

DECOLONIAL DIALOGUES

@HUMANITIES

LEARNINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, SCENARIOS



Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities: Learnings, Recommendations, Scenarios, 2024

This report is presented to the Daily Board of the Faculty of Humanities based on input by the Editorial Board of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities (chaired Margriet Schavemaker).

Research conducted by/report written by Emma van Bijnen (project secretary Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities) supported by Imogen Mills.

In collaboration with/with contributions by: Margriet Schavemaker, Mano Delea, Els van der Plas, Esther Peeren, Sruti Bala, Nuraini Juliastuti, Mirjam Hoijtink, Christian Bertram, Chiara de Cesari, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Paul Knevel, Sanjukta Sunderason, Judith Noorman, meLê Yamomo, Jouke Turpijn, Margo Keizer, Machiel Keestra, Reza Kartosen-Wong, Vany Susanto, Iris Bouw, Phaedra Haringsma, Ghanima Kowsoleea, Chris de Ploeg, Lateesha Verwey, Niels Boogers, Noah Benjamins, Sofia Frumkina, Sanaa Kashif, Diana Burduja, Noah Pellikaan.¹

¹ Some contributors prefer to remain anonymous.

Table of Contents

PART I: INTRODUCTION, ORGANIZATION, AND GOALS

Table of Contents	2
1 Introduction to the Report	5
1.1 Methodology	5
1.2 Disclaimers.....	7
2 Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities	8
2.1 Motivation	8
2.2 Project Goals	10
2.3 Organization.....	11
2.3.1 Steering committee.....	11
2.3.2 Board of Editors.....	11
2.2.3 Programming Team	15
2.2.4 Production Team	16
2.2.5 Communication Team	17

PART II: PROGRAMMING AND REFLECTION

3 Programming and Reflections	19
3.1 Programming January 2023 – February 2024	19
3.2 The Exhibition ‘If These Walls Could Speak’	33
3.2.1 Participating Artists.....	36
3.2.2 Artist selection	42
3.3 Programming Reflections	43
3.4 Media Reflections	45
3.5 Interventions during the Project (2023)	46

PART III: RECOMMENDATIONS AND SCENARIOS

4 General Advice	49
4.1 General Recommendations	49
4.1.1 Let’s Do Diversity.....	50
4.1.2 Academic Relations with Former Colonies.....	50
4.1.3 Selective Uncomfortability.....	52
4.1.4 Room Purpose and Renaming.....	52
4.2 General Dissuasions	53
5 Scenarios: Material Changes	54
5.1 Material Changes	55
5.1.1 Change is Required.....	55
5.1.2 Permanent -Temporary	56
5.2 Scenario 1: Verbal Contextualisation	56
5.2.1 What.....	56
5.2.2 How	57
5.2.3 Why.....	58
5.3 Scenario 2: Visual Contextualisation	58
5.3.1 What.....	59
5.3.2 Why.....	59
5.3.3 How	60
5.4 Notes on the Scenarios.....	60
6 Scenarios: Usage	61
6.1 General Advice on Usage.....	62
6.2 Scenario 1: Education	63
6.2.1 Why.....	63

6.2.2 What	64
6.2.3 How	65
6.3 Scenario 2: Thematic Events	66
6.3.1 Why.....	66
6.3.2 What.....	66
6.3.3 How, Scenario (2A)	68
6.3.4 How, Scenario (2B)	69
6.4 Summer Programming	69
6.4.1 What	69
6.4.2 Why.....	70
6.5 Scenario 3: Curation and Collection	70
6.5.1 What	71
6.5.3 Why.....	71
6.5.3 How, scenario (3A)	71
6.5.4 How, scenario (3B)	72
6.6 notes on the scenarios	72

PART IV: COMMITTEE AND INTERIM PERIOD

7 Conservation and Management Committee	75
7.1 Why	75
7.2 What	79
7.3 Who	80
7.3.1 Permanent Knowledge Members	80
7.3.2 Functional Support Members	81
7.3.3 On Call Diversity/Inclusivity Members	81
7.2 How	82
7.4.1 Policy	82
7.4.2 Mandate	83
7.4.3 Implementation.....	83
8 Interim Period	85
8.1 Urgent Recommendations (Interim)	85
8.2 Responsibilities	86

PART I: INTRODUCTION, GOALS AND ORGANIZATION

1 Introduction to the Report.....	5
1.1 Methodology	5
1.2 Disclaimers.....	7
2 Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities	8
2.1 Motivation	8
2.2 Project Goals	10
2.3 Organization.....	11
2.3.1 Steering committee	11
2.3.2 Board of Editors.....	11
2.2.3 Programming Team	15
2.2.4 Production Team	16

1 Introduction to the Report

The document ‘*Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities: Learnings, Recommendations, Scenarios*’ is written as an open access report in which the results of the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* are presented to the Daily Board of the Faculty of Humanities and shared with the public. The document reports on the project’s goals, activities, as well as recommendations and scenarios for the FGw Daily Board’s consideration.

1.1 Methodology

The report was written by Emma van Bijnen (project secretary), supported by Imogen Mills.² The contents are based on extensive conversations with, as well as input and feedback from:

1. *Decolonial Dialogues Editorial Board* meetings (held between January 2023 and December 2023) (see section 2.3.2)
2. Six one-on-one follow-up interviews with individual members of the *Decolonial Dialogues Editorial Board* (November 2023 – January 2024)
3. A focus group with representatives of the *Central Student Council* (on January 18th, 2024)
4. Four one-on-one follow-up interviews with humanities students by Imogen Mills and Emma van Bijnen (December 2024)
5. The faculty’s *Advisory Board* (meeting in the VOC-zaal³ about the project on October 6th, 2023)
6. The visit by the *Ambassador of Indonesia to the Netherlands* (H.E. Mayerfas) and his delegation to the room, (June 7th, 2023)
7. The *discussion board* in the VOC-zaal, which asked visitors of the room to respond to the following two questions: (1) *What do you think the room should look like in the future?* and (2) *In which way can the UvA denote more attention to the colonial past and its present-day impact?*

² From November 2023, Imogen Mills, student at the *University of Amsterdam*, and intern ‘*Research and Publications*’ at *Amsterdam Museum* aided with the incorporation of the students’ voice in this report, as well as copyediting.

³ Throughout the report we refer to the *VOC-zaal*, which is how the room is colloquially known. Other terms for the room are the *Dutch East India Company room*, *bewindhebberskamer*, *bewindhebberszaal*, *VOC-hall*, and *VOC-room*. The term ‘*VOC-zaal*’ is used in this document as it is what is most used by students and staff.

8. (E-mail) conversations with visitors of the programming that centred on the room (e.g., the editions of 'Talks and Drinks' between March and November 2023, and the symposium 'Curating UvA?!' on the 24th of November 2023)
9. Reflections by programmers Chris de Ploeg and Phaedra Haringsma (January 2024)

Throughout the project, the future of the room, both in terms of its materiality and its usage, was discussed with the members of the Editorial Board. In the latter half of the project, three dedicated editorial board meetings were organized to discuss suggestions for this report (November 8th, November 22nd, and December 14th of 2023). During these meetings new suggestions were gathered and the general outline for the scenarios was discussed. In addition, during the meetings and via e-mail, Editorial Board members were invited to one-on-one follow-up meetings with the project secretary and the project support. The goal of the follow-up meetings was to gain more detailed information and discuss some emerging scenarios with individual members of the board. In the end, six follow-up interviews were conducted with members of the editorial board. As such, the editorial board members had multiple opportunities to provide feedback.

The ideas by the members were translated into scenarios by the author of the report. The scenarios were constructed in a way where multiple ideas by multiple board members could be included. Ideas that automatically exclude ideas by other board members were adjusted for compatibility. Accepting that scenarios should be as broadly applicable as possible, and that it would be impossible to formulate scenarios that are (fully) satisfactory for everybody, suggestions that were in line with (A) other proposals or (B) benefit multiple stakeholders (i.e., faculty members from various departments, as well as students) were elaborated on.

As the student voice is important as well, the ideas by the editorial board were supplemented and compatibility tested by a focus group with the Central Student Council, as well as four one-on-one interviews with students in the Faculty of Humanities. To ensure students the freedom to safely voice their opinions, the focus group and most of the one-on-one interviews were organized by student assistant Imogen Mills (MA student at the Faculty of Humanities).

Although they do not form the foundation of the scenarios in this report, the feedback provided via (1) the message board, (2) the embassy meeting, (3) programming, and (4) the faculty advisory board, were used to supplement the base scenarios. Either with detail or as argumentative support.

1.2 Disclaimers

Throughout this document references are made to 1–9, as well as quotes from various contributors to illustrate underlying reasoning. Please note that all quotes have been anonymized unless explicit request/permission is provided by the contributor to use their name.⁴

The contents of this document are written with the University of Amsterdam’s *Strategy Plan 2021-2026: Inspiring Generations* (see e.g., ‘strategy’, ‘students’, ‘responsibility’ or ‘staff’)⁵, and the *2019 UvA Diversity Document*⁶ in mind. In addition, it explicitly endorses the *Let’s Do Diversity* report (Wekker, Sloodman, Icaza, Jansen and Vázquez, 2016)⁷.

It is important to note that this report and the findings should not be read or considered in isolation. Although the VOC-zaal is generally considered the clearest example of the University of Amsterdam’s (past) approach to the Dutch colonial past, which has resulted in some considering the room a form of “colonial advertisement” (anonymous – student) the motivations that underlie *the learnings, recommendations and scenarios* in this document apply to the university as a whole. Specifically, it applies to the University of Amsterdam’s approach to her colonial (cultural) heritage and the Dutch colonial past in general. For all who were involved in the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* and all who contributed to the report, the VOC-zaal is but the very visible tip of the much larger iceberg that is becoming increasingly difficult for the university to ignore. As such, the project and this document are to be considered a pilot that must lead to more widespread action and intervention. To that end, some recommendations are for the University of Amsterdam, which includes but is not limited to the Faculty of Humanities.

⁴ As all the Editorial Board meetings during the *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* were deemed ‘confidential’, as to create an open and safe space for feedback, input, reflection and the sharing of personal stories, all input provided by members of the editorial board for this report is anonymized.

⁵ See <https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/policy-and-regulations/general/strategic-plan/strategic-plan.html> (accessed January 2024)

⁶ See <https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/policy-and-regulations/general/uva-diversity-document.html> (accessed January 2024)

⁷ See <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=06a2473a-2076-4f2c-83e2-f1d8b3ea2d31> (accessed January 2024)

2 Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities

In 2023 (between January 2023 and February 2024), the *Faculty of Humanities* (FGw) organized the public programme *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* in and around the room that is known as the VOC-zaal. The programme consisted of, among other things, lectures, performances, debates, viewings, and a small exhibition.

2.1 Motivation

The immediate cause for the program was the so-called VOC-zaal in the Bushuis/Oost-Indisch Huis (former headquarters of the Dutch East-India Company (VOC)), which was built in the 1990's and is furnished with, among other things, copies of painting depicting former colonies of the East-India Company. It is important to note that the VOC-zaal is a reconstruction made in 1997 and not the original 'bewindhebberszaal' (or Board of Directors room).⁸ Historian Gabri van Tussenbroek, has throughout the project provided lectures in which he discussed the history of the building and the room, providing proofs that the original room was not even located on the spot the reconstruction is in. Furthermore, he explains how the reconstruction is inspired by, but is not a historic replica of the original bewindhebberzaal. Amongst other things, the paintings largely differ from the copies hanging in the room today, and there was no balustrade (see image 1 and image 2). In the words of the historian responsible for the construction in the 1990's, Lodewijk Wagenaar himself: "it is an operetta, only the players are missing".

In recent years, there has been a growing feeling of unease with the room by students and staff, and an increase of criticism on the way in which the colonial history of the Netherlands and the city of Amsterdam are (re)presented here. The daily board of the faculty thusly decided to temporarily close the room in August of 2022 (at the time it was used for meetings and graduation ceremonies).

⁸ For more about the background of the VOC-zaal, especially the climate in which it was built back then on behalf of the university's board of directors see *'Zaal vol Ongemak'* (2023) by *Biografie van Amsterdam*, Master Publieksgeschiedenis 2023, Universiteit van Amsterdam: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8O69g2GjSbQ> (accessed January 2024).

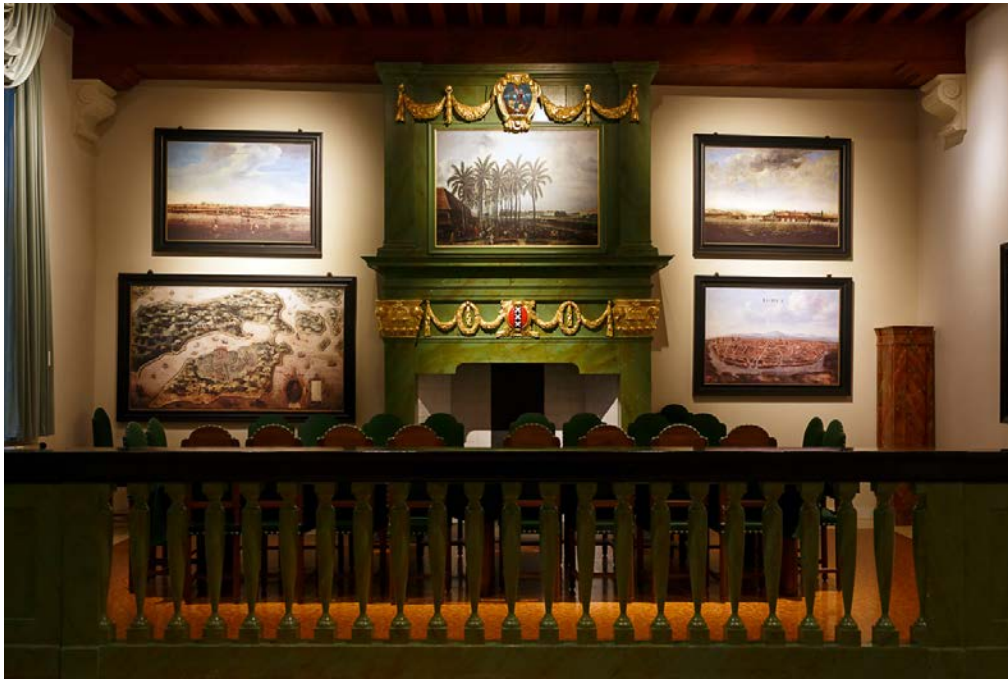


Image 1: The reconstructed stately room in the East Indian House. Photo by Bob Bronshoff

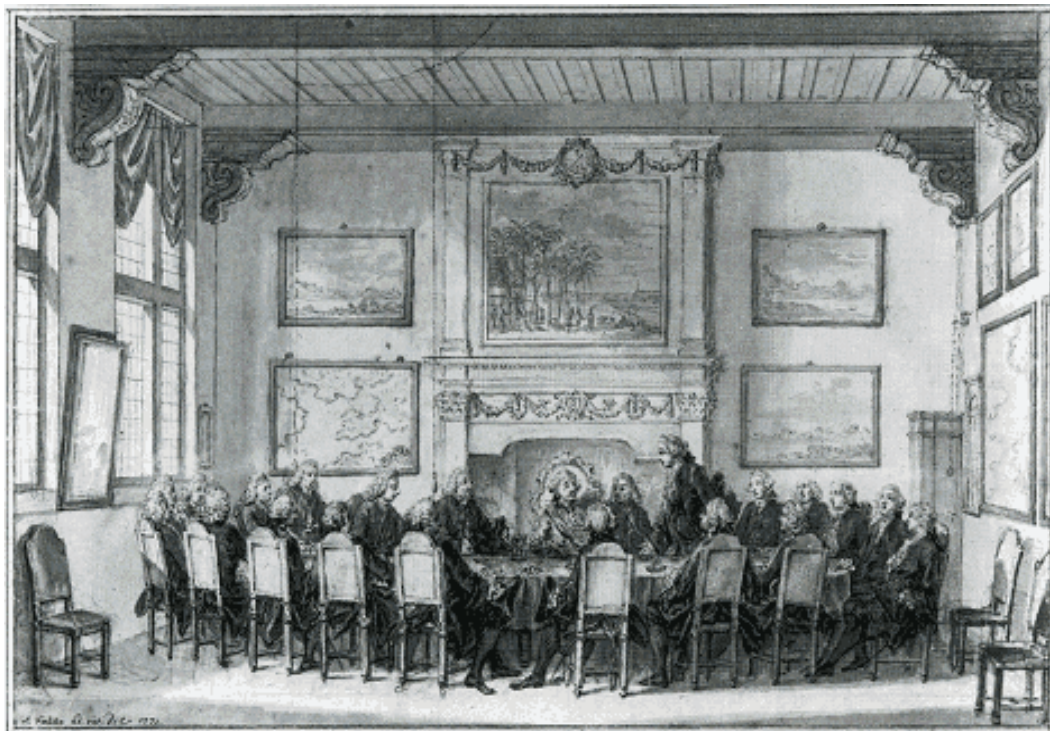


Image 2: a meeting in the Oost-Indisch Huis in Amsterdam. Drawing by Simon Fokke (1771) on which served as inspiration for the current VOC-zaal. Amsterdam Municipal Archives. The paintings on the wall now hang in the Rijksmuseum.⁹

⁹ From *Het Oost-Indisch Avontuur. Duitsers in Dienst van de VOC (1600-1800)* by Roelof van Gelder (1997).

2.2 Project Goals

As of January 2023, the doors of the room reopened for the public project ‘*Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*’. The goal of the program was to consider what the future of the so-called VOC-zaal should be and how to handle the colonial history of the building. Additionally, this project aimed to offer an open, safe, and inspiring place where expertise on decolonisation can be shared (think, for example, of the new interfaculty research priority area *Decolonial Futures*).¹⁰ The program also supplied input to the interdisciplinary research to be done by the University of Amsterdam on the colonial history of the institution (led by Machiel Keestra, Central Diversity Officer). Summarized, the general objective of *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* were to:

1. Chart the colonial history of the VOC-zaal, and the East-India-/Bushuis in a polyphonic manner.
2. Think of future scenarios for the VOC-zaal.
3. Create a temporary platform for public and accessible conversations about the colonial past and current debates on diversity, inclusion, and decolonisation within the Faculty of Humanities.
4. Put the decolonisation of heritage on the agenda within the faculty of Humanities, and to create a platform for conversations on contested heritage.
5. Connect humanities scholars who focus on decolonising heritage.
6. Create a network of internal and external partners for the decolonisation process within the faculty of Humanities.
7. Garner input for the UvA-led research on the institution’s colonial history.
8. Highlight the colonial history of this UvA-location and its surrounding area through performances and exhibitions.

¹⁰ For more on *Decolonial Futures*, see <https://www.uva.nl/en/shared-content/faculteiten/en/faculteit-der-geesteswetenschappen/news/2024/01/new-research-priority-area-decolonial-futures-to-be-launched.html#:~:text=In%20January%202024%2C%20the%20new,years%2C%20from%202024%20to%202029>.

2.3 Organization

The organization of the project Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities consists of the Steering Committee (section 2.3.1), the Editorial Board (section 2.3.2), the Programming Team (section 2.3.3), the Production Team (section 2.3.4) and Communication (section 2.3.5).

2.3.1 Steering committee

Steering Committee (convened once per month)

The Steering Committee monitored the process during the project and made procedural adjustments to the other groups where necessary. Additionally, they kept an eye on the finances and the general progress of the project. At the same time, they ensured, among other things, the programming team and the editorial board act and program in accordance with the project agreement. The Steering committee was chaired by Marieke de Goede (dean).

- Marieke de Goede (Chair of the Steering Committee)
- Margriet Schavemaker (Chair of the Editorial Board and Programming Lead)
- Emma van Bijnen (Project Secretary)
- Anne van de Graaf (Director Business Operations FGw)
- Maria Hagen (Head of Communications FGw)
- Ghanima Kowsoleea (Head Programmer until March 16th, 2023)

2.3.2 Board of Editors

Board of editors (convened once per month or bimonthly)

The *Editorial Board of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* was chaired by Margriet Schavemaker, supported by Emma van Bijnen. The editorial board convened on: January 25th, March 22nd, May 24th, September 26th, November 8th, November 22nd, and December 14th of 2023 (Microsoft Teams; 17:00 – 19:00).

The extensive editorial board was dynamic in its composition of active participants and consisted of staff from the Faculty of Humanities, as well as student representatives and external partners whose

focus is on cultural heritage, decolonialisation and related themes, such as diversity, racism, and inclusivity. During the project, the editorial board shared ideas for programming, provided feedback to improve the project and its output, advised on open call proposals, discussed related projects within the faculty, and had open conversations on the University of Amsterdam and her colonial cultural heritage. The last three editorial board meetings were led by Emma van Bijnen, author of this rapport, and centred on the future of the VOC-zaal and the university's future approach to colonial heritage. In addition to the polyphonic discussions during the editorial board meetings, various one-on-one conversations were scheduled with individual board members to provide input on either programming or the scenario's that make up this report.

The Editorial Board of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities consisted of the following members:

- *Margriet Schavemaker*
Chair of editorial board and curator of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities. She is artistic director at Amsterdam Museum and Professor of Media and Art in Museum Practice at the University of Amsterdam. She specialises in modern and contemporary culture and museums.
- *Emma van Bijnen*
Project secretary of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities. Lecturer at Speech Communication, Argumentation and Rhetoric (University of Amsterdam). Head of Research and Publications at Amsterdam Museum. In her research, she focuses on the connection between research and practice, as well as representation and in/exclusion in (multimodal) communication forms.
- *Els van der Plas*
Director at the Allard Pierson in Amsterdam. She is an art historian who specialises in aesthetics and beauty in difficult circumstances.
- *Mia Lerm Hayes*
Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Amsterdam. She focuses on social (art) practice, and image studies, as well as art(istic) research. In addition, she curates contemporary art exhibitions.
- *Esther Peeren*
Professor of Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam and Academic Director of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis. She focuses on processes of marginalisation and

questions of agency, on the underilluminated impact of globalisation on rural areas, and on the changing relationship between centres and peripheries.

- *Sruti Bala*
Associate Professor at the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Amsterdam. She is also Coordinator of the MA Theater Studies programme and member of the ASCA advisory board. Her research interests are at the intersections of performance and politics.
- *Mano Delea*
Lecturer within the Department of History, European Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Amsterdam. His research focuses on social movements and transformations in historical trajectories of emancipation, which he analyses from the perspective of sovereignty and power relations.
- *Nuraini Juliastuti*
Trans-local practising (postdoctoral) researcher and writer. She focuses on art organization, activism, illegality, and alternative cultural production.
- *Mirjam Hoijtink*
Assistant Professor at the department of Cultural Studies and Program Director of the MA Museum Studies at the University of Amsterdam. She has a strong affinity with human, political, ideological, and cultural historical dimensions of museum collections.
- *Christian Bertram*
Lecturer of Architectural History at the department of Art History at the University of Amsterdam. His research interests include history, theory and historiography of modern architecture, and landscape and garden architecture. In addition, Bertram took part in the Editorial Board as OR member of FGw.
- *Chiara De Cesari*
Associate Professor in European Studies and Cultural Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Her research explores the ways in which colonial legacies live on today, especially in museums.
- *Paul Knevel*
Lecturer at the History Department of the University of Amsterdam. He specializes in public history, urban studies, and Dutch history.

- *Sanjukta Sunderason*
Assistant Professor Art History at the department of Arts and Culture of the University of Amsterdam. Her research focuses on the entanglements between (left-wing) aesthetics and 20th-century decolonization in South Asia and across transnational formations in the Global South.
- *Judith Noorman*
Associate Professor at the University of Amsterdam. She researches early modern Netherlandish art and is also director of the Amsterdam Centre for Studies in Early Modernity.
- *meLê Yamomo*
Assistant Professor of New Dramaturgies, Media Cultures, Artistic Research, and Decoloniality at the University of Amsterdam. In his work as artist-scholar, meLê engages with the topics of sonic migrations, queer aesthetics, and post/de-colonial acoustemologies.
- *Jouke Turpijn*
Lecturer of Dutch History at the University of Amsterdam. He specializes in public history and the political, social, and cultural history of the Netherlands during the last two centuries.
- *Margo Keizer*
Initiator of the Humanities & Society organization at the University of Amsterdam.
- *Machiel Keestra*
Assistant professor at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Amsterdam and the university's Central Diversity Officer. His research interests include history of philosophy and hermeneutics, philosophy of action, the philosophy of cognitive neuroscience and philosophy of interdisciplinarity.
- *Reza Kartosen-Wong*
Lecturer of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam. His research explores manners in which Asian Dutch youth engage with media, as well as topics related to diversity and inclusion.
- *Iris Bouw*
Student BA Economics and Business Economics at the University of Amsterdam, and member of the Faculty Student Council.

- *Angelina Senchi*
Student MA Book Studies at the University of Amsterdam, student assistant at Allard Pierson and secretary for the Faculty Student Council.
- *Vany Susanto*
PhD student at the Amsterdam School of Historical Studies. She does research into the VOC directorship of Batavia and the impact of early modern petitions (rekesten) on the relation between the VOC government and the governed peoples, as well as the diverse social groups in Batavia.
- *Phaedra Haringsma*
Guest correspondent for De Correspondent on colonial power structures, programmer for Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities at the University of Amsterdam.

2.2.3 Programming Team

Steering Committee (together with the production team and the communication team, convened once per week)

The programming team was responsible for the programming that took place during the Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities project. As part of the project, a total of 40 programs took place in the VOC-room and the Bushuis/Oost-Indisch Huis between January 2023 and February 2024.¹¹ The assignment was to platform public events to discuss and study the colonial past and its effects through a variety of forms. The programming consisted of symposiums, readings, viewings, panels, performances, walking tours, lectures, and an exhibition.

Primary programming team

- Margriet Schavemaker (the responsible)
- Ghanima Kowsoleea (programmer until March 16, 2023)
- Chris de Ploeg (programmer from August 1st, 2023)
- Phaedra Haringsma (programmer from August 1st, 2023)

¹¹ This number excludes the closed thematic events hosted in the room as part of the project, such as the visit by the Indonesian ambassador to the Netherlands and his entourage on the 7th of June 2023, or the faculty advisory council meeting on the 4th of October 2023.

Secondary (supporting team from Amsterdam Museum)

During the project, the programming team was supported by the following programming support from *Amsterdam Museum*.

- Lateesha Verwey (programming support)

For the duration of the project, Lateesha Verwey acted as a valued programmer and moderator for various events.

- Daan Ferwerda (programming support until August 1st, 2023)

With the resignation of Ghanima Kowsoleaa as head of programming, Daan Ferwerda (then programming intern at Amsterdam Museum) stepped in, until the end of his internship. He was succeeded by Chris de Ploeg and Phaedra Haringsma.

2.2.4 Production Team

Production team (together with the programming team and the communication team, convened once per week)

The primary responsibilities of the production team are supporting and assisting the programming team. This could be by providing advice for programming suggestions from the editorial board and open calls to relevant and diverse programming. As well as assisting in the material, technical, and productional support needed for programming. In these cases, it varied from meeting with artists to get a grasp of the interventions needed in the room for the exhibition, such as the curtains, opening the cupboard at the back of the room, and changing the lighting. The production team also offered technical support during all programs by assisting with sound, PowerPoint presentations and so on.

- Robert Rotgans (production lead)
- Jelmer Wesselius (production support until October 31st, 2023)
- Carlijn Verweij (production support from November 1st, 2023)

2.2.5 Communication Team

Communication Team (together with the production team and the programming team, convened once per week)

The programming team was tasked with writing and editing promotional texts for events in the VOC-zaal, but they were supported by the communication team. The team primarily offered support in the distribution of promotional texts to university newsletters, website pages, students, and outside the university. In addition, the Head of Communications, Maria Hagen, was part of the Steering Committee of the project:

- Maria Hagen (Head of Communications, Faculty of Humanities)
- Anne Stikkelman (communication support)

PART II: PROGRAMMING AND REFLECTIONS

<u>3 Programming and Reflections</u>	19
<u>3.1 Programming January 2023 – February 2024</u>	19
<u>3.2 The Exhibition ‘If These Walls Could Speak’</u>	33
<u>3.2.1 Participating Artists</u>	36
<u>3.2.2 Artist selection</u>	42
<u>3.3 Programming Reflections</u>	43
<u>3.4 Media Reflections</u>	45
<u>3.5 Interventions during the Project (2023)</u>	46

3 Programming and Reflections

Over the course of 2023 and until February 2024 public programming was organised in the VOC-zaal. Part of the programming was done by *the Programming team* (section 2.2.3), and part of the programming was organised by interested parties, such as course coordinators and university staff. This chapter covers all the programming in this period, as well as some highlighted events and the exhibition. Finally, it gathers general insights from the programmers Chris de Ploeg and Phaedra Haringsma.



Image 3: audience during a program of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities. Photo by Communications FGw.

3.1 Programming January 2023 – February 2024

In this section the different programs are listed, organized between January 2023 and February 2024

19 January, Opening Symposium Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities

During the symposium, the context and objectives of the project were discussed with experts from inside and outside the UvA from scientific as well as artistic perspectives. The programme focused on the reconstruction of the room in the 1990s, previous programmes and research and teaching projects within the faculty on the room and colonisation issues in general. Broader UvA research on the university's colonial past were also discussed.

16 March, Decolonial Dialogues: Three Films About Everyday (Migrant) Activism

A screening of three short films and a discussion about everyday (migrant) activism. And a talk with Piotr Goldstein, (co)creator of the three films, on what activism is. Does it only happen in organizations and movements? Does all activism make sense? Who can become an activist? Who are ‘professional activists’, and who will never be ‘socially active’? Finally, how can we decolonise the ways in which we research, think, and talk about activism?

21 & 23 March, Decolonial Dialogues: European Studies BA elective ‘Thinking (Post)Colonial Europe’.

A two-hour course seminar on the birth of the museum and archives, and on the coloniality of memory and archives/record-keeping. Students read important academic texts pertaining to the theme and bring to the classroom their discussion questions on the topic. They took this opportunity to acquire familiarity with the space, with an eye to completing their final assignment, which was an exhibition idea for the room. This final assignment required students to redefine the public function of the room and to use oral history, visual arts, music/poetry and other sources for an exhibition space that does justice to the violence and trauma wrought by colonialism and coloniality.

24 March, Decolonial Dialogues: Talks & Drinks 1

An informal drinks reception to share new decolonial research via short presentations and conversations and end the afternoon with drinks. Organised every third Friday of the month. This programme was about the way students relate to the colonial past, in and around the University of Amsterdam. The event took place in the so-called ‘VOC-Zaal’, its existence is the focal point of the videos and podcast discussed in today’s programme.

31 March, Decolonising Media Studies, Exhibition of Final Projects

A presentation of student projects from the elective ‘Decolonising Media Studies: From Theory to Practice’. This year, the exhibition of final projects took place at the VOC-Zaal, in line with the aim of the course to encourage decolonial reflections on the pedagogies, curricula, and higher education, including the University of Amsterdam’s own practices and heritage.

21 April, Decolonial Dialogues: Talks & Drinks 2

The second edition of Decolonial Dialogues: Talks & Drinks touched upon varying notions of decolonialism with Sanjuncta Sunderason, Esther Peeren and Darshan Vigneswaran. We discussed,

amongst other things, their collective research project: Decolonial Futures. The event was moderated by Margriet Schavemaker.

26 April, Lecture: 'Netherlands in the World'

A lecture from the BA-course 'Netherlands in the World', part of the minor Dutch Studies, in which (international) students reflect on Dutch colonial history and the way it shapes the present world. Inspired by their own fieldwork as well as theoretical reflections on the significance of locations in processes of remembrance and belonging, students discussed the role and future of the room. In their own popularizing essay or podcast, they discussed a (possible) function of the VOC room and reflect on potential interventions – with regard to the room's interior, presentation or use – that can help to fulfill such a function. (Note: not a public event)

26 April, Screening: Perfumed Nightmare – decolonial subjectivity and modernity

A screening of the Philippine independent film Perfumed Nightmare. The film is a story about a young man who lives in a small village in the Philippines. While he is learning the craft of building houses out of bamboo, he dreams of living a more modernized life. When he gets the chance to move to France, modernity might not be all he expected it to be. After the screening there was a Q&A with Sam Yang and the audience to discuss the film and the connection between modernity and decolonial practices.

8 May, Decolonial Dialogues: The Dance that Makes You Vanish

A book discussion with dance and cello performances. This decolonial dialogue in the VOC-zaal featured a special event that combined a book discussion, dance performance, and cello music to delve into the cultural reconstruction in post-colonial Indonesia. Rachmi Diah Larasati, a professor of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota, discussed her book entitled "The Dance that Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia." After the book presentation, there was a dance performance by Rachmi Diah Larasati with a live cello performance by Alfian Emir Adytia and discussion by Nuraini Juliastuti, a trans-local practicing researcher and writer, and Joss Wibisono, journalist and alumnus of UvA's Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The event was hosted by Rika Theo, Information Specialist of Political Science and Media Studies University of Amsterdam, in collaboration with the human rights activist group Watch65.

12 May, Decolonial Dialogues: Talks & Drinks 3

During this third edition of Decolonial Dialogues: Talks & Drinks, there were talks with the creators of the podcast series 'Filosofie & Dekolonisatie' (Philosophy & Decolonisation): Yolande Jansen, Soraya

Arou-Gouya and Marieke van der Steen. In the three-part podcast, they enter into discussion with a varied group of people about questions such as: What does decolonisation of philosophy mean? Which legacies of the colonial imagination do we find in contemporary philosophy and the humanities? What are the conditions for ‘good discussions’ about decolonisation and how can philosophy contribute to this?



Image 4. OPO STREY (Stand up, Fight), during Talks & Drinks #3. Photo by: Communications FGw.

16 May Postcolonial approaches to 'Philosophy of Science

A seminar on the philosophy of science for theatre studies through a postcolonial lens. By discussing texts from postcolonial criticism, we can start to question the status and legitimacy of the canon of the philosophy of science and discuss to what extent postcolonial criticism changes the way we view familiar subjects. At play here is the critical approach of Dutch colonial history. What role can do cultural phenomena such as the theatre, art, and architecture play in maintaining colonial nostalgia and how do they vouch for postcolonial criticism?

26 May, Final class “Post-Colonial Encounters in Arts and Culture”

A public class from the course “Post-Colonial Encounters in Arts and Culture” (BA European Studies) where students reflected on their own position as students in the course. Taking their cue from Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” they thought about the ways in which art and literature can

put ignored or unheard voices central and how they as students relate to the study material. We also discussed what it means to do post- and decolonial work in a building like the Bushuis. Which obligations come with the location and its history, and how can we act accordingly?

26 May, Making History Visible: Black Lives Under Nazism in Literature and Art

A talk on a largely unrecognized artistic corpus that challenges the negligence of Black wartime history. Among the examples discussed were the wartime internment art of Surinamese painter Josef Nassy, the jazz fiction of Canadian writer Esi Edugyan, and the photomontages of Scottish artist Maud Sulter. These works offer a new perspective on Holocaust memory by showing the embeddedness of African diaspora within Holocaust history. Hosted by Sarah Phillips Casteel & Rosa de Jong.

2 June, Re-dramaturging (hi)stories

A reflection on their theatrical interpretation of Carthage/Cartagena by Caridad Svich from the MA Theater Studies and the Master International Dramaturgy.

5 June, Racial and Social Justice Matters

An event hosted by the UvA's Central Diversity Officer dr. Machiel Keestra for a group of students at the University of Connecticut in the wake of an international 'ICare4Justice' project aiming to develop a global antiracism framework. After a brief presentation of the Dutch and our university's colonial and slavery past, the discussion focused on exploring its aftermath in higher education and science. The students, supervised and guided by dr. Saran Stewart (dir. of Global Education, U Connecticut) and Mary Tupan-Wenno (executive director of ECHO, Center for Diversity Policy in Utrecht), participated in a course on 'Racial and Social Justice Matters: A Comparative Analysis of Global Access and Equity in Higher Education'.

13 June, Contest the West.

The digital exhibition *Contest the west* presented during this afternoon portrayed how the west has considered itself throughout history, how it has contrasted itself with the rest of the world, and how great the influence of the rest of the world was and is on the west. In addition, this exhibition offers a critical look at Western dominance in the world and asks the questions "Who, what and where is the West?" each time. At this meeting, the virtual rooms of the online exhibition were briefly explained and there was room for questions and discussion, after which the exhibition was published online. The presentation is free for all to attend. The exhibition was designed by seven students from the research

master's programme in History at the University of Amsterdam, namely: Roos van Bommel, Ingmar Hof, Vincent Jurg, Britt Kwaker.

16 June, Decolonial Dialogues: Talks & Drinks 4

During this fourth edition of Decolonial Dialogues: Talks and Drinks we talked about the history of the East India-house and the reconstruction of the VOC-zaal, where Decolonial Dialogues is situated. Gabri van Tussenbroek and Walther Schoonenberg talked about (earlier) functions of the building, what the architecture says from a (de)colonial perspective, and we looked ahead to future scenarios. What purpose does the reconstruction serve? And what should happen to this room in future?

26 June, Decolonial Dialogues: Decolonizing the Slaveholding Republic

The Civil War and Reconstruction remade the United States Constitution leading many historians to call it the Second American Revolution or the Second Founding. However, few are aware that this process of constitutional change began with the abolitionist debate over the nature of the Constitution and its relationship to slavery and black citizenship.

During this talk, Manisha Sinha (University of Connecticut) recapitulated that dialogue and traced the roots of the transformation of the Constitution during Reconstruction in abolitionist discourse, one in which African Americans and women formally excluded from the body politic also played a role. She explained how the Reconstruction Constitutional Amendments transformed the United States from a slaveholding republic into an interracial democracy.

28 June, Keti Koti dialogue table

The Keti Koti Dialogue Table is a tradition where we reflect together on dealing with the consequences of the Dutch colonial and slavery past. We do this by sharing with each other personal experiences, emotions, and insights in relation to the dialogue theme specifically determined for this meeting: "Seeing and Being Seen: Who Cares?". During the dialogue, a shared meal is served, recalling the slavery in the past. Rituals referring to slavery are performed at the beginning and at the end. Between conversations, the Fri Yeye choir sings songs of mourning and liberation that were sung on the plantations at the time of slavery.

This special Keti Koti Table took place in a significant year of commemoration: 160 years after the abolition of slavery in Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles and 150 years after the period of forced labor "under State supervision" that followed. Moreover, the Dutch state recently officially apologized for its involvement in slavery and the slave trade. The investigation into the University of Amsterdam's

involvement in slavery will begin in the coming years. Meanwhile, Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities were already being organized in the hall where the administrators of the VOC met at the time. This hall is in the Oost-Indisch Huis, where the Keti Koti Table also took place. This Keti Koti Table is offered by the FGw Daily Board and the Central Diversity Office of the University of Amsterdam in cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities and the Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities.



Image 5: Keti Koti Dialogue Table - Participants share their personal stories. Photo by Michelle Urbiztondo



Image 6: Keti Koti Dialogue Table - The choir walks through the courtyard of the Bushuis. Photo by Michelle Urbiztondo

15 September, Far Too Close walk

During this walk, podcast maker Maaïke de Kleijn guided you across six locations of the University Quarter, connecting their histories with contemporary themes such as racism, decolonisation, and human trafficking. The tour took participants to het Spinhuis, Athenaeum Illustre, het Binnengasthuis and het Bushuis/Oost-Indisch Huis, where guests were invited to talk about the university's colonial past and its contemporary ramifications.

20 September, Workshop: Finding foremothers and forefathers (rescheduled).

An introduction to researching family history. Researching family history is a popular way to connect with the past and one's own heritage. This workshop introduced conducting family history research, aiming to help participants dig into their own family past. This workshop was given by historian and writer Suze Zijlstra. When she was a student, she interviewed her own Dutch-Indonesian grandmother about her memories of living on Java (Indonesian Archipelago) during and after Dutch colonial occupation, and her migration to the Netherlands. About fifteen years later, Zijlstra used these recordings and many other archival and family sources to write her book *De Voormoeders*, in which she searched for the Asian and Eurasian women in her own family history. While some women could be easily found, and appeared relatively frequently in the sources, others were harder to trace.

27 September, Trans(in) moan(in)

TRANS(IN) MOAN(IN) was a sonic performance by choreographer Raoni/Muzho Saleh in collaboration with composer Abel Kroon. This performance served to be made and unmade by the sound of the transmoan, a wayward sound that combines the raw emotion of the analog moan with the driving force of the techno beat. "Waywardness" is a term coined by Saidiya Hartman who speaks of "waywardness as the social poësis that sustains the dispossessed". Before the start of the performance, Raoni and Abel invited the audience to participate in a 30-minute collective reading session of texts by anti-colonial theorists and poets. The purpose of this practice was to bring forth the voices and thoughts of those who care deeply for the marginalised and dispossessed. This collective reading session also served as an introduction to the discourse and world-making that underlies this project.

28 September, The Mourning Sociality

Mourning Sociality was a public collective ceremony facilitated by choreographer Raoni/Muzho Saleh. This event centred the public expression of collective grief by moaning in togetherness. The Mourning Sociality is a space where mourning is an expression of love for what has been lost. 'A space that praises

the grooves of our skin that have become valleys full of loss, anger, grief, and hysterical humour. The intention for this gathering was to collectively practice loving and honouring our broken hearts and resilience in togetherness. It was a space where tears are received with embracing hands, where wailing was encouraged by other trembling voices, and where you could lament our suffering with the help of the proximity of other bodies so that you did not suffer in stillness or loneliness.'

13 October, Far Too Close Walk

A walk-through of Amsterdam's city centre, specifically focusing on its colonial history (see 15 September and 15 December also).

26 October, Decolonial Marxism

This programme shed light on decolonial Marxism, led by a wide variety of researchers and activists. From Anton de Kom to Tan Malaka, from the LOSON to the Partais Komunis Indonesia, across the Global South communists have risen up against 20th-century colonialism. Adapting the lessons of Marxist political thought to their own context, 'slightly stretched', in the words of Frantz Fanon, they created their own decolonial communist traditions. Traditions that can be placed in an older, larger history of resistance against colonialism and slavery. Yet these links are seldomly mentioned today.

31 October, Experiments in Radical Inheritance (private meeting)

Under the banner of the Artistic Research Research Group (ARRG) - and with the support of NICA - this (private) event aimed to explore emerging methodologies and strategies for inheriting otherwise in times of rapid social and ecological change.

31 October, Interferences: Liminalities of Failures

An event on the colonial histories of radio and the decolonial possibilities of listening. Elizabeth Enriquez (University of the Philippines) opened the programme with the keynote lecture, followed by a panel discussion with the research partners and fellows of the Decolonizing Southeast Asian Sound Archives (DeCoSEAS) research project. The evening concluded with the live staging of the 2020 Deutschlandfunk Hörspiel, *Interferences*, performed by meLê yamomo and Thijs van den Geest. They were accompanied by the gamelan ensemble under the direction of Krishna Sutedja. Drinks were provided towards the end of the programme. The event was moderated by Vincent Kuitenbrouwer.



Image 7: Interferences by meLê yamomo. Photo by Brian Trinanda K. Adi.

3 November, Decoloniality, Transnationalism, and Afrofuturism: The Dialogue

A dialogue on slavery legacies, arts and cultural heritage and what decoloniality, transnationalism, and Afrofuturism mean for the Black (African/Afro-diasporic) communities, led by a wide variety of interlocutors and with music and dance performances. Taking inspiration from traditional African forms of engagement like palace gatherings and village assemblies, this symposium explored contemporary global issues relevant to Africa and the African diaspora. It brought together African and European perspectives to discuss the impact of Dutch slavery on African communities and seek proactive solutions. With *Bright Richards – African/Intercultural connections, New Dutch Connections, Utrecht*), *Emmanuel Adu-Ampong – Cultural Geography, Wageningen University*, *Edward Oludare – Education/Cultural practitioner, DOWEN College, Nigeria*, *Jimoh Ganiyu – Art History, University of Virginia*, *Leroy Lucas – Curacao native/Afro-diasporic heritage, Keti Koti Utrecht*, *Kamai Freire – Candomblé Religion/Transcultural heritage, HFM Weimar University, German*, *Femi Eromosele (Panel chair) – Comparative Literature, Utrecht University*, *Francis Kotia – Ghanaian Ambassador to the Netherlands*, *Felix Ameka – Centre for Linguistics, Leiden University*, *Eniola Ajayi - Nigerian Ambassador to the Netherlands*, *Rachel Gillett – Cultural History, Utrecht University* *Oladele Ayorinde – Anthropology/Ethnomusicology, Indiana University*



Image 8: performance during Decoloniality, Transnationalism, and Afrofuturism: The Dialogue. Photo by Communications FGW.

10 November, Decolonial Dialogues: Colonialism, Decolonization, and Global Health

This event discussed colonialism and decolonization in relation to global health. Krish Seetah gave a lecture on this topic, based on his extensive research in the Indian Ocean through multidisciplinary approaches. Alessandra Cianciosi presented the results of an archaeological project on the quarantine system established in Mauritius in the nineteenth century. And was concluded with the screening of a film realized by Clara Jo, which proposes an alternative reading of the theme through an artistic lens.

17 November, Decolonial Dialogues: Talks & Drinks

During this edition of Decolonial Dialogues: Talks and Drinks, we discussed the layout and the historical use of the former headquarters of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and, in particular, the directors' room (bewindhebberskamer). What could be seen, and smelt, there and what was the purpose thereof? And how can we look at that from a present-day perspective based on a critical, decolonising outlook. Tom van der Molen zoomed in on what is portrayed in the paintings (the ones present being copies of the originals). Which role did they play in promoting the VOC? Bram van Leuven was there to talk about how spices were stored and presented in the Bushuis. And Inger Leemans talked about the role that smell played at this location and which it still can play in the critical re-evaluation of history.

We ended with a participatory presentation of 'culinary activism', in which the reclaiming of spices was the main focus.

21 November, Are the curators infiltrated agents working for the CIA?

A talk by Thais Di Marco, project coordinator of the art project *The Goldfish Bleeding in a Sea of Sharks*, a poetic and historical attempt to connect liberal and neoliberal cultural politics to a geopolitical scenario, and how this scenario impacts artists and art productions with special focus on selection processes through curatorial practices. This talk was developed with the support of the *Mujeres Creando - Anarcho Feminist Movement* in La Paz - Bolivia and first presented at *La Virgen del Deseo* and received long term contributions by Chihiro Geuzebroek and Felizitas Stilleke. The talk is the result of the arts project *Goldfish Bleeding in a Sea of Sharks*, which was made possible by WORM - Rotterdam, AFK, FONDS21, FLAM Forum for Live Arts Amsterdam and Het Huis Utrecht. This programme was organized by *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* and the Amsterdam Museum.

24 November, Symposium: Curating UvA?!

Universities are (semi-)public spaces where choices in art and the cultural representation of heritage have a bearing on the lived experience of an institution's students, staff, and visitors. At the UvA Medical faculty (AMC), for example, contemporary art of the highest quality is carefully presented by a team of dedicated specialists. However, if we take a look at the display of paintings in core buildings of the UvA, like the auditoriums at the Lutherse Kerk or the Agnietenkapel, one is confronted with series of historical portraits of predominantly white old men. Little is known or explained about the selection of portraits and the significance of those depicted. And in other UvA buildings (i.e. De Doelenzaal or the Bushuis) one stumbles on (re-)presentations of the Dutch colonial past without any critical contextualization. The lack (or inconsistency) of care and context regarding the presentation of art and heritage in academic institutions is growingly questioned by students and staff. Not only at UvA: in November 2022 a social stir was caused when a group of female staff members at Leiden University took a painting off the wall representing a group of smoking white men. After a first public approval of the Leiden leadership via Twitter, it was decided that the painting should be returned to its original spot and a committee was asked to give advice on what to do next. Part of the research was the organization of a symposium on the matter which took place on May 26, 2023.

The symposium *Curating UvA?! Rethinking the Role of Art and Design in Academic Public Spaces* furthered the conversation with speakers from both the university and the museum world who shed light on questions such as: what curatorial strategies can be deployed to diversify narratives and

transform academic buildings into welcoming, polyphonic spaces? What selections have been made by universities in the past and how has UvA chosen to represent itself? What processes and structures do we need to curate university spaces in thoughtful and inclusive ways? And how does the role of the university as public space and strategies of curation relate to more fundamental issues regarding diversity, equity, inclusivity and accessibility at the university? To discuss these questions, were, amongst others, Judi Mesman, Jörgen Tjon A Fong, Olav Velthuis, Els van der Plas, Marieke de Goede, Kitty Zijlmans, Sabrina Kamstra, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes.



Image 9: Humanities Dean Marieke de Goede opens *Symposium: Curating UvA?!* Photo by author.

1 December – 31 January 2024, If these walls could speak.

In this exhibition contemporary artists and documentary film makers collectively converted this historically charged room into an exhibition space, inviting reflection on its past, present and future (see section 3.2 for an elaboration on this event).

12 January, History is not context, it's reality; On Israel/Palestine: Colonialism and Genocide

Teach-in about the political and social reality in the region and how we got here. Organizers: Erella Grassiani, Mikki Stelder, Sinin Nakhle, Chiara De Cesari, Sudeep Dasgupta, Yolande Jansen. This programme dove deeper into colonial dynamics of genocide, using cases from Banda and Namibia to Palestine and the United States. How are colonialism and genocide related? And how do we see the

continued workings of colonialism in genocide remembrance culture and scholarship in the Western world?

15 December, Far Too Close Walk

A walk-through of Amsterdam's city centre, specifically focusing on its colonial history (see 15 September and 13 October also).

18 January, Tasting the History of Rice

This event took palates from the Caribbean to West Africa, illustrating how various dishes reflect patterns of colonial migration. It delved into the rich histories behind the ingredients to discover how resilience, adaptation, and resistance have influenced African and diasporic cuisines. From their food to conversational topics, research zines, panel discussions, question cards, rituals and other exhibitions – all were carefully curated to enhance and stimulate the essence of the table, so that at Tabili, everyone felt like they have a seat at the table.

19 January, The Crow Messengers: Language and Colonialism in South Africa

This event interwove academic reflection on language and colonialism in South Africa with various artistic expressions, including film excerpts, music and poetry. Artists, academics, and community organisers delved into the role of Dutch (and English) colonialism in the erasure of Khoen and San languages. Some of those are no longer spoken, giving way to new languages. How have oral traditions fared in this environment? What is the role of archives containing narratives in these languages for present day knowledge production? What does reclaiming an ancestral language mean for one's identity? And how can artistic expressions contribute to marginalised perspectives being heard?

24 January, Decolonial Dialogues: Grande Finale

After one year of *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*, hosting nearly forty events, the project came to and end with a 'grande finale'. A diverse afternoon filled with music, rituals and food to storytelling and talks. In this grand finale of the public programme *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*, contributors reflected on the programme and the preceding decolonial efforts at the UvA (e.g. the 2015 Maagdenhuis demonstrations) with faculty, activists and researchers. There were break-out sessions for more intimate and complex conversations, such as story-telling sessions on Banda and exchanges on future decolonisation work at the University of Amsterdam. What does a decolonial future hold for the "VOC-zaal"? What have nine years of decolonial struggle at the University of Amsterdam taught us? What still needs to be done? We concluded with the presentation of the Decolonial

Dialogues@Humanities report: *Learnings, Recommendations, and Scenarios*, which was handed over to the Daily Board of the Faculty of Humanities. We will end the day with festivities and drinks.

3.2 The Exhibition ‘If These Walls Could Speak’

In the exhibition ‘*If These Walls Could Speak*’ contemporary artists and documentary film makers collectively converted the historically charged, so-called VOC-zaal into a space for reflection on its past, present and future. In the presented artworks, one encountered different perspectives on the colonial history of the Netherlands and its aftermath in the present. This space, once used as a site for showcasing conquered land and goods, now exposes the violence and pain which long remained invisible in the Dutch collective memory. Moreover, the works questioned how processes of decolonisation took shape in society and institutions like the University of Amsterdam (see impression photographs on the next pages).



Image 10: ‘*Mixedness is my Mythology*’ by Farren van Wyk (2020) and Jörgen Gario tuning his guitar. Photo by Bob Bronshoff.



Image 11: Esli Tapilatu scenting his *'Table of Reflection'* (2023) with the scent of cloves and cinnamon. Photo by Bob Bronshoff.



Image 12: Three people stand in front of screen showing a street scene. Photo by Bob Bronshoff.



Image 13: Visitors of *If These Walls Could Speak* on opening night Photo by Bob Bronshoff.



Image 14: People watching *Sihir Kamar Gelap* (2023) by Timotheus Kusno's. Photo by Bob Bronshoff.

Curatorial team: Margriet Schavemaker, Lateesha Verwey, Phaedra Haringsma

Production: Carlijn Verweij, Robert Rotgans, Edo Mulder. With generous support of: *Faculty of Humanities, Amsterdam Museum, Mondrian Fund, BeamSystems.*

3.2.1 Participating Artists

Farren van Wyk (1993) is a South African and Dutch photographer and educator. She holds a bachelor's degree in photography, and a master's degree in cultural and visual anthropology.

Mixedness is My Mythology (2020): Farren van Wyk's photography delves into the core of her dual South African-Dutch nationality, reflecting on the historical complexities between these homelands. Her camera explores issues of identity and citizenship, notably examining her family's Coloured identity amid apartheid's aftermaths. In her project *Mixedness is My Mythology*, Van Wyk and her brothers photograph each other, visually encapsulating their shared identity. Growing up on a Dutch farm contrast with Van Wyk's forebears' forced migration under apartheid rule. The home also represents her parents' mixed-race backgrounds and her coming of age in the Netherlands. It is a place that reminds the artist of the effects of the transatlantic slave trade, but also the current shift from a history of segregation to a modern celebration of diverse heritage. For Farren, home is where roots and present existence blend together into a kaleidoscopic mixedness. Chayren Zimmerman and Maaïke Kuiper assisted in creating this project.



Image 15: *'Mixedness is my Mythology'* by Farren van Wyk (2020). Photo by author.



Image 16: 'Mixedness is my Mythology' by Farren van Wyk (2020). Photo by author.

Esli Tapilatu (1983) is a Dutch-Moluccan artist. With his art, he builds bridges between people and cultures.

The Table of Reflection (2023): is an art project by the Dutch-Moluccan Esli Tapilatu. Through embroidery, he reflects on generational trauma, grace, and redemption. The tablecloth you see here, is a cartographic representation of Cape Town and Banda Neira, separated by a red sea and a black book, symbolising Dutch historical injustices. As part of this project, the tablecloth you see here will be exhibited in three significant locations tied to Dutch colonial history: Amsterdam, Cape Town and Banda Neira. In this exhibition the installation is positioned on the replica of a 17th century table in the boardroom of the Dutch East India Company. It was at this table that the Amsterdam directors of the VOC made decisions about colonial trade and commerce involving genocide, enslavement, theft, and robbery. Tapilatu intertwines in his work the stories of the peoples who have suffered under this. From Amsterdam, the artist took the directors' tablecloth to Cape Town, where local kings and queens were given space to respond to the words spoken in the installation. In 2024, the story of Banda Neira will be added to the tablecloth.



Image 17: 'Table of Reflection' by Esli Tapilatu (2023). Photo by author.

The Sites of Memory Foundation (SoM) organises activities around the hidden and under-represented stories of the shared cultural heritage of the Netherlands and its former colonies. SoM is originated by Jennifer Tosch (cultural historian and founder of the Black Heritage Tours) and Katy Streek (theatre maker and programmer).

If These Walls Could Speak: is created by SoM, in collaboration with Bowie Verschuuren (filmmaker), Jomecia Oosterwolde (choreographer and dancer), Jörgen Gario (poet and musician), Shishani (vocalist, guitarist, and songwriter). It is a video installation in response to the changing narratives of the VOC-zaal (Dutch East India Company room). *How is history remembered here? Whose voices still need to be heard?* SoM adopts a multidisciplinary, intersectional approach to unveil the hidden history. Through poetry, music and dance, the SoM team amplifies silenced and underrepresented voices. In reframing the history of this space, the children, women and men whose lives were decided about in the VOC-zaal are central to this work.



Image 18: *'If these Walls could Speak'* by artist collective *Sites of Memory* (2023). Photo by author.

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno (1989) Timoteus Anggawan Kusno is a multi-disciplinary artist, researcher, and filmmaker who presents his works through installations, drawings, moving images, and institutional projects. He navigates the boundary between fiction and history, imagination, and memory, and addresses the lasting effects of colonialism and power through his narratives.

Sihir Kamar Gelap (2023): In Timoteus Kusno's *Sihir Kamar Gelap*, past and present are intertwined, reflecting questions about home, time, and everything in between. It is a two-channels video artwork that blends archival films from the Eye Filmmuseum and the Centre for Tanah Runcuk Studies with Kusno's recordings and dance sequences set in Yogyakarta. This piece delves into the dynamics of our dependence on sweetness, contemplating the memory, history, and profound implications of the colonial sugar trade.



Image 19: *'Sihir Kamar Gelap'* by Timoteus Anggawan Kusno (2023). Photo by author.

Dismantling the Monument, 2023: The diorama by Kusno is situated within a closet, facing the moving image works that give the impression of an open Pandora's box, or a cabinet of curiosity. The sculptures provoke questions about the concealed dimension of modernity, which was established through violence, and the enigmatic entanglement between colonialism and feudalism in the Indonesian archipelago (see next page).

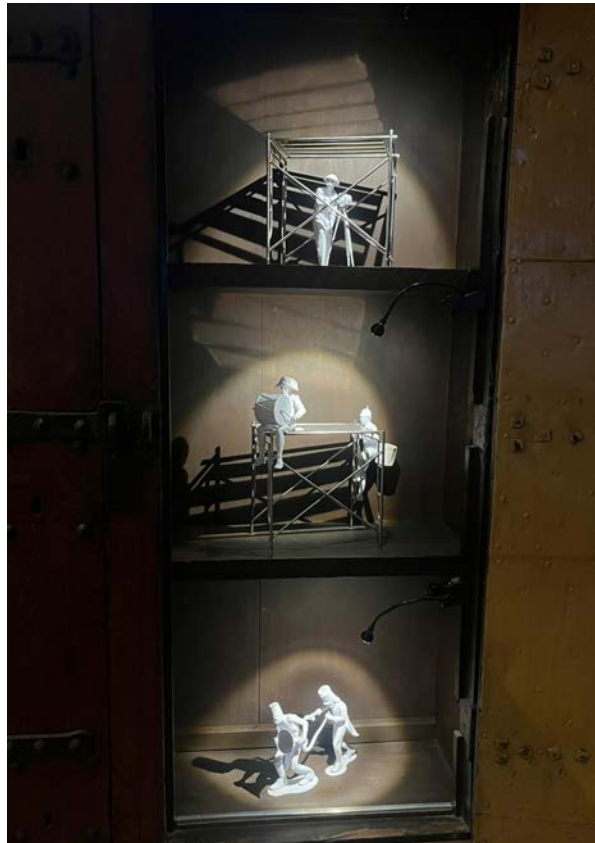


Image 20: *'Dismantling the Monument'* by Timoteus Anggawan Kusno (2023). Photo by author.

Zhang Ziru, Caterina Lungu, Saskia Blagaj-Berger, Valentina Prados Spitaleri, Thabise and Ghaliah Tahboub are six Media and Culture students from the University of Amsterdam. *Decolonial Monologues* is a documentary project they started together after discovering the silence surrounding the Bushuis' colonial history.

Decolonial Monologues, 2023: This documentary made by six Media and Culture students from the University of Amsterdam centres on the conversations taking place in and about the reconstruction of the VOC-zaal. Using the space as a point of departure, the filmmakers interviewed fellow students, artists, museum professionals, UvA administrators and historians. In the film, they reflect on the legacies of colonialism and contemporary decolonial practices. They discovered a wide range of different perspectives that are yet to be explored. The documentary is directed by Zhang Ziru and Caterina Lungu; edited by Saskia Blagaj-Berger, Ghaliah Tahboub, and Zhang Ziru Music by Thabise; produced by Ghaliah Tahboub; and the research was conducted by Valentina Prados Spitaleri (see next page).



Image 21: *'Decolonial Monologues'* by Zhang Ziru, Caterina Lungu, Saskia Blagaj-Berger, Valentina Prados Spitaleri, Thabise and Ghaliah Tahboub (2023). Photo by author.

3.2.2 Artist selection

The artists were selected by means of an open call posted on the University of Amsterdam's website, under the project Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities (deadline the 5th of May 2023). The open call stated that the project was looking for artists who use their work to reflect on themes like:

- The VOC and the history of the Oost-Indisch Huis (East Indian House)
- Decolonisation and diversity
- Slavery in the East
- Dutch East India Company (VOC) and Dutch West India Company (WIC)
- Disputed cultural heritage

The programming may include performances, visual art, media art, installations, sound art, poetry, and other forms of written art.

The participating artists were selected by means of a selection committee. The committee consisted of Margriet Schavemaker (chair of the Board of Editors, professor Media and Art in Museum Practices, and Artistic Director at the Amsterdam Museum), Els van der Plas (Director of the Allard Pierson

Museum), Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes (Professor Contemporary and Contemporary art), Sruti Bala (Professor in Theatre Studies), Ghanima Kowsoleea (head programmer until March 16th 2023), Lateesha Verwey (programming support, curator in training, and Heritage Studies student), and Emma van Bijnen (project secretary, research and publication at Amsterdam Museum, lecturer multimodal communication).

The work by the artists was then curated by the programme team (led by Margriet Schavemaker). In terms of artist payment, hanging fees and production budgets for new work, the project followed the *Fair Practice Code* of the Mondriaan Fund.¹² The total budget for the exhibition (1st of December 2023 – 1st of February 2024) was €20.000,00.

3.3 Programming Reflections

In section 3.3 some general reflections by programmers Phaedra Haringsma and Chris de Ploeg are presented. They reflect some of the urgency, reception and obstacles encountered when programming for *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*.

The programming over the past year proved that people are interested in and excited for different approaches to conversations on decoloniality. The walking tours hosted by Far Too Close gave international students and faculty the opportunity to meet and touch on different aspects of the colonial history, “*from PhD [candidates] with specific knowledge about the University’s buildings to international students from Indonesia and Malaysia who knew about the effects of Dutch colonialism overseas,*” adds programmer Phaedra Haringsma. This personal reflection on topics of decoloniality reoccurred in the room throughout the year. By hosting different events the university and the room itself were able to acknowledge the painful personal stories behind its colonial legacy.

The interactive and experimental nature of some of the programming highlighted this in particular. Take, for example, the symposium Decoloniality, Transnationalism, and Afrofuturism: The Dialogue, offered a space to members of all corners of the African Diaspora: people of Nigerian, Ghanaian, Senegalese, Surinamese, Brazilian, Curaçaoan descent. Ultimately, the conversations kept on going and they weren’t left with enough time to get through at the talking points. This event also showcased the importance of different kinds of expression, as Haringsma adds: “*the performance [...] really tied the event together.*”

¹² See <https://www.kunsten92.nl/onderwerpen/fair-practice-code/>

Another example is Tasting the history of rice, this event attracted 85 people, with more emailing to get on the waiting list. Haringsma notes: *“I think teaming up with people who bring their own network is a really good strategy to avoid that only the ‘usual suspects’ show up. [...] so for future events I think there’s a case to be made to involve collectives of people from outside UvA.”*

However, there were also some obstacles that are lessons for both organizers and the university. As programmer Chris de Ploeg notes: *“Decolonization at the university cannot solely be about diversity and inclusion within the institution itself - a relatively privileged part of society - but should also delve into its ethical relations to the outside world, both within the Netherlands and internationally.”* De Ploeg recommends understanding diversity and inclusion within a framework that incorporates the perspectives of transformative justice. Crucially, this means avoiding a framework of diversity and inclusion that engenders ‘assimilation’, ‘cultural cloning’ or in other ways incorporates communities of colour without transforming the ethical organization, structure and culture of the university itself. Moreover, the university can commit more to programs of decolonization, diversity and inclusion by working with movements outside the university.

When it comes to decolonizing the university, De Ploeg recommends ensuring the university is place for freedom of speech and protest:

“This is especially important considering the colonial history of the university and the historical fact that most progress has come from the bottom-up. Democratization was a result of the first waves of student protests in the 20th century, deepened by a new wave of protests in 2015, which also included the first drive for sustained diversity and inclusion policy at the University of Amsterdam”.

An example of where the university can improve here is in the house rules that do not allow ‘cultural, political and/or religious’ expressions, whether flyers, posters, or events.¹³ By making the university a safe space for discussion, expression, and meeting one another, the university can encourage critical and autonomous student organization, offering spaces that can be run for critical programming and dialogue within the university.

For decolonization to work within the university in the future, top-down gatekeeping should be prevented. Instead, trust should be given to the expertise of the selected programmers, the responsible

¹³ See UvA house rules: <https://extranet.uva.nl/en/content/a-z/house-rules-and-code-of-conduct/house-rules-and-code-of-conduct.html#Events-and-distributing-information> (accessed January 2024)

boards and experts on the subject. Whilst interventions may happen on grounds of funding or the scope of the project, it should not affect content. Reflecting on programming for *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* De Ploeg observes the contentious point of the UvA's neutrality in practice. Considering the expressed concerns by the programmers, the recommendations regarding the limitation of top-down control included in this report should be taken into consideration by the daily board if public programming is continued in the future.

3.4 Media Reflections

During the project various media outlets wrote and published about the project. Below a selection is presented:

Het Parool

Het Parool, an Amsterdam-focused daily newspaper, reported on the VOC-zaal on the 23rd of January 2023. The report written by Marcel Wiegman places the UvA's new approach to the room (*Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*) in the wider societal shift towards Dutch colonial heritage. The article starts with a brief description of the room and features comments by the dean, Marieke de Goede. It continues by detailing how *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* started and what is to come.

Publisher: DPG Media. Link to the article: <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/voc-zaal-in-het-oost-indisch-huis-op-de-schop-de-tijden-zijn-veranderd~bc72d5c1/> (accessed January 2024)

Folia

Folia, a student-lead journalist platform at the UvA, wrote about the exhibition *If these Walls could Speak* on the 6th of December 2023 (by Sija van den Beukel). The report features a conversation with Lateeysha Verwey, part of the curatorial team for the exhibition and a Master student at the UvA. The article briefly details the exhibition, highlighting the '*Tafel van Bezinning*' by Esli Tapilatu. It ends by looking ahead to the closing symposium and this final report (the current document).

Link to the article: <https://www.folia.nl/international/160137/artists-exhibit-in-voc-hall-on-uva-colonial-past-its-time-for-practical-steps> (accessed January 2024)

NAPnieuws

NAPnieuws featured an article and a video on the opening symposium of *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* on the 23rd of January 2023. The report was written and filmed by Anneke

Claessens, Mara Werner and Louise Jens. The video features students and staff, and images of the VOC-zaal. The article details the colonial history of the East-India House as well as the history of the 90's reconstruction of the VOC-zaal.

Link to the article: <https://www.napnieuws.nl/2023/01/23/voc-zaal/> (accessed January 2024)

Algemeen Dagblad / transfer Parool

Daily national newspaper Algemeen Dagblad, reported on the VOC-zaal on the 27th of January 2023. It briefly writes about the history of the room and features comments by dean of the faculty, Marieke de Goede. It places the room in the wider context of the societal trend to a different approach to the Dutch Colonial past. The article was written by Marcel Wiegman.

Publisher: DPG Media. Link to the article: <https://www.ad.nl/amsterdam/voc-zaal-in-het-oost-indisch-huis-op-de-schop-de-tijden-zijnveranderd~ac72d5c1/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F> (accessed January 2024)

3.5 Interventions during the Project (2023)

To conclude part II of this document and segue into part III on recommendations and scenarios for the future of the room, the changes that have been made *during* the project (between January 2023 – February 2024) should be mentioned. These changes were initiated by the Steering Committee and executed during the project:

- The room was opened and was made freely accessible.
- New contextual information, in the form of wall texts, were added and placed outside the room. The texts briefly describe the history of the room, the building, and the East India Company, as well as the intention of the project.
- The gates in the balustrade that previously prevented anyone from entering the area of the room where the table is placed were opened. Thereby demystifying what was considered by a lot of people as “*a shrine to the Heren XVII*” (paraphrased, anonymous – Editorial Board).
- The table was turned into a decolonial reading table. Various books and readers were added to the table, where anybody could take place and read.
- Outside the room a screen was placed with the ‘project video’. In this video the project, its goals, and the room itself were discussed by Ghanima Kowsoleea, Margriet Schavemaker and Marieke de Goede (Dean of the Faculty of Humanities).



Image 22: Project video and new contextual signage. Photo by author.

- Inside the room a message board was placed, with two questions: (1) *What do you think the room should look like in the future?* and (2) *In which way can the UvA denote more attention to the colonial past and its present-day impact?* Visitors to the room could write out their thoughts on these statements and add them to the board. The useful additions to the board have been (anonymously) added to this report.



Image 23: Message Board at the entrance. Photo by production team Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities.

PART III: RECOMMENDATION AND SCENARIOS

<u>4 General Advice</u>	49
<u>4.1 General Recommendations</u>	49
4.1.1 <u>Let's Do Diversity</u>	50
4.1.2 <u>Academic Relations with Former Colonies</u>	50
4.1.3 <u>Selective Uncomfortability</u>	52
4.1.4 <u>Room Purpose and Renaming</u>	52
<u>4.2 General Dissuasions</u>	53
<u>5 Scenarios: Material Changes</u>	54
<u>5.1 Material Changes</u>	55
5.1.1 <u>Change is Required</u>	55
5.1.2 <u>Permanent -Temporary</u>	56
<u>5.2 Scenario 1: Verbal Contextualisation</u>	56
5.2.1 <u>What</u>	56
5.2.2 <u>How</u>	57
5.2.3 <u>Why</u>	58
<u>5.3 Scenario 2: Visual Contextualisation</u>	58
5.3.1 <u>What</u>	59
5.3.2 <u>Why</u>	59
5.3.3 <u>How</u>	60
<u>5.4 Notes on the Scenarios</u>	60
<u>6 Scenarios: Usage</u>	61
<u>6.1 General Advice on Usage</u>	62
<u>6.2 Scenario 1: Education</u>	63
6.2.1 <u>Why</u>	63
6.2.2 <u>What</u>	64
6.2.3 <u>How</u>	65
<u>6.3 Scenario 2: Thematic Events</u>	66
6.3.1 <u>Why</u>	66
6.3.2 <u>What</u>	66
6.3.3 <u>How, Scenario (2A)</u>	68
6.3.4 <u>How, Scenario (2B)</u>	69
<u>6.4 Summer Programming</u>	69
6.4.1 <u>What</u>	69
6.4.2 <u>Why</u>	70
<u>6.5 Scenario 3: Curation and Collection</u>	70
6.5.1 <u>What</u>	71
6.5.3 <u>Why</u>	71
6.5.3 <u>How, scenario (3A)</u>	71
6.5.4 <u>How, scenario (3B)</u>	72
<u>6.6 notes on the scenarios</u>	72

4 General Advice

Chapter 4 outlines general advice regarding the University of Amsterdam's preferred attitude and approach to colonial (cultural) heritage, as well as associated themes, such as racism, inclusivity, and diversity.

Whilst this report acknowledges the steps the University of Amsterdam has taken in the past to address these themes, for example with the establishment of Diversity Committees, this report puts forward suggestions by the contributors to this report to further these efforts. The recommendations are in line with the university's strategic plan 2021-2026. The strategic plan includes the Diversity Document (DD) as the next step to "take broader action" when it comes to "diversity, equity, and inclusion".¹⁴ In other words, the recommendations put forth in this chapter, and indeed the scenarios for the VOC-room, aid the university in achieving its four strategic objectives regarding its diversity and inclusivity ambitions:¹⁵

1. *Guaranteeing an inclusive culture*
2. *Strengthening our core tasks (education, research and valorisation) by increasing diversity*
3. *Improving accessibility of rooms/physical spaces, support and facilities*
4. *Striving towards more diverse student and staff populations.*

As inclusion and diversity are part of the University of Amsterdam's core values as a knowledge institution, the 'learnings, recommendations, and scenarios' in this document are to be considered constructive and functional suggestions that do not merely align with the University's mission statement; it helps achieve them.

4.1 General Recommendations

As previously stated, besides the scenarios presented for the room, this document also puts forward some general advice. These are, as are all included recommendations, based on the conversations with the different contributing groups of this report (including the Decolonial *Dialogues@Humanities Editorial Board* and the *Central Student Council*).

¹⁴ See <https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/policy-and-regulations/general/uva-diversity-document.html?origin=0UhYKxFGQVStuYQPIHu0iQ>.

¹⁵ See page 6 of the Diversity Document (2019).

4.1.1 Let's Do Diversity

“Do more with Let's Do Diversity!” – (anonymous - student)

In recent years, the University of Amsterdam has started implementing the recommendations included in the *Let's Do Diversity Report* (2016, Wekker, Sloomman, Icaza, Jansen and Vázquez).¹⁶ More is being done with diversity in mind than before the report came out. Nevertheless, it is important to all contributors that these efforts are continued, as the research conducted for the *Let's Do Diversity Report* is still valid. As such, this current document may reflect or echo some of the 2016 findings, as many of the sentiments expressed by the contributors to this document are indeed not new.

The general recommendation is to read and consider the current document together with the *Let's do Diversity Report*; this current document neither replaces the 2016 report, nor does it be considered without it. Moreover, specific recommendations for the future of the VOC-zaal, as well as general recommendations on how the university can/should improve its dealings with its colonial heritage, should be considered concrete and functional suggestions that can help the university further its efforts to implement the inclusivity and diversity proposals put forward in the 2016 report.

4.1.2 Academic Relations with Former Colonies

*“Create institutional connections, especially with the Universities on ABCSSS¹⁷ Islands” –
(anonymous – Message Board)*

In conversations with staff and from comments left on the message board (see quote), it has become clear that a considerable effort needs to be made in strengthening the university's structural institutional connections and collaborations with former Dutch colonies. Whilst some collaborations do take place, they are limited, often not structural, and generally initiated and maintained between specific researchers or smaller programs. In other words, they are not university or faculty wide, and are generally not supported by the university with substantial budgeting and repeated dedicated efforts. The university should actively seek out various types of educational and research exchange

¹⁶ See <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=06a2473a-2076-4f2c-83e2-f1d8b3ea2d31> (accessed January 2024).

¹⁷ Dutch Caribbean Islands and the Netherlands Antilles: Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Sint Maarten, Saba, Sint Eustatius.

relations and programs. For example, with the research priority area *Decolonial Futures*, the university has a chance to set this up properly in the coming years.

Improved relations with universities in those former colonies could strengthen both research and education at the university. This need for the strengthening of institutional relations was also one of the key outcomes of the visit by the Ambassador of Indonesia to the Netherlands (H.E. Mayerfas) and his delegation to the project on June 7th, 2023. The mutual desire for improved academic relations between the University of Amsterdam and Indonesian academia was expressed. An example would be to set up recurring shared PhD-tracks in various departments, where research would be done partly at the University of Amsterdam and partly at a university in Indonesia. Doing so would deepen research and teaching, broaden access to data, generate more (research) internships and so on.



Image 24: Visit by Ambassador of Indonesia to the Netherlands (H.E. Mayerfas). Photo by Communications FGW.

For the discussion of the Dutch historical past, as well as programs on such themes and issue, active and ongoing collaboration with the academic society of the former colonies is essential. This necessity has been echoed by the editorial board: “*We need to learn how to talk with the community, not about the community*” (anonymous – Editorial Board). This goes for our research and education. As an

important side effect, structural cooperation prevents one-sided narratives of history, as well as furthers our understanding of the socio-cultural effects of Dutch the relationships with former colonies, then and now.

4.1.3 Selective Uncomfortability

Firstly, it should be acknowledged that when it comes to the future of the VOC-zaal, or indeed future decisions by the University of Amsterdam in relation to ‘colonialism’, no single approach will please everybody. Where some feel that change may be happening too fast or is going too far, others may feel it is not happening fast enough or does not go far enough. It is important to note that: this is okay. Uncomfortability with change is not an argument to do nothing at all. This selective uncomfortability is in line with the university’s own core values, explained in their mission statement and strategic plan (Diversity Document). This basis includes the clear aim for inclusivity and diversity and against exclusion and discrimination. In short: *If by changing the room in line with the extensive expert advice presented in this document, and according to the university’s own principles, the room will become uncomfortable for people who do not align with these core values, the University of Amsterdam should be okay with this.* Additionally, as an important hub for critical thinking, such changes and shifting value-based approaches create room for important timely debates. Such debates should be welcomed at our university.

4.1.4 Room Purpose and Renaming

As has been noted several times, the name of the room itself needs to change. Using the name ‘VOC-zaal’ colloquially normalises the understanding of it. Not only is the use of the name ‘VOC-zaal’ or any of the existing alternatives, such as ‘Bewindhebberszaal’, highly provocative and considered by some simply offensive, the new purpose of the room (as will elaborated on in the scenarios in chapters 5 ‘Material Changes’ and chapter 6 ‘Usage’) call for an appropriate renaming and rebranding. The renaming of the room opens up the opportunity launch the room as a new space for specific purposes, which align with the values of the university.

For the renaming, the daily board is advised to decide on the scenarios it wishes to adopt, as it is important that the name properly aligns with its new (intended) function(s). For the naming, it is recommended that the options are generated by the diversity/inclusivity members of the proposed committee (see section 7.2.3). The options can then be put to a vote by the larger Faculty of Humanities community (including staff and students). This will help the faculty to rebrand the room for its new use

more effectively, with a new (community selected) colloquial name (for further suggestions on this principle see section 8.3 *'Responsibilities'*).

In general, clear communication on room's purpose and use, as well as its renaming will (A) help with the visibility of the room as a thematic space for decoloniality and discourse on inclusivity and diversity, (B) will help the faculty demonstrate how it is actively trying to further implement its own goals on inclusivity and diversity. It is a response to the increasingly louder calls for decolonization from students, staff and the wider (academic) community, in an informed, curated, and educational way (for further suggestions on this principle see section 8.3 *'Responsibilities'*).

4.2 General Dissuasions

In section 4.2, some general recommendation on what should not happen are presented:

The room should not remain the same or revert to the state it was before *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*. In other words, the recommendations made in this document should be taken to heart by the daily board and should in some form be implemented in the coming academic year (2024–2025) (see chapter 8 *'Interim Period'*).

The room should not be used for anything that has nothing to do with the themes: *colonialism, decolonialisation, racism, inclusion/exclusion, diversity*. The room may be booked for teaching or events (free of charge) via a form on the UvA-website, managed by Decolonial Futures (with minimal impact to their core focus) or an existing organizing body within the university, such as VOX-POP (see chapter 6 *'Usage'*). This also means it cannot be used for ceremonies or meetings on topics other than those centring on the themes listed above. This explicit request for thematic usage is shared by staff and students alike: *"the room cannot return to its former use for meetings and graduation ceremonies"* (anonymous – Central Student Council).

The room should not be closed unless the room is booked for a closed off thematic event or course. As succinctly put by the Central Student Council: *"it's a public room in a public building at a public university, it should be accessible to everyone at the university"*. In other words, rather than the room being closed unless there is programming, it should be open for anyone to access unless there is, for example, a class in session. Closing the room or making it exclusive, exudes an 'exclusive/excluding' attitude, which does not align with the inclusivity values of the university.

The daily board should not keep staff, students and (facility) workers out of the loop as to what is going to happen to the room for too long (see Chapter 8 '*Interim Period*'). The board should provide updates on what they are doing and when they plan to present their decisions.

The decisions regarding the materiality of the room should not be made without input from the Conservation and Management Committee (see chapter 7 '*Conservation and Management Committee*'). This goes for the interim period and as well as the future; for all decisions regarding the materials of the VOC-zaal, the committee should be actively involved.

The decisions regarding programming in the room should not be done without approval of an advisory body, such as *Decolonial Futures* (next five years; the duration of the research priority area). This goes for the interim period and in the future. In short, approving or rejecting the applications will be up to the advisory body. This advisory body should not be responsible for the organization of programming, but function as the content managers of the agenda. They approve and disapprove based on the thematic guidelines that they draw up with the help of the *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities Editorial Board* (i.e., programming must be about colonization, decolonization, inclusion/exclusion, racism, and diversity, and that the event itself should not exclude or discriminate in any way) (see section 6.3.4 for the alternative scenario).

The decisions regarding the room should not be made purely top-down. An option would be for the FGw daily board to select scenarios, or adapt them into different versions and have students, staff with relevant (academic) specialisms, and (facility) workers vote for the one(s) they considered most preferable. In doing so, the faculty practices inclusion and shows it is open to listening to their students and colleagues. In addition, this way the university can gage the support for their choices before implementing, thereby limiting criticism (for further suggestions on this principle see section 8.3 '*Responsibilities*').

5 Scenarios: Material Changes

In chapter 5, scenarios for the VOC-zaal are proposed that concern changes to the room itself. Meaning, differently from the scenarios proposed in Chapter 6 '*Usage*', the scenarios here concern material interventions to the static/permanent material elements of the room (e.g., the walls, the paintings, the mantle, the balustrade, the table).

5.1 Material Changes

In line with the qualitative input provided by the editorial board, contributors to the project's programming, staff and students, section 5.1 presents general recommendations on material changes to the room.

5.1.1 Change is Required

What is important to note is that the research conducted for this report yielded some surprising results. It is especially noteworthy that except for a few comments on the message board, no person who contributed to the report stated they wanted to simply remove everything and paint the room. To varying degrees people asked for elements of the room to remain. This could be due to the nature of the group of people involved in the project who have stated that showing the (contextualised) past helps discuss the past itself, or perhaps it is a result of the project itself (i.e., showing that contextualisation/interaction with the room is preferred to total erasure). Nevertheless, a vast majority agrees maintaining some elements of the current materiality, but adding to it new layers is preferred.

“The room shouldn't be untouchable. If the room keeps some of its current design, it should become clear that this is not a place that lionizes the VOC. It should be contextualized and reflect the university's current stance on its colonial history.”

– (anonymous - Central Student Council)

For all the scenario's discussed in this rapport, it is important that 'people' remain at its centre. Whilst we are concerned with history, programming, and materiality; it is important that in the end it is about those that were affected by the colonial past, and those who still are. As succinctly phrased by one Editorial Board member: *“This room is relevant because it is a symbol of power, which had (harmful) consequences, and still does”*. As such, and as previously acknowledged upon the closing of the room, the VOC-zaal cannot remain as it is now, nor go back to the state it was before the project commenced in January 2023.

Faculty and students also note the necessity for making major contextualizing additions to the room. Minor changes, for example in the form of a sign outside the door of the VOC-zaal, whilst leaving the room itself unchanged, would lead to the continued euphemizing of Dutch colonial history. On the other hand, significant contextualisation to the room both verbally, or textually (see scenario 1, section 5.2), as well as visually (see scenario 2, section 5.3) will help the University of Amsterdam fulfil its own inclusivity and diversity aims, and signal willingness from the University of Amsterdam's Executive

Board to listen and implement advice from her staff, workers, and students. In other words, the interventions to the room following the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* must be substantive and extensive. To guide these changes, we recommend leadership follow the recommendations and scenarios outlined in this document. The scenarios are constructed in a way that they are complementary, thereby making combined implementation easy.

5.1.2 Permanent – Temporary

Although this document makes a clear distinction between temporary interventions, such as programming and exhibitions (chapter 6 ‘Usage’), and lasting material changes, such as contextual additions (chapter 5 ‘Material Changes’), none of the proposed ‘material changes’ to the room should not be considered *permanent*. This notion is based on two principles that emerged during the project: (1) It is advisable to work from the principle that “*decolonization is a verb rather than a noun*” (anonymous - student). As such, it is not something you can achieve by means of a single intervention; it is a process of consistently critically examining the past and the present. (2) Any intervention reflects the times of intervening, as indeed the ‘reconstruction’ of the room in 1997 does. As such, any material changes made because of *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities 2023* may be altered or revisited in the future. It is important that any changes in the future are done in consultation with the committee (chapter 7 ‘Conservation and Management Committee’), who must be given mandate to come up with new scenarios in the future.

5.2 Scenario 1: Verbal Contextualisation

Please note that for all scenarios in this report a *what, how, why* structure is used (not always in that order). In doing so, this document systematically discusses the basic principles of the scenarios, how they should be implemented, and why it is important to do so.

5.2.1 What

“Don’t destroy the room but add an anticolonial reading table and descriptions of the paintings”
– (anonymous – message board).

With the slogan ‘add rather than remove’ in mind, scenario 1 proposes that the reproduced materials from the 1990’s should not be removed but contextualized textually. Specifically, permanent verbal contextualisation must be added to the room.

5.2.2 How

Some informative additions have already been provided during the project (i.e., the texts outside the room explaining the project and the room, as well as the project's explanatory video). The current verbal contextualisation needs to be (A) *revised* and (B) *expanded on*. (A) The contextualising materials were produced with the aim of providing context to the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*. As such, the room and its history are discussed, but the narrative is framed in light of the project, making it so that the current materials are functional templates for future contextualisations but not usable as is. (B) The contextualising materials need to be expanded as the current materials are considered too limited. Based on the report research, the following concrete recommendation for contextual additions can be made:

1. The History.

Explanation of the colonial history tied to the room.

- What was the East India Company?
- What was the East-Indian House?
- Who were the 'bewindhebbers', the 'Heren XVII'?
- What was the 'bewindhebberskamer', also known as the 'VOC-zaal'?

Form: sign outside the room and a video inside the room (elaboration of the sign outside).

2. The Reproduction.

Explanation of why and when the room was made.

- That it was made in 1997.
- Why it was made in 1997¹⁸.
- How it was made as a reproduction based on a sketch.
- How it is reflective of the time, and it is not anymore.

¹⁸ It is important that the sign also notes the opposing views and voices back in 1997.

Form: sign outside the room and a video inside the room (elaboration of the sign outside).

3. The (Re)presentations.

Explanation of what we can see in the room.

- What the paintings are of?
- What can we see above the fireplace/mantelpiece?

Form: signs on the walls next to the paintings and the mantel.

4. The Purpose

Explanation of what the purpose is of the room and its usage.

- What is the room currently used for (i.e., thematic use only)?
- What key interventions have been made in line with this purpose (i.e., material interventions)?
- What informed the decisions (e.g., the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*)?

Form: sign on the wall, outside the room.

5.2.3 Why

By adding contextualisation to room, rather than changing the rooms features, the reproduction of the 'Bewindheberskamer' can continue to feed conversations on (post-)(neo-)(de-)colonialism, diversity, racism at large, and the Dutch colonial past in specific. The added contextualisation adds the necessary information on the room, as well as a critical reading of the room, by which possibilities of a one-sided presentations of Dutch colonial history, or even uninformed glorification of the Dutch colonial past, can be minimized.

5.3 Scenario 2: Visual Contextualisation

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the contextualisation should be substantive and neither just verbal nor just visual. A combination between the two is highly preferable. Section 5.3 presents scenario 2 as an option for permanent visual contextualisation, which is complementary to scenario 1 (section 5.2). Please note that section 6.3 in chapter 6, presents two alternative scenarios for visual

contextualisation; they are scenarios for changing visual contextualisation (in the form of exhibitions; see sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.4).

5.3.1 What

“[the future of the VOC-zaal needs] contemporary art works engaging in a decolonial dialogue with the colonial room and paintings” – (anonymous – message board)

With the slogan ‘interact rather than remove’, scenario 2 proposes that the reproduced materials from the 1990’s should not be removed but visually contextualized by interacting with the existing materials. Specifically, contextualization (and critiqued) by means of artistic interaction with the materials/the room (i.e., artistic interventions).

In scenario 2, contextualisation does not (solely) take the form of adding contextual information and leaving the materials as is, but instead by commissioning artists to interact with the reproduction from 1997 itself. The artistic intervention could include adding critical art to the walls, reworking the reproductions of the paintings, and so on. In doing so, the materials themselves are contextualised, questioned, subverted, emphasized, explained, without removing the material itself.

The underlying reasoning for such interventions, is best put forward by a contributor to the message board: *“Open up the room to (self)presentations and testimonies of and from the people the VOC oppressed. Create a juxtaposition that opens the centre of the room to discussion and reflection”* (anonymous – message board). It is important that the artists themselves have personal connections to one/or more former Dutch colonies, as the interaction with the existing materials should give voice to ‘the other side of the story’, whereby the room is opened to (self)presentations and testimonies not only of, but indeed also from the people the VOC oppressed and affected.

5.3.2 Why

The exhibition *‘If these walls could speak’* has shown us artists are willing to create and share high quality art that is thematic and successful in visually contextualizing the materials of the room through various mediums. Besides the verbal contextualization, the visual contextualisation not only (A) provides extra context in a way that verbally presented information, in the form of information signs and boards, cannot, but also (B) adds the voice of those who (still) feel the consequences of the Dutch colonial past. In doing so, the university meets students’ requests to use the space for an ‘exhibition space’ that enters into dialogue with former colonies (in a way that does not require an annual budget for artist commissions and exhibitions): *“transform this room into an exhibition space, especially for dialogues with formerly colonized countries”* (anonymous – message board).

5.3.3 How

Scenario 2 would require a one-time commission from the University of Amsterdam. If this is done, it is important that the curation of this commission is approached in line with the procedure for the exhibition '*If These Walls Can Speak*' (1 December 2023 – 1 February 2024) (see section 3.2.2 on artist selection).

In short: the selection of the artist(s) will have to be done by means of a selection committee, following responses to an open call placed on the University of Amsterdam website, widely communicated on relevant (international) art news outlets, such as e-flux, and social media. The artist fees will be determined following the fair practice code.¹⁹ The commission will be that the artist(s) artistically respond(s) to the existing materials, for which they may even use a selection of the existing material itself (such as the printed reproductions of paintings on the walls). It is important that the interventions by the artist(s) critically reflect on the room, what it represents and what it symbolizes. The interventions should, however, not impede with the functionality of the room. As such, (large) installations would not make for functional 'permanent' artistic interventions. In addition, it is important that the artist(s) chosen are POCs from the former colonies, or descendants from those from the former colonies, as to properly add counter voices to the Dutch colonial depictions of power presented in the room now.

5.4 Notes on the Scenarios

Firstly, it is important to note that selection of scenario 2 (visual contextualization), does not exclude the implementation of scenario 1 (verbal contextualization). In any case, both verbal and visual contextualization needs to be done.²⁰ Please do keep in mind that the choice for one permanent artistic intervention, as scenario 2 proposes, may exclude the alternative proposal for visual contextualization through changing/temporary interventions and exhibitions (see section 6.3). In addition, with accessibility and inclusion in mind, it is imperative to underline that with both visual and verbal contextualization come the responsibility of adding audio support for those with a visual impairment.²¹

Secondly, although both scenarios propose that the room largely remains the same, according to the guiding principle of 'adding to or interacting with, rather than removing', conversations with Editorial

¹⁹ See <https://www.kunsten92.nl/onderwerpen/fair-practice-code/>.

²⁰ In case of an artistic interaction with the existing material itself (i.e., the paintings), the texts placed besides the paintings will include an explanation of the artistic intervention.

²¹ An alternative would be to add braille.

Board and interested students has resulted in the following additional suggestions, each supported by symbolic and functional arguments:

1. Remove the balustrade.

Symbolic argument: it creates a symbolic separation between visitors of the room and the ‘table of the Heren XVII’, which adds an “*offensive sense of theatre in which the Heren XII are totally glorified*” (anonymous – Editorial Board) to the room and labels the barred portion of the room as special.

Functional argument: The balustrade physically cuts off a large portion of the room. Removing the balustrade makes the room more accessible in its entirety, which in turn makes the room more functional, and allows for more people. The balustrade currently also prevents those in a wheelchair to access this portion of the room (comfortably).

2. Remove the table.

Symbolic argument: The prominence of the table in the room evokes images of a “shrine” or a “monument” (anonymous – Editorial Board). This is only emphasized by the balustrade (see point 1. ‘Remove the Balustrade’). Removing the table from the room still leaves enough materials to feed the discussion on the Dutch colonial history and the role of the room/building, without having the symbolic table of the Heren XII there.

Functional argument: The removal of the table makes the room itself functionally bigger and allows for more varied programming and usage (see recommendations under chapter 6 ‘Usage’). In addition, it makes the room more wheelchair accessible.

As previously stated, any alterations made to the room should be done directly following the suggestions in this report and in consultation with the standing committee presented in chapter 7 ‘*Conservation and Management Committee*’.

6 Scenarios: Usage

As outlined in the Diversity Document (2019; part of the Strategic Plan 2021-2026), the University of Amsterdam has clear ambitions when it comes to diverse and inclusive environments:

“We want to be an inclusive environment that is free of discrimination and becomes known for freedom and acceptance and for equity and

diversity, in which interaction leads to greater mutual and intercultural understanding.” (page 10).

During the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*, the need for interaction for the sake of greater mutual and intercultural interaction was echoed by students and staff alike. It is in the use of the room that this interaction can be structurally implemented.

6.1 General Advice on Usage

With its location at the heart of the Bushuis and its many complex historical layers, the room is an ideal space for lectures, workshops, assignments, and symposia on (de)coloniality, under the condition that the room is thoroughly contextualized as outlined in chapters 4 and 5. The VOC-zaal is the ideal space for the continuation of polylogues, preferably in a structural and broader manner (i.e., as part of educational tracks and individual courses), as proposed by students and lecturers.

Interestingly, a seeming consensus on the use of the room can be summarized as follows: Firstly, it should function as the designated location for focused education, conferencing and convening on the *(a) (Dutch) colonial past, (b) inclusion/exclusion, (c) diversity, and (d) racism*. Conversely, the room should *not* be used for activities that are unrelated to the themes (a)-(d) outlined here. This is an interesting result, as a lot of contributors also agree there is a space shortage. Nevertheless, the general advise is not to use it exclusively for thematic content.

As proven throughout the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*, the room lends itself to various types of programming on these relevant themes, as the room itself evokes feelings of pain and healing, as well as material for research and discussion. Thus, it should remain a functional contextual backdrop for thematic education and events.

Taking the above as the starting point, section 6.2 presents the preferred first (and primary) use of the room in the future: *education*. The dedication of this room to thematic education may provide new/extra impulses for the inclusion of critical engagement with (a)-(d) in existing courses. Further thematic programming, such as teach-ins, workshops, and symposia may complement the thematic education schedule in the room (section 6.3), whilst the summer break offers the opportunity for summer programming, when valuable partners may use the room for summer schools and (student) conferences (section 6.4). The three complementary proposals for room usage promote the thematic transfer of knowledge both within and outside the university, by students and staff. The recommendations allow the university to function as an inclusive knowledge institute.

6.2 Scenario 1: Education

“It would be good to keep it as a thematic lecture and tutorial room because other than this room now there is nowhere in the Bushuis that talks about the building’s history”

– (anonymous - Central Student Council)

6.2.1 Why

Varied and critical education is at the core of what makes the University of Amsterdam. As such, education should be the room’s use core use in the future.²² More specifically, scenario 1 ‘*Education*’ describes the need expressed by teaching faculty (lecturers and program directors) to use the room as a thematic lecture hall for theory and practice. It is the ideal place for an educational theatre that through its materiality facilitates and stimulates learning and storytelling when it comes to (Dutch) colonial history, and related subjects. Currently, students feel as if the room is off-limits to them. By dedicating the room to education, the university can make the room’s function centre around students in a functional and didactic way. Students expect that a dedicated room for thematic education will improve the quality of thematic education and boost students’ engagement with the theme.

In short, dedicating the room to thematic education, allows various education tracks (A) to further deepen the critical thinking learning goals of various courses; (B) to develop assignments and student analyses of the space itself, as well as the themes and questions on coloniality and cultural heritage it holds (i.e., to put theory into practice); and (C) a place for thematic experimentation, such as workshops and student symposia.

More concretely, implementing Scenario 1 ‘*Education*’, complemented by versions of Scenario 2 ‘*Thematic Events*’ and Scenario 3 ‘*Summer Programming*’, will help the University of Amsterdam further implement their “*Things to Do*” goals for students (see the *2021-2026 Strategic Plan: Inspiring generations*), as it will help to (page 13):

- *Tailor the curriculum to encourage students to participate in academic life and research.*
- *Formulate learning objectives which make students aware of different social backgrounds, inequalities of power and processes of discrimination and exclusion.*
- *Include community activities in the elective element of the curriculum, e.g. entrepreneurial activities, or social activities with a learning component.*
- *Encourage students from all backgrounds to participate in extracurricular activities.*

²² In presenting this, we presuppose the importance in a variation of methodology, practice, and presentation to the understanding and knowledge transfer of and in the VOC-zaal.

- *Increase interaction and sharing of knowledge with alumni and the connection between students and alumni at personal level.*

6.2.2 What

As stated, this room's base function should be education. In this scenario the room can be booked for the following:²³

1. Courses

Whilst the thematic use of the room for classes or entire courses is not limited to the Humanities Faculty (and indeed should not be limited to this faculty), the Humanities alone has various *minors* (e.g., Cultural Analysis, Critical Dutch Studies, European History, and Public Presentation of the Past), and *masters* (e.g., Heritage and Memory Studies; Publieksgeschiedenis; Comparative Cultural Analysis; Cultural Analysis; Curating Arts and Culture; Geschiedenis (Research); Kunstgeschiedenis; Artistic Research, Art and Performance science; Cultuur en Politiek) that would benefit from (partially) using the room. Program directors and lecturers can, for example, opt to use the room when they offer a course that touches on themes central to this room. Doing so, will enrich their programs and allow them to use the material backdrop as input for their lectures, course work, and (research) assignments.

In addition, by offering the room for educational programming, thematic education may become more accessible for other faculties. As a member for the Central Student Council notes:

“Because of its central location in the city it would also be good if other faculties can get involved. The humanities have an ongoing dialogue on the decolonizing the university and contested heritage. It would be good to get other faculties involved and broaden the conversation. I’m in business administration/economics. It is relevant there too, but the discussion is non-existent.” (paraphrased)

It is important to note that there are already other faculties involved in decolonial work, as *Decolonial Futures* shows, with the involvement of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

²³ It is preferred that the proposals by program directors and lecturers for individual classes, guest lectures, courses, assignment, and so on in the room are for structural use (i.e., recurring).

(FMG) and the Law Faculty. Offering the room, could deepen the involvement and strengthen cross faculty bonds.

2. Individual classes or guest lectures.

Some courses do not centre on themes and topics relevant to the room but have dedicated weeks or a dedicated classes in which, for example, the course topic's connection to the Dutch colonial past is discussed. For these instances, lecturers may book the VOC-zaal as the lecturing room.

3. Student symposiums (as part of a course)

Various courses ask students to organize lectures or symposiums on themes or specific cases. The room makes for a relevant space to organize and host these thematic student organized symposiums.²⁴

4. Research assignments

For example, bachelor students could use it as a base for a final assignment and Master students can use it as a place for critical reflection within their research. In addition, it can be used as the basis for Block 3 and Block 6 assignments that are generally focused on the application of theory and skills on a specific (research) case or project (e.g., the mid-term exhibition within the Artistic Research RMA)

6.2.3 How

The use of the room for thematic education needs to be properly promoted to the teaching staff and program directors. It is important that proper guidelines are set in place as to what qualifies teaching staff for the use of the room. These guidelines should be sent to them along with the promotion of the space for education. The guidelines are mainly based on content principles (i.e., eligibility based on the theme of the course, class, or assignment). The desired use of the space can be requested via the online form.²⁵ The online form not only asks them to specify 'when' they want to book the room for educational purposes, it also asks the applicant 'why' they want to do so (pointing them to the guidelines).

²⁴ The organization of symposiums and other events initiated and/or organized by students outside coursework, will be discussed under 6.3 'Thematic Events'.

²⁵ One can imagine this is done by the departmental responsible for making the teaching schedules.

For planning purposes, priority is given to use that is structural (repeated annually). For example, if a lecturer has a course that is given every year to second year students in block 3, in which they do a case study on the Dutch colonial past, the room should be reserved for this class annually. This structural planning then forms the basic agenda for the use of the hall. One-time or incidental use by teachers (as well as additional programming, see section 6.3) is planned around this structural schedule.

After the suggested material interventions have been completed – i.e., the desired contextualisation has been added and the balustrade and table have been removed (chapter 5). As various members of the Editorial Board have noted, although some of the technology in the room should be renewed, it is very well suited to educational purposes, as it is spacious and the general acoustics in the room are very good. What is needed are small tables and light chairs that can be easily reconfigured and removed if the room is used for thematic events (section 6.3) instead.

6.3 Scenario 2: Thematic Events

“Organize Workshops here. I would use the space to broaden up the knowledge of students/staff on this topic! Keep the room!” – (anonymous – message board)

6.3.1 Why

As the public programs organized in 2023 for *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* demonstrated (section 3.1), the VOC-zaal is particularly suited to public programming. Within this scenario the space will remain open to students and the public, as well as being open to proposals for public programming. This scenario would allow for diverse views, understandings, and methods around the themes central to the VOC-zaal.

6.3.2 What

As stated, *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* has proven that the room lends itself to public programming, the proposals in this document present programming as complementary to its preferred base function: *education* (see section 6.2 for the reasoning). By making public programming the room’s complementary use, rather than its primary use, the university is able to platform thematic programming without overprogramming. The University of Amsterdam currently has multiple organizations and suborganizations that organize programming (e.g., *VOX-POP*, *UB*, *Spui25*), not to mention the various student led groups that organize programs (e.g. *Amsterdam United*) and student/study associations. The concern from more than one contributor to this document is that

“public programming market is very much oversaturated” (paraphrased, anonymous – Editorial Board / Central Student Council). Resulting in various organizations proposing similar programs, lowering attendance, and confusing potential audiences. As such, it is suggested to offer the room as *a location* for programming to the various organizing parties for their own thematic programming.

Below some suggestions for thematic events for which the room may be booked:

1. Workshops

Workshops can be organized on a particular topic or case by teaching staff, educational- and research programs, as well as study/student associations. During these meetings students are engaged theoretically/conceptually as well as practically. These meetings can be organized supplementary to or separate from the regular education programming.

2. Teach-ins

Teach-ins are freely accessible educational forums that are focused on practical outcomes. The VOC-zaal being centrally located in a place of learning is well suited such a use. As much important research on (de)coloniality also takes place outside the university the VOC-zaal can function as a meeting place for students and researchers both internal and external. A member of the Central Student Council notes:

“The VOC-zaal is a good place for teach-ins. The programming is already hosted by faculty and students and this room could serve as a place for teach-ins on decolonization and other related topics. It can become a meeting place for researchers, students, faculty, for the entire academic community.”

3. Symposiums and conferences

At the university, various research groups, research priority areas and so on, regularly organize symposiums and conferences. The room would make an ideal location for thematic conferencing and symposiums, whether it be for an entire symposium program or keynote speech. For example, the research priority area *Decolonial Future* can organize a yearly conference here, as well as invite guest researchers and speakers to present their work in colloquium form.

4. Public events

Public events are events organized as community or university outreach, which may include the forms mentioned above (including lectures, symposiums, workshops), with the difference being that they are completely open to the public. Whereas most academically organized conferences and symposiums are for peers/fellow academics, public programming is for all who are interested.

6.3.3 How, Scenario (2A)

Any thematic event programming should not be organized by permanent programmers, but based on the proposals that are submitted via a form on a dedicated page on the UvA-website. The applications must meet, among other things, the substantive requirement that they be thematic (see more on this in section 6.2.2). As such, *Decolonial Futures* aided by other expert members from the *Editorial Board of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*) will formulate substantive guidelines. As the content needs to be closely and structurally monitored and evaluated, it is recommended that the execution and approval of proposals will be done in accordance with the guidelines set up by the advisory board, who may function as a steering committee as well. As substantive experts, they can best assess whether a room request is appropriate. As a bonus, this priority research area is so well informed about all programming around the theme.

As proposed, for the educational use (see section 6.2; the priority use of the room), the agenda can be filled out in advance, as the courses that may use the room are known in advance. It would be helpful if the agenda is visible on the website that includes to form for application. The application information page also shows the general verbal contextual information on the room, specifically '*The History*', '*The Reproduction*', and '*The Purpose*' (see section 5.2.2). As such, applicants can make an informed decision on whether the room is suitable for what they want to organize.

The form asks the applicant for the *type of event, duration, date, expected number of attendees, whether its closed or open, and who the organizing responsables are*. In addition, applicants provide a reason why the room is the preferred location for their event. It is important to note that the application is only for the booking of the space. In this base proposal the production and production costs are the responsibility of the organizers/applicants themselves (see section 6.6 for request on additional funding by the university).²⁶

²⁶ If additional funding in this scenario were to be granted, it is advisable to discuss the possibilities for *Decolonial Futures* to organize various events on decoloniality themselves in the room in the coming five years (duration of the research area program).

6.3.4 How, Scenario (2B)

An alternative for managing (the agenda of) the VOC-zaal as a venue for thematic programming would be an existing programming body, such as VOX-pop. The renovated VOC-zaal can function as a space where one can request the room for thematic programming at times when there is no thematic education taking place. In all cases, the room itself should be made available for free.

It is important that the application in this scenario does not have to be limited to the booking of the space. In some cases, the applicants will have their own budget and production (for example in the case of symposiums or conferences tied to research groups), whereby active support by the VOX-POP (or alternative) is not needed. In other cases, they are student initiatives. To stimulate the latter, as well as the quality of these events, VOX-POP (or alternative) should receive extra budgeting from the university to help with the production and organization of said events (section 6.6 for request on additional funding).

Like the other scenarios, applications for the thematic use can be made via an online form on a dedicated VOC-zaal website page. Besides the timeslot, applicants indicate (a) what type of event it is, (b) who their intended audiences are, (c) what they have a budget for. The website page also contains (1) the conditions for requesting the space (i.e., thematic) and (2) an agenda of which dates are already occupied, and which dates and timeslots are still open. This makes renting out the hall / organizing thematic events in the hall easier.

6.4 Summer Programming

During the summer break, the structural educational programming discussed in section 6.2, can make way for *summer programming*.

6.4.1 What

The absence of the regular educational programming allows the University of Amsterdam to host summer schools organized by partners such as The *National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy* (NiNsee)²⁷, *The Black Europe Summer School*²⁸ and workshop series or schools by, for example, the *Black Archives*²⁹ or *Amsterdam United*³⁰.

²⁷ See <https://ninsee.nl> for more on NiNsee.

²⁸ See <https://www.blackeurope.org> for more on the Black Europe Summer School.

²⁹ See <https://www.theblackarchives.nl> for more on The Black Archives.

³⁰ See <https://www.spe-amsterdam.nl/netwerk/amsterdam-united/> for more on Amsterdam United.

6.4.2 Why

By opening up the VOC-zaal for summer programming by external partners, the university can welcome in new ideas and perspectives that will enrich the learning and research within the university. Much of the important research and educational programming on (de)coloniality is done outside of the university. From *The Black Archives* and *NiNsee* to *The Black Europe Summer School* (financed by students who participate). The latter, for example, is highly valued and open to advanced undergraduates, graduate students and PhD candidates, post-doctoral researchers, junior faculty, professionals with a master's degree, teachers, and policy workers. The program attracts academic contributors of high calibre, which makes the Black Europe Summer School a good partner, whereby the university further fulfils the "Things to Do" in the 2021-2026 *Strategic Plan* (section 6.2.3).

Summer programming by externals can help University of Amsterdam can garner new partnerships and increase the amount of knowledge on topics relating to the VOC-zaal, as well as the university and contested heritage more broadly. It would present the university as a hub for research and education on the (de)coloniality and help strengthen connections on these relevant topics across academic institutions. As *The Black Europe Summer School* is already being organised, it can easily be held in the VOC-zaal, as it does not require much effort on the university's side. As some of these suggested partners previously had closer ties to the University of Amsterdam, welcoming them back into the building would also be a meaningful symbolic gesture.

6.4.3 How

The application will formally be done in the same way as the other requests for the use of the room. The University of Amsterdam should actively reach out to the abovementioned institutions to offer them a platform for their summer programming in the form of the VOC-zaal, and in some cases financial support (see section 6.6 for the advice to provide some form of financial support to partners with limited funding). The university should, however, not influence, change, manage the content or programming.

6.5 Scenario 3: Curation and Collection

In this section the alternative to the permanent visual contextualization (section 5.3) is presented. Here, the visual contextualization is proposed through changing exhibitions of art and/or collection.

For all scenarios a what, how, why structure is used (not always in that order). In doing so, this document systematically discusses the basic principles of the scenarios, how they should be implemented, and why it is important to do so.

6.5.1 What

The exhibition *'If These Walls Could Speak'* (see section 3.2) and the *'Symposium: Curating UvA?!'* (see section 3.1) demonstrated that the topic of (de)coloniality should not be presented or discussed through text only.

Although the space is not suitable as a 'white cube' and therefore not suitable as a more general exhibition space, changing exhibitions can be organized on the wall where the door is located, by which a changing visual contextual layer is added to the space and multivocality is introduced into the space. There are two options for this: section 6.5.3 'Scenario (3A) contemporary art' and section 6.5.4 'Scenario (3B) collection'.

6.5.3 Why

As explained in chapter 5, critical visual contextualisation of the 'beauty' of the East India Company as currently shown in the VOC-zaal is vital. Whilst a permanent intervention would be suitable, according to some contributors to the report, changing visual contributions are preferred because it allows "[...] *voices from different colonies to come through*" (anonymous – Editorial Board). The Dutch colonial empire was vast and the effects it had on people deep and widespread. Changing contextualisation would allow the stories from South-East Asia to Central America and from South Africa to the Caribbean to be heard.

6.5.3 How, scenario (3A)

In scenario (3A) the visual contextualisation will take place through the organisation of contemporary art exhibitions. For this scenario an annual budget for curating contemporary art exhibitions must be made available (to be discussed by the one who will be selected to lead this initiative). The selection of the artists is done together with a selection committee. It is recommended that the responsibility for the organization of the exhibition is a permanent member of the University of Amsterdam staff with (modern) art as their area of expertise. As contextualization need to be multimodal (verbal and visual) there needs to be an exhibition organized in the room at all times. It is important though that the exhibitions organized in this room are limited to the wall where the door is, as installations in the

room would hinder the primary use of the room (see section 6.2). The proposed collaboration partner in scenario (3A) is de *kunstcommissie*.³¹

6.5.4 How, scenario (3B)

Scenario 3B is an interesting and workable alternative to scenario (3A). In this scenario, a visual contextual layer is added every 3-4 months by the *Allard Pierson Museum*.

This is particularly interesting as the museum of the University of Amsterdam itself has a large and interesting collection of objects related to Dutch colonial history. By using this collection, we can add different critical layers to the space, by showing the other sides of this history. *Allard Pierson Museum* has, for example, numerous maps of the Caribbean, Suriname, Indonesia and the former colonies, as well as art, posters and other paper collection pieces (for example, even an advert for the sale of a plantation that took place at the Oost-Indisch Huis/Bushuis itself). Both the organization and the conservation and management of the objects will fall under the museum. As the Allard Pierson Museum is also the proposed lead for the Conservation and Management Committee (see chapter 7 ‘*Conservation and Management Committee*’).

6.6 notes on the scenarios

Firstly, the three scenarios are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they complement each other. When the academic year is over, the summer partnership events in the form of summer schools can replace the education that takes place in de room during the two semesters. Throughout the calendar year, the thematic events perfectly supplement and complement the structural programming.

Secondly, in this basic proposal, the budget for education (see section 6.2) lies with the subject/course; the budget for thematic events, such as symposia, workshops and teach-ins in Scenario (2A) comes from the organization of the events or programs (see section 6.3), the budget for summer programming comes, as is currently done, from contributions from students (see section 6.4). However, it is highly advisable for the Faculty of Humanities, and the University of Amsterdam in general, to set aside a five-year budget to stimulate and support such thematic programming. Especially in view of the importance of strengthening ties with collaborating parties, it is important to offer a small contribution for the organization of events by partners and students without core funding.

Additionally, as Scenario 1: “Education” prioritizes the use of the room by faculty, in Scenario 2: “Thematic events” could prioritize student initiatives. This does not mean that if a staff-initiated

³¹ The kunstcommissie established itself with support of the FGw in 2019.

conference that has been planned in the room in advance, can be cancelled because of a last-minute student request. It means that in case both students and faculty request the room for a specific date and timeslots, do so around the same time, and no alternatives are viable, priority is given to students. To stimulate student involvement and make it be known that the room can be used for thematic events, it would be important to actively offer the room to *Amsterdam United*³² to organize events in the room. In doing so, the room could be their dedicated hub for the organization of events. When it comes to external partnerships, the specifics of the summer partnership programs should not be limited by gatekeeping from the university. If the partners are suitable, the program is inclusive, and it abides by the guidelines set up for thematic programming set up by *Decolonial Futures* (aided by other expert members from the *Editorial Board of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*), the content responsibility and initiative should lie with them.

The above coincides with the general recommendation for FGW to use the room for active outreach/valorisation; as a place from which the Humanities seek connections outside the university around the theme of decolonization. To do so, the advice is that the daily board reaches out to *Humanities & Society organisation – University Quarter* (Margo Keizer) as there are concrete proposals for collaborations and opportunities for relevant outreach (e.g., primary/secondary education, the forthcoming National Slavery Museum, KNAW Humanities).

Lastly, in order for the room to be used in the future, some material changes need to be made. More space needs to be created (see section 5.4 notes on the scenarios for material changes). Additionally, the room needs suitable facilities like small and light tables, chairs, as well as sufficient light (for its use as a lecture room). Small and light is key here, as they need to be easily removed when the room is not used as a lecture room but as a programming space. In addition, digital facilities should be provided, for example allowing teaching staff to use, for example, PowerPoint. Finally, the space must be freely accessible and easy to find for people joining from outside the university. Clear signposts and awareness amongst staff and students are a crucial part of this, as well as a dedicated space on the University of Amsterdam website.

³² *Amsterdam United* organizes various activities, such as debates, meetings, and film evenings. In all these activities diversity is key. Through these activities Amsterdam United wants to start the discussion on diversity within the UvA and create intercultural awareness for all UvA students. Additionally, Amsterdam United accompanies first-generation students and students with a migration background who encounter obstacles in their study. Amsterdam United is a super diverse platform, which aims to transcend various limitations – ethnic, religious, sexual, political, or other nature. For more information see: <https://www.spe-amsterdam.nl/netwerk/amsterdam-united/>.

PART IV: COMMITTEE AND INTERIM PERIOD

<u>7 Conservation and Management Committee</u>	75
<u>7.1 Why</u>	75
<u>7.2 What</u>	79
<u>7.3 Who</u>	80
<u>7.3.1 Permanent Knowledge Members</u>	80
<u>7.3.2 Functional Support Members</u>	81
<u>7.3.3 On Call Diversity/Inclusivity Members</u>	81
<u>7.2 How</u>	82
<u>7.4.1 Policy</u>	82
<u>7.4.2 Mandate</u>	83
<u>7.4.3 Implementation</u>	83
<u>8 Interim Period</u>	85
<u>8.1 Urgent Recommendations (Interim)</u>	85
<u>8.2 Responsibilities</u>	86

7 Conservation and Management Committee

Chapter 7 proposes a standing committee that deals with proposals for the improvement of, or changes to, the University of Amsterdam's public spaces, including the VOC-zaal. Note that this committee will go beyond the Faculty of Humanities, as both the problem(s) and the solution proposed here affects the university as a whole.

The committee should be given a mandate to consider *top-down* applications and *bottom-up* proposals. This report will refer to 'top-down' proposals for public spaces, in case of proposals made by university boards and other deciding organs on the alteration, conservation or management of public spaces. This includes, but is not limited to, the (re)decoration of public spaces, art and (material) heritage in public spaces, and the maintenance of public spaces that are falling into disrepair. This report will refer to 'bottom-up' proposals for public spaces, in case of proposals made by academic staff or students who wish to propose well-reasoned changes to university public spaces. This includes, but is not limited to, the addition or removal of paintings and other collection pieces in common areas that do not comply with the university's mission of inclusivity or diversity, as well as the maintenance of public spaces that are falling into disrepair.

7.1 Why

As has become clear from conversations with relevant academic staff, as well as the director of *the Allard Pierson Museum*, currently, there is no clear policy, advisory body, or procedure in place when it comes to alteration, maintenance or management propositions for the University of Amsterdam's public spaces.

The need and urgency for the instalment of a visible standing committee with a clear mandate was discussed in-depth during the "Symposium: Curating UvA?!" (November 24th, 2023). The online announcement for this event best summarizes the current situation:

"Universities are (semi-)public spaces where choices in art and the cultural representation of heritage have a bearing on the lived experience of an institution's students, staff, and visitors. At the UvA Medical faculty (AMC), for example, contemporary art of the highest quality is carefully presented by a team of dedicated specialists. However, if we take a look at the display of paintings in core buildings of the UvA, like the auditoriums at the Lutherse Kerk or the Agnietenkapel, one is confronted with series of historical portraits of predominantly white old men. Little

is known or explained about the selection of portraits and the significance of those depicted. And in other UvA buildings (i.e. De Doelenzaal or the Bushuis) one stumbles on (re-)presentations of the Dutch colonial past without any critical contextualization. The lack (or inconsistency) of care and context regarding the presentation of art and heritage in academic institutions is growingly questioned by students and staff. Not only at UvA: in November 2022 a social stir was caused when a group of female staff members at Leiden University took a painting off the wall representing a group of smoking white men. After a first public approval of the Leiden leadership via Twitter, it was decided that the painting should be returned to its original spot and a committee was asked to give some advice on what to do next.”³³

As discussed during the symposium itself, the lack of clarity, mandate, and care when it comes to what is displayed in the university’s public spaces, has hitherto resulted in, what some called, “*confusing and damaging presentations and representations*” (anonymous – Editorial Board). Currently, decisions such as the painting the space outside the VOC-zaal, which included the door of the VOC-zaal that used to say ‘Bewindhebberskamer’ (‘trustee chamber’) and carried the VOC logo, can be made without proper consultation with and/or without the knowledge of the in-house experts the University of Amsterdam has at her disposal. This problem was noted during the conference (see images 19 and 20 on the next page).

³³ Read the full announcement on <https://www.uva.nl/en/shared-content/faculteiten/en/faculteit-der-geesteswetenschappen/events/2023/11/symposium-curating-uva.html?origin=RbRgSRwZR3mwqcpSrRhRXA> (accessed January 12th 2024).



Image 25: the door to the VOC-zaal before it was painted. Photo by author.



Image 26: the door of the VOC-zaal after it was painted blue, no longer carrying the VOC logo. Photo by author.

“Various pieces of art and the cultural representations of heritage are not handled or presented with the proper care needed” (anonymous – Editorial Board). Not only painting, but also the placement of

clothing racks, trash cans in front of collection pieces, or even the (re)hanging of artworks, are done without proper policy or expert consultation (see images 21-23 below).

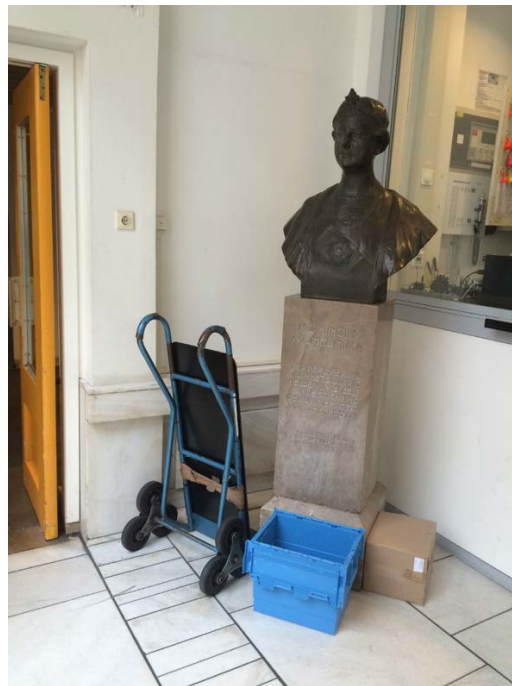


Image 27: bust at the UvA with parcels placed in front of it. Photo by Els van der Plas.



Image 28: statue at the UvA with bins on either side of it. Photo by Els van der Plas.



Image 29: crooked paintings under an air vent. Photo by Els van der Plas.

The appointment of a dedicated standing committee will make the preservation and management of art, cultural heritage, and public space more transparent and streamlined. *Top-down*, the university can demonstrate that their choices are widely supported and well thought through (they have been implemented them in line with policy and with the approval of the designated committee). The clarity that this process creates also prevents misunderstandings and miscommunication during and after interventions in public spaces; for example, questions or complaints from students or staff, as well as preventing someone from unexpectedly not being informed (as was the case with the painting of the VOC-zaal door). *Bottom-up*, it ensures that students and staff feel taken seriously and get the idea that the university takes such requests seriously. Currently, it is unclear where one should go to ask for such interventions. Furthermore, this indicates that the university takes art, heritage, and the management and preservation of its public spaces seriously. All this prevents possible friction and the opportunity for the university to systematically respond to the reasoned needs of its staff and students when it comes to visual public space management.

7.2 What

A small but diverse committee of representatives with substantive as well as practical knowledge should be installed. The committee is consulted for all proposals regarding changes to the University of Amsterdam's public spaces, as well as their conservation, and management. The committee must be separate from programming and facility services and can be a subcommittee or successor of the broader existing *Kunstcommissie* (art committee). The conservation and management committee will

evaluate incoming proposals (top-down and bottom-up), whereby they work closely with relevant in-house services.

Based on advice obtained on, among other things, the preservation and management of UvA's public spaces, it is strongly recommended that the committee's advice be guided by the three basic principles below. These three guiding principles form the basis of the policy that the committee will apply:

1. Diversity and Inclusivity Principle.

Guided by the question: *Is there a substantive objection to the proposed plan? Particularly taking into account codes of inclusion, diversity, accessibility and sustainability (see UvA's Strategic Plan 2021-2026 and the 2019 Diversity Document).*

2. Conservation and Management Principle.

Guided by the questions: *Is it feasible according to the responsible for conservation and management (led by Allard Pierson Museum)? Is there a practical objection to the proposed plan?*

3. Sustainability Principle.

Guided by the questions: *Is the proposed intervention durable? Is the proposed intervention sustainable (i.e., climate responsible? Are there sustainability objections to the proposition?).*

7.3 Who

The committee proposed here has a singular mission: handle proposals by colleagues and employees regarding changes to the public spaces of the University of Amsterdam. As such, it is not an extensive editorial board, but a small diverse committee of expert representatives that will be able to take fast action. The type of representative members, subdivided into three categories (1) *permanent knowledge members* (section 7.3.1), *functional support members* (section 7.3.2), and (3) *on call diversity/inclusivity members* (section 7.3.3), as well as suggestions for specific members are discussed in the sections below.

7.3.1 Permanent Knowledge Members

The permanent members are constituting the small core of the standing committee. Every proposal that is submitted must be, at least, approved by these standing knowledge members. The permanent knowledge members should collectively cover art, collection, public history, architecture, and cultural heritage. The report recommends the committee to be led by the *Allard Pierson Museum*, as they are

responsible for (A) most of the materials discussed in the proposals handled by this committee and (b) the staff responsible for the handling of these materials (e.g., placement, removal, renovation, conservation, and maintenance).³⁴

Summarized, the permanent knowledge members are: (1) director of the *Allard Pierson Museum*, as the committee chair, (2) an advisor modern and contemporary art, (3) an advisor on public history and cultural heritage, and (4) an advisor architecture heritage, as well as (5) an advisor on conservation and restoration (different from the functional support members, see 7.3.2).

7.3.2 Functional Support Members

These members make up the functional support, providing functional and practical advice and feedback on implementation and feasibility. They are responsible for the conservation, as well as the presentation, preservation and management of the public spaces. In addition, they are responsible for the hanging of paintings, and so on. As such, they will look at proposals from their practical and functional support perspectives. They test proposals for feasibility and translate principles into practical advice. *Management and Conservation* are also the responsible for the placing and hanging of art and collection pieces. This makes their inclusion in the committee essential.³⁵ Finally, the committee needs a *secretary* who is (a) responsible for the minutes, (b) communication with applicants, (c) pre-sorting of the submissions (submissions are done by means of a designated form on a designated webpage that concerns material interventions), and (d) scheduling appointments.

Summarized, the proposed functional support members are (1) an accommodation and/or facility representative, (2) the relevant operational management directors (differs per application); (3) management and conservation employees (from Allard Pierson), (4) a committee secretary.

7.3.3 On Call Diversity/Inclusivity Members

Depending on the proposals, different sections of the policy are relevant. Not all proposals touch on subjects such as 'the colonial past', 'questionable cultural heritage', or broader, 'diversity and inclusion/exclusion'. As such, these knowledge members do not need to be part of the committee permanently; instead, they need to be involved when a proposal for which they are needed (as per the policy document). In other words, they are on call members of the committee that deal exclusively with

³⁴ It is conceivable that the committee as a whole falls under *the Allard Pierson Museum*.

³⁵ Based on the recommendations by a member of the Editorial Board. For this to be done for the University of Amsterdam as a whole, two management and conservation employees are needed (FTE).

Diversity and Inclusivity Principle (section 7.2). As such, for any proposal that concerns the change, maintenance, and management of, for example, the VOC-zaal, additional substantive members must give their opinion on the proposal. Another example would be the addition of contextual information on the Dutch colonial past elsewhere in het Bushuis or the removal of prints referring to 'De Oost' in de Doelenzaal (see image 24 below).



Image 30: problematic prints referring to 'De Oost' in Doelenzaal. Photo by Unknown.

Summarized, the suggested members are (1) the diversity officer of the faculty to which the public space belongs (differs depending on the submission); (2) Esther Peeren (professor of Cultural Analysis and representative of the research priority area Decolonial Futures); and (3) Rolando Vázquez Melken (professor of Post/Decolonial Theories). This on-call board can be supplemented by members depending on the nature of the submission/intervention request.

7.2 How

In the sections below suggestions for the basic set up for the policy, the mandate and the implementation are presented. It is important that these sections are further discussed when this UvA committee is installed.

7.4.1 Policy

The chair(s) of the committee can take the lead in drawing up the policy documented, supported by the broader art committee of which they are part. The policy will include a separate, extensive section on diversity and inclusion. It is a requirement that the 'on call diversity/inclusivity' members of the

committee take the lead in this, supported by the *Editorial Board of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*. They will assess applications that touch on these themes against this section of the policy and, if necessary, issue advice for improving proposals in line with the policy.

7.4.2 Mandate

It is recommended that the committee be given the official order from the University of Amsterdam to carry out their policy regarding the presentation, preservation and management of the university's public spaces (including, but not limited to art and cultural heritage).

All proposals to add, change or remove the public spaces needs to be run by the committee. Proposals to the committee by applicants may be approved without modifications or approved with the request to the applicant to (slightly) modify their proposal, taking into account the recommendations of the committee. If the committee has an objection to the proposal, the applicant(s) will use the constructive feedback and recommendations by the committee to improve the proposal. The judgement of the committee is based on the policy (to be written) (see section 7.4.1).

It is strongly advised that the decisions by the committee are binding. In any case, any proposals that are rejected for practical reasons (particularly relating to management and conservation) should not be implemented. Failure to comply should result in negative consequences for those circumventing the committee's ruling. Irresponsible purchases, deletions or modifications must be avoided in all cases. In the event of rejection for substantive reasons, those who ignored the committee, must clearly communicate to all staff and students that the interventions implemented are without substantive approval from the committee (including explicit mentions of the committee's objections).

7.4.3 Implementation

Below several points that are important for the implementation of the committee and its activities are outlined. Further elaboration of this point will follow the broader discussions about installing this UvA-wide committee:

- **For bottom-up proposals/requests**, an online form must be used that contains the basic requirements for such requests. This ensures that the required information is included and that ill-considered requests do not get through (i.e., are automatically rejected).

- **Top-down proposals/requests** from the university (and its various boards) must be drawn up with the policy in mind. A complete outline of a proposal or request is submitted to the committee in a timely manner.
- **All Proposals/requests** include a general and a detailed description of the proposed intervention, a budget, timeline, and the peoples involved in the implementation. In addition, it (a) provides reasoning for why this intervention is desirable and (b) explicitly describes how the policy is taken into account in the proposal.
- **A negative advice or a request for revision** can be given on the basis of substantive or practical objections. The committee can advise that a proposal/application needs to be adjusted. They provide reasons for adjustment requests based on the policy and their expert knowledge, as well as constructive advice on the basis of which adjustments can be made.

8 Interim Period

In chapter 8, some general suggestions for the interim period are presented. The proposed interim period commences on the 2nd of February 2024, when the exhibition '*If These Walls Could Speak*' closes, with most structural changes commencing in academic year 2024-2025.

8.1 Urgent Recommendations (Interim)

As these suggestions come from the scenarios and general recommendations, extensively outlined in this document, and the people who will have to implement this minimal output were largely involved in *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* (for example as part of the *Editorial Board*) and the construction of this document, the implementation of these 'minimal output' recommendations should be doable.

1. We recommend that verbal contextualization is added as soon as possible, in line with the recommendations made in section 5.2. To this end, new contextualizing wall texts have been created, for which the FGw daily board has contacted, at least, the members of the *Editorial Board of Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities*. Of all the interim recommendations, this one is most urgent.
2. The base use of the room for thematic education, in line with the recommendations made in section 6.2, is recommended to start academic year 2024-2025. To this end, (A) the guidelines for educational programming in the room has been set up, (B) the room has been offered room to the program directors and lecturers of, at least, the above-mentioned Humanities tracks and course, (C) the webpage has been set up with the relevant information about the room and its new function.
3. It would be advisable to establish *The Conservation and Management Committee* during the interim period, including the hiring of the dedicated support (FTE) (see chapter 7), giving the board the assignment to write the discussed policy document. Additionally, if material changes commence, facility management is strongly advice to coordinate with the committee that has the mandate to oversee and advise on all material changes in public spaces (i.e., all material changes that the VOC-zaal will undergo is in coordination with/coordinated by the committee).
4. It is recommended that during the interim period, the Daily Board starts exploring the two types of visual contextualization (permanent: section 5.2, and changing: section 6.3), or a

combination. To this end, the council is advised to contact the responsible parties and the new *Conservation and Management Committee*.

5. Once choices have been made for (a version of) a scenario, the people responsible for the implementation of the scenario are contacted and the details for implementation are discussed.
6. The room requires a new name (see section 4.1.4).³⁶
7. During the interim period the room remains open unless work is being done to the room.
8. During the interim period, the room should not be used unless it is thematic in nature (i.e., the Editorial Board and students advice against the (temporary) use of the room for general meetings or as a celebration room) (see e.g., section 4.2).
9. Per the request by the *Allard Pierson Museum*, during the interim period, the VOC-zaal can be used as an area of exploration for the visual contextualization using the Allard Pierson Museum's extensive collection.
10. Suriname's independence will be celebrated in 2025. This would be a great opportunity for an exhibition about Suriname and slavery to be held in the room (coordinated by *Allard Pierson Museum*)
11. If the board opts to host summer programming with collaborating parties in the room, these parties can be contacted during the interim period (by the party who oversees programming).

8.2 Responsibilities

First, once the FGw daily board has decided to implement a scenario or recommendation proposed in this document, it is advised to contact and delegate the responsibility of the implementation to those proposed in the document or viable and appropriate alternatives. It is considered pertinent that the FGw daily board hands over the tasks, responsibilities and oversight to the designated organizations and boards and to prevent the board from becoming a gatekeeper. In other words, the implementation

³⁶ For supportive reasoning, consult the motivation provided by Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly Witte de With) to change their name. See <http://change.wdw.nl/reports-media/report12/>, as well as reports on the name change in the media: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/nieuwe-naam-melly-lachte-kunstcentrum-witte-de-with-al-jaren-vanaf-de-eigen-muur-toe~b1ca50e1/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>, <https://hyperallergic.com/399876/witte-de-with-art-museum-decolonizes-name/> (accessed February 2024).

and management of the chosen scenarios should lie with the staff members, organizations and (student) councils. As made clear by all contributors to this report; as a thematic content space, the material content and the use of the room are preferably managed and monitored by those who have these themes within their area of expertise and not by administrative management. Top-down interference is considered patronizing of the in-house experts the university has. Good policy regarding the VOC-zaal can be guaranteed by means of clear guidelines for usage set up by experts, and the special committee for the material aspects of the space guarantees the proper implementation of changes to public spaces, including the room (see chapter 7).

Secondly, the board has the responsibility to keep her employees and students updated on the steps and progress they are making during the interim period. After a year of intense engagement by students and staff, 'radio silence' would make the board seem autocratic and the project *Decolonial Dialogues@Humanities* seem merely symbolic, which in turn would lead to criticism. It is therefore highly recommended that the board provides regular updates during the interim period through newsletters and on the dedicated page about the VOC-zaal. An additional suggestion would be the following: when two or more scenarios or proposals are considered viable options, or when the board has made slight variants of a scenario, contributors to this report suggest presenting these pre-selected options to students and employees for a vote. By putting these options to a vote, the board comes across as open and democratic. In addition, the board already tests the proposed choices and limits any criticism.