



**MAS**  
IN YOUNG  
HANDS



# YOUTH TAKES OVER MUSEUM IN ANTWERP

MAS IN YOUNG HANDS  
2006-2018  
A RETROSPECTIVE



# MAS IN YOUNG HANDS 2006-2018 A RETROSPECTIVE

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# VOOR WOORD

2006. The MAS-under-construction takes the first step in setting up a youth museum. The result, twelve years later, was *Instinct*, an exhibition project in which the young people of MAS in Young Hands took a leading role throughout the entire process. *Instinct* opened in October 2018.

In this document, the MAS and the coordinator for youth work, who is part of the MAS team, look back on the MAS in Young Hands journey, and share their experiences. These are also based on what the young people themselves contributed. We go over the story, look at what was successful and what was less successful, identify the do's and don'ts, and formulate recommendations. We describe in detail the unique process that resulted in *Instinct*.



**The author: Liene Conard**

*As an enthusiastic 21-year-old, Liene became an audience coordinator at the MAS in 2010 after her third-year internship in Art and Culture Mediation (bachelor's degree in Social Work at the Karel de Grote-Hogeschool. She coordinated the first youth exhibition in the window displays of the museum route and helped set up the youth organisation MAS in Young Hands.*

*Her years of experience as a (group) leader in the scouts - youth movements play an important role in Flanders - came in handy. After eight years of events, activities and small-scale work in the museum, MAS in Young Hands opened its own exhibition on 26 October 2018: *Instinct*.*





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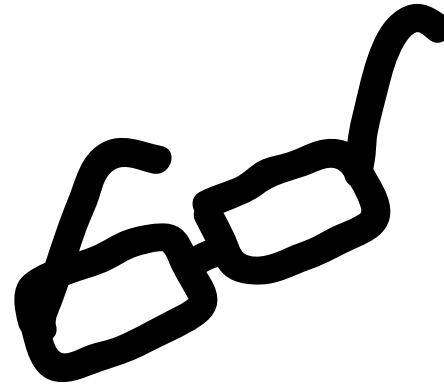
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# SOME **BACKGROUND**



Since 2006, the MAS, which opened in 2011, had been investigating methods of youth participation in museums. This initially resulted in two reports that laid the foundations for MAS in Young Hands as it existed and operated until 2019. Two events and an exhibition were also set up in those early years. Even before the doors of the MAS opened, the museum wanted to claim a place in the world of young people, with the key words: participation, emancipation and stimulating competencies. With this ambition, the MAS was a pioneer in Flanders.

## **Kies\* (2007):**

almost 150 recommendations for youth participation in museums, by around twenty experts from the cultural and youth field.

## **À la carte (2009):**

a survey of young people in Antwerp on what they really think about museums. The basic question: how do we make museums accessible to young people?

During the construction phase, the event **MAS in Bache and MAS Under Construction** were organised with external partners (youth organisations, the city's youth service, schools) at the MAS site. They recruited the young people. One of the recommendations of the Kies\* report was immediately put into practice: involving young people in developing the new museum. For MAS in the Bache, young people painted 'baches' (sheets) which were then displayed around the MAS site during a festive event. MAS Under Construction consisted of creative site workshops and a visit to the building site.

In 2011, Antwerp was the European Youth Capital and the MAS opened its doors. This was an excellent opportunity to highlight MAS in Young Hands, and a firm springboard for a new start. Eight groups of young people creatively got to work on the theme 'Crossing borders'. Inspired by the MAS collection and the building, young people, under the guidance of two art education organisations (Piazza dell'Arte and De Veerman) and artist Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, designed the window displays along the route of the MAS. The result, which was on display for a year, was one of the opening exhibitions in May. All the artworks were subsequently auctioned off. All of the proceeds went to Music For Life, an annual campaign by Flemish radio station Studio Brussel, where money is collected for charity. The visitor numbers to the museum route were impressive: in one year (May 2011-April 2012), 884,484 people visited the project.





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# MAS IN YOUNG HANDS?

**MAS in Young Hands:** this has been the name of the youth crew of the MAS since 2011. It is a group of young volunteers between the ages of 16 and 26 who want to be representative of the youth of Antwerp. More and more young and talented people join every year.

The starting point and goal: to turn the MAS into a youth museum, a museum that also adapts its offering and activities to the living environment and interests of young people. The means: place the initiative in the hands of the young people themselves and support them in doing so. As far as the MAS is concerned, young people are the partners, employees and (future) curators.

Together, the young people come up with initiatives, events and activities, and are given the space to put their creativity to the test and push the boundaries of the museum. They look at the museum with a critical eye and try to make the MAS a pleasant place for young people. MAS in Young Hands gives them a voice. They complement the MAS team and also try to reach other young people and bring them in contact with the MAS. They fire up their enthusiasm about art, culture and heritage.

It's a win-win situation. The young people gain work experience and find a second home in the MAS where they can just 'be', but also study or meet friends. For the museum, they are a direct line to one of the most difficult-to-reach target groups: young people.

The MAS invests in the activities by working with a part-time coordinator, who is a member of the team. The coordinator guides and supports the young people, and is a bridge figure between the latter and the MAS team.



**“Together with you, we will sneak behind the scenes of the MAS and look for our young soul that lurks in the museum, as partners.**

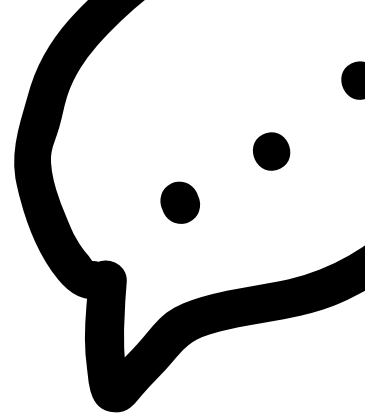
**You will have the opportunity to take the helm and you will become co-curator of this museum.**

**Which way will you navigate? And what do you want to accomplish in the MAS?**

**We provide an education, the budget, the opportunities and a museum.**

**You get stuck in!”**

# RECRUITING YOUNG PEOPLE



## (How) does it work (or not)?

This very first call in the search for young people for MAS in Young Hands resulted in nine highly educated young people. They demonstrated a clear cultural interest, aspired to a job in the cultural sector and saw this form of voluntary work as an ideal stepping stone. They were not representative of young people in Antwerp.

### A pattern and how to break it

It turned out to be very difficult to break this pattern. With posters and flyers, and via (the erstwhile) Netlog, Facebook, the website, stop-motion videos and other creative impulses, the MAS tried to reach new potential young candidates every year, as much as possible. Even today, there is no magic formula in this regard.

### The selection and the mix

In 2015, we radically changed our approach: there was a targeted call with more concrete information: who are we, what do we do, how it works, what you can expect.. The MAS requested a CV and a motivation letter from the candidates. A targeted, paying Facebook campaign among young people in Antwerp - radius: 15 kilometres - between 16 and 20 years of age, led to more than forty applications. We also overcame a significant obstacle and were able to put together a group that represents the diverse youth of Antwerp more and more over time.

Every year, just before the rush of the exams and the group work to be handed in, the MAS launches a new call in the spring. That way, MAS in Young Hands can start the summer holidays with a 'fresh' group, a mix of new young people and a few 'stalwarts'. Every interested young person is invited for a personal interview, which is very useful for the coordinator. The interview is necessary to weigh up the expectations and

explain how MAS in Young Hands works in the details. The final selection is based on a mix of motivation, age, background, choice of studies, personality and... the gut feeling of the coordinator. The selection procedure ensures that young people feel that they are taken seriously. They are proud to be part of the team. Forming a close and diverse group is therefore one of the main objectives.

Each young person makes a commitment of at least one year and chooses whether or not to stay on for one or more years. As such, MAS in Young Hands member Evy has run the whole gamut, from the age of 16 to the age of 26. She's an exception to the rule. We see people who are staying in Antwerp for a year with an Erasmus programme, or are studying here and stay in student housing. This type of volunteer work asks (too) much of them. Others live in Antwerp and often stay with MAS in Young Hands for at least three to four years. In any case, the new faces are a breath of fresh air and provide new ideas every year. For curiosity, excitement and also for a group dynamic in which you have to restore the balance.

**The 'stalwarts' take newcomers under their wings and introduce them to the MAS and its collections. This interaction is bearing fruit.**



# WHY FROM 16 to 26?

In conversations and presentations of the MAS youth association, the question is often asked why MAS in Young Hands applies such a broad age category. The report Kies\* from 2007 referred to 15- to 25-year-olds. This was slightly adjusted because you can only sign a volunteer contract in the year you turn 16.

The experience with MAS in Young Hands has shown us that 16 to 18 year olds live differently to those aged 18 and over. They generally have more imagination, join MAS in Young Hands from a certain unawareness and are even less 'shaped' by a choice of study. The over-18s, for their part, make a well-considered choice, think from the perspective of their choice of study and are more inhibited - or stimulated - by previous experiences from their school or youth movement.

**“It is precisely the combination of the two ‘categories’ of young people that makes MAS in Young Hands and the final ideas so strong. The young people listen to each other and complement each other perfectly: there is enough imagination and at the same time enough sense of reality.”**



# A DIVERSE GROUP OF FRIENDS

## The collaboration with Atlas and Arktos

Building friendships is a core value in how MAS in Young Hands operates. Friendships are essential for young people and form the basis for their social well-being and a successful school career. This is definitely the case with a (super) diverse young population. A Flemish person with Turkish roots is twice as likely to progress to higher education if they have at least one good native Flemish friend, according to the recent CILS (Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Surveys) study.

This is one of the reasons why MAS in Young Hands has been working with Atlas, Integration & Citizenship Antwerp, since 2016. Atlas has a specific offering for newcomers aged between 15 and 19, among whom there are many unaccompanied minors. Their summer course for 16 to 18 year olds is based on three pillars: education, work and networking. They place a lot of emphasis on this last aspect. To this end, Atlas works closely with OKAN schools (reception classes for non-Dutch-speaking newcomers). In addition to the course, young people work out their plans for the future, look for a leisure activity or sign up for additional classes, with the help of counsellors.

After the summer course, seven young people progressed to MAS in Young Hands. The collaboration with Atlas is based on these foundations:

In OKAN classes, you are mostly with other OKAN students and it is difficult to make Belgian/Antwerp friends. MAS in Young Hands offers young people a platform to get to know other young people of their age in the same environment.

**Dutch is not an easy language. There is no better way to learn a language by practising, talking and making mistakes. Ideally with people of the same age.**

The MAS has a large collection, with objects from all over the world. Discovering recognisable objects, new items in the collection and other stories together brings young people into contact with each other, and into conversation.

**Most of the young people on the Atlas course come from conflict zones, with the accompanying stories about what they have experienced in a different society and culture. Through them, the young people at the MAS learn more about social (world) contexts, perceptions and personal issues.**

For Dutch-speaking young people, this cooperation was not always straightforward. There was a lot of openness to get to know everyone, but the language was a barrier. Without realising, they made inside jokes, used idioms or spoke too fast, which led to miscommunication. Atlas and the MAS organised the 'Klare Taal' (Ready Language) course together. As such, everyone learned to communicate in Dutch with another person who was not yet proficient in the language.

The MAS also solicited Arktos, a centre of expertise that gives children and young people a boost and supports partners in doing the same. The intention was to work on teambuilding, solidarity and communication. Using various methods, Arktos therefore went in search of 'the glue', the element that would connect the young people from MAS in Young Hands. Each young person examined their own unique role within the group. Thanks to Arktos, the coordinator could observe this and be part of a story of connection. They also received individual training in group dynamics, to respond better to how things progressed within the group.

**Following an intensive two-year process, two 'young people from Atlas' remained in MAS in Young Hands' volunteer crew. In 2018, we started a new project with Atlas, in which young people can once again join MAS in Young Hands from the summer course.**



# THE IMPORTANT FUNDAMENTALS

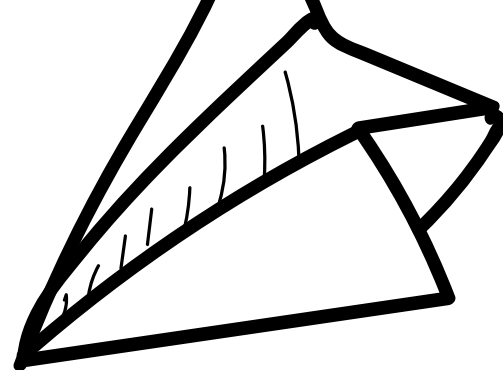
## What MAS in Young Hands considers important

- ☑ **Make the link with the museum's activities and collection.** When MAS in Young Hands comes up with initiatives, creates exhibitions and organises events, this link is always made. The young people draw on the rich repositories and heritage of the MAS, and their activities are incorporated into the MAS calendar.
- ☑ **Involve the entire museum team.** MAS employees feel connected to the plans and initiatives of MAS in Young Hands. For example, following the opening of their mini-exhibition in 2012, the youth team received spontaneous, positive and constructive critical reactions from employees, almost immediately. They want 'their' youngsters to do well and become better in what they do. Their involvement goes even further: almost everyone contributed to making the MAS[KED] event from 2012 to 2018 a success: curators backstage and at the entrance, an audience coordinator next to the stage, the communication manager at the artist entrance, the director in the central coordination point.
- ☑ **Break open the concept of 'museum'.** MAS in Young Hands organises events, activities and specific projects to get other young people interested. In addition to conventional museum activities, this also includes other events. It is not unheard of that a football match with the Red Devils is broadcast live in the museum, as long as there is a link with an object, the collection or the activities of the museum.
- ☑ **Draw on existing events.** During Museum Night - and also on the occasion of '5 Years of MAS' - the young people from MAS in Young Hands devised an additional programme, so that the public got to know them.
- ☑ **Collaborate with the (various) organisations that reach young people.** MAS in Young Hands has done this already, and still does with youth centres (Het Bos, Kavka), young entrepreneurs, colleges (Karel de Grote-Hogeschool, GATE15), television stations (JIMtv), secondary schools (SISA), etc.
- ☑ **Success depends on effective and targeted communication, both digital and on paper. (Both are necessary.)** Don't scrimp on either aspect. Let young people have their say, in cooperation with colleagues from Marketing and Communication. For example: exit interviews at the Instinct exhibition gleaned the following information, when visitors were asked how they knew about the exhibition: 65% saw the campaign image on posters. 30% on a flyer or information panels, 22% on the website and 8% via social media.

**“Success  
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# HITS

# AND MISSES



In recent years, MAS in Young Hands was all about smaller interventions and larger events, forms of cooperation and in-house initiatives. These ranged from night-time museum events to the MASup app, from their own exhibition *Instinct* to taking up a small area in a permanent exhibition hall. We will go over them here, highlighting the lessons learned. We will discuss *Instinct*, and the creative process behind it, separately in more detail.

## Night-time events, the key to success?

It has almost become a hobby. MAS in Young Hands enjoys organising activities outside regular opening hours. What is not surprising is that young people love 'mysterious', exclusive opening hours, as highlighted in the Kies\* report in 2007. Yet night-time events are not automatically the key to success. MAS in Young Hands organised a highly successful night-time event during the *Bonaparte aan de Schelde* exhibition, but has also organised less successful night-time events which only attracted a handful of visitors. Various factors were at play: the date, the weather, other events that were on at the same time, the theme of the exhibition, collaborations and partners, the supporters, communication, etc. Every aspect has to be right, because as a (youth) museum you are in competition with clubs, cafés, dance halls, pop-up shops, etc. Sometimes hitting a wall is part and parcel of it.

## Sometimes it goes awry...

In 2013, MAS in Young Hands wanted to take over the museum hall on the third floor of the MAS for a week in the summer. The youngsters had chosen to work on the theme of 'recycling', in which they would work as sustainably as possible, with recycled materials and carefully-chosen partners. Art, sustainability, disposable culture and scarcity were the key themes,

and objects from the MAS collection played the key role. Despite a lot of enthusiasm within the MAS, the project did not go ahead. The lesson: check with management in good time to make sure everyone is on board.

## Mentors

Each young person was assigned a mentor within the MAS team, to bounce ideas off and act as a point of contact for projects. That way, the young person could get to know the museum and how it works, even behind the scenes, as well as getting to know the mentor him or herself. They go to their mentor with questions about the do's and don'ts, such as: which communication channels should I use for a night-time youth event? What do I have to take into account so that everything is safe and technically in compliance? The MAS staff member, for their part, benefited from the young, fresh and non-museum-centred vision of the young person in day-to-day work and activities. The mentor could also ask the young person for advice, for example for a new campaign or for developing an educational workshop.

The young people and MAS staff member were matched based on personality, interests, studies and function within the museum. In matching the two, it was important that every function was covered. For example, in addition to a curator and a communications manager, there were also



a team leader for Heritage Conservation and a MAS director who mentored a young person from MAS in Young Hands.

The mentorship broadened the thinking and activities of the MAS staff members. Thanks to the initiative, links were established between the museum and the target group of young people more quickly. The young people also shared their expertise and network with MAS staff members. This led to a collaboration with the Chinese community in Antwerp. An 18-year-old called Lilong was involved and actively participated in the project. Curator Leen Beyers called in An-Sofie from MAS in Young Hands to conduct research for the permanent exhibition Antwerp à la carte. And the director gave the floor to his mentoree during the award ceremony European Museum of the Year Award, where MAS in Young Hands won the Silletto Prize.

Despite this, the project ran out of steam. It turned out to be very difficult to plan things together, taking into account working time and school time. Some staff members also saw their mentorees more as an intern or student who could do extra tasks. Despite some success stories, the idea was better in theory than in practice.

### MASup, the app with six party routes

Six tours ('party routes') took you on a tour of discovery around the museum. Each tour had its own common theme, with trivia, secrets and games: 'Een vluggertje', 'I'm Kanye West', 'Ik zien A geire', 'MAS op wereldreis', 'Lazy Sunday' and 'Mijn date is heet'. If you couldn't make a choice, you could use the 'take a chance' button.

The app was launched in 2015, together with the event From Seven to Eleven. 250 young people attended. In the space of a year and a half, the app was downloaded 1,309 times and 4,137 tours were made. 'Een vluggertje' (with one stop per floor) was the most popular, with almost 25% of the requested tours. It turned out that the app was also used by various schools.

Unfortunately, the app also quickly became obsolete. With a view to good management and conservation, various items in the museum change every three to six months, with all that entails. The permanent exhibition in the MAS is also regularly updated or adapted. As a result, the app was no longer relevant after two years.



## MAS[KED]

For MAS[KED], the entire MAS route, from the ground floor to the eighth floor, was transformed into one large dance floor, for a nocturnal Venetian masked ball with a modern twist. The event was organised from 2011 to 2018.

The MAS organised this large-scale party together with partners: the non-profit youth centre Kavka, youth culture centre Het Bos and Record Label/Artist Agency Kurious. Five stages were filled with up-and-coming DJ talent from Antwerp, and from 8.00pm until 4.00am the young visitors were treated to a jam-packed music programme. The museum rooms were also opened up, exclusively for MAS[KED] visitors. MAS in Young Hands provided additional content-related activities and support.

The first five editions were sold out, with 2,500 partygoers for each one: 2,300 young people and 200 volunteers, staff and artists. For the last two editions (2017 and 2018), the event 'only' reached between 1,200 and 1,500 young people. Why this was the case is still a matter of guesswork.

## Exhibitions

The MAS tries to involve MAS in Young Hands as much as possible in permanent and temporary exhibitions, ideally as early as possible in the process. That way, there is still room for their creativity and involvement in the presentation.

The rooms of the MAS are set up according to a fixed grid. The last room is always called the 'Sporenruimte' (Trace area) and has often been devised by MAS in Young Hands. In this area, visitors can leave a reflection or trace on the exhibition, just before they leave it. This is a symbolic reference to the traces that Antwerp has left in the world, and the world in Antwerp. For example, the youngsters devised a Sporenruimte for the permanent exhibition Antwerp à la carte and the temporary exhibitions Body Art and Encounters.

Over the years, there has been a change in the mentality of MAS staff members. MAS in Young Hands is no longer only asked to organise something to fill an extra space (something that was not always immediately obvious), but also to think about the content. For example, MAS in Young Hands developed the clusters Pride and Chrysostomos for the exhibition Feest! The youngsters contacted the gay community, went in search of additional information, expanded the MAS collection with new objects in consultation with the curator, and composed a song that was part of the unique soundtrack.



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# HIGHLIGHT

## EXPO 'INSTINCT'

On 25 October 2018, the exhibition Instinct opened and the youngsters at MAS in Young Hands took over an entire museum floor, following an intense process. In the exhibition, they showed the animal side of the museum's collection through creative combinations and a 'wild programme'.

The MAS has a multi-faceted collection. Think of any object, and there's a good chance you'll find it in one of the depots waiting to be shown to the public. The MAS curators set MAS in Young Hands the challenge of delving into all these objects and building a unique exhibition. With their

bold take-over, the youngsters came up with a new definition of what they thought a museum ought to be.

They followed their instincts. They chose to exhibit a rich selection of objects from the collection that were about animals. Instinct became an exhibition full of playful legends, museum anecdotes and wacky combinations that you don't often come across in a museum. For example: an Inuit costume made of whale gut, and the pair of pigeons that delivered important messages to the Antwerp resistance during the Second World War.





# ONE AWARD AND **ONE CHALLENGING DIRECTOR**

Just to refresh our memories: MAS in Young Hands' activities... worked. Not only did the MAS win the international Silletto Award for its approach to young people in 2013, but studies have also shown that young people choose the MAS as the symbol and icon of 'young Antwerp'. In other words, it's no longer the cathedral, which for many in Antwerp is literally and figuratively a sacred tower. This was the conclusion of an Ipsos study into the image of the city of Antwerp carried out in 2016: "Young residents describe the MAS as the icon of their generation. The MAS is blowing a new wind through the city. And these Antwerp residents can really feel it."

The jury report of the Silletto Award states, among other things: "They (the young people from Mas in Young Hands) are able to stimulate other young people's interest in the museum in the future, functioning as ambassadors. Moreover the MAS thereby allows its own expertise and objectives to be questioned by those youngsters. The judges make the Silletto Award to the Museum aan de Stroom for the effectiveness of its empowerment of a new generation of participants."

Of course we need to remain alert and critical, especially when it comes to youth activities: is MAS in Young Hands sufficiently participatory? Isn't it the preserve of a group of friends who do great things with and for each other? Isn't it just mainly good intentions and plans? Director Marieke van Bommel challenged MAS in Young Hands with these and similar questions. And she was very specific: MAS in Young Hands would receive €100,000 and the most expensive exhibition hall of 850 m<sup>2</sup>, on three conditions:

1. There had to be interaction between young people and the collection;
2. The hall had to remain open to the regular museum visitors during normal opening hours;
3. The project had to have a "face".



**Off**  
**we**  
**go!**



## April 2017: Quoi?

The youngsters of MAS in Young Hands were certainly no novices. An awful lot of (good) ideas have been discussed in recent years, for which there wasn't always time or budget. With the three conditions of the director in mind, the coordinator searched through all the folders, reports and brainstorming ideas, and went to the young people with a selection of MAS in Young Hands' ideas. It soon became clear that the group wanted to create an exhibition. Of course with the MAS collection, but also with space for events, restorations and a fablab/coworking-space. The young people wanted to respond to the emotions of the visitors: that principle was key throughout the entire process. (Other options discussed were: a workshop room, an event hall, a club room, and a nightclub.)

It was to be an exhibition then, but on what? In two brainstorming sessions, the young people went in search of a suitable theme. On the longlist: dreams, the zoo of life/zoo/animals, controversial themes, glitter and the museum of the internet. It was immediately clear that the young people were excited about it. Ideas such as a museum tinder, music, memes, a ranking according to price or colour, art versus kitsch... were all considered at lightning pace. They were up for it!

A steering group, together with the coordinator, kept an eye on the process, helped make decisions and (at times) tempered the ambitions. The steering group consisted of: Director Marieke van Bommel, Public relations coordinator Cathy Pilgrims, Coordinator of Research Leen Beyers, Marketing & Communication Manager Claire Verstraeten and a Production Manager (alternately Sandra Lintermans and Julia Rossow). The group met on a monthly basis to discuss the state of play, starting with the shortlist themes. The 'zoo of life/zoo/animals' immediately emerged as a favourite. Not just because the Antwerp zoo celebrated its 175th anniversary in 2018, but also because that theme could cover every collection cluster of the MAS: Applied Arts and History, Culture and History, the Maritime Cluster and World (Africa, Oceania, America, Asia).

Initially, the young people wanted to develop a kind of interactive exhibition, with changing themes and different pieces exhibited every month. The steering group immediately made it clear that this was not feasible in terms of conservation and management, staffing, transport, budget, etc. That was a relief for the coordinator, who also had her doubts. With a steering group behind you, you are stronger in dialogue with the young people.

The principle 'for and by young people' is very important for MAS in Young Hands. The MAS tries to take this into account at all times and incorporate it as much as possible. It was also a prerequisite for the process and result of this exhibition. For example, the MAS was looking for a school that teaches woodworking, to collaborate with and devise the scenography. In collaboration with the Department of Education of the City of Antwerp, we started collaborating with BuSO School De Ark (Luchtbal, Antwerp) fairly quickly. This school is just a few kilometres from the MAS, in an Antwerp district where the museum was not yet familiar. The school were very enthusiastic straightaway. They felt honoured to have been asked.

## Summer 2017: to the depots

The MAS has a collection of over 500,000 artefacts. How were MAS in Young Hands supposed to choose from them? The first selection took place ‘visually’ in the three MAS depots: the Kijkdepot, Hessenhuis and Luchtbal. Together with the curators, the youngsters were able to browse the shelves and drawers of the MAS which they hadn’t seen until then.

“The visit to the depots was a unique experience. It’s crazy to think we were all allowed to walk around there.”

**(Yvette - MAS in Young Hands)**

“I knew the MAS had a huge collection. But you don’t realise how huge until you walk through those corridors. Objects I’ve never seen before and things I never would have thought were in the MAS collection.”

**(Maxim - MAS in Young Hands)**

## Autumn 2017: a title

A year before the opening, a title and definitive text had to be nailed down for the communication to groups, schools and fairs. A deadline that sent MAS in Young Hands into a brief panic. Because the young people also knew that a good title is essential. Claire Verstraeten attended two MAS in Young Hands meetings, to help come up with a title and the message that the exhibition wanted to convey to visitors. The emphasis was on the animal side of the MAS collection, the extensive programme, the take-over of the museum and the fact that the MAS - and consequently also the curators - had set MAS in Young Hands the challenge of delving into the artefacts of the museum.

Instinct was born, and here’s why:

- **The youngsters of MAS in Young Hands followed their instincts in all their decisions;**
- **‘Instinct’ refers to the animals and animal-related materials in the MAS collection;**
- **Visitors could follow their own instincts in the exhibition.**

## A lack of focus

Both the coordinator and the youngsters of MAS in Young Hands had never created an exhibition from scratch before. At the end of 2017-early 2018, the group lost focus for a while and were at an impasse in terms of making choices: how many objects do we need? Which objects are we going to choose? What is the next step? How should the exhibition look? How are we going to create it? The team was on the verge of panic. But salvation was on the way...

“Nice idea! But how do we get started???”

**(MAS in Young Hands)**

## Spring 2018: a scenographer!

From the start of the process, it was clear that quality had to take priority. LED strips, tie-wraps, hand-written signs, etc.: they all testified to admirable self-reliance, but not necessarily professionalism. As with any MAS exhibition, a professional scenographer would be appointed to design and furnish the museum hall.



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Four agencies sent in a proposal for evaluation. People nervously wondered whether the approach of the young people would be in line with the vision of the steering group. In addition to practical and budgetary considerations, assessing a design also depends on the individual. Fortunately, there was a unanimous decision for the submission by MO KA, a design agency in Brussels with a small team that develops creative concepts for major brands. They have experience with graphic design, as well as interior and event design. Their proposal for the design, the original approach, the digital applications and the plan of attack appealed to everyone. MO KA got stuck into the brief straightaway, envisaging a space for a playful coworking spot and a grandstand where around fifty visitors could sit, ideal for the planned activities and events. A lot of wood was used in the design, meaning that BuSO School De Ark could be involved in the entire process. That was also part of the brief.

## Spring 2018: final selection of the objects

The visits to the depot were pleasant and impressive, but perhaps made it even more difficult to make a selection. The coordinator of MAS in Young Hands first asked all curators of the MAS to make a pre-selection around the theme ‘animals’, each for their own specialisation. Five curators discussed their proposals with the young people. Strikingly, the curators primarily focused on ‘masterpieces’ and unique stories. The young people chose more ‘visually’.

“The selection of objects remained the choice of the young people and was respected by the curators.” **(Leen Beyers - Coordinator of the team of curators)**

The young people were very interested in certain stories or trivia related to the objects. As a result, several museum pieces were included in the selection which, at first sight, did not arouse much interest but which took on a new dimension thanks to the additional information.

“Selecting the objects was not the most enjoyable part for me. If you missed a meeting, you were completely out of the loop. Sometimes objects found themselves back in the selection which we had previously scrapped, or vice versa. It was too chaotic for me. I was very happy when it was over.” **(Maxim - MAS in Young Hands)**

“I was really excited to see all those museum pieces. We had to make a selection from them. There were occasional disagreements between us. Fortunately, Liene allowed us each to have one veto.” **(Nina - MAS in Young Hands)**

“In most cases, we hadn’t seen the objects in real life before. So we had to make a decision based on a photo, or sometimes even without a photo. That meant there were a few nasty surprises later on, when it turned out that some objects were much smaller than we first thought.” **(Yvette - MAS in Young Hands)**

“Not everyone was always present at every meeting. For example, Liene showed us early comic strips about animals at one meeting. No one was enthusiastic about them. So the next meeting we went to take another look with other people from MAS in Young Hands. Everyone thought the comics were great. So we selected them and gave them a nice place on the wall.” **(Maria - MAS in Young Hands)**

“It’s nice that the curators were so involved in the project. We got the feeling that “Instinct” was really supported by the entire MAS team. It was difficult for us to refuse objects when the curators talked so passionately about them, we had to feel our way through.” **(MAS in Young Hands)**

The final selection was a mix of the pre-selection by the curators and objects that the youngsters found on their own in the depots and the digital database of the MAS. Based on keywords, materials and search terms, they found various objects that MAS employees did not even know existed. In the end, the Instinct exhibition featured almost 300 objects from the MAS collection.

*“It’s great that so many objects were selected which otherwise would have stayed lying around in the depots. A challenge for our team now is to register these objects more effectively.”*

*(Leen Beyers - Coordinator of the team of curators)*

## March 2018: facing the facts

Every year, MAS in Young Hands spends a weekend in the MAS. To gain inspiration, to give shape to new ideas, to work on projects, to follow training courses and to participate in team building activities. In 2018, the theme of the weekend was Instinct: MAS in Young Hands was given a communication training course from HURAE, went in search of its own identity and visited the Natural History Museum in Brussels. Cathy Pelgrims (Public Relations coordinator) gave a workshop on the learning styles of Kolb and colleague Sandra Lintermans (production management) went with MAS in Young Hands through the entire production process.

The young people needed a wake-up call. They had a great time working on the exhibition and felt honoured. But they hadn’t quite realised how important it was. The exhibition was due to open in October 2018 and had to be ready, on that expensive third floor. The message would get through more effectively if someone else from the museum banged their fists on the table, instead of the coordinator of MAS in Young Hands. Cathy Pilgrims was that person. The young people got a wake-up call and were confronted with the facts. That was necessary to get everyone singing from the same hymn sheet again.

## Easter holidays 2018: working days

Two working days were organised during the Easter holidays, where everyone from MAS in Young Hands could move about if they wanted, but where there was a lot of hard work to be done. The young people were free to choose which aspects of the exhibition they wanted to work on. The programme took shape and the themes/emotions of the exhibition were sketched out. The young people were divided into smaller working groups, where their expertise and interest were linked to specific tasks in the process. There were groups for the communication campaign, the scenography, the objects and the programming.

*“The working groups worked very well. Everyone could pitch in in their field of interest. All the diverse areas of study came in handy, and the result was a nice ensemble in the end.”*

*(MAS in Young Hands)*

## Summer 2018: searching and researching, writing and cleaning

The young people decided to ‘instinctively’ place the objects with a certain feeling. Five exhibition themes formed the common thread in this regard. They thought it was important to provide additional information for certain objects, such as facts and figures. This was a concise translation of the fascinating stories they had read or heard during their research or from the curators. Each youngster chose a number of objects. They did further research themselves and were able to call on the help of MAS staff members. They wrote the texts,



which were checked first by the coordinator and then by an editor. The curators checked the content of all the texts.

The young people were involved in the entire multimedia story. They went looking for humorous YouTube clips featuring animals. These clips were turned into a surprisingly colourful compilation by multimedia partner Undefined. And they played the leading role in the introduction video at the start of the exhibition.

Nina from MAS in Young Hands, a conservation-restoration student, was involved in the restoration and cleaning of the selected objects. Colleagues from Conservation and Management gave up their time to help her in her work and supervise her. As such, she gained new experiences (and time was freed up for the colleagues).

## Looking for a campaign

Together with the City of Antwerp, the young people went in search of a suitable communication campaign for the exhibition. MAS in Young Hands found this very intense, and anything but fun in the beginning. The group didn't have any confidence in city campaigns, because they didn't really appreciate the house style and had had less than positive experiences in previous years. From the very first meeting, everything was agreed on: the young people would be involved at every stage and there was room for their opinions. The staff members would creatively translate these opinions with their experience.

The first concept was not what MAS in Young Hands were looking for, a view that the young people and the Director of the MAS shared. And it was a disappointment for the creative team. In the discussions, the 'for and by young people' facet was stressed once again, as was the 'instinctive' character of the exhibition. The second concept consisted of several proposals that got a better reception. The young people didn't know what to go for at that point. In the end, the choice went to a campaign for which MAS in Young Hands was the face, in combination with MAS objects.

"I must admit that in the beginning I found it rather tense to involve the young people so closely in searching for a campaign image for the exhibition. Generally, the more opinions there are, the more I have to compromise. But nothing could have been further from the truth. There were very pleasant discussions with useful input and the necessary flexibility. And the models for the imagery did an incredibly good job! So we ended up with one of my favourite campaign images the MAS has ever done."

**(Claire Verstraeten - Marketing and Communication Manager)**

"The collaboration with Claire and the Communications team was great! Compliments from the young people." **(MAS in Young Hands)**

## September 2018: time to roll up sleeves

Where possible and necessary, MAS in Young Hands rolled up its sleeves. The scenography used wooden 'nests' that were suspended from the ceiling or which stood on the ground. As such, MO KA gave a crash course in building nests. The whole team worked for a whole weekend on twelve smaller and two large nests. Their respective diameters: 275 and 500

centimetres. With wooden sticks and tie-wraps, they were built from scratch.

MAS in Young Hands decided to label each object with information, in an original way. Object title, period, origin and material were printed with DYMOs in Dutch, French and English. This was an underestimated and intensive job, which caused a lot of frustration towards the end. But it was a nice result (with the exception of a few complaints about legibility).

*“It’s great that they gave us so much trust.”*

*(MAS in Young Hands)*

The staff members needed to leave their comfort zone: letting young people loose in the MAS wasn’t straightforward. But they did it with gusto. During the construction period, the youngsters from MAS in Young Hands stood nicely between the window displays and objects, wearing the right gloves, ready to place ‘their’ objects in the right spot.

## **October 2018: press conference and opening!**

No opening without stress. It was all hands on deck during the last few days. The evening before the press conference, the young people were all still putting on labels, correcting wrong labels, putting up text signs and cleaning the room. Yvette gave a nice speech, both during the press conference and at the opening. And MAS in Young Hands managed to surprise the MAS with unexpected gifts.

*“We were in the paper, how crazy is that?”*

*(Yvette - MAS in Young Hands)*

*“Very nice to get so many positive reactions from all the colleagues, but surely we got some things wrong with the exhibition ?”*

*(MAS in Young Hands)*



# A wild programme

If it had been up to MAS in Young Hands and the coordinator, the fringe programme of the exhibition would have been even more extensive. In consultation with the steering group, it was decided to go for a manageable offering, which was also feasible for the staff:

- ✓ Maxim from MAS in Young Hands produced a design for a mural for the exhibition together with two young artists who were friends. The design was based on the objects and the theme. During the weekend of the exhibition, the drawing was worked on live during the opening hours of the museum hall. The visitors were able to enjoy the process and the result.
- ✓ During the autumn holidays, the theatre production Animalium, an adventurous show with mechanical circus animals (the last of its kind), paid a visit. This was a project of De Machienerie in collaboration with Ell Circo D'ell Fuego. 24 performances were given in the Instinct grandstand.
- ✓ “Fortunately, I only found out that there was a live turtle in the theatre performance when it was finished.  
(MAS staff member from Conservation & Management)
- ✓ Every last Wednesday evening of the month, the non-profit organisation Talanton, in collaboration with MAS in Young Hands, organised funky concerts with young talented musicians from Antwerp. The MAS knows Talanton from the annual event Jazz in ‘t MAS. The organisation is run by young Antwerp residents and students.
- ✓ For two Saturday afternoons, you could visit the exhibition with spoken word and a fitting soundtrack that was put on by a silent disco.
- ✓ Visitors were encouraged to sketch too on two Sundays.
- ✓ Every Sunday, a youngster from MAS in Young Hands was ready to take visitors in tow. You could also book your personal guide (by name!) via the website.
- ✓ The coworking space was available every day for work, meetings or brainstorming. It became part of the STUDY360 campaign, in which students can study in unique places in the city during the exam period.
- ✓ A space was set where people could play ‘animal’ board games, selected by hand and approved by MAS in Young Hands. At the end of January a game boarding day took place.
- ✓ We concluded with a study day: what does the future hold for museums and youth associations?

“We need to make museums more interesting for young people, not make young people interested in museums. The exhibition “Instinct” is how it should be.”

**(Franky Devos, Director of Vooruit arts centre in Ghent)**

“The space was designed so you could feel you were part of it, not just a visitor. That’s new.”

**(Marieke van Bommel, Director of the MAS)**

# THE END RESULT



An exhibition also entails the development of accompanying museum products. The youngsters made a wish list of gadgets and created eight different morphed animals for these media, in collaboration with the scenographer. These animals can all be seen in the exhibition, and the morphed animals are also part of the scenography. They also chose a number of museum objects to republish: a 19th-century owl and goose board game, postcards from 19th-century comic strips and a coaster set inspired by a strange collection of 20th-century labels for Best Portland Cement. MAS curator Jan Parmentier wrote the PARMENTIERS Dierengids (Animal Guide), a quirky booklet based on the objects selected by the young people.

As such, MAS in Young Hands won the Museum Product Award 2018.

The Museums + Heritage Awards are presented annually to innovative and pioneering initiatives within museums and other heritage institutions. Prizes are awarded in different categories to highlight the wide variety of institutions and initiatives in the sector. The exhibition 'Instinct' was nominated in the category 'The International Project of the Year - less than £1m'.

## In the eyes of the youngsters of MAS in Young Hands

This was a unique project for the 15 youngsters from MAS in Young Hands. They learned:

- ☑ about all the facets of museum work,
- ☑ how to start a project,
- ☑ about perseverance,
- ☑ about how to work together as a group,
- ☑ to develop their talents,
- ☑ what professional work means.

They gained new insights and learned a lot, while the project remained enjoyable at the same time. And they are especially grateful for the opportunity they have had, and for all the help and support they received from the museum staff. Every team had to be on the same wavelength to make this a success. The youngsters admitted that there might have been more challenges, were it not for the 'experienced control' by the MAS which ensured that they didn't get ahead of themselves, and that everything remained feasible. The steering group was necessary in this regard.

**"It wasn't always easy to keep the balance between what we wanted and standard museum practice." (Liene Conard - Coordinator MAS in Young Hands)**

**“How mad  
is that?  
Your own  
exhibition  
at the MAS.  
I never  
thought this  
would be  
possible.”**

## In the eyes of the MAS

Several aspects to bear in mind:

- ✓ Instinct took the youth work of the MAS to a higher level. The MAS gave the young people confidence, and that is one of the reasons why they were successful. A useful lesson for participatory projects.
- ✓ MAS staff members were positively surprised and want to give MAS in Young Hands more opportunities in the museum in the future. For example, the young people were recently asked to help reflect on creating the collection.
- ✓ The MAS collection offers so many possibilities, more than is sometimes realised. A 'blind' visit to the depot is almost a must when looking for surprising objects for an exhibition. The young people made staff members look at the museum's 500,000 objects in a new light.
- ✓ The concept of 'museum visit' has been broadened. A museum room can also be a place where you can feel at home, where you can work and which can come alive. Space for activities creates dynamism.

*"What a dedication, what a motivation, what an excellent group of young people who work tirelessly for the MAS. It's always a pleasure to bump into them in the offices of the MAS."*

*(Sandra Lintermans - Production manager)*



# Obstacles

- ✓ The cooperation with BuSO De Ark was good right from the start. But as things progressed, it became difficult to involve the students effectively. For safety and insurance reasons, the contractors did not want to work together with them. An exhibition needs to be built very quickly in a short space of time, and the school unfortunately needed more time. Ways of involving the students in the exhibition were hastily looked into. For example, they made a wooden hut along the museum route, inspired by the exhibition, where visitors could ‘chill out’. And they made wooden window displays that the MAS and the young people can use during the exhibition and in the future to display objects. All the pupils of the school came to visit the exhibition, together with MAS in Young Hands.
- ✓ A coworking space in a museum room sounds better on paper than it is in reality. Minor flaws (too dark, too cold) meant that things didn’t go so smoothly. It is also prohibited to eat or drink in the museum, which is not ideal when you are studying or working. For the heritage conservators, it wasn’t straightforward to keep an eye on this.
- ✓ The young people themselves gave guided tours of the exhibition. They were given specific training in this respect. There were fewer bookings than for a “normal” temporary exhibition. The MAS guides had the impression that groups found it ‘unusual’.
- ✓ A wild programme is not easy to communicate: there were various activities at different times, for a variety of target groups. The communication went via the regular channels, with an extra focus on university and college campuses. There is a feeling that this should have been done differently, in order to bring the event to the (young) people of Antwerp in the best possible way.
- ✓ MAS in Young Hands made an instinctive exhibition for dreamers and doers, as the concepts in the learning styles of Kolb attest. Some visitors didn’t understand too well, got lost or found it too chaotic. The young people hadn’t thought about this.

“The educational aspect of the museum’s collection was somewhat lost in the ‘Instinct’ exhibition, in my opinion. Although the information on most objects was instructive and often surprising, there were also objects where the explanation was very brief.”

**(Heritage conservator at the MAS)**

“Youth work is a good addition to a museum, but the educational aspect of a heritage museum and the (historical) value of its objects must (in my opinion) be carefully conserved. **(Heritage conservator at the MAS)**

“The scenography and the nests created a very pleasant atmosphere. I felt like an explorer. If there were no events on, the grandstand did feel a little empty. The cosy room at the end was indeed very cosy.” **(Heritage conservator at the MAS)**

“Every now and then we were told that not everything was as clear as it could be. But I’m afraid we can’t always take the conventional approach. At some point the spectator has to accept that. The exhibition is open to everyone, but we tried to make that less obvious. That irked some visitors, but it doesn’t matter for young people. They find that attractive.” **(Maxim - MAS in Young Hands)**

# Highly visited and much appreciated

MAS in Young Hands, together with intern Robin Hagemans, conducted a face-to-face survey on 'Instinct'. 201 surveys were carried out throughout the exhibition. In addition to the visitor figures, we used these data to make an analysis and evaluation.

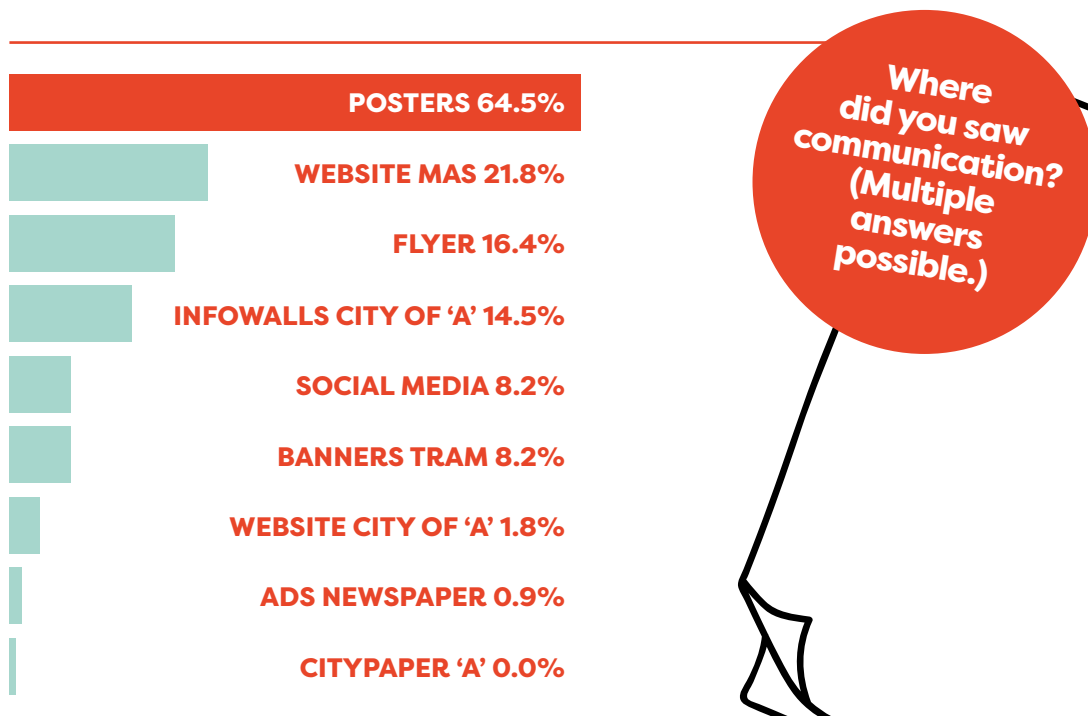
Instinct (duration: 3.5 months) welcomed 41,689 visitors. The young people should be very proud of that fact. This figure is completely in line with previous temporary exhibitions of the MAS and exceeds the stated marketing target of 25,000 visitors. 22 percent of the visitors came to the MAS specifically for the exhibition. One third had already visited the MAS.

25 percent of the visitors were students and 22 percent were between 16 and 26 years old. Unfortunately, there are no figures to compare these percentages with. During STUDY360, 446 students came to Instinct's co-working space.

Events and crossovers between different disciplines were very important. 10 percent of the visitors to Instinct came into contact with the MAS through a similar event. A theatre performance or a music concert in a museum is still an oddity for many visitors. A series with a recurring concept worked better than one-off interventions.

## Targeted communication

For the MAS and MAS in Young Hands, a communication campaign targeted on young people was very important. Together with the Enterprise & City Marketing department of the City of Antwerp, it was decided to organise targeted posters in the City of Antwerp as well as in colleges and universities. This was supplemented by advertising on trams, and was also used on Facebook and Instagram, with paying and non-paying posts. Two thirds of the visitors to Instinct had viewed the various campaign images. 65 percent had spotted posters and only 8 percent had come into contact with a campaign image via social media. The images were appreciated in particular for their 'originality' and because they were 'well made'. The campaign made 58 percent want to visit the exhibition.





Did visitors to Instinct understand the principle ‘for and by young people’ beforehand or did they have a suspicion during their visit? 45 percent felt that Instinct was made by young people. 34 percent felt that the exhibition was specifically aimed at young people. 17 percent knew in advance what the exhibition would be about.

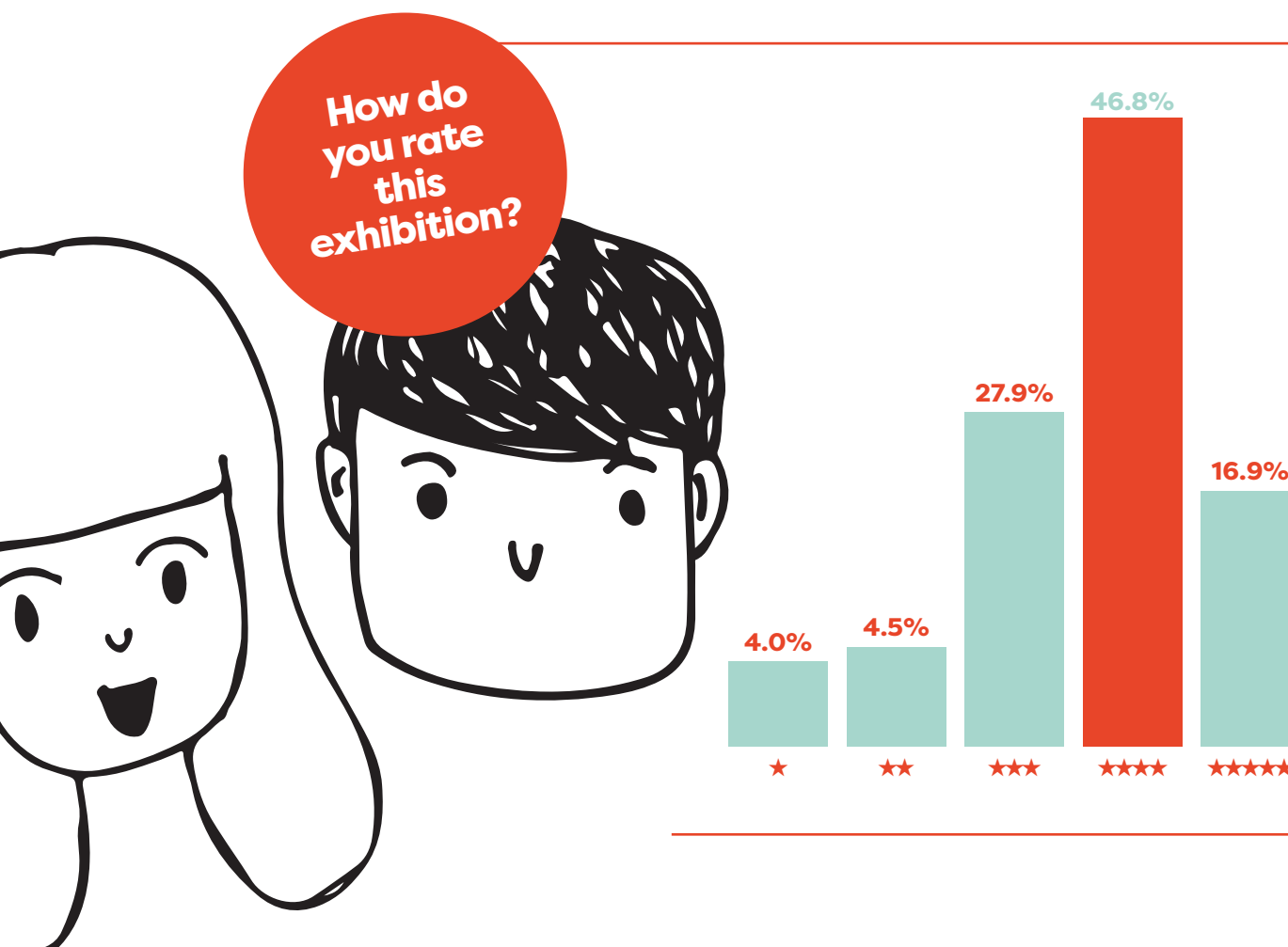
## Was it good?

The MAS collection is the focus of all MAS in Young Hands projects. They want to show what there is to discover and see in the MAS collection. 70 percent of the visitors were curious about the permanent collection thanks to Instinct. That was definitely the goal we were striving for.

Visitors appreciated the anecdotes and stories accompanying the objects. The division into different themes was not clear for everyone. And the structure of what MAS in Young Hands is and does should have been presented more explicitly.

- ☑ “The idea that this was set up by young people, I find remarkable”.
- ☑ “It’s very funny and original”.
- ☑ “I don’t really like to see dead animals, but I liked the cute animal videos.”
- ☑ “It looks nice and the presentation is great”. But I don’t understand why certain objects are divided within a certain theme”.
- ☑ “I thought some information was missing from time to time, but at the same time there were also funny and interesting facts”.
- ☑ “Should be organised again.”
- ☑ “Problems with parking”.

**Instinct was highly appreciated by the people surveyed.**  
63.7 percent gave four stars or more.



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# WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

## 10 COMMANDMENTS

### GEBOD 1

Ensure adequate catering: food and drink connects.

### GEBOD 2

Organise training courses: each year, youngsters from MAS in Young Hands receive two professional training courses, both by external professionals and by MAS staff members. These training courses are always linked to a project they are working on at the time.

### GEBOD 3

Ensure sufficient space and time for team building activities.

#### Training and team building: examples

- ☞ The art education organisation De Veerman taught MAS in Young Hands how to broaden their view of a museum visit by incorporating music, dance and photography. The young people discovered for themselves what a museum is and can be, through a sensory approach.
- ☞ Professional Snapchatter Barbara Van Geel gave a multi-day course on how MAS in Young Hands can do storytelling, just like commercial companies (albeit low budget).
- ☞ MAS in Young Hands learned how to write 'Loesjes' with a view to successful campaigns and titles. One example: "People are like chocolate. They come in various shades and are sometimes nutty."
- ☞ An exhibition from start to finish: MAS production manager Sandra Lintermans gave more information about the process and which steps you have to go through.
- ☞ A training for guides to give guided tours in their homemade exhibition Instinct.

As regards teambuilding, MAS in Young Hands went on a Shitty Guide Tour, escaped from an escape room, made trips to Museumnacht Gent and N8 in Amsterdam, and went to the museum every year on weekends. All the young people were given a sweater (an identity symbol works wonders for a feeling of togetherness), after the meetings they drank a beer, or more, and took the time to get to know each other's competencies, to chat and to discover each other's good and bad qualities. The coordinator: "Compare MAS in Young Hands with a youth movement in terms of intensity. We see each other almost every week and every now and then you take home items to prepare or work on."

#### **GEBOD 4**

Take young people seriously: every young person signs a volunteer declaration in which their 'mission' within the MAS and MAS in Young Hands is clearly set out. There are also arrangements for limited remuneration.

#### **GEBOD 5**

Ensure there is recognition. A youngster from MAS in Young Hands gets a ComPas (Competency Passport) after their 'career'. This certificate is awarded by Antwerp-based organisations and schools to young people who, in their spare time, support, coach, and supervise other children, teenagers and young people in institutions 'recognised' by a jury. It is a recognition of the skills they have acquired. As a museum, you can also issue your own competency document. There are various organisations that support you in this regard.

#### **GEBOD 6**

Appoint a (young) coordinator. Young people need a point of contact in the organisation: someone they can talk to in difficult situations at school or at home, and who follows up on practical matters, such as contracts and order forms. MAS in Young Hands is coordinated by an audience coordinator who works part-time on this project.

#### **GEBOD 7**

Be patient and take sufficient time. MAS in Young Hands mainly meets during the weekend or on week nights, moments when there are no MAS staff members about. Going over things with colleagues takes place during regular hours, but at other times with the young people. This slows things down. For example, the MASup app took a year to complete. (MAS in Young Hands needed a year and a half to realise the Instinct exhibition, which is fast.)

#### **GEBOD 8**

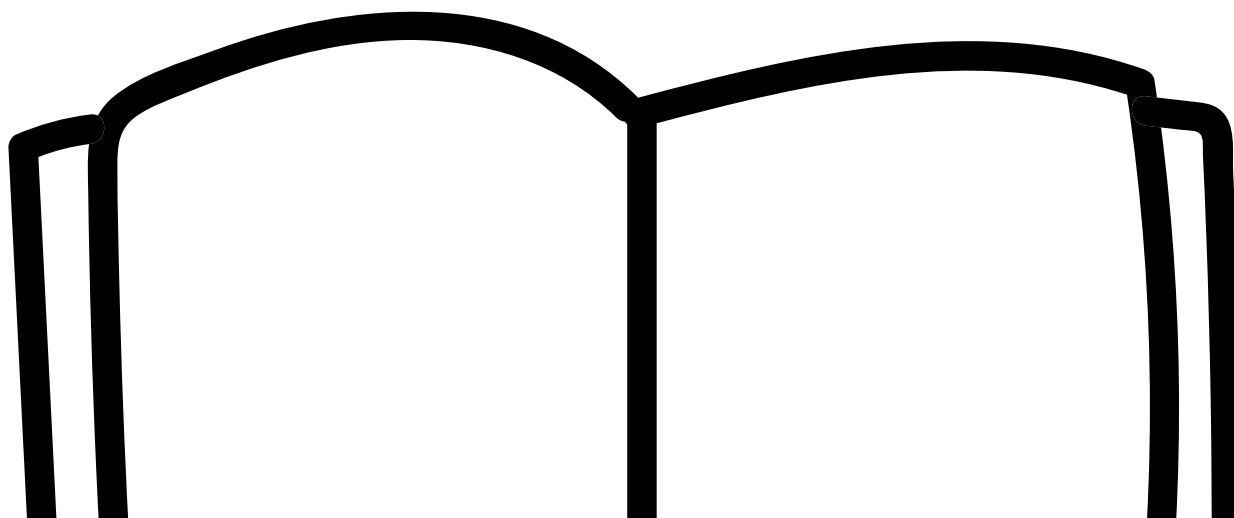
Have faith in the young people. Each individual from MAS in Young Hands receives an access badge to the offices and can also open the other doors of the museum. Everyone from MAS in Young Hands is always welcome. They are also capable of independently supervising activities and events.

#### **GEBOD 9**

Provide a budget. Even with small amounts you can achieve a lot. For example, work with local young artists and other creative talent. They are usually very grateful for getting a platform.

#### **GEBOD 10**

Put the youth work in your policy documents. Are young people really important to your organisation? Do you want to radically extend the principle of 'for and by young people'? First convince your director and ensure there is a (long-term) place in the organisation's mission and vision. MAS in Young Hands has become a cornerstone of the operations of the MAS.





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# MAS IN YOUNG HANDS 2006-2018 A RETROSPECTIVE

## Colophon

### AUTHOR

Liene Conard

### EDITORIAL STAFF

Patrick De Rynck, Cathy Pelgrims

### LAYOUT

HURAE

### WITH THANKS TO MAS IN YOUNG HANDS

Ahmad Mashta, Anne Van Thillo, Anneleen Mombaerts, Anton Rombaut, Arno Verlent, An-Sofie Nedée, A'nouch van den Block, Bart van Beveren, Brent Blockx, Britt de Sutter, Carlijn Postma, Dries Vancauwenberghe, Erin Huysmans, Evelyn Vonck, Evi Marechal, Evy Chong, Flore Keersmaekers, Francis Claudio, Iris Van Keer, Iryn Bijker, Jakke Theyssens, Laura Aerts, Layla Luyckx, Lilong Wang, Lina Nasser, Manila Sapkota, Mara Nuyens, Maria Vasquez, Marije Spek, Maxim van Cauwenberge, Mohammed Maadh Shaheen, Murtadha Ghazi, Nathalie Brejaart, Nina Deleu, Olivia van Aalst, Omar Albarwari, Rashid Alkhazaaly, Robin de Cock, Roxanne Cox, Sadaf Ahmadzay, Senna Theuwissen, Steffy Spencer Lopes, Stien Kames, Sophia Simons, Stefan Goovaerts, William Mallien, Yvette Poupalova, Zakaria Ben Liazid

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Marieke van Bommel  
MAS | Museum aan de Stroom  
Hanzestedenplaats 1  
B - 2000 Antwerp  
T + 32 (0)3 338 44 00  
E mas@antwerpen.be

[www.mas.be](http://www.mas.be)

