

Amsterdam Museum presents The Golden Coach Exhibition

18 June 2021 - 27 February 2022

On Friday 18 June, the exhibition 'The Golden Coach' will open at the Amsterdam Museum. After more than five years of restoration, the Golden Coach will be on display to the public for the first time since its official use. The coach will be on loan to the Amsterdam Museum until February 2022, temporarily returning it to the city that gifted it to Queen Wilhelmina in 1898.

The Golden Coach will be displayed in a glass enclosure in the large courtyard at the Amsterdam Museum. It will be a tranquil setting where visitors can take a closer look at the restored coach. The six interior spaces surrounding the courtyard, each with a unique view of the Golden Coach, will highlight stories connected to the beautiful coach. Hundreds of cultural and historical items, paintings, relics, cartoons, photographs, and videos come together to paint a comprehensive picture of the history of the Golden Coach and the historic and contemporary discussions around this iconic vehicle.



The Golden Coach. Photo: Arthur van der Vliet

The Golden Coach was designed as a gift for the inauguration of the first woman to sit on the Dutch throne, then-18-year-old Queen Wilhelmina. Since its inception, the coach has had both fans and critics. The Golden Coach is far more than just a vehicle – it symbolises something much greater: the House of Orange, democracy, the confident capital city, Amsterdam, the fairytale (or gilded cage, depending on your perspective) of royal existence, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the country's colonial past. The exhibition explores each of these facets from multiple perspectives, in multiple unique voices. The visitor will meet the inventors, builders, spectators, demonstrators, descendants of the people depicted on the coach and, of course, its users: the members of the Royal Family.

The coach is still a hot topic for debate today in the Netherlands. After its restoration, should it still be used on Prinsjesdag (the state opening of Parliament) and during royal weddings and inaugurations? Is it time to update the coach, or does it belong in a museum? This exhibition will highlight a wide range of perspectives on the coach and help encourage debate on this controversial piece of Dutch heritage. The Amsterdam Museum will also invite visitors to share their views and use augmented reality to create an alternative Golden Coach. The exhibition will include work from a number of contemporary artists on themes relating to the coach. The museum will also travel to all provincial capitals with a mobile installation before and during the exhibition to share information about the coach and map out which perspectives on the Golden Coach are popular with people across the country. The exhibition *The Golden Coach* will be open through Sunday, 27 February 2022 at the Amsterdam Museum.

A gift from a divided Amsterdam

The idea for the Golden Coach arose from a city in transition. The exhibition starts by transporting the visitor back to Amsterdam at the end of the 19th century, a city rapidly expanding into a modern, confident capital after a long period of stagnation. Railway stations, factories, luxury hotels, and brand-new districts were springing up where city walls had so recently been. The city's population doubled in just thirty years, thanks in part to a massive influx of rural residents. What did the citizens of Amsterdam still have in common?



Proof of contribution,
Amsterdam City Archives

Women and workers were striving for recognition, young people were looking to chart their own new path, and even the churches were in turmoil. The need for a unifying symbol grew, and was found in the House of Orange. King William III (1817 – 1890), however, did not cut a particularly inspiring figure. But his young daughter, Queen Wilhelmina (1880 – 1962), was more appealing to the modern imagination. During the eight years preceding her coming of age and her inauguration, the idea of a gift to the young queen from the city itself grew in popularity.

Leendert Mens was certainly in favour. The Mens family lived in the Jordaan and was the driving force behind the *Oranjevereniging Willemstraat* (Willemstraat House of Orange Society), where, legend says, the idea for the Golden Coach

was born. The gifts he received from the court as a token of gratitude for his loyalty are on display in the exhibition, including a cigar holder that Queen Regent Emma is said to have made herself. The story of the Mens family and the House of Orange collections on display illustrate that love for the House of Orange was traditionally strong in working-class neighbourhoods like the Jordaan. The Canal side residents also supported the idea of the Golden Coach. But not everyone was as enamoured with the royal family. Amsterdam was also a hub for socialists and anarchists - outspoken opponents of the monarchy, as evidenced by the cartoon *Heintje en Emma in De Roode Duivel* (Heintje and Emma in The Red Devil) from October 1894, which mocked the head of state. Clashes between 'red' and 'orange' followed, and concerns about polarisation grew. The Golden Coach was intended to encourage solidarity. A door-to-door collection campaign invited citizens to contribute, which also became a source of harsh criticism levelled at the 'golden coach'.



Heintje and Emma in De Roode Duivel. Oct 1894

The Netherlands and the colonies

The designers of the Golden Coach thought the colonies should be included as well. After all, Queen Wilhelmina became the head of state for not only five million Dutch people, but also half a million people in Suriname and the former Dutch Antilles, and more than 40 million residents in the Dutch East Indies. The exhibition and the audio tour take a deep dive into the relationship between the House of Orange and the colonial world.

The artwork on the coach itself features a number of references to the colonies, including the much-discussed panel 'Hulde der Koloniën' ('Tribute from the Colonies'), painted by Nicolaas van der Waay. To understand these references and the commonly held view of the colonies at the time, *The Golden Coach* takes a look at the colonial exhibition held in 1883 on Museumplein. Around one and a half million Dutch people were introduced to the colonies at this International Colonial and Export Exhibition, and the inventors and creators of the Golden Coach were involved in the exhibit, as well. The Spijker brothers had coaches on display and Nicolaas van der Waay painted allegorical portraits for one of the pavilions. It raises questions about the extent to which they based their depictions of the colonies on the 1883 World Fair. In the exhibition *The Golden Coach*, we see a diverse selection of what the Spijker brothers and Van der Waay must have seen: an abundance of products, raw materials, and cultural items. The organisers of the 1883 World's Fair intended "to bring modern Western civilisation to the colonial wilderness, and to show the colonial wilds to the modern, civilised public in Amsterdam." That is why artists from the Dutch East Indies and Suriname were also included in the exhibition. Artist Nelson Carrilho, descendant of one of the people from Suriname at the world exhibition, reflects on the colonial exhibition and colonialism in his work.



Panel 'Homage to the Colonies'
Photo: Arthur van der Vlies



Aucan boy Johannes Kojo (Kodjo), 13 years old, exhibited in Amsterdam at the World's Fair in 1883.

The Golden Coach dissected

It's no exaggeration to say that every square centimetre of the Golden Coach has a symbolic meaning. That's why one room of the exhibition provides a comprehensive dissection of each part of the coach, using photographs and historical items. Upon closer inspection, we can see a Protestant Bible, a Catholic cross, and a Jewish Torah depicted on the coach. The female figures on the roof represent sources of prosperity: agriculture, trade, shipping, and industry. The coach, with all its symbols, can be seen as the story of the relationship between the Netherlands and the House of Orange.

The Golden Coach was intended to illustrate what the Netherlands had to offer, made by the best craftsmen with the best materials from across the kingdom. The thin layer of gold leaf on teak wood from Java shines through. In a series of videos, the restorers take a closer look at the materials used on the coach and the coach builders' methods. They help us answer questions like why was the Golden Coach intentionally designed to look old when it was completed? And why does the coach now have black instead of white tyres, as it did in 1898? Where was the battery hidden that was needed to power the electric lights, a novelty at the time?

The paintwork deserves extra attention. The original sketches by Nicolaas van der Waay give us a clear picture of what is depicted on each of the four painted panels, including the much-discussed 'Tribute from the Colonies'. This allegorical painting depicts 'the West' (Suriname and the former Antilles) and 'the East' (Indonesia) bringing gifts and paying homage to the Dutch Virgin. The exhibition includes audiovisual presentation that goes into more detail. *Colonies* (2017) by Iswanto Hartono, provides an individual perspective on the panel, which is on display in

this room.



*Two seated orphan girls sewing,' Van der Waay
Amsterdam Museum*



*Details of the Golden Coach
Photo: Arthur van der Vlies*

This room also revolves around the makers of the Golden Coach. An in-depth photo series introduces us to the craftsmen who made the coach. Twelve men spent nearly two years working on the coach at the Spyker factory. In the audio tour, the visitor gets to know one of them, a fitter named C.H. Bos. Through prints and paintings, the visitor will meet the ladies of Tesselschade, Arbeid Adelt and the girls from the city orphanage, the building that now houses the Amsterdam Museum. They were jointly responsible for the embroidery that covers the interior of the coach and comes in at more than fifteen million stitches. Although the coach was intended for the first woman on the throne, they were the only women to make a craftsman's contribution. This room shines a light on the restoration process, and the Golden Coach's recent restoration is examined in detail.

The coach in use

In 1898, Queen Wilhelmina was presented with the Golden Coach on the occasion of her inauguration. Souvenirs, historical photographs, and archival footage will give visitors a sense of the inauguration celebrations throughout the kingdom - including in the colonies. But it wasn't until February 1901 that Queen Wilhelmina accepted the gift from the city of Amsterdam and brought the Golden Coach to The Hague by train. The original certificate of transfer is on display in the exhibition. That very same week, she rode in the coach for the first time for her wedding to Duke Hendrik of Mecklenburg. Since then, the Golden Coach has remained in use for festive occasions such as baptisms and weddings. The coach has also been used on Prinsjesdag since 1903, the annual opening of Parliament. In the exhibition, the visitor will learn how the Golden Coach is reserved for royals and when it hits the streets, it is always a ceremonious occasion – a ride in the coach makes the monarch visible, but at the same time emphasises the distance between the monarch and the people. In the exhibition, a procession of valets, postilions, and coachmen is imitated in full regalia. The procession allows the visitor to experience all the ritual and protocol that accompany a tour in the Golden Coach. When the Golden Coach passes by, it is a moving experience for everyone, something the visitor will experience in the large audiovisual presentation that accompanies the procession. In it, the Golden Coach rides through time and the visitor can see the spectators' responses down through the years.

As they follow the procession, the visitors walk towards demonstrators. The Golden Coach is perhaps the most visible symbol of the monarchy, and therefore also a major target of its opponents. In 1966, Provo protesters disrupted the wedding procession of Beatrix and Claus with smoke bombs, and in 1980 the coach was kept off the streets completely for fear of squatters and rioters. The coach was pelted with a bag of white paint in 2002 and still bears the marks of the tea light holder that hit it in 2010. Recent protests have been directed less at the monarchy itself and more at the 'Tribute from the Colonies' panel, the coach, and the effects of colonialism and racism on our society.

This expansive exhibition space also gives an overview of how the coach has been used since 1901, including unique and fascinating stories. For example, in 1949, the Golden Coach was the highlight of a travelling exhibition to support reconstruction. Dutch citizens cycled dozens of kilometres to admire it. At the time, the coach was the symbol of democracy rebuilt. In 2001, shortly after the September 11 attacks in the United States, the coach did ride, but stopped for a few moments outside the U.S. Embassy to acknowledge the Ambassador, and the coach escorts wore more subdued uniforms. The history of the Golden Coach is a journey through moments of communal experience in our society's history.

The Golden Coach in the open air

After all these stories and perspectives on the Golden Coach, visitors will have the opportunity to take a closer look at the coach in a tranquil, outdoor setting. The coach will be housed in a special glass enclosure that will give visitors a 360-view of the coach from every angle. In the audio tour, different narrators will explain the features and artwork depicted on the coach and how it can be interpreted.



*Courtyard at the Amsterdam Museum.
Photo Amsterdam Museum, Richard de Bruijn*

Research and reflection

The exhibition ends with a room that invites visitors to share their views on the Golden Coach. What is the meaning of the coach? And what do the visitors think should happen to the coach in the future? A range of diverse perspectives will be presented using video, audio, art, and augmented reality.

The Amsterdam Museum is also venturing outside the museum walls for opinions on the Golden Coach. In order to allow as many voices as possible to be heard in the exhibition programme about the many facets of the Golden Coach, the Amsterdam Museum will be touring the Netherlands with a mobile installation, as soon as Covid-19 restrictions are eased. The installation will provide visitors with information and give them the opportunity to share their personal associations, memories, emotions, and thoughts about the royal coach. The results will be presented in the research room in the exhibition, at www.goudenkoets.nl, and compiled in a research report.



Photo: Amsterdam Museum



Mobile installation 'Golden Coach'.
Photo: Amsterdam Museum, Iris Duvekot.

Artistic reflections

The Golden Coach is, first and foremost, a historical exhibition. Several contemporary works have also been incorporated into the journey through the exhibit. The Amsterdam Gallery has also been completely redesigned for the occasion, with mostly new work about the Golden Coach. The Amsterdam Museum has commissioned thirteen artists to create work that relates to themes raised by the Golden Coach. Erwin Olaf, Brian Elstak, Berend Strik, Sharelly Emanuelson, and up-and-coming talents like AiRich and Serana Angelista, among others, have taken their own experience, knowledge, and craftsmanship and woven them into an artistic commentary on the materiality and iconography of the coach.



'Deep in me a passionate dream', Nelson Carrilho, 2017 Photo: Tom Benavente

Audio tour and events

In a free audio tour accompanying the exhibition, historians, anthropologists, restorers, activists, House of Orange supporters, and others explain various aspects of the Golden Coach. A series of public programs will be scheduled at the Amsterdam Museum and on location during the exhibition. The museum is also organising an academic symposium, workshops, and group tours. Visitors can find the latest information on the Amsterdam Museum website.

Primary and secondary school students and pre-university students will be able to take part in a special educational programme that will focus on discussing themes around the Golden Coach. Urban Myth, Theater De Krakeling and STIP theatre productions have created a family-oriented performance (8+) entitled: 'The Golden Coach - the gift that nobody wanted' with Birgit Schuurman and Tarikh Janssen about the young crown princess Wilhelmina and the young Kwadjo from Suriname, who discuss the ways in which power can be taken for granted. The performance will be staged in theatres across the country from September 2021 to February 2022.

Book

This exhibition will also be accompanied by a special edition publication. The colourful, 164-page book contains in-depth essays on the genesis and ritual dimensions of the Golden Coach, its recent restoration, and the links with our colonial past. The book is published by WBOOKS and will be available from June 2021 in the museum shop, in bookstores, and online for €24.95.

Extra long duration

The Golden Coach opens to the public on Friday, 18 June 2021 and runs through Sunday, 27 February 2022. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, there will be a maximum number of visitors allowed into the exhibition per time slot. In order to give as many people as possible the opportunity to visit the exhibition and to view the Golden Coach in an unrushed way, while still respecting safety measures, the lender has agreed to extend the exhibition for longer than initially planned. The exhibition will be on display for more than eight months.

Exhibition development

The exhibition and public program on this controversial gift were developed by a research team of eleven specialists. The content and approach were discussed at length with a sounding board group of 25 external experts. The group included among others Karwan Fatah-Black, Lara Nuberg, and Pieter Verhoeve. *The Golden Coach* was designed by Bureau Caspar Conijn.

'The Golden Coach' will be on view from 18 June 2021 to 27 February 2022 at the Amsterdam Museum, Kalverstraat 92. The exhibition is made possible in part by BankGiro Lottery, Blockbuster Fund, De Nederlandsche Bank, Dr Hendrik Muller's Vaderlandsch Fonds (publication), Gerard van den Tweel, Van den Tweel Foundation in Nijkerk, Kickstart Culture Fund (museum routing), Mondriaan Fund, Nico Nap Foundation, Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Cultural Heritage Agency. The Amsterdam Museum is supported by the City of Amsterdam and the BankGiro Lottery.

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Images: *High res versions of all of the images shown, and more (57 in total), can be downloaded in this [PDF](#). Would you like to more images? Please contact us.*

Fact sheet *about the exhibition *The Golden Coach* in the Amsterdam Museum is available in this [PDF](#).*