



Cultural Heritage Agency  
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science



## Shared Heritage in Museums in South Africa: Opportunities for Collaboration

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**SHARED  
CULTURAL  
HERITAGE**

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# Introduction

The past shapes the present; hence the importance of material and immaterial heritage. The Netherlands shares an important part of its history with other countries in all parts of the world where there have been trade or other relations. The traces left by this past – buildings, archives, shipwrecks, museum collections, intangible heritage, etc. – can be referred to as shared cultural heritage.

To strengthen the historical ties that bind the Netherlands to other countries, and to preserve the traces of that shared past, the Netherlands government introduced the Shared Cultural Heritage Policy. Through this policy, which is executed by the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency, the National Archives, DutchCulture and Netherlands Embassies, the Netherlands cooperates with several countries. Given the long relations between the Netherlands and South Africa, it is not surprising that the latter is one of the focus countries within the Shared Cultural Heritage Policy.

Within the Shared Cultural Heritage Programme of the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency, three museum professionals from the Netherlands undertook a two-week study trip to South Africa in the summer of 2015. The mission was led by Harrie Schuit, specialist in the

conservation and restoration of historic interiors at the Cultural Heritage Agency, who was accompanied by Duncan Bull, senior curator of paintings at the Rijksmuseum, and Maria Holtrop, junior curator of history at the Rijksmuseum. In addition, the mission was supported by the Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria.

Aim of the study trip was an exchange of knowledge and experiences between museum professionals from South Africa and the Netherlands concerning the collections for which they are responsible within a variety of contexts, from established national museums to smaller public house museums. It was also hoped to gain an idea of the extent of the collections and historical interiors which can be considered as shared cultural heritage, their physical condition, and the wishes of South African colleagues for mutual exchanges of information on conservation and collections management of works both on display as well as in storage.

The target group thus included South African museum professionals in public museums, among them curators, restorers and conservators. The authors owe a debt of gratitude to all of those whom they visited and who gave so generously of their time.

Our trip fortuitously coincided with the last weeks of a nationwide programme to register all items of South African national heritage, including all objects of whatever nature held within public museums, as well as items of national importance in private hands. Almost all the institutions we visited were busy rounding off this registration, which included a requirement to provide a market-valuation for all works whether or not they were part of inalienable collections.

## Wednesday 22nd July

Our first appointment was at the **Pretoria Art Museum** where we were welcomed by the Director, Dirk Oegema and his curatorial colleagues Gerda Guldemon and Hannelie du Plessis.

The Museum houses the City of Pretoria's collection of fine art, consisting mainly of paintings, sculpture and decorative arts by nineteenth- and twentieth-century South African artists working in the European tradition, plus a substantial group of European old-master paintings.

The museum's founding collection came into being in 1912, and was initially shown at the City Hall. The bequest of a collection of European, particularly Dutch and Flemish, paintings by Lady Michaelis (whose husband had already given a collection of Dutch paintings to Cape Town) in 1932 greatly enriched the collection, after which collecting policy focused on works by South Africans. The present, well maintained, building was completed in 1964, and was extended greatly in the 1970s: it is in the internationalist modernist style, with excellent well lit galleries suited to the display of fine arts.

The collection comprises some 4000 objects, and the staff consists of three museum professionals all of whom we met. The museum attracts about 5000 visitors per year. The collection and the buildings are owned and financed by the City of Pretoria (now also known as Tshwane), one of the two major metropolises that constitute the Province of Gauteng. No works have been added to the collection during the past seven years, and the museum became

increasingly dependent on hosting travelling exhibitions rather than on its own collections and initiatives to attract visitors. No travelling exhibition has, however, been held since 2003. The museum identifies no single object with immediate public recognition for publicity purposes; and it has no budget for publicity: the only publicity it can hope to generate is free attention in the media.

At the time of our visit, staff were busy with the heritage registration programme entering details into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with self-made snapshot photographs added. There has been no campaign of high-quality digital photography.

Preventive conservation is partly undertaken in house: damaged or deteriorating objects are packed and safely stored in the depots to await restoration and the necessary funding to carry it out. Only when damage has been caused in a situation where insurance compensation can be claimed is the object professionally restored.

The staff conducted us around both the galleries and the depots. We were impressed by the beauty and suitability of the galleries for displaying art, and the variety of works on display, but we also noted the paucity of visitors. The depots are somewhat crowded, but no more so than in many European museums. It is clear that, despite limited financial support, the staff are managing to keep both building and collection reasonably maintained.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The museum is kept going with limited means and personnel, but there are limited opportunities for development or renewal. It should be asked whether in-house fund-raising initiatives might not make it less dependent on the City of Pretoria.

Obvious areas of attention would be the acquisition of a professional museum-oriented database rather than the use of an outdated spread-sheet, and a campaign of photography. The danger of damaged objects accumulating in the depot could be obviated by hiring, on a

periodic basis (say once in two years), a jobbing conservator to effect the most urgent repairs, thus allowing the more important objects to be returned to view, and also more complex preventive conservation measures.

We were uncertain as to the place of this Museum within the museum landscape in Gauteng as a whole; and to what extent co-operation between the various museums in the region, civic, national and educational, might be of use.

On Wednesday afternoon we were welcomed at the **National Museum of Cultural History** by a team of curators, led by Corine Meyer and Annemarie Carelsen. The museum is housed in what was formerly the national mint and currency reserve, and falls under the Ditsong umbrella. It contains over 3,3 million objects representing the history of Southern Africa from the stone age to modern times. The collection consists of a diverse variety of subjects, materials and technologies. It includes an impressive collection of rock engravings from all parts of South Africa, a large collection of weaponry and European applied arts and utensils, as well as works inspired by Dutch examples (including a set of copies after paintings by Rembrandt van Rijn made in 1901). The museum also contains human remains, notably a number of skulls, supposedly of Dutch origin amongst others from Nijmegen and Maastricht. The extensive and impressively well-ordered depots are arranged by type and

material; the objects, in overwhelmingly good condition, are meticulously documented. The database used is DOS based and outdated. At this time the database is not functioning properly although a new database is being investigated. The information on the DOS database is however retrievable.

Despite being housed in the former building of the mint with an effective security system, recent events have resulted in sharpening the museum's security measures. Some works have been withdrawn from display in the galleries because of the threat of theft. The depots are equipped with a biometric system that still needs to be activated. Access to the depots now requires that an authorized staff member must be accompanied by a colleague when visiting a depot. Every key that is used is registered in a key register. Working, though unsophisticated, temperature and relative humidity controls are installed in the museum and it is clear that great attention has been paid to all aspects of preventive conservation, especially in the storage facilities.

The museum employs three conservators – for ceramics, furniture and paintings/paper documents – who perform the necessary conservation requested by curators. Objects that require treatment outside their sphere of expertise are sent, if funds are available, to the South African Institute for Heritage Science and Conservation. Presently the museum does not have conservators in metals and plastics.



Pretoria Art Museum



The display in the large gallery



The weapons depot at the National Museum of Cultural History



The furniture depot



The Engelenburg House from the Garden



One of the rooms with objects packed for protection during the building works

The curators had prepared a file with information regarding the curation of the collections for our edification, setting out their policies of collection management and acquisition, and with examples of the various administrative checks and balances in use. This was supplemented by similar documentation concerning preventive conservation as mentioned above, including a file of problem cases detailing particular problems the curators have encountered.

Given that we had spent almost all of our time visiting the extensive depots, filled with a plethora of objects, we decided to return on Saturday morning to explore the galleries and public spaces.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

We were greatly impressed that, despite the size and range of the collections, everything was so well inventoried and housed, and that information about each object is readily retrievable. The curators themselves were most concerned at the lack of opportunities to transmit their knowledge and experience, in many cases built up over several decades. Few junior members of staff have been taken on and even fewer interns. This, coupled with the evident lack of public interest in the museum and its collections (see below) raises the spectre that, despite its excellent current state of management, the museum could lose its function as a centre of knowledge over the next few decades.



## Thursday 23rd July

The first visit was to the **Engelenburg House**, which falls under the South African Academy for Arts and Sciences, and where the hosts were Dionne Prinsloo, Linda Brink and Annemarie Carelsen, joined by the architect Francois van der Merwe.

Although it appears a unified structure, the Engelenburg House is an accretion from different phases of construction in 1903, 1922, 1953 and 1999. Those of 1953 and 1999 are extensions that will shortly be partially demolished and reconstructed with a component of new construction. The plans, shown by the architect, include a relatively large space for exhibition galleries and offices from the Academy.

All objects, including the furniture, were packed away at the time of the visit; but it was nevertheless possible to appreciate the quality of the interiors, which remain of great interest despite the traces of old leaks (some of which have stained the imitation gilt-leather wall-paper) and some unfortunate earlier alterations in the functions of several rooms. Decisions will need to be made about the alterations in decoration, including the introduction of artificial gold paint and the possible restoring of original colours. The same is true of the exterior, where the roof in particular shows traces of many interventions and is in need of renewal.



The Literature Building, University of Pretoria

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The future use of the Engelenburg House as a museum and/or offices was not entirely clear; and as the policy in this respect will necessarily have consequences for the way in which it is restored, the apparent absence of a full vision and estimate of the expected visitor numbers seem strange. The architect and the Academy will need to formulate such a vision; and in the meantime the curators are concerned about the safety of the collections.

In the afternoon we visited the campus of the **University of Pretoria**, where we were received by Gerard de Kemper, curator of the University's art collections, who also teaches a course in Museum Studies with a current complement of seven students. The collection, which is for the most part an accumulation of gifts and bequests, comprises around thirty-five thousand objects and attracts around thirty thousand visitors per annum. Its star attraction is the group of gold objects excavated at Mapungubwe, which counts among the earliest witnesses to advanced civilization in Southern Africa. This is complemented by extensive collections of European and oriental porcelain (the latter with some important specimens), paintings, and a collection of ephemera and popular curiosa associated with the house of Orange assembled by a Dutch courtier and bequeathed to the University. In addition, the University is the repository for a collection of miscellaneous works of art, imported into South Africa after the Second World War, which has been the subject of controversy.

The public rooms in the 'Ou lettere' building are attractively presented: apart from the Mapungubwe treasures, a selection of the more appealing Orangist material and the more important ceramics are the subject of changing displays selected and presented by the Museum Studies students. Other works are scattered around the campus, and include notable groups of sculptures by Edoardo Villa and Anton van Wouw, as well as furniture and other objects.

We saw the constricted and slightly chaotic depots on the eve of their evacuation to a site off campus. The disparate nature of the collections – including an impressive collections



The display of ceramics

of moulds for sculpture – was evident, and it is to be hoped that works on paper, which are a cause for concern, will fare somewhat better in the new depots. All items are registered in an Oracle database, with descriptions and photographs, an estimate of market value and a condition report.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The University of Pretoria contains some extraordinary collections with direct links to the Netherlands, and seems to make good use of them both for the decoration of the campus and for teaching purposes. We were later informed, by the former director of the Apartheid Museum, that an initiative was underway to build a new museum on the University Campus to house a private collection of twentieth century art. We heard nothing of this during our visit, and are thus uncertain how far this new project will benefit the existing collections and provide an

opportunity for an up-to-date registration system and storage.

On **Thursday evening** Jeroen Louis Martens, **Cultural Attaché at the Netherlands Embassy**, hosted a dinner at his home in Pretoria to which he had invited a varied group of museum professionals and others in the cultural sector ranging from a junior intern to a museum director and academics.

The dinner was conducted along the lines of a Socratic symposium, led by our host, in which various questions of museum policy and practice were vigorously debated including the tensions between preserving collections for posterity and serving the needs, or perceived needs, of the public and visitors. Many issues are of relevance in both South Africa and the Netherlands; in particular the definition of museum, a word increasingly used to describe commercial ventures without permanent collections.

## Friday 24th July

In the morning we visited the **Johannesburg Art Gallery**, and were received in the board room by the director Antoinette Murdoch and the majority of the professional staff, including Philippa van Straaten, Tara Weber and Marian Paulik, from whom we heard an account of the museum, its history, the state of its physical buildings and its hopes for the future. The collections, which are of considerable quality, comprise some ten thousand objects, by European painters and South African painters working in the European tradition, a large and important contemporary artwork collection, traditional southern African art objects, a Japanese print collection, as well as a small furniture and other applied arts collection. The museum attracts some thirty-five thousand visitors per year. It falls under the City of Johannesburg which is the legal owner of both the building and the collections and is responsible for its financial wellbeing; but in practice it depends largely on the recently established foundation of 'Friends of the JAG' to be able to operate. Touring exhibitions of its more important European works is important for the museum. Exhibition installation and logistics costs, as well as photographing and insurance are paid for by the lenders. The museum doesn't make money or income from loans. The educational role of the museum was emphasised, particularly in a rapidly evolving society where modern media are not yet as widespread as in Europe and America. Funds have been raised to enable schoolchildren,

especially from the outlying districts, to visit the museum, but there was until our visit no member of staff whose sole responsibility is educational. Today the museum hired an education officer.

It was evident that the museum had been considerably neglected in the years following the political changes of 1994, and like many of the older museums in South Africa has difficulty in shaking off the perception that it is a colonial relic. Security had become lax, and the building had degraded. The fine building, erected between 1910 and 1915 to the design of the British imperial architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, was being restored to celebrate its centenary. However, the state of the 1980s Meyer Pienaar extension remains problematic. But thanks to the initiative of the present staff and imaginative fundraising the roof was being – provisional – repaired.

The neglect of the building has resulted in climatic conditions and pest control being less than optimal, and here again the want of expertise in the field of paper conservation was felt. Digitisation of artworks, extensive archives, and storage across all collections are other major problems. The database used for the collection is the general one for the City of Johannesburg (STAR) which is superannuated and not designed for museum use; thus the museum is constrained (as is also the case in Museum Africa) to follow the mandates of the City. This includes furnishing all objects in the collection with barcodes (in a dictate which includes all of the City's movable



Principal entrance of the Johannesburg Art Gallery



One of the galleries with a display of tapestries



property) and using the City's website rather than being able to develop its own.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Repair of the building is obviously the most urgent consideration, and once this is done, conditions in the depots should improve. Preventive conservation should be a priority, especially for works on paper.

We spent the afternoon in the vast edifice of **Museum Africa**, the former market hall of Johannesburg, which in 1994 was reopened as an all-embracing historical museum comprising collections from various of the City of Johannesburg's institutions, including the comprehensive collections of prints and drawings of the former Africana Museum previously housed in the Johannesburg Public Library. The museum houses more than 120 thousand objects, mainly focused on the history of South Africa and including substantial holdings of pre-Colonial ethnographical material as well as extensive material relating to the Dutch and British colonial periods, to the Afrikaner Republics, and to the history of the area now known as Gauteng and its development into a gold-mining centre. It also contains a good collection of decorative arts, both European and South African, as well as a reference collection of coins and printed banknotes. Together with the historical collections at Iziko in Cape Town and those of the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria,

this is one of the most important repositories of historical objects and information in the country.

Unlike those (national and nationally funded) institutions, however, Museum Africa is entirely dependent on the City of Johannesburg; and it has suffered increasingly from lack of funding and from staff wastage over the past fifteen to twenty years. Diane Wall, the present Manager Collections, is the only senior curatorial employee in the organisation, with vital posts left unfilled for up to fifteen years. There are specialist curators, at junior level, for the collections of mineralogical specimens; but the lack of curatorial expertise and administrative backup is evidently having an adverse effect on what were, in the 1970s and 1980s extremely well maintained and well catalogued collections (as evinced by the exemplary 7 volume catalogue, *Catalogue of pictures in the Africana Museum*, published between 1966 and 1973).

Like the Johannesburg Art Gallery this much larger collection is managed with the STAR database, and barcodes have been brought onto objects by City personnel untrained in handling works of art and historical objects; the museum even lacks an adequate barcode scanner. In practice, the old system of inventory cards remains the most reliable collections-management aid. The lack of controls means that the extensive depots are not regularly cleaned and maintained, and the depletion of curatorial expertise and experience will soon mean that much of the collection will be difficult to identify.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=252&Itemid=51](http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&id=252&Itemid=51)



Exterior of Museum Africa



One of the depots, housing paintings, prints and drawings



## Conclusions and Recommendations Saturday 25th July

We were sad that a museum that had opened as a civic showpiece as recently as 1994 and which is still advertised on the City of Johannesburg's website as being 'the City's soul'<sup>1</sup> should have reached the degree of decadence that we witnessed. Although the public areas were reasonably maintained (particularly those used for temporary exhibitions), the depots are palpably neglected, and that containing European (and much Dutch) decorative arts is in close proximity to an unmaintained oil-fired boiler system. Although it can be understood that so ambitious a project for a cultural centre planned during the last days of the apartheid regime should have received a lower profile, such neglect of a cultural resource and historically important material is difficult to grasp (especially when compared with the care lavished on the collections at the National Cultural History Museum). Once again, the lack of expertise in the field of paper-conservation was strongly felt. Given the strong presence of works from the Dutch colonial period (including some important Dutch objects such as long-case clocks), this is an institution that certainly merits attention from any programme of cooperation that might follow. But that can scarcely supply the most urgent need, which is for knowledgeable and administratively experienced curators and collections managers.

We returned, unannounced, to the **Cultural History Museum** in Pretoria, to see the public areas and exhibition galleries. They are arranged in various thematic presentations, of which that profiling the Rock Art of the pre-colonial indigenous peoples was by far the most impressive, both in the quality of the objects on show as in the intelligence and sensitivity with which they were presented and explained. Other displays were more difficult to follow, including one of recent acquisitions of ephemera, on the history of currency, and of reconstructed township dwellings, which made but little use of the rich permanent collections we had seen in the depots. More impressive was the photographic exhibitions, among them one on Steve Biko. It was with mixed feelings that we saw the full-size indifferent copy of Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' displayed in a dark corner of the foyer: this and the other indifferent copies after Rembrandt are reminders of the ties felt by the Transvaal Republic to the Netherlands, but their quality is scarcely sufficient to make them a priority. In general, the presentation (with the notable exception of the rock art) was extremely traditional, even of modern material which might have benefited from a less cautious and dated approach.

As well as noting the difference of standards between the depots and the presentation in the public galleries, we also remarked that the only other visitors in the building was one adult with



Exterior of Cultural History Museum



'Non-white shop' in one of the displays evoking the history of the townships



The Kruger Museum



The Drawing Room of Kruger's house

two children in tow and that much of the available exhibition space was left empty while more than three million objects remained inaccessible in the depots.

We then visited the **Kruger Museum** (which falls under the Ditsong umbrella), the former residence of the president of the Transvaal Republic from 1883 to 1902 who received much support and adulation from the Netherlands during the second Anglo-Boer War. The architects T. Claridge and C. Clark designed it as an unpretentious citizen's house, with a characteristically South African *stoep*, and the back garden now includes the presidential railway carriage, coach and ox-waggon as well as an extended collection of Kruger memorabilia. The house was built to the then most modern specifications in 1884 and has been open to the public since 1934.

The interiors conform partially to the period of the house's construction, and in addition to furniture and other objects there are many other objects associated with Kruger including portraits and memorabilia. Visitors are free to walk through the house within defined routes, and with somewhat dated barriers to prevent them touching objects.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

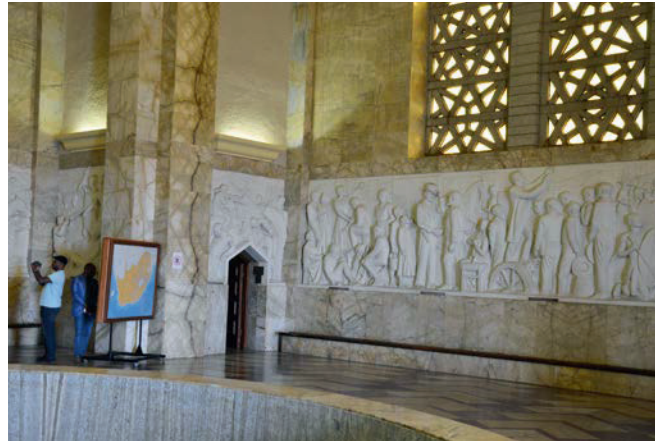
The museum succeeds in conveying an impression of how Kruger lived. The slightly worn character of the house evidently stems from a commendably reticent policy regarding innovation and renovation. However, intervention will be needed within the next five years at which point it might be prudent to review the preventive conservation, such as insect control and the sprinkler system.

In the afternoon we visited the **Voortrekker Monument**, built between 1937 and 1949 to the designs of Gerard Moerdijk as a monument to the development of the Afrikaners as a self-perceived separate group. Situated on a hill, it dominates the city and is surrounded by well-maintained gardens and heroic sculptures of the major icons of Afrikaner nationhood, including 64 ox-wagons in high relief. The monumental architecture and dramatic lighting, influenced by the Pantheon in Rome and the Invalides in Paris, are reminiscent of the monuments erected in the Fascist and Communist dictatorships of the 1930s, as is the series of giant relief sculptures showing important moments of Afrikaner history. There is a display of objects from the daily life of the trekkers and boers in the basement; but the museum consists principally of the monument itself.





The Voortrekker Monument



The Great Hall, with its relief sculpture frieze



Exterior view of Freedom Park

### Conclusions and Recommendations

From the perspective of shared cultural heritage, the Monument is an important symbol of the desire of the descendants of the early Dutch settlers to forge their own independent nation; and it is very much a child of its time. It is well maintained and appears to be well visited.

The nearby **Freedom Park**, opened in 2013, is a clear attempt to provide a corrective alternative to the Voortrekker Monument. It lies at the edge of a township, and gives a contemporary view of

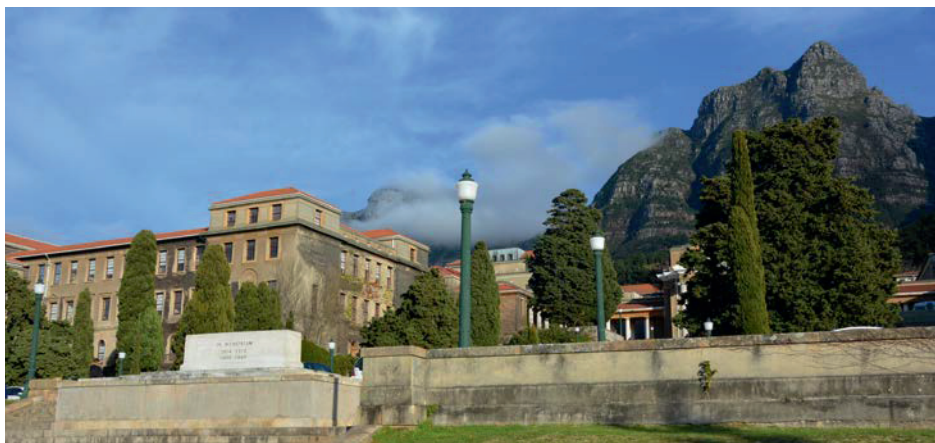
South African history from the Creation to the present day; the development of modern democracy is traced in minimalist displays, moving from the Dutch East India Company's fledgling colony, through the diamond and gold fever, to the Freedom Charter which is the foundation of South Africa's new Constitution.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Freedom Park, although by no means a conventional museum, is a fine example of



One of its displays



The University of Cape Town



Archaeology storage depot

a didactic presentation of historical themes through sensitive and reticent display. It is to be hoped that it will be as well maintained as the Voortrekker Monument.

### Sunday 26th July

We spent the day travelling from Gauteng to Cape Town, where we were able to orient ourselves by a walk along the lower slope of the front facade of Table Mountain

### Monday 27th July

Our first appointment was at the Department of Archaeology of the University of Cape Town, where we were received by Professor Simon Hall. UCT and the University of Stellenbosch both have active archaeological departments;

and although all material uncovered in digs remains the property of the state and falls under SAHRA and Iziko, in practice much of it is stored at the University where it is studied and handled by researchers and students. This is thus no museum, but rather a working collection, mostly of material dating from the period of Dutch East India Company rule at the Cape and thus also of interest to students of Dutch history. After a fruitful meeting in which we learned much about the practice of archaeology and the difficulty of interpreting the material, we visited the depots in which all sorts of objects are stored in boxes, classified by site, and then by the nature of the objects. The storage is crude but effective; the robust nature of archaeological material requires minimal climate control; but there is a problem with labelling being destroyed by silver-fishes.

### Conclusions and Recommendation

The Department is a leading centre of excellence in the field of archaeology, and an important repository of knowledge about the Dutch colonial enterprise and its interaction with indigenous peoples and imported slaves. The vast quantity of archaeological material both at UCT and at Iziko, makes the question of cataloguing and collection management slightly more complicated, and we were not entirely clear who had the final responsibility for the collections.

In the afternoon we made our first acquaintance with **Iziko museums of South Africa**, a national museums group situated in Cape Town. We were





The South African Museum



The Display of San rock art

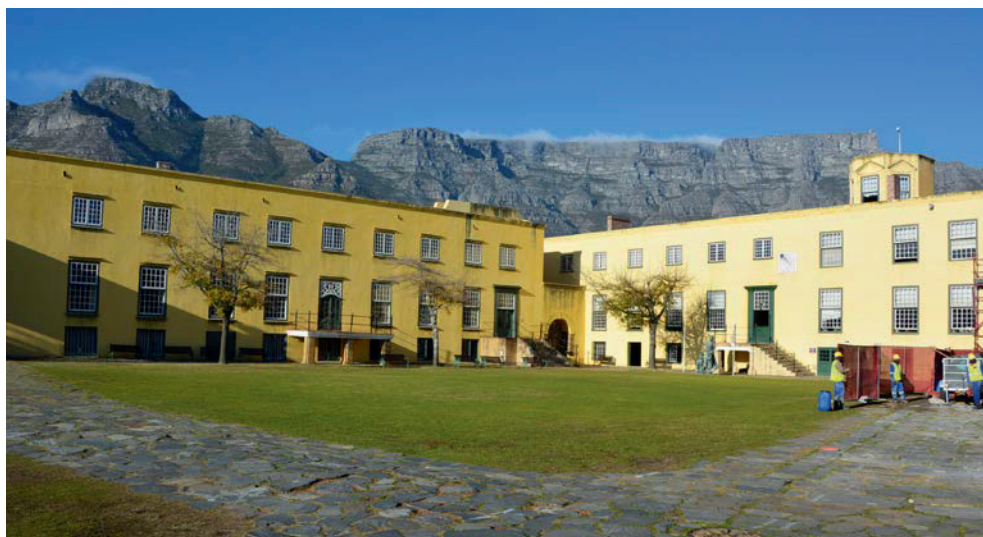
received at its flagship building, the **South African Museum**, by the CEO Rooksana Omar and her senior management team, Bongani Ndhlovu (Executive Director: Core Functions), Susan Glanville-Zini (Director Institutional Advancement), Paul Tichmann (Curator Slave Lodge), Hamish Robertson (Director Natural History Collections), Esther Esmiol and Gerald Klinghardt (Social History Curators), and Hayden Proud (Curator Art Collections).

The team recounted the history of Iziko in which eleven previously independent museums, including a planetarium: The South African Museum, The William Fehr Collection at the Castle of Good Hope, The Rust en Vreugd Museum, The Michaelis Collection at the Old Town House, The Koopmans-de Wet House, The Iziko Social History Centre, Groot Constantia, The Slave Lodge and The South Africa National Gallery. Iziko has one administration which comprises some 200 employees, cares for around 2.2 million objects, and receives some 550,000 visitors annually. The collections are grouped, with some overlap into Natural History, Social History and Fine Art, and are displayed in a variety of buildings in and around Cape Town, including historic houses and monuments as well as the purpose-built South African Museum and South African National Gallery.

The institution is proudly aware of its position in the plurality of South African communities, and attempts to engage with as wide an audience as possible. It has recently commissioned a survey of visitor expectations in order to plan for the future, and is concerned to counteract the legacy of the pre-democratic period which influenced the nature of the collections and their way in which they were interpreted. The degree to which 'outreach' to the outlying townships is necessary, and the question of local versus European colonial history, are on-going matters under consideration. At present around half the visitors are South African and half are foreign tourists, who have somewhat different expectations.

Like its sister institutions, Iziko was engaged on the inventory of all its collections for the heritage registration programme, which it found an useful exercise, though the requirement to estimate financial values was proving both difficult and frustrating.

Following the meeting we were given a tour of the South African Museum, including the very impressive displays of ethnographical material and San Rock paintings, the natural history displays, and the reference material. We were particularly impressed with the campaign of digital colour photography of the canonical collections of South African entomology, and with the excellent standards of cataloguing.



Courtyard Castle of Good Hope

## Conclusions and Recommendations Tuesday 28th July

As an umbrella institution (various branches are discussed below) Iziko is an important party in the project of Dutch-South African shared cultural heritage. Because Dutch East India Company rule largely was confined to what is now the Western Cape, this region is rich in objects with Dutch associations, although these are by no means lacking at the museums we visited in Gauteng. We were struck, however, by how much better conditions were, on the whole, at Iziko; and the extent to which the organisation was actively re-orientating its position with an eye to the future. Here, too, remedies for dealing with diminishing state subsidies were actively being sought, not simply by raising admission fees but in manners of fundraising, ranging from grants from international foundations to local sponsorship. This is something relatively new for South African museums, having been pioneered in the USA and become customary in the Europe only during the past two decades.

The South African Museum itself was being extended and partially reconstructed during our visit, so that we had limited access to the depots. Its focus is on ethnography and above all on natural history, and it seeks new ways of interpreting its core collections

In the morning we visited the **Castle of Good Hope**, formally the property of the South African Defence Force, but where the residential quarters from the Dutch East India Company period have housed the greater part of Iziko's '**William Fehr Collection**' since 1952. The Castle also houses an independent military museum, and various objects of historical importance,



Part of the Fehr Collection in the former Governor's Residence



such as colonial boundary-stones, weapons, and archaeological material. The Castle, built by the Dutch East India Company in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, is the most prominent tangible monument of the Dutch colonial period; much of the material used in its construction, including bricks and possibly also wood, was imported from the Netherlands, and its five bastions are named after Dutch towns.

The Governor's quarters and those of other high officials are situated in the transverse building which bisects the Castle's vast inner court. They underwent many alterations during the British period and later; on the occasion of the Van Riebeeck celebrations of 1952 they were arranged as a museum and furnished with the collection of Cape furniture and paintings collected by William Fehr, bequeathed to the Nation and now in the care of Iziko. The adjoining Secunde's house is furnished with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century items, several of them of Dutch origin, from the Iziko Social History Collections. In both areas, and the adjoining cellars, there are objects of great historical importance; and the Castle is well visited being an established attraction for both tourists and South Africans.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

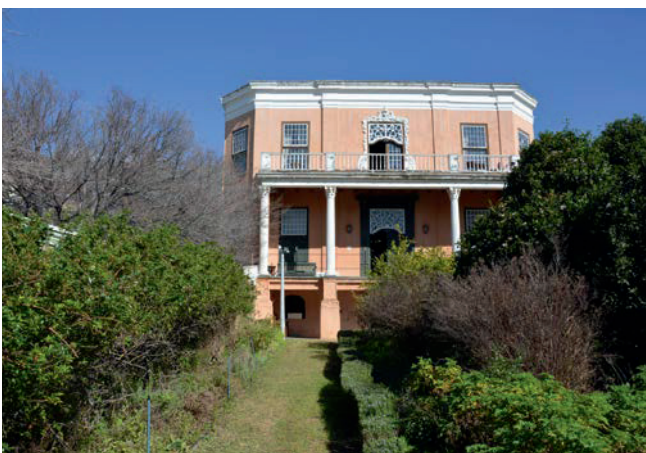
Our visit coincided with the final weeks of the now very dated display of the Fehr Collection as the Castle was being evacuated for building works. This will necessitate a re-evaluation of

the Fehr Collection (largely assembled from a variety of sources between the wars). It is uncertain whether the collaboration between Iziko and the Castle will continue once the latter's structure has been refurbished. Though the Fehr Collection had no link with the Castle, it was not inappropriate there; but it is felt by many that a new display, with different priorities is necessary. If the Fehr Collection is not rehoused in the Castle, a new position within Iziko for this collection will need to be considered.

In the afternoon, Esther Esmiol took us to **Rust en Vreugd**, one of the few surviving suburban villas dating from the Dutch East India period, and built for one of its officials, W.C. Broers, with whom several travellers, including Le Vaillant lodged. Having been incorporated into a school, the building was extensively restored and rebuilt in the 1960s and set up as a house museum in which the works on paper from the Fehr Collection are also kept. The whole is now under the care of Iziko; and the Fehr works, which also fall under Iziko, have remained there as a substantive collection illustrative of Cape history rather than being incorporated into the prints and drawings collection at the South African National Gallery.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

While the exterior of the building is charmingly maintained, the whole ensemble is very much the child of conservation ideas of the 1960s,



Rust en Vreugd from its garden



Rotating display of works on paper



The Michaelis Collection on display



The Old Town House (Burgerwachthuis)

a pioneering moment in South African heritage management. The interior and staircase date largely from this period, and somewhat compromise its integrity as a house museum. It attracts few visitors. Works on paper from the Fehr collection are circulated periodically in the downstairs rooms, but these displays are not

advertised as special exhibitions. Rust en Vreugd is certainly an important element in the shared cultural heritage of Holland and South Africa; but its role as a museum is slightly problematic.

Thereafter we visited, unaccompanied, two smaller museums. The **Michaelis Collection**, an important and valuable group paintings mainly by Dutch seventeenth-century masters, is housed in the former Burger Wachthuis (built 1755) which functioned as the City Hall until the end of the nineteenth century. It was purchased by Sir Max Michaelis as an outstanding example of Cape Dutch town architecture that was also of historic importance; and as an appropriate home for the collection of Dutch golden-age art he had assembled largely on the European art market. When it opened in 1914, it was South Africa's first art museum.

Not far away, in Strand Street, is one of the very few citizens' houses from the Dutch colonial period to survive more or less intact. It had remained in same family for most of the





The Koopmans De Wet House



One of its rooms



Entrance to the Stellenbosch Museum



The hall of Grosvenor House

nineteenth century, and the last owners had wished that some of its furniture to be taken into public ownership. When it was found necessary to auction the house and its contents, their importance was recognised and the late eighteenth-century building and much of its contents were purchased to create what was South Africa's first house museum, known as **The Koopmans De Wet House**. It too opened in 1914. The collections of Cape Dutch furniture, silver and ceramics are particularly fine.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Both these museums have been taken under the wing of Iziko and the Michaelis paintings are now looked after by the South African National Gallery. Both have fewer visitors than might be expected from their prominent positions, and the

Old Town house depends largely on its catering and the hire of its rooms rather than visitors to the Michaelis paintings. That is perhaps not inappropriate for what was always intended as a public building; but it is worth asking whether the Michaelis paintings – an important example of shared heritage and overall of high quality – might not be better integrated into the collections of the National Gallery. The Koopmans De Wet House, perhaps thanks to the lack of visitors, has managed to retain the atmosphere of a private house, and is perhaps the most evocative of the Dutch colonial period.

### Wednesday 29th July

We drove to Stellenbosch, the first town to be established outside Cape Town during the Dutch period, where we were welcomed to the



Vergelegen, principal facade

**Stellenbosch Museum** by its manager, Debbie Gabriels. The museum was founded in 1962, and consists of four house-museums within walking distance of each other. It receives a subsidy from the local government, and some ten percent of its income is generated from ticket sales; there are about 2000 visitors per year, mostly tourists attracted by the surrounding vineyards and scenic countryside. Of the 26 members of staff, ten are employees of the local government. There is no director and no curator: when curatorial and/or administrative expertise are needed these are hired externally; otherwise the manager maintains the status quo. The visit begins with what is billed as the oldest farmhouse in South Africa, of somewhat primitive construction and with a guard in period costume tending the fire. The following Schreuderhuis is billed as the earliest surviving town house, and then to the house built in 1789 for H.L. Bletterman when he was appointed the Dutch East India Company's regional magistrate. Both are furnished in period style, though few items are original to the houses. The final two houses are from the British period, Grosvenor House with an interior from the early nineteenth century, and the O.M. Berg house with one from the 1860s/70s which also contains a small depot.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The museum is modest in scope and ambition, aiming more at a period feel than authenticity or educative ends; and is certainly charming. Personnel in period costume, as often found in North American house museums, add to the charm. There seems to be little exchange with other heritage organisations, and it could possibly enrich its scope by using items from the Iziko Social History Collections.

In the afternoon we went to the farm **Vergelegen**, founded in 1700 by the colony's Dutch governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel, and the scene of one of the worst corruption scandals within the Dutch East India Company when it was shown that Van der Stel had abused company funds and labour to enrich the estate for his own benefit. After his disgrace, the land was divided and his luxurious residence passed through many hands before being restored by a British family at the beginning of the twentieth century following early drawings and descriptions. It is now owned by the mining conglomerate Anglo-American which runs the estate commercially as vineyards and opens the house to the public as a private museum.



The Headquarters of SAHRA in Cape Town



Our meeting with the colleagues at SAHRA

Although the exterior has been scrupulously restored, and excavations have taken place to establish the original positions and functions of the outbuildings, there has been no attempt to present the house in a Dutch colonial way. It has been furnished by an interior decorator in a South African version of the English country-house style, and as such is a rich foil for some of the better British eighteenth-century paintings from the South African National Gallery that have been given on loan.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This is largely a commercial operation which offers the experience of visiting the residence of a wine-estate as it might have been during the final years of British rule. Despite its architecture and early history there is little here to base a Shared Cultural Heritage initiative on.

### Thursday 30th July

We were welcomed to the headquarters of the **South African Heritage Resources Agency** by its Executive officer Dumisani Sibayi, and members of his staff including Tara van Niekerk, T. Gregory Ontong, Phillip Hine and Katie Smuts. SAHRA was set up in 2000 (absorbing the former National Monuments Council) as the national protector of heritage sites of all kinds, archaeological, marine, architectural, and industrial, in the whole of South Africa. It has a staff of eighty, fifteen of whom work in the Pretoria office. SAHRA does not

directly own or maintain any cultural properties but functions more as a watchdog: permission must be given by SAHRA for any archaeological investigations, or for any development of archaeologically or architecturally sensitive sites. It also controls the importation and exportation of heritage objects, including those belonging to national and local museums. SAHRA is charged with educating and raising public consciousness about heritage issues.

Most importantly, SAHRA has the final say in heritage concerns, with powers to overrule the heritage departments of South Africa's nine provinces, who are primarily responsible for heritage matters and for ensuring adequate maintenance. SAHRA also has the power to declare sites or buildings as National Monuments with specially protected status.

It is also SAHRA that has recently instigated the national register of all cultural heritage items, their condition, context and value (including those in museums, as we have already seen). The results will probably confirm what SAHRA already estimates, that the vast majority of museums are underfunded and unable optimally to maintain their collections.

Gregory Ontong informed us that South Africa has around fifty thousand architectural monuments, categorised as Grade 1 (national), grade 2 (provincial) and grade 3 (local). SAHRA assesses the 'Heritage Impact' of any proposal to alter, restore, extend or repurpose a declared national monument, and is responsible for



giving or refusing permission. This occupies most of the energies of the 'Built Environment' department, and can be both politically and financially sensitive.

SAHRA employs four archaeologists who are responsible for policing all archaeological sites and monitoring any digs in progress. This includes marine archaeology along more than 3000 kilometres of coastline particularly rich in historical shipwrecks, including many Dutch East India Company ships. They are conscious that they have insufficient financing and manpower to fulfil this function adequately

There was much discussion about the role of cultural objects and the promotion of historical awareness of pre-historic, colonial and more recent history in South Africa.

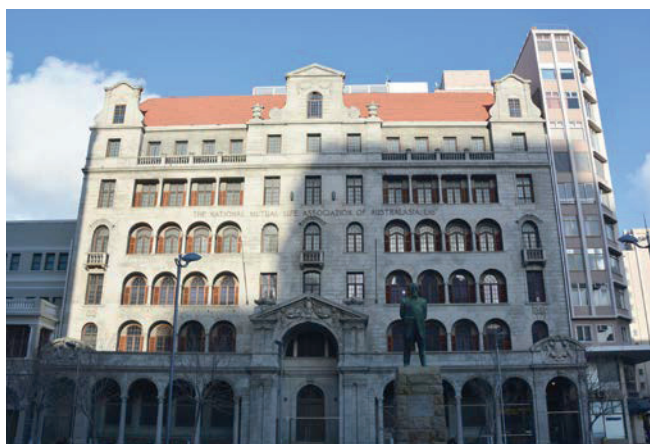
## Conclusions and Recommendations

SAHRA's role and modus operandi is broadly comparable to that of the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency: SAHRA has a greater controlling and coordinating function, and will, for example, be placing the results of the registration programme on an open database system, SAHRIS, to which other professionals in the heritage industry will have access. With this database, SAHRA could play a leading role in stimulating the registration and management of collections in a wide variety of museums which up until now have had no, or inappropriate collection-registration software (as we saw on several occasions during this study-trip).

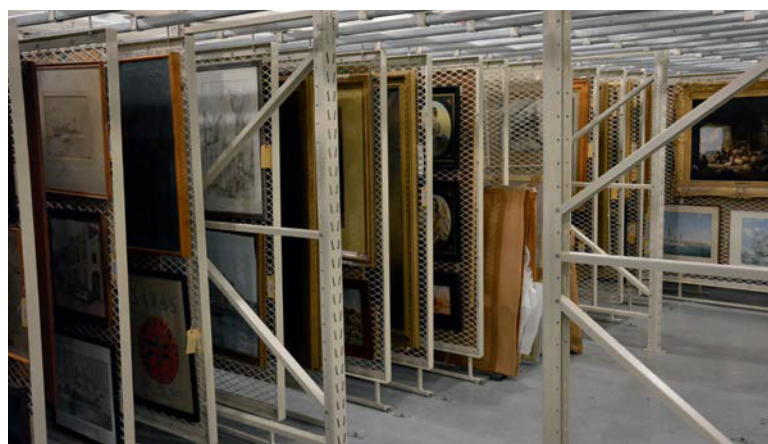
A general database should also help SAHRA's role in monitoring the provincial heritage agencies.

In the afternoon we visited Iziko's Social History Centre in Spin Street, where we were again received by Esther Esmiol, and made the acquaintance of her colleagues Fatima February, Bradley Mottie, Tessa Davids and Lailah Hisham. This centrally located building combines the depots of Iziko's historical collections, with a study-room and library open to the public. We were shown the database, Logo Flow, that Iziko uses as a collections management system and in which approximately thirty thousand out of approximately 150 thousand of the Iziko Social History Collections object records have been entered. Additional records such as photographs and condition reports can be linked but has not yet been done.

In the conservation studios, the Iziko conservators – who work for all eleven museum in the group – are mostly engaged on preventive conservation, and on minor reparations where necessary. As Fatima February and Bradly Mottie explained, they and their colleagues feel the need of training and further studies in the field. It emerged here, as also in the Gauteng museums, that the lack of specialist conservators is keenly felt, particularly those for paper and metals. Some objects are treated by external restorers and firms, including the South African Institute for Heritage Science and Conservation; but demand exceeds supply the tariffs are punishingly dear, and the studios are situated some 600 miles from Cape Town. Furthermore many necessary materials – such as



Social History Building



One of the Paintings depots



Principal facade of Groot Constantia



Furniture from the De Pass collection in the interior

acid-free paper, microcrystalline wax etc. – have to be imported; and there is no access to conservation scientists except those abroad. After the ateliers and the archaeological workshops (where conservation is undertaken as necessary), we visited the many well-ordered and well-kept depots containing furniture, textiles, weavings and much else.

### Friday 31st July

On this day, the last of the study trip, we made informal visits to the **Slave Lodge** and the **South African National Gallery**, both of them part of the Iziko umbrella, as well as to the wine estate **Groot Constantia** in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. Groot Constantia has long been the postcard-icon of Dutch colonial prosperity (and, more recently, of exploitative slave-ownership) at the Cape. Established in the late seventeenth century by the governor Simon van der Stel, during the course of the eighteenth century it became by far the most famous vineyard in South Africa, its wines sought throughout the world, until the vines were devastated by disease in the late nineteenth century. This prosperity resulted in an unusually large and elaborate house in the Cape Dutch style, which

after being razed by fire in the 1920s was restored and is now run as a house-museum under the aegis of Iziko, including the separate and spectacularly ornamented winery dating from the 1790s, and a dower house.

None of the original contents of the house survive, and it has been furnished in period style with objects bequeathed to the City by the twentieth century collector Alfred de Pass, including some Dutch paintings, ceramics and silver and items from Dutch Batavia as well as Cape Dutch furniture. The history of the house is explained, and in the stables there is a didactic presentation of the slave-economy which made such estates possible.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite its almost complete rebuilding after the fire and the eclectic furnishing, Groot Constantia has become, for better or for worse, a symbol of Dutch culture at the Cape during the rule of the Dutch East India Company. It is superbly maintained, and the estate continues to function as a wine producer with a considerable income from tourism.

Thanks to the generous hospitality with which we were received, and the candid discussions we were able to have with our colleagues, we can look back on a very successful mission. We made the acquaintance of most of the leading guardians of the cultural heritage in South Africa's two main urban conglomerates, Gauteng and the Cape Peninsula, and were able to see both the front-of-house presentations and behind-the-scenes conditions of the major museum collections there. We were pleasantly surprised at the quantity, and often the quality, of what can be described as 'Shared Cultural Heritage', even when, as is the case with the De Pass Collection and the Michaelis collections in both Cape Town and Pretoria, it came to South Africa at the end of British rule under an historicist impulse. We noted that, despite the knowledge built up over decades by curators and their predecessors in many of the institutions and the close co-operation with academic departments in the universities, there is no unified platform for scholarly research within the museums, or the exchange of

information between institutions and transferral of knowledge to a younger generation. Further, financial restraints are resulting in the attrition of curatorial and conservation staff, and posts are frequently left open when curators retire, taking the fruits of their experience with them.

Most interesting from the perspective of shared cultural heritage is the place of colonial history in a country where the wounds of colonialism have not yet healed, and where there is a thirst for a more inclusive historical narrative which is not necessarily supported by the physical objects which museums exist to preserve. The different perspective with which the Netherlands and the various population groups of South Africa view their shared cultural heritage must lie at the heart of any future actions in this area. Perhaps the most valuable outcome of this study trip was the recognition that a dialogue on such subjects is both necessary and desirable, especially when items of shared heritage become regarded with hostility or indifference.



# Opportunities for Collaboration

Although during this first mission only two of South Africa's nine provinces were visited, it is possible to make a provisional sketch of what The Netherlands might be able to offer the public museum collections of South Africa within the framework of the Shared Cultural Heritage Policy of the Netherlands Government. We identified five main areas.

## 1. Digitising

For all museums worldwide the registration of their collections in a stable, easily accessible, and easily upgradable database is now a priority. This should be a system that can accommodate photographs and other information, and ideally should have an interface which can be consulted via the internet. We had the strong impression that South African museums were lagging in this respect, largely because of financial constraints and outdated software. The Netherlands has long been a trailblazer in this respect and can offer advice; at the same time Dutch museums could profit from the excellent analogue record-keeping we saw at the Cultural History Museum in Pretoria and at Iziko.

## 2. Fundraising

Almost all of the institutions we visited were underfinanced, and frequently dependent on national or local government for funding. With a few exceptions the American model, now adopted by many European museums including the leading Dutch ones, of raising funds from individuals or companies with a strong interest in heritage matters, has scarcely been explored. In many cases such sponsorship can be in kind.

## 3. Preventive conservation

Preventive measures can often obviate, or at least delay, the necessity for expensive conservation or restoration. This applies not only to objects and ensembles such as interior; and is particularly relevant to 'reference collections' which are housed in depots. Again, the Netherlands has built up an international reputation in this field and is willing to share its experience.

## 4. Display

The renewal of museum displays is expensive and intellectually demanding. South Africa society has experienced a profound change over the past twenty years, and there is a desire among curators and others for a reassessment in the way in which historical collections are presented.

## 5. Transfer of knowledge

Without sufficient young scholars who find a museum career attractive and financially feasible, the knowledge built up by the earlier generations will be lost. This already appears to be happening in several of the institutions we visited; if collections are considered worthy of being preserved the expertise necessary must be cherished. South African museums face a particular challenge in that many were founded with a very Eurocentric and colonial view of history and artistic achievements. The younger generations, particularly those who have grown up since the introduction of democracy, have other priorities and other interests which need to be catered for, and bridging the gap between the generations will not be easy and may result in the undervaluing of existing museum collections.

## What next

The success of our mission to Gauteng and the Cape leads us to believe that, from our point of view, it is desirable also to visit other regions in order to get a better picture of the shared cultural heritage present in South African Museums. We are especially interested in those places in which the Netherlands, or at least Dutch people and Dutch traditions, have made a strong impact. These include Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Kokstad in Kwazulu Natal; Bloemfontein in the Free Staet, Kimberley in the Northern Cape; and Uitenhage, Swellendam and Genadendal in the Eastern and Western Cape.

# Appendix 1:

## Itinerary

	Morning	Afternoon
<b>We 22-7</b>	Pretoria Art Museum Dirk Oegema Gerda Guldemonnd Hannelie du Plessis	National Museum of Cultural History Corine Meyer Annemarie Carelsen and other colleagues
<b>Th 23-7</b>	Engelenburghouse Dioné Prinsloo Linda Brink Francois van der Merwe Annemarie Carelsen	University of Pretoria Gerard de Kamper
	Evening: Expert meeting Jeroen-Louis Martens Participants: Nontobeko Ntombela; Jeannine Howse; Shahid Vawda; Brett Pyper; Annemarie Carelsen; Dirk Oegema; Dione Prinsloo; Riana Mulder; Christopher Till; Kgomotso Mohlala	
<b>Fr 24-7</b>	Johannesburg Art Gallery Antoinette Murdoch Philippa van Straaten and other colleagues	Museum Africa Diana Wall
<b>Sa 25-7</b>	Cultural History Museum Kruger House Museum	Voortrekker Monument Museum Freedompark
<b>Su 26-7</b>	Flight Cape Town	
<b>Mo 27-7</b>	University Cape Town Simon Hall Bertram House	South African Museum Rooksana Omar Esther Esmiol Hamish Robertson Gerald Klinghardt and other colleagues
<b>Tu 28-7</b>	Castle Good Hope (William Fehr collection) Esther Esmiol	The Rust en Vreugd Museum Esther Esmiol The Michaelis Collection at the Old Town House Koopmans- de Wet House
<b>We 29-7</b>	Stellenbosch Museum Debbie Gabriels Stellenbosch Univesity Museum Rupert Museum	Vergelegen Estate
<b>Th 30-7</b>	SAHRA Dumisani Sibayi Katie Smuts Philip Hine Tyrone Gregory Ontong Tara van Niekerk	Iziko Social History Collection Department Gerald Klinghardt Esther Esmiol Ayesha Hendricks Bradly Mottie Fatima Februari
<b>Fr 31-7</b>	Groot Constantia Manor House	Slave Lodge South African National Gallery Ester Esmiol

# Appendix 2:

## Personae

Name	Occupation	Institution
Jan van den Bos	Curator military collections	National Museum of Cultural History
Linda Brink	Project Manager	Engelenburg House Museum, Pretoria
Jo Burger	Librarian	Johannesburg Art Gallery
Annemarie Carelsen	Curator historic interiors	National Museum of Cultural History
Robyn-Leigh Cedras	Curator	Rupert museum
Gerard DeKamper	Curator	Universiteit van Pretoria
Esther Esmiol	Curator Social History Collections	Iziko Museums
Fatima February	Conservator	Iziko Museums
Debbie Gabriëls	Manager Museum	Stellenbosch Museum
Susan Glanville-Zini	Director Institutional Advancement	Iziko Museums
Gerda Guldmond	Curator	Pretoria Art Museum
Simon Hall	Archaeologist	University of Cape Town
Ayesha Hendricks	Assistant collections	Social History Collections
Jeannine Howse	freelance heritage consultant	Gordon Schachat Collection
Phillip Hine	Archaeologist, Palaeontologist	South Africa Heritage Resources Agency
Gerald Klinghardt	Social History Curator	Iziko Museums
Sheree Lissos	Historical Curator	Johannesburg Art Gallery
Jeroen-Louis Martens	First Secretary Press and Cultural Affairs	Dutch Embassy
Francois van der Merwe	Independent architect	Engelenburg House Museum, Pretoria
Corine Meyer	Curator metals and ceramics	National Museum of Cultural History
Kgomotso Mohlala	Deputy Director	Melrose House
Bradly Mottie	Conservator	Iziko Museums
Riana Mulder	Regional president	SAMA North
Antoinette Murdoch	Director	Johannesburg Art Gallery
Bongani Ndhlovu	Executive Director: Core Functions	Iziko Museums
Musha Neluheni	Curator Contemporary Collections	Johannesburg Art Gallery
Tara van Niekerk	Maritime archaeologist	South Africa Heritage Resources Agency
Nontobeko Ntombela	Teacher	WITS artschool heritage studies
Dirk Oegema	Acting Director	Pretoria Art Museum
Rooksana Omar	CEO	Iziko Museums
Tyrone Gregory Ontong	Manager Built Environment	South Africa Heritage Resources Agency
Marian Paulik	Manager Conservation	Johannesburg Art Gallery
Hannelie du Plessis	Curator	Pretoria Art Museum
Dionë Prinsloo	Chief officer	Engelenburg House Museum, Pretoria
Hayden Proud	Curator Art Collections	Iziko Museums
Brett Pyper	Head of School	WITS School of Arts
Hamish Robertson	Director Natural History Collections	Iziko Museums
Dumisani Sibayi	Acting chief executive officer	South Africa Heritage Resources Agency
Kattie Smuts	Manager of the National Inventory	South Africa Heritage Resources Agency
Philippa van Straaten	Curator	Johannesburg Art Gallery
Frank Teichert	Curator rock stones and human remains	National Museum of Cultural History
Paul Tichmann	Curator Slave Lodge	Iziko Museums
Christopher Till	Director	Apartheid Museum
Shahid Vawda	Head of School	WITS School of Science
Diane Wall	Curator	Museum Africa, Johannesburg
Tara Weber	Registrar	Johannesburg Art Gallery





In the summer of 2015, three museum professionals from the Netherlands went to South Africa. Aim of this study trip was to exchange knowledge and experiences with museum professionals in South Africa concerning the collections for which they are responsible within a variety of contexts, from established national museums to smaller public house museums. It was also hoped to gain an idea of the extent of the collections and historical interiors which can be considered as shared cultural heritage, and the wishes of South African colleagues for mutual exchanges of information on conservation and collections management. In this report, the authors describe their findings and distinguish opportunities for collaboration.