



press release

Counterplay: an exhibition about the identity and positioning of female monarchs

Apeldoorn, 4 February 2025 – **Counterplay – A Century of Female Monarchs will open at Paleis Het Loo on 18 April 2025. The exhibition will tell the story of the reigns and the personal challenges of three Dutch queens, against the background of radical social change and public perceptions. This will be an exhibition about identity, counterplay and positioning. Linking the historical context to topical issues will allow visitors to reflect on their own views of image, gender and power.**

In Counterplay, Paleis Het Loo will explore how the royal family adapted to social change in the 20th century, in an era that saw three successive female monarchs on the throne, and in which tradition frequently clashed with modernity.

Double roles

Counterplay will highlight the personal touch that queens Wilhelmina, Juliana and Beatrix brought to their role as monarch. How they navigated the double role of monarch and mother, the tradition of royal marriage and dynastic responsibility, in a society in which the position of women was revolutionised. Their stories will be told on the basis of seven key events, using publications that examine some persistent myths, debunking or shedding new light on them, and offering new perspectives on the monarchy.

Social change affecting gender roles and power

The reigns of these three queens were masterclasses in female leadership. Wilhelmina came to the throne at a time when women were still unable to vote, evolving from a teenage monarch to a strong leader. Her daughter Juliana broke with tradition by becoming the first Dutch royal to attend university in the swinging twenties. Her diplomatic role during the Second World War is more important than people generally

paleis het loo



realised. Beatrix modernised the monarchy without losing any dignity, and restored the distance between monarch and people.

Counterplay will give visitors a unique glimpse of these women's lives, through the lens of social change relating to gender roles and power. The exhibition will show how they dealt with being a focus of public attention, and how they wrote new rules for the monarchy. By focusing on the images projected by both the royal family and the media, the exhibition will also highlight the changing relations between men and women, and their impact at court. It will show how three generations of women helped make the Netherlands the country we know today.

Critical view

2025 is the fiftieth anniversary of the first UN International Women's Year – a perfect opportunity to look back at the lives and influence of three female monarchs in a changing world. The Second World War, a key moment in 20th-century history, will also feature in the exhibition, tying in with this year's celebrations marking 80 years of freedom. By retelling these historic stories, Paleis Het Loo hopes to inspire visitors to take a critical look at their own role in the ongoing development of gender relations and power.

Counterplay will show at Paleis Het Loo from **18 April to 31 August 2025**.

About Paleis Het Loo

Paleis Het Loo is the largest authentic 17th-century palace built by the House of Orange-Nassau, the Dutch royal family. Since 1984 visitors have been able to discover how the Dutch royals lived and worked here, enjoying the gardens, the palace, and the surrounding natural environment. It is a place with an extraordinary history.

Paleis Het Loo is a national museum that provides a platform for exhibitions that put the Dutch royal family in a historical and contemporary context.

Note for editors (not for publication):



Paleis Het Loo

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Images: <https://paleishetloo.nl/over/pers/beeldmateriaal>
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