

# ***Play Van Abbe***

## **The museum in the 21st century**

**28 November 2009 – June 2011**

*What is the role of an art museum in the 21st century? What are the conventions of a museum and to what extent are we aware of them? How did they develop and are they appropriate today? Can we make them visible? Change them? Play with them?*

From 28 November 2009 the Van Abbemuseum will present *Play Van Abbe*. *Play Van Abbe* is the result of a long process of rethinking the collection over the past three years. For the next 18 months, this multifaceted programme will take the collection and use it to suggest answers to the questions outlined above. It consists of exhibitions, projects, performances, lectures, discussions, and new techniques for mediating the public's reactions to art and its contexts. With the social and political changes of the last 20 years in mind, the museum uses *Play Van Abbe* to ask topical questions about the identity and objectives of museums and cultural heritage organisations more generally. It aims to focus not only on the artworks themselves but also on the way we are allowed to look at and to talk about them in a museum. Questions about form and content, copy and original, good and bad are put up for argument. The apparent neutrality of the museum is tested and the relation to exhibiting and collecting art is explored. The history and purpose of art museums in general and Van Abbemuseum in particular are revealed as partial and related as much to ethical decisions about society as to aesthetic choices about beauty and order. The programme will be subdivided into four parts, each with its own theme. On 28 November, the first part will commence: *The Game and the Players* with as its central theme the conventions and personalities that produce the knowledge and experience of a museum today.

### **Play Van Abbe**

*Play Van Abbe* is a 'game' or 'role-play' in which the visitors, the artists and the museum workers are asked to play an active role. As a programme it seeks to remain playful while encouraging critical thinking about how artworks got here and what the museum can do with them now that they have arrived. Together with visitors, artists, (guest) curators, researchers, and institutions from the Netherlands and abroad, the Van Abbemuseum wants to play the museum like an instrument and learn more about itself and the possibilities of cultural production today. In order to do justice to these questions, the museum has suspended its temporary exhibitions programme for 18 months and puts its full attention on *Play Van Abbe*.

The questions addressed in this programme are based on the museum's observations of how society has changed over 20 years. For example, how does globalisation or the creation of on-line communities affect a museum? How can we create space for interpretation and reflection in a continuously demanding environment?



Using *Play Van Abbe*, the Van Abbemuseum contributes to a broad theoretical discussion about the identity of museums of contemporary art in the 21st century. The topics are visualised in the museum's every-day situations.

Christiane Berndes, curator of the collection: '*We want to visualise the museum in relation to day-to-day life and the world around us in a different way. We want visitors to stop and think 'we never looked at it this way'. I'd like them to be inspired!*'

### **Programme setup**

The 18-month programme of *Play Van Abbe* is subdivided into four parts, each with its own theme. In each part, specific topics are put up for discussion. Through works of art and forms of mediation, curatorial and artistic visions are explored, and the museum model is investigated, and exhibitions are displayed anew.

New stories are told with the museum's collection, old stories are reconstructed and artists are given assignments.

Each part features an *intervention or interruption*; a project that breaks into the chapter's theme and seeks to test the limits of the practice of the museum.

During the change-over period, when parts are exchanged for new ones, visitors are invited to take a look behind the scenes of the museum.

The four parts of *Play Van Abbe* are supplemented by lectures and discussions, a research programme, an international-conference and various publications.

### The parts

The first part *The Game and the Players*, will commence on Saturday 28 November 2009 and will run until March 2010. In this chapter, the museum will focus on the stories of artists and exhibition makers. Who are these 'players' within a museum? What are their aims? How was the collection presented in 1983 and how is it done in 2009? The first chapter is about positioning an art museum – today and in the past – and rethinking it as both a productive environment in which stories unfold and a site for presentation in which things are seen.

In March 2010, the second part, called *Time Machines* begins. In this chapter museum models from the past are viewed. How does the museum use presentation techniques to tell a story and what are the hidden assumptions?

In part 3 *The Politics of Collecting/ The Collecting of Politics* the act of collecting falls under the spotlight. What does it mean to collect and keep works of art? What kind of world is perceived when viewing a collection? Who decides and why?

The final part, called *The Tourist, the Pilgrim, the Flaneur (and the worker)* will investigate the pleasure of being a visitor to the museum and how to intensify that experience.

### The background of Play Van Abbe

*Play Van Abbe* evolved from the *Plug In* programme at the Van Abbemuseum which ran between 2006 and 2009. It is also a response to the challenges of various disciplines, including art, art history, cultural studies and sociology, as well as people involved in the daily practice of the museum. Their questions relate to the work of art as a material object and to the museum as the context in which the work of art is positioned and identified.

Together with interdisciplinary and international forms of collaboration, *Play Van Abbe* investigates how to position a museum as a knowledge institution that tries to preserve a 'collective cultural memory'. It seeks to surprise and inspire a public while promoting critical, long term thinking about art's role in the contemporary world.

### Curators

Christiane Berndes  
Charles Esche  
Annie Fletcher  
Diana Franssen

### Research curator

Steven ten Thije

### In collaboration with

Instituut Collectie Nederland (ICN), Amsterdam  
Hildesheim University, Germany

### Advisers

Prof. Dr. Deborah Cherry, Faculty of Art History, department of Modern Art History, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Prof. Dr. Thomas Lange, Institut für Bildende Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Hildesheim University, Germany  
Prof. Irit Rogoff, Professor of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths University of London, United Kingdom  
Shepherd Steiner, Art Critic, Visiting Assistant Professor in Modern and Contemporary Art, University of Florida, United States of America  
Dr. Sarat Maharaj, Professor of Visual Art & Knowledge Systems, Lund University & the Malmö Art Academies, Sweden  
Dr. John Byrne, Head of Masters Studies Fine Arts, Liverpool John Moores University, United Kingdom

### Subsidisers

*Play Van Abbe* has been realised in part by contributions by the Mondriaan Foundation, BankGiro Loterij and Provincie Noord-Brabant.



Provincie Noord-Brabant



The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is one of the first public museums for contemporary art to be established in Europe. The museum's collection of around 2700 works of art includes key works and archives by Lissitzky, Picasso, Kokoschka, Chagall, Beuys, McCarthy, Daniëls and Körmeling. The museum has an experimental approach towards art's role in society. Openness, hospitality and knowledge exchange are important. We challenge ourselves and our visitors to think about art and its place in the world, covering a range of subjects, including the role of the collection as a cultural 'memory' and the museum as a public site. International collaboration and exchange have made the Van Abbemuseum a place for creative cross-fertilisation and a source of surprise, inspiration and imagination for its visitors and participants.

## Press Release October 2009

Van Abbemuseum  
Bilderdijklaan 10  
Eindhoven, the Netherlands

### Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday 11.00 – 17.00 hrs.

Thursday 11.00 - 17.00 hrs.

On Thursdays, the museum is open until 21.00 hrs. Free entrance from 17.00 hrs.

### Entrance

Adults: € 8,50

Groups of 15 and over, senior citizens: € 6

Students; holders of the Dutch young people's cultural pass (CJP) € 4

Thursdays from 17.00 - 21.00 hrs.: free entrance (until 31 December 2009)

For more information, please visit [www.vanabbemuseum.nl](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl)

For the editors:

For more information and photographs, please go to:

[www.vanabbemuseum.nl/press](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl/press)

Or contact:

Ilse Cornelis, Marketing & Communication

Phone: +31 (0)40 238 1019

Mobile: + 31 (0)6 12995794

[i.cornelis@vanabbemuseum.nl](mailto:i.cornelis@vanabbemuseum.nl)