



Transforming the Public Sphere: The Dutch National Exhibition of Women's Labor in 1898

Maria Grever, Berteke Waaldijk

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In 1898, the year Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands was inaugurated, five hundred women organized an enormous public exhibition showcasing women's contributions to Dutch society as workers in a strikingly broad array of professions. The National Exhibition of Women's Labor, held in The Hague, was attended by more than ninety thousand visitors. Maria Grever and Berteke Waaldijk consider the exhibition in the international contexts of women's history, visual culture, and imperialism.

A comprehensive social history, *Transforming the Public Sphere* describes the planning and construction of the Exhibition of Women's Labor and the event itself—the sights, the sounds, and the smells—as well as the role of exhibitions in late-nineteenth-century public culture. The authors discuss how the 1898 exhibition displayed the range and variety of women's economic, intellectual, and artistic roles in Dutch culture, including their participation in such traditionally male professions as engineering, diamond-cutting, and printing and publishing. They examine how people and goods from the Dutch colonies were represented, most notably in an extensive open-air replica of a “Javanese village.” Grever and Waaldijk reveal the tensions the exhibition highlighted: between women of different economic classes; between the goal of equal rights for women and the display of imperial subjects and spoils; and between socialists and feminists, who competed fiercely with one another for working women's support. *Transforming the Public Sphere* explores an event that served as the dress rehearsal for advances in women's public participation during the twentieth century.

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