

# Foreword by the Directors

*'In a year of grand gestures, it is the small things that have left the greatest mark' - 2015 seen through the eyes of the Van Gogh Museum management team.*

During an internal meeting held in January 2015, we took a look ahead. The presentation on all the activities planned for 2015 ended with the words: *'Don't forget to smell the roses, this [year] is as good as it gets'*. Of course, great things would continue to happen even after 2015, but on the eve of the anniversary year marking 125 years of Van Gogh's inspiration (*Van Gogh 125 jaar inspiratie*), the overwhelming feeling was a determination to relish all the special things that we were set to achieve that year. During the subsequent twelve months, we would regularly remind each other of this prescient remark. For there is absolutely no doubt that 2015 proved a memorable year.

In this annual report, we take a close look at the activities that we and countless others helped shape during this extraordinary anniversary year.

In 2015, we celebrated first and foremost the power of attraction that Van Gogh's legacy has on millions of people. Even more than in previous years, people from across the world helped keep Van Gogh's heritage alive, often in quite moving ways. In this year, Van Gogh, his art and his life, proved even more topical and relevant than ever, 125 years after his death.

In line with the theme, 125 years of inspiration, the exhibition *When I give, I give myself* opened in the spring. In it, international contemporary artists and writers, under the inspiring leadership of guest curator and visual artist Henk Schut, each responded to an excerpt from Vincent van Gogh's letters with a piece of their own art. The result was an emotionally moving dialogue between Van Gogh's ideas and a range of themes on the one hand and contemporary art and literature on the other.

On 29 July, we met to commemorate Vincent van Gogh, together with his family at his grave in Auver-sur-Oise. To mark the 125th anniversary of his death, *The Vincent Van Gogh Atlas (De Grote Van Gogh Atlas)* was published. This book takes the reader on a journey in Van Gogh's footsteps, passing through all of the significant places in the artist's life.

Dialogue and inspiration also played a central role in the *'125 questions campaign'*, launched exactly 125 days before the opening of our new entrance building. It started with a fascinating viral campaign calling for people to put questions to the museum about Van Gogh. The museum's experts gave answers to 125 of the more than 3,000 questions sent in. The questions and answers featured in various parts of the campaign.

In the meantime, building work in and around the museum continued. According to the overall plan, the new building was scheduled to open in the weekend of 4, 5 and 6 September. Thanks to the united forces and unswerving support of all parties involved, we successfully completed this challenging project within the set time and budget.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone – our sponsors and supporters – for their contribution towards the construction and the opening of our new entrance building.

In the lead-up to the official opening of the new entrance building, we organised a general rehearsal with members of the public in mid-August. The idea was to subject the building to extensive testing, two weeks before its opening. Both the building itself and our staff passed the test with flying colours, enabling us to look forward to the opening weekend with increasing confidence.

On Friday, 2 September, the time had come: in the presence of a colourful group of guests, we opened the doors of our new main entrance at 16.00. To mark this special event, we built a giant labyrinth on Museumplein, made up of 125,000 sunflowers. During the opening weekend, more than 40,000 people came to view this extraordinary installation and the new glass entrance building. On Sunday afternoon, staff handed out sunflowers. Less than three hours later, all 125,000 flowers had been 'picked' and gradually found their way across Amsterdam. The museum's fans were also able to follow the opening festivities via various social media. Photographs, videos and posts were shared extensively, quickly turning the online world yellow! For the museum's many stakeholders, we organised a series of evening openings to thank them for their involvement and place them in the spotlight.

In the wake of these festivities, we made our preparations for the exhibition *Munch: Van Gogh* which was opened on Wednesday, 23 September by her Majesty Queen Sonja of Norway and her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix, attracting widespread media coverage. This exhibition focused on the artistic affinities and parallels between the Norwegian Edvard Munch and Vincent van Gogh. It proved a huge success, attracting more than 585,000 visitors from the Netherlands and beyond.

Van Gogh's legacy was commemorated worldwide by a range of different organisations and institutions. For example, Mons, European Capital of Culture 2015, devoted an exhibition to the artist about his time in the Borinage. On the anniversary of Van Gogh's death, the Zundert flower parade created an enormous self-portrait of the artist made of dahlias on Amsterdam's Museumplein. Dutch broadcaster AVROTROS

called on professional and amateur artists to enter works inspired by Van Gogh for a special competition. Media company Sanoma devoted the May edition of *Donald Duck* magazine to the life and work of Vincent van Gogh. It also published a one-off glossy magazine *VINCENT*, focusing extensively on Van Gogh. More than 100,000 people went to see the cinema film *Van Gogh. A new way of seeing* that premièred in various cities all over the world.

This worldwide focus on Van Gogh combined with strong programming resulted in a record number of visitors in the anniversary year 2015. In the course of this year, more than two million Van Gogh fans visited our museum. The new building, designed to accommodate greater numbers of visitors with ease, is living up to its promise and fits like a glove. The extended opening times during peak periods and measures to optimise capacity have also enabled greater numbers of people to enjoy visiting our museum.

In 2015, much of our attention was focused on Van Gogh, the anniversary year and our museum in Amsterdam. In our museum based in The Hague, De Mesdag Collectie, we also commemorated an influential Dutch artist: Hendrik Willem Mesdag. During this year, we celebrated a century of cultural heritage left by the man that put The Hague on the international map. The publication *Hendrik Willem Mesdag – Kunstenaar, verzamelaar en entrepreneur* (Hendrik Willem Mesdag – Artist, collector and entrepreneur) marked the start of the Mesdag anniversary year 2015. We showcased his cultural heritage by means of two eye-catching exhibitions. In the spring, the double exhibition entitled *De aquarel* (The Watercolour) held in De Mesdag Collectie and Teylers Museum, featured leading works from our own and other collections of works by the greatest

Dutch 19th-century painters. The autumn was devoted to the family exhibition *Zeebonken & Strandgasten* (Seafarers & Beachgoers). It presented works by contemporary artists who, like Mesdag, took their inspiration from the sea and the shore.

The numerous activities in this dual anniversary year were only made possible thanks to the support of many highly dedicated stakeholders from the Netherlands and abroad. There are therefore also various people and organisations we would like to thank: museum visitors, online fans, lenders of works, sponsors, financial supporters, advertisers, fellow museums, government bodies, the City of Amsterdam, foundations and charities, funds, businesses, the friends of our networks, suppliers and local residents.

Unfortunately, limited space prevents us from mentioning you all by name here. We offer our extensive thanks elsewhere in this report.

Before we invite you to read on and experience the anniversary year of 2015 once again, we would like to say a few words to our colleagues, the members of the Supervisory Board, the Advisory Board and members of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation. It is thanks to your enormous efforts, valuable advice and encouraging words that this year proved so memorable. Memorable with a capital M. So, on behalf of the management and the entire team, we offer our heartfelt thanks!

*'Smell the roses'.*

Axel Rüger  
Director

Adriaan Dönzelmann  
Managing Director