

Introduction

In October 2024, the international committees CAMOC (International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities) and COMCOL (International Committee for Collecting) joined forces once again to host a joint annual conference in Amsterdam. More than a decade after their first collaboration in Berlin in 2011, on participative strategies, they came together to reflect on the changing practices of collecting, representing, and collaborating with the city. Hosted by the Amsterdam Museum in partnership with Imagine IC, *Collecting with(in) the City* brought together 225 museum professionals, researchers, artists, and community partners from across the world to explore the evolving relationship between the city and its museums.

The conference began on 9 October with city tours that invited participants to encounter Amsterdam in its many layers. From a morning breakfast program at Imagine IC and visits to other cultural institutions in Amsterdam Southeast to afternoon explorations across other parts of the city, the day emphasized the local and lived dimensions of heritage work. In the evening, the Amsterdam Museum welcomed guests for opening drinks, setting the stage for dialogue and exchange. During the opening reception Sites of Memory presented an artistic intervention.

The following two days, 10 and 11 October, were dedicated to conference sessions at Pakhuis de Zwijger. With keynote lectures, dialogue sessions, paper and poster presentations, the program offered a wide-ranging platform to consider what it means for museums to collect “with” and “in” the city today. The questions that framed the conference were both urgent and generative: How can museums capture not only objects but also stories, sounds, and rhythms of urban life? How can institutions work with communities in equitable, reciprocal ways? What power relations shape collections and collecting practices?

The conference focused on five interrelated themes. Power and (in)equalities examined how collections reflect social hierarchies and asymmetries, and how museums can navigate multivocality and claims of ownership. Creative engagements highlighted collaborations with artists and communities in crafting new ways of representing and experiencing the city. Fluid borders between museum and society raised questions about mobility, ownership, and ethics as museums move beyond their walls. Tangible and intangible emphasized the interconnectedness of objects, traditions, and stories. Finally, concepts of care explored how museums can create practices of reciprocity, reflection, and emotional well-being within and beyond their spaces.

Amsterdam—on the eve of its 750th anniversary celebrations—offered a fitting backdrop for these discussions. With its own histories of collecting the city through co-creative programs, the host institutions embodied the very practices under debate. This publication brings together the keynote contributions and selected presentations from the conference, organized as they were presented in the thematic sessions of the conference. We hope they offer insights and reflections that speak to the challenges and possibilities of collecting with(in) the city today.

On behalf of the Scientific committee of CAMOC and COMCOL,

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Reception and network event at Diaconie
Photo: Françoise Boleschowski