

## What are colonial collections?

Colonial collections consist of cultural objects that were made or acquired in one of the former Dutch trading missions, colonies or mandated territories or from another colonial power in the period from the 17th century until 1975, when Suriname became an independent nation. Unequal relations of power during the colonial era led to objects being acquired unlawfully. Objects were taken from their rightful owners without their consent, for instance in acts of theft or pillaging or when people were forced to sell them, give them as 'gifts' or use them for barter.

*Examples of cultural objects include works of art, religious and historical objects, jewellery, objects relating to natural history and utensils.*

## Where are the Netherlands' cultural collections kept? (physical locations)

Many of the cultural objects originating from communities colonised by the Netherlands are now kept in museums. These include the National Museum of World Cultures, Museum Bronbeek and the Rijksmuseum, as well as many smaller museums and other institutions that manage collections. The Netherlands distinguishes between owner and custodian of objects, as this is relevant to the question of who should decide on their return.

### Owner:

The Dutch state

Province

Municipality

### Custodian:

national museums, Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE)

provincial museums

municipal museums

*Other institutions that manage collections include archives, libraries, churches and universities. These institutions may be both the owner and the manager of a collection, as is the case with the Leiden University Libraries.*

## Where can I find information about colonial collections? (online)

A colonial collections consortium develops and manages a digital data hub where users can search for information about objects in Dutch collections that have a colonial background. Countries of origin can use this information to develop a picture of which objects are in collections in the Netherlands and how they got there. These countries and their communities can also contribute additional information online about the objects. This makes the hub a valuable connecting factor for further cooperation between museums in the Netherlands and those in the countries of origin. It also makes it easier for a countries of origin to substantiate requests for the return of objects.

To consult the data hub, please visit [www.colonialcollections.org](http://www.colonialcollections.org)

# Policy on colonial collections in the Netherlands

## How do we handle colonial collections?

Acknowledgement of historical injustices is the first step in handling colonial collections with due care. The unequal relations of power during the colonial era meant that cultural objects were often taken without permission. The government intends to help **rectify this historical injustice** through the following:



## When will colonial collections be returned?

National policy on the return of objects pertains to cultural objects in the Dutch state collection whose return has been requested by another country. When an object is returned, ownership is transferred from the Dutch state to the other country. Is the Dutch state not the owner of the object? Then the decision on return lies with its current owner.

**Requests:** requests are made from state to state, from the ministry in the country in question to the State Secretary for Media and Culture in the Netherlands.

**Requests for advice:** the State Secretary requests advice from an independent advisory committee.

**Assessment:** the committee assesses the request on the basis of an investigation of provenance carried out by the museum and in consultation with the country of origin.

**Decision on return:** the State Secretary takes a decision based on the committee's advice.

**Logistics:** transfer of ownership and logistical details for the return are arranged in consultation with:

## Who is involved in policy?

The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (International Cultural Policy Unit) and the **Ministry of Education, Culture and Science** (Department Heritage & Arts) share responsibility for policy in this area. This fact sheet provides a summary of parties involved in policy and implementation.



Programme International Heritage Cooperation will be expanded to include the entire Caribbean part of the Kingdom (Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten) and the three public bodies located in the Caribbean region)



Museums are responsible for investigating the provenance of objects, which is a core task for any collection management institution. The **Colonial Collections Consortium** can help with this. Partners of the Consortium are:



independent

Advisory Committee

museums in the countries of origin

Dutch embassies

the repatriation committee

the countries of origin

**A support unit (Bureau) supports the consortium.**

### Core tasks:

- Function as first line help- and infodesk for institutions in the Netherlands and countries of origin.
- Supporting museums in investigating provenance.
- Building and providing a network for cooperation, knowledge sharing and investigation among museums.
- Monitoring policy developments in Europe and around the world regarding colonial collections and restitution.
- Implementing the communication strategy that are aligned with the goals of the Consortium. More info: [www.colonialcollections.org](http://www.colonialcollections.org)