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## UNTITLED is renamed MELLY at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam

As of today, MELLY is the new name of the ground-floor gallery space of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. This is one of several gallery spaces in the institution's building at Witte de Withstraat 50 in Rotterdam.

The name MELLY was proposed by a group of young Rotterdammers: GIZEM ADANUR, CHLOÉ BLANSJAAR, TAYLER CALISTER, MOHAMED CHAJID, SJOERD VAN KAMPEN, STIJN KEMPER, EVA LANGSTRAAT, JOY RAVENSWAALJ, and SYTZE VAN DER WOLK. They were participants of a work-study program at Witte de With from September 2018 to February 2019, and were tasked to develop a new identity for the space. MELLY was inspired by the artwork *Melly Shum Hates Her Job* by artist Ken Lum, a billboard commissioned by Witte de With, and which has remained on the building's façade since it was first exhibited in 1990. The youngsters proposed naming it MELLY, towards creating a more welcoming environment and conversation-based program.

Since May 2018, this gallery space was provisionally called UNTITLED. Designed as a site for displays and events, UNTITLED has presented work that ranges from commissioned art and archival displays to public programs. It has also functioned as a classroom and a bookshop. This transformation from a white-cube exhibition gallery space into a multi-purpose display and event space developed in connection with a collective learning initiative. Fostering civic participation through visual arts was, and still remains, the main goal of this initiative, which entails a work/study program designed for Rotterdam youth. Midway through the first edition of this six-month program, the nine program participants proposed to Witte de With staff the renaming of the space from UNTITLED to MELLY.

*Sharing their stories, the collective learning participants create a spatial possibility that reflects a desire to connect, to have power, to mend and in so doing interrogate damages done and narratives told.*

— Teana Boston-Mammah, sociologist, April 2019

The collective learning participants interpreted Ken Lum's bill-board, *Melly Shum Hates Her Job*, as a proto-meme, Pre-Internet Era. "Melly can be anyone," they remarked. Witte de With's director, Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy, explains how the working process with program participants made evident "a common interest in fostering social inclusion, in developing collaborative creations, and in establishing innovative partnerships that are locally meaningful and also globally relevant."



Ken Lum, Melly Shum Hates Her Job, 1990.

Inspired by his family's history, of Chinese railroad workers in Canada, Ken Lum created *Melly Shum Hates Her Job* to address emotional experiences around labor conditions. Ken Lum's artwork, however, is purposefully not biographical. Instead, it addresses a common experience of social mobility—or lack thereof—in light of class, race and gender divides. Today, considered by the local neighborhood as a public art staple in Rotterdam's Cool District, this billboard has been displayed abroad in various languages and continents throughout the years. It has also inspired several artists throughout time, and Melly Shum's name itself has been used as pseudonym for social media accounts.

*Melly came to Rotterdam almost 30 years ago. She is now a familiar face, a Rotterdammer. Her story represents that of so many. Now she offers all of us the opportunity to share our stories with her, to understand our histories, to define our lives together.*

— Jacob van der Goot, Chairman Rotterdam Council for Art and Culture, April 2019

Renaming UNTITLED to MELLY is part of an identity proposal which, overall, emphasizes multiple viewpoints of collective experiences. MELLY also highlights the wealth of diversity that makes Rotterdam a culturally rich and exemplar city of the twenty-first century.

*It's a brilliant move to name this new space MELLY! I can still remember that it suddenly appeared: MELLY SHUM and the exhibition by Ken Lum. It was spectacular then and still good 29 years later! Good art is forever and the viewer always has the freedom to interpret a work of art in his own way. MELLY is free from an imposed meaning and therefore forms the ideal breeding ground for this exciting new initiative that will inspire the youngest generation.*

— Joep van Lieshout, artist, April 2019

Twelve artists working in the Netherlands and the vicinity were commissioned to create posters responding to the new identity proposal: MAJA BEKAN, KÉVIN BRAY, CHLOÉ DELANGHE, BALDVIN EINARSSON, PRISCILA FERNANDES, VERA GULIKERS, AN ONGHENA, KEVIN OSEPA, JOSIE PERRY, RORY PILGRIM, TRAMAINE DE SENNA and EDWARD CLYDESDALE THOMSON. The artists were in conversation with the nine participants of Witte de With's collective learning program as part of the process. Their poster exhibition opens this afternoon in MELLY at Witte de With. Also opening at MELLY is a display regarding the original exhibition by Ken Lum, which involved internal discussions about cultural diversity and which entailed numerous partnerships towards its development. This archival display has been organized together with Stijn Kemper, a 2018-2019 participant of the collective learning program at Witte de With.

While MELLY does not replace the name Witte de With, the entailing process to name the institution's ground-floor gallery was inspiring for the institution's ongoing investigation about its name.

The name of this nonprofit arts institution, founded in 1990, reflects its location, With de Withstraat, which for its part is a street name named after the Dutch naval officer Witte Corneliszoon de With (1599-1658). In 2017, a discussion arose regarding the name of the institution, which argued that more awareness about its origins and meanings was necessary. Since then, Witte de With has been conducting research about its identity, and considers the entailing process of renaming UNTITLED to MELLY as a case study in its ongoing investigation.

At her arrival to Witte de With in 2018, Hernández Chong Cuy said that she would prioritize conducting research that accounts for both written and underrepresented histories. She explained that the institution "will be responsive and responsible, and this comes, first and foremost, by changing our terms of engagement with contemporaneity."

In an effort to grant easier access to the institution's activities and public offer, the entrance to MELLY and to all events held here are admission free.

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Several events and programs take place throughout the year. For more information, please follow us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#) or check our [calendar](#).

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A press pack with the biographies of all participating artists can be downloaded [here](#). For press requests or for further information, please contact Jeroen Lavèn via [press@wdw.nl](mailto:press@wdw.nl) or call +31 10 411 01 44.

Witte de With  
Center for Contemporary Art  
Witte de Withstraat 50  
NL-3012 BR Rotterdam

Open: Tue–Sun, 11 am–6 pm  
Fri, 6–9 pm, Kunstavond, free  
entrance

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Founded in 1990, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art presents a changing program of art commissions and exhibitions, educational initiatives and events, as well as publications that range from artist's books to catalogs to web-based editorial platforms.

Recently, the institution has been examining the origins and limitations of its name. The current consideration of our institution's name is part of a wider discussion on decolonizing in the Netherlands. Our institution was originally named after its street, which, for its part, was named in 1871 after the seventeenth century naval officer Witte Corneliszoon de With.

To read more about this, [click here](#).

Witte de With is supported by the city of Rotterdam and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

*An Exhibition of Posters* and the Initiative for Collective Learning are partly made possible by The Cultural Participation Fund.