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Curating Diversity: Towards fostering sustainable LGBTQIA+ inclusion in museum practices.

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Curating Diversity:

Towards fostering sustainable LGBTQIA+ inclusion in museum practices.



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Introduction

Due to my deeply personal connection to the LGBTQIA+ community, I have long been interested in exploring inclusion practices within museums.¹ Growing up in a small Luxembourgish village made me experience first-hand how isolating it feels to not be represented in cultural institutions. Indeed, the museums I was surrounded by predominantly upheld heteronormative standards, which made me feel marginalised and disconnected from the world around me.² My recent visit to Queer Britain in London, the United Kingdom's first LGBTQ+ museum, reminded me how common this experience still is. When I entered the small museum, I was drawn to a large wall covered in post-it notes, each answering a single question: "Why is it important for LGBTQ+ people to be seen?" Responses varied, but the majority of answers that visitors had left highlighted the importance of visibility in normalising queerness for younger generations, opposing right-wing discrimination, and to work towards a more inclusive society (see Fig. 2).³ This direct confrontation with the persistent need for the LGBTQIA+ community to advocate for representation marked the beginning of my interest in researching the broader topic of the museum's role when it comes to advancing inclusivity.

In the early stages of my research, Richard Sandell's edited work *Museums, Society, Inequality* (2002) was an important source which provided me with a comprehensive overview of the intricate relationship between cultural institutions, issues of inequality, marginalisation and discrimination. Featuring contributions by international scholars and museum professionals, the book provided me with a culturally diverse insight into the evolution of inclusion and social responsibility in the museum sector up until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the edited book *Museum Activism* (2019) by Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell gave me a better understanding of the contemporary

¹ "LGBTQIA+" is an umbrella term referring to individuals who identify across a spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual individuals. See The Center: The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, "What Is LGBTQIA+?"; Throughout this thesis I employ the acronym "LGBTQIA+" as a comprehensive umbrella term to denote the diverse spectrum of identities within the community. However, when citing scholarly sources or referencing materials from museums that use varied iterations of the acronym, I will adhere to their specific terminology for accuracy and respect for their chosen language.

² "heteronormative" is defined as "of, designating, or based on a world view which regards gender roles as fixed to biological sex and heterosexuality as the normal and preferred sexual orientation." See Oxford English Dictionary, "heteronormative (*adj.*)."

³ "queerness" is defined as "the quality of having or showing a sexual identity or gender identity that is different from traditional ideas about sex and gender, for example if somebody is non-binary, bisexual or transgender." See Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "queerness."; In a colloquial context, the term is increasingly used interchangeably with the LGBTQIA+ acronym. Furthermore, in the context of museology, it means "to consider or interpret (something) from a perspective that rejects traditional categories of gender and sexuality: to apply ideas from queer theory to (something)." See Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, "queer."

museological discourse around the museum's shifting roles and responsibilities.⁴ Kevin Coffee's article in this book specifically links this development to *new museology*, an approach which brought about a prioritisation of the museum's social function.⁵ He states that through the inclusion of more diverse audiences and subjects by means of public programs and collection practices, museums can broaden their societal engagement, further accessibility and thus distance themselves from their historical exclusionary practices.⁶ Considering the broadness of the topic of the museum's role and matters of inclusion, my research in this thesis becomes more focused through an emphasis on LGBTQIA+ narratives and voices specifically. Indeed, the ongoing public demand for broader representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals and narratives in museums and society at large, as expressed on the Queer Britain post-it wall, warrants an investigation of the role of museums when it comes to fostering the inclusion of this community. For that reason, I will discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with the inclusion and representation of LGBTQIA+ narratives in museums. Consequently, this thesis will be centred around the following research question: "Can museums evolve into more inclusive institutions for LGBTQIA+ narratives and voices through a focus on authentic representation, collaboration and caring practices?"

Historically, LGBTQIA+ narratives and voices have been systematically overlooked within museum collections and exhibitions, which reflects the broader societal ostracization that has been endured by the community over centuries. While museums have made progress in recent decades to incorporate queer voices, issues like *tokenism* hinder the inclusion of the wider community.⁷ These types of tokenistic practices become most evident during Pride Month, when museums often showcase works by renowned deceased queer artists like Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), Andy Warhol (1928-1987), or Keith Haring (1958-1990) without any accompanying community engagement programming. For instance, in the context of a collection of events at the Stedelijk Museum, which took place as part of Queer & Pride Amsterdam 2023, Keith Haring's *Amsterdam Notes* (1986) was used to showcase the museum's superficial attempt at highlighting LGBTQIA+ narratives.⁸ After having identified the problem of tokenism in the context of inclusion of LGBTQIA+ narratives in museums, I became intrigued by the prospect of exploring the inclusion of smaller, more marginalised

⁴ Janes and Sandell, *Museum Activism*, xxvii.

⁵ "New museology" will be defined in the subchapter 1.2.; Coffee, "Up Against it," 310.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Tokenism" is defined as "policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort (as to desegregate)." See Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, "tokenism."

⁸ Stedelijk, "Queer & Pride at the Stedelijk."

queer subcultures, rather than further contributing to the existing research on acclaimed male gay artists of the past. This led me to concentrate on the exhibition titled *Grand March: A Historic House through a Ballroom Lens* (hereafter *Grand March*) at Huis Willet-Holthuysen, one of the sites of the Amsterdam Museum. The exhibition spotlights the ballroom scene through the perspective of the Dutch ballroom house, House of Vineyard.⁹ I was initially drawn to this exhibition because of its amplification of the marginalised voices of a scene that I had never seen exhaustively represented in a museum before. Additionally, in the context of my academic interest in inclusive museological practices, the exhibition's original blending of historical architecture and design with a contemporary artistic expression captivated my interest. As a result, this case study serves as a foundation for exploring the broader topic of the museum's role in fostering inclusivity throughout this thesis. Through a visual and thematic analysis of the exhibition's displays, the public programs organised around it and its collaborative basis, I aim to critically analyse the way in which the Amsterdam Museum has made use of authentic representation, collaboration, and caring curatorial practices to establish a more sustainable inclusion of the ballroom community into their broader inclusion practices.¹⁰

Grand March's location in the Netherlands adds even more focus to my research as it allows for a more thorough examination of the museum's functions and its inclusion practices within the Dutch cultural context. Considering that the Netherlands was the first country to legalise same-sex marriage and that its capital is among the LGBT community's most welcoming cities worldwide, one would expect the inclusion of queer narratives to be paramount within the Dutch cultural scene.¹¹ However, recent political developments, marked by a rise in conservatism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, have exacerbated societal challenges faced by marginalised communities and consequently negatively impacted the prioritisation of inclusion efforts in society at large, and in museums. Another motivation for this thesis was the noticeable gap in scholarly literature about inclusion practices that actively engage with queer narratives, and the history of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the Netherlands. While this research project may not directly address this gap by providing a comprehensive mapping of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in Dutch museums, it will

⁹ The ballroom scene is an LGBTQIA+ subculture that originated within African-American and Latino queer communities in the late 1960s New York City. It centres around competitive events known as "balls" where participants perform in various categories. See subchapter 1.4.

¹⁰ In this context, *sustainable inclusion* refers to the long-term commitment to ensuring that marginalised narratives and voices are amplified, valued, and integrated into museum practices, exhibitions, and policies. See chapter 3.

¹¹ Government of the Netherlands, "Same-sex marriage."

approach *Grand March* with a nuanced understanding of the Dutch cultural and political landscape.

To address the broader research topic of the museum's role in the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ narratives, the first chapter of this thesis will provide a historical and theoretic overview of the museum's evolving social role. The theoretical framework of this thesis examines the intersection of power dynamics and marginalisation with reference to feminist theory, queer theory, social studies, critical museology, and the principles of new museology. This allows for the provision of vital perspectives on how museums might evolve from exclusionary to inclusive spaces, concentrating on LGBTQIA+ representation. By examining the International Council of Museums' (hereafter ICOM) definition of the museum, this chapter addresses museums' self-proclaimed role as inclusive and diverse institutions. Additionally, the chapter examines inclusion in the Dutch cultural landscape, exploring initiatives such as the 'Diversity & Inclusion Code.' The second chapter will examine the complexities of museological representation, and how museums can navigate the task of authentically representing diverse marginalised identities. With a particular focus on queer identities, it critically evaluates the historical relationship between museums and identity representation. The chapter also addresses the shift in museology towards more democratic and inclusive methods such as collaboration and co-curation with marginalised groups. Through a detailed analysis of *Grand March*, the chapter stresses the transformative potential of museums in promoting understanding of diverse identities, while also acknowledging the complexities and challenges inherent in this endeavour.

The third chapter will explore the possibility of museums adopting principles of care in their inclusion efforts of LGBTQIA+ narratives. While scholars in museology and heritage studies have extensively examined the issue of care as pertaining to collections, such as the preservation and maintenance of physical artifacts and heritage objects, comparatively less attention has been paid to care-work directed towards communities and individuals. I argue that museums, as public spaces with a considerable amount of educational and normative authority, have the potential to improve their troubled relationship with communities that the institution neglected for centuries, by taking on caring responsibilities as part of their institutional commitment to inclusion. Furthermore, I discuss how such a shift in museological practices and a less hierarchical engagement with marginalised communities has the potential to enhance museums' inclusion efforts. Building upon the theoretical foundation of each chapter, I will visually and thematically analyse *Grand March* to shed a light on the Amsterdam Museum's approach to inclusion, representation, collaboration and

care. I will review *Grand March*'s wall texts, and supplementary information available on the museum website to thoroughly understand the exhibition design, curatorial narratives, and themes, and to study the benefits and limitations of this approach to inclusion. Furthermore, private conversations with the curators of the exhibition, namely Amber Vineyard, Elly Vineyard, and Roberto Luis Martins, will provide further insight into the collaborative process of this co-curated exhibition. Overall, with this thesis I aim to contribute to the academic discourse on the challenges and opportunities of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in museums, and to position authentic representation, collaboration and caring practices as possible guiding principles for museums' ethical operations. I intend to emphasise the importance for museums to nurture caring and empathetic relationships with marginalised communities in order for them to evolve into less oppressive, and more community-oriented institutions.

Chapter 1. From exclusion to inclusion: The Evolution of the Museum's Roles and Responsibilities

The following chapter will comprise a thorough investigation of the historical context and the museological theory surrounding the museum's roles and responsibilities. Through an in-depth consideration of the institutional history of the museum, this chapter will shed light on the evolving societal roles of museums over time from which their practices of inclusion and exclusion will become clear. Specifically, the discussion of new museology will elucidate the gradual shift towards more community-centred and inclusive practices since the 1970s. The latter is crucial for gaining a thorough understanding of the complex relationship between the LGBTQIA+ community and museums, and the difficulties related to the former's museological inclusion. This chapter sets the stage for subsequent discussions on the ethics of care and the possibility of creating more sustainable inclusion within museums through collaborative representation of diverse identities, as it provides an overview of the current state of research and theoretical perspectives on the matter of inclusion in the museum. This chapter aims to establish a foundation for the following exploration of this thesis's research question, namely how authentic representation, collaboration and caring practices can act as tools for museums to develop their ability to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion. In addition, the chapter will provide an overview of *Grand March* and explain its significance within the broader context of museum inclusion. Throughout this thesis, *Grand March* will serve as an illustrative example of the challenges and opportunities associated with the inclusion and representation of LGBTQIA+ narratives in museum spaces.

1.1. The oppressive and exclusionary legacy of museums

The genesis of the modern form of the public museum as we know it today occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Europe according to the sociologist and museum theorist Tony Bennett.¹² It can be argued that what connects the ancient Greek *mouseion* – a temple dedicated to the muses housing collections of art and functioning as a repository of knowledge – to the modern museum is their shared foundation rooted in what John E. Simmons describes as humanity's impulse to collect objects.¹³ However, this seemingly harmless inclination took a problematic turn during the nineteenth century. European collectors and museums became increasingly fascinated with ethnographic

¹² Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 19.

¹³ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, "museum."; Simmons, *Museums: A History*, 139.

artifacts, which led to an era marked by the “exploration, exploitation, and colonization of other continents and islands.”¹⁴ In other words, the insatiable desire of nineteenth-century museums to expand their collections and elevate their status as educational institutions drove them to orchestrate large excavations and systematically plunder archaeological sites, especially in the global south.¹⁵ One such example was the 1897 Benin Expedition, where thousands of royal artworks and other sacred objects were looted by British military forces and which are now, according to archaeologist Dan Hicks, displayed in roughly one hundred fifty museums and galleries around Europe and North America.¹⁶ While not all museum acquisitions were tainted by colonialist practices, John Giblin, Imma Ramos and Nikki Grout, curators of African and Asian collections at prominent British and Scottish museums, assert that museums emerged as instrumental tools of the empire seeing that they propagated Eurocentric and racialised narratives that echoed the imperial state’s disciplinary logic.¹⁷ Considering all this, it is worth pointing out that the nineteenth and early twentieth century solidified the museum’s status as an oppressive institution.

By spotlighting the museum’s violent colonial past, one can better understand the institution’s role in perpetuating exclusionary practices. In the context of the latter, David Fleming, a prominent museum professional and advocate for museum democratisation, points out that museums, historically restricted to the educated elite, have been agents of social exclusion rather than democratic instruments of societal inclusion.¹⁸ While there might be some truth to that, Fleming’s statement does not do justice to the efforts that have historically been made when it comes to the democratisation of the museum. Indeed, historian Barbara J. Black writes extensively about the efforts to increase museum accessibility for the working class in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ She mentions, for instance, that the British Museum changed its opening hours to include Sundays and late hours, as well as introduced free admission days.²⁰ Although this might be considered an important step towards making museums more inclusive in the context of that time period, it is worth pointing out that ideas about inclusion in museums and society at large have changed

¹⁴ Simmons, *Museums: A History*, 150.

¹⁵ The “global south” is defined as “the countries of the world which are regarded as having a relatively low level of economic and industrial development, considered collectively; contrasted with Global North *n*. The majority of these countries are typically located to the south of more industrialized nations.” See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “global south (*n*).”

¹⁶ Hicks, *The Brutish Museums*, 3.

¹⁷ Giblin, Ramos, and Grout, “Dismantling the Master’s House,” 471.

¹⁸ Fleming, “Positioning the museum for social inclusion,” 213.

¹⁹ Black, *On Exhibit*, 101.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

considerably over time. This leads me to the conclusion that early attempts at improving museum accessibility centred primarily on removing class barriers and disregarded other forms of marginalisation. As societal awareness of various forms of marginalisation has increased over time, so has the focus on inclusion initiatives within museums.²¹ Nowadays, museums have a much broader understanding of what it means to be inclusive, encompassing not only economic barriers, but also physical, cognitive, and sensory accessibility, as well as considerations for ethnic diversity and gender identity.²² It follows that practices of inclusion must always be considered in the political, social, and economic context in which those practices are put into place.

Nevertheless, the museum's authoritarian role, arguably reinforced by its historical trajectory, has been an obstacle in the move away from exclusionary museological practices. As an institution wielding cultural authority, the museum has, throughout past centuries, assumed the critical role of validating selected narratives, histories, or objects through their inclusion in collections or exhibitions. Indeed, the establishment of a museum collection or the curation of an exhibition always generates the need to select the most fitting artifacts in relation to the type of museum. Museum professional and art historian Anna Conlan terms this practice the *selective taxonomy of knowledge*, highlighting how museums dictate norms, classify knowledge, and validate particular values, narratives, or ideals.²³ Conlan explains that the practice of classification and omission that is inherent to museum activities "formally classifies certain lives, histories, and practices as insignificant, rendering them invisible."²⁴ In other words, this process inherently delegitimises alternative narratives by excluding them from institutional recognition, and thus effectively prioritises certain stories over others. By contextualising the discussion of classification within the framework of this thesis, it becomes evident that understanding the authoritative practice of classification explains how the marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ people within society was mirrored by the exclusion of their narratives in museums. Queer theorist and art critic Jennifer Doyle provides an example of this exclusion by calling attention to the absence of Andy Warhol's series of silk-screens titled *Sex Parts* (1978) (see Fig. 3), which depict close-ups of anal sex between men, from retrospectives about the artist.²⁵ Doyle contextualises this absence in the broader pattern of omission of Warhol's sexuality from major art exhibitions, and underscores how museums –

²¹ See Fyfe, "Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums," 38.

²² ArtSentry, "Are Museums for Everyone?"

²³ Conlan, "Representing Possibility," 257.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Doyle, "Queer Wallpaper," 391.

in the context of the early twenty-first century, when Doyle's article was published – were reluctant to address the sexual identities of artists.²⁶ Historian Angela Vanegas further connects these instances of exclusion to institutional homophobia as she suggests that curators have historically exercised narrative authority to exclude certain identities from museum representations.²⁷ While it is not certain whether the exclusion of Warhol's sexually explicit work occurred on the grounds of homophobia, a lack of language in addressing sexuality within museum contexts, or a combination of both, omissions of this sort do result in excluding parts of the LGBTQIA+ experience. Ultimately, the selective representation and sometimes even complete absence of marginalised communities has fuelled representational inequality.

The exclusionary nature of the traditional museum becomes more apparent when viewed through the lens of French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) seminal work *The Order of Things* (1966), which deals with the relationship between knowledge, power, and discourse. Foucault argues that classification is an act with political implications as it typically reflects the interests and values of those in positions of power.²⁸ This perspective is in line with museologist Susan Cairns's contention that museums have historically functioned as gatekeepers of knowledge and cultural narratives.²⁹ Foucault's and Cairns's perspectives are particularly relevant when considering that the canon serves as an example of the traditional museum's reliance on classification systems. In the context of art museums, the canon is made up of artworks deemed significant, influential, and representative within a particular artistic tradition. For instance, the canon of Surrealist art includes pieces by Salvador Dalí, René Magritte and Joan Miró, whose works address key Surrealist themes such as the subconscious and dream imagery. However, as noted by art critic John Berger, the canon often reflects and perpetuates dominant cultural, social, and historical narratives, as it serves the ideological interests of the ruling class.³⁰ Illustrating this point, the canon of Surrealist art disproportionately overlooks female surrealists such as Remedios Varo (1908-1963), Leonor Fini (1907-1996) and Claude Cahun (1894-1954). As art historian Victoria Ferentinou notes, women were not allowed to become members of the movement until the mid-1930s.³¹ Such patriarchal structures within the movement hindered female artists'

²⁶ Ibid., 392.

²⁷ Vanegas, "Representing lesbians and gay men in British social history museums," 106.

²⁸ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, see "Human Sciences" and "Classifying the Living."

²⁹ Cairns, "Mutualizing Museum Knowledge," 107.

³⁰ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 86.

³¹ Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender," 109.

abilities to attain the same level of canonical importance as their male counterparts. It was not until the early twenty-first century, with exhibitions such as *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism* at the Manchester Art Gallery that these perpetually underrepresented artists began to receive significant recognition.³²

In her critique of the traditional canon, art historian and cultural analyst Griselda Pollock highlights the imperative of inclusivity by advocating for the incorporation of women and minority cultures to enhance the canon's breadth.³³ Pollock argues that excluding artists based on gender or ethnicity restricts the canon's scope and distorts perceptions of artistic achievement.³⁴ Not only do such exclusionary practices limit the representation of minority communities in museums, but they also reinforce social marginalisation and thus perpetuate a narrow perspective on artistic expression. While Pollock's early work does not explicitly address LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the canon, her broader theoretical framework foregrounds intersectionality, which suggests an openness to expanding the canon to encompass marginalised voices beyond women. Consequently, Pollock's perspective provides a foundational basis for linking the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ perspectives from museum collections at least in part to the exclusionary practices of the canon. Pollock's writing thus serves as a channel for advocating the broadening of the contemporary artistic canon to include more marginalised voices and perspectives in museums, such as those of the LGBTQIA+ community. This section emphasised how museums, through their classification systems and adherence to traditional canons, have historically reinforced dominant ideologies and perspectives while marginalising socially unprivileged minorities. Thus, linking Foucault's, Cairns's and Pollock's insights to the museum's role as a source of knowledge production underlines the pervasive influence of institutions like museums in shaping our understanding of history, culture, and society.

1.2. Inclusion and Diversity in museums

Over the past fifty years, scholarship has demonstrated how various aspects of museum operations – such as public programming, collection policies, and curatorial narratives – perpetuate exclusionary practices. Within the culture sector, there has been a notable shift in focus towards inclusion and diversity due to a growing institutional awareness of these

³² *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism* ran at the Manchester Art Gallery from 26 September 2009 until 10 January 2010; Kellaway, "Review. Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism."

³³ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

exclusionary practices and heightened public demand for greater representation of diverse perspectives and cultures.³⁵ This evolving cultural landscape prompts a critical examination of the concept of inclusion within museums. Conversations around inclusivity often target the museum's representation of and accessibility for disabled people, individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds, and different ethnicities, among others. However, this thesis will primarily centre on the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals within museums. In a political climate marked by rising LGBTQIA+ hate crimes and increasing societal divisions, changing social needs underline the belief of scholars such as Tony Bennett, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Richard Sandell that museums have a social responsibility to empower marginalised communities.³⁶

When considering the complex relationship between museums and issues of inclusion, it is crucial to acknowledge the paradigmatic shift encapsulated by the concept of *new museology*.³⁷ According to historians Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander, new museology emphasises the social and cultural role of museums in society, in contrast to traditional museology, which focused primarily on artifact collection, preservation, and display.³⁸ The ICOM definition of the museum serves as another evidence of the growing interest in matters of inclusion within museums. Both the 2019 and 2022 versions classify the museum as an inclusive space. The 2019 version describes contemporary museums as “democratising, inclusive, and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures”, echoing the sentiment of the 2022 version, which highlights museums as “open to the public, accessible and inclusive, [...] foster diversity and sustainability.”³⁹ However, the 2019 definition carries a more overt political agenda compared to its 2022 counterpart. It characterises museums as institutions that “[acknowledge] and [address] the conflicts and challenges of the present” and “[contribute] to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.”⁴⁰ This political stance sparked critique from the majority of the ICOM community, including social scientist John Fraser. He argues that while museums have the potential to increase inclusivity, the 2019 definition is overly ideological, emphasising aspirations rather than inherent museum qualities and overlooking the influence

³⁵ Van Haeren, Nadimi, and Van Andel, “Diversity, equity and inclusion.”

³⁶ NL Times, “LGBTQ+ interest group calls for action.”; See Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*; Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*; Sandell, *Museums, Society, Inequality*.

³⁷ This contemporary approach to museum theory and practice emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially through Peter Vergo’s publication *The New Museology* (1989).

³⁸ Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 380.

³⁹ 2019 ICOM, “Museum Definition.”; 2022 ICOM, “Museum Definition.”

⁴⁰ 2022 ICOM, “Museum Definition.”

of funding bodies on the museum's agency.⁴¹ He characterises the activist tone of the 2019 version as "a thin veneer of social acceptability as an apology for the persistent use of museums in service of a political elite."⁴² Additionally, museum theorist Helena Robinson cautions that assigning social justice roles to museums through the ICOM definition risks delegitimising museums that do not adopt ethical and social responsibilities, as well as alienating certain museum audiences.⁴³ In response to public objections, the 2022 museum definition adopts a less ideological and vaguer tone, which allows for interpretation within the diverse scopes of museum nature. Having considered the recent evolution of the ICOM definition and the sector's responses to it has shed light on the ongoing museological debate surrounding museums' roles as spaces for inclusion and social justice within society. In fact, both museum definitions demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, an integral aspect of the museum's character. In the context of my broader research topic, these definitions highlight the sector's redefined social role with inclusivity becoming a central tenet of the contemporary museum definition. Whether supported by practices of social justice or not, inclusivity contributes to making the sector more accessible and welcoming to diverse voices.

In a Dutch context, this paradigmatic shift is exemplified by the introduction of the 'Diversity & Inclusion Code' in 2019.⁴⁴ This code, created for and by the cultural sector, emphasises the importance of providing equitable access to museums for individuals of all backgrounds and identities. It reflects a collective effort to mirror the diversity of Dutch society. The code guides institutions in implementing practices that prioritise diversity and inclusion and focuses on the importance of fostering environments where individuals feel safe, respected, and included.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, art historian Cathelijne Tiel has critiqued the code for displaying diversity as a business imperative rather than a moral one.⁴⁶ This raises concerns about the code's ability to address systemic inequalities and dismantle power imbalances within arts institutions. By framing diversity and inclusion primarily as means to access new markets, the code risks instrumentalising marginalised identities without addressing the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate exclusion. Nonetheless, in current times, in which museums are facing considerable financial challenges, a focus on financial remuneration might be essential to ensure the prioritisation of inclusion in museums.

⁴¹ Fraser, "A Discomforting Definition of Museum," 502.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Robinson, "Debating the 'museums'," 1176.

⁴⁴ "Diversity & Inclusion Code."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Tiel, "Retort #23. A better art world?"

Additionally, Tiel’s analysis challenges the notion that diversity and inclusion initiatives alone can effectively combat systemic inequalities within the cultural sector. Without critically examining the systems that perpetuate inequality, inclusion efforts may remain superficial and fail to address the root causes of exclusion. By adopting Tiel’s critical lens, which draws attention to the importance of considering both the visible manifestations of inclusion and the deeper systemic issues at play within the cultural sector, I will be able to establish a nuanced evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of various LGBTQIA+ inclusion strategies within *Grand March*. Despite critiques, the Diversity & Inclusion Code is a significant step towards establishing standards for inclusive practices within the cultural sector. However, a recent motion passed in Dutch parliament aims to remove the Diversity & Inclusion Code as a mandatory requirement when applying for cultural subsidies starting from 2029.⁴⁷ Opponents of the code argue that such mandates wrongly politicise the cultural sector.⁴⁸ Similarly to the critical reactions to the 2019 ICOM museum definition, this shift underscores the resistance to museums adopting a political or more socially involved role. Such a departure from ensuring inclusion will undoubtedly impact which stories are foregrounded in museums. With conservative parties gaining more political power after the recent Dutch elections, it is possible that subsidies will primarily be granted to museums foregrounding “traditionally” Dutch culture rather than those amplifying the voices of marginalised communities.⁴⁹ Indeed, without the financial incentive to implement inclusion and diversity practices, museums are likely to prioritise mainstream narratives instead of supporting the marginalised communities which are lacking representation in large institutions. Ultimately, making the code not compulsory will risk leading museums astray from embodying some of the essential traits that define them as institutions, namely inclusion and diversity.

1.3. The LGBTQIA+ community and museums

Over the past thirty years, museologists such as Richard Sandell, Angela Vanegas and Amy K. Levin have written extensively about the historic exclusion of marginalised communities and the scarce LGBTQIA+ representation in museums.⁵⁰ More specifically, Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton have raised poignant critiques regarding the lack of LGBTQIA+

⁴⁷ Geelen, “Diversiteit en Inclusie.”

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Boztas, “‘Culture is fragile’.”

⁵⁰ Sandell, *Museums Society, Inequality*, 98; Vanegas, “Representing lesbians and gay men in British social history museums,” 106; Levin “Introduction,” 7.

narratives, histories, and experiences from museums on an international scale.⁵¹ This historic lack of representation is intrinsically linked to the criminalisation of homosexuality well into the late twentieth century. While there have been significant legal revisions of anti-LGBT laws in recent years, it remains notable that sixty-four countries still uphold laws that criminalise homosexuality.⁵² The Netherlands was the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001 after repealing laws prohibiting male homosexuality in 1971.⁵³ Following the trajectory of the gay liberation movement which spanned from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, LGBTQIA+-themed exhibitions started emerging in Western museums from the 1980s onward. It is also worth noting that the examples that I will discuss in this thesis, among which *Grand March*, are situated in Western countries where LGBTQIA+ individuals are relatively free and protected by hate crime laws. Nevertheless, in the United States, conservative administrations and the rise of far-right ideologies are currently hindering the prioritisation of protective legal measures.⁵⁴

In the past four decades, Western museums in particular have increasingly turned their attention to LGBTQIA+ narratives and identities, most of which recognised the importance of representing diverse voices within their collections and exhibitions. Yet, public historian Susan Ferentinos observes that initial efforts to include historical LGBTQ narratives in museums primarily originated from LGBTQ community-based organisations, which established the groundwork for mainstream museums today.⁵⁵ Significant milestones in the cultural representation of LGBTQIA+ history and narratives include *A Lesbian Show* at the Artist in Residence Gallery in New York in 1978 (the first exhibition about lesbian artists), the opening of the Schwules Museum in Berlin in 1985 (the first museum to be dedicated to gay history), and the inauguration of the Homomonument in Amsterdam in 1987 (the first monument to commemorate gay men and lesbians who were persecuted and killed during the Nazi regime).⁵⁶ It can be argued that the public demand for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in museums arises from a willingness to address historical voids and foster a sense of belonging for marginalised communities. Indeed, museum informaticist Laura-Edythe Coleman defines the culturally inclusive museum as one that foregrounds the representation of marginalised groups, or objects representing the latter, as well as engaging in participatory and

⁵¹ Sullivan and Middleton, *Queering the Museum*, 18.

⁵² Reality Check team, "Homosexuality."

⁵³ Government of the Netherlands, "LGBTI equality in the Netherlands," 3.

⁵⁴ See ACLU, "2024 Anti-LGBT Bills."

⁵⁵ Ferentinos, "Ways of Interpreting Queer Pasts," 20.

⁵⁶ Weick, "The 1978 "A Lesbian Show" Exhibition," 4; Schwules Museum, "Über uns."; HomoMonument, "Our History."

collaborative practices to make the museum more accessible.⁵⁷ By actively incorporating LGBTQIA+ narratives, museums not only acknowledge the existence and struggles of queer individuals but also validate their experiences by providing a platform for institutional recognition. This is particularly relevant given gender and sexuality scholar Joshua G. Adair's assertion that most minority individuals refrain from visiting museums due to their prolonged alienation from them and a perceived inability to change.⁵⁸

Despite a growing awareness, significant obstacles still stand in the way of successfully integrating LGBTQIA+ stories into museum spaces. For instance, Sullivan and Middleton point out that heterosexual and cisgender identities still represent the benchmark against which difference is measured in museums.⁵⁹ Indeed, museums have had difficulty pursuing sustainable inclusion that effectively prioritises minorities' needs rather than merely providing superficial representation. This is especially obvious when considering the rise in LGBTQIA+-themed exhibitions that occur annually around Pride Month.⁶⁰ Art historian Patrik Steorn maintains that museums may purposefully plan LGBTQIA+-themed exhibitions during Pride to increase visitor numbers.⁶¹ What results are temporary displays, which, constrained by their limited timeframe, risk reducing queer experiences to superficial narratives, reinforcing stereotypes, and neglecting intersectional perspectives. While I will investigate the problem of superficial representation of LGBTQIA+ narratives further in chapter two, it is worth noting that such strategic choices are reflective of the dire financial situation that most Dutch museums find themselves in since the cutting of funds by 24% in 2010.⁶² Yet some contemporary museums are making notable progress towards greater inclusivity despite those financial obstacles. In fact, the Amsterdam Museum is one of the institutions attempting to counter structures of exclusion, as *Grand March* significantly challenges the absence of LGBTQIA+ histories from museums.

1.4. *Grand March: A Historic House through a Ballroom Lens* at Huis Willet-Holthuysen (Amsterdam Museum)

⁵⁷ Coleman, *Understanding and Implementing Inclusion*, 18-19.

⁵⁸ Adair, "Part I: Frameworks", 2.

⁵⁹ Sullivan and Middleton, *Queering the Museum*, 27.

⁶⁰ *Pride Month* is defined as "a month-long observance in celebration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people—and the history, culture, and contributions of these people and their communities." It takes place in June and is colloquially referred to as *Pride*. See Dictionary.com, "Pride Month."

⁶¹ Steorn, "Queer in the Museum," 135.

⁶² Higgins, "Arts cuts in the Netherlands."

Grand March: A Historic House through a Ballroom Lens is a temporary exhibition running from 2 December 2023 until 13 October 2024 at the Huis Willet-Holthuysen, one of the Amsterdam Museum's locations.⁶³ Located in the centre of Amsterdam, Huis Willet-Holthuysen, a stately double mansion, at first glance embodies the essence of a traditional historic house museum as it preserves the legacy of its affluent former owners, Louisa Holthuysen (1824-1895) and Abraham Willet (1825-1888) (see Fig. 4). However, the collaboration between Huis Willet-Holthuysen and the House of Vineyard, the Netherlands' pioneering ballroom house (see Fig. 5), marks the basis of a fascinating initiative aimed at integrating contemporary artistic narratives within historical contexts.

Before analysing the exhibition, it is vital to define key terminology. In order to provide clear definitions and explanations, I am drawing from texts by cultural critic Ricky Tucker, Black queer theorists Marlon M. Bailey and Shamari Reid, all of whom have written extensively about the rich history, culture and significance of ballroom. The ballroom scene established itself as an LGBTQ+ subculture in Harlem, New York, in the late 1960s. Created by African American and Latino LGBTQIA+ people, ballroom provided a safe haven for marginalised communities, particularly transgender individuals and drag queens of colour who were often excluded from mainstream queer spaces.⁶⁴ Central to ballroom are *balls*, events where members compete against each other in a variety of performance or beauty categories in order to win trophies, cash prizes or ballroom recognition (see Fig. 6).⁶⁵ A ballroom *house* refers to the family-like structure, led by house *mothers* and *fathers* who support their house children in developing their performance skills so as to win trophies at balls, as well as provide emotional care as they take on the roles of the members' chosen family.⁶⁶

The collaboration between the Amsterdam Museum and the House of Vineyard marks the third instalment of the Huis Willet-Holthuysen's initiative to offer new perspectives on this historical space through contemporary artistic interventions. The fact that, every six months, Huis Willet-Holthuysen opens its doors to contemporary artists or makers to co-curate a temporary exhibition, reveals the concept's potential for adaptability.⁶⁷ Indeed, one of the earlier iterations of this template was ANOHNI's (1971-) intervention through the

⁶³ The exhibition, originally scheduled to close on 26 May 2024, was extended until 13 October 2024, as announced at the end of May.

⁶⁴ Reid, "Exploring the Agency of Black LGBTQ+ Youth," 99.

⁶⁵ Tucker, *And the Category is...*, 24.

⁶⁶ Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*, 5.

⁶⁷ Amsterdam Museum, "Huis Willet-Holthuysen."

exhibition *She Who Saw Beautiful Things*.⁶⁸ The exhibition explored the legacy of Julia and Erika Yasuda, addressing themes of femininity, androgyny, transgender identity, and societal challenges.⁶⁹ The adaptable nature of this initiative opens up the possibility of extending this format to other marginalised communities, which could facilitate brief yet impactful moments of inclusion for a diverse array of minorities. At the same time, this template reflects a progressive approach to redefining the role of historic house museums and offering a new perspective through which to look at antiquated collections. While historic house museums conventionally prioritise the preservation of former occupants' legacies, initiatives like the collaborative co-curation between the House of Vineyard and the Amsterdam Museum signal a departure from traditional paradigms. By juxtaposing the interior of Huis Willet-Holthuysen with elements of ballroom culture, *Grand March* challenges conventional perceptions of the traditional historical house museum and invites reinterpretation of this historical space. Among a variety of fashion, jewellery, photography, and other visual arts installations exhibited alongside the permanent collection, a notable example includes a sixteenth-century suit of armour adorned with contemporary pieces (see Fig. 7). This piece blends historical and contemporary garments, by combining an armoured harness and intricately decorated white shirt from the Amsterdam Museum's with a tulle dress from the House of Vineyard's archive. The juxtaposition of traditionally masculine armour and ornate feminine attire, results in an innovative reinterpretation of the historical artifact. Such interventions underscore the transformative potential of collaborations between established institutions and contemporary artists. Indeed, this original endeavour mirrors the recommendations put forth by museum anarchists Franklin Vagnone, Deborah Ryan, and Olivia Cothren in their 'Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums' (2015).⁷⁰ These scholars underline the need for historic house museums to adapt to contemporary audiences and engage directly with local communities to avoid becoming obsolete.⁷¹ The successful reinterpretation and contextual reorganisation of Huis Willet-Holthuysen, achieved through collaboration with the House of Vineyard, highlights how such initiatives can inject new life and contemporary relevance into historic house museums, to ensure their continued resonance with diverse audiences.

⁶⁸ ANOHNI is an English singer, songwriter and visual artist; Amsterdam Museum, "She Who Saw Beautiful Things."

⁶⁹ Dr. Julia Yasuda was a model, performance artist, PhD educator, intersex activist and member of the 90s performance group The Johnsons. Erika Yasuda was an artist. They were a couple. See Pitchfork, "ANOHNI Remembers Collaborator and Muse Dr. Julia Yasuda, Dead at 75."

⁷⁰ Vagnone, Ryan and Cothren, "The Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums," 98.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

The Amsterdam Museum's dedication to inclusivity underpins its entire organisational ethos and extends far beyond individual exhibitions like *Grand March*. Fundamental to this ethos is the museum's mission to emphasise diversity, and collaboration within the museum's exhibitions, activities, and collections.⁷² Furthermore, the museum is committed to fostering a sense of community among Amsterdam's inhabitants and visitors, as becomes clear in its mission statement:

“As a safe public place, the Amsterdam Museum contributes to strengthening community among Amsterdam's inhabitants and visitors by making the history, the heritage, the art, the culture, and the narratives of the city audible, visible, and accessible. This allows inhabitants and visitors to shape a better city for everyone, together.”⁷³

This statement accentuates the museum's commitment to providing a platform for diverse voices and narratives within the city's historical and cultural landscape. By actively engaging with marginalised communities through collaborative initiatives, the Amsterdam Museum not only amplifies underrepresented perspectives and provides a safe public space for them, but also empowers individuals to participate in shaping the city's collective identity. Coleman's concept of *community self-curation* aligns closely with this approach, as it emphasises the importance of enabling communities to actively shape cultural dialogue and representation.⁷⁴ While museum professionals, such as the curator of fashion Roberto Luis Martins, were involved in the process, *Grand March* prominently foregrounded the narrative authority and creative choices of the members of the House of Vineyard. As the coming two chapters will explain further, they narrate their own story, either through the reversal of gender roles juxtaposed with historic objects or through videos and audio descriptions scattered throughout Huis Willet-Holthuysen, where they share their personal experiences and perspectives. Such inclusive efforts can be a first step towards improving the problematic relationship between a marginalised community and the museum that historically excluded it. Indeed, I argue that exhibitions such as *Grand March* have the capacity to empower those very communities by institutionally recognising minorities. However, this inclusivity may also evoke discomfort or resistance among visitors who do not identify with or approve of the portrayed narratives. As Hooper-Greenhill notes:

⁷² Amsterdam Museum, “About Us.”

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Coleman, *Understanding and Implementing Inclusion*, 26.

“Exhibitions are produced to communicate meaningful visual and textual statements, but there is no guarantee that the intended meaning will be achieved. Visitors to museum exhibitions respond in diverse ways. They may or may not perceive the intended messages, and, perceiving them, they may or may not agree with them, find them interesting, or pay attention to them.”⁷⁵

This dynamic is evident in the public reaction to *Grand March*. The guest book entries at Huis Willet-Holthuysen provide an insight into the range of reactions to the exhibition (see Fig. 8-11). One entry expresses discomfort with the perceived intrusion of “violent” themes into the historic building’s peaceful atmosphere (see Fig. 8). This review suggests that the exhibition’s content interferes with the enjoyment of the traditional museum space, and thus demonstrates a resistance to the blending of queer narratives with historical contexts. Conversely, another entry shows appreciation for the exhibition’s inclusive nature (see Fig. 9). While museums may not single-handedly change the perspectives of visitors with deeply held beliefs, social scientists and psychologists specialising in intercultural research Melody M. Chao, Franki Y. H. Kung, and Donna Jingdan Yao argue that regular exposure to diverse narratives has the potential to increase receptiveness to diversity in people exposed to it.⁷⁶ Despite the divergence in public reactions to *Grand March*, the museum remains steadfast in its dedication to amplifying diverse narratives and acting as a facilitator for bridging societal divides. While some visitors may resist or feel discomfort with exhibitions like *Grand March*, the museum’s mission statement reflects a long-term commitment to creating inclusive spaces where all voices are heard and valued. By collaborating with marginalised communities and providing platforms for their representation, *Grand March* exemplifies a transformative approach to museum practice, one that transcends traditional roles to become a dynamic space for collaboration, collective storytelling, and inclusion.

⁷⁵ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums, and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 4.

⁷⁶ Chao, Kung, and Yao, “Understanding the divergent effects of multicultural exposure,” 85.

Chapter 2 – Framing Diverse Identities: The Complexities of Museological Representation

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the museum’s evolving role when it comes to the inclusion of marginalised communities and the Amsterdam Museum’s general methodologies for enhancing diversity within Huis Willet-Holthuysen. This chapter explores the intricacies of how museums depict diverse and marginalised identities and the potential benefits thereof. Museums often grapple with the task of *authentically representing* both national or cultural identities and minority voices in their efforts to diversify and increase inclusivity in their collections and exhibitions.⁷⁷ While the inclusion of diverse narratives in museums signifies progress towards broader societal representation, mere inclusion does not necessarily translate into a nuanced understanding of the represented identities. *Identity politics* may have contributed to the heightened focus on matters of identity in the recent decades and the substantial shift in museological practices.⁷⁸ According to sociologist Sercan Eklemezler, the rise of social history in the early 1980s prompted museums to concentrate more on portraying the histories of previously marginalised groups.⁷⁹ Similarly, museologist Virginie Rey argues that according to the values of new museology “museums should be sites of inclusion that question hegemonic understandings of identity, while speaking to the community as a whole.”⁸⁰ However, as previously mentioned, museums have struggled with shedding their Eurocentric approach to identity representation. Scholars such as Kris Morrissey, whose research centres on museums and social change, and Grayson Dirk, a queer museum professional, remark that museums have faced criticism for privileging, disregarding, or misrepresenting certain identities.⁸¹ This has given rise to distorted and inauthentic portrayals of identity. For instance, critical and cultural theorist Rhiannon Mason argues that ethnographic collections have often depicted cultural identities as exotic “Other”, namely accentuating their otherness in contrast to Eurocentric norms rather than acknowledging their unique identities.⁸² Nevertheless, recent years have seen a shift away from this patronising

⁷⁷ When I speak of “authentic representation of identity” throughout this thesis, I refer to a form of representation that transcends generalisations and stereotypes. It involves a nuanced depiction of identity that respects the complexity and individuality of the subjects.

⁷⁸ “Identity politics” is understood as the political movements which are shaped by individuals’ identities such as their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or socioeconomic status, among others. See Thiel and Coate, “Identity Politics and Political Identities,” 2.

⁷⁹ Eklemezler, “What a Museum Cannot Bear Witness To,” 134.

⁸⁰ Rey, “Introduction: Engaging with ‘Minority’ Voices,” 3.

⁸¹ Morrissey and Dirk, “Identity & Museum Practice,” 555.

⁸² Mason, “Conflict and Complement,” 56. (as cited in Eklemezler, “What a Museum Cannot Bear Witness To,” 134.

relationship between museums and the public they represent, to a more democratic approach, at times allowing marginalised communities to represent themselves through collaboration or co-curation, for instance. *Grand March* is exemplary for this transformative shift. Prior to delving into the exhibition's portrayal of the complex identity of ballroom, it is imperative to critically evaluate the concept of identity and examine the history of queer identity representation in museums up to the present day.

2.1. Identity representation in museums: exploring dynamics and responsibilities.

Before considering the complex topic of identity representation within museums, it is imperative to establish a comprehensive understanding of the concept of identity.

Psychologist Barry R. Schlenker defines identity as:

“a theory of the self that is formed and maintained through actual or imagined interpersonal agreement about what the self is like. Analogous to a scientific theory, its contents must withstand the process of consensual agreement by informed, significant observers.”⁸³

With this definition, Schlenker conceptualises identity as a multidimensional construct shaped by both internal self-perceptions and external societal perceptions, as he highlights that societal norms and interpersonal interactions influence individual identity formation. Furthermore, philosopher and intersectional feminist Audre Lorde's concept of the *mythical norm* provides valuable insight into the societal power dynamics that shape identity representation. Lorde explains how prevailing social norms – which are defined by characteristics such as whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, Christianity, and financial security – act as benchmarks against which other identities are measured.⁸⁴ This normative framework marginalises individuals who diverge from the established societal standards and thus perpetuates systemic inequalities based on identity. It is also important to point out that individuals possess multiple identities which encompass various aspects such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status. In the context of the oppression of women in a patriarchal system, law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional analysis emphasises how intersecting factors such as race, gender, and class shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege.⁸⁵ This is further complicated by

⁸³ Schlenker, “Identity and self-identification,” 67.

⁸⁴ Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex,” 109.

⁸⁵ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1244.

the fact that the concept of identity is – according to some scholars, such as media and diversity scholar Katherine Goodnow – not a static concept, but rather something that can be resisted and even negotiated.⁸⁶ Frameworks like the ones outlined here emphasise the importance of acknowledging the interconnection and complexity of various identity markers and their impact on lived experiences.

When considering the role of museums in representing diverse identities, it is essential to examine the parameters outlined by the ICOM’s definition of the museum. While this definition emphasises museums’ commitment to inclusivity and diversity, as was discussed in the previous chapter, it does not explicitly address the concept of identity representation. Considering that sociologist Derrick Brooms argues that museums are “sites where knowledge and power are created and identities are constructed and rearticulated,” one must ask the question why the topic of identity is omitted in the ICOM definition.⁸⁷ Identity is a complex concept that presents challenges for museums seeking to engage with it in non-superficial ways. Profound and nuanced engagement may require museums to collaborate with communities and reevaluate their curatorial practices, among other endeavours. Such undertakings are time-consuming and resource-intensive, so much so that they might not be a priority for all museums. This could explain its absence from the ICOM definition. Nevertheless, the definition states that museums “operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities”, which suggests a broader ethical imperative for museums to operate with integrity and value authenticity which could extend to the topic of identity representation.⁸⁸ Here, the degree and manner in which museums choose to contribute to social inclusion by representing diverse identities always varies depending on their respective types, collections, and missions. As a result, museums have the autonomy to determine their approach to the topic of identity representation and which identities they choose to represent. As the upcoming analysis of *Grand March* will demonstrate, museums can start to navigate the complexities of identity representation more effectively by fostering open dialogue and collaboration with diverse communities. Such an approach allows museums to authentically reflect the multiplicity of human experiences and identities without too much mediation, while also addressing the ethical directives outlined by the ICOM definition.

⁸⁶ Goodnow, “The construction of identities,” x.

⁸⁷ Brooms, *From Trial to Triumph*, 171.

⁸⁸ 2022 ICOM “Museum definition.”

Museums have become more interested in representing a wider range of national and cultural identities over the past forty years. Nonetheless, the museum's historical position of authority highlights that museums have played a significant role in shaping and interpreting historical narratives. Urban planning scholars, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach underline museums' historical influence in validating and reinforcing identities and values, often favouring the narratives of the elite while side-lining alternative viewpoints and marginalised identities.⁸⁹ This preservation of exclusive national heritage, they argue, perpetuated a system that categorised cultural differences according to racial and class hierarchies.⁹⁰ Linking this to the focal point of this thesis, namely the LGBTQIA+ community, heteronormativity has historically contributed to the exclusion of these narratives from museums. Sociologists Juan Battle and Colin Ashley define heteronormativity as “a theoretical concept in which patriarchy and heterosexuality are centred as the social norm and all other genders, sexualities, and sexual expressions are cast as deviant.”⁹¹ The analysis of heteronormativity as a concept thus lays bare the normative standards that have historically excluded LGBTQIA+ narratives from museums because of their nonconforming identities. In other words, heterosexuality still often functions as the norm against which otherness and difference are defined.

In the new museological discourse, the topic of identity takes centre stage. Indeed, librarian and art history scholar Deirdre C. Stam emphasises the importance of recognising the collective identity of museum visitors, particularly based on factors such as ethnicity or gender.⁹² She elaborates:

“The museum, as an interpretive instrument for a society, is an important source of understanding and self-knowledge for that society, and is therefore worth reorienting to allow greater exploration of social diversity than has traditionally been the case.”⁹³

In essence, Stam proposes that museums should investigate social diversity, which may involve the interaction with complex identities, in order to provide the public with a better understanding of both themselves and the world around them. Sociologist Tracy Jean Rosenberg further develops this idea by suggesting that museums foster tolerance of diversity by assisting the bridging of community divides, accurately representing groups, and engaging

⁸⁹ Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach, “Displaying and Celebrating the “Other”,” 52.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Battle and Ashley, “Intersectionality, Heteronormativity,” 1.

⁹² Stam, “The Informed Muse,” 274.

⁹³ Ibid.

in dialogue with communities to learn about their needs from the museum.⁹⁴ The proactive approach to identity representation that Rosenberg suggests not only fosters understanding among different social groups but also promotes the inclusion of communities in the museological discourse about how to serve their needs. Furthermore, Mason argues that museums can attract and engage with marginalised communities by displaying their histories, which could in turn increase visitor numbers.⁹⁵ Ultimately, while the authentic representation of identity may not be museums' primary role, they possess the power to reshape social identities, particularly those historically defined by exclusion from mainstream society. Yet, as discussed previously, such inclusion can also have the opposite effect. The negative entries in Huis Willet-Holthuysen's guest book suggest a common public dissatisfaction with the experience of encountering queer culture in a historic house museum. Since there is no available information on age, gender or sexual orientation, it is hard to make any conclusive assumptions about which social demographic typically reacts negatively to LGBTQIA+ subject matter. It becomes evident that museums grappling with queer subject matter in unconventional contexts may encounter scrutiny and a reduction in visitor numbers from their customary audiences.

2.2. The relationship between museums and the representation of LGBTQIA+ identity.

Moving on from the broader discussion of identity representation in museums, this section will concentrate on the methods museums have used to depict LGBTQIA+ narratives and identities thus far. According to Ferentinos, the majority of public historic engagement with LGBTQ narratives has promoted a homogenous understanding of the community that ignores internal conflicts and differences while also giving precedence to gay and lesbian experiences over bisexual and transgender ones.⁹⁶ She points out that within those constraints, the perspective that is foregrounded primarily is that of the white, middle-class, cisgender man.⁹⁷ This underlines how important it is to acknowledge and deal with the variety of identities that exist within the LGBTQIA+ community. Although Ferentinos's observations stem from an American context, their implications resonate with European institutions as well. For instance, the Schwules Museum, established in Berlin in 1985, initially focused solely on the

⁹⁴ Rosenberg, "History Museums and Social Cohesion," 116.

⁹⁵ Mason, "Conflict and Complement," 57.

⁹⁶ Ferentinos, "Ways of Interpreting Queer Pasts," 22.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

exhibition, collection, and research of the history and culture of gay men.⁹⁸ However, the museum started a journey to engage with a wider range of LGBT identities and lived experiences with the opening of the exhibition *L-Projekt* in 2008, which centred on the Berlin lesbian scene since the 1970s.⁹⁹ Today, the museum prides itself on presenting the history and identity of all queer people and studying sexual and gender diversity.¹⁰⁰ Notably, being a museum entirely dedicated to the LGBTQIA+ community facilitates the detailed exploration of the diverse identities within the community. In contrast, exhibitions in mainstream institutions, such as the Museum of the City of New York's *Gay Gotham: Art & Underground Culture in New York*, have faced criticism for failing to equally represent all contingents of the LGBT community.¹⁰¹ Despite its intent to showcase New York's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender artist community, the exhibition disproportionately highlighted certain identities. Indeed, in a review of the exhibition Deborah Solomon criticises the show's representation of lesbian artists as minor talents, stating that "this is a show about diversity that lacks diversity."¹⁰² When theming an exhibition as LGBTQIA+-themed, museums and curators arguably bear a responsibility to represent all the identities within in the acronym equally. Thus, spotlighting overwhelmingly on white gay artists can inadvertently convey the message that they are the most important members of that community which deserve the most institutional representation. It is worth noting that with a multifaceted and multi-identity community like the LGBTQIA+ community that includes a plethora of sexual, gender and cultural identities, representing each of those identities is almost impossible, especially in small-scale, temporary exhibitions.

On the other hand, exhibitions such as *Grand March*, which centre on ballroom as a subculture within the larger LGBTQIA+ community, provide a more targeted opportunity at examining the topic of identity.¹⁰³ The task of representing identity is less vast in this context, which potentially makes it easier for museums to handle. Additionally, the cultural and artistic aspects inherent in subcultures like ballroom highlight the multifaceted nature of identity. Consequently, the focus on a subculture offers a nuanced perspective on identity at the same time as challenging and questioning normative beliefs associated with identity.

⁹⁸ Schwules Museum, "Leitbild."

⁹⁹ Schwules Museum, "Frauenbiografien und Berliner Lesbenszene."

¹⁰⁰ Schwules Museum, "Leitbild."

¹⁰¹ Museum of the City of New York, "Gay Gotham."

¹⁰² Solomon, "Review: "Gay Gotham."

¹⁰³ Academic researchers Katrina Kubicek et al. define the term "subculture" as "a group of people with a culture (whether distinct or hidden) which differentiates them from the larger culture to which they belong." See Kubicek, McNeeley, Holloway, Weiss, Kipke, "'It's Like Our Own Little World'," 1526.

Given that both Janelle Joseph, critical scholar of race and indigeneity, and Naomi Bain, author and LGBT+ advocate, argue that the ballroom community is a place where identity can be affirmed and a sense of belonging can be developed, identity plays a particularly important role in how ballroom is portrayed.¹⁰⁴ This subculture unites various marginalised communities whose experiences of oppression intersect, originally comprising African American and Latino individuals of various sexual and gender identities. Given the profound role of identity in ballroom as a source of discrimination, while simultaneously being a means of celebration, and community-building, it becomes evident that the nuanced representation of identity in the museological engagement with ballroom is essential.

2.3. Ballroom Culture: A focus on Subcultural Identity.

The inclusion of ballroom culture in public institutions like museums can be considered a significant step towards the broader recognition of diversity within the wider LGBTQIA+ community. Nonetheless, as the mother of the House of Vineyard, Amber Vineyard, has pointed out, the institutional portrayal of the subculture and its social and cultural identity often concentrates excessively on the extravagant and entertaining aspects of the ballroom scene.¹⁰⁵ While those are intrinsic features of the community's self-expression, focusing on those exclusively risks oversimplification of its culturally multifaceted identity. As outlined in the first chapter, ballroom culture was founded on the need to provide a safe space for marginalised individuals to express themselves authentically without facing discrimination and makes use of complex systems of kinship to support and care for each other in the face of societal ostracization. Events like "Vincent op Vrijdag x Vineyard World presenteren 'Golden Femme'" at the Van Gogh Museum, though well-intentioned, risk reducing ballroom culture to a mere spectacle for the entertainment of mainstream audiences. At that event, visitors were invited to vogue, pose, and dance among the display of a selection of Gustav Klimt's works so as to underline the liberating elements of his paintings.¹⁰⁶ This type of temporary inclusion and superficial representation of the ballroom culture in the museum risks, if repeated too often, overlooking the deeper social and cultural significance of ballroom culture

¹⁰⁴ Joseph and Bain, "Leisure as black survival," 326.

¹⁰⁵ Amber Vineyard, personal conversation as part of the event "Deep Dive into the Archive" at Huis Willet-Holthuysen, 20 March 2024.

¹⁰⁶ "Voguing" is a highly stylised dance form that originated within the ballroom scene. It is characterised by angular and exaggerated movements often inspired by poses from fashion runways or magazines such as *Vogue*, hence its name.; Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam, "Vincent op Vrijdag x Vineyard World."

as a space for marginalised individuals to form identity as well as find community and belonging.

During my attendance at the “Deep Dive into the Archive” event, Amber Vineyard provided valuable insights into the significance of the *Grand March* exhibition for the institutional engagement with and representation of ballroom.¹⁰⁷ They emphasised that the exhibition, which was co-curated by selected members of the House of Vineyard, offers a unique perspective into the social and cultural identity of ballroom culture through the eyes of the members of the Dutch house themselves.¹⁰⁸ This perspective is particularly meaningful in light of the current tendency in museums where shows about ballroom culture are curated by or told through the artistic creations of artists outside of the community. One exhibition that serves as an illustration of this phenomenon was *Deep in Vogue: Celebrating Ballroom Culture*.¹⁰⁹ Although this exhibition collaborated closely with Amber Vineyard, it primarily showcased ballroom culture through the lenses of French-Haitian documentary photographer Chantal Regnault and Dutch filmmaker Otilie Maters.¹¹⁰ Using external artwork to narrate a subculture’s story is not inherently problematic, especially considering that Regnault’s photographs are among the most important pieces of documentation of the heyday of the Harlem ballroom scene. However, what posed a problem was the exhibition’s narrow focus on the entertainment aspects of ballroom culture. Indeed, the exhibition’s portrayal of ballroom, which fixates solely on performance and visual spectacle, overlooked the deeper, nuanced facets of ballroom culture.

That is not the case in *Grand March*. The Amsterdam Museum places identity representation at the forefront of its mission, stating that the museum’s programmes and exhibitions are organised primarily for and by Amsterdammers to make “the history, the heritage, the art, the culture, and the narratives of the city audible, visible, and accessible” and thus bring people together to discuss past, present and future identities of the capital’s inhabitants.¹¹¹ As ballroom gains prominence in Amsterdam’s and the Netherlands’ creative

¹⁰⁷ The edition of the recurring event “Deep Dive into the Archive” that I attended took place at Huis Willet-Holthuysen on 20th March 2024. During the event, Amber Vineyard, Elly Vineyard, and member Roxette Capriles offered personal tours of *Grand March*. Additionally, in a Q&A session, they provided insights into the origins and history of the House of Vineyard and delved into the lessons learned over the ten years of its existence.

¹⁰⁸ Amber Vineyard identifies as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns.; Amber Vineyard, Q&A in the context of “Deep Dive into the Archive,” 20 March 2024.

¹⁰⁹ *Deep in Vogue: Celebrating Ballroom Culture* at Kunsthal Rotterdam lasted from 18 September 2021 until 13 March 2022.

¹¹⁰ Kunsthal Rotterdam, “*Deep in Vogue*.”

¹¹¹ Amsterdam Museum, “About us.”

industry and cultural heritage, Dutch museums have begun to open up space for this subculture, as evidenced by its presence in museums such as the Van Gogh Museum, and Kunsthal. Unlike these aforementioned exhibitions and events, *Grand March* distinguishes itself through its spotlighting of the rich history, heritage, and artistry of ballroom culture and its focus on emphasising the scene's diverse cultural, social, and artistic identities.

In fact, the co-curation process of the exhibition aligns the makers of the exhibited objects with the exhibitors themselves which results in minimising mediation in the display and curatorial process and thus ensuring authentic representation. In that way, the members of the ballroom house take on an empowered position as they become responsible for the representation of their multifaceted identity, and the specificities that distinguish them as a subculture within the LGBTQIA+ community. A glossary that one is referred to via a QR code introduces visitors to ballroom language and a plethora of terms related to gender and sexuality, offering definitions of terms like “ball”, “queer”, “femme queen” or “grand march” (see Fig. 12). Rather than adopting an academic tone, or simplifying language to cater to a lay audience, the information labels throughout the exhibition make use of highly specific ballroom language, which is further explained in the glossary. In a phone conversation with the father of the house, Elly Vineyard, he explained to me that maintaining the authenticity of ballroom language was a deliberate choice advocated by the House of Vineyard to properly convey their specific identity despite resistance from museum curators.¹¹² Eventually, the co-curation process between the Amsterdam Museum's curatorial team and that of the House of Vineyard displays Michael Frisch's concept of *shared authority*, which integrates scholarly and personal perspectives to create more inclusive and democratic historical narratives.¹¹³ The commitment to authenticity in the language used throughout the exhibition sets the stage for the unapologetic celebration of identity throughout the exhibition.

A visual and thematic analysis of select display rooms within the exhibition will shed light on how *Grand March* represents various aspects of identity inherent to the ballroom community. In the “Dining Room” on the first floor, visitors can observe a table surrounded by large pictures positioned on chairs which depict the founding mothers of the ballroom scene in Harlem, New York in the 1970s and 80s (see Fig. 13). Originally serving as a dining space, the room is described in the information label as a venue for gathering, group formation and sharing. The visuals of this room create the impression of these legendary

¹¹² Elly Vineyard, personal communication with author, 26 March 2024.

¹¹³ Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xxii.

ballroom figures – Avis Pendavis, Crystal LaBeija, Pepper LaBeija, Dorian Corey, Angie Xtravaganza, and Paris Dupree – sitting around the table, suggesting their deserved place at the metaphorical table of institutional recognition. The information label reiterates this idea by emphasising that this room pays tribute to the remarkable individuals who laid the groundwork for exhibitions like *Grand March*. Despite enduring social marginalisation, the information label notes that these Black and Brown trans women refused to be invisible and lived authentically while nurturing their community. According to Elly Vineyard, they are to thank for the existence of the House of Vineyard.¹¹⁴

The inclusion of their memory in the exhibition conveys the idea that the growing institutional attention towards the ballroom subculture, and the House of Vineyard’s ability to openly express its diverse identities in a museum setting, is thanks to the resilience of these pioneering trans women. Thus, this room spotlights the importance of ancestors or previous generations in both individual and collective identity formation. As historian Susan Elizabeth Ramírez observes, recollections of the past whether of individuals, families, lineages, ethnicities, or nationalities, play a crucial role in shaping identities.¹¹⁵ The value of free expression of identity in ballroom is further accentuated by a background audio recording extracted from a scene in the recent Netflix series *Pose*. In this scene, Elektra, one of the show’s main characters, confronts verbal harassment by a woman in a restaurant. She is defending her and her friends’ presence, all of whom are trans women, by asserting, “we fought for our place at this table” and underlining the diversity of womanhood.¹¹⁶ Together, this auditory backdrop and the visual tableau call attention to the debt owed to the founding mothers of ballroom culture for having established a foundation that allows the open expression of multifaceted identities within the community, as well as in institutions today.

The “Bedroom” is another room that stands out for its depiction of a specific part of ballroom identity (see Fig. 14). This room is dedicated to the *sex siren* ball category, which challenges and transcends the male gaze that is imposed on bodies, female ones in specific. Bailey defines it as a “body category that emphasises the physical sexual appeal of its participants.”¹¹⁷ The information label elaborates that this category, aimed at reclaiming the marginalised body and breaking free from the constraints of heteronormative society, serves as a pivotal expression of artistic freedom within the ballroom culture (see Fig. 15). The

¹¹⁴ Dijksterhuis, “Hoe ballroom in tien jaar opkwam in Nederland.”

¹¹⁵ Ramírez, “Alternative Ways of Remembering and Knowing,” 2.

¹¹⁶ See the full clip of the scene: Still Watching Netflix, “Elektra Reading a Transphobe For Filth.”

¹¹⁷ Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*, 171.

significance of the topic of this room is reinforced by its direct connection to the identity of Louisa Holthuysen, whose femininity faced a lot of scrutiny in her lifetime due to her choice not to have children and her masculine presentation. Abraham and Louisa's former bedroom, darkened through thick curtains and lit up with vibrant red hues, now symbolises agency over one's own body (see Fig. 16). This is particularly expressed through the selection of sex toys, namely whips, and collars, that are neatly presented to the viewer on a sofa placed in the centre of the room. The open display of sexuality contrasts with the traditional museological engagement with sexually explicit topics. As fine arts professional Hayden Hunt observes, when institutions take on the topic of sexual identity, the latter is often displayed in a way that minimises controversy, for instance by concealing controversial material.¹¹⁸ In *Grand March* however, the objects that express sexuality are boldly celebrated through their positioning in the middle of the room. The fact that sexuality, as a fundamental aspect of the ballroom identity, has been included at all in this exhibition stands out especially if one considers museums' historical reticence toward sexually explicit subjects. For instance, Owen Jones notes that objects with sexual themes were part of a secret collection in the British Museum between 1830 and 1953, concealed from public display due to the prevailing sensibilities of the time.¹¹⁹ In embracing and prominently featuring aspects of sexuality within ballroom culture, *Grand March* challenges museological taboos and provides a platform for open dialogue and celebration of diverse identities, sexual identity being one of them.

In conclusion, *Grand March* is a testament to the progress in identity representation within cultural institutions. Although the ICOM definition does not specifically list diverse identity representation as one of the museum's primary responsibilities, the institution's commitment to inclusion, diversity, ethical operations, and public education raises the possibility that its roles may include the authentic representation of communities. The exhibition honours the resilience of its founding figures by celebrating the multifaceted identities of the ballroom community, using ballroom language, and not shying away from controversial displays. In a conversation with one of the curators from the Amsterdam Museum, Roberto Luis Martins explained that *Grand March* aims not only to educate but also to inspire self-expression and identity acceptance among its visitors.¹²⁰ In other words, the exhibition is aspirational for those who feel marginalised by societal norms and aims to educate the public on the diversity of gender, sexual and cultural identities within the

¹¹⁸ Hunt, "Curating Gertrude Stein," 236-237.

¹¹⁹ Jones, "Putting LGBTQ people back on the canvas of history," 352.

¹²⁰ Roberto Luis Martins, personal communication with the author, 9 April 2024.

ballroom community. Drawing from sociologist Eleanor Formby's insights on Pride events, I argue that *Grand March* creates a space that fosters community, safety, and freedom, and thus challenges the notion that certain identities should remain invisible or marginalised.¹²¹ As a result, the exhibition's celebration of multifaceted non-normative identity serves as a reminder that LGBTQIA+ lives are worthy of institutional recognition and that everyone deserves a seat at the table of societal acknowledgment. Nonetheless, the exhibition's temporary nature underscores the importance of seizing opportunities for institutional representation and amplification of diverse voices within mainstream narratives. The exhibition's limited time frame suggests that the displayed identities are not part of the permanent collection which emphasises the potential impact a permanent exhibition could have in increasing visibility and acceptance of the multifaceted identities within ballroom.

¹²¹ Formby, "Exploring LGBT+ People's Experiences of Pride Events," 136.

Chapter 3 – Cultivating care in the museum.

In a global context dominated by warfare, neoliberal individualism, economic disparities, impending ecological disasters, and an increasingly divided society, one can argue that we are witnessing a crisis of care. Sociologist Emma Dowling defines this crisis as the “growing gap between care needs and the resources made available to meet them,” categorising it as a pervasive issue affecting all aspects of social life, from the private to the public realm.¹²² According to cultural theorists Elke Krasny and Lara Perry, despite this crisis, contemporary movements such as Black Lives Matter or Fridays for Future embody a more caring approach to life, nature, and human rights.¹²³ In this chapter, the focus shifts away from discussing mandatory roles and responsibilities of museums to a more idealistic exploration of innovative approaches to LGBTQIA+ inclusion. While care is not explicitly outlined in the ICOM definition, extensive scholarship accentuates its transformative potential within museum practices. Indeed, while museums may not immediately come to mind when considering care, their resources and influential role as agents of social change, as argued by Sandell and Hooper-Greenhill, provide a strong foundation for contemplating the integration of more caring practices.

Concentrating particularly on the ‘ethics of care’ outlined by feminist scholars over the past fifty years, this chapter examines how incorporating care into museum practices such as curation, exhibition making, and public engagement can lead to more sustainable and meaningful inclusion of LGBTQIA+ narratives and voices within museums. In this context, *sustainable inclusion* refers to the long-term commitment to ensuring that marginalised narratives and voices are amplified, valued, and integrated into museum practices, exhibitions, and policies as well as the creation of an inclusive environment that acknowledges and respects the diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities, and experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community. A detailed visual and thematic analysis of *Grand March* will enhance understanding of how Dutch museums, consciously or not, have exhibited signs of ethics of care in their exhibitions focused on LGBTQIA+ narratives. Moreover, within the context of museums’ historical struggles to distance themselves from exclusionary practices that were discussed in the first chapter, this chapter explores whether foregrounding care can be a method to rectify the strained relationship between museums and the LGBTQIA+ community. Consequently, this section researches how an increased focus on

¹²² Dowling, *The Care Crisis*, 11.

¹²³ Krasny and Perry, “Introduction,” 1.

care has the potential to fundamentally alter power dynamics within museums, thereby transforming interactions with marginalised communities, such as the LGBTQIA+ community.

3.1. Defining care

Before concentrating on the benefits and drawbacks of introducing more care into museums, it is essential to establish a theoretical framework and clarify key definitions. “Care”, as defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, encompasses “attention accompanied by protectiveness and responsibility”, “responsibility for the safety and well-being of someone or something” and “the act or activity of looking after and making decisions about something” among others.¹²⁴ Given the multifaceted nature of care, it is crucial to consider its meaning within the specific context in which it is practiced and its intended recipients. According to the social and feminist philosopher Virginia Held, in interpersonal relations the cultivation of care emphasises the importance of empathy, compassion, and solidarity, necessitating effort and energy to understand individual needs.¹²⁵ As museums are social institutions working with and for people, these values should guide the practice of care within museum contexts. Central to this discussion is the concept of the “ethics of care,” pioneered by feminist scholar Carol Gilligan in the 1980s. Her ethical theory highlights divergent moral responses between men and women, with women foregrounding values such as empathy and compassion.¹²⁶ Gilligan’s work is part of a scholarly discussion that locates the ethics of care in the private sphere, and which underlines that caring is a responsibility socially as well as biologically relegated to women. A more broadly applicable model of care that transcends the private sphere has gradually replaced the binary view of ethics of care, according to more recent research on the subject. In fact, contemporary academics like Virginia Held and professor of political sciences and women’s studies Joan C. Tronto advocate for the collective need for care, not only within interpersonal relationships but also as a basic value in institutional and societal structures.¹²⁷ At the heart of all discussions surrounding the value and practice of care lies the concept of interdependency.

3.2. Museums and Care: Past, Present and Future

¹²⁴ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “care.”

¹²⁵ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 11; Tronto, “Creating Caring Institutions,” 162.

¹²⁶ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 11.

¹²⁷ Held, “The Ethics of Care,” 213.

Examining the relationship between museums and care reveals that the practice of care has not been wholly absent from the institution of the museum. Indeed, Nuala Morse, scholar of museum studies and social geography, explains that the caring for heritage objects, involving preventive conservation, documentation, and cleaning to ensure their physical preservation has been the form of care most prevalent in the museum.¹²⁸ However, with the changes brought about by new museology, which shifted attention away from inanimate objects to the audience and the public, social scientists Peinan Cheng et al. argue that the institution's understanding of care has been changing.¹²⁹ Museums have been placing emphasis on the theme of care in their exhibition concepts, as evidenced by *Handle with Care* at Museum Princessehof and *Who Cares?* at Museum Van de Geest.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, it might be interesting to explore a potential shift of focus from merely exploring care as a subject to actively implementing caring practices within museum operations (see Fig. 17). Recent years have arguably demonstrated the wish of museums to apply a more caring attitude towards marginalised communities, especially manifesting in the form of a heightened concern for matters of inclusion and diversity. In the context of the Dutch museum landscape, as detailed before, this is best exemplified by the Diversity & Inclusion Code, which is endorsed by many Dutch cultural institutions, including the Stedelijk Museum, the Rijksmuseum, and the Amsterdam Museum.

The systemic historical exclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community from institutional narratives such as those presented in museums has left its traces. Indeed, museum professionals C. Aaron Price and Lauren Applebaum point out that the historic and contemporary exclusion of marginalised communities from museums has resulted in the latter lacking a sense of belonging in those spaces.¹³¹ As public institutions that aim to be as inclusive as possible, museums arguably have a social role to play when it comes to addressing the marginalisation of communities like the LGBTQIA+ community and creating a more welcoming and democratically accessible environment. This role becomes especially apparent when considering the 2019 ICOM definition of the museum, which states that the contemporary museum “[aims] to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global

¹²⁸ Morse, *The Museum as a Space of Social Care*, 1.

¹²⁹ Cheng, Zhang and Huang, “Constructing National and Local Identity in the Third World,” 957.

¹³⁰ *Who Cares?* is on at the Museum van de Geest in Haarlem from 30 November 2023 until 1 December 2024. *Handle with Care* took place at the Keramiek Museum Princessehof in Leeuwarden from 26 November 2022 until 29 October 2023.; Museum van de Geest, “*Who Cares?*”; Keramiek Museum Princessehof, “*Handle with Care.*”

¹³¹ Price and Applebaum, “Measuring a Sense of Belonging,” 2-3.

equality.”¹³² As mentioned in the first chapter, this definition has since been updated. Nevertheless, the 2019 definition’s recognition of museums’ activist potential underscores the ongoing discourse of contemporary museological scholarship. It follows that, if social justice and global equality are idealist aims that museums could be promoting within their practices, then that could be done, among others, through active engagement in the caring inclusion of communities they may have previously marginalised. Nonetheless, as care is not mentioned in either of the most recent ICOM definitions, it would be up to each museum to decide whether to adopt such caring practices or not. When thinking about the relation between the museum as an institution and the LGBTQIA+ community, it is worth discussing Held’s perspective on the function of care in relations between people of unequal power. She states that “in fostering trust and mutual concern rather than confrontation and violence, the approach of care lends itself to reducing hostility between groups.”¹³³ By redefining museological practices to include care for communities, museums could make some major advance when it comes to distancing themselves from the systems of oppression inherent within their foundation and thus reconceptualise their relationships with all marginalised communities.

But why exactly should museums take on caring responsibilities when it comes to their engagement with the LGBTQIA+ community? To better reflect on that, one needs to understand the complex relation that the community has with care. In fact, public care, such as health care and social care, have structurally been harder to access for LGBT individuals due to discrimination and social marginalisation.¹³⁴ As a result, law professor Nancy J. Knauer points out that LGBT individuals have had to rely on their chosen families – namely spouses, partners, and friends – to provide them with care and support privately in the absence of democratically accessible, institutional care.¹³⁵ The confrontation with the crisis of care has raised awareness of the urgency of distributing care responsibilities more equally. While museums might not be equipped to take on health care responsibilities, for instance, their contemporary practices – being centred around education, community engagement, and inclusive programming – make one think that museums have already, even if unconsciously, engaged in some form of social care. In that context, Morse maintains that the concept of the museum as a place for social care is based on a proactive framework that links the museum’s

¹³² 2019 ICOM “Museum definition.”

¹³³ Held, “The Ethics of Care,” 221.

¹³⁴ House of Commons, “Health and Social Care and LGBT Communities.”

¹³⁵ Knauer, “LGBT Older Adults,” 151.

civic responsibilities to broader societal concerns regarding welfare.¹³⁶ However, to care for the LGBTQIA+ community appropriately, museums' already existing caring practices would benefit from more intentional efforts. According to Held's definition, "care calls for empathy to understand the needs of others, sensitivity in doing so and in responding to them, and especially, respectful concern and activity to actually meet those needs."¹³⁷ By applying this concept of care to museological practices, museums could attain a more sustainable form of inclusion.

3.3. Challenges and Limitations of caring practices

While implementing caring practices in museums offers numerous benefits, it also presents challenges, some of which I will discuss in this section. Infusing the museum's methodologies with care undeniably complicates museum work. Caring museum practices are relational, affective, and flexible: they require active collaboration, clear communication, and a certain flattening of hierarchical structures. In fact, Tronto maintains that hierarchies are obstacles for the implementation of good care, as they separate the responsibility for care from its practice.¹³⁸ Putting an end to the concept of hierarchies altogether is a challenging, time-consuming, and expensive task for an institution whose colonialist and oppressive dynamics are deeply entrenched in the groundwork of the museum. In the context of curatorial practices specifically, Krasny and Perry point out that:

"Curating with care involves and foregrounds the importance of the much-needed but often forgotten activities, which demand more – more time, more attention, and more resources – to treat all relations ethically and care-fully."¹³⁹

As a practice that is based on the principles of interdependency and relationality, care is a complex task for museums to undertake. Indeed, as the previous quote underlines, the *careful* approach to museological practices necessitates a rethinking of relationships with the public, and the communities which the museum serves. For instance, museum care for a community entails the establishment of contact with the community to identify their needs. By seeking out collaborations, organising talks, or other interactive events, museums can use their institutional privilege to start to understand and eventually meet those needs in their terms. Though, in a time where the cultural sector is struggling to stay afloat financially,

¹³⁶ Morse, *The Museum as a Space of Social Care*, 210.

¹³⁷ Held, "The Ethics of Care," 228

¹³⁸ Tronto, *Caring Democracy*, 164.

¹³⁹ Krasny and Perry, "Introduction," 8.

museums may not all be open to taking on more responsibilities and societal roles than they already have. In the case of the Netherlands specifically, the most recent election results threaten the cultural sector. In their election campaign, the Party for Freedom (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, which won the elections by a landslide, announced that they would end subsidies for art and culture.¹⁴⁰ If that does materialise, then it is almost certain that most museums will choose to focus on mere survival and the maintenance of the objects that are already in their care, rather than taking on the intricate task of care for marginalised communities. As a practice that does not make museums reap immediate benefits, financially especially, it is very unlikely to be prioritised by institutions.

In the context of considering inclusion as a form of care, it must be said that the past two decades have seen LGBTQIA+ narratives more frequently included in museums. Steorn observes that Pride Month especially can stimulate museums to re-evaluate their collections, exhibition programs and internal policies through a lens of social progressivism and non-normativity.¹⁴¹ While this is progress that needs to be acknowledged, there remains room for improvement, as the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ narratives can sometimes be performative. Steorn identifies that in most cases where queer-themed exhibitions are organised in the context of Pride Month, this is done to attract what he labels a *pink audience*, namely a culturally active LGBT+ community, motivated by the wish to increase visitor numbers and thus enhance economic gain.¹⁴² This was arguably the case for *Seahorse Parents*, an exhibition at Foam taking place in the context of Queer & Pride Amsterdam 2023, which dealt with trans men's journey through pregnancy.¹⁴³ The exhibition fell short in achieving sustainable inclusion not only because it was of very small scale and only lasted for two months, but also because it was not underpinned by much public programming that could foreground trans voices. Such instrumentalisation of LGBTQIA+ narratives during Pride Month, with the primary goal of attracting specific audiences or enhancing profit, perpetuates tokenism. It can be argued that initiatives driven more by self-interest than genuine concern for the LGBTQIA+ community compromise the authenticity and ethical integrity of inclusion efforts because they do not align with the principles of empathy and sensitivity that Held's definition of caring practices highlights.

¹⁴⁰ Boztas, "‘Culture is fragile.’"

¹⁴¹ Steorn, "Queer in the Museum," 135.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ *Seahorse Parents* at Foam, Amsterdam lasted from 28 July until 27 September 2023.

At the same time, there might be public resistance to and discomfort with LGBTQIA+ inclusion in museums, stemming from conservative ideologies, traditional heteronormative societal norms, deeply ingrained religious or cultural beliefs about non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, or prejudices and misconceptions about LGBTQIA+ communities perpetuated through media, social discourse, or lack of education. Although intended to promote inclusivity and diversity, events such as “Drag Queen Story Readings,” organised in institutions throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, as well as around Europe, feature drag queens reading books to children, often provoking strong reactions from conservative and traditionalist segments of the audience. Such a drag reading in Leiden aroused protests which highlighted concerns about the appropriateness of drag queens’ attire, moral values, and perceptions of LGBTQIA+ individuals as potential threats to children.¹⁴⁴ Such events may inadvertently alienate conservative or older visitors who hold traditional views on gender and sexuality, consequently leading to a decline in visitor numbers, which museums in financial trouble cannot afford. These types of controversies highlight the possibility of polarising responses from museum visitors as a result of the caring emphasis on LGBTQIA+ inclusion. The increased presence of LGBTQIA+ narratives is a step in the right direction towards greater representation and equity. However, it also poses challenges for museums having to navigate the complexity of societal change as well as reconcile diverse audience reactions.

The previous analysis has critically examined the museum’s evolving role in adopting caring values and addressing contemporary social challenges, particularly in LGBTQIA+ inclusion efforts. Although caring practices have the potential for fostering sustainable inclusion and undoing past marginalisation, incorporating them into museum operations poses challenges. In addition, as mentioned before, caring responsibilities are not outlined in the ICOM definition of the museum, and therefore do not represent a key role that all museums need to fulfil. Nonetheless, for museums which are committed, independently from the institutional directives, to reversing power hierarchies and remedying troubled relationships with marginalised communities, the adoption of caring practices has the potential to contribute to such endeavours. Turning now to *Grand March*, the next section examines how caring practices might be applied in museum settings. The chapter aims to shed light on the transformative potential of ethics of care within museums while recognising the difficulties that come with implementing caring practices in museums.

¹⁴⁴ Van der Aa, “Demonstraties rond voorleessessie.”

3.4. Caring Practices within *Grand March*

Grand March serves as an exemplary insight into the Amsterdam Museum's response to the historical lack of LGBTQIA+ representation in museums. In the last ten years, the Amsterdam Museum has emerged as a leading example in the Dutch cultural landscape for its commitment to inclusion and diversity. Its dedication to LGBTQIA+ inclusion arguably started with the museum's involvement in the initiative by the name of "Queering the Collections", a project aimed at making queer histories visible within archives and museums, launched in partnership with ILHIA, the Reinwardt Academie, and COMCOL.¹⁴⁵ Cultural consultant Riemer Knoop states that queering collections is about getting museums and archives to better reflect the diversity of the population in their collections, acquisition policies and exhibition practices.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the Amsterdam Museum's commitment to improving the representation of the diverse narratives present in society is especially apparent when considering that the museum states that it works towards "strengthening community among Amsterdam's inhabitants and visitors by making the history, the heritage, the art, the culture, and the narratives of the city audible, visible, and accessible."¹⁴⁷

The LGBTQIA+ community has been central to a number of recent exhibitions and initiatives at the Amsterdam Museum. For instance, the third instalment of the exhibition series *Collecting the City* entitled *Gay Games 1998* focused on a sporting and cultural event which centres around people from the LGBTIQ+ community, while the "Queer Gaze Tours" give viewers an opportunity to discover the history of the city of Amsterdam through queer artworks and objects.¹⁴⁸ With the exhibition *Grand March*, the Amsterdam Museum has gone a step further: the exhibition not only contributes to making an underrepresented artform visible to a larger public, but it also gave its community a key role in the curation and storytelling responsibilities within the exhibition. As artist-researcher Johanna Braun points out that the etymology of the word "curating" stems from the Latin word *curare*, meaning "to

¹⁴⁵ ILHIA is the acronym for the *Internationaal Homo/Lesbisch Informatiecentrum en Archief*, an international archive and documentation centre focused on the collection of LGBTQIA+ heritage. See ILHIA LGBTI Heritage, "Organisation."; The Reinwardt Academie is a Dutch institution for higher vocational education that offers degrees in cultural heritage.; COMCOL stands for "committee of collections" and is an international committee of ICOM which concentrates on the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections development. See ICOM, "International Committee for Collecting."

¹⁴⁶ Knoop, "Queering the Collections," 11.

¹⁴⁷ Amsterdam Museum, "About us."

¹⁴⁸ *Gay Games 1998* took place at the Amsterdam Museum on the Amstel from 23 June 2023 until 21 January 2024. See Amsterdam Museum, "*Gay Games 1998*"; Amsterdam Museum, "Queer Gaze Tours."

take care of’, it becomes clear that curating and caring are intrinsically connected.¹⁴⁹ Giving over curatorial control to a marginalised community thus imbues it with the authority to care for its own representation, at the same time as counteracting the historical invalidation of their voices. In that way, I argue that the curatorial and narrative practices that make up *Grand March* reflect caring practices, which result in creating a more sustainable inclusion of LGBTQIA+ stories.

First and foremost, the inclusion of the topic of ballroom and the history of the House of Vineyard, which make up the central topics of *Grand March*, can be considered a form of care. The Amsterdam Museum’s proactive outreach to the first Dutch ballroom house to co-curate this exhibition underscores its commitment to spotlighting the unique history, art, and community of ballroom culture.¹⁵⁰ Considering that, as Sullivan and Middleton have noted, most LGBTQIA+ exhibitions have focused on white and cisgender men, *Grand March* displays an attempt at diversifying the portrayal of the queer experience in museums.¹⁵¹ Indeed, whether consciously or not, by putting on this exhibition, the Amsterdam Museum transcends traditional museological boundaries and amplifies voices that have long existed on the fringes of society. It must be noted here that mere inclusion is not sufficient to begin the process of transforming the unequal relationship between museums and marginalised communities if it is not followed by active practical efforts to counteract their societal ostracization. Indeed, Sascia Bailer, a curator working at the intersection of care, contemporary art, and structural change, explains that curating with care consists of “[using] curatorial practice and thought as a vehicle, as an organisational method to actively (re)construct relationships, visibilities, and caring infrastructures with the sincere dedication to the sociopolitical transformation.”¹⁵² Having identified that LGBTQIA+ communities in general are still struggling to have their voices heard in society at large as well as in big institutions, the Amsterdam Museum, having assumed a caring position, responded to the community’s need for a platform by giving them an opportunity to tell their own story and celebrate their heritage with only limited institutional mediation.

Another way in which *Grand March* reflects ethics of care can be observed in the centralisation of the narrative voice of House of Vineyard in this exhibition. Far removed

¹⁴⁹ Braun, “Spellbound,” 261.

¹⁵⁰ The fact that the idea for the exhibition originated from the Amsterdam Museum, specifically out of the initiative of the curator of Fashion and Popular Culture, Roberto Luis Martins, was revealed to me in a phone conversation with Elly Vineyard. Elly Vineyard, personal communication with author, 26 March 2024.

¹⁵¹ Sullivan and Middleton, *Queering the Museum*, 44.

¹⁵² Bailer, “Care for Caregivers,” 192.

from traditional museological practices where the curator dominated the narrative, the narrative framework of *Grand March* exemplifies a departure from conventional museum practices, with the curatorial voice shared between the Amsterdam Museum and the House of Vineyard, where the latter is given precedence.¹⁵³ According to professor of digital culture, Daniel H. Mutibwa, such collaborative curatorial praxis and community engagement is based on the idea that these constituencies hold the experiential knowledge and relationship with their culture that establishes them as authorities on the matter.¹⁵⁴ This inclusive approach, however, encountered challenges during the collaborative process. In a phone conversation I had with Elly Vineyard, he commented on the fact that the house members had to advocate for greater narrative autonomy.¹⁵⁵ Confronted with strict museological traditions about exhibition making, the House of Vineyard curators initially clashed with the Amsterdam Museum team which did not approve of their non-normative language used in information labels and their untraditional curatorial approaches. Eventually, the Amsterdam Museum team understood the need for the House of Vineyard members to express themselves freely without having to adhere to the conventions of the museum, which resulted in the use of authentic ballroom language throughout the exhibition as I discussed in the second chapter. This demonstrates how the co-curation with an external community who advocates for a certain level of narrative and curatorial independence can create difficulties in the process of infusing inclusive museological practices with care.

In spite of these strains in the collaboration between Amsterdam Museum and House of Vineyard, visitors of *Grand March* are confronted with a multiplicity of perspectives which bring together the contemporary and the historical in a way that complements each other. While the audios and labels narrated by Amsterdam Museum curators provide historical information on the house, give an analytic and factual perspective on ballroom that might be most useful to those visitors unfamiliar with ballroom, the ones by members of the House of Vineyard confront visitors with the principles of freedom and resistance which ballroom culture is founded on (see Fig. 18). The room which best illustrates the subversive creative methods and the empowered narrative voice of the House of Vineyard best, is the grand salon (see Fig. 19). This room, in which the House of Vineyard has creatively intervened, displays a mannequin that merges a sixteenth-century armoured harness and a

¹⁵³ Out of 10 audio stops in the audio guide, only three of them are narrated by curators from the Amsterdam Museum.

¹⁵⁴ Mutibwa, "Rising beyond museological practice and use," 112.

¹⁵⁵ Elly Vineyard, personal communication with author, 26 March 2024.

decorative white shirt, both part of the Amsterdam Museum's collection, with a tulle dress from the House of Vineyard's archive (see Fig. 20). By bringing together the hypermasculine element of the armour with the decorative feminine dress, the House of Vineyard challenges the Amsterdam Museum's categorisation of their fashion archive into male and female clothing, and simultaneously illustrates the way in which ballroom transcends the limitations of the fixed gender binary.¹⁵⁶ Instead of telling a simplified story of ballroom that merely focuses on the entertainment value of the movement, the exhibition, as narrated primarily by the house members themselves, does not shy away from tackling the complexity of gender. Rather than simplifying the fluid nature of gender for every visitor to understand, the narrative voice of House of Vineyard is unapologetically their own to do justice to the subversiveness and resistance of their artform. In that way, the inclusion of the ballroom house in this exhibition has two outcomes. First of all, *Grand March* has provided the House of Vineyard with a platform to tell their story in their own words, in comparison to the majority of exhibitions on LGBTQIA+ topics, where curators narrated the story for them. Second of all, the House of Vineyard's new and transhistorical perspectives on the collection of the Huis Willet-Holthuysen result in making the Amsterdam Museum's collection more relevant and accessible for contemporary audiences.

Another element which reveals practices of care in Amsterdam Museum's engagement with a subculture within the LGBTQIA+ community is the fact that this collaboration is based on the physical transformation of Huis Willet-Holthuysen into a symbolic home for the House of Vineyard. Considering that ballroom houses originally functioned as physical houses and refuges for their members to find shelter after they were kicked out of their own homes by homophobic or transphobic relatives, the invitation from Amsterdam Museum to make Huis Willet-Holthuysen their own can be understood as a sign of care.¹⁵⁷ This gesture of hospitality reflects the museum's commitment to providing a safe and inclusive space for marginalised communities, reminiscent of the welcoming nature of ballroom houses for outcasts. Indeed, as they re-imagined and re-purposed the spaces, objects and stories within the house, the members of the House of Vineyard had the freedom to physically claim a space as their own, which has not historically been open to marginalised communities. On the third floor in specific, the Amsterdam Museum gave the House of

¹⁵⁶ In this YouTube video, curator of Fashion and Popular Culture, Roberto Luis Martins, mentions the binary organisation of the Amsterdam Museum's fashion collection. See Amsterdam Museum, "Kunst in het Kort #25: Roberto Luis Martins over *Grand March*."

¹⁵⁷ Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*, 95-96.

Vineyard the freedom to design three rooms completely from scratch, namely, “the Living Room”, “the Archive Room” and “the Catwalk” (see Fig. 21, 22, and 23). In a conversation I had with one of the curators of the Amsterdam Museum, Roberto Luis Martins, he explained that the creation of these rooms functions as a response to the need for certain physical spaces in the Dutch ballroom scene.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, the information panel for “the Living Room” points to the fact that there have not been many opportunities for the House of Vineyard to look back at their work since their founding ten years ago, and that this room gives them the opportunity to do so.

The living room has been created to act as a physical space to meet, build community, provide education, and engage in a dialogue with the public as the house members believe that the ballroom community “is shaped [...] by the moments where [they] gather to appreciate what [they have] done, learn from the past, and make plans on how [they] can build a sustainable future” (see Fig. 24).¹⁵⁹ Visitors are invited to take a seat and immerse themselves in the stories of the House of Vineyard and the Dutch ballroom scene in general. The countless photos and posters of past balls which are plastered on the walls of this room in a haphazard fashion, as well as the thick purple curtains, create a domestic atmosphere in which the visitor is incited to learn about the legacy of the House of Vineyard (see Fig. 25). Furthermore, the short film *Otherland*, which tells the emotional story of Elly Vineyard’s journey from his native country of St. Martin to the Dutch ballroom scene after having been rejected by his family for being gay, introduces visitors to the personal hardship that pushes LGBTQIA+ individuals to find a new home in the ballroom community. Aside from being a place for remembrance and reflection for the public and the house members alike, the living room is also used as a space for public programming such as the “Deep Dive into the Archive”: this recurring event emphasises the importance of documentation and archiving when it comes to collectively honouring and preserving the legacy of the House of Vineyard (see Fig. 26). By giving the House of Vineyard access to these spaces, the Amsterdam Museum has fulfilled its role as facilitator by providing the marginalised community with the curatorial authority to claim space, preserve collective memory, celebrate their evolution throughout the past decade, and build community in the process.

Grand March offers a compelling demonstration of how narrative voice and physical space are two aspects of museological practices that can be adapted to provide care for

¹⁵⁸ Roberto Luis Martins, personal communication with the author, 9 April 2024.

¹⁵⁹ From information label of “The Living Room”. See Fig. 24.

marginalised communities. Museums as places of diverse representation with the ability to create collective identity, have a sometimes untapped potential when it comes to using their institutional privilege to validate socially overlooked and historically underrepresented narratives. Through their active collaboration with the House of Vineyard, the Amsterdam Museum has successfully identified the ballroom house's needs and responded to them in a caring way with museological resources available to them. *Grand March* is an illustration of how the application of such ethics of care in the process of creating an exhibition can considerably change the power dynamics between museums and the LGBTQIA+ community. Moreover, the analysis of this exhibition illustrates a few possible ways in which to integrate caring practices into museum contexts. *Grand March* provides a unique opportunity for visitors to get a deeper understanding of historical and contemporary narratives through the exhibition's blend of traditional artifacts with contemporary queer elements. This method emphasises the relevance of queer perspectives within historical settings while also highlighting the value of inclusivity and diversity in museum practices. It is clear from this analysis of *Grand March*, that caring practices may be implemented in straightforward ways that preserve the integrity of historical collections and simultaneously foster a more inclusive and equitable museum environment.

Conclusion

When it comes to the role of museums in fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion, it has become apparent that the relatively vague institutional definition proposed by ICOM makes it hard to clearly define that role. The recent changes to the definition of the museum, which this thesis analysed in detail, demonstrate that the museum's role is fluid and highly dependent on the academic discourse as well as the social and political context within which it exists. What is clear from the 2022 definition however, is that the general principles of ethical operation and communication should guide all museum practices.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the definition does not offer a detailed guideline on how to go about the inclusion of marginalised communities and their narratives in an ethical way. It follows that it is up to museums themselves to decide how to approach this problem. However, through my analysis of *Grand March*, I have identified the museum's primary roles as facilitators and potentially even caregivers in fostering more sustainable inclusion of LGBTQIA+ narratives and voices. Indeed, by providing the location, institutional backing and museological experience, the Amsterdam Museum has played its role in facilitating the successful inclusion of the ballroom subculture in the exhibition by enabling the House of Vineyard to claim space and curatorial authority, among others. In fact, this thesis has found that collaborative processes, authentic representation, and ethical and caring practices within museological frameworks have the potential for advancing sustainable inclusion.

In this context, *Grand March* serves as a practical illustration of academic theories on museum inclusion put into practice and in that sense has succeeded in spotlighting the ballroom subculture in the Netherlands. Through the examination of *Grand March*'s methods in this thesis, it became evident that temporary exhibitions like these hold promise to act as stepping stones when it comes to optimising the engagement of museums with marginalised communities. Already the title of the exhibition, *Grand March: A Historic House through a Ballroom Lens*, highlights its aim to provide a reinterpretation of the Huis Willet-Holthuysen through the contemporary lens of ballroom culture. However, the significance of *Grand March* extends beyond its surface narrative. As I have argued in the first chapter, exhibitions of this kind have the potential to heal the fraught relationship between museums and marginalised communities by offering institutional recognition and fostering a greater sense of belonging. Nevertheless, the disapproving reviews in the Huis Willet-Holthuysen guest book suggest that challenges persist in normalising the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ narratives.

¹⁶⁰ 2022 ICOM, "Museum Definition."

The second chapter made clear that, while general inclusion efforts represent a step forward in achieving broader societal representation, mere inclusion does not always equal a comprehensive understanding of the identities showcased in the museum. Although the ICOM definition of the museum does not explicitly address authentic identity representation, the definition does underline the importance of ethical practices. Though it is up to every museum to decide how to approach identity representation, one would hope that museums as stewards of knowledge and identity, would aim for the authentic representation of identities. *Grand March* is an exemplar of the power of collaboration in achieving this authenticity, which has conceivably been successful through its application of Frisch's concept of *shared authority*. By sharing curatorial authority, the House of Vineyard and the Amsterdam Museum blend scholarly and experiential perspectives to offer an arguably more authentic portrayal of the multifaceted identity of ballroom. Nevertheless, such collaborations, especially ones with communities which have such a strong creative vision as the ballroom community, may challenge traditional museological practices to the point of complicating collaboration. Still, it might be necessary to face such obstacles to change the exclusive and hierarchical structures of museums in the long-term. Furthermore, the focus of *Grand March* on a subculture rather than the whole LGBTQIA+ community also allows for a more manageable and detailed exploration of identity. This focused approach enables a deeper and more authentic exploration of ballroom culture, contrasting sharply with the superficial depictions of ballroom that have become commonplace in the Netherlands. In that sense, exhibitions like *Grand March* play a pivotal role in emancipating the ballroom community from being merely "othered" entertainers to being acknowledged as artists with rich cultural and social identities that deserve institutional recognition.

The third chapter underlined the benefits of incorporating ethics of care into museum practices to bring about more sustainable inclusion efforts. Central to this chapter was Held's conception of ethics of care, which emphasises the cultivation of empathy, compassion and solidarity in both individual and institutional relationships. While contemporary museums have arguably already been engaging in various forms of care, a more deliberate application of caring practices could lead to a reconceptualisation of museums' relationships with marginalised communities. With *Grand March*, the Amsterdam Museum has taken significant steps towards infusing their museum practices with care. Indeed, by providing the ballroom scene with institutional validation, and giving the House of Vineyard curatorial authority, the Amsterdam Museum has succeeded in creating a more caring and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals and has plausibly taken on the role of caregiver. Although such

caring practices have the potential to fundamentally alter power dynamics within museums, it needs to be noted that implementing caring practices in museums is complex as community needs are dynamic and the task of dismantling institutional hierarchies takes time. Though ethics of care are not part of the museum's primary guiding principles, I have argued that caring museological practices and the museum's assumption of its role as caregiver should be viewed as avenues through which inclusionary practices can be enhanced and expanded.

I acknowledge the limitations of this thesis, particularly its focus on one exhibition situated in the capital of the Netherlands. Consequently, the arguments presented herein should be understood as contextually specific to a metropolitan Dutch cultural. Another constraint arises from the small number of resources detailing public reactions to the exhibition, which deterred me from making conclusive remarks about *Grand March*'s reception. To address such limitations and advance our understanding of effective strategies for fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion within the museum, future research would need to adopt a more expansive approach. Through better monitoring of public reactions to inclusion initiative, we can glean deeper insights into the complexities of inclusion efforts. Furthermore, a mapping of inclusive practices in the entirety of the Dutch cultural scene, also encompassing the less metropolitan areas of the Netherlands, is vital to get a more complete understanding of matters of inclusion beyond the Randstad. Inclusion of marginalised communities and minorities is important in all aspects of social life and should therefore be investigated in the context of other institutions as well. In the bigger picture, *Grand March* has offered a valuable lesson on LGBTQIA+ museum inclusion, beyond mere tokenism. The exhibition has proved that museums can successfully evolve into more inclusive institutions for LGBTQIA+ narratives and voices by relying on authentic representation, caring and ethical practices, and community collaboration. Thus, the Amsterdam Museum's original approach to queer inclusion exemplifies one possible tactic of fulfilling the vague principles of the museum definition (and going beyond). In conclusion, this thesis has highlighted museums' potential to serve as catalysts for social change by fostering inclusive spaces where all voices are not just acknowledged but considered with care. By following the guiding principles that *Grand March* is based on, cultural institutions can begin to address historical exclusions and pave the way for more inclusive and equitable museum experiences.

4. Illustrations



Fig. 1. (Title page) Bete van Meeuwen, “Elly Vineyard in *Grand March*,” photograph, 2023, (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

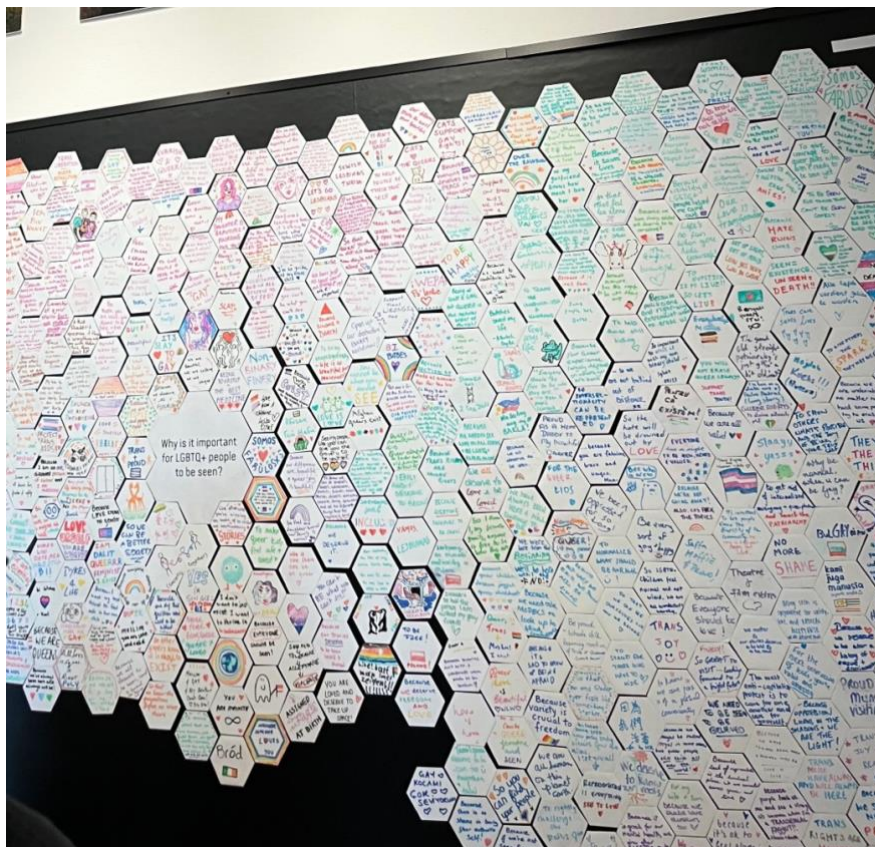


Fig. 2. Entrance room, personal photograph, 14 October 2023, (London, Queer Britain).

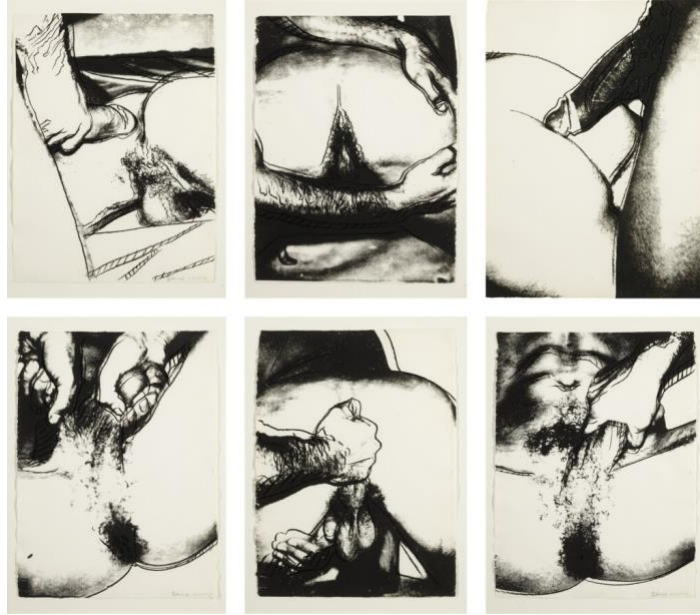


Fig. 3. Andy Warhol, *Sex Parts (F. & S. 172-77)*, 1978, screenprints, 79.7 x 59.5 cm, (New York, Sotheby's).



Fig. 4. *Huis Willet-Holthuysen*, Amsterdam, Herengracht 605, 1017 CE, 1687. Exterior: facing the façade of the building. Image ca. 2023.



Fig. 5. Bete van Meeuwen, *House of Vineyard at Huis Willet-Holthuysen*, 2023, photograph, (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

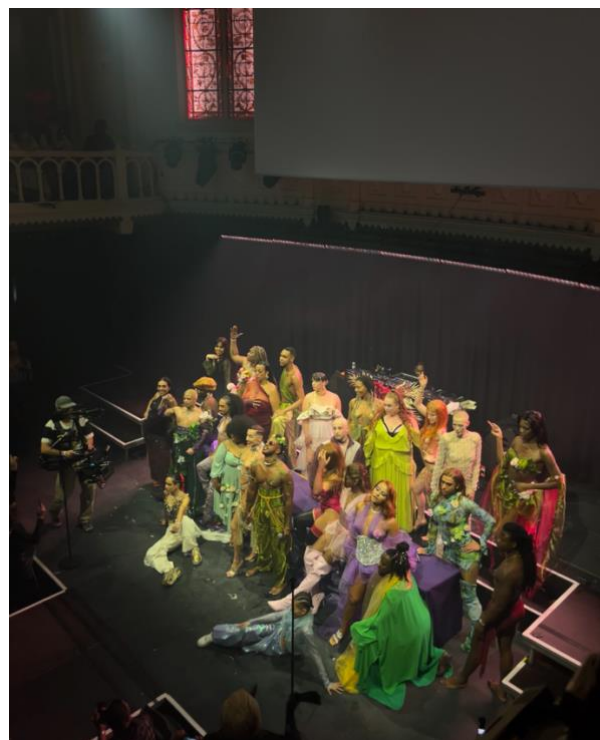


Fig. 6. “Paradisus Ball: 10th anniversary celebration of the House of Vineyard,” personal photograph, 16 April 2024 (Amsterdam, Paradiso).



Fig. 7. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, Mannequin (left) in “Grand Salon”, 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

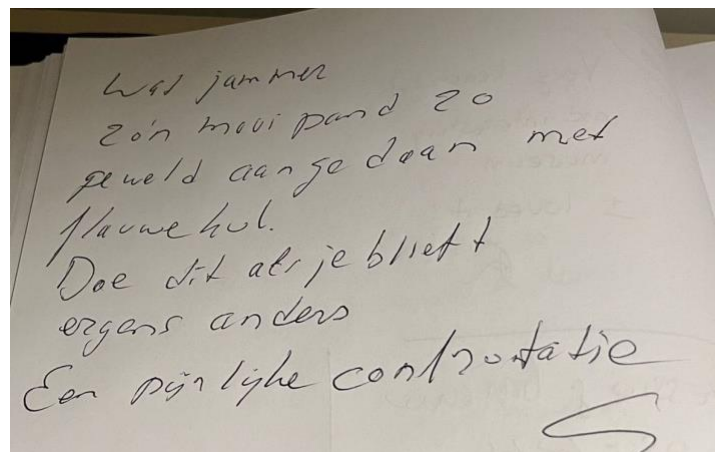


Fig. 8. Guest book entry, personal photograph, 20 March 2024 (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen). Translation by the author. “What a shame, all this violent bullshit brought upon such a beautiful building. Please do this somewhere else. A painful confrontation.”

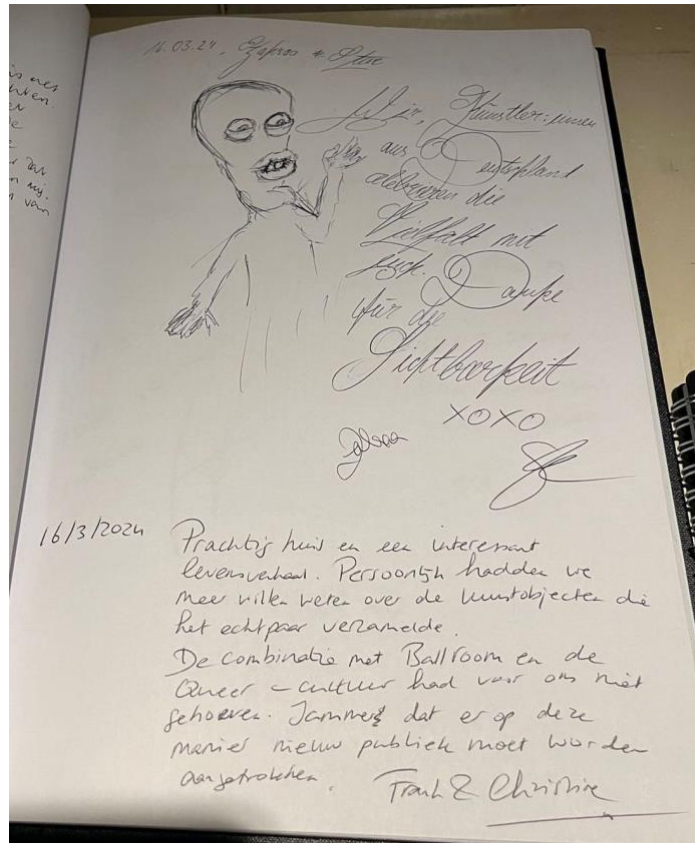


Fig. 9. Guest book entry, personal photograph, 20 March 2024 (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen). Translation by the author. Top. “We artists from Germany celebrate diversity with you. Thanks for the visibility.” Bottom. “Beautiful house and interesting life story. Personally, we would have liked to know more about the art objects that the couple collected. For us the combination with ballroom and queer culture was not needed. Too bad that you need to attract a new public in this way.”

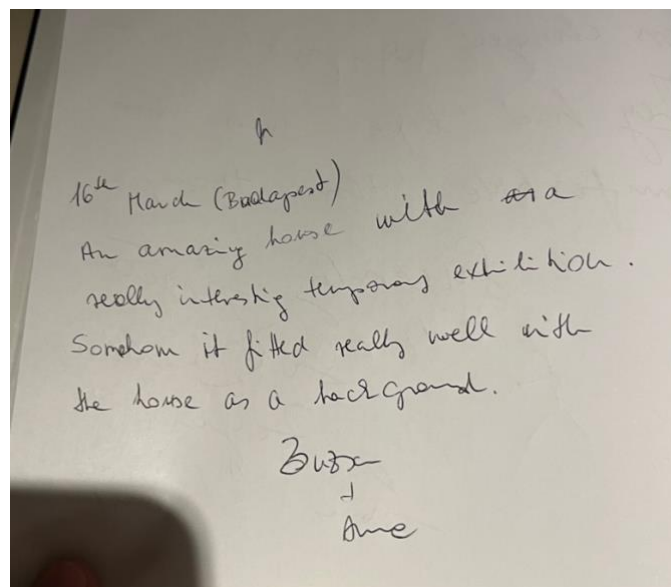


Fig. 10. Guest book entry, personal photograph, 20 March 2024 (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

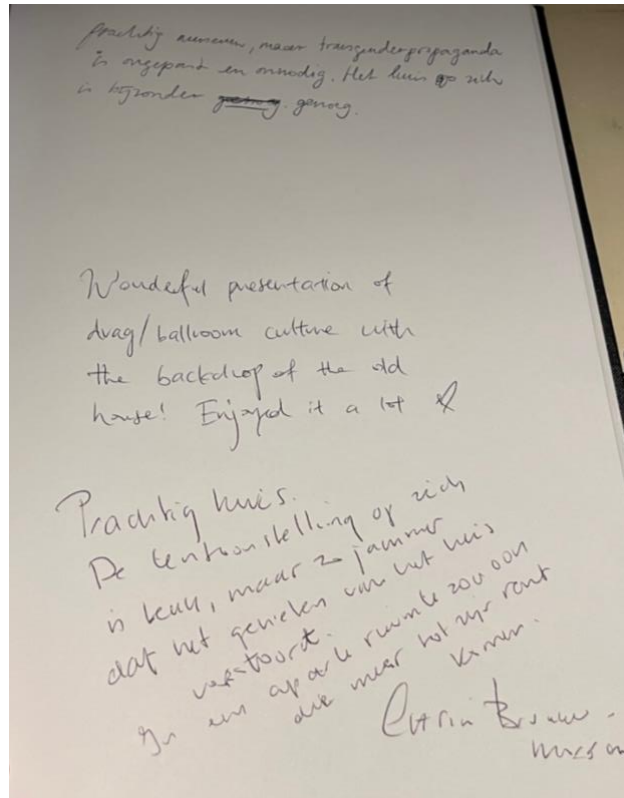


Fig. 11. Guest book entry, personal photograph, 20 March 2024 (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen). Translation by the author. Top. “Beautiful museum, but transgender propaganda is inappropriate and unnecessary. The house in itself is special enough.” Bottom. “Beautiful house. The exhibition in itself is nice, but such a shame that it disrupts the enjoyment of the house. In a separate room, it would also be more at peace.”

Vocabulary List Grand March

- **Balls**
Central events where members of the ballroom community come together to compete against each other in various categories, demonstrating their skill and creativity while representing their respective houses.
- **The binary**
“The binary” here refers to the gender binary, which is the idea that there are only two distinct genders (male and female).
- **Categories**
At a ball, participants compete against each other in categories. Each category highlights something else, such as fashion, performance, ‘realness’ – or body for example. Some categories are for specific genders only, while others are open to all.
- **Femme queens**
Our term for trans women in the ballroom community, recognizing their unique position as the pillars of the community. Within ballroom there is terminology for a variety of genders and gendered experiences as lived within the context of ballroom.

- **Giving flowers**
Honoring, showing respect
- **Grand March**
Initiation during a ball where the house that hosts the ball presents the house in its entirety, highlighting every member in their own category.
- **Legendary**
A title added before an individual’s name to denote their contribution to the ballroom community.
- **Mothers**
In ballroom, mothers are the leaders of a house. A mother in ballroom can be any gender.
- **Mother of Sirens**
Referring to Amber’s contribution to the Sex Siren category, as one of the first people in Europe to walk and popularize this category.
- **Runway**
When someone participates in a category at a ball, they do so on the runway, oriented towards the judges while being cheered on by their community from the sides. This creates a dynamic space; everyone forms a part of what happens on the runway.
- **Trailblazing**
Someone who has played an integral part in the formation and existence of a national ballroom scene.
- **Walking**
The act of participating in a category at a ball.

Fig. 12. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, “Vocabulary List Grand March,” screenshots taken by the author, 3 May 2024 (Amsterdam Museum website).



Fig. 13. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, “Dining Room,” personal photograph, 9 December 2023, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 14. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, “Bedroom,” 2023, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

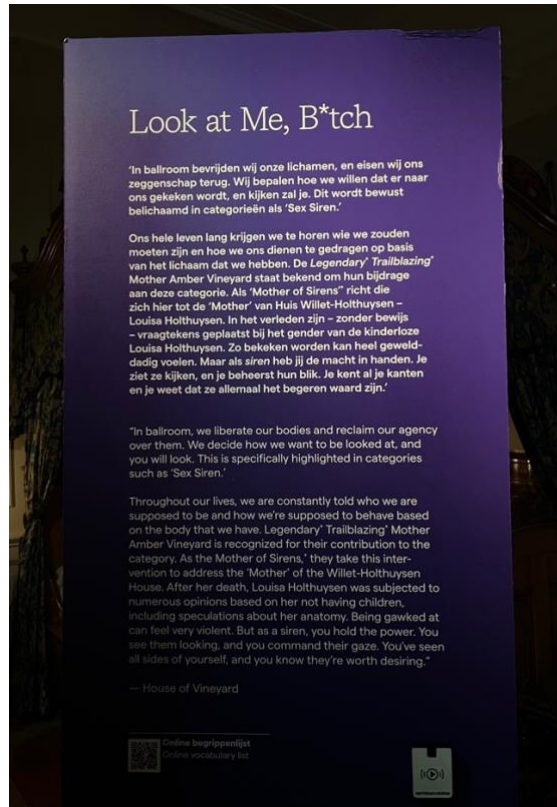


Fig. 15. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, “Look at me B*tch” Information Label in “Bedroom”, personal photograph, 15 March 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 16. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, “Bedroom,” personal photograph, 9 December 2023, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

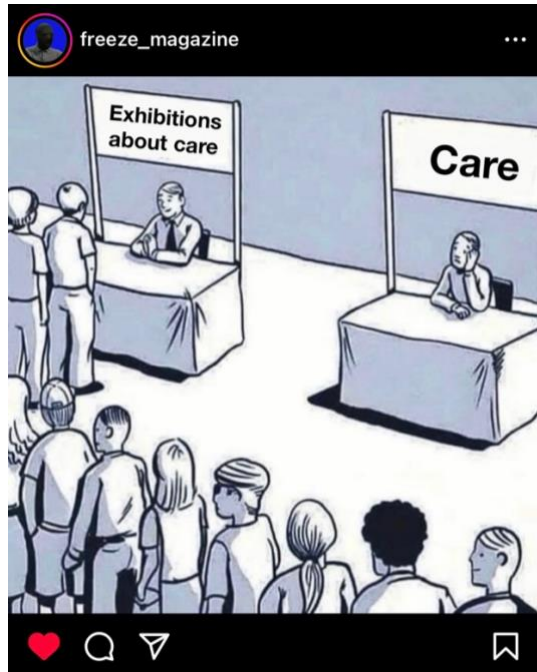


Fig. 17. Cem A. (@freeze_magazine), Meme Post, Instagram, 19 December 2023.



Fig. 18. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, Information labels about ballroom (left) and historical context of Huis Willet-Holthuysen (right) are exhibited next to each other in the “Side Room”, personal photograph, 15 March 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 19. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, “Grand Salon,” personal photograph, 15 March 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 19. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, Mannequin displaying sixteenth-century armour and a decorative white shirt from the Amsterdam Museum collection with a dress from House of Vineyard collection in “Grand Salon,” personal photograph, 15 March 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 21. House of Vineyard, “The Living Room,” personal photograph, 15 March 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

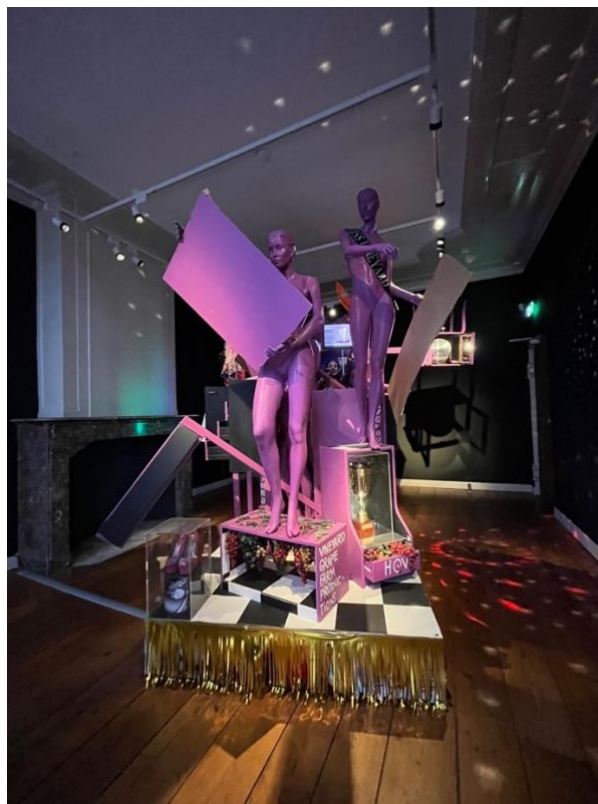


Fig. 22. House of Vineyard, “The Archive Room,” personal photograph, 15 March 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 23. House of Vineyard, “The Catwalk,” personal photograph, 9 December 2023, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 24. House of Vineyard and Amsterdam Museum, Information label of “The Living Room,” personal photograph, 9 December 2023, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 25. House of Vineyard, Photos and posters plastered on the walls in “The Living Room,” personal photograph, 9 December 2023, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).



Fig. 26. Event “Deep Dive into the Archive” with Elly Vineyard (left) and Amber Vineyard (right), personal photograph, 20 March 2024, *Grand March* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum, Huis Willet-Holthuysen).

Illustration credits

- Fig. 1. Downloaded 5 May 2024. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/tentoonstelling/grand-march-house-of-vineyard-ballroom/50109>.
- Fig. 2. Photo taken by the author. 14 October 2023.
- Fig. 3. Downloaded 2 May 2024. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2019/important-prints-and-multiples-day-sale/andy-warhol-sex-parts-f-s-172-77>.
- Fig. 4. Downloaded 2 May 2024. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/locaties/huis-willet-holthuysen/3632>.
- Fig. 5. Picture by Bete van Meeuwen, 2023. Downloaded 2 May 2024. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/tentoonstelling/grand-march-house-of-vineyard-ballroom/50109>.
- Fig. 6. Photo taken by the author. 16 April 2024.
- Fig. 7. Downloaded 2 May 2024. <https://www.iamsterdam.com/en/whats-on/calendar/exhibitions/all-exhibitions/grand-march-a-historic-house-through-a-ballroom-lens>.
- Fig. 8. Photo taken by the author. 20 March 2024.
- Fig. 9. Photo taken by the author. 20 March 2024.
- Fig. 10. Photo taken by the author. 20 March 2024.
- Fig. 11. Photo taken by the author. 20 March 2024.
- Fig. 12. Screenshot taken by the author. 3 May 2024. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/begripenlijst-grand-march>.
- Fig. 13. Photo taken by the author. 9 December 2023.
- Fig. 14. Downloaded 1 May 2024. <https://www.amsterdammuseum.nl/en/exhibition/grand-march/50109>.
- Fig. 15. Photo taken by the author. 15 March 2024.
- Fig. 16. Photo taken by the author. 9 December 2023.
- Fig. 17. Downloaded 12 March 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/p/C1Cimz6ugwQ/?igsh=amZpZDhqM2V5ZGpm>.
- Fig. 18. Photo taken by the author. 15 March 2024.
- Fig. 19. Photo taken by the author. 15 March 2024.
- Fig. 20. Photo taken by the author. 9 December 2023.
- Fig. 21. Photo taken by the author. 15 March 2024.
- Fig. 22. Photo taken by the author. 15 March 2024.
- Fig. 23. Photo taken by the author. 9 December 2023.
- Fig. 24. Photo taken by the author. 9 December 2023.
- Fig. 25. Photo taken by the author. 9 December 2023.
- Fig. 26. Photo taken by the author. 20 March 2024.

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