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As a first-time participant at a CODART congress, I had a wonderful experience meeting new colleagues, making connections for future projects, seeing a part of the Netherlands and a collection I may never have seen otherwise, and learning more about member institutions throughout the two days of programming.

I was glad to have attended the pre-congress visit to Het Loo Palace, hosted by Director Johan ter Molen, on Sunday, March 20. This important building and collection is nonetheless off the beaten path for the typical visitor or researcher to the Netherlands, and so it was a good opportunity to see it and furthermore, to gain special insight to the collections from Curator Marieke Spliethoff. At the splendid reception after our visit, I had the opportunity to talk extensively not only with Marieke but to a welcoming CODART Board member about research and exhibition possibilities. From my point of view, this was an auspicious start to the congress.

The next day we were greeted by the well-organized and friendly CODART and museum staff at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede. After a warm welcome by Director Lisette Pelsers, the conference program began. Throughout the day panel speakers presented various scenarios in which “twilight” collections or objects had become highlights in special exhibitions and permanent installations. Peter Hecht began with a historiography of the reception and exhibition of Netherlandish art, followed by an overview of the recent exhibition of the Dutch art collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York by Esmée Quodbach. Paul Knolle of the Rijksmuseum Twenthe then presented on his museum’s strategy of exchanging works with other institutions while collection objects go out on loan. I found the presentations diverse and very interesting but lacking in one point of view that may have been relevant to the congress as a whole: that of a small-to-medium sized institution outside of Europe. In these institutions, many of us are by nature working with “twilight” collections. Without the ability to exhibit a traditional, canonical history of art, we are challenged to find creative ways to make our collections interesting and relevant to our audience. Many of us have by necessity come up with resourceful solutions for permanent installations, such as installing thematically, combining different media in one gallery (in order to highlight collection strengths other than paintings), and focusing on process and technique.

The Market of ideas sessions were fruitful, and I participated in the “Molenaer to Monet to Musscher” discussion with Dennis P. Weller of the North Carolina Museum of Art. The discussion focused on how to sell a scholarly dossier exhibition on a relatively unknown artist to a museum administration interested in blockbusters. Although we unfortunately did not solve this problem, it was fruitful to learn from the experiences, problems, and successes of colleagues from Warsaw, Moscow, and Rotterdam, among others. My second session, “Presenting the work of Netherlandish migrant artists” with Karen Hearn of Tate Britain was a fascinating and ambitious topic. Karen presented us with her challenge to install galleries that tell many different stories at once: a history of emigration of Netherlandish artists, their influence, their relationship with locals and their reception. Within the time constraint of half an hour, I was very happy to learn more about what other museums have done surrounding this problem. In general I think many of us would have enjoyed having more time for these important and intimate discussions.

This thought-provoking day was followed by a truly sumptuous dinner at the Stadsschouwburg in Enschede, where I was thrilled to be able to get to know yet another tableful of colleagues. On the morning of the 23rd, we gathered again at the Rijksmuseum Twenthe for a morning of programming. We began with a panel discussion that provided a recap to the previous day, and one congress participant made an important point about the perils of exhibiting works of lesser quality in the name of “twilights.” After coffee, Paul Spies presented an enlightening talk on

the successful rebranding of the Amsterdam Museum and its strategy of installing the collection in two layers, for quick and more focused visits. Gero Seelig gave an overview of the Staatliches Museum Schwerin collection and made some very vital points about the responsibility of cultural professionals to educate decision-makers and policy-makers on collections and their importance. After this compelling beginning, I unfortunately had to leave conference, but I did so for the gratifying purpose of seeing the splendid Lucas van Leyden exhibition in Leiden before my return to the States the next day.

The CODART VEERTIEN congress was a revelation to me, primarily for the contacts and networking it provided. As someone who gets to Europe only once or twice a year, this was an excellent use of my time (although I was sorry to depart early), and I was particularly happy with the schedule overlap with TEFAF, allowing me to combine the trip and justify it to my budget manager. Finally, the after-effects of the meeting have been fruitful, as I have corresponded with several colleagues about potential exhibition collaborations and also taken advantage of the research resources at the RKD.