

Museon-Omniversum

Abstract

The Museon-Omniversum was founded as an educational museum in The Hague in 1904. From 1909 it organised various exhibitions featuring its acquired collection, which today is divided into three subcollections: nature, culture and technology. The museum's natural history and ethnographic collections include various objects that were acquired in a colonial context.

History of the museum

In October 1904 the 'Vereeniging Het museum ten bate van het Onderwijs' (Association for the Museum for the benefit of education) was founded by a group of educational reformers who were advocates of so-called 'visual education' – education supported by the showing of objects, photographs or films. The Museum ten bate van het Onderwijs (Museum for the benefit of education) itself was established a few years later, in 1909. The 'Schoolmuseum' (School Museum), as it became known in general parlance, was located on the Nieuwmarkt in The Hague and covered the fields of geology, ethnology, biology and industry. The foundation for the collection was laid through appeals in the press and letters to companies and other museums. The museum's first director, geologist [Herman van Cappelle](#), played an important role in this effort. A few years later, an appeal was made for donations from Suriname. Thanks to donations from Queen Juliana and others, the Museon-Omniversium's Surinamese collection is now one of the largest in the Netherlands.

The Museon's collection of objects is divided into three subcollections: nature, culture and technology. Both the natural and the cultural collection contain objects that were acquired in a colonial context. Although the Museon's collection plan for 2024-2028 includes a list of objects originating from a (former) colonial context the natural history collection has not been included in this inventory, even though it also contains objects collected, for example, in the former Dutch East Indies or Suriname. Important colonial collections include the aforementioned collection from Suriname, mainly assembled by the museum's first director, Herman van Cappelle; the collection of Congolese objects, which was largely compiled in 1935 from purchases and donations from the collections of the Rotterdam Zoo and the Colonial Museum in Antwerp. The objects date mainly from the late nineteenth century and originate primarily from the Vili, Cabinda, Congo, Yombe and Woyo ethnic groups; The Inuit artefacts collected by Niko Tinbergen in 1932 on behalf of the museum, to which objects from a fellow expedition member were later added. In addition, several North American objects from the former Tropenmuseum (now the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam) were transferred to Museon-Omniversium, including objects from the [Artis](#). In addition to the object collection Museon-Omniversium holds a large collection of visual material, including a noteworthy collection of photographs from the 'South Celebes expedition' of 1905-1906. It is also important to note that large parts of Museon-Omniversium's cultural collection were acquired in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1921, the municipality of The Hague took over the museum from the Vereeniging Museum ten bate van het Onderwijs (Association Museum for the Benefit of Education). From 1985 onwards, the museum continued under the name "Museon". In 1997, the museum became independent, with the collection remaining the property of the Municipality of The Hague. In 2022 it merged with Omniversum, a wide-screen cinema also located in The Hague. That is

why the official name is now 'Museon-Omniversum'. For several years Museon-Omniversum has been researching the colonial history of its collection, which will also be made available via the Colonial Collections Datahub at a later date. The research has focused for example on examining wood specimens from the museum's natural history collection as well as a skull korwar from Papua (coll. no. 54098). The korwar incorporates human remains, as do other objects in the museum's ethnographic collection. At this moment, provenance research into an object registered as 'kwakwabangi' (coll. no. 9656) is also being carried out.

Provenance research

The Museon-Omniversum collection is fully searchable via the [collection website](#), which is structured in the same way as the Wereldmuseum collection website. As described above, the collection is divided into three themes: nature, culture and technology but there is also a large collection of visual material. If you have any questions about the collection please direct these to contact.collectie@museon-omniversum.nl.

The Museon-Omniversum archive is managed by the [Municipal Archives of The Hague](#). The archive is divided into the period when the museum was independent and the period after the museum was taken over by the Municipality of The Hague. There is a separate access for the archives of the Municipal School Cinema. The Museon's [Collection Plan 2024-2028](#) provides an overview of the collections in the museum as well as a list of what the museum describes as 'Collections with a colonial context' (p. 81). However, in most cases the numbers are only approximate because the origin of many objects is unknown.

Related Aids

- [Civil servants in colonised territories](#)
- [Scientific research in colonised territories](#)
- [Artis Ethnographic Museum](#)
- [Naturalis](#)

Primary sources

Website:

Website Museon-Omniversum The museum website, including a short history of the organisation, annual reports and the collection policy.

<https://www.museon-omniversum.nl/>

Archive:

0538-01 Museum voor het Onderwijs (Museon) The Museon archive, divided into the period when the museum was independent and the period after it was taken over by the Municipality of The Hague. The inventories regarding the establishment of the museum's collection can be found under accesses '2.3' and '4.2.5.4'.

<https://hdl.handle.net/21.12124/013EA8543F1B42ADAD433E999DCA0729>

Secondary sources

Catalogue:

Catalogus der verzamelingen van het Museum ten bate van het Onderwijs, 1914 (Vereeniging "Museum ten bate van het onderwijs": 1914). Catalogue of the Museum ten bate van het Onderwijs from 1914, compiled by the then director of the museum, Herman van Cappelle.

<https://hdl.handle.net/11245/3.32171>

Book:

Cappelle, Herman van. Het Museum Ten Bate van Het Onderwijs Te 'S-Gravenhage En Zijne Toekomst (Vereeniging "Museum ten bate van het onderwijs": 1913). Booklet written by the then director Herman van Cappelle conveying his vision of the future of the museum.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/64272291>, [WorldCat 64272291](#)

Book:

Cappelle, Herman van. Verslag van een studiereis naar Parijs, Bazel, Zürich en Luzern ten behoeve van het Museum ten bate van het Onderwijs verricht in Sept. 1913 (Vereeniging "Museum ten bate van het onderwijs": 1914). Report of a trip made by Herman van Cappelle to France and Switzerland where he visited several educational museums to gain inspiration for his museum in The Hague.

<https://hdl.handle.net/11245/3.32971>

Collection plan:

Museon-Omniversum. Collectie in een museum over actuele thema's: Collectieplan Museon-Omniversum 2024-2028 (Den Haag: 2024). Collection plan of the Museon (in Dutch) It provides a good overview of the collections and looks at the museum's policy regarding collections from a colonial context.

[https://www.museon-omniversum.nl/media/x4ljsuzz/collectieplan 2024-2028-def.pdf](https://www.museon-omniversum.nl/media/x4ljsuzz/collectieplan%2024-2028-def.pdf)

Relevant Data

TO BE FILLED

first edited by Wiebe Reints as original_author on 2025-05-13

last edited by Wiebe Reints as original_author on 2025-12-23