

Statements:

Independent, free lance art historians often know parts of a museum's permanent collection better than the museum's own curators.

Independent art historians can work on a freelance basis to carry out research on the permanent collection, while museum curators devote their time to organizing temporary exhibitions.

Michiel Plomp, chief curator of the art collections, Teylers Museum

One of the chief tasks of a museum curator is to carry out research on the permanent collection and publish the results. In Teylers Museum the important collection of old master drawings has been the subject of study since ca. 1990. So far three volumes have appeared, in 1997, 2000 and 2004, and two more volumes are currently in the making. A total of eight volumes are planned.

Experience has taught us that the research and writing of these sizeable catalogues can best be done by independent art historians working on a freelance basis. Undisturbed by the daily goings-on in the museum, they have the time, the peace of mind and the expertise to concentrate on such long-term tasks. It is precisely the smaller museums with limited staff and resources that are under constant pressure to attract greater numbers of visitors by mounting exhibitions and to seek sponsorship in ever more creative ways.

This means that curators no longer have enough time to devote themselves to scholarly study of the permanent collection. This is strange and regrettable, but that is the current state of affairs. By their very nature exhibitions depend on teamwork involving most of a museum's staff as well as fellow professionals from outside the museum and even outside the country, so it is understandable that curators devote themselves more to organizing exhibitions than to studying the permanent collection.

On the positive side, this development can in fact benefit the publication of collection catalogues. At least they get published – otherwise one would have to wait until the curator reaches retirement age and finally has enough time to compile such a catalogue. An important condition for “free lance catalogues” is that the collaboration between the independent and the museum-based art historians is characterized by close cooperation and the intensive exchange of information and texts in progress.

The curators at Teylers Museum, will of course not free themselves from the museum's holdings. Exhibitions are always connected in some way with the permanent collection. As a result, parts of the collection are continually being subjected to scholarly updates, such as recently happened in connection with the Claude Lorrain and Raphael exhibitions. Furthermore, the curators are very much occupied with the permanent collection, since “acquisitions” is an important task. In Teylers Museum we seek to make the collection

more complete and coherent in such areas as sixteenth-century Netherlandish drawings, nineteenth-century Netherlandish drawings and paintings, and finally contemporary drawings from the Netherlands and elsewhere.

About Michiel Plomp

After studying art history at the University of Utrecht, Michiel C. Plomp (1958) worked at Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof in Delft, the Centraal Museum in Utrecht and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Since 2006 he has been the Keeper of the Art Collections at Teylers Museum in Haarlem. His catalogue of the seventeenth-century Dutch drawings in the collection of Teylers Museum was published in 1997. In 2002 he received his Ph.D. from the University of Groningen, having written his dissertation on the collecting of drawings in the Low Countries in the period 1732-1833. He organized Teylers Museum's recent exhibitions of the drawings of Claude Lorrain (2011) and Raphael (2012).

Michiel Plomp has been a member of CODART since 2007.