FROM COLLECTION TO CONNECTION, REVISITED

Re-Use, Infrastructure and Innovation in Cultural Heritage Information & Data at the Rijksmuseum

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Chief Librarian Rijksmuseum Research Library

KULTURPOOL / STAKEHOLDER FORUM – 05/05/2025

RIJKS MUSEUM

National Museum of Art and History from The Netherlands

Mission : Connect people, art and history

RIJKS MUSEUM

1 mio collection objects / 0,5 mio library volumes / ~3 km archives & documentation

2.7 mio annual museum visitors on-site / 8.2 mio website / 77 mio socials (2023)

State-funded public collection since 1800
Partially privatized in 1995

Build in 1885 by Pierre Cuypers / Closed for 10 years during renovation 2003-2013

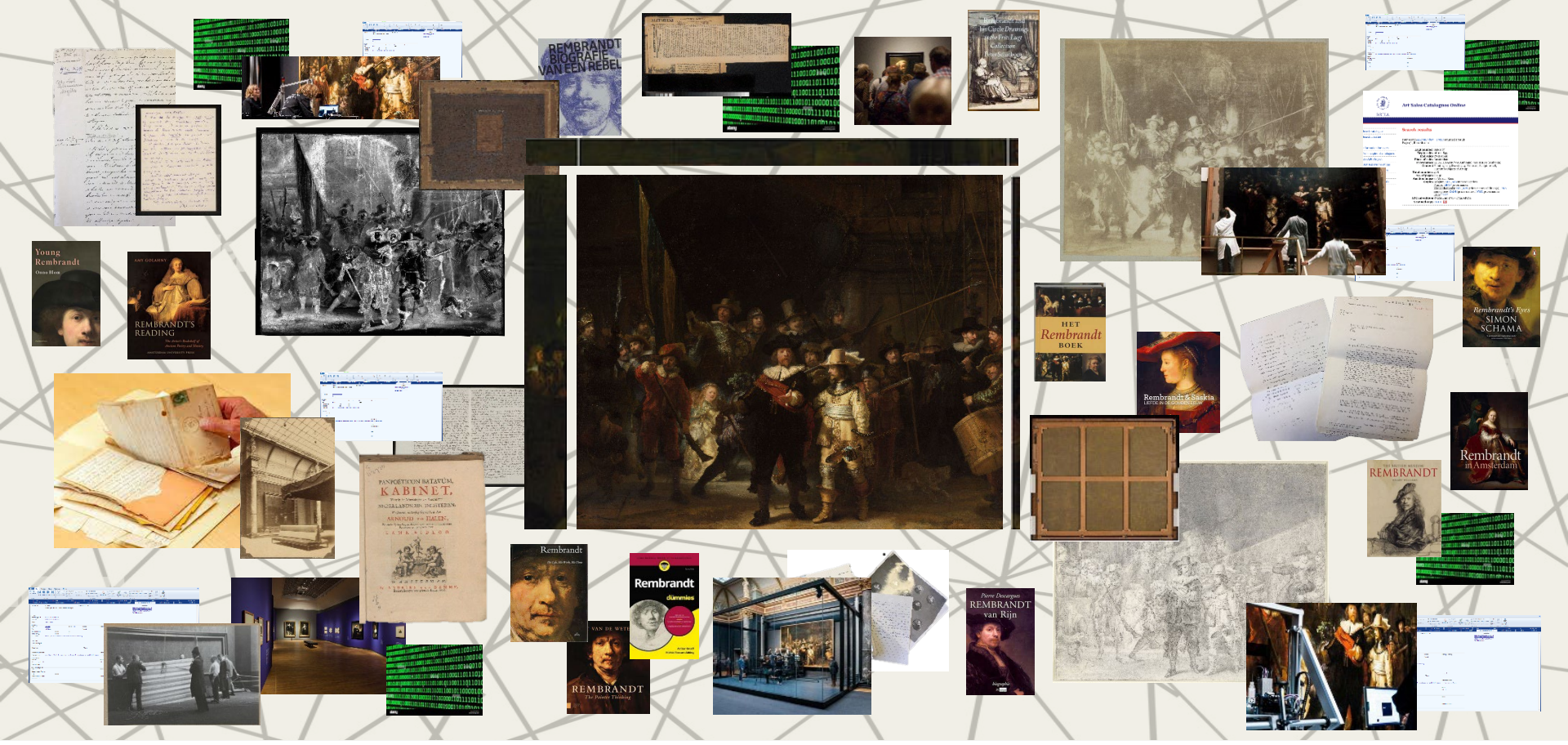
+/- 900 staff

FACTS & FIGURES

RIJKS MUSEUM

Slice from The Nightwatch by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1642 - https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200107928

RIJKS MUSEUM



RIJKS MUSEUM

A holistic approach opens up so many new opportunities & connections.

Basis is an integrated vision on Libraries, Archives, Museums (LAM's).

Cross-collection research and search is the ultimate ideal

which requires openness & standardisation

in a single institution, but preferably in many.

It is clear that - if electronic sources of information are to be effectively managed for future access by historians and others – **differences between libraries, archives and museums will largely have to disappear** and their different philosophies, functions, and techniques will be integrated in ways that are as yet unclear.'

W. Boyd Rayward (1998)

Digital technology is breaking down the silos between the cultural sectors.

By the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Rt Hon. Matt Hancock

Culture is Digital report (2018) - UK

How did this ideal
drive change
in the Rijksmuseum?

Knowledge needs to be shared

Taco Dibbits

General Director Rijksmuseum

Slice from **Allegory of the Sciences by** Gerard de Lairesse
https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200111830

CONTINUUM

RIJKS MUSEUM

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH SERVICES (2016-)

Responsible for all ***information and data*** about the collection and the organisation, digital ánd analogue

Rijksmuseum Research Library & institutional Archive lost their organisational independence

Extra responsabilities: Collection IT, digital collection strategy, collection data infrastructure, data services, research data, information & data policy

39 fte / 48 people (2025)

Digital Transformation Process @ the Rijksmuseum

RIJKS MUSEUM

1980 - 2013

Sloooow proces of gradual digitalisation,

unvoluntarily supported by unexpected situations,

coinciding with digital developments that were quickly adopted,

leading to systematic digital strategic development,

which is accelerating in both time and scope.

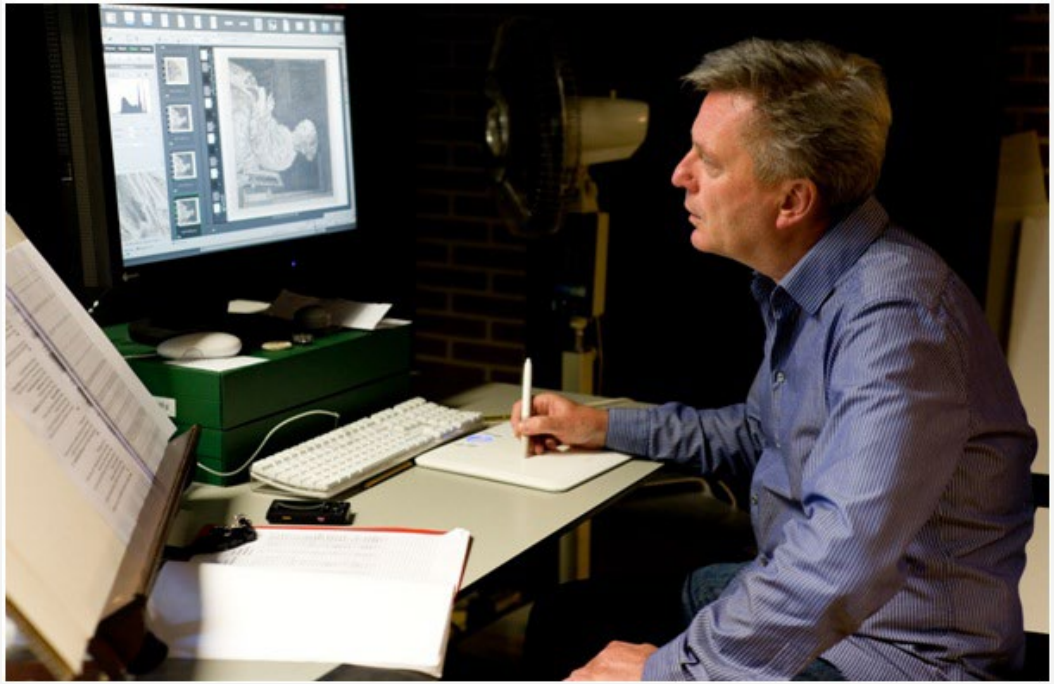
Geert-Jan Koot (2nd chief librarian)
with first modem in the museum (1989)

First automated library catalogue in Study Room (1990)
First online library catalogue (2002)

AUTOMATION & NETWORKING

RIJKS MUSEUM

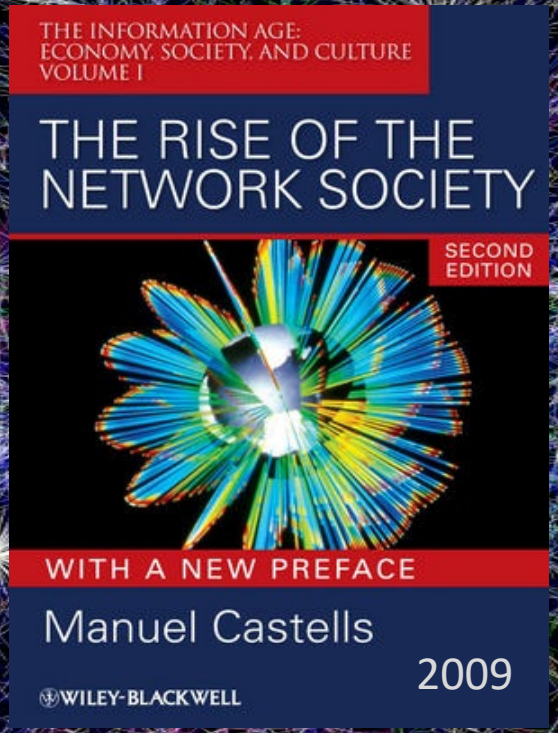
Museum closed for 10 year
because of renovatiosns 2003-2013

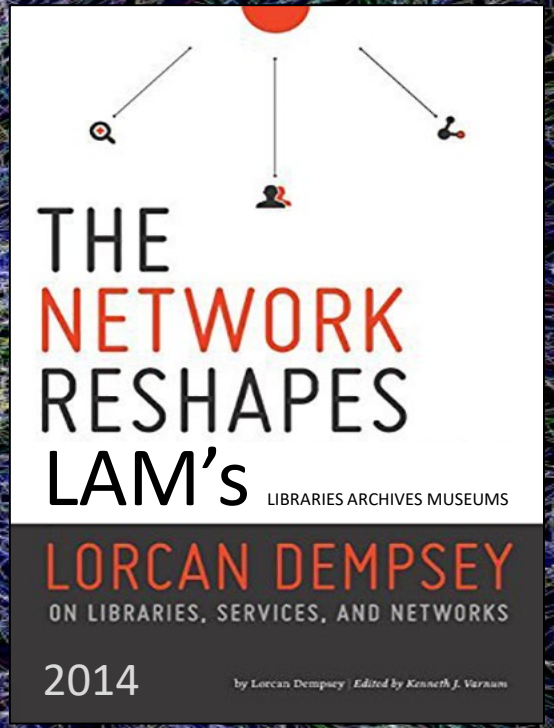


Start of large & systematic digitisation & registration projects (2003 –)

DIGITISATION & REGISTRATION

RIJKS MUSEUM





By The Opte Project - Originally from the English Wikipedia, CC BY 2.5, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1538544

DIGITAL TURN -> DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

RIJKS MUSEUM

2013

First version digital strategy (Web Team)

Launch of new website & new collection website RIJKSSTUDIO
plus a *de facto* open data collection policy with CC0 images & collection API

Digital openness linked with physical closedness / closeness

COLLECTION -> CONNECTION

(RE-)OPENING OF THE MUSEUM / THE COLLECTION (2013)

RIJKS MUSEUM

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn

RIJKS MUSEUM

Johannes Vermeer

RIJKS MUSEUM

Schilderijen

RIJKS MUSEUM

FIRST COLLECTION WEBSITE (2013)

RIJKS MUSEUM

Rijksmuseum

- Art belongs to everyone, our collection belongs to everyone
- → Connects people, art and history
- → Core values: simple, personal, authentic, quality, innovative

E-strategy

- → Bring collection close to the people (anywhere, anytime)
- → largest possible reach of the collection
- → The website should reflect successful trends. Rather than thinking solely in terms of the collection or technological possibilities, we must identify ways of reaching the public.
- → The website must be "lean and mean", like an app.
- → It must be possible to find and share information quickly and easily
- → Other platforms should be used where possible rather than building everything ourselves.
- → It must be possible to manage and present content regardless of device or screen resolution.

E-strategy RIJKS MUSEUM

‘SEAMLESS’ – Tim Sherratt

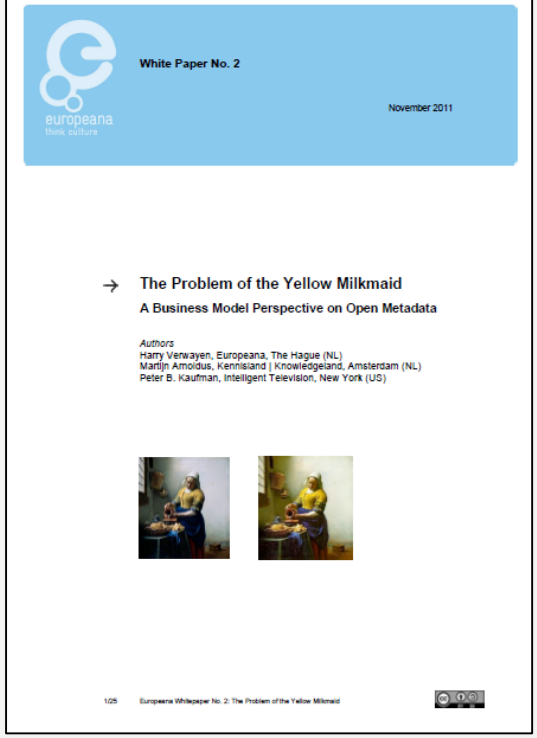
DIGITAL STRATEGY (2013 / 1st version)

RIJKS MUSEUM

Democratising the Rijksmuseum

Why did the Rijksmuseum make available their highest quality material without restrictions, and what are the results?

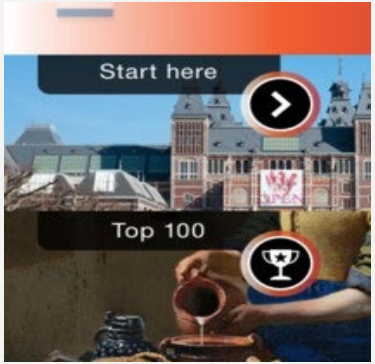
Joris Pekel, Europeana Foundation



Business cases for the open data policy of the Rijksmuseum (2011 and 2014) in close collobration with Europeana

ALIGNMENT WITH EUROPEANA

RIJKS MUSEUM



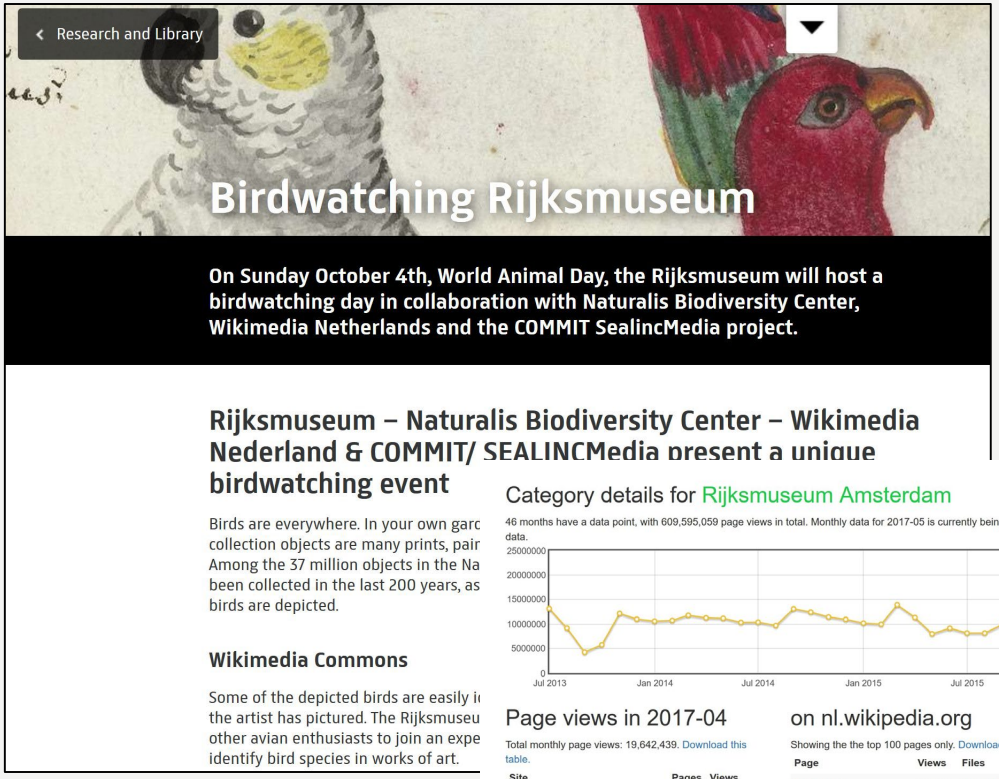
LONG TAIL

RIJKS MUSEUM

RIJKS STUDIO AWARD

LONG TAIL

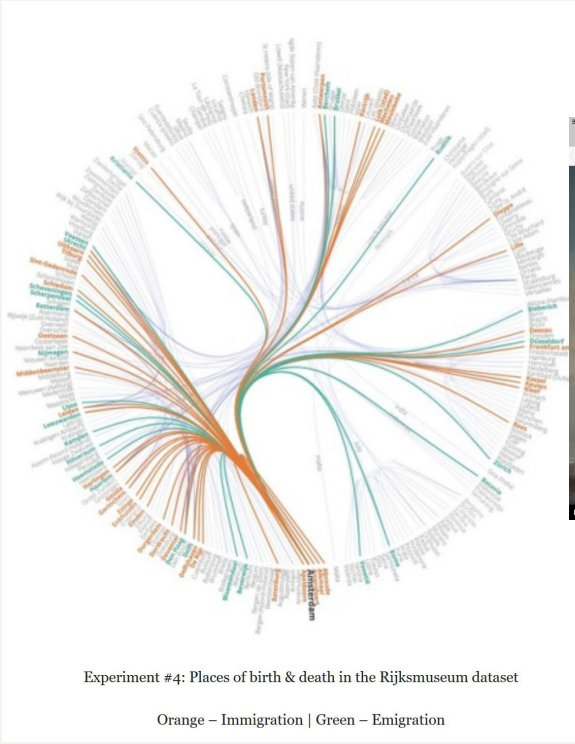
RIJKS MUSEUM



A lot of public crowd-sourcing (hackathons, edit-athons, …)

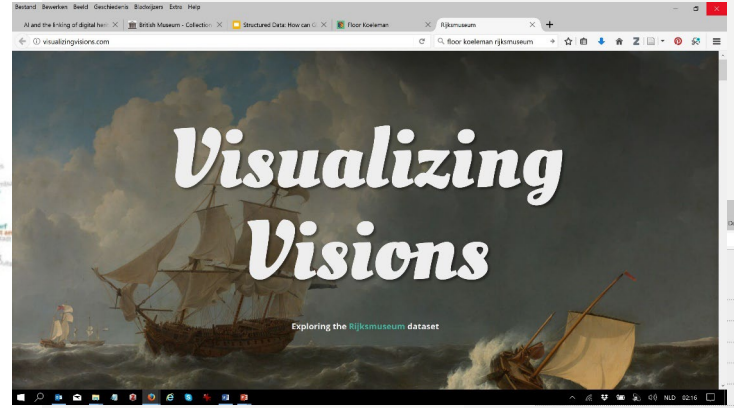
LONG TAIL

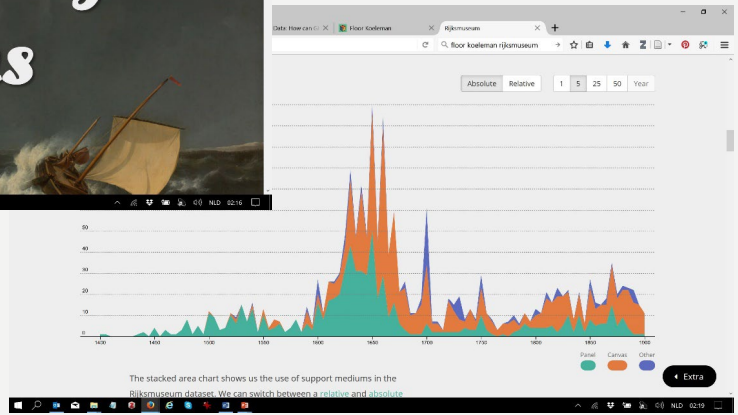
RIJKS MUSEUM



Experiment #4: Places of birth & death in the Rijksmuseum dataset

Orange – Immigration | Green – Emigration





Popular datasource for artistic & academic research

Floor Koeneman - http://visualizingvisions.com/

2018

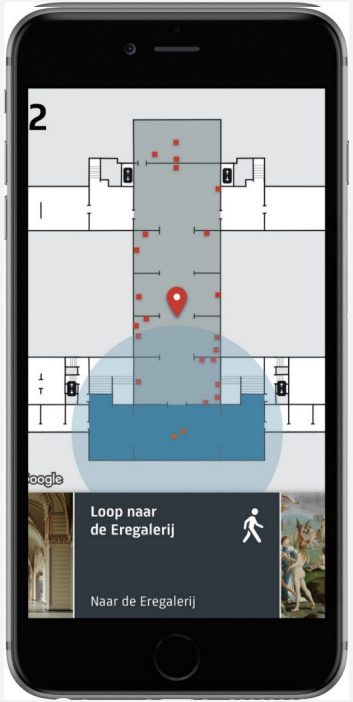
Second version digital strategy (Communication & Marketing)

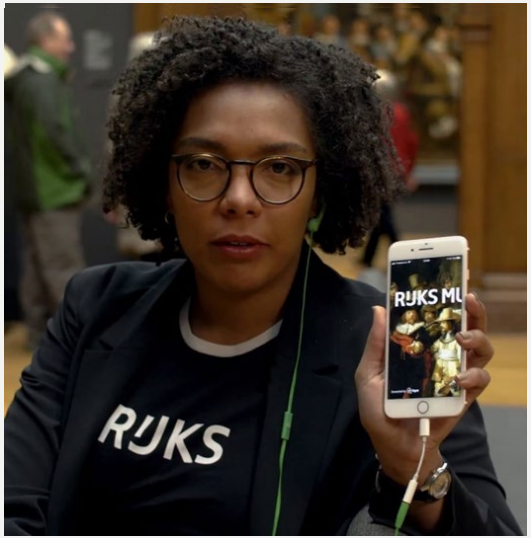
Linked to marketing, the rise of social media and the impact of the COVID pandemic

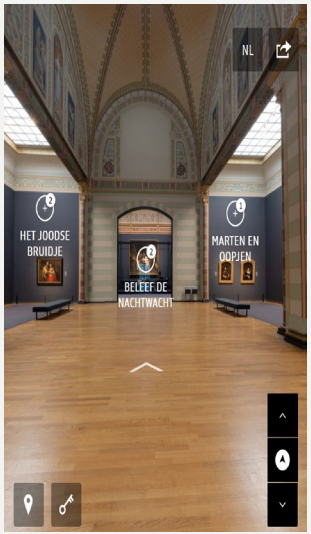
Launch of dedicated apps, stories platform, internal data analytics, …

DIGITAL STRATEGY (2018 / 2nd version)

RIJKS MUSEUM

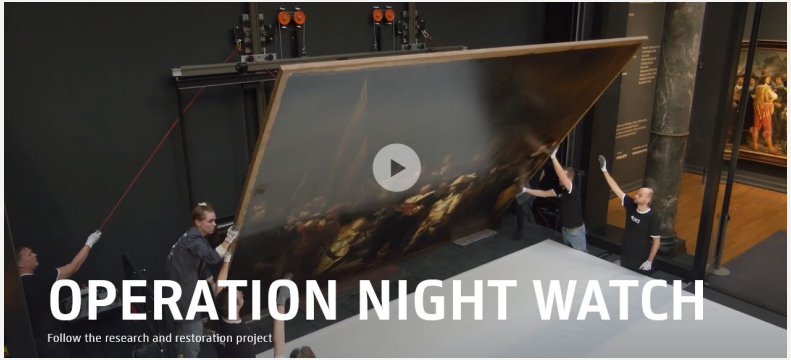


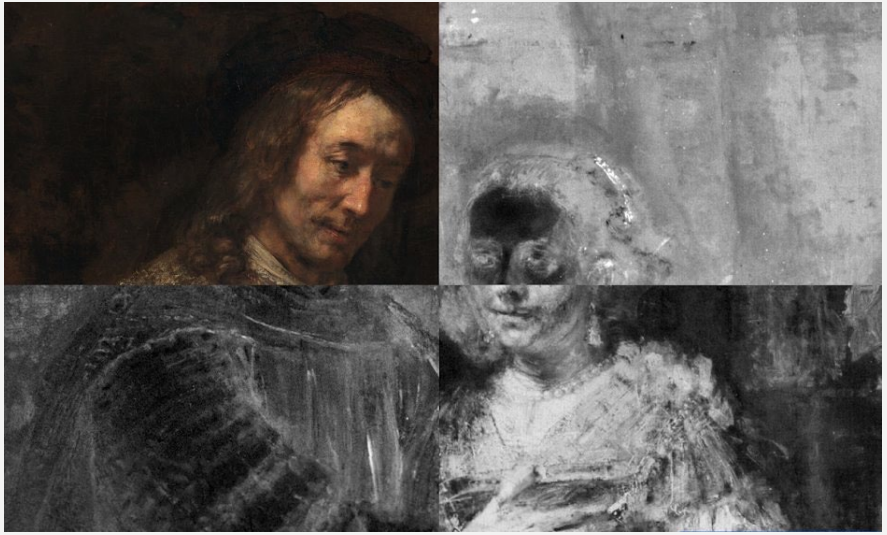




DIGITAL STRATEGY (2018 / 2nd version)

RIJKS MUSEUM





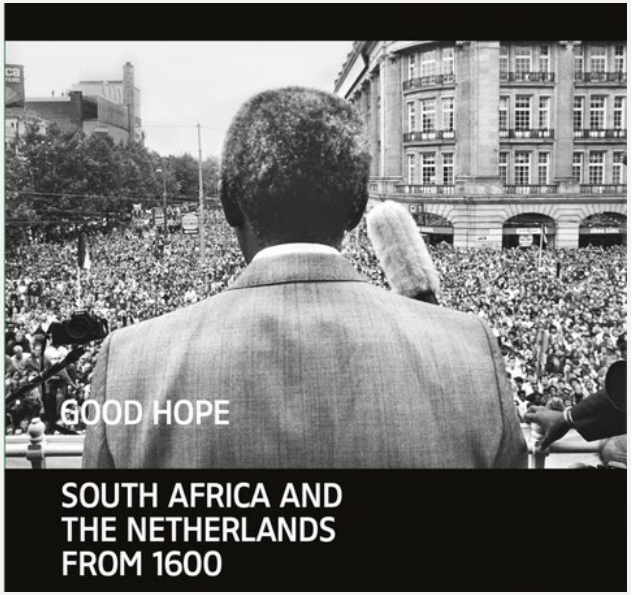
Rise Technical Art History & Conservation Science

Cultural Heritage Data for Research

Exponential growth of research data

MORE AND MORE DIVERSE DATA

RIJKS MUSEUM



2017

2021

2022

IMPACT OF RECENT EXHIBITIONS

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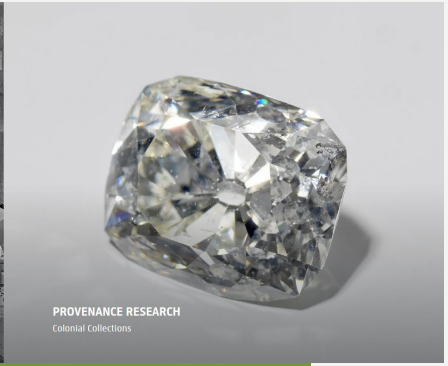
Terminology project

Systematic review of museum labels



DATA IN CONTEXT project

Data reconcillatIon & enrichting projects

Provenance research

GROWING AWARENESS OF BIAS & NEED FOR POLYPHONY

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. . . NEITHER IS

TECHNOLOGY, DIGITISATION,

INFORMATION NOR DATA

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Open -> FAIR GLAM

A binary approach (open vs closed) is by now way too limited

Collections are too diverse and many

A more nuanced approach is necessary to deal with reality

FAIR is a concept coming from Open Science : Findable – Accessible – Interoperable – Re-usable

2021

Third version digital strategy (integrated / every sector in the museum)

Post-pandemic & first post-digital* strategy - * *Ross Parry*

Aligned with National Digital Heritage Architecture (DERA) - *decentralisation*

- Open when possible, closed when necessary
- Findable, Accessible, Interoperable & Reusable (FAIR)
- Digital & Sustainable

‘Digital is a dimension of everything’

John Stack
Science Museum London

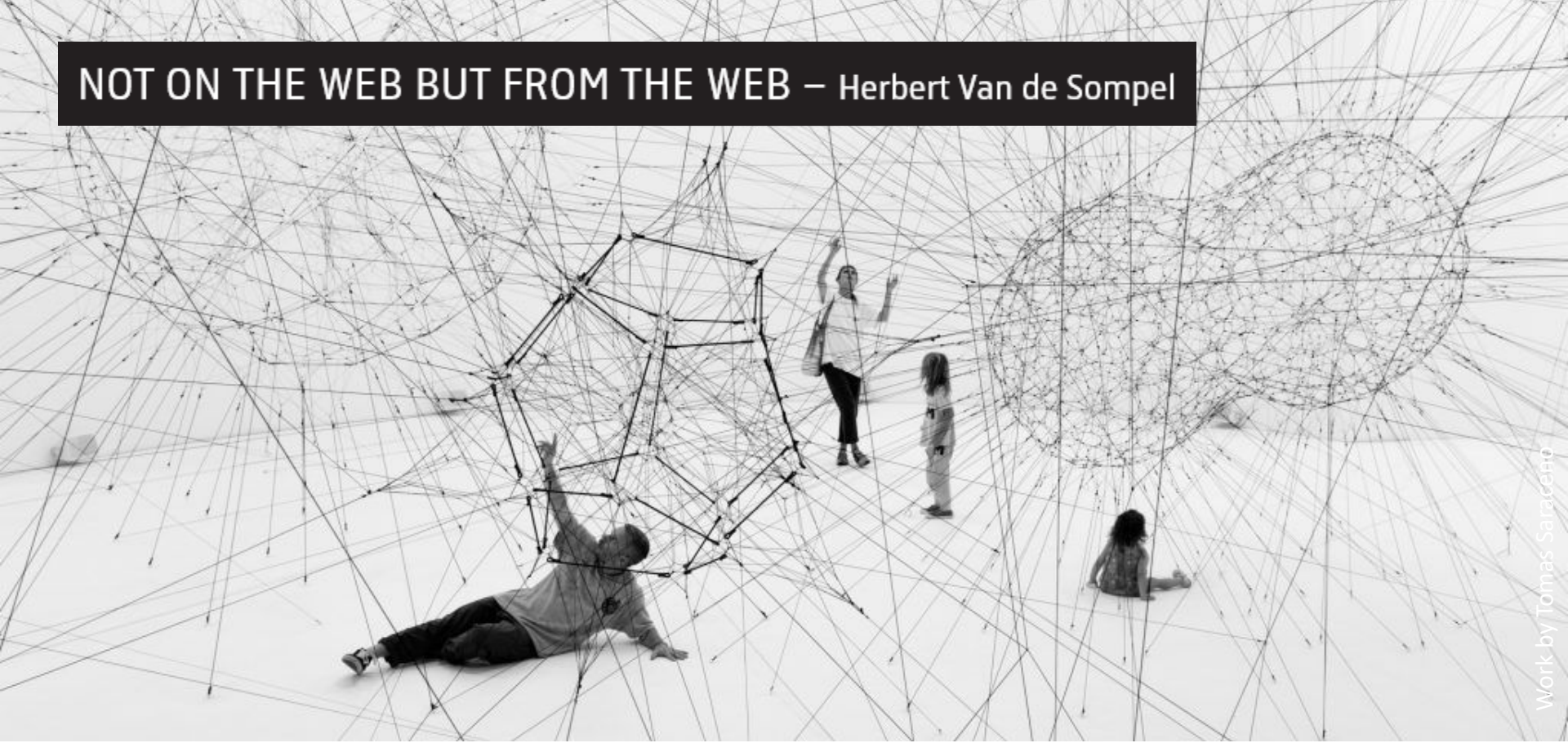
Everything is connected

Tagline
#ICOM #CIDOC2024 conference
in Amsterdam

INSPIRATION

RIJKS MUSEUM

NOT ON THE WEB BUT FROM THE WEB – Herbert Van de Sompel

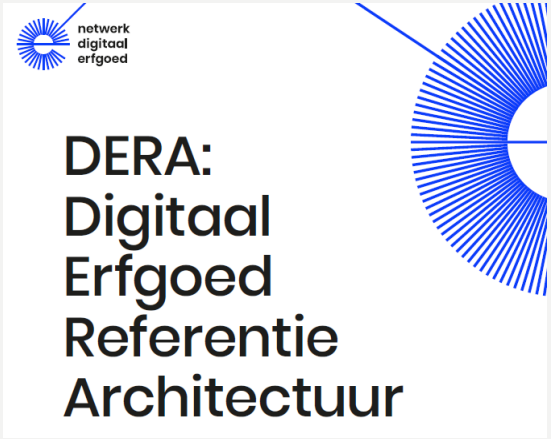


Work by Tomas Saraceno

INSPIRATION

RIJKS MUSEUM

netwerk digitaal erfgoed



Network organisation of the Dutch LAM world

Decentralised approach

Architecture board

Advises on (open) infrastructure, policies and standards.

NATIONAL ALIGNMENT

RIJKS MUSEUM

“Innovation requires infrastructure”

Diane Zorich
Smithsonian Institute

https://www.whitehousehistory.org/presidential-sites-summit/presidential-sites-summit-speakers/diane-zorich

INSPIRATION

RIJKS MUSEUM

Management

Awareness of the importance of data and infrastructure

Digital & Marketing

Look beyond the interface

Information specialists

Focus on enrichting data via context

Website builders

Willingness to use open data

Designers

Capable of using data intensively

Curators

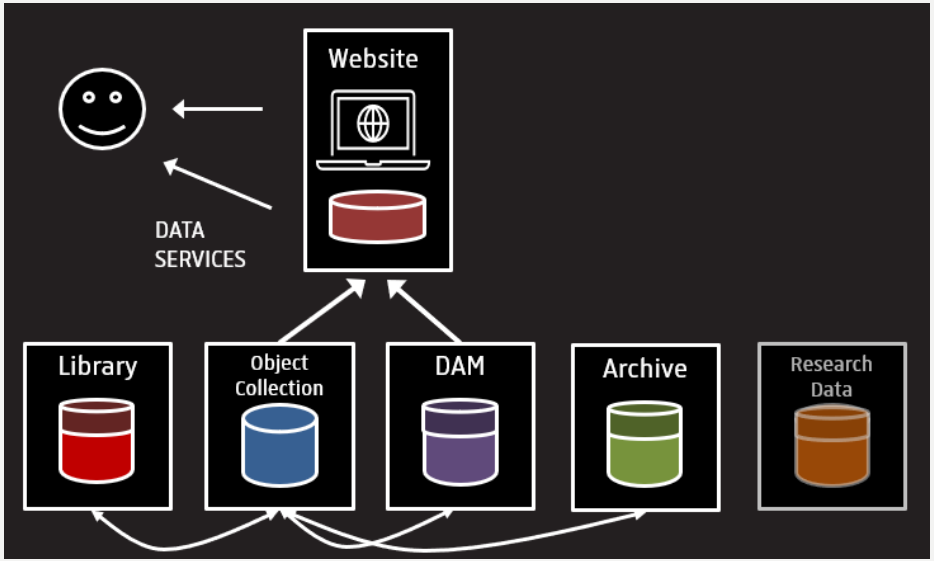
Belief in the power of telling stories with data

Inspired by a slide from Chris Dijkshoorn

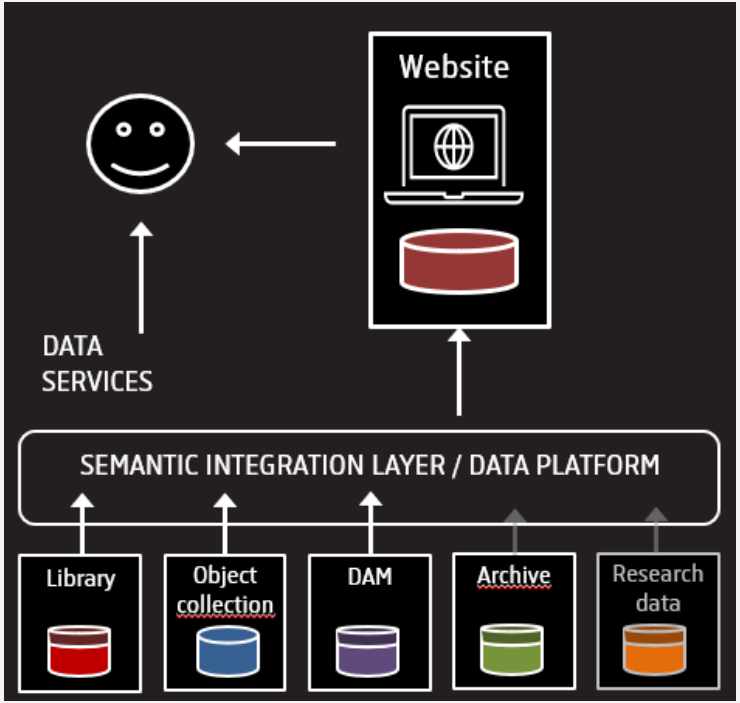
De Staalmeesters – Rembrandt van Rhijn. olieverf op doek, 1662
https://id.rijksmuseum.nl/200107929

DATA AWARENESS

RIJKS MUSEUM



Past infrastructure (2013-2024)



New infrastructure (2025-)

OVERHAUL OF COLLECTION DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

RIJKS MUSEUM

NEW COLLECTION WEBSITE (2024-)

RIJKS MUSEUM

NEW DATASERVICES (2024 -)

RIJKS MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION (EN)
INFORMATION AND DATA POLICY (EN)
INTRODUCTIE (NL)
INFORMATIE- EN DATABELEID (NL)

https://data.rijksmuseum.nl/policy

Information and Data Policy Rijksmuseum

Summary

The Rijksmuseum links individuals with art and history. Widely sharing information and data makes these links between people, art and history possible. The Rijksmuseum's Information & Data Policy is therefore intended to facilitate the sharing of information and data about our collections with as many people as possible.

The Rijksmuseum strives to make information and data about the collections findable, accessible, understandable and reusable. The information and data are as open as possible, and as closed as they need to be. This is to ensure that we comply with information and data protection legislation. With this policy we want to indicate that we will always try to share as much information and data as possible, even though not everything will be immediately public. We do this because the Rijksmuseum's collections are for everyone.

NEW INFORMATION & DATA POLICY (2024 -)

RIJKS MUSEUM

Management

Data-driven decisions

Digital & Marketing

Data-driven campaigns

Information specialists

Focus on contextualisation

Website builders

Faster development through standardization

Designers

Data-driven design

Curators

Capable of sharing data and stories better

Inspired by a slide from Chris Dijkshoorn

DATA ~~AWARENESS~~ EMPOWERMENT

RIJKS MUSEUM

Digital vs Analog is a false dichotomy

Reality is fundamentally hybrid

Connections matter, always, everywhere

Human connections

FROM COLLECTION TO CONNECTION, REVISITED

RIJKS MUSEUM

CONTACT

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