Missiemuseum Steyl

Abstract

The Missiemuseum in Steyl was established in 1931 with the collection of objects that missionaries brought from their activities in Asia and Africa. The exhibition of the museum has virtually been unchanged since 1934.

History of the museum

In 1875, during the so-called *Kulturkampf* in Germany, the priest Arnold Janssen decided to found the [Society of the Divine Word (Societas Verbi Divini)](http://www.wikidata.org/entity/Q696656, SVD) in Steyl, just across the border with the Netherlands. Ever since the mission to China in 1879, missionaries had been collecting objects and bringing them back to Steyl. In 1894, the mission house built a new printing workshop, where the collection was also housed. The collection grew steadily with objects from various countries to which the Steyl missionaries travelled, and as well as ethnographic artefacts it comprised taxidermied and preserved animals. Not all of the animals and objects were collected by the missionaries from Steyl, collections from other Christian communities were also incorporated. Due to the growing collection, the museum moved to another new location, where it remains to this day.

The museum as opened in 1931 was arranged completely according to the design of Brother Berchmans, who was also responsible for the museum's large butterfly collection. The presentation of the collection at the Missiemuseum has remained virtually unchanged since Berchmans' death in 1934. Thus, in line with prevailing ideas in 1931, the showcases with ethnographic objects are arranged according to the supposed degree of ‘civilisation’ of different peoples. Given that the arrangement of the museum has remained virtually unchanged since 1934, the Steyl Mission Museum is a ‘museum within a museum’, giving an impression of how ethnographic collections were perceived in the twentieth century.

With Brother Berchmans leaving little documentation relating to the museum collection when he died, the precise provenance history of many objects is not known. Much of the natural history collection was bought from zoos and merchants. Ethnographic objects were mainly acquired by SVD missionaries, with little known about the means of acquisition. The natural history collection does not focus only on flora and fauna from abroad but also includes objects from the Netherlands. The Steyl Mission Museum is also the custodian of the Schmutzer collection, a group of wooden sculptures made between 1924 and 1927 by Indonesian artist Iko and commissioned by Joseph Schmutzer.

[image] *Picture of the permanent exhibition in the great hall of the Missiemuseum Steyl* (Kleon3)

Provenance research

As Brother Berchmans left little documentation regarding the Missiemuseum Steyl collection there is limited provenance history on many objects. A minimal register was recorded and updated until 1934. There is also a museum archive but this is not openly accessible. Researchers can use the archive on request; to do so please email the curator.

The Missiemuseum's collection is not fully registered although this is being worked on. The idea is that as the museum collection is registered it will become available via the Limburgs

Erfgoednet website, where some objects from the museum can already be viewed. Besides the museum collection, the SVD also has a library of natural history and ethnography books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as a collection of photographs and glass negatives. More information about the Missiemuseum Steyl collection can be found in the Collection Plan 2023-2028 (in Dutch).

Related Aids

- Christian missionaries in colonised territories
- Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap
- Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal
- Natuurhistorisch en Volkenkundig Museum Oudenbosch

Primary sources

Website:

> *Website Missiemuseum Steyl The Missiemuseum's website contains relevant contact and other information.*
>
> https://www.missiemuseum.nl/nl

Secondary sources

Report:

> *Collectieplan Missiemuseum Steyl 2023-2028 The Missiemuseum's collection plan (in Dutch) contains relevant information about the origins of the museum's collection.*
>
> https://www.missiemuseum.nl/public/files/Collectieplan2023-2028_Publieksversie.pdf

Collection database:

> *Limburgs Efgoednet Once the entire museum collection of the Missiemuseum has been registered and digitalised it will be accessible via the Limburgs Erfgoednet website.*
>
> https://limburgserfgoednet.nl/

Relevant Data

TO BE FILLED

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