

Amsterdam is home to several weird yet wonderful offbeat museums. Read about a few here...

■ BY PRACHI JOSHI

Museum Magic

No visit to Amsterdam is complete without exploring the Rijksmuseum. If you're pressed for time, just make your way to the Gallery of Honour on the second floor where you can see some of the most important paintings in their collection, including Rembrandt's masterpiece 'The Night watch'. Apart from Rijksmuseum, Museumplein is home to two other stalwarts – the Van Gogh Museum and the contemporary art museum Stedelijk. However, did you know that Amsterdam has more than 50 museums? Some of them are quite quirky, some almost bizarre, and most of them are overlooked in favour of the big ones. So, on your next trip to Amsterdam, make some time for one or two (or more) of these offbeat museums.

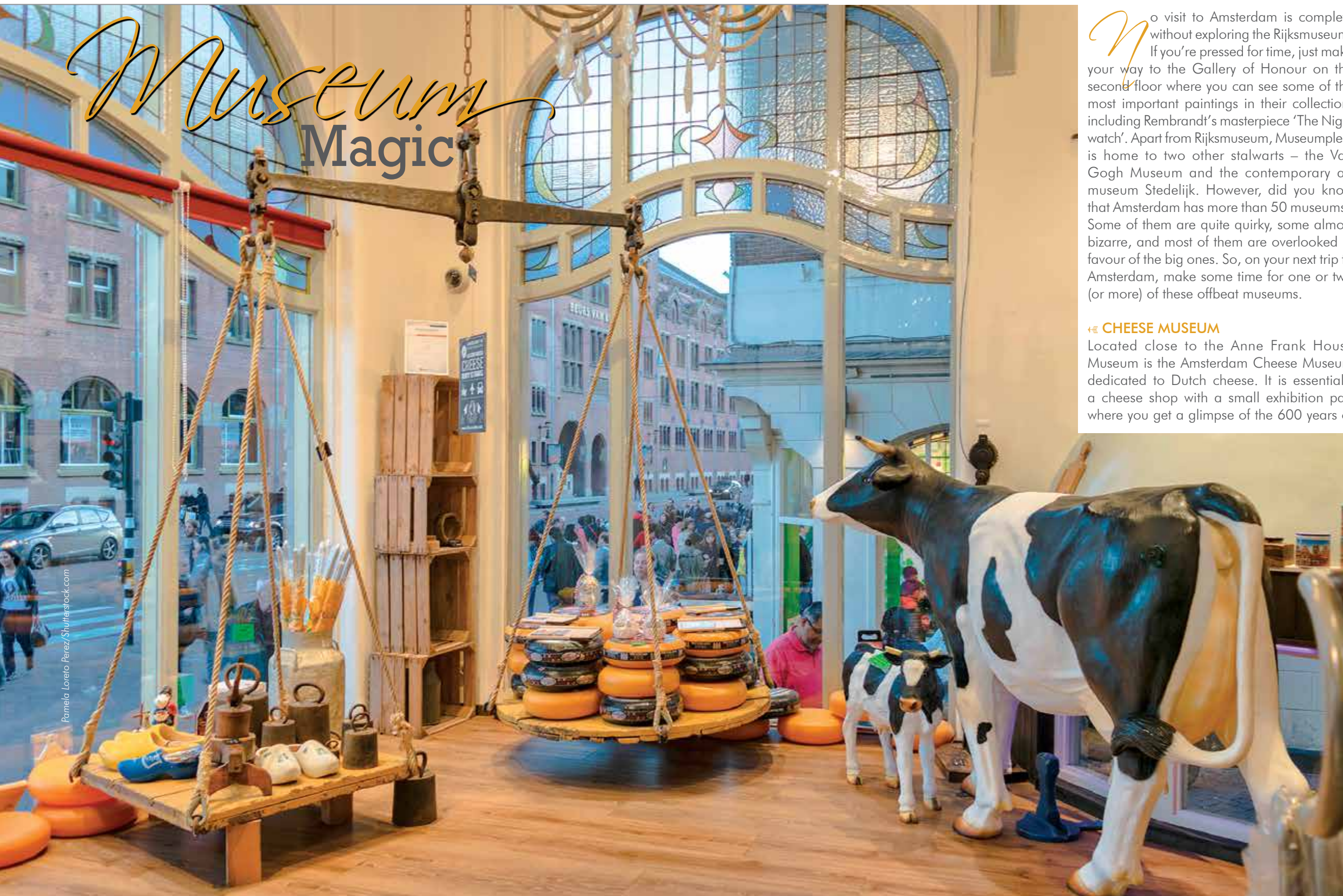
🧀 CHEESE MUSEUM

Located close to the Anne Frank House Museum is the Amsterdam Cheese Museum dedicated to Dutch cheese. It is essentially a cheese shop with a small exhibition part where you get a glimpse of the 600 years of

Dutch cheese making through photos and videos. The shop is manned by cheesemongers (wearing traditional Dutch clothes) who also double up as tour guides. In addition, you get a chance to sample a variety of Dutch cheese, from fresh, unpasteurised cheese to aged Gouda, and of course, you can buy some local cheese.

👜 MUSEUM OF BAGS & PURSES

The Museum of Bags & Purses (Tassenmuseum) is the only museum of its kind in the world, dedicated to such a specialised collection. Take a step back into time and see how the humble handbag evolved from the late Middle Ages to today. It's a fascinating mix of history and fashion. The museum itself is housed in a 17th-century canal house and houses a permanent collection of more than 5,000 bags and purses, including some celebrity bags like those of Madonna and Margaret Thatcher. The museum's café is located in charming period rooms and offers a delightful high tea.





Balzaal Klein / Kattenkabinet

🐱 CAT CABINET

If you love cats, make your way to Kattenkabinet, a quirky museum located in a 17th-century canal house and dedicated entirely to the feline species – specifically with references to cats in art and culture. The museum was founded in 1990 by a wealthy Dutchman, William Meijer in memory of his beloved cat, Tom. There are paintings, sculptures, photographs, and posters. And needless to say, there are a few friendly cats to keep you company as you wander around the museum. Apart from the feline theme, the house in which the museum is located is itself an historic building with beautifully preserved and restored rooms, wall appliques, and ceiling paintings.

➡ AMSTERDAM TULIP MUSEUM

Think Holland and no doubt you will imagine the colourful tulip fields forever immortalised

in postcards and in Bollywood movies. So it's no surprise that Amsterdam has a museum dedicated to these gorgeous flowers. The Amsterdam Tulip Museum is located in Jordaan and gives a historical perspective on this national icon, beginning with the flower's journey to the country during Ottoman times. There are fascinating insights as well. Did you know that in the 17th century, Holland was in the grips of 'tulip mania'? The tulip was a luxury item and a status symbol, and people paid vast sums of money to buy a single bulb. There were tulip stock exchanges and people even sold or re-mortgaged their houses to invest in the flowers! This went on for three years before the inevitable crash, and it was years before the tulip trade recovered.



Amanda Hall / robertharding / Dinodia



Nick Padalino / Electric Ladyland

🏠 ELECTRIC LADYLAND

The enigmatically named Electric Ladyland is a fluorescent art museum, the only one of its kind in the world. It exhibits a permanent collection of fluorescent artworks, advertisements, and artefacts from the 1930s and 1950s. The museum offers a guided tour and a demonstration of fluorescent minerals – common looking grey stones that burst into a multitude of colours when seen under different wavelengths of light. Once you enter the ‘fluorescent environment’ of the museum, you become a part of ‘participatory art’, and you can pitch in to create a piece of fluorescent art.

➡ HOUSEBOAT MUSEUM

In a city of canals, it’s no wonder that there’s a museum dedicated to houseboats. The Woonbootmuseum or Houseboat Museum in Amsterdam is the only one of its kind in the world and it gives you a glimpse of the houseboat life. Located on the Prinsengracht canal, near the Anne Frank House, the museum is a former freighter built in 1914 and converted to a houseboat named Hendrika Maria in the 1960s. Inside, you can see what a typical houseboat looks like – there’s a sizable living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and a skipper’s quarter complete with a sleeping bunk. There’s also a projection room where you can see a short film on the practicalities of living on a houseboat. 🌊



OTHER OFFBEAT MUSEUMS IN AMSTERDAM

Pipe Museum

Another 17th-century canal house in Amsterdam houses the Amsterdam Pipe Museum dedicated to the history of smoking pipes throughout history. The collection begins with the pipe’s origin in Northern America as far back as 500 BC, tracing the pipe’s evolution to modern day. There’s a collection of various iconic pipes like the Gouda churchwarden, German porcelain pipe bowls with miniature paintings, French pipes, carved wooden pipes, and more. The museum includes smoking paraphernalia from across the world, including African ceremonial pipes, Aboriginal pipes made with plant stems, carved Maori pipes, and Chinese opium pipes. pipemuseum.nl

Museum Vrolik

Museum Vrolik is probably Amsterdam’s weirdest museum, and that’s saying a lot! The 19th-century medical professor Gerardus Vrolik, his son Willem, and many of their contemporaries built up an extraordinary collection of medical artefacts. This included, amongst other things, skeletons, skulls, and conserved anatomical specimens. This museum is certainly not for the faint-hearted, but if you’re interested in science and anatomy, the museum offers an intriguing insight into the human body. The museum also has a collection of animal artefacts such as the heart of a lion and the eye of a whale, and more.