

Self-evaluation Document

Master in Theatre, Toneelacademie

November, 2019

Inhoudsopgave

Prologue.....	4
Standard 1 : <i>intended learning outcomes</i>	7
Standard 2: <i>educational environment</i>	11
Standard 3: <i>testing</i>	17
Standard 4: <i>realised learning outcomes</i>	21
Challenges and Ambitions	25
Student Voices.....	28

Prologue

The Master in Theatre is a very young master's program. Its pilot ran from 2011 to 2015. The accreditation procedure in 2015 was not without hurdles. The initial application was rejected and the proposed program had to be rethought which led to significant alterations. The first cohort of students after the accreditation (starting in September 2016) encountered a learning environment that differed strongly from the pilot program. For this reason, this text will take the moment of accreditation as ground zero for the Master in Theatre. The Master in Theatre is still evolving significantly during each academic year, with the fourth cohort only starting in September 2019. It goes without saying that this Visitation comes at a very early stage in the development of the master's. We will not invoke the newness of the program as a defense in this self-evaluation. We do ask you to keep in mind that if we speak about evolution and changes in the program, they are very recently installed or are in the process of being applied.

This Visitation is not part of a cluster with other similar Master's in the Netherlands (e.g. with Das Theatre). This soloist performance is not of our choosing; a cluster Visitation could have enriched this feedback moment. We decided to be positive and to view it as an important and very focused input for our development process. We hope that you, the members of the Visitation Commission, share this point of view.

This self-evaluation aims to present an institution in constant transition, rather than a fixed construct. As mentioned above, the Master in Theatre has strongly evolved and is still evolving: the official language of the program became English; the training program is no longer aimed solely at theatre directors and scenographers, but at a much larger group of "performance practitioners"; a new team is being created; the positioning in relation to performance bachelor's has been clarified; etc.

These changes result from the practice of the training program: the concrete experience of the students, their constant and systematic feedback, the return of workshop leaders and other artistic, educational, and academic professionals, involved in one way or the other with the program. All of them have systematically changed this learning environment. In other words, these changes stem from the bottom up construction of this training program. Instead of deciding ahead of time what the place, position, and desired result of an encounter should be, we try it out - like you do in an artistic process, not knowing exactly where you will end up. We try to enter new encounters with all collaborators (team, mentors, workshop leaders, students, administrators, etc.) with an open mindset, to live these encounters and from there to see how the potential of these encounters can be fully explored. All this of course within the bigger (institutional, national, disciplinary, etc.) framework that has been set out. Our hope is that the Master in Theatre - even if some more solid contours are becoming apparent - will continue to be a flexible, evolving "tender institute", made with and by all of its participants.

Overall we believe that the trajectory of the Master in Theatre since 2015 is promising. The process in achieving the current situation has been very intensive but also very rewarding. Within the continuous tension between formal

structures/legislation and the individual artistic needs, we have been able to develop a “tailor made” study program for artists that applies with the national framework for a professional Master in Theatre.

Standard 1: *intended learning outcomes*

"The intended learning outcomes fit the level and orientation of the training and are tailored to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements."

Based on its expertise in education around the performing arts, de Toneelacademie Maastricht determined that it was important in 2011 to set up a master's degree program. Based on the idea of **lifelong learning**, it seemed important for de Toneelacademie to offer artists who have already acquired an artistic identity and history and an existing professional context, a learning environment for deepening their practice and/or concentrating on research. The Dutch-Belgian performing arts landscape is very dynamic and plays a pioneering role in an international context, leading in major structural and technical developments. Following a bachelor's degree (providing basic skill training), a master's degree could provide established theatre artists with a context and a network to investigate their own position within this changing landscape. The Master's therefore had to respond to constant changes in the field, both nationally and internationally.

The accredited Master in Theatre (2015) is therefore a *post experience master's*¹ that focuses on **performance practitioners**, offering an experimental environment, which provides them with a context and a network to develop new aspects in their artistic practice. The collective learning environment starts from the **artists'** autonomy and aims to support and optimise their individual artistic growth process.

The intended learning outcomes of the Master in Theatre are related to the current domain-specific requirements that are determined by the international perspective from the professional field. The master's level of the training is communicated via the so-called Dublin Descriptors. The program takes the (seven) national competences of a Master in Theatre as the point of departure to develop a program that starts from the **autonomy of the artist**.² Within a generic training model based on these seven competencies, students create a highly individualised trajectory for their personal artistic development. The essential end goal is that the master's students are aware of the important developments within the changing contemporary performing arts field, the art world, and society, and can autonomously (re)define their position within these realms.

Within this idea of continuous contextualisation and positioning, **artistic research** as a tool for artistic development has been given a very important role. To this end, the design and development of the program has always worked closely with the

¹ [Professionele masterstandaard](#), Vereniging Hogescholen, juni 2019, pg 4.

"Post-experience master: The degree offers the student broadening within their profession. To be selected to the program relevant work experience is required; (...)."

² Beroepsprofiel en Opleidingsprofiel 2017, Landelijk Netwerk Theateropleidingen. Hoofdstuk 5, de competenties van de opleiding theater – masterniveau. P 25-31.

<https://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/system/profiles/documents/000/000/070/original/theater.bop.2018.pdf?1523878561>

Maastricht University/Faculty of Culture and Social Sciences and the Research Centre for Arts, Autonomy and the Public Sphere at Zuyd Hogeschool. The direct and continuous dialogue with theatre professionals (inside and outside the training) is the other important systematic input in the development of the program.

Global society, technological developments, new media, transdisciplinarity, identity politics, advanced economic thinking, fake news/post-truth, and the like, pose so many challenges for the "old" performing arts. They ask for a constant reconfiguration of what theatre is and can be today, where it should be presented, and who the audience is. By putting together as diverse a student group as possible (discipline, age, sex, gender, cultural background, nationality, etc.) and pushing the boundaries of the performative (with the visual arts, the socio-cultural field, activism, etc.) the Master in Theatre strives to create an environment where the student group functions as **a reflexive community** in a theatre laboratory.

The relevance and importance of the students' learning objectives are guaranteed at different levels **in relation to the professional field**. Firstly, the national competencies and their actualisation in the program are an ongoing topic of discussion by everyone involved in the training, all of whom are working in the professional field. Secondly, most students have already created a professional context for themselves: they are professional performance practitioners with an existing practice, which means that their artistic work has a relevance to their field of work and/or that their choices in the training process are shaped by their interactions with their communities. Thirdly, everyone involved in the feedback and assessment moment, is a professional working in the field (artistic, academic, educational), including the peers, teachers, and coaches closely involved in the program, (guest) workshop leaders, and external jurors. Fourthly, the artistic project (Masterproof) is realised in the professional field, which requires it to function in relation to the logic of that field.

In addition to the national competences, the Master in Theatre would like to share the following basic **values** with its participants:

- The generosity to seek, to fail, to change, and to open that search to others
- The focus on a collective context as the locus of development of new ideas that enrich the individual (artistic) trajectory
- The fundamental importance for the creation of a diverse and inclusive environment beginning with a belief in the richness of difference
- Horizontality as input for learning situations, departing from a basic curiosity in one another and the belief that everyone is a specialist

The Master in Theatre occupies a **unique position** in the Netherlands and Belgium and in an international context because the Masterproof, one of the graduation assessments, is realised in the professional field. As a result, continuous dialogue with the professional field is a foundational element that makes the program unique. In addition, the exciting series of balancing acts between the assumed

disciplinary nature of the program and the various disciplinary backgrounds of the students, between a defined program and individual development trajectories, and between the students' personal journeys and the demands of a reflexive community, form the creative powerhouse of the program.

The continuous negotiation model with and between the students and all involved in the program compels the Master in Theatre to be fluid and flexible, and responsive to both the needs of professional artists who want to grow and current trends in the professional field. We need to remain vigilant in observing developments in the professional landscape and, in the medium term (if the program's identity has stabilised somewhat and there is a large group of alumni), investigate whether the realised learning outcomes are effective and have had a positive effect on the trajectory of artists who participated in the Master's, and whether their training retains a lasting importance in the artistic field.

Standard 2: educational environment

"The program, the educational environment, and the quality of the teaching team make it possible for incoming students to realise the intended learning outcomes."

The Master in Theatre offers a context and a network of performance professionals who want to develop their competences in a laboratory environment or introduce a new aspect to their existing artistic practice. This individual development trajectory, where students are the author, owner, manager, and engine, is given concrete form in the **three structural lines** in the master's program; an artistic project realised in the professional field (Masterproof); the Project Plan for that performance; and an artistic research (Critical Reflection).

These three lines are thematised in the workshop program, the mentoring process, and in a reflexive community of fellow students. Together, the development of the artistic research (towards Critical Reflection) and the artistic project (towards Masterproof and final Project Plan) form the foundation of each artist's individual development trajectory.

The organised part of the program takes place exclusively only on Mondays and Tuesdays. These dates are set long before the next academic year so that they can be communicated to potential students, allowing them to plan and combine the master's trajectory with their professional work.

The Master's trajectory is divided into **three blocks**, each with a different emphasis.

The first block (September to January) is the busiest, with organised encounters every Monday and Tuesday. This block provides a space for exploration and contextualisation by the student in the training (Exploration Phase). The focus here is on artistic research through a conceptual approach and the practice of invited artists.

In the second block (February to June) there is a shift from organised to self-organised. Workshops remain important, but mentoring and the development of the students' individual trajectories takes precedence. Here, the positioning of the student becomes more important (Integration Phase). After the second block there is an important assessment. At the end of this block, students will have completed a concrete plan for their artistic project, allowing them to initiate the project in the professional field. Their artistic research plan (Research Proposal 2.0) indicates the concrete direction their artistic research is taking.

In the third block, they realise their artistic project (Masterproof) and communicate their artistic research (Critical Reflection). The students are completely self-organised and serve as hosts for the new students of the first year (during the opening days, the curated days, and open working moments in their rehearsal process).

Students are explicitly asked to follow blocks 1 and 2 together. The handling of block 2 can run longer, usually because the project plan takes more time (a production place must be secured in the professional field) or because the concretisation of the research requires more time. The duration of the self-

organised block 3 is mainly determined by the premiere date of the artistic project (the Masterproof), which depends on external factors such as the professional production partner.

The Master's program has **a threefold program**: a workshop program, a mentoring program, and the set-up of a reflexive community.

The workshop program is mainly made up of short encounters, usually with maximum duration of two days, with artists and researchers chosen by the organisers of the training, independent of the individual research project of the students. The emphasis is primarily on **workshops** that focus on artistic research and its methodologies. Of course, the other six national competences are also taken into consideration in the workshop program.

Craftmanship as one of these competences is relatively underrepresented in the workshop program because we assume that the artists already have an established skill set in their craft for them to start the program (which they would have acquired at a bachelor's level). The generic nature of the workshops means they cannot respond directly to the very diverse and specific requirements of individual artists in terms of skill development. To this end, students are able to use their individual mentoring budget. (See paragraph Mentoring Program below.)

The curation of the workshop program is defined by a speculative look at current trends in the performing arts landscape, transdisciplinarity, the broader art world, and society. Workshops are short and many, so students receive a multitude of input from different angles. If during these first encounters (with ideas, with individuals) students find input they want to incorporate into their further development, they can so through individual mentoring process.

The workshop *Travel Companions* is the only longer workshop, lasting twelve sessions in the first block. This workshop starts from an academic input on artistic research and focuses on communicative and analytical skills (spoken and written). Students develop a shared language to speak about (their) artistic research.

Through the series of encounters, the students make two presentations and write two mini-essays, before they finalise the workshop with writing a final essay. For the students who start the training, the workshop program is a compulsory part of their curriculum. Students of the third block are explicitly invited to the workshops of block 1 and 2. The alumni are also kept informed and are always welcome.

Originally, the challenge was to build a completely different workshop program each year, to keep the programming sharp and to provide third-block students and alumni with a richer offer. The experience and feedback from students have shown us that some workshops are basic building blocks. These workshops are now part of the basic structure of the program and return each year as part of the *identity kit*. (See paragraph Identity kit below).

The **mentoring program** has evolved considerably throughout the four years of training. It consists of two packages. The generic mentoring; mentoring by mentors closely involved in the program, is a compulsory part of the curriculum and is often linked to specific assessment moments within the course.

In the generic mentoring attention is paid to all the national competences with the focus depending on the specialty of the mentor. The mentoring with the coordinator is continuous throughout the training and each student has at least two encounters with him during each block. Discussion subjects are the general well-being of the student in the training and every subject that this will raise. Besides the mentoring by the coordinator, in block 1 there is an individual mentoring session foreseen around the artistic project plan and two collective mentoring sessions on artistic research. In block 2 there is individual mentoring around the artistic project and around artistic research. In block 3 individual mentoring is organised around the curated days (artistic research trajectory).

In addition, the student has an individual budget of 50 mentoring hours for their specific trajectory, to be distributed over artistic research and artistic project. In the individual mentoring, the students concentrate on those competences that they specifically want to develop and, based on this, they choose their personal mentors (scientists, theoreticians, specialised professionals, artists from their own or some other discipline, etc.)

We are convinced that the **reflexive community** formed by the student group is the most important and valuable gift of the Master's. Not as an end in itself, but as the rich breeding ground for an individual trajectory. A lot of attention is paid to creating an optimal environment so that this active group can emerge. The creation of a horizontal culture with the students as expert, peer-to-peer mentoring, the emphasis on autonomy and responsibility in and for the collective, the organisational form of many workshops, etc. are some of the many formal moments in which the reflexive community can emerge and grow. Paradoxically, the main input of the Master's for the student's individual trajectory may also be the most informal and the least "institutionalised". Students create small experiments with each other, collaborate with fellow students in their artistic projects, and organise working days outside the curriculum.

The learning environment has a basic program that thematically activates and assesses the seven national competences in different contexts. Because the Master's is based on an individual trajectory, students are invited at the beginning of the training to position themselves in a personal way relative to the national competences. The students determine which competences deserve special attention because they are of exceptional importance to their development at this time. Students are encouraged to negotiate at any time during the program around how they acquire competences and how they want to see them judged. As an example, a student who has already written n number of project plans may not benefit from production plan $n + 1$. For this artist, it is probably much more productive to devise a long-term development plan and to get expertise formative feedback on this plan. From this year, the **identity kit** has been created to give students a better insight into their own competences, to make considered choices about how they want to put them into operation, and to determine which competences they want to give extra attention to. The identity kit is an artistic self-definition with competences put into operation, created in the first block of the program.

The identity kit consists of the following components:

- The students determine the competences on which they want to focus in particular, with reference to the national competences of the program (master's level).
(Competences Workshop)
- An exploration of and a statement about artistic research methods. The students determine which specific artistic research context suits them by speculating around their "Artistic Research House".
(Research House Workshop)
- A statement about an artistic research domain. Through a dialogue with a relevant artist in an essay, the student explores a research domain and/or question.
(Travel Companions)
- An in-depth confrontation with personal artistic methodologies.
(Artistic Recipe Workshop)
- An exploration of writing as a form of artistic self-definition.
(Artist Writings Workshop)
- An exploration of the sensitive body as a research tool.
(Sensory Knowledge Workshop)

At every feedback moment – both in formative and summative assessments - the identity kit is used as a benchmark and reference for peers, the team, workshop leaders, and evaluators.

The choice to not only use the generic national competencies, but also to enable students to create a hierarchy within their learning objectives and to "own" competencies, has grown through the re-profiling of the Master's in the accreditation process and through meetings with the student group. The formalisation and elaboration of concrete formats must be further elaborated and refined.

The **team** closely involved in the organisation of the Master's, the workshop organisers, the mentors and professionals invited for feedback and assessments, etc. are prominent and pioneering artists and/or researchers in Dutch, Belgian, and international art contexts with a great attention for research (in the Arts). If these artists in the contact with the Master's program also shows a keen interest in art pedagogy, they are invited to pursue a relationship that transcends the one-off encounter. For those long-term relationships, besides artistic excellence, the most important qualities are: the competence to accompany the development and growth of artists, the flexibility to relate to very different artistic universes, and the willingness to think together about an artistic pedagogical project. The Master's considers the relationship with the academic world and its integration into the program very important. These are primarily realised through the direct involvement of the Maastricht University/Faculty of Culture and Social Sciences and the Research Centre for Arts, Autonomy and the Public Sphere at Zuyd Hogeschool.

The Master's home base is the Toneelacademie and all the **facilities** (logistics, technical, etc.) it offers are available to the program. Since this academic year, the Master's, in a school with an acute lack of space, has its own space. This is important for the development of the identity of the program. The training can

“assign” the space and students can “leave traces”. Of course, the dream is for the program to ultimately have a real substantial work/rehearsal space.

Along with the workshops at the academy, there is also a conscious policy to go and meet artists in their own *habitat* within their personal network. Also the Masterproof performances, which are presented in a professional context, are moments when the whole group through open rehearsals and premieres crosses the threshold of different professional houses.

The Master in Theatre is made visible along the common channels that the Toneelacademie uses. The website is also an important tool for potential students both in the Netherlands and abroad. Word of mouth by former students, workshop leaders, and mentors is increasing the **visibility** of the program. Nevertheless, we think that the program is still not well known enough and this is an important point to work on. A larger group of applicants offers the possibility to increase the quality of students, thereby strengthening the program and to sharpening the laboratory idea of a reflexive community.

There are three **selection** moments per year (March, June, and September). Prospective students are encouraged to contact the team before the official selection procedure to check whether the program is the right fit for them as an informal first selection. Candidates must have a bachelor’s degree in the performing arts, or a different bachelor’s degree combined with demonstrated relevant practical experience in the performing arts. The selection dossier includes: a curriculum vitae, a motivation letter, a description of the artistic project and the artistic research that form the core of the Master’s program, copies of the necessary diplomas, and a portfolio. Candidates also bring supporting material that documents their professional context and their contacts around production possibilities. They can be invited to an interview on the basis of their registration file. The selection committee for the program is composed of the program coordinators and two mentors, closely involved in the training. In the conversation with the applicants, their artistic identity and context, their motivation, their reflexivity, openness for a collective environment, and their expectations, are all being considered. An additional assignment is a possibility. Because the horizontal meeting between experts forms the basis of the entire master’s program, a clear positioning of the artist (usually by a developed artistic identity, an artistic history, and a professional work context) is an important condition. A reflexive, critical and open research attitude are equally important because artistic research has an important role in program as a lever for artistic development.

Due to the growing importance of the reflexive community and the (in)formal interaction in the group for the individual trajectories of the students, the selection is also considered in the light of the creation of a reflexive community. The guiding idea is that **diversity** and difference can be powerful engines to create a dynamic, challenging, and inspiring group. This conviction has first proven itself in the disciplinary expansion. At the start, the Master’s was conceived only for scenographers and directors, but other performance practitioners and also visual artists with a fascination for performance started to apply. At this moment e.g. a fashion designer, a choreographer-light designer, and a writer are also part of the

community. For the same reason, we also try to work on cultural diversity and decided to make the program in English. The presence of professionals from other performance cultures allows participants to question the unconscious and unexplored obviousness of their own performing arts culture.³

The organisers and students are in a permanent and very transparent dialogue with each other, on their individual trajectories in the training, on the collective trajectory of the group, and on all of the issues relating to the concrete organisation and ideological basis of the program. The significant evolution that the program has experienced over the last three years is largely determined by the feedback of students. Also for the students at an individual level a **negotiating model** is used, so that the concrete steps and formal requirements of the program are aligned with the specific interests and the individual nature of their trajectory.

This is very positive and productive "conflict", provided it is recognised as such, with a commitment to constant negotiation between the individual student and the reflexive community and between the individual student and the organisers of the program.

Again and again, students have to determine how to position themselves in relation to their personal needs and the collective dynamics of an artistic community, between individualism and generosity. Ideally, this negotiation provides a powerful collective that propels the individual trajectory.

Through the first three years of the Master's, we have made an ever-greater appeal to the **responsibility** of the students, in relation to their own development and the training project. This participation model leads to a great satisfaction with the students and to a better education overall. The fundamental tension between, on the one hand, the general and generic frame of the organisation of a training program and the generic requirements of the government, and on the other, the individual development needs of performance professionals, constitutes a guiding principal of the Master's program as well as being one of its biggest challenges.

³ This choice to make the Master's an English-language program was further supported by:

- Students are better prepared for international art practice: They learn the international terminology and they learn to communicate in the language used in international productions. This is a prerequisite for getting to know various theatre cultures.
- A large part of the workshop leaders in the Master are from abroad and communicate in English. (in 2018-2019 25%).
- The literature and theatre texts used are mostly in English.
- The theatre world is international and theatre makers collaborate with people with different cultural backgrounds. To prepare students for this, the training should reflect the theatre world. This is best achieved by creating an "international classroom". In addition to the diversity mentioned above, this requires English as a language of use. This is about striving for quality improvement, not simply for attracting more students.
- The current students and alumni of the still young Master in Theatre prove that the field of work is international. Several currently enrolled students are working on international projects, and the alumni are working on projects in North Africa, Iraq, and Turkey.

Standard 3: *testing*

"The training has an adequate system of testing."

In the three years following the accreditation, the system of testing and examination has evolved considerably. The concrete experience and sharper profiling of the program, the feedback from the team and students, and the internal audit of Zuyd Hogeschool, have been the engine for two major shifts around assessments.

The first shift is the explicit invitation to the student to create an individualised set of competences within the context of the national competences for a Master in Theatre (see Standard 1) as the reference for testing. Secondly, there is a resolute choice to focus on continuous feedback in the interaction with and between students, with an accent shift from summative to formative formal assessment moments.

As with the program offerings, all seven national competences are covered in the assessments, but the students are explicitly invited to determine within these competences the focus they find valuable in their personal development trajectory. Each block has **continuous feedback** in the many mentoring sessions (see Standard 2) during the blocks, and concludes with formative and summative assessment moments.

The individual development trajectory of the students is given concrete form in three lines throughout the Master's program: A performance project that is realised in the professional field, the project plan of that performance, and an artistic research trajectory. The examination program follows the development of these three lines through the three blocks of the program.

Block 1 closes end of January with two summative moments of assessment and an formative moment of assessment.

Within the artistic research line, the Final essay of the workshop series *Travel Companions* is assessed. (Essay Travel Companions)

The second formal assessment moment is the assessment of the first version of the production plan. (PPI: Production and Organisation 1)

The students work around a number of fundamental questions around the organisation of the artistic project. Both summative reviews also pay a lot of attention to feedback in the form of feed up and feed forward.

The third line, the artistic project is not summatively judged at the end of block 1. Instead the students present the development of their artistic projects in the State of the Art (see below). An exclusively formative assessment of the artistic project has been chosen at this moment in time, because block 1 and 2 form a continuity in the development of most artistic projects. A caesura fits better after block 2.

The **State of the Art I** is the performative closure of the first block with all participants of the program (team and students). Students can also invite their own artistic collaborators. It is a feedback moment in which all the current master

students look back, contemplate their actual positioning and preview. They themselves indicate exactly what feedback they would like to receive. All attendees provide written feedback on feedback forms. In addition, there is a direct moment of oral feedback in a more limited circle. Throughout the three years of training, the State of the Art has become an essential moment in which the reflexive community is celebrated. As mentioned, it is a moment of feedback, but it is also a ceremonial moment of generosity and exchange, community and celebration. Next to the presentations by students, there is a communal dinner and an graduation ritual for alumni, organised by the current students.

Block 2 closes (end of June) with three summative assessments. Within the artistic research line, the artistic research plan (materialised in the artistic research doc 2.0.) is evaluated. The two other lines, project plan and artistic project, come together in the project plan that contains an artistic-substantive description and a logistical-organisational and financial elaboration of the artistic project.

Both documents are assessed as concrete plans by which the artists can realise their performance and concretise their artistic research respectively in the professional field. Just like after the first block, the formative aspect is very important in the reviews (feed up and forward). These assessment moments form a real caesura in the program: from contextualisation and positioning, students move to a concrete implementation phase and become completely autonomous.

The second block closes with the State of the Art II, organised in the same way as the first one.

Block 3 concludes with three summative and formative assessment moments: The Masterproof is the conclusion of the artistic project, the Critical Reflection, the communication of the artistic research, is assessed, and the Evaluation of the project dossier as part of the line project plan is included in the assessment of the Masterproof.

All assessments are made with **standardised assessment** forms drawn up on the basis of the national criteria, with different emphasis depending on the assessment component. These forms, by the way they are drawn up and by the contextualisation by the team, invite to go into the development possibilities of the material offered. Students are also informed in advance of the criteria used in the assessment and are explicitly asked to indicate the competences that are important to them within the specific assessment and the associated feedback. In this way, a "negotiation culture" (where students shape different parts of the training in a meaningful way and in an individualised course) is drawn through the form and content of assessment.

The composition of the **juries** has evolved throughout the short history of the program. Now there is a clear evolution through the itinerary. The examinations are initially assessed by an assessor from the team, then the Committee of Evaluators is extended and the final juries in block are composed primarily (2 of the three jury members) of external jurors. In addition, there is a continuous feedback that adopts very different, more informal forms (in workshops, peer-to-peer, mentoring, state of the art, etc.)

The **Examination Committee** guarantees the final level by designating qualified examiners, monitoring the multiple-eyes principle, and through consultation with the field of study on the master's level of the program. The examination committee assesses the tailor-made pathways in which the testing of artistic competences is always a compulsory part. The Examination Committee acts as a critical friend and gives feedback on the quality of examinations. The Examination Committee provides a reflection in the annual report on how the assurance of the quality of review and examination is carried out and shows that it is in control.

The program has an **adequate system of testing**, with the emphasis being strongly shifted from summative to formative assessment. The training has renewed its system of testing and examination and has made several improvements since the start of the Master's and continues to evolve.

Standard 4: realised learning outcomes

"The program shows that the intended learning outcomes have been realised."

The individual development trajectory of the students in three lines (artistic project, artistic research, and project plan) leads to three graduation evaluations: a Masterproof, a Critical Reflection, and an Evaluation of Production Plan.

The artistic project is realised in the professional field with professional partners who are part of the working context of the artist. The presence of this professional context is one of the criteria for the selection in the Master in Theatre program. Another possibility is that the student is committed to the exploration of a new professional context to start the Master's. In that case, the team will accompany the artist in the development of this new network and context for the artistic project.

Because the training pursues artistic diversity and because in a laboratory context the identity and the margins of performance can be questioned, this professional context can adopt very different and radical forms. Depending on the artistic ambitions of the student, the **Masterproof** can be a cutting-edge performance on the border between visual arts and theatre, educational theatre, community theatre, a fashion event, an installation in public space, etc.

But the Master in Theatre is a discipline-centered training, so there is an insistence that the Masterproof will be able to be assessed on performative / performance qualities.

This assessment is done by a jury consisting of at least three members. Through the development of the program, the conviction has grown that it is better that the coordinator is not a part of the jury for the Masterproof. Since 2018-19 it has been established that the jury consists of a juror from the professional context of the project (with knowledge of the development of the trajectory in that context), a juror from the team of the Master's (who knows the development of the student in the Master's), and jury member from the professional field with (artistic or other) affinities with the concept of the project (but without specific knowledge of the student and project). The jury member from the team contextualises the moment of assessment within the program and explains the assessment forms that serve as a guideline for the three jurors. The jury acts as a formal examiner and sets out the written final assessment.

In block 3, the student gives shape to the **Critical Reflection**, a format that communicates the research conducted by the student in the most effective way. There are endless possibilities of form here. Consciously the Master's does not commit to a written text as the final communication form for the research, from the belief that artistic research also needs to be an investigation into its form of communication. The importance of writing is not underestimated. Criticism takes place within the workshop Travel Companions with two artist texts and a summation assessment of a final essay.) So far, this research into the right form for the communication of research has led to the following critical reflections: an

essay, a portfolio, a podcast, a lecture-performance, a film essay, and finally a cross between a performance, a guided exhibition, a debate, and a choreography. An important decision, which is linked to the content and form of the research, is the choice of the target audience for communication. Who does the student focus on? Are the insights, reservations, and experiences of the research especially important for peers? Other theatre professionals? Is the research particularly interesting for a specific group of scientists or for the general public?

The jury for the Critical Reflection is composed according to the same logic as that of the Masterproof and functions in the same way (with a member of the team, one of the self-chosen mentors, and an external specialist).

In order to conclude their project plan, students are asked to reflect, in addition to the complete project plan with the handling of the financial organisation, also (briefly) on the logistical, organisational, and financial elaboration of the artistic project and how all these elements have influenced the artistic project. Or another individual assignment is given to the student who fits their development needs and trajectory.

Due to the thorough guidance, and the State of the Art that constitutes the possibility of a try-out, the Critical Reflection as a final product within the program has grown strongly, both in terms of content and form. The presentations for the target audience have a clear impact. Because they make "research" concrete/visible, the Critical Reflections are a very good means of communication to clarify what the profile of the program is and what it has to offer (like State of the Art I and II). The team continues to explore how to maximise the impact of the conducted research.

The final step in the line project plan is the evaluation of **production dossier**, it also has a particular interest in the personal development of the artist. This third phase of the project plan is assessed by the jury who assesses the Masterproof and follows the same procedure (see above).

Because the program is better able to estimate and define itself (and to gain profile), a more precise selection of students has become possible. For the same reason, the guidance of the students in the process has become more effective. The result of this is that the **quality** of the graduation products has risen. Because of the diversity of students, it is difficult to limit the Masterproof within a profile.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that it is not our hope that we can ever trace the "Maastricht Master's profile"; in our alumni, that they are "recognisable" as alumni of this program. Our students are very different at the start, and we hope that they will still be as diverse as alumni.

At the moment, the new training has only produced a few alumni. Our important goal is to deliver Master's students who know the most important developments within the changing contemporary performing arts field, art world, and society, and autonomously define a position; something we see these alumni having achieved. These autonomous artists have developed their competences in a way that suits the

national competences, but also in a way that fits seamlessly with their personal needs regarding concrete artistic positioning.

The professional field gives a **growing recognition** the valuable context that the Master's offers for artistic deepening and renewal and uses the Master's as a support in their accompaniment of artists.

Challenges and Ambitions

The Master in Theatre focuses on **experienced performance practitioners** who want to deepen their artistic practice or look for a different context for their work. For artists with a flourishing practice, it is not easy to take the time and space for research, even though this desire lives with many of them. The fact that this research can be done within a (master's) course and that this educational context can be an autonomous and tailor-made trajectory, separate from patronizing and naïve rules (and other possible clichés around education), is still a surprising discovery for many artists. And if these experienced artists learn about the Master's, it still demands a great deal of energy from the coordinators to fully explain how this laboratory phase can operate harmoniously in relation to their existing artistic practice.

It is important to keep communicating about the training and the opportunities it offers. Because the training is young, there are still too few artists studying or who have graduated who can act as examples or **ambassadors**. An active and time-intensive policy of concrete conversations with artists and theatre houses in the Netherlands and Flanders is still necessary.

De Toneelacademie is an institute with a long history of successful training that has a great reputation and fame. The addition of a new training program to the institution was not an immediately obvious choice. The strategies to give a new educational program visibility, in a digital world and in an international context, demand a different approach. The small team of the Master's have had their hands full with the construction of the training and its program and had hoped for more concrete **support for publicity and recruitment** by De Toneelacademie and Zuyd

We believe the Master in Theatre could play a unique role for performance **artists with different cultural backgrounds** that do not necessarily fit the formats of the existing theatre landscape in the Netherlands and Flanders. With its individualised trajectory, the Master's could help these artists to broaden their context and network without having to make confirm themselves. Here too, this requires a lot of work. Artists with a different cultural background must know about the Master's. We must know them and reach out to them. This is a very intensive process. We would like to see more energy in the future. Our hands itch.

As artists with different cultural backgrounds are important as an alternative voice in the reflexive community, so are **international artists** from other continents. In terms of the integration of international students, there needs to be a lot of thought and concrete solutions proposed (particularly before the beginning of the training). To mention a few concrete examples: How do we estimate the professional context and history of a non-European applicant? What do we do about the enormous and therefore daunting enrolment package that a non-EU artist has to pay? How do we deal with the length of time a visa requires? We must consider a specific route for these applications that are likely to take more time to be completed.

Now that the Master's chalk lines have become more and more clear, it is important to find as many tools as possible to communicate them clearly to the participants. The Master in Theatre has a strong oral culture with a close involvement and great responsiveness of the team. This way students get enough guidance. Written **manuals**, protocols, and contextualisation should be more and better. These handles are important in an educational program that makes the student themselves responsible for determining their frame of reference.

This year, the Master's finally has its own space, in which work can be done at the table, but also on a (mini) play floor. Is this the place where we can express our dreams about a large **performance laboratory space**? Where students can really be on the floor, can build constructions that can also leave for longer periods, where different students can work together separately and then "by chance" get into each other's work? And if we still dream, we also dream about production budgets to make experiments concrete and material...

The implementation of the Masterproof in the professional field of work is an essential feature of the Maastricht Master in Theatre. It is also the Achilles heel of the project, when the artist seeks a new context for his work and calls for the help of the master's team. In an "overcrowded" performing arts landscape with increasingly limited resources, it is not easy to find new production partners for master's students. So far, we have succeeded in doing so, but we need to develop a network of **specialists on a production level**, individual supervisors of the project plan, which accompany the artists in the search for a new production context.

The State of the Art I and II and the Critical Reflections have a significant potential within the recruitment process as ways to clarify the individuality and importance of the master's to potential artists/students, but as also as a way to **open the program up to the sector**. How does the "Tender Institute" in its vulnerability also open up and make itself porous? The first thoughts around it now are cautious steps in a (digital and paper) publishing policy and "reprises" of the State of the Art for another/larger audience.

Another form of opening is the **relationship with other master's programs**. Within Zuyd, the Master in Theatre, together with the department, has always worked actively for a broad and shared artistic research program on various art courses around van Zuyd. This concept has many advantages in our eyes; cost-saving, greater choice for students, more diverse groups, interdisciplinarity, etc. So far, our ambitions have struggled against certain practical objections, as well as a lack of ideological flexibility and perhaps, imagination. We do not give up the fight. Within that context, we think it is also important that we engage more in the network of the National Theatre Master's, as well as in an international context.

It's the same old song... It is self-evident that for many of the above-mentioned desires, **additional resources** would be a blessing.

Student Voices

Mario Leko

started September 2016

"I applied for the Master in Theatre at Toneelacademie back in 2016. At the time I was having a hard time finding a program open enough for my personal trajectory. With already more than 10 years of work experience in theatres in Croatia (where I come from) as a costume designer, set designer, and video artist, some theatre programs in Belgium (where I am based now) weren't as open for me to take that next step in my decision to produce and direct my first theatre piece. Basically I faced many "cold showers" in the application process because of the fact I was lacking a bachelor degree in performing arts (instead I have one in fine arts). This was luckily not the case with the master in Maastricht. If I reflect on this master (which for me is soon coming to an end) I must say that the program itself is firmly constructed around the idea of self-reflection. It puts the focus on artistic research as one of its main preoccupations, it also puts an artist or in this case theatre maker as a driving force of their own trajectory. For me this master provided a solid platform for focusing my research and navigating it towards its realisation. Artistic research is a very inward process that, at a certain point, has to start communicating outwards. This program made me aware of all of the benefits as well as the struggles that come along the way. In the process of making a theatre piece I am always confronted with "myself in the making". Somehow with every new creation it seems I am starting from zero. Luckily that isn't really the case, and this master taught me to access all of my tools much faster. Even though it seems at moments we are creating our own "new language" with each new creation, first we have to get to know our own alphabet."

Arno Synaeve

started September 2017

"I started the Master in Theatre in Maastricht right after completing my Master in Painting in Ghent, with a significant passion for – but with no significant amount of experience in – the theatre field. To my astonishment, on those introductory days I met a mix of experienced and less experienced creators, who each approached theatre from a very different angle. I had to get used to the fact that, when I was at the point of putting my first professional theatre performance on stage, I was in a classroom with one of the artistic leaders of the best-funded theatre houses in Belgium.

For me, this is the true strength of this program; a diverse group of people who get to know each other over the course of the program in various ways, during which everyone can share insights and experience as well as receiving them. This brings me to the crucial word I associate with this program: lightning-field expansion.

I experience the Master in Theatre as an open and critical environment; in relation to the other students, in relation to the field of work, but also in relation to the program itself. This is an integral part of the program; there is an open invitation to

think about what could be different and better. This is something I have never experienced as a student before.”

Ludy Graffelman

started September 2017

“I have a very positive experience of the Master. I have divided the Master for myself into four phases; the first year is a phase in which you will receive many master classes and encounters (first semester) followed by a phase in which these encounters continue but where the emphasis is on preparing for the following academic year (second semester). In the second year, there is a period to carry out your research and production (first semester) and then a period to reflect on everything and finish the Master (second semester). I am now in this last period.

“Artistic research” is a key term of the Master; the skills you need to possess as a professional theatre maker. The Master focuses on what you specifically want to develop, research, and learn. The first phase of the first year was, in my experience, mainly about how to conduct artistic research. The development of a research state of mind is important to this, and my vision of my career as a theatre-maker has therefore been somewhat turned upside down. I was still very busy in my mind with proving myself as a professional director and the opinions of my colleagues in the theatre field. This first period has been challenging for me, but has encouraged me more to follow my own fascinations and autonomy. I see this as a great merit, considering I had trouble with this individuality in the work field and could not have been able to make this step without the Master.

Because of the emphasis on artistic research during the first period, I have occasionally missed the concrete connection with the discipline of theatre. Fortunately, this was better fulfilled in the second period with more focused field visits (such as the Belgian NeedCompany) and more focused master classes (such as the scenography workshop with Theun Mosk). Also the second period of the first year and the first period of the second year have provided a lot of space for individual supervision (usually by coordinator Bart Van den Eynde). This direct accompaniment is one of the reasons why I wanted to follow the Master and has been of great importance in making my theatre production, which is a part of the Master. I found the accompaniment to be, firstly, of very high quality and, secondly, pleasant, supportive, and motivating. This is in stark contrast to what I recall from my bachelor's program.

The strength of the Master is the great attention paid to the individual student. This has brought me both a desire to work and a great challenge, through which I have been able to develop my autonomy as a theatre maker.

The danger is that as a student researcher you can make overly ambitious choices, but I have been able to discipline myself in this regard. The program offered, together with the guidance provided, has changed my vision of making theatre from “must perform” to “become fascinated, investigate, and translate to theatre” – a

development that I currently embrace, and which I am now thankful to the Master for (and will be for my whole life).”

Abel Enklaar

started September 2018

My year at the masters in theatre, a part of a student chapter.

As I am now entering the next phase in my master’s trajectory, I take the time to reflect and see what it has been that I have been experiencing.

When I joined the masters in theatre project I wanted to engage more with modes of artistic research and deepen my understanding of theatricality. Being from an interdisciplinary background I felt unsafe working as a director in the professional field I always felt like I did not yet earn the right to be there. I was looking for a place I could come to and hone my craft.

In the program I not only found an opportunity to engage with the world of theatre through the lectures, workshops, and readings. Most of all I was taken by the breadth and richness of the backgrounds, tastes, and ideas of my fellow students. For a year, almost every week we formed a ragtag family. Sharing our frustrations, our plans, our understanding of the field.

What I value most in the approach of the course is how this family also extends to the staff, and in already my first mentor talk I had with Bart, I was truly moved by how personal and involved he was with my artistic ideas and questions. Or in the effort everyone puts into the coaching. I have learned so much through these one to ones, with my classmates, or with staff.

Thinking of what I went through in regards of artistic development over the last year I think what has been the most exciting element for me is how through feedback from everyone slowly but surely, I managed to involve more my true personal relationship to the topics I was speaking and making about. It was as if before I always had this pretense that critical engagement had to be based in objectivity, that the themes and subjects could speak for themselves. It is through the work we did at the masters in theatre and the critical reflection of my peers I now take a step in a new direction interweaving autobiographical elements into my work, elements which were always there but I never dared to address.

Uphill now I have found this new awareness has shifted focus in my practice from a more direct, functional approach to a more narrative driven, sensitive, and process-oriented approach.

Most of all the master in theatre has given me a safe space, where in all openness I found peers to relate to and together question what theatre can and should be, who we want to be as creators, and where I want to go. Not only within the trajectory of the masters but also in the great big interdisciplinary world out there.

For me, the Master in Theatre is of a two-sided nature, so far as I can tell, as I just began the second year. For one, it presented me quite overwhelmingly and in an inspirational manner with other artist's practices, theoretical input, and ten extremely and beautifully diverse characters and practices (my fellow students). I felt encouraged to open myself up to all of it and also the way it would change my project idea. The other side for me is that it encouraged me to take a look in the mirror, playfully as well as sincerely, and reflect upon my artistic practice, goals, and working methods, which felt interesting for me in that I am still in the early stages of my very own individual artistic practice. I am happy the Master led me to start a logbook in which I document the evolution of my project and thought process almost every day, trying to make it tangible and usable for the future. I feel like the Master supported me in finding a way to think about my approaches and also presented me with many different new ways to do this. The Master in Theatre supports my autonomy and self-responsibility, which is challenging as well as deeply enriching when paired with carefully selected artistic and academic inputs and the support of different mentors, with whom to discuss my ideas. For the future, I do hope my bond to the Master will last and that together with all the other student cohorts we will manage to build a unique network of diverse artists and their practices.

- Diversity of students enriching
- Reflection and contemplation
- Multiple forms of input that are valuable in themselves and highly inspirational to apply to my own practice
- Encourages to self-organise individually and as a group
- Diversity of the workshops and academic focus points. Unique in that I felt encouraged to open myself to any form of artistic input and other practices and at the same time find the point at which to gather my thoughts and apply them to my practice.

I like that I started a logbook for the master program to keep track of how my topic is evolving and changing. I am writing in it nearly everyday, which gives me a clear (if also sometimes overwhelming) perspective on my project.

I expect the second year to be an intense lesson in self-organisation and I find it quite hard to keep the program in mind when thinking of the things that both my project and I need in order to finalise my study and artistic project.

Line Mertens

started September 2019

Master in Theatre, impression from a first-year student

I applied for this master's program because of its explicit openness towards anyone having acquired some professional experience in an aspect of performance. My professional experience would then be writing and translating. I think I am a first, because my background only exists on paper. I have a university degree in comparative literature, a writing portfolio, and I am enrolled in the Toneelacademie's part-time bachelor (Docent en Regie). My aim is to be active in a performative literary field. I write with that aim in mind, and it is my hope that the master program can help me clarify what that could entail, and how I could professionalise that practice, starting from the Dutch theatre landscape.

I have been in the program for three weeks when I write this. This means that over the past three weeks, our class has met every Monday and Tuesday. We have met several people who will guide us through this program, each from their own perspective, ranging from a theoretical course on artistic research practices (Travel Companions), to a meeting with Tanja Elstgeest from Het Huis in Rotterdam, who gave us a peek into the production aspects of beginning theatrical work. This last meeting somehow surprised me. I had not anticipated that the professionalisation aspect of the master would be prominent from the start, but I gather now that it is fundamental. I estimate that we will build our practice on several pillars simultaneously. I hope this will make our house sturdy. I would like to add that my surprise about the production focus might be a very singular one. In my class group, I am in this respect the odd one out. The others clearly have already established, each in their own way, some professional practice. They are already in the field I would like to enter. It now seems to me that we can learn a lot from each other, considering that I feel very much at home in the more theoretical components of the master. It also seems to reflect the construction of the master itself, which (and now I am projecting, looking at the rest of the year's program) is built around a variety of practices, creating a richness in the multitude. I am slightly nervous and a bit overwhelmed, but also very eager to figure out my path.

