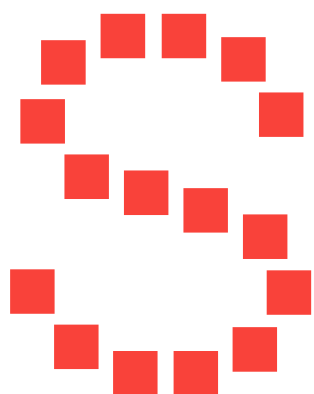
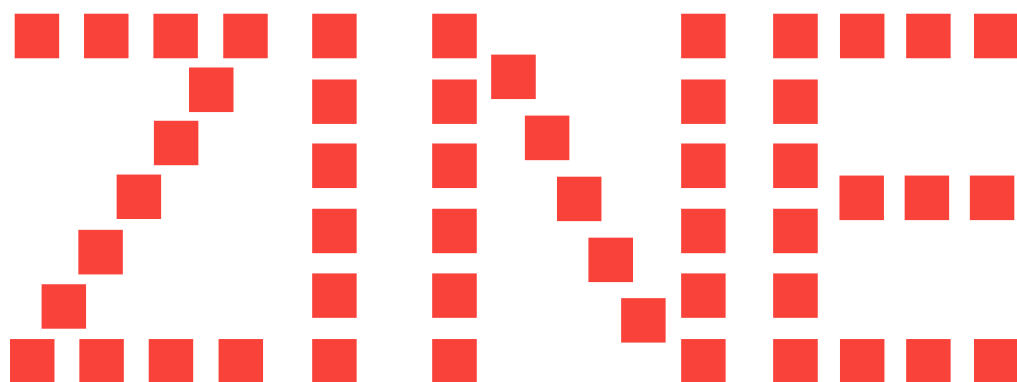


EVERYBODY
HATES QUOTAS



#4
2026



AMSTERDAM

STEDELIJK

MUSEUM

FOREWORD

“All you need to do is count,” the Guerrilla Girls pointed out in the eighties. Who’s on the wall? Who gets to exhibit? Who gets collected? And who doesn’t?

Broad public debates about racism and other kinds of systemic exclusion often remain frustratingly abstract. But it’s different when you start to count. Numbers can demonstrate irrefutably how some groups always have more space than others. Although many feel awkward about defining and measuring diversity, and resist doing so. And many feel uncomfortable about setting quotas to foster diversity.

In 2020, Stedelijk Museum laid out an ambition inspired by a broad-based movement in the museum world: the museum wanted to build a diverse collection reflecting more accurately the full range of perspectives, experiences and histories that characterize the art world, and human experience.

This Szine shows what happened when that abstract ambition turned into a concrete target: to spend at least 50 percent of the acquisition budget on works by artists and designers identifying as Black, of colour and/or belonging to an ethnic minority and/or born outside Western Europe and North America.

This research was an initiative by Emma Harjadi Herman, manager of education and inclusion at the Stedelijk, and was implemented in collaboration with independent researcher Hannah Sweering. The first part of this publication presents the results of an analysis of makers of artworks purchased by Stedelijk Museum between 2021 and 2025. Categories such as origin, ethno-racial identification, gender, age, artistic discipline and purchase price are used to reveal patterns of inclusivity and exclusivity. At the same time this analysis provides a factual groundwork for a discussion that many still base on assumptions and beliefs.

Following the analysis is a conversation with me and two curators who share responsibility for the museum's collection policy, Amanda Pinatih and Leontine Coelewijn. We offer an insight into the way purchasing decisions are taken in practice. Our reflections show that building a collection is about balancing the search for artistic quality with the means available, with historical areas of interest and lacunae, with international networks, gifts and the stories identified as those the museum aims to tell.

This analysis of five years of purchases offers no conclusions. It shows the state of play. It reveals the impact of a concrete decision taken at the museum in an attempt to realize a particularly elusive ambition. Our hope is that the transparency achieved here will contribute to the ongoing discussion in the sector about the role museums play in today's changing society. About the direction the museum should take and how to organize that. This publication is an invitation to continue that conversation.

Rein Wolfs
Director
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

REPRESENTATION IN PURCHASES BY THE STEDELIJK

A quantitative analysis

By Hannah Sweering and Emma Harjadi Herman

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and inclusion are ranking increasingly higher on the agenda in the cultural field in recent years, thanks to the sustained efforts of artists and activists concerning these topics. Against this backdrop, in 2020 the Stedelijk formulated a multi-year strategy for the period 2021–2024. One of the most significant ambitions formulated in this strategic plan was broadening the museum's artistic scope. Among other things, this effort translated into introducing more diverse perspectives regarding purchases for the collection. The Stedelijk manages a collection of more than 100,000 artworks, assembled over a period of more than 125 years. Several dozen pieces are added each year, partly through donations and partly through purchases. The Stedelijk established a quota for such acquisitions for the period 2021–2024. Continuing into the 2025–2028 strategic period, the museum decided to keep the quota in place.

The quota stipulates the following:

At least 50 percent of the acquisitions budget will be spent on artists and designers born outside Western Europe or North America and/or artists and designers who identify as Black, of color, and/or members of an ethnic minority. Attention is also paid to intersecting forms of exclusion, such as gender.

The purchases made over five years provide sufficient data to be able to recognize averages and trends. This was therefore a good moment for closer analysis. Central to this is the following broader, exploratory question:

If we look at various characteristics of the artists and designers and of the purchased works, what is notable about the purchases made in the period 2021–2025?

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

WESTERN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

The quota specifies *“artists and designers born outside Western Europe or North America and/or artists and designers who identify as Black, of color, and/or members of an ethnic minority.”*

To establish what is entailed by Western Europe and North America, the definition provided by UNESCO was taken as a starting point, with a few adjustments. This concerns “Group I” (“Western Europe and North America”), in which, for our purposes, we have omitted Turkey from the list and added Liechtenstein. The list of countries we use for this quota is as follows: Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America.

BLACK, OF COLOR, AND/OR MEMBERS OF AN ETHNIC MINORITY (BIPOC)

For the definition of the second aspect of the identity of artists and designers, we adhered to advice from Rana and De Koning,¹ namely: Black, of color, and/or members of an ethnic minority. As an abbreviation, we employ the commonly used English term BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). We attach great value to the principle of self-identification, but we could not always ask the artists and designers how they identify themselves. Based on public sources such as interviews, publications, and knowledge provided by curators, we determined how makers view and present their ethno-racial identity, as well as gender identity. When the available information was insufficiently clear, the category “unknown” was applied.

AGE

The age of the maker (at the time of the work’s purchase) is also included in this analysis. For this, we worked with four categories: <35 years, 35–64 years, 65+ years, and deceased. The aim here is to approximate the frequently applied classification of emerging, mid-career, and established artists.

PARTNERSHIPS

Artists and/or designers sometimes collaborate. For this analysis, artist duos, design duos, married couples, and occasional collaborations between two or more makers were split into individuals. These makers are therefore counted separately in the analysis.

Collectives (groups of multiple artists presenting themselves as a single entity, sometimes with a changing composition) are designated as “Collective.” Gender, origin, and ethno-racial identity are mentioned in cases where the collective explicitly positions itself as such. Examples: The Guerrilla Girls identify as women, while Chimurenga positions itself as pan-African.

1 Rana, J. and A. de Koning (2023) Diversiteit in de culturele sector: Een aanzet tot zinvoller definiëren en meten. In: *Boekman Extra*, 2023, no. 42, Amsterdam: Boekmanstichting.

SCOPE

ACQUISITIONS BUDGET

The annual budget available to the Stedelijk for purchasing works consists partly of yearly contributions from subsidy providers such as the Municipality of Amsterdam, the VriendenLoterij, and the Mondriaan Fund. In addition, the Stedelijk has numerous private benefactors. Some of these specifically contribute to making acquisitions possible. The Stedelijk also has an independent support fund, the Stedelijk Museum Fonds, which aims to financially bolster the museum's activities. All purchases made possible (in part) by a contribution from the abovementioned and other benefactors were included in the analysis. In total, about 7.5 million euros were spent on purchases for the collection during the period 2021–2025.

DEVELOPMENT BUDGET

Occasionally the Stedelijk makes what is known as a “development budget” available to an artist to create new work for an exhibition. If a work is subsequently purchased from that same exhibition, the asking price may factor in the previous expense made through the development budget. In such cases, a work's purchase value does not reflect the total investment. Development budgets are not reflected in this analysis.

IN-KIND DONATIONS

In the period 2021–2025, in-kind donations of nearly 400 works were received. The quota relates to the expenditure of the acquisitions budget. In-kind donations are therefore excluded in this analysis.

DATASET

To assess the extent to which the quota has been met, we examined the representation of makers in the Stedelijk's purchases between 2021 and 2025. The dataset was compiled based on internal information from the museum's systems (financial administration and collection registration), supplemented with input from curators and public sources.

The analysis focuses on the entire period 2021–2025, because a larger number of data points provides a more representative picture of wider trends, and the data cannot be traced back to

individual artists. In addition, however, whether the quota was met is examined for each individual year.

During this period, nearly 7.5 million euros were spent on acquisitions. With this amount, work by 193 makers was purchased.

The makers behind the purchased works are central to this analysis. Our research focuses on which makers' works were purchased in the period 2021–2025 and, consequently, which identities are represented in the collection acquisitions. Each maker has therefore been counted once. Work by ten makers² was purchased in multiple years; in these cases, amounts from the various years are combined. In cases where a work was produced by multiple makers, for this analysis the purchase value is divided equally among the makers involved.

Incidentally, the amounts paid do not always go to the artists (in their entirety); in cases where the purchase is made on the primary art market, a portion often goes to the gallery representing the artist. Purchases are also sometimes made on the secondary art market, where the purchase value is paid to the previous owner of the work.

The following factors are taken into account for each maker: ethno-racial identification, country of birth, place of work, gender, age, purchase value, and the subcollection to which the work belongs.

PRESENTATION OF PERCENTAGES

Percentages are rounded to whole numbers for readability. Values below 3 percent are shown with one decimal place to preserve visibility of small differences. In the graphs, percentages smaller than 1 percent are not shown, and are instead included in the legend with the percentage in parentheses. As a result, the data in the graphs does not always add up to 100%.

² These are: Miriam Cahn, Sigrid Calon, Hans Eijkelboom, Eileen Gray, Rashid Johnson, Hana Milétić, Sandra Mujinga, Katja Novitskova, Magali Reus, and Xavier Robles de Medina.

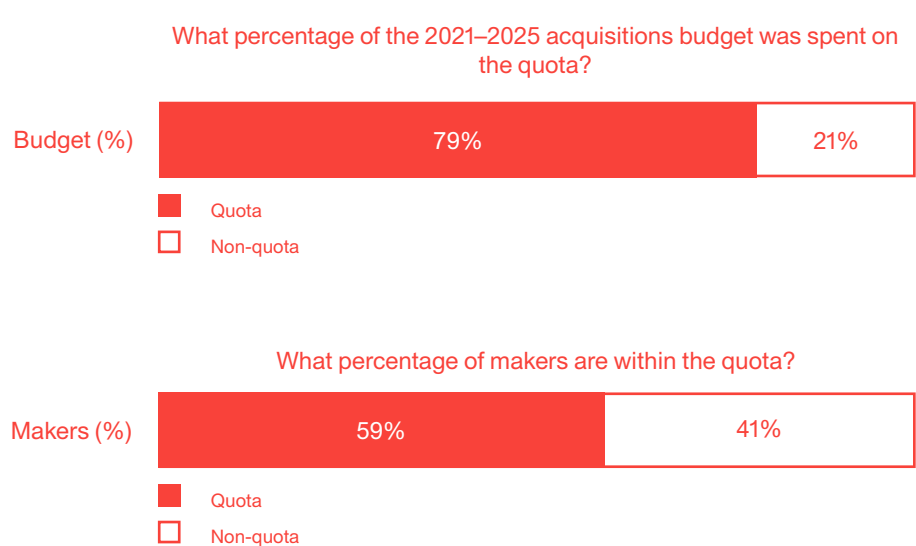
FINDINGS

QUOTA FULFILLED

In the period 2021–2025, the quota was met for each year.³ In total, 79 percent of the budget was spent on work by makers who fall within the quota, compared to 21 percent on work by makers outside the quota.⁴

Of the 193 makers whose work was purchased in this period, 59 percent fall within the quota.⁵

Notable is that the average purchase value for works by artists within the quota is significantly higher. On average, approximately 50,000 euros was paid for their work, while purchases involving makers outside the quota cost on average around 20,000 euros.



The quota consists of two components: ethno-racial identification and country of birth. To gain insight into how the quota was achieved, these components were analyzed separately, and thereafter examined in conjunction.

³ 75 percent in 2021; 69 percent in 2022; 78 percent in 2023; 61 percent in 2024; 88 percent in 2025.

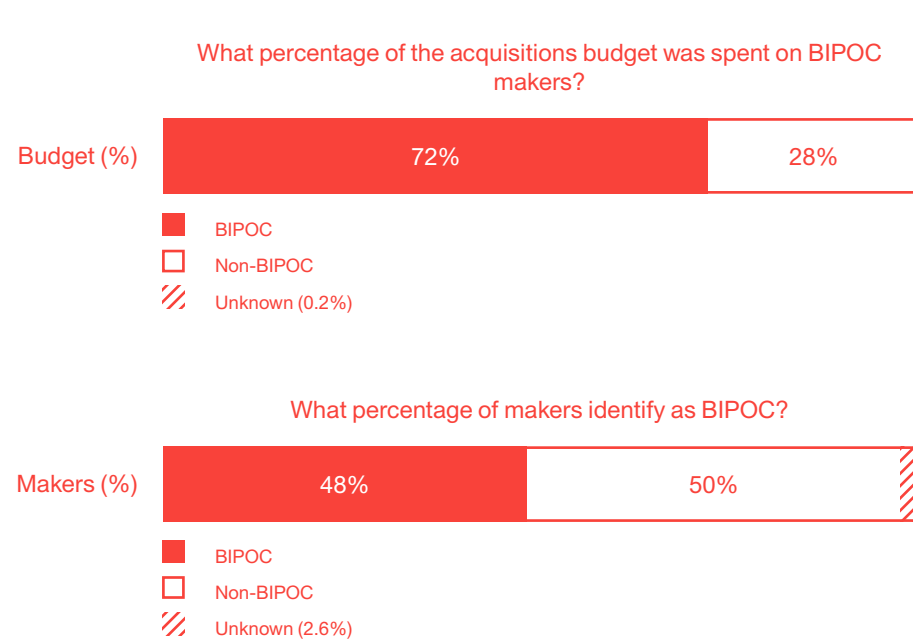
⁴ Since work by some makers was acquired in multiple years, the sum of makers in the annual totals (2021–2025) is higher than the sum of unique makers for the entire period.

⁵ Makers included the quota were in the minority only in 2023.

ETHNO-RACIAL IDENTIFICATION (BIPOC)

Almost half of the artists connected to acquisitions between 2021 and 2025 identify as Black, of color, and/or as members of an ethnic minority (BIPOC).

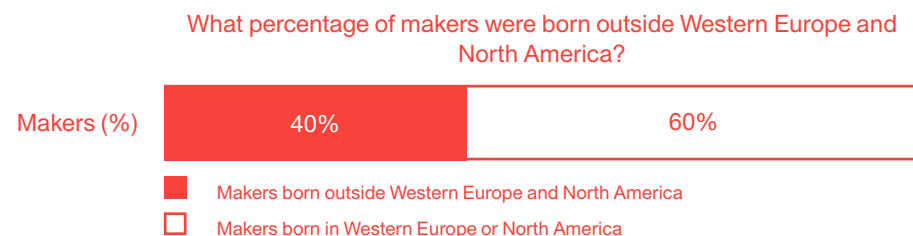
Their share of the purchasing budget, however, is significantly higher. In total, 72 percent of the budget went toward BIPOC makers. This difference is also visible in the average purchase value: On average, approximately 60,000 euros was paid for work by BIPOC makers, nearly three times as much as for makers who do not identify as BIPOC.



ORIGIN

Four in ten makers connected with the 2021–2025 acquisitions were born outside Western Europe or North America. A smaller portion of the budget went toward these makers.

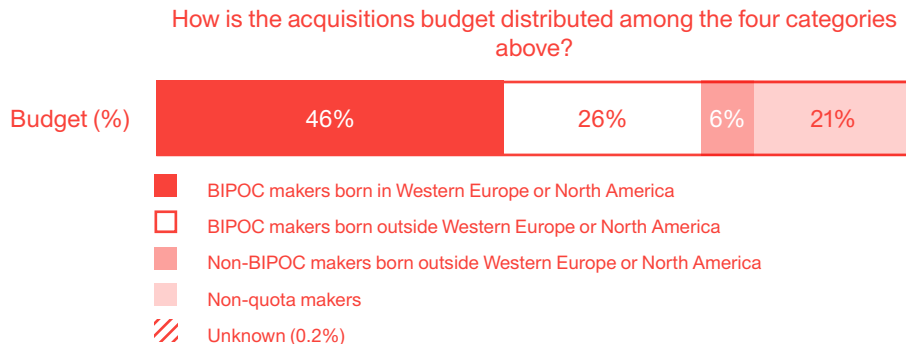
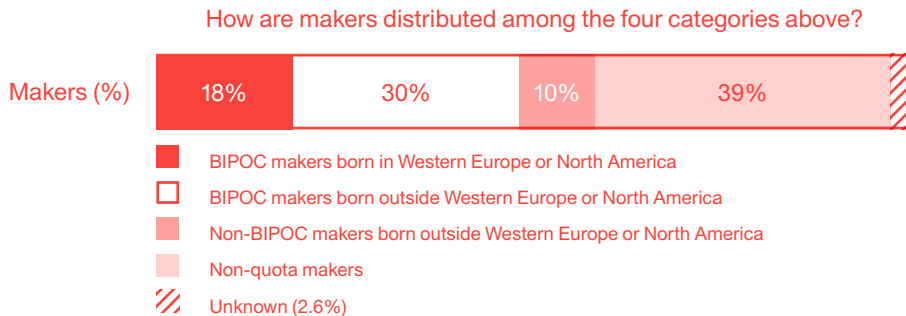
On average, about 30,000 euros was paid for their work. For works by makers born in Western Europe or North America, the average purchase value is significantly higher, reaching nearly 45,000 euros.



The Netherlands and the United States are by far the most common countries of birth: 28 percent of makers were born in the Netherlands and 14 percent in the United States. Suriname follows at a distance with 6 percent.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNO-RACIAL IDENTIFICATION AND ORIGIN

When ethno-racial identification and origin are considered together, a clearer picture emerges of how the purchasing budget is distributed. Based on these two factors, four groups of makers can be distinguished: BIPOC makers born within Western Europe or North America; non-BIPOC makers born outside Western Europe or North America; BIPOC makers born outside Western Europe or North America; and makers who fall outside the quota.



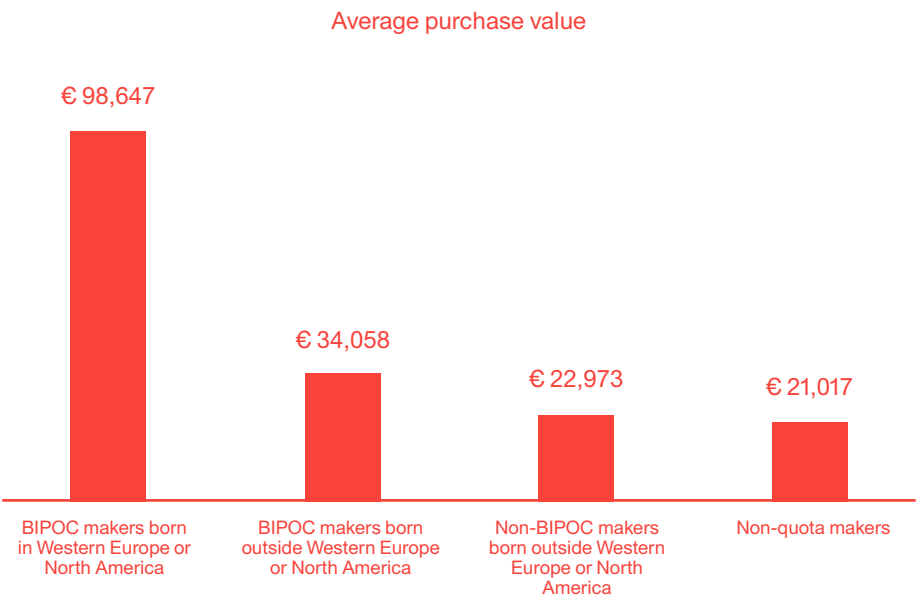
The largest portion of the budget went toward BIPOC makers who were born in Western Europe or North America. Although they represent only 18 percent of all makers, they received nearly half of the total purchasing budget (46 percent).

A second large group is comprised of BIPOC makers born outside Western Europe and North America. They form 30 percent of makers and received 26 percent of the budget.

In addition, there is a smaller group of artists born outside Western Europe and North America who do not identify as BIPOC. They represent 10 percent of makers and received 6 percent of the budget. This primarily concerns artists and designers from Eastern Europe.

The remaining 21 percent of the budget went toward makers born in Western Europe or North America who do not identify as BIPOC.

The average purchase amounts reflect clear differences as well. For work by BIPOC makers born in Western Europe or North America, nearly 100,000 euros was paid on average, considerably more than for the other groups.



WORK REGION

Most makers whose work was purchased between 2021 and 2025 are based in Western Europe or North America. In total, 76 percent of makers are active in these regions; 18 percent work outside these regions and 6 percent work both within and outside Western Europe and North America.

The average purchase value hardly differs between artists working within and outside Western Europe and North America: approximately 39,000 and 38,000 euros, respectively.

The Netherlands and the United States are the most strongly represented countries. Altogether, more than half of the artists work in one of these two countries.

MIGRATION PATTERNS

When place of birth and region of activity are combined, a picture emerges of makers' migration patterns.

Makers who are born in Western Europe or North America almost always continue working in these regions: 98 percent remain active there.

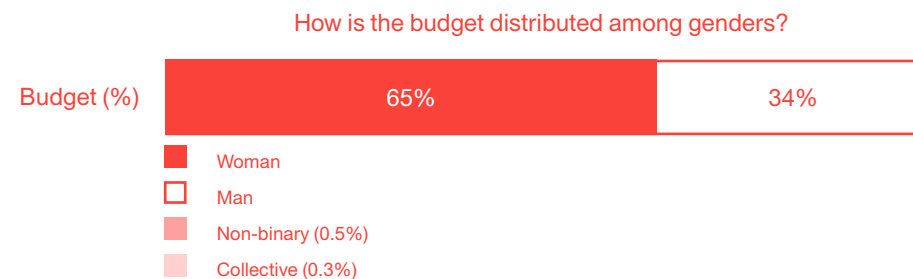
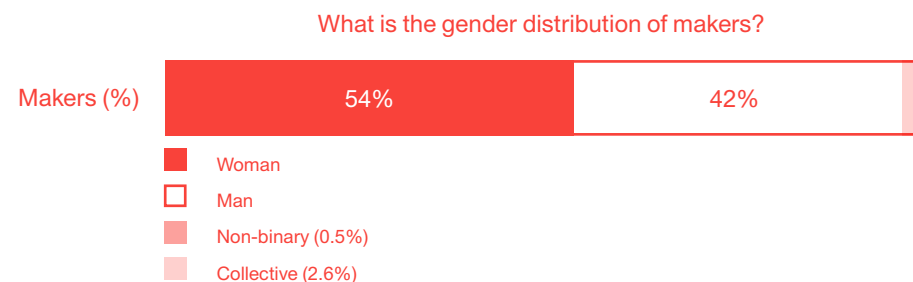
For makers born outside Western Europe and North America, the picture is more divided. This indicates that Western Europe and North America have a strong appeal as areas to work.



GENDER

Women form a small majority of the artists whose work was purchased. Of the 193 makers, 54 percent identify as women and 42 percent as men. In addition, a small number of makers identify as non-binary or work in collectives.

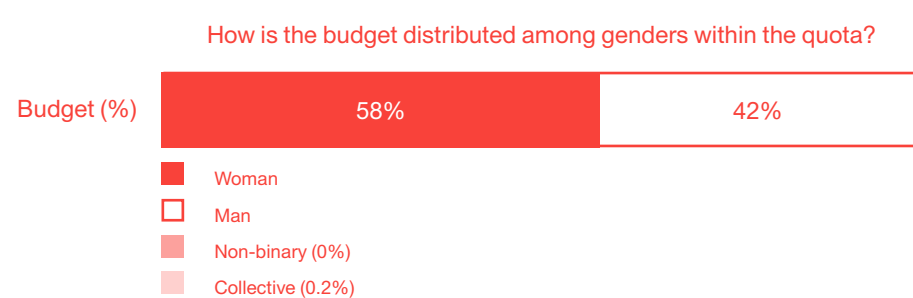
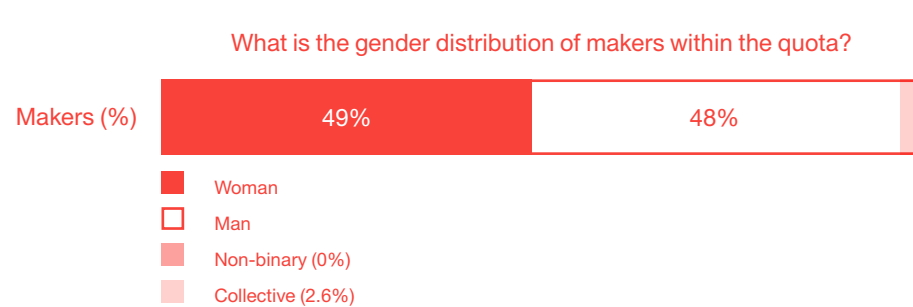
Women received a larger share of the purchasing budget: 65 percent. The average purchase value is also higher. On average, approximately 46,000 euros was paid for work by women, compared to 31,000 euros for work by men.



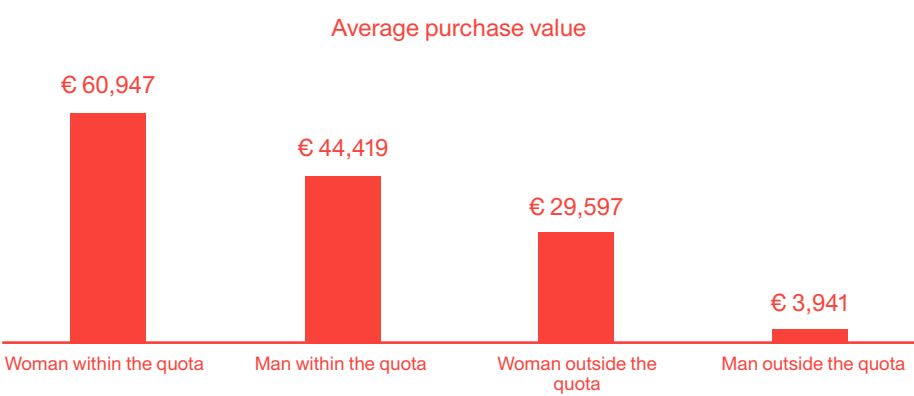
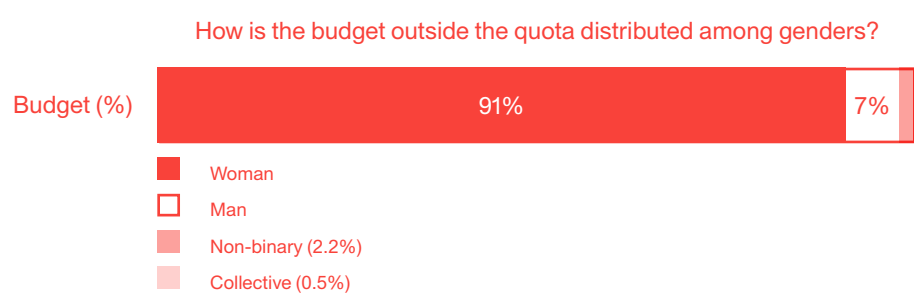
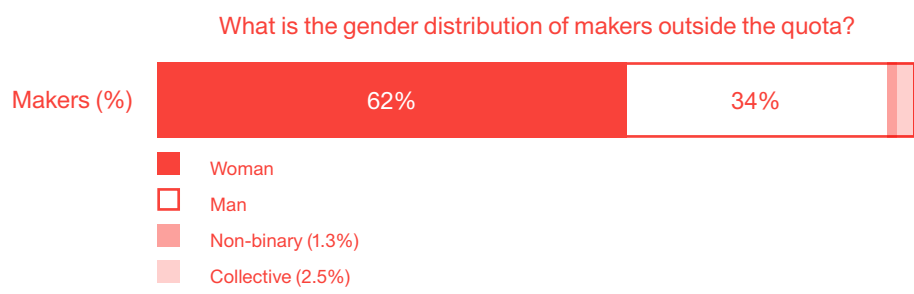
GENDER AND QUOTA

When gender is broken down by makers within and outside the quota, clear differences emerge in the distribution of the purchasing budget.

Within the group of makers who fall under the quota, the ratio of men to women is virtually equal in terms of numbers. Nevertheless, female makers receive a larger share of the budget. The average purchase price for their work is also higher.



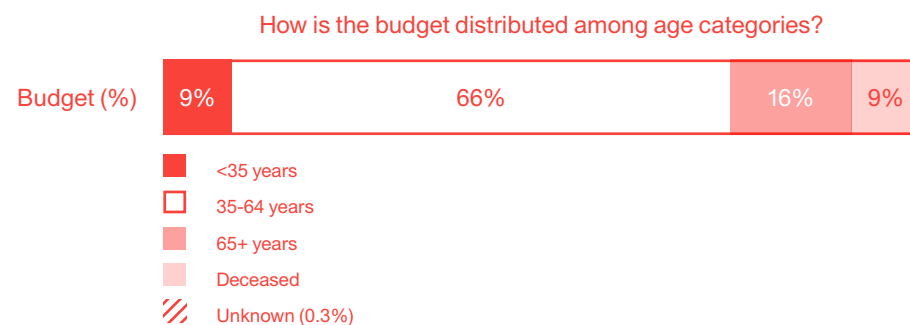
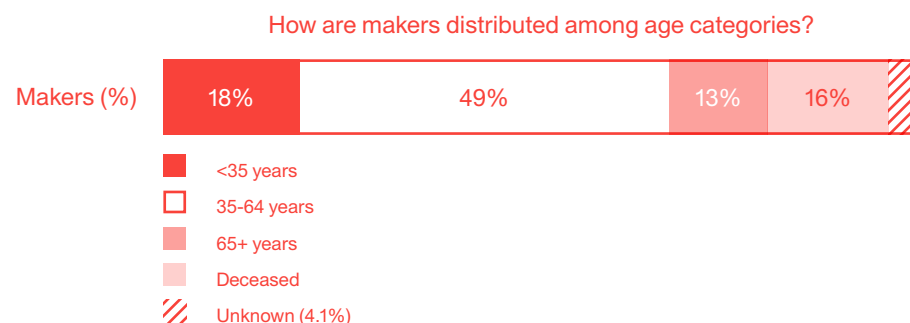
For makers outside the quota, the picture is even more pronounced. In this group, women form a clear majority of makers and receive by far the largest share of the purchasing budget. The average purchase price for acquisitions of works by women (approximately 30,000 euros) is significantly higher here than for men (approximately 4,000 euros).



AGE

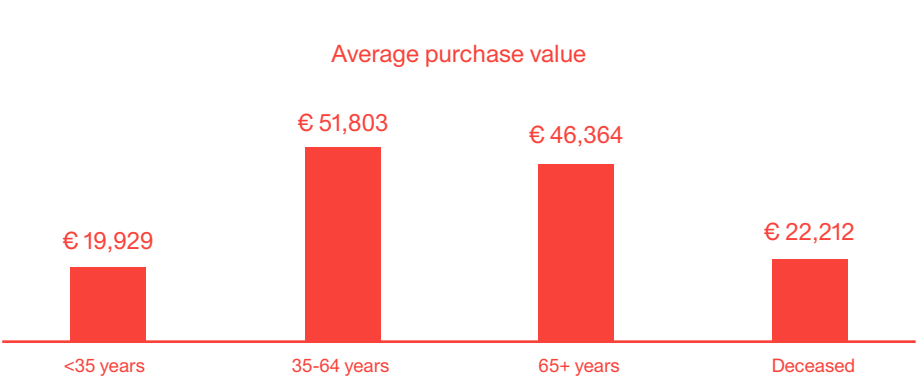
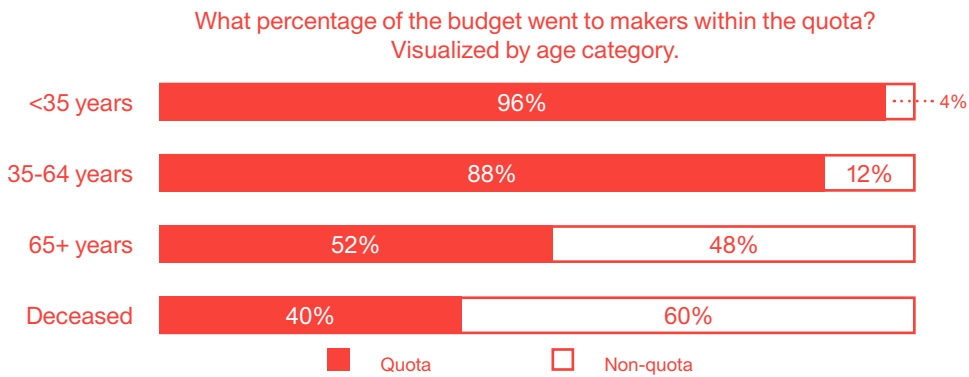
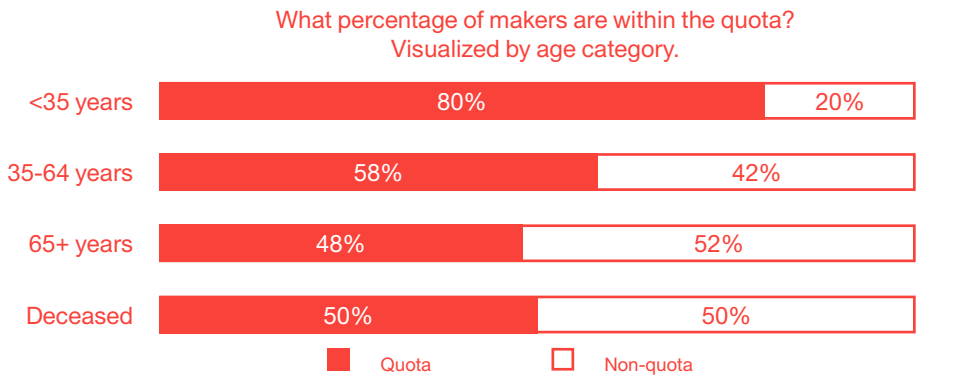
The analysis makes a distinction between four age groups, based on the age of the artist in the year the artwork was acquired:

- Younger than 35 years old (emerging artists);
- 35 to 64 years (mid-career artists);
- 65 years and older (established artists);
- Deceased.



The acquisitions in the period 2021–2025 are mainly focused on mid-career artists. Makers between the ages of 35 and 64 received two-thirds of the total purchasing budget. In terms of the number of makers, this is also by far the largest group: approximately half of all purchases were works by artists between 35 and 64 years old.

When looking at the budget distribution by age group, for makers under 65, the largest share of the budget went toward makers within the quota. Among makers aged 65 and older, this is roughly half, and among deceased makers, the proportion is clearly less.

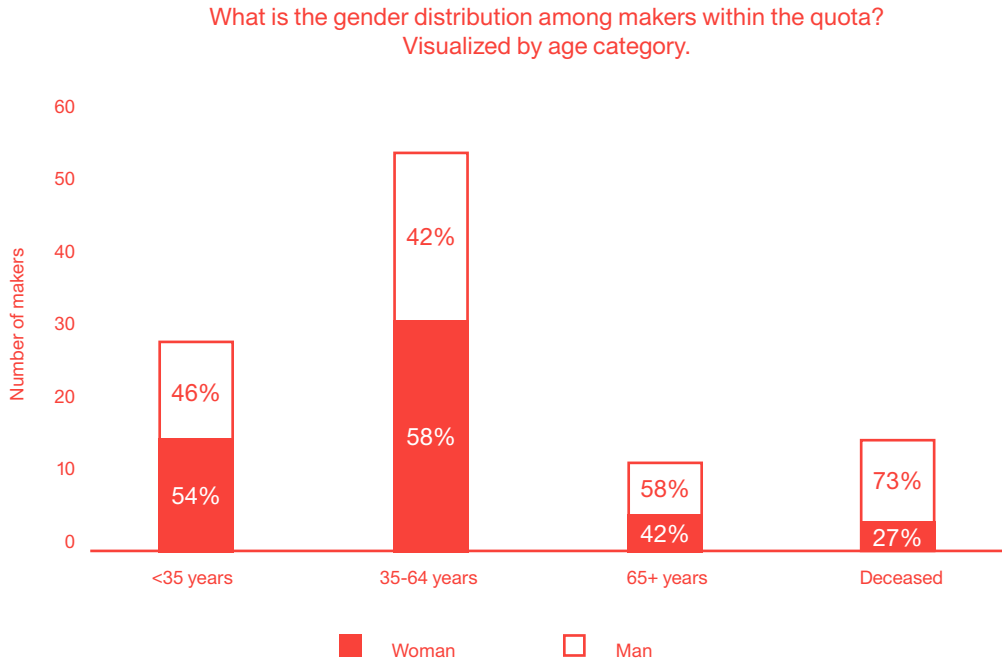


AGE AND GENDER

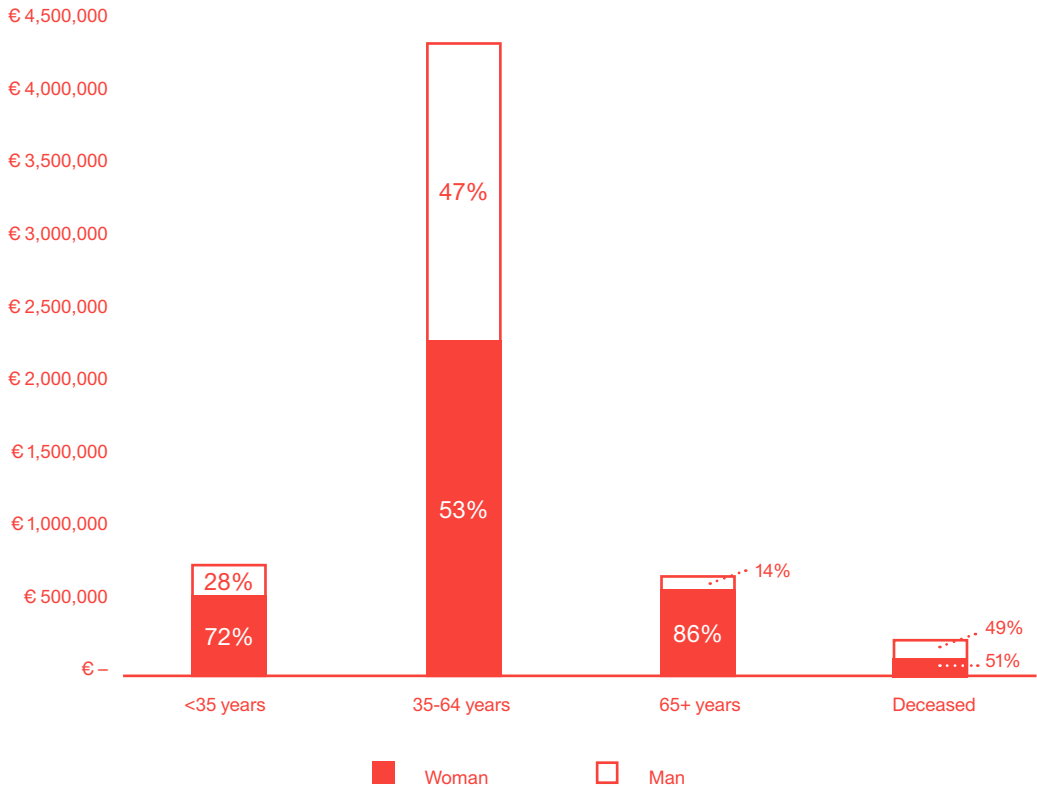
The combination of age and gender was also examined. From this, several clear patterns emerge. Non-binary makers and collectives are not included in this section because their numbers are too small to draw significant conclusions about their distribution across age, gender, and quota categories.

Makers within the quota

- As stated previously, the majority of the purchasing budget (79 percent) went toward makers who fall under the quota.
- Within this group, women received a larger share of the budget than men.
- The budget is heavily concentrated among makers aged 35 to 64.
- Across all age groups, women received a larger share of the budget than men. Only within the 35 to 64 age group is the distribution between women and men relatively balanced.
- Within this age group, a relatively small group of men received a significant share of the total budget.



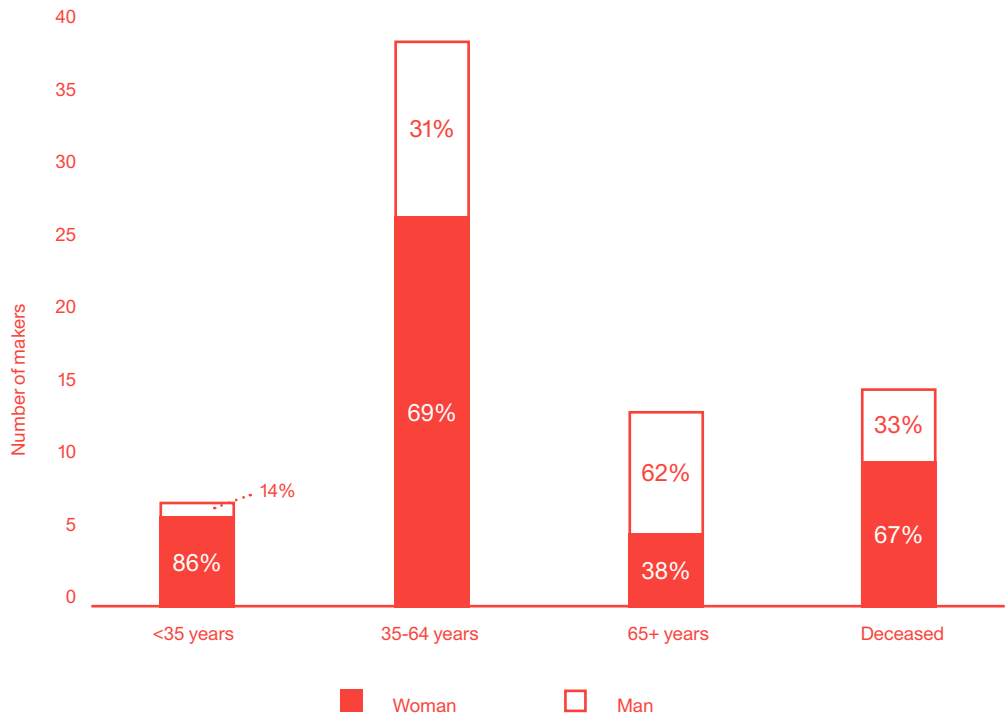
What percentage of the budget went to makers within the quota?
Visualized by age category.



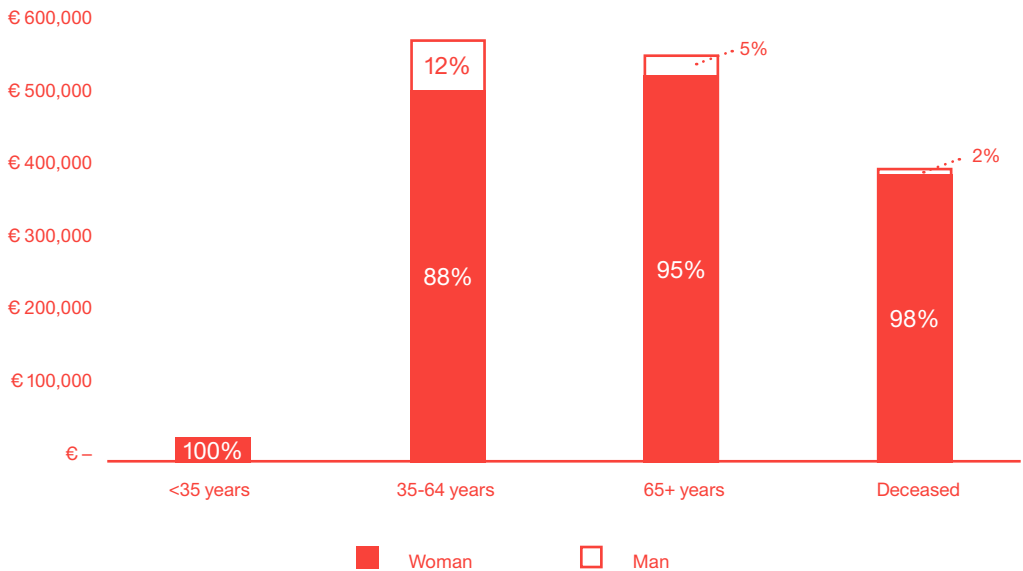
Makers outside the quota

- A smaller part of the budget (21 percent) went toward makers outside the quota.
- Within this group, the budget went predominantly toward female makers.
- The budget is primarily concentrated among older and deceased makers.
- The proportion of young makers is quite small, and young male makers in particular are hardly represented, receiving practically none of the budget.
- A large part of the budget went toward a relatively small group of older or deceased female makers.

What is the gender distribution among makers outside the quota?
Visualized by age category.



How is the budget distributed by gender among makers outside the quota?
Visualized by age category.



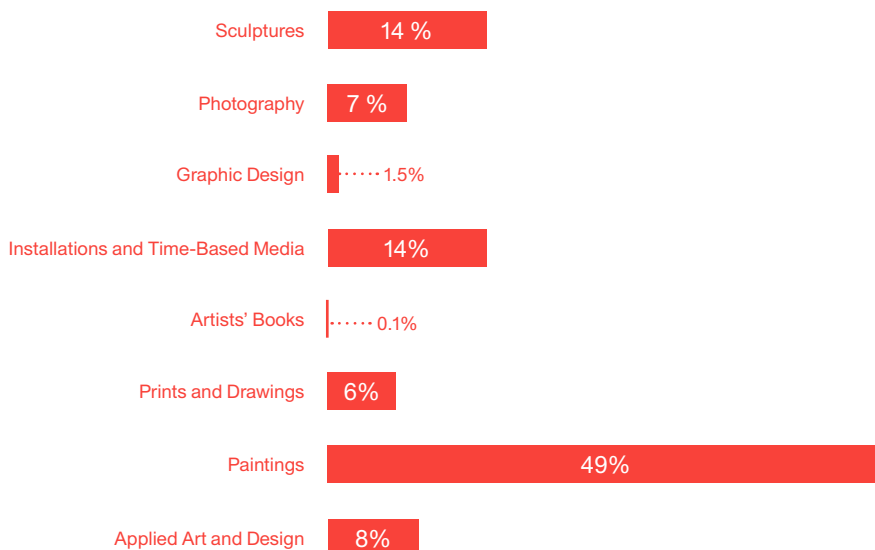
SUBCOLLECTIONS

The Stedelijk collection is categorized in the following subcollections:

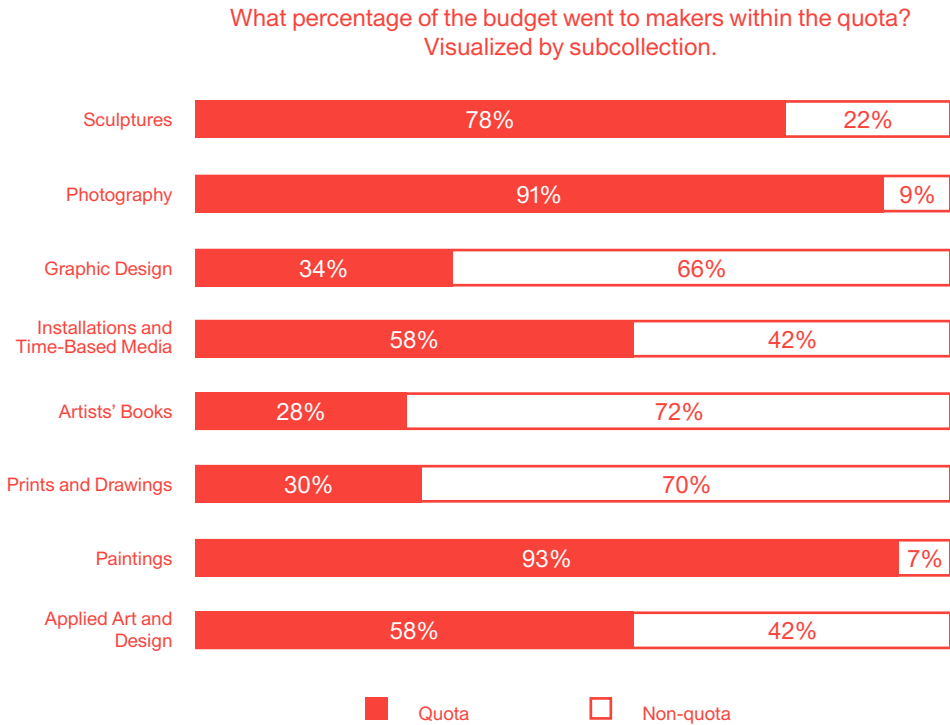
- Sculptures
- Photography
- Graphic Design
- Installations and Time-Based Media
- Artists' Books
- Prints and Drawings
- Paintings
- Applied Art and Design

Almost half of the total budget in 2021–2025 was spent on the Paintings subcollection. Other subcollections on which a large portion of the acquisitions budget was spent are Sculptures and Installations and Time-Based Media.

Distribution per subcollection of acquisitions in 2021–2025



Within the various subcollections, the extent to which purchases fall within the quota varies greatly.



In the Sculptures, Photography, and Paintings subcollections, the quota has been met by a wide margin. In other subcollections, such as Graphic Design, Artists' Books, and Prints and Drawings, the proportion of purchases within the quota is significantly lower.

CONCENTRATIONS IN THE ACQUISITIONS BUDGET

To gain insight into the degree of concentration of the acquisitions budget, the makers were divided into three groups: the top 10 percent (i.e. 19 makers⁶) with the highest total purchase value over the period 2021-2025, the bottom 10 percent (i.e. 19 makers) with the lowest total purchase value in the period 2021-2025, and the middle 80 percent. The top 10 percent shows the extent to which the budget is concentrated among a small group of makers with the highest purchase value. The bottom 10 percent comprises the makers with the lowest purchase value. This includes work in the Applied Arts and Design, Artists' Books and Graphic Design collections. The middle 80 percent provides insight into the distribution within the majority of makers, without extreme outliers determining the overall picture. By ignoring the largest and smallest outliers, a clearer picture emerges regarding the distribution among the majority of makers.

To what extent is the acquisitions budget concentrated on a small group of makers?



⁶ Of these nineteen makers, only work by Miriam Cahn and Rashid Johnson was purchased in multiple years.

The following is notable:

- The budget is heavily concentrated among a small group of makers: the top 10 percent (19 makers)⁷ received 67 percent of the total purchasing budget, while the middle 80 percent received 33 percent altogether. The bottom 10 percent received 0.1 percent of the budget.
- Within the top 10 percent, the budget is clearly concentrated among makers born in Western Europe or North America, while in the middle 80 percent, the budget is divided almost equally between makers born within and outside these regions.
- In the top 10 percent, the United States is by far the most represented country in which artists are active. In the middle 80 percent, most artists live and work in the Netherlands.
- Within the top 10 percent, a small group of male makers received a large share of the budget: together, five men received 23 percent of the total purchasing budget in 2021–2025.

7 These are, in alphabetical order: Igshaan Adams, Lucas Arruda, Miriam Cahn, Myrlande Constant, Simone Fattal, Ellen Gallagher, Nan Goldin, Lynn Herschman Leeson, Hannah Höch, Claudy Jongstra, Isaac Julien, patricia kaersenhout, Corita Kent, Rashid Johnson, Ana Lupaş, Ana Mendieta, Antonio Obá, Christina Quarles and Tschabalala Self.

KEY FINDINGS

Data about the purchases from 2021–2025 shows the following:

- The quota has been met by a wide margin each year.
- The quota was primarily met through large acquisitions of works by BIPOC makers born in Western Europe or North America, while the group of makers covered by the quota is broader and more diverse.
- Of the makers born outside Western Europe and North America, a large portion are active in these regions. A significant portion of these makers are therefore strongly anchored in the art landscape of Western Europe and/or North America.
- More than half of the budget went toward female makers, and the average purchase amount is also higher for women than for men.
- The budget is heavily concentrated on BIPOC men aged 35–64 and on older or deceased female makers outside the quota.
- Young makers who fall under the quota are much better represented than young makers outside the quota.
- Subcollections differ greatly in the extent to which the quota is met.
- The acquisitions budget is extremely concentrated: a small upper portion received two-thirds of the total budget. Furthermore, one-fifth of the total purchasing budget in 2021–2025 went toward just five mid-career male makers who fall under the quota.
- The quota is bolstered by a few major acquisitions of renowned makers, but the analysis of the middle 80 percent shows that the quota has been met even without these outliers.

BEHIND THE DATA

A conversation with Rein Wolfs, Leontine Coelewij and Amanda Pinatih

By Emma Harjadi Herman and Hannah Sweering

WHY THIS QUOTA?

HANNAH SWEERING The quota has been more than adequately met. Of the amount spent on purchases over the past five years, 79% went to makers who fall under the quota. Firstly, why was this quota implemented at all?

REIN WOLFS Toward the end of 2019, I joined as director and entered an organization that was intensely occupied with questions like: How can we become polyvocal? How can we become a better representation of the world? How do we shed the label that we are almost exclusively a museum for Western European and North American art? Similar questions were posed at many museums, both in the Netherlands and internationally. My first task at the museum was to write a new multi-year strategy for the period 2021–2024. We formulated this quota in that framework at the time. Back then, we asked ourselves whether we also wanted to introduce a quota with respect to the representation of female makers. Ultimately, we decided to first focus on ethno-racial diversity. We pay attention to gender as well, of course, but we didn't want to attach a quota to that, because the two goals might otherwise impede each other. This research now shows that those two areas of focus have actually gone hand in hand quite well.

HS What has the quota effectuated at the museum?

RW The museum looks different. The evolution we have undergone is most visible in the collection display. Very different works than before can clearly be seen in the galleries. And at the same time, those works that appeared earlier remain on display, too. But now they are counterbalanced by works from makers who were previously less on our radar at this museum.

The artistic team has changed significantly as well. I felt it was important to implement that new way of thinking with a staff that's also composed differently. In particular the artistic staff and the management team, because they are ultimately the two guiding bodies in a museum like this. We soon realized it's a myth that diversity and quality impede each other. This idea was immediately disproven by the "acquisitions" that we have also been able to make in the domain of personnel. The importance of looking at the art world through different eyes is paramount.

HS A quota is a concrete target, not an abstract intention. Over the past five years, almost 80% of the budget has gone toward work by makers who are within the quota. Could you now say that the goal is achieved?

RW I think the ultimate goal lies further, but we've met the short- and medium-term objectives. We've been able to make a difference, and we've been able to make it clear that there is a way. I assume the quota has also become part of the museum's DNA. And I can't imagine a reverse course being followed.

BIPOC MAKERS FROM WESTERN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

HS The quota focuses on two components: on the one hand, makers who were born outside Western Europe and North America, and on the other, makers who identify as Black, of color, and/or as members of an ethnic minority. What emerged from our analysis is that the quota was largely met by purchases from BIPOC makers originating from Western Europe or

North America. Are you satisfied with the broader scope that's been added in recent years?

RW Overall, I'm satisfied with the figures we have achieved and how the collection display has taken on a different appearance. I had secretly hoped we would have found even more work by makers outside Western Europe and North America, but it turns out that the art market, art education, and the art world are still heavily concentrated in the Western world.

LEONTINE COELEWIJ Many young makers gravitate to North America or Western Europe, simply because of the good options for further education.

AMANDA PINATIH The infrastructure is here.

LC After all, it's much easier to connect with existing networks.

RW The exceptions to that rule do send a strong signal. An artist like El Anatsui, for instance, makes a very conscious choice to continue working in the part of the world he comes from. The same goes for Igshaan Adams and Ibrahim Mahama.

AP The three makers you mention also all have a very collective practice. Which is why it's so important they continue operating in their local context. The community they wish to support is there. You also see makers who do both. Xavier Robles de Medina, for one, works in both Berlin and Paramaribo.

In addition, the opportunities the artistic staff has to meet artists are influential as well. Of course we go to the Venice Biennale, which is a very Western European institution, even though what is shown there has certainly shifted in recent years. So it is about resources and what we can investigate ourselves.

EMMA HARJADI HERMAN How do such resources guide your work as a curator?

AP It determines what your options are. Where can you go? But also, who do you know and in which networks are you active? What ways are there to expand those networks, get to know other people? Personally, I don't look so much at geographical regions, but rather overarching themes. Focusing on just one country is less interesting to me. For example, for me, this revolves around the idea of in-betweenness. I investigate what kind of a space that is, and then in particular as a place for radical creation and change. It is exactly in such an in-between area where people can encounter one another. Then it's not just about Suriname or Indonesia, for instance, but rather about

makers with different backgrounds and overlapping identities. Where do they find each other? That can be physically, but also on a conceptual level.

BLIND SPOTS

EHH How can you, as an individual curator or as an institution, map out your own blind spots?

AP That's of course rather difficult, because you don't know what your blind spots are until something or someone makes you aware of them. As a curator you have to investigate your own blind spots, while as an institution you can perform this research on a somewhat larger scale, like the analysis we're discussing today. But plenty of feedback comes our way from the outside, such as activists, scientists, and artists who inform us about one thing or another. In 2020, for example, when the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum following the murder of George Floyd, people also looked at how the cultural sector and the Stedelijk would take action. The quota received significant support from staff at the time, as a way to address the institutional blind spot regarding racism.

RW At the time, in fact, we were also in a situation where a lot was shifting. Within the International Council of Museums (ICOM), there was vehement discussion about what a museum in the twenty-first century should actually be. A new definition was introduced, in which museums were portrayed as discursive institutions: as institutions situated at the heart of society and thus also a reflection of it. All of us in the museum world had a strong feeling that museums can also play a role in the field of activism. Later, that was amended slightly, because we noticed that an assertively activist stance can be at odds with our ambition as an institution to be a polyvocal space.

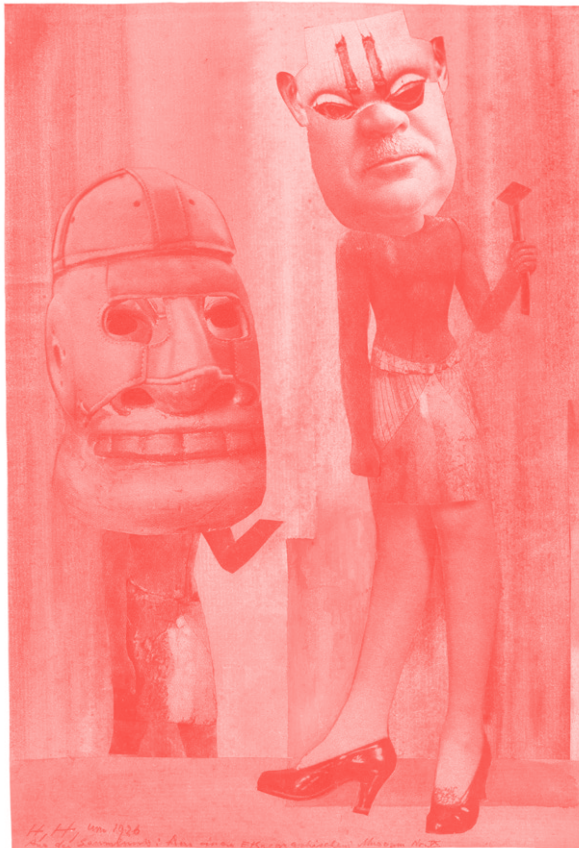
I would like to add one thing. There are larger institutions, such as Tate, that establish committees which operate in various parts of the world. We don't have the resources for that. So what we did is appoint two curators-at-large. The help we got from Yvette Mutumba, for example in identifying the museum's blind spots, was enormous. It was important to get an outside perspective on the language we use in the museum. And the way we are positioned as a museum in the world in the first place.



↑ Igshaan Adams, *Nama Stap*, 2023, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Gallery view *Tomorrow is a Different Day. Collection 1980 – Now*. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

→ Sandra Mujinga, *LACK #2044*, 2022, © Sandra Mujinga, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Acquired with support from the Mondriaan Fund





↑ Nan Goldin, *Untitled*, 1982, from the series *Memory Lost*, 2019-2021, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, © Nan Goldin

← Hannah Höch, *Aus der Sammlung: Aus einem ethnografischen Museum Nr. IX*, ca. 1929, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Acquired with the support of the Rembrandt Association (thanks in part to its Helze Fund) and the Mondriaan Fund

THE MUSEUM'S ROLE

HS Despite having a quota and the ambition as a museum to position yourself at the center of the world, there are always perspectives and knowledge systems that are overlooked. Really, the question becomes: Is that a problem? How broad should and does the Stedelijk want its representation to be?

RW We're not an encyclopedic museum, of course. We can't be that, and don't want to be.

LC The purchases we can make are very limited. The existing collection is an important benchmark in this regard. I'm responsible for the period from 1960 to 1990. I find it quite interesting to consider questions such as: What was purchased at the time? What is missing? What are key lines or clusters? What works are there, for instance in abstract painting or performance art, that allow us to look at that time in a different way? These include, to name a few, works by Ana Mendieta, Ana Lupaş, or Nan Hoover. As far as I'm concerned, the museum as it exists, with our own unique DNA and with unique clusters in the collection, is an important starting point for answering the question: Does it fit us? And the Stedelijk's collection doesn't need to include everything—that's impossible.

AP Every two years we draft a collection plan where we indicate the direction we want to go. In it, we make specific choices about what we wish to collect. Then, when you go looking in the wider world, it's like putting on glasses for that collection policy.

LC If we make a proposal for a purchase, we also need to always justify how we intend to use it. What role will this work have, for example in the collection display?

RW We don't collect just for the sake of it. We collect to show it.

OLDER FEMALE MAKERS

EHH One thing that stood out in the analysis is that a large number of works have been purchased for hefty sums from older female makers and female makers who are no longer living. The Guerrilla Girls have said about this that one of the advantages of being a female artist is “Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty.”

LC I feel that’s quite cynical, and not entirely true if we’re looking at our collection. A lot of what we purchase is by important female artists who are quite a bit younger. I’m thinking of Magali Reus, Sandra Mujinga, and Nora Turato, to name a few.

RW And we’ve been doing that for a long time.

AP Sheila Hicks, for example, we started collecting early on.

LC Another example is Nan Goldin. I believe she was somewhere in her thirties when we made our first purchase from her. And we acquired another important work of hers when we recently presented her solo exhibition. On the other hand, especially when it comes to the period under my charge, there are of course artists that we missed, or from whom we did not purchase anything at the time. The eighties were a different era, after all.

Back then, Liesbeth Brandt Corstius was director of Museum Arnhem. She set a quota: 50% of the budget went to female artists. And this was openly scorned: “Oh, over there in Arnhem, Ms. Brandt Corstius buys 50% women and 50% art.” That’s how it was seen at the time. The Stedelijk belittled quotas and art by women, too. Because of that, a great deal is still missing. Naturally, you can never buy everything you think is important. Nevertheless, over the past few years we have been able to make a few acquisitions that allowed us to address gaps in the 20th-century collection like Corita Kent, Hannah Höch, and the installation by Ana Lupaş. We also agreed to occasionally make substantial purchases. So as not to scatter the purchasing budget too widely, but really go for a number of very significant and meaningful pieces.

RW Substantial sometimes means large in size, too. We deliberately purchased large-format works on occasion. That was important, we felt, because this museum has gained such fame through those large canvases by male North American painters from the sixties and seventies. For a long time, “big” was the measure of things here at the Stedelijk Museum. We wanted

to align with that, on the one hand, and at the same time be able to make a difference. We purchased a very large work from El Anatsui then, and from patricia kaersenhout, and very recently also from Ibrahim Mahama. Sometimes an artwork needs to be sizable to hold its own next to those other large works.

“SUPERSTAR EFFECT”

HS We also clearly see your commitment to substantial acquisitions reflected in our analysis: Nearly 70% of the budget went to 10% of the makers acquired over the past five years. This tracks with a marketing phenomenon known as the “superstar effect.” Which is to say, a small pool of artists get all the major exhibitions and their work is purchased for enormous sums, while the vast majority of makers lag behind and earn little. What’s your take on that?

RW With visual art we are situated centrally in a market: We deal with economic goods that are traded. That’s the big difference compared to other art disciplines. As soon as a visual artist is noticed, you see the market respond. Then things can move very quickly. And so for public museums such as the Stedelijk, opportunities for buying something at art fairs like Art Basel are limited.

LC Private collectors and private museums often have more money and can therefore act faster and sometimes buy something on the spot. That’s difficult for us.

HS The fact remains, spending a huge amount on one artist means that fewer works by other makers can be purchased.

RW That is partly true. We usually cover only a small portion, and sometimes none at all, of the enormous sums required for a work by Rashid Johnson, for example, from our own budget. Purchasing such a work often means a lengthy search for private investors and funds who want to help us make it possible. That could easily take a year. Those contributions are then earmarked for that specific acquisition. Sometimes it involves a million euros or more for a single work.

Picture this: In 2025 we had 100,000 euros in our own acquisitions budget. Ultimately, we were able to make acquisitions worth three million euros. The vast majority of this was therefore made possible by gifts earmarked for purchases. An example is the four-panel painting by Ellen Gallagher that we acquired with the help of contributions from the Mondriaan Fund, Vereniging Rembrandt, and various private benefactors. Or the work by Christina Quarles, entirely financed by a private benefactor. Another path we sometimes take to realize very large acquisitions is purchasing them together with other museums, like we did with Wael Shawky.

What happens is that for high-profile works, which carry a greater financial value, it's easier to find funding through foundations and other donors than for smaller works. With our own budget, we tend to focus more on young makers and up-and-coming talent.

AP By placing that emerging talent alongside those superstars within the museum, it eventually makes them superstars too. I think that's an interesting evolution.

RW But the difference in the price paid for a film by Wael Shawky or a film installation by Hiwa K is very large, of course. That's easily a factor of ten or more.

UNDERREPRESENTATION

EHH One group that's very obviously underrepresented in the purchases over the past few years is young white men. What are your views on this?

AP This again goes back to the collection plan we drew up. In it, we formulated a number of clear thematic lines to which we, as curators, consciously adhere. This means that, in practice, you quickly arrive at the choices that have now been made. Looking at themes such as in-betweenness or collective practice, you see that we chose to acquire makers who align most strongly with them.

RW Still, I was actually shocked by how much it deviates. We don't want to exclude young white male makers.

AP We don't want to exclude anyone.



↑ Ana Lupaș, *Coats to Borrow*, 1989, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photo: Peter Tijhuis

↓ El Anatsui, *In the World But Don't Know the World*, 2009, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and Kunstmuseum Bern. Acquired with support of the Rembrandt Association (thanks in part to its Titus Fonds, its Themafonds Naoorlogse en Hedendaagse kunst, its Van Rijn Fonds and its Coleminks Fonds), the Mondriaan Fund, the BankGiro Loterij and Stiftung GegenwART, with special thanks to the SIGG COLLECTION @ El Anatsui. Photo: Peter Tijhuis





← Rashid Johnson, *Standing Soul Sculpture "Care Free"*, 2024, © Rashid Johnson
Photo: Walla Walla Foundry, courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, acquired with support of Deepak and Reena Agrawal and Dominic Stas and Dominique Veys via the Stedelijk Museum Fonds

↓ Ellen Gallagher, *Negroes Battling in a Cave*, 2016, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, acquired with support from the Mondriaan Fund, the Rembrandt Association (with contributions from its Titus Fund, Fabritius Fund, and Coleminks Fund), and benefactors of the Stedelijk Museum Fonds, Glenstone Foundation, Adriaan Mol and Dymf Erens. © Ellen Gallagher. Photo: Peter Tjhuis



EHH The quota has been met for the past five years, but if we look closely at the subcollections, clear differences across disciplines emerge. As in, the quota was easily reached in the Paintings and Photography subcollections, but not in Industrial Design. Why would that be?

AP It's often said that industrial design is still a white male world. That's partly true, but if you take a look at the academies, there's a lot changing. At the same time, it's also a matter of research and the resources at your disposal: What do you focus on? Who gets the attention? And how do you define the field? What do we actually understand as being industrial design, and to what extent are we keeping pace with the changes happening in that field?

EHH What could be the next step in that respect? What would you as a team want for the coming period?

RW Ideally we would no longer need any quota. That we get to a point where this attitude permeates everything we do, across all disciplines. A year and a half ago, we considered whether we should keep the quota for the new multi-year strategic plan as well. At first I thought we wouldn't need it anymore. Nevertheless, we've chosen to continue adhering to the quota through this policy period, to ensure we don't regress. We wish to continue on this path.

IN-KIND DONATIONS

EHH The Stedelijk always enjoys receiving many in-kind donations—at least 400 works over the past five years. The donations are outside the scope of this analysis, but we're still curious: What is your view on the diversity of voices when it comes to those in-kind donations?

LC I think the composition of artists is changing there, too. We're receiving an increasing number of donations from areas that we designated as priorities for our policy. With the new collection display, I've been able to allow several of those donations to play a prominent role. Personally, I think that's really great. Then, of course, I think of the Helen Frankenthaler piece. It's truly a very

significant, large donation, around which I formed an entire gallery. But I'm also thinking of smaller donations, for example the work of Bhupen Khakhar and Raja Babu Sharma, very interesting artists from India from the seventies and eighties. We now also have a really beautiful sculpture by Norva Sling on display. These may not be very sizable or spectacular donations, but they are special works that allow us to invoke slightly different accents and tell different stories in a collection display.

RW It's also noticeable in larger donations, like the works by Julie Mehretu or Rashid Johnson. You can see that the course we've set is being recognized. We encounter people who are dealing with the same themes. They feel it's a good fit, placing a work with us. We also approach people and know how to get them enthusiastic about helping us achieve precisely those ambitions through in-kind donations.

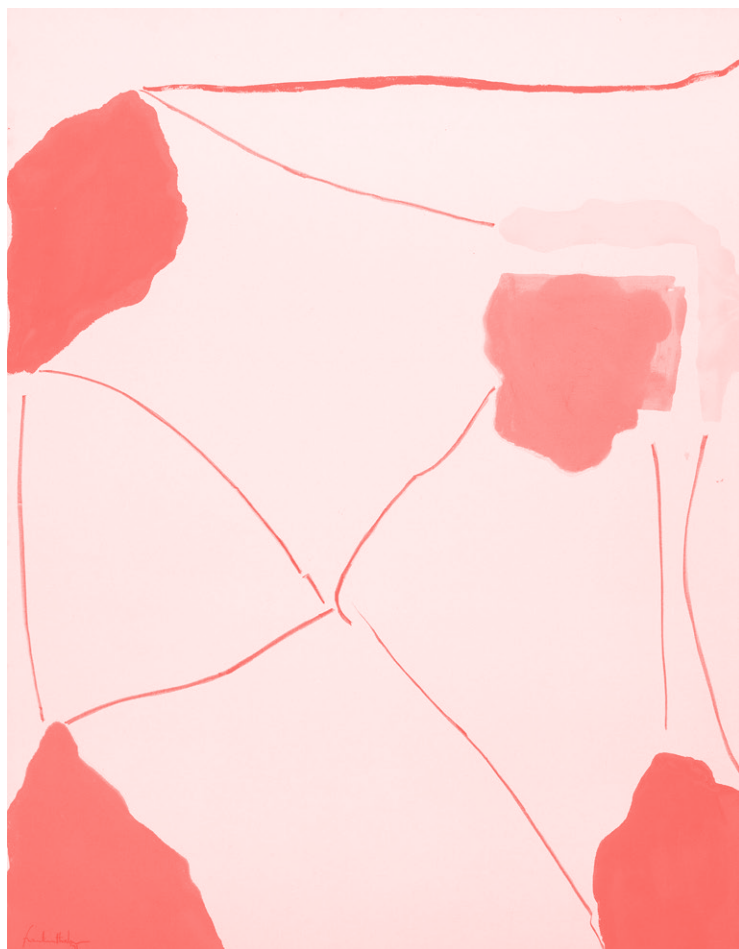
AP We are increasingly focusing on donations. And indeed, the museum has changed, and people can see that from the outside. They know by now where our interests lie. Consider, for instance, the work by Tschabalala Self. The donor came to us in that case, and it fits perfectly in our strategy. Self is an important young maker, and her work is already quite costly, so for us a donation like that is more than welcome.

HS How does the donation process work, and how does the collection policy factor into it?

LC We receive numerous offers. Almost every day, I get messages like: "I still have a very beautiful piece hanging," or "My aunt has something on the wall. Would you like to have this?" It demonstrates a huge commitment to the museum and a love for art. And yet we have to reject most offers, because we already know we won't be able to show them.

AP As with purchases, every donation is assessed according to the collection policy. If a work doesn't fit, then it's not accepted.

RW You have donations that come along, and you have donations that you work toward. In the latter category, we are consciously focused on representation and polyvocality. Among the gifts we receive are works by artists who do not fall within our quota, but who are nevertheless important to our collection, for example due to their historical significance. Collecting is also hunting, isn't it?



↑ Wael Shawky, *Drama 1882*, 2024, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg. Joint acquisition by Stedelijk, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, with support of the VriendenLoterij and the Mondriaan Fund

← Helen Frankenthaler, *Hommage à H.M.*, 1971, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Gift Helen Frankenthaler Foundation



↑ Right:
Julie Mehretu,
TRANSpaintings, 2023,
frame: Nairy Baghramian,
collection Stedelijk
Museum Amsterdam.
*Gallery view Tomorrow
is a Different Day.*
Collection 1980 – Now.
Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

← Tschabalala Self,
Baton Rouge, 2023,
collection Stedelijk
Museum Amsterdam,
©Tschabalala Self

LC There you have it, we are indeed hunters and gatherers. Besides the new works we bring in, it's also about what is hidden in what we already had—discovering works in the collection that sometimes haven't been seen for decades. We then get them restored and give them a place in the exhibition hall. Works like these entered the collection at some point and haven't been looked at in a very long time. I think it's wonderful to show that.

DEFINITIVE ART HISTORY

HS So your changing perspective makes these forgotten works visible again?

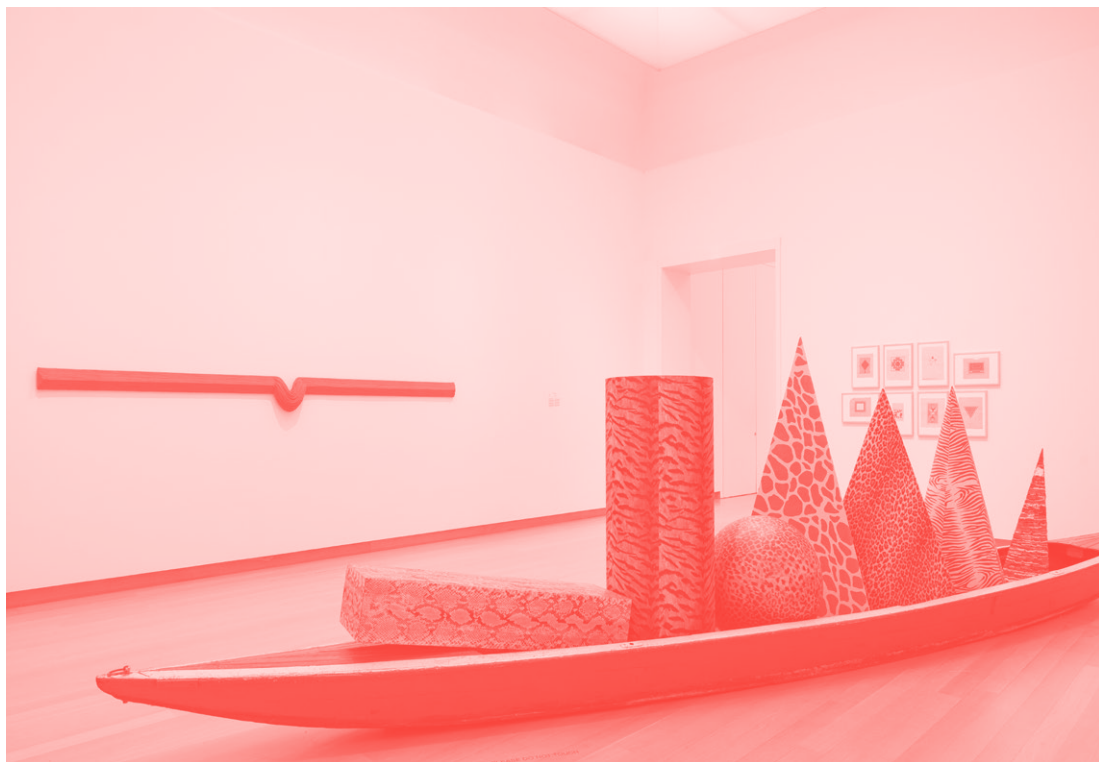
LC Without question. Like female makers from the sixties, seventies, and eighties: Mary Bauermeister, Hetty Huisman, Naomi Kobayashi. We've now brought them out and shown them.

RW With the changing strategy, the reception of history changes along with it.

LC A big change for me is also in the way we present the collection. In the past, it felt like we were very visibly presenting "the" history of art: a parade of highlights, famous pieces that were more or less the same kind of artworks as thirty years earlier. A succession of styles: impressionism, expressionism, pop art, you name it. Now, we're looking more at works that carry a social weight and tie in with current events. In that sense, we are handling the collection differently. We look at what we need and which elements we want to utilize to tell stories.

RW When I studied art history, some forty years ago, the entire cultural-philosophical view of history began to shift under the force of postmodernism. Now that a few decades have passed, it has become much more common to tell all kinds of different stories in parallel. We view polyvocality as a collection of various stories that can and must be told in different places, at different times, to different people with different backgrounds. We still keep in mind traditional, linear art history, but through the way we expand and display the collection, we try to offer a counterpoint to it and bring about a new balance. A vast crossroads of possibilities opens up when you look at art and art history in this way.

But the quality remains high, of course. Because naturally we are about quality, too.



↑ Installation view
 'Everyday, Someday,
 and Other Stories.
 Collection 1950 – 1980'.
 Fltr: Naomi Kobayashi,
Ito wa ito, 1980; Claudio
 Parmiggiani, *Zoo
 Geometrico*, 1969; and
 a series of framed works
 on paper by Raja Babu
 Sharma, 1985-1995,
 collection Stedelijk
 Museum Amsterdam.
 Photo: Peter Tijhuis

→ Installation
 view 'Tomorrow is a
 Different Day. Collectie
 1980 – Now'. Fltr:
 Anthony Cudahy,
*Eveningdawn (Reverse
 Pareidoliac Figure)*,
 2022; Lydia Ourahmane,
*21 Boulevard Mustapha
 Benboulaid*, 2021;
 and Xavier Robles de
 Medina, *Aaliyah. Queen
 of the Damned. Directed
 by Michael Rymer*,
Warner Bros. Pictures,
 2002, 2023/2024;
 collection Stedelijk
 Museum Amsterdam.
 Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij



WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

EMMA HARJADI HERMAN has worked at the Stedelijk since 2020 as education and inclusion manager. Prior to this, she worked at Mama Cash, a fund for feminist activism, for the Dutch government in Brussels and The Hague. Emma studied political science at Sciences Po Paris and Université d'Abomey-Calavi in Benin, and graduated with honors from the University of Amsterdam.

HANNAH SWEERING is a researcher and policy advisor who focuses on equity within institutions and social systems. She recently led a study for the Boekman Foundation on the position of female visual artists in the Netherlands. Hannah obtained a master's degree in international relations from Johns Hopkins University in Bologna and a master's degree in political economy from Leiden University. She currently works between Accra and Amsterdam.

REIN WOLFS has been the director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam since December 2019. After studying at the University of Amsterdam, he worked as the first director of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich and as head of presentations at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, after which he moved to Germany, where he led the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel from 2008 and became Director of the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn in 2013. In 2003, he was the curator of the Dutch Pavilion during the Venice Biennale. At the Stedelijk Museum, he (co-)initiated many exhibitions, including Hito Steyerl, Ulay, Remy Jungerman, Anne Imhof,

Felix de Rooy, Nan Goldin, Marina Abramović, Pamela Rosenkranz, Ellen Gallagher, Miriam Cahn, and Danh Vo.

LEONTINE COELEWIJ is an art historian and curator of modern and contemporary art at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Her recent exhibitions include *Marlene Dumas – The Image as Burden* (2014, Stedelijk Museum, and touring Tate Modern, London, and Fondation Beyeler, Basel/Riehen), *Seth Siegelaub: Beyond Conceptual Art* (2016), *Nam June Paik: The Future is Now* (2020), *Bruce Nauman* (2021, in collaboration with Tate Modern, London), *Yto Barrada* (2022–2023), *Ana Lupas – On This Side of the River Elbe* (2024), and *Yayoi Kusama* (2026, in collaboration with Fondation Beyeler/Basel and Museum Ludwig/Cologne). Next to this, she is responsible for the permanent display of the Stedelijk Museum collection 1950–1980, *Everyday, Someday and Other Stories*, which opened in February 2022. Her specific areas of interest include overlooked perspectives on late modernism, local countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s, performance history, and feminism.

MADE NGURAH AMANDA PINATIH is an art historian, curator, and PhD candidate, and works as a curator of design and contemporary art at the Stedelijk. In her work, she develops experimental ways to transfer knowledge and investigates topics involving social, political, (de) colonial, and ecological issues. She has (co-)curated various exhibitions such as *Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art* and *When Things Are*

Beings, and was also independent curator of the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale Architecture 2025. As a PhD candidate, she conducts research into Indonesian objects and how they acquire meaning regarding memory and connectedness within diasporas. In the process, she analyzes how contemporary artists activate these objects to commemorate and reinterpret their state of “in-betweenness.” Pinatih is also a cofounder of Design Museum Dharavi in the Dharavi district of Mumbai.

S(TEDELIJK)ZINE

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Editor-in-Chief
Charl Landvreugd

Authors
Emma Harjadi Herman,
Hannah Sweering

With contributions by
Rein Wolfs, Leontine Coelewijn, Amanda
Pinatih

Translation
Dutton Hauhart

Design
Eva Heisterkamp (series concept)
Janna Meeus (issue)

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stedelijkstudies@stedelijk.nl

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