

THE PHOENIX. A PROJECT FOR AND BY ARTISTS, MUSEUMS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

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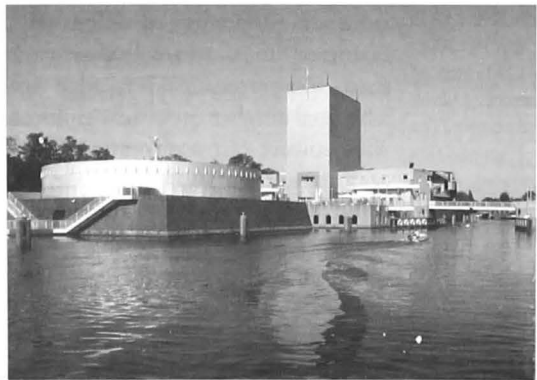
The Groninger Museum, founded in 1894 as a regional museum, has developed into a prominent (inter) national museum since the present new, multicoloured post-modern building was realized in 1994. The high-profile building, with its differently designed pavilions in the form of a series of design objects from the 1980s, was created by Alessandro Mendini in conjunction with guest architects Michele de Lucchi, Philippe Starck and Coop Himmelblau. The Museum is located between the Central Station and the inner city and has given rise to a very lively district in terms of urban development: a gateway to the inner city for the large numbers of commuters and students, with a reanimated shopping area around it.¹

However, the success of the Groninger Museum as a major tourist attraction for the city of Groningen is not only limited to the impressive building and its immediate surroundings.

The mission statement of the Groninger Museum mentions collecting, exhibiting *and* educating as its core tasks. And further it says: "The Groninger Museum is extrovert and multicoloured. It tries to cater for a broad public and seeks to surprise its visitors, exhorting them to new opinions, with the help

of nationally and internationally significant presentations." It goes without saying that this is also the principal aim of the numerous educational programmes involving the building itself and the innovative exhibitions: to inform, to intrigue, to exhort to opinion. After all, you cannot really learn until you have found something – whether it is old or new – that truly arouses your interest and creates the need to learn more about it, to form an opinion and to voice it. The Museum is a living part of society and does not use its exhibitions, the accompanying multidisciplinary presentations and its educational programmes to present cut-and-dried art-historical views; it rather seeks to awaken interest in the visitors and answer questions that

¹Martin, M.,
Wagenaar, C.,
Welkamp, A. (eds),
*Alessandro &
Francesco Mendini!
Philippe Starck!
Michele de Lucchi!
Coop Himmelblau!
In Groningen!*,
Groninger
Museum,
Groningen (1994).



Groninger Museum

are in the mind of the people. Actors and artists draw visitors out by means of performances with *tableaux vivants* or by reciting stories and poems referring to the objects. This way the public is challenged at exhibitions to make their own contributions in the form of visual material, poetry or short stories, which will then be judged and offered to other visitors through multimedia tours. After that the process is repeated.²

Government policy: demand-oriented

According to the current government policy, cultural bodies are expected to work in a more demand-oriented way when dealing with educational establishments.

Cultural education is becoming an increasingly important factor in education. Within the context of the Cabinet motto 'working together, living together', the Dutch government has indicated that it will also give priority to cultural education in the years to come. It is convinced that cultural education will put young people in closer contact with fundamental values in our society as well as with historical lines, and will also teach them to appreciate and judge art. The final aim is to acquaint children with culture (art and heritage) in a continuous learning process and to offer them a varied programme of cultural activities.³

Cultural education is understood to mean all educational activities that aim to acquaint pupils with cultural expressions in an active, receptive or reflective form. It also

includes activities that add to the know-how and ability of teachers in this field, and possibilities to have the team of teachers supported by external experts or institutions. Cultural education extends from visual education, music, dance and drama to literature, audio-visual and cultural heritage. This last category includes museums, archives, archaeology and monuments.

The notion of cultural education is interpreted in a broad sense; the idea is that the choices spring from views developed by the school, which are justified in the school's course programme to explain how so-called 'core objectives' are met.

Core objectives are definitions of the knowledge, insight and skills that need to be acquired by all pupils in primary schools in any event. They can be regarded as targets that schools need to strive for in terms of pupil results.

Subject-wise, the core objectives can be classified in six categories: Dutch, English, arithmetic and mathematics, world and social studies, art and physical education.

The core objectives as laid down for the subject 'art' are:

- The pupils learn to use images, language, music, play and motion to express feelings and experiences and to communicate.

- The pupils learn to reflect on their own work and that of others.

- The pupils acquire some knowledge of aspects of cultural heritage and learn to appreciate them.⁴

In order to enable primary schools to give body to their cultural education policy, extra funds will

²This trend is also visible in other museums: see 'Museumeducatie in de praktijk. Tendrapport museumeducatie 2007', Cultuurnetwerk Nederland, Utrecht 2008.

³H.A. Plasterk, H. A., 'Regeling versterking cultuureducatie in het PO 2008-2011', Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague (2008).

⁴Greven J, Letschert J, 'Kerndoelen primair onderwijs, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague (2006).

be made available. The purpose behind this incentives measure is that schools should increasingly develop lines of policy with regard to cultural education. This also implies that schools develop their own view on cultural education and its connection with other relevant areas of learning within the school syllabus.

The policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on culture and education seeks to stimulate schools to work in a more demand-oriented fashion. Increasingly, the relevant funds are finding their way to the schools, which can thus purchase what is on offer, or – which is the object in view – can indicate to the supplier of the cultural product what they need. What is preferable in this context is that the product is made in close co-operation between the school and the cultural institution.⁵ An obstacle is that the museums have not received extra funds, in contrast with the schools.

A development that contributes to the strengthening of cultural education and ensures a more demand-oriented approach on the part of the schools is the appointment of an Internal Cultural Coordinator (ICC).

He or she sees to it that artistic and cultural activities are given a place of their own within primary education. The ICC formulates the cultural policy and is the focal point and driving force when it comes to organizing cultural activities within the school. Further, the ICC keeps in close touch with cultural institutions. For teachers

and educational staff of cultural institutions aspiring to become an ICC, a special course has been developed to that end.

Policies are pursued by the national government as well as by regional authorities. The policy of the Province of Groningen is as follows:

We want culture to play an ever greater part in the private lives of people in Groningen; we not only want to bring people into contact with culture, but especially want them to participate actively. We want our programmes to show that culture range and participation are on the increase. We are convinced that passive participation is a precondition to finally achieve active participation and/or development of talent. Basically, the foundation is laid in the schools: via cultural education pupils come into touch with art and culture and get to take part actively in their schools. There they become acquainted with culture, are made curious and offered the opportunity to discover their own talents. To achieve all this, cultural education plans of the schools are highly important.⁶

To a greater extent than has been the case of late, the provincial government wants supply and demand to be brought together within the networks in which schools and cultural institutions participate. The deciding factor here is what the schools want: their demand is the guiding principle.

What is the view of the City Council of Groningen on cultural education?

⁵Hagenaars, P. 'Doel en streven van cultuur en school', Cultuurnetwerk Nederland, Utrecht (2007).

⁶M'Stroomversnelling 2', Cultural Memo 2009-2012, Province of Groningen, Groningen (2008).

Being the local authority, we feel that it is one of our major responsibilities to make sure that a wide range of art forms remains accessible. Obviously, it is up to the citizens themselves to visit these institutions. When it concerns children or young people, however, it is a different matter altogether. The early experiences with art and culture play a decisive role on children's emotional, social and artistic development and their active participation in later years. It is common knowledge that not all children come into touch with art and culture as a matter of course. This is regrettable. The school is the place par excellence where children, regardless of their background, can become acquainted with the broad range of art and culture. To achieve this, we are making sure that culture is given its niche in education.⁷

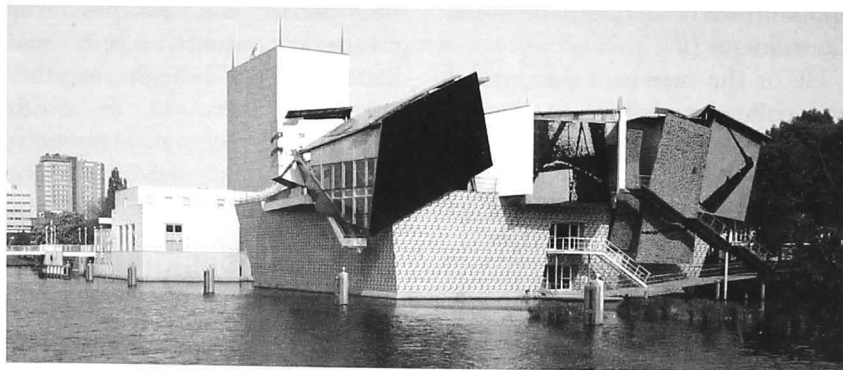
The City grant is a supplement to the funds for cultural education that schools receive from the national government.

⁷Cultuurstad Groningen, 'gewoon bijzonder', Cultural Memo of Municipality of Groningen 2009-2012, Groningen (2008).

What questions?

But what questions do teachers – particularly those working in primary education, who have had no artistic training – put to the professionals of the museum and to professional artists? It is virtually impossible for

outsiders to formulate questions that make sense, certainly when it concerns avant-garde presentations, new movements about which information is still scarce, or innovative multidisciplinary projects that exceed the bounds of disciplines. In addition, there are all sorts of practical matters and sometimes even political or religious ideologies that may prevent pupils from different target groups from asking good questions: a nude painting or political satire may well put off religious communities, even in this progressive and tolerant but also very religious country. The institutes and artists will have to extend a helping hand, if only to get a discussion going. The Groninger Museum has developed a remarkable project that has combined the questions from our society, the wishes of the museum and the ideas of the artists in one unique whole that may well be copied elsewhere. What does this project involve and why does the Groninger Museum believe that it links up perfectly with a public-oriented policy and that it is so special for the community?



Coop Himmelblau pavilion, Groninger Museum)

Ailihto.

The Isle of the Phoenix

The project is called *Ailihto. The Isle of the Phoenix*. It consists of a highly imaginative installation in the Coop Himmelblau pavilion of the Groninger Museum, with an extensive programme for target groups from special education, and with family programmes

The original set-up of this installation is as follows:

In this installation the children enter a new, strange world that surrounds them. They not only watch a performance, admire a work of art, listen to a concert or a storyteller. A child that visits this exhibition will become part of an intense space where it is surrounded by light, sound, smells and images. This way the child becomes the hero in the epic.

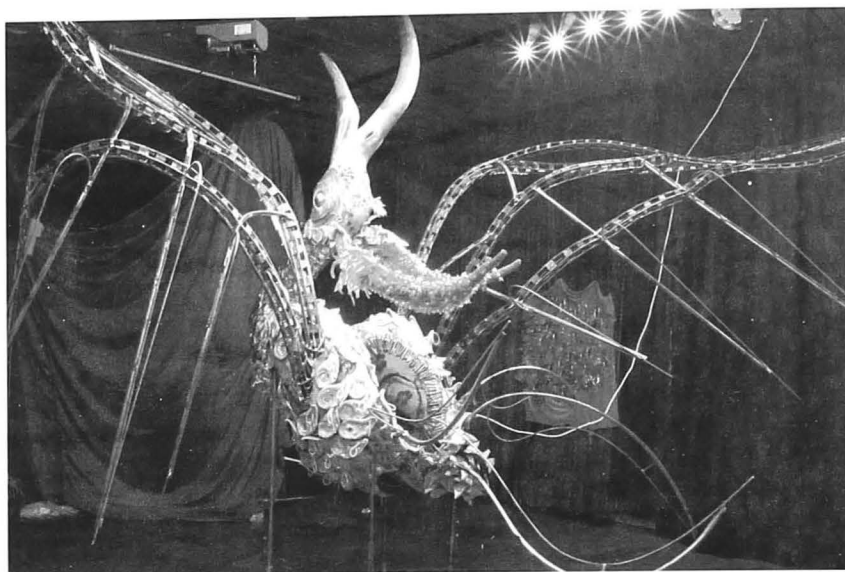
The installation consists of various parts. At first a semitranslucent black curtain hides the works of art, although already some reflection and light are visible. The everyday world is left behind and, like a prince or princess in a fairy tale, the child 'travels' to a peculiar place. Here there are four huge dragons. In numerous myths and tales the dragon stands for evil that must be overcome. In some stories and cultures the dragon incorporates good as well as evil. The dragon is a winged creature breathing fire. The dragons in this installation are designed quite differently. There is a red dragon conveying energy and power, and a darting, dreamy light-blue dragon with a tail pointing to the sky; then there is an orange



Red dragon with mirror gate

dragon that radiates warmth and is basking in the sun, and also a blue dragon that seems to emerge from the sea. The dragons are several metres long and high. Their bodies are designed sculpturally and are situated in a landscape with mirror gates.

The child is surrounded by a 'soundscape' consisting of many different layers. These sound layers create various atmospheres, in which the child hears echoes of the worlds and cultures embodied by the dragons. There are sounds from Egyptian music, for example, which has come down to us by means of papyrus, there is the rustling of reed and of the wind, but also Inuit throat singing and the pattering of horses' hoofs, birdsong and the mumbling of witch doctors. The dragons are directed towards the earth. They are designed in such a way that children can see their faces from their height and perspective. By means of the ever changing lighting (computer - controlled light machine) the dragons are revealed step by step, while their appearance is changing all the time. The lighting causes various effects on the material and on the colours



The Firebird

because of the kind of material (textile) and the way it has been processed (in many, many layers). Each dragon tells a story.

The children can sit down and listen. Each dragon tells a story, a myth about the Creation of the world. The children are not expected to understand every word of the stories, which are rather meant to convey a certain atmosphere and bring all sorts of associations to mind. Lines of poems by children have also been incorporated. Various voices are sounding and children will be able to understand fragments. The tales are very evocative and rich. They refer to themes such as light and fire, wanting to fly, longing for the sun, the passing of time. It looks as if the dragon is dreaming and telling stories about days long gone. Time and again these tales offer moments of rest between the periods when the children are exploring the multicoloured world

of the dragons. This way they are better able to concentrate and to watch while they are listening.

The Mirror Gates refer to the nature and the landscape the dragons and the children find themselves in. The Gates call up associations of tropical plants and flowers but also of crumbly stones. In this room the children also smell different lovely scents connected with the myths of the Phoenix, such as the smell of lemon or rosemary. For visually handicapped children the Firebird is fitted out in such a way that they can also get an impression by feeling their way. For hearing-impaired children parts of the story will be expressed by an interpreter for the deaf.

The next part of the installation includes a change-over to the image of the Phoenix itself. In many stories and myths the emergence of the Phoenix is a moment of great significance. It is not granted to many to see the bird as it is very

rare. Some traditions have it that first a worm crawls out of the fire into which the bird Phoenix had disappeared. Then this worm becomes feathered and grows wings, and eventually it develops into a bird. According to other stories, the bird first disappears for three days before it rises again from its own ashes. The visitors stand still in a particular place in the room to experience how the light changes there. A kind of solar eclipse is taking place. The light changes from warm to cold, becoming blue and unreal.

After this they enter the last part of the installation and this is the place where they can see the Phoenix. The design of the huge bird suggests that it raises itself, above the earth, its tail reminiscent of a worm. Bands of light and theatrical lighting worked into the body are suggestive of motion. Here too the children can listen to a part of the story, hear sounds and smell scents. Various stories about the Phoenix are given shape in a poetic and associative manner, along with fragments of different versions of fairy tales and sayings about the Phoenix, and its emergence.

The artist

Ailbto. The Isle of the Phoenix has been made by the artist Othilia Verdurmen. She has described the lengthy genesis of this remarkable installation, providing an excellent insight into the artist's creative process:

'At first I thought that the Phoenix was red. I was trying to find a distinction between the structures of the sentinels and the coverts of the Phoenix. And I wrapped and wrapped poppy-red feathers around the bird's neck.

At first I thought that the light from the eyes was star-shaped. And I made patterns around the eyes. All I had so far was the head and it was very difficult to define the expression, because I could not see what the position of the neck was in relation to the body. The head was so big that I could not see the left and the right-hand side simultaneously.

At first I looked at the eyes of the Phoenix. Were they really eyes that looked at you? Was I to make a creature – for the first time in my life – that was self-sufficient, yes, that was making no attempt at all to make contact? To look at the sky, yes, to be the sun itself.

This is how I thought at first and every day I wore my large red apron with traces of glue, clay, paint and here and there a silver glitter. Out-of-place stars in red muddy earth. Stars that had casually fallen from the sky, and only a child could understand that those tiny glitters were stars.

The Phoenix was so big that I could not possibly grasp the whole bird outright, and every day I hoped to find a golden trail that simply had to be followed. But it would take a long time and I had to go on looking, scattering around the disconnected structures, which I had been working on for weeks on end, on the Phoenix, without

any consistent thought. And I was small and I was big.

I saw that the colour red, so high in the sky, was wrong. I remembered that at one time the head was suspended high in my studio. An ever changing light was shining on the golden back of the Phoenix's head. Then, all at once, I saw a planet up in the sky!

Yes, the back of the bird's head was a planet and the lashes were like a streak of stars. And I understood that the Phoenix so high in the sky also embodied a connection between heaven and earth. I tried to take in this image of the floating planet, in the depth of my being. It was a sunny day, but the curtains in my studio were closed and there I was, sitting in a blacked-out room. There was this concentration that can suddenly afford a deep and close insight. If you are very happy with what you see and allow it to enter your innermost being, you will find a trail. The more you filter out the outside world, the higher your chances of finding a trail in the dark. You will not find it in noise and light, but rather in loneliness and silence. The blacker your environment, the more each tiny pin-prick of light will catch the eye and tell you what to do.

In the barn I understood that the red could only occur in the lower parts of the Phoenix. Red is the earth and red in the sky made the Phoenix heavy, whereas I wanted to achieve lightness! I was going to remove all I had made so far and start all over again. In my studio I had a couple of spare eyes. So I

painted and painted, holding the eye before the torch and trying to find out where the light came from that shone from the eye. I knew exactly what eyes I was looking for, but I could create only one derivative of those eyes. There is always the limitation of the pigments in the paint, the transparency and smoothness of the polyester base form. I sanded and sanded until an intricate network emerged that allowed the light to emanate.

As soon as the bird's head was back in my studio, I carried out an 'eye-lid correction'. Everything was removed. The feathers, the leather, the eyes that were still empty. Everything off – and now rebuild it very, very patiently.

And at the same time the idea for the feathery structure was born. I had discovered that real feathers were far too coarsely structured, as it were, to lend lightness and elegance to the Phoenix. Suddenly my eye fell on a golden plastic material with a snakeskin print. I covered it with transparent spangles in different tints. To my surprise the snakeskin pattern adapted its colouring to the changing light shining on it. Now I had my magic bird and I was very happy with the delicate balance between the light from inside and that from outside. Two effects that are likely to diminish each other's strength if applied without subtlety. I looked forward to the story that I could visualize by means of the various effects.

A creation is no good until I have come to love it a little. And this does not usually happen until I have managed to fathom its nature

and character sufficiently to be able to achieve a logical structure in the design. I had now found a number of fundamental images that gave me a push in the right direction. First of all, the image of the planet, then the sun around the eyes and the multicolouredness in the structure of the feathers that would add something intangible to the Phoenix.

I found that the regular structure of the feathers and the abstraction of the plumage would intensify the symbolic value of the Phoenix. It was not to become a big realistic fluffy bird – no, it was to be an impalpable myth. The diagram of the plumage stirs the imagination rather than give an interpretation. I was also happy with the gigantic wings, which through their position and lineation lent credibility to the belief that the Phoenix could actually fly! In spite of the open line structure, the wings were powerful and dynamic.

I also found that from the point where the neck begins, I could make the structure run upwards and – in contrast – downwards from the head. This would cause the Phoenix to get out of its own shell, as it were, giving rise to an interesting interplay of forces.

It was a play of gravity. The glass beads emphasized the downward aspect, making it look as if copper flames framed the neck like an ascending crown.

If you want to build a Phoenix, many questions are awaiting answers. Does it come from the fire, or is it fire itself? This is a very

essential difference. It occurred to me that the Phoenix comes from fire, but need not necessarily be made of the same substance. My main challenge was in the flying. How could I give a creature of such dimensions and wingspread the suggestion of lightness? Dense wings would fit in badly with the rest of my project. I also realized that dense wings would come across as tremendously massive. Openwork wings, however, must be composed of a careful interplay of lines. More often than not the laws of nature turn out to be surprisingly logical and wings with holes are simply not very helpful when it comes to gliding with the wind. Therefore I examined the bones and muscles that make up a wing. I used this knowledge to develop an interplay of lines with enough lift to evoke the suggestion of flying.

Now that I had made it my challenge to let the gigantic bird come out of the fire with a strong suggestion of lightness, I wanted to make sure that there were as few places as possible where the fire touched the bird, to support it from the bottom up. This required a very balanced form. The Phoenix was different on all sides when you walked around it. The left wing seemed to extricate itself, like a hand that you pull out of dough. The wing ended up close to the ground, without actually touching it. The right wing was free in the air. I wanted to see the Phoenix at the very moment of flying up. The tension in the muscles, the position of take-off, the head already lifted up to heaven in delirious joy,

everything full of new young life.

The breast thrust forward in all vulnerability, the way animals do when they feel safe and secure.

The body was heart-shaped and open at the back, in the same way that the sentinels had egg-shaped openings. A shape that was not compact, but that you could look into to find a mysterious cavity. The cavity that is home to the unknown, the beginning of everything. And everything was fixed to the heart: the wings, the neck and the tail. Everything is fixed to the heart. Even the position of the heart on the fire was slightly oblique and inclining to the left, similar to the position of the heart in the human chest. The tail was raised up on the left-hand side, touching the ground in the middle. And on the right-hand side, the tail – clad in exuberant billowing feathers – pointed downwards. This way, the Phoenix was full of life and completely dynamic, as you can be mad with the joy of living at the start of something new. Yet that new life comes with a primal scream, and the frantic tension just before the release into the wide skies comes close to birth pangs. This to me seemed the most exciting moment of the Phoenix.

So there it was, on the fire, in all its strength and greatness. And once again I was small and I was big. I saw what it would cost to complete this gigantic work. In attempting to achieve lightness, I had to toil. Underneath the heart, in and around the heart, between the irons and with frayed ends hanging from my fingers. But what is it

compared to the awesome vision that was nearing its completion after three years? What is it after the sentinels had waited for the emergence of the Phoenix? And I worked on my island, where the sentinels were quiet underneath their dark-blue cloths and where the mirror gates had let me through to allow me, after all those years, to discover the Phoenix. Yes, that expectation that eventually I would see its completion, gave me wings.

Besides the capricious spatial shapes of the fire, the light increasingly formed my starting point. How could I build up the fire in such a way that I could increasingly allow the light to do its work as I got higher and higher? It was extremely exciting. At first I was so fascinated by the threads of light and their colour possibilities that it seemed almost a sin to cover the light with my fire structures. In contrast to textile, which is a seasonal product, you use light to mix every colour you want!

Of course I can evoke colours by the combination of materials and structures. Ultimately, colour is also a vibration, as is light, but because textile has much more mass than light it is also more unyielding and it occasionally requires a challenging quest to find exactly the proper combination of materials to realize a certain effect.

And thus, mass, transparency and light were the components that I worked with. Everything was new, the balance between them, the light that was so much more

impressive when covered with black because the contrast was then greater as well as the enchantment of the changing light. The fire was completely exotic and hypnotizing.

The composition of my Phoenix consists of three elements, which are interwoven with one another: the fire, on which the Phoenix rests, the Phoenix itself, and the palm nest. I wished to make a clear distinction between the elements in terms of colour and elaboration. You could see the fire through the tail of the Phoenix. It is easy to lose all orientation in the confusion of lines and colour, certainly if there are many nuances in the colours. You can be so subtle that everything gravitates together. That is why I use bold fluorescent pink as a final colour wash over the palm leaves for example, and canary yellow for the fire. Although these colours are opposites and are actually hard colours, they draw attention to refined structures with their intensity, and make a distinction between the various sections. It is a structure of layer upon layer. Light guides the eye. Colour guides the eye.

This was the way the Phoenix was on the last day.

The last day, the day I began on the wings. I began with the wings and they were golden. When I departed I suddenly saw where black had to be in the bird. Gold and black. Gleaming, exciting red through transparent black. Gleaming through black. I was fascinated.

But fate seizes you at unexpected moments.

Then something occurred that seemed impossible in view of the powerful, creative flow the previous day. Yes, if your hands have become butterflies that can cross even an ocean on the wind, if you are so vulnerable and insignificant as we as humans actually are, if you have decided to surrender yourself to the wind of your ideas, the waters of your visions, and the earth is to you a place where the sparks of your spirit can build a new world, if you are so great and so vulnerable at the same time, you cannot imagine that everything can be destroyed in a second.

I arrived on my bicycle and was confronted by the total devastation of my studio, my island, where for years and years the Phoenix was planned to arise.

There stood the skeletons of my sentinels, the heart of the Phoenix, where a wing still stuck out, icicles like stalactites under the head of the orange sentinel The curl of the red sentinel still stood bravely erect to tell me that his spirit was not dead.

The sound of running water and dripping. The ash and the black. When I saw it, everything went black. Then I lost a couple of days.

But I returned one day. It was then that I suddenly experienced the tenderness of death.

I immediately began to make plans. How could I secure the carcass as quickly as possible, and would the textiles that I used still be available in black and grey, and those beads in gleaming white? And



The Fire

I had to have the glass beads, even if they are expensive, as they reflect the light in an amazingly beautiful way. The light threads will be placed in the heart, in the heart and I take



Artist Othilia Verdurmen
bids the Firebird farewell

a right-angle grinder and make a hole in it! Out of this, yes, out of this allow a new bird to emerge. A foetus as it were. And the light of the old bird wanes slowly as if it is dying while the light in the new bird slowly waxes. I can hardly keep up with this powerful flow and I am transported by something that is much greater than myself. The Phoenix!

It is just a day in the life of the Phoenix. A normal day. That is simply what a Phoenix does. It dies and changes. (23 February 2009)

After the dramatic fire in the artist's studio, at the beginning of 2009, she began all over again. Or, more precisely, continued with the creative process. The Phoenix, destroyed by fire, rises from the ashes and begins a new life. The previous installation is continued in the new island, and the past documented in a book, which is the source of the above text. The sentinels are no longer needed, but the mirror gates

return for a kaleidoscopic effect. The fire from which the Phoenix rises is represented by new lighting effects, inspired by soap bubbles. The artist carefully wraps layers of textile around light sources so that an even stronger play of light-blocking textile and light-revealing fire. In December 2010 the new installation will be completely finished.

Special-needs education

During the above-described generative process of the installation, the Groninger Museum developed an educational programme, in conjunction with the artist, in which the main target group consisted of children from primary school, partly on the basis of the artist's previous experiences with the way children react to her work. The Museum began to research which core objectives the project could harmonize with, and which demands were current in education. It soon became evident that there was primarily a connection with demand from an educational target group that has difficulty in making use of what a museum regularly offers – namely special-needs education. Very specific demands are extremely topical in this large group. In co-operation with teachers and specialists from this educational area in particular, a unique whole has arisen, in which the artist, museum professionals and educational experts supported and steered one another.

From the 19th century onward, there has been education for

children with a sensory and/or mental handicap. Since the first compulsory education law in 1901, this special-needs education has developed itself substantially. In 1927, Special Primary School education (BLO) was introduced. Until 1985, this was dealt with under the Primary School Education Act.

1985 saw the introduction of the Interim Law for Special Education and Secondary Special Education (ISOVSO). Until 1995, this Act regulated education given to the deaf and hard-of-hearing, the blind and visually impaired, those with multiple disabilities, the chronically ill, children with learning difficulties (MLK) or children with problems with learning or upbringing (LOM).

In 1995, special education underwent major changes in a juridical respect.

The project entitled *Going to School Together Again* ensured that regular primary school education and special education were brought closer together.

The education for children with learning difficulties, up to the age of 12 years, children with difficulties with learning and with upbringing, up to the age of 12 years, and infants whose development is threatened (IOBK) are now included under the category of Special Primary School Education, along with regular primary school education, and both are governed by the law on Primary Education (WPO).

Secondary Special Education for children with learning difficulties (VSO-MLK) and Secondary Special Education for pupils

with difficulties with learning and upbringing (VSO-LOM) are now included along with regular secondary school education under the law on Secondary Education (WVO).

Children who cannot follow education at WPO or WVO level can attend (Secondary) Special Education. The decision can also be taken to enrol a pupil with a pupil-related budget (LGF or a backpack) at a school for regular primary school education. An independent Indication Committee (CVI) determines if a pupil is entitled to this option.

(Secondary) Special Education is included under the Law on Expertise Centres (WEC) and is subdivided into four clusters:

Cluster 1: education to visually impaired children or children with multiple disabilities and this impairment,

Cluster 2: education to deaf children, hard-of-hearing children, and children with serious speaking difficulties, or children with multiple disabilities with one of these impairments,

Cluster 3: education to chronically ill children with a physical disability, children with physical disabilities, and children with serious learning difficulties, or children with multiple disabilities with one of these impairments, and

Cluster 4: education to chronically ill children other than those with a physical disability, children who experience great difficulty with their upbringing, and children in school related to pedagogical institutes.

Each cluster has schools spread throughout the country. In each region, the schools in one cluster work in co-operation. In this way, knowledge and expertise can be combined. Accordingly, we speak of 'Regional Expertise Centres' (REC).

In each region there is an active REC Cluster 2, Cluster 3 and Cluster 4. Cluster 1 has a different organizational form and is included under overarching organizations such as Visio, Bartiméus and Sensus.

Concrete activities for special education

Concrete activities have been developed for the project in conjunction with the cluster teachers. Every group that will be visiting *Ailibto. The Island of the Phoenix* will be given a workshop in the school classroom by a museum teacher. Didactic material that is attuned to the core objectives of the cluster to which the group belongs will be produced for this preparatory workshop.

Each point of address for the education provided to children from the various clusters will be taken from the core objectives of special education:

governmental policy aims at the emancipation, integration and normalization of people with a disability. The core aims in this are the stimulation of the sensory and human locomotor development and social-emotional development. Pupils learn to deal with their own possibilities and limitations, with self-confidence and self-esteem,

and learn to express their own wishes, feelings and opinions.

It is important that children are stimulated, that their inquisitiveness is aroused, and that they orient themselves to nature and the surrounding world.

Senses such as smell, touch and hearing (in visually impaired children for instance) ought to be stimulated. Children with an auditory impairment must have the opportunity to use appliances and to gain access to what is on offer in other ways.

Pupils should learn to comprehend visual possibilities, and to study various materials on the basis of the aspects of colour, form, rhythm, space, texture and composition. It is worthwhile stimulating the imagination of the pupils and helping them to express their feelings and to shape their ideas.

Preparatory workshops and processing possibilities

The didactic material dovetails with the core objectives and the specific qualities of children in the various clusters. In addition, didactic material will be developed that can be used by children in regular education.

The theme offers many points of address that will be covered in separate workshops or parts of these.

The workshops will be held in school. They form a single entity with the experience of the installation in the Museum and will be used as preparation in

principle. They will be given by the regular team of teachers of the Groninger Museum (didactic and visually educated) and/or the artists (including an aroma workshop). Schools can make use of the workshops in various ways according to their requirements: as direct preparation for the Museum visit or as a series of lessons in which the various experiences (listening, looking, smelling) are the focus of attention.

The Museum teachers are ideally suited to give workshops to a team of school teachers, after which they can apply parts in their own programme. It is possible to extend the workshops into a programme for a longer period. In this way, adequate integration is realized between the teaching programme and the core objectives, while a new interaction between the Museum teachers and the teachers in special and regular education also arises. The intention is to realize extreme flexibility when fitting in the workshops at school and also to bring about seamless integration with the content of the core objectives at school and the specific installation in the Groninger Museum.

The development of the workshops on the basis of the issues current in education

In view of the specific expertise of the teachers from the cluster areas, the workshops will be developed further in close co-operation with the teachers. After all, they know exactly the qualities

and the restrictions of the individual pupil. In the meantime, contact has been established and discussions held with all teachers from all the cluster areas. These areas came together for a meeting for the first time. Normally, the various clusters do not come into contact with one another. For the schools, this was an inspirational experience. It can lead to far-reaching co-operation in the future.

1. Listening

The class listens to the soundscapes in advance. Adapted versions will be made for some target groups. Children listen to the sound fragments and react by:

- making a drawing of the genesis of the world
- philosophizing on the basis of questions and proposals about the story
- dancing or moving to the music and the sounds from the soundscape
- writing their own poem about the sun, the sea or the moon, the night or the stars.

2. Looking

This assignment is meant to prepare children for looking at the many colours, forms, and layers in the installation.

- with various materials (paper, textile, cardboard, paint, coloured pencils, foil) the children make pieces of work consistently based on a single colour: in other words, red, orange, green and light-blue
- they discuss their associations with that colour
- they combine the various

pieces of work into a landscape

- they illuminate this landscape with a torch and study how colour reacts to light

3. Smelling

- the children smell various aromas (ginger, a lily, herbs, soap, coffee, wood, vanilla)
- they discuss the association
- they are given information and background stories with regard to smells
- they are given information on the Phoenix smell (according to tradition, it built a nest of certain herbs)
- they learn to make an aroma themselves

4. Phoenix

- the children listen to the soundscape on the Phoenix
- stories and fairytales about the Phoenix are read out loud
- the children discuss themes from the stories and myths
- the children make wings from various materials
- the children photograph themselves (and each other) with wings (and make-up)
- the children make and egg and paint it

5. Dragons

- various stories about dragons are read out loud
- every child makes his/her own dragon (material choice depends on the possibilities of the child and the time available)
- every child makes up a story about his/her dragon. What is the dragon's name? Where does he

live? What does he like? What is inside his egg?

New step in museum education

The workshops and the installation *Ailibto. The Island of the Phoenix* distinguish themselves in a number of respects from the common assortment in the field of art education for children.

Due to the nature, set-up and size of the installation, the visitor is fully captivated. The installation makes an appeal to all of the visitor's senses (sound, image, smell, touch). The visitor experiences the exhibition in a direct, physical manner. The children visit the installation under the supervision of a Museum teacher, who activates the 'programme' of the installation according to a schedule. In other words, sound, smell and illumination run according to a schedule. The story is told and experienced within a certain timespan in a theatrical setting.

In the regular provision of workshops, these are a preparation or assessment of the exhibition in the Museum, which is the focus of attention. The Museum teachers supervise pupils at the exhibition with an educational teaching discussion and a creative processing assignment in the studio of the Museum itself. These components are reasonably independent of one another and can also be booked separately.

In the *Ailibto. The Island of the Phoenix* project, all the parts have been blended into a whole, by the artists, teachers and Museum educators.

The processing material goes further than usual. The child is addressed as an artist and as a human. Major themes are touched upon, such as the genesis of the world, the triumph over evil (the dragon), the longing to fly, the yearning for light. The theme comprises numerous references to myths and fairytales from various cultures and, as such, fits in with the notion that art can be an experience that touches upon the magical working of rituals and the 'Great Stories' that can raise humans above themselves. The workshops and supervision in the Museum ensure that children can associate freely with the material provided and gain inspiration in their own way and at their own level. This is justified by the poems that young autistic children write about the genesis of the world, for example, or the intense expression of some of the children's drawings about their dreams.

In summary

With this large-scale project, the Groninger Museum deliberately attempts to reach new target groups in a structural way. The experiences of co-operation in the realization of the workshops at school and in the Museum, and the practical experiences of the school workshops and the experience of the installation in the Museum, will lead to a structural assortment.

All too often, a 'somewhat adapted' version of the programmes for regular education is provided. Moreover, it is true that the demand from special education is

not yet so great that time and space have to be made free in museums to develop special programmes to accompany an exhibition or clarify a building. However, this is the way a vicious circle is created: little supply – little demand – little supply. The Phoenix project works on a completely different principle. The installation and the experience of the installation, the education workshops as preparation, and the Museum visit itself deliberately form a total artwork and total experience in which the artists (image, sound, smell), Museum teachers and educators from the Museum and teachers from special education co-operate on a completely equal footing. The result of this will be visible in all sections of the project. There is thus no mention of hierarchy on a succession of autonomous art work – what could museum education do with that? What could special education do with it?

Instead of an increasingly further simplification of the visual language and information, stratified structures and various application possibilities are created.

Not only teachers and fellow Museum educators but also artists can learn from this and become convinced that that this kind of approach can be interesting. After all, the final result is a project that is usable at several levels, and will also be presented at several locations.

The installation will be on display in the Groninger Museum from December 2010 / January 2011 and, complete with the educational project, will travel on to the Rijks Museum Twenthe in Enschede from summer 2011 onward, and then to other museums, in the Netherlands or abroad, if they are interested.