

COMCOL



International Committee for Collecting

www.comcol-icom.org

COMCOL is the International Committee of ICOM with the mission to deepen discussions and share knowledge of the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections (both tangible and intangible) development. COMCOL is a platform for professional exchange of views and experiences around collecting in the broadest sense. The mandate includes collecting and de-accessioning policies, contemporary collecting, restitution of cultural property and respectful practices that affect the role of collections now and in the future, from all types of museums and from all parts of the world. COMCOL's aims are to increase cooperation and collaboration across international boundaries, to foster innovation in museums and to encourage and support museum professionals in their work with collections development.

COMCOL Newsletter (formerly *Collectingnet Newsletter*) is published four times a year and distributed to members of the committee. It is also available at COMCOL's website <http://www.comcol-icom.org>, at ICOM's website <http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-committees/international-committees/international-committee/international-committee-for-collecting.html> and at the Swedish Samdok website <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Publication.asp?publicationid=4213&topmenu=143>.

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From the editors

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of the newsletter. For COMCOL, the newsletter is an important forum and we invite museum professionals and scholars to take part in developing the work by contributing material within the subject field of the committee (see above). We welcome short essays on projects, reflections, conference/seminar reports, specific questions, notices about useful reading material, invitations to cooperate, new research or other matters. Please send your contribution for the next issue by **1 June 2011** to the editors, and contact us also if you wish to discuss a theme for publication.

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COMCOL in the years 2011-2013

The concepts of networking and participation will be central notions for COMCOL's programming of the years 2011-2013. The committee wants to promote debates around these topics as a contribution to a wider debate on collection development. COMCOL wants to seek partnerships across the professional field (museums and other heritage institutions) to collect new ideas and experiences, thus serving as a clearinghouse for the benefit of the international museum community as a whole. In particular, in its conferences the committee wants to collaborate with local museum training programs in order to involve young (future) professionals, and to build productive bridges between the academic world and museum practitioners.

The key concept is "collection development". Collections are dynamic entities serving as a resource in fulfilling the institution's mission. Acquisition and disposal are instruments to increase the quality of collections. Two notions are essential to the committee's understanding of development and quality: networking and participation. Developing the quality of collections should be understood in the context of geographically and/or thematically defined networks of collecting institutions (and individuals). Collection(s) development is based on the assumption that there is a connection between the quality of the network and the quality of the individual members of this network. In this sense collection(s) development benefits from collection mobility, i.e. the exchange of collection items between institutions. The second notion is participation, i.e. the involvement of source and interpretive communities in collecting (and disposing) policies.

The forthcoming annual conferences will be dedicated to the following themes:

- 2011 (Berlin) Participative collecting (31. October- 03. November)
- 2012 (Capetown) Intercontinental collection mobility
- 2013 (Rio de Janeiro) Networked memories

The topic of the 2011 annual meeting is *Participative strategies in documenting the present*. The host institution is the Museum Europäischer Kulturen (Berlin). Its involvement (together with partners from Amsterdam, Barcelona, Dudelange, Liverpool, Luxemburg, Tallin, Volos and Zagreb) in the European project *Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Cities* (sponsored by the European Union) will bring experiences with participation of source communities to the discussions. The focus on documenting the present by collecting tangible (and intangible) evidence makes it possible to elaborate on the experiences of the Swedish Samdok project. So, in the Berlin conference the committee will profit from the experiences of two networks, one national and one international. Besides discussing the theory, practice and ethics of participative strategies (e.g. merely as a form of crowdsourcing) the meeting will also include discussion on collaborative models.

The meeting will be organized together with CAMOC. Because of this the meeting will focus on participative strategies in urban contexts. The *Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Cities* project will serve to bridge the interests of COMCOL and CAMOC. This European dimension is also reflected in the adoption of the conference by ICOM Europe.

A special role will be envisaged for students from the museum studies programme of the Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft (Berlin). Special arrangements will be made for students of the European ethnology programme of the Humboldt Universität, students of the Institute for Museum Studies and Exhibitions (Oldenburg) and other museum studies programmes elsewhere.

I hope to see you all in Berlin! More information on the annual meeting and a call for papers will be announced shortly via the COMCOL website.

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Conference report

Lending for Europe

Freda Matassa

The EU Collections Mobility project was launched in 2005 with the aim of removing the barriers to lending and borrowing museum objects throughout Europe. Since the project began, the goals have been to increase the number of museums on the international lending circuit and to create common standards to make the loans process simpler. The project was launched by the Netherlands under the leadership of Frank Bergevoet and Astrid Weij and an expert team was created who produced the book *Lending to Europe*. This publication set out the five main themes for encouraging loans between collections:

Loan administration and standards
Insurance, indemnity and valuation
Immunity from seizure
Long term loans and loan fees
Building up trust and networking

The project was taken up by each member state who held the EU presidency and several reports and guidelines were produced, including a European Loan Form. These are available on the Network of Museums Organisations website – www.NE-MO.org. The project is now drawing to an end with three major outcomes:

- Website www.lending-for-europe.eu
- Book *Encouraging Collections Mobility: A way forward for museums in Europe* (can be downloaded from the website)
- “Train the trainers” sessions in Antwerp and Budapest

The Website, which was designed by German colleagues, contains all details of the project as well as useful information and forms which can be downloaded.

The book *Encouraging Collections Mobility* was led by Finland and published by the Finnish National Gallery, Erfgoed Nederland and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. It features a series of articles written by experts from across Europe including the history of collecting and museums, the legal aspects of the mobility of

art, state indemnities, immunity from seizure and the use and accessibility of stored collections. The book, which can be downloaded from the website, had over 22,000 hits during the first two months.

There were two “Train the Trainers” sessions, the first in Antwerp on 1-3 December 2010 and then in Budapest on 23-25 February 2011. They were designed to promote best practice and shared standards in loan administration and took the form of exercises, discussions and participation. Two delegates from each member state were invited to attend. Trainers were experts drawn from a variety of countries. There were four topics: Insurance and indemnity; Immunity from seizure; Long-term loans/ collection research and a Simulation Game which presented delegates with the challenges that might arise in loans negotiation or administration where they had to think on their feet to solve problems.



Freda Matassa teaching during the Collections Mobility 2.0 training. Photo Dieuwertje Wijsmuller.

The training sessions gave the delegates the opportunity to share experiences from their own museums and states and provided a valuable platform for increasing the understanding of national cultural variations and loan practices. The plan is that all delegates will develop the training in their own countries and that best

practices and common standards will make lending and borrowing easier and simpler for participating museums, while increasing the high standards of care and process.

Throughout the project, everyone involved has been keen to increase understanding and shared practices between participating countries. The safety and security of the objects has always been uppermost while, at the same time, trying to simplify processes and create common standards. The use of indemnities instead of high-cost insurance has been promoted as well as state immunities from seizure as a guarantee of the safe return of objects. The high cost of loans has been examined, with suggestions for sharing resources and keeping costs down while ensuring the safety of objects. Long-term loans

have been promoted as a good way of getting objects out of storage and presenting them to new audiences.

All information is available to download on the website www.lending-for-europe.eu.

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Essay

The musealisation of Knut. Dilemmas in the relationship between zoos and museums.

Peter van Mensch



Knut as front page news, Berlin populist newspaper B.Z. 29 March 2011 (see also p. 6 in the newsletter).

Knut was born on 5 December 2006. The young polar bear soon became the icon of the Zoologische Garten Berlin. Generating a worldwide “Knut-mania”, the cub was largely responsible for a significant increase in revenue at the Berlin Zoo. On 19 March 2011, Knut died unexpectedly at the age of four.

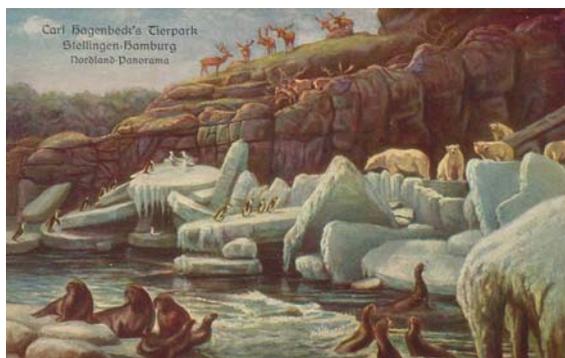
When it was announced that the body of Knut was to be handed over to the natural history museum many voices of protest were raised. A real protest demonstration was even organized on 2 April. In the meantime, however, the skin was already donated to the Museum für Naturkunde. Its director announced that a stuffed Knut could be used in an exhibition on climate change (*Tagesspiegel* 02-04-2011).

The discussion about polar bear Knut will be used in this paper as a starting point to explore the relations between zoos and natural history museums as a special case of collections mobility. The relations between zoos and natural history museums have hardly been studied until now, and in particular not in the context of collections mobility.

Parallel histories

Natural history museums and zoological gardens share parallel histories. It can be argued that the famous Alexandrian Mouseion was both a museum and a zoo (as well as a library and university). At the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century royal menageries were turned into public zoos (Vienna, Paris) and new zoos were established by zoological societies (London, Amsterdam, Antwerpen). Origins that are not very different from museums. In fact, often the origin of both institutions was strongly connected, the zoo being part of the museum (Paris) or the museum part of the zoo (Amsterdam, Antwerpen).

Whereas the emphasis in natural history museums may be on research and in zoos on education and entertainment, the purpose of both institutions was to document biodiversity. Around the turn of the century an ecological approach became influential in the ways living and dead animals were being presented. The first “Freianlagen” as introduced by Carl Hagenbeck in his zoo at Stellingen (near Hamburg) may not have aimed to evoke the authentic ecological conditions of the animals they reflect as much as to indicate that the dioramas in museums provide a new perspective on the content and form of presentation. In zoos this approach was perfected by the end of the 20th century. New types of “Freianlagen” respect the natural conditions, often creating a total environment by merging the sphere of the visitor and the sphere of the animal.



“Freianlage” in Carl Hagenbeck’s Zoo at Stellingen. Old postcard.

Biodiversity, as I have already said, was and is the rationale behind zoos and natural history museums. From the beginning museums aim to

document and classify diversity in nature, and zoos increasingly found new legitimacy in preserving it. New types of institutions emerged: gene banks – also referred to as “frozen zoo” (San Diego) or “frozen ark” (Nottingham) – i.e. collections of genetic material taken from animals (e.g. DNA, sperm, eggs, and embryos) which are stored at very low temperatures for optimal preservation over a long period of time.

Relatively new in both zoos and natural history museums is the attention given to the historicity of their presentation as expression of a concern for the cultural history dimension of their work. In the Amsterdam zoo, the interior of the so-called Groote Museum (1853) will be partly restored to its late 19th century appearance. The Galerie d’Anatomie Comparée (Paris) has been restored, respecting the original, late 19th century, design of the space and presentation. In the Zoologische Garten Berlin the 19th century buildings, evoking the architectural traditions of the countries of origin of the animals, are carefully preserved and restored.

Collection policies

In the past it was only natural that deceased animals from zoos were handed over to museums. Nowadays museums are more reluctant to accept zoo animals. There are two reasons for this. Initially, museums were satisfied to have one example per species. With an evolving understanding of the concept of species, museums started to document variation by collecting series. In order to study geographically based variation, it became very important to know the precise location where the specimen was collected. Zoos collected their animals usually from the wild. Considering the relatively short lifespan of such animals in captivity, their remains were useful for the scientific purposes of museums, provided the location of origin was known. Due to ethical and legal restrictions, zoos increasingly depend on breeding and the exchange of animals with other zoos. Zoo born animals are of little use for the scientific purpose of museums. After several generations bred in captivity some physical changes can be observed (comparable to the process of domestication) which limits the use of the

specimen for taxonomy (= the classification of biodiversity).

Throughout the 19th century, zoos and natural history museums shared a common concern for taxonomy and to some extent comparative anatomy. In the 20th century zoos became less interested in taxonomy and discovered their potential as a laboratory for the study of animal behaviour, which lessened the ties between zoos and museums. However, from a collecting point of view zoos again became important sources of materials when museums started to develop new, thematic exhibitions for which the scientific collections were less suitable or for which no material could be found in the existing collection. Some natural history museums even created separate collections of not-documented or zoo-bred specimens for exhibition purposes (for example, Leiden). The intention to use the stuffed skin of zoo-born Knut for an exhibition on climate change is an example of this.

Cultural biographies of animals

Relatively new in museums is the interest in the “cultural biography” of their collection items. Every specimen has its own history of acquisition, preparation and exhibition. The recent exhibition *Klasse Ordnung Art* (14 Sept. 2010 – 28 Febr. 2011), organised to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Museum für Naturkunde (Berlin), showed many examples of the recognition of the double-layered significance of collection items: objects are documents of biodiversity as well as documents of the history of the study of biodiversity, or in general function more as documents of the relationship between man and nature.

The cultural biography of the skeletons in the Galerie d'Anatomie Comparée (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris) is well researched. In the gallery – being a museological monument itself – many skeletons are equipped with lengthy explanatory labels informing the visitor about the cultural history of the object.

Many pet cats and dogs of museum directors were stuffed and added to the collections. The Museum für Naturkunde (Berlin) owns a stuffed pet parrot who lived in the household of the great naturalist Alexander von Humboldt



Bobby exhibited in Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin. Photo Peter van Mensch.

(1769-1859) for over 30 years. The same museum owns a stuffed skin of the popular (wild-born) gorilla Bobby who lived in the Berlin Zoologische Garten from 1928 to 1935. Bobby was as much an icon of the zoo as Knut 80 years later. But, whereas the exhibition of Bobby in the museum was much appreciated at the time, the population of Berlin appears to be less enthusiastic about stuffing Knut. According to a survey of populist newspaper *B.Z.* 73 % of the population was against “ausstopfen” (*B.Z.* 30-03-2011).

Contemporary collecting

The example of Knut raises the question to what extent natural history museums should develop a policy to acquire animals with a cultural value rather than a scientific value in the sphere of taxonomy. In general natural history museums seem to have moved in the direction of the cultural history museum, focusing on the relation between man and nature. Referring to the cultural biography of collection items, as mentioned above, is an illustration of this. But should this “new” orientation in the public domain be reflected in the collection profile?

The national natural history museum Naturalis at Leiden (Netherlands) deliberately showed interest in acquiring “Stier Herman”. The bull was the first genetically modified or transgenic bovine in the world. The announcement of Herman's creation (1990) caused an ethical storm. Dutch law demanded he be slaughtered at the conclusion of his role in the experiment,

but the museum got permission to acquire the bull. Since the museum did not want to kill the bull in order to preserve him, the bull was kept in a special stable on the museum's premises. After it was necessary to kill the animal (2004), the bull was preserved and mounted, and since 2008, placed permanently on display. According to Naturalis, the symbolic value of having Herman the Bull is that he represents the start of a new era in the way man deals with nature, an icon of scientific progress, and the subsequent public discussion of these issues (Wikipedia).

Should such policy include high profile zoo animals such as Bobby and Knut? And should visitors participate in the decision making process? How does the general public perceive the difference between zoos and museums? Zoos and museums are both institutions in the museological sphere. Transferring items from zoos to museums is a form of collection mobility. The case of Knut reminds us of the

fact that within the museological sphere the difference between institutional contexts (in this case zoo versus museum) may have its ethical consequences.

References

About Knut, see Wikipedia:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knut_\(polar_bear\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knut_(polar_bear))
(accessed 04.04.2011)

About Herman the Bull, see Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_the_Bull
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Klasse Ordnung Art. 200 Jahre Museum für Naturkunde (Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin 2010).

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Essay

Getting to Grips with the Butler Gallery Art Collection

Jean Tormey

“Our role is to protect and preserve the Collection but the challenge is to use it – we want all Kilkenny people to enjoy this living collection” (Treasa O’Brien and Grace Kearney, organizers of ‘Stations’)

An early ambition

The Butler Gallery (www.butlergallery.com), a contemporary art gallery located in the basement of Kilkenny Castle, Kilkenny (in Ireland's rural South-west) started collecting Irish and international art in the 1940s under the auspices of the Kilkenny Art Gallery Society. KAGS had the intention of purchasing works of art for a gallery and paying its expenses (including the insurance of pictures); organizing lectures, and promoting an interest in modern and contemporary art in Kilkenny generally. The Society continued to collect and organize exhibitions when it installed itself in the former kitchens of Kilkenny Castle in 1976 and began calling itself the Butler Gallery (after one of its Founders, Peggy Butler). We see even in this

short history of the Gallery, that education had been present within its mission from the very start. Although an early motivational force, it was not till the early two thousands that directorial and educational staff of the Gallery really started exploring the potential for education projects to occur linked to the Collection. The concept of what effective education programming was had changed radically by that time, of course. This article introduces some of the highlights of education practice at the Butler Gallery since 2003.

Far from the white cube

Stations, in its adventurousness and innovativeness, was something as a graduate in 2003 that I admired from afar. *Stations* brought

5 artworks from the Butler Gallery Collection into 5 Kilkenny homes over a period of 5 months, allowing each household to live with a different artwork for a month at a time. The term 'Stations' was inspired by the old Irish Catholic tradition of neighbours and friends visiting each other's homes to host mass in the community. It was the first time I had heard of a collection being taken out of its usual habitat and exhibited in a non-gallery setting, with the public acting as true 'custodians' of a collection that actually belongs to them.

Innovation with regard to treatment of the collection and engagement grew from strength to strength following *Stations*. From 2005-2008 under the management of Louise Allen, the Gallery initiated an exciting animation project linked to the collection that toured Ireland. In 2005, 'Freeform' used Squido animation techniques to enable participants to literally bring aspects of the Butler Gallery's Collection alive through animation, making their own short films. Later in 2007/ 2008, Allen collaborated with artist Andrew Snyder and students and teachers from two local rural schools (Scoil Naomh Fiachra, Clontubaird and Lisnafunchin National School) to develop a set of cards linking art, maths and science in the primary school curriculum in an exciting card game called 'Art-i-fact' that can now be accessed on line at <http://www.artifactcardgame.org> /. A project that had resulted organically from the Gallery's Artist in Primary School Programme, it is unlike anything, I have ever seen, in collection and museum education initiatives.

Getting a grip

In more recent years, the education programme at the Gallery has continued to find inspiration in the collection, contributing to a comprehensive array of events, courses and projects. Streamlining its different facets and consolidating the links between what is being hung and installed in the gallery with the public who experience it (whether inside or outside the Gallery), the education programme is laying the groundwork for its move to a new, bigger venue where a much-needed, dedicated space for Education will co-exist with a permanent location for the Gallery's Collection. One of the ways this has been done is through taking works out of storage temporarily to use in discussions on art with young people.

An example of where this has been used recently is at the outset of the development of a book soon to be published, created by children from our long-standing 10 year-old family programme, *Solas*. 'What is Art?' is written by children for children of all ages and uses the skills learned through the family programme to bring the question of the meaning of art to a broader audience (particularly the schools and libraries of Kilkenny). In the early days of the development of this project, young people between 5 and 12 looked at Dorothy Cross' *Skate* and Barrie Cooke's *Elf Study*, prompting discussion and response that led to some of the final content of the publication. 'What is Art' will be available before the end of April at www.fundit.ie.

Red Square

In a similar vein during the summer of 2009, the Gallery embarked on a Young Critics' project for the Kilkenny Arts Festival (a major international interdisciplinary festival in Kilkenny, and the oldest running festival in Ireland), which led to the development of a continued programme for young people entitled *Red Square*. During the festival, participants from the group discussed different aspects of the festival with each other, met artists and curators and wrote about what they did, giving opinions on their blog at <https://redsquarekibosh.wordpress.com>. Proving to be a hit with the young people and audiences in general, *Red Square* is now working on a curating project funded by European Youth in Action funds. As part of this, a group of 16 young people have been participating in training that will contribute to the group curating an exhibition from the Butler Gallery Collection in the summer of 2011, inviting an alternative perspective on the 100 year-old collection.

As part of this project, young people travelled across the water to Liverpool recently to check out a similar project that had been realized at Tate Liverpool – '*A Sense of Perspective*', curated by young people from Tate Liverpool with counterparts from Tate Britain, London, the Pompidou, Paris and Kiasma, Helsinki. The exhibition brought together a selection of recent pieces from the Tate Collection traversing photography, sculpture and new media with Carl Andre's '*Venus Forge*' from 1980 being the oldest piece in the exhibition. Themes

emerging from the transitional phase of youth such as (in the words of one of the young curators) “*the crisis of identity, the questioning of beliefs you are born into; your sexuality and the balance between defending yourself and respecting others*” were dealt with through the exhibition. The group who curated the exhibition discussed alternative types of display and interpretation, but decided on the traditional white cube format for their exhibition, concluding that the artwork spoke for itself.

Red Square Curates

Meeting the young curators from Liverpool made our group realize just how much needs to be done between now and the opening of their exhibition in June, from finalising a theme, to choosing work, to planning their own education programme linked to the exhibition. In their choice of work thus far, the group have indicated an interest in some of the unknown aspects of the collection – work by anonymous

artists, and work that is not what it appears at first look. Naturally, given the predominant mood in Ireland at present, they have also been drawn to work that is immediately positive in nature and indicates some sort of journey from darkness and negativity into light.

In some ways, with the *Red Square* project, we are back to *Stations* – where the goal is not the making of art work by the public in order to engage with the Collection, but instead about awareness, engagement and opinion.

‘Red Square Curates’ runs at the Butler Gallery, Kilkenny Castle, Kilkenny from June 25 – July 24 2011.

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[Call for participation/collaboration](#)

Europa Ludens

Toy Museum Mechelen: Call for participation/collaboration

Patrick Van den Nieuwenhof

In 2012, the Toy Museum in Mechelen in Belgium celebrates its 30th anniversary. During that year one of the activities will be a unique exhibition: *Europa Ludens*. In this exhibition the Toy Museum Mechelen will focus on the similarities and differences in toys, games and children’s play. The purpose of this exhibition is to examine how the European unity-in-diversity philosophy influences our children’s toys and the way our children play throughout Europe.

Mirrors of the (European) adult world

Therefore the Toy Museum Mechelen wants to collaborate with other Toy Museums (and museums with a toy collection) from the 27 European member states to introduce these European countries to the general public through toys of that country. Toys are indeed

popular items to be kept. As a child, toys are very often the first objects we manipulate. After a period of time when we grow up, we still keep these toys as objects of remembrance. This can result in a private collection of toys. In the more public sphere more and more museums are collecting toys as representatives of the daily life. Contemporary toy museums, history museums and museums of anthropology are studying toys as cultural objects.

The storyline of the exhibition *Europa Ludens* will include these new ideas concerning toys as heritage objects through the integration of the Toy Museum’s vision of toys as mirrors of the adult world. Toy museums in the European Union are kindly requested to participate in this exhibition with objects from their collection.

Some of the following questions could serve as inspiration for the selection of objects:

- Which toys are typical for the country/region in which the participating museum is located?
- What are the masterpieces/treasures of this museum?
- Are there objects referring to the European Union or its diversity in the collection of the museum?

Network of European Toy Museums

Simultaneously, the Toy Museum Mechelen intends to (re)install a network of European toy museums and institutions, in which the participants can exchange interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise in the fields of conservation, registration, the use of keywords, educational programs and scientific research dealing with the history of toys, games and play.

The aim is to:

- obtain a broader view on how toy museums in Europe approach toys as historical heritage,
- establish partnerships and combine interdisciplinary points of view within a heritage community,
- initiate a platform for collection mobility for museums with a toy collection.
- participate in international trends in the field of heritage such as the Europeana platform and UNESCO's intangible heritage program,
- create a structural network of toy museums as a step towards a community of practice, in which good practices or lessons to be learned are distributed.

This European network will be officially initiated in 2012. During an installation meeting, the participants will set out a short-and long-term research agenda.

More information?

The Toy Museum Mechelen is currently still looking for museums and institutions, contributors and partnerships.

For all details and requests, please contact:

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