

Enhancing Public Engagement in Historic House Museums of Amsterdam

Educational Guidelines for Historic House Museums Highlighting Their
Conservation and Restoration Work

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Abstract

A persistent challenge has been identified: historic house museums struggle to attract and retain visitors worldwide. In the Netherlands, data from 2023 confirmed a significant decline in visitor numbers to small museums, a category that includes historic house museums. This thesis proposes a response to this issue by exploring how increased transparency around behind-the-scenes conservation and restoration work can enhance public engagement. Through an extensive literature analysis, it was possible to trace the origins of the public engagement concept as well as other relevant theoretical frameworks. Three historic house museums in Amsterdam served as case studies: Huis Willet-Holthuysen, Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, and the Embassy of the Free Mind. The research methodology combined historical research using online sources, on-site visits, and interviews with museum employees. The aim was to understand which public engagement strategies related to conservation and restoration work the house museums have employed, both in the past and the present. After the analysis and application of the public engagement typology of Rowe and Frewer, the educational guidelines were outlined as practical recommendations for historic house museums to enhance their public engagement. This research concluded that there are several possibilities which historic house museums in Amsterdam can utilise to enhance their public engagement, such as educational workshops, co-creative activities, and events surrounding the conservation and restoration work conducted in the museum. The educational guidelines provide concrete first steps for the historic house museums to become more visible and valued. This can subsequently influence the perception of the work in the cultural heritage preservation field as a whole.

Keywords: public engagement, historic house museums, conservation, restoration.

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1. Introduction

When visiting a new city or planning a cultural weekend, what comes to mind first? Likely, landmarks, main squares, and museums. When selecting a museum to visit, national institutions are usually the preferred choice. In the case of Amsterdam, the Rijksmuseum and van Gogh Museum usually attract the most visitors.¹ Another well-known destination is the Anne Frank House. Being among the top three most visited museums in Amsterdam, it enjoys a strong position and visitor turnout, eliminating the need for active public engagement strategies.^{2,3} However, not all museums of this category receive the same attention, specifically those that are smaller and lesser known. Presumably, not as many people are even aware of this category – historic house museums. These cultural institutions can be defined as museums that are set in a historic residence, preserving and presenting their original interiors, artefacts, and stories.⁴ Internationally, historic house museums often struggle with visibility and public engagement, in the sense of attracting and retaining visitors as well as staying relevant.⁵ Moreover, in the Netherlands, in 2023, it was established that there was a 33% decrease in visitors after the COVID-19 pandemic in small museums, which are defined as having an annual turnover of up to €400,000.⁶ Bearing in mind that in seven out of twelve provinces in the country, half of the museum work is executed by volunteers, which saves a significant amount of funds.⁷ Additionally, there is a planned governmental

¹ Oomen, Marretje. "Cultuur en Recreatie in Cijfers 2024." *Onderzoek en Statistiek*, accessed 28 June 2024. <https://onderzoek.amsterdam.nl/artikel/cultuur-en-recreatie-in-cijfers-2024>.

² Ibid.

³ Dineke Stam (Former Curator, Exhibition Maker, Researcher, and Project Manager Education at the Anne Frank House), personal communication with the author, March 14, 2025.

⁴ Giovanni Pinna, "Introduction to Historic House Museums," *Museum International* 53, no. 2 (2001): 4-5, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000122975>.

⁵ Ryan, Deborah, and Franklin Vagnone. "Reorienting historic house museums: An anarchists guide." In *ARCC Conference Repository*. 2014: 97-98.

⁶ Museumvereniging. 2023. *Museumcijfers 2023*: 23. Amsterdam: Museumvereniging. <https://museumvereniging.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Museumcijfers-2023-.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid: 53.

value-added tax increase in the cultural sector from 9% to 21% in 2026.⁸ This will have a grand impact on small museums, leading to higher entrance fees, potentially decreasing visitor turnout and further straining the financial stability of these institutions.

In spite of the fact that in some small museums, the visitor numbers are recovering, most of the institutions still find it difficult to sustain themselves.⁹ Most of the historic house museums in the Netherlands can be considered small museums, based on their size, annual turnover, staffing structure and visitor numbers.¹⁰ To overcome the aforementioned challenges, such museums may attempt to make their stories more relevant and engaging for their audience. Museums might explore new ways of exhibiting information, including demonstrating aspects that have usually remained behind the scenes or received little attention. The historical narratives are usually displayed and described very well in a house museum, but an essential aspect of its existence is often neglected or overlooked: the ongoing conservation and restoration work that contributes to its preservation. These practices can be integrated into exhibitions or events, through which the historic house museums can create a more engaging and educational experience, which can subsequently establish a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage. A historic house museum can be a fine combination of educational information and aesthetic pleasure. Captivating historic interiors of past periods bring a visitor back in time, demonstrating the life of former inhabitants quite directly, while simultaneously supporting the narrative with history-based information. However, the concept of people-for-people may be missing, which this thesis introduces. It implies that the work and contributions of individuals are not only valued but also actively serve and benefit

⁸ Belastingdienst. "Verhoging Btw-Tarief 2025." *Belastingdienst*, 2023, accessed March 20, 2024. <https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontentnl/berichten/nieuws/verhoging-btw-tarief-2025#:~:text=Het%20Belastingplan%202025%20bevat%20een,Daarnaast%20geldt%20een%20overgangsregeling>.

⁹ DutchNews.nl. "Small Museums Are Still Struggling to Boost Visitor Numbers." *DutchNews.nl*, accessed March 18, 2024. <https://www.dutchnews.nl/2024/09/small-museums-are-still-struggling-to-boost-visitor-numbers/>.

¹⁰ Museumvereniging. 2023. *Museumcijfers 2023*: 23. <https://museumvereniging.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Museumcijfers-2023-.pdf>.

others within a community. This emphasises a reciprocal relationship, in which the actions of one person or group enhance the experiences and outcomes for others. This additionally promotes a sense of shared responsibility and mutual appreciation. Because the purpose of house museums is not to simply display the ways of how the elites used to live, but to demonstrate the beauty of craftsmanship in interior making. The emphasis is on original craftsmanship, which should be complemented by acknowledging the nowadays work of conservators and restorers who sustain the preservation of historic interiors. The expertise of these specialists assists in saving cultural heritage for future generations. However, their work, extensive research and conducted ethical considerations are frequently not given enough attention. Moreover, it can be said that this lack of transparency limits public engagement and disconnects visitors from the material reality of heritage preservation.

Through including information about conservation and restoration practices in their exhibitions or events, historic house museums can open new perspectives for their visitors. This way, a visitor would not be disregarded but rather included in the usually behind-the-scenes processes of a museum's life. When witnessing the ongoing work of an estate's preservation, the public may gain a greater appreciation for the fragility of cultural heritage and the level of expertise required to maintain it. Subsequently, a strengthened engagement with a house museum may lead to a broader public understanding and support for heritage conservation and the cultural sector in general. Failing to include an open dialogue about the conservation and restoration processes in an engaging way risks alienating visitors from the actual processes that sustain historic house museums. The presentation of historic interiors as static and untouched strengthens an illusion that preservation practices happen without effort. However, in reality, conservation and restoration are sometimes a challenging process that should be made visible, accessible and understood. Thus, there is a

need for new ideas and implementations in order for museums to truly fulfil their role as spaces for education and engagement and remain valued and relevant for future generations.

This all has led this thesis to explore the following research question:

How can historic house museums in Amsterdam enhance public engagement by giving more visibility to their conservation and restoration work, in light of their past and current strategies? The following sub-questions were defined in order to provide a wider scope for the research topic: What past and current strategies were employed by the three house museums in Amsterdam to engage the public? To build further on that, this thesis will additionally explore: In what ways is conservation and restoration work made visible (or invisible) to the public in each museum? Finally, this thesis will analyse the following sub-question: How can historic house museums reimagine conservation and restoration as participatory or co-creative processes?

The underlying idea behind it is the research into what strategies the historic house museums in Amsterdam can employ to bring light and awareness to the conservation and restoration work done in the historic interiors of their estates. This thesis aims to explore three house museums in Amsterdam as case studies: Huis Willet-Holthuysen, Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder and Embassy of the Free Mind. Based on this research and thorough analysis, the aim is to develop educational guidelines for historic house museums in Amsterdam for incorporating the work of the heritage experts into the exhibited information or in the form of special events, lectures or workshops. The guidelines will provide strategies and solutions for increasing public engagement with the museums. Public engagement generally refers to the ways in which organisations attempt to involve individuals in their work.¹¹ It is important to highlight that there are numerous means through which one can

¹¹ National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. *"Introducing Public Engagement,"* accessed March 22, 2024. <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/introducing-public-engagement>.

achieve public engagement, such as informing, consulting and collaborating with the public.¹²

This thesis focuses on all these aspects that are defined in depth in the Theoretical Framework chapter and are expanded and presented in the Educational Guidelines for Enhancing Public Engagement chapter.

The structure is the following: the Theoretical Framework chapter sets the beginning to dive deeper into the terminology, concepts and relevant previous national and international research. It establishes the academic foundation and theory for this research and finishes with an outlined methodology. After that, the chapter focusing on Case Studies and Analysis discusses each of the three historic house museums. An analysis identifies key points of improvement for public engagement in the museums. Thereafter, the Educational Guidelines for Enhancing Public Engagement chapter provides a discussion of the completed analysis, answers the set research question and sub-questions, as well as outlines educational guidelines. Lastly, the Conclusion chapter reflects on the conducted research, lists suggestions for further research and ends with closing remarks.

Can outlining the educational guidelines that emphasise the transparency and accessibility of conservation and restoration processes help establish a stronger connection between the public and heritage professionals? An inquiry this thesis seeks to explore is whether this approach could lead to increased visitor engagement and a deeper appreciation of house museums' role. Subsequently, the hypothesis is that educational guidelines for historic house museums in Amsterdam, developed through an analysis of three case studies and supported by extensive literature and theoretical frameworks, could provide a well-founded basis to enhance public engagement in these institutions.

¹² Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division, University of Oxford, "What Is Public Engagement with Research?" accessed March 23, 2025, <https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/public-engagement/what-is-public-engagement>.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter establishes the academic foundation for the current thesis research, giving attention to critical concepts, theories and relevant previous research related to public engagement with heritage. The chapter includes theoretical perspectives on public engagement as a concept, visitor participation in museums, and relevant examples of public engagement strategies. At the end of this chapter, the research design and methodology of the study are discussed. It explains the selection criteria for the three house museums chosen as case studies. Furthermore, it describes the data collection methods, which include interviews with house museums' staff and examination of public events and programs.

2.1 Historic House Museums' Struggle

This research focuses on historic house museums specifically by the reason of these institutions being a valuable information source and representation of a specific period in relation to architecture and historic interior design.¹³ Historic house museums represent a vital part of cultural heritage, due to the historical knowledge they convey. A visitor to such a museum can not only learn about a historically significant building with its architecture and interior, but also about the lives of its past inhabitants. Historic house museums provide a unique experience combining the observation of cultural heritage and the interpretation of the given narrative. Despite their contribution to heritage education and preservation, historic house museums deserve more recognition. Through experiences in personal network, it has come to this author's attention that a significant number of people are not familiar with this kind of museum, or have never attended it. Thus, it is useful to research ways of improving the visibility and appreciation of historic house museums. This is achieved by reviewing available literature around the concepts of public engagement and other relevant theoretical

¹³ Pavoni, Rosanna. "Towards a Definition and Typology of Historic House Museums." *Museum International* 53, no. 2 (2001): 16.

frameworks. We will begin by pointing out an international struggle of historic house museums.

Deborah Ryan and Franklin Vagnone, in their publication “Reorienting Historic House Museums: An Anarchist’s Guide”, argue that historic house museums are facing challenges such as declining visits, financial instability, and issues with board leadership worldwide¹⁴. Often, the house museums present a fact-based narrative, typically focused on prominent white men, in historic rooms with few signs of habitation or opportunities for meaningful connections across generations. They argue that, locked in a pre-determined period of interpretation, these museums have become insensitive to the communities around them, especially as those communities change. The museum boards and staff often lack expertise in civic engagement, unlike professionals in fields such as urban design and architecture. This has led to historic house museums being viewed as irrelevant and unresponsive by diverse 21st-century audiences.¹⁵ The critique of these issues dates back as early as 1998.¹⁶

To address this issue, Ryan and Vagnone discuss a thorough strategy for reorienting historic house museums towards a new paradigm of real-life habitation and greater inclusiveness.¹⁷ They introduce The Anarchist Guide for Historic House Museums (AGHHM), which advocates for a change of the current approach to house museums, switching the traditional museum activities to promote a shared experience through getting the community involved.¹⁸ One of the main ideas is to build relationships with the people living nearby and create stories that are interesting to them.¹⁹ This means reaching out to groups who might not normally visit historic houses, finding out what they care about, and

¹⁴ Ryan, Deborah, and Franklin Vagnone. “Reorienting Historic House Museums: An Anarchist’s Guide.” In ARCC Conference Repository, (2014): 97.

¹⁵ Ibid., 98.

¹⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁷ Ibid., 97.

¹⁸ Ibid., 100.

¹⁹ Ibid., 101.

searching for ways to connect those interests to the museum. The authors present that historic house museums could offer space for community meetings or classes, or host events that relate to the history of the house but also to the current community's interests.²⁰ Through focusing on what the local community wants and needs, they argue that the house museums can become more welcoming, get more visitors, and become important parts of their neighbourhoods again.²¹

What these authors from the United States are essentially presenting is a public engagement strategy. By adjusting the prevalent structure of historic house museums, they intend to involve more local communities with the subject matter of the museums. This thesis research attempts to establish similar strategies in the form of educational guidelines to engage people more with house museums in Amsterdam. However, it is crucial to define the meaning and origins of public engagement as a concept before delving deeper into the theoretical base for this research.

2.2 What is Public Engagement?

Public engagement is a broad term that is usually used to describe all the different ways that organisations or institutions responsible for making policies can involve members of the public in their work, especially in setting agendas, making decisions, and forming policies.²² According to Gene Rowe and Lynn J. Frewer in *A Typology of Public Engagement Mechanisms*, public engagement is best understood as a combination of three distinct but related concepts: public communication, public consultation, and public participation.²³ They believe that looking at these three concepts separately helps to understand the different ways information circulates between the organisation and the public.

²⁰ Ryan and Vagnone. "Reorienting Historic House Museums," 103.

²¹ Ibid., 103-105.

²² Rowe, Gene, and Lynn J. Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms." *Science, technology, & human values* 30, no. 2 (2005): 253.

²³ Ibid.

The first of these concepts is public communication, which implies that there is a one-directional flow of information.²⁴ In the case of public communication, the organisation that leads an initiative usually spreads the information to the public. The main aspect here is that the organisation is primarily informing the public, and it does not necessarily require or actively seek feedback or input from the public.²⁵

The second concept is public consultation.²⁶ This differs from public information as it involves a one-directional flow of information from the public back to the organisation. In the case of public consultation, the organisation starts a process of collecting opinions and information from the public on a particular issue. Importantly, the authors point out that in public consultation, there is typically no formal dialogue or discussion between the people and the organisation.²⁷

Lastly, there is public participation.²⁸ This form of engagement involves an exchange of information between the public and the institution, where there is a dialogue happening, often in a group setting. Such interaction can imply that there are representatives from both the public and the organisation, or sometimes only the public representatives who collect the information from the organisation before giving their input. The authors emphasise that this dialogue and discussion can lead to a change in opinions of both the public participants and the organisation. These three concepts are what Rowe and Frewer collectively refer to as public engagement.²⁹

In this thesis research, the focus is on Rowe and Frewer's three concepts of public engagement as a way to understand and analyse how historic house museums in Amsterdam can better involve the public in their conservation and restoration work.³⁰ To answer the set

²⁴ Rowe and Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms," 253-254.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 254.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

research question, it is examined how each of these three aspects can be put into practice using the Key Engagement Mechanisms Classified According to Structural Variability that Rowe and Frewer introduce.³¹ These mechanisms encompass a list of public engagement strategies grouped according to the three concepts.³²

2.3 What is the Origin of the Public Engagement Concept?

The concept of public engagement was not primarily introduced as such, however, there has been debate and critique around the “deficit model”. This concept, while not explicitly named, was first described by Brian Wynne in *Misunderstood misunderstanding: social identities and public uptake of science*.³³ He observed a prevalent concern of scientists and policymakers, which stemmed from their perception that the public lacks the capacity or willingness to grasp the concepts as communicated by experts properly. This perspective originates from the assumption that the public’s failure to comprehend or accept scientific information is mainly because of their own intellectual shortcomings in grasping technical details. Wynne does not explicitly name the deficit model, but he articulates its foundational principle, the belief that the public has a “deficit” of scientific knowledge that needs to be filled by expert communication.³⁴

Later, a chapter by Alan Irwin, Alison Dale, and Denis Smith in *Misunderstanding Science?* explicitly refers to the concept of the deficit model.³⁵ They describe its approach as conventional, where the primary concern appears to be the public’s lack of ability to understand science.³⁶ Thus, the term deficit model became the label used to describe the perspective that Wynne initially critiqued as a “self-defeatingly scientific conception”.³⁷ The

³¹ Rowe and Frewer. “A typology of public engagement mechanisms,” 276- 282.

³² Ibid.

³³ Wynne, Brian. “Misunderstood misunderstanding: social identities and public uptake of science.” *Public understanding of science* (1992): 282.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Irwin, Alan, Alison Dale, and Denis Smith. “Science and Hell’s Kitchen: The Local Understanding of Hazard Issues.” In *Misunderstanding Science? The Public Reconstruction of Science and Technology*, edited by Alan Irwin and Brian Wynne. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1996): 48.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Wynne, “Misunderstood Misunderstanding,” 282.

core assumption of this model, as highlighted in both publications, is that the public's lack of scientific literacy is the main barrier to their acceptance of scientific information. Moreover, it indicates that effective public engagement should focus on reducing this perceived knowledge gap.³⁸

Both publications provide significant critiques of the deficit model.³⁹ Wynne argues that this way of framing the deficit model only leads to greater public detachment. He contends that the deficit model operates on the false premise that public engagement with science is mainly an intellectual process of receiving information. This overlooks the crucial influence of social connections, interactions, and individual interests. According to Wynne, when the public seems to disregard scientific information, it is not necessarily because they lack understanding, but because they fail to identify with or recognise it in a moral sense.⁴⁰ He asserts that the central issue is not people's cognitive limitations but rather the degree of trust and credibility they have for the scientific representatives or organisations. Through research, Wynne found out that the public reactions to scientific advice were rooted in their social identities and their relationships with scientific experts.⁴¹ He suggests that improving public engagement requires scientific institutions to demonstrate a similar level of self-reflection in the public sphere.⁴²

Irwin, Dale, and Smith also directly challenge the deficit model, framing it as the traditional but problematic approach that assumes the public is presumed to lack prior knowledge in their relationship with science.⁴³ In contrast, the authors wish to depict the sharing of technical information in a way of broader interaction involving various shapes of knowledge, apprehension, and communication, especially within the local knowledge held by

³⁸ Irwin, Dale, and Smith, "Science and Hell's Kitchen," 48; Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding," 282.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 283.

⁴¹ Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding," 287.

⁴² Ibid., 300.

⁴³ Irwin, Dale, and Smith, "Science and Hell's Kitchen," 48.

communities. Their research in Greater Manchester indicates that local residents' responses to environmental hazards are shaped by a diverse range of cultural resources and pre-existing knowledge.⁴⁴ They conclude that to truly understand the public responses, it is necessary to know the social and cultural ways with the help of which the public knowledge is created. Their findings suggest that when the public appears to dismiss or find scientific information irrelevant, it is often an active social process linked to issues of trust, credibility, and the practical value of the information, and not disinterest or irrationality.⁴⁵

From these publications, we learn that public engagement is not simply about the individuals' understanding of scientific information.⁴⁶ Instead, it is a complex concept, which is constructed by social identities, trust, and credibility that people invest in institutions. Public engagement also involves individuals' pre-existing knowledge, accumulated information, and their critical evaluation of information sources based on trustworthiness and practical relevance to their everyday lives and concerns.⁴⁷ Effective public engagement strategies require recognition of local contexts and knowledge.⁴⁸

Drawing on the research of Wynne, Irwin, Dale, and Smith provides valuable insight for this thesis. Both publications critique the idea that a lack of public understanding, whether of science or other fields, stems from a deficit of knowledge.⁴⁹ For historic house museums, this suggests that making conservation and restoration visible can expand a model of simply passing on the information about heritage preservation. By showcasing the processes, skills, and ethical considerations involved, museums can build trust and connect with the visitors' existing appreciation for history and craftsmanship. This is influenced by recognising that public engagement is a social and cultural process influenced by trust in the institution and

⁴⁴ Irwin, Dale, and Smith, "Science and Hell's Kitchen," 49.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 53.

⁴⁶ Irwin, Dale, and Smith, "Science and Hell's Kitchen," 49; Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding," 282.

⁴⁷ Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding," 281-283.

⁴⁸ Irwin, Dale, and Smith, "Science and Hell's Kitchen," 50.

⁴⁹ Irwin, Dale, and Smith, "Science and Hell's Kitchen," 48; Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding," 284.

the relevance of the work to their own understanding and values. People actively evaluate the trustworthiness and perceived motivations of information sources, therefore, transparency in conservation practices can enhance the museum's credibility and establish a stronger connection with visitors.⁵⁰ Moreover, by focusing on the tangible work of conservation, house museums can uncover the existing public interest in the preservation of history and move towards a structure of public engagement that values dialogue and connection over a simplistic transmission of knowledge.

Building on dialogue, the discussed deficit model is largely a “top-down” concept, where scientific knowledge is seen as superior and the public's lack of understanding is framed as a failure to grasp this privileged information shared by experts.⁵¹ This perspective undermines people's existing knowledge, experiences, and social networks. For historic house museums in Amsterdam aiming to enhance public engagement through conservation and restoration work, adopting a top-down approach would involve simply presenting expert knowledge about preservation without considering the visitors' own appreciation for history and craftsmanship. To move beyond this, we should instead focus on building trust through transparency by showcasing the processes and ethical considerations of conservation, keeping in mind the visitors' existing knowledge and perspectives. This way, a dialogue and interaction can be established rather than a simple one-way communication. This involves stepping away from a prevalent museum structure that assumes that people need to be filled with expert knowledge.

2.4 Authorised Heritage Discourse

In order to consciously avoid the top-down structure of the educational guidelines that are outlined in this research, it is crucial to consider the authorised heritage discourse (AHD), which was introduced by Laurajane Smith and describes the dominant way of thinking about

⁵⁰ Irwin, Dale, and Smith, “Science and Hell's Kitchen,” 53-54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

heritage in Western societies.⁵² This discourse suggests that true heritage consists of “old, grand, monumental, and aesthetically pleasing sites” like historical buildings and important artefacts.⁵³ The AHD promotes the cultural values of the West as universally important and shapes what is generally accepted as heritage by both the public and experts. It also gives a certain importance to the knowledge and opinions of experts and influences how heritage is managed and presented.⁵⁴

Smith specifically looks at house museums, especially grand houses like English country houses, as being strongly influenced by the AHD.⁵⁵ She argues that these types of museums are often seen as prime examples of authorised heritage. Because of the AHD, the way these house museums create exhibits tends to focus on certain aspects.⁵⁶ There’s often a big emphasis on the physical beauty and authenticity of the house, its architecture, and its collections. The idea can be that these elements do not need additional and detailed explanation. Furthermore, Smith points out that these exhibits often lack a broader social context. They might not fully explore the lives and experiences of everyone who lived or worked there, often making the roles of women, housekeepers, enslaved people, or other staff invisible. This focus on the elite can lead to an incomplete understanding of the house’s history and its connection to the wider social issues of its time.⁵⁷

In terms of public engagement, Smith contends that the AHD shapes how house museums interact with their visitors by often positioning them as passive recipients of information.⁵⁸ The museums adopt a certain mentality, where visitors look at displays and accept the interpretation provided by the experts. There might not be many opportunities for visitors to actively participate, share their own perspectives, or critically think about the

⁵² Smith, Laurajane. *Uses of heritage*. Routledge, (2006): 11.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11-12; 28-29.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44-49.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

heritage being presented. The focus lies on the idea that the present generation (represented by experts) is responsible for preserving the house for future generations, which might limit discussions about its relevance or use in the present.⁵⁹ Smith suggests that under the influence of the AHD, house museums can unintentionally reinforce national narratives and the values of the elite who historically owned the houses, rather than proposing a more diverse and critical view of the past.⁶⁰

This thesis research aims to reject the AHD and focus on creating an engaging and inclusive environment in historic house museums in Amsterdam. For this matter, certain public engagement strategies have to be analysed and considered.

2.5 Public Engagement and Museums: Strategies

In his publication, *The Politics of Talk: Coming to Terms with the 'New' Scientific Governance*, Alan Irwin argues that the current emphasis on public dialogue and engagement in science and technology, particularly in Europe, leads to a move towards greater democracy in science policy.⁶¹ This shift is partly due to a perceived “legitimation crisis” in science, where there is a need to regain public trust. Consequently, he argues that transparency and openness are able to make the public interested again. While official reports emphasise the importance of including the public in science-based policy, Irwin points out several challenges and tensions. These include the continued belief that public scepticism stems from a lack of scientific understanding (the deficit model), the difficulties in creating genuine dialogue, and the uncertain connection between simply talking to the public and increasing their trust. Irwin suggests that there is a need to analyse the engagement policies carefully to understand the underlying assumptions about science, expertise, and the public. He views

⁵⁹ Smith, *Uses of heritage*, 11-18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 43; 45.

⁶¹ Irwin, Alan. “The Politics of Talk: Coming to Terms with the ‘New’ Scientific Governance.” *Social studies of science* 36, no. 2 (2006): 299-300.

these initiatives as a “social experiment” that can reveal a lot about the current relationship between science and society.⁶²

Linking this to the present research question on historic house museums in Amsterdam, the lack of trust may exist between museums and the public. By giving more attention to conservation and restoration work, museums can make use of the principles of transparency and openness that Irwin discusses.⁶³ Making the often-hidden processes of conservation visible can serve as a form of direct dialogue about the museum’s main efforts and the expertise involved in preserving cultural heritage.

Irwin critiques the persistent influence of the deficit model theory.⁶⁴ In the museum context, a parallel conception might exist where the complexities of conservation are only understood by experts. By actively engaging the public with the conservation and restoration processes, museums can reject this deficit of understanding about their work, revealing the full, potentially imperfect process of house museum work. This is in contrast to an often perfectly displayed interior of house museums criticised by Laurajan Smith, which only portrays the intended story to the visitors. Irwin refers to a notion that public trust can only be achieved through openness and that people should be trusted to respond rationally to this openness.⁶⁵ House museums can apply this notion by trusting the public to engage with the intricacies of conservation.

Furthermore, to build on Irwin’s notion, historic house museums that open up their conservation work to public view could potentially conduct their own social experiments concerning public engagement.⁶⁶ By observing how the public interacts with and responds to the conservation process, museums can gain valuable insights for establishing stronger relationships and building trust.

⁶² Irwin, “The Politics of Talk: Coming to Terms with the ‘New’ Scientific Governance,” 299-316.

⁶³ Ibid., 299-300; 304-305.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 300-301; 306.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 306.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 316.

Lastly, Irwin points out that public engagement strategies' terms such as "consultation" and "dialogue" are subject to interpretation and that control over the framework for engagement is rather influential.⁶⁷ House museums ought to be mindful of how they frame, present and involve the public in their conservation work. By genuinely opening up the process and allowing for public curiosity, questions, and participation rather than simply showcasing finished results, they can produce a more meaningful engagement and avoid what Irwin might consider a superficial or controlled form of public dialogue.⁶⁸ This can contribute to transforming conservation from a potentially obscure back-office activity into an essential part of the development of public engagement and connecting the historic house museums to their audiences.

The Participatory Museum by Nina Simon discusses a theoretical shift in how museums operate, turning away from the traditional model of institutions delivering content for passive consumption towards becoming dynamic platforms where visitors can participate, share, and connect with each other and the museum's shared information.⁶⁹ To facilitate this, the publication recommends that museums mainly focus on what their visitors want and need when designing activities and exhibits. They should create clear and well-organised ways for people to get involved, making sure it's easy and appealing for them to contribute their ideas, stories, or creations.⁷⁰

Nina Simon highlights two beneficial concepts. Firstly, the "social objects", which are defined as artefacts and experiences that naturally spark conversation and social interaction among visitors.⁷¹ These artefacts can help the museum visitors to bring their attention to an object in place of directly on each other, which makes dialogue and engagement slightly easier. Main qualities that could make an object social often include being personal

⁶⁷ Irwin, "The Politics of Talk: Coming to Terms with the 'New' Scientific Governance," 315.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 315-316.

⁶⁹ Simon, Nina. *The Participatory Museum*. Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, (2010): 26.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 35-39.

⁷¹ Ibid., 127-128.

(triggering individual stories), active (physically engaging people), provocative (sparking discussion through surprise), and relational (inviting interpersonal use).⁷²

The second useful concept discussed is the “pull technique”, an interpretative strategy in the museum context that encourages visitors to actively seek out and retrieve information based on their own interests.⁷³ Rather than the museum passively presenting information to everyone in the same way (a “push” approach), pull techniques rely on the visitor’s self-motivation to learn more about specific aspects of the exhibit. Simon highlights that this active seeking of information provides visitors with a feeling of power in participation, because they have the ability to choose what they want to explore and learn. Known examples of pull techniques include audio tours, where visitors can select what they listen to, and interactive installations that are activated by the visitors’ actions.⁷⁴

In regard to house museums, Simon points out that their visits are often focused on individuals looking at displayed interiors and learning on their own, but there’s a chance to make them more social.⁷⁵ She suggests that house museums could encourage visitors to interact more with each other by doing activities such as voting for their favourite room or sharing personal memories that connect to the objects in the house. By making these social activities a part of the visit, house museums can create a more engaging and communal experience. After all, the goal of public engagement in any museum, including house museums, is to make the institution more relevant and valuable to the community by actively involving visitors in ways that align with the museum’s purpose.⁷⁶

To apply this theoretical framework to the researched case, conservation and restoration work in Amsterdam’s historic house museums can be made visible and interactive. Instead of simply showing finished and perfect historic interiors, we can treat a

⁷² Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, 130-132.

⁷³ Ibid., 37-38.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 48-50.

house museum as a platform, like Nina Simon suggests.⁷⁷ This way it will let the visitors see and even participate in the process of caring for the house and its objects. Audience-centred design can be used by finding out what parts of heritage conservation are most interesting to people and subsequently creating ways for them to engage with it. The objects undergoing restoration can be made into social objects by using them to start conversations, by asking visitors what they think should be done or by sharing stories related to the objects' condition. The pull techniques can be used too, where the house museums could offer interesting snippets or questions about the conservation work that make people want to learn more. Nina Simon talks about promoting social interaction, so that potentially the opportunities can be created for visitors to talk to each other about what they are seeing in the conservation process.⁷⁸ Overall, the idea is to make the behind-the-scenes work a way to connect with the public more actively, showing them that the house museum is not just about the past interiors and objects, but also about the ongoing work of preserving it for the future.

In their publication on the sector advice for museums in the Netherlands, Sectoradvies Musea: 'In wankel evenwicht', the Raad voor Cultuur discusses the vitality and diversity of the museum sector.⁷⁹ They additionally highlight financial pressures and a potential overemphasis on temporary exhibitions that could impact core tasks such as collection care. They emphasise the importance of making collections accessible to diverse audiences and adopting a "meerstemmige benadering" (pluralistic approach) in interpretation. The Raad voor Cultuur's report stresses the critical role of management and preservation and expresses concern about budget cuts and potential knowledge loss in this area. The publication also notes the growing significance of digitalisation and the value of collaboration and knowledge sharing within the museum sector.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, 26.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 127-128.

⁷⁹ Raad voor Cultuur. "Sectoradvies Musea: 'In wankel evenwicht'." 2018: 4.
<https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/documenten/adviezen/2018/04/19/advies-in-wankel-evenwicht>.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10-15; 23-26; 26-29; 33-35; 26-29; 41-52.

The Raad voor Cultuur recommends that museums establish new connections with society while ensuring that the focus on public engagement does not compromise collection management and preservation.⁸¹ They also highlight the vital role of museums in making their collections accessible and engaging for the public.⁸² Given the societal expectation for museums to present frequent exhibitions and connect with contemporary discussions, the current thesis research offers possibilities for achieving this. By bringing the typically behind-the-scenes work of collection care into the public eye, public engagement events can provide a unique and engaging experience for Amsterdam's community, making the preservation of heritage tangible and relevant.

The Raad voor Cultuur's publication points out a potential risk of losing knowledge about collections and conservation, particularly within smaller institutions.⁸³ By involving the public in learning about the care of historical interiors, artefacts and buildings, these initiatives can contribute to broader knowledge transfer and add to an appreciation for heritage preservation among new generations. This aligns with the publication's emphasis on museums playing an educational role through diverse programs like workshops.⁸⁴

The Raad voor Cultuur additionally portrays museums as platforms for connection and active participation among various societal groups.⁸⁵ Organising events centred around conservation and restoration in Amsterdam's historic house museums can be a strategic way to connect with communities that have a specific interest in heritage, craftsmanship, or local history.

The current research's primary focus is on in-person strategies, however, the Raad voor Cultuur's publication notes the increasing significance of digital tools in enhancing

⁸¹ Raad voor Cultuur. "Sectoradvies Musea: 'In wankel evenwicht'," 22-26.

⁸² Ibid., 15-17; 41-44; 80-82.

⁸³ Ibid., 23-26; 66.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 45-48; 92-95.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 22-26; 35.

visibility and accessibility of collections.⁸⁶ Thus, considering how digital platforms could complement the conservation workshops, such as through online registration, pre- or post-event resources, or virtual tours of conservation labs, could further broaden the reach and impact of these initiatives.

Based on the outlined theory and literature, it was possible to establish a foundation for the educational guidelines on public engagement with historic house museums in Amsterdam.

2.6 Methodology

This research involves an analysis of three historic house museums located in Amsterdam as case studies. The case studies were chosen based on being categorised as a house museum and possessing at least one room with a historic interior or historic artefacts.

Several house museums were contacted, but they could not accommodate the current research, such as Huis van Loon and Huis Bartolotti. Nevertheless, three house museums were chosen: Huis Willet-Holthuysen, Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder and the Embassy of the Free Mind. The choice of these specific case studies is based on the fact that all three are museums located in historic houses with extensive history. Additionally, the museums are operating under different types of management: Huis Willet-Holthuysen is a publicly managed museum, Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder is managed by a non-profit foundation, and the Embassy of the Free Mind is a private institution.⁸⁷ Thus, these differences might bring valuable insights for this research in terms of a larger coverage of different house museum types. Moreover, all three estates are recognised as Rijksmonumenten (National Heritage Sites).

⁸⁶ Raad voor Cultuur. "Sectoradvies Musea: 'In wankel evenwicht'," 33-35.

⁸⁷ Amsterdam Museum. "About Us." Amsterdam Museum, accessed June 8, 2025. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/about-us>; Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder. "Organisatie." Opsolder, accessed June 8, 2025. <https://opsolder.nl/organisatie/>; Embassy of the Free Mind. "Organisatie." Embassy of the Free Mind, accessed June 8, 2025. <https://embassyofthefreemind.com/nl/embassy-of-the-free-mind-nl/organisatie/>.

In terms of the conducted methods, firstly, literature and online source research were carried out to explore the history of each case study. Secondly, the site analysis was conducted in each of the house museums, as well as an online research on their previous and present public engagement strategies. Thirdly, interviews with museum employees were conducted, which focused on receiving as much information as possible about the current status of the public engagement strategies in each museum, their past attempts, and most importantly, the activities and opinions in relation to sharing information about the restoration and conservation work conducted in their museums. Interviews were selected as the primary method of data collection, as they provide access to insider perspectives from museum employees that are not publicly available online. Based on these methods, it was possible to seek an answer to the main research question and the sub-questions. Furthermore, the educational guidelines were based on the theoretical framework and the case studies' analysis.

In this methodology, the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach is applied because it helps to understand how historic areas, like Amsterdam and the buildings within it, are managed and how changes are considered.⁸⁸ The HUL approach looks at the bigger picture of a historic city, not only individual buildings, and recognises that these areas are constantly evolving.⁸⁹ Since this thesis research focuses on historic house museums in Amsterdam, which is a city with a significant history, the HUL approach provides a useful way to think about the case study museums within their broader urban context. One of the key ideas of HUL is that heritage is not frozen in time but has a dynamic character. That is why looking at how historic house museums in Amsterdam handle conservation and restoration work is crucial, as these activities are about managing change in historic places.

⁸⁸ Albers, Fleur, Dré van Marrewijk, Cees van Rooijen, Yoran van Boheemen, Rick Lensink, and Ilonka van Slooten. *HUL in Holland: Implementation of the Historic Urban Landscape Approach in Dutch World Heritage Sites*. Amersfoort: Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, in cooperation with Feddes/Olthof Landscape Architects BV, (2018): 6

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Furthermore, the HUL approach highlights the importance of involving different people and groups who have a stake in the heritage.⁹⁰ This research methodology includes interviews with museum employees, which directly aligns with this principle by seeking the perspectives of those who are actively involved in the museums' operations and public engagement efforts.

It is important to point out, however, that using interviews as the primary source for analysis and one of the bases for the educational guidelines may have had certain limitations in terms of the subjectivity of the interviewee. Moreover, the three selected case studies located in Amsterdam for an analysis may have limited the outlined educational guidelines because of a narrow insight into their applicability to other historic house museums across the Netherlands.

⁹⁰ Albers et al., *HUL in Holland*, 7.

3. Case Studies and Analysis

This chapter presents the three selected case studies. Each house's historical background is described, as well as its current-day activities. Moreover, this chapter presents and analyses the house museums' existing public engagement strategies, focusing on the specific strategies they employed in the past. Each museum's strategies, including the event formats and interactive programs, are analysed to determine their effectiveness. The chapter evaluates what has worked well and what challenges these museums face in engaging visitors. The assessment considers the museums' goals and their alignment with broader heritage conservation objectives. The chosen timeline for analysis of this data focuses on the activities starting in the past decade, as this thesis research aims to consider recent public engagement strategies and efforts. Furthermore, this chapter expands the discussion by exploring public engagement practices in house museums outside Amsterdam. Case studies from other museums in the Netherlands and an international example from Latvia explain successful approaches that could be adapted locally.

3.1 Case Study I: Museum Willet-Holthuysen

The building on Herengracht 605 was built in approximately 1673 or 1674 after Hendrik Hooft acquired the necessary land, starting in 1658 and purchasing an adjacent plot in 1671 (Fig. 1), as outlined by Buschmann and Veen.⁹¹ Hooft, who served as the mayor of Amsterdam on multiple terms, lived there until his death in 1679, after which his daughter, Isabelle Hooft, inherited the property and resided there following her marriage to Jacob Hop in 1684.⁹² In 1705, the house was sold to Jean Deutz, who held positions of prominence in the city as he was a Schepen and raad (alderman and councillor) of Amsterdam. His family

⁹¹ Buschmann, J.-E., and L.J. Veen, eds. *Onze Kunst*. Jaargang 1. Antwerpen: L.J. Veen, (1902): 6-27.

⁹² Genealogie Online. "Henrick Hooft," Kwartieren Jager, Teeuwen, Oudt, Van Asch, Van Wijck, Sikkema, Pruim, accessed June 5, 2025.
<https://www.genealogieonline.nl/kwartieren-jager-teeuwen-oudt-van-asch-van-wijck-sikkema-pruim/I4229.php>

owned the estate for 53 years. In 1739, it underwent major renovations. In 1758, Frederik Berewout then purchased the house. Berewout was involved in the whaling industry and the West Indian trade, specifically the sugar trade in Suriname. He served as a director of the West India Company (WIC) from 1728.⁹³ The Berewout family owned and lived in the property from 1758 to 1800. The next owner was Johan Christoph Blanckenhagen, who purchased it in 1800. He was a member of the noble Blanckenhagen family from Livland, Riga.⁹⁴ After his death, his family sold the house in 1821. Sarah Johanna Hulst, the wife of Baron J. Taets van Amerongen van Woudenberg, bought the house in 1821. The Taets van Amerongen family resided there for 34 years. The Baroness died in 1838, and her husband, Baron J. Taets van Amerongen van Woudenberg, remained there until his death around 1853. Pieter Gerard Holthuysen, a merchant, purchased the house in 1855, moved in in 1857, but passed away in 1858. After his death, his daughter, Louisa Holthuysen, inherited it and married Abraham Willet in 1861.⁹⁵ The couple further renovated the property, and upon Louisa's death, the house and its contents were donated to the city of Amsterdam, establishing it as a public museum, now known as the Willet-Holthuysen Museum. The origin and history of the museum are rooted in the lives and passions of its founders, Abraham Willet and his wife, Louisa Holthuysen. The spouses were nineteenth-century Amsterdam art collectors.⁹⁶

⁹³ Greet's Genealogie. "Gezinskaart van Frederik Berewout (1692–1777)," accessed June 5, 2025. <https://www.greetsgenealogie.nl/gezinskaart-van-frederik-berewout-1692-1777/>

⁹⁴ Lukatis, Christiane. "»Blanckenhagen de Riga«: Ein livländischer Adliger auf Grand Tour." In *Treffpunkt Rom 1810: Die Geschichte eines Künstlerstammbuchs*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, (2021):10-25.

⁹⁵ Buschmann and Veen, *Onze Kunst*, 6-27.

⁹⁶ Van Capelleveen, Ruud. "Willet Holthuysen Museum." *AbsoluteFacts.nl*, accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.absolutefacts.nl/noord-holland/amsterdam/willet-holthuysen.htm>.



Fig. 1 Façade of the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

As Hubert Vreeken describes in his research *Bij wijze van museum: oorsprong, geschiedenis en toekomst van Museum Willet-Holthuysen, 1853-2010*, Abraham Willet's (1825-1888) collecting interests were broad, encompassing art, historical artifacts, and books. He was particularly interested in the 18th-century costume history, heraldry, and genealogy.⁹⁷ Louisa Holthuysen (1823-1895) played a crucial role in preserving the collection and ensuring its future as a museum. In her will, she stipulated that the house and its contents be preserved and opened to the public as a museum. Louisa Holthuysen also left a considerable amount of funding for the museum's maintenance.⁹⁸

The artistic and intellectual environment of 19th-century Amsterdam influenced Willet-Holthuysen's collecting activities. The museum officially opened in 1896, a year after

⁹⁷ Vreeken, Hubert. "Bij wijze van museum: oorsprong, geschiedenis en toekomst van Museum Willet-Holthuysen, 1853-2010." PhD diss., Universiteit van Amsterdam [Host], (2010): 91-125.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 47.

Louisa's death.⁹⁹ The first curator was Frans Coenen. Coenen expanded the library into a resource for the applied arts and used it as an educational tool for the public. The initial presentation focused on conserving Willet-Holthuysen's nineteenth-century interiors. Over time, the museum's focus and presentation adjusted due to changing tastes and museum philosophies. There was a period when the 19th-century collection was not highly valued, and the museum faced challenges in maintaining its identity. In 1932, the Stedelijk Museum became the manager of the museum. From 1939 to 1950, the museum was even closed and used for other purposes. In recent decades, there has been a renewed appreciation for the museum's unique character as a well-preserved 19th-century collectors' home. Efforts have been made to restore the house to its original appearance and to highlight the story of the Willet-Holthuysen family.¹⁰⁰

Initially, before Abraham and Louisa Willet-Holthuysen resided there, the house was a seventeenth-century canal house that had been adapted by the previous residents to the styles of their time, though the original layout remained largely unchanged.¹⁰¹ The façade, reflecting Louis XIV style, displays a cornice and high mansard roof with two dormers and corner chimneys, restored to its 18th-century nature during a 1953 restoration. Important interior elements include a grand staircase, 18th-century marble sculptures, and the "Blue Room" (originally from Herengracht 250), showcasing 18th-century design. A baroque garden reconstructed in 1972 and renovated in 1996 adds to the structure. The kitchen in the basement illustrates typical service kitchens from the era.¹⁰² The building is recognised as a Rijksmonument (National Heritage Site), with the number 1687.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Vreeken, "Bij wijze van museum: oorsprong, geschiedenis en toekomst van Museum Willet-Holthuysen, 1853-2010." 150-151.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 8-60.

¹⁰¹ Buschmann and Veen, *Onze Kunst*, 126.

¹⁰² Schoonenberg, Walther. "Herengracht 605 – Huize Willet-Holthuysen." Digitaal Grachtenboek – Database van de Grachtengordel. Amsterdam Monumentenstad, accessed May 4, 2025. https://www.amsterdam-monumentenstad.nl/database/grachtenboek_objecten.php?id=1598.

¹⁰³ Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed. "Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder." Monumentenregister, accessed May 4, 2025. <https://monumentenregister.cultureelerfgoed.nl/monumenten/1687>.

Currently, the museum contains a combination of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century interiors, partly from the last residents and partly from other canal houses.¹⁰⁴ Some visitors may not be able to distinguish between authentic and later additions, however, there is a movement towards creating a more cohesive representation of how the couple lived in the house.¹⁰⁵ The Museum Willet-Holthuysen is currently part of the Amsterdam Museum, which was founded in 1926 and operates as a public institution.¹⁰⁶

Current activities at Museum Willet-Holthuysen are significantly focused on re-establishing its identity as the former home and collection of Abraham and Louisa Willet-Holthuysen, emphasising the ensemble value of the house, its nineteenth-century interiors, and their diverse collection.¹⁰⁷ A key development is the establishment of a semi-permanent exhibition on the first floor dedicated to the spouses' lives and collecting interests. Efforts are also underway to restore and reinterpret the rooms on the *bel étage* to more accurately reflect their appearance during the Willet-Holthuysen residency. Furthermore, there is ongoing inventory and research into various aspects of the collection, including photographs, the library, and prints, all contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the Willet-Holthuysen legacy.¹⁰⁸

In relation to exhibiting the work of conservators and restorers, there is a brief information section available in the museum about the ongoing restoration processes. However, the museum is not displaying it actively and does not intend to make a separate exhibition dedicated to the ongoing research.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Van Capelleveen, "Willet Holthuysen Museum.", 300.

<https://www.absolutefacts.nl/noord-holland/amsterdam/willet-holthuysen.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ Vreeken, "Bij wijze van museum: oorsprong, geschiedenis en toekomst van Museum Willet-Holthuysen, 1853-2010.", 128.

¹⁰⁶ Amsterdam Museum. "About Us." Amsterdam Museum, accessed June 8, 2025. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/about-us>.

¹⁰⁷ Vreeken, "Bij wijze van museum: oorsprong, geschiedenis en toekomst van Museum Willet-Holthuysen, 1853-2010.", 291-299.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Boonstra, Jaap (Furniture Conservator at Museum Willet-Holthuysen), personal communication with the author. March 27, 2024.

3.1.1 Past Public Engagement Strategies: Museum Willet-Holthuysen

Nowadays, the Museum Willet-Holthuysen hosts public events, including lectures, temporary exhibitions, and educational workshops. Spaces within the museum, whether furnished or not, are used for these events. In the interview with the Collections Advisor at the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, Marysa Otte, it was revealed that the museum is active in events and educational workshops for children as young as four to five years old.¹¹⁰ The children are welcome to participate in activities that teach them about historical customs and the times when the Willet-Holthuysen couple lived in the house.¹¹¹ These experiences are not only informative but also aim to instil a sense of decorum appropriate to visiting historic house museums.

To enhance public engagement and attract a more diverse audience, the museum regularly organises thematic interventions within its historic rooms.¹¹² These interventions are often designed to resonate with underrepresented communities. For example, a previous queer exhibition received significant positive feedback in the guest book, highlighting the importance of visibility and representation in museum narratives.¹¹³ “We do it to attract more inclusively the people and community with special interests, so they feel welcomed too” (Appendix A).¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, these interventions also cause mixed reactions, particularly from visitors who prefer a more traditional historic house presentation (Fig. 2). This reflects a broader institutional challenge of trying to accommodate both authenticity and inclusivity. “The questions that museums deal with are that you want to be a historic house with a historic interior, but you also want to be inclusive for everyone” (Appendix A).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹¹¹ Kidsproof, “Willet-Holthuysen – kindvriendelijk museum in Amsterdam,” Kidsproof, accessed June 15, 2025,

<https://www.kidsproof.nl/amsterdam/uitje/huis-willet-holthuysen-willet-holthuysen-kindvriendelijk-museum/>.

¹¹² Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹¹³ Amsterdam Museum, “Queer Gaze Tour – With Roxette Capriles,” Amsterdam Museum, March 24, 2024, accessed June 15, 2025,

<https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/public-program/queer-gaze-tour-roxette-capriles/80093>.

¹¹⁴ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

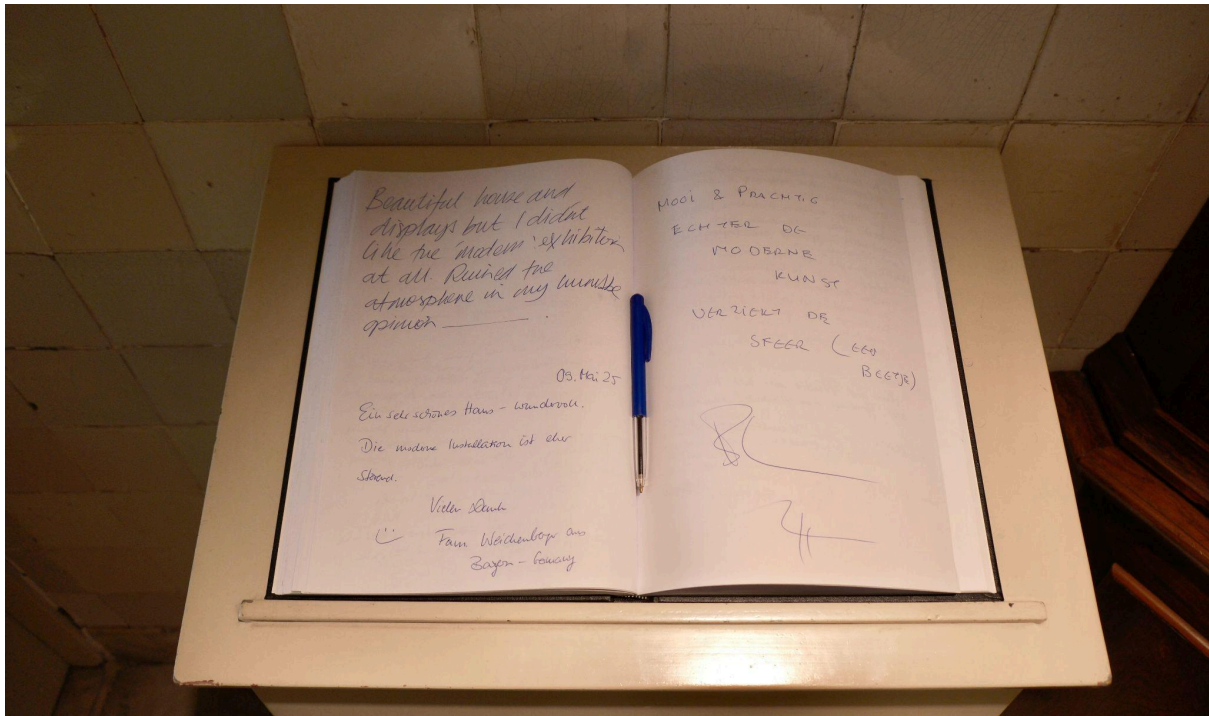


Fig. 2 Guest book in the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, with a critical remark about the temporary exhibition in the historic interior (top left corner), 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

The museum evaluates its outreach strategies through various means, including visitor numbers, ticket sales, and qualitative guest book entries.¹¹⁶ Special events such as Open Garden Days and Easter Egg Hunts are especially successful in attracting large and varied audiences, such as families with children.¹¹⁷ Participation in national events like the Museumnacht (Museum Night), where certain museums in Amsterdam stay open in the late evening and host special exhibits or parties, also contributes to increased visitation and return visits.¹¹⁸ However, the museum acknowledges that attracting completely new audiences remains a persistent challenge.¹¹⁹

Although the museum does not maintain an elaborate emphasis on conservation and restoration work in its exhibitions, it has made certain efforts to communicate several projects

¹¹⁶ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹¹⁷ Amsterdam Museum, "Open Tuinen Dagen," Amsterdam Museum, accessed June 15, 2025, <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/public-program/open-tuinen-dagen/95262>; Amsterdam Museum, "Easter at the Willet-Holthuysen House (Paaseieren zoeken 2024)," Amsterdam Museum, accessed June 15, 2025, <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/public-program/paaseieren-zoeken-2024/79935>.

¹¹⁸ Museumnacht Amsterdam, "Huis Willet-Holthuysen," Museumnacht Amsterdam, accessed June 15, 2025, <https://museumnacht.amsterdam/museum/21/huis-willet-holthuysen/>.

¹¹⁹ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

to the public.¹²⁰ For example, research and conservation work on the Garden Room's chandelier are presented, and the research conducted in the kitchen was shared with the public before. Currently, this research is not shared anymore, but the discovered information is integrated into the museum's audio tour and wall texts throughout the whole museum, with emphasis on the historical context of the Willet-Holthuysen family's occupancy (Fig. 3). Long-term projects, such as those in the Women's Salon and the Garden Room furniture, include research on historical fabrics and furnishings, often funded by private donors. These projects are shared with visitors as the work progresses, although updates are slow due to the nature of the work.¹²¹



Fig. 3 The information board in the kitchen of the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

Other forms of research were communicated through the museum's past blog publications.¹²² Contributions by several colleagues were published on the H'ART Museum

¹²⁰ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Amsterdam Museum. "Blog Amsterdam Museum" Amsterdam Museum, accessed 10 June 2025. <https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/361/blog-amsterdam-museum>.

website (which is a part of the Amsterdam Museum as well as the Museum Willet-Holthuysen). For example, in 2011, the Furniture Conservator at Museum Willet-Holthuysen, Jaap Boonstra, posted an article about the reconstruction and conservation process of the upholstery of historic chairs in the museum's 'Antique' room.¹²³ However, this blog platform appears less active in recent years regarding the information shared about conservation and restoration.

There is clear internal interest in making conservation and restoration work more visible to the public, although it is not a widespread institutional priority. "There is interest" (Appendix A).¹²⁴ Marysa Otte noted that visitors frequently express curiosity about the origins and care of the collection.¹²⁵ However, practical constraints such as the cost of producing new audio tours and the limited space for explanatory texts in historic interiors hinder these ideas. Suggestions for future improvements include dedicated routes or thematic labels that include conservation and restoration practices.

The museum identifies inclusivity as its guiding principle and specifically targets audiences that are traditionally underrepresented in museum attendance, such as communities from Amsterdam New-West.¹²⁶ Through co-creative projects like Collecting the City, the museum partners with these communities to develop exhibitions that reflect their identities and experiences.¹²⁷ These initiatives are based on the belief that the museum's collection belongs not only to the institution but also to the citizens of Amsterdam. "People who feel attached to Amsterdam – they are our community, and they also, in a way, own the collection. When people realise that it is also their collection, then they get happy that we take good care of it" (Appendix A).¹²⁸ Additionally, children's involvement is also prioritised through

¹²³ Boonstra, Jaap. "#020today: Hoe reconstrueren we een wandbespanning?" H'ART Museum, July 16, 2011, accessed June 15, 2025. <https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/4631>.

¹²⁴ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Amsterdam Museum. "Collecting the City | Co-creatie met partners in de stad." Amsterdam Museum, accessed June 14, 2025. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/samenwerkingsproject/collecting-the-city/82990>.

¹²⁸ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

object-making labs.¹²⁹ Moreover, the Amsterdam museum has a Children's Board, which participates in acquisition decisions in a co-creative manner.¹³⁰ The children are consulted and encouraged to think critically about the collection acquisition decisions. Usually, these meetings take place several times per year, and the applications for the Children's Board are openly available online.¹³¹

The Willet-Holthuysen collaborates extensively with external conservators and researchers, particularly in areas where internal expertise is limited.¹³² In the past, the museum employed a team of four conservators, however, only one remains employed today, reflecting a national trend toward reduced staffing in conservation roles. External experts are brought in for specialised tasks, such as painting or paper conservation. The museum emphasises the importance of continuity and clear communication with the external specialists to ensure successful outcomes. Long-term partnerships with conservation studios are maintained to preserve institutional knowledge and collection care standards.¹³³

Visitor feedback is gathered primarily through the guest book and targeted impact assessments.¹³⁴ These assessments are qualitative in nature and aim to understand whether visitors feel included, empowered, or connected to the museum's mission. Staff members have conducted interviews and distributed small questionnaires to conduct this evaluative work, particularly in relation to co-creative projects. Attendance numbers are also monitored to determine the effectiveness of individual exhibitions or events.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Amsterdam Museum. "ELJA Kindermuseumlab." Amsterdam Museum, accessed 15 June 2025. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/collaboration/elja-kindermuseumlab/57572>.

¹³⁰ Amsterdam Museum. "Amsterdam Museum benoemt tweede kinderbestuur." Amsterdam Museum Nieuws, 17 April 2025, accessed 15 June 2025. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/nieuws/amsterdam-museum-benoemt-tweede-kinderbestuur/202542>.

¹³¹ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

The museum acknowledges multiple challenges in promoting meaningful public engagement.¹³⁶ Among these is the broader issue of articulating the social value of the museum to a diverse public. Marysa Otte emphasised that the worth of a museum cannot be measured solely in financial terms, but its success lies in how well it resonates with and reflects the community. If a museum fails to maintain public interest, it risks becoming irrelevant.¹³⁷

Digitally, the Amsterdam museum is among the first museums in the world to publish its entire collection online.¹³⁸ Their emphasis was not on perfection, but the goal to make their collection accessible and open to interpretation. Efforts are ongoing to improve the online database. “And we are still working to be more researchable and searchable” (Appendix A).¹³⁹

The museum currently employs a team for collection management, consisting of four core staff, one in-house conservator, and two registrars.¹⁴⁰ Volunteers are also involved, especially in areas such as textiles and public engagement. The Amsterdam Museum’s overall workforce, including security and exhibition staff across four museum sites, comprises more than 100 individuals.¹⁴¹

3.1.2 Analysis: Museum Willet-Holthuysen

After the interview with Marysa Otte, the online sources research and on-site analysis, it was possible to establish that Museum Willet-Holthuysen engages with its public and the role that conservation and restoration play in enhancing that engagement. The Museum Willet-Holthuysen regularly hosts events, seasonal activities and participates in broader initiatives such as the Museumnacht. Importantly, the museum has also introduced temporary

¹³⁶ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Hart Amsterdammuseum. “Beeldcollectie.” Hart Amsterdammuseum, accessed June 15, 2025. <https://hart.amsterdam/nl/page/232315/beeldcollectie>

¹³⁹ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

exhibitions (referred to as ‘interventions’) to reach more diverse audiences. These range from a queer-themed exhibit to one focused on World War II, deliberately designed to create inclusive narratives that resonate with visitors who might not otherwise see themselves reflected in the traditional collections. These interventions demonstrate one of the museum’s main strategies: using thematic temporary exhibitions as a means of public engagement and social relevance.

However, in relation to the visibility of internal conservation and restoration work, the approach of the museum is not as consistent. Restoration information is integrated into information boards in certain locations, such as in the Garden Room, where a chandelier underwent treatment, or the Women’s Salon, where long-term conservation research on the interior has been partially communicated. Yet, much of this information is not always sustained or continuously displayed. For example, detailed research findings from the kitchen restoration project were initially shared but later removed when the information board and audio tour texts were revised (Fig. 3). Even though some of the findings were indeed incorporated into the new guides, the lack of sustained information means that conservation and restoration practices often remain a background concern as opposed to a central element for public engagement in Museum Willet-Holthuysen.

Despite this, there is evident public interest in conservation and restoration work in the museum. Its visitors frequently inquire about the origins and care of the collection. Marysa Otte acknowledged this curiosity and expressed an openness to increasing visibility of conservation and restoration work conducted in their institution. However, she also noted internal ambivalence, naming practical limitations such as budget constraints and the aesthetic integrity of historic interiors, where large interpretive texts may not be desirable. One proposed solution could be the development of a specialised “conservation route” within the museum, which takes place in parallel to the original guided tour. However, such an

initiative may be interrupted by the high cost of producing new audio tours and digital materials.

In terms of reimagining conservation as a participatory or co-creative process, the museum already applies co-creative strategies in its object acquisition and programming. Through initiatives like Collecting the City, residents from Amsterdam's New-West area are able to contribute to the museum's contemporary collection in a collaborative way.¹⁴² This also includes workshops with children where artworks are created with guidance from artists and decisions on new object acquisition are made collectively with a children's board. Moreover, the museum has worked with communities in the context of queer exhibitions to select and acquire objects together.¹⁴³ These co-creative approaches are not yet extended directly to conservation activities, however, the existing strategy and ideology provide a good basis for doing so. For example, future conservation campaigns in Museum Willet-Holthuysen could be co-designed with the community contributing their opinions, values, or even historical knowledge related to specific objects or rooms.

The museum's collaboration with external experts further highlights a valuable but under-explored opportunity. Due to staffing reductions and funding limitations, most conservation work in Museum Willet-Holthuysen is outsourced, however, the museum still prioritises ensuring continuity with its external specialists. Such collaborations are useful, but currently invisible to the museum visitors. There is potential to develop more transparent and engaging information sharing, such as short videos, blog posts, or live streams, where the behind-the-scenes work of conservators can be demonstrated. This is in line with the museum's ethos of attempting to be more searchable and researchable, placing all of their collection online.

¹⁴² Amsterdam Museum. "Collecting the City | Co-creatie met partners in de stad." *Amsterdam Museum*. Accessed June 14, 2025. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/samenwerkingsproject/collecting-the-city/82990>.

¹⁴³ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

Lastly, feedback from visitors, which is gathered through the guest book, interviews, and impact studies, has a significant role in the museum's programming. These evaluations give the museum insights about its qualitative impact, such as feelings of belonging and inclusion. Such initiatives could be extended to future conservation-related programming, helping the Museum Willet-Holthuysen to assess how engaging the newly shared information is for the public.

While conducting an on-site analysis in Museum Willet-Holthuysen, it was revealed that there is one information board briefly mentioning the work in progress in the Women's Salon, it includes a historic photo and fragments of curtain materials of the room (Fig. 4). This board has been present in the museum and not updated for at least the past ten years.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the board is placed inside a glass case, which is located in the corner of the room and may not be as noticeable. The information on the board does not cover the research process in-depth and may leave the reader with a number of questions.

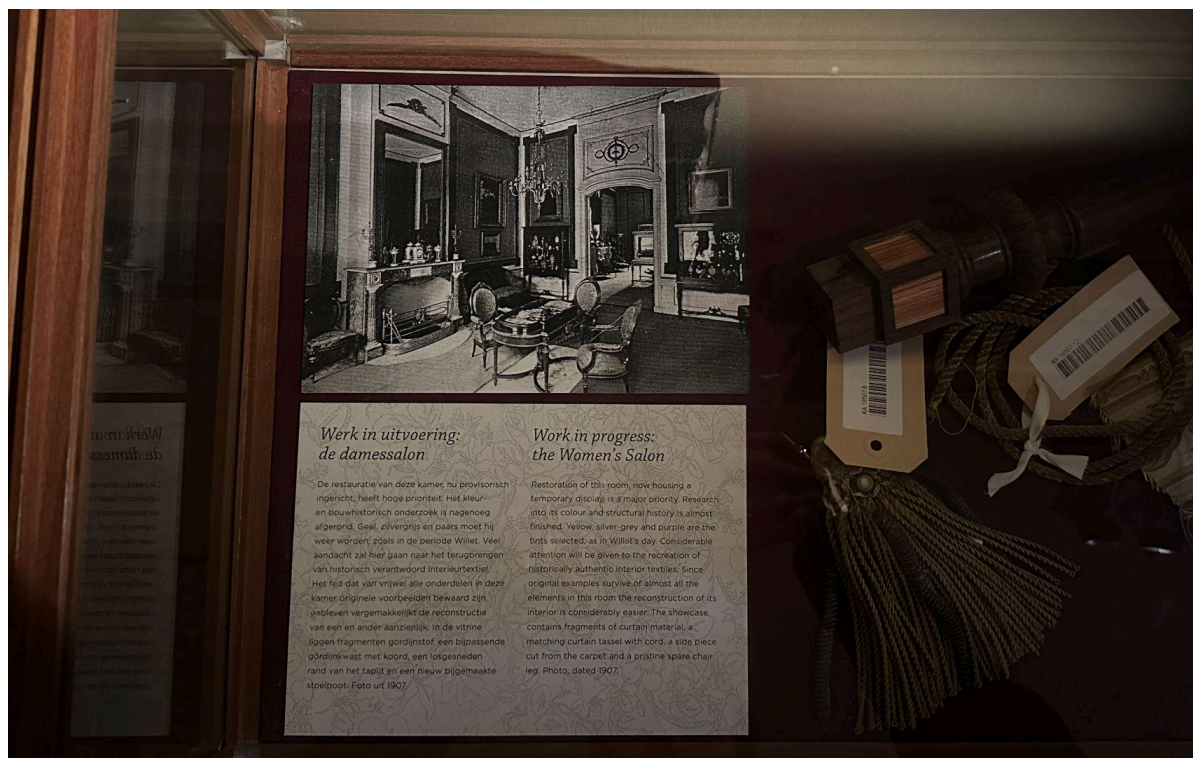


Fig. 4 Interior of the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, the information board in the Women's Salon, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

¹⁴⁴ Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum Willet-Holthuysen, interview by the author, June 10, 2025.

Next to that, in the Garden Room, there are numerous AFR stratigraphies on the walls and a large window reveal located on the ceiling, demonstrating the original decoration pattern (Fig 5 & Fig. 6). The AFR stands for Architectural Finished Research, and implies the analysis of original colour finishes of an interior.¹⁴⁵ Only a brief explanation of the conducted research is provided on the information board, which specifies that restorers uncovered the original flower finish, however, it does not mention the AFR (Fig. 7).



Fig. 5 Interior of the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, the stratigraphies in the Garden Room, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

¹⁴⁵ Lincoln Conservation. "Architectural Paint Research." Lincoln Conservation, accessed June 6, 2025. <https://www.lincolnconservation.co.uk/services/historic-materials-analysis/architectural-paint-research/>.



Fig. 6 Interior of the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, the chandelier and window reveal on the ceiling of the Garden Room, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

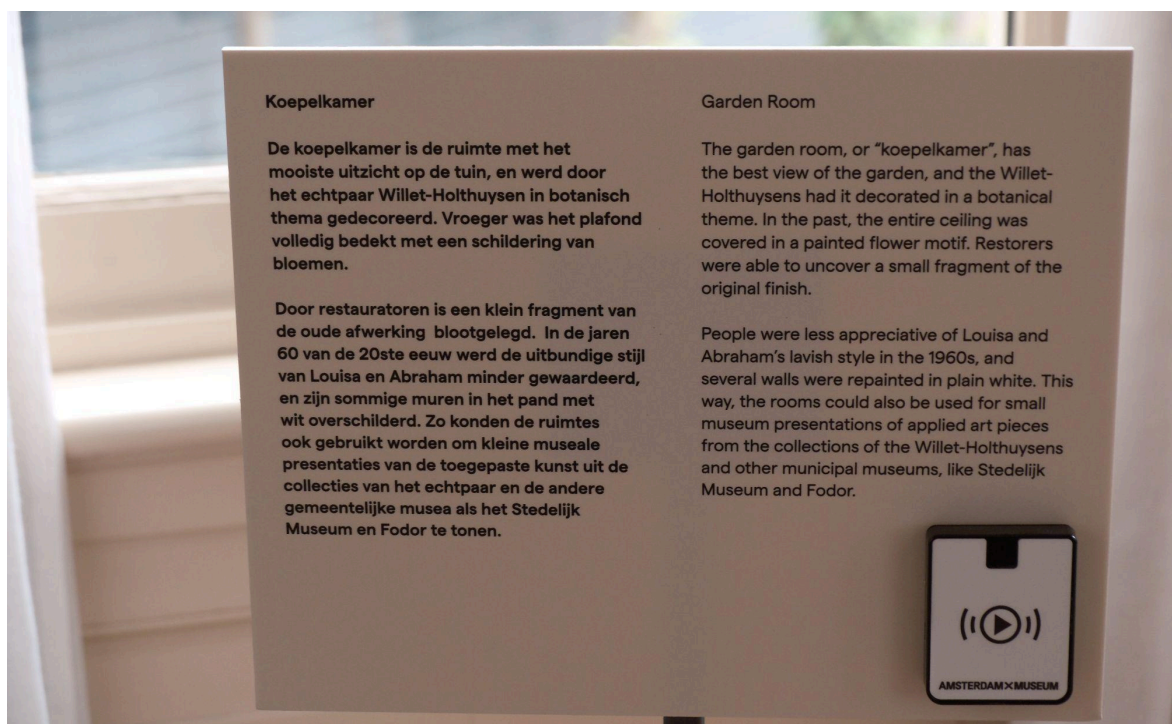


Fig. 7 Interior of the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, the information board about the restoration in the Garden Room, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

Additionally, there is an information board present in the room that mentions the restoration of the chandelier (Fig. 6). However, the text is very short, and it does not specify what exactly was executed in the two-year restoration process (Fig. 8).

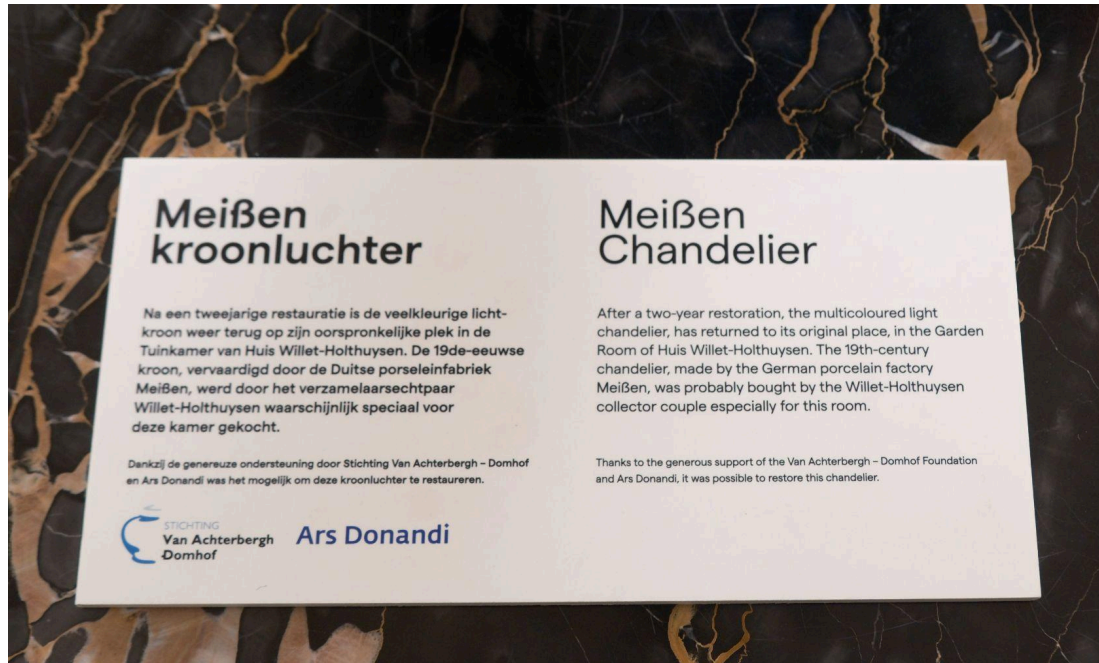


Fig. 8 Interior of the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, the information board about the chandelier in the Garden Room, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

In conclusion, Museum Willet-Holthuysen is involved in several crucial strategies to promote public engagement, especially through inclusive exhibitions and co-creative projects. However, conservation and restoration work remains relatively invisible, despite a demonstrated visitor interest.

3.2 Case Study II: Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder

The building at Oudezijds Voorburgwal 40, now known as Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, and the three adjacent houses were built in approximately the 1620s (Fig. 9).¹⁴⁶ In 1572, Oudezijds Voorburgwal 40 was owned by the merchant Pieter Goverts, about whom the biographical information is limited. After his death, ownership transferred to his son-in-law, Roetert Ernst, who was the founder of the influential merchant firm Roetert Ernst & Ernst

¹⁴⁶ Gawronski, Jerzy, and Ranjith Jayasena. "Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder: Archeologisch onderzoek Oudezijds Voorburgwal 38-40, Amsterdam (2013-2014)." AAR (Amsterdamse Archeologische Rapporten) 100. Amsterdam: Gemeente Amsterdam, (2017): 168.

Roeters, which specialised in grain trading.¹⁴⁷ In 1611, Ernst sold the property, and the new owner likely had the buildings rebuilt. In 1661, a German Catholic merchant, Jan Hartman, acquired this property, the biographical information about him is limited as well.¹⁴⁸ Between the years 1661 and 1663, the building underwent significant renovations. These large modifications to the property involved the installation of a parlour, referred to as the Sael. Most importantly, during this period, a hidden Catholic church was constructed within the attics of the interconnected houses. It was designed to accommodate approximately one hundred fifty people.¹⁴⁹ The need for a concealed church arose because in 1581, the new Dutch Republic made it forbidden to openly practice the Catholic Mass. This prohibition followed the declaration of independence from the Spanish Habsburg rulers by seven northern Dutch provinces in this year. However, due to the prevailing religious tolerance of the era, private churches were allowed, provided they were not outwardly distinguishable from regular houses when viewed from the street. The church in the attic was one of several such “house churches” in Amsterdam at the time, though it is noted to be the only one operating nowadays.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Genealogie Online. “Roetert Ernst (1554–1622).” Kwartierstaat De Paula Lopes, accessed June 5, 2025. <https://www.genealogieonline.nl/stamboom-boris-schubert-moonlight/R13989.php>

¹⁴⁸ Boersma, Foekje. “Our Lord in the Attic,” *Conservation, The GCI Newsletter* 22, no. 1 (2007): 22.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.



Fig. 9 Façade of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

The creation of the church necessitated certain changes in the building's structure.¹⁵¹ Specifically, the floor beams supporting the top floors were separated in the middle, which allowed for the creation of a large open space in the centre of the church, with galleries along both sides. To secure these galleries to the roof structure, cast iron tension rods were installed. This hidden church served as a place of active religious practice from approximately 1663 until 1887. Its function as a parish church ended when the much larger Saint Nicolas Church was consecrated nearby in 1887.¹⁵² Following its cessation as a parish church, a group of Catholics in Amsterdam established the Amstelkring Foundation.¹⁵³ They purchased the

¹⁵¹ Boersma, "Our Lord in the Attic," 23-24.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

building in 1887 with the goal of preserving it from potential demolition. The property was subsequently opened to the public as a museum in 1888. Initially also known by the foundation's name, Amstelkring, the site eventually became Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder. In addition to the well-known attic church, the museum contains several period rooms, which are considered scarce examples from that historical time (Fig. 10). The Mass was reinstated in the attic church in 1951 by local Catholic artists, and it is now also being utilised for various other functions, including weddings, lectures, and other events. The museum's defined mission involves preserving the heritage of Catholic Amsterdam. This is achieved by the thoughtful maintenance of both the building and the objects' collection. Additionally, it seeks to create an inclusive and uplifting environment that invites the public to reflect and express their own religious and spiritual journeys.¹⁵⁴



Fig. 10 Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interior, the attic church, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

¹⁵⁴ Boersma, "Our Lord in the Attic," 23-24.

The museum comprises both aboveground and underground building components and is classified as a Rijksmonument (National Heritage Site), with the number 6107.¹⁵⁵ The building complex combines a 17th-century canal house with contemporary museum infrastructure. It was fully restored inside and on the outside, however, it still retains its original layout, architectural finishes, and spatial qualities. The upper floors include the living quarters and the attic church, which is decorated with Baroque ornamentation, stucco, and wooden altar pieces.¹⁵⁶ The interiors demonstrate preserved wooden floors, panelled walls, and period furnishings. The building restoration included integrating certain modern additions, such as education rooms, a library, and offices. Special care was taken to conceal all modern installations within existing elements, such as chimney ducts, avoiding visual disruption. The museum is now accessed through a new entrance building and underground space (the “Nieuwe Huis”). These additions are neutral architectural elements, which were integrated under the supervision of heritage authorities. They provide a good solution to modern adaptation with respect to the irregular layout of the original house.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, in the museum’s interior, one can find uncovered wall and woodwork stratigraphies from the past AFR, showcasing the chronology and the original colour finishes of the rooms (Fig. 11 & Fig. 12). The site analysis yielded that, in total, there are more than 8 stratigraphies present in the museum’s interior.

¹⁵⁵ NL Bouwmeesters. “Museum Ons’ Lieve Heer op Solder.”, accessed May 4, 2025. <https://www.nlbouwmeesters.nl/projecten/museum-ons-lieve-heer-op-solder/>; Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed. “Oudezijds Voorburgwal 40, 1012 GE te Amsterdam.” Monumentenregister, accessed May 4, 2025. <https://monumentenregister.cultureelerfgoed.nl/monumenten/6107>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ NL Bouwmeesters. “Museum Ons’ Lieve Heer op Solder.” <https://www.nlbouwmeesters.nl/projecten/museum-ons-lieve-heer-op-solder/>

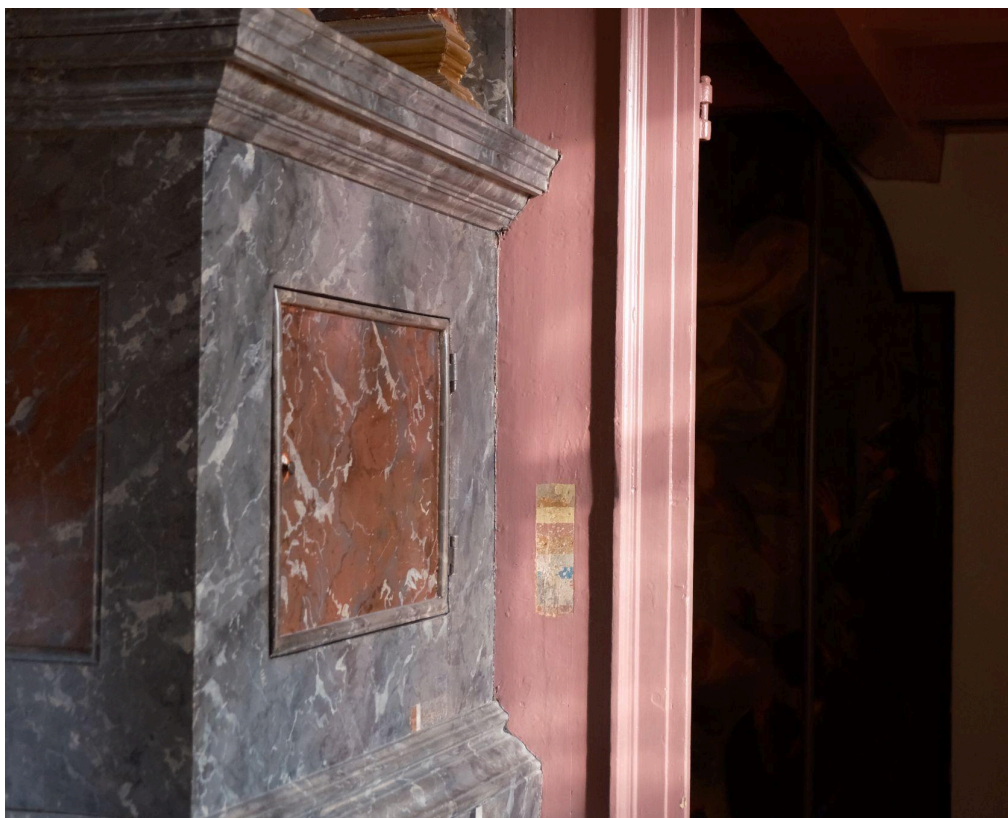


Fig. 11 Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interior, the AFR stratigraphy displayed on wood, 2025.
Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.



Fig. 12 Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interior, the AFR stratigraphy displayed on the decoration, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

Over its extensive history, the building has seen a considerable number of visitors. It is estimated that several million people visited the church before it became a museum in 1887. Since its transformation into a museum, an estimated two million additional visitors have passed through its doors, with annual attendance steadily increasing.¹⁵⁸

3.2.1 Past Public Engagement Strategies: Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder

According to an interview with Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder's Creative Marketer, Jaël Buteijn, the online sources research and on-site analysis, the museum actively engages in a wide range of activities that aim to connect with diverse audiences, both local and international.¹⁵⁹ Through a thoughtful combination of heritage conservation, academic collaboration, public programming, and strategic communication, the museum seeks to deepen public understanding of religious history and cultural heritage.

One of the main ways the museum reaches out to the public is through collaborative academic events, specifically such as the guest lectures organised in partnership with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU).¹⁶⁰ These lectures, taking place at the university itself, are often focused on detailed and specialised topics that relate to the museum's collection and mission, such as the religious history of Amsterdam, specific artworks or conservation projects (e.g., the restoration of historical paintings), or broader questions about heritage preservation. Additionally, the museum has been involved in digital heritage projects, such as the creation of an online map of religious heritage in Amsterdam, also conducted in collaboration with the VU.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Boersma, "Our Lord in the Attic," 24.

¹⁵⁹ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ KRO-NCRV. "Tentoonstelling Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder over Mirakel van Amsterdam." KRO-NCRV, March 15, 2025, accessed June 5, 2025.
<https://kro-ncrv.nl/tentoonstelling-ons-lieve-heer-op-solder-over-mirakel-van-amsterdam>.

Next to that, the museum has implemented several innovative strategies to improve public engagement and increase visibility.¹⁶² Inspired by a successful example and advice from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the marketing team began producing behind-the-scenes content that documents conservation processes. For example, a recent restoration project involving medieval goblets was filmed and shared with the public via Instagram.¹⁶³ The video demonstrated the technical process, such as painting, attaching hooks, and structural conservation, in addition to sharing a rare look into what it takes to prepare an object for display. Moreover, a few years ago, the museum shared a detailed video on YouTube documenting the restoration of two paintings from its collection.¹⁶⁴ Through this change in the narrative from simply exhibiting objects to demonstrating behind-the-scenes labour involved, Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder makes it possible to play an active role in information sharing about its collection in an interactive way. Public reactions to this shared restoration, particularly the medieval object conservation, were very positive, affirming the museum's decision to open up its internal processes to the public.¹⁶⁵

Though the aforementioned behind-the-scenes content and conservation videos are relatively new, their impact has already been felt. The museum currently evaluates the success of these strategies primarily through social media statistics and website interactions, as well as other informal indicators. Namely, the focus is on conversation feedback from visitors who report having seen the restoration content online and, thus, become motivated to visit the museum in person. The museum staff monitors social media statistics and website interactions in-depth.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁶³ @museumopsolder. "Mirakel van Amsterdam." Instagram, March 6, 2025, accessed May 30, 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DG3PVVOqmaE>.

¹⁶⁴ Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder. *Restauratie collectiestukken Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder*. YouTube video. Published October 1, 2021, accessed June 1, 2025. <https://youtu.be/gevdZPuILn8>.

¹⁶⁵ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Information about the museum's conservation and restoration work is made available on a per-object basis and is often tied to specific "PR moments."¹⁶⁷ For example, plastic support beams in the church space frequently cause questions from visitors, which staff use as opportunities to explain the renovation process: "We communicate when asked" (Appendix B).¹⁶⁸ The restoration of the museum building itself was publicly communicated via newsletters, which are issued quarterly, and regular updates on social media. Such a transparent approach kept the public informed and cultivated a sense of shared direction over the museum. In addition, when objects are temporarily loaned to institutions such as the Oude Kerk, this information is shared with interested audiences upon request.¹⁶⁹

Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder expresses a strong interest in further increasing the visibility of its conservation and restoration work.¹⁷⁰ Currently, the core team consists of two curators, both of whom also function as conservators with different areas of expertise. The staff believes that the collection department deserves greater public attention and is open to finding new ways to highlight their work more consistently.¹⁷¹

The museum caters to a varied target audience.¹⁷² These include Dutch cultural heritage enthusiasts, local families (for whom they organise children's treasure hunts), and a large segment of international tourists, who comprise approximately 70% of all visitors. There is also a religiously motivated audience, every first Sunday of the month, a Catholic mass is held in the museum space, maintaining a connection to the building's original purpose. Visitor demographics are partially tracked via postal code data and website analytics, though the museum currently collects only limited demographic information.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Currently, the museum team largely handles programming and research dissemination internally, however, they acknowledge the need to eventually outsource or collaborate with external experts in order to scale their initiatives and goals.¹⁷⁴ The museum's team consists of two staff members in marketing, four in education, an office manager, a facilities manager, and six museum workers. Their work is further supported by approximately 15 volunteers. Due to the small size of the team and the variety of ongoing tasks, managing data and coordinating external partnerships remains an ongoing aim. A future goal is to create a dashboard that can help centralise and visualise visitor data to better inform programming and marketing decisions.¹⁷⁵

The museum actively seeks out and values feedback from its visitors.¹⁷⁶ It responds consistently to Google Reviews, viewing this as a way to improve engagement and establish a direct channel with its audience. In addition, two physical guestbooks are placed in the museum, allowing visitors to leave messages, comments, questions, and suggestions (Fig. 13). This form of engagement not only collects insights but also contributes to visitors feeling seen and appreciated.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

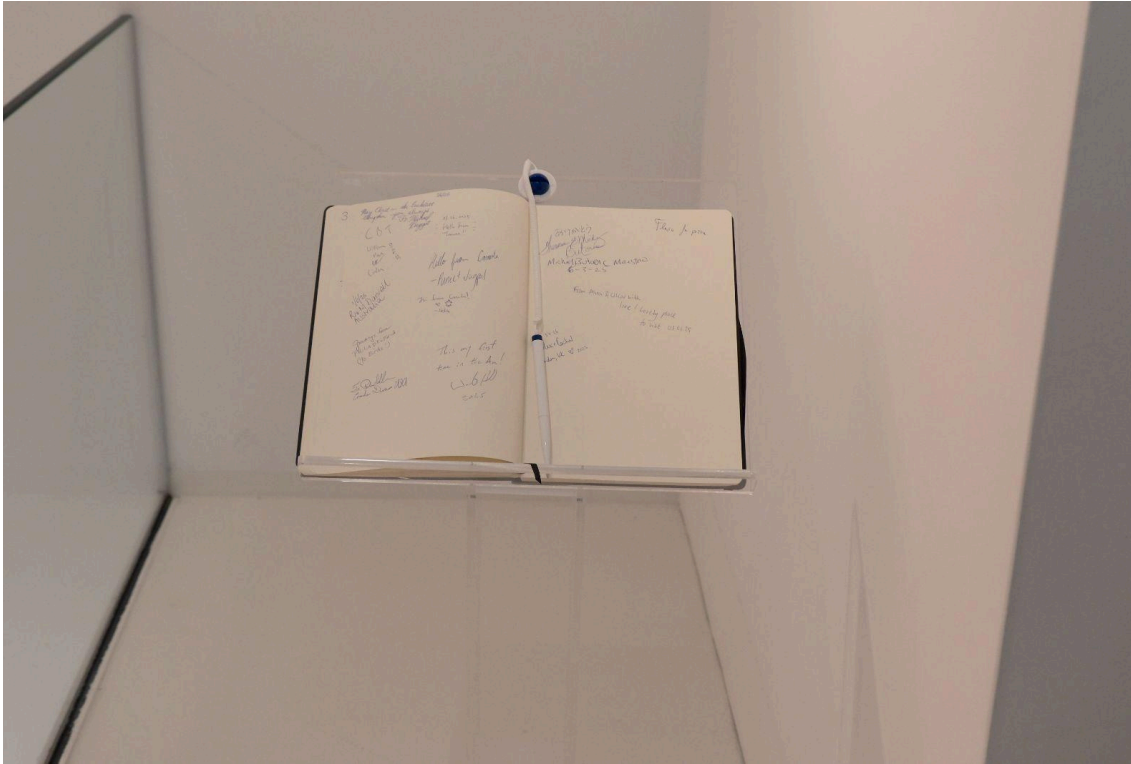


Fig. 13 Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, one of the guestbooks, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

One of the biggest challenges the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder faces is connecting more deeply with the local Dutch audience, particularly those who reside in Amsterdam.¹⁷⁸ International tourism remains strong, but the team would like to form a better relationship with local communities and position the museum as an essential part of the city's cultural value. Importantly, the museum was recently recognised as one of only five institutions in the Netherlands to receive a European Heritage label, which speaks to its significant cultural value on both a national and European level.¹⁷⁹ The museum is now seeking ways to better communicate this recognition and its broader relevance to Dutch heritage and identity, especially because the area where it is located is actively trying to

¹⁷⁸ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁷⁹ Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, "Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder ontvangt Europees Erfgoedlabel," Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, April 17, 2024, accessed May 14, 2025, <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/actueel/nieuws/2024/04/17/museum-ons-lieve-heer-ontvangt-europees-erfgoedlabel>.

become a cultural hub: “We are willing to engage more with Dutch people, and specifically people from Amsterdam” (Appendix B).¹⁸⁰

Moreover, the museum has experimented with several digital tools to demonstrate behind-the-scenes work.¹⁸¹ A restoration-focused video is available on YouTube, and the education team recently collaborated with a YouTuber who filmed a guided tour of the museum.¹⁸² These kinds of digital collaborations help reach new audiences. Although parts of the collection are already available on the website, creating a comprehensive digital catalogue remains a future ambition due to the resource-intensive nature of the task.¹⁸³

Public engagement is also pursued through participation in major cultural events.¹⁸⁴ For instance, the museum is participating in the Museumnacht, welcoming 80 visitors with the Museumnacht wristband in 2024 after the event.¹⁸⁵ In autumn of 2025, the museum also plans to take part in the Amsterdam Dance Event (ADE), which is a good opportunity to engage with new visitor groups who might not otherwise be frequent visitors to a museum.¹⁸⁶ The public engagement is mainly measured through ticket sales and campaign data from Meta (if an advertisement was run using it). Additionally, the attendance numbers at the special events provide quantifiable insights into the effectiveness of an outreach.¹⁸⁷

3.2.2 Analysis: Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder

Based on the information about the museum's past efforts and strategies, it was possible to learn that the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder has significant potential for

¹⁸⁰ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder. Een korte rondleiding door Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder. YouTube video. Published February 3, 2025, accessed May 24, 2025. <https://youtu.be/WYtw19-h1UQ>.

¹⁸³ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Museumnacht Amsterdam. “Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder.” Museumnacht Amsterdam, accessed June 11, 2025. <https://museumnacht.amsterdam/museum/49/museum-ons-lieve-heer-op-solder/>.

¹⁸⁶ Amsterdam Dance Event, “Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder,” Amsterdam Dance Event, accessed June 14, 2025, <https://www.amsterdam-dance-event.nl/en/venues/museum-ons-lieve-heer-op-solder/2545302/>.

¹⁸⁷ Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer of the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder, interview by the author, April 8, 2025.

establishing a deeper public engagement by giving greater attention to its conservation and restoration work. The case study clearly demonstrates efforts to bridge the gap between specialist knowledge and public curiosity. By demonstrating behind-the-scenes restoration activities and sharing this on social media platforms, the museum has taken important steps to demystify the processes that are usually hidden from public view.

Current strategies for public engagement employed by this museum demonstrate that it prioritises traditional as well as innovative approaches. The Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder collaborates with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam to organise guest lectures. At the same time, the museum organises children-oriented treasure hunts, regular Catholic masses, and participates in major public events such as Museumnacht and the ADE. The goal of such initiatives is to diversify the visitor base and reach groups that may not typically attend heritage institutions. It is important to pinpoint that the museum's audience is largely international, however, Dutch residents, especially locals from Amsterdam, are less represented. The museum recognises this disproportion as a challenge and expresses a clear ambition to become more involved and recognised in the local cultural environment.

Although the museum has begun to make its conservation and restoration work more visible to the public, the demonstration remains relatively informal and potentially inconsistent. Restoration work is sometimes shared through social media videos, and questions about architectural interventions are answered on-site. However, specifically, the latter is quite an impromptu moment, which relies on visitor initiative rather than being structurally organised and included within the museum exhibition. The institution does communicate large-scale renovation works through quarterly newsletters and social media posts, but there is no sustained or integrated narrative of conservation work within the permanent exhibitions. For example, the remaining stratigraphies on the walls after the AFR are left in the museum's interior without an information board next to them. Instead, it seems

that the conservation emerges as a background function in the museum, made visible primarily during “PR moments” rather than as a continuous occurrence. The museum does not yet systematically present conservation and restoration as a lens through which one could better understand the efforts of the experts, as well as the craftsmanship, historical, material, and ethical considerations of its collection.

Further, in response to this research’s sub-question, of how house museums can reimagine conservation as a participatory or co-creative process, this case study shows clear potential. The curatorial and marketing team, which includes conservators, expresses a desire to increase the visibility of their work and acknowledges the importance of reaching audiences beyond traditional enthusiasts and visitors. Currently, the use of guestbooks and Google reviews is primarily aimed at feedback collection, however, such or similar tools could be employed for establishing dialogue, thus letting the visitors co-create or respond to conservation decisions. Similarly, the idea of developing a digital dashboard to manage visitor data suggests the museum’s interest in more responsive programming. Opportunities can be identified to create participatory experiences such as open conservation labs, visitor workshops, or co-curated mini-exhibitions focused on material care. These initiatives would align with improving the public understanding of the museum’s cultural significance and would challenge the top-down heritage model associated with the AHD.

In conclusion, the Museum Ons’ Lieve Heer op Solder demonstrates both the promises and limitations of current public engagement strategies related to conservation and restoration work. The museum’s willingness and openness to be more transparent and inclusive, combined with its past behind-the-scenes initiatives and digital experimentation, builds a good foundation for more participatory forms of engagement.

3.3 Case Study III: Embassy of the Free Mind

The building known as the “Huis met de Hoofden” (House with the Heads), located on Keizersgracht 123 in Amsterdam, has a noteworthy history (Fig. 14).¹⁸⁸ Its name originated from the legend that tells of six robbers who were beheaded by a courageous kitchen maid, with their heads supposedly mounted on the façade as a warning. In reality, however, the heads represent classical deities: Apollo (arts), Ceres (agriculture), Mercury (commerce), Minerva (wisdom), Bacchus (wine), and Diana (the hunt).¹⁸⁹



Fig. 14 Façade of the Embassy of the Free Mind, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

¹⁸⁸ Van Houten, E. Geschiedbouwkundige beschrijvingen behorende bij het Grachtenboek van Caspar Philips Jacobszoon. As cited on Amsterdamse Grachtenhuizen. “Keizersgracht 123, het huis met de hoofden.”, accessed May 3, 2025.

https://www.amsterdamsegrachtenhuizen.info/grachten/kg0/kg0199/kg03123/index-tx_sbtap_pi1%5Btab%5D=1.html.

¹⁸⁹ Amsterdam Cultuur Historische Vereniging. “Keizersgracht 123”, accessed May 3, 2025. <https://www.amsterdamhv.nl/wiki/keizersgracht123.html>.

The house was built in 1622. Its architect was likely Pieter de Keyser, who was the son of Hendrick de Keyser. The person who commissioned its construction in 1622 was Nicolaas Sohier, a wealthy stocking merchant and art enthusiast. The façade of the house was constructed using brick and stone, including Doric and Tuscan pilasters.¹⁹⁰

Over the centuries, the house has undergone various changes and restorations.¹⁹¹ It is noteworthy that the interior of the House with the Heads has a significant historical value. Behind the entrance, which includes the original front door and small gate, is located a 17th-century front room with a heavy-beam ceiling (Fig. 15). The front door, visible on the interior, originates from the 17th century. The oak panelling with columns and capitals, as well as the doors in the Dutch Classicist style, were likely added at a later date. The sandstone gate at the back of the front room is designed in the style of Hendrick de Keyser, dating from the time of construction. This gate leads to a central corridor that runs the length of the house, extending to the garden. In the left rear room, in the large hall, where a red marble mantelpiece is located. This mantelpiece was housed in the Stedelijk Museum (in the former style rooms) for a certain period of time, but was returned due to the efforts of monument conservationist Henk Zantkuijl. It is considered one of the most exquisite 17th-century mantelpieces in Amsterdam, displaying the alliance coat of arms of Louis de Geer and his wife, Adrienne Gérard. From the large hall, one can observe the garden, reconstructed in the Baroque style.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Van Houten, Geschiedbouwkundige beschrijvingen, “Keizersgracht 123.”
https://www.amsterdamsegrachtenhuizen.info/grachten/kg0/kg0199/kg03123/index-tx_sbtap_pi1%5Btab%5D=1.html.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Schoonenberg, Walther. “Keizersgracht 123. Huis met de Hoofden. Interieur.” Digitaal Grachtenboek - Database van de Grachtengordel. Amsterdam Monumentenstad, accessed May 3, 2025.
https://www.amsterdam-monumentenstad.nl/database/grachtenboek_objecten.php?id=1466.



Fig. 15 Embassy of the Free Mind, Large Hall, 2025. Photo by: Ksenia Kiselova.

The Huis met de Hoofden had several owners and occupants throughout its history. The first owner of it was Nicolaas Sohier, one of Amsterdam's wealthiest citizens and a passionate art collector.¹⁹³ The interiors were adorned with masterpieces, including works by Peter Paul Rubens. Sohier sold the house to Louis de Geer, a prominent arms dealer and industrialist with extensive business interests in Sweden, including copper and iron mines. De Geer was also a trusted advisor and financier to the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus.¹⁹⁴ The De Geer family earned their wealth in early industrial ventures, including arms dealing and supplying the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and West India Company (WIC), which

¹⁹³ Schoonenberg, "Keizersgracht 123. Huis met de Hoofden. Interieur." https://www.amsterdam-monumentenstad.nl/database/grachtenboek_objecten.php?id=1466.

¹⁹⁴ Marjolein de Cleen. "Huis met de Hoofden." *MforAmsterdam*, 18 September 2022, accessed June 6, 2025. <https://mforamsterdam.com/huis-met-de-hoofden/>

were key actors in Dutch colonial expansion.¹⁹⁵ The De Geer family occupied the house for four generations. From 1656 to 1670, the known Czech philosopher and educator Jan Amos Comenius lived there as a guest of the family.¹⁹⁶ After the De Geer family left, the house saw many different owners and functions over the years. In 1811, the art dealership De Roos was located in the house. This dealership was where Rembrandt's 'Anatomische les' was sold to the Dutch state in 1928. The house was also used for educational purposes, the first Higher Citizen School was located there from 1865 to 1869 after the municipality purchased the building. From 1909 to 1931, it housed the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, also referred to as the Conservatorium of the Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst. Following that period, from around 1931 until the early 1980s, it was used by a fur trader for a time. Important restorations took place, first in 1907 and later again when 19th-century extensions in the garden were removed, the double rear façade restored, and an original mantelpiece returned. Later occupants included the Bureau Monumenten en Archeologie from 1983 to 2009. In 2006, Joost Ritman purchased the property for the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, which opened in 2016.¹⁹⁷ The Huis met de Hoofden is officially recognised as a Rijksmonument (National Heritage Site), with the number 2249.¹⁹⁸

Today, the Huis met de Hoofden is called the Embassy of the Free Mind, which functions as a museum, library, and cultural centre, promoting the study and appreciation of Western esoteric traditions. It has an active role as a location for free thought, hosting exhibitions, lectures, and events that explore the interconnectedness of philosophy,

¹⁹⁵ Marjolein de Cleen. "Huis met de Hoofden." *MforAmsterdam*, 18 September 2022, accessed June 6, 2025. <https://mforamsterdam.com/huis-met-de-hoofden/>

¹⁹⁶ Schoonenberg, "Keizersgracht 123. Huis met de Hoofden. Interieur." https://www.amsterdam-monumentenstad.nl/database/grachtenboek_objecten.php?id=1466.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Van Houten, *Geschiedbouwkundige beschrijvingen*, "Keizersgracht 123." https://www.amsterdamsegrachtenhuizen.info/grachten/kg0/kg0199/kg03123/index-tx_sbtab_pi1%5Btab%5D=1.html; Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed. "Keizersgracht 123, 1015 CJ te Amsterdam." Monumentenregister, accessed May 4, 2025. <https://monumentenregister.cultureelerfgoed.nl/monumenten/2249>.

spirituality, and science. The institution continues to attract scholars and visitors interested in the knowledge preserved within the estate.¹⁹⁹

Moreover, the Embassy of the Free Mind is currently home to the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, a library specialising in alchemy, philosophy, and other related subjects (Fig. 16).²⁰⁰ The building underwent significant renovation between 2007 and 2014 to accommodate the library's collection, which includes manuscripts, and early printed books. The library's possessions include 4,004 early printed books, 25 medieval manuscripts and 376 post-medieval manuscripts.²⁰¹



Fig. 16 Embassy of the Free Mind, the library, 2025. Photo source: Museum NL, <https://www.museum.nl/en/embassy-of-the-free-mind>.

¹⁹⁹ Embassy of the Free Mind, "Over het museum," accessed May 3, 2025, <https://embassyofthefreemind.com/nl/museum/over-het-museum>.

²⁰⁰ Van Houten, Geschiedbouwkundige beschrijvingen, "Keizersgracht 123." https://www.amsterdamsegrachtenhuizen.info/grachten/kg0/kg0199/kg03123/index-tx_sbtap_pi1%5Btab%5D=1.html.

²⁰¹ Allard Pierson. Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica State Collection, UBA688. <https://archives.uba.uva.nl/resources/ubainv688>.

The house also holds historical significance related to Comenius, the philosopher and educator.²⁰² In 2020, a philosopher's tile was placed in the sidewalk outside the building in commemoration of his time there. This tile serves as a reminder of the house's intellectual legacy.²⁰³

3.3.1 Past Public Engagement Strategies: Embassy of the Free Mind

An interview was conducted with the Embassy of the Free Mind's Events and Project Manager, Chiara Mancini, as well as the online sources research and on-site analysis.²⁰⁴ It revealed that the museum organises various events aimed at engaging the public. These include gatherings such as children's workshops, public lectures by scholars, and a variety of community-based activities.²⁰⁵ Additionally, the museum participates in the annual Museumnacht.²⁰⁶ Some events are thematic, such as workshops focused on tarot, alchemy, and breathwork.²⁰⁷ The museum also maintains strong ties with its community through events for members of the "Friends of the Museum" group and active volunteers.²⁰⁸

To promote public engagement and increase visitor numbers, the museum has recently intensified its social media efforts. They monitor likes, shares, and other engagement metrics to maintain the content strategy. Additionally, they try to use local community groups to promote events targeted at families and neighbourhood residents. New ticket reselling platforms, such as GetYourGuide, are also used to attract tourists. Both internal communication channels and external platforms are employed to broaden their outreach.²⁰⁹

²⁰² Van Houten, Geschiedbouwkundige beschrijvingen, "Keizersgracht 123." https://www.amsterdamsegrachtenhuizen.info/grachten/kg0199/kg03123/index-tx_sbtap_pi1%5Btab%5D=1.html.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Chiara Mancini, Events and Project Manager of the Embassy of the Free Mind, Museum Development, interview by the author, May 12, 2025.

²⁰⁵ Embassy of the Free Mind, "Kidspagina," Embassy of the Free Mind, accessed June 15, 2025, <https://embassyofthefreemind.com/nl/museum/kidspagina/>.

²⁰⁶ Museumnacht Amsterdam, "Embassy of the Free Mind," Museumnacht Amsterdam, accessed June 15, 2025, <https://museumnacht.amsterdam/museum/68/embassy-of-the-free-mind/>.

²⁰⁷ Embassy of the Free Mind, "Courses," Embassy of the Free Mind, accessed June 15, 2025, <https://embassyofthefreemind.com/en/plan-your-visit/hours-admission/events/courses>.

²⁰⁸ Chiara Mancini, Events and Project Manager of the Embassy of the Free Mind, Museum Development, interview by the author, May 12, 2025.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

The Embassy of the Free Mind's social media performance is evaluated quarterly using standard metrics. When the events sell out or do not, the team assesses potential causes and adjusts future programming accordingly: "Usually, if we sell out, it is good. When we do not sell out, we look at why it happened and what we can do next" (Appendix C).²¹⁰ Content that resonates with audiences includes inspirational quotes on Mondays, posts related to the library's book collection, and events such as lunch concerts.²¹¹

Information on conservation and restoration is outlined in the museum's one-year policy plan, which differs from the typical three-to-five-year plans used by most institutions.²¹² This plan addresses the care and handling of both the building and the book collection.²¹³ However, conservation and restoration efforts are not currently shared with the public on location.

The Embassy of the Free Mind employs six scholars, including researchers, a library team, interns and freelancers.²¹⁴ Some of the researchers are working on their PhDs and studying in the library, and most of their outputs are shared in academic contexts such as conferences. Public visibility of the research remains limited, as the information is considered to be incomprehensible to the general public. Nevertheless, the museum communicates some research through PR posts, exclusive book tours led by researchers, and an annual exhibition that highlights the book collection.²¹⁵

Increasing visibility of conservation and restoration work is not currently a priority for the museum. These topics have been shared during past renovation projects, including media coverage: "For us, the story of the house is a small fragment. It is not everything" (Appendix

²¹⁰ Chiara Mancini, Events and Project Manager of the Embassy of the Free Mind, Museum Development, interview by the author, May 12, 2025.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Embassy of the Free Mind. Beleidsplan 2022-2024, 2022. PDF document, accessed June 10, 2025. https://embassyofthefreemind.com/images/Documents/Beleidsplan_2022-2024_EFM_lr.pdf.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

C).²¹⁶ At present, the focus of the Embassy of the Free Mind is on other themes, although a house history tour that links the building to the book collection of the library is offered.²¹⁷

The museum targets a variety of visitors, from academic scholars who explore the book collection in depth, to creative individuals seeking inspiration and experiences, and a middle group of ‘change-makers’ interested in philosophy and societal impact. The museum’s programming and communication work are tailored to these varied audiences.²¹⁸

The museum used to collaborate largely with external experts in event co-organisation and business strategy development. In recent days, an external agency was involved in the renovation work of the house, the garden house and the redesign of an exhibition room. Interns and freelancers support the marketing, website development, research, and archival work of the museum.²¹⁹

The Embassy of the Free Mind collects feedback through social media monitoring and interviews conducted by the museum interns each quarter. A form for visitor feedback is also available on-site. Although there is currently no formal system to collect and analyse this data consistently, the museum’s employees implement the feedback directly when it is received, particularly regarding the visitor experience and suggestions for new topics to learn about.²²⁰

One of the main challenges faced by the Embassy of the Free Mind is funding. Because it is mainly a library, unlike other museums, it does not receive structural governmental funding and instead relies on private donations, fundraising, and its own revenue. Without sufficient funding, it is harder for the museum to make it into a multi-experience museum, adding more complicated features.²²¹

²¹⁶ Chiara Mancini, Events and Project Manager of the Embassy of the Free Mind, Museum Development, interview by the author, May 12, 2025.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

The Embassy of the Free Mind employs several digital tools, such as a virtual tour, which they frequently update, an audio tour, and a partial digitisation of its rare book collection. A new website is currently under development.²²² The museum also releases two monthly newsletters. One is centred around the promotion of all the events from the upcoming months, and looking back at what the museum has done in regards to research, past events and other information. This newsletter will be released twice a month in the near future. The second newsletter is about the library, it includes the research conducted in the book collection, as well as short essays about the research work from the library scholars.²²³

The museum operates with a core team of approximately 15 employees, supported by two to three freelancers and one intern at any given time. Approximately 60 volunteers are associated with the museum, 30 of them are actively engaged in tasks such as research, event support and supervising reading rooms. The volunteers include university students, individuals in career transition, and retirees.²²⁴

The current conservation responsibilities in the museum's library are distributed across the staff members. Such activities as acquisitions, insurance of new books and artworks, climate control and other preservation practices are managed internally. There is no designated conservator or restorer employed at the museum.²²⁵

Looking at successful engagement strategies, some events, particularly the Museumnacht, attract significant numbers of visitors, sometimes over 1,000. Out of this number, a small proportion (approximately 50-100) returns. The museum is of the opinion that most events attract limited repeat visits, however, each occasion provides an opportunity to reach new audiences and build a higher public engagement over time.²²⁶

²²² Chiara Mancini, Events and Project Manager of the Embassy of the Free Mind, Museum Development, interview by the author, May 12, 2025.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

The site observations of the Embassy of the Free Mind yielded that there is no information about the current or past conservation processes displayed on-site. Moreover, there are no traces of ongoing research in the museum interior, which could not be the case as the building was renovated.

3.3.2 Analysis: Embassy of the Free Mind

The Embassy of the Free Mind demonstrates a strong commitment to greater public engagement through a wide variety of programming aimed at including diverse audiences. The museum participates in events such as Museumnacht and organises its own lectures, creative workshops, and sessions. Such activities potentially attract both local and international visitors, as well as a core community of creative individuals and scholars. The museum's outreach is conducted by strategic use of social media, ticket platforms, feedback from visitors, and online engagement. However, despite this active involvement with the public, the museum does not currently emphasise its conservation and restoration efforts of the historic library as part of its permanent public narrative. In fact, there is no internal conservation and restoration work conducted in the museum at all. A surprising observation is that the museum does not have an internal book conservator, even though the main attraction of the institution is its Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, with numerous ancient books.

Conservation and restoration work is not exactly present behind the scenes, and subsequently there is no visibility of it in the museum's communication or programming. The Embassy of the Free Mind has a one-year policy plan that includes preservation goals for the building and the library collection. The museum utilises humidifiers in the library, digitisation of rare books, and past renovation work. These activities are considered vital internally but are not presented to visitors in a structured way. There was media attention in the past

surrounding the museum building's renovation, however, it was merely incidental, rather than the result of a strategic plan to engage the public with conservation and restoration work. The museum does not currently utilise information boards, tours, or other programming that explicitly refer to the conservation themes. Most importantly, the Embassy of the Free Mind maintains a rather top-down view on sharing certain information as the team considers the public unable to comprehend the carried out research. This is a problematic stance that this thesis aims to challenge.

Several factors can potentially explain the lack of visibility of shared conservation and restoration work. First, the museum operates without structural governmental funding and must therefore prioritise activities that appeal to donors or may generate revenue. Publicly showcasing conservation work in the library may not fulfil these criteria. Second, unlike many other historic house museums in the Netherlands, this institution centres around its philosophical and intellectual legacy rather than the physical elements of the house. This focus on intangible heritage makes it more challenging for the museum to create storytelling around material conservation. Lastly, the Embassy of the Free Mind lacks a structured strategy for integrating visitor feedback into long-term planning and does not yet use its existing research or restoration work to engage the visitors in a reflective or participatory way.

Nonetheless, there is substantial potential for conservation and restoration work to be more highlighted and potentially contribute to higher public engagement. The museum already provides house tours that could be expanded to include narratives about past restoration decisions and the material history of the house. Stories about the museum building's renovation, preservation challenges, and conservation choices could add to the visitor experience by revealing this previously invisible labour of care that sustains this

historical site. Most importantly, the library's preservation work should be highlighted too.

The current work on the digitisation of books or the handling of rare materials could be made accessible through information boards, newsletter posts, short videos and engaging workshops. External conservators could be invited to host lectures about book conservation practices, the history of bookmaking and more. These various forms of storytelling would not only educate the public more but also align with the museum's philosophical mission by evoking reflection on the value of preservation. Such content would be appealing to the museum's usual audience, which is driven by curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge.

Furthermore, the museum is well-positioned to produce such educational content, as it has an in-house research team, a network of interns, and an existing digital newsletter. The funding and staffing remain a limitation, however, small-scale and low-cost interventions could be a possibility, such as behind-the-scenes social media content, a series of "book" care stories" in the newsletter, or integrated conservation content in guided tours. Making conservation work visible would diversify the museum's engagement even more, as it may appeal to a new audience interested in sustainability and heritage care.

In conclusion, the Embassy of the Free Mind excels at diverse and community-oriented programming, but it has as potential to include previously unexplored conservation and restoration activities into the public view. Starting to engage with professional conservation and integrating these aspects into the visitor experience presents an opportunity to deepen public engagement. Moreover, it can help to connect the audience more meaningfully to the ongoing research processes that sustain the museum's physical and intellectual legacy. Subsequently, this could transform conservation from an internal museum responsibility into a shared cultural value.

3.4 National and International Examples

3.4.1 Rijksmuseum: Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Since 2019, the Rijksmuseum, located in Amsterdam, has established the ‘Operation Night Watch’ project.²²⁷ Conservators and researchers from major world institutions are working on the restoration of Rembrandt’s *De Nachtwacht* in a transparent glass chamber, letting the museum visitors, as well as online watchers, observe the process. Researchers are utilising the most recent research methods and technologies, including advanced imaging, computational analysis, and visualisation tools, as part of this project.²²⁸

To enhance public engagement, the museum has stationed Ask-Me guides next to the glass enclosure that directly interact with the public, addressing frequently asked questions about the research, the painting’s significance, and the project’s goals.²²⁹ This direct interaction provides museum educators with valuable feedback to analyse how complex research techniques are communicated, and subsequently leads to better visitor involvement. The research conducted as part of Operation Night Watch has also reached a broader global audience through digital platforms and academic publications. For instance, an extremely high-resolution photograph of The Night Watch placed on the museum’s website quickly accumulated a significant number of views, and a report on a discovery made using advanced techniques gained widespread international attention.²³⁰ This demonstrates a considerable public fascination with the intersection of art and science. Learning directly from audience interactions is helping the museum adjust its communication strategies both within the physical space and through external channels. Projects like this, which reveal the work happening behind the scenes, are effective in connecting visitors more openly with the

²²⁷ Styles, David. “How Notre Dame and Rijksmuseum Boosted Public Engagement with Restoration and Conservation.” Museums + Heritage Advisor, 2019.
<https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/posts/how-notre-dame-and-rijksmuseum-boosted-public-engagement-with-restoration-and-conservation/>, accessed May 6, 2025.

²²⁸ Keune, Katrien, and Irma de Vries. “Unlocking Art’s Wonders: Science as a Bridge to Public Engagement.” Conservation Perspectives, The GCI Newsletter 39, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 16-17

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

research being done on the collection. The innovative nature of the research generates international interest. Consistently conveying the core message of the information is crucial for the success of such initiatives, highlighting the potential of science to improve public appreciation and connection with art.²³¹

3.4.2 Huize Kolthoorn, Museum Geelvinck: Heerde, The Netherlands

An exhibition in Huize Kolthoorn, Museum Geelvinck, located in Heerde, demonstrated that another way to increase public engagement with historic house museums is through storytelling. Sharing the stories through exhibitions, digital platforms, or guided tours could make the process of cultural heritage conservation more graspable and once again accessible. By knowing the story behind a room or a particular object, the visitors can establish a stronger connection with its significance.

The author of this thesis established an AFR Exhibit at the historic house museum Huize Kolthoorn in 2024.²³² The Architectural Finishes Research (AFR) was conducted in the dining room of the house that was previously inhabited by Dutch painters and spouses Jan Kleintjes and Hedwig van Osselen-Kleintjes. The purpose of AFR is to determine the historical colour schemes of objects and assemblages in interiors, architecture, and urban planning as they have evolved over time. The research investigates the sequences of finishing layers. In-situ AFR is usually complemented by archival, literature, laboratory research, and, when possible, an analytical technique analysis. The results of AFR can be used in maintenance plans and for restoration or reconstruction purposes.²³³ Unfortunately, the general public is mostly unaware that this research exists. In the Huize Kolthoorn exhibit, the

²³¹ Keune, Katrien, and Irma de Vries. "Unlocking Art's Wonders: Science as a Bridge to Public Engagement." *Conservation Perspectives*, The GCI Newsletter 39, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 16-17

²³² Verwey, Dunya. *Kleuronderzoek Grote Eetkamer Huize Kolthoorn door Ksenia Kiselova*. Geelvinck Museum, 2024, accessed May 6, 2025.

<https://geelvinck.nl/kleuronderzoek-grote-eetkamer-huize-kolthoorn-door-ksenia-kiselova/>.

²³³ Ibid.

results of the AFR were displayed in the researched room with the use of information sheets and QR codes.²³⁴

It was reported by the museum curator and director that this addition improved the engagement with the visitors and sparked further questions and interest.²³⁵ It, thus, should be noted that the exhibitions within historic house museums can benefit from displaying the conservation and restoration research.

3.4.3 Rundāle Palace Museum: Pilsrundāle, Latvia

Rundāle Palace Museum in Latvia employs several methods to share its restoration and conservation efforts with the public, in this way promoting engagement and increasing awareness of cultural heritage preservation. The museum employed several strategies to facilitate both passive and active participation in conservation activities.

The museum has published several scholarly works that document its restoration projects in detail. For example, among these is the monograph *Rundāle Palace III: Restoration*, authored by Imants Lancmanis and Lauma Lancmane in 2021, which provides comprehensive information on the palace's restoration history.²³⁶ This publication includes photographic documentation and detailed descriptions of the restoration processes, highlighting both challenges and achievements. Another significant publication, *Stoves of Rundāle Palace*, focuses on the preservation and restoration of the palace's stoves, demonstrating the techniques and materials used in their conservation.²³⁷

²³⁴ Verwey, *Kleuronderzoek Grote Eetkamer Huize Kolthoorn door Ksenia Kiselova*. Geelvinck Museum, 2024, <https://geelvinck.nl/kleuronderzoek-grote-eetkamer-huize-kolthoorn-door-ksenia-kiselova/>.

²³⁵ Buisman, Jurn, and Dunya Verwey. Personal communication, February 11, 2025. Director and Curator, Museum Geelvinck.

²³⁶ Rundāles Pils Muzejs. "Rundāle Palace Museum Has Published a Monograph 'Rundāle Palace III. Restoration.'" Rundāle Palace Museum, accessed May 6, 2025. <https://rundale.net/en/rundale-palace-museum-has-published-a-monograph-rundale-palace-iii-restoration/>.

²³⁷ Rundāles Pils Muzejs. "Research Publications, Rundāle Palace Museum Collection and Exhibition Catalogues." Rundāle Palace Museum, accessed May 6, 2025. <https://rundale.net/en/museum/research/research-publications-rundale-palace-museum-collection-and-exhibition-catalogues/>.

Rundāle Palace Museum regularly organises exhibitions that highlight its ongoing restoration efforts or past ones. For example, the 2023 exhibition *Doors to History: The Activities of the Rundāle Palace Museum in the Exploration of Architecture and Art* presented the museum's exploration and preservation activities, including photographs and artefacts from various restoration projects.²³⁸ Additionally, the museum hosts annual temporary exhibitions, which often include aspects of its restoration work, providing visitors with updated perspectives on the conservation process.²³⁹

The museum hosts educational programs aimed at directly engaging visitors with its conservation activities. These programs include lectures on subjects such as monumental painting restoration and the conservation of museum objects.²⁴⁰ Furthermore, the museum has developed interactive educational initiatives, such as the “Junior Restaurateurs” game, which educates young visitors about the principles and practices of restoration in an engaging and accessible way.²⁴¹

Rundāle Palace Museum also utilises digital resources to enhance public understanding of its conservation efforts. The museum screens film chronicles, and documentaries that demonstrate the restoration processes, providing visitors with a visual representation of the work being undertaken. Additionally, the museum has launched a digital guide, which shows interactive information about the palace's exhibitions, gardens, and restoration projects.²⁴² This digital resource enables visitors to explore the museum's conservation work remotely and in greater depth.

²³⁸ Rundāles pils muzejs. “Exhibition on Latvian Cultural Heritage Research Expeditions.” Rundāle Palace Museum, accessed May 6, 2025.
<https://rundale.net/en/rundale-palace-museum-will-launch-an-exhibition-on-the-expeditions-of-the-museum-staff/>.

²³⁹ Kokborg, Heidi. “Rundāle Palace Museum: A Rococo Masterpiece.” Scan Magazine, accessed May 6, 2025.
<https://scanmagazine.co.uk/rundale-palace-museum-a-rococo-masterpiece/>.

²⁴⁰ Rundāles Pils Muzejs. “Support Foundation.” Rundāle Palace Museum, accessed May 6, 2025.
<https://www.rundale.net/en/communication/fonds/>.

²⁴¹ Visit Bauska. “Rundāle Palace Museum.”, accessed May 6, 2025.
<https://www.visit.bauska.lv/en/objects/map/rundale-palace-museum/>.

²⁴² Rundāles Pils Muzejs. “Digitālais gids.” Rundāles pils muzejs, accessed May 6, 2025.
<https://digitalaisgids.rundale.net/>.

Through its publications, exhibitions, educational programs, and digital resources, Rundāle Palace Museum actively engages the public in its conservation and restoration efforts. These initiatives provide visitors with valuable insights into the techniques and challenges involved in cultural heritage preservation.

The analysed information from the case studies, as well as the national and international examples, provides a basis for the educational guidelines for historic house museums in Amsterdam. This will be expanded on more in the next chapter.

4. Educational Guidelines for Enhancing Public Engagement

Based on the research findings, this chapter provides practical recommendations in the form of educational guidelines for historic house museums in Amsterdam to potentially enhance their public engagement efforts. It suggests the guidelines' basis and typology and, thereafter, the strategies for increasing visitor involvement in conservation and restoration activities, as well as ideas which house museums can employ in order to achieve their engagement goals. The chapter provides the answer to the set research question and sub-questions through the outlined educational guidelines.

4.1 The Educational Guidelines' Basis

The educational guidelines for improving public engagement in historic house museums by highlighting conservation and restoration work are based on insights from Irwin, Simon, and the Raad voor Cultuur discussed earlier. Alan Irwin argues that transparency and openness are essential to rebuilding public trust in expert-led fields, implying that making hidden museum practices visible can establish a relevant dialogue.²⁴³ Nina Simon advocates for participatory, visitor-centred approaches, where museums act as platforms that encourage interaction, curiosity, and shared experiences.²⁴⁴ The Raad voor Cultuur emphasises the importance of preservation, knowledge transfer, and accessibility, urging museums to involve the public in core tasks like collection care.²⁴⁵ Together, these ideas are in favour of the notion that involving the general public in conservation and restoration processes can build trust, promote engagement, and connect house museums more significantly with society.

Moreover, the national examples from the Rijksmuseum, Huize Kolthoorn, as well as the international view from the Rundāle Palace Museum, provide a strong additional basis for

²⁴³ Irwin. "The Politics of Talk: Coming to Terms with the 'New' Scientific Governance.": 299-3016.

²⁴⁴ Simon. *The Participatory Museum*: 26-132.

²⁴⁵ Raad voor Cultuur. "Sectoradvies Musea: 'In wankel evenwicht'.": 4-80.

developing the educational guidelines. The Rijksmuseum's *Operation Night Watch* demonstrates how transparency and real-time interaction can successfully connect the public with complex restoration processes.²⁴⁶ At Huize Kolthoorn, public engagement was improved by linking Architectural Finishes Research to storytelling within a historic interior, using tools such as QR codes and in-room displays to make conservation work accessible and relatable.²⁴⁷ Lastly, Rundāle Palace Museum integrates publications, exhibitions, practical educational programs, and digital tools to communicate its restoration work, showing how multifaceted strategies can effectively engage diverse audiences and establish long-term interest in conservation.²⁴⁸ These cases collectively support the idea that openness, interpretation, and interactivity are crucial to meaningful public engagement in conservation and restoration work.

4.2 The Explanation and Typology for the Educational Guidelines

Historic house museums in Amsterdam can develop their approach to the improvement of public engagement by understanding the different types of engagement and the structural parts of various mechanisms that can influence their effectiveness, as discussed by Rowe and Frewer in *A typology of public engagement mechanisms*.²⁴⁹ As mentioned previously, they define three core types of public engagement activities: public communication, public consultation, and public participation.²⁵⁰

The first type, public communication, involves information flowing predominantly from the museum to the public.²⁵¹ In the context of sharing the information about

²⁴⁶ Keune and de Vries. "Unlocking Art's Wonders: Science as a Bridge to Public Engagement.": 16-17.

²⁴⁷ Verwey, *Kleuronderzoek Grote Eetkamer Huize Kolthoorn door Ksenia Kiselova*. Geelvinck Museum, 2024, <https://geelvinck.nl/kleuronderzoek-grote-eetkamer-huize-kolthoorn-door-ksenia-kiselova/>.

²⁴⁸ Rundāles pils muzejs. "Exhibition on Latvian Cultural Heritage Research Expeditions." <https://rundale.net/en/rundale-palace-museum-will-launch-an-exhibition-on-the-expeditions-of-the-museum-staff/>.

²⁴⁹ Rowe and Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms.": 276-282.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 253-254.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 253-254.

conservation and restoration, this means the museum informs visitors and the broader community about ongoing projects, the importance of preserving collections and buildings, or the techniques used. As argued by the authors, the feedback from the public is not actively requested or formally processed in this structure. The goal is to disseminate knowledge about the museum's stewardship responsibilities and activities. Mechanisms for this type of engagement include traditional publicity methods such as newsletters, press releases, or website information, public talks or hearings where museum staff present information (these can include optional Q&A sessions), or drop-in centres and online information resources where the public can access previously prepared material. The main factors influencing the effectiveness of communication are to what extent the information reaches the intended audience and how well the information is understood.²⁵²

The second type, public consultation, involves gathering information from the public, and this process is launched by the museum.²⁵³ For conservation and restoration work, this could involve seeking public opinion on aspects of preservation plans, priorities for future restoration projects, or opinions on proposed interventions. This process usually does not involve an ongoing dialogue between the public and the museum. The aim is to collect existing public opinions or knowledge on the topic. Mechanisms for consultation in the house museum setting can include structured methods like surveys, opinion polls, or referenda, which are effective for collecting specific data from large numbers of people using closed responses. Moreover, other methods that allow for more open feedback can be used, such as inviting comments on consultation documents or through interactive websites, or focus groups or study circles, which allow for organised, face-to-face discussion and evocation of more detailed, qualitative information. The effectiveness of consultation is linked to

²⁵² Rowe and Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms," 262.

²⁵³ Ibid, 253-254.

increasing the relevant information gathered from the public and ensuring it is conveyed to the museum and processed by it thereafter.²⁵⁴

The third type, public participation, is characterised by a transfer of knowledge or information, involving dialogue between the public and the museum.²⁵⁵ This allows for the public view to potentially be formed through discussion and negotiation. For conservation and restoration work to be visible, this could imply involving the public in discussions about sensitive restoration decisions, co-developing guidelines for future preservation work, or establishing advisory groups. Participation methods frequently take place in group environments and include some level of discussion.²⁵⁶ Examples for house museums could include citizen juries, consensus conferences, or action planning workshops, where selected participants engage in organised discussions with access to flexible information to develop recommendations. Other participation types may include negotiated rulemaking, which often involves knowledgeable stakeholders, or processes such as opinion polls that combine discussions with the collection and analysis of participants' opinions. Effectiveness in participation depends on reaching a meaningful information flow between the public and the museum, both parties actively processing this information, and creating a desirable result out of it.²⁵⁷

For a historic house museum in Amsterdam to decide which engagement strategies are best suited for communicating about or involving the public in conservation and restoration, several main structural elements that Rowe and Frewer discuss should be considered.

²⁵⁴ Rowe and Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms," 262.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 253-254.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 276-282.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 262.

One crucial part is the participant selection method: Whether the museum uses controlled selection (inviting specific stakeholders or randomly selecting participants for a survey or jury) or relies on uncontrolled selection (where anyone interested can participate, such as attending a public meeting or visiting a website). Controlled selection can be more effective at ensuring the involvement of the most relevant individuals or groups, which is important for accessing the relevant information. However, uncontrolled selection can broaden reach and accessibility, particularly for communication purposes.²⁵⁸

For consultation and participation, the response ways available to the public are significant. A closed response method (multiple-choice questions on a survey about conservation priorities) limits input but makes collecting of information easier. An open response method (inviting written comments on a restoration plan or facilitating group discussion) can promote more detailed information, but also add unnecessary data and make the structured collection of information more complex.²⁵⁹

Another important part, particularly for communication and participation, is the nature of the information shared. Set information (static display or printed brochure about conservation techniques) provides a standard message but does not allow for clarification. Flexible information (Q&A session with conservators who can answer questions) allows the public to seek clarification and address information gaps, potentially leading to better understanding and more informed contributions.²⁶⁰

The way information is communicated also influences how effective it is. Face-to-face interaction is hypothesised to be less prone to misunderstanding due to non-verbal cues, establishing better communication and dialogue.²⁶¹ Non-face-to-face

²⁵⁸ Rowe and Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms," 276-282.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

methods (online platforms or publications) can potentially reach a much larger audience. House museums must weigh the benefits of depth of interaction added by face-to-face methods (tours focusing on conservation or workshops) against the broader reach of non-face-to-face methods (website content or virtual exhibits).²⁶²

When employing the educational guidelines about conservation and restoration work, a house museum should first articulate its specific goals: Are they primarily trying to inform visitors about ongoing work, seek input on how future projects should be prioritised, or involve the community in making difficult decisions about preservation? Once the purpose aligns with communication, consultation, or participation, the museum can select or design strategies by considering how these structural parts (participant selection, information flow, response mode) align with the desired outcomes in terms of competence and efficiency. For example, a museum wanting to inform a broad local audience about a new roof restoration project (communication) might use controlled selection via a local newsletter and uncontrolled selection via a website with set information and non-face-to-face transfer. If they want public input on potential colour schemes for exterior paint (consultation), they might use a controlled survey of members or an uncontrolled online poll with image options. If the decision involves a complex collaboration, such as whether to restore an interior element accurately using potentially toxic historical materials or use safer modern alternatives (participation), a citizen jury with facilitated discussion and access to expert information might be considered.

4.3 The List of Educational Guidelines

Based on the typology presented by Rowe and Frewer, the educational guidelines were outlined.²⁶³ Analysis of the three case studies yielded that there is significant room for

²⁶² Rowe and Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms," 276-282.

²⁶³ Ibid.

improvement in public engagement with historic house museums in Amsterdam. The three house museums are making significant efforts to preserve and present their heritage, however, their engagement strategies remain limited in their demonstration of the ongoing research and conservation and restoration work. Based on the research findings and analysis, the following actionable recommendations are proposed to improve public engagement in these institutions:

Demonstrating Conservation and Restoration Processes

Historic house museums in Amsterdam can heighten public interest by sharing the behind-the-scenes work of conservation and restoration with their visitors. This could include providing guided tours of conservation projects in progress, talks with restorers, lectures by conservators, or volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to maintenance and preservation activities. Transparent communication about the challenges and ethical considerations in conservation can also add to a sense of shared responsibility and care for heritage in the specific institution. Most importantly, the museums should supplement the presence of ongoing research with substantial information. For example, if AFR stratigraphies are present in the interior, there should be information boards nearby explaining the scope of the research and what exactly the visitor is looking at.

Design Interactive Events and Workshops

To increase participation and relevance, house museums should consider programming that responds to the interests of different audience groups. Interactive workshops on the topics of conservation and restoration could be a base engagement strategy. The workshops could include heritage crafts, storytelling sessions, pigment making, paintings' retouching, book cleaning and more. These events could be further adjusted for families, school children, young adults, or community groups. Co-creation workshops, where

visitors help program the content or format of exhibitions in a house museum, can additionally empower the visitors and create stronger emotional connections with the museum.

Organise Special Exhibitions

Temporary exhibitions can be employed by house museums to address contemporary themes or underrepresented histories linked to the house museum's context, such as the history of slavery and exploitation connected to the former house owners and involved craftsmanship. The exhibitions can include complex past restoration projects in order to give these projects significant attention and detailed explanation. Integrating participatory elements, such as visitor-contributed narratives, open referenda, can further promote visitors' engagement and sense of relevance. Collaborations with artists, academics, or community members may also help in the organisation of the exhibitions and extend their reach.

Assemble a Community Jury

Having an aim to achieve meaningful public participation in complex heritage decisions, historic house museums can assemble a community jury through controlled participant selection, ensuring representation of relevant stakeholders and informed community members. This format allows for deliberative, face-to-face interaction and flexible information sharing, such as Q&A sessions with conservators, allowing participants to ask questions and address gaps in their understanding. An open response mode, which can take place through facilitated discussions rather than fixed surveys, could promote a dialogue, and access to expert knowledge and informed decision-making. This approach is particularly useful when the house museum seeks community involvement in ethically or technically complex restoration choices.

Establish Volunteer Programs

Volunteer programs in historic house museums can lead to a valuable opportunity to involve the public directly in the conservation and restoration process by assisting professional in-house conservators and restorers. These programs can provide volunteers with specialised training to support routine tasks such as environmental monitoring, condition reporting, and preventive care, which are essential for preserving historic interiors and other artefacts. By participating in these activities, volunteers can gain direct experience and a better understanding of the challenges and techniques involved in conservation work. Such a collaboration can assist house museums in managing resources in a more effective way.

Improve Accessibility and Inclusivity

House museums should aim to reduce physical, sensory, linguistic, and social barriers that might prevent certain groups from engaging with their collections and exhibitions about the restoration and conservation work. This could include multilingual materials, audio descriptions, or inclusive storytelling that reflects diverse perspectives. The outreach should also target underrepresented communities, building a stable relationship through partnerships with local organisations and community leaders.

The outlined educational guidelines aim to make historic house museums more open, participatory, and socially relevant spaces. Implementing such guidelines can help the historic house museums in Amsterdam progress, reject passive visitation and aim toward more purposeful, as well as long-term, public engagement. The guidelines support the people-for-people concept, where the museums highlight the craftsmanship of past centuries through contemporary research and preservation work. The work of restorers and conservators assists in preserving the work of craftsmen, in order to make it more visible and

appreciated by visitors. This creates a meaningful cycle of human effort dedicated to benefiting others, where knowledge is exchanged, understood, and valued by the community.

The educational guidelines can be implemented to support long-term engagement within the historic house museums in Amsterdam. In order to avoid the authorised heritage discourse, as planned, the museums must change their stance from considering the visitor as incapable of comprehending certain technical information to an equal party. The visitor should not be disregarded or overlooked in the exhibited content of house museums. Most individuals are inherently curious, thus there is no limit for the museums in achieving engaging exhibitions, events or workshops for their visitors. The more accessible the work of the museums is, the more appreciated it may become in the course of time, as the general public will be given an opportunity to learn what it takes to preserve heritage for future generations. Giving the people information they may never have heard before may additionally spark more interest in the field of cultural heritage conservation and restoration in general. This, subsequently, may lead to young individuals being motivated to follow an education program such as the Master's Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage at the University of Amsterdam, or others.²⁶⁴ More attention should be given to our field of work since one common issue within cultural institutions these days is the lack of funding. The political environment may not be easily and directly adjustable for those reasons, however, smaller steps, such as the proposed guidelines, may influence the political priorities of the residents in the Netherlands. To clarify, while being more informed about the complicated work heritage experts perform, the general public may become more inclined to choose political parties that prioritise cultural heritage preservation and provide more financial aid to the cultural sector.

²⁶⁴ Universiteit van Amsterdam. *Master Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage*. Accessed June 5, 2025. <https://www.uva.nl/shared-content/programmas/en/masters/conservation-and-restoration-of-cultural-heritage/conservation-and-restoration-of-cultural-heritage.html?cb>.

4.4 Answer to the Research Question and Sub-Questions

A thorough analysis of the three case studies, Huis Willet-Holthuysen, Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder and Embassy of the Free Mind, yielded that all three house museums are not currently involved in constant, active and structured information sharing about the conservation and restoration work conducted in their institutions. Furthermore, despite the fact that some of these museums host various engaging gatherings and participate in co-creative processes, they do not offer events or workshops on-site directed at the work of researchers, conservators or restorers.

The main research question of this study was: How can historic house museums in Amsterdam contribute to public engagement by giving more attention to the conservation and restoration work conducted in a museum? To provide the answer to that, this thesis outlined the educational guidelines for historic house museums in Amsterdam, based on the current situation in the selected case studies and the literature. Whilst it may not be possible to conclude whether the proposed guidelines can contribute to public engagement in house museums without testing them first, they provide a sufficient basis for action. They illustrate a realistic plan of action for house museums to implement in their internal strategising in order to give more attention to the conservation and restoration work conducted in their museums. By following the educational guidelines, the house museums may potentially attract more visitors and make the public more interested in their narratives, thereby tackling the current struggle of small museums in the Netherlands. The educational guidelines are based on transparency and education priorities, thus, the public will be given an equal opportunity to enjoy the usually hidden information. To directly answer the research question, in order to contribute to public engagement by giving more attention to the conservation and restoration work conducted in a museum, historic house museums in Amsterdam can

demonstrate the conservation and restoration processes, host interactive events and workshops, organise special exhibitions, assemble a community jury, establish volunteer programs and improve their accessibility and inclusivity. The educational guidelines are not limited to this list, but are encouraged to be expanded through practice and implementation of public engagement strategies

In regard to the first research sub-question (what past and current strategies were employed by the three house museums in Amsterdam to engage the public?), it was possible to establish that all three museums have employed various strategies to better engage with the public. However, the second research sub-question (in what ways is conservation and restoration work made visible to the public in each museum?) revealed that only Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder and Huis Willet-Holthuysen are displaying moderate information about the conservation and restoration work in the museums, but its visibility on a daily basis remains limited. Finally, to answer the last research sub-question (how can historic house museums reimagine conservation and restoration as participatory or co-creative processes?), historic house museums can reimagine conservation and restoration as participatory or co-creative processes by emphasising the educational guidelines involving the public providing feedback or participating in decision-making, such as the community jury or conservation and restoration volunteers. In order to actively avoid the AHD, a house museum needs to focus on involving its visitor not only through the extensive and transparent information sharing but also through practical involvement. This way, an institution can demonstrate that it listens to the public opinion, which may encourage more individuals to be active within their communities.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

This chapter summarises the key findings of the thesis research, emphasising the significance of public engagement in historic house museums. It additionally reflects on the broader implications of the research, paying attention to the potential benefits of a better public engagement with the museums. The chapter also discusses the study's limitations and suggestions for further research.

Public engagement is a complex concept that was first introduced within a deficit model, described by Brian Wynne.²⁶⁵ This, mostly top-down view, was contrasted by opposing opinions of Wynne himself and others, as well as the arguments of Laurajane Smith and her criticism of the AHD.²⁶⁶ This thesis subsequently attempted to actively reject the AHD in the outlined educational guidelines. This was further complemented by the publications from Alan Irwin, Nina Simon, and the Raad voor Cultuur, where other perspectives on public engagement were given, prioritising transparency and dialogue with the public.²⁶⁷ The underlying aim of this thesis was to tackle the ongoing international struggle of historic house museums to attract and retain visitors. Challenges with public engagement call for innovative solutions and strategies.

Based on the analysed literature, theories, and the three case studies, as well as national and international examples of successful public engagement strategies, it was possible to answer the set research question as well as the research sub-questions. This study can, thus, conclude that historic house museums in Amsterdam can employ more information sharing about the ongoing research and the internal work of conservation and restoration with

²⁶⁵ Wynne, "Misunderstood Misunderstanding," 282.

²⁶⁶ Smith, *Uses of heritage*, 44-49.

²⁶⁷ Irwin, "The Politics of Talk: Coming to Terms with the 'New' Scientific Governance," 299-3016; Simon, *The Participatory Museum*: 26-132; Raad voor Cultuur, "Sectoradvies Musea: 'In wankel evenwicht'": 4-80.

their visitors. Moreover, to actively avoid the AHD and top-down governance processes, the museums should be involved in organising engaging events and participatory gatherings with the public. Educational guidelines were outlined to specifically provide ideas for potential public engagement implementations. The guidelines were based on extensive literature research, theories on public engagement with museums, analysis of national and international initiatives, as well as the typology presented by Rowe and Frewer.²⁶⁸ Most significantly, the guidelines were created as a solution for a better representation of the conservation and restoration work after the analysis of the three case studies: Huis Willet-Holthuysen, Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder and Embassy of the Free Mind. The analysis revealed that overall, none of the museums were actively and continuously involved with public engagement centred around the work of conservation and restoration. For this reason, potential implementation of the educational guidelines will lead to a sparked interest among the public and a better understanding of the heritage experts' work, as well as active participation in the museum decision-making.

The proposed educational guidelines suggest feasible solutions for enhancing public engagement in historic house museums in Amsterdam, but face several limitations. Firstly, this research considered only three case studies. In the future, it might be beneficial to analyse a larger pool of historic house museums in Amsterdam in order to establish more reliable conclusions and potentially expand the educational guidelines. Additionally, there were several historic house museums in Amsterdam that were unable to participate in the interviews due to capacity and time pressures. These museums were Huis van Loon and Huis Bartolotti. Researching these institutions would have added significant value to this research by giving more perspectives and examples of public engagement strategies, or lack thereof. Secondly, this research faced certain time constraints, which prevented interviewing more

²⁶⁸ Rowe and Frewer. "A typology of public engagement mechanisms," 276-282.

staff members in the selected case studies. It would have been beneficial for this research to receive a perspective from museum directors, curators, conservators, as well as volunteers to establish more detailed educational guidelines for enhancing public engagement. Moreover, it is important to note that future research could explore additional research questions related to public engagement, for instance, by implementing one of the proposed educational guidelines in a historic house museum setting and assessing the extent to which it enhances visitor engagement. Additionally, another valuable method would be to conduct a survey among museum visitors to determine what types of activities or content they are interested in seeing and participating in.

To bring these research findings into a broader academic framework, the visitor should not be disregarded as uninformed or unable to comprehend the complexity of the heritage experts' work. All individuals should be given an equal opportunity to freely access information and critically engage with it. It is in the hands of the historic house museums of Amsterdam to keep the door to knowledge open for their visitors, and in this way, establish a trustworthy relationship of attendance and support. There is a benefit in that for the cultural sector as a whole, which, as mentioned previously, could even affect the voting behaviour of the Dutch citizens. Preservation of heritage remains one of the most important practices for society, as it maintains our knowledge of the past and safeguards crucial memories embedded in physical monuments for future generations to witness. Thereby, every small step and implementation count in order to make our field of work more seen, heard and appreciated. The end goal is to actively engage communities and incorporate their opinions and voices. Therefore, beginning this journey by implementing the outlined educational guidelines can serve as a crucial foundation for enhancing public engagement within the field of heritage preservation.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: Interview with Marysa Otte, Collections Advisor, Museum

Willet-Holthuysen

10 June, 2025. Location: Museum Willet-Holthuysen

If not quoted directly, the interview answers are not direct quotes but the notes of the Interviewer.

1. Does your museum host any special events, lectures, or workshops for the public?

“Yes, we host many events.” Rooms with no collection are used for gatherings or events, and rooms with some collections as well. Now they have an intervention, a temporary exhibit in the rooms with objects. We have very small children visiting the museum, 4-5 years old. They also go through the museum. They learn manners, how the people were greeted in the Willet house. How you should walk through an old house. What people used and how they used it. How to behave in a historic house.

2. Have you implemented any specific strategies to enhance/promote public engagement or increase visitor numbers?

“For attracting other visitors, we do interventions. This current one is about WWII, a general topic. Before that we had a queer temporary exhibit. We do it to attract more inclusively the people and community with special interests, so they feel welcomed too.” If you look at their guest book, people write especially about the queer exhibit. “As usually, it is hard to find something about themselves in collections.” In the guest book reviews, you will also find people who are disappointed, as they do not enjoy modern additions in the historic interiors. “The questions that museums deal with are that you want to be a historic house with a historic interior, but you also want to be inclusive for everyone.” The exhibit they did on House of Vineyard also belongs to heritage. It is our human heritage.

3. If so, how do you evaluate the success or impact of these strategies?

Guest book reviews. “Maybe you do not attract more or new people, but it is difficult for the city of Amsterdam. Imagine they are not interested in that. Or only want to see that they want to attract as many visitors as possible.” Every year, there is an Open Garden in their museum, and a lot of people come then. With Easter, they have Find Easter Eggs events in the garden, and a lot of people with children join. Other special events also attract more people. They also evaluate it by ticket sales and visits. Or comments in the guest book. Museumnacht: they participate as well. They have return visits from it.

4. Is information about the museum’s conservation and restoration work made accessible to visitors (e.g., through exhibitions, signage, or digital content)?

“We have some information available about the chandelier in the Garden Room. There were large treatments done to it. Also had information about the kitchen, but it is gone now. There were tiles that were taken out, and the wood restorer did research on the wall, and he found out there was a door that was gone. We had some of these research findings printed and placed in the kitchen.” But it was removed when the general explanatory texts about the museum were updated, and this research information was included in the overall audio text.

“On every text in the museum now, there is information about the original colours, and how it looked as the Willets lived there. Also, information that we want to highlight is the time of the Willets when they lived here.” In 1950, they wanted to go back to the 17th century more. They changed the kitchen. There was a change from going back to the original or certain stylistic eras to what it was like when the Willets lived there in the historic setting. An ongoing project in the Women’s Salon is shared; the information board has been there for more than 10 years. It includes the work on furniture in the interior. Furniture in the Garden Room: They are now doing the research on how the furniture looked during the time of the Willets. The research is going. They found something about the fabrics, and they will share it in the room. Usually, it takes a long time. Before they thought of doing the Women’s Salon only, and after they thought of doing the chairs in the chandelier. It is funded through donors.

5. Do you communicate other types of research conducted within the museum to the public? If so, how?

Yes, some communication is done through the old blogs on the Hart Museum website. Jaap Boonstra did some posts. Thijs Boers did a post as well.

6. Would you be interested in increasing the visibility of conservation and restoration work in your museum and sharing it more actively with visitors?

“I would be interested in increasing it.” “But I am not sure if others will be.” A lot of visitors are interested in reading such information. You don’t want to have a large text in a historic house. Maybe have a special route about it. A problem with that is that the audio tours are expensive to make. Because visitors ask about it, they are always interested in where the collection comes from and what they do to conserve it. “There is interest.” Because now they figured out ways to place information about it in the museum. To include information about what they do, other voices and other stories. Based on inclusivity and colonialism. “You can call these other stories, objects that tell the stories”.

7. Who is your target audience, and how do you reach them?

“We try to be inclusive”. We try to be inclusive of the people who do not visit the museums that much. For example, people from the New-West area of Amsterdam. They have a new project called Collecting the City. They work together with New-West in a co-creative way. That is exhibited in a museum, and that makes it easier to connect with the museum. “The collection belongs to the city of Amsterdam. People who feel attached to Amsterdam – they are our community, and they also, in a way, own the collection. The museum has a collection, but also the people are the city and the museum. When people realise that it is also their collection, then they get happy that we take a good care of it.” They have a lot of co-creation projects going on. “On children’s holidays in May we have the bootcamps for making an object together with a group of children and with the artist.” We acquire some of it as well, decisions what we acquire are made with the children’s board of the museum. “They decide with us”. Children make decisions. You think ahead with this object, what is so important? What does it mean for the future? Happens more than once a year. They can sign up when they want. The children’s board is chosen then.

“We did a jury with the community. Very clear moment was: we had a queer exhibition, in 2015 approximately. The community proposed some objects, and the acquiring team was also thinking about it.” This is a case where we can’t say this is a community. It is a group of people, but you cannot say that it is not a community, and maybe agree within it. “You have

to choose something, you have to do something, and that is what we try to do in the acquisition work.”

8. Do you collaborate with external experts (e.g., conservators, researchers) in your public programming?

Yes, for acquisition, they work for a short time for the museum. For conservation and restoration, they work with external experts. They used to have 4 conservators, but now only 1 conservator is left. “For me, it is better to have your own conservators. For big projects, they can be the coordinator of a project. There is a lot of work for conservators when there is a new exhibition. But when there is a condition report, it is good to have external conservators. Then your own conservator is busy with it fully. Good to have some conservators and have some external help. Now we need a lot of external conservators.” They try to work with externals on a more continuous basis. So that the information will not get lost. It is important to take the time to get them acquainted with the collection and how their questions are answered. “With external experts, you need to inform them well and be very specific with what information you need. One thing is good- you can choose specific specialists for the objects, and sometimes good to have new eyes on the collections.” It is something you cannot do with the curator of your own museum. Budget: that is why less conservators. Now, there is a trend in the Netherlands to have fewer conservators, still prejudice against them. Fewer people are now working as conservators. Older conservators are not replaced. In the 30 years when fewer conservators were available. Fewer people work to maintain the buildings. For historic rooms, the conservators usually work for heritage organisations and not for museums. Richer museums have their own conservators. For paper and books, we have a long relationship with paper and conservation studios. They checked the whole collection. As external conservators. Also, external painting conservators worked on the paintings. As a museum, we never had a painting conservator.

Funding for restoration and conservation: not to spend it too much. There is more funding for education than for conservation.

9. How do you gather feedback from visitors, and does this influence your programming or communication strategies?

“Guest books- very important. For certain projects, we do impact research. It is called impact because it is qualitative research, not just the quantity.” They analyse how inclusive it was. Do they feel that they belong to the community or that they are empowered? How they get the information: Ask questions to visitors. Marysa Otte did some interviews herself. Some employees are researching the impact of co-creative projects. The results are not there yet. They generally do interviews or small questionnaires.

They monitor how many people come to the museum in general. But also they check what attracts fewer or more people

10. Are there any challenges or barriers your museum faces in regards to public engagement?

“There are always all kinds of challenges.” They need to make the work interesting. “As a museum, your value is not expressed in money, but the social value of the museum is very important for everything. If people are not interested, then you lose everything.” The challenge is to give value.

11. Has the museum experimented with digital tools (e.g., virtual tours, blogs, videos) to showcase behind-the-scenes work?

Audio tour. “We were one of the first museums in the world to have the whole collection on the website. It is not so important to be perfect, but to share about the collection, what is there. We try to invite people to add their information about it”. The whole collection of the museum is published online.

“And we are still working to be more researchable and searchable.”

12. How many volunteers and other team members are employed at the museum?

Collection management and information: 4 people who handle the collection, 1 conservator. There are 2 registrars. 1 registrar for objects on loan: Acquisition and registration in the systems. The Amsterdam Museum has more than 100,000 objects in several locations. Some volunteers are involved. Interested in textiles: 4 people. Also volunteers in public. Museum employees. Everyone in the Amsterdam museum comprises 100 people for the collection, also the security. In general, they have 4 exhibition houses.

7.2 Appendix B: Interview with Jaël Buteijn, Creative Marketer, Museum Ons' Lieve

Heer op Solder

8 April, 2025. Location: Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder

If not quoted directly, the interview answers are not direct quotes but the notes of the Interviewer.

1. Does your museum host any special events, lectures, or workshops for the public?

Jael consulted the museum curator, who said that there are guest lectures conducted together with the VU. They do other projects as well, like online mapping of religious heritage in Amsterdam. The lectures are happening at the Vrije Universiteit. Topics such as resorting to paintings, religious history, etc., are specific to their study.

2. Have you implemented any specific strategies to enhance/promote public engagement or increase visitor numbers?

Doing a new content of behind-the-scenes: goblets needed to be restored, so they filmed the process and shared it with the public on Instagram. This implementation was a tip from the Rijksmuseum. Process of painting and hooks, etc. The idea for the museum was not to simply have an exhibition but to showcase what it takes to get it ready. The Middle Ages object, the conservation of which was demonstrated. People reacted positively to it.

3. If so, how do you evaluate the success or impact of these strategies?

The implementation was new. But usually, they evaluate it via social media statistics. Additionally, they measure real-life examples. For example, concerning the restoration video, a lot of visitors said they saw it when they came to visit the museum. Generally, the public engagement is measured through ticket sales. If a campaign is run on Meta, they can see the statistics, as well as the advertisement.

4. Is information about the museum's conservation and restoration work made accessible to visitors (e.g., through exhibitions, signage, or digital content)?

Per object. PR moments are scheduled. In the church, there are plastic beams: people ask about them, and the museum's employees provide the answers. The whole building was renovated, process was communicated via the newsletter and social media. The newsletter is released 4 times a year.

5. Do you communicate other types of research conducted within the museum to the public? If so, how?

"We communicate when asked." For example, certain objects are on loan to Oude Kerk.

6. Would you be interested in increasing the visibility of conservation and restoration work in your museum and sharing it more actively with visitors?

Yes. The collection department wants to be seen more. There are 2 curators in the museum, one of whom is also the curator for the building. They are both conservators with different expertise.

7. Who is your target audience, and how do you reach them?

Several target audiences: Dutch culture lovers, that involved in families with children (for whom treasure hunts for children are organised). Another category is: international tourists. It is the biggest one, as 70% of visitors are tourists. Another museum's audience is the Catholics. Every first Sunday of the month, there is a mass in the museum's church.

7.1 How is the demographic studied?

The museum asks only where the visitors are from in the ticket purchasing process. They use the analytics on the website.

8. Do you collaborate with external experts (e.g., conservators, researchers) in your public programming?

Currently, the museum works with only its team, but they are too busy to outsource it. There is a need to make a dashboard to see how to further process their data.

9. How do you gather feedback from visitors, and does this influence your programming or communication strategies?

They use Google reviews. The museum staff always reacts to the reviews to improve engagement. There are two guest books for the visitors in the museum. It helps the visitors to feel valued.

10. Are there any challenges or barriers your museum faces in regards to public engagement?

"We are willing to engage more with Dutch people, and specifically people from Amsterdam". The neighbourhood where the museum is located is trying to become a cultural hub. Last year, the museum received the European Heritage Label. Thus, the museum aims to communicate better to the public that it brings a lot of cultural value to the Netherlands.

11. Has the museum experimented with digital tools (e.g., virtual tours, blogs, videos) to showcase behind-the-scenes work?

A video for YouTube has been made, with tours for a school. This was a collaboration with a YouTuber. The team of museum teachers presented a tour, and the YouTuber filmed it. They are also willing to display the full collection branch on their website, however, it will require a lot of work. The museum participates in the Museumnacht. A lot of people come back. 80 people came back in 2024. They will collaborate with ADE this year.

Staff: 2 marketing employees, 4 education employees, 1 office manager, 1 facility manager, 6 museum workers, 15 volunteers.

7.3 Appendix C: Interview with Chiara Mancini, Events and Project Manager, Embassy of the Free Mind

12 May, 2025. Location: Embassy of the Free Mind

If not quoted directly, the interview answers are not direct quotes but the notes of the Interviewer.

1. Does your museum host any special events, lectures, or workshops for the public?

Yes, the yearly events, Museum Night, children workshops, lectures by scholars, workshops on tarot, alchemy, and breath work. Varies depending on who the museum is in contact with. Community-based events, friends of the yearly membership or volunteers.

2. Have you implemented any specific strategies to enhance/promote public engagement or increase visitor numbers?

Have been trying to increase social media engagement: likes, shares, etc. They try to use community groups, from the neighbourhood, families, to promote specific events. Ticket reselling platforms – use them to target tourists (GetYourGuide). Internal and external channels.

3. If so, how do you evaluate the success or impact of these strategies?

They do quarterly social media metrics. Ticket reselling, they just started, so no evaluation is available yet. “Usually, if we sell out, it is good. When we do not sell out, we look at why it happened and what we can do next.” Social media metrics are used to look ahead. They look at what kind of content people like. Content they like: Monday inspirational quotes, things related to their book collections or a community, lunch concert, etc, something more dynamic is generally successful.

4. Is information about the museum’s conservation and restoration work made accessible to visitors (e.g., through exhibitions, signage, or digital content)?

They have it in their policy plan, a one-year policy plan (most museums do it for 3-5 years). It is an overview of how to preserve and handle the monument and the book collection.

5. Do you communicate other types of research conducted within the museum to the public? If so, how?

There is a research institute in the museum. It consists of 2 researchers, a library team of 3 scholars, in total 6 scholars who are employed and a few interns and freelancers. They do research, and some do their PhDs. They all research the book collection. Research is conducted for both themselves and the museum. No information is displayed here; a lot is very complicated, and it is not for the general public. They do the PR posts about the researchers. A tangible way to see it is with the museum experience. There are books with texts made by the research team; they also have book tours, where they promote the research, and exclusive book tours (pricey). In the book tours, the researcher, depending on your interest, shows you the content. Yearly exhibition – one main one, which highlights the book collection, to explain the main themes of the book collection.

6. Would you be interested in increasing the visibility of conservation and restoration work in your museum and sharing it more actively with visitors?

It is not the priority; in the past, they communicated it. It was in the newspapers when the house was renovated. Currently, there are other priorities. They do a tour of the history of the house. That tour is connected to the books. The history of the books' origins.

7. Who is your target audience, and how do you reach them?

It is a scale: the scholars, who are here to learn, are experts in the book collection. On the other scale: creative people, who come here to get inspired. They do not know much about the book collection, but they want an experience. And middle of the scale: change makers, they know philosophy, they come to make change, and discuss.

8. Do you collaborate with external experts (e.g., conservators, researchers) in your public programming?

In the past, they collaborated in many ways in events or business strategy. They also work with different intern groups, who help with marketing, website development, research, archiving and cataloguing. An external agency was mainly used for renovation work on the house. Just renovated the garden house. For a new design for the exhibition room, they hired someone.

9. How do you gather feedback from visitors, and does this influence your programming or communication strategies?

Social media metrics. Interns have to conduct interviews with the visitors. Every quarter, a new intern does it. There is a form visitors can fill out after their visit. The part that is missing is to add the inputs together and analyse them. They do use the feedback. When they get feedback, they apply it immediately. The visitors usually share their general museum experience feedback or what they would be interested in knowing more about.

10. Are there any challenges or barriers your museum faces in regards to public engagement?

The funding! Because it is a library, it is different from other museums. It is not about the house or artwork, but about the dense philosophical content. It is a challenge to translate it to the general public. With no money, it becomes harder to make it a multi-experience museum. Private donors and donations are used for financing, which is the main income source. "For specific projects, we do fundraising to get our own revenue". No structural funding from the government is available. Each year it is less available.

11. Has the museum experimented with digital tools (e.g., virtual tours, blogs, videos) to showcase behind-the-scenes work?

There is a virtual tour, and they always update it. Also, they offer an audio tour. 2000 of the rare books are digitised in the catalogue. Also, they are working on a new website. There are presentations shown in the museums: videos that are looped to show what they are. Monthly news set 'Looking Back Moving Forward', where they promote all the events from the upcoming months. They also look back on what they have done about research or events, or add anecdotal information. Now, this will be twice a month. The second newsletter is the library newsletter, where the researchers create short essays about the research from their work.

12. How many volunteers and other team members are employed at the museum?

The team is around 15 people. Then they have 1 intern always. 2-3 freelancers. And then 5 work in the museum site + the museum. The others work for the library. Volunteers: 60. Around 30 are active. They help from research to the café to events. They supervise the

library or the reading room. A lot of students from the UvA. Also, the 20-30 year olds in studies or a burnout, and a few retired people.

12.1 Do you have a conservator?

No. All museum workers share the responsibility. Work with humidifiers. etc. You need to make sure that people are enforcing the policy. For example, the books are not allowed in the garden, etc. They have one person who deals with acquisitions, new books or artworks, insurance, etc. The biggest effort is to digitise the collection.

12.2 Was the building renovated?

The ground floor, the first floor, and the garden house were renovated. They work with the Noord province to fund the rest of the renovation. The property was abandoned, so now they make sure it is safe. There are plans to continue the renovation. The museum is a house and a meeting place. The heart of the museum is the library. "For us, the story of the house is a small fragment. It is not everything." All the walls are new in the building. The original skeletons are intact.

12.3 Are there more visits after the workshops?

No, after the Museumnacht. Might have visitors who come again. You get more visitors in one night: 1000 visitors. 50 -100, come back. Their own events bring a few new people.