Digitization in cultural and heritage education

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Being asked for a column about digitization, I had roughly 2 choices: I could either speak about the unlimited possibilities of digitization, about what digitization can bring us. Or I could take the opposite view; we are all heading towards damnation, real life is suffering at the expense of digital possibilities, we have to protect ourselves!
Perhaps it would be interesting in this context to opt for the second choice: after all, I am probably here amongst a group of believers. That's how it works: people go to conferences about topics in which they are interested. This observation immediately shows what you all have to do if you take this subject seriously: you have to bring those doom-thinkers or those who do not yet see the possibilities of digitization into your thinking, enthuse them to get started.

As LKCA we are happy to contribute to sharing relevant research, good examples and do's and don'ts. And we also like to bring people together who want to move forward on this theme. I therefore invite you to come to us if we can do something.

When it comes to digitization and cultural education, we see three possibilities:
- Digital resources as an archive
- Digital resources as a medium
- Digital resources as an instrument for learning and reflection

In practice, these often intermingle and always have some influence on each other. For example, the Hermitage Museum in Amsterdam has the Dutch Masters project in the classroom, where children can make a digital exhibition themselves, join masterclasses in photography and all this in the form of a competition. 21st century skills all over the place!

The use of digital resources as an archive is probably the most developed digital aspect in our sector. Certainly in the heritage sector a huge impact has been made in digitization. The opening up of collections, the recording of performances, the recording of music: it also offers great possibilities for education. And it becomes even more beautiful when those possibilities are greater than in real life. Consider, for example, the digital zoom in on paintings where you normally cannot get so close. Or parts of collections that are in the basement and that you cannot view in the museum. I think it would be good if our government would think about such possibilities before they put all the children of the Netherlands on the bus to the Rijksmuseum. Investing in virtual reality possibilities is more of this time and even better for the environment.

Have you already been to the Mondriaanhuis? For me it's a great example of the use of digital means as a personal medium, in this case in combination with existing art. Tinker Imagineers developed several digital installations based on the artworks and life of Piet Mondrian. Not without reason are these installations nominated for a British design award. Soon I will go there with my eldest son and I am already looking forward to see how he will react to these installations and get to know the art of Mondriaan and the life and music in Mondrian's time in a different way.

Digital means as a medium also pose problems for the established order. After all, they have influenced our thinking: fragmentation of visual language, change of language through texting and WhatsApp and the widespread dissemination of youth culture by social media: the cultural sector does not always have an answer. As far as I am concerned, it shows how important it is that we ensure sufficient diversity among the professionals we work with: younger generations fundamentally differentiate themselves through digitization than older ones. With 2 sons of 8 and 5 I experience on a daily basis just how big the differences between generations are when it comes to this type of differentiation.

When it comes to the use of digital means as an instrument for learning and reflection, I think we are still at the beginning in the cultural sector. Recently a colleague pointed out to me that one of the pioneers in this area was Bob Ross. Do you remember him? With his The Joy of Painting he inspired many people to start painting from 1982 to 1993 through television. For many people nowadays it is obvious that if they want to learn something new they first look at YouTube. For example, I am very happy with my yoga teacher Adriene, where I take a half-hour session every morning. My son learns to type via Donald Duck and it is great to see how digital helps him to learn in a fun way.

Digital resources are now often completely separate from more traditional forms of learning. The challenge is to integrate digital learning resources much more in our way of working. We will have to act together in this. Certainly in a fragmented sector with a lot of small organizations and self-employed entrepreneurs, that is a challenge.
When it comes to accessibility of culture for everyone, digitization offers me enormous opportunities and I think it is our joint task to see how we can use digitization to make cultural education affordable or to keep it affordable for everyone. Certainly out of school. In its elaboration, we will inevitably also meet this other role that is required of the professional. That is exciting, but it is time to talk about this topic with one another.

We should not expect miracles from digitization. But I think that we have all been able to see what the possibilities are today. And it is our job to look seriously at how we use it to reach more people, in a better or more fun way and also dare to ask questions about what that demands from us. The LKCA is more than happy to participate in this dialogue.