

The RE-usable Fashion Museum: crowdfunding a study collection at MoMu (Antwerp) / Object Based Pedagogy and Engaged Practice Using a Study Collection at the Antwerp University

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Abstract:

Most museum collections are locked away for their users, even though there is a strong case to be made for giving direct access. But how does a museum facilitate this object-based research, thinking about the practical consequences and knowing that accessing these objects inherently causes their deterioration?

The first part of this article will point out the importance of object-based pedagogy in textile and costume conservation studies using a study collection. The second part will explain the ideas behind the RE-usable fashion museum, a co-creation and crowdfunding initiative by MoMu (Antwerp).

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Introduction

MoMu and the University of Antwerp's (UA) Faculty of Design Sciences, Department Conservation Studies are establishing a Study Collection, a collection compiled for the sole purpose of being accessible for study, research, training and inspiration. Two years ago both institutions started the project 'Study Collections: a challenging context in universities and museums' that was funded by the Flemish government as a cultural heritage project. The goals of this project were:

- To create a think tank on study collections and raise awareness on the phenomenon of study collections within the academic and museum context in Flanders;
- To register and share a study collection on an online platform, available for everyone, but in specific scholars, artists, designers, researchers;
- And most important, to make the collection physically accessible to all.

Even though both institutions take great care of their objects, the Study Collection is not regarded as a 'museum collection', and as such long term preservation is not the prime objective. Availability and ease of access of the artifacts on the other hand is key. During the project two costume and textile study collections were used as work cases. One collection was situated at the UA's Faculty of Design Science (Conservation Studies) and was named the Study Collection Chris Dhondt. The other collection was situated in a museum, the Fashion Museum of Antwerp, MoMu.

Background and history of the Study Collection Chris Dhondt

The Study Collection Chris Dhondt is being used since 1994 at the University of Antwerp (UA) during the practical courses of textile conservation. The diversity and variety in materials and patterns make this collection most interesting. The collection was donated by the Fashion Institute of Technology (F.I.T.) of New York in 1994. Since then it has been used by students in textile conservation to practice the art of pattern taking and presentation, preservation and conservation techniques. Its content consists of mainly Western clothing

from the second part of the twentieth century and traditional and ethnical clothing from all over the world including, for example, a large collection of kimonos.



Fig. 1:
Study collection Chris Dhondt, University of Antwerp, Conservation Studies. Phot: Stany Dederen for MoMu
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Object based pedagogy

At the University of Antwerp's Faculty of Design Sciences, more specific in the Conservation Studies Department, object-based pedagogy is used while teaching and doing research on conservation of textile and costume. The University of Antwerp offers a three-year bachelor and one-year master in conservation. The students are able to specialize in costume and textile; they also have the possibility to specialize in metal, wood, stone, glass, ceramics, paper and photographic documents, paintings and wall paintings, polychromies or combined materials.

The UA's Study Collection is accessible, either directly or through digital media, for students enrolled at the university. The aim of working with this collection is to enhance the learning experience about techniques, materials and conservation. The students are reading the object by doing material research such as fibre and fabric analysis, historical research, pattern drawing.



Fig. 2:
Students of the University of Antwerp, Faculty of Design Sciences, Conservation Studies

Conservation students are working on a particular object to learn the complete conservation treatment of a textile or a costume. The physical access restrictions of our collection are common to most collections of historical fashion. And as we are dealing with conservation students the collection is in good hands.

The MoMu-Study Collection

MoMu's Study Collection originates, for a large part, from one person: Jacoba De Jonge. She is a passionate collector from the Netherlands whose impressive costume collection MoMu acquired in 2011. Miss De Jonge collected historical costumes and accessories throughout almost all of her life, and her collection consists mainly of fashionable womenswear from the eighteenth until the early twentieth century. Next to this 'main' collection, Jacoba De Jonge had provided herself a study collection that she used during workshops as she was also a dedicated lecturer on costume. This smaller collection consisted of dresses, blouses, clothing fragments and bonnets, and a large collection of samples of fabrics, laces, embroideries, etc. This study collection was donated to MoMu with the aim to be used for educational and study purposes. So it happened that this collection became the start of the development of a larger study collection that would be available for, and could be consulted by, everyone who has an interest in fashion, fabrics and other textile related techniques.



Fig. 3:
Study collection MoMu Jacoba De Jonghe. Photo: Stany Dederen for MoMu (Creative Commons 3.0 By-SA 3.0)

To enlarge its Study Collection, and to provide a wider range of different type of objects, MoMu and the University of Antwerp joined forces. Some 300 pieces from the Chris Dhondt Collection were selected by MoMu and UA and were included in the MoMu Study Collection as a permanent loan. From October 2016 onwards, MoMu will start a providing service with this collection. In total this Study Collection consists of about 1,000 objects that can be consulted by appointment in the reading room of the MoMu library. A wide range of items will be at present to hopefully answer many questions regarding patterns, fabrics, details, finishings and techniques.

The RE-usable fashion museum: co-creating and crowd funding a Study Collection at MoMu (Antwerp)

But the story does not end here. MoMu strongly believes that its Study Collection presents a great opportunity to enter into a new kind of dialogue with its users. A dialogue based on equality and reciprocity, or 'co-creation' to coin to an often used phrase and concept.

According to Wikipedia (in itself a co-creative resource) the definition of co-creation is:

... a management initiative, or form of economic strategy, that brings different parties together (for instance, a company and a group of customers), in order to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-creation>)

Co-creation can take many shapes, but in this specific context, the term is used to indicate that end-users get a more prominent role and also become co-producers for the Study Collection. For museums this is a new kind of dialogue. Museums are used to see themselves in a more authoritative role, in which they transmit their content and knowledge to their end users. A collaborative role is rather new for most of them.

How is this co-creative paradigm transfigured into the Study Collection? First, MoMu allows and encourages the re-use of our Study Collection in many ways as possible. This means by doing the following:

- Provide physical access to the Study Collection so that artifacts can be used for research and education, but can also be re-used as a source of inspiration, thus feeding new forms of creativity;
- Content and systems that will be created about the Study Collection by MoMu will be made accessible under an open license:
 - Open data: All metadata and digital objects created on the Study Collection will be made available under a CC-BY-SA license;
 - Use Open standards. (For the Study Collection a new data model 'Echocore' was created (<http://www.immd.be/files/ECHOCORE.pdf>);
 - Open source system (OMEKA) (<http://128.199.60.250/omeka/>): MoMu built a database for the Study Collection in the open source platform 'OMEKA'. If further software development of our database is done with this platform, these developments will also be shared under an open license.

MoMu wishes to implement re-use as default setting and as standard value for the whole Study Collection, hence the name 'the re-usable fashion museum' and considers this project as a pilot. An important exception for this 'default setting' comes from potential third parties 'intellectual property rights' infringements. E.g. MoMu will not make a digital photo of a Dior dress available under an open license, if the museum does not have the explicit approval from the fashion house of Dior that it is able to do so.

Crowdfunding and crowdsourcing

But MoMu also firmly believes in a feedback mechanism from its users, which will happen through crowd funding and crowd sourcing. The Study Collection has been recognized by the King Baudouin Foundation, a Belgian independent and pluralistic foundation that aims to contribute in innovative and sustainable ways towards greater social justice, democracy and respect for diversity, as a 'philanthropic' project. This means that potential donors can get a certificate for tax reduction. MoMu's aim is to attract donors in order to:

- Expand the Study Collection through the acquisition of new (missing) artifacts;
- Improve access to the Study Collection with a better designed and more professionally built website;
- Further digitize the Study Collection and improve the object descriptions;
- Improve the preservation conditions of the artifacts through better storage and packaging of the collection.

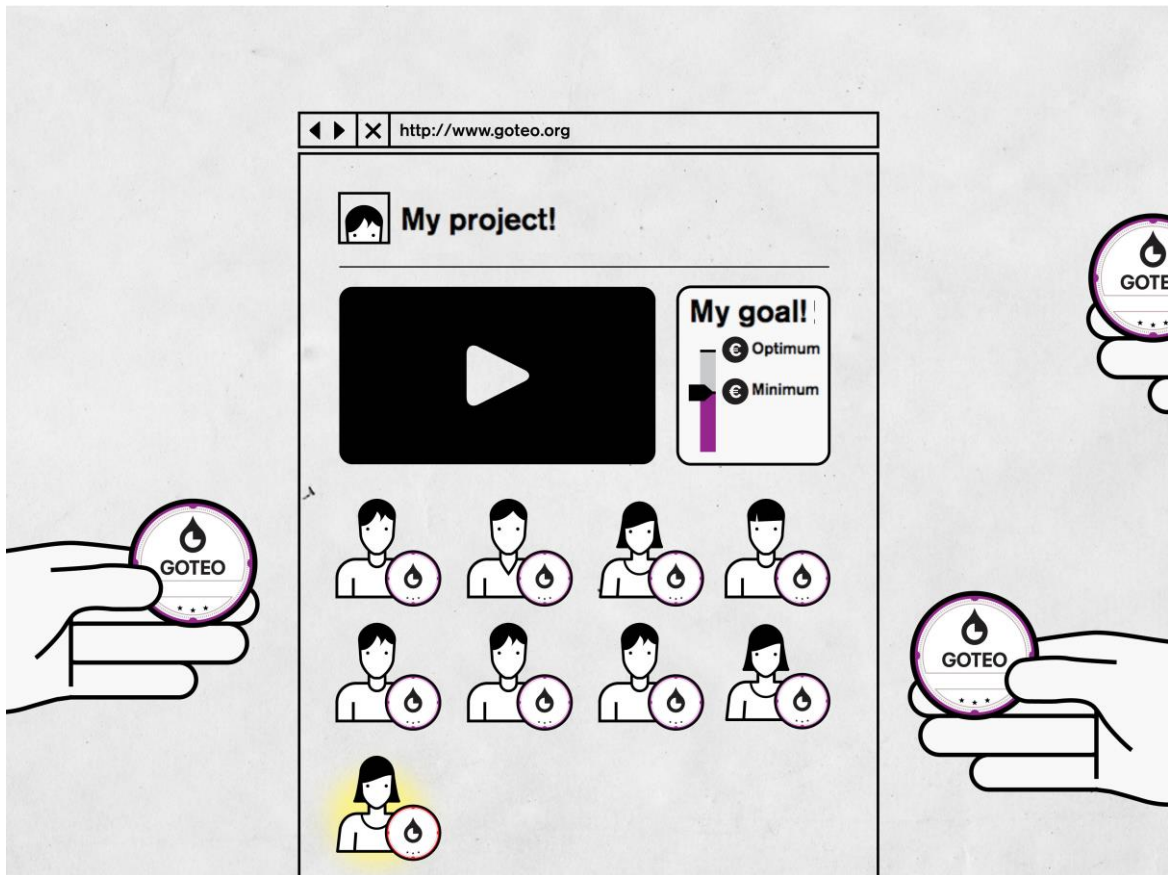


Fig. 4:
The Goteo-platform (Creative Commons 3.0 By-SA 3.0)

In order to do this, MoMu is teaming up with Goteo Foundation to set up a crowd funding platform. Goteo is an electronic platform for civic crowd funding and collaboration on citizen initiatives and social, cultural, technological and educational projects. Goteo is a tool for generating resources 'drop by drop' for a community of communities consisting of over 65,000 people, with a funding success rate over 70%.

Both the King Baudouin Foundation and Goteo Foundation can build bridges between different communities through active participation in supporting culture. It's not just about financing (crowdfunding!), but also about creating a community that strikes an alternative balance between cultural projects and the crowd, potential users and participatory citizens, thus enabling the crowd to become a source on information (crowdsourcing). More specifically MoMu is thinking of initiatives such as setting up a pattern-making event from objects from the Study Collections, or launching a 'call for missing objects' in order to build a more complete collection. But also other initiatives are possible.

MoMu is currently submitting a proposal named 'the re-usable fashion museum' on the Goteo-platform and hopes to start the crowdfunding and crowdsourcing campaign on a short notice.

For more information on the Study Collection at MoMu, please check:
<http://www.momu.be/en/collectie/studiecollectie.html>

Both study collections from UA and MoMu can be consulted via the following link:
<http://collectiemutsaard.org/collections/show/1>

The collections can also be seen on Europeana Fashion:
<http://goo.gl/YwF3Ae>