

Including outsider art

An ethnography of the revision process of the collection presentation of Museum Dr.
Guislain during spring 2019



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June 2019

Abstract

The focus within this ethnography of the revision process of the collection presentation of Museum Dr. Guislain during spring 2019, is on how the meaning of outsider art is constructed and negotiated in this process. How is outsider art defined and for which purposes? Within the term outsider art, some of the core issues that receive more attention, not only in Museum Dr. Guislain, but in the wider museum sector and society too, become visible: processes of in- and exclusion, (de)stigmatisation, telling hidden histories of traditionally marginalised groups and multiperspectivalism. It is argued that in their history and current practice both museums and outsider art have the potential to—in the worst case—promote social exclusion and at best promote social inclusion. Among the most important data for this research are the semi-structured interviews with ten people involved in the revision process and the walls with ideas, notes, and pictures created by the exhibition makers. In the new collection presentation, the exhibition makers do not set outsider art apart. They only mention the term outsider art within the context of its history. For contemporary artworks they do not differentiate, which is an inclusive approach. They choose works because of their content, and only provide with personal details of the artist when relevant. Opinions like these are widely shared among the museum staff. The question is to what extent they want to promote these opinions. More and more people working at Museum Dr. Guislain seem to be in favour of taking a stance in debates such as the outsider art debate. This seems to be part of bigger developments and ambitions within the museum. Museum Dr. Guislain in general, and the new collection presentation in particular, have the potential to function as agents of social inclusion. However, as long as the exhibition ‘The Cabinets’ is still on show too, a complete art exhibition with works selected on ‘outsiderness,’ the museum does not transcend the excluding component of outsider art completely.

Keywords: *outsider art, museums, transition, social inclusion, ethnography*

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Preface

The image of Bob Dylan made up out of lines of East-Indian ink is looking at me from my living room wall. It is a drawing made by my father of one of his heroes and one of the things he collects. He surrounds himself with folk and rock vinyl, books, art, and little treasures he finds, such as safety matches, fruit stickers... to the point that his house has turned into a museum.

He is on his way to *The Museum of Innocence* in Istanbul, created by one of his other heroes, writer Orhan Pamuk, when he loses everything including himself. I receive a phone call of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and my brother and I depart on a maniacal search for our psychotic father. A search leading from state hospitals, to the Dutch Embassy, to shabby police stations, to an over-the-top television show... And even though we have found him back, we feel this journey has not ended.

Shortly after returning, we decide to start an art project about the intersection of creativity or art and madness together with New Heroes, the interdisciplinary art organization we both work for. My master thesis forms a part of this bigger exploration. For this thesis project, I am making an investigation on (outsider) art in Museum Dr. Guislain. As in (outsider) art, and at Museum Dr. Guislain, madness and creativity come together quite literally.

In carrying out my master thesis project at Museum Dr. Guislain, many parts of me and my life congregate: my experience in museum studies, cultural studies, and sociology, my experience as an artistic coordinator at New Heroes, my love for art and storytelling, for crossing borders and for the multidisciplinary. Outsider art and artists fascinate me, as they are situated simultaneously inside and outside the art world and inside and outside of society. And I think New Heroes, ethnographers, and my father are choosing a similar position. But do outsider artists choose this position deliberately? The paradoxality makes me raise many questions like this, questions that relate to bigger issues of identity politics and how society categorizes people.

I would like to thank everyone at Museum Dr. Guislain for sharing their quests with me. Many thanks to my friends and new heroes for their support and distraction. And special thanks to my mother, father, and brother, for supporting me always and for encouraging me to choose alternative routes even it means getting lost sometimes.



Figure 1:
Beetsma Riegstra, J. J.
24.05.2019.
Portrait of Bob Dylan,
2009.

*Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who
That it's namin'.
For the loser now
Will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'.*

- Bob Dylan, 'The times they are a changing,' 1964

Introduction

“...[O]ur collection is not only beds and injection needles and scientific material, but the main collection we have is a narrative, it’s history, it’s a story on psychiatry and it constantly changes, like history,”¹ states Bart Marius, the new artistic director of Museum Dr. Guislain. Museum Dr. Guislain is situated in one of the first mental hospitals of Belgium, which is partially still in use; a museum a bit outside of the city centre of Ghent; a museum that presents the history of psychiatry, a collection of (outsider) art and temporary thematic exhibitions on themes related to mental health; a museum that is hard to label and that is about labels; a museum in transition.

Museum Dr. Guislain is currently revising its permanent exhibition or collection presentation. The current exhibition more or less presents the history of psychiatry in a chronological order and the museum staff as well as an assessment committee of the Flemish government feels is ‘outdated.’ For the new collection presentation, the exhibition makers are choosing for a more theme-based and flexible approach, closer to their temporary exhibitions using a mix of (historical) documents, scientific objects, contemporary art, reproductions, and so-called outsider art.

My exploration of the revision process focusses on how the meaning of outsider art is constructed and negotiated, how it is defined, and for what purposes. Outsider art is a controversial category of art. Berger (1998), and many other scholars, pointed out that there is little hope for consensus on the definition of outsider art. Museum Dr. Guislain (n.d.) describes it as art made by artists “who operate outside of the professional art scene or on the fringes of society.” Some argue (e.g. Prinz, 2017) it should not be a separate category all together, as it asks the artists to ‘stay outside.’ It certainly is a complex concept. In the concept of outsider art, I believe, some of the core issues that are receiving more attention not only in Museum Dr. Guislain, but in the wider museum sector and society too, become visible: processes of inclusion and exclusion, (de)stigmatisation, telling hidden histories of traditionally marginalized groups, and multiperspectivalism (Kosut, 2006; Rainaldi, 2015; Ross, 2010).

¹ This is a quote from an introduction for iArts students in English I attended and recorded. All other interviews were held in Dutch and quotes are translated to English and edited according to rules of written language trying to keep the intention and meaning intact.

For this research project I followed the part of the revision process, in which the team working on the exhibition is giving substance to the concept: defining sub-themes, choosing which objects they would like to use and where, writing texts for the catalogue. This is an especially interesting time to come in as a researcher, as the museum staff is 'rewriting history.' They are reconsidering the stories they want to tell and in doing so telling something about the current state of society; as museums are specifically sensitive barometers for cultural sensibilities and changes (Sandell, 1998).

As destigmatisation, inclusion, and including multiple perspectives are ongoing processes, I believe it will be more revealing to look at the work-in-progress instead of the end-product. It is in this phase that considerations and justifications are made within the organisation. To analyse the stories museums want to tell, most cultural studies and museum studies projects focus on analysing finished exhibitions and in doing so they miss a crucial part. Very little work is done on the production of exhibitions and even less in an ethnographic and holistic way (Macdonald, 2001). By not looking at the finished exhibition, but at the creation process, we can also see what objects, texts, and ideas did not make it to the exhibition. How do the exhibition makers try to form a nuanced story showing different sides and perspectives? We can hear different voices within the process, see where opinions may differ, and how decisions are made. In other words, we can grasp more of the thoughts behind the exposition (Macdonald, 2001).

From mid-March to mid-May 2019, I spent two days a week at Museum Dr. Guislain carrying out participant observations, taking field notes, and having (interview) conversations with people from all layers of the organization who contribute to the revision process. I took the following main question as a starting point: How is Museum Dr. Guislain constructing the meaning of outsider art in the process of revising their permanent exhibition Spring 2019?

By looking for an answer to this question and by exploring this process, I hope to gain in-depth empirical insights and contribute to recent and topical conversations regarding the redefinition of the museum as a more socially inclusive institute (Sandell, 1998; 2002; 2003) and to connect this to the outsider art debate (e.g. De Cleene & Van Goidsenhove 2013; Delaney, 2017; Gompertz, 2013; Mihajlović, 2015; Prinz, 2017; Van Heddegem, 2016; Rainaldi, 2015; Risser, 2017; Ten Berge, 2007).

The first theoretical chapter will be on the definition and function of museums in general. I will start by looking at an interpretation of Foucault's museum which highlights the fact that the most important matter museums display is interpretation (Lord, 2006). Museums display the difference between the objects and the conceptual orders in which they are normally shown. They are about the relation between things and the words that describe them. Today, museums no longer try to collect everything or present the totality of time, like they did in the 19th century; in Hooper-Greenhills words: "the great collection time of museums is over" (2000, p. 152). I will explore what phase may have arrived for museums now by outlining some recent trends, tendencies, and changes in museum practice. An important example is the increased attention for the visitor and for attracting a more varied audience (Weil, 1990; Serota, 1996; Hein, 2000). Moreover, I will suggest the time may have arrived for museums to turn into (more) social institutions, with the museum as a potential agent for social inclusion. I will mostly draw from museologist Richard Sandell here, as he is specialised in museums and social inclusion, and has written multiple publications and books on this topic (e.g. 2002; 2007). Altogether, this will later serve as a context in which we can situate the changes Museum Dr. Guislain is currently making and considering.

In the second chapter, I will provide a brief cultural history of outsider art and we will see how processes of inclusion and exclusion play an important role in this history too. Additionally, I will outline the current debates in the (outsider) art world and academia, and highlight the dilemmas museums are confronted with when exhibiting outsider art.

In the methods section, I will further justify my chosen methods and give a description of how I gathered my data at Museum Dr. Guislain including the implications of choosing an ethnographic approach. In the following chapter I will present a short history of (outsider art at) the museum and its current position within the museum world, outsider art world, and the city of Ghent. In Ghent Guislain is the only museum not supported by the city government. This chapter concludes with a description of the current permanent exhibition.

The first chapters will provide us with sufficient context to dive into the revision process itself and look at how outsider art is included and treated during the creation of the new collection presentation. We will both look at the use of the term itself and concrete examples of ways in which outsider art is suggested to be a part of the exhibition. We will explore how different team members define and use outsider art in various ways. And look at the several functions of outsider art within the exhibition. In the conclusion, I will

summarise my findings and analyses on why and how outsider art is included. I will link this to bigger changes made within the museum, which in their turn are part of broader changes within the museum sector and society.

Before we start, I would like to make some notes on the terms often used in this thesis. First, about the term outsider art: I considered not using the term at all, because within the debate on the term, many argue not to make a distinction between outsider art and 'mainstream' art (e.g. Prinz, 2017; Museum of Everything, n. d.). Thus, as an idealistic statement, I wanted to only talk about art. However, I refrained from this for several reasons. First of all, it is impractical. There is still an art world and scene relying on this category of art. Additionally, the term is part of the history and debates that I address. You may recognise this line of thought and the balance between the ideal and practical later on in how museum staff deal with the term.

The exhibition under revision is the permanent exhibition or collection presentation on the history of psychiatry. I will use these terms for the new exhibition at times as well (e.g. 'the new collection presentation'). However, it should be noted that these descriptions do not entirely cover the reality of the situation. We will find out that the new exhibition will contain both objects from the collection and loans, so it is not strictly a collection presentation. Moreover, the presentation will be more dynamic, with objects and parts changing every one or two years, making it less permanent in nature. Additionally, the exhibition will be more thematic and departing from current events relating to mental health, thus it will not strictly be on the history of psychiatry.

Thirdly, even though I sometimes write that Museum Dr. Guislain (or simply 'Guislain' or 'the museum') does or finds something, I am well aware the institute as a whole does not actually do anything on its own, but that it exists of individuals. This is exactly what makes it interesting to come in as a sociologist and ethnographer. By being 'in the field', I can discover the different opinions, the negotiations, and social processes that precede releasing an institutional message or exhibition as Museum Dr. Guislain. Artistic director Marius puts it like this: "It is not about art with a capital A, or about the museum, or the exhibition with a capital E; no, it is about individuals who have to come to a result together, that's what I think it is about."

Like the exhibition makers at Guislain, I had to make many considerations and balance interests while writing this thesis. One of the decisions I made is to include many

images (see appendix A for the full list). I chose to do so because visuals play an important role in my research and because images and words can tell different stories. I also chose to include illustrations made by my father (front page, figure 1, 2 and 3) for several reasons. The first reason is that he was one of the motivations for starting this project in the first place and that I said from the beginning that I wanted to interweave the personal and the academic.² Secondly, I again found out during this research (but also within my work for New Heroes), how big themes really become relatable and start to live when told or approached through personal and specific stories. Moreover, this is a way of giving alternative examples than the ones that are often given (works of the 'canon of outsider art'). By choosing specific examples from my father's art, I am also playing with the notions of framing and gatekeeping, using my power as the curator of this thesis.

Enjoy my exhibition.

² Including personal examples and autobiographical reflections and connecting those to the wider subject of this study (and in so to cultural experience) makes this thesis relatable to autoethnographic epistemologies and accounts. An advantage of this type of ethnography is that it allows for the use of my own creativity and sociality, while studying human creativity and sociality. Moreover, according to Bochner (2000) including good personal narratives in research could contribute to positive social change. Choosing to use auto-ethnographic methods also accounts for the rather unconventional use of images in this thesis, as this stance of science finds it limiting to see the written word as the only form of science and promotes moving beyond this to include other forms (Scott-Hoy and Ellis, 2012).

(Re)defining the role of the museum

Foucault's museum

It may be hardly surprising to include Foucault in the theoretical chapter of a research on a psychiatry museum, as he was very critical to power mechanisms and is well-known for *Folie et Dérison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique* (1964) 'Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.' In this book, and in his oeuvre in general, he proposes an alternative methodology, a philosophical view on history that still inspires many today (e.g. Boyne, 2013; Huffer, 2010; Gutting, 2005; Sheridan, 2003; Still & Velody, 2012). Foucault rejects the linear, progressive history of psychiatry, that presents it as a story of progress: from chains, to institutes, to medical treatments, to therapies... Foucault views these treatments as different ways of the functioning of power and powerlessness through time. New treatments are always presented as a humane solution, but according to Foucault they are just new ways of exercising power.

Foucault (1964) also argues that those who have been writing the history of psychiatry before him did this in a very rational way. History is a scientific discipline just like psychiatry and medical science. By writing a *history* of madness you position yourself on the side of psychiatry and psychiatrists, Foucault argues. He tries to offer a counterweight; he opposes the history of psychiatry with 'the archaeology of silence'. With archaeology he means his way of writing history. And with silence, he means the voices of the insane, of patients, that were barely heard in the history of psychiatry so far. In his alternative way of writing history, he pays attention to literature and art and shows the historical-philosophical potential of these sources. This may explain his literary style: he may have been trying to be on the side of maniacal literary figures and artists such as Hulderling, Artaud, Van Gogh, and Nietzsche.

Foucault's ideas are of course not uncontested (Habermas, for example, famously critiqued Foucault for being incoherent in 1986), nevertheless Foucault's ideas are indeed still relevant, especially for places such as Museum Dr. Guislain, both in terms of his view on power relations through time and on including art and literature in a history or archaeology

of psychiatry. However, I would especially like to pay attention to interpretations of Foucault's ideas on 'the museum.'³

A quick reading of Foucault may lead to the false conclusion that museums to Foucault are embodiments of state power, and Enlightenment institutes that want to "totalize, categorize and control the world," so warns Lord (2006, p. 2). But actually, the museum could help to dismantle the idea of historical continuity that Foucault rejects. The museum could use the Enlightenment values of critique, freedom, and progress to dismantle the relations of power that also come with this thinking.

In their essay *Des espaces autres* ('Of other Spaces'), Foucault & Miskowiec (1986) present the museum as a 'heterotopia', as a place of difference: a place where the ordinary positions and relations of a culture are both "represented, contested and reversed" (Foucault, 1998, p. 178). Other examples of heterotopias are cemeteries, cinemas, and holiday parks. These are places that are at once outside of life, culture, time, and space, but simultaneously are part of it and presenting it (Lord, 2016).

Thus, in the museum disruptive elements of life and culture are put on display. Moreover, *interpretation* is put on display: the space between *les mots et les choses* ('the words and the things') and the difference between objects and concepts is presented. "Without interpretation, without presenting a relation between things and conceptual structures, an institution is not a museum, but a storehouse," so explains Lord (2006, p. 4). Hence, the museum has the potential to be a place of archaeology in which power relations, multiple perspectives, and interpretations can be shown.

Returning to Foucault's broader ideas on what he in his later works called 'effective history,' focussing on discontinuing, breaks, and non-linearity and his ideas on epistemes and discourses, we can find that they have had their effect on museum studies since the end of the 1980's (Mason, 2006). Influenced by Foucault, museologists increasingly

³ In this chapter I mostly draw from cultural theory and philosophical sources that talk in a rather general(izing) way about 'the museum' as a social institution and that mainly focus on the production side of the museum. Of course, museums are very divers, and definitions, functions, and changes vary for different types of museums (large or small; private or public; history, art, or science museums). However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to look into all these differences and into an extensive amount of theories; rather I highlight the aspects many museums do seem to have in common (e.g. they are reproducing knowledge and relate to society) and focus on some theories that seem relevant.

acknowledged and started to question the relationship between governments, museums, and cultural policy (Mason, 2006). Hooper-Greenhill (1992) applies Foucault's concepts of the Renaissance, the Classical, and Modern epistemes to the changes in the perception of knowledge and in turn what changes these shifts caused in the practice of museum collecting. In the 16th century, collections were based on the interests of their owners, wealthy individuals, families, or institutions, who selected on the basis of oddity and novelty, and presented these rarities in *Wunderkammers* 'Cabinets of Curiosities.' In the 17th century, Hooper-Greenhill detects an epistemic shift in structuring collections in a more taxonomic way. The third shift she describes is in the late 18th century when museums opened for a broader audience and were increasingly also seen as disciplinary tools to educate and civilise the masses (for more on the first ideas on the 'disciplinary museum', see Hooper-Greenhill, 1989; 1992).

Bennett develops this idea of the disciplinary museum (1988; 1995). He applies Foucault's concept of the panopticon as a disciplinary tool of self-regulation in prisons as described in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) to the 19th century public museum. This is defined as part of the broader development taking place at that time towards governmentality (Hall, 1999). According to Bennet (1995), institutions like the museum were arranged in such a way that visitors both observed and were being observed, and in doing so became very aware of their own behaviour, tending to internalise the acceptable and civic way to act.

Museums in transition

The current definition of the museum of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), is the following: "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment" (ICOM, 2007). However, ICOM (2019) feels this definition needs revision and is openly and actively looking for a new definition.

Museums and their definition and functions are changing over time. We have seen this in the theory of Hooper-Greenhill (1992) about shifts in knowledge conception and museum collection. If we look at more recent times, we can see the ways of presenting in museums gradually move further away from the object itself. Cameron (1971) typifies the

museum from before World War II as legislating, as a temple, a venue for display where no contextual information was provided with the objects. He continues to contrast this with the museum from after WWII, which, so he argues, turned into a 'forum': multiple voices and perspectives were presented. Casey (2003) describes it as follows: "Rather than having objects speak for themselves, museum professionals interpret cultural significance, for visitors by structuring art and artefacts around easily identifiable chronologies, geographies, formal themes, and narratives" (p. 2).

The latest shift perceived by museologists is a shift even further away from the object to what is sometimes called the 'performing museum' (e.g. by Casey, 2003; Garoian, 2005; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) or what is also described as a shift towards experience, arguably caused by a focus on the visitor and on attracting new visitors (e.g. Serota, 1996; Weil, 1990; and for a more marketing oriented perspective see Kotler & Kotler, 2000). In her book *The Museum in Transition*, Hein (2000) also argues how museum functions are changing and merging because of the wish to attract a more varied audience. Museums are "presenting themselves in a less linear and more theatrical manner," (p. 5) so she writes. She identifies the shift in focus from the object to the experience of the audience as one of the largest recent changes in museums. Weil (1999) in the title of his article about the 'The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum,' argues that museums change 'From Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody.'

Weil's (1999) title also points to a politicisation of museums (Mason, 2006). Objects become a means instead of an end and many museums are posing (critical) questions instead of giving answers and presenting truths. These are "questions of identity, objectivity, and privilege that were traditionally obscured" (Hein, 2000, p. 6). Driven by a wish and need to reconcile their traditional responsibilities with a regenerated and self-conscious understanding of education and exhibition, museums today are almost forced to ask these questions. Moreover, museums offer a place for people to reflect on their own identity. In a world of many choices, self-definition is valuable and, according to Hein (2000), museums are among the institutions that lift people into the public sphere where they are free to be both themselves and different. She perceives museums as places for inquiry and exploration.

An example of a relatively new museum (established in 2010) in which many of the above-mentioned developments appear is the Humanity House: this migration museum in the Hague wants their visitor to "see, hear and feel what it must be like to flee" (Humanity

House, 2018). The focus here is on the story and experience and not on objects, the museum deals with the perception of 'the other' and with questions of identity and privilege; they have an openly political and social mission (Zlatkoe, 2018).

According to Hein (2000) many museums seem to change from authoritative, self-assured, and self-explanatory, to self-conscious or self-aware, in doubt, justifying and presenting multiple perspectives. For ethnological museums, often established in colonial times, this is particularly visible. For example, the *Tropenmuseum* in Amsterdam openly searched how to deal with their colonial past and become a museum in which many voices and perspectives are represented (Dartel, 2009). At their website they now state:

With the opening of the permanent exhibition Things That Matter in 2018, the Tropenmuseum has abandoned its geographical layout and shifts its focus to universal themes that connect people worldwide. Current social issues such as migration and identity play a prominent role in this.

Still, by gathering, saving, and combining objects and stories, museums can help make sense of the world and of social groups and identities. Museums are not only preservers and propagators of cultural values, argues Hein, they have the "capacity to canonize," (p. 14) and thus have a responsibility as 'world makers' (Hein, 2000).

Hein (2000) detects a similar shift in the role and profile of most curators. She describes how curators change from eccentric, independent connoisseurs exhibiting for themselves and the elites, to team players, respecting everyone's perspective and aiming for a broad audience, for serving the public. This spirit of compromise could be dangerous because 'all is nothing.' Hein concludes that in their pursuit of offering exciting experiences and attracting wide-ranging audiences, museums should pay attention to their uniqueness. To avoid 'experiential sameness' and as to not become all the same and indistinguishable "museums need a memorable identity" (p. 149).

The museum as an agent of social inclusion

Sandell (1998; 2003) proposes a more specific role museums may develop, namely a social role. A museum model that may be more aligned with his ideas is the museum as 'contact zone' as proposed by Clifford (1997, pp. 188–219). Clifford (1997) perceives the museum as a place where different groups and cultures come together, meet each other and where

ideas are exchanged. Additionally, museums are constantly transforming and adjusting in reaction to their own changing contexts. He describes it as follows: “[a] contact perspective views all culture-collecting strategies as responses to particular histories of dominance, hierarchy, resistance, and mobilization” (1997, p. 213). Clifford (1997) emphasises how the different communities and audiences that form a society, have influence and can exert power on museums.

Sandell (1998; 2003) sees how museums are increasingly asked to promote social inclusivity and become interested in doing this. He describes how ‘social exclusion’ has become a central concept in various areas of government policy; primarily in a socioeconomical context and later also within the cultural sector.

The term ‘social exclusion’ emerged in France in the 1970’s and largely replaced the term ‘poverty’, which is concerned with *distributional* issues (Room, 1995). Social exclusion is seen as more useful as it deals with *relational* issues: it is about the breakdown of ties between an individual and his or her surroundings: family and friends, community, and governments and institutions. Social exclusion is about not being able to join or to be prevented from fully participating in economic, political, social, and cultural systems within society. The concept emphasises the “multidimensional and interrelated nature of inequality and disadvantage” (Dodd & Sandell, 2001, p. 12).

As we have seen, museums close to the ones we know now, started as elitist and exclusive entities in the 16th century (Bennett, 1995). Even though efforts have been made to open up (for example in the mid-19th century when the Louvre became a *public* collection, as equal access to art was an important agenda of Enlightenment), the museum today could still be perceived as exemplifying institutionalised systems of exclusion (Haan, 1998). Many mechanisms that may complicate or block access to museum services for certain (minority groups of) people are still intact, such as non-representation within collections and exhibitions, high ticket prices, and selective communication (Sandell, 1998).

This may be the case because of remaining traces of the 19th century museum, in Gramsci’s words an ‘instrument of ruling-class hegemony’ (Bennett, 1995, p. 91). This may lead to the idealistic idea that the museum could then also be the opposite, that it “could be purged of its elitist function and turned toward empowerment of the hitherto excluded” (Mason, 2006, p. 24). However, Bennett does not believe it to be this simple, because of how culture has been accustomed into dividing people into social groups, labelling, and

granting them different types of statuses (Bourdieu gives a similar argumentation for art galleries and the politics of taste: Bourdieu & Darcel, 1991; Bourdieu, 1993; 1994).

Sandell (1998) does believe museums can contribute to social inclusion and describes three levels on which museums could do so. The first is on a cultural level and means making sure those excluded are represented, that they have access, and that they can participate. Secondly, museums can play a role as agents of social regeneration by helping to improve the quality of life of people by setting up initiatives for individuals or small groups which seek to alleviate disadvantage and encourage personal development. Thirdly, museums could influence society and aim to be a vehicle for broad positive social change by providing a forum for public debate, education and persuasion in which, for example, greater tolerance towards minorities is promoted. Level two and three include the economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions and could be explicitly expressed as museum goals.

In line with the above, including outsider art within collections and presentations could be seen as a way to represent people who are often (socially) excluded (e.g. psychiatric patients or people with disabilities). As we will see in the next chapter, art made by 'the insane' was not perceived as art for a long time. Labelling it as *art brut* or *outsider art* may have helped in the emancipation process of these people and their creations. However, the term has an excluding component to it as well, as it draws this outsider art apart from 'mainstream' art and places it outside of art history. In the next chapter, we will first turn to the history of outsider art and then to the current outsider art debate with special attention to the roles and dilemmas for museums.

A cultural history of outsider art and the (outsider) art world today

A cultural history of outsider art

The label outsider art was created in 1972 by Richard Cardinal, as a translation for the French term *art brut* (Dubuffet, 1949). What we label outsider art now, was not perceived as art for a long time. However, ideas that are embedded within the concept of outsider art, such as the link between art and madness, go as far back as Western antiquity (Prinz, 2017). The myth of the mad geniuses, to give another example, is firmly rooted in and became a part of the cultural discourse during Romanticism (Becker, 1978; Bowler, 1997; Cubbs, 1994).

From the 20th century onwards, we can see a new approach to madness emerge, namely a medical one. Madness was now seen as a disease of the brain and the mad became mental patients to be treated in asylums. The link between creativity and mental illness was confirmed by academic psychiatrists, for example by Benjamin Rush who wrote in his book *Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind* (1812, p. 154) that some of his patients with no record of creativity began to show artistic talents.

Most doctors did not encourage their patients to be creative though. Painting could be beneficial, but only if it stayed 'within the lines': patients should paint calmly in and by nature (Allegaert, Caillau & De Preester, 2007). If psychiatrists did look at the expressive art of their patients, it was for diagnostic purposes: they saw the work as a reflection of the (state of the) mind of its maker. This becomes clear in the comment of Doctor Hyslop on an exhibition he curated in 1900 at the Bethlem Hospital:

...they ignore all contemporary ideals as to what is beautiful, significant, and worthy to be portrayed, and it is thus that free play is given to the workings of their defective minds, and whereby they evolve their absurd crudities, stupid distortions of natural objects, and obscure nebulous productions which, being merely reflections of their own diseased brains, bear no resemblance to anything known to the normal senses or intellect (Hyslop, 1916, p. 35).

The exhibition attracted hundreds of visitors; as the quote of Hyslop suggests, they probably did not look at the work with appreciation, but rather with curiosity or even disgust (Prinz, 2017).

Even when appreciation for the creations of mentally ill started to rise, most psychiatrists did not see the work of their patients as art. Some did and started publishing enthusiastic books on the subject (Beveridge, 2001). *L'Art Chez les Fous* ('Art of the insane') (1907) by French psychiatrist Marcel Réja (pseudonym of Paul Meunier) was one of the first. In 1921, Swiss psychiatrist Walter Morgenthaler published the first monograph of an outsider artist, namely Adolf Wölfli, titled *Ein geisteskranker als Künstler* ('A Mental Patient as Artist'). A year later, German psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn published his *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken. Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie der Gestaltung* ('The plastic activity of the mentally ill. A contribution to the psychology and psychopathology of formal configuration').

These books caught the attention of artists—German expressionists specifically and modern artists more generally—who were breaking away from the strict academies and developing different styles. They were looking for inspiration at alternative places, turning for example to child art and to what came to be called folk art, naïve art, and primitive art. Here, the interest and approach to the work made by psychiatric patients changed from a mere diagnostic one to an artistic one (Rhodes, 2000).

However, not everyone responded positively to this experimental art. Madness and avant-garde art were grouped together and labelled as 'suspicious' by some (Allegaert et al., 2007) and the Nazis adopted this view and saw innovative art as a threat to the German culture they were defending, resulting in 'The Degenerate Art Exhibition' (Spotts, 2002) and in the sterilisation and execution of many artists/patients (Prinz, 2017).

After World War II, the cultural climate in Europe became more open to new ideas, which meant it was time to reconsider traditional norms and values. Modern artists were looking for creative authenticity and some started to collect art of psychiatric patients (Rainaldi, 2015). The most famous collector was the French painter Jean Dubuffet. He did not look at outsider art just for inspiration, he really saw it as superior to the 'normal art' of the academies. This stemmed from the dissolution of the war: from a culture that could lead to horrible events like this good art could not arise, so he believed. In art by the insane he saw art that was not influenced by this culture; it was anti-cultural (Dubuffet, 1949).

Dubuffet called this art 'art brut'. As part of a wine merchant family, with 'brut', he referred to the purest and least sweet wines (Outsider Art Museum, 2019). In 1949, Dubuffet 'chucked the Parisian cultural field' with a manifest in which he clearly stated his preference for art brut and organized the first large exhibition of the collection he was building together with Andre Breton and Jean Paulhan.

However, by breaking a lance for this art, he put it in a box as well and narrowed it down (Prinz, 2017). In wanting to break away from categories, boxes, institutions, and traditions, he created a 'new orthodoxy of inclusion' (Rainaldi, 2005, p. 12). Even though Dubuffet's collection also included works of "prison inmates, spiritualists, the poor, and those who came to art late in life with little prior exposure" (Prinz, 2017, p. 258), he also had to exclude many artworks and artists. Dubuffet later created a new label for art that came close but did not quite reach the standards he set for art brut: *Neuve Invention* (Maizels, 1996).

In 1972, Roger Cardinal wrote a book on art brut, but as his editor was afraid the English-speaking audience would not understand this term, they came up with a translation which would also be the title of the book: 'outsider art'. It suited the spirit of the time, one of rebellion, counterculture, anti-establishment, and also anti-psychiatry. In line with Dubuffet, Cardinal meant to indicate art outside the influence of high culture. However, the new term does mark a conceptual change from a term that mainly points to the condition of the art (raw or rough), to a term that is about its place, and cuts it off from the art world (Prinz, 2017). Despite Cardinal's own warnings, the definition gradually broadened, slowly turning into the umbrella term it is nowadays, consisting of works by "any artist who is untrained or with disabilities or suffering social exclusion, whatever the nature of their work" (Raw Vision, n.d., n.p.).

It was not until the 1990's that outsider art—the name and the art that carried the name—really started to bloom. The beginning of this was marked by the exhibition *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art* at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1992 and the launch of the first *Outsider Art Fair* in New York in the same year (Prinz, 2017). Before we take a closer look at the development of what I will call the 'outsider art world,' I would first like to examine more closely to what 'outsider art characteristics' people are attracted to.

Characteristics

Outsider art varies greatly in form and content. To determine whether an artwork or artist is outsider art—or where to place it on the spectrum with outsider art on one end and mainstream art on the other, as some suggest (e.g. Cardinal, 1994)—usually one or more factors are used. These factors are stylistic characteristics (aesthetics), the artist's life story, the artist's distance from the mainstream art world, and social factors and marginalisation (Rainaldi, 2015).

It should be noted that the social and aesthetic characteristics which are seen as 'typically outsider' are sometimes also apparent in art and artists not labelled outsider art. The same is true the other way around: some art or artist labelled outsider art do not exactly meet the set social or aesthetic criteria (Prinz, 2017). That being said, I would like to take a look at stylistic characteristics that are often ascribed to outsider art.

Outsider aesthetics

An early list of stylistic features of work made by psychiatric patients was offered by criminologist Cesare Lombroso in 1891 (p. 198–205). He notes these works often consist of: minute details; arabesques; atavism (such as absence of perspective); eccentricity; originality; imitation; uniformity; symbolism; obscenity; content pertaining to criminality and insanity; absurdity; and uselessness.

Prinzhorn (1995 [1922]) did not believe in a list of traits of the art of the schizophrenic people he analysed, but what binds them is according to him a 'disquieting feeling of strangeness.' The Austrian psychiatrist Leo Navratil (1965), who believed in the healing power of artistic expression for schizophrenic patients, reports four main characteristics in this art, namely: "deformalisation; deformation; use of symbols; and a tendency to impose facial interpretations on shapes" (Beveridge, 2001, p. 597).

The stylistic features Dubuffet and his companions proposed for art brut were: representation of the inside world and mental states rather than the outside visual world; compulsive repetition; chance; automatism; microscopic or macroscopic views; rejection of perspective, scale, proportion, naturalistic colouration; combining images and text; and bricolage—using found or unconventional material (Glimcher, 1987).

Cardinal (1972) too identifies certain stylistic indicators, namely: dense ornamentation; leaving no space unfilled; obsessively repeated patterns; metamorphic

accumulations; appearance of instinct through wayward symmetry; configurations that occupy an ambiguous ground between the figurative and the decorative; other configurations which hesitate between representation and enigmatic calligraphy or which seek the perfect mix of image and word; and certain favourite subjects (for example self-portraits).

Despite his precise descriptions, Cardinal also says one should be careful with generalisations like this, as art brut is a “teaming archipelago rather than a continent crossed by disputed borders. The only connection between each ‘island of sensibility’ is that they are all distinct from the cultural mainland. The only likeness is within the work of a single artist” (1972, p. 52). Prinz goes one step further and states outsider art is not a genre at all “because there are no rules for its content and form” (2017, p. 261).

However, if he compares the lists of outsider aesthetics, Prinz (2017) comes to the following summary of outsider style: works usually show “amateurism; labour-intensiveness; insensitivity to beauty norms; and compositional busyness” (p. 261)—the latter stemming from ‘horror vacui’, fear of emptiness. Prinz (2017) also distils an outsider temperament or idealised artistic personality from the descriptions—and we can recognise some of these in the lists above too. The outsider temperament, he writes, consists of: honesty in artistic production (not adapting to sell), authenticity (expression of the true self), imagination (presentation of alternative worlds), quirkiness (being different, not fitting in socially), and compulsivity (having an urge to create large amounts of work). For two examples of art works in which we can recognise many of the aforementioned characteristics, see figure 2 and 3.

The ultimate feature

A recurring characteristic in the description of outsider art is authenticity. The modern artists who first started to show interest in art brut were looking for authentic creativity and current day art dealers and collectors praise the art for its authenticity (Rainaldi, 2005). Lately, there is much attention for authenticity both at Western marketplaces and in the field of sociology (see for example Cueto & Hendrikx, 2017). The different definitions and uses of the term seem to have the following in common: it is about in how far “a product (or service) or producer is what it (or its owner) claims (it) to be” (Hahl, Zuckerman & Kim, 2017, p. 831). In other words, the actor’s ‘front’ and ‘backstage’ should be consistent.

The very fact that an artist suffers from mental illness proves his or her authenticity, argues Rainaldi (2005), it trumps every other identifying characteristic that might define an outsider artist. Fine (2004) agreeing with this, calls outsider (or self-taught art) a type of 'identity-art' and argues that the artists biography is what people are mostly looking at when deciding how authentic an artist is:

The works are authentic because of the biographical contours of their creators—life stories of difference that infuse the content of the work. The purity—the unmediated quality—of the vision gives a work by an elderly black sharecropper a greater value than the 'same' work by a wealthy white stockbroker. The work might be identical, but for many the meaning changes (Fine, 2004, p. 6).



Figure 2:
Beetsma Riegstra, J.J.
China en ik op zoek
naar mezelf
('China and I in search
of myself'), 1990.



Figure 3:
Beetsma Riegstra, J. J.
The ex en Fendika en
twee jazzmuzikanten
('The ex and Fendika and
two jazz musicians'),
29.12.2010.

Presenting outsider art

As mentioned before, outsider art really became 'big business' in the 1990's. Outsider art could now be analysed as an 'art world' as Becker (1982) described it. It is a network with its own suppliers, performers, dealers, critics, and consumers. This means an art work is not made by one genius artist, many people are involved in its creation. All the people involved in creating (the meaning of) an art work, form a network. In large complex societies there are many 'art worlds' "each connected to related institutional spheres or subcultures, social classes, or status groups" (Zolberg, 1990, p. 18).

Museums are part of these art worlds and they play an important role as gatekeepers. This is quite literally the case when curators are selecting works to exhibit. When it comes to outsider art, the role of gatekeepers might be of even greater influence, as without their endorsement the works would probably not enter the art world at all, as many outsider artists would not consider themselves artists or look for acceptance by the art world (Van Heddegem, 2016).

Moreover, to return to some museum theory, by placing something in a museum it is immediately viewed differently. This is what Malraux's (1947) has called the 'museum effect',⁴ a concept that is still used within museology. Casey (2003, p. 1) describes it as follows: "the very placement of the object within the museum creates its importance and validity." Moreover, Alpers (1991) describes how the museum effect causes every object that enters a museum to turn into art; if an object is placed in a museum it is isolated from its context and it asks for attentive looking.

Even if the museum is less authoritarian today, curators are still influential in selecting objects and (art) works, creating a discourse around it and connecting it with other actors within the museum field. In which context does the museum place outsider art? How is it presented? What do or do they not tell about it (in introduction and object texts)? Why? This all contributes to the meaning given to outsider art.

⁴ For Malraux this was part of his idea of the *Musée imaginaire* 'The museum without walls,' a conceptual museum: with the emergence of colour reproduction it becomes possible to see all master pieces, compare them, and keep shifting them and playing with them in your head. With the emergence of the internet his idea was reconciliated and his concept could be made more concrete, see for the latter for example Huhtamo (2002) and Krauss (2005).

Thus, museums, like sociologists, may play an active role in keeping up or breaking down romantic myths and automatic assumptions made about art such as “[...] the notion that art is the spontaneous expression of its creator, that it should eschew playing any social role, or fulfilling any social function, and exists for its own sake” (Zolberg, 1990, p. 11). It seems as if romantic myths and automatic assumptions made about art and artists are even more persistent in most people’s ideas on outsider art, including people in the outsider art world itself (Rainaldi, 2015). The self-consciousness, striving for multiperspectivalism and the pursuit of more social inclusion of museums nowadays, as described in the former chapter, may contribute to changing these ideas.

[I am] highly suspicious of and have little respect for . . . the caste of professional artists and people intoxicated by culture—the art that fills our museums and is the object of all these exhibitions, publications and comments, and which one can call en bloc: CULTURAL ART (Dubuffet and Minturn 1951 (translation 2004), p. 262).

It is quite paradoxical then, that Dubuffet’s so much preferred outsider art now ‘fills our museums and is the object of all these exhibitions, publications and comments’ too. And that the inauguration of his collection at the Château de Beaulieu in Lausanne, to which Dubuffet donated his collection, actually gave an impulse to this development and is still encouraging the spread of its fame internationally, as is stated on the website (Collection de l’art brut Lausanne, n.d.)

Some initiatives seek for attention for outsider art, but without labelling it as such. The Museum of Everything (n.d.), for example, is a wandering museum “for the untrained, unintentional, undiscovered and unclassifiable artists of modern times.” They consciously do not label the art they show as outsider, as they want to blur the lines between professional and autodidact artists. They staged their first exhibition in London in 2009 (Delaney, 2017). They travelled to different places in Britain, Europe, Russia ever since, amongst others to Kunsthal in Rotterdam (05.03.2016-22.05.2016) and the Biennale at Venice where they showed *Il Palazzo di Everything* (29.05.2013-28.07.13).

The Venice Biennale of 2013 in general was about outsider art. As Gompertz (2013) writes for the BBC:

The big trend emerging from this year's Venice Biennale is that outsider art has become the latest art world fashion and passion. [...] It is, I suspect, a reaction against the increasing commodification of art, the result of a blooming market fuelled by the new ultra wealthy, profiting from economies new emerging from around the world.

Here, we can recognise elites seeking for authenticity as described by Hahl et al. (2017).

Gompertz (2013) continues:

From the portrait produced by imprisoned soldiers in Jeremy Deller's British Pavilion to random and eccentric offerings from the Museum of Everything, Venice Biennale 2013 is the moment where the outsiders found they have been invited to the most glamorous party being held in the most beautiful city in the Adriatic. And ironically, in the process becoming part of the global art market.

Looijen (2016), the director of the Outsider Art Museum in the Netherlands, which is housed in the Hermitage in Amsterdam since 2016, also recognises the Biennale as the launch of outsider art into the international art scene. Examples of modern art museums with a collection of outsider art are the Lille Musée d'Art Modern (n.d.) and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (n.d.) in Dublin which adopted the Musgrave and Kinley outsider art collection.

Museums and the outsider art debate

As we have already seen, outsider art consists of many paradoxes. These become especially clear when outsider art is presented in museums. I will describe four main dilemmas in the current debate surrounding outsider art that museum professionals—and to some extent academics and art dealers too—are confronted with.

To begin with, the term outsider art directs attention to the background of the artist. Does one give extra attention to the biography of the outsider artist or is it better not to do this? Too much attention to the biography may lead to the reduction of the artist to his outsider position/illness or to a different kind of evaluation of the art: 'it is good despite the fact that...' On the other hand, by not paying any attention to the life of the artist, an

important part of the story is ignored. Additionally, opportunities to contribute to the emancipation or normalisation of mental illnesses may be missed. This dilemma became clear, for example, when the Dutch Collection De Stadshof Foundation in 2002 moved her collection on long term loan from the art museum in Zwolle to Museum Dr. Guislain in Ghent: some people felt uncomfortable, they did not want the link between outsider art and psychiatry to be emphasised.⁵ Also, because different parties in the field of outsider art use different definitions of the term. For instance, whether outsider art is art made by mentally ill, there are outsider artist that are outsiders in a different way so they may be wrongly connected to psychiatry (Ten Berge, 2007).

A similar exhibition or curating dilemma is: should or should outsider art not be mixed with or exhibited next to 'insider art'? Modern artists like Klee appreciated outsider and child art and primitive art for their qualities and used it as inspiration. Sometimes outsider art is still exhibited next to modern art to show it as a source of inspiration which, one could argue, makes it smaller, and does not allow it to stand and speak for itself. Do you emphasise the differences between 'insider' and outsider art by exhibiting it together? Should you then explain what makes outsider art and what is not considered outsider art? But then again, if you do not tell anything about it, are you then ignoring an important part of the story? See De Cleene & Van Goidsenhove (2013) for an example of this dilemma in practice at Middle Gate Geel '13, an exhibition curated by Jan Hoet about myth, psychiatry, and art.

Middle Gate Geel '13 and other exhibitions may pose questions on the relationship between insider and outsider art. However, and this is the third dilemma, can someone or something be fully inside or fully outside? The term outsider is problematic as it imposes a contradiction, it is *not* insider. Nothing is specifically called 'insider art', unless you talk about outsider art. Insider is the norm. In practice, there are insider artists with outsider characteristics and vice versa (Prinz, 2017). Outsider artists should remain outsiders for their art to keep being evaluated and appreciated as outsider art. To use the concept of Bourdieu (1993): they should be 'disinterested.' Insiders (curators, art dealers) decide what is outsider art and what is not and a criterium of outsider art is that the maker is not interested in the

⁵ Reith and Smolders explicitly contest an emancipatory task or mission is an objective of Collection De Stadshof Foundation.

art world, in the appreciation of his/her art and in the selling of his/her work. He/she is kept outside (Prinz, 2017). There are examples of outsider artists who were dropped out from the 'outsider art canon' because they contracted with galleries after they became visible (Outsider Art Museum, 2019).

This leads us to the ultimate dilemma: should outsider art remain a separate category all together? The criteria for deciding what is outsider art and what is not are unclear. Prinz (2017) convincingly argues how outsider artists are judged on their 'outsider temperament' and 'outsider style'. Nevertheless, many artists not categorized as outsiders do have the same qualities and many artists who are labelled as outsider artist do not always match these criteria. Outsider and insider positions cannot always be defined so clearly. One can be an outsider in a certain situation or at a certain moment and in insider at another.

The different possible definitions, functions, and directions of outsider art make it a rewarding subject to focus on within my explorations of the revision process of the permanent exhibition at Museum Dr. Guislain. In this process, the meaning of outsider art is constructed in conscious and more unconscious ways. How is outsider art shown and mentioned within the new exhibition and for which reasons? This focus becomes even more relevant given the context (as laid out in the first chapter) of a shifting museum landscape which is in search of a new definition and (more social) role of the museum. In revising the collection presentation, the exhibition makers are also redefining what they stand for as a museum, what role and position they would like to take in. How does the search of Guislain align or contrast with bigger changes within the museum world and within society? And (how) does the meaning of outsider art, as constructed by the museum, reflect these changes? In the next chapter, I will first explain which methods and data I used to find answers to these questions.

Methods and data

Methods

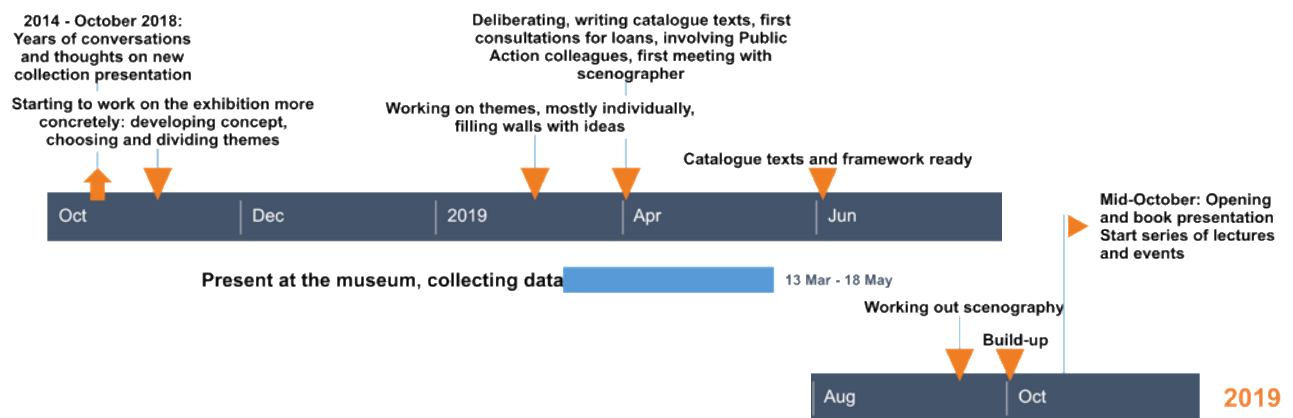
Being in the field

An important condition of ethnographic research is studying interactions in a natural setting, 'in the field.' Consequently, it was important for me to spend time at the museum (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). By being present at Museum Dr. Guislain I could observe and evaluate what people were doing, and not only what they say they do (Miller, 1997). I observed when I was working at Museum Dr. Guislain, listening to and joining in conversations (also during breaks) and I took fieldnotes. The fieldnotes were sometimes mental or jotted down when I was still there. I then turned them into full field notes at the end of the day in the train or in my room.⁶

My first full day at Museum Dr. Guislain was on the 13th of March 2019 and from then on, I usually spent two days a week at the museum during a time span of two months. This formed the period for data collection. The data collection took place at Museum Dr. Guislain, in Ghent, Belgium. At the 1st of April, I joined a meeting in Antwerp organized by FARO, the Flemish interface centre for cultural heritage *Kick-off conflict en meerstemmigheid in musea* ('Kick-off conflict and polyphony in museums'). Additionally, I went to different places to provide me with more context on the outsider art world. For example, I attended a symposium on art brut at the Outsider Art Museum in Amsterdam (30.01.2019), and I talked with an outsider art expert at the Dolhuys, Museum of the Mind in Haarlem (03.04.2019).

I could only follow a small part of the total revision process, namely the phase in which the exhibition makers gave substance to the concept. The direction of the revision had already been chosen, themes were picked and divided between the exhibition makers. For an overview of the part I did follow, see the time table on the next page. I followed a period in which abstract ideas were turned into more concrete ideas, of choosing objects and words, but—and this was made clear to me very often—in which everything could still change, and nothing was definite yet.

⁶ As they are quite lengthy, they are added to the separate appendices together with my interview transcripts and only available on request.



Notes on reflexivity

As the idea that I as a researcher am part of the social world I am studying is at the heart of ethnographic methods, it was important to be reflexive, during (but also after) the data collection. To not eliminate the effect of the researcher, but to acknowledge the researcher always has an influence. Subsequently I will try to point out when and how I may have been of influence.

During this research I had an ‘overt role’ in a ‘closed setting’; it probably had an effect on the museum staff that they knew I was doing research. They may not have been too worried, because I am a student, so they may have seen me as some sort of intern and not as someone checking or judging them which is a commonly reported fear of research subjects (see for example Sharpe, 2000). Still, I have tried to be aware of my own influence on the interactions taking place and the interpretations I made.

My position at Museum Dr. Guislain changed from time to time. In some respects, and at some moments I was not far from being an insider. For example, I have done a minor in museum studies, thus I was familiar with important vocabulary and key issues and in that respect, I was an insider. On the other hand, as a Dutch person in an all Flemish team I was arguably more of an outsider, missing some of the cultural particularities and subtleties and indeed vocabulary and expressions. Certainly, at the beginning I did not know the full particulars of the organisation; where everything is located, how things are done: I was an outsider. However, spending more time at the museum I started to find my way around and I gradually moved somewhat closer to the inside (Gellner & Hirsch, 2001).

Obtaining access and adjusting expectations

I first got introduced to Patrick Allegaert, artistic advisor of Museum Dr. Guislain by the artistic director of New Heroes. He mentioned my brother and I were going to do a project about the search for our psychotic father in Istanbul and that I wanted to write my thesis on a topic related to this.

During our first meeting at the museum (October 24th, 2018) I was still at the beginning of diving into the subject of outsider art and fascinated by the paradoxicality of the term. I recall Allegaert advising me to not get stuck on the definition of outsider art: “We’re passed that.” The next meeting, exhibition maker and artistic director Bart Marius joined. During this meeting we also discussed outsider art and how the link with psychiatry is loaded, how outsider art was auctioned at Sotheby’s for 50.000 US dollars; how it is a world on its own and it sometimes has to do with coincidences if you do or do not end up in this circuit. At that meeting the revision of the permanent exhibition was mentioned for the first time, this sparked my interest and Marius suggested this may be an interesting thesis topic.

The idea to take the revision of the permanent exhibition as a topic for my research developed. During the next conversation, which was with one of the other exhibition makers, I noticed it was not evident to her that someone would come and follow their process. Van Bouchaute explained that they deliberately had chosen not to have an intern on this exhibition (as they would for the temporary exhibitions). As everyone was very busy, they would not have time to guide someone new. It was a delicate and vulnerable process as well and they really wanted to do this properly. She gave me an idea on what the schedule would look like (see time line) and an update on the revision process and the current ideas.

It was decided that I could not attend brainstorm sessions, because they had little time for the creative process, so if they had some time together it would not be desirable to have an outsider there. Fortunately, Allegaert reassured me they would be happy to talk with me and we scheduled a meeting. I was appointed a desk for the day. I breathed out in relief: now I could finally start, I was in (see figure 4, 5 and 6).

At first, I was quite concerned about not being able to attend meetings. However, along the way some data sources emerged I did not think of before. Most importantly these were the walls used by the exhibition makers to visualize their ideas: they filled walls with notes, draft introduction texts, post its, and images of the chosen objects per theme (see figure 7, 8 and 9). Moreover, artistic director Marius pointed to the fact that I probably

gained a better insight in the different perspectives within the team by speaking to everyone separately, as they could speak more freely this way.

Before diving into the interviews and bumping into the walls, I first had to get a general idea of the museum. We will first have a look at which data sources helped me with that. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) underline it is part of the ethnographic method to use a range of data sources. To gather “whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry” (p. 11) and so I did. I will now describe which sources I used and how they helped me answering my research question.

Figure 4:
10.04.2019
Desk two behind
the reception at
Museum Dr. Guislain.



Figure 5:
10.04.2019
Desks behind the
reception at
Museum Dr. Guislain.

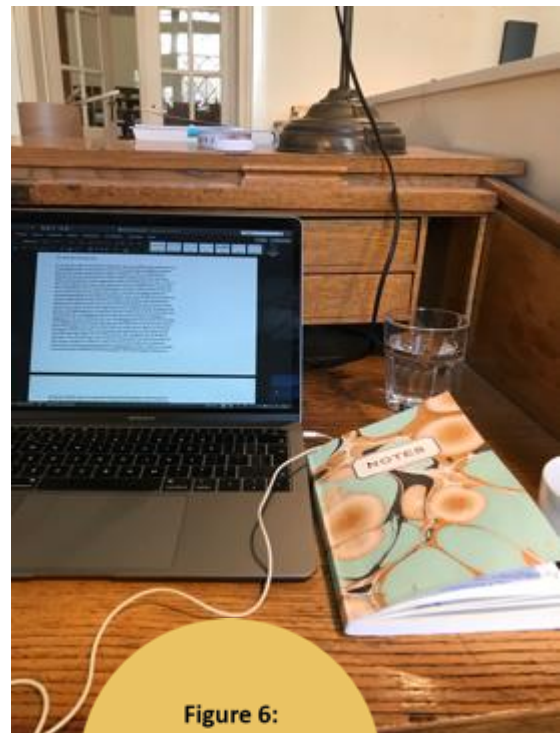


Figure 6:
10.04.2019
My desk at
Museum Dr. Guislain.

Data

Observations and secondary data

To obtain a good understanding of what it is that Museum Dr. Guislain wants to change, it is necessary to have an idea of the current permanent exhibition and its relation to the rest of the museum. I obtained this by simply visiting the current exhibition, taking notes, and talking about it with the museum staff. In some of the first interviews I talked more about the history and context of the museum. One of the interviews took place at the current exhibition (see figure 22 and 23). In this interview I asked Allegaert, who has been working at the museum since it opened, to show me his favourite objects and to point out to me what (objects) would probably stay and what definitely needed to change.

To understand the relation between the different exhibitions I also visited the other main exhibitions. As I kept hearing that the new collection presentation should be more like the large thematic exhibitions, I followed a guided tour in the current thematic exhibition *Prikkels* ('Sensations'). Of course, for my topic it was also important to have an idea of the main outsider art exhibition *De Kabinetten* 'The Cabinets' (see figure 17 and 18). This exhibition was made together with the people from De Stadshof Collection Foundation. Reith and Smolders, both working for the foundation, showed me around in 'The Cabinets' and gave me their view on outsider art or 'solitary creations', as they prefer to call it.

The website provided me with an easily accessible overview and with an idea on how the museum would like to present itself. How are divisions and connections made here? What is put on top? What subsections are made? And which terms are used?

On one of my first days, I worked on a computer of the museum and could access the shared hard drive. This also provided me with some general ideas on working method and process. In the drive, I saw lots of folders from *Adoptie* ('adoption') to *Zwijgen* ('keeping silent') and some subfolders. I especially consulted the folder *Permanente collectie 2019* ('Permanent collection 2019') and its several sub-folders.

Primary data: interviews and revision process materials

Among the most important data for my research are the semi-structured interviews. My research question asked for 'targeted sampling'. More specifically, a combination of a 'critical case sample' and a 'key informant example', as my sample is based on the specific

experience and expertise of the subjects (Marshall, 1996). I planned interviews with as many of the museum staff and other people involved in the revision process of the permanent exhibition as possible. The organisation consists of thirteen people (Museum Dr. Guislain, n.d.). As they work with a small team, everyone has multiple functions within the museum. There is a mix in backgrounds and expertise (e.g. art history, literature studies, psychology), and different perspectives are represented (see Appendix B). My key informants have been artistic advisor Patrick Allegaert and Bart Marius, who is head of exhibitions and research and recently turned artistic director. They helped me with planning the interviews and with giving me (ongoing) access.

My interview guide basically consisted of different topics and many relatively open-ended, non-directive questions to fall back on (see Appendix C). Some questions were not necessary to ask to multiple interviewees, for others, especially the ones closer to my main topic and question, it was of course insightful to ask them repeatedly to be able to collect different perspectives. I often made a tailored version of the interview guide before a new interview.

Mid-March the exhibition makers started printing A4's with their initial ideas: key words, sub-themes, an introduction text, but mostly images of objects. They used the walls of an empty hall—'the old café'—to make configurations of the objects, to visualize their ideas (see figure 9). This way they could also run through their ideas together more easily and discuss structures and changes with each other. Sometimes, for example, they discovered an object fit better in a different chapter and moved it from one wall to the other.

They used coloured post-it notes to indicate certain types of to dos. Blue notes indicate loans, the addition of a pink note means that they will have to look for an image of this object for the catalogue, an orange note indicates that an object or work is interesting, but that an extra adaptation is needed (e.g. making an edit of a documentary or thinking of showing a newspaper article in a more engaging way). Finally, on the green notes ideas are written down for the colleagues of Public Actions and Education (see figure 7).

The walls proved to be a very nice way for the exhibition makers to talk me through their theme or 'chapter'. This was a natural way for them too, as they would share their ideas in a similar fashion with their colleagues (so they told me). Moreover, this way much of the topics and concrete examples occurred naturally without me being overly directive.

However, I often did mention at the beginning of the interview that I was especially interested in the position of art in the exhibition, which may have caused them to give more examples of artworks or make more comments on art.

In terms of ethics, I asked the interviewees for permission for recording the interviews and for mentioning their names. I sent a draft version to those who were interviewed so they could factcheck and comment on any severe misinterpretations or mis-contextualisation. This way they could also see how I used the pictures of the walls.

The walls with ideas, notes, and pictures of objects felt like having a glimpse into the mind of the curators and into their process. Together with the interviews, they were very insightful. They provided me with an overview, also of the working method, and gave me the opportunity to check small details. After the interviews I often returned to one of the walls, to re-examine the given examples; to check names, titles of works, and where things were placed or sometimes moved.

As mentioned in the introduction, I use many images, because I believe they enliven and clarify my story. All pictures are made by me, whenever the image consists of an artwork I try to provide as much details as possible on the artist, title of the work, and date unless they are already included in the image. See appendix A for an overview of all figures.



Figure 8:
27.03.2019
Wall with ideas for the
new collection presentation
for the theme power
and powerlessness.



Figure 7:
27.03.2019
Detail of wall with
ideas for power and
powerlessness.



Figure 9:
27.03.2019
Overview of the old cafe
with walls filled with ideas
for the new collection
presentation.

Analyses

The process of analysing started as soon as I started collecting my data. At first, this was merely to see if I was still on the right track. I made small adjustments to my focus and my research question. Even though I sometimes thought of changing it completely or throwing it away, I did not. In all phases, of the process I had to remind myself to stay close to my initial question, and to link everything, all striking features, back to this. It all started to make more sense to me, or feel more relevant, when I felt I could see the treatment of outsider art as some sort of case study within the revision process; the revision process in turn, could be placed within bigger changes in the museum, which could be placed in changes in the museum world, which could be connected to changes within society.

Once I collected all my data the challenge was to translate my ethnographic experience, this ever-growing web of interpretations and connections in my head, into a form which could 'travel' (Hastrup, 1995) and to 'scoop up' "more general patterns, connections, and dilemmas" (MacDonalds, 2001, p. 94). This way I could form a 'thick description' constituting not only of what the people in the museum did and said, but also of its context and interpretation (Geertz, 1973).

One of the steps I took before arriving at the final version of this thesis, was coding my data (most importantly the interview transcripts) in different phases. I will describe the different stages here in logical order; in reality I jumped back and forth between those steps. I started by making more open or initial codes. This meant breaking up my data into small bits, for example words, lines, or incidents and attaching labels to these bits. Preferably these labels categorised, summarised, and accounted for the bit of text selected. I then used focused coding to narrow down my codes, only keeping the ones that occur most often or that appear most significant analytically (see appendix D for the code book). Finally, I analysed the focused codes, trying to combine and integrate them within a (theoretical) story (Charmaz, 2006).

In the analysis of the interviews, I tried to take into account that an interview talk is always a co-constructed reality (Rapley, 2001). Thus, when presenting interview extracts, I try, as Rapley (2001) advises, to provide with context. If I feel it is necessary, I also provide with the question or comment that advanced the extract.

Many parallels could be drawn between the process of writing this thesis and the process it is dealing with: creating an exhibition. Both are semi-structured, deal with

limitations and restraints, and try to be self-critical and reflexive. For both of these processes counts: they could be endless, you can always keep looking, keep adding perspectives, and keep gaining data. However, at some point you have to make choices, you have to move to the next step, you have to write, and you have to make your deadline.

Museum Dr. Guislain in context

I am standing in front of the gates of Museum Dr. Guislain. An avenue with trees on both sides leads to a monastery-like building that was built in the 19th century as an asylum. Red and yellow bricks. A building that breathes some sort of serenity, while you are holding your breath thinking of the staggering number of stories it stores.

While entering, I notice the many signs indicating where to go for the 'Therapeutic community,' 'The reception of the Psychiatric centre', and so on. But I already know where to go. I take a right and walk through the cloister. I see more signs next to the first door, a church in the middle of the 'monastery garden.' The two large doors and the walls surrounding covered with stickers remind me of one of my fathers' walls covered with fruit stickers. More signs indicate the entrance of the museum (see figure 10-14).

There is a welcome desk where they sell the tickets. In front of it there is a small 'museum shop' with exhibition catalogues and books on the subjects of psychiatry, psychiatry and art, and outsider art. Behind the cashier is a large space filled with the desks of the people working 'backstage' of the museum: the exhibition makers, financial support, the director. The desks are filled with papers, computers, books, notes, and letters. For two months, I will be sitting behind one of those desks, walking around in the museum and having (interviews)conversations with the people working on the revision of the collection presentation (see figure 4-6).

In this chapter, I will show what can be found behind those red and yellow bricks. First, we will decide where the museum could be placed within the museum landscape of Ghent and Flanders and within the outsider art world. Then, I will give a short history of the museum showing that (outsider) art played a role in the museum from early on and how this developed. Finally, I will describe the current permanent exhibition, again paying special attention to outsider art. Knowing what is at stake, we are then ready to dive into the analyses of the revision process itself.



Figure 10:
19.03.2019
Wall with directions to
Museum Dr. Guislain.



Figure 12:
19.03.2019
Signs indicating where
to go for Museum
Dr. Guislain.



Figure 11:
19.03.2019
Signs indicating where
to go for the entrance and
different exhibitions at
Museum Dr. Guislain.

Figure 13:
13.03.2019
Admission stickers at
gate at Museum
Dr. Guislain.

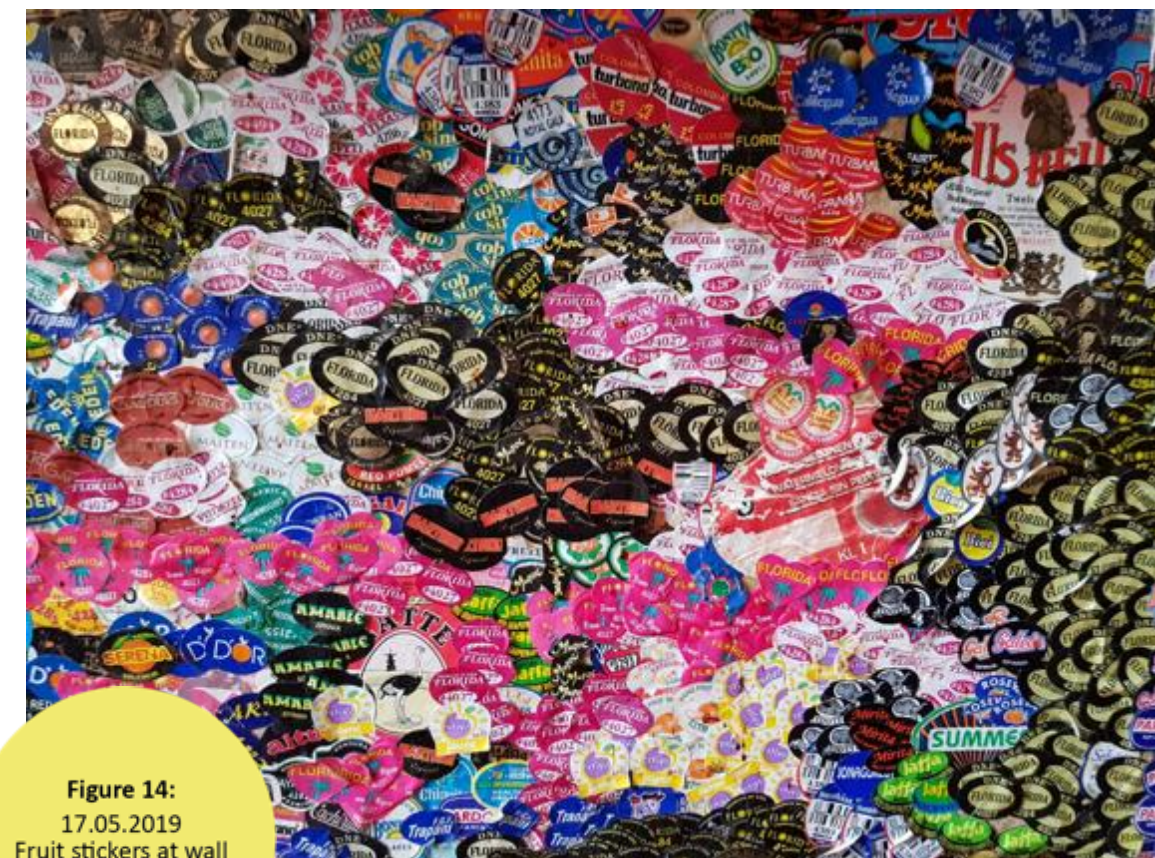


Figure 14:
17.05.2019
Fruit stickers at wall
at my father's house.

(Outsider) position of Museum Dr. Guislain

In some respects, Museum Dr. Guislain has to deal with the same issues as other museums: changing demands from the government, shortage in budgets, the question how to deal with the permanent collection presentation, and so on. However, in many aspects Museum Dr. Guislain is an outsider in the museum landscape: in terms of location, finance, and in terms of type of museum. The museum may even be a bit of an outsider within the outsider world. Per aspect, I will shortly describe how Guislain is different and what this could imply.

Museum Dr. Guislain is literally an outsider in Ghent in terms of location. In contrast to all other museums that are located in the city center, Museum Dr. Guislain is situated a bit outside of the city. This, of course, has to do with its history: patients needed to be taken away from the overstimulation of the hectic city, and were offered a place of peace and calm, thus the asylum was built in the countryside (now suburbs). As Van Der Voorde, working on Public Actions and Education, puts it:

We lower the threshold, because we try to reach many social groups, but we are really hard location wise. Like tourists won't accidentally walk in to Guislain right. You won't accidentally stay on tram 1 to afterwards think "Oh yeah a museum, I'll go inside."

The museum is an outsider within the museum landscape of Ghent and Flanders in terms of finance too: it is one of the very few private museums. The museum has relatively small budgets, which has an impact on their possibilities and the way they work. Artistic director, Marius explains that when the Brothers of Charity resigned as a sponsor, they had to look for private sponsoring, a tough job, but they succeeded. All the other museums in Ghent—e.g. SMAK, MSK (the Museum of Fine Arts), the Design Museum, Huis van Alijn—are city museums. Guislain is the only museum which is completely private, which in turn has consequences for the funds available for creating exhibitions as the salaries for the team are part of the entire budget of the museum, whereas most employees in city museums are paid by the city of Ghent. This is one of the reasons they work with a small team and combined functions. It also has consequences in terms of communication, says Van De Voorde: Guislain is not part of a city package deal for tourists, for example, and is less likely to appear in the city magazine.

Most importantly, Museum Dr. Guislain is an outsider museum in the sense that it is hard to categorise, hard to put in a box. Is it a medical, cultural history, science, or art museum? During an introduction talk about the museum for a group of interdisciplinary art students, I say I think the museum is 'somewhere in-between.' Marius answers: "I think that's the place where we want to be. We are a museum for some people on outsider art and actually we like the idea of being an outsider museum." The museum is defined by all they do: from community, educational, and public work, to addressing taboo topics and difficult themes, elaborates Marius. It is for good reason that within the new exhibition on psychiatry the relativity of classifications will be shown. Maybe at some point the government would not know anymore whether to send Guislain to the social, the economic, or the art and culture department, and Marius says he loves that idea. Being outside can be difficult, he continues, but it can also present a big opportunity. Marius: "You lack the money, but you have the freedom and that is the way we are always wandering around." The same may be true for many outsider artists.

Moreover, maybe Museum Dr. Guislain is taking in an outsider position within the outsider art world too. By organising two symposia on outsider art in 2003 and 2005 Guislain brought international professionals in the field of outsider art together to share ideas, and by doing so positioned itself in the 'outsider art world'. The second symposium explicitly dealt with the cultural meaning of outsider art (Allegaert et. al., 2007). When I was talking to Allegaert, I noted that there is something like an international outsider art world and Museum Dr. Guislain is a player within this field. He answered: "Yes! And we like to keep it that way, right."

Marius, however, in a different conversation, nuances how much of a player in the outsider art world Museum Dr. Guislain is. They want to and should take part, they are the place to do so; however, he says, they do not possess the master pieces of outsider art that sell for enormous amounts of money at Sotheby's or in specialized galleries, so they do not stand out in that respect. *LAM* and the *ABCD collection* in Paris of Bruno Decharme, do have those big names and curators "go shopping there for the Biennale in Venice," as Marius puts it. Moreover, there are already several specialised museums in the Benelux, for example the *Outsider Art Museum* in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and *Art en Marge* and *Mad Musée* in Belgium. Marius: "I think our place in this may be different."

We will take a look at the history of the museum now, and what role (outsider) art has played in it. Next, we will turn to the current permanent exhibition in which I will highlight the (minimal) appearance of outsider art.

Short history of (outsider) art at Museum Dr. Guislain

The early history of Museum Dr. Guislain is interwoven with the history of the congregations of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity and the Catholic order. In the early 19th century, Peter Joseph Triest (1760-1836), founder of the congregations, together with Dr. Joseph Guislain, was a pioneer in psychiatry. They wanted to improve the inhumane situations in the Hospice n°8 and Gerard the Devil's Castle where the insane were imprisoned and chained and introduced principles of limited violence and occupational therapy. These therapeutic principles were embedded in the architecture of the first asylum in Belgium by the Ghent city architect Adolphe Pauli. In 1986 Br. Dr. René Stockman started the museum in the attic of this building.

Now, the position of the congregation and the Catholic church, both for the museum specifically, as in the Belgian society in general, has become less prominent and exclusive. Until recently, the Brothers of Charity remained one of the main backers of Museum Dr. Guislain. Of course, it remains relevant to show this part of Belgian history within the museum, states Allegaert, but how it is told and how much space it occupies is something to reconsider.

The embedding of art in the exhibitions is something that has grown through time. First, the museum focused on putting together the historical collection and showing this. Soon, artworks and reproductions made an entrance. When the museum and its collection expanded, topicality and current issues were becoming increasingly important and fine art was granted a place, especially in temporary exhibitions. During the 90's (the time the 'outsider art world' really started to take shape, as we have seen in chapter two) the course in the direction of outsider art was followed. *Gestoorde Vorsten* ('Mentally Ill Kings' 26.11.99 - 31.05.00) was the first exhibition in which everything collided: collaborations with local and international partners, a multidisciplinary approach, and the use of art from contemporary and outsider artists (Allegaert, et al., 2007). From 2000 onwards, the museum included more contemporary art. An important exhibition in this sense was *Pijn* ('Pain') in 2005, in which

ties with the contemporary art world were extended and credibility, reliability, and expertise were proven, which is important for rearranging loans.

Nowadays, Museum Dr. Guislain has both a collection of objects stemming from the history of psychiatry, a photography collection with both historical pictures, and photographs from contemporary photographers (sometimes commissioned by the museum), and it is the presenting place of a collection of outsider art. The museum builds on its reputation with daring temporary exhibitions about themes such as melancholia and depression (18.10.14 - 31.05.15), shame (31.10.15 - 29.05.16), and anxiety (11.11.17 - 27.05.18) in which it is using all three parts of the collection as well as loans. Currently on show is an exhibition on (over)stimulation: *Prikkels* ('Sensations,' 20.10.18 - 26.05.19).

The museum started to present an (outsider) art collection separate from the thematic expositions from 2002 onwards, in collaboration with the De Stadshof Collection Foundation. When Museum De Stadshof in Zwolle, The Netherlands, had to close its doors in 2001, their collection moved to Guislain in long term loan. Collection De Stadshof forms an accurate reflection of outsider art and is broad in scope: it contains works from established outsider artists such as Willem van Genk and newer discoveries, artist with finding places ranging from psychiatric institutes, elderly homes, and homeless shelters, to the local cafes of small villages where collectors asked for the 'village eccentric' (Ten Berge, 2007). Several temporary exhibitions on and with outsider art have taken place at Guislain between 2000 and 2008 as well; for an impression see the posters included in figure 15.

The semi-permanent presentation of outsider art is housed in the wing of the building opposing the one in which the permanent collection is housed. No connection between the two exhibitions has been made (yet). Above the entrance is a sign saying 'Art collection' with an image of a zeppelin, a copy of a picture of Willem van Genk, one of the most famous Dutch outsider artists (see figure 16). During my time at the museum there was a temporary art exhibition downstairs titled *Narrenpraat* ('Fools talk,' 25.01.19 - 05.05.19) with works donated by Halflants. Upstairs one can find the art collection on show in a semi-permanent presentation called *De Kabinetten* ('The Cabinets'), wherein elements and artworks are changed on a regular basis (for an impression of this exhibition see figure 17 and 18). Both of the introduction texts did not mention the term 'outsider art,' which is a conscious choice.

On the website the term outsider art is mentioned explicitly. During my research period I noticed changes were made regularly in the website texts, but the term remains in use here. If you click on 'Collection' a division is made between: 'The History of Psychiatry' and 'The Art Collection' (and on the Dutch version of the website *Bibliotheek* ('library')). On their website it becomes clear that a lot is going on at the museum: new exhibitions pop up; things such as activities and news are announced, and there was an open vacancy for a production and logistics employee at some point. Among the news is also the item: *Collectie onder constructie* ('Collection under construction'), with a call for support in the form of gifts for the new collection presentation (Museum Dr. Guislain, n.d.).

Figure 15:
Poster images of
exhibitions on and with
outsider art at Museum
Dr. Guislain.

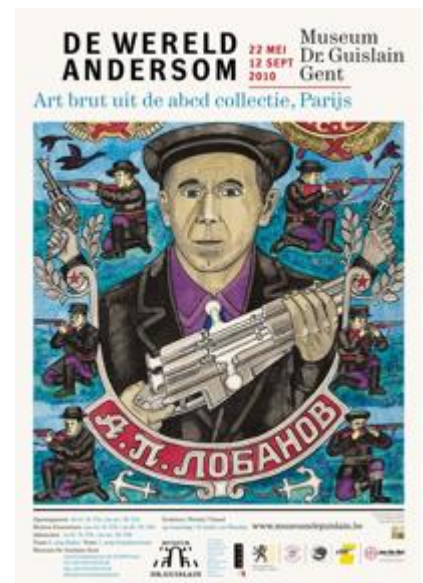
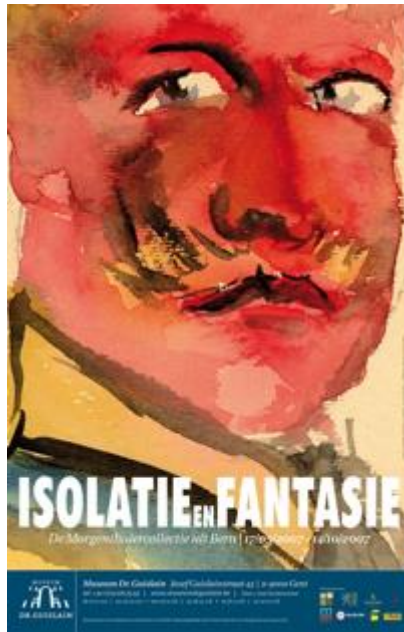
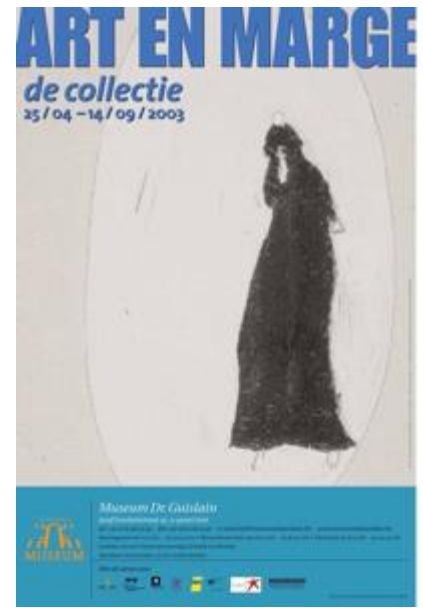
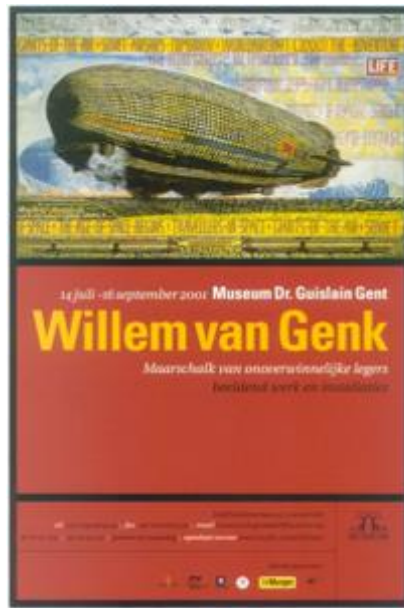


Figure 16:

13.05.2019

Inner garden and entrance
with art collection sign.



Figure 17:

13.05.2019

Another view of The
Cabinets exhibition.



Figure 18:

13.05.2019

Overview of The
Cabinets exhibition.



Current permanent exhibition

The current permanent exhibition on the history of psychiatry has been on show since 2007 (Museum Dr. Guislain, n.d.). It is located in the attic of the old asylum building in which the museum is housed and shows a rather chronological overview of the history of psychiatry. In the entrance hall right on top of the stairs, there are pictures by Michel Hendryckx. Right in front is a large scale model of the old station building of 's Hertogenbosch, by Jules Vismale (figure 19). He made this in the healthcare institution Reinier van Arkel, so reads the text. One other work that stands out, that could be easily classified as outsider art, is *Zelfportret als Prins Carnaval* ('Self-portrait as Prince Carnival') by Joris Coudeville (figure 20). It is the poster image of the exhibition *Gestoorde Vorsten* ('Mentally Ill Kings') I mentioned before. Both texts do not mention the term outsider art. The text for Coudeville is about mentally ill kings in general and does not provide with more information on the work or on Coudeville.

The structure of the exhibition is more or less chronological in covering different perceptions and treatments of the insane through history such as incisions, imprisoning and chaining, pilgrimage, phenology, bath therapy; occupational, sensory, and physical therapy, psychiatry, radiology, medicine, anti-psychiatry, and diagnosing. The history of Triest and Guislain and the Guislain hospital itself is told and shown quite extensively too.

It is quite dark in the exhibition spaces, spot lights are used to highlight objects. Colours used are mostly pastels: grey, white, beige, yellow and a somewhat brighter blue. Walls are placed to create semi-separated spaces. Some of the stickers with text are peeling off a bit. A few of the small tv screens are not working.

There is quite a lot of text: an introduction text in three languages, 'hall texts' on old-school looking flip over signs with different languages on the other side, and object texts. Some bigger quotes are placed low or high on the walls. The first big quote points to the responsibility of the museum:

Museums embody a moral. Our time realises that those responsible for museums have to think deeply about such things and the fact that the public are constantly present. The public not only expects to see art, they

also expect something more and we have to try to find out precisely what that is. – Ben Okri.⁷

For an overall impression of the exhibition see figure 22 and 23.

The topic of art by the mentally ill is brought up in the chapter of ‘Degeneration.’ The book by Hans Prinzhorn, *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken*, is shown surrounded by German books and magazines on psychiatry in a vitrine underneath 12 portraits of Victims of the T4-programme. The hall text describes how in the second half of the 19th century doctors, sociologists, politicians, and economists put entire societies in the doctor’s seat, diagnosing them as healthy or sick. Modern art then was considered by some as a sign of ‘mental aberration.’ These theories on the interconnectedness of sickness and experimental art developed and were adopted by the Nazi’s who presented those works and their ideas on them in ‘The Degenerate Art Exhibition.’ The hall text then continues to present the view of others, of artists, psychiatrists, and politicians who defended and celebrated the new developments in art and who also asked more attention for the work of psychiatric patients. Here, Morgenthaler’s monograph of Adolf Wölfli and Prinzhorn’s book are brought up. In doing so, a bit of the beginning of outsider art is told, but without naming it as such. The text concludes: “It made people realize that even the least accessible madman may hide a sensitive human being, sometimes an exceptionally gifted artist.”

In the rest of the exhibition, objects are presented that were used at the asylum when it was still in use and medical instruments, (historical) objects, clothes, documents, books, maps, and pictures that were obtained later. Additionally, there are reproductions (prints and plaster images), some videos, masks, and religious objects. There is a reproduction of an old pharmacy and a composition of small old asylum objects that looks like an artwork. The exhibition continues one floor down, the walls of the staircase are covered with posters of past temporary exhibitions. Downstairs you end up in what were once the dormitories. This are spaces with higher ceilings, and more light. Here, the more recent history of psychiatry is presented with radiological instruments, a cupboard full of medicine boxes, a panel on anti-psychiatry, and finally a presentation with animation video’s on diagnosing and a scanner which you can enter to have a simulation on being diagnosed.

⁷ The quotes on the wall are only in Dutch. The catalogues do provide with the English and French version.

Figure 19:
13.03.2019
Jules Vismalen.
Scale model Station 's
Hertogenbosch
1896-1944.



Figure 20:
18.05.2019
Joris Coudeville.
Self portrait as
Prince Carnaval.

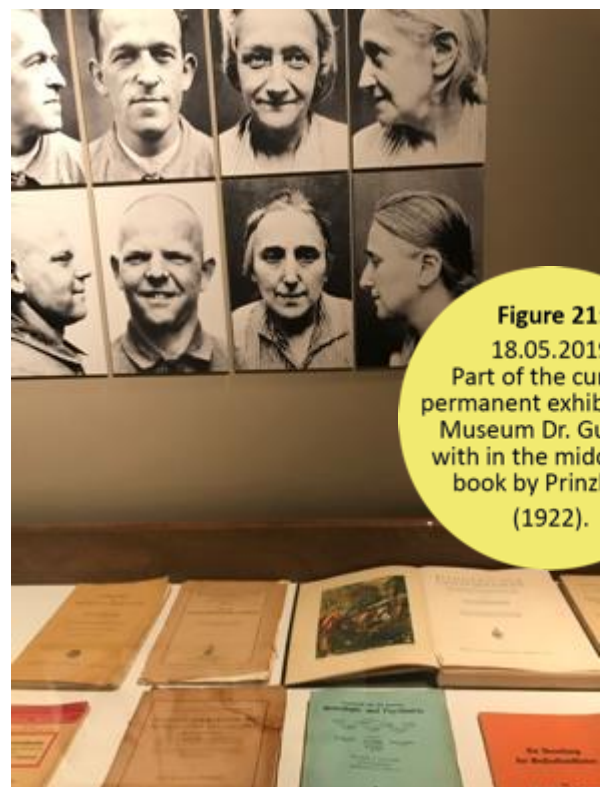


Figure 21:
18.05.2019
Part of the current
permanent exhibition at
Museum Dr. Guislain
with in the middle the
book by Prinzhorn
(1922).



Figure 22:
13.03.2019
Overview of the current
permanent exhibition at
Museum Dr. Guislain.



Figure 23:
13.03.2019
Another impression of the
current permanent
exhibition at Museum
Dr. Guislain.

Results

We have learned more about the changing definition and role of the museum in the first chapter and about the cultural history of outsider art and the current outsider debates in the second chapter. I have talked about when and how I arrived at the museum, what data I found, how I dealt with it, and provided background information on the history and position of (outsider art at) Museum Dr. Guislain. Now is the time to take all of this with us and look at the actual process of revising the permanent exhibition.

First, we will look at why the collection presentation should be revised and will find both practical and idealistic motivations for this move. Then, I will describe the concept of the new exhibition and highlight the role of outsider art in it, as one of the changes is to include more (outsider) art in the new exhibition. Next, I will describe the considerations made in choosing which (outsider art) objects and story elements should be part of the new presentation. Along the way, an answer to my main question—what meaning of outsider art is constructed within the revision process—will start to take shape.

Motivations for revision

Artistic advisor Allegaert explains how the permanent collection has always had ‘something double’. It has to be shown, also because it is connected to the history of the museum, because it is relevant. It attracts many groups from educational programmes that have a connection with health care, it is often part of their yearly programme. On the other hand, Guislain has an intense track of permanent exhibitions which they have always focussed on.

One of the most important reasons for the revision, a recurring theme in my interviews, is the fact that the permanent exhibition is lagging behind in comparison to the temporary exhibitions, a comment shared by the government advice board. It is lagging behind in quality, form, content, and accessibility. Over the years in their temporary exhibition, Museum Dr. Guislain developed a style that is thematic, associative, and poetic. And the current permanent exhibition does not match this style. Due to a lack of time and money, the temporary exhibitions were prioritised.

The current collection presentation does not properly reflect the view of the museum on the history of psychiatry and it does not reflect what they aim to be as a museum. The exhibition has a chronological structure, which suggests that the history of psychiatry is

linear, which could suggest that things are getting better; an image the museum does not believe in. One of the exhibition makers Van Bouchaute elucidates this:

...it no longer is approached as something linear, also to prevent you from suggesting that it goes from a not so good approach to an increasingly better approach. That is not true, it swings back and forward in the history of psychiatry. Some ideas come back, suddenly receiving support again, to suddenly disappear again; it's oscillating like that. And exactly to be able to demonstrate that, we choose for a thematic approach in which this becomes clear, because then you can also link themes and periods.

Moreover, chronology does not permit the type of exhibition making the curators hold dearly, namely creating a narrating structure by bringing objects together in an associative way. Artistic director Marius elaborates on this:

In a chronological line, you can't do that, because you depart from the Neanderthal, so to speak, and you end in the near future, so you have to follow a certain trajectory, so to be very associative in this way, is much harder.

What exactly is the collection that is the basis for this exhibition? Marius explained that when they looked at their collection critically—partly because they had to account for its value towards the government—they realized that the narrative of Museum Dr. Guislain, *is* their collection. Many of the objects in itself may be quite worthless, but everything together—the building, the medical instruments, the history, the documents, and pictures, the stories, etcetera—form a tree structure, and that *is* their narrative and their collection. Per definition this narrative shows psychiatry is not improving over time, it is an ongoing search for solutions for psychiatric problems. It shows the not-knowing, and the attempts that are made tell much about the state of society at a certain time. Marius explains: “...they just don't know how to deal and how to cope with psychiatric problems, or how to fix it. It's the society around the problem that is changing.”

The collection presentation has to be revised, because this narrative is the core of the museum. And because it is important to tell the story of psychiatry in a way that is appealing today. This means the exhibition needs a fresh look and people need to be able to see and

empathise with the stories and objects that are presented, are relevant to them. The new presentation should reflect what the museum stands for: to be a social museum that uses its outsider position to address and depict themes related to mental health in a poetic and associative way and make them accessible for various groups. Social awareness and societal involvement are part of the DNA of the museum and it could show (off) more of this. It is for these reasons that they will not open a temporary exhibition this October; the revision of the collection presentation deserves all their attention, both internally in anticipation to the opening and from the outside world (the press and audience) when it opens.

Concept

Consequently, the exhibition makers are choosing an approach that is closer to the way they curate temporary exhibitions. The direction they chose for the new collection presentation is non-chronological, thematic, more dynamic, and it includes more (outsider) art. The idea is to depart from current issues and trends in society and mental health care such as 'psychologization' or the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and link this to the history of psychiatry; to show ideas and developments come and go, that history is not linear. Marius gives the following example:

Josef Guislain who built this hospital for example, 150 years ago, had the idea that melancholy, depression, came from the intestacy/infection diseases and now in psychiatry they believe that depression is mainly the result of an infection disease. So, it was an idea 150 years ago and it is again now.

The non-chronological and the inclusion of art are in line with Foucault's methodology, his philosophical view on history is relevant to the museum, also on a museological level. De Cleene clarifies how Foucault justifies using art in a museum on psychiatry:

Because he talks amongst others about the way in which art and literature can say something different about the way psychiatry functions than the psychiatrist. Because he hears some sort of alternative voice in, for him that is Hulderling, or Arteaud, or Van Gogh, or Goya; that is why he is very important.

As they have been wanting to change the collection presentation for a long time, the concept for the revision of the permanent exhibition was developed over the past years. How they would rethink and restructure the collection presentation was a recurring topic of discussion. Thus, when they actually started working on the new collection presentation, they already knew they wanted to work thematically, and the process of coming up with the themes and dividing them between the exhibition makers went naturally. They chose the following themes and division:

1. *Classificatie en archivering* ('Classification and archiving') – Sarah Van Bouchaute
2. *Architectuur/wonen* ('Architecture/living') – Patrick Allegeart
3. *Verbeelding* ('Imagination') – Yoon Hee Lamot
4. *Macht en Onmacht* ('Power and powerlessness') – Arnout De Cleene
5. *Lichaam en geest* ('Body and mind') – Bart Marius

In the first chapter, Van Bouchaute works on revealing the longing to categorise people and how categories and problematics from a certain time tell something about that era and can be linked to developments during that period. The architecture chapter is about the importance of the building, of inside and outside and shows different ideas on what the asylum should look like through time. The third chapter, on imagination, deals with how being different and insanity fascinates artists throughout time. The (hi)story of art brut and outsider art are part of this chapter. The chapter De Cleene is working on, was first titled *Verzet* ('Resistance') and is about power structures and relationships, anti-psychiatry, and stigma. Lastly, the chapter Marius is working on, is about the dichotomy between body and mind and on the constant shifts in emphasis from one to the other through history.

The exhibition makers opt for a more dynamic form, with objects changing (every one or two years) and sometimes maybe whole temporary chapters appearing and disappearing again. An example Bart gives of such a 'chapter' is a forthcoming installation by the Italian artist Fossaroli in which he links a work about Basaglia to the registers of Guislain. There are two main reasons for choosing this flexible approach. The first one is to keep it interesting for regular visitors. The second is to force themselves, as they have a small team, to stay close to their core, to keep giving attention to the collection presentation. Marius adds to this: "...by committing ourselves to that, to be occupied with that more intensive,

new themes could emerge in that exhibition, that could, for example, inspire for a new temporary exhibition.” Thus, a third reason for taking this dynamic approach is, that in this way the collection presentation will be more in dialogue with the temporary exhibitions.

An inspiration for this ‘almost hybrid’ type of exhibition making and mixing different types of objects including outsider art is Harald Szeemann and his idea on the *Museum of Obsessions* (see: Getty Research Institute, 2018). Marius explains why he is inspiring to the museum: “...[he is] inspiring because we can combine both documentary material, reproduction, books, visual arts.” Szeemann will be part of the story they tell about outsider art too, as they would like to show some curators who have been important in showing outsider art in the contemporary art world. Exhibition maker Lamot, working on the imagination theme, points out: “In his Documenta, and in general, he actually started to exhibit works from the Canon of psychiatry very early on, so it actually is a very important artist.”

Telling the history of outsider art, is one of the three ways outsider art appears within the new permanent exhibition. The second one is the use of outsider artworks as a representation of the voice of the patients. This sometimes overlaps with the third way outsider art appears in the exhibition, namely because of its content. In the last case, it really does not matter if the work is outsider art or not and it is treated the same way as other (art) objects. Its function is to enrich the story that the objects in the collection and documents from the archive are telling, in dialogue with, or confronting them with. We can recognise an interesting paradox or negotiation here between historicization (telling the history of outsider art) and its deconstruction (trying to avoid labelling works as outsider art).

By embedding more (outsider) art in the collection presentation, it is not only more in line and in dialogue with the temporary exhibitions, but it also forms a bridge to the other side of the building in which the (outsider) art collection is presented. The new permanent exhibition will be moved one floor lower, which will make the exhibition move closer to *De Kabinetten* (‘The Cabinets’) in a literal way too. The presentation of the collection is literally granted more space here: the rooms are bigger, and the ceilings are much higher. Moreover,

the aspiration of being more open will at certain points be quite literal: the windows will be uncovered, and daylight will come in.⁸

The provisional title of the new collection presentation is *Op Losse Schroeven* which directly translates to 'on loose screws.' It is an expression meaning something like 'unsettling' or 'on shaky ground.' It was chosen intuitively, everyone in the team felt something for it, so tells Marius. This is a reference both to the form, content, and goal of the exhibition. Marius explains the choice for this title as follows:

Op Losse Schroeven, in our eyes, is a somewhat more playful title, maybe more poetic too, something we may have been looking for as well. I also think it is recognisable, that people will know what it is about. We say in Flanders when someone stands out or goes a little crazy, that someone has a screw loose, thus Op Losse Schroeven.

The outsider art within the exhibition may help to unsettle too. Additionally, at times it could also form a representation of an often socially excluded group, potentially contributing to social inclusivity on a cultural level, as we have seen in chapter one (Sandell, 1998). In the concept for the new collection presentation of Museum Dr. Guislain, we can recognise various other developments that are also taking place in the broader museum sector and that were described in the first chapter, such as the aim for including multiple perspectives and a focus on attracting wide audiences and various groups (including socially excluded groups) (Hein, 2000; Serota, 1996; Weil, 1990; Sandell, 1998).

Moreover, in the different ways of including outsider art within the exhibition, some of the outsider art dilemmas described in the second chapter become visible. Within the new collection presentation, outsider art will be placed in a historical context and will inevitably be linked with psychiatry. At the same time, when looking at recent (outsider) art, the exhibition makers would like to let go of the distinction and treat contemporary art and outsider art in the same way, choose it for its content and quality. More elements of the

⁸ This also has a practical consequence, as this means that for certain works that have to be protected from sunlight a creative solution must be found, for example they will get a 'cabinet' or have to be exhibited in one of the smaller attached rooms.

outsider art debate will become clear in the next sections, in which the revision process will be examined more closely.

Revision process

Central to the part of the revision process I followed was the constant search for the right mix and balance of different aspects and ingredients that should be part of the exhibition presentation. The exhibition makers were constantly looking for a mix and balance between:

- Types of objects
- Perspectives (psychiatrist, patient, caretaker, etcetera)
- Own collection and loans
- Type of link with psychiatry: objects directly from psychiatry, about psychiatry or has an associative link with psychiatry or mental health (or sometimes a combination, that may be the most convincing ones).
- Literal/factual/scientific and associative/interpretation/narrative
- Current events and history
- Ideal and practical
- Iconic and unexpected/different/unknown/surprising
- Familiar and new

The outsider art pieces have to deal with these same considerations. I will continue by giving examples. I chose examples in which different aspects of the balance and mix the curators are looking for become clear and examples that reveal more about how the curators make certain choices. These examples show different instances in which the meaning of outsider art is considered and constructed and how outsider artworks are related to other types of objects.

Familiar and new

When I first asked Allegaert which aspects of the current permanent exhibition he thinks should change, he answered: “Everything, everything. I find everything needs to change and improve.” However, when we walked through the current presentation two months later, he could point to many very important pieces that should definitely be part of the new

presentation too, because of their relevance. And I recognise some of them in the catalogues of the previous two permanent exhibitions too (Stockman & Museum Dr. Guislain, 1987; Allegaert & Suykens, 2001).

An example is the panel with shackles (figure 22). De Cleene describes it as one of the first pieces Dr. Stockman obtained and says that it will now be part of the chapter on Power and Powerlessness:

...this building is an answer to these kinds of [inhumane] situations and it is a central piece in the museum because it is, I think, the oldest piece from the museum itself, or it is at least owned since 1986, the emergence of the museum, so within the collection it is a very important piece. And it also shows of course very clearly how power and powerlessness inn psychiatry can appear, namely someone who chains someone else.

Because all of the people in the team have been working in the museum for a long time, they know important objects and story elements intuitively. Thus, for certain objects the question is not if it should be part of the exhibition, but rather where it would be placed best, in what configuration or in juxtaposition with what other objects, and what part of the story it will tell. The same counts for certain topics or narratives: some things must be told; the question is how and through which objects. This is true for the story of outsider art and certain key points and figures in it (for example Morgentaler and Prinzhorn, see figure 24 to 27 for works that refer to these subjects and that are suggested to be included in the new exhibition by Lamot). I will return to this later. We will first examine the way in which the exhibition makers make decisions intuitively more closely.



Figure 24:
18.05.2019
Hanz Prinzhorn: influence on other artists; similarities in technique suggested loan.



Figure 25:
18.05.2019
Authorized photo copies Prinzhorn Collection Katharina Detzel and Marie Lieb.

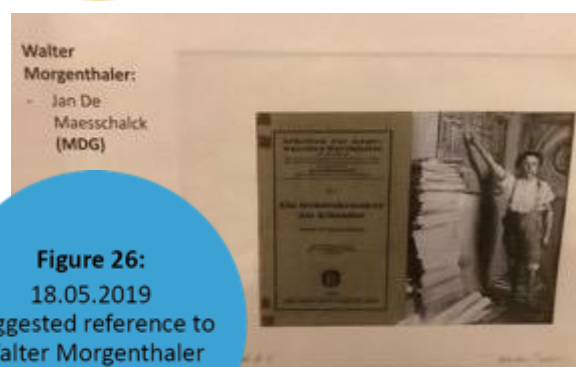


Figure 26:
18.05.2019
Suggested reference to Walter Morgenthaler own collection.



Figure 27:
18.05.2019
Morgenthaler book and art work Wölfli own collection.



Figure 28:
18.05.2019
Suggested works Eric De Volder for new exhibition.

Links, associations and intuition

The exhibition makers work quite intuitively; however, I would like to make a distinction here, as I see subtle—but important—differences between linking, associating, and being intuitive. Linking is more direct, for example a work forms a link to the Prinzhorn collection as it is an interpretation of one of the works in this collection (e.g. figure 24 and 25). In the object text this link may then be made clear. When associating the link is less direct, but the connection made, might still be more or less explicable. An intuitive choice is harder to explain, but it is made in a larger degree because of a feeling. Lamot illustrates this by giving the following reason for including an artwork at some point: “I feel this really fits in here.” In this case, it is more about a certain atmosphere. This explanation will not be included in the (object) text but left open for the visitors’ own interpretation.

The different ways of choosing something intuitively and linking more specifically become clear when Lamot is talking about theatre director Eric de Volder, of which she would like to include drawings, pictures, film fragments, and props that represent ‘the theatrical’ (see figure 28):

...this also fits here. But he is also truly inspired by certain outsider artists, for example Emma Hauk, an artist from the Prinzhorn collection, and he really based a work on that, for example. So well, I will have a look which ones are there, which films are specifically based on this, to show some of this. So that’s the intention, but if that will not work out, anyway, [it would be great if we] could show something by him; it would suit the atmosphere very well.

Thus, it would be preferable if there would both be an intuitive link—the atmosphere is fitting—and a more direct link—he is inspired by an outsider artist from one of the first outsider art collections. Again, it depends on practical factors what is going to be possible. To tell something about the Prinzhorn Collection this way, is also a creative solution as it is not within the financial possibilities of Guislain to have a loan from this collection.

Mix of types of objects and perspectives

In my first short interview conversation with Patrick, he tells me about the ideas for the architecture theme he is working and how “the patrimony of psychiatry, has to be part of it.”

A representation of this heritage, he finds in the scale model of a very large asylum in Bierbeek built in the 1930's. The 'giant sized' scale model is made by a patient in Bierbeek "very minutely, actually fantastic what he has done." The idea is to present this together with scale models that are recently made by architects who think about how to design mental health care institutions.

In this example we can detect a couple of things. Firstly, an example of an outsider artwork is given without labelling it as such. From the description we can tell it is an outsider artwork (it is made by a psychiatric patient), but this is not the point. It is mainly selected because of the content (it is a representation of the old asylum architecture) and because of its quality (it is described as precise and fantastically done). In the idea of presenting it together with scale models of architects who are working on psychiatric hospitals now, we can see the aim for a mix of types of objects and for connecting history and current ideas (a more artistic interpretation of an old existing building is presented next to architectural plans for new buildings that are executable).

A great deal of the time when De Cleene points to the outsider artworks that are part of his theme Power and Powerlessness, he also does not mention it is outsider art, but he may say it is made by 'a patient.' For example, in the part that is about the small town of Geel, which has a tradition of family nursing, he would like to include a work of a patient who resided there (see figure 31):

*...[it is] not from our collection, so we don't know if it will be possible.
That's someone who makes work amongst others with his own blood. It is a
very beautiful work, again you have this alternative language, or an
alternative writing, and you will get, some sort of artistic point within the
collection of images of Geel that are mainly photographic.*

Here we can recognize the aspiration for a mix of types of objects: there are many pictures in this part, thus a different kind of work (in this case a painting made from his blood) would be desirable. Whether the work will end up in the exhibition depends on practical issues, namely if they will be able to rearrange the loan.

The work of the resident of Geel also forms an example of the use of outsider art as a representation and visualisation of the voice and experience of the patient, that becomes most clear in the chapter Power and Powerlessness. Another concrete example here is an

artwork by Wolfgang Hueber, that will be part of the introduction of De Cleene's chapter, in which a doctor tells a patient '*Du Schwein*' ('you pig,' see figure 29). Another example of this type of work is that of Karel Frans Drenthe, also suggested as part of the introduction, De Cleene explains Drenthe was someone: "who was a patient and who made a very critical series actually from the perspective, [...] from within the mental hospital, also humoristic, about how psychiatry was functioning." Thus, he represents the voice or perspective from within psychiatry (see figure 30). De Cleene draws upon the motive for choosing these works: "These are pretty breezy, but still striking ways to criticize the power relations in psychiatry."

We have already seen some of the ways the term outsider art is used or not used by the museum staff and will now look at this issue in more detail.



Wolfgang Hueber, *Andenken von Dabeim*, crayon and graphite on cardboard, 1994 - 70 x 50 x cm, Collectie De Stadshof, Museum Dr. Guislain

Wolfgang Hueber, *Du Schwein*, mixed media on canvas, 1988 - 127 x 98 x cm, Collectie De Stadshof, Museum Dr. Guislain



Figure 29:

28.05.2019

Suggested art works from De Stadshof Collection Foundation for introduction power and powerlessness theme.



Figure 30:

28.05.2019

Suggested art work (one of a series) by Karel Frans Drenthe.

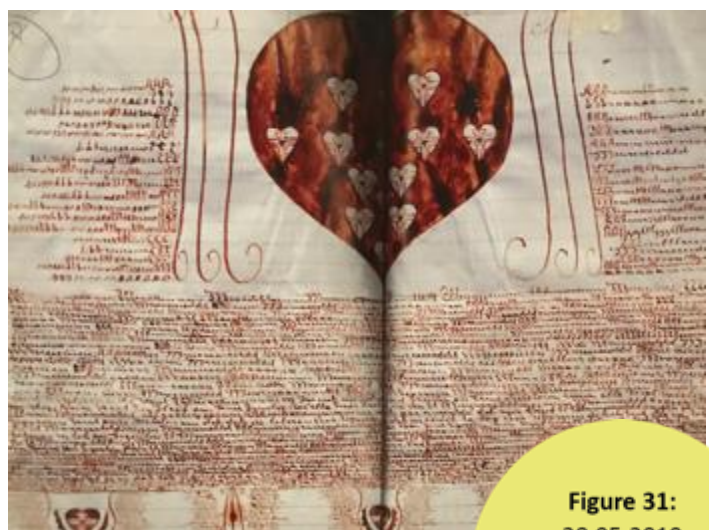


Figure 31:

28.05.2019

Suggested loan to be part of the story about family nursing in Geel.

Ideal versus practical in the use of the term outsider art

The balancing between ideal and practical is also recognisable in the way the people working in the museum use the term outsider art. Here we find ourselves in the middle of the outsider art debate, because, as we have seen in chapter two, one of the big questions is whether the term should still be used at all. It becomes clear the museum staff is aware of the different sides and arguments within the debate. They are trying to find a balance between their ideal—not using the term at all anymore—and the practical—using it because it is the quickest way to say what they mean and simply because the term is still used and an international scene is relying on it, which the museum is a part of.

Sometimes a distinction between art and outsider art is still made explicitly. For example, when I tell Timperman and Van de Voorde, who are working on public actions and education, at the beginning of the interview that I am mostly interested in the use of art in within the new exhibition, Timperman asks: ‘art or outsider art?’ Artistic advisor Allegaert reflects on differentiating between contemporary art and outsider art:

Both have always been present. Increasingly it is presented, certainly here, that we hardly or not talk about the distinction at all. Also, because the public debate turns more in that direction, that outsider art is becoming a dirty word. You actually cannot use it; it would promote stigma. So, that it would work counterproductive. Watch out, it is like that sometimes with those terms: at a certain moment they are very useful to use, but 10 to 15 years later, they could have a different connotation, causing you to better not use them at all anymore.

Thus, it is important that when the term is used, for example in a historical context, it is done right. Timperman and Van de Voorde state it will be extra important to give stricter guidelines to the guides, because when it comes to the collection presentation, there are quite some sensitive subjects. They work with volunteers and they do not have time to check them very often, and sometimes they might tell the story less nuanced than intended or jump to conclusions. Van de Voorde emphasises: “...and for outsider art this can be very problematic too, if you say, ‘this here are works made by psychotic patients’ while that’s not true.” When I ask how they would like to have the story of outsider art told they laugh and sigh. Van de Voorde answers: “I think even the exhibition makers still haven’t fully made up

their mind about it. [...] because even internally you have to constantly discuss it, because outsider art is diff[icult]- yes, the question is already: can you call it that.”

Clearly, the exhibition makers want to be correct; if they use the term outsider art, it should be in a nuanced, self-aware way. Rather the tension between not using the term, but having to sometimes anyway, often becomes clear in adding something to it straight away if the term is brought up. Lamot (Imagination) says for example at some point: “...*to then call it* [emphasis added] outsider art—I say it like this, because we are not keen on using it, but it is pure to communicate easily, right?” The first time De Cleene (Power and Powerlessness) mentions outsider art is when he talks about the introduction text of his chapter: “In that intro there will be art and outsider art too, *even though it may not be so important to call it that* [emphasis added], I think.” He probably says it like this, because I mentioned I was particularly interested in the use of art and especially outsider art in the exhibition, but for him, he makes clear with this comment, it might not be very relevant to make the distinction between art and outsider art. When Allegaert explains the development of using art in the exhibitions at Guislain (“it has grown, but actually it was there right from the start”), he says: “In the course of the 90’s a track was followed in the direction of what was then called outsider art, in direction of De Stadshof, Willem van Genk, that sort of collections.” By describing it this way, he implies that it was once called outsider art, but it is not any longer.

Thus, for example in *De Kabinetten* (‘The Cabinets’), the term outsider art is consciously no longer used. Most individuals I talk to within the museum say it would be their preference to not use the term at all. However, there are two reasons to sometimes still use the term outsider art. The first reason is a practical one: the term is still in use internationally. Lamot elaborates on this and explains why she thinks it is too early to drop the term altogether; there is still a whole branch relying on it: “As long as there are economic interests around outsider art, I think, it is not so easy to get rid of the term.” She emphasises that she is really speaking for herself here.

The second reason to use the term outsider art is within a historical context or to explain its history. Allegaert states you cannot deny the historical link between art brut, the Prinzhorn Collection, and psychiatry: “...it has been important that psychiatrists and artists came to look at visual works made there [at asylums], that the work was taken out of there, and that it was shown in exhibitions and so on.” According to him, the whole machinery has been important for the development and recognition of this art and has to be shown.

When I talk with artistic director Marius about the changes within the museum itself in relation to broader changes within the museum sector, he says that he believes museums are going to take up a more active role in the public debate. And he also applies this to the outsider art debate:

Apart from that, there is everything that is moving considering outsider art and art brut and the definition of it, which is changing a lot too and I think we can play a role in this, because we are of course on one side a museum about the history of psychiatry, but on the other side, we also present outsider art.

In terms of presenting outsider art, there is a lot of rethinking to do, Marius continues:

Also about the status of outsider art, when we will address this in the future, how will we talk about it, how will we write about it, what will our vision as a museum be. Because we have the advantage that we are able, especially with our thematic temporary exhibitions, to build a bridge to other art, to other types of museums.

This search for how to address, talk, and write about outsider art, is also apparent when thinking about explicitly presenting the history of outsider art within the exhibition. How much will be included and in what way?

Telling the history of outsider art

This history of outsider art is mostly told in the Chapter Imagination, which Lamot is working on (see figure 24 to 28). They will also try to include the steps the museum took in this area (Allegaert, 02.04). When Lamot starts explaining the idea of her theme, she mentions outsider artists implicitly; when thinking about her chapter, she took the collection of Guislain as a starting point:

So that means the artworks that are acquired, let's say the last 10 years, the things that had already, and actually I started with purely listing everything that's here. For example, you have artists that have a history in psychiatry themselves, but also many artists who are fascinated by it and also responding to that in some way in their work.

Thus, she differs between artists who work from within psychiatry and artists who make works about psychiatry.

De Cleene also explains it is very relevant to show outsider art within the new permanent exhibition because of its content: “my colleague Yoon Hee [Lamot], is working on imagination, in which it is substantively very relevant to show outsider art. I mean, expression is given to certain psychic states, how art can have a therapeutic effect” So, different ways in which art and psychiatry are linked and how psychiatry is visualised or imagined in art are part of this chapter and outsider art forms just one part of this.

At first, Lamot formed some sort of sub-theme in which she told the history of outsider art. However, when they walked through her ideas with her colleagues, they came to the conclusion that it would be better to spread this history through the whole chapter, to really leave the historical and chronological and implement the thematic approach that is part of the overall concept. The idea is to let iconic people from the history of outsider art pop up in different sub-themes: “You also have Prinzhorn of course, he is included, Morgentaler and Wölfli will be included too.” Some key people will be brought up in the introduction, however they are not going to walk through the standard list. Dubuffet could, for example, be shown somewhere else. Lamot adds: “Also because that already is an exhibition in itself, if you wanted to do that [tell the complete history of outsider art].”

Something Lamot definitely wants to show is the scale model by Eben Ezer “a very silly tower [...] he just started building that at home, it’s standing there, and he had complete visionary theories about it, very religious as well.” One of the reasons for showing this scale model, explains Lamot, is because it was made for the exhibition *Visionair België* (‘Visionary Belgium’) by the curator Harald Szeemann, who, as mentioned before, played a role within the history of outsider art.

A piece of the (hi)story of outsider art is also told in the chapter ‘Power and Powerlessness.’ De Cleene selected some works from De Stadshof Collection Foundation in which experimentation takes place with typography, in which some sort of alternative alphabet is made. De Cleene tells more about this ‘big tradition within outsider art’:

... you have art brut and outsider art, but you also have outsider literature and the écrit brut, in which you have many experiments like that to invent

a new language or an alternative language relative to the dominant rational psychiatric language.

Even if the exhibition makers know what they would like to show and in what way, this may not always be possible, as there are many practical considerations to take into account. Before we arrive at the conclusion, we will focus on this, especially on what it entails to show outsider art in a historical building like this.

Limiting factors

When it comes to making decisions, inevitably, practical considerations play an important role as well. Money, time, and space are limiting factors. As we have seen in some of the examples above, sometimes the museum is dependent on others to see if a loan is possible. The museum has limited budgets, so expensive loans or extensive scenographic interventions or high-tech technologic solutions (which is not their style anyway), are often impossible. The amount of space is also a limiting factor.

Additionally, (the character and look of) the old building is both a strength and a weakness as it is very determinative. Marius gives an example of Roger Ballen, a photographer who exhibited here once:

...who sent his pictures and we could do what we wanted with them, but the only thing that mattered to him was the colour of the walls and that had to be exactly this type of grey [points to the floor], it had to be the same, so as to make the floor way less dominantly present.

This is an example of a detail which proves these halls were never designed to be exhibition spaces (see figure 32). It is an impressive building and it tells an important (part of the) story, however, it can also be perceived as uninviting or even daunting. Timperman (public actions and education) adds: "It still remains a secluded domain, hard to access too."

The determinative character of the building may be even more problematic when it comes to exhibiting outsider art here, especially when it comes to presenting a whole collection of art. Marius describes it as follows:

Everything in our museum references to or is part of a frame of reference surrounding psychiatry. If you show art brut here, then you have this

immediate [link], you will make that historical link from where art brut is coming from, from psychiatry, so our place is way too determinative.

If the 'museum effect,' as described in the second chapter, is that once an object is placed within a museum context it is immediately perceived in a different way, then the 'Museum Dr. Guislain effect' may be that everything presented here is (sometimes wrongly) automatically linked in some way to psychiatry. The De Stadshof Collection Foundation also has trouble with this, as many artists in their collection have no psychiatric background at all. And even if they present artists who do have experience with psychiatry, that is not the point. De Stadshof Collection Foundation wants to depart from the work, from the 'solitary creations.' Their mission lies in the artistic.

This may be one of the reasons for the clear distinction and spatial division between the thematic temporary exhibition and collection presentation on one side, and the art collection on the other side of building. And it also explains that the art showed here is not labelled outsider art. However, De Cleene too acknowledges that even if the art collection is not labelled *outsider* art collection, you still have this meta-context that ensures there is always a touch of psychiatry clinging to it.

Paradoxically, it seems more problematic to present an (outsider) art collection in an old psychiatric building, than to incorporate (outsider) artworks in a thematic exhibition in the same type of building, even if the theme is related to psychiatry. One could say it is difficult to place artworks within certain themes, but, so argues De Cleene:

...the advantage is, I think, that an artwork, at least if it is a good artwork, will not care too much about a theme. That it in fact provides the opportunity to put everything 'on loose screws,' which also is the provisional title of the exhibition, to question it a bit. I think, if you choose the right artworks, they will raise questions other works cannot address and that they won't be captured too much by a certain thematic structure.



Figure 32:
10.04.2019
Floor at Museum
Dr. Guislain.

Conclusion

We are nearing the end of this exhibition, my thesis, in which I have tried to reveal the place and meaning given to outsider art in a part of the revision process of the collection presentation of Museum Dr. Guislain. In most exhibitions, it is left to the audience to draw its own conclusions. However, here I will try to carefully formulate an answer to my main question and point to the limitations of this research and possible directions for further research.

Most museologists only analyse finished exhibitions (Macdonald, 2001). Following the process of creating an exhibition in an ethnographic way, brought with it the advantage that I could move beyond what the museum is presenting to the world, and gain insights in the delicate processes, doubts and negotiations of the different exhibition makers. I recognise the observation of Hein (2000) about the new role of the curator being a team player respecting the input of colleagues. That it was about the revision process of the collection presentation, makes my research even more relevant, since the collection presentation is at the core of a museum. Thus, I was not only following the creation process of an exhibition, but also the process of redefining the role of the museum and what it stands for.

I chose to focus on the meaning and treatment given to outsider art, because there are ongoing debates on this topic and consensus is not reached on the definition and meaning of this term (Berger, 1998). It is way easier to express ideals on paper than it is in practice. Again, by being inside an organisation I could observe the balancing of various interests, practical considerations, and social processes that one would not be able to see from the outside (Macdonald, 2001). Among the most important data for this research were the semi-structured interviews with ten people involved in the revision process. Moreover, the walls with ideas, notes, and pictures created by the exhibition makers were very insightful. With help of these sources, I found out that the way the team uses and defines outsider art, is indeed part of and exemplary for the search for the new direction of the museum.

In the first chapters the broader context and relevance of looking at this particular case were defined: in their history and current practice both museums and outsider art have the potential to, in the worst case promote social exclusion and at best promote social

inclusion (e.g. Sandell, 1998). It is a particularly interesting time to start this investigation as both museums in general and Museum Dr. Guislain are in transition (e.g. Hein, 2000). They are explicitly looking for a new definition and for new roles of the museum (ICOM, 2019). One of the new roles suggested is that of stimulating social inclusion (Sandell, 1998). One of the ways museums could do this is by including perspectives of (formerly or often) socially excluded groups (Sandell, 1998).

Part of the definition of outsider art is that their creators often suffer from social exclusion (e.g. psychiatric patients or people with disabilities, see for example Cardinal, 1972; Prinz, 2017), thus showing this art in museums could be seen as a way to represent and emancipate those socially excluded people and value it as art (the 'museum effect', see Alpers, 1991; Casey, 2003; Malraux 1941). However, outsider artists are never allowed to fully participate since curators decide what is outsider art and what not and place them apart from art history and apart from the 'mainstream' art world (Prinz, 2017). We see this at Museum Dr. Guislain too: as long as there remains to be a complete art exhibition on show with works selected on 'outsiderness' (even if called differently), the museum does not transcend the excluding component of outsider art completely.

In the new collection presentation, the exhibition makers do not place outsider art apart. They will only mention the term outsider art in the context of its history. They will not differentiate between contemporary artworks and contemporary *outsider* artworks. They select works for their content and quality and provide background details of the work and artist only when relevant. The exhibition makers are constantly trying to reach the right mix and balance between different types of objects, perspectives (e.g. psychiatrist, patient, caretaker), own collection and loans, the type of link with psychiatry (direct, indirect or associative), between the literal and the associative, current events and history, the iconic and the unexpected, and between familiar and new.

Thus, what outsider artworks are included in the new collection presentation is influenced by the same conceptual, practical, and idealistic considerations that apply to contemporary art. However, it may be even more important to look at what stories are included (or what stories these objects tell), as we can see a shift further away from the object towards the centrality of the narrative (a general shift in museums as describe by amongst others Casey, 2003; Garoian, 2005; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). The idea that the narrative *is* the collection and that the objects in itself are quite worthless, is in line with this.

The story of outsider art is one of the stories told in the new exhibition, by doing this and in including works of artist with various backgrounds and artworks that are about mental states and mental illnesses, the new exhibition poses “questions of identity, objectivity, and privilege”(Hein, 2000, p. 6). An increasing number of museums, media and groups in society are stretching the importance of raising these questions (Hein, 2000; Sandell, 2002; 2007).

For a long time, Museum Dr. Guislain (n.d.) mostly wanted to be a place for debate, to question (ab)normality. In line with this, they kept their position in the outsider art debate quite open. Now, they still present different perspectives. Both in general and when talking about outsider art; the people working at the museum are reflective. They talk about their preferences, their ideals, but also about their doubts and not-knowing. They show the different arguments and sides of the debate. This is in line with the self-aware, cautious and legitimising attitude that Hein (2000) perceives at many museums today. However, about some aspects the museum staff does have a clear opinion, which is widely shared; for example, about choosing works because of their content and only giving personal details of the artist when relevant. The question is in how far they want to promote these opinions. More and more people seem to be in favour of communicating their position more clearly, to take a stance in debates such as the outsider art debate. This seems to be part of bigger developments and ambitions.

“A museum in transition,” that is how Marius explicitly typified the museum. Not only are there changes within the museum itself, but also in the broader museum sector, locally and internationally shifts are taking place, as we have seen in the first chapter (e.g. Sandell, 1998; Hein, 2000; ICOM, 2019). Marius also believes the role of museums is changing, and he thinks Guislain could play an important role in this for Flanders. He believes museums are going to take up a more active role in the public debate, maybe even take part in deciding to what a society evaluates which is in line with both Mason (2006) and Sandell (1998; 2002; 2003; 2007). As an example of a movement in this direction Marius gives the increasing amount of collaboration with the neighbourhood of Museum Dr. Guislain.

In Marius’ wishes, we can recognise the various ways in which museums can contribute to social inclusion according to Sandell (1998). First, the importance of the inclusion of different perspectives and the representation of the voice of psychiatric patients (who are often socially excluded) is emphasised by the exhibition makers at Guislain. This

could increase social inclusivity on a cultural level. Lowering the threshold—something the people from public action and education are working on at Guislain—also helps increasing social inclusivity. Furthermore, Museum Dr. Guislain is functioning as an agent for social inclusion in the second way mentioned by Sandell (1998) as well, namely by setting up smaller initiatives specially catered for certain socially excluded groups. Ultimately, Museum Dr. Guislain in general and the new collection presentation in particular also have the potential to influence society and aim to be a vehicle for broad positive social change by providing a forum for public debate, education, and persuasion in which greater openness about mental health issues is promoted.

In further research it would be advisable to analyse the collection presentation once it is finished; to examine what ideas, wishes, suggestions, and ideals expressed during the creation process are captured in the end result and how this is perceived. My research has focused on the production side of the new exposition. I found that the concept is clearly designed with the audience in mind, a reoccurring trend in museum practice (Hein, 2000; Serota, 1996; Weil, 1990), thus further research should preferably focus on the perception side. Finding out if the exhibition is appealing to the audience and if social inclusion is indeed increased, if (formerly excluded) people feel represented and able to participate, calls for audience research. Additionally, my thesis only focused on one case, thus another suggestion for further research is to investigate other collection presentations, since several people in the museum mentioned the collection presentation represents the essence of a museum, that it is challenging to find the right set up and that more museums are seeking for new forms of presenting their collection.

I hope more museums will open up. Since I believe that openly sharing of quests, doubts and vulnerabilities, is one of the strengths of Museum Dr. Guislain. To dare to choose intuitively, to be poetic, but to still be able to communicate an important message.

Foucault (1961) opposed the history of psychiatry to the archaeology of silence. By not only showing historical documents and objects that supposedly belong to the first category, but by also showing artworks about mental health and from within psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain may also be contributing to the archaeology of silence.

If this is true, one of the key pieces in the chapter 'Power and Powerlessness' exemplifies this. This consists of tiny notes with scribbles that were hidden in between the cracks of the wooden beams of the building. The director of Guislain found them once

during a renovation. These are traces of someone who wanted to say something. One of the notes says: 'Hersentjes, hersentjes, hersentjes' ('Brains, brains, brains.'). And on many of them is written: 'Kraak je evenaar.' ('Crack your equator,' see figure 33). However, the key piece for De Cleene, is a note that says: 'De waarheid zeggen' ('Telling the truth,' figure 34). It appeals to the imagination and is open for interpretation. De Cleene links it to the fact that when a patient says something, it is often seen as irrational, it would not have any connection to reality, or have any claim of truth, but when someone writes 'telling the truth'... it could mean so many things. Even if it is hard to say if these notes are a piece of (outsider) art or an (ego)document, it does not matter, because they tell a story of humanity and vulnerability. Maybe the things that are hard to label—just like the museum itself—are especially capable of moving you, making you wonder and letting you raise many questions on what it means to be human and to be allowed to take part.

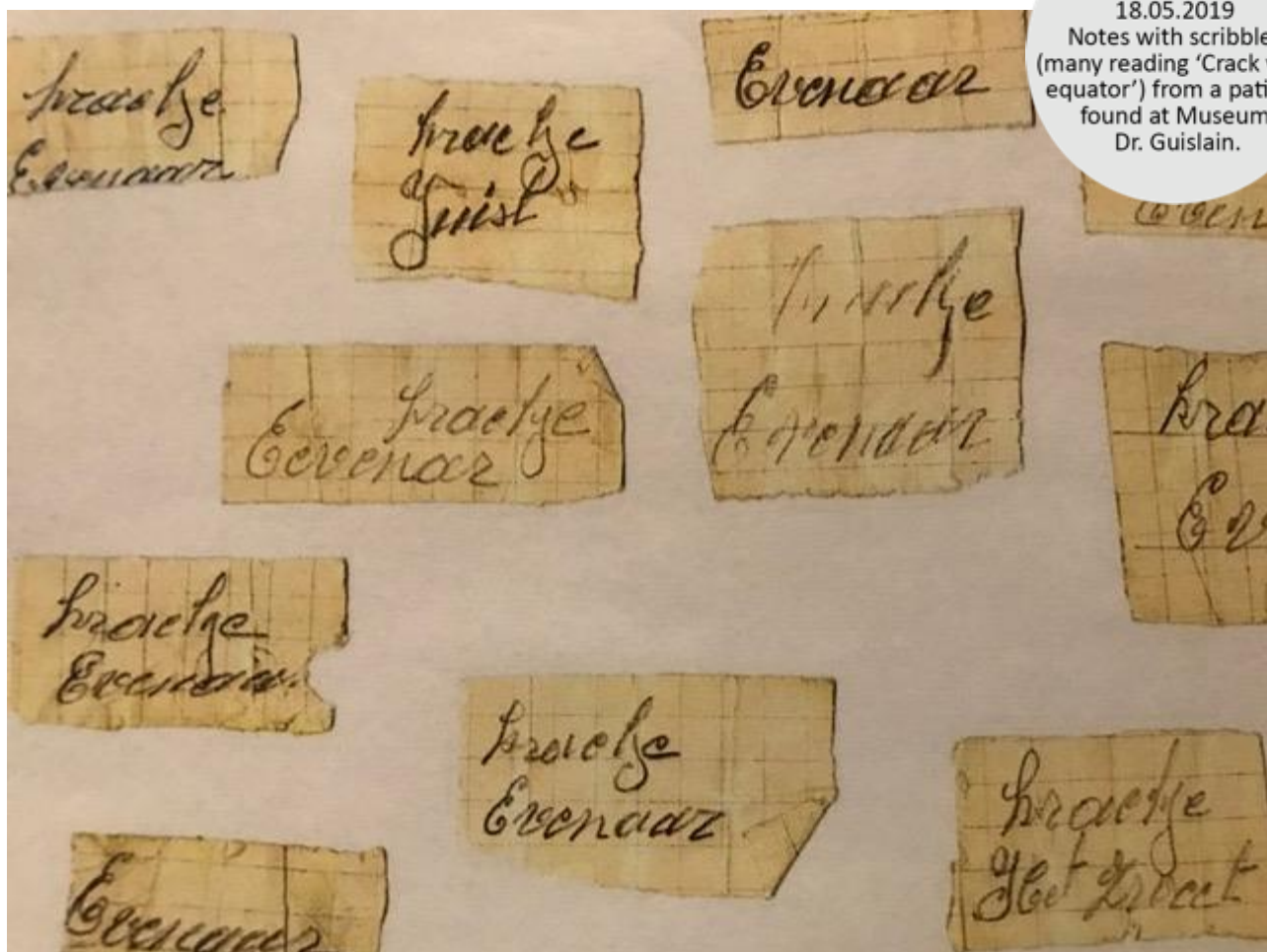


Figure 33:
18.05.2019
Notes with scribbles
(many reading 'Crack your
equator') from a patient
found at Museum
Dr. Guislain.

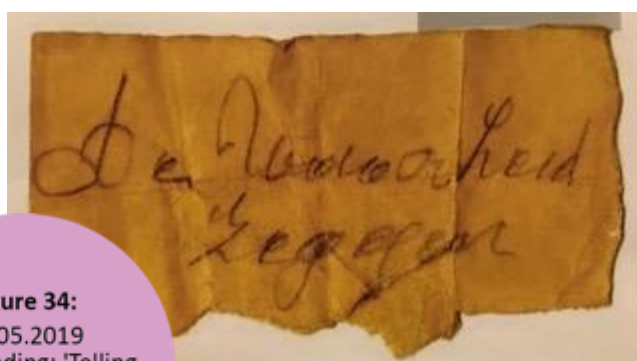


Figure 34:
18.05.2019
Note reading: 'Telling
the truth' found at
Museum Dr. Guislain.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of figures

All figures are pictures made by the author; the date of taking the picture is given followed by a short description of its the content.

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Appendix B: Overview of respondents

Name	Function within the museum	Focus within the revision process
Patrick Allegaert	Artistic advisor	Architecture
Bart Marius	Artistic director, exhibition and research	Body & Mind; coordination overall concept and execution
Sarah Van Bouchaute	Exhibitions, and projects youth care	Classification
Yoon Hee Lamot	Exhibitions, communication and international projects	Imagination; coordination catalogue
Arnout De Cleene	Exhibitions, international projects and policy	Power and Powerlessness
Alexander Couckhuyt	Preservation and loans	Rearranging loans
Kristine Timperman	Public relations and communication	Integrating public actions and education; special focus on community projects
Eline Van de Voorde	Public relations and communication	Integrating public actions and education; support editing texts
Liesbeth Reith	De Stadshof Collection Foundation, founder and member of the board	Providing loans from their collection
Frans Smolders	De Stadshof Collection Foundation, secretary	Providing loans from their collection

Appendix C: Interview guide

Introduction

Thank you very much for making time for this interview. As you maybe already know I am here at Museum Dr. Guislain a couple of days a week from half March till half May for a research project that is part of my Master Art, Culture and Society at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I'm interested in the revision process of the permanent exhibition and in particular in how you are planning on incorporating art in this exhibition.

Warming up questions

For how long have you been working at Museum Dr. Guislain?

How did you end up here?

What do you like most about working/your job here?

What is your favourite spot in the museum?

Current permanent exhibition and reasons for its revision

How old is the current exhibition? When was it revised last?

Were you also involved in making the current exhibition?

When did the idea that the current exhibition needed to change occur?

Why are the main reasons it needs to change?

What aspects need to change in particular according to you?

Which elements of the current permanent exhibition would you like to keep?

Are reactions of the audience also indicating the exhibition needs to be renewed? If so, what kind of reactions?

Is it hard to let go of the current exhibition? If so, how do you make sure to see it as if its new?

Inspiration for the new exhibition

Where do you look for inspiration for the new exhibition?

Are there museums or specific exhibitions or curators which inspire you for this exhibition?

Are there specific magazines, newspapers you follow?

What books inspire the exhibition?

Are there particular objects or artworks that inspire you during the creation process?
Do you make mood boards? If so, could you show me and explain what I see?
Do you get inspiration from conversations with each other or with other people?
Do you involve people who its about (psychiatric clients) in the process of making the exhibition? Or do you get inspiration for example from encounters?
Are there any personal experiences that form an inspiration in the process of making this exhibition?

Revision process: working method

Who is involved in the revision process?
How are the tasks divided?
How do you work together?

What are de phases in the revision process? Which phases did you go through already? In which phase are you now? Which phases are still to come?

What kind of planning do you use? Do you set deadlines? One of the hard deadlines is the one for the catalogue text, right? How does this work? How do you work towards this deadline?

Did you indeed already start adapting the website texts? Does this has to do with the revision of the permanent exhibition too?

I've heard you choose 5 themes. How did you arrive at those? Did choosing the themes go smoothly or was it a tough quest? Was there consensus quickly or were there many discussions?

Could you tell me a bit more about your working method?
Is it comparable to working on a temporary exhibition? What is similar? What is different?

You divided the themes. And I've heard you have a focus week in which you all work on your own theme. What does this week look(ed) like for you? Were you reading a lot or writing a

lot? Did/do you make a mood board for example? Do you get stuck sometimes and what do you do then?

In general: do you send inspiration you find on other themes (e.g. articles) to each other?

How do you communicate? Via mail, app, face to face, phone?

After the focus week: how do you share your ideas with each other? How do you give each other feedback? What if you disagree: how do you solve this? Or do you not always solve it?

What do your brainstorm sessions look like? Do you focus on one theme for example? Is there an agenda? Do you share questions or inspiration?

Revision process: reoccurring discussions/questions/disagreements

What are the major points of discussion within the revision process?

Could everything be discussed? Or are some things more or less set?

Which questions reoccur?

Which of these do you find important and why?

Are there any terms/words that are sensitive? Which ones?

As you are presenting topics that are sometimes still taboo in society, how does this effect your conversations internally? Can you discuss everything freely/openly?

Concept and content of the new exhibition

What would the exhibition look like in an ideal world? If everything was possible budget wise etc.

What would the visitor experience?

With what kind of feeling would he/she leave?

Which story would you like to tell with the new permanent exhibition?

Why do you choose for a shift from a more chronologic to a thematic approach?

Sara told me that it has to do with a major shift in thinking as well, to not think everything is getting better all the time, but to see history as a process. Could you tell a bit more about this?

What five themes did you choose again?

Which theme are you working on?

Why was this theme allocated to you? Or why would you like to work on this theme?

Do you start from the themes/stories you would like to tell, and do you look with what objects you could do this? Or are there certain objects you definitely would like to show, and do you create a story around it? Or is it a mix of these approaches? How does this work?

What type of objects do you use to tell what part of the story? When do you choose to use art and how? Could you, for example, use (outsider) art to use to show/represent the experience of a psychosis of depression and to make sensible? To show it in a poetic way? Is art made by someone with no or little education more capable of doing this as they create from within?

May works of the Stadshof collection be included? Are you free to do this or will you consult someone of the Stadshof? How would they find it to have their works included in this exhibition?

How much of your collection can you show in the exhibition? What do you take in consideration while choosing? E.g. that it will be a good mix of types of objects (it struck me how many different kinds of objects are included in the new permanent exhibition?

What will roughly be the ratio in art and historical/practical objects, you think?

I heard the new permanent exhibition will be more structured like the temporary exhibition. In what way will it be similar? What works well in the temporary exhibitions? How do you notice this? How would you like to incorporate this in the new permanent exhibition?

The permanent exhibition will be less permanent. How do you imagine a flexible setup? Did you find a form for this already? How would you like this to work in practice? Do you think in the direction of the Kabinetten in which you present your art collection? How many times do you think you'll make changes?

Who's your audience? Students, what ages? Clients from next door and from other institutions? Art- and culture lovers? People from the neighbourhood? What kind of people would you like to see more often? What are the different reactions from these groups to the exhibitions? Is it important that a diverse audience can recognize themselves? How do you make sure this happens? Do keep sensitivities people (of other cultures) may have in mind in making the new exhibition? If so, how?

Relation to other exhibitions

How will the new permanent exhibition relate to the other exhibitions?

How will it relate to the temporary exhibitions?

How will it relate to the exhibition of the art collection?

In the current setup the presentations of the history of psychiatry and the collection of outsider art are totally separated. How do you envision this in the new setup?

Use of (outsider) art in the exhibition

Within your theme: Are there specific objects or works of art you would like to use? Is there any outsider art among this? Does it matter in this case that it's outsider art? Will you tell about it or not? Do you still want to keep a separation between non outsider art and outsider art?

In the introduction text and other texts of the exhibition you do not mention the term outsider art. A conscious choice I assume? How did you arrive at this choice? Is it something you will also do at the permanent exhibition? Do you feel sort of forced to keep using the term sometimes (e.g. on the website) because you are part of the outsider art world? What is your place in the outsider art world you would say?

Appendix D: Code book

Outsider art:

- mentioned as something separate (from art)
- Used in exhibition to
 - o tell the history of outsider art
 - o to represent the voice of the patient
 - o because of its content
- position of
- outsider art world
- Stadshof Collection
- (Biography of) Artist
- Stigma
- Future scenario
- Take a position (in debate)
- Use of term
 - o Nuancing term
 - o Implicitly mentioned
 - o Art brut

Reason for choosing object/story element:

- Type of object
- Perspective (psychiatrist, patient, caretaker, etcetera)
- Own collection
- Loan
- Link with psychiatry
 - o Direct
 - o About
 - o Associative
- Literal/factual/scientific
- Associative/interpretation/narrative
- Current event
- History
- Ideal
- Practical
- Iconic
- Unexpected/different/unknown/surprising
- Familiar
- New