

## **Sypesteyn: a collector's-house museum**

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Sypesteyn Castle in Loosdrecht is a small castle with a fine collection of the arts and applied arts. It is a so-called house-museum situated in a beautiful garden in Loosdrecht, southeast of Amsterdam, and northwest of Utrecht. It is relatively unknown, as the collections are not well publicized. Conny Bogaard, the previous curator, received a grant from the Mondriaan Foundation to study Dutch house museums, of which Sypesteyn is one of the most interesting representatives. In 2002, Bogaard published the paper "Sypesteyn Castle: a special kind of collector's house in The Netherlands" in *Open Museum Journal*, vol. V (July 2005). At the CODART congress I would like to introduce her new study *Bepaald maar niet beperkt*, which is devoted to a specific type of house-museum, the so-called "collector's house". This book will be published next December.

### SYPESTEYN CASTLE (1927)

In 1902 the Dutch nobleman "jonkheer" Catharinus Henri Cornelis Ascanius Van Sypesteyn (1857-1937) established the Van Sypesteyn Foundation. The foundation's statutes define its primary aim: "to gather, keep, maintain and extend the family archives and portraits, coat of arms, valuables and rarities and all other objects related to or proceeding from the Van Sypesteyn Family, all in a wider sense." Van Sypesteyn, an enthusiastic private collector, wished to honor the Van Sypesteyn family, of which he was the last male descendant. It was also his intention to unite the family possessions with his private collections in order to display them to the public. In 1884 he devoted himself to reacquiring the former family property at Loosdrecht. He built a castle-museum on the "Ter Sype" site, where the family was thought to have owned a medieval stone house – Sype-steyn. Between 1911 and 1922, a neo-gothic castle arose, surrounded by a park and formal gardens; four years later, in 1926, the museum opened to the public. Van Sypesteyn believed he had created a reconstruction of a Dutch manor house as it might have been built around 1600.

Although the Van Sypesteyn family claims to originate from the mediaeval noble house of the same name, which was honored by Count Floris V in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this cannot be documented. The family was, in fact, ennobled only in 1815. The family line of the last Van Sypesteyn can be traced back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. As well-to-do merchants, the family adopted aristocratic manners during the seventeenth century. And like many other patrician families of that time, they spent great fortunes on stately homes and country houses, as well as on the arts.

The family's collecting habits are best illustrated by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Cornelis Ascanius IV (1694-1744), mayor of Haarlem. He owned a considerable collection of paintings and coins, along with a curiosity cabinet. Cornelis Ascanius IV represented the typical 18<sup>th</sup>-century collector-connoisseur, his collecting and involvement in other cultural activities demonstrating excellent taste and good judgment. His son, Cornelis Ascanius V (1722-83), was also an important patron of the arts. This co-founder of the well-known Teyler Foundation in Haarlem, which promotes the arts and sciences by means of a public museum and stimulating scientific research, was deeply influenced by the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment.

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several important Dutch collections were assembled. Private collectors like Van Sypesteyn and Van Gijn represent this tradition. However, the essence of their collections differed from those of earlier connoisseurs. Notions of national identity encouraged the collection of objects that were both nostalgic and idealistic. Collections were not only assembled for aesthetic reasons. Both Van Sypesteyn and Van Gijn emphasized the educational value of visual material in illustrating local history.

Educational ideals also inspired Van Sypesteyn in his design for his park and gardens. His belief that a garden was made by man as well as by nature was emphasized by his inclusion of a collection of architectural fragments and decorative objects in the landscape. Van Sypesteyn's fervent wish was to bring about a perfect symbiosis of house and garden, inspired by local history. His ambition to provide an historical interpretation of his collection is also evident in its presentation, for which he designed a series of period rooms. He made no distinction in his collection between artistic pieces and historical objects and documents.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a group of collector's houses evolved, within the genre of the Dutch collector's-house museum. They followed international museum trends of the time, by adopting encyclopedic collecting traditions and evocative forms of presentation in order to promote education. The collectors who pursued these ideals not only wished to perpetuate their family names but were also striving for a better society. It is precisely this mix of personal creativity and idealistic notions, demonstrated in the display of the collection, that distinguishes this type of museum.

Sypesteyn Castle pays tribute to Dutch traditions in private collecting and museological developments during the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century. The assertion that public education was an integral part of the museum program means that Sypesteyn has developed to become more than a collector's-house museum; it is, in fact, a "collector's museum". Van Sypesteyn specifically intended his home to become a museum for public education.

This coherent presentation of a private collection in a domestic interior has recently become the focus of interest for several restoration projects in Dutch collector's houses. For the discussions on restoration matters and collection display it is essential to understand the artistic philosophy that lay behind this form of presentation. Primary sources, such as inventories and architectural plans, and documents such as diaries and letters, have become even more significant in the interdisciplinary study. The history of private collecting and that of the historic interior are now integrated into general studies on domestic culture as a whole.

Bogaard's book will focus on the Dutch collector's museum of Sypesteyn as set apart from contemporary collector's-house museums in maintaining its specific character and presenting a unique conceptual vision of the whole complex of castle, museum interior and landscape gardening that is unrivalled in the Netherlands.