

Feline Fragments 19 (2011)

(page checked March 2026)

Amsterdam Cats Netherlands



De Poezenboot

De Poezenboot, or the 'pussycat boat', is a converted houseboat moored on the Singel canal close to the centre of Amsterdam in Holland, and is operated as a sanctuary for stray cats. The story of this unique refuge began in 1966, when an Amsterdam lady called Henriette van Weelde found a family of cats sheltering under a tree opposite her house and decided to take them in and look after them. One cat led to another, and before long she became known as 'the cat lady' and people were bringing her cats they could no longer care for. When they filled her house — and garden — and even her roof terrace, but still kept coming, she had to find another solution.

She lived close to a canal and had the idea of acquiring a boat for her growing feline 'family'; if people could live on the canal, why not cats? In 1968 an old Dutch sailing barge was bought and suitably converted to house the cats. There was much interest in the project, and volunteers began to sign up to help in its running. After some three years the fame of the 'cat boat' had spread to the extent that a second boat was needed, and was acquired and fitted out in 1971. As well as taking in cats, the shelter began to put suitable ones up for adoption, and to encourage visitors to come and look around and perhaps make a donation towards upkeep.

By 1987 the sanctuary was registered with the city authorities as a charity, so now it's the 'Cat Boat Foundation'. There is also a separate, land-based shelter for some of the wilder and more

difficult cats, together with some goats and ponies, at Bobeldijk, outside Amsterdam near the town of Hoorn.

The history of the project on their website covers only the period up to about 2002; in recent years the second boat needed refurbishment, and permission for that was requested from the authorities. Unfortunately it was refused, and so the sanctuary remains restricted to just the one boat. It is manned entirely by volunteers and some 40 cats — all of which are given names — can be taken in and looked after on the boat. Where possible they are put up for adoption and rehomed, thus making room for others to be taken in.

On several days a week part of the boat is opened to visitors, who can go in and 'speak to' some of the cats, who seem to occupy every available nook and cranny and are quite friendly. Another part of the boat is closed off and is used for medical purposes and as a place where animals can be kept in quarantine if required. A regular vet is used and will visit the boat if for any reason a cat cannot be taken to the practice.

The whole enterprise is supported by voluntary donations, with no local or government support of any kind. To read more about this unique cat sanctuary, or possibly even make a donation, visit the [Poezenboot website](http://www.poezenboot.nl) (it can be viewed in English)..





Update, 2023

After some 45 years the Poezenboot was becoming no longer fit for purpose, with constant repairs and refurbishment not sufficient to keep it functional. A campaign was launched for a new and much improved boat, and by October 2023 that was ready to take its place at the same site, and the old one was removed. There was still quite a lot of work to be done, but it was expected the new vessel would be fully operational by the end of the year. You can read more, with many photos, [here](#) (2023), and see also the [Facebook page](#).



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De Kattenkabinet (2011)

(The Cat Cabinet)



Not far from De Poezenboot, at 497 Herengracht and within walking distance, is a special collection of art entirely devoted to the cat at [De KattenKabinet](#). It was founded by Bob Meijer in commemoration of his lifelong companion and 'buddy', a red tomcat called **John Pierpont Morgan** (see [this page](#) –undated – for more about him). The present building was acquired in 1985, on one of the finest stretches of canal in the city, and has several rooms open to the viewing public.

Housed there are paintings, drawings, prints, documents, books and sculptures relating to cats and their role in art and in society at large throughout the ages. The works on display include some by well-known names such as Picasso, Foujita, Rembrandt, Steinlen and Toulouse Lautrec, and the museum is thought to be unique in the world in its scope. In addition there are several live cats, and the fortunate visitor will be greeted by one or more of them!

The Kattenkabinet is open for several hours each day.

[Instagram](#)