

# Foreword by the Directors

## The Van Gogh Museum on the move

*On the move* was the primary theme for the Van Gogh Museum in 2012. On 24 June 2011 we had announced that our museum's permanent collection would be moving temporarily to the Hermitage Amsterdam in late September 2012. We had set ourselves the goal of implementing the required renovations to our building on Museumplein in the relatively short period of seven months. This meant that our activities in 2012 were not only guided by the programme but also by the renovation work and associated move to other premises.

In every respect these were exceptionally ambitious projects which renewed our energy and brought new insights. We displayed our collection in a new environment, collaborated with a range of parties, dealt with visitors to our closed premises on Museumplein, and above all completed a substantial building project.

Behind the scenes we worked hard on the preparations for renovating our building and moving the collection to temporary premises. On 24 September the time had come. Under the watchful eye of the national and international press the painting *Sunflowers* was removed from its gallery and prepared for transport to the Hermitage Amsterdam. The Hermitage closed its doors to the public for five days so we could make the finishing touches to the presentation *Vincent. The Van Gogh Museum in the Hermitage Amsterdam*. On 29 September we opened the doors of our temporary accommodation. Much was new: the location, working with new people. But a familiar factor was the continuing interest shown by our public whose response to our presentation *Vincent* was overwhelmingly positive.

Together with the artist Henk Schut we developed the *Van Gogh Mile*, a walking route concept with visual and audio artworks, to guide visitors as effectively and pleasurably as possible from Museumplein to our new quarters in the Hermitage on the banks of the River Amstel. The highlight of this route was the 'red line', a 2.2 km long red cord, which was suspended five metres above the ground and literally connected the Van Gogh Museum and the Hermitage Amsterdam with each other. The opening of the *Van Gogh Mile* made our move a reality and in early October we embarked on the required renovations at Museumplein.

Excellent collaboration with the Government Buildings Agency and contractors was a major reason why we were able to successfully complete this project, within budget and on time, in the projected period of just seven months. Against all expectations we even managed to refurbish the floors, walls and ceiling, thereby giving the interior a fresh appearance. New installations and improved insulation have also made our building more sustainable. During the preparations for the

renovations and the actual execution of the work, we were always surrounded by professional partners. We thank our 'caretaker', the Government Buildings Agency, the City of Amsterdam and the contractors who made extraordinary efforts to complete the project within the allotted time.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the directors and staff of the Hermitage Amsterdam for their hospitality and successful collaboration. The move to the Hermitage Amsterdam would not have been possible without the support of our network of partners. In this regard we particularly wish to mention the City of Amsterdam and Amsterdam Marketing who supported us in the realisation and promotion of this unique project.

The success of the *Van Gogh Mile* art route can be partly attributed to the support we received from the City of Amsterdam, the VSB Fund, the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, Boels Rental, Wacom Europe, Artery and BridgeHeads. We are delighted by their belief in innovative art projects. We would also like to thank all the residents of Amsterdam, contractors and organisations whose collaboration, patience and enthusiasm made possible this 2.2 km long art installation through the historic city.

During this challenging year almost 1.5 million Van Gogh fans found their way to our building on Museumplein and, from late September, to our temporary accommodation in the Hermitage Amsterdam. Our activities were closely followed through a range of social media. On Facebook we concluded 2012 with almost 80,000 followers, while more than 1.1 million people spread our messages on Google+. We are exceptionally proud that we have such a large network of people interested in Van Gogh who join with us in promoting the museum worldwide.

We opened 2012 in our premises on Museumplein with *Dreams of nature. Symbolism from Van Gogh to Kandinsky*. This exhibition was devoted to the European Symbolist landscape in the late nineteenth century. The Kurokawa Wing was themed on the natural world and transformed into a birch wood. The Symbolist pictures on display combined with the striking exhibition design and associated activities to form a spectacular whole. The Prince Bernhard Culture Fund sponsored transport of the exhibition works, thereby allowing us to include a wealth of magnificent works in the colourful presentation.

In the Rietveld Building we paid plenty of attention to our permanent collection and additionally created a special place for top exhibits from our print collection. This presentation, entitled *Beauty in Abundance. Highlights from the Van Gogh Museum's Print Collection*, allowed visitors to immerse themselves in major works by artists such as Bonnard, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec and their contemporaries.

2012 was also an exceptional year in the field of acquisitions as we were afforded a rare opportunity to add a work by Vincent van Gogh to our collection. On 10 May we displayed this new acquisition, the 1882 watercolour *Pollard Willow*, for the first time. The piece had been high on our wish list as a potential purchase, as it is one of the most representative watercolours from Van Gogh's time in The Hague. Generous financial support enabled us to purchase this picture. We would like to thank the BankGiro Lottery, the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, the Rembrandt Association and its Print and Drawing Fund, the VSB Fund and the Mondriaan Fund for their munificence in this connection.

Thorough research into Van Gogh and his art is crucial to our museum in order to preserve the collection for this and future generations, and also to increase our knowledge of the work and life of Van Gogh. In June we presented striking new research results: not only had we discovered a previously unknown letter by the artist, our researchers had also concluded that the canvas *Tree Roots* must have been the artist's final work, rather than the better known *Wheatfield with Crows*. These and other discoveries were described at length in a new volume of our Van Gogh Studies series entitled *Van Gogh: New Findings*.

We attach great importance to welcoming more children to the Van Gogh Museum. An ambition we were able to further with the help of the Turing Foundation which sponsors the *Turing Museumplein Bus*. In early February the *Turing Museumplein Bus* took its first trip. This free bus service allows primary school children from the Amsterdam region to travel to Museumplein where they can visit the Van Gogh Museum's permanent collection, or the collections in the Rijksmuseum and Stedelijk Museum.

In May we opened the exhibition *Penseelprinsessen II. Schilderen als beroep* (Paintbrush Princesses II. Women Painting as a Profession) in The Mesdag Collection in The Hague – the museum managed by the Van Gogh Museum. This presented the work of a number of professional women artists from the nineteenth century. The collection assembled by the painters Hendrik Willem Mesdag and his wife Sientje Mesdag includes a striking amount of work by female artists. Sientje Mesdag-van Houten also proved of great value in helping many of these women set up as independent professionals. The exhibition was sponsored by the Prince Bernard Culture Fund (Zuid-Holland), the Hartenfonds, the SNS Reaal Fund, the Mondriaan Fund, the Stichting Pieter Haverkorn van Rijsewijk and the J.E. Jurriaanse Stichting. We are extremely grateful to them for the support they give us as we continue to raise the profile of this unique museum.

In this foreword we can only outline the major events and developments. You can read more about these, and the other activities which we undertook in 2012, in our online Annual Report for 2012. A year which would have been very different in its style and scope without the unfailing support of our partners, sponsors and other interested parties.

We are especially grateful to our permanent partners the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the BankGiro Lottery for the continual and generous support they give our museum. Time and again their involvement reinforces the activities we are developing, now and in the future.

Research into our print collection was sponsored by the Vincent van Gogh Foundation. This research will allow us to make this important collection more accessible. We thank the Foundation sincerely for its support.

Our ongoing research into *Van Gogh's Studio Practice* (which underpins the 40th anniversary exhibition *Van Gogh at Work*) has been supported for a considerable time by our Partner in Science Shell Nederland, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands and the De Gijsselaar-Hintzenfonds. Thanks to their continuing support we regularly make new discoveries.

In the realisation of various educational projects we received financial support from the members of the Van Gogh Museum Global Circle. Their contribution is of enormous value to this and future generations.

We also wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the members of The Yellow House for their always lively support, their generous financial contributions and wealth of advice.

Finally, we would like to thank the members of our Supervisory Board and the staff of the Van Gogh Museum and The Mesdag Collection. The support and trust of our Supervisory Board were great assets in 2012. During this exceptionally challenging period our staff delivered a tremendous result. Without their enormous dedication, passion and involvement we would not have been able to plan, prepare and successfully carry out what we had determined to achieve in this ambitious year.

We trust that you will enjoy reading our online Annual Report 2012.

Axel Rüger  
Director

Adriaan Dönzelmann  
Managing Director