

Editorial

WOMEN OF THE RIJKSMUSEUM

This Rijksmuseum Bulletin is devoted to women. There is no real need to mention this so explicitly – after all, we never say how gender-related an issue is. I dare not say whether or not this is the first ‘women’s issue’ in the Bulletin’s whole history, but since 2000 we have published only one article about a female artist and three articles about a female central figure. I have not taken the acquisitions into account, but still, not a good balance. And this uneven distribution can be seen in the whole collection presentation.

This is why, in 2021, the Rijksmuseum decided to systematically make the traces that women left in Dutch cultural history more visible – a necessary catch-up effort. The Women of the Rijksmuseum (WRM) project was formed. This project is made possible in part by the Susi Zijderveld Fonds, the Familie Krouwels Fonds, the Machteld Vos & Willem Sijthoff Fonds, and the ‘Women of the Rijksmuseum’ Fund. It aims to embed the female narrative in the collection and the displays through research. The WRM’s activities are part of the coordinated plan to make the Rijksmuseum more inclusive and more diverse. The emphasis is not exclusively on women; the project also includes other gender issues in its research. Every emancipation process deserves in-depth investigation, but in 2022 women are still the largest population group that is systematically invisible worldwide, both in socio-economic and legal respects, as well as in art and history. The full and self-evident participation of women in society therefore continues to be an issue, which is why it deserves extra attention, especially in a cultural history museum.

This Bulletin gives a good explanation of how this social and historical invisibility works. In his research into Pink’s *VideoSchetsboek/At Home series*, Erik de Jong analyzes how the ideal of domestic happiness formulated in the late eighteenth century is still generally accepted today. As De Jong writes: ‘There was a firm belief that domestic bliss was good for the development of the nation. Domesticity was linked above all else with the development of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, and also with family life and maternal love.’ Hence the happiness of the nation rested on the shoulders of women, as mothers and protectors.

The family situation of Maritge Vooght in the seventeenth century, unearthed from the archives by Femke Valkhoff, was completely different. Here we encounter a family economy; home and work were not yet as rigorously separated as they were later. The brewery owned by Maritge and her husband was a family business, in which husband, wife and children jointly contributed to the family’s financial well-being.

Valkhoff’s research into the portrait of Maritge Vooght is representative of the work of the WRM: its focus on women in the collection gives rise to a more complete perspective on history. However, the usual art-historical methodology is often insufficient to find the information. Not only are women often not mentioned in the archives, literature study also provides us with a repetition of old assumptions, frequently deriving from the nineteenth century and therefore part of the ideal of femininity referred to above. Fortunately, what applies to all marginalized groups in history is also applicable here: object research and circumstantial evidence often yield new knowledge, as a recently acquired tablecloth and napkin demonstrate. Different questions, knowledge of our objects and inventive methods of research will eventually bring about a paradigm shift in our view of history and culture. This is the way to build a historically representative and inclusive presentation of our collection.

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Chair of the Women of the Rijksmuseum Project

See www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/research/our-research/overarching/women-of-the-rijksmuseum