

CODART TWAALF congress

Market Table summaries

Your own project...on your OWN time? Adriaan E. Waiboer, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

In this Market of Ideas session at the CODART TWAALF congress, participants discussed various issues related to personal projects, such as doctoral dissertations or outside publications, which while they may not belong to the core responsibilities of curators, often contribute to the status of the institutions they represent. The participants included curators as well as a handful of directors and heads of curatorial departments, which led to a stimulating discussion between both "sides."

Curators shared their problems, including failed attempts to convince their superiors to allow them to work on their own projects. One participant even admitted being afraid of raising the subject with his director. The most common reason given for turning down these requests was that directors simply did not see the added value of their projects, even if it concerned - as one curator pointed out - a publication related to the history of the collection. Their superiors were more interested in having them organize exhibitions and the like to draw in visitors. One of the participating directors explained that he had said no to projects because they did not strictly relate to the collection, or that he deemed the curators in question not capable or experienced enough to work on their own projects.

Positive experiences were also shared. Some participants mentioned existing arrangements in their institutions, such as a "study day" or a "library day," which allow curators to work on a personal project one day per week without having to worry about job-related matters. Others brought up how they - or their colleagues - had made successful "deals" with their superiors. The advantage of such arrangements, it appeared, is that the expectations of both parties are put on paper, thereby providing clarity. Moreover, curators can work on their own projects during normal working hours without feeling guilty. Such deals, though, also involve accountability: problems might arise should a project not be completed in the agreed-upon time period. In general, participants acknowledged that when asking their superiors for time to work during their regular hours, curators should show their goodwill by offering to work on their own time, in the evenings and weekends, as well. One of the participating directors commented that a good curator should be able to combine museum duties with his/her own work regardless of any deals.

Perhaps the most extreme example of how to solve the problem was given by a participant who had arranged for someone to replace him while he was finishing up his doctoral thesis. A more practical solution could be found in the form of a fellowship, which allows a curator to take time off, while his/her employer is reimbursed by a grant. Fellowships like these, however, are more common in the USA than elsewhere.

Forgotten objects: The gap between the fine and applied arts. Dirk Jan Biemond, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

At this Market Table we discussed artists working in different media: some 16th- and 17th-century painters, engravers and sculptors worked in and made designs for objects nowadays more commonly associated with the field of the decorative arts. Examples of this by Hendrick Goltzius and Romeyn de Hooghe were forwarded to help focus the session. The discussions concentrated mainly on practical matters; is it possible to integrate other media in an exhibition of paintings or drawings, and what would the additional value be? One thing is clear; art historians in different fields should talk more with one another. I hope CODART will prove to be a fruitful platform for this.

Describing drawing techniques. Thera Folmer-von Oven, curator, private collection

Two groups, numbering 18 colleagues from 12 different countries, attended my Market Table at the CODART TWAALF congress. The discussion centered on the following questions: do you share my experience that the variety of methods for describing drawing techniques sometimes causes confusion and/or misunderstanding? Would it be useful to have common guidelines? How should this be implemented?

To get the discussion going I handed out photocopies of four drawings, all in different techniques. The first one was described as being in “black chalk heightened with white,” and this alone was enough to underscore the problem. The formulation “heightened with white” does not convey either a liquid or a drawing-material: it can refer to white chalk as well as to body-color. Therefore, this definition is incomplete and open to misinterpretation.

During the sessions, many significant observations and ideas were brought up. For instance, it was noted that in the past, drawings have been described in a way that lacks clarity. Sometimes this is due to the fact that languages have their own specific terms. If such texts have to be translated into another language, the interpretation becomes problematic and the original drawings have to be checked “in situ.”

Another complicating factor is the difficulty at times of identifying the materials used. Even a drawings expert has to admit that in some cases it is almost impossible to distinguish the materials or liquids. It is important to explain to the reader/public that a drawing is the result of a creative process, which can be described step by step from the very first sketch to the final outcome. However, this method calls for a descriptive text, whereas the technical information in a catalogue entry is normally conveyed as a brief formulation.

Furthermore, it was noted that when writing an entry you have to keep your public in mind. Are they scholars or laymen? Writing for visitors of an exhibition, you have to describe the technique from the drawing’s outward appearance back to its basic structure, because that is what they can see. Furthermore, the length of the technical description is crucial (some museums have restrictions). If the text has to be concise, it is important to be as precise as

possible. Finally, new methods allowing more refined technical research of drawings must also be incorporated in the technical description. We need to think about how this should be formulated.

The participants agreed that the technical description is an important part of the catalogue text and that guidelines would be useful. But how should this be implemented? Were a glossary to be devised in the future, it would have to be digitalized. This could be attached to a database that is already available. The RKD could be a possible host or partner for the project. The 50-Lux Club (its members are directors of print rooms) was mentioned as a useful contact for expertise. To start with, though, we have to first think about the contents of the glossary and encourage colleagues to contribute to the discussion. This could be an interesting subject for a colloquium. For the moment, the discussion on this subject had been posted in the Curator's Forum on www.codart.nl/forum. Please give us the benefits of your ideas and insights.

CODARTmodern. Yes or no? Ludo van Halem, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam and Gerdien Verschoor, CODART, The Hague

The question discussed at this Market Table was whether it would be relevant to extend the existing CODART network to Dutch and Flemish (or Belgian) modern art. Carel Blotkamp wrote an article on this subject in the CODART Courant no. 17: "CODART, let's get modern!" As a starting point, a few questions were reviewed. To what extent do the classifications "Dutch" and "Flemish" apply to modern art? Is it only curators in the Netherlands and Belgium who need such a network, or is this also the case for colleagues abroad? And, perhaps even more important: what is the relevance of such a network for our own members? In short: in how far can a network of curators of modern Dutch and Flemish art be truly international? This all begs the fundamental question whether it is even CODART's task to set up such a network. Or, could CODART instead serve as the successful model for an entirely new body?

However, recently CODART has been regularly approached by curators of (Dutch) modern art interested in becoming members, indicative of a growing demand for a network in this particular field. And, in fact, this need was confirmed by some Market Table members, as 20th-century Dutch art and design is represented in many museums around the world. However, serious objections to this idea of extending the network were also raised. Some participants argued that there would hardly be any shared interests between specialists in the fields of older and modern art, as Dutch modern art in international museums is hardly considered as being typically Dutch. It was concluded that there are serious objections to an extension of the network. However, it is interesting to investigate how CODART members think about this subject, and therefore a survey of our members was held in May.

Join the CODART young curators's group! Alice Taatgen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen

The central question for this session was what CODART can do for aspiring curators interested in furthering their careers. Two options were discussed. The first is the possibility of CODART inviting fledgling curators to the annual congresses to introduce them into the network (as has been done the last years with students of the MA Curatorial Studies). To maximize their attendance, they should be assigned a task within the organization of the congress and/or an individual "coach" responsible for introducing them to curators. The second option that was discussed was that the website could be used as a forum for people seeking and offering job opportunities. As there is no website (known to the participants) specifically aimed at vacancies dealing with Dutch/Flemish Old Masters, this initiative would provide a highly specialized forum where curators could place adds and find personnel for their internships, projects and jobs. Another option, discussed after this session, would be to develop a coaching program for starting curators within de CODART network.

Both options were received positively, especially by the younger generation, which thinks it would benefit greatly from such an initiative. Some cautionary remarks were made as well. For instance, with respect to the latter point, the posting of vacancies on the site was not seen as a problem, while the posting of the curatorial candidates's CVs was. The sheer number of participants interested in being on the site would make it counterproductive, and it would also engender too much work for CODART and the website committee. As to aspiring curators attending the congresses, given that so few would be able to participate, the objection was raised that it was unfair to select only a small number from the many able candidates. There was concern about the favoritism inherent in this system. Also expressed was the notion that the best curatorial candidates will make a career anyway, because of the quality of their work. Which one hopes is true!

For sale! De-accessioning the Museum aan het Vrijthof collection. Monique Dickhaut and Patrick Rijs, Museum aan het Vrijthof, Maastricht

The essence of the introduction at this session was a plea for the idea that it is better to sell a museum object to a museum that needs it to complete its collection than to store it in a museum depot, just because the collector who founded the museum once bought it. This turned into the focus of the discussion. Most of the participants represented large public museums with collections bought with public money, and although they were all familiar with instances of other public museums selling objects from their collections, most feared that agreeing with the central statement of this Market Table session would lead to a slippery slope.

A new museum concept for Luxembourg. Danièle Wagener, Villa Vauban, Musée d'Art de la Ville de Luxembourg and Martina Sitt, Hamburger Kunsthalle

In spring 2010, the Villa Vauban's once privately owned art collections of mainly Dutch and Flemish works from the 17th to the 19th century will be displayed in a restored setting, including a museum extension, in the middle of a park in Luxembourg City. Various exhibitions, selected events and a pertinent communication strategy will highlight the variety of the collections. We offer tailor-made solutions to our different target groups on how to approach the collection and emphasize the complementary aspects of our exhibitions, each one allowing the visitor to discover new features of the collections.

Our presentation of the new museum concept was very well received. For instance, participants particularly praised the idea of using the museum's collections as a core element for all future exhibitions and activities. Also pointed out was the importance of involving the visitors emotionally with the new museum's activities. The presentations led to truly fruitful discussions, which are significant for our work. All in all, the Market Table presentation proved to be a very positive experience.

New evidence on Justus van Egmont? Prisca Valkeneers, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts), Antwerp

In general, the presentation of this case study was a good opportunity for me to discuss the life and work of Justus van Egmont with specialists in the field. For the participants it was an occasion to find out more about this particular complex case.

After studying some of the signed and dated paintings and drawings that had been provided to the participants, we all took a closer look at *Venus giving the weapons to Aeneas* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 2901) attributed to the artist. A brief explanation was given of the inventories related to the Cabinet de l'Amour's context and other related paintings. The case itself provoked interesting discussions on Justus van Egmont's style. The group focused on his manner and the reception of the nowadays forgotten painter in the 18th century. Colleagues also made some very intriguing suggestions about other possible Van Egmonts in different collections in specific and on conducting research in general.

As to the case itself, my doubts about this attribution were confirmed by all of the participants in both groups. This painting belongs to the category of reattributions. As for the possibly related paintings in the Warsaw depots, we will probably have to look further in French circles to establish the connection.

Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (Netherlands Institute for Art History) (RKD). Suzanne Laemers and Elly Kluck, RKD, The Hague

The majority of the participants said that they were familiar with the RKD and had visited the institute at least once. However, not everyone seemed to be thoroughly acquainted with the diversity of the collections and their different locations. For instance, the Iconographic Bureau,

with records of approximately 110,000 documented Dutch portraits from the late Middle Ages up until the present, is often overlooked. This is due not only to the fact that documentation at the RKD is dispersed throughout different departments. Not everyone is aware that the best way to begin researching a project is to first consult the on-line database *RKDartists&*. In addition to providing biographical information on artists, this database functions as an index to the collections, providing a complete overview of all the locations with documentation on a particular artist.

Inter-institutional research resource on paintings by Rembrandt. Wietske Donkersloot, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (Netherlands Institute for Art History) (RKD), The Hague

At the Market Table on the Rembrandt Database, the RKD's Wietske Donkersloot presented the plans for the development of an inter-institutional research resource on art historical, conservation and technical documentation of Rembrandt paintings. This project, jointly organized by the RKD and the Mauritshuis and supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York, is now in a pilot phase that runs through August 2010. By then, the database will have been developed and made accessible via www.rembrandtdatabase.org (.com/.net/.eu/.nl). It will contain information and digitized documentation files (images and texts) on 19 paintings by or (formerly) attributed to Rembrandt in the Mauritshuis, as well as a number of paintings in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Gallery in London, the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden. After the pilot phase, the goal is to advance the development of the database as an ever-changing and growing research resource on Rembrandt, incorporating information and documentation from multiple institutions.

Because the resource is meant to serve as a research tool for curators and art historians in general as well as conservators and conservation scientists, the Market Table presentation and discussion was set up to find out whether the present outline for the database meets the needs and expectations of curators. The overall response in the two sessions was positive. Possibilities for expanding the contents - offering more (art historical) context to the documentation files - were broached. The discussion was very helpful for the RKD/Mauritshuis team in their efforts to further develop their plans. The team was happy to learn that a number of institutions represented at the two sessions would be interested in contributing to the database after the pilot phase. The RKD and the Mauritshuis will maintain contact with these potential future partners and keep the CODART network informed about the progress of the project.

At the Market Table, a handout was distributed to the 24 participants. Should you be interested in this handout, it has been posted on the CODART website.

The Rubens database of the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium). Bert Schepers and Lies Van de Cappelle, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels

The Rubens database is currently being developed within the framework of Fabritius, the museum's collection database (<http://www.opac-fabritius.be>), and serves as a test case for integrating a broad range of textual and visual data that is art-historically and technically relevant in a multilingual online research tool (Dutch / French / English).

During the Market Table sessions, the main points of discussion focused on accessibility (online registration, legal and copyright issues), the target group (the international scientific community) and user-friendliness (working with a test audience); issues of standardization and the use of thesauri (Garnier, Iconclass); and the difference between our approach and that of Rubensonline.be (Rubenianum), which takes the needs of non-specialists more into account, or the RKD/Mellon Rembrandt project, which is designed to accommodate a number of geographically distant institutional contributors.

The animated discussions clearly indicated a strong interest in inter-institutional networking between museums that hold important Rubens collections and a growing need for a central platform of scholarly discussion (cf. the recent development of an online Rubens Bulletin by the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp).

L'Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique / het Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium (IRPA/KIK) (Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage). Pierre-Yves Kairis, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Brussels

The discussion during the Market Table session centered on questions about the IRPA-KIK database and its accessibility. Currently, the database is bilingual Dutch-French. For instance, the search screens exist only in French and Dutch. This situation is temporary: the steady improvement of the thesaurus's multilingualism is permitting an ever greater equivalency of the descriptors. Questions also arose about updating data, for example of attributions, which until now have not been treated systematically. With this in mind, IRPA-KIK is trying to enter into collaboration with museums and Belgian universities.