

Name Change Initiative at the institution formerly known as Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art

Public Review, 26 September 2020
Rotterdam, the Netherlands

INTRODUCTION

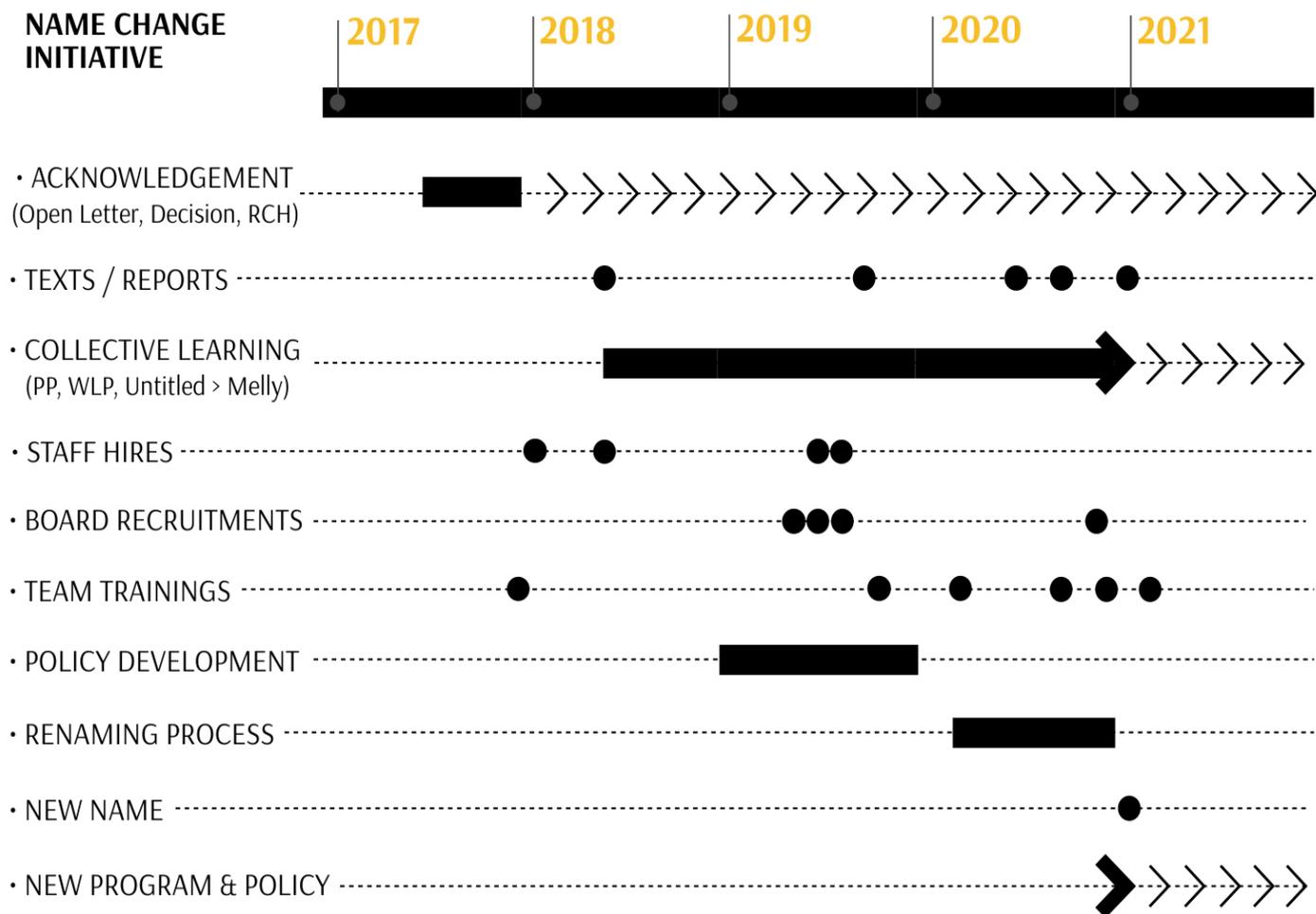
In 2017, a group of cultural practitioners publicly challenged the name of the institution with an Open Letter. Their stance and activist work conveyed to us urgent historical awareness, as well as the needs of an increasingly multi-vocal society and the pressing concern of systemic racism. In response, the institution vowed to change its name.

In 2018, the institution launched a multi-faceted Name Change Initiative. This initiative is embedded in the institution's policy on Collective Learning, designed to foment public participation, promote social inclusivity, and foster mutual understanding through both programming and systemic changes at the institution.

The institution's name change is premised on two central criteria: Firstly, the current name "Witte de With," as we were more commonly called, indicates the institution's location 'Witte de Withstraat', but does not express the institution's vocation, which is presenting contemporary art and theory. Secondly, the original name impinges upon the institution's pursuit of inclusivity, which is vital to the relevance and contribution of cultural practice in general.

On 27 June 2020, we announced the withdrawal of our thirty-year-old name "Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art". Our new name will come into effect 27 January 2021. To read more about this, go to: change.wdw.nl.

NAME CHANGE INITIATIVE



METHODOLOGY

The Name Change Initiative seeks to contribute to best practice in the Netherlands and internationally, lowering the threshold to further precedents.

It has involved hires, training, research, and programming at the intersection of art and education [Table 1]. This was to ensure a more diversified team and a group of stakeholders informed our institutional name change; and, because the name change is one among several other actions of a deeper transformation underway to become a more welcoming institution. The initiative has also involved a public-input phase informing our Renaming Process [Table 2]. A total of 206 people participated in this phase, whether in-person or online.

In designing our initiative and processes, we have been inspired by two institutional case-studies: one is Yale University's Calhoun College renaming to Hopper College in 2017; another is Bristol's Colston Hall renaming to Bristol Beacon in 2020. Both institutions undertook a name change involving a research-based and years-long process. An internal case-study was undertaken in the 2019, renaming Untitled to Melly, an art gallery at our institution turned multipurpose space, which is part and parcel of our initiative.

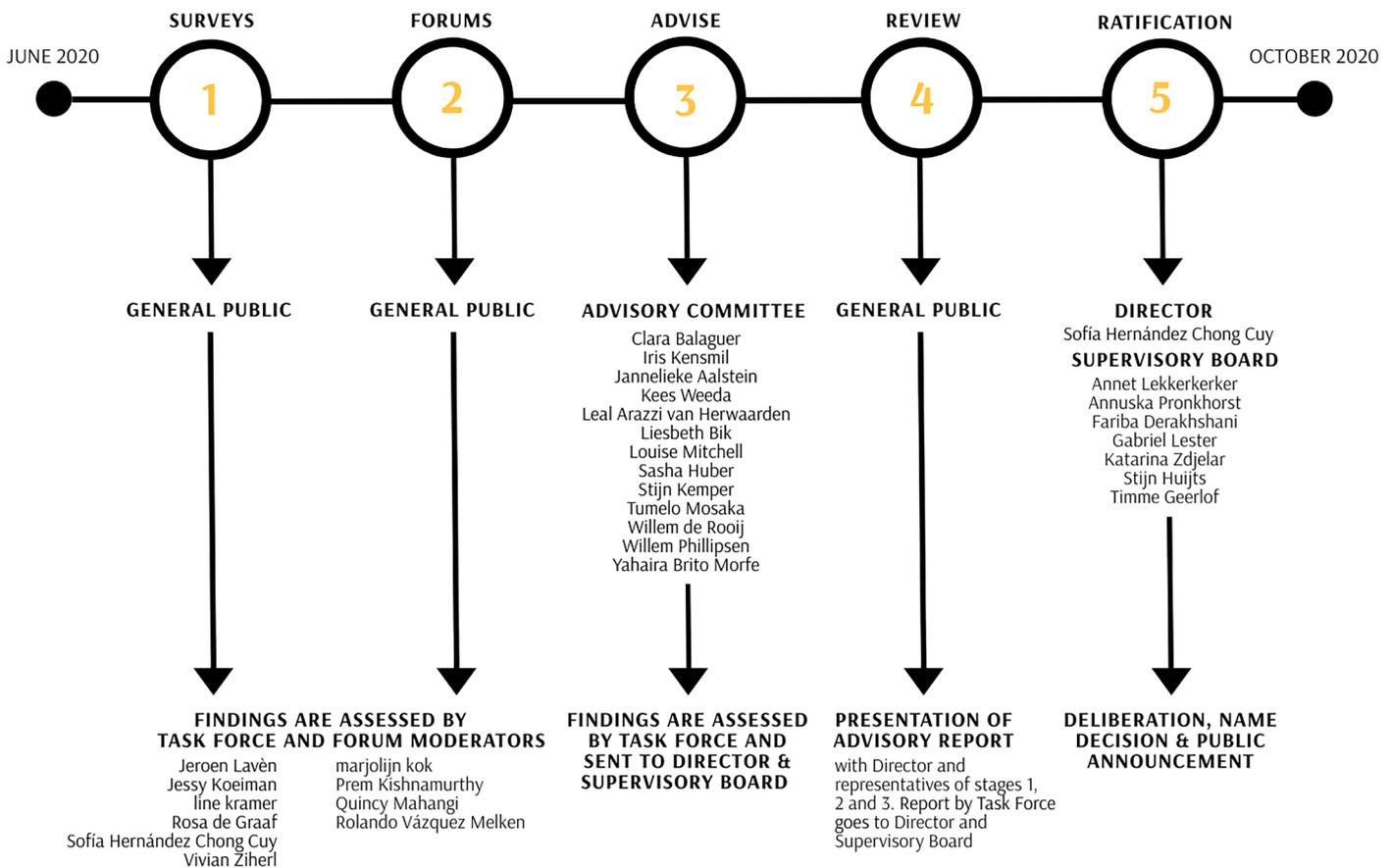
The naming criteria and name options shortlisted for our institution were based upon research undertaken by our Name Change Initiative work-group, as well as staff workshops, started in 2019. These also derive from public input in the Renaming Process, and from feedback sessions with our Initiative Partners, both undertaken in 2020.

SURVEY & FORUMS

From 14 June to 19 September 2020, there was a public input phase in our Renaming Process. This included an Online Survey and five Forums open to the general public. The majority of the participants were from Rotterdam. People from Amsterdam, Arnhem, Den Haag, Utrecht, and other cities in The Netherlands also participated, as well as people from Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, South Africa, Switzerland, United States, and the United Kingdom, among other countries. This is a summary of ideas voiced in this phase:

- The renaming of the institution calls for a **reframing** of art and the institution, for example, of the role that art has in society, as well as the role of the art institution in the 21st century.
- The institution's former name created a demand for **accountability** to colonial history and its legacies. The new name should carry forward this demand, for example, be accountable for practicing anti-racism through its institutional culture and program.
- Participants stressed the importance of reforming the existing **education** curriculum pertaining to Dutch history. They asked our institution to advocate and contribute to historical learning.
- Participants expressed that our institution must implement improved modes of public **communication** and audience connectivity.
- Participants stated they **experience** feeling 'unsafe' and underrepresented in museums and contemporary art institutions. They also observed a lack of institutional presence/leverage in changing social narratives.

RENAMING PROCESS



ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Including 13 respected figures in the field of culture and emerging leaders in the arts, the Advisory Committee meets twice in 2020. The Committee is uniquely placed to consult in selecting a new name for our institution and to guide us in our process of institutional transformation. Prior to this Public Review, held on 26 September 2020, the Committee deliberated and provided a report of advice on a shortlist of names we provided. Their advice considered our institutional history, as well as a detailed report on the findings of the public input phase. In addition, the dossier they received included the following ideas about naming itself, which were posed in the public input phase and discussed by our institution's team:

- The name should be simple and clear; readily able to be energized.
- The name should express our forward-looking, bold, and experimental reputation.
- The name should embody the position of the institution, and convey what it stands for.
- The name should enact an 'un-silencing' that continues beyond the new name, as colonial naming enacts a 'silencing'.
- Whereas the old name excludes audiences, the new name should welcome the institution's changing constituencies.
- The name should address that Rotterdam is a multi-lingual city, and be in a language that is easily understood locally and internationally.

NEXT STEPS

Our new name will be selected and ratified by our institution's Director and Supervisory Board on 30 September 2020. By 5 October 2020, the new name will be publicly announced. Thereafter, we undertake the administrative procedures pertaining to our name change, as well as the communication design of our new name. The Advisory Committee meets once again this year to discuss the name launch, as well as to advise on our policy framework for ongoing institutional transformation. Our new name will come into effect with a new graphic identity and activities program on 27 January 2021, celebrating both the institution's anniversary and its future outlook.

THE NAME CHANGE INITIATIVE TEAM

Work-group

Rosa de Graaf, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Jessy Koeiman, line kramer, Jeroen Lavèn, Vivian Zihlerl
Public-Input Phase Assistant: Veronika Babayan
Media Consultant: Moniek van de Wiel
Earlier-phase members: Paul van Gennip, Wendy van Slagmaat-Bos
Upcoming-phase members: Aqueene Wilson, Cye Wong-Loi-Sing

Initiative Partners

Brand New Guys, Rotterdam; Werkplaats Typografie, Arnhem; Wkshps, New York and Berlin

Forum Moderators

marjolijn kok, Prem Krishnamurthy, Quincy Mahangi, Rolando Vázquez Melken

Advisory Committee

Jannelieke Aalstein, Leal Arazzi van Herwaarden, Clara Balaguer, Liesbeth Bik, Yahaira Brito Morfe, Willem de Rooij, Sasha Huber, Stijn Kemper, Iris Kensmil, Louise Mitchell, Tumelo Mosaka, Willem Philipsen, Kees Weeda

Supervisory Board

Fariba Derakhshani, Timme Geerlof, Stijn Huijts, Annet Lekkerkerker (chair), Gabriel Lester, Annuska Pronkhorst, Katarina Zdjelar

Institution's Staff

Gerda Brust, Office Manager; Rachel Carey, Financial Administrator; Paul Van Gennip, Deputy Director; Rosa De Graaf, Associate Curator; Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Director; Jessy Koeiman, Curator of Collective Learning; marjolijn kok, Archive; Angélique Kool, Executive Assistant; line kramer, Senior Technical Supervisor; Jeroen Lavèn, PR & Social Media Editor; Docus Van Der Made, Curator of Academic and Public Programs; Emmelie Mijs, Education Assistant & Art Mediator; Erwin Nederhoff, Receptionist; Sarah van Overeem-van der Tholen, Development Manager; Wendy van Slagmaat-Bos, Project Coordinator; Heba Soliman, Melly Manager; Erik Visser, Books & Library Assistant; Vivian Zihlerl, Research and Programs Manager

ABOUT THE INSTITUTION'S NAME CHANGE INITIATIVE

change.wdw.nl

For detailed information, please consult these documents:

Shortlist of Names

change.wdw.nl/reports-media/report9/

Public-Input Report

change.wdw.nl/reports-media/report7/

Advisory Committee Report

change.wdw.nl/reports-media/report8/

Timeline 1: News and Updates

change.wdw.nl/reports-media/timeline1/

Founded in 1990, the institution was conceived as an art house with a mission to present and discuss the work created today by visual artists and cultural makers, from here and afar. It organizes exhibitions, commissions art, publishes, and develops educational and collaborative initiatives. This non-profit institution has especially worked with artists, and engaged audiences, who are interested in posing challenging inquiries and articulations of our present. While its program considers the contemporary, it also regards how art has been created and experienced in the past, and it imagines the futures art can come to shape.

The institution is supported by the city of Rotterdam and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

