

#44

Zeszyty Artystyczne

TKANINA ARTYSTYCZNA
Wobec współczesności

TEXTILE ART
In the face of contemporary times



Uniwersytet Artystyczny
im. Magdaleny Abakanowicz
w Poznaniu

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Errol van de Werdt

Was the former CEO of the TextielMuseum in Tilburg, Netherlands. Currently, he works internationally as an independent curator, critic, and consultant. He holds degrees in museology (BA) (Leiden), art history and archaeology (drs. Ma) (Amsterdam), and human resource management (BA) (Zwolle). Errol is primarily interested in areas of collaboration between different fields such as design, art, fashion, and architecture. He is a member of the advisory board of the Centre of Heritage Arts and Textiles (CHAT) in Hong Kong, a board member of the Dutch Museum Registry, and a member of the Scientific Board of the Fashion Museum in Antwerp (MoMu).

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Errol van de Werdt

The TextielMuseum **for the Future, jako ważne** **miejsce na mapie miasta**

The TextielMuseum in Tilburg, with the TextielLab as its beating heart, is not a traditional museum. It is about the world of textiles, but it is much more about what artists and designers do with them. It works according to a unique concept that has no equal worldwide.

In this concluding essay, I look back at the museum's genesis and look ahead to the future.

In 2017, the museum won the national Bankgiro Lottery prize in the Fashion and Design category. In 2018, it won the international Best in Heritage Award in Dubrovnik. This encourages us to continue along the same path and explore new avenues. If the museum takes its mission seriously, renewal is not a one-off event but an ongoing process.

In the museum's history, three clear stages of development can be distinguished as far as I am concerned. The museum was founded in 1958 as a classical museum commemorating the old textile culture. In the subsequent second phase, the museum was further developed into an operating museum that links the ancient craft with new techniques. We are currently in the third phase: a completely renewed museum is being set up based on a new museum ecosystem which works as a catalyst to promote cooperation with other social parties. The museum opts for broad social

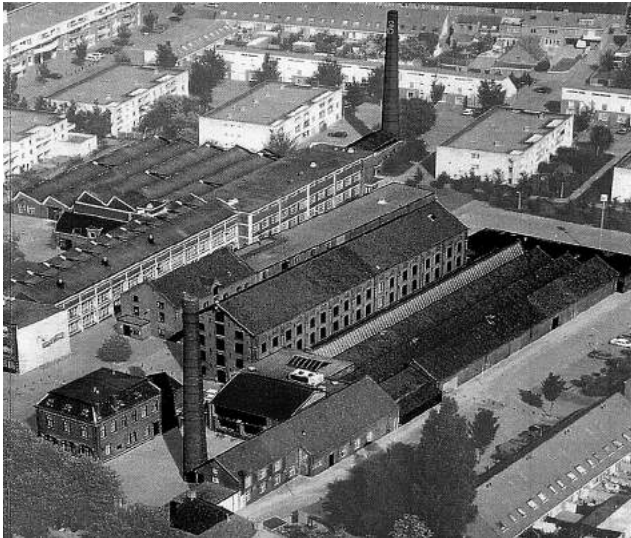
positioning and is an agent of change in urban development. All these phases will be reviewed in this article. (1”)

The start of the TextielMuseum: a ‘Place of Memory’

Tilburg was long known as the ‘wool capital’ of the Netherlands. (2”) The city’s economy thrived during the industrial revolution thanks to its wool industry, but this quickly disappeared in the 1960s – a fate that befell many European textile cities. Countless people lost their livelihoods, and the old industrial buildings became vacant. The TextileMuseum was established in 1958 in a manufacturers’ villa as a historical memorial to the city’s unique economic history.

In the 1970s, Mommers’ former woolen fabric factory was threatened with demolition, along with Dröge’s factory complex next door. Thankfully, this was prevented. In 1986, the TextielMuseum moved to the newly restored and repurposed Mommers, which has since become one of the city’s most essential and last-remaining industrial heritage complexes.

The two factories, the old factory streets, the outbuildings, and accompanying office villas together form a historic ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ that illustrates the glorious history of Tilburg’s textile industry.



Il. 1.

Two national monumental industrial heritage complexes, by G. Dröge and Chr. Mommers.
Photo: Joep Vogels, Tilburg Regional Archives.

Movable heritage from the textile industry, including a striking steam engine, was given a place in the 'new' museum. Machines were shown in operation as much as possible, and artists' products were gradually made.

However, thought was soon given to the next logical step in the museum's further development.

Transformation into a 'museum in operation'

In around 2000, an innovative step was taken by positioning the museum as a 'museum in operation'. This was subsequently experimented with in abundance, which acted as a stepping stone for the next phase of the TextielMuseum of the Future. The old craft was cherished and connected to the new ways of working. In a sense, the craft was preserved and further developed. Artists and designers could use the centrally located TextielLab to produce new computer-controlled machines.

A contemporary transparent glass entrance building was added in 2008. The combination of historical and modern architecture gave this monumental complex a boost that matched the envisaged new direction: a contemporary 'makers' place' where visitors can look directly over the shoulder of the designer or artist and be included in the creative process.



II. 2.
Modern addition from 2008; glass entrance building to the TextielMuseum, Cepezed architects. Photo: Josefina Eikenaar

An ideal working environment

The TextielLab, the museum's beating heart, was expanded over the years using modern and historical machines.



Il. 3.

The TextielLab – the beating heart of the TextielMuseum – is an ideal working and learning environment for artists and designers. Photo: Josefina Eikenaar

An ideal working and learning environment has been created for artists, designers, and fashion designers. Experimentation, innovation, research, and development (sustainable and intelligently integrated with electronics) are high on the agenda, with makers facilitated in many ways.

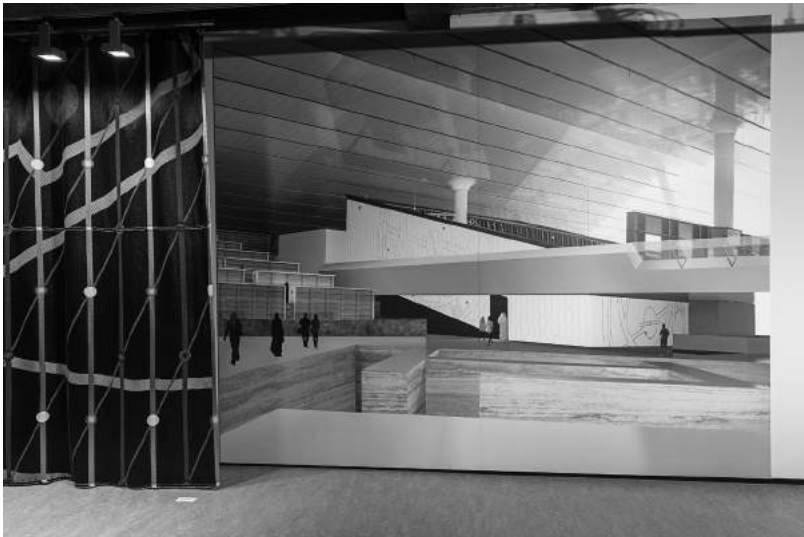
The museum collection is also used: pattern and recipe books, historical techniques, and crafts. Boundaries are pushed back using the latest technology, modern yarns, and expertise. Prototypes, autonomous artworks, and exclusive productions are developed in the museum. A unique place unparalleled in the world has been created for makers.

This development put the TextielMuseum firmly on the cultural world map. The attention it generated has allowed me to talk about our methods in many places worldwide. Tilburg went out into the wider world, and the world came to Tilburg to witness the cultural miracle of textiles with its own eyes. This significantly boosted the visibility of the TextielMuseum and Tilburg nationally and internationally. However, this importance needed to be consistently recognised. I've always made a firm commitment to this, based on my conviction that it would increase governmental funding for renewal plans. My faith in this has not diminished.

Over 250 art, fashion, and design projects a year are carried out here, some of them for renowned clients such as Hermès, Renault, the Dutch Royal House, the Rothschild Bank, and The National Library of Qatar.



II. 4.
TextielLab commission; Interior design Rothschild Bank, London. Photo: Ray Hardinge



II. 5.
TextielLab assignment; national library Qatar. Photo: Josefina Eikenaar

An ideal learning environment

About a dozen talented alumni and academy students participate in the programs each year. They follow an excellence program on an ‘open call’ basis, partly online and partly in the Lab, with the aim of acquiring personal skills, improving their expertise in techniques, and developing their own signature.

I have always been delighted when we see these students come back years later, telling stories of their businesses where new young designers are given a chance to develop their talent further. For me, this has come full circle. It has always been a challenge to secure funding for individual students.



Il. 6.
Excellence program TextielMuseum. Photo: Patty van den Elshout

Visitor becomes maker

Besides the professional maker and the talented student, a third environment was created that focuses on the visitor as a maker. To this end, a design studio was created where visitors can make their own socks or scarves based on professional designs in which the colors, patterns, and text can be personalized. Thus, an environment of inquiry-based and design-based learning was created, guided by Confucius’ saying: “What I hear, I forget; what I see I remember; what I do, I understand”. As a result of COVID, the business case for this facility was no longer valid, so it was

closed temporarily. This facility still offers unprecedented opportunities to develop textile products remotely (digitally) from home.

Education, design, and research-based learning, with continuous learning paths

Exhibition-based education focuses on inquiry-based and design-based learning. It is a didactic form that stimulates visitors to find the answers to their answers, while design-based learning emphasizes coming up with a solution or product. These skills align with society's need to prepare young generations for social developments due to globalization and digitalization – so-called 21st-century skills (4"). In close coordination with education, the TextielMuseum creates an educational offer based on lifelong learning.

Collection and accessibility

The museum has a broad collection of information carriers: from the books and magazines in the specialized library (25,000 items), through archive documents, recipes, sample books from old textile factories, and raw materials, to the museum collection itself. Besides collecting, accessibility is also important. Objects in the 'open depot' can be studied on request. The museum also collects design sketches and sample objects developed in the Lab, which are available on an open-source basis. Information carriers are an essential source of cultural assets.



II. 7.

Cultural assets. Composition of objects from the museum's collection; the collection as a source of knowledge and expertise. Photo: Josefina Eikenaar

Citizens' Science

In Citizens' Science projects, source research is carried out in the museum in co-creation with scientists, citizens, and the museum. The resulting knowledge gained is then made available digitally. For example, the library has a collection of old paint recipe books. For the 'Dye' exhibition, these books were examined during a special workshop in which recipes were tested under the guidance of experienced textile dyers. Part of the exhibition project was setting up a garden on the museum grounds for the growing of dye plants. This plant garden was maintained in collaboration with residents, and the knowledge gained was recorded.



Il. 8.

Citizen Science project at the 'Dye' exhibition at the TextielMuseum. Photo: Kevita Junior

Programming of the collection and themed exhibitions

Programming focuses on presenting the collection and paying explicit attention to the techniques applied, the material, and the creative process. This is done from the perspective of responding to society's need to develop expertise in inquiry-based and design-based learning among young people.

The museum reports on recent developments in textiles, technology, culture, and current social themes, such as sustainability, gender, identity, migration, and colonialism in the world of textiles. It also explores different audience approaches, such as increasing visitor or community participation and involving visitors in the exhibition's composition. In ad-

dition, there is plenty of experimentation with themed shows, so-called ‘Try Outs’.

A recent example is the ‘Royal Embroidery’ exhibition project, as part of which TextielLab was commissioned to create a contemporary interpretation of its 18th-century Chinese curtains for Huis Ten Bosch Palace. In collaboration with 12 embroidery working groups nationwide, embroideries were made under TextielLab’s guidance. Together, these groups produced new curtains for the palace.



II. 9.

Royal embroidery; the new curtains for Huis Ten Bosch. Photo: Patty van den Elshout

Another example of active visitor participation was seen in the “Long Live Fashion” exhibition. This exhibition raised awareness about the importance of circularity and sustainability in textiles; after all, as a sector, it is the second biggest polluter in the world. The focus was on how clothes can be given a longer life through reuse or repair. A ‘Micro factory’ was built in consultation with textile artist Christien Meindertsma, designer Harm Rensink, and textile recycling company Wolkat. In the ‘fixing station’, visitors could repair garments. They could also create innovative couture from reused textiles according to a basic design. Students from the local ROC led the ‘Factory’, which is a striking illustration of the use of vocational education in a museum exhibition.



Il. 10.

Factory: design Harm Rensink, 'Long Live fashion' exhibition at the TextielMuseum.

Photo: Josefina Eikenaar

These new forms of programming will continue at the Textile Museum of the Future. (3) The biggest challenge in these experimental projects was completing these programs on time and within budget. Permanently staffing the 'Micro factory', for example, was problematic and could eventually only be continued with paid staff.

The Textile Museum of the Future – a Place of significance for the city

Digitalization and globalization have a significant impact on our daily lives. A museum needs to reflect these lightning-fast changes.

For me, the Museum of the Future is an inclusive museum for everyone – a place of gathering where everyone feels safe and at home. The museum is increasingly taking an active role as a place for meetings and debates. It is a place for reflection on social issues. New generations of visitors are no longer passive consumers of culture: storytelling, sharing experiences, and active participation are becoming increasingly important.

Reflecting on this, I have become increasingly aware that the Textile Museum is dedicated to one of the world's most polluting industries, where social justice is not commonplace. This realization imposes a moral obligation on us to raise these issues, and the museum's activities should substantially contribute to ensuring a cleaner and fairer world. This is a collective responsibility, and this thinking should start to translate pro-

grammatically into our daily activities and thus also into the plans for the TextielMuseum of the Future.

Besides social changes, current developments in our field also force us to reorient ourselves.

As a result of digitalization, we are witnessing a new industrial revolution where new technologies, alternative raw materials, sustainability, and personalization play a crucial role. Many artists are working on 'smart' applications with textiles. Because of all these developments, I feel a sense of urgency to make plans for the Textile Museum of the Future.

COVID acted as a catalyst in this process. As never before, I realized how vulnerable the museum was. More clearly than ever, I became aware of the importance of solid local social positioning. This was necessary to gain broader social support and increase the social relevance of our work. More than a narrow focus on intrinsic cultural values is required. Without compromising on our grand international ambitions, COVID made me realize again how important it is to be anchored in local communities.

The Lab's firm commitment during COVID to digitizing the development processes via remote cameras meant that the Lab could maintain its connection with the outside world and continue functioning.

From then on, a motto emerged: "Tilburg to the world and the world to Tilburg". This is a good outline of what we stand for: roots firmly anchored in the local community but with an open mind to the outside world.

As a museum and lab, you must constantly invest and innovate to remain a nationally and internationally valued development place for top designers, up-and-coming talent, companies, and new young generations. The Lab's pioneering role creates obligations and calls for an ambitious approach to plan development.

The current phase in the museum's development is the development of a new museum ecosystem. The museum catalyzes collaboration with other social parties from the fields of education and business, as well as makers. The idea behind this is that being in one place together can create synergy between parties based on the campus, strengthening the whole and increasing the possibility of developing new textiles together. New opportunities can arise by combining knowledge and expertise. In this form of work, the conditions in which innovation can occur are optimized. In addition, by collaborating with other parties, the museum will position itself more firmly in society.

New museum definition

ICOM (International Council of Museums) recently amended its definition of an international museum: "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent

institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive; museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing". (5")

This definition emphasizes a new social role for museums: the importance of an inclusive approach, connecting with the museum's community, and active public participation and sustainability. (6") It also includes intangible heritage as a focus area.

The developments of the Textile Museum for the Future and a place of significance for the city align with this. The plans should logically continue the current 'museum in operation'. The idea is a new museum ecosystem with parties cooperating sustainably and contributing to social goals. Together, the desire is to create a cultural breeding ground, a kind of *campus*. The museum's identity can thus better connect with that of the city or region in which it operates (7"), thus making it easier to no longer or exclusively focus on the past but also to relate to the present and future.

In these expansion plans, the museum initiates and drives new-style urban redevelopment. The museum has thus become an *agent of change* for social issues. This position increases social support by remaining focused on something other than cultural activities.

I strongly believe in this role for museums because culture and heritage are strong but underestimated tools in shaping social change. In daily practice, selling this argument to governments has often proved difficult because the museum is still seen by them as a traditional museum.



Il. 11.
Rendering of the new Cultural Hub. Photo: Mecanoo Architects

This new model is the starting point for the museum of the future. The renewal plans under development respond to the rapidly changing museum landscape. A preliminary design will follow soon.

New mission and vision

The first step was to update the museum's mission and vision with a stronger focus on our social positioning. It was decided to broaden our target groups towards families and children, with a goal of 100,000 visitors annually. A prerequisite is the creation of new offerings for these target groups.

Assignment for the architect

The brief for the architectural firm was threefold (8"): transform two national monumental industrial complexes; preserve both complexes and solve the architectural problems; finally, develop a logical route and make the museum suitable for the intended growth in visitor numbers. All this should lead to a new TextielMuseum for the Future and a Place of Significance for the City in line with the current museum.

The campus: a new cultural hotbed. The museum as a catalyst

The new concept consists of an optimal museum facility linked to a campus. The museum will form a platform for meetings and knowledge exchange through exhibitions and events. An exhibition space will be created for contemporary themes, similar to the 'Try Outs' mentioned above. There will also be rooms for collection presentations and a semi-permanent exhibition where visitors can explore the origins of Brabant's textile industry. There will also be an area for contemporary textile art installations, focusing on future developments within the textile world.

A knowledge and information center with an open depot function will be set up at the heart of the museum. This center will still be housed in the Mommers complex. The educational rooms will have a place here. An extensive textile presentation for children and families will also be created.

The second part of the concept includes the campus in the Drøge complex, which will be connected to the museum area. This campus will be set up as a hybrid learning-and-making environment with space for educational parties, industry, and makers.

A new Lab environment

Three ‘Lab environments’ will be built for the new hybrid learning-and-making environment: each lab addresses a different level of technical mastery, progressing from simple to complex.

The first environment will include a simple-to-use *Repair Cafe* (Low-End Lab) for textiles, focused on ‘tinkering’ with garments, which means embellishing and improving garments yourself creatively. This involves informal design and inquiry-based learning. It will be staffed by volunteers.

The second environment will consist of a Textile Factory (*Mid-End Lab*) that responds to the needs of professional practice and is intended for developing small-scale productions, research, and testing. It will be run by students and is aimed at MBO, HBO, and WO education.

Small, easy-to-operate weaving machines (TC2) will comprise the museum collection’s machinery park and historical devices. Consideration is still being given to developing a *Heritage Lab* where old museum machines will be restored and put back into use. In doing so, students could gain work experience with these machines.

The *TextielLab* (*High-End*) will be modernized, updated, and spacious. It will provide an ideal working and learning environment for professional makers and students, focusing on two main techniques: weaving and knitting. It will feature cutting-edge technology and will be mostly dedicated to developments for the top end of the creative industry. It will have space for an R&D program to develop sustainable, intelligent (electronics-enabled) textiles. In a directed manner, the Lab will remain accessible to visitors, who will be given an introduction in advance. Whether tufting, embroidery, and passement techniques can be incorporated into the museum spaces as interactive elements for visitors and makers is still being explored.

The biggest challenge is bringing parties together that are willing to invest in each other. A conclusive business model is a prerequisite for this. The talks that preceded this were labor-intensive and only sometimes ended in the dreamed-of result.

The floors of the Dröge factory will create spaces for startups, educational parties, and studios. There will be a new space for large-scale events and maker presentations in a covered street between the Dröge and Momers complex. The catering facility will be enlarged; the museum shop will get a showroom for the web shop, and several modern, well-equipped meeting rooms, workspaces and an auditorium will be realized. Architecturally, the two factories will be linked by clear routing through the complex.

The prerequisite is a renovated and preserved building complex with modern facilities based on a museum ecosystem. Its new role will be ful-

filled by citizens and parties from education and business. Programming will better reflect the changing needs of the public, and the campus will occupy a firm position in society.

The public spaces will be attractively designed, with improved accessibility and logical routes to create a connection with the city and the immediate residential area.

Where are we going?

The renewal plans have yet to crystallize since my resignation as director. My departure coincides with further discussion that will also determine the moment of handover. The programs are an essential concept that is the starting point for further elaboration and development. I will continue to follow the realization and concretization with great interest. I wish my successor and all the museum staff every success with the next steps. With all decision-making complete and funding in place the revamped Textiel-Museum hopes to be operational in 2027. (9”).

‘The Future is now. Let’s shape it together. ●

Errol van de Werdt

Abstract

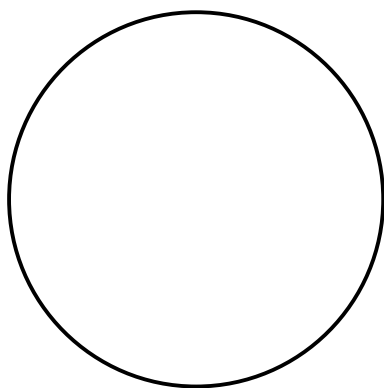
The research issue concerns Adaptive rezoning, the role museums can play in society, and Placemaking by means of industrial heritage. Placemaking is an often-underestimated tool in urban development and can significantly boost the livability of an area or neighborhood. Museums can play an essential role as a catalyst and be an “agent of change”. For these goals a model of a museological ecosystem is developed as a method to interconnect the different interdependent parts of the ecosystem. Through collaboration with parties such as businesses and schools and libraries, critical social issues such as sustainability, social cohesion, and identity development can be promoted together in collaboration with the government. The area gets a crucial economic boost through the establishment of startups and the Lab’s collaboration with educational parties. The benefits of investing in the redevelopment of monumental heritage complexes are apparent. The complex is a new impetus for urban promotion or city marketing. By taking on a more significant social role as a museum, it can gain support from more prominent groups in society. The importance of co-creating support is endorsed. As a result, the city invests not only in its cultural infrastructure but also in urban development and social cohesion in the areas concerned. The museum ecosystem is a vehicle for bringing together different disciplines, from education and business to government and museums. Because the knowledge and expertise of participants complement each other, added value is created. This integrated approach enables social issues to be tackled in the best possible way.

Keywords:

placemaking, agent of change, catalyst, redevelopment of heritage, co-creation

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