

De Andere Helft. Expertmeeting #6: Research Methods

May 17th, 2023 – 14:30-17:00

Program

14:30-14:40 Introduction by Jenny Reynaerts	2
14:40-14:55 Dr. Susanna Avery-Quash (National Gallery, London).....	2
Which general guidance can be given to researchers who wish to study female donors?... 3	
What strategies would you suggest for selecting and identifying female donors?.....	3
Which strategies can be used for conducting follow-up research?.....	4
Do you have any strategies for categorising female donors?.....	4
Which specific challenges have you encountered during your research and how did you address them?	5
14:55-15:05 Short notice by Bram Donders (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam) and questions	5
15:05-15:20 Bert-Jaap Koops (Independent Art Historian). Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison: Issues of Sources and Interpretation	6
15:20-15:30 Short notice by Rachel Esner (University of Amsterdam) and questions.....	8
15:30-15:50 Break	9
15:50-16:05 Jenny Reynaerts (Rijksmuseum): The Other Half. Plans and progress.....	9
Mission statement.....	9
Answers to questionnaire.	9
Suggested methodology.....	10
16:05-16:30 Discussion	10

14:30-14:40 Introduction by Jenny Reynaerts

Jenny Reynaerts (JR) welcomes everyone and says that she is happy that this expert meeting will address one of the questions raised at the last meeting, concerning methods of research about female mediators in the museum world. After announcing some changes that have taken place in the board of The Other Half, she introduces the first speaker.

Susanna Avery-Quash is senior research curator at the National Gallery in London and research fellow in the history of art at the University of Buckingham. Currently she is also acting as interim head of the curatorial department at the National Gallery. As senior research curator she is in charge of several research trends buying, collecting and display, art and religion, and the legacies of British slave ownership. But also Women and the Arts Forum and all these projects encourage people to engage with the pictures of the National Gallery in fresh ways from a variety of entry points. But first, Jenny would like to mention the National Gallery's Annual Anna Jameson Lecture which started in 2021, named after one of the first female historians that gives the floor to eminent art historians on the theme of women in the arts. The Women and the Arts Forum also developed podcasts, films for the internet, and a collaborative PHD project together with the Birkbeck, University of London. To make all this research and programming available, the National Gallery is currently working on developing a specific section on the website.

Today, Dr. Susanna Avery-Quash will speak about the methodologies employed by the research department to bring women collectors and donors into view.

14:40-14:55 Dr. Susanna Avery-Quash (National Gallery, London)

Susanna Avery-Quash (SAQ), is Jacob Rothschild Interim Head of the Curatorial Department while remaining Senior Research Curator (History of Collecting) at the National Gallery. We are here to discuss her article "Two hundred years of women benefactors at the National Gallery: an exercise in mapping uncharted territory" (2020).¹

Dr. Susanna Avery-Quash has developed and has been leading various research strands, all of which seek to encourage engagement with our pictures from different angles by telling new stories: Buying, Collecting & Display (including the recent ongoing research project on Legacies of British Slave Ownership); Art and Religion; Women and the Arts Forum. The Women in the Arts Forum is a way of dedicating resources to its study and sharing results with wide audiences from specialists in the field to the general public. Thinking about the contributions, past and present, that women have made in the field of the arts. Susanna Avery-Quash is giving it a big push at the moment because next year, in 2024, is the National Gallery's 200th birthday. As part of the new offer Avery-Quash makes known to the public the contribution that women have made to the National Gallery's history in various ways. Therefore, two conferences will be held: one in May 2024 which will be concentrating on women writers and collectors of art, and one in March 2025 about women trustees and employees of the National Gallery. Just recently Susanna Avery-Quash has recruited a new researcher for 22 months for three days a week to help her with the organisation and logistics of the annual lecture and two bicentenary conferences on women to do with the National Gallery. The researcher will also do research on writers who wrote about art or artists, donors, trustees or employees, and will help to build a proper webpage for the National Gallery.

¹ <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/avery-quash-and-riding.pdf>

The research into women donors and benefactor of the National Gallery over the last 200 years, was prompted by a call for papers about women donors to museums for a conference in Edinburgh, organised by the National Galleries of Scotland in 2019. She realised that she had no information in one place to hand which was both upsetting and shocking, yet, she hoped, rectifiable and of use for our forthcoming bicentenary. So, she set herself three simple goals as a starting point:

1. Compile a complete list of names of women donors over 200 years of the National Gallery;
2. Attach those names to their gifts;
3. Analyse those gifts to find out if any patterns emerged.

These were very basic fundamental questions because the core information needed to be searched for first. To spread the word and, as Avery-Quash realised, there wouldn't be any conference proceedings on this occasion, she decided to publish it in a peer reviewed, open access journal. This in order to get the material out to as many people as possible as fast as possible. What Avery-Quash would urge you all to do is to share the results in order to get feedback and pass on the word.

Which general guidance can be given to researchers who wish to study female donors?

Ensure that you get adequate financial resources to do the work in terms of funding so you can do the project properly and not have to leave it in a half finished way. Money is always unfortunately the motor that successfully drives forward all projects, whether we like to admit that or not. Also, get buy-in from as many different constituencies as possible, and the higher up the better. This will give you visibility for your project within your institution, so that people from directors and trustees can have it on their radar to promote further afield on their end. Above that, ensure research on women donors is embedded into a research strand within a research culture of your organisation, so that it doesn't sit to the side of the gallery or museum's work but is considered to be core to it.

For future-proofing purposes, it's very important that other resourcing is sufficient including staff time in terms of research and then embedding it into the institution's collection management system so it is researchable. If not, the information will be lost with the person who has created it. Therefore, ensure that the results are disseminated – besides online or printed publications – through public-facing channels in your museums and elsewhere. Make the work that you have been doing accessible to show that your institution is interested in working in the field and perceives the research as very important. You might think about other channels by creating a web page for instance, theme talks, talks about women who donated (part of) their collections, make donated works part of the collection's display, etc.

Also, build up your network in the field so that you have contacts to ask for help in this fascinating, but still obscure and occasionally disheartening field, and with whom you can seek advice for best practice and good tips. Promote your work at conferences and workshops, especially as a speaker, as these events usually cater for a whole range of useful contacts from established academics to early career scholars, to contemporary artists in the field and the general interested public. In Avery-Quash's experience, attendees tend to gravitate round speakers and speakers are often hived off to a special lunch or reception, so you'll have more attention than being just a delegate. Trying to promote your work is always good – not only to attend – but the icing on the cake is to have the platform and get the attention.

What strategies would you suggest for selecting and identifying female donors?

Generally, think how you want to define the donor to art galleries or museums. Do you want to restrict your search to those who donated complete works of art? If you do, you might miss those who donated in other ways: those who donated money to pay for works of art; and those who donated in other ways, such as financial contributions for other museum functions, e.g., buildings, refurbishment, posts e.g., in the Curatorial Department; funding (reframing) projects. The strategies depend on how big your collections are. If the collection is massive, you need to make some

decisions about how to define a manageable group to start with. This could be done by date; by type of object (often the decorative arts rather than painting) – in this case start with the most important group of works as they are likely to have been better studied and therefore there'll be more primary and secondary literature available for you to use; by importance to the institution, whether that's related to the founder or trustee, or any upcoming anniversary or exhibition (so that you can tie your work into something already in the exhibition-/collection program and thereby gain from (piggy-back on) built-in publicity, funding, etc. In Avery-Quash's case, she was able to confront the whole lot as the National Gallery has only been in existence for 200 years and has only 2,300 works. Also, contact the Collection Information colleagues of the institution and ask for a list of all the donors within your chosen parameters. She found she needed to go through the list to see if any of the differently written names were the same woman (often went under both her maiden and married names, or a mixture, plus alternate spellings). Search archives online and plugged in each of these names to get a list of relevant primary source material including correspondence, board minutes (they often have the correct spelling; then contact an institution archivist to get out relevant material).

Which strategies can be used for conducting follow-up research?

Thinking about her own institutional history, many works originally donated or offered to the National Gallery were transferred or immediately given to sister institutions, such as Tate Britain, which was originally called The National Gallery of British Art at Millbank (it also contained from the start much modern foreign painting); that history is acknowledged by the fact that their accession numbers there are virtually identical to ours, simply the National Gallery at the front being replaced by N0. So, Avery-Quash immediately went to the Tate's website whenever she couldn't locate a painting that she was looking for in the National Gallery's Collection Information database. Does your institution have any similar historical ties with sister institutions? If you believe any of the female donors you are researching may have spread their generosity across institutions, plug their names into the search engines of sister institutions and see what comes up and if necessary, you can follow things up by contacting the relevant external curator or archivist. In her case, she found many women who, in addition to giving paintings, also collected and donated (in more quantities and therefore better known with more relevant material associated with them in these other institution) works on paper (drawing, watercolours, engravings, etc.) [at the British Museum]; ceramics [at the V&A]; jewellery [at the V&A]; and furniture [at the V&A]. So, Google their names and see what comes up and then, in turn, follow up those leads (often, if they were related to or married prominent men, Avery-Quash would look them up, including biographies of them, e.g. in ODNB to see if the women she was interested in featured in these other biographies). Look into family history sites, such as ancestry.com, etc. to fill in gaps.

Do you have any strategies for categorising female donors?

Avery-Quash suggests to look at different types of donation:

- By school – what schools of painting they were largely responsible for donating (not necessarily for collecting): a mixture but often 18th-century French and Dutch art.
- By genre – not always the traditional subjects associated with women like flower painting: portraits, landscapes, a few of the Virgin Mary.
- By medium – a few pastels; works on paper have been transferred to another institution.

Look at the size of donations and perceived worth in terms of financial benefit: who were the key donors and had they been sought out and cultivated by the institution? For the National Gallery, for instance, Kenneth Clark went to visit one woman, the only case Avery-Quash could find of such deliberate and strategic activity. Also look into the motivations for donation: Avery-Quash trawled through the correspondence, acquisition files, annual reports, collection information records. Often the donations were given in memory of a relative, mostly a male relative (husbands and sons), occasionally for a mother or sister. She also looked at gifts given by men in memory of a woman.

Next to that, she also investigated the process of donation: did the women donate in one bulk or drip-feed over time? In her experience, numerous women would cultivate a relationship with the National Gallery, firstly through a single gift, which in later years they built on with one or more further donations. Therefore, research the way in which the process of donation developed and see whether there is a pattern.

Which specific challenges have you encountered during your research and how did you address them? Some objects had been transferred into another collection – once she became aware of this trend, she incorporated that strategy into her looking to encompass other institutions. Another challenge was to make recent dusty old archives seem relevant, and bringing the research right up to date, so she included donors up to the time of writing.

Avery-Quash decided to give her article to the Development Department so that they can share it with all current and potential future (female) donors. Many such women were intrigued to read it and felt delighted to see themselves as part of an ongoing trajectory with which they could induce new potential donors. To say to the (possibly future) donors that both the donations and the story are taken very seriously. But, where to draw the line – how far to stray beyond a main centre? In Avery-Quash's case in London, she kept things as a first step limited to London but if she knew of a family connection to a region, she'd look there too. The scholarly challenge was to find parameters that were wide enough to tell a story but not too wide that she would never find sufficient time to complete it. Remember that you can't do everything and that there'll always be a chance to expand on published research in the future.

During your research, you can feel a bit isolated and disconsolate: sometimes Avery-Quash felt she was looking for a needle in a haystack. From her experience, she'd advise you to share your work and invite other scholars to contact you if they've found relevant information to add so that you feel embedded in a supportive scholarly community. And how to keep your ongoing findings up to date? Avery-Quash confesses that she has not yet succeeded but she is aware she needs to keep the donor list up to date with all the new female donors. On a related point, how to grow the project: if it goes well and you are getting institutional buy in, you might be able to secure a bit of funding or resources in other ways like help from colleagues (or a student placement) to enable you to carry on, embed or expand your project. How you can build on your projects is very encouraging for the field as well as for you personally.

14:55-15:05 Short notice by Bram Donders (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam) and questions

Bram Donders is research fellow at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen with a focus on women artists and donors. He is a member of The Other Half steering group as well and he was just granted a scholarship for the museum's research, entitled "Bequathed. Female donors and legators at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen 1849-present day". One in five collectors of the museum was female yet they have been neglected in art history and the history of collecting.

Bram Donders (BD) will, from this September on, focus on female benefactors or donors from the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. Donders considers the article Avery-Quash wrote together with Christine Riding on female benefactors to the National Gallery a really great help for his own research.

BD For my research, I use TMS [The Museum System] as the basis of my list of female donors – but I also use annual reports. Did you use them both or did you only use the TMS database?

SAQ I used both of them. I thought I might as well use all the resources to check my information both in terms of comprehensiveness and accuracy. Sometimes out of all the documentation I think we

relied most on our annual report, because that was published to be seen by the outside world. The annual report is a good summary – especially the museum’s new acquisitions. Therefore, for accuracy, I went to TMS first and I did the double checking there – and after go to secondary sources as well. We decided we couldn’t use different names and so we changed the names (in many cases to the woman’s maiden name as this gives most information) so we could connect and embed the information.

BD I also really liked your tip to use Google, because I think that really is a great start finding these women. I would like to add some tips: use Delpher – a Dutch digitised database with (news)papers and magazines – and archive.org, a very large library for full-text research. Another tip I would like to give is to use quotation marks in order to get results searching for that specific name. Use the “burgerlijke stand” (civil registry), the Dutch archives, such as www.wiewaswie.nl, where you can search for specific people by their last name or surname and not only their husband’s(/partner’s) name. This makes it easier to identify the people you are searching for.

BD Was it difficult to find specific sources as the archival system of museums and institutions is very focused on the male perspective? Did you use another kind of method to look for the female perspective in archives or other institutions?

SAQ Not per se, but I had exactly the same issue as you. I did write or ring colleagues, which was very helpful. So I didn’t have any different specific strategies – but as a deep dive, I would follow up by contacting colleagues and scholars.

[audience] Are there any follow up researches planned to follow up your research together with other institutions?

SAQ What I’ve tried to do so far is build up a network so that we can begin to talk nationally and internationally. But also, when I’m doing particular conferences and invite speakers to come and talk they have a platform with us and they can share to get those links going. But, to answer the question: no, I have not yet planned any follow up research but my new researcher will help, so I look forward to reporting back with a more positive answer next time.

JR One of the things we found out with *The Other Half*, this sharing of information is therefore so important because we encounter the same names. The pattern you – Susanna Avery-Quash – have found in British institutions is the same in the Netherlands, something we need to delve into in the near future.

15:05-15:20 Bert-Jaap Koops (Independent Art Historian). Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison: Issues of Sources and Interpretation

Bert-Jaap Koops, is an independent art historian who has researched the role of Mrs. Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison who was the legator of a key part of the collection of the Dordrechts Museum. She lived for many years with the collection making her both keeper and curator, an angle which Koops has also looked into. Besides that, Bert-Jaap Koops is secretary of The Other Half since 2022.

Koops presents the results of research he did for his internship at Dordrechts Museum in 2022, with special attention to the role of sources and some interpretative dilemmas. The research centred on the Collection Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison, which largely consists of around 110 paintings (mainly the Hague School and romantics) and Colenbrander ceramics. The collection was left to the Dutch State by Willem van Bilderbeek and his wife, Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison (1849-1951). Which role did she play in the collection?

The couple lived in a Dordrecht mansion, Cronenburch, custom-built by Willem van Bilderbeek's nephew, Bernardus van Bilderbeek, to house their vast collection – not only paintings, but also sculpture, ceramics, glass, and furniture. Interior photographs show the display of all objects in a well-considered ensemble. Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison was likely not involved in collecting paintings, but may have been responsible for other parts of the collection. She played an important role in the bequest, given that the couple were married in community of property: when Willem van Bilderbeek died in 1918, leaving his collection and Cronenburch to the State, Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison allowed the State to choose those paintings they were interested in, which were thus allocated, along with Cronenburch, to Willem van Bilderbeek's half of the joint estate.

As Willem van Bilderbeek had stipulated that his widow would have lifelong usufruct of the inheritance, Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison continued to live in Cronenburch amid the art collection, effectively the Rijksmuseum Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison since 1919. Since it was a residence, the museum was not open to the public, but Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison occasionally showed visitors around who had requested access in advance. Her role in managing the collection – formally the responsibility of the museum's director, Jonkheer Six (and later Laurens Bol) – was important: she had to give permission for loans, and she ensured that loaned paintings were not travelling too much and were adequately insured. She also was contractually responsible for dusting the art works, and for ensuring an adequate heating of the museum building, which proved a continuous challenge during the energy scarcity of the 1930s crisis years and the war period. Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison also intervened in emergencies, for instance mopping the floor at night (at 76 years of age), together with her aged house-maid, when the ceiling started leaking, to prevent damage to the art works. The most interesting part of her story is how she lived in the museum during the crisis years and the war period; both she and the art collection came through unscathed. After the war, she lived in relative isolation, remaining sound of mind and good-spirited until she died at the age of 101.

Koops concludes that, while Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison probably did not play a role in collecting paintings, she did play an important role in managing the collection and in ensuring it was left to the State in good order, to become available to the public. Thus, she took good care of the collection 'in her husband's spirit', as she frequently expressed it. Subsequently, Koops discussed some methodological challenges in his research. Finding sources was a challenge, because the couple had no children and there is no Van Bilderbeek family archive (the archive of the Lamaison van Heenvliet family contained no relevant documents). Her testament was not retrievable, being somewhere in archival limbo. However, it was possible to piece together a story from many different information snippets from different sources, primarily newspapers and the archive of the Rijksmuseum Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison. The latter explains the emphasis in the story on the years 1918-1951, because more information was available on this period. An important additional source of information turned out to be contact with distant relatives, who provided many photographs, and eventually – when one of the relatives was reminded by some travel photographs of a travelogue – a travel diary of the Van Bilderbeek's niece, which included colourful details of visits to museums and the couple's particular interest in Dutch paintings in foreign collections. Also, Koops encountered another portrait of Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison, a pastel by Jo Koster. The photographs helped visualise the story, but also included pitfalls: pictures of an elderly looking lady which seemed to be Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison, taken at a pageant at Heenvliet, turned out to be of her eldest sister, Cornelia Lamaison, lady of Heenvliet.

Finally, Koops mentioned two interpretive dilemmas. Only two statements gave an indication of Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison's involvement in collecting paintings. On the one hand, a letter from her husband showed that the couple used to visit art auctions in Amsterdam together, suggesting that she may have been involved in purchase decisions. On the other hand, in an interview, a niece who in her youth visited her aunt, Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison, when asked whether her aunt was also interested in paintings, answered: 'No, she didn't think all that was necessary. Whenever her

husband bought some paintings, he used to give her jewels.’ Although the latter statement was made sixty years after the niece’s visits, Koops decided to follow it, for lack of any real evidence that Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison was actually involved in painting acquisition, leading him to conclude that she was ‘probably’ not involved in collecting paintings.

The second interpretative dilemma is the potential influence of her brother and agent, Piet Lamaison, and after his death, her nephew Gijs Lamaison van den Berg. The museum director alluded several times to Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison being influenced in her opinions by her brother. She also mainly corresponded with the museum director through her brother. One of the few letters in the museum archive hand-signed by herself is full of bureaucratise (civil-servant type formulations), suggesting that it may have been typed or dictated by her brother (a high municipality official). Although this potentially downplays the role she played in the collection management, Koops in the end decided that, even if she may have been influenced to some extent by her brother or nephew, she was still responsible for the content of decisions and correspondence herself, so that it was defensible to attribute her a significant role in taking care of the collection.

15:20-15:30 Short notice by Rachel Esner (University of Amsterdam) and questions

Rachel Esner is one of the founders of The Other Half, Associate Professor and program director of the dual MA program Curating Art and Cultures at the University of Amsterdam. Since 2021 she is also academic director of the Netherlands Research School for Art History. Her subject within the reach of The Other Half is museum history, focusing on early twentieth century women curators.

Esner argues that Koops, with his presentation, has shown the dilemmas one can face. She agrees with Koops’s analysis to be cautious in interpreting the role the woman played in the collection: with lack of confirmative evidence, one should not over-interpret the role that the wife may have played in assembling a couple’s collection. While Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison may not have played a role in collecting, the interior photographs offer a wealth of information. Isn’t it likely that she played an important role, besides collection management, as decorator of the home? Koops answers that he has considered this issue, but could not find any concrete evidence of who was responsible for the meticulous display of all the objects in the house. The photographs were made in the 1910s, when Willem van Bilderbeek published a catalogue of his painting collection. It seems quite likely that Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison was (at least partly) responsible for the display and house decoration, but in the absence of evidence, Koops hesitates to draw conclusions on this.

Esner states that a caretaker role is often associated with a commemorative donation. In that light, she wonders which extent the caretaker role in this case included an active involvement in the donation. Who made the selection of paintings to include in the bequest to the State? Koops answers that the selection was made by Frederik Schmidt-Degener (then director of Museum Boijmans). There is no indication that Jo van Bilderbeek-Lamaison actively participated in the selection process.

Finally, Jenny Reynaerts suggests that an additional source of information may be the archive of the Ministry of the Interior, since this ministry was responsible for accepting the bequest and setting up the Rijksmuseum Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison. This may include additional documentation, and taxation reports. Bert-Jaap answers that he has not visited the national archive, but that he did look at its list of contents, which gave the impression that its contents were largely identical to those held in the archive of the Rijksmuseum Van Bilderbeek-Lamaison in Dordrecht. Still, it may be interesting to look at the national archive in follow-up research.

15:30-15:50 Break

15:50-16:05 Jenny Reynaerts (Rijksmuseum): The Other Half. Plans and progress

Mission statement. The Other Half states its mission as follows: “To increase awareness, knowledge, and visibility of women as actors in the Dutch art field, particularly in the formation of the Collectie Nederland between 1780-1980, and to sustainably embed women as actors in the art field within the history of visual and applied arts.” We are all here temporarily and we want to go this whole research to go on forever and be as sustainable for next generation’s research projects.

The Other Half defines *actors* as “all women who have been involved in any way with selecting, collecting, managing, maintaining, researching, presenting, and promoting art (including visual and applied arts) in the Collectie Nederland. While makers are also actors in the art field, they fall outside the scope of the project as they already receive sufficient attention in other contexts. All other women who have operated in the art world have been neglected in art history and therefore The Other Half focuses on their work and contributions rather than artworks made by women artists.

One of the strategic objects of the research group’s project is “to gain a better understanding of the role of women in selecting, managing, presenting, and promoting objects from the Collectie Nederland.” Moreover, The Other Half aims “to establish a collaborative network of multiple Dutch museums and universities.” This is done in order “to create a publicly accessible platform, managed by or through the RKD, within which research results from different institutions are jointly disseminated and presented in an open, accessible, and sustainable manner.”

Answers to questionnaire. Reynaerts shows the results following the questionnaire. Two more institutions reacted as well but are not shown in the table (Amsterdam Museum and Centraal Museum, Utrecht) but they had not encountered methodological issues. However, Reynaerts wants to mention that both museums are working on (research) projects regarding female actors. The Centraal Museum is not clear about the direction they’re on yet, and the Amsterdam Museum is working on its female founders: Louisa Willet-Holthuysen and Sophia Lopez Suasso-de Bruijn.

Reynaerts focuses especially on the two columns with answers regarding “methodology” and “problems”. You won’t find sufficient information just looking at archives and literature. Interviews, oral history seem a good additional source – provided that (if possible) the persons interviewed knew the protagonists being researched. Interviews with collectors now give an indication of possible motivations, which might be applied to past donators. Statistical analysis is important; and the digital humanities such as Delpher and other genealogical sites. Object study is also interesting, and may function as a good starting point; looking at several objects together enables the view of the collection (and therefore maybe the mind of the collector). RKD archives are useful, but it is also important to keep adding information. Lastly, there is the question of reception history; women’s magazines are very interesting additional types of sources.

One of the problems researchers have encountered is the archival gaps. How to connect the islands of knowledge? This issue, again, stresses the importance of sharing knowledge and findings of and about collectors who donated to different institutions. Much of the literature is biased. It is not only the historiography of negligence (or even erasure). Researchers should be aware of this and need to change it. Another question raised is: How to weave feminism into social art history? Feminism, in Reynaerts’s view, is social art history. Social context is very important. Try to place the women in the worlds (societies, etc.) they lived in. Also, how accessible are museum archives? Reynaerts urges to make use of museum archives. Access should probably be requested but – as most museums are

public institutions – the request should be granted. However, not all archives are well-documented. The name of the female donors, for instance, is often not part of the thesaurus. And, lastly, collection databases often lack an indication of gender and although “mevrouw” is often mentioned, this, still, remains a big problem.

Suggested methodology. Reynaerts states it can be useful to start a more methodological survey. The suggested methodology she discusses fits well with Avery-Quash’s presentation about methodology.

Step 1a: Inventory First, generate a list of women’s names (including all variations, not only in spelling but also maiden name/married name/widow). Also, search for married couples. Not everything is already in Axiell/TMS; museums need to take an additional step.

Step 1b: Enrichment For as many women as possible on the list, place as much information as possible that is available in the museum’s registration system and acquisition files, supplemented with biographical (basic) information from generally available sources such as lexica (Digitale vrouwenlexicon, Biografisch Portaal), RKD, Civil Registry, and possibly Wikipedia. The aim is to place women in the institutional context and map their network. For strategic reasons, it is advisable to start with the women who have played a role in the objects displayed in the permanent exhibition. This way, the role of women can be made more visible, as well as the progression of the project *The Other Half*. Be aware of getting stuck in the standard narrative of art history and contextualise.

Step 1c: Sharing Where possible, the data found are entered into the databases of the RKD or shared with other institutions via the RKD so that they can build on the name lists and supplement them. The project initiated by *The Other Half* is all about visibility. Therefore, do not wait for finalising researches but publish also work in progress.

16:05-16:30 Discussion

[audience] Could a document, a kind of roadmap, be made available to colleagues as an evolving document so they can add to it in a fruitful way? Maybe it could be placed on Sharepoint?

JR Yes. We will integrate Avery-Quash’s methodologies. Together we can pioneer a new modus operandi and foster new collegiality.

[audience] It is also good to think about collaborating and looking for advice in other fields, such as art history and social gender history. In social gender history, an action-based method is used wherein verb phrases are looked into to research what women did.

[audience] I keep getting hung up on the distinction in the document shared by *The Other Half* between makers and actors. Surely, there are several female makers who also collected and later donated (their) artworks.

JR We’re excluding makers as we are not looking into the making of artworks. However, we do not exclude makers who also collected, sold, donated or bequeathed objects. We aim to research the ways in which these women distributed, collected and managed their artworks or collections. However, it is important to stress the double roles some of these women have taken.

[audience] The emphasis in this regards the way in which they were benefactors. Of course, women artists who also collected are included but it is a secondary factor that they were artists.

[steering group member] This was an object of some discussion among the steering group while making this document – how to include makers – because of course, some makers sometimes

donated their own works and not just artworks made by others to museums. We would certainly consider them to be donors and benefactors and include them in our research.

JR As a matter of fact, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam has mapped those artists who donated their own work to the museum's collection. This is an interesting group because it is also about managing your own reception history, etc. In the Rijksmuseum Collection there are also quite a couple of female artists who donated their own work to the collection and therefore they intended to stay in art history.

In the Teams Meeting's chat, [someone from the audience] adds some tips regarding researching female actors. Try to find living relatives, they often have documents, stories or other things about the deceased or still living family members. It worked very well when researching Dutch female artists. Also have a look into the obituaries placed in newspapers. In the Netherlands you can find these obituaries in the CBG, for instance.

[audience] I wanted to react to something SAQ said earlier. I think Google is actually very useful and important because of the access to an enormous amount of information through global search, and fields of research where you would not have necessarily even think of looking at. Also you then go through a process that does not discriminate sources of art history. Furthermore, this can also compensate for biases in literature – even though the internet, of course, has its own biases.

[steering group member] Yes, also AI and ChatGPT could be useful, so think of how to use them. Be critical and be aware of the biases in data and algorithms, but use all possible sources.

[steering group member] I agree, as I used Google many times in my own research. However, caution is needed, as much of the information is not fact-checked, such as genealogy websites. Sometimes they conflate women with synonymous names, and dates of birth and death can be mistaken (ly reproduced). However, it is a really good first line of research.

JR Maybe organise an expert meeting on AI?

[steering group member] I wanted to add to the mention of AI and ChatGPT that Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen will be working with data specialists of PWC. They are helping in using a method to get patterns in data systems and using AI to analyse texts. Maybe a paper will be written on this type of methodology and shared with others who are interested.

[steering group member] I wanted to add something. I think that we can all agree that one of the main ways we can bring women to the surface if we stop hierarchising certain kinds of practices. One of our most important instruments is to re-evaluate what it means to be collecting decorative objects or not to always assume that that is a minor practice. This is also a feminist strategy.

Jenny Reynaerts closes the discussion and thanks everyone who participated in this expert meeting.

Report by Sanne de Rooij, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen