

Maria Montessori's Former Home

Koninginneweg 161 Amsterdam



When Maria Montessori and her son Mario returned from India after the Second World War, they went to live in Amsterdam, at Koninginneweg 161. Montessori's study can be found at the second floor (the room with the French Balcony). The historical object and heirlooms in the study serve as a tribute and remembrance to the life and work of Maria Montessori and her son. The room has been largely preserved in its original state.

Things to look out for

The display case in the study





On entering the study, you will see a display case on the left side. The display case contains medals and awards, some of which will be described in detail. Above the display case there is a diploma that King Umberto I awarded to Maria Montessori on July 10, 1896. She was one of the first women in Italy to graduate as a doctor. To the left, you will find a certificate, for the French distinction of 'Officer in the order of the legion of Honour'. To the right there is a certificate for the honorary citizenship of the city of Perugia, Italy. Montessori became honorary citizen of Perugia at the age of 80 on August 31, 1950.



Maria Montessori was born in the North of Italy, in Chiaravalle, in the province of Ancona. The house where she was born is currently a study centre for Montessori studies. A badge in the display originates from this small study centre.

Maria Montessori visited her place of birth on August 26, 1950. She was awarded a gold brooch with the following inscription: "A Maria Montessori la sua Città natale". Which means 'To Maria Maria Montessori from her native town.' She is wearing the brooch at the ceremony in the picture.



Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori had a beautiful signature, which in many ways resembles the sandpaper letters that children use. A stamp bearing her signature is included in the display, as are a number of badges and medals in the display.



A portrait of Maria Montessori is portrayed on the front, with the years 1870-1952. Underneath of the medal, there is a quote that shows that she believed school was more than an institute where –in a bright way- knowledge was transferred. The back of the medal depicts a child working with the Brown Stairs. A world map is also featured in the background. The text at the bottom of the picture reads 'Education for Peace' surrounded by additional text 'Within the Child is the Person he will become'.



Abs Joosten

In 1975, Abs Joosten, a renowned AMI trainer who had worked in the Netherlands, India and the United States was invited, to speak at an AMI EAA conference in the United States.

The conference took place in Saint Paul in the state of Minneapolis, from 22 to 25 June. Mario Montessori and his wife Ada were guests at the conference. Mario had an active role as a host, and was offered the badge.

The bookcase with books Dr Montessori wrote



The bookcase contains titles written by Dr Montessori, including 'The Montessori Method' and 'The Absorbent Mind', in different editions and languages. There are a number of portraits on top of the bookcase and there are numerous diplomas and certificates. A portrait of Renilde Montessori– Stoppani, Maria Montessori's mother is located above the bookcase. On top of the bookcase is Mario's Montessori diploma. He obtained his diploma in 1925 in London, where Montessori courses were frequently given. The diploma states 'she', and this was changed to 'he' for Mario, because most participants attending Montessori courses were women. The diploma bears an emblem of a child in a sailing boat. There was also a badge with the same image, which you were allowed to wear on graduation.





Next to each other, on top of the cupboard are two portraits of Ada Montessori-Pierson en Mario Montessori. Mario is holding a cigarette in the painting, smoking was common at that time in history.

There is also a picture of Helen Keller (1880 – 1968) together with Ann Sullivan Macy. When Keller was 19 months old she suffered from meningitis, which caused blindness and deafness. Her teacher Ann Sullivan taught her Braille and a tactile signing that she use to write into the palm of Keller. Keller succeeded in graduating from high school and in 1904 she obtained her doctorate in Boston in linguistics. She travelled the world with Sullivan, giving lectures about education for the blind and the deaf. Keller spoke seven languages. The picture was made in 1913, the year when Montessori first visited the United States. Keller wrote: "To dottoressa Maria Montessori. With our admiration and gratitude." She signed the message together with Sullivan.



Next to the mantelpiece, there is a picture of a painting of Rafael: *Madonna in the chair*. "Among the pictures in our *Children's House* in Rome we have hung a copy of Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola*, and this picture we have chosen as the emblem of the *Children's Houses*."

"In this beautiful conception, Raphael has not only shown us the Madonna as a Divine Mother holding in her arms the baby who is greater than she, but by the side of this symbol of all motherhood, he has placed the figure of St John, who represents humanity. So in Raphael's picture we see humanity

rendering homage to maternity, maternity, the sublime fact in the definite triumph of humanity".

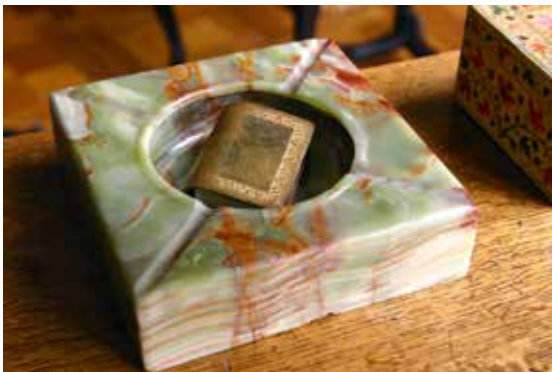
[Maria Montessori in *The Discovery of the Child*]

The Desk

Behind the desk, on the far right is the portrait of Alessandro Montessori, Maria Montessori's father. You will find the certificate that was given to mark the appointment of Montessori as *Officier in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau*.



There is an ashtray made of Onyx on the desk. Both Mario and his mother were heavy smokers.



There was a lot of handwriting done at the desk, which is shown by the inkstand and the bottle of Gimborn ink. There is also an extremely heavy historical Olivetti typewriter. The carved wooden box would have been used for the storage of stamps.



The statue from Berlin



There is a Byzantine statue on top of the bookcase that is positioned between the two windows overlooking Koninginneweg. The original statue is in the Museo di Berlino.

The statue is a copy in terracotta of a marble statue. The original was made by Francesco Laurana (1430 – 1502), it was severely damaged during the Second World War. Only the head remained intact. The statue depicts princess Isabella of Aragon (1470 – 1524). She was the princess of Napoli and later on the countess of Milan. She married Gian Galeazzo Sforza, the duke of Milan. We do not know how Maria Montessori acquired the statue.

Wall with images of Dr Montessori



This wall contains paintings from different episodes of Maria Montessori's life. Made by Sir Frank O. Salisbury, the portrait of Maria Montessori was given to AMI in 1955, by the Montessori Society of the UK at a diploma graduation ceremony. Mario Montessori accepted it. Claude Claremont was also present at the ceremony.

Sir Frank O. Salisbury (1874 – 1962) was a famous British painter, who has also painted Queen Elizabeth II, Winston Churchill and Montgomery of Alamein. He was a traditional painter who opposed 'modern' contemporaries like Picasso and Mondriaan. Salisbury was also very famous in the United States.

An embroidered copy of the portrait was presented to AMI in 2007 at the first international congress in China. This exceptional work of art can be found on the first floor of the AMI building.



In the painting, Maria Montessori is wearing a black academic gown and she is holding a book. The text in the book reads 'Mammalina Immortale' means Immortal Mammalina. Close friends used to call Maria Montessori 'Mammolina' and she sometimes signed letters with that name.



Viola Mammola

Above and to the left of Salisbury's painting is the most well known image of Dr Montessori. To the right is a portrait in silver *en relief*, which shows Maria Montessori *en profile*. A portrait of this kind *en profile* of Maria Montessori is rarely found.

A small picture shows Maria Montessori as a young woman in 1898, she is 28 years old and she had just graduated as a doctor. The picture shows pride and confidence. Marjan Schwegman wrote a biography on Montessori in Dutch in 1999. She chose this picture, which she called a state portrait as the cover for her book.



This picture inspired Henriëtte Kors, a Dutch sculptor from Noordwijk. She used the picture as an example for her sculpture, with the intention to make a sculpture that was accessible for children. Next to being a sculptor, Henriëtte is also a Montessori teacher in Oegstgeest.

Additional details

The silver box from Karachi - Pakistan

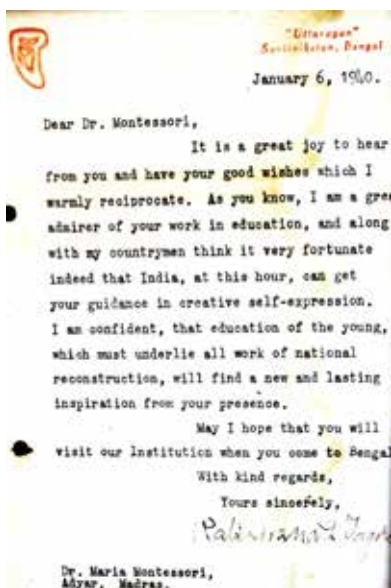


There is a beautiful silver box on the mantelpiece in Maria Montessori's study. The two palm trees are placed on the lid, which resembles a small school with a teacher and children gathered under the trees.

The inscription on the front of the box reads that representatives from the city of Karachi offered the box to Dr Montessori in 1946, to mark the second course in the city. The first course was held in 1939. The third and last course was given together with Mario and Albert Joosten in 1949.

The box with the inscription was first kept in Dr Montessori's residential home and then in Mario Montessori's office in Baarn. After his death, the intention was to move the box to Montessori's study. However, Ada Montessori thought it would be a better idea to return it to Pakistan since there was a Congress in Karachi round that time. A delegation of the family travelled to Karachi, as did a number of members of the AMI board. Bob Portielje, then AMI president, attended together with Prof. Dr. Jan Kon- ing, former AMI president. Fred Kelpin was the third person to represent the AMI board. He handed over the box to the Pakistani society, agreed upon with Gool Min- walla. To his very surprise, Fred saw the box again in Montessori's study in 2000. It turned out that Farida Akbar had brought it with her from Pakistan to Ambleside, England, where a meeting of AMI trainers took place. The box was then offered to AMI.

Letter of Rabindranath Tagore



The letter of Tagore is on the mantelpiece. Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) was a poet, writer, philosopher and pedagogue. He was the first non-European person to win the Nobel prize for literature, in 1913. He used the prize money to establish a university in Santiniketan in Bengal.

Tagore's vision on pedagogy can be found in numerous different books, though he did not write a book dedicat- ed to pedagogy. Classes should take place outside, un- der a tree, like the children on the silver box from Kara- chi. Children should learn to be in touch with the na- ture. Montessori, who called it 'going out', shared this vision. The life cycle of plants and animals should also be studied and the senses should be educated in order to enjoy music, literature, dance, theatre and art in

more depth. His vision strongly correlates with Montessori's vision.



Tagore (on the right with the beard) with Gandhi (on the left with the glasses)

Officer in the Order of Oranje-Nassau



On 16 September 1950, Queen Juliana of the Netherlands appointed Dr Montessori as Officer in the Order of Oranje-Nassau. The order of Oranje-Nassau, was introduced in 1892. Dr Montessori became Officer in the Order of Oranje-Nassau. This order is awarded to people for accomplishments in the field of social welfare at an international level. What is remarkable is that Helen Parkhurst, an employee of Maria Montessori in the United States was also awarded the same honour. Parkhurst established the Dalton schools in the United States, which is a method derived from Montessori.

Officier de la Légion d'Honneur





Dr Montessori was appointed *Officier de la Légion d' Honneur* on 29 November 1949. The Legion of Honour is a national French distinction, which Napoleon Bonaparte introduced in 1802. The order consists of the same ranks as the order of Oranje-Nassau. The cross from Queen Juliana was somewhat more generous than the modest cross which was awarded in the name of the socialist president Vincent Auriol. In contrast to the Dutch queen, Auriol signed the distinction himself. On the lid of the box is written what kind of distinction it is. It notes Rue de Solferino 7, the seventh arrondissement in Paris. The museum of National Orders from the Legion of Honour is located here.

Doctor Honoris Causa of the Gemeentelijke Universiteit of Amsterdam



On 18 September 1950, Maria Montessori was named Doctor Honoris Causa of the *Gemeentelijke Universiteit of Amsterdam*. Maria Montessori's grandson and secretary Drs Mario Montessori Jr can be seen sitting on the right side of her in the picture. Her promoter was Prof Dr Helena Stellwag, who had been a professor of pedagogy for five years at the time. Stellwag had a great interest in Montessori education. Between 1961 en 1963, two members of her Pedagogic-Didactic Institute (Drs Blaauw en Drs Bakker), conducted a study on math scores, comparing children attending a Montessori pre-school with children attending regular pre-schools.

Maria Montessori was not the only one to receive an honorary doctorate at the ceremony. On the left, leaning on his hand, is the second recipient of an honorary doctorate: Former minister of education Gerrit Bolkestein, the father of Frits Bolkestein. Frits Bolkestein is a Dutch politician; he is a former European Commissioner, a former minister of Defence and a former leader of the liberals in the Dutch Parliament. Gerrit Bolkestein was inspector of secondary education. When he was 68, he became Minister of Education in a Dutch War Cabinet in London.

Maria Montessori received more than one honorary doctorate. She became honorary Master at the University of Durham in 1923. The year 1924, which is written next to the newspaper clipping, is a mistake.



Message of Pope Benedictus XV:



Next to the entrance door is a portrait of Pope Benedictus XV (1914 – 1922). The Pope sent his photo to Maria Montessori with a personal message dated 21 November 1918:

“May the apostolic blessing we bestow upon our dearly beloved daughter Maria Montessori signify a pledge of grace and heavenly favours allowing the book ‘The Method of Scientific Pedagogy as applied in Child Education in the Children’s Houses’ to become a fertile source of good.”¹

Elsewhere in the building

In the glass display case in the lecture hall at 163



Located on top of the display case is a bust of Beatrice Portinari. She was the object of affection of poet Dante (1265-1321). However, Beatrice married someone else. Dante wrote the play *La Divina Commedia*, The Divine Comedy, between 1306 and 1321.

The first part of the comedy –The Inferno- was performed on August 3, 1933, in the Bachzaal of the Amsterdam Conservatorium. Two grandchildren of Maria Montessori performed in the play: Marilena and Mario. The play was part of a public lecture by Maria Montessori: *The stage in relation to education in Arts*. Mario can be seen on the left and Marilena on the right. Santiago Banqué, a friend of Mario, is the person in the middle.

Sculpture of Victor Gutiérrez



Victor Gutiérrez is one of Mexico's most well known sculptors. He constructs true-to-life sculptures, often with a symbolic meaning. The large statue of Maria Montessori was made in 2007. It is located at the Centro Internacional Villa Montessori, in Morelia (in Michoacan) Mexico, which is south of Mexico city. The two boys on the balcony give an idea of the size of the statue. 2007 marked the centenary of Montessori education. There is a small replica of the statue in the garden of the AMI office.

Portrait of Maria Montessori by Maurice Mendjisky (1890 – 1951)



The portrait used to be located in the rooms on the first floor, which are now used as the office. During the renovation of the office, the portrait was moved to the wall leading to the study. Mario Montessori is sitting left from the portrait of his mother, which was supposedly painted sometime around 1936. Maurice Mendjisky was – as his name suggests – of Polish descent. He was, just like Maria Montessori, a peace activist. He united writers, musicians and painters into a peace movement, amongst them painters like Signac, Leger and Picasso. In 2014, a museum was opened that was dedicated to Mendjisky and the Parisian school. The painting is a beautiful and colourful portrait.

Head in bronze by Theo van Reijn (1884 – 1954)



Theo van Reijn was a famous Dutch sculptor. The sculptures at the Amsterdam Amstel station are an example of his work. He sculpted the bronze head of Maria Montessori in 1934. The sculpture can be found on the balcony behind the library. There are probably more versions to be found because schools were able to buy a replica.

The materials room

The materials room is located in the building at Koninginneweg 163. There is an overview of Montessori Materials used for the Casa dei Bambini and Primary school. Visitors are often interested in 'historic objects' that can be found in the room.

The anthropometer

In *The Discovery of the Child* Dr Montessori writes:

"I had an anthropometer made for children with a scale from 0,50 to 1,50 meter, with a small extendible bench on the smooth side – height 30 centimetres – in order to measure a sitting posture. Currently, I advise to have the anthropometer constructed with two smooth sides. On one side the body length can be measured, the other side measures the sitting posture. At this side, the zero is noted at 30 centimetres, in accordance with the height of the bench. " This means that the anthropometer in the material room is the latest model. (Anthropos means human in Greek.)



The monochords



Maria Montessori describes the monochords in *The Advanced Montessori Method, Vols. I:*

" One of the instruments which brings the child to producing and recognizing notes is the monochord. It is a simple, resonant box with one string. The first scale of C, the scale with sharps and the scale with flats is experienced with tuning. The string is made to correspond with one of the resonant prisms (do). This is made possible by a key with which the string can be loosened or tightened. The child may now be taught to handle the violin bow or mandolin plectrum, or he may be instructed in the finger thrumming used for the harp or banjo.

On one of our monochords, the notes are indicated by fixed transversal frets, the name of each note being printed in the proper space. These notes are, however, not written on the other monochord, where the child must learn to discover by ear the proper distances at which the notes are produced. In this case the child has at his disposal movable frets with which he can indicate the points he has discovered as producing a given note. These frets should be left in position by the child to serve as a check on his work."