

History of Collecting and Exhibiting (1500-present)

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### Visit to CollectieCentrum Nederland

On the 24th of February, our class visited the CollectieCentrum Nederland, which is a depot for four state collections. Our professors Hans Piena and Susan Hogervorst led us on a private tour of the state's collection, using several objects as focal points of an overarching discussion on identity-shaping and appropriation.

Hans Piena's tour through the facilities highlighted several objects within the collection. Whether their history be on display or in public use, these objects shared a common purpose of cultivating social cohesion through identity building and the distilling of moral as well as ideological sentiments. Sodomite crossword puzzles, Dutch farmers' plaques, and politically affiliated chinaware have all transcended their historical time period, collaborating to create a story of Dutch identity.

Jacco Hooikamer gave a presentation on traditional Dutch clothing, with a focus on the clothing from Staphorst. As an example of appropriation, Hooikamer showed clothing that is traditionally worn in periods of mourning, yet, were recently used and displayed during a festive catwalk that was meant to show the modern take on traditional Dutch clothing. Many people from the community of Staphorst felt offended because the original meaning and context of the designs were not respected.

Finally, Yuri van der Linden gave the last lecture on the story of the historical capture of Damietta by the city of Haarlem during the crusades. This victory is depicted on a stained glass window, as well as on a glass goblet. However, as it turns out, the story is not historically correct and the people of Haarlem were not even present in Damietta at the time. Van der Linden explains that the story was probably used to boost the sale of beer from Haarlem. Thus, another example of appropriation, in this case, of a historical event to shape a commercially beneficial identity.

The group discussion was organized around this week's literature: Frans Grijzenhout's chapter in *Performing the past* as well as 'Nationalism and Museology: Reflections on the Swedish Experience' by Stefan Bohman. The discussion was centered around the points of cultural heritage, inequalities in art making/curating, and state-led appropriation of local identities. An object in its museological setting acts as a vehicle for uncovering its own historical and cultural conditioning, as well as the nations'. This, however, poses the risk of changing the meaning of the object through its interruptive preservation (the heritage paradox). And in some cases, the risk of recreating the inequalities of the past represented through these objects. This power dynamic of museum curation and its construction of a wholistic/fractured national identity was the highlight of our discussion. In this, the museum and its intertwined relationship with the state hold the power of identity building. Even when carrying out a 'bottom-up' approach, the museum still adheres to the demands of 'high culture'. This leaves local identities misrepresented or even appropriated

for the image of the state, as seen in the reading of the Swedish construction of 'peasant culture'. Over the past few decades, museums have become increasingly inclusive in diversifying the curating of exhibitions while addressing interdisciplinary issues. However, the question of whether state affiliated museums can holistically represent a national identity still stands. And should that be its job?



