

Museums

Did you know that Amsterdam is a city of museums? There are tons of museums and art galleries within the city. But if you're done exploring the famous spots, try dipping in to some of the offbeat ones, many of them quite removed from high-drama cultural topics. In fact they pay fitting tribute to perfectly bizarre themes and objects of daily use. These are essentially hybrids of a museum and a showcase of the fun and irreverent vibe of Amsterdam.

Cat paintings, sketches and sculptures adorn KattenKabinet.



OFF THE RADAR

Exploring Amsterdam through its unusual museums.

Text: Supriya Sehgal



Left and inset: KattenKabinet highlights the role of cats in Amsterdam's culture; A shield sign at the museum.



On a recent trip, after having walked the hallowed grounds of Rijksmuseum, Anne Frank House and Van Gogh Museum, my dog-eared guidebook of the city went for another round of mild mutilation – you know, the joyous kind. It was time to explore the museums that enshrine the odd.

My first stop was the canal side address of KattenKabinet, a collection of art that throws light on the role of cats in Amsterdam's culture over the centuries. The museum was founded by Bob Meijer in memory of his ginger-

haired tomcat, John Pierpont Morgan, named after the American banker JP Morgan. The cosy spread of paintings, sketches and sculptures sprawl over two storeys and the garden of an old patrician house. One painting has even found its way on the ceiling of the museum. While I could hear puffed oohs and ahs over contributions of famous painters such as Sal Meijer and Henriette Ronner-Knip, my favourite part was a dimly-lit sideboard with handwritten tributes by visitors to their own cats that had passed away. An hour of trawling the two floors, I peered into my map to go to the next closest place of perusal.

I've always been partial to knapsacks than purses and fashionable handbags, so the largest collection



MUSEUM INFO

KattenKabinet

Herengracht 497, 1017 BT Amsterdam; 020 626 9040; Timings: Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 12–5pm; Entry € 7

Tassenmuseum Hendrikje

Herengracht 573, 1017 CD Amsterdam; 020 524 6452; Timings: 10am–5pm; Entry € 12.50

Electric Ladyland - The Museum of Fluorescent Art

Tweede Leliedwarsstraat 5, 1015 TB Amsterdam; 020 420 3776; Timings: Tue–Sat 1–6pm; Entry € 5

of these accessories was an unlikely stop. But given that they have some historical highlights and a ludicrous amount of designs (more than 5,000), I made my way to Tassenmuseum Hendrikje (Museum of Bags and Purses). With muted inclination for fashion, I made my way straight to the masterpieces – Gianni Versace Couture's electric green handbag worn by Madonna, a Swarovski-studded cupcake shaped purse that swung into fame when a replica featured in the film Sex and the City, and a slim 18th-century handbag made of copper and porcelain. They reminded me why fashion quotient was never a virtue I desired. My fascination lay in the 17th and 18th century period room, where high tea is served to a ticketed audience.

Electric Ladyland – The Museum of Fluorescent Art was only two kilometres from here. A walk along the canal with tourist-loaded boats gliding along was a cathartic break from bags. I was in for a psychedelic assault on the eyes. Electric Ladyland is truly one-of-a-kind museum, where the visitor becomes a part of the art – American artist Nick Padalino's way of introducing 'participatory art' to the world. Dedicated to fluorescence and named after singer Jimi Hendrix's album, Electric Ladyland takes over the senses. As suggested, I slipped into a pair of soft slippers on top of my shoes and made my way into a cave-like space with every imaginable colour radiating every direction. Reminiscent of the Flower Power movement of the late 60s and early 70s, the artwork gave an 'almost hallucinatory' peek into a world which thrummed with great music – music I grew up on and which made me regret why I hadn't

Above: Red Telephone Purse Bag inside Tassenmuseum Hendrikje. Below: With more than 5,000 designs, the museum is an accessory lover's delight.



At Electric Ladyland the visitor becomes a part of the piece of art.

OTHER OFFBEAT MUSEUMS

Museum Vrolik

This houses a collection of pathological specimens, odd skulls and bones, and more, put together by Dutch scientist Gerardus Vrolik (1755–1859).

The Torture Museum

This documents the history of the human cruelty and features a variety of devices such as the Guillotine, the rack and the stocks and thumb screws.

Sex Museum

This houses an interesting collection of objects about human sexuality.

Hash, Marihuana and Hemp Museum

It is dedicated to cannabis, and offers visitors information about its historical and modern uses for medicinal, religious, cultural, agricultural, and industrial purposes.

grown up in that era. My musical and psychedelic desires vanquished.

I thought of KattenKabinet again and couldn't help but break into a smile. For John the cat's 15th birthday, a set of Pierpont Morgan bills was printed from the bank of Pierpont Morgan. The text 'In God We Trust' was replaced by 'We Trust No Dog'. For someone who has no special fascination for cats, I've returned from Amsterdam with an enduring admiration for our feline friends and a renewed affinity for all kinds of museums.

Fact File

Getting There

Jet Airways operates daily non-stop flights from Mumbai and Delhi to Amsterdam.

Accommodation

Camden offers a variety of stay options, from luxury hotels and guesthouses to B&Bs and hostels.

For more information

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