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## Museum Theatre in the Netherlands

*Der Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über die Verwendung von MuseumsTheater in größeren niederländischen Museen. Art und Grad der Anwendung schwanken je nach Art des Museums: Die Autorin unterscheidet fünf unterschiedliche Schwerpunktsetzungen der Museen, die jeweils einen spezifischen Zugang zum Arbeitsfeld MuseumsTheater haben: Lebendige Geschichte, Geschichten erzählen, Galerietheater, geführte Rundgänge und »echtes« Theater. Schließlich stellt die Autorin ihr Unternehmen »Pandemonia Science Theatre Holland« vor.*



There are approximately 600 museums in Holland. This figure includes all the small private museums. As far as it is possible to inventory, about 40 museums have made use of some kind of theatre, 16 of them worked together with Pandemonia. These include:

- Art Museums (e.g. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)
- Science Museums (NewMetropolis, Museum Boerhaave)
- History Museums (Amsterdams Historisch Museum)
- Maritime Museums (Scheepvaart Museum Amsterdam)
- Anthropology Museums (Museum for the Antique World, Leiden)
- Museum of Communication (PTT Museum Den Haag)
- Military Museums (Airforce Museum, Soesterberg)
- Open Air Museums (Zuiderzee Museum, Enkhuizen)

Different types of theatre have been used. Sometimes there is a discussion about what theatre is. Can the form used in a particular museum be called theatre? Nowadays the overall term used is: museum theatre. As in England you can find more or less five forms of museum theatre in Holland: Living History, Story-telling, Gallery theatre, Guided Tours (promenade theatre), and »Real« plays. In practice these divisions are not watertight. Each location demands its own particular form and this may turn out to be a combination of several styles or even something as yet unheard of!

### **Living History**

As we see the use of this form in Holland (for example in the Maritime Museum Amsterdam, and the Zuiderzee Museum Enkhuizen) museums have different interpretations of how to do this.

The Maritime Museum in Amsterdam uses as decor a replica of a VOC ship. On board the ship, on a daily basis, is a group of amateur actors. There is a daily routine that can be performed by more or less all the actors. Depending on the particular skills of the people scheduled for that day, there is something extra, such as music or dance. Their costumes are historically based, but they make use of modern possibilities. Not all the shoes, belt, hats etc. are perfect replicas. They live the life on board of the ship, but they are very well connected with the audience in modern times.

The Zuiderzee Museum is much more strict about their amateurs. The actors don't »perform« they »live« in a few small houses. Their text is scripted, their costumes and all their props are perfectly historically accurate. The actors display no connection with modern times. Audience members with questions about video or computers are ignored.

### **Story-telling**

This form is not used so often. An actor in a costume tells a story with the audience surrounding him, sometimes with the use of props or small costume changes. For special occasions such as the Museum Weekend museums will offer their audience a storyteller, mostly for young children. The best example, to my knowledge, in Holland is in the Tropical Museum in Amsterdam, where storytellers introduce young children to other cultures, sometimes in a quite elaborate set design.

## Gallery theatre

This theatre works well in museums especially when there is no auditorium. An actor in character costume uses an exhibit as decor and interacts with the audience. An advantage of this form is that the public is free to come and go without disrupting the act.

## Guided tours

An actor takes a small group of people on a special highlight tour of the museum. The actor may play one character throughout the whole tour, or change character en route – with the addition of a hat or costume.

## »Real« Plays

When circumstances permit – an auditorium, with seats, light, sound etc. – a more conventional theatre play can be set up. The final result of course will still depend on a variety of factors – subject-matter, target group, length, finance etc.

## About Pandemonia

Pandemonia was founded in 1984 by Tony Maples (artistic director) and Lea Witmondt, business director. In 1988 it became Pandemonia Science Theatre Holland. 25 percent of Pandemonia's commissions are from museums, the other 75 percent are universities, governmental organisations, scientific institutions and schools. Currently the emphasis of our work is on touring productions for schools dealing with the impact of new technologies on moral and ethical issues. The productions differ in length (from short ten-minute acts to full length plays) and in target group (children, young people, families, adults, specialist groups). This means that each production is custom-made. Pandemonia has six people on the payroll, ten regular freelancers and every season up to 40 »floating freelancers«. Most of the scripting is done by Tony Maples, although a number of actors write their own material for »one-off« acts. The business side of Pandemonia is run by Lea Witmondt.

As of now (spring 2001) Pandemonia is working in five museums: the Maritime Museum, the Dutch Air Force Museum, the

Royal Money Museum, the Dutch Railway Museum, and the Museum Boerhaave History of Medical Science. Pandemonia uses gallery theatre, promenade theatre and storytelling techniques in these locations. Since 1989 Pandemonia produced approximately 45 museum theatre pieces. The amount of performances only in museums is between 2,500 and 3,000.