



# The Stedelijk Museum's *When Things Are Beings* as a 'Third Space': Remediating Artistic Exclusivity through Self-representation and Inclusive Collection Practices

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**Abstract:** This article explores the issue of artistic exclusivity within art history and museums, shedding light on the historical roots of this problem and its continuation within collection practices. It examines how artists, particularly those outside the identity categories of white, Euro-American, and male, have struggled for recognition within the art historical canon. The central theme of this article is the concept of the 'third space', which serves as a means to bridge connections between individuals, fostering cultural exchange and dialogue. As a case study of a 'third space' and an example of an inclusive collection practice, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam's exhibition *When Things Are Beings* is presented as a promising step towards a more equitable and diverse future in the art world, underlining the institutional responsibility to address representation inadequacies within museum collections.

**Keywords:** Museums, Museum Collections, Third Space, Inclusivity, Identity, Representation, Contemporary Art

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## Introduction

The pervasive issue of artistic exclusivity is encountered both in art history and within museums, with art historians functioning as the root of the cause and museum curation and collection as the unfortunate continuation. With texts such as Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists* in mind, women specifically have always found themselves as a minority in the art historical canon, succeeding only when being framed as the exception to the rule.<sup>1</sup> Historically, this process of exclusion extends to demographics outside of women and into any group independent of the identity categories of white, Euro-American, and male. The museological side of the issue has been forced into the public consciousness by groups such as the Guerrilla

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<sup>1</sup> Of the approximately 180 artists mentioned in Vasari's *The Lives of Artists*, only four of them are women. In regard to Vasari's view of the women artists, the translators of the volume, Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, state the following: "while male artists execute works without regard to their personal feelings throughout *the Lives*, Vasari seems unable to imagine a woman creating a work of art without sentimental or romantic inspiration". Keeping in mind that the Renaissance view of artistry values logic over emotion, this is an undeniably narrow-minded and sexist estimation of the artists mentioned. Reference: Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 565.

Girls, who famously brought the gender and race disparity within museum collections to light, garnering a lot of attention in 1989 by asking: “Do women need to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, they would paste stickers next to museums that read: “We Sell White Bread.”<sup>3</sup> With the many years that have passed, the questions that remain are: How much has really changed? And what paths towards inclusion are museums taking today?

As a contemporary art institution, the Stedelijk in Amsterdam is in the unique position to affect change for artists working today. In their collection of 100,000 artworks, a 2021 study found that only 8% of the collection was made up of woman identified artists, and 91% (with a birthplace on record) of Euro-American creators.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, they function as a part of the wider problem at hand, guilty of upholding the default-other dichotomy of the traditional museum. Nonetheless, the approach behind their recent exhibition *When Things Are Beings* differs greatly from their museological and art historical predecessors in terms of access, representation, and artist opportunity.

In this article, I will explore and analyse the function of the exhibition as a ‘third space’ that deviates from conventional museological and art historical practices. *When Things are Beings* does this by promoting fluid self-representation, positioning itself as a solution to the art exclusivity problem to the end of creating a more diverse collection. It will delve into the exhibition’s curatorial decisions, its connection to art historical literature, and the methods it uses to include diverse voices and perspectives. By examining specific artworks, such as Amy Suo Wu and Elaine W. Hor’s *radio SLUMBER* and Marcos Kueh’s *Kenyalang Circus*, the article unravels the exhibition’s impact on challenging fixed Eurocentric identity categories and efficacy in creating a platform for artists of diverse backgrounds.

## Living Objects and ‘Third Spaces’: Literary Influences on Curatorial Decision-making

A ‘third space’, according to critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha, mediates connections betwixt “the I and the You”, producing meaning between the two subjects.<sup>5</sup> This connection and production of meaning then enables all in the space to experience and participate in dialogical interpersonal and/or cultural exchange. It is a space in which ‘contact zones’, described by visual artist Mary Louise Pratt as places where previously separated subjects temporarily converge and become intertwined, are channelled through.<sup>6</sup> In the museological appropriation of the term, the ‘third space’ has become a point of discourse, with museologists such as Simona Bodo calling for the normative integration of the ‘third space’ into curative practices. Whilst analysing how the ‘third space’ functions in (Italian) museums today, Bodo found three experimental practices currently in use. The first approach lies in the training and use of so-called ‘cultural mediators’ for the purpose of offering new perspectives to visitors, the second refers to the active engagement of mixed groups in the creation of shared narratives surrounding collections, and the third involves facilitating interactions between contemporary artists to harvest new perspectives on identity and heritage through unique forms of communication.<sup>7</sup> For *When Things are Being*, Bodo’s first and third types of experimentation are of particular relevance. With the curators (Britte Sloothaak and Amanda Pinatih) acting in a role comparable

<sup>2</sup> Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls*, 23–24.

<sup>3</sup> Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> Caroline Gutierrez, “Visualizing the Stedelijk.”

<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, quoted in Clifford, *Routes*, 192.

<sup>7</sup> Bodo, “Museums as Intercultural Spaces,” 184.

to Bodo's 'cultural mediators' and the artists prompted to bring new perspectives to culturally relevant objects, the 'third space' has multiple sources within the halls of *When Things are Beings*, functioning as a means of dialogue for both the museum visitor and exhibited artists.

The exhibition, conceived from a sort of competition for a selected portion of the exhibited artworks to become a part of the museum's collection, was based on the work of American-Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai and his theorisations surrounding the social life of objects. The central point of Appadurai's theory is that people and things are not as inherently distinct from one another as we may assume, with the transactions that surround said things inescapably endowed with the social relations they are made within or exist under.<sup>8</sup> In other words, things move through time and space as we do, constantly moving from valuable to not, their character changing depending upon the social situation it finds itself within.<sup>9</sup> The exhibition uses this as a foundational theory, and, therefore, a way to both understand and conceptualise the inner life of the objects exhibited. The prompt: to submit artworks that evoked the Indonesian concept of *guna-guna*, garnered over 750 entries, of which only 24 projects were chosen.<sup>10</sup> The exhibition is spearheaded by the Municipal Art Acquisitions project that (since 1995) has met its aims through open calls for artists and designers living in the Netherlands, the submissions of which go through a jury selection process.<sup>11</sup> With each edition, the theme changes, thus encouraging new perspectives to come to fruition to the end of diversifying the Dutch cultural zeitgeist.<sup>12</sup> According to the exhibition's own publication, *guna-guna* — which finds its routes in Indonesia and its continuation within South-East diasporas in the Netherlands — speaks of a "silent and mystical force that can be productive, protective, or destructive", and is associated with animism and ritual practices that can be found not only in South East Asia but Europe too.<sup>13</sup>

As previously mentioned, curators Britte Sloothaak and Amanda Pinatih (both of whom are of Indonesian heritage) act as 'cultural mediators' for the exhibition. The difference between Bodo's 'cultural mediator' and *When Things Are Beings* 'cultural mediators' lies in the fact that, as curators, Sloothaak and Pinatih are insiders to the museum rather than outsiders who are afforded temporary access. In their curatorial process, Sloothaak and Pinatih seem to focus on making connections rather than separations, finding middle grounds within the exhibition that allow the objects to take up their own space without feeling completely disconnected from one another. The use of translucent cloth arches that each visitor has to step through in order to reach the next artwork encourages connection, but with some intervention (see **Figure 1**). As a visitor, you are invited to explore different manifestations of *guna-guna* rather than completely foreign cultures, never without the mystical force that has brought every object together. The way certain objects are exhibited adds to this atmosphere, leaving the visitor with no doubt over the power of the artwork in front of them. This is particularly true for *Salawaku, Active Protection through Compassion* by visual artist Hatutamelen (see **Figure 2**). The *Salawaku* was traditionally made for combat to be used alongside a machete (parang) or spear (tombak), but is often used today during ceremonies or rituals.<sup>14</sup> Its purpose is to transform malevolence into compassion to stave off conflict whilst holding knowledge only legible to its owner.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Appadurai, "The thing itself," 15.

<sup>9</sup> Appadurai, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>10</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 151–152.

<sup>15</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 151–152.



**Figure 1.** Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. James Beckett, *The Sceptical Structures of Max*, 2019. Hatutamelen (James Noya), *Salawaku, Active Protection through Compassion*, 2022. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij.



**Figure 2.** Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. Hatutamelen (James Noya), *Salawaku, Active Protection through Compassion*, 2022. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij.

Historian Stephen Greenblatt, in his exploration of resonance and wonder in museum exhibitions, states that exhibitions and artworks worth viewing have the ability to both evoke wonder and resonate with the visitor.<sup>16</sup> For Greenblatt, *resonance* is defined as the ability the

<sup>16</sup> Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 54.

museum object has to reach outside of its formal boundaries and instil in the viewer a sense of the fluid, elaborate cultural forces it was birthed from.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, *wonder* refers to the power an artwork has to persuade exaltation, stop a visitor in their tracks and make them feel completely awestruck.<sup>18</sup> In being suspended from the ground, hovering above its platform underneath, the way *Salawaku* is positioned reaffirms its power. The object has a sun motif made of shell sitting at eye level in order for the viewer to meet its gaze, whilst the spotlight that shines above it is placed so it appears to spill out from the object itself. *Salawaku* surely stops any visitor in their tracks. Its cultural force is undeniable, radiant, and protective; its presentation resonant and wonderful. The amount of space the object is given magnifies its importance, its aura reaching all corners of the space it resides within. As such, Hatutamelen's artwork in particular shows off the precise, thoughtful exhibition design of *When Things are Beings*, showing that — within the confines of the Stedelijk — each of the artworks are at home, allowed to breathe and fully flaunt their force.

In Appadurai's article *The Thing Itself*, the author discusses the lack of distinction that can be made between different objects, specifically between the art object and everyday object, as well as the object and the human, in a variety of cultures.<sup>19</sup> As such, the objects within the exhibition work as human subjects rather than inanimate objects, carrying their own lives and cultures with them into the exhibition space. This is comparable to the Brazilian exhibition *Resistência já!* (or Resistance now!) that is currently on view. This exhibition was conceived of as a collaboration between *The Museum of Archeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo* (MAE-USP) and three different indigenous groups (Kaingang, Guarani Nhandewa, and Terena).<sup>20</sup> The three indigenous groups arranged the artefacts in exhibition according to their energy, and what they meant to each of the communities.<sup>21</sup> Existing around the same time as *When Things are Beings*, this type of curatorial approach is seemingly becoming more popular.

Specifically, when it comes to *When Things are Beings*, the curatorial connection to literature relevant to art history makes for a fascinating approach to its content, structure and interpretation. As such, the exhibition is not only a step towards self-representation, but an exploration of the academic ground museology is founded upon. In Pinatih's own words, she found herself interested in "an object's biography and how this changes when an object enters the museum space and maybe the collection".<sup>22</sup> The change that occurred within the 'third space' they created forever altered the meaning behind the exhibited objects, where they were appropriated as a communicative channel for personal identity, diasporic experience, and intercultural dialogue. Framed by the curators as what perhaps could be called 'living' objects, the way each piece is presented is well supported by theories surrounding 'storied matter' and its existence as an extension of human and non-human culture. According to Serpil Opperman, professor of the environmental humanities, 'storied matter' is any matter that not only has agency but has the capacity to hold stories within its material, producing meaning about the world for the people that encounter it.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, 'storied matter' can aid us in the path towards understanding ourselves, encouraging us to foster new perspectives on the everyday.<sup>24</sup> This analysis of the function of 'storied matter' is particularly pertinent when it comes to the choice to include James Beckett's *The Sceptical Structures of Max* (see **Figure 3**) in the exhibition.

<sup>17</sup> Greenblat, "Resonance and Wonder," 42.

<sup>18</sup> Greenblat, "Resonance and Wonder," 42.

<sup>19</sup> Appadurai, "The thing itself," 15–22.

<sup>20</sup> MAE-USP, "Exposição "Resistência já!."

<sup>21</sup> MAE-USP, "Exposição "Resistência já!."

<sup>22</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Opperman, "Storied Matter," 411.

<sup>24</sup> Opperman, "Storied Matter," 414.





**Figure 3.** Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. James Beckett, *The Sceptical Structures of Max*, 2019. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij.

Beckett's piece explores industrial heritage by discussing the history of the particleboard (developed by German inventor Max Himmelheber) and its ties to the Japanese Shinto belief of animism through Himmelheber's own connection with the subject.<sup>25</sup> Animism, the belief that all things have life and can possess human qualities, is central to the understanding of not only the particleboard and its materiality but also the prevalence of intercultural dialogue in artistic practice. Alongside his artwork, Beckett's research also culminated in a piece of accompanying literature that was also displayed in the exhibition. Sloothaak and Pinatih's choice to include this text results in a transparency that posits the connection between art historical writing and exhibition-making as natural extensions of one another. In reference to art historian Tessel M. Bauduin's exploration of modern European art and the influence of theosophy, Sloothaak herself positioned the inspection of the spiritual realm in Euro-American art as a longstanding theme within art history, stating the upsurge of this theme within contemporary art (due to current social debates on colonialism, gender constructs, capitalism, etc.) has become of popular interest.<sup>26</sup> As demonstrated by Bauduin, exhibitions have long been a catalyst for wider, further reaching discussions of art and discourse surrounding culturally relevant themes, all of which is shaped through art historical musings on the same.<sup>27</sup> In other words, museum exhibitions and art historical writing work in sort of a cyclical continuum of influence between and within one another. Using examples such as Hilma af Klint and her introduction to wider audiences through the exhibition: *The Spiritual in Art*, Bauduin frames exhibitions as a platform in the sense that they decide which artists and which sides of art history are presented to the general public and, as such, remembered.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the artists that were

<sup>25</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 56.

<sup>26</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Bauduin, "Abstract Art," 429.

<sup>28</sup> Bauduin, "Abstract Art," 440.

chosen for the exhibition mirror who and what the curators believe should have their place solidified in the art historical canon.<sup>29</sup>

## The European Superiority Complex vs. Fluid Self-Representation: Diversifying a Collection

Looking further into the artists in the exhibition, Bodo's aforementioned third type of 'third space' experimentation becomes pertinent. This is made clear through the curators' attempt to facilitate interactions and connection between each artist for current perspectives on heritage. By promoting artistic interaction and looking for new standpoints, *When Things Are Beings* allows for the self-representation of both individual cultures and artists. In contrast, previous approaches to cultural representation — especially within ethnographic museums — have attributed Eurocentric values and categorisations onto non-European artworks.<sup>30</sup> Taking the Great Exhibition of 1851 as a primary example of how colonial attitudes towards objects of cultural significance were previously exhibited in museums, the way institutions go about representations of identity has changed drastically. Both *When Things are Beings* and the aforementioned *Resistência já!* are particularly good examples of this, championing the self-representation of cultural identity over colonial storytelling. In the Great Exhibition, objects from other cultures were chosen for the ultimate goal of exhibiting "Britishness" and portraying the empire as they wish to be seen: as a civil, noble, moralistic society that naturally contrasted with the other 'foreign' cultures on display.<sup>31</sup> The portrayal of an English identity was therefore dependent on narratives of their artistic superiority to colonised countries, and economic dominance as shown through the sheer amount of objects on display.<sup>32</sup>

Europeans positioning themselves as superior continued as a pervasive issue as the world moved into the 20th Century. Even when it came to efforts to be different, such as the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in Centre Pompidou, Paris, long-time histories of taught European superiority marred the treatment of the cultures shown in the exhibition.<sup>33</sup> Brought into being as a reaction to the 1984 MoMA exhibition *Primitivism*, which was widely criticised for parading the Western ego, *Magiciens de la Terre* attempted to prove that different approaches could be taken to the curation of cultures.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, much like the MoMA's *Primitivism* exhibition, this was met with criticism. This was primarily due to the fact that the curators seemingly ignored academically-trained African artists and instead opted for an exoticised view of African folk art.<sup>35</sup> As expressed by artist and critic Rasheed Araeen, this static and traditional view of African art was juxtaposed with the so-called 'Western' artists in the exhibition, who were exhibited as modern, progressive and dynamic.<sup>36</sup> This failed attempt reveals the lengths institutions have to go to undo their longstanding presumptions and implicit biases. Paired with the treatment of artists during this period, racial discrimination proved as pervasive an issue as ever, its claws imbedded in all forms of cultural crossover between the 'West' and the 'rest'. For example, when Guyanese artist Aubrey Williams met Pablo Picasso, who had been integrating African art techniques and heritage objects into his work, he was not

<sup>29</sup> The artists chosen were as follows: Yinka Buutfeld, Hatutamelen (James Noya), Saskia Noor van Imhoff, Marcos Kueh, Sabine Marcelis, Chequita Nahar, Ana Navas and Antonio Jose Guzman and Iva Jankovic.

<sup>30</sup> Unruh, "Dialogical Curating," 77.

<sup>31</sup> Shears, *The Great Exhibition*, 77–78.

<sup>32</sup> Shears, *The Great Exhibition*, 77–78.

<sup>33</sup> Probst, *What Is African Art?*, 165–167.

<sup>34</sup> Probst, *What Is African Art?*, 179.

<sup>35</sup> Probst, *What Is African Art?*, 166–167.

<sup>36</sup> Probst, *What Is African Art?*, 166–167.

spoken to as an equal, but told he had a “fine African head”.<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly, his disappointment in the continuation of alienation and objectification of artists of colour was all that he could take from the meeting.<sup>38</sup> It is instances and events such as these that propel efforts to stray away from these models of exhibiting and artistic othering, and create new paths forward. In *When Things Are Beings*, Sloothaak and Pinatih put forth artistic self-representation within a ‘third space’ as one possible option.



**Figure 4.** Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. Amy Suo Wu and Elaine W. Ho, *radio SLUMBER*, 2020. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij.

In her essay on dialogical modes of curating as a natural progression from dialogical artistic practices, museologist Leanne Unruh (in reference to Art Historian Grant Kester’s exploration of the same) writes of the artist as a “facilitator and collaborator” to conversations that work beyond the limits of fixed identity.<sup>39</sup> One of the artworks chosen for *When Things Are Beings*, Amy Suo Wu and Elaine W. Ho’s *radio SLUMBER* (see **Figure 4**), presents identity and culture as fluid and not easily categorised. Using feminist scholar Silvia Fedrici’s reclamation of gossip as an integral form of knowledge sharing between women as a starting point, *radio SLUMBER* encourages the viewer to interact with conversations between women in a pillow-filled fort reminiscent of those you would see at a childhood sleepover.<sup>40</sup> Here, the artist’s work as facilitators of shared philosophies and personal experiences for the creation of a dialogical art piece. This concept, of which is reflected in the exhibition's publication through the transcription of a conversation between the curators on the motivation behind their choices, is fundamental to the understanding of *When Things Are Beings* dialogical style of curation. In the exhibition, the art object is put forth as the key player in the communication of identity, and both object and artist retain their respective objecthood and personhood within the ‘third space’. Here, the artist behind the object nor the object itself are forced into interpretations and narratives that go against their own conception of who they are. Instead, they are given a platform of self-representation, something that has been museologically and art historically rare for those outside of the white, Euro-American, and male identity categorisations. These

<sup>37</sup> Gikandi, "Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference," 455–456.

<sup>38</sup> Gikandi, "Picasso, Africa, and the Schemata of Difference," 455–456.

<sup>39</sup> Unruh, “Dialogical Curating,” 78.

<sup>40</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 180–182.



categorisations traditionally function as the default identities within museums and the art historical canon, making those that fall outside of these categories not only anomalous but a form of the ‘other’.

This change in approach to museal collection and curation, towards non-white, non-Euro-American, non-male centred explorations of culture, can be traced back to the influence of seminal texts such as *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, written by art historian Linda Nochlin. Although contested, Nochlin’s reasoning that the so-called “woman problem” within art history comes from disadvantage culminating in a lack of access to education and therefore artistic greatness, can also be attributed to the absence of acknowledgement a variety of underrepresented demographics have experienced.<sup>41</sup> In her paper *The Triple Negation of Colored Women Artists*, artist Adrian Piper analyses this problem further through the experience of specifically non-white, woman-identified artists. Using the term “Euroethnic” to describe the previously discussed default identities and their monopoly within the art historical canon, Piper calls for non-Euroethnic identities to work towards community progress rather than fighting one another for the one seat available at the hypothetical table.<sup>42</sup> This process of uplifting one another, whilst focusing less on rigid Euro-American identity categorisations that are thrust upon non-White artists, is what Piper proposes as a tactic towards the end of reforming the artistic mainstream; something that can be enacted by both artist and curator.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 5.** Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. Marcos Kueh, *Kenyalang Circus*, 2022. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij.

In *When Things Are Beings*, this fluidity is present. One of the additions, a set of textiles by Marcos Kueh named *Kenyalang Circus* (**Figure 5**), investigates the exotification and commodification of the Malaysian portion of Borneo.<sup>44</sup> The inspiration for the artwork comes from Kueh’s desire to emancipate himself and those like him from colonial inheritance in a

<sup>41</sup> Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power And Other Essays*, 176.

<sup>42</sup> Piper, "The Triple Negation," 19–20.

<sup>43</sup> Piper, "The Triple Negation," 20.

<sup>44</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 114–116.

‘post-colonial’ world.<sup>45</sup> Through this work, Kueh expands notions of Malaysian identity, inviting the viewer to explore more flexible, personal forms of selfhood. Here, the artwork — in its function as a ‘living object’ — has its own voice and forms its own identity outside of the artist. In the end, the inclusion of Kueh’s textiles positions the artwork and its identity over the identity of the artist who created it, something Piper has urged the artworld to work towards when it comes to artists of colour.<sup>46</sup> As one of the artworks chosen to be added to the collection, with the Stedelijk’s current collection (particularly the demographics it represents) in mind, Kueh’s work is anomalous. As previously mentioned, a 2021 study on the Stedelijk’s collection (supervised by Sloothaak) found that only 8% of the collection belonged to women-identified artists, and 91% to Euro-American creators.<sup>47</sup> In *When Things Are Beings*, of the 26 artists involved in the creation of an artwork, around 60% identified as women and 65% fell outside of Euro-American identities.<sup>48</sup>

In Nochlin’s aforementioned essay, she states that issues surrounding disadvantage must not deter oneself from making progress, but fuel action towards the creation of institutions where success can come to anyone.<sup>49</sup> Nochlin positions this as the solution to the problem. When relating this to *When Things Are Beings*, especially considering the call for artists only required those applying to live and work in the Netherlands, the exhibition may turn the Stedelijk into such an institution; one that strives towards providing paths to artistic acclaim and remembrance based on artistic prowess regardless of identity. By buying a selection of the 24 art pieces for their own collection, they solidify the artists within the exhibition as historically relevant for future generations. Therefore, going beyond the exhibition itself, the objects diversify the Stedelijk’s collection to the end, so that it will not resemble the exclusive history of past collective practices. Art historian Paris Spies-Gans, in her response to Nochlin’s *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, found some historical inadequacies surrounding Nochlin’s assertion that access to art-making was the main factor in the exclusion of women. In her view, lack of acknowledgement has played a far more crucial role in women’s absence in the art historical canon.<sup>50</sup> As such, there is an institutional responsibility to remedy such exclusion, and the implementation of inclusive collection practices offers long-lasting solutions to this.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Stedelijk’s *When Things Are Beings* potential to become a model for the effort to move away from our history of institutional exclusion and into a future of varied perspectives is promising. The curators pushed inclusive practices further by making sustainable additions to the canon in the form of collection and preservation rather than sticking to the temporal intervention of a fleeting exhibition. The integration of the ‘third space’ approach provided an opportunity to create connections rather than separations, disregarding the ‘us vs them’ perspective that has historically found a home within the museum. By approaching each object under the lens of *guna-guna*, the exhibition positioned each artwork, and, therefore, each culture, on an equal platform. When exploring earlier exhibition

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<sup>45</sup> Pinatih and Sloothaak, *When Things Are Beings*, 114–116.

<sup>46</sup> Piper, “The Triple Negation,” 16.

<sup>47</sup> Gutierrez, “Visualizing the Stedelijk.”

<sup>48</sup> From my own calculations based on information taken from each artist’s biography in the previously referenced *When Things Are Beings* publication. It is important to note that I included those of mixed heritage in the latter percentage.

<sup>49</sup> Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power*, 176.

<sup>50</sup> Spies-Gans, “Why Do We Think There Have Been No Great Women Artists?,” 89–90.

techniques, the way in which objects from what would have been considered ‘foreign’ cultures were interpreted and framed in an exhibition space, as well as the intention behind their integration, is almost unrecognisable as an approach when compared to *When Things Are Beings*. This is particularly true when it comes to the focus on self-representation, as opposed to the highly enforced, fixed Eurocentric identity categories that were once completely inseparable from curatorial practice. Based on the work of Arjun Appadurai and the direct result of developments in art history and museum studies, *When Things Are Beings* acts not only as a model for the future of curating and collecting, but also as a look into new museological practices focusing on the matter of inequality. This progression, made possible by art historians and artists such as Linda Nochlin and Adrian Piper, has culminated in a general acknowledgement of institutional responsibility towards creating more equal access to opportunity and fair acknowledgement for artistic prowess. The Stedelijk’s research into their own collection proves that there is a lot more work to be done, as it is here that we can see the remnants of exclusive practices that have preceded us. As such, Britte Slothaak and Amanda Pinatih’s curatorial technique offers a new way forward for not only the Stedelijk, but any other institution that may need to look inward towards the representative inadequacies within their own collections.

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## Images

Figure 1. Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. James Beckett, *The Sceptical Structures of Max*, 2019. Hatutamelen, *Salawaku, Active Protection through Compassion*, 2022. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij. Source: DAMN Magazine. <https://www.damnmagazine.net/when-things-are-beings>.

Figure 2. Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. Hatutamelen (James Noya), *Salawaku, Active Protection through Compassion*, 2022. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij. Source: Stedelijk Museum. <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/nieuws/bekendmaking-aankopen-uit-tentoonstelling-when-things-are-beings>.

Figure 3. Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. James Beckett, *The Sceptical Structures of Max*, 2019. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij. Source: DAMN Magazine. <https://www.damnmagazine.net/when-things-are-beings>.

Figure 4. Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. Amy Suo Wu & Elaine W. Ho, *radio SLUMBER*, 2020. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij. Source: DAMN Magazine. <https://www.damnmagazine.net/when-things-are-beings>.

Figure 5. Installation view *When Things Are Beings*. Marcos Kueh, *Kenyalang Circus*, 2022. Photo: Gert-Jan van Rooij. Source: Stedelijk Museum. <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/nieuws/bekendmaking-aankopen-uit-tentoonstelling-when-things-are-beings>.

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