "Presentist Anachronism and Ironic Humour in Period Screen Drama." *Research in Film and History. New Approaches*, 2022, pp. 1–35, doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/18962.
- Smith, Alana, creator. *Dickinson*. Apple TV+, 2019.
- Storer, Cristopher, director. "Before I got my eye put out." *Dickinson*, season 2, episode 1, AppleTV+, January 8th, 2021.
- Waldman, Katy. "Alena Smith's Subversive 'Dickinson.'" *The New Yorker*, 25 February 2021, www.newyorker.

com/culture/persons-of-interest/alena-smiths-subversive-dickinson.
Whiting, Amanda. "The Story behind the Miraculously Weird 'Dickinson.'" *Bustle*, 20 February 2024, www.bustle.com/entertainment/the-story-behind-the-miraculously-weird-dickinson19355435

End Notes

- ¹ Questions of authorship are quite complex when speaking of TV series, where "the final product of an aired episode goes through complex collaborative processes, filtering the contributions of performers, designers, editors, and network executives" (Mittel 2015, 91). In this essay, I will refer mainly to the show's creator and mention other contributors, such as set designers, where necessary.
- ² For clarity, I will refer to the protagonist of the series as 'Emily' and the historical figure either by her full name or 'Dickinson'.
- ³ See Russo (2021) for an in-depth analysis of how *Dickinson* employs intentional anachronism.
- ⁴ See Finnerty (2022) for an overview of Dickinson's negotiations with celebrity culture during her time and an analysis of the way the show *Dickinson* grapples with her status as a queer celebrity, alongside a number of other recent films about the poet.

Reproducing Traces of Trauma: Towards Transformation Through Contemporary Art

Best
Paper
Prize

Author

Amy Louise Stenvert

Discipline

Curatorial Practice, Art History

Keywords

Trauma / Reproduction / Wounding / Fugitivity /
Contemporary Art

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/dr678IHq



Content
Warning

Abstract

In the spring of 1863, a man known by the name of Peter escaped from a plantation in Louisiana and found safety among Union soldiers encamped at Baton Rouge in the United States of America. Before being able to enlist in the military, he underwent an extensive medical examination which revealed that his back was heavily mutilated and filled with horrific scars. The photograph taken – later often referred to as ‘The Scourged Back’ – became proof of slavery’s brutality and was used by the abolitionists in their campaign to end slavery. The picture was reproduced many times and rapidly spread across the country. More than 160 years later, the image of Peter still provides a powerful imprint of the horrors of slavery and has formed the blueprint of a string of recently produced contemporary art works. This short essay centers three pivotal works by Victor Sonna, Arthur Jafa and Fabiola Jean-Louis that deal with this subject matter and discusses their potential in dealing with and transforming historical trauma.

Disclaimer: The reproduction of violent images – as is done in this essay through the discussed (art) works – raises several ethical questions. While violent images can serve as catalysts in bearing witness to traumatic events, mobilizing and effectuating change, they must always be handled with utmost care. These images carry a significant weight, and repeated exposure and insensitive handling could potentially lead to (re)traumatization, desensitization or turn suffering into spectacle. In this essay, the images – in each case contextualized – are intended to carefully re-read history and empower action without perpetuating harm.

Introduction

During one of my visits to the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in the autumn of 2021, I was unsuspectedly confronted with an intriguing artwork that was positioned as a barrier between the austere, white museum walls. The installation, which, upon closer inspection, appeared to be constructed of bits and pieces of old monkey bars, held a total of fifty-two almost see-through images made of white-coated silkscreen mesh fabric (figure 1). Taking an even closer look, I was drawn towards one particular picture which seemed vaguely familiar. A rather gruesome image of a seated man with visibly painful looking scars covering his whole back (figure 2). Nevertheless, this man seemed strong, with his left hand positioned firmly on



Figure 1. *Installation view of Wall of Reconciliation* by Victor Sonna. 2020. Images on silkscreen mesh fabric and wood, dimensions variable. Photography: Ronald Smits. Courtesy: the artist. The installation was part of the solo exhibition *1525*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 18 July 2020 - 9 January 2022.



Figure 2. *Detail of Wall of Reconciliation* by Victor Sonna. 2020. Image on silkscreen mesh fabric, wooden frame. Photography: Ronald Smits. Courtesy: the artist.



Figure 3. *Installation view of Wall of Reconciliation* by Victor Sonna. 2020. Images on silkscreen mesh fabric and wood, dimensions variable. *Refresh Amsterdam #2: War & Conflict*, Amsterdam Museum, temporary location Hermitage Amsterdam, 7 October 2023 - 24 February 2024.

his left hip and his face also looking in that direction; his eye catching my eye. ‘Where have I seen this man before? What do we know about him?’ I thought to myself, but couldn’t find answers in the wall text or the accompanying catalogue (Esche et al. 2020).¹ Fast forward to two years later, when I visited the Amsterdam Museum to see the exhibition *Refresh Amsterdam #2: War & Conflict*. I encountered the same artwork and again, I was struck by this specific image that was part of the installation (figure 3). Here, too, the exhibition text didn’t present any details about the person depicted.² It seemed time to find out more about this portrait that resonated so strongly in my memory.

The Scourged Back: 1863

The wonders of the web’s image algorithms quickly led me to the photograph of ‘The Scourged Back’ (figure 4),³ an iconic portrait of a man known by the name of Peter (formerly referred to as Gordon). The story goes that during the spring of 1863, Peter escaped from a plantation in Louisiana or Mississippi and found safety among Union soldiers encamped at Baton Rouge (Masur 2020, 77; Silkenat 2014, 179). This event happened during the American Civil War (1861-1865) when the Union was reconstructed and finally freed from slavery, after a long battle between the divided North and South (Masur 2020, 40-46). Subsequently enlisting in the military – which was only possible after the Lincoln administration signed the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 – Peter underwent an extensive medical examination as part of this enlistment (Collins 1985, 43-44). His back was heavily mutilated and filled with horrific scars. The photographs taken of his back – of which at least three versions are known – became proof of slavery’s brutality and were used by the abolitionists in their efforts to end slavery (Lange 2020, 61-62). A journalist for Henry Ward Beecher’s famous *Independent* (1863) wrote:⁴



Figure 4. *The Scourged Back*, attributed to McPherson & Oliver, April 1863, albumen silver print from glass negative. International Center of Photography. Purchase, with funds provided by the ICP Acquisitions Committee, 2003 (183.2003).



Figure 5. Unknown, "A Typical Negro", *Harper's Weekly*, July 4th, 1863. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.

"The black man with the scarred back is the type of the slave system, and of the society that sustains it. It typifies the pride of race and the contempt of labor. This card-photograph should be multiplied by the hundred thousand, and scattered over the states. It tells the story in a way even Mrs. [Harriet Beecher] Stowe cannot approach: because it tells the story to the eye. If seeing is believing - and it is in the immense majority of cases - seeing this card would be equivalent to believing things of the slave states which Northern men and women would move heaven and earth to abolish!"
 ('*The Scourged Back*', 4).

And this is exactly what happened: his portrait was reproduced many times and spread across the country soon after.⁵ One of Peter's images was copied by engravers for publication in *Harper's Weekly* and is probably the most well-known reproduced example. There, the image was given the caption 'Gordon, under medical inspection' and was flanked by two other smaller images – that are far less known today – one showing him in rags and the other depicting him in uniform, presenting the readers of the magazine with a success story of the runaway slave: a clear, linear and therefore also reductive narrative starting with captivity, moving towards emancipation and finally achieving freedom in the form of an American Union soldier (figure 5).

The Scourged Back: now

Now, more than 160 years later, this image of Peter – and other photographs of enslavement, emancipation and freedom taken from the 1850s onwards – still provides a powerful imprint of the horrors of slavery and is stored in various registers of our collective memory in various parts of the world. This specific representation, firmly rooted in history, presents us with a multifaceted ever-changing narrative filled with meanings and legacies (Willis 2021, 35). Not only through the reproduction of the original, but first and foremost through the reproduction of the image *through* other images. In this essay, I will analyze three contemporary interpretations of 'The Scourged Back' and discuss the particular ways in which they carry the potential and might even contribute to transforming the traces of trauma, and argue for their relevance as mediators between past and present narratives.

Trauma and suffering in contemporary art

Griselda Pollock, a feminist art historian and cultural theorist, has extensively explored the theme of trauma in art. Her work intersects with psychoanalytic theory, feminism and memory studies, offering a profound understanding of how trauma is worked through and processed in visual culture. Pollock convincingly argues that trauma itself – given its intangible nature – cannot be represented (Pollock 2013, 4 & 20). When looking at works of art that are informed by trauma, we are therefore not dealing with the phenomenon itself, but with its *after-affects*: that what is left behind, the painful residuals of the actual event. They signify spaces in flux that are held or carried by *after-images*: the artworks themselves (Pollock 2013, 27). Despite trauma's irrepresentability, it is in effect something that can be "*approached, moved and transformed*" (Pollock 2013, 4). The author invites

“When looking at works of art that are informed by trauma, we are therefore not dealing with the phenomenon itself, but with its after-affects: that what is left behind. the painful residuals of the actual event.”

us to step away from the dominant discourse of cure and healing that is tied to trauma studies and instead focus on being confronted with ‘wounding’ without directly seeking resolution (Pollock 2013, 4).

Diametrically opposed to this idea of wounding, is the concept of ‘fugitivity’, a term popularized by cultural theorist and poet Fred Moten. In his work, Moten aims to go beyond traditional categories of analysis rooted in Western philosophy that fail to consider the black experience, developing new forms of aesthetic inquiry that place the conditions of being black at its core. Similar to Pollock, Moten is highly critical of the discourse on trauma. His critique specifically focuses on blackness as always already damaged and thought of in terms of victimhood. Instead, Moten seeks to understand how black cultural practices embody forms that exceed trauma, even while they might remain marked by it (Moten 2003; Harney & Moten 2013). Fugitivity, then, suggests a mode of being that resists capture, categorization, and commodification, even when born out of the conditions of profound historical trauma (Harney & Moten 2013, 22-43). Moten is particularly interested in practices that move beyond trauma as mere suffering. They can then represent acts of survival, resistance, and the creation of alternative modes of being and knowing.

The works of Victor Sonna, Arthur Jafa and Fabiola Jean-Louis – each incorporating the image of ‘The Scourged Back’ – shed new light on the aforementioned concepts of wounding and fugitivity and underscore the importance of art and reproduction in engaging with, critiquing, processing and moving beyond the immensely complex legacies of (historical) traumas, in this case slavery.

Wall of Reconciliation

The artwork described in the introduction concerns Victor Sonna’s *Wall of Reconciliation* (2020). When approaching the wall – which can be placed in different angles according to the space in which it is presented – the viewer is confronted with multiple (historical) images, that each bear witness to brutality. Sonna presents us with an asynchronous narrative, for instance by pairing the imprint of an etching from the 17th century with a photographic image from two centuries later. Some feel vaguely familiar, while others have a strong resonance in our collective memory. Some are iconic, others are maybe less well-known, of course all depending on who is looking. The materiality of the work, using the silkscreen mesh fabric which is normally used to produce a series of screenprints, underscores the infinite reproducibility and vastness (in time and geographical space) of the traumatic events depicted (Esche 2020, 116).

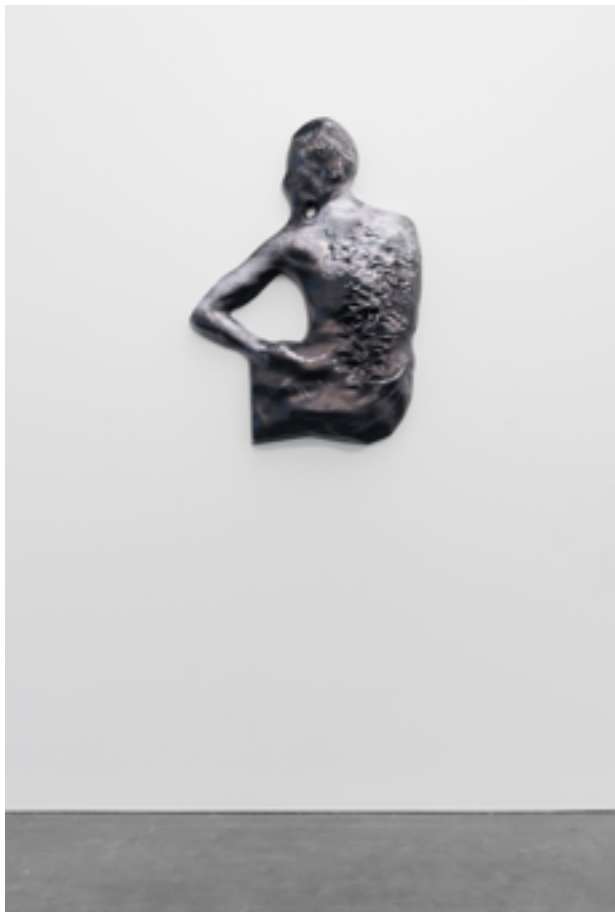


Figure 6. *Ex-Slave Gordon* by Arthur Jafa. 2017. Vacuum-formed plastic, 144.8 × 111.8 × 22.9 cm. Courtesy the artist and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Gift of R.H. Defares.

Most importantly, Sonna's work invites us to make a connection through a physical experience by becoming part of the installation: the images remain abstract without contrast and need a fellow viewer, forming a dark backdrop, on the other side of the wall to become clear. This active experience of the artwork – blurring the boundaries between object and subject and actually establishing a relationship between both – ties in closely with a phenomenon described by Pollock as 'wit(h)nessing', a term coined by the feminist theorist of affect and painter Bracha Ettinger (Pollock 2013, 12-13; Ettinger 2004, 69). The concept goes beyond the traditional notion of witnessing, which implies a detached observation of events. 'Wit(h)nessing', on the contrary, involves an emotional and ethical connection between the witness and the person or the event being witnessed, acknowledging the interconnectedness of human experiences, especially those marked by trauma (Ettinger 2004, 69-94).

By juxtaposing both viewers and inviting them to look at the same image, Sonna stresses our complicity and collective responsibility in the

“This specific representation, firmly rooted in history, presents us with a multifaceted ever-changing narrative filled with meanings and legacies (Willis 2021, 35). Not only through the reproduction of the original, but first and foremost *through* the reproduction of the image through other images.”

making of history. Our history should be looked at headfirst – as something we need to come to terms with, hence also the term ‘reconciliation’ in the title – after which we can decide how to shape our future together.⁶ The artwork strongly advocates for the existence of a multitude of perspectives in the shaping of that future. As argued by Sonna in conversation with head of collections Steven ten Thije: “*If you already know what the other person is supposed to think, there’s no room left for dialogue*” (Esche 2020, 232).

Ex-Slave Gordon

While Sonna’s *Wall of Reconciliation* offers a critique of the horrors that took place during slavery – by putting emphasis on and confronting us with the reproducibility of the image and placing it within a new constellation – Arthur Jafa’s wall-sculpture *Ex-Slave Gordon* (2017) (figure 6) aims to critique those same horrors by focusing on the identity of the sitter instead (the title already giving a clear indication).

The work was part of the American tour of the groundbreaking traveling exhibition *Afro-Atlantic Histories* (2021-2024), which was originally organized in tandem by the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP) and the Instituto Tomie Ohtake in Brazil (2018).⁷ For the American rendering of the exhibition, Jafa’s sculpture was contextualized within the theme ‘Enslavements and Emancipations’ and shown next to a framed original of ‘The Scourged Back’⁸ and a large photograph ‘Untitled’, from the series *Memory Black Maria* (1995) by the Brazilian artist Eustáquio Neves (Lucas 2022). Neves restaged the image of ‘The Scourged Back’ by writing the word ‘Zumbi’ over the sitter’s back, a direct reference to the enigmatic leader of Quilombo dos Palmares, Brazil’s largest community of fugitives from slavery (Pedrosa et al. 2021, 84). Neves seeks to re-signify Peter’s scar tissue by reappropriating the image of suffering and focusing on a narrative that celebrates successful resistance. In Jafa’s sculpture, we can also see a clear focus on the re-signifying of the wounds. Here, they are not erased, but magnified. In the object text next to the work, we read the following:

“The translation of the photographic image into a three-dimensional figure further attests to the subject’s humanity; and the larger-than-life scale and palpable raised wounds make him virtually and viscerally present” (Pedrosa et al. 2021).

Interestingly, nothing is said about the materiality, albeit this clearly being an important element in the reading of the work. The sculpture is not

made of a classic material such as bronze or marble, but consists of vacuum-formed plastic. By using this highly unconventional material, Jafa creates an immense tension between the iconic image and figure behind it, the object and subject. It's almost as if the historical figure is trying to break out of the plastic, to unveil new truths after being muted for so long, reclaiming his individuality in the present.

Madame Beauvoir's Painting

Another recently produced work adding to the collection of works based on the image of 'The Scourged Back', is Fabiola Jean-Louis' *Madame Beauvoir's*



Figure 7. *Madame Beauvoir's Painting* by Fabiola Jean-Louis from the series *Rewriting History*. 2017. Print, 131,1 x 101,2 cm. Collection Wereldmuseum, Amsterdam, coll. nr. 7243-1. © Fabiola Jean-Louis.

Painting (figure 7). The work is currently part of *Our Colonial Inheritance*, the semi-permanent collection display of the Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam. The exhibition focuses on Dutch colonial history in Suriname, Curaçao and Indonesia, but does not limit itself to these countries.

The photograph is part of Jean-Louis' larger series *Rewriting History* in which 17th, 18th and 19th century culture is critiqued and reappropriated. In this particular image, the artist creates a *mise-en-abyme*, suggesting a recurring sequence of events. We see a painted version of the image of Peter seated on his chair, his scars highlighted with splashes of red and white paint and the profile of his face obscured by an all-seeing eye, a symbol of the awareness of a higher being. Seated in front of Peter is a woman – Madame Beauvoir – in a richly decorated dress, the back of which mimics the back of Peter. This time however, the scarring becomes something that embellishes the rich, gold material. The 'wounds' are flanked by two butterflies, a symbol of metamorphosis.

The symbolism applied in this work suggests artists, and that what they produce, carry with them a healing potential and a power to transform history (Benedicty-Kokken 2024, 223). This potential is strengthened by the choice of material for the dress, which is fully made of delicate paper (Jean-Louis 2024). By using the same material on which history is commonly written and reproduced – newspapers and magazines such as *Harper's Weekly* – allows for a reinterpretation of narratives and imagining otherwise, without erasing that same history.

Conclusion

In this essay, three artworks have been analyzed with a specific focus on their dealing with traces of trauma. Each of them serves as a valuable mediator between past and present and does so in distinct ways: Sonna's in emphasizing collectivity, Jafa's in expressing individuality, and Jean-Louis' by using *mise-en-abyme* as a visual trope. Their artworks underscore the importance of reproduction in engaging with, critiquing and processing the immensely complex legacies of (historical) traumas, in this case slavery. They move beyond trauma, not only by showing the wounds but by turning these into powerful acts of survival and resistance. Looking back at our histories – not only through text, but also through images – can be an essential part in moving forward.

References

- “A typical Negro.” *Harper's Weekly*, 4 July 1863, 429.
- “The scourged back.” *Independent*, 28 May 1863, 4.
- Benedicty-Kokken, Alessandra. “Dessalines’ Nalatenschap, Vodoufilosofie en Intimiteit (als Curatie).” *Onze Koloniale Erfenis*, edited by Wendeline Flores and Wayne Modest, Lannoo, 2024, pp. 210-227.
- Collins, Kathleen. “The scourged back.” *History of Photography*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1985, pp. 43-45.
- Esche, Charles, et al. *Victor Sonna, 152*. Van Abbemuseum, 2020.
- Ettinger, Bracha L. “Weaving a Woman Artist With-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event.” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2004, pp. 69-94.
- Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Minor Compositions, 2013.
- Jean-Louis, Fabiola. “Rewriting History.” *Fabiola Jean-Louis*, 2020, www.fabiolajeanlouis.com/aboutrewritinghistory. Accessed on 7th October 2024.
- Lange, Allison K. *Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women's Suffrage Movement*. University of Chicago Press, 2020.
- Lucas, Julian. “A visionary show moves black history beyond borders.” *The New Yorker*, 4 May 2022, www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/a-visionary-show-moves-black-history-beyond-borders. Accessed on 3rd June 2024.
- Masur, Louis P. *The U.S. Civil War: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Pedrosa, Adriano et al. “Emancipations.” *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, edited by Adriano Pedrosa and Tomás Toledo, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2021, pp. 81-128.
- Pollock, Griselda. *After-Affects After-Images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum*. Manchester University Press, 2013.
- Silkenat, David. “‘A Typical Negro’: Gordon, Peter, Vincent Colyer, and the Story behind Slavery’s Most Famous Photograph.” *American Nineteenth Century History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2014, pp. 169-186.
- Willis, D. “Visualizing Slavery: Image and Text.” *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, edited by Adriano Pedrosa and Tomás Toledo, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2021, pp. 34-39.

Endnotes

- ¹ In the wall text, a general remark was made that highlighted we are looking at historical representations of slavery, but no individual details were mentioned. Similarly, in the catalogue, no references are made that point out any details about the images.
- ² Similar to the former presentation at the Van Abbemuseum, the exhibition text presented a sense of collectivity and connectivity between the images by referring to ‘historical pictures of slavery’, not mentioning any details about what or who we are looking at.
- ³ In some instances, this image is referred to in literature and popular culture as ‘Whipped Peter’ or ‘A Map of Slavery’. The captions each express different viewpoints, the first placing emphasis on the identity of the sitter and the pain he must have endured, the second underlining slavery’s centrality to the history of the United States and a form of collectively felt pain. See also Masur (2020, 77-79).
- ⁴ Henry Ward Beecher was an avid advocate of the abolition of slavery, together with his sister Harriet Beecher Stowe. She received worldwide recognition with her novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), which helped fuel the abolitionist cause.
- ⁵ The impact these images might have had in influencing popular opinion – not only in the United States, but also in Britain – is mentioned by Kathleen Collins (1985, 43-45). For an analysis of the subtle differences between the images, see Silkenat (2014, 171-172).
- ⁶ It is telling that the exhibition catalogue *Victor Sonna, 152* opens with a black page, with a singular anonymous quote in white capital letters, saying: ‘*Iets moet eerst afbrokkelen voor het opnieuw kan worden opgebouwd*’ [translation: ‘*Something has to crumble first before it can be built anew*’]. Similarly, a large quote was placed in the exhibition space of *Refresh Amsterdam #2: War & Conflict*, saying: ‘*Verzoening kan alleen plaatsvinden als je de werkelijkheid onder ogen komt*’ [translation: ‘*Reconciliation can only happen when you face reality*’].
- ⁷ The exhibition was presented in four museums in the United States: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (October 2021-January 2022); National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (April-July 2022); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (December 2022-April 2023) and Dallas Museum of Art (October 2023-January 2024).
- ⁸ Here, the third known image of Peter was presented, which also formed the basis for the printed engraving in the article in *Harper’s Weekly*.

Bee



A key theme in the work of artist Jeroen van der Most is exploring the boundaries of intelligence. Can we use technology to extend the human mind?

Replica

In one of his projects Van der Most started working on an Artificial Intelligence (AI)- based replica of his mind. AI was fed with information about the artist’s background, life, and vision on art and technology. This information enabled the system to eventually create streams of visuals for new artworks. As if the artist had created them himself.

Animals

In experiments with more disruptive effects, some of the most interesting results were achieved by mixing the ‘AI-mind’ of the artist with the minds of animals. AI that knew the background of artist MOST was disrupted by another AI. This second AI asked the first one to imagine the world experiences of animals like dogs, birds, and insects. As a result, the mind of the artist and the animal minds were blended. These ‘mixed-mind systems’ could then be asked to create new art as well as new visualizations.

Among the different animals, the life of the bee offered one of the most fascinating concepts around intelligence, like collective decision making; cross-pollination; and rhythmicity. This led to a stream of visuals that unveiled a space where mutual thriving could be ignited: Bee.

Video

You can find a video of Bee, as well as a video of the performance that was given with the AI systems through this link: jeroenvandermost.com/bee



The Visual Essay

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024



Drawn to Old Masters: Copies in Carel Joseph Fodor's Collection

Drawn to Old Masters: Copies in Carel Joseph Fodor's Collection

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Author

Tom van der Molen

Discipline

Art History and Cultural History

Keywords

Collecting / Copies / Drawings / Paintings / Fodor

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/ug243AHw

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Abstract

Carel Joseph Fodor (1801-1860) was an avid art collector. When he died, at the age of 59, he had amassed an impressive collection of 161 paintings, 877 drawings and 302 prints, which he bequeathed to the city of Amsterdam. Since 1963 that collection has been part of the collection of the Amsterdam Museum.

A conspicuous feature of Fodor's collection is that he did not collect Old Master paintings. Old Master painters and their most famous works did enter the collection in another way: in reproduction. More specifically, by means of copies in a variety of mediums: painted and in print, but particularly drawn. Fodor's collection forms an excellent case to explore the popularity of drawn reproduction in the 18th and 19th century. It offered collectors like Fodor the double joy of appreciating the skill of the copyist and the reference to the original painting.



Object 1. Jan Willem Pieneman (1779-1853), *Portrait of Carel Joseph Fodor (1801-1860)*, 1848 Oil on canvas, 101,3 x 75,3 cm Amsterdam museum, Fodor Collection, SA 2065

Introduction

Carel Joseph Fodor (1801-1860, object 1) was an avid art collector. He became rich by trading in coal, the fuel of the Industrial Revolution that was in full swing during his lifetime. Fodor spent much of his wealth on art. When he died, at the age of 59, he had amassed an impressive collection of 161 paintings, 877 drawings and 302 prints. Having remained unmarried and childless, he bequeathed the complete collection to the city of Amsterdam, on the condition that a museum would open to showcase his paintings, prints, and drawings. In 1863, the Museum Fodor opened its doors in Fodor's former home at the Keizersgracht. Arie Lamme (1812-1900), the art dealer that had acted as an intermediary for Fodor since 1850, became the first director. Since 1963, the works left by Fodor are part of the collection of the Amsterdam Museum (Reichwein 1995, 8-9).

Fodor's collection of paintings consists mainly of contemporary art (mostly French, Belgian and Dutch), the prints and drawings collection combined contemporary art with early modern art. A conspicuous feature of Fodor's collection is that he did not collect Old Master paintings. This is in sharp contrast to some other affluent collectors in his time. The most prominent example is Adriaan van der Hoop (1778-1854) who amassed a collection (and, like Fodor, left it to the city of Amsterdam) with all the big names of Dutch art, such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer, Frans Hals and Jan Steen, but also Peter Paul Rubens and Antoon van Dyck.¹

One can only guess why Fodor did not collect these paintings; money would not have posed an obstacle. As he wanted to form his own museum (and posthumously did), perhaps he concluded that there were enough collections in Amsterdam and the Netherlands with this category of paintings and that he could offer more by collecting the work of contemporary artists (Bergvelt 1995, 46-47).

However, the early modern prints and especially the drawings in Fodor's collection are of world class (for example: Objects 2, 3, 4). He collected in a time that the Print Room of the Rijksmuseum only collected prints and not yet drawings. As such, he met a need that was hardly covered by other public collections at the time.

Old Master painters and their most famous works did enter Fodor's collection in another way: as reproductions. The copies in the collection were of a variety of mediums: painted; in print; and most particularly drawn. In this essay I explore the copies of Old Master painters in Fodor's collection to shed light on what reproductions Fodor collected and why. Which painters and paintings were represented in this particular part of Fodor's collection? And what was the purpose and meaning of these copies within the collection as a whole?

I will start by describing what I understand to be a copy and what might have been reasons to collect copies. Then, I will give a short description of the painted copies in the collection, with references to printed copies that I will not extensively address. They are different from the painted and drawn copies because they are not unique and uncolored. Therefore, it would require a very different approach to the motifs that Fodor might have had to collect them. After a short case study of representations in diverse media of Paulus Potter's famous *The Bull*, I turn to the drawings.

This visual essay has been conceived as a digital exhibition, showcasing material that is only rarely on display, but deserves to be considered as an integral part of the collection that Fodor gifted the city of Amsterdam over 160 years ago.

In the captions, where the originals are mentioned, clicking the inventory number of the original will link to that artwork in the database of the museum concerned.



Object 2. Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617), *Sitting partridge dog*, c. 1597 Metalpoint on paper, 42,5 x 30 cm Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10179



Object 3. Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), *Young man embracing a young woman*, c. 1633 Chalk on paper, 32,5 x 30,1 cm Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no TA 10301



Object 4. Rembrandt (1606-1669), *The healing of Tobit*, c. 1636 Pen in ink on paper, 20,8 x 20,2 cm Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no TA 10281

Copies, Translations and Learning Art

In our times, where originality in the arts is highly valued, the idea of a copied artwork has negative connotations. In and before Fodor's time this was not necessarily the case. This in part had to do with how art education for young artists was conceived. Copying good examples was considered to be a crucial part of training a painter or craftsman. Moreover, it should be noted that there is a considerable difference between a copy that has been made in the same medium (and the same size) as the original; and for example, a print or drawing after a painting. In the former case we can speak of a copy in the quite narrow sense of the word, if the copy is made to pass as an original, we can even speak of a forgery (Jellema 1987, 7).

The cases from the Fodor collection discussed here are clearly something different: they concern (much smaller) painted copies as well as printed and drawn copies. They all translate the original in a new form, in size and/or in medium, but all in a different way. The painted copies retained some of the material appearance, whereas the prints reproduced paintings as multiples, resulting in a reproduction of the composition and its related iconography, but hardly the technique of the original. The drawn copies form a sort of in-between, they offer the copyist ways of reproducing the painting and showing their own skill in translating the medium of oil paint into ink, graphite or watercolor. As such, the drawn copy functions as a reproduction of the composition, iconography and (to a limit) style of the painter of the original and simultaneously as an original translation by the copyist.

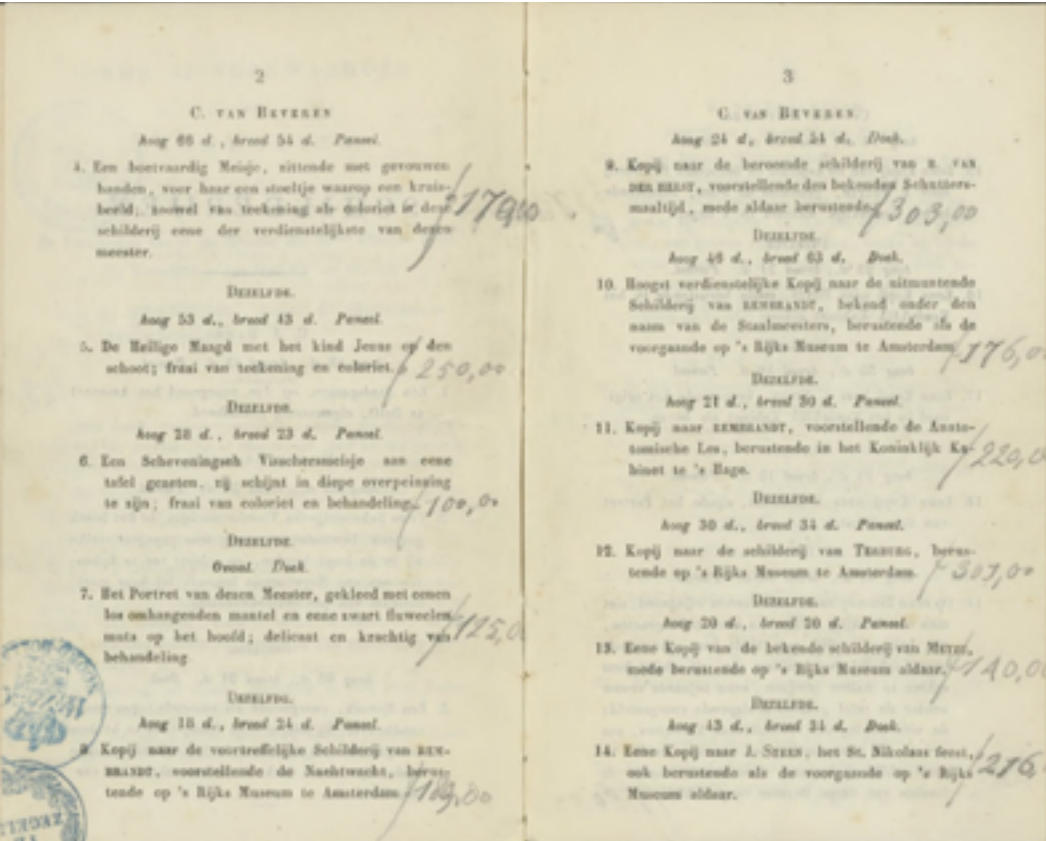
This might explain the popularity of drawn reproductions in the 18th and 19th century. It offered the collector the possibility to appreciate the skill of the copyist and to subsequently enjoy a reference to the original painting (Jellema 1987).

“This might explain the popularity of drawn reproductions in the 18th and 19th century. It offered the collector the possibility to appreciate the skill of the copyist and to subsequently enjoy a reference to the original painting (Jellema 1987).”

19th-Century Painted Copies after 17th-Century Paintings

On 30 October 1848, paintings from the collection of Albertus Bernardus Roothaan (1793-1847) were auctioned in Amsterdam. Among the auctioned paintings were no less than 11 copies after famous Dutch 17th century paintings by Charles van Beveren (1809-1850) (Auction Roothaan 1848, see object 5). Fodor bought six of them (objects 6-11), all precise copies after paintings that had already been on display in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and in the Mauritshuis in The Hague. He did not buy the copies after Rembrandts *Night-watch*, *Syndics of the clothmakers guild* and a *Self Portrait* of that master, Van der Helst's *Company of Captain Cornelis Witsen and Lieutenant Johan Oetgens van Waveren*, nor the famous *Bull* by Paulus Potter that were also available. Eleven years later he would buy a painted copy after the latter painting after all (see below, p. 135, object 14).²

The paintings replicate - on a smaller scale - materiality, color and iconography of the originals. For the original owner Roothaan they might have also served to support Van Beveren, with the added advantage of having reproductions of some of the most prized works from the Rijksmuseum and Mauritshuis on his wall. For Fodor the latter was probably his prime motive.



Object 5. Pages from the auction catalogue of paintings from the collection of Albertus Bernardus Roothaan with 11 painted copies after Old Master paintings by Charles van Beveren.

Object 6. Charles van Beveren (1809-1850) after Jan Steen (1626-1679),
The feast of Saint Nicholas, before 1848
 Oil on canvas, 45 x 36 cm
 Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. SA 1142
 The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1809 (inv. no. SK-A-385)





Object 7. Charles van Beveren (1809-1850) after Gerard ter Borch (1617-1681), *The paternal admonition*, before 1848
Oil on panel, 31,2 x 34,6 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. SA 1143
The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1809 (inv. no. SK-A-404)

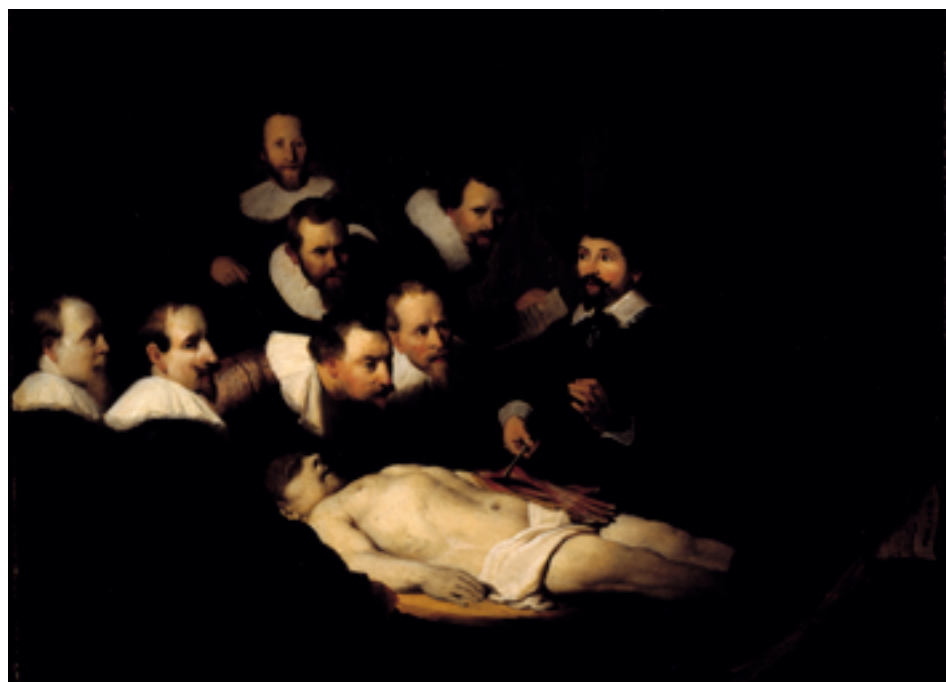


Object 8. Charles van Beveren (1809-1850) after Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667), *The old drinker*, before 1848
Oil on panel, 22 x 21 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. SA 1695 (stolen in 1972)
The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1827 (inv. no. SK-A-250)

Object 9. Charles van Beveren (1809-1850) after Jan Steen (1626-1679),
The life of man, before 1848
 Oil on panel, 37,6 x 46,9 cm
 Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. SA 1311
 The original has been in the Mauritshuis since its founding in 1822 (inv. no. 170)



Object 10. Charles van Beveren (1809-1850) after Rembrandt (1606-1669),
The anatomy lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, before 1848
 Oil on panel, 22 x 30 cm
 Amsterdam Museum,
 Fodor Collection, inv. no. SA 1692
 The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1828 (inv. no. 146)



Object 11. Charles van Beveren (1809-1850) after Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667),
The Huntsman, before 1848
 Oil on panel, 28 x 22,2 cm
 Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. SA 1264
 The original has been in the Mauritshuis since its founding in 1822 (inv. no. 93)



Object 12. Paulus Potter (1625-1654), *The Bull*, 1647

Oil on canvas, 236,5 x 341 cm

Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. no. 136



A specific case: *The Bull* by Paulus Potter

In Fodor's time the biggest star of the collection of the Mauritshuis was neither a Vermeer nor a Rembrandt. Instead, it was the large painting of a bull that Paulus Potter made in 1647 (object 12). The exquisite realism of the work might well have been a reason for its popularity, but it might also have been a result of the theft of the painting by French troops in 1795. *The Bull* was then displayed in the *Musée Napoléon* (now *Musée du Louvre*), where it made a great impression on the French art lovers. In 1816 the painting returned to the Netherlands where it entered the collection of the Mauritshuis in 1822 (Buvelot 2005).

There are two reproductions of the painting in Fodor's collection and one drawing featuring the painting. Interestingly, all the reproductions of the painting have to do with foreign reception of the painting as well. The print (object 13) was made in the 18th century for the second volume of Jean-Baptiste-Pierre LeBrun's *Galerie des peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands* (1792-1796, 66-67) and was quite common. Fodor had the complete set of prints from these books, including many other copies after old master paintings.³ A painted copy by Coenraad Willem Koch (object 14) was commissioned by the Dordrecht-born painter Ary Scheffer, who worked and lived in Paris (Ewals 1987, 24).⁴ The provenance might have been almost equally interesting for Fodor as the subject

matter, because he owned quite some works by the highly acclaimed Scheffer.⁵ Finally, the historicizing drawing showing Potter before his masterpiece was drawn by Brussels-based Jean Baptiste Madou (object 15). Fodor owned a good many of his drawings, including nine other of old master painters at work.⁶ All show a romantic imagination of the life and work of famous painters. Apart from references to Potter's most famous painting Fodor also owned original prints and drawings by Paulus Potter himself.⁷

The interest in Potter's famous painting fits well into the nationalistic character of 19th-century collecting. What could be more Dutch than a bull and other cattle in a flat landscape with low-hanging clouds? The fame abroad served as a highly welcome foreign recognition of the genius of 17th-century Dutch painting.

Object 13. Jacques-Philippe Le Bas (1707-1783) and Louis-Joseph Masquelier (1741-1811) after Tethart Philipp Christian Haag (1737-1812) after Paulus Potter (1625-1654), *The Bull*, 1773

Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. A 11689

In 1773, the painting was in the collection of Stadholder William V.



Object 14. Coenraad Willem Koch (1834-1859) after Paulus Potter (1625-1654), *The Bull*, 1854
Oil on panel, 25 x 34,7 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. SA 2474
The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1822 (inv. no. 136)



Object 15. Jean Baptiste Madou (1796-1877), *Paulus Potter before his painting The Bull*, 1841
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, Inv. no. TA 10670

Drawn Copies

The drawn copies after Dutch 17th-century paintings in the collection of Carel Joseph Fodor can be roughly divided into drawings made in his own lifetime and those made by artists in the 18th century. Of the 19th-century copies, eleven are made by Reinier Craeyvanger, which suggests that they were probably commissioned by Fodor, perhaps intended as a series. He copied after works in the Mauritshuis and in the Rijksmuseum, as most of the 19th-century copies were. The opening of the museums in the early 19th century offered artists the chance to use the works of their illustrious predecessors as examples (Van Thiel 1982). The copying of examples had been an important aspect of training artists for centuries. 19th-century copies that form the following list of works from Fodor's collection are divided by the institution where the originals could and still can be found. These drawn copies in Fodor's collection are generally either land- or cityscapes or genre-paintings, with some familiar compositions from the painted copies above. Jan Steen seems to have been a favorite.

With the exception of two pen and ink drawings, all drawings are watercolors, which gives them a significant other function than printed copies that did not record the coloring of the paintings. The two exceptions, *The Old Drinker* after Metsu (object 28) and *The Paternal Admonition* after Ter Borch (object 29) are made by Frans Molenaar and Willem Steelink, who both made printed reproductions as well. The drawings might have originally been meant to serve as an intermediate phase towards a print, but from both works corresponding prints do not exist.

19th-Century Drawn Copies after Paintings in the Mauritshuis



Object 16. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Gerard ter Borch (1617-1681), *The Messenger, known as 'The Unwelcome News'*, ca. 1832-60 Watercolor on paper, 35,1 x 32,4 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10485
The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1822 (inv. no. 176)

Amsterdam Museum Journal



Object 17. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Gerard Dou (1613-1675), *The young mother*, ca. 1832-60 Watercolor on paper, 36,7 x 27,5 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10487
The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1822 (inv. no. 32)

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Object 18. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Frans van Mieris (1635-1681),
Man and Woman with Two Dogs, known as 'Teasing the Pet', ca. 1832-60

Watercolor on paper, 26,8 x 19 cm

Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10488

The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1822 (inv. no. 176)



Object 19. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *View of Delft*, ca. 1832-60
Watercolor on paper, 35,7 x 44 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10489
The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1822 (inv. no. 92)



Object 20. Reynier Craeyvanger after Philips Wouwerman (1619-1668), *Battle scene*, ca. 1832-60
Watercolor on paper, 30,5 x 59,2 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10490
The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1822 (inv. no. 219)



Object 21. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Jan Steen (1626-1679),
The life of man, ca. 1832-60
 Watercolor on paper, 30,5 x 59,2 cm
 Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10492
 The original has been in the Mauritshuis since 1822 (inv. no. 170)



Amsterdam Museum Journal

Object 22. Reynier
 Craeyvanger (1812-1880)
 after Jan Both (ca. 1618-
 1652), *Italian landscape*,
 ca. 1832-60
 Watercolor on paper,
 30,5 x 59,2 cm
 Amsterdam Museum,
 Fodor Collection,
 inv. no. TA 10493
 The original has been
 in the Mauritshuis since
 1822 (inv. no. 20)



Issue #3 Winter 2024

19th-Century Drawn Copies after Paintings in the Rijksmuseum

Object 23. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Jan Steen (1626-1679),
 The feast of Saint Nicholas, ca. 1832-60
 Watercolor on paper, 30,5 x 25,2 cm
 Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10486
 The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1809 (inv. no. SK-A-385)



Object 24. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Gerard Dou (1613-1675),
The night school, ca. 1832-60

Watercolor on paper, 43,9 x 34,4 cm

Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10491

The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1808 ([inv. no. SK-A-130](#))



Object 25. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Jan Hackaert (1628-1685), *The avenue of birches*, ca. 1832-60
Watercolor on paper, 43,9 x 34,4 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10491
The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1808 ([inv. no. SK-A-130](#))



Object 26. Reynier Craeyvanger (1812-1880) after Philips Wouwerman (1619-1668), *The bucking grey*, ca. 1832-60
Watercolor on paper, 31,8 x 42,1 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10495
The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1814 ([inv. no. SK-A-483](#))



Object 27. Johannes Egenberger (1822-1897) after Godfried Schalcken (1643-1706), *'Differing tastes'*, ca. 1837-60
 Watercolor on paper, 31,8 x 23,3 cm
 Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10514
 The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1809 (inv. no. SK-A-369)



Object 28. Frans Molenaar (1821-1886) after Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667),
The old drinker, 1845

Pen in ink and wash on paper, 20,5 x 18,3 cm

Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10719

The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1827 (inv. no. SK-A-250)



Object 29. Willem Steelink (1826-1913)
after Gerard ter Borch (1617-1681),

The paternal admonition, 1848

Pen in ink and wash on paper, 29 x 25,5 cm

Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection,
inv. no. TA 10852

The original has been in the Rijksmuseum
since 1809 (inv. no. SK-A-404)



18th-Century Drawn Copies

In addition to the copies from the 19th century, Fodor also collected drawn reproductions from the 18th century. Jan Steen and the genres seen above form part of the copied material here too, but now also portraits are among the copies. The 18th-century copies often give hints of the provenance in the 18th century, more often than not in private collections at the time of reproduction. Sometimes they are even the only record we have, when the original has been lost.

Object 30. Jacob de Wit (1695-1754) after Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), *Nicolaas Rockox (left panel of the Rockox triptych)*, ca. 1710-54

Chalk and watercolor on paper, 27,6 x 15 cm

Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10375

The original has been in the Royal Museum of fine Arts in Antwerp since 1815 (inv. no. 307-311). In the time of Jacob de Wit it was still in its original location, in the Recollects Convent in Antwerp.



Object 31. Anna Alida de Frey (1768-1808) after Jan Steen (1626-1679), *The schoolmaster*, ca. 1783-1802 Watercolor on paper, 27,7 x 24,3 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10520 Current location of the original unknown





Object 32. Johannes Pieter de Frey (1770-1834) after Govert Flinck (1615-1660), *Portrait of a woman*, ca. 1790-1792

Chalk and watercolor on paper, 34,6 x 26,2 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection,
inv. no. TA 10521

Current location of the original unknown

Object 33. Wybrand Hendriks (1744-1831) after Rembrandt (1606-1669), *"The Shipbuilder and his Wife": Jan Rijcksen (1560/2-1637) and his Wife, Griet Jans*, 1800

Watercolor on paper, 36,6 x 52,9 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection,
inv. no. TA 10537

The original has been in the Royal Collection in London since 1811 (inv. no. RCIN 405533). In 1800, when Hendriks made his drawing, the painting was auctioned in Amsterdam from the collection of Jan Gildemeester.



Object 34. Wybrand Hendriks (1744-1831) after Frans Hals (1582/83-1666), *The Governors of the Elisabeth Hospital*, 1787
Watercolor on paper, 34,8 x 54,7 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10539
The original has been in the Frans Hals Museum since 1862 (inv. no. OS I-114). In 1787, when Hendriks made his drawing, the painting was in the Elisabeth Hospital in Haarlem.⁸



Amsterdam Museum Journal



Object 35. Jacob van Strij (1756-1815) after Meindert Hobbema (ca. 1638-1709), *Landscape with farms and a high tree*, ca. 1800
Watercolor on paper, 40 x 55,4 cm
Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10914
The original has been in the Kunsthaus Zürich since 1948 (inv. no. R 14). The location of the painting in the time of Van Strij is unknown, the earliest known provenance is at auction in London in 1833.

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Object 36. Willem Joseph Laquy (1738-1798) after Jan Steen (1626-1679), *The doctor's visit*, ca. 1753-1798

Watercolor on paper, 39,3 x 33,2 cm

Amsterdam Museum, Fodor

Collection, inv. no. TA 10665

The original has been in the Alte Pinakothek since 1806 (inv. no. 158).

In Laquy's time the painting was part of the collections of Charles Theodore, Elector of the Palatine and Bavaria in Düsseldorf.



Amsterdam Museum Journal



Object 37. Johannes Huibert Prins (1756-1806) after Jan van der Heyden (1637-1712), *Amsterdam City View with houses on the Herengracht and the old Haarlemmersluis*, ca. 1777-1806

Watercolor on paper, 26,9 x 32,4 cm Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10852

The original has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1809 (inv. no. SK-A-154). In Prins' time it was still in the collection of Adriaan Leonard van Heteren (1722-1800) in The Hague.

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Conclusion

Old master paintings were represented in Fodor's collection through copies in various mediums: painted; printed; and above all drawn. Fodor collected older copies after those paintings, but also commissioned contemporary artists to copy the paintings that by that time had already entered the largest public collections in the Netherlands, being the Mauritshuis and the Rijksmuseum. The collected copies reflect the taste in Fodor's day, with genre painters such as Jan Steen, Gabriel Metsu and Gerard Dou seemingly being favorites.

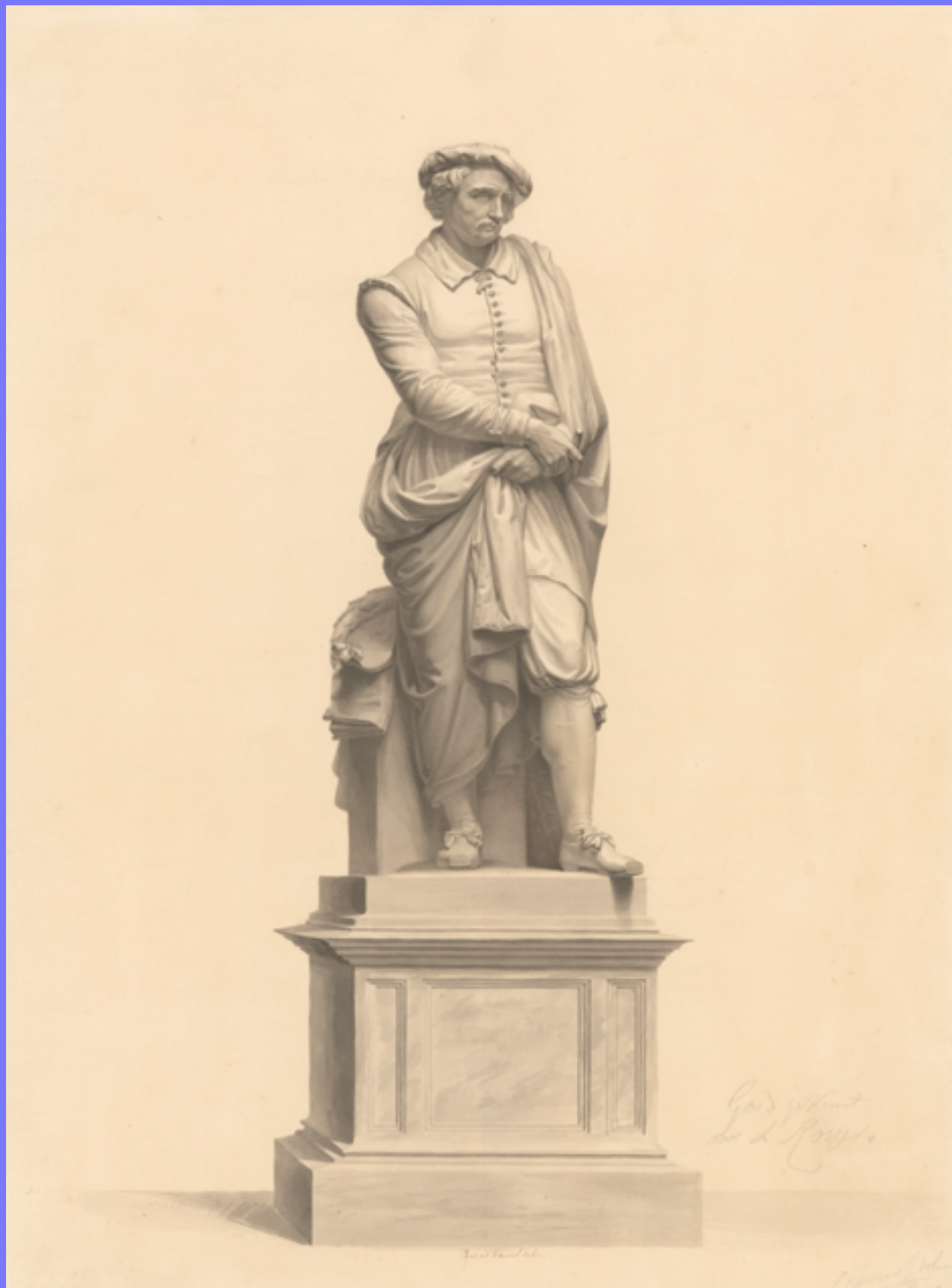
In Fodor's time, the 17th century was considered the heyday of the country's history in general, but of the arts in particular. The (colonial) power of that time and the artistic highlights were great sources of pride. 17th-century artists, and Rembrandt van Rijn in particular, were elevated to national heroes. Statues were raised (object 38), streets were named after them, and contemporary artists were recommended to be inspired by them (Koolhaas and De Vries 1992). By commissioning contemporary artists to make copies, Fodor stimulated that experience while at the same time supporting the artists financially.

The copy allowed for retaining the meaning that the 17th-century images had for Fodor and his contemporaries. They could still serve as windows to the Dutch 17th century, its people, landscapes, norms and values. Together with a good choice of original drawings and prints and contemporary art that often also reflected the illustrious past, the drawn copies fit in well with 19th-century nationalist ideas of collecting art (Bergvelt 1995).

Besides serving as translations of 17th-century images and meaning, they also served as valuable artworks in their own right, offering a translation from the medium of oil paint to watercolor.

“The copy allowed for retaining the meaning that the 17th-century images had for Fodor and his contemporaries.”

Object 38. Edouard Taurel (1824-1890), Rembrandt's statue after L. Roijer, ca. 1852-60
Pen in ink, 45,3 x 33,2 cm. Amsterdam Museum, Fodor Collection, inv. no. TA 10876



References

- Bergvelt, Ellinoor. "Carel Joseph Fodor en zijn museum." *Levende Meesters: de schilderijenverzameling van C.J. Fodor*. Stadsuitgeverij Amsterdam, 1995.
- Bergvelt, Ellinoor. "De canon van de Gouden Eeuw. De collectie van der Hoop en de opvattingen van Thoré-Bürger." Ellinoor Bergvelt et al. *De Hollandse meesters van een Amsterdamse bankier. De verzameling van Adriaan van der Hoop (1778-1854)*. Waanders 2004.
- Buvelot, Quentin and Peter van der Ploeg. *Koninklijk Kabinet van schilderijen Mauritshuis: een vorstelijke verzameling*. Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis, 2005.
- Ewals, L.J.I. *Ary Scheffer: sa vie et son oeuvre*. Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 1987.
- Jellema, Renske E. *Herhaling of vertaling? Natekeningen uit de achttiende en negentiende eeuw*. Teylers Museum, 1987.
- Koolhaas, Eveline and Sandra de Vries. "Terug naar een roemrijk verleden: De zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst als voorbeeld voor de negentiende eeuw." *De Gouden Eeuw in perspectief*, edited by Frans Grijzenhout and Henk van Veen. Sun, 1992.
- Le Brun, Jean-Baptiste-Pierre. *Galerie des peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands*. Paris, 1792-1796.
- Loos, Wiepke. *The Fodor collection: nineteenth-century French drawings and watercolors from Amsterdams Historisch Museum*. Hamilton 1985.
- Reichwein, Gusta. "Inleiding." *Levende Meesters: de schilderijenverzameling van C.J. Fodor*. Stadsuitgeverij Amsterdam, 1995.
- Thiel, P.J.J. van. "Het Rijksmuseum in het Trippenhuis, 1814-1885 (IV): Kopiïsten en fotografen." *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 30 (1982), nr. 2: 63-86.
- Catalogus van eene bijzondere fraaije verzameling schilderijen, door voornamelijk meesters uit de hedendaagsche Nederlandsche en Vlaamsche scholen, benevens eenige kunstig geboetseerde beeldwerken, door L. Roijer; alles nagelaten door wijlen den wel-ed. heer A. B. Roothaan, lid der Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunste alhier*. Brondgeest, Roos en De Vries, 1848.

Endnotes

- ¹ Interestingly Van der Hoop collected drawn copies after paintings as well. These were not left to the city of Amsterdam however but auctioned after his death (Bergvelt 2004, 5-26)
- ² Fodor owned prints after the majority of these paintings. Lambertus Antonius Claessens after Rembrandt, *The Nightwatch*, 1797. Amsterdam Museum, A 11190 (<http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.328>); Henricus Wilhelmus Couwenberg after Rembrandt, *The Syndics of the clothmakers guild*, 1845. Amsterdam Museum, A 11194 (<http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.332>); Johann Wilhelm Kaiser after Rembrandt, *The Syndics of the clothmakers guild*, ca. 1849-60. Amsterdam Museum, A 11264 (<http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.402>) and Johann Wilhelm Kaiser after Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Banquet at the Crossbowmen's Guild in Celebration of the Treaty of Münster*, ca. 1849-60. Amsterdam Museum, A 11259 (<http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.397>). I could not ascertain which Self Portrait of Rembrandt Charles van Beveren copied.
- ³ 201 prints in total. Amsterdam Museum A 11545 until A 11745. De museum also still holds the folders in which Fodor kept these prints KA 22423 en KA 22424. They are marked 'Cabinet de Mr. le Brun 1' and 'Cabinet de Mr. le Brun 2'.
- ⁴ It was bought at the auction of Scheffer's collection in 1859. Auction Paris (Malard), 15 and 16 march 1859, no. 34 (Lugt no. 24729)
- ⁵ He owned 26 prints by and after Scheffer, two drawings with scenes from the story of Faust and Margarete (Amsterdam Museum, TA 10773 and TA 10774) and two paintings:
Greek exiles on a rock, staring at their lost fatherland. Amsterdam Museum, SA 1828 (<http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.37845>) and the impressive *Christ Consolator*. Amsterdam Museum, SA 2059 (<http://hdl.handle.net/11259/collection.37903>). Arie Lamme, who was acting as Fodor's intermediary to buy art was Scheffer's cousin.
- ⁶ *Quentin Massijs in his studio*, TA 10673; *Philippe de Champaigne before his easel*, TA 10674; *Ludolf Bakhuijzen at the beach*, TA 10675; *Jan Steen shows his work*, TA 10676; *Adriaen van Ostade in an inn, where some peasant fight*, TA 10677; *Philips Wouwermans drawing after nature*, TA 10678; *Adam Frans van der Meulen at the battle of Valenciennes*, TA 10679 and with the same subject TA 10691 and *Scene from the life of David Teniers*, TA 10690
- ⁷ 13 prints, A 11096 until A 11108 and 4 drawings, TA 10259 until TA 10262
- ⁸ This was one of the drawn copies that previously was in the collection of Adriaan van der Hoop. See note 1.

Garden of Aiden



The artwork *Garden of Aiden* by artist Jeroen van der Most combines elements of Old Master artworks with creatures generated by Artificially Intelligent (AI) computer systems (like the birds in the bottom-left and right).

**Creativity**

With the artwork, Van der Most documents the evolution of creativity, which was once thought to be uniquely human, but through AI transforms into a collaboration between human and machine. At the same time, the art piece explores a more distant future. One of a world in which the roles of humans, animals and AI might be turned upside down.

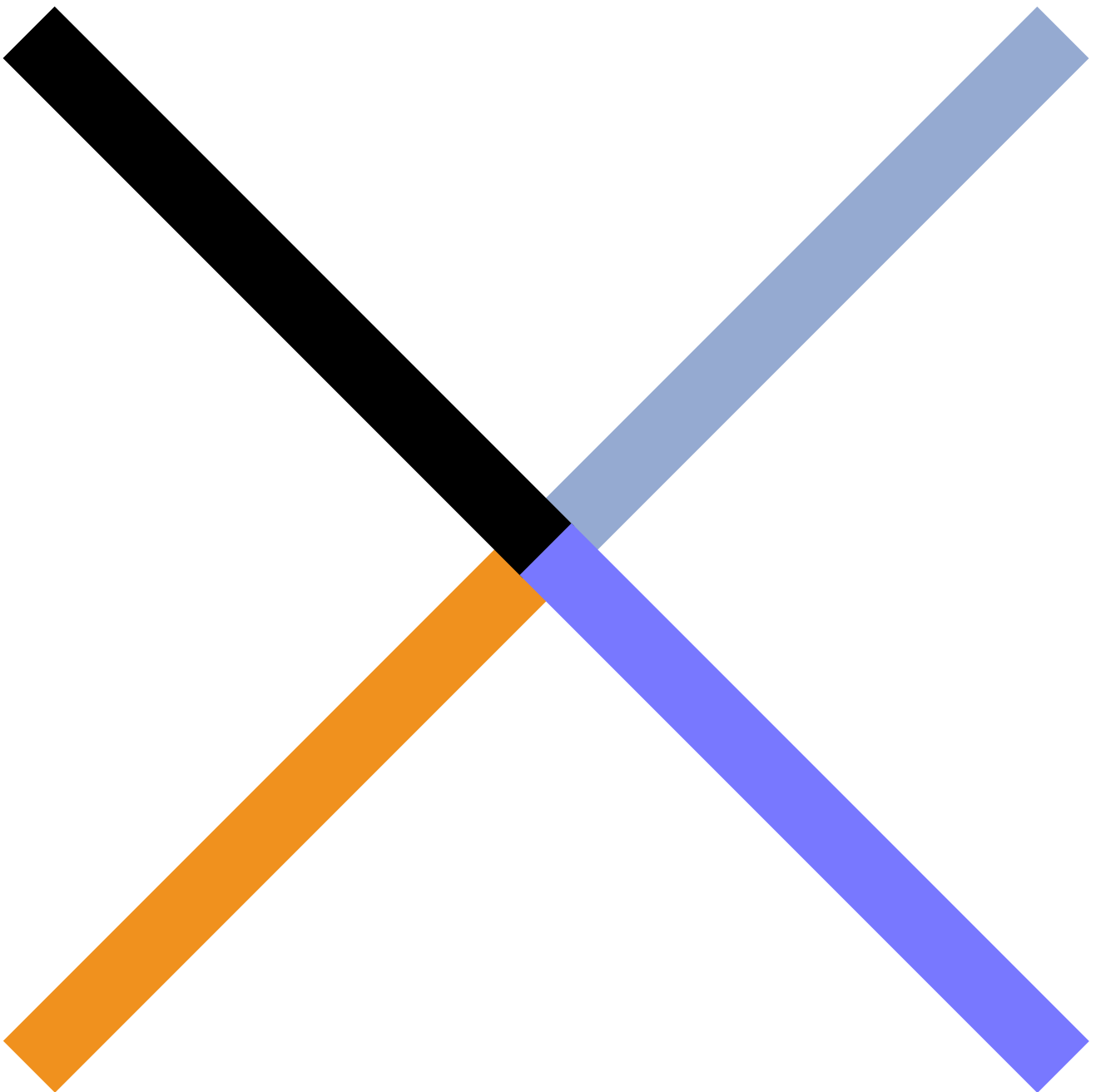
Old Masters

The AI based imagery in the artwork was generated using a so-called 'GAN system' trained on thousands of bird pictures. The artist combined the AI output using digital image manipulation software with fragments from artworks by the following list of Old Masters: Rembrandt; Vermeer; Jean-Baptiste Oudry; Hans Savery de Oude; Joost Cornelisz. Droochsloot; Jan Wijnants; and Roelant Savery.

Video

You can find a video about the Garden of Aiden through this link:
jeroenvandermost.com/garden-of-aiden

The Long Essays



Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Reproduction and Belarusian National Identity158

Dzianus Filipchyk and Anton Petrukhin

Reproduction of Christianity in Rap Music184

Lola Abbas

Framing Chinese Architecture as Art204

Yuansheng Luo and Thomas Coomans

Assassin’s Creed II: Freedom in Videogames230

Roos van Nieuwkoop

Intentional Olfactory Reproductions248

Sofia Collette Ehrich

Reproduction in Museum Construction of Belarusian National and Cultural Identity

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Authors

Dzianis Filipchyk and Anton Petrukhin

Discipline

Belarusian History, Museum Studies, and World Heritage Studies

Keywords

Belarusian National Identity / Exposition's Formation / Absence of Artifacts

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/ui673SHe

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Abstract

The essay reveals the historical-political preconditions for the loss of original museum objects in Belarusian museums in the 19th and 20th centuries: such as their transfer to other state museums within the Russian Empire and later the USSR as part of internal cultural policy, as well as due to the outbreak of two world wars. After 1991; Belarus became an independent state that had to search for its national identity. Museums didn't stay away from these processes and actively participated in the retranslation of new ideas through their exhibitions. However, one of the main problems in presenting a holistic view of Belarusian history was the lack of real museum artifacts, which could serve as material proof, evidence of historical events and achievements of the ancestors. To solve this problem the museum community used reproductions to show a new image of Belarusian history and culture in local and state museums.

Introduction

In 1991, after centuries of ethnic Belarusian lands being part of various states, Belarus gained independence. This process coincided with the formation of other sovereign states in Eastern and Central Europe. After decades of Moscow's socialist influence, countries of the region had to rebuild their identities. For Belarus, which was called “самая советская из всех советских” [translation: *‘the most Soviet of all Soviets’*] (Чернявская [translation: *‘Chernyavskaya’*]), this process was challenging. It was affected by two world wars, the division of Belarusian ethnic territory (1920-1930s), massive political repression, and the suppression of national culture within the Russian Empire and the USSR.

After achieving independence, Belarusian society needed to distance itself from the Soviet past and the Soviet interpretation of history, redefine its identity, and become an ‘imagined community’ i.e., a full-fledged independent nation (Anderson 1991). On the other hand, the Belarusian authorities also needed museums as institutions which Tony Bennett called the “*major vehicles for the fulfillment of the state’s new educative and moral role in relation to the population as a whole*” (1995, 109). Although Bennett used this figurative expression for the museums of the 19th century, taking into account the delay in the formation of Belarusian statehood, it can be applied to the description of museums in Belarus after the 1990s.

Museums have actively engaged in the processes of redefining Belarusian identity, seeking to find and disseminate new ideas through their exhibitions. In his 1972 work *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Trilling argues that societies typically pursue authenticity only when they perceive a threat to the truth (Trilling qtd. in Penrose 2020). After the fall of the communist ideology and radical revision of the historical discourse, Belarusian society became interested in establishing a real national history; museum expositions with authentic artifacts and evidence of historical events could satisfy this demand.

However, one of the main obstacles to the creation of a holistic image of national history was the lack of artifacts - authentic museum objects that could serve as physical evidence of historical events and cultural achievements of our ancestors. Museum originals were lost as a result of the long period of absence of an independent Belarusian state, which led to the relocation of valuables of Belarusian origin to other territories.

This topic is especially relevant, given the almost complete absence in Belarusian and foreign historiography and museum practice of studies that comprehend the significance of originals and copies in the construction by Belarusian museums of the image of national history, and the search

for national and cultural identity. Such understanding becomes especially relevant in the conditions of socio-political instability, and changes in foreign policy, which can have a significant impact on museum expositions.

This essay analyzes how Belarusian museums used reproductions, copies, and models in their expositions to form national and cultural identity in the post-communist period.

The first two sections analyze the reasons for museum losses, which provide an initial insight into such a massive recourse to museum copies and reconstructions in museum practice. The third section shows the general context of museum construction in Belarus after the fall of the communist regime and draws parallels with the experience of other post-communist countries. Furthermore, the examples analyzed in the essay are considered in chronological order.

To analyze the problem, an historical and analytical approach was used to trace the development of museum collections in the Belarusian lands in the 19th and 20th centuries. The comparative method makes it possible to reveal the scale of museum losses in Belarus in comparison with neighboring countries. Considerable empirical material about the quality of reconstructions and their place in the expositions was collected by the authors directly during their visits to the analyzed museums. The work of one of the authors as a museum guide also contributed to the collection of information for this article.

The theoretical basis of the study is formed by the works of Benedict Anderson, Jan Penrose, Simon Knell, Lionel Trilling and Tony Bennett. Among Belarusian researchers, the problem of copies and reproductions in expositions has been considered mainly within the framework of applied museology (Ладзісава [translation: '*Ladzisava*'] 1991, Мірончык [translation: '*Mirončyk*'] 2004) and the history of museology (Гужалоўскі [translation: '*Hužaloŭski*'] 2001; 2002).

The essay analyzes the largest museum projects of the period after 1991: the Museum of Belarusian Printing, well-visited UNESCO World Heritage sites (Mir, Niasviž), material artifacts significant for Belarusian history (the cross of St. Euphrosyne of Polack and the Hedwig glass), regional museums dedicated to important Belarusian historical figures (the house-museum of the composer Michał Kleofas Ogiński and museums of the artists Ilya Repin, Walenty Wańkiewicz, Napoleon Orda), and the Museum of the History of the Viciebsk People's Art School.

The independent Belarusian state needed to use museums as a tool to display its history and demonstrate its cultural heritage in the context of a shortage of real artifacts. To solve this problem, the museum community

turned to reproductions in the broadest sense. Reproductions, copies, and models became a way out of the situation, allowing museums of various levels to present a new image of the history and culture of Belarus.

The Origins of Museum Losses in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Today, there are 156 museums under the Ministry of Culture in the Republic of Belarus, whose collections consist of a total of 3.5 million items (*‘Число Организаций Культуры На Конец Периода’* [translation: *‘Number of Cultural Organizations at the End of the Period’*] 2024). Compared to neighboring countries, which exceed Belarus in terms of area and population but share a common historical and cultural heritage, the Belarusian museum collections appear very small. For instance, Polish museum collections have more than 20 million museum items (*‘Działalność Muzeów w 2021 Roku’* [translation: *‘Activities of Museums in 2021’*] 2022), while Russian museum storages contain more than 92 million items (*‘Музеи и Зоопарки Российской Федерации в Цифрах 2020’* [translation: *‘Museums and Zoos of the Russian Federation in Figures 2020’*] 2021). The comparison of Belarusian and Lithuanian museums does not favor Belarusian ones. The museum collections of the Republic of Lithuania, which is about three times smaller than Belarus in terms of population and area, have more than 7.5 million items (*‘Museums and Galleries’*).

Several reasons can explain such a situation regarding the size of the country's museum collections. In the 16th – 18th centuries, the Belarusian lands were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth - a single state where the ancestors of modern Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians lived. Representatives of the privileged estate, including natives of the present-day Belarusian lands, accumulated wealth, and traveled extensively, acquiring art objects and enriching their private collections. Unique furniture collections, weapons, arts and crafts, books, and other artifacts were formed in noble residences.

As a result of three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, 1795) the present Belarusian lands were ceded to the Russian Empire. From that time onwards the active export of cultural valuables from the territory of modern Belarus began. An illustrative case is the Radziwiłł palace and park complex in Niasviž (Minsk region). The castle, built in the 16th century, was the family residence of the wealthy and influential Radziwiłł family [bel. *‘Радзівілы’*].¹ Over the centuries, the Radziwiłłs amassed extremely valuable collections in Niasviž. After the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772), the Russian Gener-

al-in-chief A.I. Bibikov took most of the archive and library from Niasviž to St. Petersburg (Гужалоўскі [translation: 'Hužaloŭski'] 2001, 18).

During the Napoleonic Wars, the Radziwiłłs, like many other noble families in the Belarusian lands, supported the French emperor and sided with him against the Russian Empire. After Napoleon's unsuccessful campaign in 1812, a wave of confiscation of the cultural treasures of his followers began. In January 1813, Russian Admiral P.V. Chichagov gave the order to send the Radziwiłł collection to Moscow, which was valued at 10 million zlotys (a very large sum for that period). The numismatic cabinet (over 13,000 items) from Niasviž was transferred to Kharkiv University (in present-day Ukraine). As a result of the confiscation and relocation, the Niasviž collection was never restored.

Toward the middle of the 19th century, the traditions of private collecting gave way to public museums, which to a certain extent reflected the historical development of the Belarusian lands and contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about the region's past. Such was the Museum of Antiquities in Vilnius, opened in 1856. Vilnius (now in present-day Lithuania) was historically the political, economic, cultural, and religious center of the Belarusian lands. The exhibition narrated the historical path of the Lithuanian and Belarusian peoples during the existence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, showing the history and development of these lands, separate from the Russian territories. However, after the next armed January Uprising against the Russian Empire (1863-1864), the museum's activity was recognized as harmful by the Russian authorities, part of the collection was removed, and the institution's work was significantly restricted.

In the 20th century, Belarusian cultural collections suffered irreparable losses during two world wars and revolutions. The frontline of the First World War passed through the territory of Belarus in 1915. Before that, the export of cultural valuables and other property to the interior of Russia began. The western regions were occupied and looted by German troops. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, many valuables were lost in the whirlwind of civil war, migration, and nationalization. For the Belarusian lands, the period of turmoil would end in 1921 with the signing of the Treaty of Riga. This agreement between Poland on one side and Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine on the other would lead to the division of the ethnic territory of Belarus into two parts: the western part would become part of the interwar Polish state, while the eastern part would form the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) as part of the USSR.

In the BSSR, cultural and church valuables would be recognized as national treasures, and attempts were made by state authorities to record and

“Even after the end of the war, museum objects left the territory of Belarus. [...] As a result, by the time Belarus gained independence in 1991, Belarusian museums had rather small museum collections that could not reflect the historical and cultural development of the country. In order to fill the gaps in the new expositions, the museums used reproductions, copies, and models of the lost valuables.”

protect them. At the same time, some of the valuable items were exported to the territory of Russia. For instance, in 1919 the emissary of the Museum Department of the People's Commissariat (Ministry) of Education, the RSFSR, V.V. Pashukanis, participated in the export of cultural and church valuables to Russia. Pashukanis spearheaded the removal of collections from the Rumyantsev-Paskevich Residence in Homiel (Belarus) to the Historical Museum in Moscow. In the same year, he inspected the Belarusian cities of Mahilioŭ, Orša, and Niasviž, intending to export cultural treasures (Гужалоўскі [translation: 'Hužaloŭski'] 2002, 19).

The establishment of Soviet power, on the one hand intensified work on the creation of new museums and, on the other, contributed to the illegal export of collections. Church valuables became the property of the state and were often sold abroad.

The greatest losses of the country's museum collections are associated with the years of the Second World War. The rapid German offensive in 1941 prevented the organization of mass evacuation of cultural treasures. As a result, the museum collections were looted by the German army and destroyed during the fighting. Only a small proportion of the objects were returned to Belarus after the end of the war.

Even after the end of the war, museum objects left the territory of Belarus. Examples of the export of archaeological materials and the transfer of art collections abroad will be shown below. As a result, by the time Belarus gained independence in 1991, Belarusian museums had rather small museum collections that could not reflect the historical and cultural development of the country. In order to fill the gaps in the new expositions, the museums used reproductions, copies, and models of the lost valuables.

The Euphoria of Independence

Despite a rather small state museum collection, the Republic of Belarus experienced a real museum boom in the first half of the 1990s. In 1990-1994 about 30 new museums were established (Вінакурава [translation: *Vinakurava*] 2012, 183). Similar processes were not unusual in the post-communist cultural space. As noted by Simina Badica in Romania, "[i]n the enthusiasm that followed the 1989 change of regime, everything had to be reinvented" and museums faced significant difficulties in reinterpreting national history (Badica qtd. in Knell 2011, 274). In the Belarusian case, the museum specialists faced not just the task of rediscovery, but the creation of a new national and cultural identity.

The rapid growth of the state museum network brought to the forefront the issues of creating new expositions reflecting new topics that in

the Soviet period were either portrayed sporadically or ignored in museum expositions, such as the culture of privileged estates, church history, and the artistic heritage of cultural figures who had left the country. This period saw a kind of romanticization of the past, the creation of an ideal image of glorious history. In such processes, turning to medieval history, which considered a rich period of Belarusian triumphs, was almost inevitable. The Russian historian Филюшкин [translation: '*Filyushkin*'] drew attention to this trend in the museum expositions of the Baltic countries and Belarus (2016). The search for the Golden Age of prosperity led to the need to reflect this period in museum exhibitions. However, there were very few medieval artifacts in the collections of Belarusian museums.

There were several alternative ways of solving this problem: the restitution of Belarusian cultural valuables, the creation of copies and reproductions, and the creation of museum spaces of symbolic content that reveal the topic without museum originals by other means, for example, modern information technologies or installations. Belarusian museums in general have followed the path of using various copies in their construction of national and cultural identity. One of the first such projects was the Museum of Belarusian Book Printing in Polack.

Museum of Belarusian Book Printing in Polack

This project was implemented at the end of the existence of the USSR, during the period of democratization of society and a great growth of interest in national history. In Soviet times, history teaching was largely focused on the Soviet period, the history of the Communist Party, labor, and revolutionary movements. The history of Belarus was presented rather schematically, in the Marxist understanding of historical processes. What was emphasized was not the originality and uniqueness of the Belarusian culture, but the unity of the cultures of all Soviet peoples, especially the Slavic ones (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus). But by the late 1980s, the situation was changing significantly. Society began to discover both national history and the figures of this history.

During this period, the personality of Francysk Skaryna [bel. 'Францыск Скарына'] became a symbol of national and cultural revival. This native of Polack was a pioneer of East Slavic printing in the sixteenth century. After studying at European universities (in Krakow, Padua, and Prague) he engaged in book publishing (1517), bringing the printed word to the Belarusian lands.

In September 1990, the Museum of Belarusian Book Printing was opened in Polack on the 500th anniversary of Skaryna's birth. According to

the creator of the scientific concept of this museum Ладзісавя [translation: ‘*Ladzisava*’], the main goal of the institution is “*to show the book as an integral part of the historical and cultural process, as a complex phenomenon that simultaneously belongs to the spiritual and material spheres of human activity*” (1991, 25). A separate hall of the museum is dedicated directly to Francysk Skaryna, the remaining halls reflect the history of writing in the Belarusian lands, and demonstrate the reconstruction of the printing press of the 17th-18th centuries, writing instruments, and book culture of different centuries.

The author of this essay introduced visitors to the museum as an accompanying guide. Visitors repeatedly shared their impressions of the visit, often regretting the lack of authentic items, especially the old printed books of Skaryna. A very large number of exhibits, especially from the period before the 20th century, are copies, models, and reproductions that can be explained not only by the need to protect paper museum objects from the negative effects of light and other factors but also by the lack of originals.

Out of 523 known books by Skaryna, only 28 exemplars have been preserved in Belarus. The largest number of books, 350, is kept in the Russian Federation; in Ukraine, 47; in Poland, 36; in Slovenia, 19; in Denmark, 18; in Germany, 11; in Great Britain, 10; and in Lithuania and the Czech Republic, two copies each (Мотульский [translation: ‘*Matuľski*’] 2019, 10). Moreover, in the state museum collections, there are no other museum originals related to the life and work of Francysk Skaryna. That is why the museum workers of the Belarusian Book Printing Museum often turned to copies rather than originals.

Artifact Reconstruction

The creation of another iconic copy of a museum object is also associated with Polack. This is a copy of the cross of St. Euphrosyne of Polack, an exceptional masterpiece of jewelry art of the 12th century. The cross in the cloisonné enamel technique was made by the master Лазар Боґша [translation: ‘*Lazar Bohša*’] at the request of St. Euphrosyne of Polack in 1161. The cross was of great importance not only as an example of high jewelry art of its epoch but also represented historical value (as it had inscriptions about its creation); and religious value (as it contained Christian relics).

The Soviet authorities confiscated this artifact from the church, but later, thanks to the efforts of the director of the Belarusian State Museum, Ластоўскі [translation: ‘*Lastoŭski*’], it was added to the collections of this institution. The cross was found during the Polack expedition in the local financial department and, despite the protests of the Polack District Exec-

utive Committee, was transferred for storage to the Belarusian State Museum in Minsk (Гужалоўскі [translation: ‘*Hužaloŭski*’] 2002, 36). In 1929 the cross, together with other items, was transported from Minsk to Mahilioŭ, where it was lost with the beginning of hostilities in 1941. The search for the missing artifact did not yield any results.

After Belarus gained independence, the cross of Euphrosyne of Polack became a symbol of the rich historical past of the Belarusian lands, the golden age in the development of culture and the state. At the same time, it was a personification of the huge losses that this culture had suffered during the centuries of the absence of statehood. Publications about the cross appeared in mass media and scientific publications, and reports on the results of its search were heard at the state level.

The problem of returning this artifact to the cultural space was solved in the spirit of the time, and it was, of course, the recreation of the shrine in its original form. The initiators of the project to create a replica of the missing cross were the clergy, the World Association of Belarusians ‘Baćkaŭščyna’ [lit. ‘Fatherland’], as well as state institutions. As a result of the analysis of the surviving images and descriptions of the cross, the cross of Euphrosyne of Polack was reconstructed in 1992-1997 by Brest craftsman Мікалай Кузьміч [translation: ‘*Mikalaj Kuźmič*’]. The recreation of the cross was carried out in a highly professional manner, matching the dimensions, materials, technology and even the Christian relics included in the original cross. Today the reconstructed artifact is stored not in the museum collection, but in the Saint Eufrosyne Monastery in Polack.

If in the 1990s the creation of reconstructions seemed completely justified, then the implementation of such projects in the 2020s raises the question of their rationality. However, a similar approach to restoring the so-called ‘Turaŭ Cross’ is now being implemented in Belarus.

Back in Soviet times, due to archaeological excavations of the ancient town of Turaŭ, archaeologist Пётр Лысенка [translation: ‘*Piotr Lysienka*’] found three lead images dating back to the 12th-13th centuries. Following extensive study, it was concluded that they belonged to the cross in the Turaŭ temple. This cross was most likely very similar to the cross of Euphrosyne of Polack, but in the case of the Turaŭ artifact, no images or descriptions have survived. Nevertheless, in 2017 it was decided to reproduce the ancient artifact (Чаплева [translation: ‘*Čaplieva*’] 2021).

Following long discussions, a decision was made that ignored scientific arguments about the original appearance of the artifact. Instead of silver, the cross was recreated in gold and with a controversial interpretation of the images of the saints depicted on it. Implementing this project in the

21st century, it was quite possible to make use of information technology to visualize the image of the cross. Instead, following the paradigm of previous decades, an expensive and controversial replica (whose conformity to the original remains highly questionable) was created. In spite of this, it will be promoted in the public space as an analog of the cross of Euphrosyne of Polack.

A more modern approach to the peculiar return of a medieval artifact was realized in the case of Hedwig glass (Hedwig beakers) that was found during archaeological excavations in Navahrudak, conducted under the direction of Гурэвіч [translation: ‘*Hurevič*’] in 1955-1962 (Щапова [translation: ‘*Shchapova*’] 1976, 209). Even though there were many museums in the BSSR at that time, the valuable find was taken out of the territory of Belarus and sent to the collection of the State Hermitage Museum (in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg). The significance of the find is confirmed by the fact that it was included in the main exposition of the largest Russian museum.

In 2022, as a result of three years of work by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus, the Belarusian Geographical Society, the Navahrudak Museum of Local History, and the priest of the local Catholic parish, two polymer copies of the Hedwig glass from Navahrudak were created and exhibited in the local history museum and the Catholic Church (figure 1). The copies do not match the original in materials, but were made with the proportions and decoration intact.

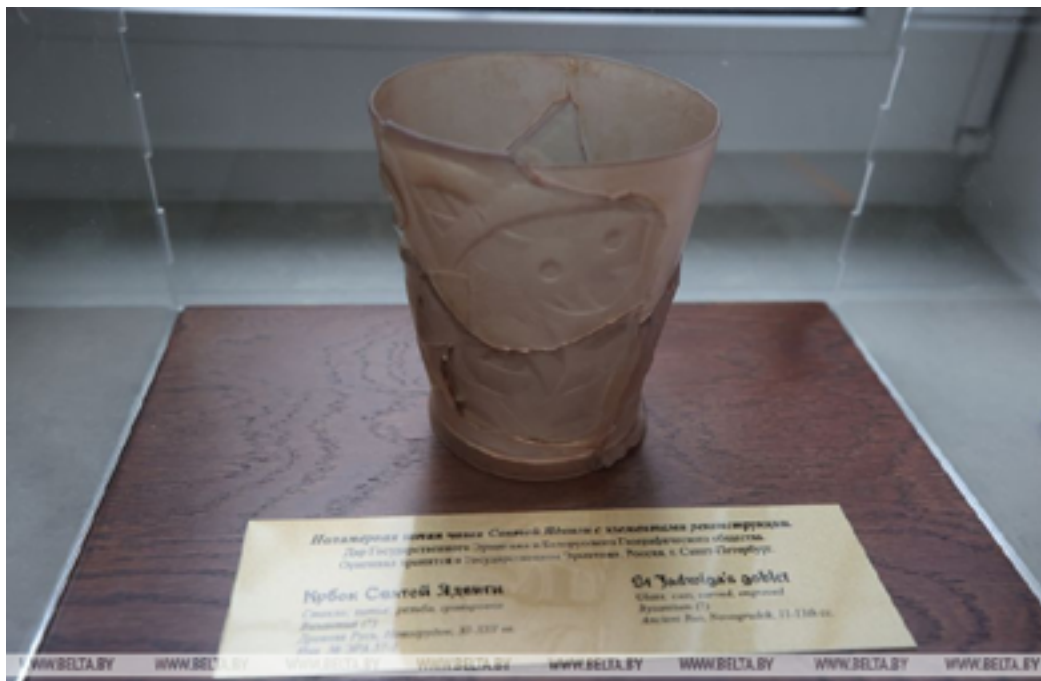


Figure 1. Polymer copy of the Hedwig glass from Navahrudak: Navahrudak 2022.
Photograph by: Леонид Щеглов [translation: ‘*Leonid Shcheglov*’] (www.belta.by).

This case raises another problem. Should the local community and Belarusian scientists be satisfied with the return of a polymer copy instead of the original artifact? Ironically, the inscription on the polymer copy emphasizes that it is a 'gift of the State Hermitage and the Belarusian Geographical Society', while the original is kept in St. Petersburg. Shouldn't the copies remain in the Hermitage, and the original artifact be returned to Navahrudak, which has had its museum since 1992? These issues are also highlighted by the restoration work at Navahrudak Castle, which should lead to the partial museumification of one of the castle towers. A polymer copy certainly gives an idea of the uniqueness of the artifact, but the presence of the original would significantly increase the significance of the museum and the interest of visitors.

Privileged Estates

When Belarus acquired state sovereignty, the necessity of displaying previously almost forbidden topics in the museum space became urgent. One of the topics that came to be in demand by the Belarusian society and museum workers was the culture of privileged estates. Conveying this great romantic history in museums necessitated exhibiting castle and palace interiors, weapons, and works of art. All of this required moulages, models, copies, and reconstructions.

One of the first restored castles in the sovereign period of Belarus' history was the Mir Castle (16th century). After the end of World War II, the castle complex fell into complete disrepair and was a ruin until restoration work began in 1987.

Already in 1992, the first museum exhibition was opened in the South-West Tower. In December 2000, the Mir Castle Complex was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. In 2010, the restoration work was completed and a year later the museum received an independent status ('Агульная Гісторыя' [translation: '*General History*']). As of 2024, the main collection of the museum contains almost 2,500 items, and the auxiliary scientific collection holds more than 2,600 items ('Фонды' [translation: '*Collections*']). A significant part of the museum's collections was formed from copies.

At the moment, both original museum objects and copies are exhibited. It is quite difficult for an untrained visitor to understand which of the objects have historical value, and which are created only to supplement the exhibition of the ensemble.

Figure 2 shows one of the exhibition complexes of Mir Castle, represented by an original tapestry from the 17th century and three reconstructions of armor from the same period. In museum labels, the armor is correctly attributed to reconstruction, but the desire of visitors to check each museum exhibit for originality seems unlikely. This can lead to the visitor's perception of the exhibition as completely original, from a specific historical era.



Figure 2. *Fragment of the exhibition of the Mir Castle. The originals stand side by side with reconstructions: Mir 2024.* Photograph by: Dzianis Filipchyk and Anton Petrukhin.



Figure 3. *Reconstruction of a Manifer: Mir 2024.* Photograph by: Dzianis Filipchyk and Anton Petrukhin.

“In the Belarusian case, the museum specialists faced not just the task of rediscovery, but the creation of a new national and cultural identity.”

One might assume that these copies are meant to contribute not so much to educating visitors as to confirming the existential authenticity of the entire complex (Penrose 2020).

Moreover, reconstructions for the museum were ordered not only during the period of its formation but also with the acquisition of independent status (2011). Thus, in 2012, a manifer² from the set of armor of Mikołaj ‘the Black’ Radziwiłł (bel. Мікалай Радзівіл Чорны) was reconstructed (figure 3). The armor of the representative of the most important noble family in the history of Belarus (the Radziwiłłs) was created in the middle of the 16th century, but not a single element of it has survived in the territory of Belarus. The main part of the armor is in Vienna, the rest is in Paris and New York (Весьялуха [translation: ‘Viesialucha’] 2015).

Most of the items presented in the exhibition are replicas unrelated to the history and owners of the castle itself. They have a completely different origin and serve to reproduce a possible image of the castle interiors, to reconstruct the material culture of a certain period.

The active use of reconstructions and copies concerns not only the main exhibition but also the temporary exhibitions of the Mir Castle. Thus, in 2015, the exhibition *Battle Helmets and Heraldic Flags of the Belarusian Lands of the 11th–17th centuries* was organized in the castle complex. Of the 30 items on display, more than half (19) were replicas (Весьялуха [translation: ‘Viesialucha’] 2015).

The creators of the exposition of another castle complex of the 16th century faced a similar problem. This is the Radziwiłłs' palace and park complex in Niasviž, which is now part of the Niasviž Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve. The property was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005.

The castle, which later was transformed into a palace and park complex, was the residence of the Radziwiłł family until 1939. Part of the Radziwiłł collection was taken from Niasviž already after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century (as discussed above), and part of the collection was sold by the owners themselves in the interwar period. In 1939 the palace and park complex was occupied by the Red Army, and the collections were taken to Minsk and given to various institutions. After World War II, the palace housed a sanatorium, which operated until 2001. Restoration works then began at the site, after which a new museum exhibition appeared in 2012. To build the exhibition, the developers chose an ensemble method, which was supposed to reflect the life of the castle owners and historical interiors.

To restore the historical interiors and reflect the history of the Radziwiłł family, the exhibition designers had to resort to the use of authentic items from the same epoch and copies. The institution acquired furniture, dishes, clocks, and other original items that had no connection with the Niasviž Palace, but allowed them to recreate the lifestyle of the era.

The task of revealing the history of the family was more difficult since the museum collections of Belarus did not have a sufficient number of originals. A striking case is the Radziwiłł portrait gallery. This collection survived the Second World War and was kept in museum collections on the territory of the BSSR. However, according to the decision of the head of the Soviet Union M.S. Khrushchev in 1954, a collection of original portraits from Niasviž was transferred to Poland, which was under the rule of the communist government and ally of the USSR. The legacy of the Radziwiłł family, representatives of the privileged class, did not fit into the Soviet paradigm. Therefore, the collection, valuable for Belarusian history, was easily transported to another country.

When work began on the museumification of the Niasviž Palace, where these portraits were originally located, the question arose about the need to exhibit them. In 2009, and only with the help of representatives of the Radziwiłł family, 48 digital copies of portraits printed on canvas were transferred from the National Museum in Warsaw to the palace in Niasviž. After completion of the restoration work, they were exhibited in the halls of the Niasviž Palace and park complex (figure 4). Although the Radziwiłł family advocated for the return of the originals to Niasviž, and despite the fact that the portraits are not on display in Warsaw, but held in museum depots, the originals remain outside Belarus (Гурневіч [translation: 'Hurnievič'] 2009).

The example of the museumification of the Niasviž Palace also shows that Belarusian curators have to resort to copying original items not only in cases where cultural properties have been taken out of the country. For instance, copies of the candelabra for the fireplace hall in the exposition were made from the 18th-century candelabra kept in the Church of Corpus Christi in Niasviž. Also, the National Art Museum in Minsk did not share the original portraits of the Radziwiłłs, as it would have significantly impoverished its section of the permanent exhibition dedicated to ancient Belarusian art. As a result, it was decided to send copies to the Niasviž Palace.

Museums in Mir and Niasviž demonstrate the experience of using copies in the expositions of major museums and UNESCO World Heritage sites. The situation in local museums is often worse. For example, in the house-museum of Michał Kleofas Ogiński [bel. Міхал Клеафас Агінскі] in



Figure 4. *Digital copies of portraits of the Radziwiłłs and a copy of a candelabra on display at the Niasviž Palace: Niasviž 2024.*
Photograph by: Dzianis Filipchyk and Anton Petrukhin.



Figure 5. *Fragment of the exhibition in the house-museum of M.K. Ogiński in Zaliessie: Zaliessie 2024.* Photograph by: Dzianis Filipchyk and Anton Petrukhin.

Zaliessie (Smarhoń District, Hrodna Region), a significant part of the exposition is built with the help of copies. A public and political figure, the famous composer M.K. Ogiński lived in the manor for many years, turning it into the center of local cultural life. Over the 20th century, the estate fell into disrepair, and only in 2015, after the completion of restoration work in the estate, the museum began its work (figure 5).

The 13 halls of the museum depict the life and creative path of the composer and show the household activities of the 19th century. Most of the items are authentic, but although they are original, they have no connection with the history of the estate. The portraits and documents in the exposition, representing the history of the Ogiński family and the development of the estate itself, are copies and reproductions. An indicative example of this approach is the placement in the exhibition space of a copy of a wineglass, which probably belonged to the Ogiński family. The original is located in the Hrodna Museum of History and Archaeology, and the copy is in the exposition of the Zaliessie Museum. The text of the museum label explains that such copies are sold by the museum as souvenirs (figure 6).



Figure 6. *The wineglass copy of M.K. Ogiński in the house-museum in Zaliessie:* Zaliessie 2024. Photograph by: Dzianis Filipchuk and Anton Petrukhin.

Lost artists

After Belarus gained independence in 1991, the issue of returning the names of famous natives, cultural figures and artists to the Belarusian cultural context became topical. During the Soviet period, their creative work was either recognized as the heritage of other nations or simply ignored.

One of the first examples of such a return of a cultural figure is the museum ‘*House of Vankovich. Culture and Art of the 1st half of the 19th century*’, which opened in 2000 as a branch of the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus. The manor house of the famous noble family of Wańkowicz was restored at the 200th anniversary of the birth of the famous artist Walenty Wańkowicz [bel. ‘*Валянцін Ваньковіч*’], who lived in this building for several years. However, even the memorial status of the building itself is in question. During the 20th century, the mansion fell into complete disrepair and was used as communal apartments before the restoration. The restorers had to rebuild the building from scratch using new materials on the historical foundation. As for the paintings of Walenty Wańkowicz, there is not a single original work in state collections, so to depict the artist’s heritage it was necessary to use either copies or reproductions of paintings (figure 7).



Figure 7. Part of the exhibition of the Vankovich Museum in Minsk with reproductions of his works: Minsk 2024. Photograph by: Dzianis Filipchuk and Anton Petrukhin.

A similar situation, when original items in the exposition are represented only by substitute materials, is typical for Ilya Repin's house-museum 'Zdraŭniova' (Viciebsk district). The estate of the famous 19th century artist was destroyed during a fire and was rebuilt in 2000. The current exhibition presents mainly reproductions of the artist's works and items that are authentic but were used at other estates in the same historical period.

The residence of the 19th-century artist Napoleon Orda [bel. 'Напалеон Орда'] in the Ivanava district was also fully reconstructed, including two manor houses and an art gallery. The exhibition does not include original works by Napoleon Orda, so the halls are filled with copies or works by modern artists.

The above cases show that the practice of using replicas is quite widespread. The use of copies makes it possible to actualize the cultural heritage that links Belarus with the European and Russian cultural context. New collections are formed around replicas, which become an important factor in the development of the local communities.

The creators of the Museum of the History of the Viciebsk People's Art School, which opened its doors in 2018, took a different path ('Музей Гісторыі Віцебскага Народнага Мастацкага Вучылішча' [translation:

'Museum of the History of the Viciebsk People's Art School'). The museum promotes the heritage of the art school, organized in 1918 by the world-famous artist Marc Chagall, a native of Viciebsk. In 1919, on Chagall's initiative, the Museum of Modern Art was opened on the premises of the art school (Гужалоўскі [translation: 'Hužaloŭski'] 2002, 16). There were about 80 works in the museum, among which were the works of Chagall, Kazimir Malevich, and Yudel Pen (Chagall's teacher). After the founder of the museum left Viciebsk, most of the paintings were moved outside the territory of modern Belarus (to Moscow).

The modern museum was opened in the historical building where the art school and the first museum operated. Chagall, Malevich, and El Lissitzky worked as teachers at the school. The building also housed the teachers' apartments, which significantly increases its historical value.

The exhibition's creators discovered fragments of old plaster, carried out soundings, and preserved the original remains of the interiors. But in this case, the previous paradigm of an exhibition filled with copies of the originals was not implemented. The Museum of the History of the Viciebsk People's Art School actively used modern information technologies, lighting equipment, decorations, and installations. These techniques do not mislead the visitor and do not create the impression of authenticity of the interior and exhibits. Instead, visitors are immersed in the ideas, philosophical concepts, and creative endeavors of artists.

This example was realized in the museumification of the avant-garde heritage of the early twentieth century, which made it possible to move away from the decades-old paradigm of using copies in a museum exhibition.

Another promising strategy that currently is not available in Belarusian museums could be using higher-quality and cheaper digital reproductions that are becoming widely available on the internet. It is also promising to create virtual reconstructions that enable demonstration of the variability of scientific approaches to reconstruction and can easily adapt to the addition of new data.

Conclusions

During the years of the country's independence (after 1991) Belarusian museums have used and continue to use museum copies for creating new and updating existing museum exhibitions. The practice of resorting to copies is motivated not exclusively by the need to preserve authentic objects, but by the extremely small size of the museum collections. These collections suffered significant losses during the absence of Belarusian statehood, wars, revolutions, and the illegal export of valuables abroad.

“The search for the Golden Age of prosperity led to the need to reflect this period in museum exhibitions. However, there were very few medieval artifacts in the collections of Belarusian museums.”

Creators of museum exhibitions after the collapse of the USSR searched for new themes that have become relevant to society. The main theme was the national Belarusian history, distinctiveness, and new, non-Soviet identity. The museums that were created during this period had to reflect a new approach to understanding the country's history at the national and local levels.

During the Soviet period, several important aspects of Belarusian history and culture were either forbidden or significantly neglected in state museum collections. One such topic was the history of Belarusian lands during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, when these territories developed independently of the Russian state. As a result, museums lack authentic artifacts from these epochs, forcing museum staff to rely heavily on copies and replicas to represent this historical period.

Another subject that was ideologically suppressed was the culture of the privileged social class. Soviet ideology labeled this stratum as hostile, alien, and fundamentally non-Belarusian. Consequently, few artifacts from this segment of society were preserved in Belarusian museums. Some valuable items, such as portraits from the Radziwiłłs' collection in Niasviž, were even gifted to 'friendly countries' in 1954. The restoration of historical sites like the Mir and Niasviž palace complexes, which are now UNESCO World Heritage Sites, has brought the issue of reconstructing their interiors into focus. Since many of the original artifacts were lost or destroyed, replicas continue to be used to furnish these sites. This challenge persists as new projects aimed at restoring aristocratic estates and their associated heritage emerge.

A third area of neglect in Soviet-era museums was the religious history of Belarusian lands. Religious topics were approached strictly from the perspective of the state's anti-religious agenda. However, in the post-Soviet period, religious history has gained a prominent place in museum exhibitions, reflecting a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to Belarusian heritage.

Additionally, the Soviet regime downplayed or ignored the contributions of famous natives of Belarus who gained international recognition, especially artists like Wańkowicz, Orda, and Chagall. This has since changed, and museums now strive to showcase the work and legacy of these individuals.

As these themes have been reintroduced into the national discourse, Belarusian museums have had to compensate for the lack of original objects by turning to replicas. They have employed several strategies in this regard. One approach involves creating reproductions of Belarusian artifacts that

are currently housed abroad, such as the Hedwig glass or the works of Wańkowicz, and even Radziwiłłs' armor. Another strategy has been producing replicas of items from major Belarusian museum collections for display in smaller or regional institutions, such as reproductions of Radziwiłłs' ceremonial portraits, originally from the National Art Museum in Minsk, now displayed at the Niasviž residence.

Museums have also engaged in the scientific reconstruction of lost artifacts, such as the cross of Euphrosyne of Polack, though some reconstructions, like the Turaŭ Cross, remain controversial. Furthermore, in efforts to restore historical interiors, particularly in castles and palaces, museums have sourced original items from neighboring countries, as seen with the printing press used in the Museum of Belarusian Book Printing.

It can be assumed that the paradigm of creating copies and reconstructions to fill museum exhibitions in Belarus will continue. Some hope for overcoming this trend is given by the Museum of the History of the Viciebsk People's Art School, which abandoned copies and with the help of installations and modern information technologies returned the names of Chagall, Malevich, and Lissitzky to the Belarusian cultural context. However, new major museum projects (like the exposition of the old castle in Hrodna) continue to demonstrate adherence to the old approaches.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 1991.
- Badica, Simina. "Same Exhibitions, Different Labels? Romanian national museums and the fall of communism" *National Museums. New Studies from Around the World*, edited by Simon Knell et al. Routledge, 2011.
- "Działalność Muzeów w 2021 Roku" [translation: "Activities of Museums in 2021"]. *Główny Urząd Statystyczny* [translation: *Central Statistical Office*], 11 May 2022, stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5493/12/5/1/dzialalnosc_muzeow_w_2021_roku.pdf.
- "Museums and Galleries." *Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania*, 18 Nov. 2023, lrkm.lrv.lt/en/activities/museums-and-galleries.
- Penrose, Jan. "Authenticity, Authentication and Experiential Authenticity: Telling Stories in Museums." *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 21, no. 9, 2020, pp. 1245-1267, doi:10.1080/14649365.2018.1550581.
- Tony, Bennett. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. Routledge, 1995.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Harvard University Press, 1972.
- "Агульная Гісторыя" [translation: "General History"]. Мірскі Замак [translation: 'Mir Castle'], mirzamak.by/by/istoriya/obshchaya-istoriya.
- Весьялуха, Марына [translation: Viesialucha, Maryna]. "Каб Продкі Прачнуліся" [translation: "For the Ancestors to Awaken"]. Літаратура і Мастацтва [translation 'Literature and Art'], 15 May 2015, p. 8, zviazda.by/sites/default/files/19-2015.pdf.
- Вінакурава, Святлана [translation: Vinakurava, Sviatlana]. *Культура Беларусі: 20 Год Развіцця 1991-2011: Манаграфія* [translation: 'Culture of Belarus: 20 Years of Development 1991- 2011: Monograph']. Інстытут Культуры Беларусі [translation: 'Institute of Culture of Belarus'], Minsk, Belarus, 2012.
- Гужалоўскі, Аляксандр [translation: Hužaloŭski, Aliaksandr]. *Музеі Беларусі (1918-1941 гг.)* [translation: 'Museums of Belarus (1918-1941)']. Нацыянальны Архіў Рэспублікі Беларусь [translation: 'National Archive of the Republic of Belarus'], Minsk, Belarus, 2002.
- Гужалоўскі, Аляксандр [translation: Hužaloŭski, Aliaksandr]. *Нараджэнне Беларускага Музея* [translation: 'The birth of the Belarusian Museum']. Нацыянальны Архіў Рэспублікі Беларусь [translation: 'National Archive of the Republic of Belarus'], Minsk, Belarus, 2001.
- Гурневіч, Дзьмітры [translation: Hurnievič, Dźmitry]. "Радзівілы: У Беларусь Павінны Трапіць Арыгіналы, а Ня Копіі" [translation: "Radziwiłłs: Originals, not Copies, Should Be Sent to Belarus"]. *Polskie Radio Esperanto*, Polskie Radio, 27 Oct. 2009, www2.polskieradio.pl/eo/dokument.aspx?iid=118763.
- Ладзісава, Галіна [translation: 'Ladzisava, Halina']. "Канцэпцыя і Тэматычная Структура Музея Беларускага Кнігадрукавання" [translation: 'Concept and Thematic Structure of the Museum of Belarusian Book Printing']. Тэзісы Дакладаў Навуковых Супрацоўнікаў Запаведніка Па Выніках Працы (Навукова-Практычныя Канферэнцыі 1989, 1990 Гадоў) [translation: 'Abstracts of the Reports of Scientific Employees of the Reserve on the Results of Work (Scientific and Practical Conferences in 1989, 1990)'], Polack, Belarus, 1991.
- Мірончык, В. [translation: Mirončyk, V.] "Музеі" [translation: "Museums"]. *Беларуская Культура Сёння: Гадавы Агляд (2003)* [translation: 'Belarusian Culture Today: Annual Review (2003)'], 2004, pp. 57-60.
- Мотульскі, Роман [translation: Matuŭski, Raman]. "Книжное Наследие Франциска Скорины: Международный Научный Издательский Проект (к 500-летию Белорусского и Восточнославянского Книгопечатания)" [translation: 'The Book Heritage of Francysk Skaryna: International Scientific Publishing Project (to the 500th anniversary of Belarusian and East Slavic Printing)']. Библиография [Bibliography], vol. 3, Moscow, Russia, 2019, pp. 3-16.
- "Музеи и Зоопарки Российской Федерации в Цифрах 2020" [translation: 'Museums and Zoos of the Russian Federation in Figures 2020']. АИС "Статистика" [translation: AIS 'Statistics'], Центр ГИВЦ Минкультуры России [translation: 'Center GIVC Ministry of Culture of Russia'], 2021, stat.mkrf.ru/upload/iblock/536/536bcd7cab50c387d487331a29da8ffc.pdf
- "Музей Гісторыі Віцебскага Народнага Мастацкага Вучылішча" [translation: 'Museum of the History of the Viciebsk People's Art School']. Установа Культур "Музей "Віцебскі Цэнтр Сучаснага Мастацтва," [translation: 'Cultural institution "Museum "Viciebsk Center of Modern Art"'], www.vitebskavangard.by/by/muzej-istorii-vnhu/.
- Филюшкин, Александр [translation: 'Filyushkin, Alexander']. "Как Изображать Прошлое Нации? Два Подхода в Музейных Экспозициях (на Примере Эстонии и Белоруссии)" [translation: "How to Depict the Past of the Nation? Two Approaches in

Endnotes

- Museum Exhibitions (on the Example of Estonia and Belarus)”. Вопросы Музеологии [translation: ‘*The Issues of Museology*’], vol. 1, no. 13, 2016, pp. 3-9, voprosi-muzeologii.spbu.ru/images/pdf-archives/2016-vm-v1.pdf.
- “Фонды” [translation: ‘*Collections*’]. Мірскі Замак [translation: ‘*Mir Castle*’], mirzamak.by/by/o-komplekse/fondy.
- Чаплева, Вікторыя [translation: ‘*Čaplieva, Viktoryja*’]. “Крыж Аднавілі, Прэмію Атрымалі, Пра Даследчыка Забыліся” [translation: ‘*The Cross Was Restored, The Award Was Received, The Researcher Was Forgotten*’]. Новы Час [translation: ‘*New Time*’], 22 Feb. 2021, novychas.online/kultura/kryz-adnavili-premiju-atrymali-pra-dasledczyka-z.
- Чернявская, Юлия [translation: Chernyavskaya, Yulia]. “Самая Советская из Всех Советских...” [translation: ‘*The Most Soviet of all Soviet...*’] Неприкосновенный Запас [translation: ‘*Untouchable Reserve*’], vol. 78, Apr. 2011, www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/neprikosnovennyi_zapas/78_nz_4_2011/article/18404/.
- “Число Организаций Культуры На Конец Периода” [translation: ‘*Number of Cultural Organizations at the End of the Period*’]. Национальный Статистический Комитет Республики Беларусь [translation: ‘*National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus*’], 19 Apr. 2024, dataportal.belstat.gov.by/Indicators/Preview?key=130674.
- Щапова, Юлия [translation: Shchapova, Yulia]. “О Резном Бокале Из Новогрудка” [translation: ‘*About the Carved Glass from Navahrudak*’]. Средневековая Русь: (Сборник Статей Памяти Н. Н. Воронина) [translation: ‘*Medieval Rus': (Collection of Articles in Memory of N. N. Voronin)*’], Наука [translation: ‘*Science*’], Moscow, USSR, 1976, pp. 209–215.

- ¹ The majority of names of Belarusian historical figures are given in transliteration from the Belarusian Cyrillic alphabet to the Belarusian Latin alphabet. However, some names are given in Polish transliteration where these are more established in the scientific literature.
- ² A ‘manifer’ is a gauntlet for protecting the left hand when holding the reins of a horse.

Gang Signs and Prayer: Reproduction of Christianity in Black British Rap Music

Best
Paper
Prize

Author
Lola Abbas

Discipline
Literary Studies and Cultural Analysis

Keywords
Reproduction / Hip-Hop / Pastiche / Cultural Identity / Great Britain

Doi
doi.org/10.61299/rr463FHr

Abstract

This essay explores how Christian tropes are reproduced in Black British rap music, focusing on the work of contemporary Black British hip-hop artists Stormzy and Dave. Using postmodern pastiche theory, the essay examines how the integration of biblical tropes, Christian themes, and gospel music within their songs, contributes to the simultaneous challenging and reconciliation of traditional Christian values with urban life experiences in a Black British context. Through analysis of Stormzy's and Dave's song lyrics, the essay demonstrates how these artists employ religious symbolism and sampling to navigate their identities as simultaneous Black British Christians and hip-hop artists. Ultimately, this 'collage' of religious and cultural references not only serves to modernize traditional religious expression but also positions these artists within a broader lineage of Black cultural perseverance, resistance, and self-fashioning. As such, this essay contributes to the discourse on cultural identity formation in hip-hop, highlighting how reproduction of Christian elements functions as both homage and self-determination.

*"This is what it sounds like when Glastonbury meets God...
this is a God tune. This is everything."
– Stormzy, Glastonbury 2019.*

Reproduction is an integral part of hip-hop culture and has been at the core of hip-hop music production since its very creation in mid 1970s New York. Often credited as the founding figure of hip-hop culture, Jamaican-born Clive Campbell created the blueprint for hip-hop as DJ Kool Herc, through his use of sampled music to create what would come to be known as ‘break-beats’ (Sweet 2018). Building on funk, disco, and other drum-heavy genres, Herc would repeat five second ‘breaks’ – i.e., *“the part of a song when all other elements would drop out and only percussion and bass could be heard”* (Sweet 2018) – from the same track on a loop by ‘scratching’ the record; dragging the vinyl back and forth on the turntable. Meanwhile, he encouraged dancers by *“verbally accompanying the music in a syncopated rhyme that served as the foundation for what would later become known as MCing, or rapping”* (Sweet 2018). Herc’s legendary block parties contributed to the rise of a prominent hip-hop culture encompassing four main elements – Djing, MCing, breakdancing, and graffiti – which helped drive urban, primarily Black youth away from gang membership and into so-called hip-hop ‘crew’ formation. As a practice that originated in the margins of urban America (Forman 2002), hip-hop culture is thus by virtue intertwined with questions of heritage, belonging and identity.

In later years, however, media representations of hip-hop and rap – as stated, both cultures dominated by (primarily male) youth of color – shifted the narrative from rap as a *substitute* for felony and gang membership to which its participants were thought prone, to one of hip-hop precisely as *“martial music of a vicious underclass”* (Maxwell 1991, 1), connected to minority illegality and violence. The demonization of the genre was not dissimilar to the demonization of previous Black-dominated genres, similarly stemming from widespread racist tendencies and a fear of the influence of Black culture on White consciousness. What separated early 1990s rappers from earlier movements, however, was their awareness of these mechanics of demonization, and their use of reproduction and postmodern pastiche to alter hip-hop culture’s violent image (Maxwell 1991). As Maxwell (1991) argues, young Black artists chose to counter criminal stereotypes *“from the inside out”* (4): through careful employment of pastiche and other post-modern techniques – steering clear of what Maxwell calls *“the pitfalls of empty nostalgia”* – rappers ironized their depiction as dangerous gangsters, as such *“negotiating with the postmodern present without succumbing to*

it” (Marshall 1991, 4). Their use of samples in this negotiation served as an act of self-determination, as artists through the cutting and mixing of selected excerpts reclaimed the right to define themselves, by altering the texts that represented them (Marshall 1991, 6). Moreover, as an originally Black artform, using samples of other Black musical forebears served as a way of reaffirming transhistorical Black communal ties, as it reasserted *“the validity of the black community’s claims to artistic originality and ownership”* (Maxwell 1991, 7). Through sampling, thus, rap and hip-hop artists reclaimed the right to their own heritage and self-determination.

Some 50 years later, the landscape of music production has changed considerably; as the late 90s saw both the ascension of hip-hop to global cultural prominence, but with that also the rise of an elaborate copyright infringement lawsuit industry that renders artists all but paralyzed in their creative freedom to build on previously existing material (Marshall 2006, 868-869). Although Marshall (2006) argues that this has contributed to a general decline in the use of sampling practices, hip-hop music is nevertheless still defined by the multifold use of samples, ranging in noticeability from small, manipulated soundbites to full adaptations of past hit songs. Importantly, Marshall notes that in manipulating their sources, these artists *“let the seams show”* (Marshall 2006, 869), by using innovative sampling techniques in order to hide their sources – but not their sampledness. This thus shows that the act, and *art*, of sampling is seen as an essential practice within hip-hop production, allowing artists to inscribe themselves within a larger transhistorical narrative and tradition, both paying homage to the roots of their cultural heritage as well as to the roots of hip-hop culture. The quest for ‘realness’ or ‘authenticity’ here thus lies precisely in the act of reproduction.

With the global dissemination of hip-hop via transnational mass media, its adaptation to various local and national contexts has led scholars to describe hip-hop as a ‘glocal’ phenomenon (Krimms 2000; Forman & Neal 2004), characterized by the continuous exchange between global (especially American) influences and local cultural specificities. The contemporary British rap scene, for instance, sees a particularly high number of artists overtly building on pre-existing material from genres such as R&B and, notably, *gospel music*. Two prominent artists in the scene, Dave¹ and Stormzy, make frequent use of samples from religious songs and speech fragments in their songs, thereby simultaneously showcasing their own cultural and religious identity while adding multiple layers to the narrative of their songs. In this sense, their songs are seen to construct a collage of different cultural artefacts and tropes. This corresponds to the postmodern

concept of pastiche similarly shown to be present in the artistry of 1990s US rappers by Maxwell (1991).

With this essay, I aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on identity construction through pastiche and sampling practices in hip-hop. Performing a close reading of Dave's songs 'In The Fire' and 'Lazarus', and Stormzy's songs 'Rainfall' and 'Blinded By Your Grace Pt. II', thereby focusing on the multitude of cultural references reproduced in their music through the lens of postmodern pastiche as outlined by Dyer (2007), I argue that reproduction is at play on multiple levels in these songs: in the 'classical' sense of samples, but also on the level of biblical tropes and genre-defying elements employed in their songs. Through their use of sampling practices, Dave and Stormzy not only position themselves in relation to their fate, values and cultural heritage on a religious level; they also connect to hip-hop's origins and essence, inscribing themselves in an extensive transhistorical tradition of meaning-production and reproduction.

Postmodern pastiche

In his canonical work *Pastiche* (2007), Richard Dyer has set out to analyze the postmodern use of what originated as an eighteenth-century Italian opera genre. In Italian opera, the term *pasticcio* – literally meaning 'pastry' – signified a play constructed out of fragments of multiple existing opera's; in its postmodern use, pastiche is used to explain a type of aesthetic imitation of another work of art, "*in such a way as to make consciousness of this fact central to its meaning and affect*" (Dyer 2007, 4). Dyer argues that pastiche, in this sense, is not superficial: rather, it is "*a knowing form of the practice of imitation, which itself always both holds us inexorably within cultural perception of the real and also, and thereby, enables us to make a sense of the real*" (Dyer 2007, 2). Although this might sound slightly vague, understood in combination with Dyer's remark that imitation is "*the foundation of all learning, [...] of behaviour, communication and knowledge*" (Dyer 2007, 1), the relation between reproduction in music and processes of cultural identity formation becomes evident.

Dyer applies a multifaceted understanding of pastiche: an entire work can be a pastiche, but pastiche can also be an aspect contained inside a wider work. Additionally, pastiche can reside in both the imitation of a specific work as well as a kind of work – e.g., a genre, or a period. Consequently, pastiche can appear in multiple forms: the most well-known form in music would be the sample, the sound fragment taken from pre-existing work. However, pastiche can also appear in the implementation of a genre in a different genre – as, for example, in the implementation of gospel elements

in a hip-hop song. Furthermore, Dyer argues that a pastiche needs to be recognized and understood as pastiche, in order to function as such (Dyer 2007, 3); and it is (generally) intentional.² The understanding of a work as pastiche “*is a defining part of how the work works, of its meaning and affect*” (Dyer 2007, 3). The fact that it is understood as an imitation thus changes – arguably, establishes and reinforces – the meaning it intends to convey. According to Dyer, being aware of the pastiche employed in a work thus ‘strengthens its case’, as it adds to the affective experience. As such, “*both the context (the frame) and the inner work itself [...] provide further indications about the assumptions and formal operations of pastiche*” (Dyer 2007, 4). Concretely, in music both the adaptation as well as the sampled origin are thus engaged in a mutually reinforcing interaction, in which the outcome (the narrative told) is greater than the sum of its parts. Against this framework, we can reconsider the use of reproduction in Black British hip-hop through the analysis of pastiche in the music of two of Britain’s most popular hip-hop artists, Stormzy and Dave.

Stormzy

Before moving on to the analysis of pastiche in the music of Dave and Stormzy, however, a short biography of both artists is imperative to shed light on the identities they represent through their music. Born in 1993 as Michael Ebenezer Kwadjo Omari Owuo Jr. to Ghanaian parents, the British rapper known as Stormzy grew up in South London. He gained prominence in the UK underground grime scene through his series of freestyle sessions uploaded onto YouTube. His 2017 debut album *Gang Signs & Prayer* catapulted Stormzy to fame, debuting at number one in the UK Albums Chart as the first grime³ album in history to do so. The album won the award for British Album of the Year at the 2018 Brit Awards. Since then, Stormzy has continued to take the world by storm, writing history as the first Black solo artist to headline the prestigious Glastonbury festival in 2019. Apart from using his platform to speak out about matters of injustice in the UK, as in his overt critique of Theresa May and the government’s handling of the 2017 Grenfell tragedy (Stormzy 2018), Stormzy is also very vocal about his relationship with faith. Stating that his “*greatest desire is to be a great man of God*” (Stormzy qtd. in Mayfield 2023), Stormzy’s devotion to Christianity earned him the Sandford St Martin award for his contribution to the public understanding of religion (Mayfield 2023).

“Through their use of sampling practices, Dave and Stormzy not only position themselves in relation to their fate, values and cultural heritage on a religious level; they also connect to hip-hop’s origins and essence, inscribing themselves in an extensive transhistorical tradition of meaning-production and reproduction.”

Dave

Equally influential in the astronomic rise of rap music to the forefront of the UK music scene is Dave, born as David Orobosa Michael Omoregie in 1998 to Nigerian parents. Known for his socially conscious lyricism, the South London rapper often addresses topics like racism, mental health, and inequality in his songs; therein not only reflecting wider issues present in British society, but also drawing from highly personal experiences with the British immigration system, homelessness, and gang violence. His debut album *Psychodrama* was met with critical acclaim and debuted at number one on the UK Albums Chart, breaking the record for most first-week streams for a British rap album – thereby surpassing Stormzy’s *Gang Signs & Prayer*. *Psychodrama* proceeded to win both the Mercury Prize and the award for Album of the Year at the 2020 Brit Awards. His second album, *We’re All Alone in This Together* (2021), similarly addresses topics of migration, inequality, and the struggles of life as a Black youth in British society. Dave often points out how these processes are inextricably linked and boil down to deliberate political policy, as for example in his overt critique of the British government’s mistreatment of members of the Windrush generation. It shows, thus, that these artists employ hip-hop to convey very deliberately and very carefully drafted messages about who they are and what context they position themselves in.

The reproduction of religion

The jump from identity politics and political engagement within hip-hop, to the analysis of religious tropes in Black British hip-hop might seem unaccounted for. However, British artists’ engagement with both hip-hop and Black Christianity share similar roots as parts of the larger rhizomatic network that Paul Gilroy has called the ‘Black Atlantic’ (Gilroy 1993), centered around the premise that Black Britain’s identity can only be understood from a transnational and intercultural perspective, shaped by the interrelated forces of slavery, diaspora, and colonialism. For while hip-hop music spread from Jamaica to first the US, and then the rest of the world through people like DJ Kool Herc as a derivative of Jamaican ‘reggae toasting’ (Maxwell 1991, 4), so too did the adapted versions of Christianity that had grown out of its original imposition on local communities through Western missionary projects. Following the 1948 British Nationality Act, conferring British citizen status on colonial subjects, West Indian as well as African Commonwealth citizens in turn brought their adapted religious customs to the British ‘Mother Country’ (Reddie). As part of what would come to be known as the Windrush generation, these people characterized

mass migration in Britain – but were met with outright racism and antipathy upon arrival from both local Brits and official government bodies.⁴ Having come to mainland Britain “*in the vain and tantalizing hope that this same Christian faith and its concomitant practice would triumph over contextual experience*” (Reddie 2010, 4), West Indian and African migrants came to occupy a simultaneous insider/outsider position within British society as Black Britains. From this position, Black settlers forged a new, vernacular culture out of the disparate African diaspora cultures of America and the Caribbean: encompassing the reaccentuation of “[e]lements of political sensibility and cultural expression transmitted [from these areas] over a long period of time” (Gilroy 1993, 145). This is visible in the continuation of traditionally Black religious practices such as Gospel (Reddie 2010, 13); and, importantly, in the culmination of ‘Black Atlantic’ elements into new, hybridized cultural forms – such as Stormzy and Dave’s hip-hop music.

Stormzy - Rainfall

Against this contextual background, we can analyze the reproduction of Christian tropes, verses, phrases, and places, as well as gospel samples and the use of gospel genre conventions, which are both common and explicit in the works of UK rappers Dave and Stormzy.

In his 2019 song ‘Rainfall’, Stormzy takes a jab at his “*enemies*” or the people that have spoken negatively about him by contrasting their criticism with the success he has lived to see. He proves his superiority over his supposed enemies by contrasting their “*Twitter talk*” (signifying gossip) with testaments to his acquired wealth in arguably stereotypical hip-hop fashion, as he draws attention to his Audemar Piguet watch and “*big fur jacket*” while bragging that he will earn “*another quarter [million] and get another number one [song]*.” While the Bible dictates to “*let another praise you, and not your own mouth*” (*The Holy Bible*, Proverbs 27:2), Stormzy complicates easy judgment as he credits the Lord for the riches he has earnt, stating: “*I give you the keys to no stress / First you give God the praise, then see Him work*”. The praise Stormzy references here, is elaborated upon in what I argue serves as the first layer of pastiche in this song. The chorus, built up out of the same two lines repeated eight times, sees Stormzy asking the Lord to “*let the rain fall on my enemies / on all of my enemies*”. This repetitive plea, and the rhythmic emphasis put on *fall* and *all* in each sentence, mimics the way a preacher delivers a sermon in typical Black Christian worship practices.⁵ Moreover, Stormzy’s deliberate use of the biblical trope of ‘rainfall’ is meaningful here: on the one hand, it refers to God’s opening of the ‘*floodgates of the heavens*’ (*The Holy Bible*,

Genesis 7:11) to cleanse the earth from sins; on the other hand, the biblical image of ‘rainfall’ here attests to Stormzy’s faith in the Lord, as it can be seen as an answer to Jesus’ plea to “*love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (*The Holy Bible*, Matthew 5:44), for “*he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*” (*The Holy Bible*, Matthew 5:45). Through the reproduction of the biblical trope of ‘rainfall’, Stormzy thus connects both his success and subsequent indifference with regards to his “*enemies*”, to his Christian faith and the Christian concept of forgiveness.

On a second, more overt level, ‘Rainfall’ features a bridge (sung by the song’s collaborator Tiana Major9), made up of an adaptation of the 00’s gospel song ‘Shackles (Praise You)’ by Mary Mary. The song preaches to praise the Lord and have faith in Him despite His “*trials*”; for “*through the fire and the rain [...] God has broken every chain*”. As the song’s bridge – a section in a song often used to contrast with, while preparing for, the verse and the chorus – the sample provides an extra layer of meaning to a song that otherwise would amount to mere self-praise. Through use of this sampled fragment, the meaning of ‘Rainfall’ thus becomes greater than the sum of its parts, as Stormzy on the one hand is able to both capture his reputation of a “*skengman*”, or someone with street credibility (*Green’s*), as well as his role as devout Christian. On the other hand, with his use of pastiche in this song he positions himself in a transtemporal discourse of Black perseverance and determination fueled by faith, despite other people’s mistrust and negativity.

Dave – In The Fire

In a similar way, Dave builds on religious tropes of Black suffering while translating them to a modern urban context. His 2021 song ‘In The Fire’ (in collaboration with Fredo, Meekz, Ghetts, and Giggz) opens to a sample of The Florida Mass Choir’s 1982 gospel song ‘Have You Been Tried’. The song employs a typical Black Christian call-and-response technique to preach the importance of persevering through hardship and remaining devoted to your faith, utilizing the biblical verse 1 Peter 1:7: “*the trial of your faith [...] though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*”. While the sampled verse ends with the line: “*That’s the way we Christians do*”, in Dave’s reproduction, each collaborator builds off the song to transform this line’s meaning, thus reshaping the song’s meaning to reflect modern urban realities of life on the streets as Black British young men. As such, Fredo raps:

*“Have you been tried in that fire / I heard bullets sing higher than Mariah in choir [...] Yeah, these guns don’t bring nothing but prison and death, still / All my n*ggas just admire the fire”.*

The hardship reflected by ‘fire’ is repurposed here to signify the dangers on the street of literal gunfire. In the following verse, Ghetts quotes from the biblical story of Abel and Cain as he questions: *“Am I my brother’s keeper?”* followed by *“I’m my brother’s leader, I’m the eldest / The one who had to make a name [...] So nobody would trouble my siblings in this whirlwind”*. The reproduction of biblical verses here serves to underscore the importance of familial ties in a dangerous urban environment.

Lastly, Dave summarizes the fires that constitute the challenges of contemporary urban life as a Black British person, summing up matters like homelessness and immigration, as he argues: *“Crime’s on the rise, hate’s on the rise / Feel like everything but my mum’s pay’s on the rise.”* However, Dave seems to subvert the purpose of the sampled fragment in order to reflect an ironic stance, as he poses the question: *“Did you come through?” That’s the question.* By questioning what it means to ‘come through’, Dave reflects on the inability to directly map traditional Christian values of good and bad onto a situation where – as these rappers proclaim – hardship through crime is a necessary means to arrive at a better situation. As Ghetts puts it: *“I stood in front of the fire and learned to cook”*. The artists on this song thus employ biblical references and tropes in order to reconcile different fragments of their identity that seem to be at odds with each other, thereby also redefining what it means to be a young Black Christian youth in urban Britain.

Dave - Lazarus

Dave portrays an equally complex relationship with Christianity and identity politics on his 2021 song ‘Lazarus’, as he – in a similar manner as Stormzy on ‘Rainfall’ – relies on Bible quotations to justify his arguably unchristian behaviour. First aligning himself with his Christian faith by proclaiming that *“Any weapon formed against [him] can’t prosper”* – a direct quotation from the Bible addressed to the servants of the Lord (*The Holy Bible*, Isaiah 54:17) – Dave then complicates this alliance as he posits biblical quotations and tropes in direct relation to descriptions of him having repeated intercourse with corporeally well-endowed women. Likening himself by means of allegory to the biblical figure of Lazarus, Dave reproduces this biblical story in an arguably immoral context as he describes:

“[B]oth the adaptation as well as the sampled origin are thus engaged in a mutually reinforcing interaction, in which the outcome (the narrative told) is greater than the sum of its parts.”

“I yell, ‘Ayo, how yuh pum pum [your bottom] so fabulous’ / First round, I thought I was dead but / It brought [a] man back to life like Lazarus”. Dave’s comparison to Lazarus, who was risen from the dead by Jesus four days after his entombment, serves here not only as a tongue-in-cheek metaphor for post-coital resurrection; it also serves as a metaphor for the belief in resurrection and redemption through faith. In the bible, Lazarus’ death and subsequent resurrection both serves as a testament to *“the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it”* (*The Holy Bible*, John 11:4); while the second appearance of the name Lazarus in the Bible tells a tale of social equality and divine justice, teaching the importance of earthly compassion and empathy to earn divine blessing in the afterlife. In this light, Dave’s promise to *“rise up until there ain’t a government left”* in the face of *“political corruption”* that makes that *“most of his people [in Nigeria], they struggle and stress”*, acquires new meaning, as it links the biblical trope of resurrection to concepts of social and political equality, justice, and heritage-based identity affiliations. Through the reliance on intertextual references, adapting biblical tropes alongside more stereotypical hip-hop tropes centered on objectifying the female body and bragging about sexual encounters, while also voicing his political concerns, Dave brings together these multiple ‘genres’ in one work. As such, he seamlessly connects the part of his identity that is concerned with Christian values and stories, to the part of his identity that is bound up with more earthly desires.

Stormzy – Blinded By Your Grace Pt. II

Departing, then, from the criminal and the sexual, one last notable example is Stormzy’s song ‘Blinded By Your Grace Pt. II’, from his debut album *Gang Signs & Prayer* – the title of which essentially voices the entire crux of this essay, namely the complex relationship between religion and urban contemporary life as a Black British youth. As a self-conscious and deliberate imitation of a previous artwork (Dyer 2007, 21), the album’s front cover already poses a perfect example of pastiche, as it features Stormzy and his presumed fellow ‘gang members’ sitting at a table purposefully meant to resemble the ‘Last Supper’, with Stormzy representing Jesus Christ and his friends representing the Twelve Apostles (Figure 1). Stormzy’s portrayal of himself and his friends as Jesus and his disciples works as a multilayered metaphor. On one level, this iconic imagery conveys a sense of ‘chosenness’, while simultaneously highlighting the deep, ‘brotherly’ ties within both Jesus’ ‘gang’ and contemporary urban gangs.⁶ Just as Jesus chose his Apostles to stand by him and spread his message despite facing great challenges, Stormzy’s recreation of this image suggests that despite the trials and trib-

ulations he and his friends have endured, they have remained loyal to both their faith and each other. Additionally, the depiction of Stormzy's fellow 'gang members' as disciples that wear balaclavas serves as a reflection on the seemingly paradoxical notions of Christianity and sinfulness that are ultimately at the core of this essay. In the Bible, Jesus' apostles are represented as 'ordinary' or even sinful people, as Jesus himself explains that: "*it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*" (*The Holy Bible*, Mark 2:17). Stormzy's alliance with the Apostles can thus be seen as his assemblage of these multiple aspects of his identity into one. Like Dave, Stormzy ascribes himself a double identity, as both Savior and follower; as both sinful and chosen. His multilayered depiction of identity, that avoids pretensions of moral superiority, therefore makes his faith relatable and believable; in its complexity, it reflects contemporary urban realities of faithfulness despite sinning.

Serving as a double intermezzo on *Gang Signs and Prayer*, the song 'Blinded By Your Grace' consists of two parts, the second of which I will analyze more closely in this essay. As the song's first part 'Blinded By Your Grace, Pt. 1' offers a calm, piano-led rendition of a gospel track, I would not immediately argue it to be an example of pastiche; for while it is recognized by some as gospel (Petridis 2017), I would not argue that it contains the apparent and intentional use of imitation as denotes pastiche – although this does not take away from the likelihood that the song was inspired by gospel practices. Its counterpart 'Blinded By Your Grace, Pt 2' however, is undoubtedly meant to be understood as an imitation of the traditional



Figure 1: Album cover of Stormzy's *Gang Signs & Prayer*. 2019. Photograph by: John Ross. Design and art direction: Mark Farrow.

Black Christian gospel genre. From the use of instruments like the organ, to the choir and the lyrics, the song is a clear appropriation of gospel within the rap music genre; or, inversely, an undertaking of inscribing rap music within the wider discourse of Black Christian religious practices. As such, the pastiche in Stormzy's hip-hop gospel song, or gospel hip-hop song, resides in the fact that the song *"combines things that are generally held apart in such a way as to retain their identities"* (Dyer 2007, 21). Furthermore, I would argue that pastiche in this sense is not confined to a material cultural artefact; for ultimately attesting to the reliance on pastiche in the reproduction of religious tropes in Stormzy's music, is his reconciliation of both these aspects of his identity – Black British Christian and hip-hop artist – on one of Britain's biggest stages during his performance of 'Blinded By Your Grace, Pt 2' at Glastonbury in 2019 (figure 2). Accompanied by a three-tier gospel choir, Stormzy introduced the song by stating: *"Glasto, we're gonna go to church right now. We're gonna take this to church and we're gonna give God all the glory right now"*. As such, by performing a hip-hop rendition of a song rooted in Black Christian traditions, simultaneously praising and encouraging others to praise the Lord while being praised by a crowd of thousands, Stormzy ultimately embodies the multilayered narrative of identity present in his music.



Figure 2: Stormzy's performance with a gospel choir during Glastonbury: 2019.
Photograph by: Jenna Foxton.

“By questioning what it means to ‘come through’, Dave reflects on the inability to directly map traditional Christian values of good and bad onto a situation where – as these rappers proclaim – hardship through crime is a necessary means to arrive at a better situation.”

Conclusion

While Dyer states that pastiche involves the combining of things “*in such a way as to retain their identities*” (Dyer 2007, 21), in this essay I have argued that in doing so, both Dave and Stormzy weave these identities together to give voice to their own complex, multifaceted identities in a contemporary Black British urban context. Through their adaptation, both artists simultaneously defy and thus modernize traditional perceptions of what it means to be religious, and what religious cultural products sound like. Standing on the shoulders of those that came before them, such as Mary Mary and The Florida Mass Choir, these artists position themselves in a long lineage of Black Christianity; and, in a long lineage of Black perseverance and suffrage – all while giving grace to God. As such, Dave and Stormzy voice a modern example of what Anthony Reddie has called ‘complex subjectivity’, or: “*the attempt by Black people to become more than the simple objectified fixed entity the oppressive forces of slavery and racism have tried to make them become*” (Reddie 2010, 25). In a more general sense, through use of pastiche Dave and Stormzy participate in the shaping of their contemporary cultural identity, “*as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished [...] a form of personal and collective self-fashioning*” (Clifford qtd. in Krims 2000, 94).

While the continuous construction and negotiation of identities is a universal experience, Stormzy and Dave’s global success paves the way for first- and second-generation migrants from a Black British context specifically but also a ‘Black Atlantic’ context in general to see themselves represented in ways that surpass simplified connotations of hip-hop culture with violence and gang membership. In this sense, Stormzy’s and Dave’s musical representations of their continuous negotiations with faith, contribute to the ongoing process of hip-hop’s reevaluation from a genre of “*martial music of a vicious underclass*” (Maxwell 1991, 1) – as is still seen in contemporary tendencies to frame grime and hip-hop in relation to knife crime and violence (Beaumont-Thomas 2018; Pinkney and Robinson-Edwards 2018; Fatsis 2019) – to a genre that is actively engaged with complex representations of politics, religion and identity.

Reproduction – be it in the form of pastiche, sampling or intertextuality – thereby serves not only as a stylistic choice, but also as a means of unifying seemingly contradictory personal and communal values. Through the reproduction of religious and cultural tropes and elements, these artists thus *reinforce* their authenticity rather than detract from it: as they both pay homage to their predecessors in a larger transhistorical and intercultural narrative by building on longstanding cultural and religious

traditions – in this case, both hip-hop’s tradition of sampling, and Black Christian traditions such as gospel; while simultaneously recontextualizing these narratives to their own contemporary urban realities. Through cutting and mixing, sampling and adapting, these artists thus employ the art of reproduction as a means of resisting any reductive, unilateral image of hip-hop music and culture. Instead, by construing a collage of cultural artefacts in their music, Black British hip-hop artists shed light on the – at times seemingly paradoxical – process of ‘assembling’ their own complex, multifaceted identities in a contemporary Black British urban context. Both devoted Christians and involved in arguably unlawful or immoral practices; both *gang signs* and *prayer*.

“Standing on the shoulders of those that came before them, such as Mary Mary and The Florida Mass Choir, these artists position themselves in a long lineage of Black Christianity; and, in a long lineage of Black perseverance and suffrage – all while giving grace to God.”

References

- “Skengman.” *Green’s Dictionary of Slang*, greensdictofslang.com/entry/z3ayrpa#pb6wtuq. Accessed 2 September 2024.
- Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author.” *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 142-148.
- Beaumont-Thomas, Ben. “Is UK drill music really behind London’s wave of violent crime?” *The Guardian*, 9 April 2018, www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/09/uk-drill-music-london-wave-violent-crime. Accessed 13 November 2024.
- “Brit Awards 2018: Stormzy asks PM ‘where’s the money for Grenfell?’” *BBC*, 22 February 2018, www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-43149959. Accessed 22 September 2024.
- Bentley, Cara. “We’re gonna take this to church’ Stormzy performs Blinded By Your Grace at Glastonbury.” *Premier Christian News*, 29 June 2019, premierchristian.news/en/news/article/we-re-gonna-take-this-to-church-stormzy-performs-blinded-by-your-grace-at-glastonbury. Accessed 28 August 2024.
- Dave and BOJ. “Lazarus.” *We’re All Alone In This Together*, Neighborhood Recordings, 2021.
- Dave, Giggs, Ghetts, Meeks, and Fredo. “In The Fire.” *We’re All Alone In This Together*, Neighborhood Recordings, 2021.
- Dave. “Three Rivers.” *We’re All Alone In This Together*, Neighborhood Recordings, 2021.
- Dyer, Richard. *Pastiche*. Routledge, 2007.
- Fatsis, Lambros. “Grime: Criminal subculture or public counterculture? A critical investigation into the criminalization of Black musical subcultures in the UK.” *Crime, Media, Culture*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2019, pp. 447-461. doi.org/10.1177/1741659018784111.
- Forman, Murray. *The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*. Wesleyan University Press, 2002.
- Forman, Murray, and Mark Anthony Neal. *That’s The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2004.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.
- Krims, Adam. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Marshall, Wayne. “Giving Up Hip-Hop’s Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling.” *Callaloo*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2006, pp. 868-892.
- Mary Mary. “Shackles (Praise You).” *Thankful*, Columbia Records, 2000.
- Maxwell, William. “Sampling Authenticity: Rap Music, Postmodernism, and the Ideology of Black Crime.” *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1991, pp. 1-15. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23413913. Accessed 15 Sept. 2024.
- Mayfield, Ros. “‘My life’s greatest desire is to be a great man of God’: Stormzy gives interview to Vogue.” *Premier Christian News*, 22 November 2023, www.premierchristian.news/en/news/article/my-life-s-greatest-desire-is-to-be-a-great-man-of-god-stormzy-gives-interview-to-vogue. Accessed 24 September 2024.
- Melville, Caspar. “Beats, rhymes and grime.” *New Humanist*, 31 May 2007, www.newhumanist.org.uk/822/beats-rhymes-and-grime. Accessed 24 September 2024.
- O’Hagan, Ciaran. “Sounds of the London Underground: Gospel Music and Baptist Worship in the UK Garage Scene.” *Rave Culture and Religion*, 1st ed., Routledge, 2004, pp. 185-196, doi:10.4324/9780203507964-13.
- Petridis, Alexis. “Stormzy: Gang Signs and Prayer review – teeming with original ideas.” *The Guardian*, 23 February 2017, www.theguardian.com/music/2017/feb/23/stormzy-gang-signs-and-prayer-review-merky. Accessed 2 September 2024.
- Pinkney, Craig, and Shona Robinson-Edwards. “Gangs, music and the mediatisation of crime: expressions, violations and validations.” *Safer Communities*, vol. 17 no. 2, 2018, pp. 103-118. doi.org/10.1108/SC-01-2017-0004.
- Reddie, Anthony G., ed. *Black Theology, Slavery and Contemporary Christianity*. Routledge, 2010.
- Stormzy. “STORMZY - BLINDED BY YOUR GRACE PT.2 & BIG FOR YOUR BOOTS [LIVE AT THE BRITs '18].” *YouTube*, 22 February 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReY4yVkoDc4. Accessed 22 Sept. 2024.
- Stormzy and Tiana Major9. “Rainfall.” *Heavy Is the Head*, #Merky Records, 2019.
- Stormzy. “Blinded By Your Grace, Pt. 1.” *Gang Signs and Prayer*, #Merky Records, 2017.
- Stormzy. “Blinded By Your Grace, Pt. 2.” *Gang Signs and Prayer*, #Merky Records, 2017.
- Sweet, Castel. “Dj Kool Herc.” *St. James Encyclopedia of Hip Hop Culture*, edited by Thomas Riggs, St. James Press, 2018, pp. 117-119. *Gale eBooks*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3679700064/GVRL?u=amst&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=ee1cf48c. Accessed 28 Aug. 2024.
- The Florida Mass Choir. “Have You Been Tried.” *Lord, You Keep On Proving Yourself To Me*, Savoy Records, 1982.
- The Holy Bible*. Holman Bible Publishers, 2018.
- The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files*. Directed by Tim Kirby and James Ross, BBC Two, 2019.

Endnotes

- 1 Although also known under the nickname Santan Dave, his music is released under the mononym ‘Dave’; therefore, I shall comply with that name throughout this essay.
- 2 Dyer regards pastiche as generally intentional, but makes a sidenote for the odd chance that a work becomes a pastiche through its failure to be “*what it set out to be*” (2); or, for the case when the consumer ‘pastiche[s]’ the work through their own interpretation – considering the ‘Death of the Author’ as described by Roland Barthes (1967), this is an interesting notion for further research.
- 3 Grime, born on the streets of London circa 2000s, is a music genre with influences from UK garage, jungle, drum ‘n bass and Jamaican dancehall. Departing from hip-hop, grime “*resignifies hip hop not as the consumerist bling bling soundtrack to upward mobility, but as the cri de coeur of the dispossessed, the narrative form of urban life*” (Melville 2004).
- 4 In the BBC documentary *The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files*, historian David Olusoga shows the deliberate laws and practices put in place to create a hostile environment for West Indian migrants even prior to their arrival. The gradual tightening of immigration laws entered the public eye with the 2018 Windrush scandal, when thousands of Caribbean-born citizens, legally settled in Britain since childhood, found that they had been silently transformed into illegal immigrants and were being threatened with deportation or detainment. The documentary gives a more than telling indication of Britain’s attitude towards migration in a postcolonial world to this day. In his song ‘Three Rivers’, Dave has used sampled fragments of speech from the documentary to supplement his depiction of multiple migratory narratives, emphasizing the processes of racism, violence and injustice caught up with global migration.
- 5 A similar argument has been made by Ciaran O’Hagan in his article ‘Sounds of the London Underground: Gospel Music and Baptist Worship in the UK Garage Scene’, in which he traces gospel influences in the genre of UK garage music.
- 6 Of course, the story of Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus is not taken into account in this argument.

Photography in Art Promotion: Framing Chinese Architecture as Art in Peking The Beautiful, 1927

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Authors

Yuansheng Luo and Thomas Coomans

Discipline

Architectural History

Keywords

Photography / Beijing / Art Promotion / Heritage / Herbert
Clarence White

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/tr896BGt

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Abstract

This essay examines how photography elevated Chinese architecture to the status of art in the early 20th century, focusing on *Peking the Beautiful*, a photography volume published by American photographer Herbert Clarence White in 1927. Despite its academic value, the book has received little scholarly attention. The study explores whether photography can be considered art and its role in shaping its subjects into art. Utilizing Hu Shih's introduction and the book's visual and textual content, the article analyzes *Peking the Beautiful* from the perspectives of institutional recognition, aesthetic experience, semiotics, and ontology. It argues that the book, supported by cultural institutions and the photographer's efforts, reframes Chinese architecture from mere craftsmanship to art, playing a crucial role in the heritagization of Chinese architecture.

Peking, for ages the center of art and culture, the pride of an ancient and glorious civilization, has within its crenelated walls the best that China has ever produced in literature, art, and architecture. To appreciate China, therefore, one must first see Peking.

– *Peking the Beautiful*, Preface

Introduction: Photography in Art Promotion^{1 2 3}

In 1927, the American photographer Herbert Clarence White (1896–1962) published a book entitled *Peking the Beautiful: Comprising Seventy Photographic Studies of the Celebrated Monuments of China's Northern Capital and its Environs Complete with Descriptive and Historical Notes* 燕京胜迹, (41 cm x 33 cm).⁴ This book possesses significant academic value but has not yet received the attention it deserves from researchers. In the introduction, 胡适 (1891–1962) [translation: 'Hu Shi or Hu Shih'], the renowned scholar, philosopher, and leader of China's 新文化运动 [translation: 'New Culture Movement'],⁵ points out that architecture in China has only been considered a form of craftsmanship and has never achieved the artistic status comparable to painting and literature. He highlighted that the aesthetic and cultural values of Chinese architecture have been overlooked due to a longstanding utilitarian perspective. In contrast, Western observers often appreciate Chinese architecture from artistic and cultural viewpoints. Hu called for Chinese people to overcome traditional prejudices and recognize the artistic significance of architecture, viewing it as an integral part of China's cultural heritage (Hu 1927, 7-9). Today, we broadly accept that photography possesses a duality, being both documentary and artistic (Wells 2021, 327-96). Therefore, White's photographs and the architecture they capture seem to be indisputably regarded as art. However, whether photography can be considered an art and its ability to frame the photographed subjects as art is a complex and multi-dimensional issue, this process involves not only a deep aesthetic examination but also concerns semiotics, the ontology of photography, and the intrinsic meaning of the art objects.

This article is grounded in the philosophical framework of 'photography as an art form', exploring how the reproduction and dissemination of photographs in a transcultural context can elevate Chinese architecture from mere craftsmanship to recognized art. The research question is centered on how *Peking the Beautiful* employs institutional endorsement, rich semiotics, and the cultivation of aesthetic experience, along with the photographic ontology of the photographer, to frame Chinese architecture—traditionally conceived as craftsmanship—as art. The article lever-

ages qualitative research methods, informed by literature on photography and artmaking, to critically examine the role of White's *Peking the Beautiful* in this transformation. The methodological approach is tailored to the research objective, emphasizing the book's purpose in promoting Chinese architecture as an art form to a global audience. Data collection primarily involved accessing digital sources, including the Library of Congress' online archives for the digital version of *Peking the Beautiful*, the physical copy of the Cambridge University Library's rare book collection, and the Seventh-day Adventists Encyclopedia for background on White. These choices were made to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and artistic significance of the work, aligning with the study's broader aim to reassess Chinese architecture through a global, artistic lens.

From an ontological perspective, Susan Sontag, in *On Photography* (1977), argues that photography is not merely a replication of reality but a profound artistic creation that transforms ordinary objects into works of art by transcending their everydayness (Sontag 1977, 3). Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* (1981), introduces the concept of 'punctum', where certain elements in a photograph evoke deep personal emotions, elevating the mundane to the extraordinary (Barthes 1981, 43-46). These transformations reflect the photographer's subjective viewpoint, as post-production modifications (Heidemann 2022, 81) and choices of composition, timing, and lighting imbue photographs with artistic expression (Szarkowski 2024, 1-13), which also challenging the positivist premises of visual knowledge production (Mjaaland 2020, 2), and makes photograph a duality, embodying both realism and constructivism, transcending reality and pointing to inherent possibilities (Ray 2020, 146).

George Dickie's institutional theory of art asserts that the art world's recognition confers the status of art on photographic works, as seen through their display in galleries and museums (Dickie 1974, 35-36). Pedro M. Cabezós-Bernal discusses how international museums use photography to document and disseminate cultural heritage, enhancing public accessibility (Cabezós-Bernal 2021, 156). Contemporary art institutions reconstruct historical narratives, uncover hidden histories, and connect artists with their works through photographic exhibitions, fostering innovative projects and diverse interpretations (Gül Durukan & Tezcan Akmeahmet 2021, 132). Postmodernism blurs the boundaries between reality and representation, allowing photography to create surreal art forms that transcend original contexts (Baudrillard 2016, 126-30). Victor Burgin, Dominique Bauer and Camilla Murgia argue that photography's replicative capabilities elevate the artistic status of its subjects, rendering them transient and

“The documentation of Chinese architecture and environment by Western photographers has provided invaluable visual resources for Chinese architectural history, architectural archaeology, heritage preservation, and even folklore studies.”

illusory entities, stripped of their material qualities and original meanings (Burgin 1982, 1-14; Bauer and Murgia 2021, 7-18).

Aesthetic experience remains central to photographic art. Monroe Beardsley suggests that art should be defined by the aesthetic experience it provokes, encompassing emotional and cognitive engagement (Beardsley 1982, 77-93). Photographic works evoke such experiences through their composition and settings, integrating subjects into the realm of art. Dominique Bauer states that photography can invoke a sense of pastness (Bauer 2018, 33-44) and the uncanny (Bauer 2016, 126-130). Photography is not merely visual evidence; it involves creative, non-indicative dimensions and critically portrays social phenomena through collaborative, perceptual, and pragmatic practices (Leon-Quijano 2021, 1118). Semiotics further enriches this understanding, as Umberto Eco posits that photographic images, as signs, construct meaning and transform ordinary objects into art (Eco 1986, 15). This intersemiotic connection between photography and other forms, such as poetry, extends beyond original meanings, achieving the 'artification' of photography (Baetens 2022, 423-24; Langmann & Gardner 2020).

Consequently, framing photographic subjects as art involves a complex interaction of ontology, institutional recognition, aesthetic experience, and semiotic indication. The creative input of the photographer, the aesthetic experience of the viewer, and the construction of cultural and contextual meanings collectively facilitate this transformation. Photography not only records reality but also creates art through capturing, interpreting, and reconstructing subjects.

Institutional Endorsement: Photographer and The Community

Peking the Beautiful emerged from an elite cultural circle that laid the foundation for it to become an essential cultural resource and work of art which, therefore, can be considered a 'cultural institution'.⁶ Herbert Clarence White, the photographer and author of the book, and his twin brother James Henry White (1896-1954) were born in New South Wales, Australia, in a well-educated Protestant family with a strong publishing background. Their father, William C. White (1854-1937), was a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) minister and church leader (Molivarez 2014) and their grandfather, James Springer White (1821-1881), was a co-founder of the SDA Church, one of the founders of *Signs of the Times* magazine,⁷ and the husband of the author Ellen G. White (1827-1915).⁸ At the age of four, he moved back with his family to California. He studied at the SDA Pacific Union College (PUC), where he specialized in theology and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1921 (Hook, 'Anna Louise' 2022). The *Seventh-day Adventist Year-*

book noted that White was in charge of the Industrial Faculty's Printing department at PUC, specifying that he was well-versed in printing and publishing work during his college years (Rogers 1918, 198–99).

In 1922, White arrived in Shanghai, primarily engaging in missionary work, photography, and publishing. After a one-year stay in Beijing to learn Chinese, he was appointed as the director of Shanghai Signs of the Times Publishing House until 1927 (Hook, 'Anna Louise' 2022). He used his holidays to travel across China, taking about 3,000 photographs, especially in Beijing (Hu 1927, 9), which we have not been able to locate. He also spearheaded the publication of two prominent English periodicals in China, the *Far Eastern Division Outlook* and *China Christian Educator*.⁹ Additionally, the publishing house released two Chinese newspapers, *Shi Djao Yueh Bao* 時兆月報 [translation: 'Signs of the Times']¹⁰ and *Sabbath School Helper*. In 1927, Herbert compiled a representative selection of his extensive photographic work in Beijing into *Peking the Beautiful*, an abundantly illustrated book published by the 上海商务印书馆 [translation: 'Commercial Press in Shanghai'], China's first modern publishing house. This meticulously produced book features photographs of Beijing's architecture, landscapes, and customs (figures 1 and 2). In the publication year of this book, Beijing faced a pivotal moment in history. On April 18, the 国民政府 [translation: 'Nationalist Government'] established its new capital in 南京 [translation: 'Nanjing'], and Beijing was renamed 北平 [translation: 'Beiping'] in 1928, losing its political status but remaining a vital cultural hub. After their return in the United States in 1929, Herbert and James White published another photo album, *Romantic China*, in 1930. James passed away in 1954, Herbert in 1962.

The latter's contributions to Chinese photography history, architectural history, and cultural heritage studies are significant. As indicated on its first page, *Peking the Beautiful* was among the earliest collections in the Chinese architectural community and was later part of the 中国营造学社图籍 [translation: 'Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture's (SSCA) Collection of Books and Drawings']. The SSCA, founded by the architecture expert and politician 朱启钤 (1871–1964) [translation: 'Zhu Qiqian'] in 1930, included among its core members the first generation of Chinese architects and scholars such as 梁思成 (1901–1972) [translation: 'Liang Sicheng'], 林徽因 (1904–1955) [translation: 'Lin Huiyin'] and 刘敦桢 (1897–1968) [translation: 'Liu Dunzhen'], and was the first and the most authoritative architectural research institute at the time (Wang 2023, 128). The dedication in the book explicitly states, "To All Lovers of China's Glorious Artistic Heritage—the Monuments—This Book is Dedicated", predating

Lin Huiyin's endorsement of the artistic value of Chinese architecture by five years: "*The art of Chinese architecture has reached its highest point of maturity. Even when compared with architectural schools around the world, it stands out as a unique and continuous system*" (Lin 1932, 163-165). It also precedes by twenty-seven years Liang Sicheng's assertion, that:

"The individuality of Chinese architecture reflects the character of our nation; it is an integral part of our unique artistic and intellectual heritage, and is not merely a matter of structural materials and methods" (Liang 1998, 13).

The 'acknowledgments' in the book directly reveal its origins within an eminent network, underpinning its significance. In addition to the assistance of his twin brother James during photographic expeditions,¹¹ the book benefited from the support of many dignitaries, scholars, and publishing figures of the time. White noted that his interest in Beijing's historical architecture was primarily inspired by the works of the writer and sinologist Juliet Bredon (1881-1937), especially the 1922 *Peking: A Historical and Intimate Description of its Chief Places of Interest* (Bredon, 1922). Born into a

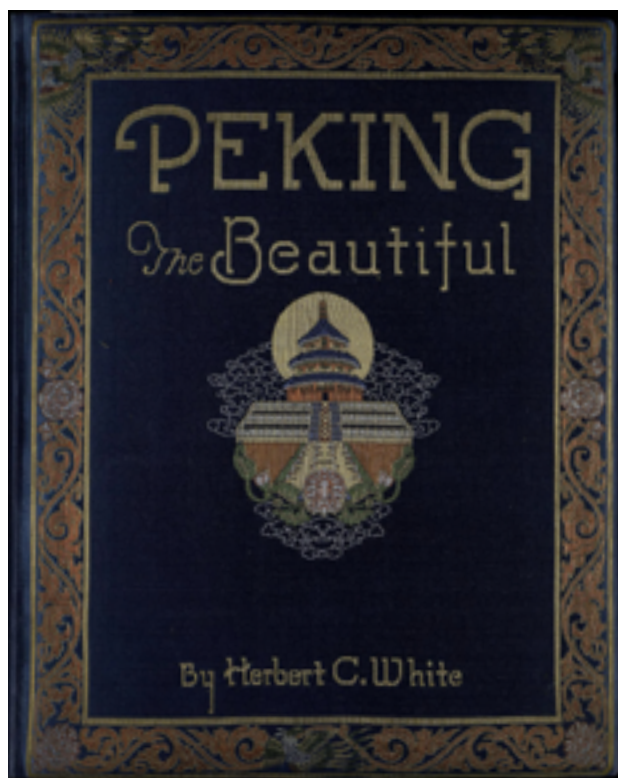


Figure 1. Silk-covered book cover: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, cover).



Figure 2. Title page of *Peking the Beautiful*: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 3).

prominent family and raised in China, Bredon was well-versed in Chinese culture. She was the daughter of Sir Robert Edward Bredon (1846–1918), Deputy Inspector General of Chinese Customs (Translation Department of the Institute of Modern History 1981, 55), and the niece of Sir Robert Hart (1835–1911), Inspector-General of China's Imperial Maritime Custom Service (IMCS). White mentioned that Bredon provided sympathy and advice in the conception and planning of the book. The author also drew knowledge from the works of sinologists such as the American missionary William Alexander Parsons Martin (1827–1916), who had been appointed by the 光绪帝 (reign 1875–1908) [translation: '*Guangxu Emperor*'] as the inaugural president of the Imperial University of Peking, the precursor of Peking University (Covell 1978, 1). He was also the first foreigner to travel from Peking to Shanghai by land (The First 200). Furthermore, the book received support from the Qing Princess 裕德龄 (1881–1944) [translation: '*Der Ling*'], who played a significant role in "*the preparation and the revision of the captions*" (White 1927, 1). As one of 慈禧, 西太后 (1835–1908) [translation: '*Empress Dowager Cixi*']'s most trusted individuals, Der Ling possessed a profound understanding of Beijing, which was inaccessible to outsiders at the time. White regarded her "*suggestions and criticism of untold value*" (White 1927, 1). The album's publication also enjoyed the backing of several key figures in the publishing industry. Dr. 郎富灼 (1869–1931) [translation: '*Fong Foo Sec*'], Director of the English Department at Commercial Press, encouraged White's conceptualization of the book and named it. Additionally, the artist Mr. A.C. Liang colorized twelve selected photographs, enhancing their aesthetic appeal. In summary, the importance of *Peking the Beautiful* lies not only in its content but also in the collective efforts of several influential individuals. These contributions formed a 'cultural institution' that validated and endowed the album with its artistic status.

White's contribution should be situated within the broader Western fascination with and documentation of Chinese art during the early twentieth century. Figures like White played a crucial role in the reproduction and dissemination of Chinese architecture through prints—both images and texts—effectively making this architecture movable and accessible to a global audience in various scales. This process of reproduction makes Chinese architecture movable, aligning with Mari Hvattum and Ann Hultzsich's assertion that prints bring silent architecture to life (Hvattum and Hultzsich 2018, 20). As Tim Anstey argues, architecture should not be seen merely as static entities but as 'things that move' (Anstey 2024, 1). Through the representation and reproduction of architectural photography

“The individuality of Chinese architecture reflects the character of our nation; it is an integral part of our unique artistic and intellectual heritage, and is not merely a matter of structural materials and methods” (Liang 1998, 13).

by Western photographers, Chinese architecture gained new perceptions and meanings as it circulated globally.

Pioneers in the production of Chinese photography at the close of the nineteenth century, such as Thomas Child (1841–1898), Charles Frederick Moore (1837–1916), John Thomson (1837–1921) from Britain, and Ernst Ohlmer (1847–1927) from Germany, played a crucial role in documenting and shaping visual representations of China. The early twentieth century witnessed an intensified Western interest in the photographic portrayal of China, prompting a number of foreign photographers to travel to Beijing, where they sought to capture the transforming landscape of this historically significant imperial city. Around 1900, Japanese photographers Ogawa Kazumasa (1860–1929) and Yamamoto Zanshiro (1855–1943) documented Beijing’s architecture, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural exchange, political upheaval, and the impact of Westernization on traditional Chinese architectural research during a pivotal period in Sino-Japanese relations. In 1907, the French sinologist Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918) (Cordier 1918) conducted extensive surveys across 陕西 [translation: ‘Shaanxi’], 山西 [translation: ‘Shanxi’], 河北 [translation: ‘Hebei’], and North-east China, capturing numerous photographs of the Great Wall, which were later published in the 1915 Paris edition of *Mission archéologique en Chine septentrionale* (Chavannes 1909). Albert Kahn (1860–1940) was a French banker and philanthropist known for his ambitious project, ‘The Archives of the Planet’, which aimed to document the world through color photography from 1909 to 1931. His initiative was particularly notable for its use of the autochrome process, the first practical medium of color photography, which allowed for vibrant and detailed images. Kahn commissioned a team of photographers to travel to over fifty countries, including China, where they captured its people’s daily lives, landscapes, and cultural practices, resulting in the first sets of colored photos of China in 1912 (De Luca 2022, 259–298). American sociologist Sidney Gamble (1890–1968) (Notehelfer and Jervis 2006) first visited China in 1908 and returned several times between 1917 and 1932. During these visits, he engaged in Christian social work and conducted extensive socio-economic surveys. He documented daily life, public activities, architecture, and religious culture in Beijing and rural northern China through thousands of photographs. Jonathan Spence described Gamble’s Chinese photos as vigorous, ebullient, unsentimental, and starkly illustrative, yet never cruel (Spence 1992, 51–67). Ernst Boerschmann (1873–1949) (Kögel 2015), conducted an exhaustive survey from 1906 to 1909 across fourteen provinces in China, covering tens of thousands of miles and documenting imperial architecture, temples, ances-

tral halls, and residences. His work culminated in publications such as *Die Baukunst und religiöse Kultur der Chinesen* (1911, 1914, 1931); *Chinesische Architektur* (1925); *Baukunst und Landschaft in China: Eine Reise durch zwölf Provinzen* (1926); and *Chinesische Baukeramik* (1927) (Wang 2010, 42). Osvald Sirén (1879–1966) (Törmä 2013) visited China between 1918 and 1935, conducting extensive research on ancient architecture, gardens, and sculptures, resulting in a substantial collection of photographs and written materials. His publication *The Walls and Gates of Peking* (1924) offers a detailed analysis of Beijing’s ancient fortifications, and his seminal work, *Gardens of China* (1949).

The documentation of Chinese architecture and environment by Western photographers has provided invaluable visual resources for Chinese architectural history, architectural archaeology, heritage preservation, and even folklore studies. Moreover, these images have reproduced Western aesthetic sensibilities and architectural heritage mindset. This is obvious in White’s work, where the modern framework of heritage values—encompassing aesthetic, historical, scientific, social, and spiritual dimensions that contribute to the significance of a place or object (Lennon 2006, 52)—is already clearly articulated, with the artistic aspect particularly explicit in *Peking the Beautiful*.

Semiotics and Aesthetic Experience: Album’s Contents

The quality of the book is commendable, rich with Chinese symbolism both in textual descriptions and photographic works, unveiling the mysteries of early 20th-century Beijing. The album includes seventy-one photographs meticulously captured by White, well-crafted essays and delicate vignettes, presented on double page spreads with the photo on the right and the text on the left. Among these, architectural photography dominates with sixty-eight images, while the remaining three are one portrait and two camel caravans. The majority of the sixty eight architectural photographs feature seventeen from the 颐和园 [translation: ‘*Summer Palace*’], ten from the 紫禁城 [translation: ‘*Forbidden City*’], seven from the 天坛 [translation: ‘*Temple of Heaven*’], four from 雍和宫 [translation: ‘*Yonghe Temple*’] and from 香山公园 [translation: ‘*Fragrant Hills Park*’], and two from the 长城 [translation: ‘*Great Wall*’], the 国家古观象台 [translation: ‘*Chinese National Observatory*’], and the 国子监 [translation: ‘*Imperial College*’]. From his arrival in China, White was immediately captivated by Beijing’s picturesque landscapes and profound civilization. Hu Shi’s earlier mentioned introduction lauds the photographic collection as a precious record of Beijing’s many important landmarks and historical sites. White’s photographs show-

case Beijing's iconic city gates and walls, the solemn Temple of Heaven, the majestic Forbidden City, the monumental Great Wall, and numerous temples and monasteries, presenting an authentic glimpse of early Republican-era Beijing (Hu 1927, 8) (figures 3-6). Unlike the usual old photos of Beijing, which show large numbers of people on the streets, White's photos are empty of people, or include a few individuals posing elegantly. From its cover, protected by a specially designed box, *Peking the Beautiful* features exquisite hardcover binding adorned with embroidered silk material, which underscores the bibliophilic value of the book itself, making it a reference for scholars studying early 20th-century Chinese art, architecture, and cultural heritage.

Peking the Beautiful is not merely a traditional album of photographs but a combination of photos and texts. Each textual piece plays a crucial role in disseminating knowledge about Chinese architecture, its history, values, and underlying philosophies, thereby offering global audiences a more insightful understanding of Chinese architectural heritage. The textual descriptions reveal many details that photographs alone cannot convey, placing architecture within specific contexts to stimulate readers' aesthetic experiences. For instance, the essay on the Forbidden City



Figure 3. *Walls of Peking (Tung Pien Môn)*: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 18).



Figure 4. *Temple of Heaven: Shanghai*, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 110).



Figure 5. *The Great Wall of China: Shanghai*, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 70).



Figure 6. *Mongol Lama Monks Reading Their Sacred 'Ching'*: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 74).



Figure 7. *The Forbidden City from the north-west*: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 30).

not only features a spectacular cityscape photograph (figure 7), but more importantly, White's description enables the readers to truly comprehend this architectural marvel and acknowledge its value as a human artistic treasure: "*Forbidden City, with its acres of yellow tile gleaming like gold in the sunlight*" (White 1927, 30). This depiction captures the grandeur of the imperial palace. Subsequently, White poetically reveals multiple layers of meaning beyond the physical structure of the Forbidden City:

“What poetic suggestion in the very name of the city, exclaims Miss Bredon, a Forbidden City reserved for the Son of Heaven! The dignity of such a conception compels respect, doubly so when we consider all it represented the profound reverence paid to the Sovereign by the people of a great empire, the immense spiritual power in his hands, the tradition of his divine descent, the immemorial dignity of his office. To have seen this Forbidden City therefore is to have seen something much more wonderful than noble buildings, and to enter it is to feel the pulse of the ancient civilization which throbbed as mightily in the eighteenth century as ever in that dim past whereof these palaces themselves, though already old, are but a modern record” (White 1927, 30).

Firstly, White reveals the unique status and lofty symbolic representation of the Forbidden City as the imperial palace of Ming and Qing dynasties. Bredon’s admiration indicates that the name of Forbidden City carries poetic and grandiose implications—a sanctuary reserved exclusively for the Son of Heaven (White 1927, 30). It not only reflects a realm of supreme spiritual authority but also embodies the sacred inviolability of the emperor. He also emphasizes the social hierarchy represented by the Forbidden City which was much more than the main imperial residence but also a profound tribute of the empire’s people to their monarch, the immense spiritual power of the emperor, the ancient dignity of the sacred blood-line tradition, and the responsibilities it entails. These symbolic meanings transcend the Forbidden City’s architectural structure, becoming a carrier of culture and power, reflecting the reverence of the ancient Chinese for imperial authority and compliance with divine will. On October 10, 1925, the Forbidden City transformed into the Palace Museum, marked the opening of imperial spaces to the public. This shift from royal private domain to public cultural resource symbolized its evolution into a shared heritage, providing a valuable site for studying ancient Chinese court culture and art (Zhou 2020, 12-19). As a witness to history, it bears the continuity and vitality of China’s ancient civilization from the 15th century and even more distant pasts. While the palace complex may be considered ‘modern’ in the flow of time, its recorded civilizational pulse remains deeply rooted in ancient traditions, resilient and vigorous. Therefore, perusing the photo book is an appreciation of architecture and a profound aesthetic experience of the vitality of ancient Chinese civilization. White’s descriptions anchor the Forbidden City at the core of Chinese politics, history, culture, and art.

“White’s contribution should be situated within the broader Western fascination with and documentation of Chinese art during the early twentieth century.”

It serves as a symbol of imperial authority and an essential component of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, rich in significance and far-reaching influence. Serving as a bridge between past and present, tradition and modernity, the Forbidden City holds profound artistic value.

The photos and essays are not juxtaposed on the same page but presented independently. The text begins with an illuminated initial, beneath which lies an autonomous vignette with a drawing, which is not a reproduction of the photograph but stands alone. Its role extends beyond decorative purposes, echoing and complementing the respective article through static or narrative images. For instance, in the essay *The Mountain of Ten Thousand Ages*, focusing on Longevity Hill in the Summer Palace, the photograph depicts a picturesque scene where buildings are reflected in the pool, divided by pristine marble railings, while the vignette drawing offers a scene that could occur on the pond, with people leisurely boating on the lake (figure 8). In the corresponding essay, White introduces:

“Few, save the Empress Dowager herself, were ever allowed to partake of the pleasures of this romantic spot. Today, the gates are thrown open: ...the lovely lake. The scene spread out before us is enchanting. All that the lavish hand of nature could bestow, combined with the best that human art and skill could devise, seems here to be brought together to enrich the spot and make it beautiful. Gardens and flowers, hills and groves, mountains and lakes, islands and bridges, temples, and pagodas, in all their natural and artistic splendor, make a rare setting for the elegant ‘verandahed’ pavilions and spacious courtyards which compose the Imperial summer home”
(White 1927, 38).

White perceptively reveals how the Summer Palace embodies the perfect harmony between the generosity of nature and human artistic skills. The words “Gardens and flowers, hills and groves, mountains and lakes, islands and bridges, temples and pagodas” not only enumerate the various components of the natural scenery and cultural landscape of the Summer Palace but also emphasize their harmonious unity in natural beauty and artistic splendor. Thus, the mutual complementarity of photography, text, and vignettes creates a perceptual experience for the reader characterized by tranquility, natural and artistic harmony. This approach showcases the grandeur and delicacy of the Summer Palace as a royal garden. Such descriptive techniques possess high academic and artistic qualities, guiding

readers to deeply appreciate the unique charm and profound significance of the Summer Palace.

Photographic Ontology: Peking’s Color

In the ‘Introduction’, Hu Shi pointed out that from the outset, White approached Chinese architecture as an art form in his photography (Hu 1927, 9). White believes that his book will possess artistic and documentation value (White 1927, 11), as he observed many ancient and priceless monuments ruthlessly destroyed at the time. Consequently, this book is envisioned as “a work of immeasurable value to China and the world, as an authentic record of picturesque Peking” (White 1927, 11). *Peking the Beautiful* stands as one of the earliest systematic records of Beijing architecture. It marks the first attempt to colorize photography to capture and showcase the vibrant colors of Beijing’s palaces and temples. Chinese architecture emphasizes profoundly integrating nature and the environment (Almodóvar-Melendo & Cabeza-Lainez 2018, 2443; Chen and Wu 2009). Hence, the colors of the environment and architecture are crucial elements in perceiving the beauty of Chinese architecture. This significant perception was absent in all previous black-and-white photographs of Chinese architecture:

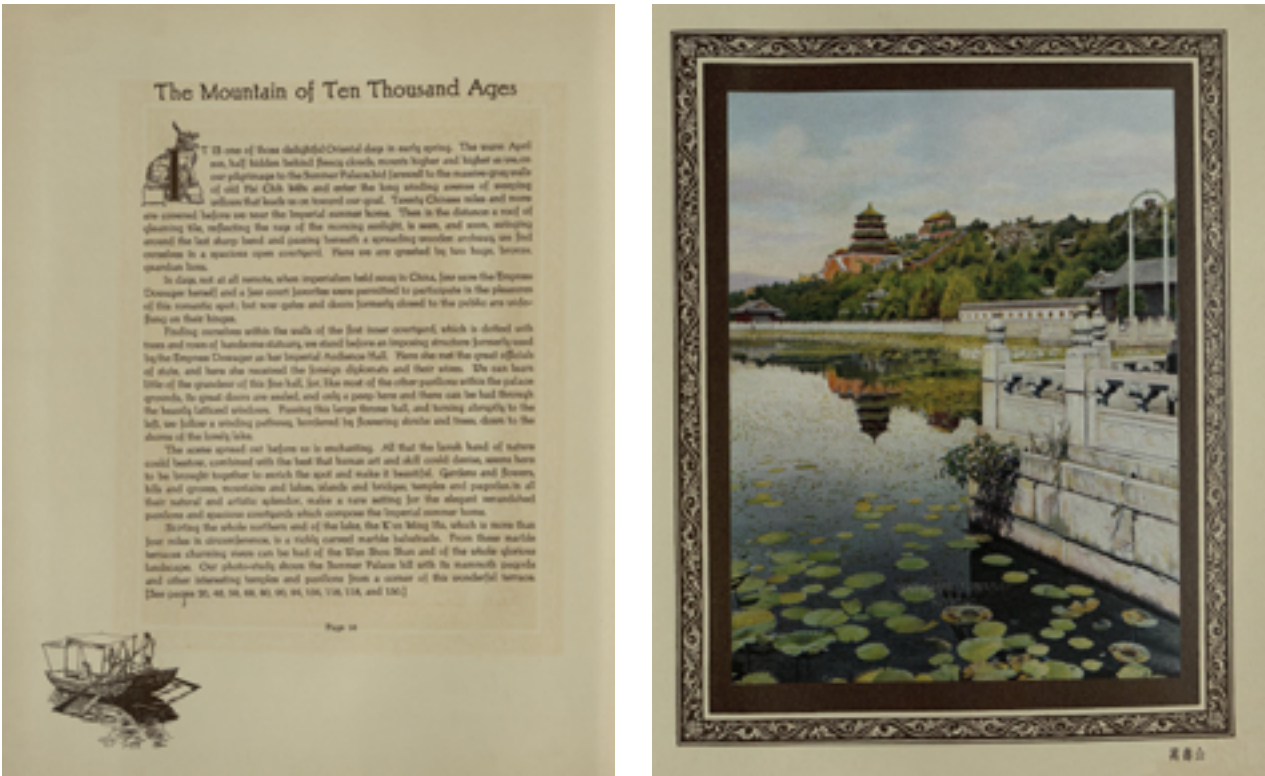


Figure 8. *The Mountain of Ten Thousand Ages*, the text, photo and vignette: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 38).

“Of all the art books thus far produced in China, no attempt has been made to show the beauty and charm of the wonderful coloring of palaces and shrines. In the present volume, the difficult and expensive task of presenting Peking in all the glory of its marvelous coloring has been accomplished, for twelve of the photographic studies have been reproduced in full and natural colors — a triumph which makes this work distinctive” (White 1927, 12).

Due to the high cost of producing color photographs at the time, only twelve photos in the album are in color, which still stands out remarkably today (table 1). What criteria did White use in selecting these twelve photos? Firstly, White recognized that these buildings contain rich color information, which is integral to accurately documenting them (figures 9 and 10). Furthermore, White keenly perceived the heritage value of these buildings, now among Beijing’s most important landmarks, anticipating their heritagization in the 1920s.¹² In 1909, the 清政府民政部 [translation: ‘Qing Ministry of Civil Affairs’] issued China’s first law on cultural heritage protection, the 保存古迹推广办法 [translation: ‘Methods for the Preservation and Promotion of Ancient Monuments’]. However, its effectiveness was limited due to the weakening of the Qing rule and sparse coverage and reporting of survey data by provinces. In 1930, the 南京国民政府 [translation: ‘Nanjing Nationalist Government’] enacted China’s first law on cultural relics protection, the 古物保存法 [translation: ‘Antiquities Conservation Act’], marking a significant milestone for architectural scholarship in China, coinciding with the inaugural issue of the 中国营造学社汇刊 [translation: ‘Journal of SSCA’]. 第一次全国文物普查 [translation: ‘The First National Cultural Relics Census’] within the People’s Republic of China began in 1956, organized on a nationwide scale to inventory immovable cultural relics (Wang and Zhao 2019). Returning to the 1920s when the book was created, China’s heritage conservation concept was still developing. Today, the buildings on the twelve colorized photos chosen by White are listed in China’s highest-level heritage category, MCHSNP, with over half designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Among these, White seemed particularly fond of the Summer Palace, which occupies one-third of the color plates. This admiration stems not only from its astonishing history and opulence, symbolized by “something for which the wicked Empress Dowager once squandered the twenty-four million taels originally appropriated for the construction of the new navy” (Hu 1927, 8), but also because White believed the Summer Palace encapsulates greatness, vastness, and glory, capturing the imagination

and humility in the face of these ancient and magnificent symbols (White 1927, 11). Through substantial financial investment and contemplation, the photographer dedicated an ontological effort to elevating Chinese architecture into an art form.

Page Number	Photo caption	Article title	MCHSNP, major cultural heritage sites under national-level protection 全国重点文物保护单位	UNESCO World Heritage
16	万里长城	Morning Sunlight on the Great Wall	MCHSNP	1987
26	玉泉山瓷塔	The Porcelain Pagoda	MCHSNP	1998 (part of Summer Palace, an Imperial Garden in Beijing 颐和园)
38	万寿山	The Mountain of Ten Thousand Ages	MCHSNP	1998 (part of Summer Palace)
46	颐和园长廊	A Thousand-Colonnade Walk	MCHSNP	1998 (part of Summer Palace)
54	西山御苑宝塔	The Hunting Park Pagoda	MCHSNP	/
62	北海之九龙壁	At the North Sea Gardens	MCHSNP	/
78	天坛之围墙	The Altar of Heaven	MCHSNP	1998
94	颐和园玉带桥	The Camel-back Bridge	MCHSNP	1998 (part of Summer Palace)
102	太和殿	The Throne Hall of Supreme Harmony	MCHSNP	1987
124	孔子纪念坊 (“圆桥教泽”坊)	The Confucian Pailou	MCHSNP	/
144	祈年殿	The Annual Service at Heaven's Altar	MCHSNP	1998
154	喇嘛教之住持	The Prayer Hour at the Lama Temple	MCHSNP	/

Table 1. Twelve colored Photograph from the album, pages, captions and heritage categories.

Conclusion: Framing Architecture as Art

Peking the Beautiful holds significant academic, artistic, and high bibliophilic value. Its photographers, Herbert and James White were distinguished representatives among early 20th-century photographers in China—such as Edouard Chavannes, Ernst Boerschmann, Osvald Sirén, Sidney Gamble, renowned for their profound humanistic cultivation and artistic sensibility. Their collections of Chinese photographs, if conserved, warrant further systematic exploration, constituting crucial academic resources in photographic history, architectural history, and cultural heritage. This study examines the pivotal role of photographic images in the process of art promotion, using the book as a case study. It demonstrates how, through institutional endorsement, semiotic expression techniques, and the creation of aesthetic experiences, photographers' proactive artistic endeavors have reframed Chinese architecture from a discourse of craftsmanship to an art form, subtly engaging in the heritagization process.

Firstly, *Peking the Beautiful* emerged from a highly esteemed milieu, with its author hailing from a wealthy and well-educated background. The book is further distinguished by the endorsement of Hu Shi, and its production and dissemination were significantly bolstered by White's prestigious network of influential figures, including Juliet Bredon, William Alexander Parsons Martin, and Princess Der Ling, among others. This high level of quality has established the book as a valuable reference for the later SSCA. Consequently, the photos within the volume are imbued with considerable artistic and scholarly significance. Secondly, it features seventy-one of White's photographs, focusing on key sites like the Summer Palace and the Forbidden City. Hu Shi praises it as a valuable record of Beijing's landmarks. White's images and texts reveal the artistic and cultural significance of these structures, offering readers a deep understanding of Chinese architectural heritage and a cohesive artistic experience. Thirdly, one of the most notable methodologies employed by White is the use of colorized (painted) photography to elevate Chinese architecture to an art form. By introducing vibrant hues that were missing from earlier black-and-white photos, twelve color photographs vividly showcase the architectural grandeur of Beijing. This innovative approach seamlessly integrates artistic expression with documentary accuracy, positioning Chinese architecture as both a significant historical record and a remarkable aesthetic achievement. In a transcultural context, this work has made significant contributions to the Chinese architectural historiography and the conservation of cultural heritage, and indeed made Peking very beautiful.



Figure 9. *A Thousand-Colonnade Walk*: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 46).

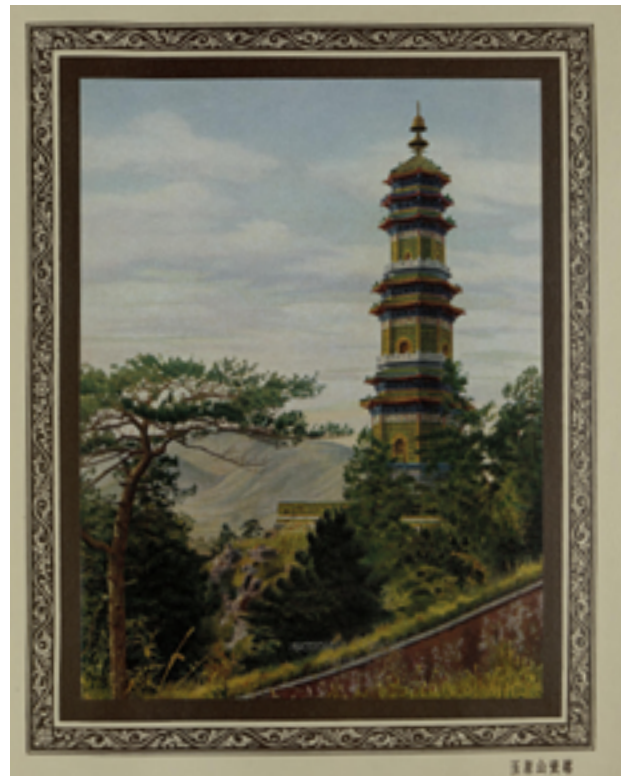


Figure 10. *The Porcelain Pagoda*: Shanghai, 1927. Photograph by: H. C. White (White 1927, 26).

“Figures like White played a crucial role in the reproduction and dissemination of Chinese architecture through prints—both images and texts—effectively making this architecture movable and accessible to a global audience in various scales.”

References

- Almodovar-Melendo, Jose-Manuel, and Joseph-Maria Cabeza-Lainez. "Environmental Features of Chinese Architectural Heritage: The Standardization of Form in the Pursuit of Equilibrium with Nature." *Sustainability*, vol. 10, no. 7, July 2018, p. 2443, doi.org/10.3390/su10072443.
- Anstey, Tim. *Things That Move: A Hinterland in Architectural History*. MIT Press, 2024.
- Baetens, Jan. "1960: When Art and Literature Confronted the Memory of World War II and Remade the Modern." *Leonardo*, vol. 55, May 2022, pp. 423–24, doi.org/10.1162/leon_r_02231.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. The University of Michigan Press, 1981.
- Bauer, Dominique. *Beyond the Frame: Case Studies*. Academic and Scientific Publishers, 2016, pp. 126–30.
- . *Place - Text - Trace: The Fragility of the Spatial Image*. Peeters, 2018, pp. 33–44.
- Bauer, Dominique, and Camilla Murgia, editors. *The Home, Nations and Empires, and Ephemeral Exhibition Spaces: 1750-1918*. Amsterdam University Press, 2021.
- Beardsley, Monroe C. *The Aesthetic Point of View*. Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Bredon, Juliet. *Peking: A Historical and Intimate Description of Its Chief Places of Interest*. Kelly & Walsh Limited, 1922.
- Burgin, Victor, editor. *Thinking Photography*. Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1982.
- Cabezas-Bernal, Pedro M., et al. "Documenting Paintings with Gigapixel Photography." *Journal of Imaging*, vol. 7, no. 8, Aug. 2021, p. 156, doi.org/10.3390/jimaging7080156.
- Chavannes, Édouard. "Mission Archéologique Dans La Chine Septentrionale." *Gallica*, Ernest Leroux, 1909, oai:bnf.fr:gallica/ark:/12148/bpt6k6340771h. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.
- Chen, Weiping. "An Analysis of Anti-Traditionalism in the New Culture Movement." *Social Sciences in China*, vol. 38, no. 2, Apr. 2017, pp. 175–87, doi.org/10.1080/02529203.2017.1302243.
- Chen, Xiangqiao, and Jianguo Wu. "Sustainable Landscape Architecture: Implications of the Chinese Philosophy of 'Unity of Man with Nature' and Beyond." *Landscape Ecology*, vol. 24, no. 8, Apr. 2009, pp. 1015–26, doi.org/10.1007/s10980-009-9350-z.
- Cordier, Henri. *Edouard Chavannes*. Imprimerie Nationale, 1918.
- Covell, Ralph. *W. A. P. Martin, Pioneer of Progress in China*. Christian University Press, 1978, p. 1.
- Currie, Thomas E., et al. "The Cultural Evolution and Ecology of Institutions." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, vol. 376, no. 1828, May 2021, pp. 1–13, doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2020.0047.
- De Cesari, Chiara, and Rozita Dimova. "Heritage, Gentrification, Participation: Remaking Urban Landscapes in the Name of Culture and Historic Preservation." *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol. 25, no. 9, Sept. 2018, pp. 1–7, doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1512515.
- De Luca, Tiago. *Planetary Cinema: Film, Media and the Earth*. Amsterdam University Press, 2022.
- Dickie, George. *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*. Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Eco, Umberto. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Frail, Tom. "Meet the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time." *Smithsonian*, Smithsonian.com, 17 Nov. 2014, www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonianmag/meet-100-most-significant-americans-all-time-180953341/.
- Gül Durukan, S. Nesli, and Kadriye Tezcan Akmeahmet. "Uses of the Archive in Exhibition Practices of Contemporary Art Institutions." *Archives and Records*, vol. 42, June 2020, pp. 1–18, doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2020.1770709. Accessed 6 Jan. 2021.
- Hafstein, Valdimar Tr. "Intangible Heritage as a Festival; Or, Folklorization Revisited." *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 131, no. 520, Apr. 2018, pp. 127–49, doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.131.520.0127.
- Heidemann, Frank. "How Does an Image Relate to What It Shows?—the Uses of Photography among the Badagas of South India." *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 35, no. 1, Jan. 2022, pp. 80–92, doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2022.2017246. Accessed 22 May 2022.
- Hook, Milton. "White, Herbert Clarence (1896–1962) and Anna Louise (Johnson) (1892–1984)." *Encyclopedia of Seventh-Day Adventists*, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Sept. 2022, encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=AJGB&highlight=[White,|Herbert|Clarence|. Accessed 1 July 2024.
- Hook, Milton. "White, James Henry (1896–1954) and Margaret Polly (Rossiter) (1901–2000)." *Encyclopedia of Seventh-Day Adventists*, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 9 May 2022, encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=DJGC#fn1. Accessed 1 July 2024.

- Hu, Shih. "Introduction." In: White, Herbert Clarence. *Peking the Beautiful. Comprising seventy Photographic Studies of the Celebrated Monuments of China's Northern Capital and its Environs Complete with Descriptive and Historical Notes*. Shanghai: Commercial Press Limited, 1927.
- Hvattum, Mari, and Anne Hultzs. *The Printed and the Built: Architecture, Print Culture, and Public Debate in the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.
- Kögel, Eduard. *The Grand Documentation: Ernst Boerschmann and Chinese Religious Architecture (1906–1931)*. De Gruyter, 2015.
- Langmann, Sten, and Paul Gardner. "The Intersemiotic Affordances of Photography and Poetry." *Semiotica*, vol. 2020, no. 236–237, Oct. 2020, pp. 85–102, doi.org/10.1515/sem-2018-0050. Accessed 21 Feb. 2021.
- Lennon, Jane L. "Gothic Silence or Postmodern Deconstruction?: Presenting the Values- Based Stories of Heritage Places of National Significance." *The Historic Environment*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2006, pp. 52–56.
- Leon-Quijano, Camilo. "The Performative Photograph." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 11, no. 3, Dec. 2021, pp. 1116–35, doi.org/10.1086/718000.
- Liang, Sicheng 梁思成. *A History of Chinese Architecture / Zhongguo Jian Zhu Shi 中国建筑史*. Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe 百花文艺出版社, 1998.
- Lin Huiyin 林徽因. "论中国建筑之几个特征." *Zhongguo Yingzao Xueshe Huikan Journal of the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture* 中国营造学社会刊, vol. 3, no. 1, 1932, pp. 163–77.
- McKernan, Luke. "Shibata Tsunekichi." *Victorian-Cinema.net*, 2018, www.victorian-cinema.net/shibata. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.
- Mjaaland, Thera. "Imagining the Real: The Photographic Image and Imagination in Knowledge Production." *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 30, no. 1, Jan. 2017, pp. 1–21, doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2017.1255079. Accessed 13 Mar. 2020.
- Molivarez. "In Memoriam...." *Llu.edu*, Loma Linda University Libraries, 2014, library.llu.edu/about/library-news/memoriam%E2%80%A6. Accessed 1 July 2024.
- Notehelfer, Fred G., and Nancy Jervis. *Sidney Gamble's China Revisited: Photographs by Sidney D. Gamble from 1917 to 1931*. China Institute, 2006.
- Ray, Larry. "Social Theory, Photography and the Visual Aesthetic of Cultural Modernity." *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 2020, pp. 139–59, doi.org/10.1177/1749975520910589.
- Rogers, Harvey Edson. *Seventh-Day Adventist Yearbook*. Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1918, pp. 198–99.---. *Seventh-Day Adventist Yearbook*. Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1925, pp. 243–44. "More than a Century of SIGNS." *Signs of the Times*, www.signstimes.com/?p=about. Accessed 1 July 2024.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.
- Spence, Jonathan D. "Gamble in China." *Chinese Roundabout: Essays in History and Culture*, W.W. Norton, 1992, pp. 51–67.
- Szarkowski, John. *The Photographer's Eye*. The Museum of Modern Art, Cop, 1966.
- "The First 200: William Alexander Parsons Martin." *The First 200*, first200.iu.edu/degree-recipient/martin-william-alexander-parsons.html. Accessed 1 July 2024.
- Törmä, Minna. *Enchanted by Lohans: Osvald Siren's Journey into Chinese Art*. Hong Kong University Press, 2013.
- Translation Department of the Institute of Modern History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 中国社会科学院近代史研究所翻译室. *Dictionary of Names of Foreigners Coming to China in Modern Times 近代来华外国人名辞典*. China Social Science Publishing House 中国社会科学出版社, 1981, p. 55.
- Wang, Yu 王珏 and Zhao Siwen 赵思雯. "Diyci Quanguo Wenwu Pucha 第一次全国文物普查, (Xinzhongguo de 'Diyi' Wenhua Pian 新中国的'第一'文化篇)." *People's Daily* 人民日报, 26 Oct. 2019, culture.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1026/c1013-31421569.html. Accessed 1 July 2024.
- Wang, Min-Ying. *The Historicization of Chinese Architecture: The Making of Architectural Historiography in China, from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1953*. 2010. Columbia U, PhD dissertation. ProQuest, www.proquest.com/docview/230986017/fulltextPDF/FB8167AADFC949DFPQ/1-?accountid=17215&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses#. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.
- Wang, Guixiang 王贵祥. "The Society for Research in Chinese Architecture, Liang Sicheng and Yingzao Fashi: A Scholarly Journey That Has Endured for More than Half a Century 中国营造学社、梁思成与《营造法式》：一部贯穿大半个世纪的学术史." *Journal of Architectural History* 建筑史学刊, vol. 4, no. 4, 2023, pp. 128–37.
- Wells, Liz. "On and beyond the White Walls: Photography as Art." *Photography : A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, 2021, pp. 327–96.
- White, Herbert Clarence. *Peking the Beautiful. Comprising seventy Photographic Studies of the Celebrated Monuments of China's Northern Capital and its Environs Complete with Descriptive and*

Historical Notes. Commercial Press Limited, 1927.
www.loc.gov/item/2021667036/.

Zhou, Linan周利楠. "600-Year-Old City, 95-Year-Old Museum, Commemorating the 600th Anniversary of the Construction of the Forbidden City and the 95th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Palace Museum 六百年的城, 九十五岁的博物院, 纪念紫禁城建成六百周年、故宫博物院成立九十五周年." *The Forbidden City*紫禁城, vol. 10, 2020, pp. 12–19, cnki:SUN:ZLJC.0.2020-10-004..

Zhou, Zhenwei周祯伟. "A Brief History of the Sign of Times Newspaper 时兆报馆小史." *Publishing & Painting* 出版与印刷, vol. 4, 2017, pp. 49–52, doi.org/10.19619/j.issn.1007-1938.2017.04.011.

Endnotes

- 1 The authors are grateful to Prof. Dominique Bauer (KU Leuven) and Dr. Cui Jinze (KU Leuven) for their thorough help.
- 2 The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
- 3 This research is supported by the China Scholarship Council (CSC) [grant number 202106260024].
- 4 There are actually seventy-one photos and texts in the book. See digital version online: www.loc.gov/item/2021667036/. 79 by Herbert and one (124) by Henry.
- 5 The New Culture Movement, which began in 1915, was a cultural campaign aimed at promoting Western ideals of democracy and science while opposing Chinese feudalism and traditional culture. It sought to foster intellectual enlightenment and individual liberation within society. By advocating for the use of vernacular language and introducing Western thought, the movement profoundly influenced China's cultural development and social transformation, laying the groundwork for the subsequent May Fourth Movement. See: Chen (2017).
- 6 Cultural institutions are pivotal organizations dedicated to creating, preserving, and disseminating cultural products and services, acting as bridges between cultural heritage and contemporary culture. These institutions, including museums, theaters, libraries, and cultural centers, serve as repositories of artifacts and knowledge and as active participants in community cultural and economic life. Comprising formal and informal organizations, cultural institutions define societal roles by upholding and promoting cultural values and setting expectations and standards for social interaction. Their presence and activities enrich cultural diversity and provide spiritual support and intellectual resources crucial for sustainable societal development. See Currie (2021).
- 7 *Signs of the Times* was first published on June 4, 1874, in Oakland, California, by James Springer White, one of the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *Signs of the Times* aimed to be “not only an expositor of prophecy, and a reporter of the signs of the times, but also a family paper for religious and general news”. See “More than a Century of SIGNS”.
- 8 *Smithsonian Magazine* ranks Ellen G. White as “one of the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time”; see Frail (2014).
- 9 Originally: *Asiatic Division Mission Outlook* (June 1917–) and *Asiatic Division Mission News* from 1912 to April 1917. See Rogers (1918).
- 10 The Signs of the Times Press was an imprint established by the SDA in Shanghai, serving as the focal point for their Chinese-language evangelism efforts. Zhou Zhenwei's article outlines the press's journey from its challenging beginnings through its development in Shanghai, its continued publication during the resistance against Japanese aggression, and its transformation and contributions to establishing the Shanghai Printing School after the victory of the resistance. The Signs of the Times Press witnessed the SDA Church's missionary activities in China and saw its publication, *Signs of the Times*, become one of the best-selling periodicals in the rear areas during the war of resistance. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Signs of the Times Press underwent government administration. They transformed into the Shanghai Printing School, playing a crucial role in cultivating professionals for the printing industry. See Zhou (2017).
- 11 James Henry White, as a missionary of the SDA Church, arrived in China with his wife Margaret in 1921, serving in the Northern China Union Mission (Shanxi, Hebei, and Shandong provinces). He held positions as secretary-treasurer of the Jilin Mission 吉林传道会 and the Zhili Mission 直隶传道会, overseeing educational and youth ministry, until 1927 when he shifted to evangelistic work in Shandong. During this period, they raised three children in China before returning to the United States in 1929. See Hook, ‘Margaret Polly’ (2022).
- 12 Heritagization refers to the process of officially recognizing cultural practices, places, or objects as heritage. It involves designating certain elements within a culture as worthy of preservation, promotion, and transmission to future generations. See: De Cesari & Dimova (2018); and Hafstein (2018).

Assassin's Creed II: Exploring the Boundaries of Freedom in Videogames

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Author

R.M. (Roos) van Nieuwkoop

Discipline

Art History

Keywords

Freedom / Ludology / Videogames / Assassin's Creed II

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/di456TEy

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Abstract

Via means of Ubisoft's action-adventure videogame *Assassin's Creed II* (2009) this essay aims to determine and explore the extent to which freedom can be experienced in both a philosophical and algorithmic sense. Focusing on three modes—narrative, exploratory, and tactical freedoms—this essay examines how games like *Minecraft*, *Skryim*, and *Halo Wars* embody these freedoms and compares them with *Assassin's Creed II* as the main case study. Through the philosophies of Hegel, Sartre, and Foucault, alongside contemporary computer science theories, the analysis highlights how player agency and game design can shape the experience of freedom or create the illusion of said freedom. The study ultimately demonstrates that while videogames offer varied expressions of freedom, they could also impose inherent constraints through coding and design.

Introduction

In recent years, videogames have not only surged in popularity and have expanded across various platforms; the aim of videogames has shifted, if not broadened, as well. A notable example is developer Ubisoft's (1986) modified version of their *Assassin's Creed* games, branded as *Discovery Tour by Assassin's Creed*. Whereas the 'original' *Assassin's Creed* games centre around a secret brotherhood of assassins, whose goal is to assassinate the in-game oppressors, this edition allows players to explore ancient Greece or Egypt without the 'conflicts' or 'gameplay limitations' found in the regular game (Ubisoft 2018). The creation of such a version, stripped of the core elements that typically define the *Assassin's Creed* experience, raises important questions about what truly defines a videogame, as the line between in-game freedom and pre-determined goals starts to fade. The history of videogames is rich and diverse, and the study of games has evolved into a specialised field within ludology—the study of games. Gonzalo Frasca (1972) in his seminal work, *Ludology Meets Narratology: Similitude and Differences between (Video)Games and Narrative* (1999), contrasts ludology with 'narratology', a concept developed to unify narrative research across various disciplines. Frasca advocates for a unified approach to game studies, bridging fields such as psychology, anthropology, economics, and sociology, and proposes 'ludology' as a framework (Frasca 1999). The broad range of theoretical frameworks which ludology consists of, has served as an inspiration for writing this essay, aiming to bridge the various disciplines and ultimately get a better understanding of freedom in videogames via numerous 'well-known' philosophical approaches illustrated by various videogames serving as case studies. In doing so, this essay will explore the extent to which freedom can be experienced within videogames, with Ubisoft's stealth game *Assassin's Creed II* (2009) as the main case study. Apart from the philosophical approach using theories by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 – 1980), and Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984), this essay will provide theories relating freedom found in the field of computer science as well. This essay will hence examine different forms of freedom—narrative, exploratory, and tactical—by analysing how selected games i.e., *Minecraft* (2011), *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011), and *Halo Wars* (2009), exemplify these freedoms compared to the main case study of *Assassin's Creed II*. By exploring the notion of freedom via numerous videogames, exploring both their philosophical and algorithmic contexts, this essay aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of freedom as it applies to videogames, and the extent to which freedom can be experienced in said videogames.



Figure 1. *Stealth assassination on Venice's rooftops in Assassin's Creed II*: Ubisoft, 2024.

Modes of Freedom

To get a better understanding of 'freedom' and specifically freedom in videogames, the three modes of freedom – narrative, exploratory, and tactical – will be defined first, each accompanied by a fitting videogame. Each of the three videogames chosen to be discussed was released between 2009 and 2011. In using a limited range of release dates, the videogames chosen will prove to be more suitable for comparison to *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), as the industry of game design develops rapidly. Each mode of freedom will be introduced via means of three notable philosophers: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 – 1980), and Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984). Subsequently, a more contemporary outlook on freedom in its algorithmic nature through theories of, among others, Alexander Galloway (1974) will be discussed in addition to the philosophical approach for each mode of freedom and accompanying videogame. In doing so, a better understanding of freedom, free will, and determinism in both philosophical and algorithmic sense will be established, to thereafter be used in comparison to *Assassin's Creed II*.

Narrative Freedom in *Minecraft*

Narrative freedom entails the ability to tell stories about oneself in the ways one desires. One could argue that narrative freedom through the lens of the external object does not exist due to the internal subject, that is, the player who creates a narrative for the external object via interaction with

the videogame. The chosen videogame to illustrate narrative freedom is *Minecraft* (2011), released by game studio Mojang Studio (2009). *Minecraft* is a popular 'sandbox' videogame, entailing a genre that is used to describe videogames allowing to freely move around through the virtual world, rather than forcing the player to use a linear approach. *Minecraft*'s use, or rather lack, of guiding posts in encouraging the player to complete the main story of *Minecraft*, proves interesting when discussing narrative freedom. *Minecraft*, being a 'sandbox' game, provides its player with a high level of autonomy, contrary to 'progression-style' games in which narrative guides the player to a certain goal, often only allowing the player to move further in the videogame after completion of certain events. *Minecraft* allows its players to both autonomously explore the environment, while also being able to shape and create said environment through creative block-building (Gabbiadini et al. 2017). In *Minecraft*, it could be argued that there is little to no 'right' way to play the game, as the events in which the player is expected or forced to follow a linear sequence of events as intended by the developers of *Minecraft* are rare and serve a purpose of, for example, rolling the end credits. To tie in *Minecraft*'s presumed narrative freedom to theories by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), Hegel describes free will to be an experience, rather than an arranged principle. Hegel's perspective of free will is rather paradoxical, whereas Hegel argues that to be free, an individual requires the ability to let go of motivations that form the identity of the individual, while simultaneously expressing themselves via specific motivations that said individual identifies with. This is, according to Hegel, the problem of free will, since it is unclear how both letting go of motivations while actively using motivations in identifying as an individual is possible. Hegel, therefore, described free will to be an experience, needed in order the experience or possess freedom (Yeomans 2012). *Minecraft*, here, offers the player an experience to be shaped to their personal preferences. When applying the notions of the internal subject and external object as theorised by Hegel, the player of *Minecraft* as the internal subject could be able to experience freedom, provided that the external subject – being the creator of *Minecraft* – adheres to the player possessing freedom. In this sense, through philosophical theories on narrative freedom through Hegel, it could be cautiously stated that *Minecraft* offers its players both free will and freedom. In using a 'message-passing' structure for the writing of *Minecraft*'s code, *Minecraft* is rather 'easy' to modify for personal use. In 2018, *Minecraft* released some of its codes for public use, granting its players the resources to start experimenting with either creating their own game by using publicised *Minecraft* code or help-

“When applying the notions of the internal subject and external object as theorised by Hegel, the player of Minecraft as the internal subject could be able to experience freedom, provided that the external subject – being the creator of Minecraft – adheres to the player possessing freedom.”

ing to improve *Minecraft* its Java engine, as stated by developer Nathan Adams (1991) in an official statement from *Minecraft* (Stone 2018). In doing so, *Minecraft* extended the 'sandbox' aspect of the game to its formal grammar, allowing the player to create a personalised version of *Minecraft* via an open system. The concept of the 'open system' is crucial here and is explored in Alexander Galloway's book *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralisation* (2004). Galloway examines how control and power operate in decentralised networks—systems where multiple local authorities manage the network instead of one central entity—highlighting that protocols governing communication and information exchange in the digital world prioritize control over freedom (Galloway 2004). In addition, in *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007), Galloway continues to elaborate on the differences between open and closed systems, in which open systems are generally linked to the public, and closed systems are associated with commercialised or state interest. Here, Galloway furthermore quotes media theorist Geert Lovink (1959) who described the mentioned concepts as freedom, 'hardwired into code'. 'Hardwired' here, means the act of creating a permanent computer feature, which cannot be altered by software. Galloway thereupon poses the question of whether it is freedom if it is hardwired, and unchangeable, suggesting that if anything, this indicates the limitations of freedom (Galloway 2007). With *Minecraft* releasing part of its code to the public, it could be argued that *Minecraft*'s system is 'open', meaning that it allows players to alter their experience, thus implying 'freedom' is not hardwired in *Minecraft* and could be experienced if the player would want to. One could even argue that *Minecraft* allows its players to create their narrative, going as far as altering the code *Minecraft* is made of, providing a solid base for a potential experience of freedom.

Exploratory Freedom in *Skyrim*

Exploratory freedom, the freedom to explore at one's own will, offers the player a great deal of movement via the use of the so-called 'open world' concept, contributing to relative autonomy through personalised routes to achieve an objective. The videogame in which exploration is of great importance and that has been chosen for this article, is Bethesda Game Studios' (2001) 'action role-playing' game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011). *Skyrim* (2011), as described by its developers Bethesda, 'reimagines' and 'revolutionises' the 'open-world fantasy epic', that in doing so 'brings to life' a virtual world that is open for the player to explore in any way they want and desire (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011). *Skyrim*, as stated by Grant Tavinor in his chapter 'Art & Aesthetics' in *The Routledge Companion to Video Game*

Studies (2016), can be considered a “*beautiful, representational artefact*,” with the “*naturalism*” accompanied by the rich detailed environment, that together with the exploratory role of the player create an “*aesthetically rewarding*” player experience (Tavinor 2016). The concept of videogames and ludology strongly rely on player interaction to create an experience, the ‘beauty’ of *Skyrim* combined with the open-world, and non-linear narrative could impact the player their experience of freedom. With the first hour or so being mandatory gameplay, introducing the player to *Skyrim* and prompting the player to create a character and to start the main quest-line, *Skyrim*’s environment is filled with landmarks, waiting to be interacted with. Via both exploration and interaction with said landmarks and communication with non-player characters, the player is encouraged to not only explore *Skyrim* but also actively engage with its environment. By asking for the latest ‘gossip’ in taverns or inns across *Skyrim*, the player can find out new landmarks to visit, and side-quests to start. The main quest introduced at the beginning of *Skyrim* is hardly mandatory for the full experience of the videogame. An aspect that is hardwired into the code of *Skyrim*, is the reoccurring threat of dragons, a threat the player is objected to ‘solving’ if they were to follow the main quest, lessening the spawning of the dragons. These dragons attack the player when seen and are often more difficult to defeat than the more common enemies the player is met with. The dragons ‘spawn’ – i.e. are coded to appear – at both scripted locations as well as randomly generated locations throughout *Skyrim* to attack the player once a certain amount of in-game time has passed; in doing so the randomly spawned dragon attack could happen anywhere if it is outside, and the said amount of time without dragon spawns has passed. For players who do not enjoy fighting the dragons or are focused on a different in-game quest, this could result in a constant state of awareness of the danger caused by the spawning of dragons, when spending time outside. This could be linked to Michel Foucault’s (1926 – 1984) notion of control through constant surveillance, or the induced state of awareness achieved via the idea of constant surveillance. Foucault strongly believes in discipline via institutional surveillance or the idea of being always watched. This would then serve as the inducing of a “*permanent state of visibility*” ultimately leading to the “*automatic functioning of power*” among those that are being watched (Foucault 1975). Whereas an individual in *Skyrim* can try to run from said dragons, the player cannot hide. Yet in gaining a sense of control over the constant threat caused by the dragons, the player gains the illusion of freedom by being able to influence said threat, without being free of said threat. With the spawning of the dragons being ‘hardwired’ into the code

of *Skryim*, with little possibility of altering said code through gameplay, the player is only able to either follow the main-quest in *Skryim* or level up their character enough to easily defeat the dragons to lessen the constant threat of spawning dragons and their surveillance. However, the threat cannot be eliminated, and exploratory freedom comes hardwired with the constant surveillance by enemy dragons, awaiting battle with the player, one which they can hardly escape.

Tactical Freedom in *Halo Wars*

The concept of tactical freedom is often related to military practices, and closely ties in with the notion of strategy. Tactics here are the individual steps that allow a strategic plan to work. Whereas strategic decisions are made as an overall plan of action, tactics can change depending on the course of action of said strategy. In 'The Heavy Division Engineer Regiment - A Key to Tactical Freedom of Action', Marc R. Hildenbrand defines tactical freedom to be the ability of a "*combat formation*" to execute a selected course of action, despite "*enemy actions*" to the contrary (Hildenbrand 1991). The videogame in which tactical freedom can be seen is Ensemble Studios' (1994 – 2009) 'real-time strategy' videogame *Halo Wars* (2009). *Halo Wars* is a strategy game: it entails gameplay in which the player's ability in tactical thinking is of great importance in succeeding the videogame's objective. The general theme of *Halo* is to be summarised centring around the threat of human extinction at the hand of The Covenant, which resulted in the 'creation' of protagonist Master Chief through both physical and biological augmentation as the ultimate weapon and 'super soldier' able to save mankind from said extinction. Whereas the details surrounding the creation of Master Chief, who has been abducted as a child to be replaced by a weaker clone to shortly thereafter die, and the ethical debate on freedom relating to war and military purposes, is a topic of debate as is, the main focus here will be the in-game timeline and actual release of *Halo Wars* that could be argued to be pre-determined, hence lacking freedom. *Halo Wars* grants the player control over human soldiers and their military equipment to fight the war in hopes of saving humanity that is otherwise threatened to go extinct at the hand of The Covenant – even though the events portrayed in an earlier videogame from the franchise *Halo: Combat Evolved* (2001) released eight years earlier, already implies the impossibility of preventing humanity from near extinction. One could therefore argue that the player is fighting against a pre-determined loss, which ties in with the notion of determinism. Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905 – 1980), while strongly disbelieving the presence of a god, argues that there is no

ultimate meaning or purpose inherent to human life. If there is no meaning or motive for human life, everything can be considered as being permitted, and it is only pre-determined societal norms and values that create a sense of limitations to freedom and acting upon free will (Odesanmi 2008). It is the individual who can decide to what extent these pre-determined values apply to their actions. When analysing the notion of determinism in a computer science sense, 'deterministic' entails algorithmic processes whose resulting behaviour and output are always the same depending on the input. This means that each input has a pre-determined output, i.e., each player action has a pre-determined outcome that has been hardwired into the underlying code of, in this case, the videogame. To clarify, the deterministic approach entails that if the player were to make decision x , its outcome will always be y . Contrary to a non-deterministic approach, in which decision x could result in $y1$, $y2$, $y3$, etc. Noteworthy is the use of a so-called 'deterministic simulation' used in *Halo Wars*. Each decision and move the player decides upon while playing *Halo Wars*, thus has a set outcome, emphasising the importance of a tactical approach to still achieve the desired goal set through strategy. There are only so many things the player can do to achieve the in-game goal of saving the world from the pre-determined threat of extinction at the hand of The Covenant. When this is analysed via the notions of Galloway's 'protocolological' approach and the notion of 'hardwired freedom', *Halo Wars* can be argued to be an algorithm that is unchangeable for the player, yet through the illusion of potentially altering the outcome already determined in an earlier game depicting events that occur later than depicted in *Halo Wars*, the player is granted an illusion of making a difference through personal choice. This, however, cannot be achieved due to the pre-determined nature of both the narrative and tactics of *Halo Wars*, as is embedded and hardwired in its code. It could be argued that the more reliant on strategies and tactics a videogame is, the less freedom the player has or can experience.

Assassin's Creed II

Starting with a brief introduction to Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed II*: the game was released in 2009 as part of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, which started with their first release in 2007. As stated on the Ubisoft franchise page, the *Assassin's Creed* series invites its players to immerse themselves in the memories of the protagonists' ancestors that can be accessed using a device known as the 'Animus', which grants access to said memories stored in DNA. In doing so, the protagonist of *Assassin's Creed* can relive historical events and hidden truths lived by their ancestors. Each *Assassin's Creed*

“Skyrim (2011), as described by its developers Bethesda, ‘reimagines’ and ‘revolutionises’ the ‘open-world fantasy epic’, that in doing so ‘brings to life’ a virtual world that is open for the player to explore in any way they want and desire” (Bethesda Game Studios 2011).

game typically takes place during an era that holds historical relevance, for example, Paris during The French Revolution, or New York City during The American Revolution. *Assassin's Creed* aims to have the in-game protagonist fight to protect “*free will*” during some of the most “*pivotal*” moments in human history (Ubisoft 2020). The *Assassin's Creed* game series are ‘action-adventure games’, heavily relying on ‘stealth’ gameplay. To elaborate, action-adventure games are characterised by elements of exploration, involving intense action sequences including running, jumping, climbing, and fighting. The basic idea behind the mentioned ‘stealth’ gameplay is the avoidance of confrontation with in-game enemies, rather than seeking it out. *Assassin's Creed II* sold over 1.6 million copies worldwide in the first week of retail, arguably defining the *Assassin's Creed* franchise as known today (Reilly 2009). With *Assassin's Creed II* defining the franchise, the twelve titles that followed heavily relied on the ‘social stealth’ implemented in *Assassin's Creed II*. *Assassin's Creed II* hence introduced some of the most recognisable features of the game series, and whereas the first *Assassin's Creed* (2007) also allowed the player to engage in stealth-like behaviours, *Assassin's Creed II* revolutionised the franchise by bettering what was, by creating the game around three core gameplay mechanics, that of the ‘fight’, the ‘navigation’, and the ‘social stealth’. In doing so, *Assassin's Creed II* has implemented game-design loops, actively supporting players in using these core mechanics by providing them with a series of in-game activities and feedback that reinforce the core gameplay mechanics. In doing so, *Assassin's Creed II* aims to keep players engaged in progressive gameplay via means of challenges, rewards, and narrative progression, ultimately aimed at making players feel that their efforts lead to tangible results and personal growth within the game. *Assassin's Creed II* is stated to be the first in the series where the ‘multilayered’ narrative began to take shape, focusing more on background stories, in-game character development, and in-game rivalries, such as that with The Templar Order (Guesdon 2018). Here, the shared enemy of the *Assassin's Creed* titles grants the protagonist a returning motive, namely that of The Brotherhood of Assassins, i.e. The Creed, whose mission is to prevent the opposing party of The Order of Templar Knights, from their quest of “*world domination*” (Bowden 2009). Where The Brotherhood seeks to promote and protect free will and resist oppression, The Templar Order believes that a structured society built on order and control is necessary for peace. Each game follows this general narrative yet follows a different protagonist through various eras in almost every *Assassin's Creed* game. The chosen videogame in this essay, *Assassin's Creed II*, follows the Italian noble Ezio Auditore da Firenze during the

peak of The Italian Renaissance (1476 – 1499). As described on the Ubisoft store, the game immerses its player in an “*epic*” story of family, “*vengeance*” and “*conspiracy*” during the “*pristine, yet beautiful*” Italian Renaissance (Ubisoft 2010). As Ezio Auditore, born into a wealthy family as the son of the head of the Auditore International Bank, the player is confronted with betrayal early on in the videogame when Auditore’s brothers and father are publicly hanged as the result of Templar-induced rivalry. Upon learning about this and the Auditore family’s involvement in The Brotherhood of Assassins, Auditore decides to seek out revenge and take on The Templar Order as part of The Brotherhood.

***Assassin's Creed II* Compared**

With an understanding of the general notion presented in *Assassin's Creed II*, each mode of freedom and accompanying videogame will be compared to the extent to which said mode is present in *Assassin's Creed II*. Ultimately, the extent to which freedom is present if not achievable in *Assassin's Creed II* will be explored via comparisons, granting a framework to differentiate the possibility of player-agency and freedom. Starting with the narrative freedom, as explained and illustrated by *Minecraft* (2011). In terms of narrative freedom, *Assassin's Creed II* follows a rather linear approach, meaning that there is a defined ‘goal’ to be achieved to complete the game. This is contrary to *Minecraft*, in which the ‘sandbox’ approach and the option to alter the written code of the game itself, *Minecraft* does not end once the ‘end’ goal is achieved. In *Minecraft*, reaching the so-called ‘End’ unlocks new in-game features to further the game after the end credits have rolled. In *Assassin's Creed II*, the end credits are the game’s end and are used as a way of hinting at a future game where Ezio Auditore’s journey continues. Other than the linear narrative in *Assassin's Creed II*, the player can only progress through the game by completing missions in a set sequence and does offer little freedom. The extent to which freedom can be experienced in *Assassin's Creed II* can be argued to be ‘better’ when analysing the exploratory freedom illustrated through *Skylrim* (2011). In terms of exploratory freedom, *Assassin's Creed II* offers the player a great deal of movement via the use of the so-called ‘open world’ concept. This entails the player’s ability to freely move around within a large virtual environment, contributing to relative autonomy through personalised routes to achieve an objective. Similar to *Skylrim*, *Assassin's Creed II* offers multiple interactive elements spread throughout the map, contributing to either gameplay experience, or part of optional completist quests. Specific to *Assassin's Creed* games is the protagonist’s skill in free running, which

is the activity of moving rapidly over or around obstacles within an environment, oftentimes through running, jumping or climbing. The use of dynamic movement to explore the environment has been integral to the *Assassin's Creed* videogames since the first game in the series. Here, the player is encouraged to climb high buildings that serve as 'viewpoints'; for example, the Notre Dame de Paris in *Assassin's Creed Unity* (2014) or the Colosseum in *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* (2010), to thereupon 'synchronise' via a button command. In doing so, the game cuts to a scene in which a panoramic 360-degree view of the surrounding area is shown. Afterwards, the in-game map of the area of said viewpoint is updated to show locations of merchants, 'hidden' treasures, and other collectables. Throughout the game, the player is encouraged to 'synchronise' all viewpoints across the area to fully unlock the contents of the map. *Assassin's Creed* plays with the concept of exploration in a rather dynamic way; however, it is directly linked to freedom. A specific example from *Assassin's Creed II* is the restricted areas in which some of the viewpoints are in regions that are coloured red on the map. Even though the areas are accessible, the guards in that area are on high alert, meaning that they will attack the player as soon as they are seen in the restricted area. This makes it significantly more difficult for the player to reach the viewpoint, whereas without eliminating all the guards, there is a possibility of being spotted while climbing said viewpoint and being shot, resulting in the player failing to pursue their climb, and ultimately falling from the said viewpoint. If the player is not yet strong or equipped enough to successfully eliminate the guards guarding the area, it is either a difficult task requiring stealth, or an area that the player must first either free from surveillance before being able to synchronise the viewpoint. As the exploration aspect is tied in with the concept of in-game freedom in terms of liberating said areas, certain viewpoints are not as accessible depending on the player's in-game process. The sequel of *Assassin's Creed II*, *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* (2010), took the use of viewpoints in the restricted area a step further. Here, Auditore is on a quest to liberate Rome from Templar oppression, by igniting surveillance towers spread across the map. The towers serve the purpose of viewpoint, as well as ways to monitor the citizens' behaviour, thus practising oppressive behaviours. To climb and synchronise said viewpoint, the player must eliminate the tower's leader first, before destroying the tower and thus lessening Templar surveillance. To relate this to the concept of Foucault, who argues that to ensure the automatic functioning of power, the individual needs to be induced with a state in which they are conscious of always being watched. This notion is also seen in *Skryim*, yet the sense of being watched is done

by the spawning of dragons, waiting to attack the player. Overall, exploring and freedom in *Assassin's Creed* are almost inextricably linked to each other, yet it is possible for the player, in *Assassin's Creed II*, to bypass almost all said viewpoints and still play the game. Yet the viewpoint at the start of the game serving a tutorial purpose is mandatory, and throughout *Assassin's Creed II*, viewpoints do prove to be a pleasant addition in gameplay where exploration grants the player a more accessible and engaging experience with the open world of *Assassin's Creed II*. When compared to *Skyrim*, the result of explorative behaviour in *Assassin's Creed II* comes faster than in *Skyrim*, where every unlockable location must be visited, rather than seen from great heights as in *Assassin's Creed II*. Yet when comparing both games to Foucault's theories on constant surveillance and the implied obedience it comes with, the sense of impending doom on the player could be argued to negatively impact the experience of freedom in both *Assassin's Creed II* and *Skyrim*. Lastly, there is tactical freedom as illustrated via *Halo Wars* (2009). Whereas *Halo Wars* follows a pre-determined simulation, it is difficult to compare a strategy game to *Assassin's Creed II* due to their inherently differing mechanics. Yet when combined with narrative freedom, it has come to the fore that *Assassin's Creed II* follows a linear storyline, where each mission must be completed to progress through the game. With each mission having a pre-determined outcome upon successful completion, the strategy used to get there can, to a certain extent, be personalised. For example, a mission can encourage the player to travel via rooftops, yet the player can choose to not do so. If the player is, for example, not seen, the player is free to choose their tactics for completing the mission. Far more interesting in terms of tactical freedom is the maxim used by The Creed, namely: "*Nothing is true, everything is permitted*" (Ubisoft 2010). This maxim can be thought of to be strikingly like the notion of Sartre, who argues that if nothing exists except for mankind, everything is permitted and mankind is radically free, yet responsible for their actions. Where *Halo Wars* only offers so many possibilities in terms of tactics used due to its pre-determined nature, *Assassin's Creed II* could be argued to be 'freer'. Throughout *Assassin's Creed II*, the player can come across optional puzzles to solve, unlocking additional cinematic content upon completion. One notable glyph, however, is presented with the hint stating how nothing is true, and everything is permitted. Here, the player can simply not give a wrong answer in solving the puzzle, whereas quite literally the game permits every solution to be a sequence of button commands. In doing so, part of the tactical freedom is directly visible in *Assassin's Creed II*; no matter

“Skyrim, as stated by Grant Tavinor in his chapter ‘Art & Aesthetics’ in *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (2016), can be considered a ‘beautiful, representational artefact,’ with the ‘naturalism’ accompanied by the rich detailed environment, that together with the exploratory role of the player create an ‘aesthetically rewarding’ player experience” (Tavinor 2016).

the tactics, the player will always achieve the strategic end goal, which is solving the glyph, paradoxically pre-determined.

Conclusion

When analysing different modes of freedom through both lenses rooted in philosophy as well as computer science, to thereupon be illustrated using videogames fitting each mode, this essay has explored the extent to which freedom can be experienced in *Assassin's Creed II*. In doing so, it has come to the fore that the extent to which freedom can be experienced greatly differs from game to game, with each offering different degrees of autonomy and freedom, shaped by their hardwired code and narrative design philosophies. *Assassin's Creed II* analysed in this context, uncovers the complex nature of interacting elements in both the game code, as well as when interacting with its player, as it navigates between the coded, pre-determined and linear outcome, as well as the illusion of choice that is embedded and inherent to videogames. Videogames are dependent on player input and interaction hence autonomy is necessary, yet the extent is solely reliant on the meaning or narrative a videogame aims to communicate to its audience. All in all, videogames offer a unique medium for both embracing and challenging the experience of freedom, with each title and accompanying team of developers in charge of player freedom, or rather its illusion.

“*Assassin's Creed* aims to have the in-game protagonist fight to protect ‘*free will*’ during some of the most ‘pivotal’ moments in human history” (Ubisoft 2020).

References

- Bethesda Game Studios. "The Elder Scrolls: *Skyrim*." *The Elder Scrolls*, 2011. elderscrolls.Bethesda.net/en/skyrim.
- Bowden, Oliver. *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance*. New York: Ace Books, 2009.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin, 1975.
- Frasca, Gonzalo. "Ludology Meets Narratology. Similitude and Differences between (Video)games and Narrative." *Ludology.org*, 1999. www.ludology.org/articles/ludology.htm.
- Gabbiadini, Alessandro, et al. "Grand Theft Auto Is a 'Sandbox' Game, but There Are Weapons, Criminals, and Prostitutes in the Sandbox: Response to Ferguson and Donnellan (2017)." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 46, no. 12, 2017, pp. 2460–66, doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0754-4.
- Galloway, Alexander R. *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralisation*. The MIT Press, 2004.
- Galloway, Alexander R., and Eugene Thacker. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Guesdon, Jean. "Looking Back on 10 Years of *Assassin's Creed*." Edited by Mikel Reparaz. *Ubisoft® - Official Ubisoft News, Previews and Features*, 2018. news.Ubisoft.com/en-us/article/6P2OoMbx17TavKwwHev2eT/looking-back-on-10-years-of-assassins-creed.
- Hildenbrand, Marc R. "The Heavy Division Engineer Regiment - A Key to Tactical Freedom of Action." *School of Advanced Military Studies*, 1991.
- Odesanmi, A. C. "Jean Paul Sartre and the Concept of Determinism." *Global Journal of Humanities* 7, no. 1&2 (2008): 85-89.
- Reilly, Jim. "Assassin's Creed II First Week Sales Impressive." *IGN*, 2009. www.ign.com/articles/2009/11/24/assassins-creed-ii-first-week-sales-impressive.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Stephen Priest. *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Stone, Tom. "Programmers: Play with *Minecraft*'s Inner Workings!" *Minecraft.net*, 6 Oct. 2018. www.minecraft.net/en-us/article/programmers-play-minecrafts-inner-workings.
- Tavinor, Grant. "Art & Aesthetics." *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, edited by Mark J.P. Wolf, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.
- Ubisoft. "Assassin's Creed Franchise." Ubisoft, 2020. www.Ubisoft.com/en-gb/game/assassins-creed?isSso=true&refreshStatus=noLoginData.
- Ubisoft Store, "Assassin's Creed II." Ubisoft, 2010. store.Ubisoft.com/nl/game?pid=56c4947f88a7e300458b4690&dwvar_56c4947f88a7e300458b4690_Platform=pcdl&edition=Standard+Edition&source=detail.
- Yeomans, Christopher. *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Crafting Intentional Scents: Enriching Cultural Heritage with Educational Olfactory Reproductions

Author

Sofia Collette Ehrich

Discipline

Olfactory Heritage and Museology

Keywords

Olfactory Heritage / Olfactory Storytelling / Museology / Perfume
/ Reproductions

Doi

doi.org/10.61299/it356WQy

Abstract

Museums internationally are using scents as a means of storytelling in their galleries, but a methodological process for developing olfactory reproductions - or historically informed scents - is still lesser known and valued. For the first time, this paper raises the importance of crafting intentional olfactory reproductions for the use in cultural heritage. It discusses how to streamline the process of commissioning olfactory reproductions with a scent designer and how to foster transparency of these productions to benefit visitor education. Insights for understanding aspects of transparency for olfactory reproductions and navigating their level of historical intent are gleaned from already established methodologies of heritage scent preservation. These young methodologies provide a framework for improving methods of olfactory storytelling within the field of cultural heritage. *The Olfactory Reproduction Matrix* presented in this paper compiles methodologies of heritage scent preservation into a table that acts as a practical tool for museum practitioners to use while developing olfactory reproductions in the setting of cultural heritage.

Introduction¹

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City broke headlines earlier this year with the opening of *Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion*, an exhibition that - according to an article written by Vogue - was “*designed to awaken your senses*” (Borrelli-Persson 2024). With the intervention of tactile (touch) and olfactory (smell) interventions, the MET’s Costume Institute aimed to reanimate fashion garments stripped of their once sensory significance by being put “*to sleep*” in the collection’s depot or placed behind glass (Borrelli-Persson 2024). Specific interest arose from the ‘olfactory interventions’ of the exhibition, developed by olfactory artist Sissel Tolaas, who spent over a year working with the collection, preparing the scents, and designing their distribution into the gallery space (Seipp 2024). Dozens of tubes ran under and between the dresses awing visitors with their spectacle. The tubes are seemingly extracting fragrant air from the heritage objects that then seem to pump directly into the gallery space. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to sniff the olfactory identity of a garment that was worn over 100 years ago (Seipp 2024).² The work of Tolaas is valuable as it encourages visitors to approach the history of fashion and the museum gallery *nose-first*, but the press, as well as Tolaas herself, were quick to classify the smells presented in the gallery as “*replications of the molecules found in the dresses*” with vague insights into their creation (Seipp 2024). These statements did not seem to negatively impact visitors to the exhibition; however, it raises the question: does it harm a museum and its visitors if scents are presented as true replications, when the true level of interpretation behind these scents is unclear? Although the attention and positive reception that this exhibition received demonstrates steps towards breaking what scholar and art critic Jim Drobnick calls the ‘anosmic cube’, it raises concerns in terms of how museums communicate the level of interpretation behind the scents presented in their galleries (Drobnick 2005).

Conversations around the interpretation and preservation of cultural heritage through scent is relevant at present when “*scent in the museum*”, also known as ‘olfactory storytelling’, is becoming more common (Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023, 8-9). Experiments that investigate the positive and negative impact of olfactory storytelling is becoming of greater interest to researchers, resulting in exciting new insights about the significant outcomes of implementing these practices (Bembibre & Strlič 2021; Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022; Alexopoulos & Bembibre 2023; Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023). Research initiatives are working towards legitimising the impact that ‘olfactory interventions’ have within the cultural heritage domain by establishing methodologies and tested practices for archiving and devel-

oping historically relevant scents as well as presenting those scents safely and meaningfully to the public (Ehrich & Leemans 2023).³ These initiatives are productive as they improve our understanding of the impact olfactory interventions have on visitor experience and in turn, bring forward the importance of using our sense of smell as a tool to engage with the past and the present.

Overall, research suggests that olfactory storytelling is beneficial to visitor experience. One study that conducted interviews and questionnaires on a sample of approximately 800 ‘olfactory exhibition’-goers showed that embracing olfactory storytelling techniques in the museum contributes to an overall positive experience (Alexopoulos & Bembibre 2023). Analysis of these questionnaires showed that most visitors enjoyed the experience, responding that the *“smells made the tour/visit special”* and *“I would like to experience more exhibitions with smell in the future”* (Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023, 16-17). This is just one example that confirms the positive outcomes of olfactory interventions in the museum. Due to olfaction’s direct connection with the brain’s limbic system (where our emotion and memory are processed), the interaction with smell in the context of heritage results in a more memorable visitor experience that is easier to recall later (Aggleton & Waskett 1999; Levant & Pascal-Leone 2014; Bembibre & Strlič 2017; Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022). Museum visitors also indicate that olfactory interventions improve their comprehension of topics presented in the galleries, makes them feel closer to the past, and builds stronger connections with those around them (Alexopoulos & Bembibre 2023; Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023). Lastly, applying multisensory approaches to the museum encourages hands-on involvement and elongates the amount of time visitors spend engaging with the collection (Eardley, Dobbin et al. 2018).

With legitimate understanding of the positive impact that olfactory interventions have within the context of cultural heritage, the frequency of olfactory storytelling is booming internationally.⁴ However, the field faces growing pains due to its reliance on interdisciplinary exchange between museum practitioners who design exhibitions and scent designers who have the knowledge to access and develop ‘olfactory reproductions’ (Ehrich & Leemans 2022, Ehrich & Leemans 2023). At the heart of this knowledge exchange lies a challenge: cultural heritage institutions and museum professionals still possess limited understanding of the methods for commissioning and accurately contextualizing historically intended olfactory reproductions in collaboration with a scent designer (Bembibre & Strlič 2017; Ehrich & Leemans 2022; Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022). The existence of this challenge has not yet been acknowledged by the



Figure 1. *Image of a visitor sniffing a scent at the Mondrian Moves exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Den Haag in the Netherlands: 2022. Photograph by: Sofia Collette Ehrich.*

field; however, I would argue it is a barrier that is restricting the influence olfactory interventions have on museum visitors, and as a result reducing educational impact.

A solution to this challenge can be found in the discipline of ‘olfactory heritage’, a relatively young field that raises awareness around the importance and correlation between smells and heritage, including the preservation and presentation of scents in the museum (Bembibre & Strlič 2017; Bembibre, Leemans et al. 2024). The field of olfactory heritage is extensive and includes many disciplines, but my research requires the investigation of two specific subcategories within the field of olfactory heritage: ‘olfactory museology’ and ‘historic scent preservation’. Olfactory museology focuses on the study of using scent in the context of the museum while historic scent preservation deals specifically with methodologies that inform the development of these scents. Together, these aspects form the theoretical framework to investigate my research question: *how can cultural heritage institutions showcase olfactory reproductions in a way that is appealing*

to visitors while also educating them about the research process behind the scent's level of historical interpretation? To address this question, I will first establish and define the theoretical framework of olfactory museology and historic scent preservation and emphasize their interdependency on each other in practice. Next, I will present the available methodologies of heritage scent preservation which in turn establish an 'olfactory reproduction discourse'. This discourse is crucial as it has the power to inform museum practitioners on the methods to shape communication around their historically intended olfactory reproductions. Analysing this discourse will reveal initial insights into how olfactory reproductions can be communicated to museum visitors in a way that is both engaging and educational. The conclusions will explore future research opportunities.

Theoretical Framework⁵

This paper situates itself within the field of 'olfactory heritage', emerging from the idea that smells are a key part of our cultural heritage and that they must be safeguarded and researched. It is a challenging topic to research as it confronts one of our deeply rooted biases: that we should rely mainly on visual experience when engaging with aspects of cultural heritage (Bembibre & Strlič 2017). In 2017, scholars Cecilia Bembibre and Matija Strlič published the first 'comprehensive treatise' on the correlation between olfaction and heritage. One of the first groups to formally propose that smells are *indeed* a part of our cultural heritage, they raise the importance of establishing a structured approach when identifying, analysing, and archiving "*historic odours*" and discuss how these concepts impact the museum sector (Bembibre & Strlič 2017, 1). They argue that visitors benefit from the engagement with smells in the context of cultural heritage; however, curatorial and conservational challenges remain, posing barriers for the field (Bembibre & Strlič 2017). Since then, olfactory heritage research has matured. Odeuropa, a European Funded Horizon 2020 project that advocated for smells and olfaction as an important part of European cultural heritage, formally defined the term earlier this year. Their *Olfactory Heritage Toolkit* defines olfactory heritage as "*materials, objects, places and practices whose significance is defined by, or notably associated with, smells and olfactory experiences meaningful to communities, groups and individuals*" (Bembibre, Leemans et al. 2024, 7). With interdisciplinary exchange at the centre, the field brings together (art) historians, heritage scientists, chemists, archaeologists, anthropologists, museum practitioners, artists, and more (Bembibre & Strlič 2022).

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this field, it is necessary to further specify the scope of this research by defining two of its theoretical subcategories. Although a commonly used term by olfactory heritage researchers, olfactory museology is yet to be defined. Based on current scholarship, olfactory museology is the study and investigation of museum practices that involve smell as a medium of storytelling (Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022). Methods and tools that are considered practices of olfactory museology can be found in the theoretical framework of olfactory storytelling. Odeuropa's *Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit: A 'How-To' Guide for Working with Smells in Museums and Heritage Institutions* proposes such a framework, guiding museum professionals and others through the process of applying scent as a medium to their own (curatorial) practice. Odeuropa defines olfactory storytelling as the careful orchestration of scent(s) and the activation of the olfactory sense in a meaningful way that deliberately connects individuals to (heritage) collections, concepts, practices, and objects within a certain setting (museum or otherwise) (Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023). Olfactory storytelling includes three key actions: (1) the selection of an olfactory narrative; (2) determining the context in which the scent and narrative is communicated; and (3) the design of how the scent is physically presented to the visitor (Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023; Ehrich & Leemans 2023). These three aspects are shaped from the overall intended effect that the chosen scent - and its related context - has on the visitor experience. Effect may be to educate, raise emotion, capture historical accuracy, preserve a concept of cultural heritage, or for theatrical effect (Verbeek 2016). Here I want to highlight that olfactory museology only considers olfactory storytelling activities that are directly related to museum practice, and therefore does not include the physical *development* process of olfactory reproductions. Olfactory reproduction development currently depends heavily on the knowledge of perfumers, scent designers or chemists who can compose scents that are safe and effective for the noses of the public. This process falls under another subcategory of olfactory heritage called historic scent preservation.

Historic scent preservation relates to any situation where the noses of today are exposed to interpretations of the "*scented past*" via the reconstruction or recreation of a historic scent (Bembibre 2021, 155). According to Cecilia Bembibre, there are four focuses of olfactory reproductions created within the scope of historic scent preservation: (1) smell creations that preserve a smell source that is no longer existing and soon to be extinct, including the preservation of (historic) perfumes; (2) scent creations that give an olfactory impression of the past but were created without access to a "*representation in the real world*" (Bembibre 2021, 157); (3) scent cre-

ations that are developed to represent a(n) (historical) autobiography of a person; and (4) scent creations meant to interpret a historical concept with the intention to be presented to the “contemporary nose” (Bembibre 2021, 162). Like the three actions that are key to olfactory storytelling, these four focuses act as a guideline for shaping the intent of an olfactory reproduction and when understood can greatly inform the way that an olfactory reproduction is presented in the museum.

Together, olfactory museology and historic scent preservation establish a theoretical framework that guides both the development of impactful olfactory storytelling practices in museums as well as informs the contextualization of olfactory reproductions to the public. However, we must acknowledge the dependent relationship between these concepts, requiring museum practitioners and scent designers to work together. Direction for streamlining these collaborations is found in the four methodologies of historic scent preservation, which each provide the information necessary for museum practitioners to effectively shape the historic intent of their olfactory reproduction with both scent designer and museum visitor. This methodological understanding informs the process of olfactory reproduction development by providing a guideline for defining and classifying types of olfactory reproductions based on their background of research and development.

Methodologies of Historic Scent Preservation

In this section, I present four methodologies for heritage scent preservation proposed by known scholars in the field of olfactory heritage. Collectively they set a guideline for classifying olfactory reproductions which can be applied to shape the way these scents are presented and contextualized for the public. Each methodology falls under one or more of the four focuses of historic scent preservation, as mentioned above in the ‘Theoretical Framework’. Their versatility and adaptability across different fields will be illustrated by describing how they lean more heavily toward one focus or the other. The table ‘Methodologies of Historic Scent Preservation’ (figure 2) provides an overview of the methodologies of heritage scent preservation from first published (left) to most recently published (right).

The earliest methodology was published in 2022, and the latest methodology was published in 2023. The table indicates (1) the name of the methodology and its year of publication, (2) the focus within the scope of historic scent preservation, (3) the term these scholars use to refer to olfactory reproductions, and (4) the citation of the original publication. Methodologies are named for their published work. Publishing platforms

of these methodologies vary, with two of them published in academic journals, one published as a key deliverable of a European Funded project, and one published via an open access research platform. Methodologies were chosen based on the prominence that their authors hold in the field of olfactory heritage.

Methodologies of Historic Scent Preservation				
Methodology	In Search of Lost Scents by Dr. Caro Verbeek (2022)	Whiffstory by Odeuropa (2022)	The NOMEN Project by the Osmothèque and its Scientific Committee (2023)	Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit by Odeuropa (2023)
Focus of Historic Scent Preservation *	② ④	① ② ③ ④	① ④	① ② ④
Overarching Term for 'Olfactory Reproductions'	None specified	Olfactory Representations: scents created by perfumers, olfactory artists, heritage scientists, museum curators and the entertainment industry to re-present historical scents and bring them to the noses of the present.	Olfactory Reconstitutions: scents that aim to recreate a scent or perfume from the past based on any information that exists on how to do so.	Heritage Scents: scents created by a perfumer or scent designer for the use of olfactory storytelling and presented to the public. Scents are employed to convey narratives which are significant to a specific culture and/or are gleaned from the analysis of historical texts and images.
As Published In	Verbeek, Leemans, and Fleming (2022, 315-342).	Leemans et al. (2022, 849-879).	Chazot et al. (2023).	Ehrich et al. (2023).

* As proposed by Cecilia Bembibre in 'Archiving the intangible: preserving smells, historic perfumes and other ways of approaching the scented past' (2021): ① smell creations that preserve a smell source that is no longer existing and soon to be extinct. This includes the preservation of (historic) perfumes; ② scent creations that give an olfactory impression of the past but were created without access to a "representation in the real world" (157); ③ scent creations that are developed to represent a(n) (historical) autobiography of a person; and ④ scent creations meant to interpret a historical concept with the intention to be presented to the "contemporary nose" (162).

Figure 2. *Table of Methodologies for Historic Scent Preservation: 2024.*
Created by: Sofia Collette Ehrich.

‘In Search of Lost Scents’ was proposed in November 2022 by Dr. Caro Verbeek, an art historian, researcher and curator based in the Netherlands. It was developed as part of her PhD research, *In Search of Scents Lost - Reconstructing the volatile heritage of the avant-garde*, which took place between 2014 and 2019.⁶ During her PhD, Verbeek produced various olfactory projects including an olfactory guided tour at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam in collaboration with IFF (International Flavors and Fragrances) (Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022; Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023).⁷ Verbeek is a pioneer in the field of olfactory museology setting precedent specifically for developing exploratory practices of olfactory storytelling at the intersection of academia and industry (Bembibre & Strlič 2022). One of her olfactory projects was an olfactory guided tour that paired twenty artworks from the Rijksmuseum’s collection with scents. The process required the expertise of museum practitioners, perfumers, and Verbeek herself who worked together to create scents that captured the (art) historical background and olfactory relevance of the artworks (Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022). It was through this process that Verbeek realized that olfactory reconstructions could have different (historic) intentions. Her findings provide a dichotomy of olfactory reconstruction types. On one side she places ‘historically informed scents’ or those based on (art) historical research that have as little interpretation as possible. Historically informed scents can be based on materiality, textual evidence, and visual imagery. On the other side she places ‘artistic creations’, or scents based on creative interpretation. Her work also mentions the use of ‘single raw materials’, or the use of a single fragrant material, and ‘scent compositions’ when several raw materials are combined. The decision behind their use is based on the intention of the storytelling and can fall under both categories (Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022). Verbeek’s methodologies fit within focuses two and four of heritage scent preservation as the methods cover scents presented to the contemporary nose that are of historical intent.

‘Whiffstory’ was published in June 2022 by researchers of the Odeuropa project. The development of this methodology is based on interdisciplinary knowledge from science, chemistry, and the humanities. This methodology has a similar dichotomy to Verbeek’s; however, it names further subcategories of historically intended scents. The scholars of this methodology aim to further establish and formalize types and descriptions for what they call “*olfactory representations*” (Leemans, Tullett et al. 2022). Sources of inspiration for forming this methodology come from previously developed scents that represent historical clothing and “*consumables*” as well as those developed based on the scientific analysis of (historic) objects

(Leemans, Tullett et al. 2022). It is the most comprehensive historic scent preservation methodology that exists, including six categories of olfactory reproductions that are based on the review of multiple case studies. The categories distinguish between olfactory reproductions that are developed based on several types of olfactory-related evidence (i.e. texts, images, fragrant residues, etc.) and achieved through different research methods or analysis (i.e. textual analysis, chemical investigation, etc.). For a comprehensive description of each of the terms, please consult ‘The Olfactory Reproduction Matrix’ (figure 3). One challenge of this methodology is that it lacks disciplinary focus. The scholars claim that the categories can describe olfactory reproductions developed from and for various purposes, including ‘olfactory art’. This makes it difficult for some to understand and apply these methods in practice. ‘Whiffstory’ encompasses all focuses of historic scent preservation as it can be applied to olfactory reproductions developed for a variety of reasons which are usually presented to the contemporary nose.

‘The NOMEN Project’ was published in July 2023 by the scientific committee of the Osmothèque Conservatoire International des Parfums. The Osmothèque is a non-profit organization founded in France in 1990 that dedicates their practice to archiving perfumes from the past and present. In addition to the preservation of historic perfumes, they design programmes and function as a place to disseminate trainings and research about perfume-making and its history (Bembibre 2021). They not only safeguard an archive of perfumes (today that number is 4,000), but they are also entrusted as guardian of perfume formulas which they are able to access in order to “*reweigh*”, or authentically reproduce, if the physical perfume is no longer available (Bembibre 2021).⁸ The Osmothèque is unique as they are able to reconstruct historic perfumes using the original materials and formula, ensuring that perfumes are authentically preserved for posterity (Bembibre 2021). ‘The NOMEN Project’ includes five distinct categories that further define the categories of perfumes made with historical intent or what they call an ‘*olfactory reconstitution*’ (Chazot, Camus et al. 2023, 2). For a comprehensive description of each of the terms, please consult ‘The Olfactory Reproduction Matrix’ (in the following chapter). This methodology is very comparable to ‘Whiffstory’ as it further defines olfactory reproductions based on the olfactory-related evidence and type of research analysis applied. However, although the writers claim that their methodology includes all olfactory reproductions that have a “*historical dimension*”, the language they choose to describe these categories is tied to the preservation of “*historic perfumes*” (Chazot, Camus et al. 2023, 3). The reproduction and preservation of these perfumes is not done explicitly for

“Does it harm a museum and its visitors if scents are presented as true replications, when the true level of interpretation behind these scents is unclear?”

public access, but rather to protect a scent at risk of extinction. This means that ‘The NOMEN Project’ falls under historic scent preservation focus one. Focus four is also relevant as the Osmothèque implements the reproduced perfumes into workshops and trainings for the public.

The ‘Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit’ was published in November 2023 by Odeuropa. The methodology was published in *The Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit: A ‘How-To’ Guide for Working with Smells in Museums and Heritage Institutions*, a handbook created to equip museum practitioners and others with the information they need to use scent as a storytelling technique in their own practice. To develop this guide, the Odeuropa team researched and evaluated previous methods of olfactory storytelling through the production of five olfactory events (Ehrich & Leemans 2021; Ehrich & Leemans 2022, Ehrich & Leemans 2023). The key learnings from this research informed the development of Odeuropa’s categorization of what they call “*Heritage Scent Creations*” (Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023, 77).⁹ Like the methodologies before, Odeuropa further defines olfactory reproductions created with historic intent. They name three types of olfactory reproductions: ‘Materially Informed Reconstructions’, ‘Historically Informed Interpretations’, and ‘Artistic Translations’ (Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023, 77-78). These three categories have two sets of subcategories: ‘Single Ingredient Representation’ vs. ‘Smell Composition’, and ‘Malodours’ vs. ‘Fragrance’ (Ehrich, Leemans et al. 2023, 77-78). For a comprehensive description of each of the terms, please consult ‘The Olfactory Reproduction Matrix’ (described in section 3.1). The ‘Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit’ took inspiration from Verbeek’s ‘In Search of Lost Scents’ but further distinguishes between olfactory reproductions that originate from a fragrant materiality and those interpreted from a historical source (written or otherwise). This shows consideration of ‘Whiffstory’, although simplified to ensure comprehension by a broader audience. The ‘Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit’ encompasses historic scent preservation focuses one, two, three and four, as the methodology can be applied to a variety of olfactory reproduction types. Focus four is key though, as *The Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit: A ‘How-To’ Guide for Working with Smells in Museums and Heritage Institutions* was developed to inform about how to use olfactory storytelling methods on the public.

The Olfactory Reproduction Matrix

Olfactory heritage scholars argue that olfactory museology lacks comprehensive scholarship that outlines best methods and practices for applying olfactory storytelling (Bembibre & Strlič 2017; Ehrich & Leemans 2021; Verbeek, Leemans et al. 2022; Ehrich & Leemans 2023). Although such

scholarship is on the rise, the research outcomes rarely reach the museum community. In fact, training programs for museum practitioners to learn techniques for olfactory storytelling do not exist (Bembibre & Strlič 2021; Bembibre & Strlič 2022). In response to this issue, I present a tool for museum practitioners to use when commissioning and contextualizing their own olfactory reproductions: the ‘Olfactory Reproduction Matrix’ (figure 3). The tool is a table that systematically organizes the information presented in each methodology of historic scent preservation (as presented in section 3), setting these methodologies in comparison with each other and prompting analysis of their different criteria. This allows the user to easier navigate the methodologies available to them and make a choice based on their description. The matrix also guides users through understanding the level of interpretation that their olfactory reproductions will have. By applying these terminologies to olfactory reproduction development, users can (1) streamline communication between museum practitioner and scent designer; (2) gain insights to effectively shape the communication and context in which the olfactory reproduction is presented in the museum; and (3) understand the research methods required to achieve these olfactory reproduction types.

Terminologies are listed for each methodology in rows 1-6. Terms listed in row 1 involve little/ no interpretation while terms in row 6 are creative interpretations.	Terminologies of In Search of Lost Scents by Dr. Caro Verbeek (2022)	Terminologies of Whiffstory by Odeuropa (2022)	Terminologies of The NOMEN Project by the Osmothèque and its Scientific Committee (2023)	Terminologies of the Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit by Odeuropa (2023)
#1		Preservation + Conservation + Restoration: an olfactory reproduction created within the domains of heritage and museum studies that restores its previous olfactory relevance, usually contributing to the safeguarding of a place or object of cultural significance. Research Methods: the collection of archival evidence (perfume formulas) and raw materials (that no longer exist).	Reweighting: a (historic) perfume composed by a modern-day perfumer from the original formula that outlines exact raw materials, quantities and techniques. The creation is true to the original formula without creative liberty. Research Methods: the collection of archival evidence (perfume formulas) and raw materials (that no longer exist).	
#2	Historically Informed Scent: an olfactory reproduction composed for the museum that is based on (art) historical research. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork, sensory panels, chemical investigations of fragrant residues.	Olfactory Re-creation: an olfactory reproduction created within the domains of history and perfumery that start from a detailed instruction or textual evidence. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork.	Adaptation: a historic perfume from before 1800 composed by a modern-day perfumer which is based on a recipe. Exact raw materials, quantities and techniques used to create that perfume are limited or vague. Perfumer may take creative liberty to fill in the gaps, but they remain true to the written recipe. Research Methods: archival and historical research.	Historically Informed Interpretation: an olfactory reproduction created for olfactory storytelling that is informed by archival research and/or visual analysis. The goal is to be as historically accurate as possible. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork
#3		Olfactory Reconstruction: an olfactory reproduction created within the domains of heritage science that starts from the olfactory materiality of an object. New fragrant materials which were not part of the original are usually necessary. Research Methods: Chemical investigations (e.g. VOC and Headspace Analysis) of fragrant residues, sensory panels with the public.	Reconstruction: a (historic) perfume remade based on chemically analysed residues. The perfumer intervenes as necessary only to fill in missing information. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, and chemical investigations (e.g. VOC and Headspace Analysis) of fragrant residues.	Materially Informed Reconstruction: an olfactory reproduction created for olfactory storytelling that starts from the fragrant materiality of a collection item or space. This item or space can be considered while an olfactory reproduction is being developed. Research Methods: Chemical investigations (e.g. VOC and Headspace Analysis) of fragrant residues, sensory panels with the public.

Figure 3. *The Olfactory Reproduction Matrix*: 2024. Created by: Sofia Collette Ehrich.

Terminologies are listed for each methodology in rows 1-6. Terms listed in row 1 involve little/ no interpretation while terms in row 6 are creative interpretations.	Terminologies of In Search of Lost Scents by Dr. Caro Verbeek (2022)	Terminologies of Whiffstory by Odeuropa (2022)	Terminologies of The NOMEN Project by the Osmothèque and its Scientific Committee (2023)	Terminologies of the Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit by Odeuropa (2023)
#4		Single Ingredient Representation: A scent applied in the domains of olfactory museology, history and perfumery that presents a historical smell narrative through a single raw material. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork.		
#5		Historical Smell Scene Composition: an olfactory reproduction created within the domains of history, perfumery and archaeology where accuracy is not the goal. Instead the scent is developed as a creative interpretation. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork.	Interpretation & Atmospherisation: a perfume composed based on historical resources about a person, narrative or place. Perfumer is allowed a lot of creative liberty. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork.	
#6	Artistic Creation: an olfactory reproduction created for the museum that is based on creative interpretation. These creations are meant to immerse visitors and stimulate them creatively. Research Methods: visual analysis of artwork's colour, shape and form, historical research.	Olfactory Imaginations – Conceptual Creations: an olfactory reproduction created within the domain of olfactory art, perfumery and history that works with a historical concept but is not intended to be historically accurate. Here, theatricality trumps accuracy. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork.	Evocation: a work of an imaginary past that allows the perfumer complete creative liberty. Historical sources only act as initial inspiration. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork.	Artistic Translation: an olfactory reproduction created for olfactory storytelling that translates a work of art, artefact and environment in a creative way. Here, theatricality is trumps accuracy, but the reproduction should add value to the storytelling. Research Methods: archival research, historical research, visual analysis of artwork.
Subcategories:	The following categories can fall under the two above types: ① Single Raw Material: an olfactory narrative communicated in the museum with single fragrant material (e.g. myrrh). ② Scent Composition: an olfactory narrative communicated in the museum through the combination of several raw materials (e.g. a smell of an Amsterdam canal house).			The following categories can fall under the three above types: ① Single Ingredient Representation: an olfactory narrative communicated in the museum with single fragrant material ② Smell Composition: an olfactory narrative communicated in the museum through the combination of several raw materials ③ Malodour: an olfactory narrative presented in the museum using a foul smell. ④ Fragrance: an olfactory narrative presented in the museum using a pleasant smell.

The four methodologies presented on the ‘Olfactory Reproduction Matrix’ are: ‘In Search of Lost Scents’ by Dr. Caro Verbeek from 2022, ‘Whiffstory’ by Odeuropa from 2022, ‘The NOMEN Project’ by the Osmothèque and its Scientific Committee from 2023, and lastly, ‘Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit’ by Odeuropa from 2023, which are put into chronological order from left to right. Olfactory reproduction terms are listed in each column by methodology. All information presented in the matrix is gathered from the published papers outlining the methodologies in detail. As an olfactory heritage researcher myself, I examined the terminologies and placed them in the matrix based on their similarities in application. The user can understand similarities and differences by navigating the rows on the matrix from left to right: terminologies that are on rows that are next to each other are comparable whereas terminologies next to an empty box imply differences. The column farthest to the left states that terminologies are listed from lowest level of modern interpretation (row #1) to most (creative) interpretation (row #6). This listing was possible due to the descriptions attributed to each terminology in the published papers as well as my own understanding of these terms and their application. Note that the level of modern interpretation indicated in this column is to be used as a helpful aid and not as a prescriptive guideline.

Analysis

The theoretical framework presented in this research offers a new understanding of olfactory interventions designed for the museum. Let us revisit the olfactory interventions designed by olfactory artist Sissel Tolaas for the MET’s exhibition, *Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion* (2024). About the scent design for the project, Tolaas said:

“What all these smells do is bring back or reawaken hidden life in all the items of concern. Visitors can engage with the items and exhibition through emotions and memory in the most efficient way and start to imagine the people who have been wearing the various garments” (Seipp 2024).

Tolaas’ reflection emphasizes the intent of her olfactory work: to trigger emotion and to enhance the imaginations of visitors via theatricality. When compared with the methodologies of historic scent preservation, we can understand Tolaas’ scents as level six ‘creative interpretations’. Created for theatrical effect rather than historical accuracy, this approach contradicts Tolaas’ repeated claim that her scents replicate the molecules identified

“Together, olfactory museology and historic scent preservation establish a theoretical framework that guides both the development of impactful olfactory storytelling practices in museums as well as informs the contextualization of olfactory reproductions to the public.”

on the MET's garments. Additionally, the curation and communication of Tolaas' olfactory reproductions is vague, leaving visitors uninformed about how her research and development *actually* contributed to the final reproductions presented in the gallery space. This approach overlooks a valuable chance to educate visitors on the olfactory heritage of fashion through the nose and offer a meaningful opportunity to critically engage with the olfactory reproductions presented in the gallery.

Through the description of the four methodologies of historic scent preservation, my research describes solutions for streamlining interdisciplinary collaboration between museum practitioners and scent designers. These solutions support transparency throughout the development process of olfactory reproductions, hence bringing forward olfactory reproductions that are both informative and engaging for the public. After the comparison of these methodologies, four key points for the olfactory storytelling process should be considered when shaping the communication of olfactory reproductions to the public:

1. Does the olfactory reproduction come from historical evidence or is it heavily interpreted through creative interpretation? Careful attention is placed on reproductions based on historic evidence, as historic scent preservation methodologies outline thirteen different options to choose from.
2. What type of research did the olfactory reproduction require? Did it require archival research, historical research, or chemical investigation/analysis? Is the olfactory reproduction informed by material investigation of the place or object?
3. What level of creative liberty was the creator allowed when composing the olfactory reproduction? Is this clearly a modern interpretation of the intended concept? How did the creator consider the research method when developing the final olfactory reproduction?
4. Is the olfactory reproduction presented as one raw material or a composition or materials? Is the olfactory reproduction a malodour or fragrance?

Taking these factors into account when designing olfactory interventions in the museum can enhance the educational value and impact of the olfactory reproduction presented.



Figure 4. *Press package for the Scent of the Afterlife card. Scientific Analysis Barbara Huber, Perfume Creation Carole Calvez and Creative Direction Sofia Collette Ehrich. Artwork by Michelle O' Reilly: 2023. Photo courtesy of Barbara Huber.*¹⁰

Through a case study, I will demonstrate the potential of presenting olfactory reproductions that not only captivate visitors but also effectively convey the details of the research methods behind their creation. In 2022, archeo-chemist Barbara Huber, olfactory museologist Sofia Collette Ehrich, and perfumer Carole Calvez worked together to create *The Scent of the Afterlife*, an olfactory reproduction developed based on the GC-MS, HT-GC-MS, and LC-MS/MS analyses carried out by Huber and her team on the canopic jar housing the organs of the noble Lady Senetnay, a the high-ranking Egyptian wet nurse of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (Huber, Hammann et al. 2023; Ehrich 2024).¹¹ The olfactory reproduction was greatly informed by Huber's peer reviewed publication detailing the chemical analysis that was performed on the jar, which was excavated by Howard Carter from a tomb in the Valley of the Kings over a century ago (Huber, Hammann et al. 2023). *The Scent of the Afterlife* was not only based on a credible scientific study, but the development process of the scent was closely documented. This ensured that the olfactory reproduction crafted by Calvez reflected the findings of Huber's research as closely as possible. This careful documentation process informed the final reproduction as well as the way the scent was communicated to the public via a QR code on the back of a scented card (figure 4 and 5). The QR code leads to a website that clearly outlines the research process that led up to the final scent and the evaluation process that the team conducted working towards the final reproduction.



Figure 5. *Museum display for the Scent of the Afterlife at the Moesgaard Museum in Denmark's exhibition, Ancient Egypt – Obsessed with Life: Denmark, 2023. Photograph by: Barbara Huber.*



Figure 6. *Barbara Huber sniffing the Scent of the Afterlife at the Moesgaard Museum in Denmark's exhibition, Ancient Egypt – Obsessed with Life: Denmark, 2023. Photograph courtesy of Barbara Huber.*

This project also raises an interesting point about how modern interpretation does not only happen during the development of the olfactory reproduction, but also when that scent is curated in the museum space. In 2023, *The Scent of the Afterlife* was displayed at the Moesgaard Museum in Denmark at their exhibition, *Ancient Egypt – Obsessed with Life*. Visitors to the exhibition were able to learn about ancient funerary practices via curated wall texts and canopic jars. In the exhibition, *The Scent of the Afterlife* functioned as an educational tool that provided visitors with a *fragrant* understanding of Egyptian funerary practices. The curators of the exhibition paid careful attention to how the olfactory reproduction was situated in the context of the exhibition, guaranteeing educational impact for the visitor. This was achieved in the following ways:

1. The olfactory reproduction was presented inside of a reconstructed canopic jar that mimicked the original jar from which the funerary balm was sampled from. This allowed visitors to experience the olfactory reproduction as if it were still inside its original canopic jar (figure 6).
2. The olfactory reproduction was situated next to the original canopic jar (on loan from Museum August Kestner, Germany) from which Huber and her team had extracted and analysed the balm. This allowed visitors to view the original jar that housed Lady Senetnay's organs after sniffing the balm's olfactory reproduction (figure 6).
3. The olfactory reproduction was placed in the exhibition's "*mummification workshop*", a part of the exhibition that presented the processes and substances that were employed during the ancient Egypt embalming process.¹²
4. The olfactory reproduction was presented together with a wall text that clearly indicated the research methods and materials that informed the creation of the olfactory reproduction.
5. *The Scent of the Afterlife* provides valuable steps forward for the field of olfactory museology. Projects like these are a perfect example of how we can develop olfactory experiences in museums that are both engaging and educational. I hope that successful projects like these encourage further collaboration between olfactory heritage researchers and museum practitioners - forging new paths forward that strengthen and legitimize the practices of olfactory storytelling into museum practice.

Conclusion

Museums internationally are using scents as a means of storytelling in their galleries, but a methodological process for developing olfactory reproductions is still lesser known and valued. By contributing pioneering research to the realm of olfactory heritage, this paper raises the importance of crafting intentional olfactory reproductions for the use in cultural heritage. Situated at the boundary of olfactory museology and historic scent preservation, the paper further legitimized the relevance of olfactory heritage research within museum practice. It addressed one of the main challenges that museum practitioners face when using modes of olfactory storytelling: designing olfactory interventions for topics of cultural heritage that are both engaging and educational. Solutions to this challenge lie in the four historic scent preservation methodologies, which can function as a tool to understand olfactory reproductions created for the interpretation of cultural heritage. When compiled and compared, the methodologies establish an olfactory reproduction discourse that officially defines and categorizes these scents based on the research methods and historical intent that they represent. This research offers a framework which museum practitioners and visitors can use to critically engage with olfactory reproductions designed for museums and understand their historic intent. With this new understanding of olfactory interventions, we can better measure the level of modern interpretation placed on olfactory reproductions, providing a new perspective to analyse and measure the integrity of olfactory related projects.

However, this research is only a first step to addressing the challenges of olfactory heritage and its place in museum practice. It is important that we continue to define the field of olfactory museology and its subsequent methodologies, which requires attention to two gaps in the field: firstly, the current historic scent preservation methodologies only allude to the field of olfactory art and inadequately defines its place in museum practice. We must clearly define the boundaries between olfactory art and olfactory museology and decide how these concepts impact the practices of olfactory museology. Secondly, scholars have specified methodologies for scents that carry historic intent but have neglected those with artistic interpretation. Further work on this second point would further define our understanding of how interpretation impacts olfactory reproductions that are a creative or abstract take on subjects of cultural heritage. As we continue to shape the field of olfactory museology, it is key that we also continue to evaluate visitor experience through measurements that aim to understand how olfactory reproductions effect educational impact on visitors. Lastly – and most importantly – olfactory heritage researchers and museum practi-

tioners must come together to establish a training program where museum practitioners can learn methods of olfactory storytelling. It is only with cooperation from the museum sector that this field will continue to grow, and that future olfactory heritage research will flourish.

“This research offers a framework which museum practitioners and visitors can use to critically engage with olfactory reproductions designed for museums and understand their historic intent.”

References

- Aggleton, John P., and Louise Waskett. "The ability of odours to serve as state dependent cues for real world memories: Can Viking smells aid the recall of Viking experiences?" *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 90, no. 1, 1999, pp. 1-7, doi.org/10.1348/000712699161170.
- Alexopoulos, Georgios, Cecilia Bembibre et al. "Odeuropa Deliverable D6.2 Questionnaires for measuring the value of introducing smells in GLAMs." *Odeuropa*, 2023.
- Bembibre, Cecilia. "Archiving the intangible: preserving smells, historic perfumes and other ways of approaching the scented past." *The Smells and Senses of Antiquity in the Modern Imagination*, 2021, pp. 155-73.
- Bembibre, Cecilia, Inger Leemans, Sophie Elpers et al. "The Olfactory Heritage Toolkit." *Zenodo Odeuropa*, 28 February 2024, doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10775277.
- Bembibre, Cecilia, and Matija Strlič. "Smell of heritage: a framework for the identification, analysis and archival of historic odours." *Heritage Science* 5, 2017, pp. 1-11.
- Bembibre, Cecilia, and Matija Strlič. "Odeuropa Deliverable D6.1 Guidelines on the use of smells in GLAMs." *Odeuropa*, 2021.
- Bembibre, Cecilia, and Matija Strlič. "Preserving historic smells: The question of authenticity." *Mediality of Smells*, edited by Jean-Alexandre Perras and Erika Wicky, Oxford, 2021.
- Bembibre, Cecilia, and Matija Strlič. "From smelly buildings to the scented past: an overview of olfactory heritage." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 12, 2022, doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.718287.
- Borrelli-Persson, Laird. "The Met's 'Sleeping Beauties' Exhibition Is Designed to Awaken Your Senses." *Vogue*, 6 May 2024, www.vogue.com/article/the-mets-sleeping-beauties-exhibition-is-designed-to-awaken-your-senses.
- Chazot, Isabelle Reynaud, Alice Camus, Sophie-Valentine Borloz et al. "THE NOMEN PROJECT Classification of fragrant compositions for historical purposes." *HAL Open Science*, 2023, hal.science/hal-04158225.
- Drobnick, Jim. "Volatile effects: Olfactory dimensions in art and architecture." *Berg*, 2005, pp. 265-280.
- Eardley, Alison F., Claire Dobbin, Joselia Neves et al. "Hands-on, shoes-off: multisensory tools enhance family engagement within an art museum." *Visitor Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2018, pp. 79-97, doi.org/10.1080/10645578.2018.1503873.
- Ehrich, Sofia Collette, and Inger Leemans. "Odeuropa Deliverable D7.2 Impact Activities Report Y1." *Odeuropa*, 2021, odeuropa.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2022/05/D7_2_Impact_Activities_Report_Y1.pdf.
- Ehrich, Sofia Collette, and Inger Leemans. "Odeuropa Deliverable D7.3 Impact Activities Report Y2." *Odeuropa*, 2022, odeuropa.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2023/08/Draft_D7_3_Impact_Activities_Report_Y2.pdf.
- Ehrich, Sofia Collette, and Inger Leemans. "Odeuropa Deliverable D7.4 The Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit." *Odeuropa*, 2023, odeuropa.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2023/09/Draft_D7_4_Olfactory_Storytelling__Toolkit_rev.pdf.
- Ehrich, Sofia Collette, Inger Leemans, Cecilia Bembibre et al. "Olfactory Storytelling Toolkit: A 'How-To' Guide for Working with Smells in Museums and Heritage Institutions." *Odeuropa*, 13 November 2023, doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10254737.
- Ehrich, Sofia Collette. "The Scents of Arabia – A 'Nose-On' Approach." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 55, 2024, forthcoming.
- Huber, Barbara, S. Hammann, C. E. Loeben et al. "Biomolecular characterization of 3500-year-old ancient Egyptian mummification balms from the Valley of the Kings." *Scientific Reports*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2023.
- Leemans, Inger, William Tullett, Cecilia Bembibre et al. "Whiffstory: Using Multidisciplinary Methods to Represent the Olfactory Past." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 127, no. 2, 2022, pp. 849-879, doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhac159.
- Levent, Nina, and Alvaro Pascual-Leone. *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Luntz, Stephen. "Cleopatra's Perfume Has Been Recreated by Scientists – and It's Spicy." *IFLScience*, 21 April 2023, www.iflscience.com/cleopatras-perfume-has-been-recreated-by-scientists-and-its-spicy-63605.
- Marx, Lizzie, Sofia Collette Ehrich, William Tullett et al. "Making Whiffstory: A Contemporary Re-creation of an Early Modern Scent for Perfumed Gloves." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 127, no. 2, 2022, pp. 881-893, doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhac150.
- Seipp, Carla. "Exploring the Scent Technology in the Met Museum's Sleeping Beauties Exhibition." *BeautyMatter*, 10 May 2024, beautilmatter.com/articles/the-mets-sleeping-beauties-exhibition.
- Verbeek, Caro. "Presenting Volatile Heritage: Two Case Studies on Olfactory Reconstructions in the

Museum.” *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2016, pp. 33-42, doi.org/10.5749/futuante.13.2.0033.

Verbeek, Caro, Inger Leemans, and Bernardo Fleming.

“How can scents enhance the impact of guided museum tours? Towards an impact approach for olfactory museology.” *The Senses and Society*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2022, pp. 315-342, doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2022.2142012.

Endnotes

- 1 My research would not have been possible without the incredible, cumulative knowledge that I gained working with my colleagues at Odeuropa, a European funded, Horizon 2020 project that concluded in 2023. I would also like to thank my former collaborators Carole Calvez and Barbara Huber for experimenting on olfactory projects with me. Lastly, appreciation goes to those who helped me with this paper along the way: my husband Maximilian Ehrich and mentors Nezka Pfeifer and Sabrina Sauer.
- 2 Detailed visuals can be consulted via Tolaas's Instagram @sssl_berlin. The post shared on June 24th, 2024, shows the work in detail.
- 3 Examples of such projects are Odeuropa (2021-2023), Alchemies of Scent (2021-Present), and ODOTHEKA (2022-present). To read more about Odeuropa, visit www.odeuropa.eu. To read more about ODOTHEKA, visit hslab.fkkt.uni-lj.si/2021/09/24/odotheka-exploring-and-archiving-heritage-smells/. To read more about Alchemies of Scent visit www.alchemiesofscent.org.
- 4 For example, *Fleeting – Scents in Colour* (Netherlands, 2020), *Smell It!* (Germany, 2021), *L'Odyssée Sensorielle* (France, 2021), *London: Port City* (United Kingdom, 2021), *Sensational Books* (United Kingdom, 2022), *Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion* (United States, 2024).
- 5 Please note that because olfactory heritage research is still a growing field, some scholars will question the legitimacy of what I use as a 'theoretical framework' and as 'methodologies'. I deliberately establish the framework of my research around these concepts to further legitimize the field and practices of olfactory storytelling. Literature in the reference list can be consulted should any of the concepts be unfamiliar.
- 6 Verbeek's methodology was technically published five months after '*Whiffstory*'. However, I consider Verbeek's methodology first on the timeline. It was developed as part of her PhD in 2014 but never formally published until November 2022.
- 7 International Flavors and Fragrances Inc. is an American corporation that develops products for food, scents and nutrition which is marketed on a global scale. For more information see www.iff.com.
- 8 For more information about the Osmothèque Conservatoire International des Parfums, see www.osmotheque.fr/en/.
- 9 Odeuropa co-developed the production of multiple olfactory events and projects as a way of experimenting and testing methods of olfactory storytelling. These findings were closely monitored and documented for the reports written for the European Union as deliverables. The author of this paper led this development.
- 10 For more information, visit barbara-huber.com/scent-of-the-afterlife-a-peek-into-ancient-egyptian-mummification/.
- 11 To see the website for *Scent of the Afterlife*, visit barbara-huber.com/scent-of-the-afterlife-a-peek-into-ancient-egyptian-mummification/.
- 12 Find more information about the exhibition here: www.moesgaardmuseum.dk/en/exhibitions/ancient-egypt-obsessed-with-life/

Shard Transformation



What if Artificial Intelligence (AI) could enable humans and nature to jointly repair human destruction? Technology is often seen as driving humans and nature apart. In this art project AI allows them to create together instead.

We are living in a time of climate change and confrontation with nature. We need to rethink technology; and no longer use it as a destructive force or a human tool, but as a medium to breed empathy and understanding between humans and nature. Eventually we need to let humans and nature create a better world together. The Shard Transformation was based on this vision about technology.

Background

In his work, artist Jeroen van der Most investigates how technologies like artificial intelligence could erase the imaginary divisions between humans and their surroundings. This is not limited to the barrier between humans and nature.

The removal of these boundaries results in deeper relationships between the entities or forces that inhabit the environment. From an increased mutual awareness and compassion, these deeper connections eventually result in shared creations that benefit the ecosystem as a whole.

When pursued, this vision about technology has consequences for art and design, as they become less human-focused. Often, technology is seen as merely a human extension of human creativity. It is the human designer or artist who ultimately determines the outcome of a creative process. Van der Most explores how AI would enable forces like nature to become autonomous actors too, which co-determine designs and the outcome of creative processes.

How It Was Made

The Shard Transformation was worked on over the course of a year, starting just before the Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020. The following steps were taken to complete the project:

- First the artist broke a large number of mirrors in the Amsterdam Forest.
- He took pictures of the individual shards. These were numbered, digitalized, and prepared for further processing.
- The artist also took pictures of thousands of forest flowers surrounding the mirrors. A methodology was developed to do this, in which high resolution pictures were taken of the forest floor. Algorithms were then built to extract the flowers from the larger pictures.
- An AI system was trained on the flower images. After analyzing thousands of flower shapes, the AI system could create new flower-like forms.
- The system was combined with custom algorithms to calculate combinations and positions of the digitalized shards, that together resemble the flower-shapes in chaotic patterns.
- The system generated printable documents with instructions that show the artist how to rebuild the mirrors into the flower shapes step-by-step.
- Based on the instructions, three final shard artworks were created by the artist. The shards were mounted on wooden plates (50 x 50 cm each) in black frames. A paint to which traces of forest soil were added, was used to give the wooden plates a dark color. The pieces can be seen as shared creations of human and nature.

Video

You can find a video about the project through this link:

[jeroenvandermost.com/
the-shard-transformation](https://jeroenvandermost.com/the-shard-transformation)

The Polyphonic Object

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024



Marian Markelo aka Okomfo Nana Efua

Priestess/Educator

Marian Markelo is a Winti priest and educator committed to preserving Afro-Surinamese heritage. She actively promotes heritage through education, art, and museum collaborations, fostering awareness of historical and spiritual traditions.

Boris van Berkum

Visual Artist

Boris van Berkum is a contemporary visual Neo-artist who fuses styles and forms from various cultures and religions in his art. Through working with ceramics, bronze, and innovative materials, he combines traditional and modern techniques.

Annemarie de Wildt

Historian/Curator

Annemarie de Wildt, historian and Amsterdam Museum curator, has created 50+ exhibitions on topics like sex work and colonialism. She innovates museum collections and serves as vice chair of ICOM City Museums.

Markus Balkenhol

Anthropologist

Markus Balkenhol is a senior researcher at the Meertens Institute. He is a social anthropologist working on colonial heritage and memory in the Netherlands. His recent publications include *The Secular Sacred* and *Tracing Slavery*.

Martje Onikoyi

Heritage Professional

Martje Onikoyi, Reinwardt Academy graduate and Art History (pre-)master's student, explores museums' transformative roles, focusing on spiritual items and their communication to diverse audiences as a young heritage professional.

The Kabra mask

Amsterdam Museum Journal

In 'The Polyphonic Object' five analyses by scholars and artists from different perspectives and (academic) fields show the layers of complexity a single object can hold. Through their (historical, museum studies, anthropological, heritage studies, and artist-perspective) reconstructions, they uncover the different stories behind the Kabra ancestor mask created by Marian Markelo, or Okomfo Nana Efua, in collaboration with Boris van Berkum. As a museum object that still regularly functions in ritual ceremonies, the Kabra ancestor mask raises questions regarding the use and purpose of museum objects.

Issue #3 Winter 2024



Boris van Berkum and Marian Markelo
Kabra ancestor mask, 2013
Amsterdam Museum

The Kabra ancestor mask was created in 2013, as an initiative of Marian Markelo, who was keen to bring images back into Winti culture in this way. That same year, a dancer (Vanessa Felter) wearing the mask accompanied Marian Markelo for the first time at her libation at the annual Ketu Koti commemoration in the Oosterpark. The Amsterdam Museum purchased the mask for its collection, but it is also still used at Winti rituals, such as Ketu Koti - the annual commemoration of the abolition of slavery.

Marian Markelo aka Okomfo Nana Efua (Winti priestess)



In December 1992, I attended the PANAFEST in Ghana, a pan-African festival of art and theatre. The theme was the re-emergence of African civilizations. PANAFEST celebrates the heritage of the African Diaspora, promotes unity, understanding and pride at the global level. During this visit, I experienced a great lack of African-oriented spirituality and attention to the ancestors. I expressed this dissatisfaction to the then-director John Darkey, and was given the opportunity to organize an ancestors' night during the following edition.

The late Marlene Ceder and I decided to symbolically bring the ancestors back to the continent. For this, we chose Ghana, because the infrastructure was familiar to us. I presented this decision to the ancestors in a question to the oracle. My consultation to the oracle resulted in the ancestors' request, or mission, to bring back the spiritual utensils, images and masks to the Winti. In turn, I asked the foremother who posed that request: 'how should I carry out that order?' She replied: 'The moment you meet the right person, I will give you



Figure 1: *Libation for the ancestors* by Marian Markelo during the National Commemoration of the Abolition of Slavery, with performer Vanessa Felter inside the Kabra mask: 1 July 2013. Photograph by: James van der Ende.

the sign'. I resigned myself to the outcome, and realized that something would happen that would have an important connection to art, spirituality and history!

While supervising a Winti-feast of a family member fourteen years ago in Rotterdam, I met Boris van Berkum. Upon our meeting, I received a sign from my foremother, who told me: 'this is the human artist you should work with to bring the visual tradition into the Winti'. I subsequently commissioned Boris, to start developing Winti art. Boris was not familiar with Winti culture, and spent three years on the road with me to experience the practical experience of Winti and to do research in various places such as Surinam.

We then entered into an ancestor-inspired collaboration to carry out the ancestors' mission. Together, we departed on a beautiful spiritual-, historical-, and art-technical journey. In the year 2013, at the 150th commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Surinam and the Dutch Caribbean, we were allowed to present the Kabra mask to the Netherlands (figure 1). In June 2013, we were given the opportunity to experience the first major public performance at the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal. The audience was impressed by the presentation by the Amsterdam Southeast-based theatre company Untold, and the similarly South-east-based music formation Black Harmony.

The Kabra mask removes millions of

enslaved African people from anonymity. With this mask, these people were given a face; a revision of a part of history, that did not tell the story of the ancestors from their own perspective. As such, the ancestors were invisible in the stories of those in power. Those physical ancestors have now become ancestor spirits for their descendants, and are actively involved in their descendants' present lives. During the Kabra Neti – the traditional night of the ancestors in the Muiderkerk in Amsterdam, organised by the Stichting *Eer en Herstel* [translation: 'Honour and Restoration Foundation'] and the Afro-Caribbean Grassroots – the mask dances with the descendants. Similarly, during Ketikoti Junior, the dancing of the mask with youngsters forms an integral part of the celebration. If, due to circumstances, the situation occurs that the mask does not dance at the Kabra Neti, it is definitely missed! Moreover, the mask is an integral part of the ceremony during the annual commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Amsterdam's Oosterpark.

The Kabra mask has however also had moments, where doubts have been expressed about the functionality or necessity of using a mask as part of Winti culture, as some have argued that 'Winti knows no images'. In response to this, I would argue that the mask is part of rehabilitating Winti culture and religion from the damage it has suffered during four centuries of colonial oppression. The Kabra mask is the product of an ancestral collaboration in which art, spirituality and history have come together. Let this collaboration, that is based on respect for individuality and expertise, have an aura that contributes to the achievement of healing in this painful historical narrative.

Boris van Berkum (visual artist)



In July 2010, I met Winti priestess Marian Markelo during a Winti dance ritual on the Eiland van Brienenoord in Rotterdam, where I had a temporary summer studio. There, Marian asked me if I wanted to make art, such as masks and sculptures, for Winti rituals, Winti spirituality and Winti culture. This commission for a Winti art collection had been appointed to her by her ancestors 20 years before we met. Now, they pointed to me as the artist who would help her with it. I immediately said yes. Our meeting turned out to be the

beginning of a fruitful collaboration between a black Winti priestess and a white artist, and an alliance between art and spirituality.

Winti Internship

Having no Winti or Afro Surinamese background myself, I started an intensive 'Winti internship' with Marian. My internship involved in-depth research on Winti, slavery history and West African art collections in museums. I participated in study tours to Ghana, Togo and Benin, and attended numerous Winti

rituals, both in the Netherlands and Suriname. And I talked a lot with Marian, historians, curators, and members of the Winti community.

The main objectives of such a Winti art collection became increasingly clear to me:

① **The revival of the West African tradition of art usage within ritual and spiritual contexts.**

This tradition, lost on the mainly Protestant plantations, includes the use of images and masks, and is now being reintroduced into Winti spirituality and rituals. This provides an opportunity to create a new material heritage that can be actively used within Winti rituals.

② **The rehabilitation of Winti.**

At the hands of the Christian churches and the colonial Dutch government, Winti was seen in a bad light among various population groups for centuries. People were cut off from their cultural and spiritual African roots; cut off from their power. A new Winti art collection and its presentations at important cultural venues such as Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Theater Rotterdam and the Amsterdam Museum, as well as the national commemoration of the history of slavery, contribute to the restoration of institutional suppression of the spirituality of ancestors and descendants, and to the rehabilitation of Winti itself.

I learnt that the Kabra – the ancestors – have an important place. They are the founding fathers of the world around us, which we in turn build on. The Kabra remain connected to us. This bond is represented as a circle, in which the living of today, those yet to be born in the future and our living dead (the ancestors) are inextricably linked. The essence of Winti is being with others and having time for each other, both with living people on earth and with the deceased ancestors. Winti brings about connection through which you

build happiness and well-being, for yourself and others. After three years of study, I was able to create the first real Winti artwork: the Kabra ancestor mask.

Design, Technique, and Choice of Materials

The shape of the Kabra ancestor mask is based on a Yoruba Gelede ancestor mask from the collection of the Afrika Museum. The mask was selected by Marian Markelo in the depot, where it was 3D-scanned by me. The original Yoruba mask is 40 cm high, but I enlarged it to 66 cm, because the ritual ceremonies in the Netherlands are much larger in size than in, say, Benin or Nigeria. The mask should therefore be more visible during ceremonies and rituals such as the National Remembrance of the History of Slavery. The Kabra mask was made in milled PU foam and finished with a transparent epoxy lacquer. The ears of the mask were painted with a layer of lacquer with brass powder: an intuitive choice that was later interpreted by the audience to mean that the ancestors with their golden ears listen closely to us, the living. The mask is plastered with batik fabric in blue and white, traditional colours associated with the Kabra within Winti culture. The blue thereby represents the royal lineage from West Africa; the white symbolizes death, but also cleanliness and purity – both important concepts in Winti. In another project, 'Kabra Blue', I connect this choice of colour to the Dutch ancestral tradition of Delftware.¹

The Kabra mask is worn during ceremonies by a regular dancer, Vanessa Felter. It is a helmet mask, meaning it is worn on the dancer's head, with her looking out from underneath the mask through the tulle collar. The Kabra mask is part of a wider Winti art collection, which consists of a growing body of visual art, design, and theatre productions, all related to and now part of Winti.

Afro Renaissance in Winti, a Neo Art Tradition.

In the preface to *Neo* (2003), Sjarel Ex, former director of the Central Museum, underlines the relevance of 'neo art' to the contemporary art world. According to him, neo art is not merely about imitating historical styles, but rather about critically reinterpreting and reconfiguring these styles for the present time. According to Ex, neo art is about creating new meanings by approaching old styles in a 'fresh' way. Even before meeting Marian Markelo, I considered myself a 'neo-artist'. I created work inspired by my fascination with styles and forms from various cultures and eras, and brought them together in contemporary art. Now, I do this in close collaboration

with representatives of these cultures, as well as historians and curators, to ensure artistic integrity and accelerate innovation. My work stems from a hybrid art practice, where I believe that each work of art requires a specific execution and technique tailored to its design and intended function. That way, I combine traditional and modern forms within a multidisciplinary and intercultural approach.

For me, the methodology of 3D scanning African art objects from museum collections and creating new contemporary Winti art based on this data, is a way of integrating and contemporizing the work of my predecessors. I consider this a typical neo-method. In the case of the Kabra mask, I transformed a 3D scan of a Yoruba Gelede helmet mask into



Figure 1: Collage of the creative process of the Kabra mask. Courtesy of: Boris van Berkum.

a Winti ancestor mask. This makes the authentic and typical Nigerian formal language an essential part of a new Afro-Surinamese Winti art object. I categorize this as an African renaissance within Winti culture, and thus a form of neo art or 'revival art' tradition.

The Afrika Museum Collection, Graveyard or Database?

I got the idea to proceed as such, when I learned that Stanley Bremer, museum director of the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, was putting the Africa collection up for sale. With the proceeds, Bremer wanted to redevelop parts of the historic museum building (Prince Hendrik's sailing club) into a luxury hotel. The idea was to generate additional income that would make the museum less dependent on state and municipal subsidies. The plans were ultimately not implemented, due to opposition from cultural and social groups. They felt that selling the Africa collection – an early trade collection – was unethical and went against the mission of a museum.

I spoke to Marian about this matter. Did the precious masterpieces of the Africa collection not serve as the Afro-Surinamer's Van Goghs and Rembrandts? She made a remarkable statement: 'When I see an Africa collection, I see a graveyard of ancestral art. In African thought, a spirit or ancestor can take place in an art object, a sculpture or a mask. But that object must continue to be used in a ritual or spiritual context. If this does not happen (as in museums) then the energy vacates the object and an empty shell remains.' In response, I argued that I saw a database of forms and patterns, of artworks, which by 3D scanning African artworks, we can 'liberate', as it were, from the museum showcases and depots; as such, we give them a new life within contemporary rituals and Winti spirituality.

On a spiritual level, this way of working is a form of ancestor worship and cooperation

with the ancestors. This is emphasized by the process that precedes creation: as before the objects are 3D-scanned, Marian Markelo performs a libation offering to honour the ancestral makers and acknowledge their spiritual presence. Marian asks for the blessing and spiritual protection of the ancestors who created these original pieces during their lifetime. She also asks their permission for their forms to be used via 3D-scanning for the creation of new Winti artworks. As such, respect and gratitude are shown for the heritage. This ritual highlights the importance of a spiritual dimension when dealing with heritage and museum collections, especially in a postcolonial context.

References

- Ex, Sjarel, et al. *Neo*. Centraal Museum, 2003.
- Van Dongen, Alexandra. *Alles eindelijk in flux*. Kaba Blauw, 17 November 2022. kabrablauw.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Alles-eindelijk-in-flux-Kaba-Blauw-Alexandra-van-Dongen-17-11-2022.pdf. Accessed 21 November 2024.

Endnotes

- 1 For more on my project *Kaba Blauw*, see Alexandra van Dongen's essay 'Alles eindelijk in flux' (2022).

Annemarie de Wildt (historian/curator)



For the past ten years the Kaba mask has been a connection between the Amsterdam Museum and society, especially the descendants of the enslaved, but it has also fundamentally challenged our thinking about museum objects in the light of reproduction techniques such as 3D printing.

On July 1st, 2013, the yearly Ketu Ketu commemoration obtained a new element.¹ The ancestors, enslaved during the colonial Dutch past, joined the gathering of activists, politicians and policymakers around the Dutch

National Slavery Monument. I was moved by the Kaba (ancestor) mask and by the way Marian Markelo summoned and addressed the ancestors, while she gave a libation to them by pouring water from a calabash (figure 1).² She talked in Dutch and Sranan Tongo (Surinamese), both to the ancestors and to the people present in the park and those who watched the event on television.

Winti-priestess Nana Efua Markelo was one of the people that played a big role in the 'slavery trail' we created in the exhibition



Figure 1: Marian Markelo and performer Vanessa Felter with the Kabra mask during the commemoration of abolition of slavery: Amsterdam, 1 July 2017.

Photograph by: Annemarie de Wildt.

The Golden Age, that was on display in the Amsterdam Museum in 2013 (Kofi & de Wildt 2019). After experiencing the impact of the Kabra mask at the commemoration, I proposed that the Amsterdam Museum would acquire the mask for the museum collection. Apart from the esthetical value, there were various arguments for the acquisition. The object made its first appearance in Amsterdam in 2013, during the commemoration of 150 years since the abolition of slavery. Journalist Liesbeth Tjon A Meeuw called the collaboration between a white artist and a black Winti-priestess “one of the most important impetuses to reveal the shared history and the collective responsibility for the process

of healing the colonial past” (Tjon A Meeuw, 2014). Furthermore, the mask represents a new – or rather renewed – element in Winti, a religion that has many followers in Amsterdam. Equally important is the way of production: the 3D scanning technique, that enabled the ‘re-appropriation’ of an object that was, as some people would say, ‘stolen from Africa’. The Amsterdam Museum holds many objects and has told many stories of white ancestors (although they usually aren’t called ancestors). Through the Kabra mask, the museum could engage with ancestors of the enslaved and their descendants.

Could the mask, as a museum object, continue to dance? Within the museum, the

possible acquisition led to lively discussions about collecting and about how strict the regular rules for loans should be applied. In the midst of the acquisition process, I attended a lecture of anthropologist James Clifford.³ Clifford argued that art museums must learn from anthropologists to see objects as a process and not just as a product. The use of the object adds value. This is exactly what happens when the Kabra mask dances and gives the ancestors an opportunity to manifest themselves. masks make sounds, Clifford stated; they move, but they lose that ability in museum display cases. The discussion about the acquisition took place in a time during which the Netherlands, as well as other countries that had been involved in slave trade and slavery, were increasingly dealing with their colonial past.

In my conversations with artist Boris van Berkum about the possibility of an acquisition, I mentioned the risks the Kabra mask would face outside the museum. He responded by pointing to the way masks are treated in Africa: when they become old and damaged, they can be replaced with newly made ones that are charged with spirituality before use. The detailed scans of the Egungun mask, could serve to create a new Kabra mask if necessary. I realized that this would naturally spark another debate within the museum about how to handle the 2013 'original' Kabra mask. The debates about the Kabra mask centred not only on the colonial past, but also on questions regarding the authenticity of objects and the possibility of their use, also outside the museum, and on the museum's role in society.

Most of the curatorial staff and the director supported the acquisition. The collection department initially was more hesitant. The sometimes-heated discussions in the museum concerned questions like: 'what if it gets dirty? Does the object need to go into the low

oxygen chamber every time it has been out of the museum?'⁴ Would that diminish its spiritual power?' Eventually, the introduction of a new category of objects called 'useable collection' [original: 'gebruikscollectie'] would allow other people than curators and conservators to handle the mask. The Kabra mask eventually became an object that links the museum to the descendants of the enslaved and makes the connection with the ancestors tangible. The Amsterdam Museum holds many objects and stories of and about white ancestors (although they usually aren't called ancestors). Including the Kabra mask is a way of making space for enslaved ancestors and engaging with their descendants.

Social life of the Kabra mask

How does a city museum deal with a spiritual object like the Kabra mask? The situation of religious objects in museums is changing, as Crispin Paine analyses in *Religious Objects in Museums* (2013). Not just anthropology museums, that have always taken religion seriously, but also art museums, that previously focussed on aesthetics, have started to pay attention to the sacred character of the exhibits and the religious meaning of objects. History (and city) museum have shifted from a focus on historical religious institutions to an awareness of other faiths in present-day society (Paine 2013). Most religious museum objects have shifted roles once they entered the museum. The Kabra mask is exceptional, because from the beginning it had a dual life as an object inside and outside the museum. It has been part of museum exhibitions, but also of the yearly Keti Koti commemoration, other processions and events, such as the *Memre Waka* [translation: 'Memory Walk'] procession on the 1st of June past locations related to slavery heritage.⁵ The mask has also has danced at the Winti Bal Masque; played a role in 'location theatre'⁶ in Amsterdam South-



Figure 2: Performance during theater project 'Wijksafari Bijlmer edition' directed by Adelheid Roosen and her company *Female Economy*: Amsterdam, 2016.

Photograph by: Annemarie de Wildt.

East (*Wijksafari* by Adelheid Roosen, figure 2); featured in documentaries (*Traces of Sugar* by Ida Does, figure 3); as well as in educational programmes at the Wereldmuseum.

Referring to Arjun Appadurai's concept of the social life of objects, anthropologist Rhoda Woets posed a fascinating question on the weblog *Standplaats Wereld*: should the Kabra-mask, travelling between the museum glass cases, storage room and ritual ceremonies, be considered as an object that is dead or an object that is alive? In what ways will the mask be loaded with meaning? (Appadurai 1986; Woets 2014) For Marian Markelo/ Okomfo Nana Efua, the Kabra mask embodies the millions of enslaved ancestors. Before the

Kabra mask accompanies her during the commemoration, she re-establishes this connection in a spiritual way.

Collective remembrance

The Kabra mask is a symbol of resilience and a catalyst for collective remembrance, inviting participants to honour the struggles of the ancestors while celebrating their freedom. Through its visual and performative elements, it encourages participation and dialogue. This museum object can also be part of spiritual rituals where it dances among the people. To Van Berkum and Markelo, this is an 'African' use of the mask, as opposed to its more static 'European' use in a museum exhibition



Figure 3: Filming in the Amsterdam Museum for the documentary *Traces of Sugar* with director Ida Does, Marian Markelo, Vanessa Felter with Kbra mask and camera man Jurgen Lisse: 2017. Photograph by: Tom van der Molen.

(Balkenhol 2015). The Kbra mask connects people through time by acknowledging the presence of the ancestors. It also connects people through space by connecting the ceremony in an Amsterdam park with rituals performed in the continent where the enslaved originated.

References

- Ex, Appadurai, Arjun, editor. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Balkenhol, Markus. *Working with the ancestors: the kabra mask and the 'african renaissance' in the afro-surinamese winti religion*. *Material Religion*, vol.11, no. 2, 2015, pp. 250-254, doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2015.105913
- Blanca van der Scheer, Inez, et al. Polyphonic Curation. Looking Back and Ahead to the Colonial Past at the Amsterdam Museum." *The Critical Visitor: Changing Heritage Practices*, edited by Eliza Steinbock and Hester Dibbits, Reinwardt Academy, 2024, pp. 125-158.
- Hondius, Dienne, et al. *Gids Slavernijverleden Amsterdam/Slavery Heritage Guide*. LM Publishers, 2014.
- Kofi, Richard and Annemarie de Wildt. "Meer dan een zwarte bladzijde." *Beleid en Maatschappij*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2019, pp. 265-275, doi:10.5553/BenM/138900692019046002006.
- Paine, Crispin. *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Tjon A Meeuw, Liesbeth. "Een nieuw verhaal voor de zwarte bladzijden." *De Nieuwe Liefde*, vol. 12, 2014, pp. 10-16.
- Woets, Rhoda. "Het museum als mausoleum voorbij: het rituele en etnografische leven van een Kabra masker." *Standplaats Wereld*, 30 September 2024, standplaatswereld.nl/het-museum-als-mausoleum-voorbij-het-rituele-en-etnografische-leven-van-een-kabra-masker/ Accessed 15 november 2024.

Endnotes

- 1 1 July 1963 was the date of the legal end of slavery in the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. Ketikoti, Surinamese for 'Breaking the Chains', is the yearly celebration of the abolition of slavery.
- 2 Hollowed-out and dried fruits from calabash trees are a typical West-African household utensil, used for drink and food, but also as vessel for knowledge and wisdom.
- 3 Keynote speech given during the symposium Collecting Geographies: Global Programming and Museums of Modern Art Symposium on 14 March 2014, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. For more information, see www.stedelijk.nl/nl/nieuws/stedelijk-symposium-collecting-geographies-global-programming-and-museums-of-modern-art
- 4 The low oxygen chamber is a space in the museum storage centre, where anoxic disinfestation is used as a safe and poison free method to control insect pests.
- 5 In 2013, the Mapping Slavery project started, aimed at uncovering the oft-hidden traces of slavery and slave trade in Amsterdam. The project resulted in the *Gids Slavernijverleden Amsterdam/Slavery Heritage Guide* (2014) of which I was one of the authors. This book sparked a flow of publications investigating the (visual) traces of slavery of various other cities. See also Blanca van der Scheer et al. (2024).
- 6 A theatre performance that is performed in a location other than a theatre.

Markus Balkenhol (anthropologist)



What might it mean to 'diversify' and 'decolonize' history, to take seriously someone else's memory, and not to remain in colonial amnesia? The Kabra mask suggests that this might also mean at least to question and suspend, if not reject, neatly modern distinctions: the past and the present, the secular and the sacred, fact and fiction, people and things. Life and death. It might mean to suspend anxiety about things becoming untidy, and to accept that slavery is not simply long ago, but that its afterlives also reach into the present.

The story of the Kabra mask has been making things untidy right from the start when, as the story goes, in 1998 Marian's *afo* Sofia (her mother's father's mothers' mother) contacted her to give her the task of bringing back religious art back into the Winti. Sofia guided Marian when she met Boris, and she guided them both when they selected the mask in the Afrika Museum. Boris sees the mask as a literal collaboration with the ancestors. 3D technology, in his view, has been able to establish a connection with the ancestors who



Figure 1: Marieke Kruithof restoring the Kabra mask, restoration atelier Amsterdam Museum: Amsterdam, 2023. Photograph by: Boris van Berkum.

worked on the same object. Vanessa Felter, the mask's dancer, regularly experiences the presence of the ancestors when she is close to the mask. Marian explains that the mask stands for the millions of people who have been enslaved, and whose histories have yet to be written. And although she emphasizes that the object itself is not inhabited by the ancestors (as would be the case, for instance, in certain artifacts from West Africa), the ancestors are attracted to the mask.

The mask may be seen as an effort to re-write the history of slavery in the Netherlands as an entanglement of enslavement, rupture, violence, survival, resilience and creativity. In this rewriting, the ancestors have

an important voice.

Does that mean that the ancestors are historians? There are good reasons to say they cannot be. Boundaries between fact and fiction, for instance, have the function of limiting what is possible to say about the past (Hartman 2019; Rigney 2001); and especially in a time of mis- and disinformation, it is important to insist on certain scientific conventions and standards – like transparency about methods and analysis, and scholarly conduct that prohibits falsification, fabrication or plagiarism (Dutch Anthropological Association 2019). But that is not to say that everything that is not science, is mere fiction, and should therefore be excluded from understandings of how the

present relates to the past. What if we were to take the ancestors seriously, asks Stephan Palmié in his book *Wizards and Scientists* (Palmié 2002, 3), as “*pertaining to a discourse on history merely encoded in an idiom different from the one with which we feel at home?*”

Palmié takes as a point of departure the idea that all historical knowledge, including written history, is a social construction (Trouillot 1995) or a “*historical imagination*” (Collingwood qtd. in Palmié 2002, 4) in the present. Knowledge of the past thus consists of the stories told about the past, and that means that it is possible to tell different stories. But written history is bound by academic conventions, which means that only particular types of evidence, such as texts or objects, are admissible. In the case of the enslaved ancestors, such evidence is rare, because the enslaved were not allowed to write or own property. Within the paradigm of mainstream Western historiography, the ancestors thus remain “*beyond historiographic recovery because the nature of the evidence we deem admissible simply erases [their] historical being and subjectivity*” (Palmié 2002, 8–9).

Palmié suggests that: “*there also exists a history that largely escapes – perhaps cannot be inscribed at all – into the narratives that we construct from the logs of slave ships, plantation account books, or the diaries of slaveholders*” (Palmié 2002, 8). Palmié terms this a ‘spectral’ or ‘ghostly’ presence that cannot be captured within conventional written history. This presence defies the idea of a linear notion of time in which the past is sealed off from the present. Instead, the presence of the ancestors is evidence for what Michael Lambek has called a ‘past imperfect’ – a past that reaches into the present. What might happen if we would listen to the stories the ancestors have to tell?

In the case of the Kabra mask, this would mean that we would have to accept

a different set of conventions, those afforded by the Winti cosmology. Listening to the ancestors requires the full depth of ritual and cultural knowledge maintained in the Winti community and its religious authorities. A scholar would therefore be well advised to listen to those, whose expertise allows them to recount the ancestors’ stories.

Listening to the ancestors does not replace conventional history; but it does enable us to ask questions that cannot be asked in the framework of a written history that uncritically clings to modernity’s distinctions. Might this not also be a way of decolonizing the written history of slavery, one that takes us beyond the archival paradigms of colonial modernity?

References

- Hartman, Saidiya V. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.
- Palmié, Stephan. *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition*. Duke University Press, 2002.
- Rigney, Ann. *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*. Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, 1995.
- Dutch Anthropological Association. “Ethical Guidelines.” *Antropologen Beroepsvereniging*, 2019, antropologen.nl/app/uploads/2019/01/ABv_Code-of-Ethics_2019.pdf Accessed 15 November 2024.

Martje Onikoyi (heritage professional)



I approach the Kaba mask as a young heritage professional of Yoruba descent. My aim is to explore and propose some ideas regarding 'the sacred' within museum spaces, particularly focusing on the transformative power museums wield over objects and their meanings.

The Yoruba ancestral mask, which served as inspiration for the design of the Kaba mask, was acquired, interpreted, and exhibited by missionaries at the Wereldmuseum in Berg en Dal. This mask functions as

a vehicle for the manifestation of ancestral spirits (Egungun) and, as such, is a crucial tool for communication (De Wildt 2015). Originally, the mask was valued primarily for its immaterial, sacred significance. However, the transformation of religious forms into 'heritage' – a process often driven by colonial oppression – results in a profanization, where the original sacredness of these objects is diminished or lost (Meyer & de Witte 2013).

While efforts are being made from various activist quarters to liberate African

I approach the Kabra mask as a young heritage professional of Yoruba descent. My aim is to explore and propose some ideas regarding 'the sacred' within museum spaces, particularly focusing on the transformative power museums wield over objects and their meanings.

The Yoruba ancestral mask, which served as inspiration for the design of the Kabra mask, was acquired, interpreted, and exhibited by missionaries at the Wereldmuseum in Berg en Dal. This mask functions as a vehicle for the manifestation of ancestral spirits (Egungun) and, as such, is a crucial tool for communication (De Wildt 2015). Originally, the mask was valued primarily for its immaterial, sacred significance. However, the transformation of religious forms into 'heritage' – a process often driven by colonial oppression – results in a profanization, where the original sacredness of these objects is diminished or lost (Meyer & de Witte 2013).

While efforts are being made from various activist quarters to liberate African material cultures from Western museum display cases, the Kabra mask has instead been deliberately added to the Amsterdam Museum's collection. What makes the case of the Kabra mask so unique? And what happens to the meaning-making of the Kabra mask when exhibited in a museum?

The Kabra mask was created in response to a message received by Winti priestess Marian Markelo (Okomfo Nana Efua) from her ancestors. These ancestors, who were enslaved people and their descendants from Suriname, tasked Markelo with the mission to revive the Winti visual culture. Winti is a Surinamese tradition and religion, rooted in various African spiritual practices brought to Suriname through slavery. It developed within a colonial and Protestant context, where visual culture was actively suppressed (Balkenhol 2015). The use of a (reproduction of a) Yoruba

ancestral mask in Winti rituals reproduces a form of the Egungun ritual adapted to a Dutch-Surinamese context, while also reviving a spiritual connection with West African ancestors through the integration of their material culture. The Kabra mask is therefore not representative of the Winti tradition, but shapes a renewed visual culture that proudly depicts the resilience of Surinamese people (Cairo & Deckers 2017).

The mask serves as a conduit for the spirits of ancestors, playing a crucial role in rituals aimed at spiritual healing and the transmission of knowledge. Its use in public ceremonies reflects its significance beyond mere aesthetics. It is a living embodiment of cultural identity and ancestral memory. However, the Kabra mask can also be appreciated as an art piece, with its well-considered imagery. This dual nature – both as a sacred and aesthetic item – poses a challenge for its representation in a museum setting. Traditional museological approaches in Western institutions often prioritize the aesthetic value of non-Western material cultures, frequently overlooking or oversimplifying their spiritual and cultural contexts. The museum space holds the power to transform meanings. What happens when religious things are transferred from a religious to a secular regime? How resilient is the spiritual dimension? (Meyer 2023).

According to François Mairesse, the resilience of the spiritual dimension within the museum space is debatable. He argues that when a spiritual object is placed in a museum, it loses its original meaning and acquires a new one, shaped by the museum's context. Mairesse draws on museologist Kenneth Hudson's observation: *"A tiger in a museum is a tiger in a museum, and not a tiger"*. He extends this idea to sacred objects, stating, *"A sacred object in a museum is a sacred object in a museum, and not a sacred object"*

(Mairesse 2019, 653). This is true considering the fact that sacred or spiritual objects do not carry the same spiritual meaning when interpreted and exhibited by museums. Musealization involves the stripping of original functions and meaning, as well as the becoming part of a new, museological reality where the spiritual item becomes an object of study or aesthetic value, instead of an object of worship or daily use. Religious scholar Birgit Meyer defines this as 'semantic iconoclasm' (Meyer 2024).

Though it could be said that the Kabra mask did not complete the full process of musealization because of the continuing ritual use, within the museum space this ritual use is not part of the visitor experience. Thus, the separation between the spiritual and museological dimension is still evident (González 2019). In contrast, Marília Xavier Cury states that sacred objects remain sacred despite their musealization, as these musealized objects continue to carry the energies of their people's ancestors and can still evoke communication with the spirits (Cury 2019). These 'ancestral energies' are integral to the meaning of the Kabra mask. However, the intangible essence of Winti, rooted in its oral tradition, is lost when the Kabra mask is displayed in a conventional museum setting (Sullivan & Edwards 2004). This creates a tension between the spiritual interpretation and the museological approach to sacred objects like the Kabra mask.

In addition to its spiritual and aesthetic significance, the Kabra mask has emerged as a potent symbol in contemporary discussions surrounding the Dutch colonial past and future (NiNsee 2023). The mask has been used to engage with difficult historical narratives and to advocate for a future that acknowledges and rectifies the injustices of the past (Modest 2015). While this political symbolism is undeniably powerful, it raises important questions about the potential risks

of oversimplification. The Kabra mask, though unique and modern in its conception, could become the singular representation of Winti in the public imagination, overshadowing the complexity and diversity of the tradition itself (Cairo & Deckers 2017). Simultaneously, the contemporary confluence of colonial history, a Western art tradition and a Surinamese spiritual practice creates space and attention for a visual culture representative of dealing with the shared past, in which the resilience of descendants of enslaved people from Suriname takes center stage.

The Kabra mask represents a unique intersection of spirituality, art, and politics, making it challenging to display in a museum setting. Its ongoing ritual use preserves the intangible essence of Winti and the mask's spiritual significance. However, within the museum space there are notable pitfalls in reproducing spirituality through sacred items such as the Kabra mask. These include an emphasis on aesthetics, where placing items in display cases risks reducing them to mere 'viewing objects', and the use of Western methods of communicating that may fail to (re)produce the spiritual and intangible meaning of these objects. Additionally, including the Kabra mask in a museum collection can seem counterintuitive, given the colonial history surrounding the acquisition, interpretation, and exhibition of similar African artifacts, such as the Yoruba mask that influenced the Kabra mask's design.

Despite these challenges, museums offer the opportunity to present the collaborative concept of the Kabra mask to a broad audience, while also renegotiating the relationship between Western museums and non-Western material cultures, engaging with the Dutch colonial past and securing its place in Amsterdam's collective memory.

References

- Balkenhol, Markus. "Working with the ancestors: the kabra mask and the 'african renaissance in the afro-surinamese winti religion.'" *Material Religion*, vol.11, no. 2, 2015, pp. 250-254, doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2015.1059135
- Cairo, Aminata, and Jeroen Deckers. "Neo-Afro in Afrofuturisme: wat mag het zijn?" Special, *Puntkomma*, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-3.
- Cury, Marília Xavier. "The sacred in museums, the museology of the sacred — the spirituality of indigenous." *ICOFOM Study Series*, vol. 47, no.1-2, 2019, pp. 89-104, doi:10.4000/iss.1529.
- González, Matías Cornejo. "Museum Performativity and the Agency of Sacred Objects." *ICOFOM Study Series*, vol. 47, no. 1-2, 2019, pp. 73-87, doi:10.4000/iss.1413.
- Mairesse, François. "Museology and the Sacred." *Material Religion*, vol. 15, no. 5, 2019, pp. 651-653, doi:10.1080/17432200.2019.1666588
- Meyer, Birgit, and Marleen de Witte. "Heritage and the Sacred: Introduction." *Material Religion*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2013, pp. 274-281, doi:10.2752/175183413X13730330868870.
- Meyer, Birgit. "What Is Religious (About) Heritage?" *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Todd Weir and Lieke Wijnia, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023, pp. 15-21, doi:10.5040/9781350251410.ch-002
- Meyer, Birgit. "'Idols' in the Museum: Legacies of Missionary Iconoclasm." *Image Controversies: Contemporary Iconoclasm in Art, Media, and Cultural Heritage*, edited by Birgit Mersmann, Christiane Kruse and Arnold Bartetzky, De Gruyter, 2024, pp. 108-130, doi.org/10.1515/9783110773576.
- Modest, Wayne. "Winti, kabra and the limbo imagination." *Material Religion*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2015, pp. 260-264, doi:10.1080/17432200.2015.1060049.
- NiNsee. "Kabra vooroudermasker 10 jaar in gebruik." *NiNsee*, 2023, ninsee.nl/kabra-vooroudermasker-exact-10-jaar-in-gebruik Accessed 15 November 2024.
- Sullivan, Lawrence E, and Alison Edwards. *Stewards of the Sacred*. American Association of Museums, 2004.
- Wildt, Annemarie de. "The Dancing Kabra Mask." *Africanah: Arena for Contemporary African, African-American and Caribbean Art*, 6 January 2015, africanah.org/dancing-kabra-mask Accessed 15 November 2024.

Letters from Nature



Climate change is destroying our planet and endangering humanity. Could nature be given a voice to speak up and write letters to world leaders — to send out a warning and to ask for help?

The Project

Letters from Nature is a collaboration between artists Jeroen van der Most and Peter van der Putten. They tasked Artificial Intelligence (AI) to write letters on behalf of various major entities under threat, such as ice caps, islands and coral reefs. These letters were sent out to political leaders across the globe.

Inspiration

The work was inspired by a range of sources. For thousands of years, people have been speculating about the ability of nature and inanimate objects to speak and tell stories. The earliest religious tales and worldly sagas contain talking animals, trees, rivers and mountains. Certain religions still ascribe human qualities to objects, and psychological experiments with robots in labs and our homes have shown that humans are strongly predisposed to personification. The split between nature and culture; subject and object, and living creatures and dead things has been heavily debated by philosophers for centu-

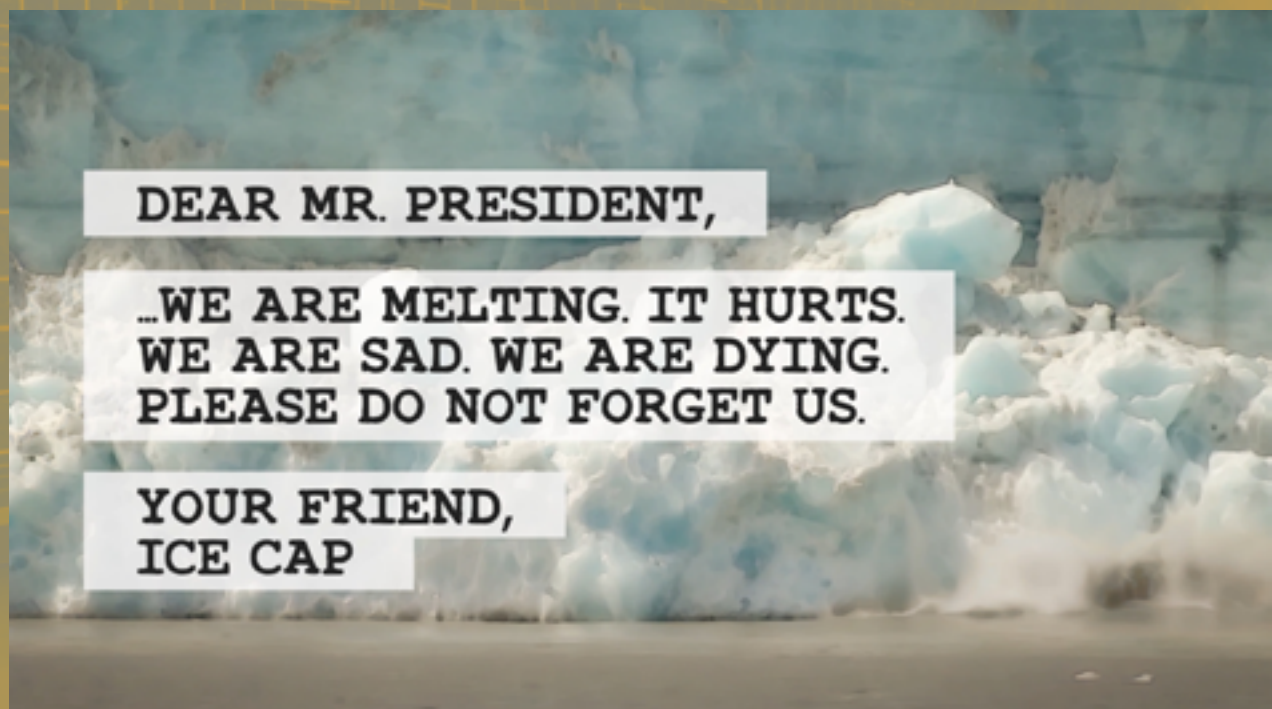
ries. Bruno Latour proposed a 'Parliament of Things', where "natures are present, but with their representatives; scientists who speak in their name."

Presentation

The messages from nature, written by AI, are presented to the audience in all sorts of forms across the world. Ranging from printed letters to projections and text cars in city centres. They stir the debate around the use of technologies like generative AI and inspire new use cases.

Video

You can find a video about the project through this link:
jeroenvandermost.com/letters-from-nature



DEAR MR. PRESIDENT,

...WE ARE MELTING. IT HURTS.
WE ARE SAD. WE ARE DYING.
PLEASE DO NOT FORGET US.

YOUR FRIEND,
ICE CAP

The Polylogue

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024



Jasmijn Blom

Jasmijn Blom, aka JACKA, is an upcoming house DJ based in Amsterdam with a passion for deep, melodic beats. Currently navigating the frustrating yet exciting journey of learning music production, she’s driven to create tracks that radiate her sense of and love for progressive house music.

Yahaira Brito Morfe

Yahaira Brito Morfe is a junior researcher in cultural analysis, freelance creative producer, talent coach and branding specialist. Since December 2023, she also works as a junior booker at Eightyfive, a music consultancy agency in Rotterdam. Next to this she works as a hospitality manager at the music venue Tolhuistuin in Amsterdam.

Kim Dankoor

Kim Dankoor is an international hip-hop researcher, media expert, and interviewer currently pursuing her PhD at Utrecht University. Her research focuses on the relationship between rap music consumption and young people’s self-perceptions in the Netherlands and the U.S. She also delves into the pivotal role of strip club dancers as gatekeepers within the Southern rap scene in the U.S.

Darek Mercks

Darek Mercks is a professional recording/performing musician most known for his bass playing in indie electro band Pip Blom. The band has played festivals like Glastonbury, Reading and Best Kept Secret, and has found a second home in the UK. Darek also teaches bass, methodics and band coaching at the Conservatory of Amsterdam.

Peter Peskens

Peter Peskens is a Dutch bass player, producer and all-round musician. He holds a degree from the Amsterdam Conservatory, and has made a prolific impact on the Dutch music scene both as a session player and as bass player in his own projects. He tours the globe with his main vocation Jungle by Night, as well as various other notable artists.

A Polylogue on Reproduction in Music

In this roundtable, Jasmijn Blom, Yahaira Brito Morfe, Kim Dankoor, Darek Mercks and Peter Peskens discuss approaches to and perspectives on reproduction in music from their various disciplines. In this engaging Polylogue, Imogen Mills (editor of the Polylogue) and Lola Abbas (editorial support) invited the speakers to reflect on a broad range of themes: from the practical implications of reproducing music; to the reproduction of societal values through music; and the significance of social media and musical reproduction. Together, they examine the historic and contemporary role of reproduction in music and the rapid changes behind music and cultural industries.

Musical Reproduction in Practice

PP: Making music often starts by reproducing other people. The whole reason I started playing music, was because I heard other people play and I wanted to do that as well.

Through practicing what you hear and building off of the music you idolize, you can then start to become creative and make something of your own. This is an important part of making music – and the same goes for sampling: if you make it your own, that is inherently making music. So, to some extent I think music is inherently reproduction; but where I draw the line, is if you simply reproduce other music without doing something original with it or giving it your own twist. Because reproduction for the sake of reproduction defies 'art'. It has to be sincere.

JB: For me, I come across the use of reproductions mainly in my practice as a DJ and producer. The process of producing electronic music basically consists of creating and arranging sounds to make a track, using software on your computer.

One way of 'gathering' these sounds is by using sample packs via online sound libraries (such as Splice).¹ Out of these sample packs from different producers, you create your own original, authentic piece.

The difficulty with this, is that many of the sounds you recognize in different songs, come from these sample packs. Take, for example, the vocals from *Donna Summer's* 'I Feel Love' or *CHIC's* bassline in 'Good Times'.² In those instances, the reproduction of the same combination of sounds starts to tarnish the originality of the music, even if every song on its own is an original piece of work. I think that is a difficult challenge when it comes to producing music: as a reproduction it needs to be authentic, original, your own thing; but at the same time, you *are* using the same snares, or hi-hats as everyone else.

PP: I understand that, but down the line, a hat is a hat and a snare is a snare. Even if you listen to all the Motown records from the seventies; it is all the

same snare (drum, eds.). The cool thing about Splice is that there is so much on there, there are so many samples, that it has become a practice of digging. In a similar way as when old-school hip-hop fanatics used to dig through crates in record stores for vinyl records that nobody had heard of, to look for 'breaks' they could sample.³ Nowadays, you have to dig deeper in order to find a weird snare sound that nobody has ever used before. Or, you have to, say, record the sound of a falling basketball, and use that as a snare. In that sense, the current digital climate also encourages you to use your creativity in order to find something unique or innovative in a sea of sounds that have already been used - and used again. Jasmijn, do you recognize certain Splice sample packs when you go out, or see another DJ play?

JB: Yes, all the time. I find I have to go to specific places, or see particular DJs, to escape popular Splice sample packs. Electronic music is arranged in roughly the same way acoustic music is: first, you create a beat or a rhythm, which you then fill up with melodies, baselines, chords, and a kick. Then, you arrange all those elements into a structure with an intro, verses, drops and breaks. The build-up from one element to another is what keeps people interested and is what makes them dance. In electronic music in general, the setup of a song remains mostly the same: for example, the number of bars you use for the tension generally does not vary much. Moreover, in progressive house - which I am mainly into - the sounds are all quite similar. Within the genre, though, there are more creative producers and more commercial producers. For the commercial producers, there is a success formula that everybody uses: first you

create tension, followed by a drop. That is something nearly everyone will recognize, because you hear it everywhere. Increasingly, you can also hear it in newer trends like hard house and hard groove. But I think the songs where people jump off that tried and tested formula, and create something completely different, are the most original and exciting songs.

DM: I think the effects of a platform like Splice are twofold: on the one hand, it is a great resource and makes music-making more accessible. On the other hand, however, these kinds of sample libraries also work against authenticity, because the use of these samples does not require expertise regarding the genre you operate in. Let's say you want to make hard house: even if you have never done that before, you can search for 'hard house' and find all these samples that are supposed to sound like hard house. But, as the users uploading their sounds choose their own key words, there is no guarantee that a given "hard house kick drum/snare/etc." is a typical sound of that genre; there is no one checking it. The lack of authenticity thus might result into people thinking they are contributing to a lineage of classic 'hard house' - because the tags on Splice told them so - when in fact they are not.

Or look at the big summer hit 'Espresso' by *Sabrina Carpenter*: the entire song is made up of three loops on Splice - but it works, and it is now one of the biggest songs of 2024. As a bass player in an indie band, I think this is fascinating, because I do not use sampling in my own practice. However, if you draw inspiration from certain sounds or bands, you are also reproducing some parts of that

“Down the
line, a hat is
a hat and a
snare is
a snare.”



Peter Peskens

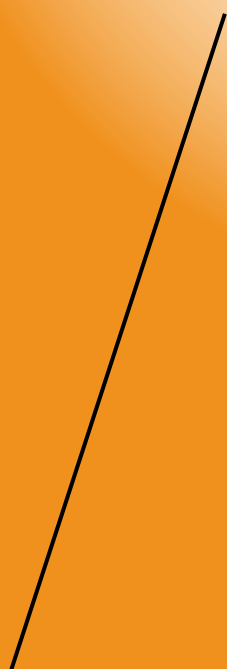
source. In that sense, listening to music and copying elements you find cool is also a part of reproduction. In that way, I reproduce music to make something new and original.

KD: When it comes to reproduction in practice, I do have a different approach, as I am not an artist but a researcher. In my practice, I analyze hip-hop, a genre in which certain forms of reproduction are, in fact, encouraged; such as the sampling of older genres and songs. In most of my research, I investigate how cultural narratives of femininity and masculinity in western societies are reproduced in commercial rap videos. For instance, when you look at traditional gender stereotypes, for the longest time the dominant narrative has told us that men should be dominant and providers in relationships, whereas women are told to be 'attractive' and sexually modest. In my research, I explore how those narratives in western patriarchal society are reproduced in contemporary commercial hip-hop music. It shows us that hip-hop is not produced in a vacuum. Like hip-hop music, the images that you see about gender are mostly reflections of how we feel about gender in larger society. That is how I employ reproduction in my PhD research.

YBM: I think my way of using reproduction in practice aligns closely with Kim's approach, as I also analyze reproductions in cultural artefacts from an academic angle. In my research, I mainly look at how femininity is portrayed in music and in lyrics, and I analyze the reproduction of certain intertextual, cultural references in lyrics.

JB: So, I think then the difference between us three creators and the two researchers is that for the researchers, reproduction is not the reproduction of sounds, but the reproduction of societal values. That's an interesting difference.

“Hip-hop is not produced in a vacuum. Like hip-hop music, the images that you see about gender are mostly reflections of how we feel about gender in larger society.”



Kim Dankoor

Societal Values and Transference

KD: Within hip-hop, reproduction is important; sampling is a fundamental tradition of hip-hop culture. Consequently, within hip-hop the lines between imitation and artistic reproduction are blurred. For example, in hip-hop culture artists sample music or copy elements of previous hits to pay homage to certain (Black) artists; to evoke a sense of nostalgia; to showcase their creative skills when it comes to production; and to create context for a certain song narrative.

Where it can get messy, is when people outside of hip-hop culture use elements from within hip-hop culture, while not paying homage to the creators who originated it. For example, take the viral (hip-hop) dance trend 'the Savage challenge'. This trend was created by *Keara Wilson*,⁴ but it was subsequently taken up by some women outside of hip-hop culture, who adopted - and as such reproduced - the challenge on TikTok, with considerable success. They were able to profit from their reproduction of Wilson's challenge, and even got invited to perform her dance on national televi-

sion. Here, you start to enter into a discussion on cultural appropriation against cultural appreciation. People outside of hip-hop culture can, of course, still appreciate and adopt certain elements of the culture. But it is important to acknowledge creators and be mindful of power structures and dynamics.

JB: Yes, for electronic music I can only agree. A lot of vocal samples in music originate from hip-hop, and find their way into electronic music through reproductions. Most of the time the people who make use of these vocal samples are not aware of where the samples originate from, or which artist used them first. I think an important part of reproducing sounds - and especially voices - in music, is understanding where the original fragment is from and who created it - whose voice you are reproducing. Not only to make sure you do not disrespect anyone, but also because samples are a great way to enhance listeners' experience of your music. Certain samples can be tied to specific cultures, traditions or movements, and

can allow you to trigger certain emotions. However, if you do not know the origin of a sample, you cannot know what effect the sample will have on your music through the ears of the listeners; whether it is positive or negative. Sampling is a personal interpretation of someone's prior art. In that way, to use a sample while not understanding where it comes from, is disputable – it is hard to see the credibility in that. I think being knowledgeable about the samples you use, can positively affect your music, and make your music more ethical and culturally rich.

PP: I think there are some instances in which you really have an obligation to realize what your reproduced sample is about, especially if you sample vocals or speeches. Even more so, if the text is politically loaded. Take *Charlie Chaplin's* speech from the 'Great Dictator' as an example; a good speech, which has often been reproduced in music. The movie is about a fictionalized version of the Third Reich. In the movie, *Chaplin* plays a fictionalized version of Hitler and gives a speech about standing up to authoritarianism. It is an important and poignant message, but I would argue it loses its impact when we keep using and reusing it. Another poignant example: around five years ago, I heard a house-track in which the artists had sampled *Martin Luther King's* 'I have a dream' speech... it made me wonder, why? It felt like it was done for the sake of attention; as a way of creating an emotional moment for the sake of creating an emotional moment.

YBM: I agree, I think that you need to understand the origin of the sample to be able to use it in your track. Loosely related to that, something I am interested in are copies of copies. Take, for example, 'Walk on the Wild Side' by *Lou Reed*, which was sampled by *A Tribe Called Quest*. When an audience is only familiar with the latter, I find that something interesting happens in that transference; the sample starts to live a life of its own. Its legacy is now separate from *Lou Reed* and even from its original song. As it reaches a new audience, the sample is ascribed new meanings. This whole discussion also begs the question: *Is it possible to know the origin of everything?* Especially when an element gets sampled so often, it inevitably starts to live a life of its own. I think, ultimately, it boils down to authenticity: when artists use samples in a credible and authentic way, it resonates with audiences because it fits within the wider framework, the tradition the artist is operating in.

“Ultimately, it boils down to authenticity: when artists use samples in a credible and authentic way, it resonates with audiences because it fits within the wider framework, the tradition the artist is operating in.”



Yahaira Brito Morfe

Authenticity versus Originality

KD: Within the field of sociology and popular music, 'authenticity' became an important topic to explore since the late 90s/early 2000s.⁵ Within hip-hop, the concept of authenticity is interesting, because since its very beginning, hip-hop has always praised authenticity. As a hip-hop artist, you are a storyteller; and the story that you tell is supposed to be your story - you have to be authentic. However, *Drake* poses an interesting case in this matter. He undoubtedly brought something new to hip-hop culture - for example, the practice of mixing a *specific* R&B and hip-hop sound and flow, or the presentation of a certain vulnerable masculinity. Therefore, I do feel he is original. However, I do not think he is authentic: for he is also known to copy accents from different countries in his music, as well as certain types of masculinities seen in other rap artists. In that sense, I would argue that *Drake* is a perfect case of the intricate lines between authenticity and originality: because to me, he was and is original; but he is not authentic.

YBM: I think an interesting point was just brought up, which can also be read in between the lines of our whole conversation: *what is the difference between authenticity and originality in music? What is that line?*

I believe the difference between authenticity and originality depends on what context they are used in. To be authentic, is to be yourself; but in a time where authenticity is a selling point for musicians, it is difficult to establish specifically what authenticity is. Originality, on the other hand, has to do with to what extent something has not been done before. I think in this specific conversation, to make a sample feel authentic, for it to resonate with listeners, it has to transform in a way that makes it serve like a signature of your own style. While originality has something to do with how well you transform and incorporate a sample; authenticity in music has to do with your own signature, and the level of originality in how you incorporate that signature into something new.

JB: For me, I think there is a difference between authenticity and originality, but the two can also enhance each other. When I think of authentic work, I think of music that an artist has put their emotions in; where you can really feel that there has been a creative process, and you can tell that the work is a result of that process. When I think of what makes music original, I associate that with the uniqueness of a piece – if it gives me a different feeling than all the other music that is already out there. I think authenticity can create originality: because by pushing your emotions and personal experiences into your work, you often push boundaries that result in originality; something that someone else could not make, because they experience completely different things. However, I think being original, and using unique techniques, does not necessarily guarantee the creation of authentic work. In my opinion, to reach authenticity you need to convert emotions, experiences and feelings into music. It is personality opposed to innovation, I guess.

DM: I would say authenticity is a mixture between (cultural) identity, heritage and credibility. Originality can be quite the contrary, because it forces you to step out of your comfort zone and try out new things. You can be authentic and unoriginal at the same time, and original without being authentic. But in my opinion, the most interesting art comes from a combination of both.

“In [some] instances, the reproduction of the same combination of sounds starts to tarnish the originality of the music, even if every song on its own is an original piece of work.”



Jasmijn Blom

Hip-Hop is the New Punk

DM: When it comes to music, reproduction and originality, I think it is imperative to mention the punk movement in the 70s. The way I see it, punk was never about being classically schooled or having skill; it was about expressing yourself musically, and you do not have to be a trained musician to do that.

PP: Now, I find that at the Conservatory of Amsterdam, students increasingly want to play in punk bands, even though they are not expressing themselves in that way in their daily lives. When you are just reproducing the sound and vision or a movement like punk without fundamentally believing in that tradition of expression, instead of kicking down the pillars of the establishment – as is essential to punk – it kicks down the pillars of punk music. By disrespecting a tradition like punk, the genre devolves into copy-cat upon copy-cat, and the result we are seeing now, is that there has not been a revolutionary or innovative change in sound since the last post-punk movement.

KD: This leads me to wonder - because if I understood you correctly, Peter and Darek, you said that there is a new wave of punk music that does not always feel authentic. However, I think that the world is an increasingly scary place, and there is a lot going on right now – could it also be that the developments we see in the world, fueled new punk bands; that it might be more authentic than you initially think?

DM: To be frank, I think hip-hop is the new punk music. By that, I mean 'punk' as a broader term; more in line with its anti-establishment and DIY-principles. I believe in that sense, hip-hop draws inspiration from punk bands.

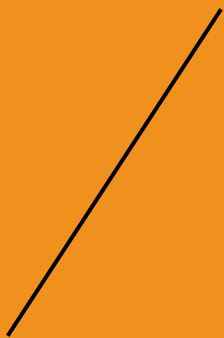
KD: Interesting, I have not thought about it like that. Although punk and hip-hop started around the same time, right? I do feel that, according to your definition, hip-hop was always punk. It may have started with block parties on the street, but very soon it became centered around anti-establishment mindsets. Also, certain elements of hip-hop cul-

ture, such as graffiti art, have always been anti-establishment. Most importantly, at the core of hip-hop music, you find creators producing songs about all that is wrong with society.

YBM: I do think that a lot of commercial hip-hop is not 'punk', and that it is even inauthentic. The characteristic of hip-hop as fundamentally coming from a position of 'anti-establishment', of being rooted in hardship and disadvantage, seems to be increasingly commodified. Statements such as 'started from the bottom now we're here' are not universally true; these words carry meaning, and are rooted in historical and political contexts.

DM: What I meant by saying that 'hip-hop is the new punk', is that contemporary punk bands are copying old stuff – even though they do not come from similar backgrounds. That, to me, feels like 'they are not punk'. In hip-hop, on the other hand, people are still fighting the same battles – such as hardship and injustice. It makes hip-hop artists and their story more credible; not in terms of the sounds, but in terms of their background, or the story behind it. You can also see it in the music: it still evolves. While newer punk bands try to mimic punk bands of previous generations, and try to sound just like them, in hip-hop music there is still new and innovative stuff happening.

“If you draw inspiration from certain sounds or bands, you are also reproducing some parts of that source. In that sense, listening to music and copying elements you find cool is also a part of reproduction.”



Darek Mercks

Reproduction and Social Media

PP: Speaking of new stuff happening, is TikTok the death of music?

YBM: No, I do not think so. I have seen people say it so often, but I do not agree; however, platforms such as TikTok do put the way we consume and interact with music in a new perspective. TikTok's algorithm, for example, actively promotes the reproduction of other people's content, superimposed with your own interpretation of it. This reproduction of other creators' videos, music, and sounds has now started to influence the development of other trends within popular culture. Take the sped-up remixes on TikTok.⁶ As a result of this trend, many artists will nowadays release multiple different versions of their tracks, including sped-up versions. But it does not stop there: in response, TikTok-users are now speeding up the already sped-up version, or they use these versions to make other weird remixes with them. It is a funny new interaction that goes back and forth between fans and musicians.

DM: The medium always has an impact on

the music. As you explain, Yahaira, with TikTok everything has become faster. But if you look at the 7-inch record on vinyl, that is the reason why the normative length for a pop music single became three minutes and thirty seconds: that is exactly the time it takes for a record player to play a 7-inch record. Before that, songs were generally a bit longer. We can note a similar trend when it comes to intros. Typically, songs are known to have intros that last for thirty seconds, up to a minute - or even longer - before the actual song starts. With the rise of TikTok, artists who aim to achieve a TikTok hit will get to the chorus in a matter of seconds, to grab the audience's attention. As a platform that relies on the rapid circulation of content, TikTok has had a significant role in the acceleration of these new trends. Its immense popularity has made this evolution even faster and more fleeting, making it difficult to pinpoint emerging trends.

PP: Yes, but when does it stop? When music consists of nothing but jingles? I wonder

if there is going to be a moment, where people are so messed up because of their shortened attention span, due to the non-stop dopamine impulse triggered by all the short-form media we consume; that a new punk movement will grow out of it, consisting of extremely long songs. If that happens – if a counterculture grows out of this – I think it will be interesting.

JB: I do think a new counterculture will develop; one that focuses on very slow sounds instead of these high-pitched, high-energy tunes. Song will become slower and longer again. In terms of remixes, 1000% slowed-down versions are already making a comeback. Also, here in Amsterdam, we are currently seeing a rise of ambient parties. At these parties, you sit down and listen to the music only, without dancing or drinking. On top of that, we are also seeing a comeback of minimal techno, with smaller clubs returning to the origin of house – that is nice to experience. It is truly a different experience to let the music put you in a flow, a trance state. Electronic music does have a message that it tries to convey, and frantically jumping up and down to hard groove all the time can distract from that.

PP: I think it is interesting that electronic dance music thus does not seem to experience these developments as such a problem – or way less, in any way.

JB: That is true, in part; on the one hand because – with ambient music for instance – as a DJ you are trying to establish a mood, or a certain feeling, rather than a story. On the other hand, electronic music consists of mostly loops; meaning that as a DJ, you can make a song as long as you want. This is because elec-

tronic music producers mainly produce for DJs to use it in their practice, rather than for people at home listening to it; so these producers just make sure that a song is composed in such a way that DJs can easily pick it apart and use it – that is why it has a very static type of formula.

However, you do in fact see that electronic music is influenced by the same trends in internet culture. Hard-techno for example, which is a very popular genre at the moment, is strongly influenced by the internet and is similarly characterized by its rapid attention-grabbing style. A so-called TikTok-raver-hype has developed around hard-techno, which has led it to be increasingly made up of very fast-paced, short snippets of a song before moving on to the next track. Typically, songs will thus not play for longer than fifteen seconds. It is a kick and a kick only, that is it.

DM: So DJs are DJing themselves faster?

JB: It all comes down to dopamine.

YBM: There is so much more to say about this. Aside from TikTok, there is a whole two hours we could fill on AI, and what that is going to mean for music. We should just do a live panel.

PP: I agree. Let's meet next week, guys.

References

- Van Leeuwen, Theo. "What Is Authenticity?" *Discourse Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2001, pp. 392–97. JSTOR, [jstor.org/stable/24047523](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24047523) Accessed 13 Dec. 2024.
- Sweet, Castel. "Dj Kool Herc." *St. James Encyclopedia of Hip Hop Culture*, edited by Thomas Riggs, St. James Press, 2018, pp. 117–119. Gale eBooks link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3679700064/GVRL?u=amst&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=ee1cf48c Accessed 28 Aug. 2024.
- White, Brooklyn. "Meet Keara Wilson, The Teen Choreographer Behind The 'Savage' Challenge." *Essence GU*, 1 May 2024, girlsunited.essence.com/feedback/news/feature-savage-challenge-megan-thee-stallion/ Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

Endnotes

- 1 Splice is a prescription-based sound library where people upload and download their royalty-free sample packs; a library full of collections of audio files that consist of certain sounds – such as drum hits, vocals, and basslines. As a producer, you can use, adjust and reproduce the sounds from those sample packs to enrich your music. You can use pre-recorded sounds that you take from sample packs, or record and create your own.
- 2 Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' is an example of vocals that have been reproduced by other artists and in new genres. Examples are Beyoncé's 'Summer Renaissance' and in 'GOOD (DON'T DIE)' by ¥\$, Ye, Ty Dolla \$ign. Other examples are the bassline from CHIC's 'Good Times', one of the most frequently reproduced basslines in music. Another example are the drums in 'Amen, Brother' by the Winstons, which spawned their own subgenre and have been sampled over multiple genres numerous times.
- 3 'Breaks' or 'breakbeats' in hip-hop music are short snippets of a song, "*when all other elements would drop out and only percussion and bass could be heard*" (Sweet 2018). Hip-hop DJ's would sample these snippets by dragging the vinyl back and forth on the turntable, as discussed in Abbas' essay in this volume.
- 4 See the interview with Keara Wilson for Essence GU by Brooklyn White, in which White places Wilson's viral choreography in a longer lineage of hip-hop music experiencing global commercial success propelled by the reproduction of dance trends (White 2024).
- 5 There are several approaches to this concept but for this explanation Kim is using van Leeuwen's (2001) take on authenticity and sincerity.
- 6 In this trend music is sped up by creators on Tiktok. The trend originated with Nightcore and is rooted in the anime fandom. Other trends like Internetcore and Happy Hardcore also use this technique.

The Vegetable Vendetta



Amsterdam Museum Journal

In *The Vegetable Vendetta*, Artificial Intelligence (AI) empowers vegetables with the marketing skills of the biggest fast food and luxury brands to promote themselves. The installation asks visitors to scan potatoes or broccoli, by using a camera. The scan is used to create an AI-generated movie starring the vegetable and using the persuasive marketing strategies of brands like McDonald's and Prada.

The Artist Speaking

Artist Jeroen van der Most: “Our food system is broken. We eat overly processed foods; there’s an obesity epidemic; and food supply chains are unsustainable. A system kept in place by an imbalance of power. Major brands promote their products with big budgets and skills that small local producers of healthy vegetables don’t have. AI enables small players to make great content without the budgets of their big competitors.”

Power

The Vegetable Vendetta is an experiment with AI to fight the power of large food enterprises. The prototype implements persuasive strategies on the spot that portray the vegetable in happy social moments or in luxurious other-worldly environments with handsome looking people. By moving a real vegetable in front of the camera, participants can change the content and adjust strategies in the videos.

The Future

The project offers a peek into a future where generative AI will be omnipresent. It will shake

up the balance of power in industries and marketing by blending the digital and physical. Could AI be a Robin Hood of food that empowers the smallest players in the food system? Overall, the project is an experiment that aims to disrupt the marketing of our food; but most of all it hopes to persuade viewers to acknowledge the charm of the humble vegetables in their AI-fueled vendetta...

About

The Vegetable Vendetta was developed in cooperation with the organizations In4Art, EatThis, and KU Leuven as part of the European funded project Hungry EcoCities. The project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon Europe research and innovation program under grant agreement 101069990 and is part of the S+T+ARTS program on promoting art-driven innovation through Science, Technology, and Arts.

Video

You can find a video about the project through this link: jeroenvandermost.com/vegetable-vendetta



**Lola Abbas**

Lola Abbas completed her bachelor's degree in Language and Culture Studies at Utrecht University in 2022. In 2023, she started her research master's degree in Literary Studies at the University of Amsterdam. In her research, she focuses on cultural memory, processes of identity formation and belonging, and popular culture(s). Alongside her studies, she works as an intern in the Research and Publications department at Amsterdam Museum.

**Markus Balkenhol**

Markus Balkenhol is a senior researcher at the Meertens Institute. He is a social anthropologist working on colonial heritage and memory in the Netherlands. His most recent publications include: Balkenhol, Markus, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs, eds. 'The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion'. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020; and Balkenhol, Markus. 'Tracing Slavery. The Politics of Atlantic Memory in the Netherlands'. London: Berghahn Books, 2021.

**Carlos Bayod Lucini**

Carlos Bayod Lucini holds a PhD in Art History and Theory from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and a MS in Architecture from Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. As Project Director at the Factum Foundation, his work is dedicated to the development and application of digital technology to the conservation, study and dissemination of Cultural Heritage. Bayod has carried out multiple projects in collaboration with the world's main museums, collections and archaeological sites. He is also a frequent speaker about digital preservation, facsimiles and museology, having taught at the MS in Historic Preservation at Columbia University (New York) among other institutions. His latest publication is a chapter in the book *Decoding Cultural Heritage* (Springer, 2024) entitled: "Digitization and Reproduction of Surface: Shedding New Light on Goya's Black Paintings".
Photo: Eduardo Lopez

**Boris van Berkum**

Boris van Berkum is a contemporary visual artist who brings together styles and forms from various cultures and religions, combining traditional crafts with innovative 3D-techniques. In 1997, he founded MAMA, a platform for media art in Rotterdam, where he served as director until 2007. In 2022, he co-founded the Cool Clay Collective, a ceramics workshop by and for artists in the Rotterdam region. In recent years, Van Berkum has worked intensively with Winti priestess Marian Markelo

on projects such as the Kabra Mask, Mama Aisa showpiece and Kabra Blue, aiming to celebrate and revitalise Winti culture. His work is part of several public collections, including Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Amsterdam Museum and the Groninger Museum.

**Jasmijn Blom**

Jasmijn Blom, aka JACKA, is an upcoming house DJ based in Amsterdam with a passion for deep, melodic beats. Currently navigating the frustrating yet exciting journey of learning music production, she's driven to create tracks that radiate her sense of and love for progressive house music.

**Yahaira Brito Morfe**

Yahaira Brito Morfe is a freelance creative producer, talent coach and branding specialist. Since December 2023, she also works as a junior booker at EightyFive, a music consultancy agency in Rotterdam. Next to this she works as a hospitality manager at the music venue Tolhuistuin in Amsterdam.
Photo: Laura van der Spek



Dick van Broekhuizen
Dick van Broekhuizen (The Hague 1973) is Head of Collections and Research in museum Beelden aan Zee in The Hague. He graduated in Art History 1997, subsequently in Art History Education in 1998. In 2022 he received his PhD on nineteenth-century Animalier sculpture.



Thomas Coomans
Thomas Coomans is professor of architectural history and conservation of built heritage at the department of architectural engineering at KU Leuven. His current research and publications focus on Sino-European architectural transfers in late Qing and Republican China, with a particular emphasis on churches and other religious buildings erected by European missionaries between the 1840s and 1940s.



Sofia Collette Ehrich
Sofia Collette Ehrich is an art historian, researcher, podcast host, and curator of multisensory experiences. Her research focuses on uncovering the best practices and challenges of implementing olfactory storytelling in

museums. She currently resides in the United States and speaks and consults internationally about multisensory curation in museums.



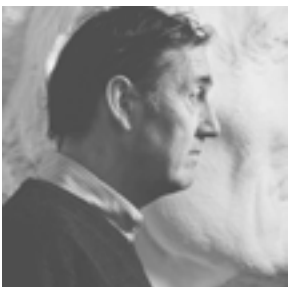
Kim Dankoor
Kim Dankoor is an international Hip Hop researcher, media expert, and interviewer currently pursuing her PhD at Utrecht University. Her research focuses on the relationship between rap music consumption and young people's self-perceptions in the Netherlands and the U.S. She also delves into the pivotal role of strip club dancers as gatekeepers within the Southern rap scene in the U.S. True to her connection with Atlanta, Kim's bond with the city remains unwavering—though she may leave Atlanta occasionally, Atlanta never leaves her.



Dzianis Filipchyk
Dzianis Filipchyk is a PhD researcher and Associate Professor of the Department of Museology, Ethnology and History of Arts of Belarusian State University. Dzianis Filipchyk is a certified guide in multiple tourist routes in Belarus, and an expert in the theory and history of culture, museum studies, historical and cultural heritage preservation, ethnology and history of Belarus.



Yophi Ignacia
Yophi Ignacia is a fashion futures designer, researcher and education specialist in sustainability. She founded The Future Mode, exploring design, research and consultancy in fashion. She obtains a master's degree in Fashion Futures from London College of Fashion. Yophi specialises in durable design methodologies by redefining the ever-changing role of designers.
Photo: Sarah Tulej



Adam Lowe
Adam Lowe, director of Factum Arte and founder of Factum Foundation, is a leader in digital preservation. Trained in Fine Art at Oxford and RCA, he established Factum Arte in 2001 and the Factum Foundation in 2009. His innovations include the facsimile of Veronese's "Wedding at Cana" and the 3D Scanning Centre in Egypt. A Columbia University professor and Royal Designer for Industry (2019), Lowe has worked on preservation projects across the globe, with exhibitions at institutions like the National Gallery of Art and the Prado Museum. He writes extensively on originality, authenticity, and cultural heritage preservation.



Yuansheng Luo
Yuansheng Luo is a PhD researcher in the Department of Architecture at KU Leuven. His research focuses on Chinese-Western architectural exchanges during the long 19th century, drawing from imagery and textual sources. He is particularly interested in how chinoiserie evolved throughout the century in print media publications and the perceptions it inspired.



Marian Markelo aka Okomfo Nana Efua
Marian Markelo, born in Moengo, Suriname, is a Winti priest, mother, and educator deeply committed to preserving African Surinamese heritage. Founder of NIRASE, the Dutch Winti Institute, she also directs several cultural organizations and serves on the board of NINSEE. Known for her libations at Amsterdam’s annual slavery abolition commemoration, Marian actively promotes heritage through education, art, and museum collaborations. She organizes heritage tours to West Africa, South America, and the Caribbean, fostering awareness of historical and spiritual traditions. Retired since 2021, she continues her impactful work across Dutch cities, enriching diverse communities. *Photo: Ernst Coppejan*



Darek Mercks
Darek Mercks is a professional recording/performing musician most known for his bass playing in indie electro band Pip Blom. He joined the band in 2018, and has been playing with them all around the world ever since. With Pip Blom, Darek has played festivals like Glastonbury, Reading and Best Kept Secret, and has found a second home with the band in the UK. Darek also teaches bass, methodics and band coaching at the Conservatory of Amsterdam.



Roos van Nieuwkoop
Roos van Nieuwkoop is an art historian and high school (art) teacher. Besides her general knowledge of art history, she specialises in video-games and their ability to convey art historical narrative through different lenses, in both academic and educational setting.



Martje Onikoyi
Martje Onikoyi is a recent graduate of the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam and a current (pre-)master’s student of Art History. As a young heritage professional, she has a keen interest in the role of spiritual items in museums, the transformative power of museums in shaping meaning, and their communication of the spiritual to diverse audiences.



Peter Peskens
Peter Peskens is a Dutch bass player, producer and all-round musician. He holds a degree from the Amsterdam conservatory, and has made a prolific impact on the dutch music scene both as a session player and as bass player in his own projects. He tours around the globe with some of the hottest bands and artists in Holland, like his main vocation Jungle by Night, S10, Weval, Jett Rebel, Benjamin Herman’s Bughouse, The Mysterons, M. Lucky and many more.



Anton Petrukhin
Anton Petrukhin is a master student of the Program “World Heritage Studies” at Brandenburg University of Technology. Anton Petrukhin is an ICOMOS Deutschland member and emerging professional in the field of the documentation and preservation of historic urban and cultural landscapes with a broad interest in the history and culture of Belarus.



Chiara Luigina Dosithea Ravinetto
Chiara Luigina Dosithea Ravinetto is an external PhD candidate at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society. Her PhD research examines on female-centric biographical television series in Italian, Dutch and English. She also currently works as a lecturer in the department of Italian Studies.



Amy Louise Stenvert
Amy Louise Stenvert is a freelance curator, writer and researcher living and working in Utrecht, The Netherlands. She holds a BA in Classical Archaeology, University of Groningen and an MA in Curating Art and Cultures, University of Amsterdam. Currently, she works for The Mondrian Initiative, an international artist-in-residency programme situated in Piet Mondrian’s former studio in Laren. Her main research interests include applied arts around 1900, discrepancy between theory and artistic practice, and themes of loss, repair and healing in (contemporary) art.



Rebecca Venema
Rebecca Venema is a distinguished independent researcher in communication sciences specializing in values, norms, and societal ethics. Her interdisciplinary research mixes both quantitative and qualitative methods, focusing on how collective values align with or challenge personal and societal values. She holds a PhD in Communication Sciences (graded Summa Cum Laude), and won the Top Student Paper of the ICA Visual Communication Studies Division (2019). She was also Shortlisted for the bi-annual Surveillance Studies Prize for Excellent Publications (2021). She is the co-chair of the Visual Communication Division of the German Communication Association (DGPUK) and Lecturer for Research Methods and Statistics at the University of Amsterdam.



Alyxandra Westwood
Alyxandra Westwood is a museum curator, programmer, writer and education professional with a focus on contemporary art, fashion and sustainability. She holds a master’s degree in heritage studies from the University of Amsterdam. Alyxandra’s research often focuses on art and design as a tool for connecting people and communities.
Photo: Elzo Bonam



Annemarie de Wildt
Annemarie de Wildt is a historian specialising in the social and cultural history of Amsterdam. As a curator at the Amsterdam Museum, she has made over 50 exhibitions about a.o. sex work, graffiti, colonialism, protest movements and the Golden Coach. She developed new acquisition methods, to include the contemporary city in the museum collection. Presently she is vice chair of the ICOM Committee of City Museums.
Photo: Tristan Roques

Editorial Board



Liselore Tissen

Dr. Liselore Tissen is a post-doctoral researcher affiliated with Leiden University and Delft University of Technology and works at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Arts and Science as the coordinator of ethics and interdisciplinary collaborations in digital humanities and social sciences research and education. Her doctoral research on the impact of the original artwork and its 3D-printed twin on the discipline of art history, conservation, and museum practice was awarded Cum Laude (2024). She specializes in art reproduction technologies, ethics, and interdisciplinary research collaborations, focusing on perception and interaction between art, technology, and society.



Tom van der Molen

Drs. Tom van der Molen is a PhD candidate in art history, with a focus on Govert Flinck. Tom is senior curator at the Amsterdam Museum, as well as its Deputy Head of Collections and Research. He specializes in unveiling the untold stories of history and historical artifacts, focusing on migration, identity, and social change to show how these forces have shaped Amsterdam's evolving urban landscape. He is a favored writer and guest lecturer at universities and cultural institutions.



Emma van Bijnen

Dr. Emma van Bijnen is the research and publications coordinator at Amsterdam Museum, and Editor-in-Chief of Amsterdam Museum Journal. She is lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, as well as an independent researcher with a doctorate in discourse and argumentation, for which she was awarded the grade Summa Cum Laude (2020). She specialises in multidisciplinary research with a focus on common ground, in/exclusion and multimodality.



Vanessa Vroon-Najem

Dr. Vanessa Vroon-Najem is a researcher, curator, writer, lecturer, and moderator. She obtained a doctorate in anthropology at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, and is currently a member of the Academic Staff, Educator Co-Creation, as well as post-doc Researcher at the University of Amsterdam. In addition, she is Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Amsterdam Museum.



Judith van Gent

Dr. Judith van Gent is an experienced Dutch art historian, curator and author. On top of her broad knowledge of art history, she specializes in the Dutch painter Bartholomeus van der Helst. She is the Head of Collections and Research at Amsterdam Museum.



Norbert Middelkoop

Dr. Norbert Middelkoop is an experienced art historian and Senior Curator of paintings, prints, and drawings. In addition to portrait painting, Middelkoop's research and curatorial practices focus on the painted cityscape. He often recurs as a guest lecturer on Amsterdam-related issues, such as portraiture and city views.

Special Thanks

Liselore Tissen

Who has gone beyond what is expected of a guest-editor. She was involved in all stages of the process, which is in part why this issue is so comprehensive.

Tom van der Molen

Who shared with us his invaluable knowledge as a guest-editor. Besides his expert knowledge, it is his ability to think multidisciplinary that makes him essential to this issue of the journal.

Imogen Mills

Who as the lead editor of ‘The Dialogue’ and ‘The Polylogue’ is valued for her critical eye and ability to manage multiple projects at the same time.

Sigi Samwel

Who as visual editor coordinates the artistic contributions and the visual essay.

Lola Abbas

Who was essential in the finalization of this edition. She provided key editorial support, proved herself a thorough proofreader, not to mention a gifted researcher and author.

Isabelle Vaverka

Who is ever flexible, clever, and creative. As the designer of the editorial formula, she is responsible for the innovative design of the AMJournal.

Jeroen van der Most

Who provided the images for this edition. Through his vision and philosophy, we were able to provide a thematically relevant critical visual layer to this issue.

Patrick de Bruin

Who has provided valuable input and was able to marry the academic content with the journal's design.

Katharina Klockau

Who managed our budget and always makes herself available when needed.

Emma Waslander

Who always thinks along and comes up with solutions when we think there are none left.

Friso Blankevoort

Who made it possible for this edition of AMJournal to be published on time.

Finally, the internal board of editors would like to thank the external board of editors for their continued support and involvement in this special thematic journal:

External Board of Editors

Pablo Ampuero Ruiz; Rowan Arundel; Sruti Bala; Markus Balkenhol; Ellinoor Bergvelt; Christian Bertram; Stephan Besser; Carolyn Birdsall; Cristobal Bonelli; Pepijn Brandon; Petra Brouwer; Chiara de Cesari; Debbie Cole; Leonie Cornips; Annet Dekker; Christine Delhay; Brian Doornenbal; David Duindam; Karwan Fatah-Black; Maaïke Feitsma; Wouter van Gent; Javier Gimeno Martinez; Sara Greco; Suzette van Haaren; Laura van Hasselt; Gian-Louis Hernandez; Pim Huijnen; Julian Isenia; Paul Knevel; Gregor Langfeld; Mia Lerm-Hayes; Virginie Mamadouh; Julia Noordegraaf; Esther Peeren; Gertjan Plets; Menno Reijven; Jan Rock; Noa Roei; Bert van de Roemer; Aafje de Roest; Margriet Schavemaker; Britta Schilling; Steven Schouten; Irene Stengs; Eliza Steinbock; Dimitris Serafis; Colin Sterling; Sanjukta Sunderason; Rebecca Venema; Tim Verlaan; Janessa Vleghert; Daan Wesselman; meLê yamomo; Mia You; Emilio Zucchetti

For more on...

Gipsotheek aan Zee

At Museum Beelden aan Zee
Permanent collection

For more on the reproduction of plaster casts as part of sculpture-making processes, as discussed in Dick van Broekhuizen's 'Short Essay' *The Plaster Trace*, visit the *Gipsotheek aan Zee* [translation: 'Gipsoteca by the Sea']. As part of the permanent collection of Museum Beelden aan Zee in Den Haag, this permanent repository has more than one thousand unique plaster models on display. By showing these studies in plaster, the *Gipsotheek aan Zee* aims to shed light on the artistic process behind (Dutch) statues and statue-making, documenting the development of these processes in great detail.

Portraits of North-Holland

At Frans Hals Museum
Open until August 17th, 2025

For more on the reproduction of works by the 'Old Masters' in a Dutch context, as discussed by Tom van der Molen in 'The Visual Essay', visit the exhibition *Portraits of North-Holland* [original: 'Gezichten van Noord-Holland'], on display at Frans Hals Museum, Amsterdam from 3 April to 17 August 2025. Amsterdam Museum and Frans Hals Museum have collaborated with various communities and social and cultural organizations in a co-creative effort to collect new and varied portraits of North-Holland's individuals and groups. As such, they counter the hegemony of white, male, Christian and colonial perspectives in the Dutch portrait tradition, both shedding light on this unilateral depiction and reflecting the current diverse demographic layout of the province.

The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman

At Amsterdam Museum
Open until April, 2025

For more on Factum Arte's facsimiles through 3D-scanning, as discussed in 'The Dialogue', visit their reproduction of Rembrandt van Rijn's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman*, currently on display at the Amsterdam Museum until medio April 2025. As the original painting by Rembrandt is currently on display as part of the exhibition *Rembrandt's Amsterdam. Golden Times?* at the Städel Art Museum in Frankfurt, the facsimile produced by Factum Arte and Factum Foundation both offers a replacement to Amsterdam Museum visitors, while simultaneously posing questions about the value of authenticity and exclusivity of art.

Drip Too Hard?

For more on the reproduction of cultural narratives in hip-hop music, as discussed in 'The Polylogue,' read Dankoor, Stephens and Ter Bogt's article "Drip Too Hard? Commercial Rap Music and Perceived Masculinity Ideals and Actual Self-Evaluations among Black U.S. and Dutch Adolescent Men", published in *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 27, 2023. The authors explore the relationship between consumption of idealized masculinity in rap and the (re) production of these ideals in young (Black) men's senses of masculine selves. With this research, they aimed to understand whether young men compare themselves to these ideals, and if so, how this informs their self-evaluations.

Indistinguishable Likeness

For more on the 3D-reproduction of artworks, as discussed in 'The Dialogue', read Liselore Tissen's PhD Thesis *Indistinguishable Likeness* (2024). In her *cum laude* awarded research, Tissen investigates how the advancement of technology and digitization, specifically the rise of 3D-printing, disrupts the Western emphasis on the materially unique artwork through its unique ability to accurately replicate all material characteristics of a painting. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach in its application to several case studies, the research demonstrates how these reproductions provide new perspectives on original artworks, deepening our understanding of art history, conservation methods, and public engagement with art.

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

For more on the value of art (reproduction) in the mass media age, as discussed in 'The Dialogue' and Dick van Broekhuizen's essay 'The Plaster Trace', read Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Here, Benjamin examines how art's aura, or its "unique presence in time and space", diminishes in the era of mass reproduction. Arguing that mechanical reproduction detaches art from its original context, democratizing access but undermining its authenticity and ritualistic value, he contrasts 'traditional' art with reproducible forms like photography, arguing that in absence of traditional or ritualistic value, the production of art is inherently based upon the praxis of politics.

Dickinson

For more on the reproduction of historical poetry in a transmedial context, as discussed in Chiara Ravinetto's 'Short Essay' *Dickinson* (2019-2021), see the homonymous tv-series *Dickinson* (2019-2021), created by Alena Smith. Set in the 19th century, this series explores the constraints of society, gender and family from the perspective of rebellious young poet, Emily Dickinson. As Ravinetto has explored in her essay, the series reproduces Emily Dickinson's poetry on the level of both theme and content, thereby making frequent use of anachronism, to explore Dickinson's role as feminist role model. Available on AppleTV.

Hip-Hop Evolution

For more on the origins and evolution of hip-hop and the role of reproductions therein, as discussed in Lola Abbas' 'Short Essay': *Reproduction of Christianity in Rap Music*, see *Hip-Hop Evolution* (2016–2020), directed by Darby Wheeler and Rodrigo Bascuñán. Spanning four seasons, the documentary series charts hip-hop's history through interviews with the genre's founding figures. Beginning on August 11, 1973, at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, New York—when DJ Kool Herc lay the foundation for hip-hop culture with his revolutionary practice of 'breakbeat DJing'—the series traces hip-hop's journey from the 1970s through the 2000s, capturing the culture's rise from its underground origins to mainstream prominence. Available on Netflix.

Certified Copy

For more on the ethical discussions regarding reproductions, see *Certified Copy* (2010), directed by Abbas Kiarostami. In this romantic drama, a gallery owner living in a Tuscan village attends a lecture by a British author on authenticity and fakery in art. Afterward, she invites him on a tour of the countryside, during which he is mistaken for her husband. They keep up the pretense and continue on their afternoon out, discussing love, life and art, and increasingly behaving like a long-married couple. But is there more to their seemingly new relationship? Behind the guise of a tale of blooming romance, philosophical and ethical questions regarding authenticity and originality are addressed.

The Mystery of the Diriyah Star Night

For more on the creation of art using Artificial Intelligence (AI), as shown in the 'Artistic Interventions' by Jeroen van der Most, listen to *Het Mysterie van de Diriyah Star Night* [translation: 'The Mystery of the Diriyah Star Night'], published by Dag en Nacht Media, 2022. This podcast traces the thrilling 'whodunit' story of AI artist Jeroen van der Most, who discovered one day that an AI-generated painting wrongfully attributed to him had been sold in Saudi-Arabia for 3.2 million dollars. Determined to get to the bottom of this story, Van der Most contacted a journalist and traveled to Saudi-Arabia to find this mysterious AI-artist. Available on Spotify. Note: in Dutch.

Synergy

For more from Peter Peskens, participant of 'The Polylogue', listen to the new album *Synergy* by Peskens' band Jungle by Night. The seven-headed instrumental collective from Amsterdam started in 2009, motivated by the wish to form a music group in which the interplay between instruments, and not vocals, are at the center. Their seventh studio album *Synergy* is a rich celebration of fifteen years of the band, featuring collaborations with various Dutch artists – culminating in songs ranging from Dutch poetry in song form, to upbeat Turkish utopian imagination. For their (inter)national tour dates, see www.junglebynight.com.

Bobbie

For more from Darek Mercks, participant of 'The Polylogue', listen to Mercks' band Pip Blom, who have released their third studio album *Bobbie* via Heavenly Recordings in 2023. The Amsterdam-based indierockband started in 2016, and has since experienced national and international success, playing festivals from Glastonbury (Britain) to Iceland Air (Iceland). In 2025, Pip Blom will be touring less than usual, as they are in the process of producing their fourth studio album. For tour dates and more, see their website www.pipblom.nl.

The Butterfly Paintings



The *Butterfly Paintings* are works of art created by butterflies and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Artist Jeroen van der Most built an AI system that tracks the flight paths of butterflies through video footage. The system then creates new shapes and movies from the tracking results. The artist curated the most interesting artworks in this final result.

The Artist Speaking

"There was a time in which an artist used technology like a brush to create a painting. We're in a phase now in which artists co-create with computer systems. There might be a future time, in which AI systems create art about us without any interference. We would be mere subjects of the art made by other entities in the outside world. The role left for us might just be to give meaning to the art pieces with our imagination. This idea was one of the inspirations for me to start the butterfly project."

The pieces were part of a project that was worked on in 2018. What fascinated the artist about AI, is the thoughts it triggered about the differences between man, animal and machine: "The encounter with an AI system that creates interesting art visuals or plays the game of 'Go' brilliantly makes you realize our intelligence is not as unique as was once thought. We're living in an environment with other intelligent entities."

According to Van der Most, the roles of technology, humanity and nature are starting to be rebalanced in our current society. The rise of AI coincides with the collapse of an imaginary hierarchy in which humanity was at the top. A transformation towards a new value system is taking place. This is of high importance in dealing with challenges like the climate crisis.

Video

You can find a video in which you see the butterflies creating an artwork through AI through this link:

jeroenvandermost.com/butterfly-paintings



Upcoming Editions

AMJournal #4: Co-creating our Cities

*Guest edited by Vanessa Vroon-Najem
and GL Hernandez*

Coexistence, coproduction and cooperation are integral ingredients of (contemporary) cities. As such, from processes to products, and from art to activism, every element of the urban experience is born out of collaboration. Essentially, every city is a product of co-creation, as the city-life is a collective life. This edition of AMJournal seeks to reflect on collectivity, collections, and representations of community.

To be published in July 2025

AMJournal #5: Women and Cities

The stories of cities are often told through the men that help(ed) make them, literally and metaphorically. However, men did not, and do not, inhabit or make the cities by themselves. Even now, the influence and presence of women in our urban spaces is still underrepresented. This issue will focus on how women have shaped cities, in the past, the present and future, whether in politics or architecture. And, in turn, how cities have shaped what it means to live as/ be a woman. From power to spirituality, from intersectionality to biology, from science to resistance, from sex to economy: All urban aspects that shape women and have been shaped by women will be explored.

To be published in December 2025

AMJournal #6: Our Future Cities

Looking back at a city's history to learn from it and create a better present is a common narrative, especially in museums. But looking into the future of those cities is a must as well. How will we inhabit urban spaces in the future? What will city economies look like? How will we build? What will we create? Will there be more green or more concrete? What will the differences be between cities in, for example, Norway versus Nigeria? How will we dress? How will we eat? Furthermore, how will we co-exist? AMJournal #5 will feature investigations into the possibilities and struggles of our future urban spaces, including projections, prognoses, hypotheses, as well as hopes and fears.

To be published in July 2026

Want to keep in touch
with AMJournal?

Want to be the first to
receive the new journal
editions?

Send an e-mail
to journal@
amsterdammuseum.nl

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024

Doi
doi.org/10.61299/wG1H29q

AM  Journal