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# Strategic Plan 2014\_2017

Van  
Gogh  
Museum

Amsterdam



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# Books and reality and art are the same kind of thing for me.

Vincent van Gogh writing to his brother Theo,  
11 February 1883

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## Management summary

The Strategic Plan of the Van Gogh Museum (hereinafter VGM) for the period 2014-2017 broadly outlines the museum's envisioned strategy and serves as guidance for museum policy and activities during the coming four years.

In this plan, the distinction has been drawn between the museum's Primary Objectives and the Strategic Pillars. Operational targets have been formulated for both.

The Primary Objectives concern the tasks that require constant attention at the museum, handled by the three sectors of the organisation: Museum Affairs (see 8.1), Public Affairs (8.2) and Operations (8.3). An additional element of the Primary Objectives is to continue to collaborate with a range of partners and where possible, to intensify and expand our partnerships (8.4).

The Strategic Pillars offer direction and focus to the VGM's objectives for the coming period. Activities envisioned by the sectors are required to comply with the Pillars. The Strategic Pillars have been drawn up based on the museum's mission, vision and core values, taking stakeholders and external influences into consideration.

- 1 Accessibility: the VGM has ensured optimal access to the collection and its buildings (9.1).
- 2 Reach: the VGM reaches as many visitors and non-visitors as possible, creating a dialogue with the public alongside a high degree of public involvement (9.2).
- 3 Income: the VGM secures additional income, partly through developing new business models and the continued professionalisation of fundraising activities (9.3).

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# 1 Foreword by the Directors

In 2009, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science announced that, for institutions that form part of the country's fundamental cultural infrastructure (such as the VGM), the four-year subsidy system would be replaced with a long-term subsidy scheme. In order to be eligible, these institutions were asked to submit a brief policy plan to the Ministry containing performance targets. In this context, the VGM drafted the Strategic Plan 2009-2014.

The government's subsidy system has since been revised and the 'old' four-year subsidy system is once again in effect. In 2013, the VGM has welcomed Adriaan Dönszelmann as its new Managing Director, successfully completed a major renovation of the Rietveld Building and put plans into place for the construction of a new Entrance Hall on Museumplein.

The VGM is entering a new phase, which means now is the ideal time to present a new plan for the years ahead. This Strategic Plan broadly outlines the museum's envisioned strategy and serves as guidance for museum policy and activities during the coming four years (2014-2017).

This Plan builds on the foundations laid out in the Strategic Plan 2009-2014, which contained a newly-defined mission, vision and strategy as well as six strategic objectives.<sup>1</sup> However, the Plan remained fairly abstract and featured few concrete objectives. The new plan contains clearer objectives that can be more easily evaluated. In recent years, the museum has made significant progress in a large number of the areas identified as focal points in the previous Plan. For example, facilities have been improved, the organisation has undergone further professionalisation and the customer focus has increased. Other aspects still require attention, such as improving the museum's digital presence and accessibility of museum buildings, and sufficiently extending the museum's network of corporate and private supporters.

As such, these aspects form significant points of interest in the new Strategic Plan. The Directors have worked closely with the Supervisory Board and the Management Team to develop the Plan and discussed it with VGM employees during various consultation sessions. Feedback and additions arising from these sessions have been incorporated into this Plan wherever possible.

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<sup>1</sup> The strategic objectives were: 1) To be an innovative museum 2) To be widely accessible 3) To express quality in all parts of the museum 4) To build up an extensive network of partners and supporters 5) To ensure that a visit to the VGM is a stimulating and enriching experience 6) To be an attractive employer.





Vincent van Gogh  
*The Sea at Les Sables-Maries-de-la-Mer* (detail), 1888  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

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## 2 Profile of the Van Gogh Museum

### The collection

The VGM carries the name of one of the best-known artists in the world, and celebrated its 40th jubilee in 2013. The museum is one of the world's strongest cultural brands and in many ways, unique in its field.

To start with, the VGM houses the largest collection of Van Gogh works in the world, with 205 paintings including some of his most famous, iconic works, 500 drawings and nearly all of his letters (in excess of 800). The collection also features paintings and drawings from between 1840 and 1920 by Van Gogh's friends and contemporaries, by artists that had inspired him and by those whom he inspired. In addition, the museum is home to a unique, internationally-acclaimed collection of fin de siècle prints, with a specific focus on the Nabis artists. An exceptional element of the print collection is the Japanese woodcuts, ukiyo-e, collected by Vincent and Theo van Gogh. The VGM collection is regularly enriched with new acquisitions and works on loan.

### Vincent van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh was a writer as well as an artist. Many of his surviving letters offer an unrivalled insight into his personality and fascinating life. Both the collection and Vincent van Gogh himself play a crucial role in the museum's activities and its image. His work and life story exude a special emotional dimension that never fails to touch and inspire

a wide Dutch and international audience, an aspect that few other museums benefit from at such a level.

### Knowledge institute

Drawing on its rich collection, the VGM has grown into the leading knowledge institute on Vincent van Gogh. For 25 years, research into his life and works has been an integral part of the museum's policy. It is fundamental to a wealth of exhibitions, publications and educational programmes. The Vereniging van Rijksmusea (Association of National Museums) visitation committee qualified this as a distinctive element of the VGM.<sup>2</sup>

The VGM is a leading museum when it comes to research, certainly in the Netherlands. Even though the VGM's research activities will not receive government support in the coming period due to austerity measures, the museum will continue to stimulate an active research and publications programme in order to continue to make expertise on Vincent van Gogh and the art of his time available to the scientific world and the public at large.

### Visitors

For several years, the VGM has achieved visitor numbers in the region of 1.5 million – in 2011, 1.6 million visitors even passed through its doors. Van Gogh exhibitions in other countries, such as those in Asia, also draw high numbers of visitors. This makes the VGM the second most-visited museum in the

Netherlands and ranks it as one of the top-25 most-visited art museums in the world. The museum also attracts an unusually young (the average age of its visitors is 32), well-educated and international public. 85% of the visitors to the museum every year travel from abroad.

### Income

The VGM's income structure is unique. The large numbers of visitors generate 50% of the annual budget through entrance fees, making them the most important source of income for the museum. Commercial activities, merchandise and sponsorship contribute approximately 25% and in broad terms, the remaining 25% comes from governmental subsidy. The Dutch State provides this subsidy so that the VGM has sufficient means to fulfil the responsibilities bestowed upon it by the government – to manage and conserve the collections placed in the museum's care by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Vincent van Gogh Foundation.

### The Mesdag Collection

The former home of renowned seascape painter Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831-1915) and his wife Sientje Mesdag-van Houten is located on the Laan van Meerdervoort in The Hague. Besides being a painter, Mesdag was a keen art collector. He commissioned the construction of a museum to house his extraordinary collection, which comprised innumerable masterpieces from

the 19th-century French Barbizon School and Hague School. In 1903, Mesdag donated his museum and collection to the Dutch State and since 1991, the Mesdag Collection (hereinafter: DMC) has been an integral part of the VGM. The collections of both museums complement one another and offer an impressive overview of late nineteenth-century art.

DMC closed in 2008 for major renovations before reopening to the public in 2010. The renovated museum complies with all current museum standards. Not to be confused with the Panorama Mesdag (an entirely different entity), DMC welcomes approximately 10,000 visitors every year. In addition to displaying the permanent collection at DMC, the VGM also regularly organises exhibitions at this location.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.derijksmusea.nl/visitaties>



Vincent van Gogh  
*The Bedroom* (detail), 1888  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

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# 3 Trends and developments in the field

When drafting this Strategic Plan, close attention has been paid to trends and developments in the field that the museum needs to be aware of and where necessary, address in future activities.

## Undiminished interest in Van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh's fame and by association, interest in the artist remains undiminished. This affords the VGM exciting opportunities to develop new projects, collaborations and revenue, but it also increases pressure on the collection, the organisation and the programme. This is due to the increasing number of loan requests, rising (insurance) values and resulting higher exhibition costs, and the demand on important (Van Gogh) works which are often sought in return for works the VGM requests from other museums for its own exhibitions.

This is at odds with the museum's Primary Objective: to manage and conserve the extremely vulnerable collection. To a certain extent, the Primary Objective limits the possibilities available to the VGM with regard to making physical use of the collection. In turn, this heavily influences the decisions the museum makes when considering future activities as well as the possibility of such activities.

## Political developments

Recent governments and cabinet changes have shown that governmental policy on museums can be unpredictable and whimsical

in nature. For example, the subsidy system has been radically revised several times. A trend can also be observed of continued governmental withdrawal. However, governmental calls to increase collaboration and 'cultural entrepreneurship' remain strong. This was corroborated by the June 2013 letter to Parliament by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in which she explained her vision for museums in the country.<sup>3</sup>

## Digital developments

The importance of communication technology and social media in modern society continues to increase, as it does in the cultural sector. The numbers of VGM fans and followers on Facebook and Twitter have risen sharply in recent years. Early in 2014, the VGM had in excess of 76,000 followers on Twitter, 213,551 fans on Facebook and 3,867,086 followers on Google+. This trend is expected to continue.

## Economic developments

Economic (in)stability both within Europe and worldwide, and the knock-on effect on tourism, affect the museum due to the fact that the large majority of visitors to the VGM travel from outside of the Netherlands. The economic climate also impacts the labour market. Rising unemployment is of particular influence, not only on purchasing power and spending behaviour but also on the supply and demand of personnel.

## Socio-demographical developments

The Dutch population is aging and the immigrant population is growing steadily. This presents the VGM with the challenge of how to make the best use of the participation and involvement of these groups in cultural life. The VGM will have to address specifically their desires and requirements if they are to present an appealing museum programme.

## Sustainability

The focus on corporate social responsibility and sustainable business continues to increase, both from the government (in the form of more stringent regulations) and consumers. Cultural institutions fulfil an important social function and as such, need to pay sufficient attention to these areas.

## Museumplein

For the first time in many years, since 2013 all museums on Museumplein (the Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum and Van Gogh Museum) are once again fully open. This has resulted in renewed, increased vitality on Museumplein and the designation of the square as the 'Cultural Heart of the Netherlands' – also including the Royal Concertgebouw and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

## Exhibitions

Rising prices for works by Van Gogh and his contemporaries on the international art market has resulted in a sharp rise in insurance values. In turn, this means that exhibition costs are rising even further while the Dutch Indemnity Scheme is increasingly proving to be far too limited to cover the rising costs associated with exhibitions featuring works borrowed from international museums.

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to Parliament by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Strength through cooperation, 10 June 2013.





Vincent van Gogh  
*Sunflowers* (detail), 1889  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

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## 4 Stakeholders

In order for the VGM to be successful, it is vital that the museum is aware of the various stakeholders as well as their needs and expectations. These factors can then be taken into full consideration as the museum plans future activities.

The most significant stakeholders have been identified as:

- VGM museum visitors (domestic and international)
- People interested in Van Gogh who are not in the position visit the museum
- The Dutch government, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Dutch political sphere
- The Government Buildings Agency
- The Province of Noord-Holland
- The City of Amsterdam and the City District of Zuid
- The Vincent van Gogh Foundation
- Financiers and sponsors (so-called 'supporters')
- Commercial partners
- The media
- The tourist sector
- The education sector
- The cultural sector, art institutions, industry organisations
- Collectors and the art trade
- Suppliers
- Employees.

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## 5 The Van Gogh Museum mission

The mission provides a general overview of what the VGM aspires to embody for all stakeholders. The mission forms the foundation for the organisation's vision, strategy and objectives. During drafting the Strategic Plan 2009-2014, the VGM formulated the following mission statement:

**The Van Gogh Museum makes the life and work of Vincent van Gogh and the art of his time accessible to as many people as possible in order to enrich and inspire them.**

In light of the success and growth achieved in the previous period and in the belief that it remains firmly applicable to the coming period, the Directors wish to continue with this mission in 2014-2017.

This notion is strengthened by the extremely positive assessment by the Vereniging van Rijksmusea (Association of National Museums) visitation committee and the favourable responses of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Council for Culture following the museum's subsidy application for 2014-2017.

Concurrently, the VGM also aspires to shift the emphasis in the coming period and formulate more concrete strategic targets.

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## 6 The core values of the Van Gogh Museum

The VGM is leading, excellent and inspiring. The core values function as an ethical compass and are at the heart of corporate culture at the museum.

### Leading

The VGM is a leading player on the world stage when it comes to Vincent van Gogh. The museum is home to a unique collection of his paintings and prints. This collection, complemented by years of scientific research into the work of Van Gogh and his contemporaries, offers an unparalleled insight into Van Gogh's life and work in the context of his time. The VGM's unique position can be traced back to its genesis: a link with the Van Gogh family and the role the museum has been awarded as guardian of the heritage of Vincent van Gogh. In addition, the VGM presents itself as a forerunner in museum operations, research, education and exhibitions.

### Striving for excellence

The VGM enjoys international renown and continuously strives for excellence. This is significantly linked to the outstanding passion and dedication of the museum's employees. The high quality of the organisation and activities at the museum was confirmed by the visitation committee. However, with success comes responsibility and the museum is determined to hold its own with other leading international museums in the coming years.

### Inspiring

Since opening in 1973, the VGM has been devoted to making Van Gogh's life and work accessible to as many people as possible in order to enrich and inspire them. The museum continues to introduce different perspectives and themes to people all over the globe, to allow them to examine the world of Vincent van Gogh in new ways and through the emotions this evokes, even to reflect upon their own lives. For its part, the VGM always seeks enrichment and inspiration in what happens outside of the museum's walls. The museum is inquisitive, keen to explore and discover, and it wants its visitors and stakeholders to do just the same.

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## 7 The vision of the Van Gogh Museum

The vision describes the ideal situation the VGM is seeking to realise. It is based on the museum's mission and core values, and it also takes external influences and the most significant stakeholders into consideration.

- 1 The VGM is one of the leading and most accessible museums in the world. It is inspirational and strives for excellence in all its activities.**
- 2 The VGM excels in carrying out its Primary Objectives, delivered by the sectors of Museum Affairs, Public Affairs and Operations, and to achieve this, collaborates with various parties.**
- 3 The main objective of the VGM is the management and conservation of the collection and making this accessible to as many people as possible. The VGM has ensured optimal access to the collection and its buildings.**
- 4 The VGM reaches as many visitors and non-visitors as possible, creating dialogue with the public alongside a high degree of public involvement.**
- 5 The VGM secures additional income, partly through developing new business models and the continued professionalisation of fundraising activities.**



Vincent van Gogh  
*Almond Blossom* (detail), 1890  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



## 8 The Primary Objectives

In this Strategic Plan, the distinction has been drawn between the museum's Primary Objectives and the Strategic Pillars. Operational targets have been formulated for both. This distinction is designed to help clearly define the focus for the coming period.

The Primary Objectives concern the continuous tasks the museum has to execute, delivered by the three sectors of the organisation: Museum Affairs (see 8.1), Public Affairs (8.2) and Operations (8.3).

An additional element of the Primary Objectives is to continue to collaborate with a range of partners and where possible, to intensify and expand our partnerships (8.4).

### 8.1 Museum Affairs

Museum Affairs concerns activities related to the conservation, management and presentation of the permanent collection, exhibitions, the scientific function of the VGM, providing access to and publishing expertise both within the VGM and outside the museum, on a domestic and international level.

The unique, extremely valuable collection itself as well as exhibiting and providing access to the collection remains the most important aspect of all activities and thought processes at the VGM. The collection is key, leading and 'king': 80% of VGM visitors come to the museum to view the permanent collection. All museum activities are derived

from this or are a logical consequence of that fact and should correspond with the museum's mission and vision.

The coming years will see continued investment in conserving, managing and extending the collection. The VGM is also focused on maintaining its established scientific and research reputation; the VGM is, and will remain, the definitive authority on Van Gogh.

#### 8.1.1 Collection management

Collection management has drafted a conservation plan outlining action required in the short, medium long and long term.

The collection survey – monitoring the condition of the collection – is a continuous, cyclical operation. Introduced in 2011, the Adlib Museum Plus collection database allows the museum to conduct the collection survey digitally. Below are the key points related to the conservation and management of the collection in the coming period.

#### Conservation and restoration

(Medium) long term plans will be drawn up for the conservation, restoration and utilisation of the collection based on the collection survey.

For each damage factor, existing operational agreements and procedures will be analysed to determine whether they are adequate to facilitate the effective conservation of the collection. All relevant departments will be

involved in this process and we will draw on expertise and best practices from within and outside the organisation. Procedures will be revised or implemented where necessary.

#### Security

The Emergency Collection Plan (Collectie Hulp Verlenings Plan) was implemented in 2013 and rehearsed based on various eventualities.

In the coming period, there will be a continuous focus on the guidelines concerning the safety of the collection in various circumstances. Training and refresher courses form an integral, evergreen aspect of this.

#### Collection registration

Since 2011, the collection has been registered in the Adlib Museum Plus collection information system. This basic registration will be complemented by the phased introduction of additional data about several sub-collections into Adlib Museum Plus.

The VGM is also working on the selection and implementation of a Digital Asset Management System (DAM). This system makes it possible to manage digital files and link them to the corresponding metadata in Adlib Museum Plus. Adlib Museum Plus and DAM are two core administrative systems at the VGM and as such, additional staff have been employed to carry out the implementation.

#### 8.1.2 Library and Documentation

The VGM is home to a valuable historical book collection and research collection, accessible to researchers and other interested parties. The reading room function will be maintained and the library will work towards improving its (online) visibility and presence.

In relation to documentation, the coming period will see a heavy focus on digitisation. Now that the collection database is implemented and the Digital Asset Management System is soon to follow suit, priority is shifting to efforts further to digitise documents about the collection and other collection-related information, such as technical documentation. A digitisation plan will be drafted to outline the required action.

#### 8.1.3 Presentation of the permanent collection

Providing access to the collection is the VGM's core business. In this area, the museum is keen to focus more closely on the desires and backgrounds of the various target groups and individual visitors.

An important aspect of this is the redesigned presentation of the permanent collection in the Rietveld Building, which will be revealed in the autumn of 2014. The new, more modern design will create a simpler, more logical and obvious link between the permanent collection and exhibitions, helping the two to form a single aesthetic union. Additional digital media will be developed further to enrich the presentation. See also 9.1.1.

#### **8.1.4 Acquisitions**

The VGM has drafted a collection plan outlining the areas that represent the focus of its collection activities and acquisition policy. However, it should be noted that the current art trading climate is characterised by extremely high prices and keen competition. Acquisitions are therefore only possible through additional external funding, which will be held in an acquisition fund. The target for the coming period is to realise an available sum of €10 million in the acquisition fund. A crucial aspect of this is the generous annual contribution from the BankGiro Loterij, with whom the VGM has entered into an agreement running through 2018.

#### **8.1.5 Exhibitions (domestic and international)**

The VGM has built up a solid reputation for its high-profile exhibitions and in the coming period, the museum will continue to organise an extensive, innovative programme of temporary exhibitions in the Exhibition Wing.

The exhibitions provide context for the permanent collection by delving deeper into various subjects, highlighting specific aspects or offering a broader perspective. As such, the exhibitions support the museum's mission. The programme for the coming period is based on the exhibition policy plan recently drafted by the VGM.

Presenting works in other countries forms a notable part of making the museum's

collection accessible. The relatively limited size of the collection means the VGM is not in the position to open museums in other countries. However, with the support of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, the museum does frequently organise Van Gogh exhibitions in other countries. These exhibitions traditionally attract large numbers of visitors, providing people who would never be able to visit the museum in Amsterdam with the ideal opportunity to discover Van Gogh's works closer to home.

The VGM's international exhibitions strategy features a selection of priority countries which will be the museum's focus in the coming period.

#### **8.1.6 Research**

For 25 years, research into various aspects of the collection has been an integral part of the museum's policy. It is fundamental to a wealth of exhibitions, publications and educational programmes.

The museum stimulates an active research and publications programme based on the collections. The aim of this programme is to make expertise on 19th-century art in general, and in particular the life and works of Van Gogh and his contemporaries, available to the scientific world and the public at large. The museum strives to achieve an effective level of reciprocity between the (temporary) exhibitions and the publication of the latest scientific insights.

The move to include conducting research as a spearhead of museum policy is reflected in the organisation of the museum itself, which featured an independent Research Department from 2005 to 2011, before it was merged into the Art Department. This department is responsible for developing and extending the role of the museum as a source of (scientific) expertise. The current research policy plan runs until 2014, hence a new version will be developed in the coming period.

The VGM also believes it has an important role to play in training and providing work experience to talented young researchers and curators specialising in 19th-century art in general, and in particular the life and works of Van Gogh and his contemporaries. The museum feels that it should share responsibility for providing the required training to the next generation of Van Gogh specialists.

#### **8.1.7 Education**

The VGM is dedicated to inspiring and enriching as many people as possible and awakening an enduring interest in art, especially in Van Gogh. In line with current governmental policy, talent development forms an important spearhead of the museum's educational policy.

The VGM reaches a young audience: the average age of a visitor to the museum is 32 years old. Education is concerned with interpreting expertise and information about

Van Gogh and his time to a wide audience. Specific target groups have been identified within this audience. The various forms of multilingual information and programmes developed for the general public, including multimedia tours, are proving to be extremely popular.

#### *Youth education*

The VGM has developed a range of educational programmes for children aged 4-12 years old (primary education) and 12-17 years old (secondary education). These programmes will be developed further in the coming period. In 2010, the VGM also introduced free entry to the museum for visitors aged 17 and under.

In the coming policy period, the museum is obliged to meet the target set by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of welcoming 41,000 pupils through its doors annually. The museum plans to achieve the required intensification of contact with schools by further developing a continuous learning path, complementing educational curricula and specific school requirements.

The VGM collaborates with numerous educational institutions. Until the end of 2014, children in the 6th, 7th and 8th years can travel to the Rijksmuseum, VGM and Stedelijk Museum for free using the Turing Museumpleinbus. The museums located on Museumplein are pursuing plans jointly to fund the bus service, securing its future after 2014. DMC is

participating in the Cultuurmenu, a collaboration between 19 heritage institutions in The Hague. The museum intends to prolong membership of the Cultuurmenu.

In 2013, the VGM launched a special programme for families with children aged between 4 and 12 years old, featuring 'Vincent's travelling case', guided tours and family days. This programme will be extended in the coming period.

#### *Adult education*

Since 2010, Education has concentrated on a strategy to provide interested parties with a service more specifically tailored to their needs. The approach takes factors including level of knowledge, style of learning and motivation into consideration, using multimedia, oral and hands-on teaching methods. Multimedia fulfils a permanent role in the museum's range of educational resources.

For example, the successful Letters multimedia tour has been developed for visitors, and for non-visitors, there's the Letters iPhone app (which achieved 150,000 downloads within 2 years after its launch). A new series of apps for non-visitors will be developed in the coming period. These resources will enable the VGM to form a closer relationship with people all over the world who are not in the position to visit the museum.

The free lectures (introduced in 2006) and workshops for adults will be developed into a broader programme geared towards life-long learners.

Another successful element is the Friday Nights at the Van Gogh Museum, a weekly platform that allows the museum to demonstrate how Van Gogh is still inspiring present-day generations of artists and culture makers. The target group for these events is local visitors aged between 20 and 35 years old. Each Friday Night currently attracts approximately 1,000 visitors; an increase to 1,250 is envisaged in 2017.

The VGM is one of the founding fathers of the MuseumPlusBus, an outreach project involving 12 museums that brings elderly people residing in nursing homes, or who receive homecare, to their museums. BankGiro Loterij contributions mean that this project will continue to run until the end of 2017 at the earliest.

The Dutch population is aging rapidly: in 2015, at least 3,000,000 people living in the country will be above 65 years old. As such, the VGM recognises the elderly as a significant target group and confirmed its commitment by signing the 'Ouderen en cultuur' (The Elderly and Culture) agreement in 2013, part of the long-range plan 'Lang Leve Kunst' (Long Live Art). In turn, the Sluyster van Loo Fund and RCOAK Foundation initiated their own

themed programme within this plan which saw institutions including the VGM invited to submit a proposal to encourage elderly participation. Several successful proposals will receive financial backing, drawn from a total budget of €1,000,000. 'Lang Leve Kunst' runs from 2014 to 2017.

The VGM also aspires to become the most accessible museum for disabled visitors in the Netherlands. Measures working towards achieving this goal will be taken in the coming period.

## **8.2 Public Affairs**

The role of Public Affairs at the VGM is to reach the public to the best of the museum's ability, to provide them with high-level service, to connect with them and offer them new experiences. The VGM regularly conducts consumer research in order to fully understand its audience. The museum also enjoys impressive reach outside of the museum, both on a domestic and international level – connecting with those who are interested in Van Gogh but not in the position to visit the museum.

### **8.2.1 Communication**

The VGM attracts repeatedly large-scale coverage in the (international) media, as recently illustrated by the presentation of Van Gogh's painting *Sunset at Montmajour*, discovered late in 2013. Van Gogh clearly remains a newsworthy subject. The museum is fully aware of this and is keen to make use

of this effectively and professionally. A new communication policy will be developed, focusing on corporate communication and a more pro-active press policy. Focal points include online visibility and the implementation of the web strategy.

### **8.2.2 Visitors**

Over the past three years, the VGM has welcomed an annual average of between 1.4 and 1.5 million visitors. 2011 was an exceptionally good year, with 1.6 million people visiting the museum. The construction of the new Entrance Hall (see 9.1) will not only contribute to the museum being able to offer visitors a more comfortable welcome, but it also means that more visitors are expected to be able to visit the museum. The museum aspires to welcome an average of 1.7 million visitors annually by 2017.

Visitors' enjoyment of the museum is occasionally being compromised by the large crowds. The following measures are planned to help alleviate crowding issues:

- More focus on visitor distribution through advanced sales (physical and online) and price differentiation.
- Continued implementation of the new ticketing system.
- Continued implementation of time slots for individual visitors.

### **8.2.3 Visitor satisfaction**

Years of research into VGM visitor satisfaction

combined with practical experience has resulted in a veritable treasure trove of information about visitors to the museum – both demographically and with regard to their desires and requirements.

The VGM believes that the relationship with the visitor can – and should – always be improved upon. Various measures have been (or will be) taken to address this. For example, the VGM recently became the first museum in the Netherlands to introduce large-scale customer orientation training for all its employees. All employees are also invited to work as a host/hostess at the museum twice a year. Work is underway on concretely defining the museum's target groups and adjusting policy accordingly. This will allow the museum better to cater for the wishes and requirements of its diverse range of visitors, from the Netherlands and beyond.

#### **8.2.4 Marketing**

Consumer/visitor research conducted by the VGM and TNS-NIPO for the VGM has provided the museum with a detailed understanding of its visitors. The results are being used at various levels within the organisation. The VGM will continue to conduct (or commission) consumer research in the coming period. The Marketing Department also refers to information sources including the museum's own systems, retail management solutions (NTSwincash) and the Museum Association's Museum Monitor to gain insight into the

character and motivation of the public and their numbers, inside the museum and beyond.

The VGM is a global cultural brand and with this in mind, further efforts are being made to strengthen the museum's brand positioning. In concrete terms, this means that the VGM is keen to present a more clearly defined identity to the public at large. Recent research indicates that the 'casual connector' profile best suits the VGM and the current brand experience. This profile is characterised by qualities including being accessible, popular and artistic/creative. In order to realise the envisaged improvements, the brand policy (identity) will be developed further and applied to all of the museum's products and services. Significant considerations include the choice of communication channels, marketing activities and educational programmes. As a result, a more consistent perception of the VGM will be created amongst its customers.

As part of the Marketing Department, Trade and Sales is responsible for all international B2B and B2C promotion. It keeps close track of the latest developments in the leisure market, analyses consumer behaviour and identifies opportunities and growth potential in order to proactively capitalise on trends in the market. Trade and Sales maintains contact with organisations such as Amsterdam Marketing and NBTC Holland Marketing – organisations responsible for the domestic and

international marketing of the Netherlands. Maintaining sound relations with leisure market retailers is an important aspect of Trade and Sales' work. Trade and Sales is determined to consolidate its retail activities and probe new markets. It will also focus on increasing ticket sales during the low season and off-peak hours as part of efforts to make optimal use of the available visitor capacity.

#### **8.2.5 Commercial activities**

VGM Enterprises B.V. (hereinafter: VGME) produces an extensive range of merchandise products inspired by the museum's collection. These products are sold in the museum shop, at the shop on Museumplein and in the webshop. The target for the coming period is to increase sales of these products, partly through a new retail policy and a redesigned shop in the new Entrance Hall. Future decisions in this area will be clearer and more well-defined. New commercial activities will also be developed in the coming period (see 9.3).

#### **8.2.6 Fundraising**

In 2010, the VGM began setting up a network of companies and as the year drew to an end, 12 Corporate Patrons had become members of the Van Gogh Museum Global Circle. This network will be extended further in the coming period. The museum also collaborates with partners including Shell and Canon on specific projects. And for private supporters of the museum, The Yellow House was established in 2009. Members of the network contribute

a fixed donation each year. The VGM is also looking to extend this network in the coming period. For other shifts of emphasis regarding fundraising, see 9.3.1.

#### **8.2.7 Publications**

VGM publications support and strengthen the museum's reputation as an internationally-renowned knowledge and research institute while also providing a valuable source of income. Innovative publication concepts will be explored in the coming years as the museum strives to reach readers the world over. E-books and digital publications relating to the museum collection are just two of the envisaged approaches.

#### **8.2.8 The Mesdag Collection**

As agreed with the VGM Supervisory Board, DMC will be evaluated in 2014. Following the assessment, a decision will be made regarding the future of DMC as part of the VGM.

#### **8.3 Operations**

Operations is responsible for the VGM functioning at the highest possible level with regard to the internal organisation and processes, personnel policy and sustainable business practices as well as ensuring suitable quarters for the collection and museum personnel in keeping with the museum's ambitions.



### **8.3.1 The internal organisation**

In recent years, the VGM has made significant progress with regard to the further professionalisation of the internal organisation, for example with the implementation of the Organisatie Ontwikkel Traject (Organisation Development Plan). However, organisations are in a constant state of development and as such, there are still processes in need of improvement. The museum aspires further to embed this new structure in the organisation. In order to achieve this, it is vital that there is further clarification of what the core processes actually are and who is responsible for the various processes. Financial administration, cost-consciousness and quality awareness within the organisation are all subjects that will remain focal points in the coming period.

### **8.3.2 External museum profile**

The VGM strives to improve the external profile of the museum as a professionally-run, enterprising, dynamic organisation with clear objectives; as an institution at which distinguished, expert work is conducted and where employees are afforded ample opportunity to further develop their talent.

### **8.3.3 Personnel policy**

The VGM aspires to establish a workforce conducive to achieving its ambitions, with a permanent core and a flexible outer layer. Talent and skills are central concerns when searching new staff. The VGM also strives to create a diverse workforce in terms of

background, sex and age. The VGM is not in the position to compete with salaries offered in the commercial sector. In order for the museum to attract suitable employees it is consequently essential that the VGM clearly formulates and communicates what makes it an appealing employer. Developing talent and leadership qualities within the organisation also need to become a focus of the museum.

Research commissioned by the VGM into personnel satisfaction in 2011 returned positive results. Several of the recommendations made subsequent to the research have already been implemented. Personnel satisfaction will be gauged by another round of research in the coming period.

The new assessment system introduced by the VGM in 2013 means that employees are evaluated and assessed at least once a year. Implementation of this system will continue in the coming period, with adjustments being made as necessary.

The coming period will also see a particular focus on reducing absenteeism, in collaboration with the new Occupational Health Service which was contracted by the VGM in 2014.

### **8.3.4 CSR**

The increasing focus on the environment and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a significant development for museums.

Museum visitors expect museums to perform well in this area. As a public, international, educational institution, the VGM recognises its responsibility and in 2011, the museum adopted an active Corporate Social Responsibility policy.

The museum's CSR policy is founded on three pillars:

- People: respecting people and the environment
- Planet: sustainability and minimising environmental impact
- Profit: taking a considered approach to continuity.

Initial steps to introduce a comprehensive CSR policy were taken in 2011.

The planned renovation of the VGM in 2012 was the ideal moment to carry out work related to CSR. For example, improvements were made to the climate control installations in the building to make them as sustainable as possible. Implementation of the CSR policy will continue and the museum aspires to receive BREAAAM certification early in 2014.

### **8.4 Collaboration**

The VGM's domestic and international networks are extensive and varied. This is due to a number of factors including the renown of Van Gogh and his works, the wide range of appealing activities organised by the museum and successful collaborations with other parties at home and abroad. The

activities planned by the museum will help to consolidate and extend these networks in the coming period.

### *Fellow Dutch and international museums*

The VGM is involved in numerous loan transactions and multiple collaborations with other Dutch and international museums, working together on organising exhibitions and conducting research. The VGM plans to continue on this course.

### *Joint promotions*

Joint promotions are collaborations with third parties that benefit both the VGM and the third party by generating free publicity or having a positive effect on the perceptions of a shared target audience. Previous joint promotions have seen the VGM collaborate with Tedex Woman Amsterdam, the Dutch version of Sesame Street (when the show celebrated its 35th jubilee) and Amsterdam Museum Night. The VGM will continue to explore potential partnerships with parties such as these.

### *Research institutions and universities*

The VGM will continue to collaborate with numerous Dutch and international research institutes and universities, such as the Netherlands Institute for Art History, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, the Dutch Postgraduate School for Art History, the University of Amsterdam, the VU University Amsterdam (Master's Museum Curator

programme), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, The Tilburg Institute for Creative Computing, Cornell University and Duke University.

#### *Museumplein partners*

For the first time in many years, since 2013 all museums on Museumplein (the Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum and the VGM) are once again fully open. The VGM has a long tradition of collaboration with fellow institutions at this 'Cultural Heart of the Netherlands' – which also includes the Royal Concertgebouw and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. The reopening of the museums has resulted in renewed, increased vitality on Museumplein and the VGM is keen to use this to its advantage.

#### *Other (art) disciplines*

Derived from the museum's mission to enrich and inspire people, the VGM is constantly on the lookout for young artists and fresh talent in a variety of (art) disciplines. The Friday Night at the Van Gogh Museum programme provides the ideal platform for these young artists to introduce their work while also illustrating the persevering relevance of Vincent van Gogh and his art, and how he is still inspiring the next generation of artists.

#### *Van Gogh Europe*

2015 marks the 125th anniversary of Vincent van Gogh's death. The VGM is working with a wide range of Dutch and international partners to develop 'Van Gogh Europe': an extensive programme of events throughout Europe exploring how Van Gogh has been a source of inspiration during the last 125 years. For example, a Van Gogh exhibition is planned in Mons – the European Capital of Culture in 2015.



Vincent van Gogh  
*The Yellow House* (detail), 1888  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

# 9 The Strategic Pillars

The Strategic Pillars offer direction and focus to the VGM's targets for the coming period. Activities envisioned by the sectors are required to comply with the Pillars. The Strategic Pillars have been drawn up based on the museum's mission, vision and core values, taking stakeholders and external influences into consideration. The three Pillars are: accessibility, reach and income.

## 9.1 Accessibility

This Strategic Pillar has been formulated as follows:

### **The VGM has ensured optimal access to the collection and its buildings.**

The VGM has ensured optimal access to the collection and its buildings.

The VGM's main objective is to ensure that as many people as possible have access to the collection. This involves not only making the museum's buildings accessible to visitors and employees in a physical sense, but also ensuring that the collection and information relating to it are accessible – in all possible forms – to people all over the world who are interested in Van Gogh but not in the position to visit the museum in person.

#### 9.1.1 Accessibility of the collection

Providing access to the collection is the

VGM's core business. In this area, the museum aspires to focus more closely on the desires and backgrounds of the various target groups and individual visitors. An important aspect of this is the redesigned presentation of the permanent collection in the Rietveld Building, which will be revealed in the autumn of 2014. The following principles form the foundation of the VGM's approach:

- The presentation illuminates as many aspects of Van Gogh's life and works as possible, with a particular focus on his working methods and the artistic context in which his work was created.
- The presentation will be distributed more evenly throughout the entire building, encouraging visitors to explore all areas of the building.
- Works on paper, including letters, will be given a permanent place in the display.
- The presentation features an element of flexibility, in order to facilitate various displays and the loan of works.
- Create space for varying presentations.

The new, more modern design will create a simpler, more logical and obvious link between the permanent collection and exhibitions, helping the two to form a single aesthetic union.

The presentation will be further complemented by new digital resources. Alongside the standard means of exploring the collection, the VGM is keen to offer visitors a total experience: a more interactive, stimulating

visit to the museum. As such, the museum will develop further initiatives in the digital domain, focused on both the collection and museum visitors. Education is set to play a significant role. It is also important that access to the collection is improved for people around the world that will never visit the museum in person, such as via the internet (see 9.2.1).

Innovative forms of presentation away from the museum could also be considered, such as a Van Gogh Experience (see 9.3.2). Such an initiative would not impact the collection, helping to balance the demand for the collection with its limited availability and considerable vulnerability.

#### 9.1.2 Accessibility of the building

##### *New Entrance Hall*

With approximately 1.5 million visitors a year, at certain times the museum reaches its maximum capacity. Pressure on museum facilities is especially notable during the school holidays, the holiday season and at certain peak hours, negatively impacting many visitors' experience. The current entrance on the Paulus Potterstraat is inadequate for effectively dealing with the large amounts of visitors to the museum. Preparations are therefore underway for a new entrance on Museumplein, which is expected to open in summer 2015. The new Entrance Hall will dramatically improve physical access to the museum.

##### *Office space*

The combination of high overheads, the distance to the museum and the ratio of floor space to occupancy means that the current offices no longer satisfy the needs and requirements of the organisation. In the coming period, the VGM will be working together with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Government Buildings Agency to find suitable replacement office space.

## 9.2 Reach

This Strategic Pillar has been formulated as follows:

### **The VGM reaches as many visitors and non-visitors as possible, creating dialogue with the public alongside a high degree of public involvement.**

The VGM reaches as many visitors and non-visitors as possible, creating dialogue with the public alongside a high degree of public involvement.

The VGM is dedicated to securing and improving access to the collection by providing information more specifically tailored to visitors and users. This effort includes developing (online) publications and educational programmes, both at the museum and elsewhere. In the coming years, the VGM will focus on achieving an innovative, attractive



positioning and establishing modern and efficient means of communicating with its public.

### **9.2.1 The digital domain**

#### *Dialogue with the public*

The VGM strives to establish a stronger sense of community with its public. The large majority of (international) visitors only come to the museum once and the contact often remains too unilateral. In the coming period, the museum will make efforts to intensify this dialogue, consequently strengthening the connection with its audience and increasing the number of repeat visits. There will be a particular focus on Dutch visitors. The redesigned web strategy, the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and the Recreatex ticketing system will all play a significant role in improving dialogue with the public.

#### *Emotional content*

Van Gogh represents broad appeal to a wide range of people, of all ages. The VGM is keen to make better use of this so-called emotional content on a suitable platform, with innovative digital resources being pivotal to success in this area.

#### *Web strategy*

The VGM is developing a new web strategy as part of our continued drive to connect both virtual (online) and physical visitors with the museum.

This strategy is designed to help the museum reach a broader audience, improve customer relations and provide a firmer focus for commercial activities.

Designed in accordance with this web strategy, the new website will be launched in 2014 – providing the foundations for further improvements. The museum aspires to double the current amount of digital visitors by 2017 at the latest. The web strategy, and the attractive online content resulting from it, is also expected to lead to a higher percentage of repeat visitors (non-unique visitors).

#### *Social media*

The steadily increasing importance of social media provides the VGM with favourable opportunities to position the museum more emphatically as a knowledge centre and to optimise sharing and exchange of knowledge with the public. The VGM began using social media in 2007 and currently actively maintains pages on Google+, Facebook and Twitter. In 2013, the museum had more than 3 million fans on Google+, making it one of the leading players worldwide. It also had the most Facebook fans in the Dutch sector, and the most followers on Twitter. The ultimate objective is to further strengthen this position and to make optimal advantage of it to also strengthen the bond with this global fan base.

It is vital that the museum is flexible, constantly monitors the situation and is able to adjust accordingly at very short notice. Decisions made by Facebook, for example, are essential

factors affecting consumer acceptance and behaviour and consequently, for the museum's presence on the medium. An apt example of this can be seen in the sweeping changes Hyves has undergone in recent years. Mobile applications are a trend that the museum needs to capitalise on through the introduction of e-books, apps and mobile websites.

### **9.3 Income**

This Strategic Pillar has been formulated as follows:

## **The VGM secures additional income, partly through developing new business models and the continued professionalisation of fundraising activities.**

The VGM secures additional income, partly through developing new business models and the continued professionalisation of fundraising activities.

The VGM generates 50% of its income from ticket sales and approximately 25% of its annual budget comes from governmental subsidy. Combined with decreasing government funding, this strong dependency on ticket sales puts the museum in a vulnerable financial position.

The VGM therefore plans to develop new business models to strengthen its financial position and as such, extend its role as an

enterprising organisation. There will be a strong focus on the continued professionalisation and intensification of fundraising activities.

### **9.3.1 Fundraising**

Fundraising is essential in order to facilitate additional museum activities such as securing major loans for exhibitions and organising educational and research projects. It also helps the museum to become less dependent on income from ticket sales, merchandise and subsidy.

Fundraising can also be used as part of collaborative brand activation efforts with partners to reach new audiences and improve the visibility of the museum.

The VGM approaches private individuals, companies, funds and other organisations who may be interested in providing support as a museum partner. The museum focuses heavily on developing and maintaining sound relations with these parties: after all, fundraising and 'friend raising' go hand in hand.

In the coming period, the VGM is keen to increase the number of long-term partners that support the museum by offering a substantial annual contribution. The VGM also aspires to increase the number of private supporters of the museum united in The Yellow House. In addition, the VGM recently launched a circle of friends called The Sunflower Collective, which features lower entrance requirements than The Yellow House or the

Global Circle. Alongside the direct (potential) income raised through such a circle of friends, it also represents a fertile source for future fundraising, acquisitions and larger donations. These friends also fulfil an important role as museum ambassadors.

Alongside companies and private supporters, (capital) funds also provide significant contributions to museum projects. However, the economic crisis has impacted the financial capacity of several funds, resulting in less money being available. The VGM is keen to maintain relations with (capital) funds already working with the museum and to attract new funds, both in the Netherlands and abroad.

### 9.3.2 Commercial income

The museum will extend its role as an enterprising organisation. Opportunities have been identified in developing and commercially marketing new services and products.

#### *New products*

Building on the successful sales of the current extensive range of merchandise products, the VGM is setting its sights on developing new products in the coming period. The VGM already made significant progress in this field in the summer of 2013, when it became the first museum to produce high-quality 3D reproductions of Van Gogh's masterpieces. Introduced to acclaim in the Netherlands, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Los Angeles, these so-called Relievos are of such

a high quality that they resemble the original work very closely.

A limited edition of the Relievos was produced: each copy is numbered and verified by a museum curator. In the coming policy period, the Relievos will be further introduced to the Dutch and international markets.

#### *PP10*

The VGM collaborates with the Rijksmuseum in PP10 Ltd, the company responsible for security at both museums. The Stedelijk Museum has also recently decided to employ the services of this company. Potential opportunities to add to the services offered by PP10 will be explored in the coming years.

#### *Van Gogh Experience*

The VGM has recognised an evident demand in the market for 'experiences': products or programmes that offer their visitors a meaningful experience. The VGM aspires to develop a Van Gogh Experience, immersing the visitor in the world of Vincent van Gogh.

#### *Van Gogh Museum Consultancy*

The expertise and skills of VGM employees is highly acclaimed and often called upon by various external parties. This resulted in the notion of commercially marketing this consultancy. A small-scale pilot is currently underway and in the coming period, the VGM will decide whether to pursue the Van Gogh Museum Consultancy commercially.

The Primary Objectives and Strategic Pillars formulated in this Strategic Plan provide a framework for VGM policy in the coming years. Throughout 2014 and in the following years, this plan will be used as the foundation for the development of more detailed policy and activity plans at departmental level. In the coming period, the museum will primarily focus on securing additional income (through fundraising and the development of commercial activities), further optimising accessibility to the collection and its buildings, and developing the digital domain.

The available financial resources and capacity of the organisation will naturally be taken into consideration as these plans are elaborated upon and put into practice. Sound planning and clear agreements between the involved parties are vital for the success of the approach outlined in this Strategic Plan.

## Colophon

The Van Gogh Museum Strategic Plan 2014-2017 was drawn up by the Directors in close collaboration with the Management Team.

We would like to express our gratitude to the museum employees who participated in the consultation sessions, providing valuable, inspirational contributions.

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**And then our future  
will be better than  
our past.**

Vincent van Gogh writing to his brother Theo,  
Etten, 12 November 1881

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Vincent van Gogh

*The Harvest* (detail), 1888, Arles  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam  
(Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

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