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ABSTRACTION IN THE EVERYDAY AN ANALYSIS OF THE EXHIBITION *KIJK MAAR, ER STAAT NIET WAT ER STAAT*



CURATORIAL PRACTICES IN THE
CONTEMPORARY WORLD II
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Introduction

Since their inception, museums have been founded on the belief that art holds the potential to deliver social benefits to visitors. This vision has driven museum professionals to prioritize the institution's role in promoting inclusion and educational initiatives. From the 19th-century there was a push for accessible museums, in the post-World War II period an emphasis on art's societal value, the concept of democratizing art has evolved alongside changing social and cultural priorities.¹

In the Netherlands, during the post-war era, theorists and art professionals critically reflected on the museum's role, describing it as pivotal in fostering social cohesion and rebuilding cultural awareness amidst widespread societal change.² These ideas were reflected in the increasing emphasis on education and efforts to engage non-visitors through experimentation with thematic approaches in exhibitions.³ This often called for innovative curatorial techniques such as multidisciplinary and transhistorical methods.

Today, it remains a key feature of cultural policies to reflect on art's enduring potential to foster social progress and public engagement in order to gain validation for the art institutions in regards to bigger social structures.⁴ For example, in the Netherlands, museums must be able to indicate the degree of social and educational value of their projects to receive governmental funding. In response to these demands, museums are continuously reflecting on and reconstructing their curatorial and educational practices. Yet, in their focus on addressing contemporary challenges, museum professionals often overlook historical exhibitions, dismissing them as outdated or less relevant to today's practices.

The 1976's educational exhibition *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat* in Centraal Museum Utrecht is an interesting example that could give insight into these practices. Designed specifically for students aged 12 to 18, the exhibition sought to demystify abstraction by connecting it to everyday concepts and using art to foster a deeper understanding of the ambiguities, symbols and norms in society. By examining this case study, I will demonstrate how the approaches and challenges of the exhibition can be understood in the context of its time, while also offering insights that are useful for reconstructing contemporary practices.

¹ Kate Booth, "The Democratization of Art: A Contextual Approach," in *Visitor Studies* 17, no. 2 (3 July 2014): 207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10645578.2014.945353>.

² Rogier Schumacher, *Neo-avant-garde in Nederland, Museumjournaal als forum van een nieuw kunstbegrip 1961-1973*. (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 11.

³ Ibid 221.

⁴ Kate Booth, "The Democratization of Art: A Contextual Approach," in *Visitor Studies* 17, no. 2 (3 July 2014): 207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10645578.2014.945353>.

Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat explored the concept of abstraction in the broadest sense of the word, including such concepts as the ambiguity of symbols and language, and meaning-making. Through a diverse range of objects and presentation techniques, the exhibition linked abstract concepts to familiar ideas. The objects included some of the museum's most valued works and loans from different time periods and institutions, ranging from old masters to cartoons and mannequins, creating a transhistorical and multidisciplinary narrative.

This paper explores how the exhibition sought to engage young audiences with abstraction and simultaneously was confronted with the new responsibility that contemporary thinking projected on museums as institutions. By situating the exhibition within the broader cultural and museological trends of the post-war Netherlands, the analysis provides insights into how the museum's educational exhibitions were part of a larger development of the cultural positioning of the museum. Drawing on archival materials from the museum's educational department and key resources referenced by the project team, the paper will focus on the question:

How can the approaches and challenges of the Centraal Museum's 1976 exhibition *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat* be understood within its historical context, particularly in relation to its attempt to engage a broad young audience with abstraction and therewith navigating the institution's responsibility in social-cultural development?

In Chapter 1, the contextual framework of the exhibition will be established by outlining the post-war museological trends in the Netherlands that informed its development. This will provide a framework to understand the ideals that the exhibition was based on. In chapter 2, I will analyse the exhibition, focusing on the range of objects and presentation techniques employed, situating these choices within their historical and conceptual contexts. In chapter 3, I will focus on the reception of the exhibition by examining evaluation forms from the educational archive, as well as other sources such as correspondence with governmental institutions. In this way, I will demonstrate how the exhibition helped with navigating the museum's role within broader social-cultural contexts.

Chapter 1: New Museology in a Dutch perspective

During post war era, the study of modern art was growing in prominence worldwide, motivated by an effort to engage a wider public in understanding abstract art as a legitimate art form or even a “universal language”.⁵ For example, Documenta II was organized around the theme of abstraction as a universal language.⁶ At the time there was a belief in inevitable progress, marked by the advancement of democracy, scientific-technical innovation, and globalization. Abstract painting was seen as a proper way to express these modern realities.⁷ This rapidly changing social-cultural discourse had to be navigated by large cultural institutions around the world.

In the Netherlands similar ideas were developed. To track these ideas, the Dutch *Museumjournaal*, established in 1955, is an important source. In his book *Neo-Avantgarde in the Netherlands*, Rogier Schumacher analyses the journal’s bounds with museums, as the journal tracked new art movements and educational goals in the Dutch cultural landscape. Schumacher tracks the journal’s growth through the forty years of its existence. He describes how, during the 1960s, the country became increasingly open to social criticism. The traditional authority of institutions, including museums, was questioned.⁸ This opened up a debate about the social responsibility of museums and led to a more critical discourse on art education and a range of experimental exhibitions and manifestations. At the head of these development there were museum directors, curators and art historians that were also involved in the *Museum Journal*.

For example, Willem Sandberg, then director of the Stedelijk Museum, was involved with the journal from the beginning held a strong belief in the potential of museums to educate and engage the public. As director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Sandberg positioned himself at the forefront of a dynamically evolving Dutch cultural landscape of the fifties, introducing a new museum model that aimed to inform the public about twentieth-century visual and applied arts. Through exhibitions, publications, and lectures, this model helped construct a modernist narrative, placing movements such as Cubism and geometric

⁵ Isabel Wünsche, ‘Representing and Interpreting Abstraction Today’. Accessed 15 January 2025. <https://www.artforum.com/columns/isabel-wunsche-universal-visual-world-language-to-global-cross-cultural-dialogue-559057/>.

⁶ Hanna Brinkmann, Laura Commare, Helmut Leder, and Raphael Rosenberg. “Abstract Art as a Universal Language?” *Leonardo* 47, no. 3 (2014): 256–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43834183>.

⁷ ‘Representing and Interpreting Abstraction Today’. Accessed 15 January 2025. <https://www.artforum.com/columns/isabel-wunsche-universal-visual-world-language-to-global-cross-cultural-dialogue-559057/>.

⁸ Rogier Schumacher, *Neo-avant-garde in Nederland, Museumjournaal als forum van een nieuw kunstbegrip 1961-1973*. (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 11.

abstraction within a broader historical framework. Sandberg's efforts were instrumental in legitimizing modern art and positioning it as a vital part of cultural life in the postwar Netherlands.⁹ In his pursuit of legitimization, Sandberg attributed an infallible value to modern art, a perspective that would be built upon by his peers.

Jean Leering, an art historian that was appointed as the director of the Van Abbemuseum in 1964, had his own ideas about how the exhibition programming should align with as well as complement the museum's collection policy. He saw exhibitions as tools to introduce the public with a broad range of art that surpasses the museum's collection areas, such as applied art, architecture, and urban planning; on the other hand, temporary exhibitions could highlight aspects of the collection or place them within historical and social contexts.¹⁰ In this way, Leering positioned exhibitions as a synthesis of artforms and extended the discussion about art beyond art itself.

Art historian and visual artist, Carel Blotkamp has also been an important member of the editorial team of the journal, especially in the seventies. He was one of the representatives of the new art critics that based itself more on academic bounds, leaning on art historical, empirical and methodological understandings of art. In his publication *Museum in Motion?*, Blotkamp praised Leering for his effort to approach art in relation to the public and placing art within the socio-political realm.¹¹ Blotkamp noted that the conceptual framework underpinning Leering's approach was not clearly defined, making it difficult to translate into effective exhibitions. Furthermore, Blotkamp found the initial exhibitions organized according to this idea unconvincing, as they struggled to effectively communicate the complex visual language and experiences of the neo-avant-garde to a diverse audience. Despite his appreciation for Leering's approach, Blotkamp questioned its feasibility in practice.¹² This disconnect between ambitious socio-cultural aspirations and the practical realities of exhibition-making is similarly evident in the challenges faced by *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat*.

Blotkamp was not the only critic that was thinking about the academic and practical feasibility of the journal's museological theories. Cor Blok, art historian and visual artist, had a similar critical stance toward the hypothesis that creativity and self-realisation was

⁹ Rogier Schumacher, *Neo-avant-garde in Nederland, Museumjournaal als forum van een nieuw kunstbegrip 1961-1973*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 19.

¹⁰ Idem, 170.

¹¹ Carel Blotkamp, (Carel Hendrik), *Museum in ζ motion? : the modern art museum at issue : het museum voor moderne kunst ter diskussie = Museum in ζ beweging?* ('s-Gravenhage: Government Publishing Office, 1979).

¹² Rogier Schumacher, *Neo-avant-garde in Nederland, Museumjournaal als forum van een nieuw kunstbegrip 1961-1973* (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 194.

interwoven. He pushed towards an inclusive, cultural and anthropological definition of culture. This definition, he argued, should encourage a critical approach toward the dynamic set of agreements and conventions that societies use to structure their living environment and regulate human relationships.¹³ He grounded this theory in his book *Beeldspraak* in which he described the relationship between the represented and the suggested in visual arts and writing.¹⁴ He states that when people are confronted with abstract art, the first thing they do is look for something they recognize. Throughout the book he is describing different forms of abstraction in symbols, language and images. This book sets the basis of the approach of the exhibition *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat*.

¹³ Rogier Schumacher, *Neo-avant-garde in Nederland, Museumjournaal als forum van een nieuw kunstbegrip 1961-1973*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 191.

¹⁴ Blok, Cor. *Beeldspraak, beeld teken en werkelijkheid in de kunst*. W. de Haan, Hilversum 1967.

Chapter 2: Exhibition analysis

In 1976, the exhibition *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat* was held as the second in a series of educational exhibitions for students aged 12 to 18 at the Centraal Museum's Maliebaan location. Curated by Hoos Blotkamp, who was responsible for the museum's educational programming, the exhibition was a collaborative effort, including a diverse group of museum curators, art historians, high school teachers, and visual artists. The team included: Toos van Kooten (Centraal Museum), Matty Veldkamp (Centraal Museum), Joop de Vries, Ineke Voorsteegh (art historian), Roland Schier (visual artist), Yvo Smit, Jacobien de Rooy (visual artist), Jos de Meyere (Curator of Old Masters, Centraal Museum), Ben Koevoets (high school art history teacher and founder of the academic teacher training program for art history), Co van Gasteren (visual artist), Nico Brederoo (art historian)

Evaluations found in the archive of the Centraal Museum's educational department, housed at the Utrecht archive, provide insight into the motivation behind the series. These documents reveal that teachers visiting the museum rarely expressed a preference for specific parts of the collection to explore with their classes when booking a guided excursion. This led the museum's educational team to conclude that such visits were often incidental and lacked a lasting impact on students.¹⁵ Furthermore, the museum did not have enough educational staff to conduct all the tours.

To address these challenges, Hoos Blotkamp initiated the exhibition series as a structured educational program. It featured exhibitions accompanied by information folders and training sessions for teachers, enabling them to guide their students effectively and fostering a more sustained engagement with the material. Teachers were provided with information folders with suggested course material and exercises, and the extensive exhibition catalogue. The first exhibition in this series, organized by the same project team, explored the theme of perspective, followed by *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat*, which tackled abstraction, and concluded with an exhibition on form and colour. The team intentionally began with perspective, as it was considered the most accessible concept to introduce to students before progressing to the more complex themes of abstraction and the interplay of form and colour.

The museum's research, referenced in an information booklet from the archive, revealed widespread misconceptions about abstraction among students from different age groups. In two second-year classes, over half of the students were unfamiliar with the term "abstraction,"

¹⁵ Evaluation on the educational programming, **HUA Archive 1823, 1.6 Information and Education, 157: Documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum project.**

with many associating it with “fantasy” or “straight, angular lines.” Similar misconceptions were found in third- and fourth-year classes, where students often defined abstraction as “something barely recognizable” or linked it to “straight, clean lines.” These findings underscored the importance of addressing these misunderstandings through the exhibition’s design.¹⁶

The exhibition was housed in the Maliebaan, in a historic city villa once owned by the Feneter van Vlissingen family. Visitors entered through a main entrance that led to a central hallway surrounded by rooms, where the room numbers were written on banners hanging above the doors. The villa’s architecture presented challenges to the exhibition’s coherence. Because the rooms were so small, information about the works was limited to the banners above the artworks, making it difficult to read. Also because of the shape of the rooms, in some spaces there were walls added to hang paintings. In the evaluation forms, it could be read that together these elements created a fragmented visitor experience that was difficult to control, impacting the educational objectives of the exhibition.¹⁷



Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat (T197604), (Hall) Room 1: The Apple, Centraal Museum Utrecht / foto A.F.S.J. Hulskamp

¹⁶ Exhibition information booklet for teachers from the museum’s archive.

¹⁷ Evaluation on the educational programming, **HUA Archive, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education, 157: Documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum project.**

The first square hall also serves as the first room in the exhibition, with the apple as its central theme. Various representations of apples are displayed—ranging from a red circle on a white canvas, to depictions of Adam and Eve, plastic models, and photographs. The guiding text in this room, available through the exhibition catalogue, emphasizes that its purpose is to introduce the concept of abstraction, helping students understand that even something familiar and concrete can be used as an abstract symbol.¹⁸

A similar approach is seen in the next room, which focuses on the concept of "home." Items on display include a large drawing by Dick Bruna, a dollhouse, children's drawings, paintings of interiors, a replica of Vermeer's home in embroidery (made by the mother-in-law of one of the project team members)¹⁹, a poster of the comic character Tante Sidonia in her home, and other visual representations of home. The text in this room begins by discussing the form of the home, the classical square with a triangular roof, which is, in itself, an abstraction. The concept of home is then explored as a societal symbol: everyone has, or should have, a home. The room further delves into how the symbolism of home appears in language, such as proverbs, as well as abstract concepts like the Dutch word "gezelligheid."²⁰ Both rooms follow Blok's theoretical framework, illustrating the connection between images, language, and abstract concepts.



Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat (T197604), Room 3: The Home, Centraal Museum Utrecht / foto A.F.S.J. Hulskamp.

¹⁸ The exhibition catalogue from the museum's archive, 1-3.

¹⁹ Evaluation on the educational programming, **HUA Archive, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education, 157: Documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum project.**

²⁰ The exhibition catalogue from the museum's archive, 5-7.

Further in the exhibition, the concepts become more and more abstract. For example, room six is completely dedicated to society. The room is subdivided into different concepts in relation to the overarching theme. One of those themes is “Clothes make the man”, here a mix of paintings, sculpture and remarkably a whole group of mannequins. This room is arranged to display how society knows different ranks. While ranks are not something concrete, you can often see someone’s rank by looking at their clothes for example.²¹ In this room is a portrait of farmers by Charley Toorop (1930)²², a sculpture study by Mari Andriessen of a dockworker (1951)²³ and mannequins with different uniforms and formal dresses. In this room, the diverse range of objects becomes evident, underscoring the multidisciplinary nature of the exhibition. The wide variety of loans also highlights this, with objects borrowed from institutions as varied as the police, a puppet theatre/museum, the Dutch railways, and the C&A clothing store.²⁴ This multimedia approach, combined with the focus on social themes, reflects the influence of Leering’s ideas on the exhibition making.



²¹ The exhibition catalogue from the museum’s archive, 14-15.

²² Charley Toorop, *Boeren* (6791 a) 1930, oil on canvas, 111,5 x 136 cm.

²³ Mari Andriessen, *De Dokwerker* (13542), bronze, 68 x 30 x 27 cm.

²⁴ Overview of loaners at the back of an exhibition information booklet for teachers from the museum’s archive.

The downstairs rooms focused on everyday concepts, while the second floor, which mirrors the downstairs space with its corridor architecture, shifts the focus more towards the artworks themselves. In room 9, for example, only abstract works are displayed. The aim here is to show how abstract art can convey messages, often abstract ones, similar to those explored in the conceptual theme rooms, through lines and colors. The exhibition catalogue further explains that, in some cases, the title of an artwork can hold deeper meaning, reinforcing the connection between language and image.²⁵



Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat (T197604), Room 9: Abstract forms with abstract concepts, Centraal Museum Utrecht / foto A.F.S.J. Hulskamp. Artworks from left to right: R. van Koningsbruggen, *Compositie*, 1972. Th. van Doesburg, *contra-compositie*, 1924.

²⁵ The exhibition catalogue from the museum's archive, 18-20.

In rooms 10 and 12, figurative paintings are displayed. These rooms use concepts of iconography to demonstrate how many Old Master paintings, while appearing figurative and concrete, also carry symbolic meanings.²⁶ For instance, the vanitas motif or Ter Brugghen's *Sleeping Mars* (1629).²⁷



Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat (T197604), Room 9: Abstract forms with abstract concepts, Centraal Museum Utrecht / foto A.F.S.J. Hulskamp.

In other rooms, different methods of abstraction are explored, including surrealist pieces and Bart van der Leek's paintings, which clearly reference reality. By shifting between the abstraction of the concrete and the concreteness of abstraction, the exhibition demonstrates that abstraction is not exclusive to modern art, but rather a concept that can be traced throughout the entire history of art. This approach mirrors Sandberg's efforts to place modern art within an art historical framework.

²⁶ The exhibition catalogue from the museum's archive, 20-23.

²⁷ Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Slapende Mars* (5460), 1629, oil on panel, 152 x 140 cm.



Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat (T197604), Room 9: Abstract forms with abstract concepts, Centraal Museum Utrecht / foto A.F.S.J. Hulskamp. Paintings from left to right: Bart van der Leek, *Stilleven (Bakje met Appels)*, 1921. Karel Appel, *De drenkelinge*, 1964.

In the case of *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat*, there is a clear attempt to present abstraction as a concept that extends beyond modern art, encompassing all of art history and even everyday life. In doing so, the exhibition sought to transcend the boundaries of art history in an effort to engage students across disciplines. The educational approach aligns with contemporary ideas about art education and the social value of modern art. However, the exhibition's broader narrative, providing a constant back and forth between figuration, abstraction, representation, and social norms creates an experience that lacks a grounded perspective. This is also amplified by the limitations of the venue, the small rooms of the villa, high signage, and minimal textual information. As a result, the exhibition attempts to cover too much and its eclectic design proves to be unsuccessful in guiding the students. Yet, when considered in the broader social-cultural context, the surrounding educational efforts, such as the information folders and teacher workshops, provided valuable tools for a significant impact on the students' understanding of modern art.

Chapter 3: Outcomes, reactions, structures

The reaction to the exhibition series was significant, with remarkably high visitor numbers. In total, the exhibition welcomed a total of 22.303 student visitors, 7.066 of whom came from Utrecht and the rest travelled from provinces outside of Utrecht.²⁸ Students from across the Netherlands attended, demonstrating the wide appeal and reach of the program. Due to the overwhelming demand the exhibition, originally planned to run for just four months between March and June 1976, was extended until July 1977, adding an entire school year to its duration.²⁹ This extended timeline, coupled with the fact that it was the second exhibition in a series, provided an excellent opportunity to reflect on whether the educational goals were achieved and to identify areas for improvement in future initiatives.

The museum not only provided a comprehensive information folder with course materials and exercises for students but also organized workshops to train teachers in using this content effectively. This close collaboration with educators allowed the project team to gather valuable feedback from both students and teachers. Since the exhibition was part of a series, and the team was actively experimenting with methods to maximize their impact, responses were carefully collected and analysed for future refinement.

An extensive evaluation written during the run of *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat* can be read at the archive of the museum's educational department at the Utrecht archive.³⁰ The evaluation highlighted the success of the collaboration between the museum's educational team and the teachers. A key goal of the series was to strengthen connections between the museum's educational programs and high school cultural education. Teachers appreciated these efforts, and a lasting partnership was formed for future projects.

Critical feedback pointed to the imbalance in the amount of information provided by the exhibitions design. While the exhibition, on perspective, provided an overwhelming amount of information, *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat* provided too little.³¹ Additionally, the wall texts were put too high for comfortable reading. However, teachers praised the thematic approach and the introduction of abstract concepts through everyday references. This thematic focus was later identified in the evaluation as a future goal: to implement these

²⁸ Letter from A.M Janssens (director) and Hoos Blotkamp Dr. T.H.J. Meyer Head of department museums Ministry of Culture, recreation and social work, 13th of February 1979. **HUA Archive, 1823 1.6 Information and Education, 158-161: Documents concerning the organization of educational exhibitions.**

²⁹ Correspondence with different loaners, **HUA Archive, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education, 158-161: Documents concerning the organization of educational exhibitions. (multiple letters)**

³⁰ Evaluation on the educational programming, **HUA Archive, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education 157: Documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum project**

³¹ Ibid.

approaches in the permanent collection display, because “the exhibition is equally intended for the ‘general public’, as it serves as an introduction to the collection”³². This goal foreshadowed current trends. Today, for instance, the museum’s permanent display similarly combines thematic narratives and everyday concepts while integrating the different collections.

During the seventies the museum was still under the governance of the Utrecht municipality, which provided funds to enable the publication of catalogues and information folders. However, the high demand created logistical challenges. Letters from the Utrecht city archives, between the municipality and the Ministry of Culture reveals the extent of these difficulties. Including requested for funding to cover the increasing printing costs of educational materials³³ and transportation expenses for schools outside Utrecht³⁴. These documents show not only how great the demand for the exhibition was but also how the museum’s educational team struggled to keep up with it. By 1980, it became clear that the educational exhibitions series could no longer be held at the Maliebaan, due to the administration tasks surrounding the planning and implementation of the class visits, the limited space of the villa, and a shortage of employees. Instead, the educational shifted their efforts to the permanent collection at the museum’s main location at the Agnietenstaat.³⁵

Correspondence between the Utrecht Municipality and the museum at this time reveals how the central museum’s staff was navigating the cultural landscape surrounding the museum. In 1977, when Hoos Blotkamp requested funding for the next exhibition, the municipality criticized the lack of communication between the museum’s educational team and the Utrecht Institute for Cultural Education.³⁶ The municipality urged better collaboration, which led to a series of discussions and eventual alignment between the two institutions. This highlights the experimental nature of educational efforts within the Dutch cultural landscape in the seventies and the museum’s navigation of its evolving responsibilities within broader societal structures.

³² Evaluation on educational programming, **HUA, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education 157: Documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum project.**

³³ Letter from A.M Janssens (director) and Hoos Blotkamp to Dr. T.H.J. Meyer Head of department museums Ministry of Culture, recreation and social work, 13th of February 1979, **HUA, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education, 158-161: Documents concerning the organization of educational exhibitions.**

³⁴ Letter from Hoos Blotkamp to the Executive Council of the Province of Utrecht to ask for coverage of the transport of classes to the exhibition. **HUA, 1823 1.6 Information and Education, 158-161: Documents concerning the organization of educational exhibitions, 158 (A-Gem).**

³⁵ Evaluation on the educational programming, **HUA, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education, 157: Documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum project.**

³⁶ Correspondence between director A.M. Janssen, Hoos Blotkamp and the Mayor and councilors of Utrecht. **HUA, 1823, 1.6 Information and Education, 158-161: Documents concerning the organization of educational exhibitions. (multiple letters)**

Other museums were also experimenting with similar exhibitions. For example, in 1972, the van Abbemuseum hosted educational presentations on concepts like “structure”, “drawing” and “symbols.”³⁷ Yet, these exhibitions are never mentioned in the archival material of the Centraal Museum’s educational team during that time, underscoring a lack of collaboration between museums. While, theoretical discussions were shared in journals like the *Museum Journal*, practical knowledge seems to have been exchanged limitedly, even as museums faced similar challenges in expanding their educational programs.

This fragmented approach echoes contemporary museological practices. While many museums today aim to democratize exhibitions and attract younger audiences, shared resources or collaborative strategies remain scarce. Policies and strategies are often developed in isolation, influenced by growing competition for public funding and pressures for cultural entrepreneurship. Reflecting on the patterns of past efforts could offer valuable lessons for addressing these persistent challenges and fostering greater collaboration in the museum sector.

³⁷ Guus Broeders, “De werkelijkheid geeft te denken” *Maandblad voor Beeldende Vorming*, volume 94, March 1978.

Conclusion

The Dutch cultural landscape of the nineteen seventies was very dynamic during a quickly changing social-cultural attitude towards institutions, museum workers and theoretical thinkers were exploring different approaches to museology, with a focus on educational approaches and a broader social responsibility.

From the fifties, Sandberg's efforts as the director of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam demanded a different attitude towards modern art, by engaging broader audiences and seeking legitimacy outside of the professional discourse. Leering opted for an understanding of exhibitions and side programming as an extension of the collection, allowing for explorations of societal concepts and the incorporation of mediums beyond traditional museum collections. Carel Blotkamp and Cor Blok were reflecting on these socio-cultural ideals and made an effort to approach them through an academic lens. They tested their feasibility in museological contexts while grounding the ideals in practical formats. However, in the rapidly evolving cultural landscape, these ambitious socio-cultural ideals predominated the museological discussions, leaving little room for the development of practical and achievable approaches.

This imbalance is evident in the exhibition *Kijk maar, er staat niet wat er staat*. While, it's the thematical approach and references to everyday life were innovative, the exhibition's overly ambitious societal scope and lack of guidance in its design diluted its overall impact. However, the efforts beyond the exhibition, such as the information folders and teacher workshops, proved effective in aligning with school curricula and engaging younger audiences with the concept of abstraction. The overwhelming demand also prompted new insights into the Centraal Museum's cultural identity within broader social frameworks, including their relationship with the municipality and the Dutch government.

Ultimately, this experimental exhibition underscores the ongoing challenge of engaging wider audiences in meaningful ways. Its focus on thematic accessibility and educational outreach remains relevant, as does its lesson in balancing ambition with feasibility. Reflection on past efforts is crucial, as change in museology, like society, is not permanent but continuously evolving.

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Note to the archival material

The Centraal Museum has an archive of all the exhibition catalogues in its library.

- Exhibition information booklet for teachers
- The exhibition's catalogue
- Information package for teachers

The main part of the historic archive of the museum is located at Het Utrecht's Archief, because the museum was part of the municipality. The access number for the Centraal Museum is 1823. Folder 1.6 holds the educational archives. Folder 157 holds documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum projects which includes an extensive evaluation of the School-Museum project, and folder 158 until 162 hold correspondence from all the educational projects organized not chronologically, but alphabetically.

HUA, 1832, 1.6 Information and Education

157: Documents concerning the organization of the School-Museum project.

- Evaluation on the educational programming

158-161: Documents concerning the organization of educational exhibitions:

- Letter from A.M Janssens (director) and Hoos Blotkamp Dr. T.H.J. Meyer Head of department museums Ministry of Culture, recreation and social work, 13th of February 1979.
- Correspondence with different loaners. (multiple letters)
- Letter from Hoos Blotkamp to the Executive Council of the Province of Utrecht to ask for coverage of the transport of classes to the exhibition.
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