

De Academische Gipsotheek Maastricht: a collection in transition

A historic collection within an institution for higher education is in itself not a rare phenomenon. Many universities have large collections that are objects of study but that are also open to the public. In the Netherlands the art academies used to have large collections too, but most have been dissolved, even destroyed during the second half of the 20th century. Not so in Maastricht where a collection of 500 objects survived the several times that its existence was under threat.

How can a relatively vast collection be preserved and presented within an institute whose main purpose is to educate young people in art, design and art education? This paper dwells on the different practices that were employed these past two years in order to reach the abovementioned goals: preservation and presentation. How is it to be compared to similar situations and, is there more possible?

Building the collection as collection has asked for a registration system, the registration on photograph and the statues have to be numbered. And why not go for 3D scans too? Is it a good idea to publish the registration public and online? Must the collection officially be made a collection? Restoration of some pieces is also under way. But how far do you take the repair of damages of a collection that has been a 'working collection' for a long time and has them to show for it?

Presenting the collection has been made much easier by the fact that the institute celebrates a jubilee of 200 years. Will the presentation of 200 objects in the cupola of the Bonnefanten museum Maastricht reach the wide and large audience that is hoped for? Will it get the collection a small army of supporters?

Inside the Maastricht Institute of Art educative and other projects take place around and with the collection. (E.g. the Minors: 'Gips is hot' and 'Beeldschoon'.) Is this the way forward in finding new and young lovers of the collection that in their turn will be the future ambassadors for the collection? Will an international congress do the same? A publication on its history?

Atelier Les Deux Garçons makes three statues, based on the ones in the collection that will commemorate the jubilee and that will ask attention for it in the public space of the Herdenkingsplein. Michel Vanderheijden Tinteren en Roel Moonen will present their project. Will it make the collection land in the hearts and minds of the population of Maastricht and beyond?

After all, the question remains if a European Platform on Casted Plaster, (supported by the European Union ?) may help plaster lovers and the objects of their interest, on the way forward to a better future? And what would we like that future to be like?

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