



Resilient Museums: Experiences from the Netherlands. Interview to Marjan Ruiter, Director Zeeuws Museum di Middelburg and to Loes Janssen, Public Mediation, Van Abbemuseum di Eindhoven.

Since 2013 the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven have endeavoured to improve quality of life for people with dementia and their loved ones. They developed a special programme, known as Unforgettable, consisting of interactive tours and workshops. Unforgettable was based on the successful Meet Me at MoMA programme developed by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. In the following years, the project was implemented nationwide and a network of 12 museums was established which in every province of the country offer people with dementia and their carer tours “unforgettable”.

We talked about this experience with Marjan Ruiter, director of the Zeeuws Museum of Middelburg, that has been a member of the Onvergetelijk network since 2015 and with Loes Janssen, Public mediation at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

Marjan Ruiter, graduated at Groningen University in history of classical antiquity and medieval history, since 2009 is director of the Zeeuws Museum and in 2018 was appointed Ambassador for dementia-friendly Zeeland.

We asked Marjan how a Museum Director can help raise awareness of dementia and create new coalitions in the area?

A museum director is in a position to use speeches, lectures, interviews with the press, discussions with politicians and other policymakers to draw attention to the impact dementia has on society, on the people who suffer from it and those around them. Dementia can result in negative effects on the economy, and creates emotional, health and social issues. Prevention and awareness can create a huge benefit for those who are inflicted by it and society.



What are the characteristics of the Zeeuws Museum and how does the museum interact with the community?

The Zeeuws Museum, situated in Middelburg, provides a rich picture of the history and culture of the province Zeeland. Our collection brings to life historical developments in different areas such as work, leisure, faith, science and art. Through partnerships with contemporary artists and designers, old ideas and objects are given a new context or significance. The Zeeuws Museum inspires new ideas. To remain of value for new generations, the museum invites contributions from others: it is an organization that continues to learn. This is how we - together with our visitors - give meaning to our heritage. Through this process we aim to realize our mission: "Connecting new generations to Zeeland's heritage". Starting in 2021 the museum investigates whether museums can contribute to a social problem that is difficult to solve, such as combating loneliness.

Loes Janssen is head of Public Mediation at Van Abbemuseum.

We have asked Loes to present the museum.

The Van Abbemuseum is a museum for modern and contemporary art. Art allows you to hear, smell, feel and see things which you experience for the first time. It's surprising, alienating and confrontational. As visitor you have a central place here. In this way the stories in the museum become richer and more diverse, and it also changes the way you view the world.

What program or tool developed by Public Mediation at the Van Abbemuseum over the past year has been particularly useful in maintaining contact with the audience of people with dementia and those who care for them during the health emergency?



Actually two things come to mind with different impact:

Small – with existing personal contacts: online tours through the exhibition with our tourguide in the museum, showing artworks in the room and having a pleasant conversation. In this way bringing the outside world into the living rooms, from the people who monthly visited the museum via the Unforgettable Tour.

Big – with existing partners: the “Vitamins for the spirit” magazine, which was send to the inhabitants of all nursing homes within and surrounding Eindhoven. In this magazine you can find stories and assignments from cultural places in the city. The Van Abbemuseum would choose an artwork from the collection and combine it with a creative assignment.

In every project art plays a central role, and together we take care of a meaningful encounter with art. Withing this process art is a tool. A tool to: “Imagine the world otherwise” (quote Charles Esche – museum director).

What is the relationship between museum programs for people with dementia and health and social services in your country?

According to Marjan Ruiten in the Netherlands cooperation between museums and health and social services is initiated by institutions that are looking for unorthodox solutions and based on shared goals. Although cooperation is becoming more common, it is however still erratic and fragile.