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Department of International Relations

Ministry of Cultural Affairs



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Cover illustration:
'The meeting', 1951 by Karel Appel, Netherlands Office
for Fine Arts, on loan to the Central Museum, Utrecht

FOREWORD

The present volume is the fourth in the series entitled 'Dutch Arts', which provides information on artistic and cultural life in the Netherlands in both the past and the present. This volume, a survey of the visual arts, comprises four chapters. The first covers the period from c. 1500 to 1600, the second concentrates on art in the 17th century, the so-called Golden Age, the third chapter covers the period 1800-1850, and the fourth the period from 1850.

The first three chapters were written by René W.C. Dessing (born 1956), an art historian who studied at the University of Amsterdam. To mark the Tercentenary of the Glorious Revolution, he produced a bilingual publication, in English and Dutch, commemorating the ceremonial entry of Stadholder-King William III into The Hague in 1691. He is joint owner of a travel agency which organises tours for groups from other countries who are interested in the rich cultural history of the Netherlands.

Mathilde Roskam, the author of the fourth chapter, is an art historian who has published a number of articles and essays on modern and contemporary art.

The three other volumes which have appeared in the Dutch Arts series deal with the arts in general, music and literature. They may be obtained from the International Information Section of the Cultural Affairs Directorate of the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs.

Hugo Verschoor, Editor

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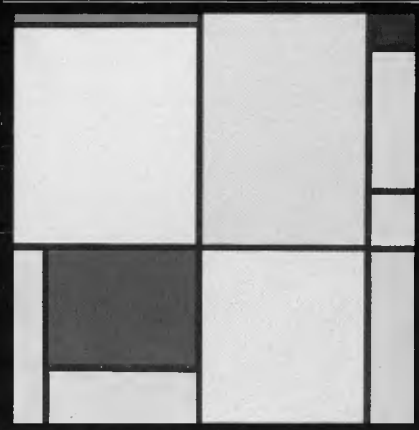
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The Netherlands, known for the greatness of its past, is equally renowned for the numerous great works of art it has produced, which scores of visitors come each year to see. The proximity of Dutch cities makes it easy to visit several of the approximately 800 galleries and museums located in all parts of the country. Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum is especially noteworthy not only for Rembrandt's celebrated *The Night Watch*, but also for its fascinating collection of art and objets d'art, of which works by the 17th-century Dutch School comprise only a part. The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam has one of the largest collections of modern art in the country. The Hague, the seat of government, has several imposing museums, including the recently renovated Mauritshuis with its exceptionally fine collection of 17th-century Dutch paintings, and the Gemeentemuseum, which houses a wide range of traditional arts and crafts, musical instruments and modern art, including a comprehensive collection of the works of Piet Mondrian. Nearby, in the port of Rotterdam, is the renowned Boymans-van Beuningen

Gemeentemuseum,
The Hague.

Museum, whose large collection includes many paintings by old masters and contemporary artists. Many paintings and drawings by Vincent van Gogh are to be seen in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, both of which will hold special exhibitions in 1990 to mark the centenary of this great artist's death. The Catherijneconvent Museum in Utrecht, for centuries an important ecclesiastical centre, illustrates the religious history of the country. In Utrecht, too, is the Schröder House by Gerrit Rietveld, a fine example of modern Dutch architecture. But it is not just the cities which house important art collections; many smaller centres also have outstanding collections. For example, the Lakenhal Municipal Museum in Leiden, where the country's first university was founded in 1575, has fine 16th-century altarpieces. Not far from Rotterdam is the old town of Dordrecht whose Municipal Museum contains works by the Dordrecht painters Ferdinand Bol, Nicolaes Maes and Aelbert, Jacob and Benjamin Cuyp. The Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, a former old men's home, has an impressive collection of Hals' group portraits of militia companies and governors.

BIRTH OF THE DUTCH VISUAL ART TRADITION

Up to 1585 the Netherlands consisted of 17 provinces covering roughly the area now known as the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. It was administered from Brussels by the representatives of the Spanish king, to whose territories it had belonged since 1515.

Before the outbreak of the Eighty Years War (1568–1648) cultural and commercial life were concentrated in the Southern Netherlands, reaching full flower under the dukes of Burgundy in the 15th century, when the splendours of the Burgundian court set the tone for architecture, fashions and the visual arts throughout Europe. Many artists from the northern provinces made their way to Brussels and Antwerp in the hope of obtaining commissions. This accounts for the fact that much early Netherlandish art was produced in the south. Around 1500 Antwerp, which owed part of its wealth to a thriving trade in luxury items, was the acknowledged economic and cultural centre of north-western Europe. Not surprisingly, therefore, there were times when more than 300 artists were registered in the city's painters' guild.

The Three Marys at the Tomb, panel by Hubert (c. 1380–1426) and Jan van Eyck (c. 1390–1441). 71.5 × 89 cm. Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam.

Jan van Eyck

One of those Flemish artists was Jan van Eyck (c. 1390–1441). Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, he illuminated devotional manuscripts. Most of the first illuminators were monks, the monastic communities in the provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland being particularly renowned in this respect. Devotional illuminations were executed in paint and gold leaf on the vellum pages of Books of Hours. Then at the beginning of the 15th century an increasing number of lay artists turned to this art form. Van Eyck was one of them, spending some time in the Hague working on a Book of Hours for the Count of Holland. He was most celebrated, however, for his panel paintings, and in particular for the triptych, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, the great altarpiece in the cathedral of St. Bavon, Ghent. The historiographer and painter Carel van Mander (1548–1606), who will be discussed later, stated about 1600 that Van Eyck was the inventor of oil paint. Prior to that period artists used tempera made with eggs and various kinds of gum, which had the disadvantage of drying quickly, thus making it difficult to effect changes. Oil paint had the additional advantage of producing better colours than other types of paint. Though Van Mander's claim has now been disproved, it is true that Van Eyck was one of the first artists to use oil paint. Shortly afterwards, it was in widespread use throughout Europe.



Early painting in the Northern Netherlands

Artists received commissions not only from the Burgundian court, but also from churches, monasteries, wealthy private patrons and guilds throughout the Low Countries. At first they were usually for miniatures,

but after the invention of the printing press around 1450 this market faded away, and artists began to turn their attention to altarpieces and portraits. Many of those works were produced for churches and for chapels dedicated to patron saints. The production of altarpieces began later than in Italy; pre-15th-



Lijsbeth van Duvenvoorde, parchment on wood by an anonymous master. 32 × 20.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam on loan from Mauritshuis Museum, The Hague. The inscription on the banderole held in her left hand reads: 'I grieve so long to hope for one whose heart will open'. A portrait of her husband, Symon van Adrichem, has been missing since 1906. It shows a banderole with the words: 'O would that I knew who will honour me with love'.

St. Christopher, panel by Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516). 113 × 71.5 cm. Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam. The legend relating that St. Christopher was a giant who one day carried the Christ Child over a brook and almost sank beneath his load was widely popular in the 14th and 15th centuries.

century North Netherlandish works of this kind are practically unknown. Though a few late 14th-century painted memorial panels have been preserved, they appear to have been rare.

The invention of printing was followed almost at once by the appearance of the first prints. In the absence of a specifically Dutch painting tradition, the earliest prints and paintings harked back stylistically to miniatures. Subjects were also taken from the Books of Hours. For example, the first representation of the months in terms of the seasonal activities of nobility and peasants was a theme often illuminated in such works.

An early North Netherlandish miniature, a marriage portrait of Jonkvrouwe Lijsbeth van Duvenvoorde, has been preserved from this transitional period. It probably dates from about 1430. The anonymous artist executed the portrait first on parchment, then on a panel, a procedure suggesting that he was a member of a monastic order in Gelderland or Holland.

Other North Netherlandish masters are Albert van Ouwater (c. 1400–after 1467) and Geertgen tot Sint Jans (c. 1465–c. 1495), a lay brother of Haarlem who is thought to have died young. Artists working in Leiden, a town grown prosperous through the wool trade, in-

cluded Cornelius Engelbrechtsz (1468–1533) and his pupil Lucas van Leiden (1494–1533), whose work was greatly admired by Albrecht Dürer. Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) lived and worked in 's Hertogenbosch. His style, which was somewhat different from that usual at the time, found particular favour with the Spanish, and many of his pictures are in Spanish collections. A master of fantasy, his work is now largely incomprehensible, based as it was on popular religious beliefs. The dire consequences of such deadly sins as lust, covetousness, pride, envy and anger are constantly recurring themes in his work.

The Renaissance

The influence of the Italian Renaissance began to make itself felt in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 16th century. It is characterised by the new dignity accorded to man and his past which was closely associated with

the humanists' rediscovery of Greek and Roman culture. The great scholar and humanist philosopher Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1467–1536) author of, amongst other works, the satire, *The Praise of Folly*, was already famed throughout Europe in his lifetime. A growing number of artists from northern countries interested in the revival of art went to Italy. Classical subjects and elements appeared in the work, even in pictures with a predominantly religious theme. One such artist, Jan Gossaert, called Mabuse (1478–1532), who travelled to Rome in 1508 in the retinue of Philip of Burgundy, Bishop of Utrecht, and was commissioned by his patron to paint the metamorphosis of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Jan van Scorel (1495–1562), in Rome during the Pontificate of Hadrian VI, the Dutch Pope, and appointed inspector of the papal collection and Painter to



the Pope, was profoundly influenced by the Italian masters Michelangelo and Raphael.

The first more or less true landscapes were painted at this time. Before then landscapes had served merely as backgrounds for religious subjects, but in the course of the 16th century paintings increasingly depicted landscapes in which religious, classical or historical subjects played a secondary role. A striking example of a landscape with a subordinate historical theme is a panel painted by Jan Mostaert (c. 1474–1555/56) around 1556 recording an expedition by Francisco Vasques de Coronado to New Mexico and Arizona.

As we have seen, the invention of printing directed artists' attention to engraving techniques, with the result that woodcuts were soon produced and disseminated on a large scale. In addition to book illustrations, many sheet prints were produced, often for devotional purposes. Engraving came to play an important part in the development of the artist,

the sale of prints allowing those who did not wish to travel to become acquainted with the work of others elsewhere. Maerten van Heemskerck (1498–1574) is thought to have been the first Dutch painter to produce a substantial number of prints on a professional basis. He usually confined his efforts to the design, leaving the actual work of engraving to professional engravers, and the printing and selling to publishers.

Revolt of the Netherlands

Around the middle of the century, social, economic and political unrest gradually gathered force and culminated in the *Eighty Years War* (1568–1648). The revolt against Spain began as a religious struggle, but increasingly assumed the character of a war of independence waged by the northern provinces.

There were a number of causes. The Reformation had gained many adherents in the years prior to 1550, partly because of the Catholic clergy had

abused and eroded religious usages and traditions. Philip II of Spain (1527–1598), reputed to be more Catholic than the Pope, considered it his sacred duty to suppress the Calvinism spreading throughout his realms.

Troops were sent to the Netherlands with orders to deal ruthlessly with these heretics. There were also economic problems. About 1560 a trade war between Sweden and Denmark had reduced grain imports, causing prices to soar alarmingly. At the same time, the huge quantities of silver shipped from the Spanish colonies were devaluing the currency. In the autumn of 1566 the situation got out of hand: mobs rampaged through the towns, venting their fury on church property in a frenzy of iconoclasm. Countless altars and church sculptures were mutilated or destroyed.

Karel van Mander (1548–1606)

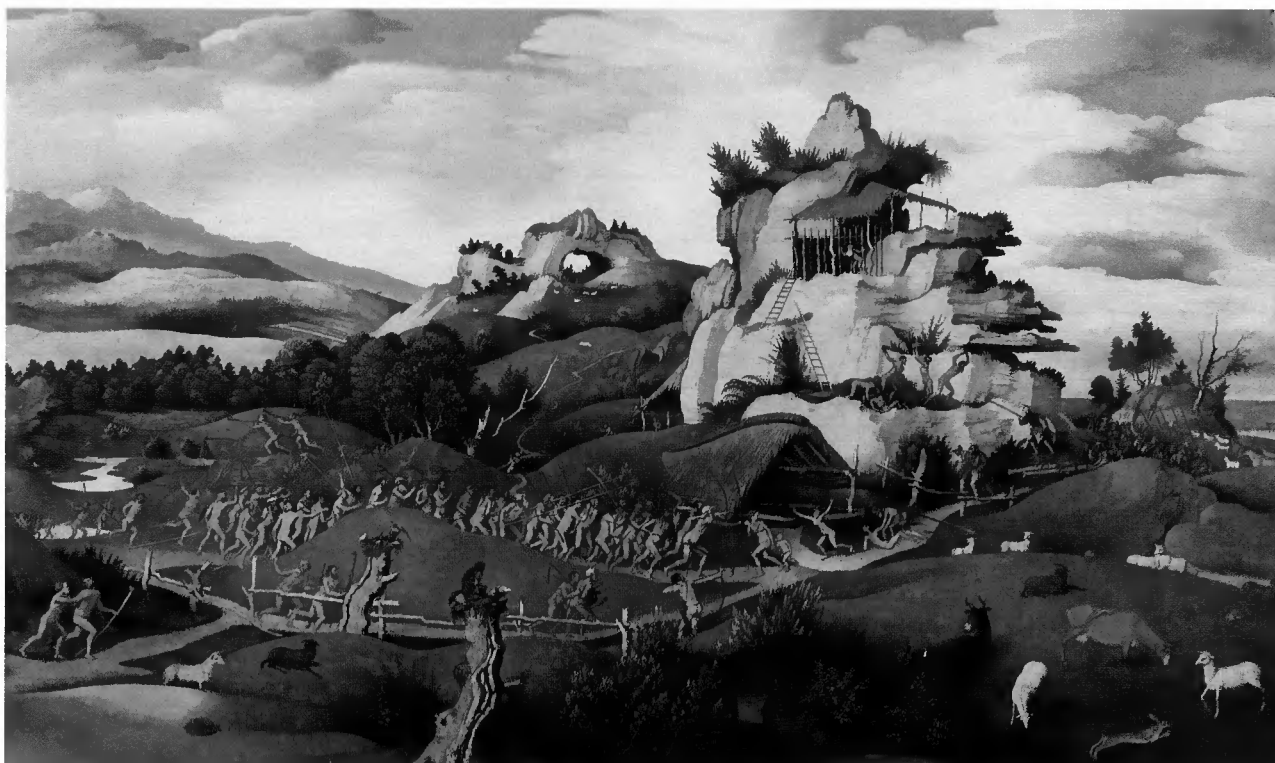
With Karel van Mander we begin to move towards the 17th century. A relatively unknown Flemish painter and historiographer, his life is illustrative of the experiences of many people in those years; moreover, the influence of his publications on later generations of artists is in itself reason enough to devote attention to him.

In 1583 Van Mander left Flanders to settle in Haarlem. An outbreak of the plague and the excesses of bands of mutinous Spanish troops roving the countryside caused many southerners to seek refuge in the towns of Holland. Haarlem was beginning to experience an economic boom thanks to the influx of Flemish workers in the cloth trade. Van Mander was at first obliged to earn his living as a sign painter, but in 1586 he was given a chance to display his artistic talents. The Earl of Leicester, the representative of Queen Elizabeth of England, was to visit Haarlem that year, and Van Mander was given the task of planning his ceremonial entry. The commission is not altogether surprising in view of his previous experience in Vienna, where he had worked on a similar project with Bartolomeus Spranger, a painter at the court of the Emperor Maximilian II and, later, Rudolph II.

In 1602 Van Mander moved to a country estate near Alkmaar, where he completed *Het Schilder-boeck*, a handbook for artists published in 1604. This important historical work in three volumes opens with a didactic poem for young artists designed to teach 'young persons eager to learn' the fundamentals of art, with particular reference to what the author had seen and learned in Italy. It

The *Metamorphosis of Hermaphroditus and the Nymph Salmacis*, panel by Jan Gossaert (Mabuse) (1478–1532). 32.8 x 21.5 cm. Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam. In the foreground Hermaphroditus, son of Hermes and Aphrodite, rejects the advances of the wood nymph Salmacis. In the background, true to Ovid's tale, Gossaert portrays their metamorphosis.





Episode from the Conquest of America, panel by Jan Mostaert (c. 1475–1555/56). 86 × 152 cm. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, on loan from the State Art Collection Service, The Hague. Francesco Vasques de Coronado's expedition to New Mexico and Arizona took place between 1540 and 1542.

was essential that they should cultivate their powers of observation in order to portray the nature and outward form of things, and copying the works of the masters was an important part of their training. The second volume consists of

biographies of classical, Italian and North European artists. Despite its inaccuracies, it is an invaluable source of information for Dutch art historians. The third volume contains, among other things, an allegorical exposition of

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was very popular. The book went through several editions in the 17th century, which implies that it had a considerable impact on later artists.



War Begets Want, engraving by Cornelis Cort from a design by Maerten van Heemskerck. c. 224 × 229 mm. Rijksmuseum, Print Gallery, Amsterdam. This print is one of a series of nine entitled *The Cycle of Wordly Fortune*, moving successively through riches, pride, envy, war, want, humility, peace, showing how one leads to the other, and, closing the cycle, riches again.

THE GOLDEN AGE:

EXPLOSIVE

DEVELOPMENT

IN THE ARTS

Following the declaration of independence by several of the northern provinces, the Republic of the United Provinces was proclaimed in 1588. The province of Holland and its mighty city of Amsterdam played a dominant role from the outset. The other provinces in the confederation were Gelderland, Utrecht, Zeeland, Friesland, Groningen and Overijssel.

The wave of refugees who fled to Amsterdam, including many wealthy Spanish and Portuguese Jews, brought unprecedented prosperity to the city. The growth of the population necessitated expansions in 1585, 1592 and 1612. Amsterdam also profited from the closure of the mouth of the Scheldt during the war with Spain, which rendered the port of Antwerp inaccessible and caused shipping to be diverted to Amsterdam. These developments enabled the city to become an international entrepôt. The United East and West India companies, founded in 1602 and 1603 respectively, played an important role here. These Dutch trading companies possessed numerous colonies and establishments in Africa, America and Asia during the 17th and 18th centuries, from where they carried spices and other exotic commodities to Europe.

Amsterdam retained its traditional right to elect its four burgomasters, whose power and prestige increased in the course of the century. Their influence extended far beyond the city itself, for the fact that it contributed more than other provinces to the budget of the Republic allowed it to play a dominant part in the affairs of the nation, which were directed by the States-General in The Hague and the individual provinces.

The stadholders occupied a singular position. They were elected by the provinces and their titles included captain and admiral-general of the Union. But they were neither sovereigns nor subjects, having less, as much as, and more authority than the States-General.

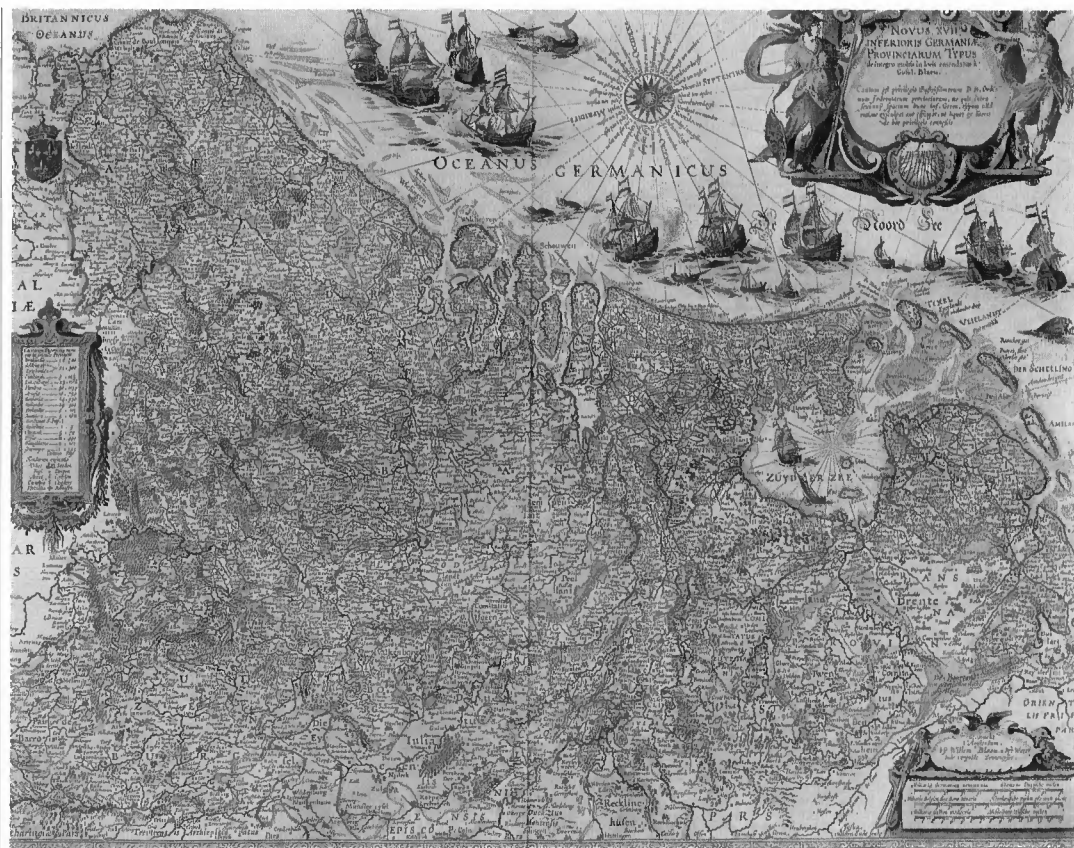
Page from Blaeu's 'Atlas major' (1662) showing The United Netherlands in 1580.

Photo General State Archives, The Hague.

by René Dessing

The visual arts in the Golden Age
The period from 1585 to roughly 1670 is referred to by Dutch historians as the *Golden Age* because of the explosive development in the arts and sciences which took place in those years. Many gifted artists lived and worked in Haarlem, Utrecht, Leiden, The Hague and, above all, Amsterdam. They produced works both for the open market and on commission. Painters formed the largest body of artists. The high quality of their work created a widespread demand for art, which also benefited the art dealers. Auctions of paintings belonging to deceased collectors were held regularly in most of the major towns and cities. Those in Amsterdam and The Hague, in particular, offered a wide variety of works by both Dutch and foreign masters, many of which were bought by agents acting for foreign monarchs.

Wealthy burghers felt more or less obliged by their status to build up an art collection, which usually comprised three categories: *artificialia*, *naturalia* and *antiquitates*. *Artificialia* consisted of man-made items like art objects, coins, medals, etc., including collections of



what sometimes amounted to hundreds of pictures; *naturalia* were natural history curiosia such as seashells, coconuts and tortoise shell; and *antiquitates* was the term used to describe objects from the classical world such as marble reliefs, sculpture, etc.

The Guild of St. Luke

The painters' guild, which was established in many Dutch towns, took its name from St. Luke, the patron saint of painters. Practitioners of allied occupations also entered the guild, membership of which in Amsterdam in the early 17th century included, besides painters, sculptors, engravers, wood-carvers, glaziers, tapestry-makers and embroiderers, compass-makers and coffer-makers.

Civic authorities granted a monopoly of their trades to the guilds, which meant that each local Guild of St. Luke was concerned principally with artists and artisans. Like all guilds, it was controlled by a master and a small body of wardens who were appointed for a fixed term – usually two years – by the authorities after nomination by the members. They supervised the observance of the regulations, which contained provisions relat-

ing to the training of apprentices, the sale of works and prohibited competition, the presentation of masterpieces, the collection of membership fees and the payment of pensions to the widows and dependents of guildsmen. The guilds also organised the annual celebration of St. Luke's Day and the funerals of its members.

The painters of tavern scenes, still lifes, landscapes, townscapes, etc. usually worked for the open market. To sell their works, artists were required to have been registered as burghers of their town and to have lived there for several years. They also had to be members of the guild. Those declining to join, or who tried to sell their works elsewhere, could count on the latter being confiscated and on a fine, which was divided between the town and the guild. Only at annual fairs were artists permitted to offer their works for sale in towns other than their own.

It is important to note that only a very few artists painted a wide range of subjects. The majority of apprentices specialised in just one or two, depending on their talent and personal preference. Sometimes it was the choice of the master which determined the type of work they were later to produce, and in

other cases it might be the question of supply and demand on the art market. Such a division into specialist categories represented a certain safeguard against excessive competitiveness and was at the same time conducive to high standards of work.

Sometimes painters achieved social prominence. Some even became burgomasters, like Dirck van Lisse (?–1669) in The Hague, and Jacobus Sibrandi Mancadaer (1602–1680) in the Friesland town of Franeker. But they were exceptions. The majority of Dutch painters had to have an additional occupation as their earnings from art alone were not enough to live on. Jan Steen (1626–1679), for instance, owned a brewery in Delft, and was later an innkeeper at Leiden. The landscapist Aert van der Neer (1603/4–1677) augmented his income by selling wine.

History painting

History paintings were greatly prized in the 17th century. Because the artists producing this type of picture depicted scenes and events which they had not witnessed themselves they were heavily dependent on their powers of imagination. This is

St. Luke Painting the Madonna and Child, panel by Maerten van Heemskerck (1498–1574). 168.5 × 231.5 cm. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. This picture goes back to the early Christian legend relating that St. Luke painted a portrait of the Virgin Mary in the Aracoeli church in Rome.



ot to say, however, that they did not work according to a more or less fixed pattern or use prints as a source of inspiration.

trangely enough, despite the regard in which these works were held, there is no known contemporary definition of the concept. Van Mander, in *Het Schilderboek*, laid down precepts for the treatment of historical themes. Human figures were to be the central element, while secondly, the theme was to be derived from the Old or New Testament or from antiquity and its mythology. Events in national history like land and sea battles could also be portrayed. It should not be imagined that such themes were presented with historical accuracy. The artists were more concerned to illuminate the quintessential and moral aspects of historical events.

In depicting more abstract events, the personification of concepts such as welfare, happiness, fame, misfortune, etc. was a device often used to enable the artist to give graphic expression to such concepts as the welfare of the nation or a particular town. There is often an element of political propaganda in these allegorical paintings, some of which relate to important events involving members of the house of Orange.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669)

Rembrandt was first apprenticed to Jacob Isaacz. van Swanenburgh (c. 1571–1638), son of the burgomaster of Leiden. The subsequent period spent in Amsterdam with the history painter Pieter Lastman (1583–1633) was however of greater significance for his artistic development. On his return to Leiden he worked with his friend Jan Lievens (1607–1674), concentrating on historical subjects. It is clear from their work that each greatly stimulated the other, as is apparent from their similar choice and treatment of some themes. Contemporaries considered Lievens to be more gifted than Rembrandt, and it is true that some of the latter's early works have a certain stiffness. However, the young Rembrandt must have realised this himself, for he continued to experiment and to seek ways of perfecting his work.

In 1631 Rembrandt moved to Amsterdam and turned his attention from historical themes to portraiture, for which he received many commissions. The Prince of Orange commissioned him to paint a series of Passion pictures, but it took some time to complete owing to the demand for his services as a portrait painter and, probably, to the time and attention taken up by his many pupils,



some of whom subsequently became history painters. The best-known of his pupils are Govert Flinck (1615–1660), Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680), Nicolaes Maes (1634–1693) and Aert de Gelder (1645–1727). Rembrandt had a profound influence on De Gelder, notwithstanding the fact that when he entered Rembrandt's studio in 1661 the master's work was considered by many to be out of date.

Landscapes

Seventeenth-century landscapes were of a highly diverse nature, ranging from recognisable topography, dunes and river scenes to Italianate landscapes and fantastic mountain formations. They were much in demand. It is not altogether clear why so many landscapes were painted in the Netherlands, a land of rivers and waterways. It has been suggested that there must have been a connection between the Dutch liking for landscape art and the

Palamedes before Agamemnon, panel by Rembrandt (1606–1669). 89.8 × 121 cm. De Lakenhal Municipal Museum, Leiden, on loan from the State Art Collection Service, The Hague. Many of Rembrandt's early paintings display a certain stiffness, which is evident in this picture. Light and shadow are not in perfect balance, and the facial expressions of the figures are not convincing.

The Blessing of Tobias and Sarah, oil on canvas by Aert de Gelder (1645–1727). 88 × 111 cm. Regional Museum, Groningen, on loan from the State Art Collection Service, The Hague.

Winter Scene, panel by
Hendrick Avercamp
(1585–1634). 36 × 71 cm.
Mauritshuis Museum,
The Hague.



Landscape with Resting
Horsemen, oil on canvas
by Aelbert Cuyp
(1620–1691). 116 × 168 cm.
Municipal Museum,
Dordrecht. Cuyp's
portrayal of animals was
masterly. Many of his
paintings show horses,
cattle, dogs and birds.

View of The Hague, oil on
canvas by Jan van Goyen
(1596–1656). 174 × 460 cm.
Historical Museum,
The Hague.



continuous struggle against the omnipresent water. Others state that the 17th-century sensitivity to nature was based on a religious feeling that it was a manifestation of the Divine. In any event, the wealthy burghers of the Dutch towns had for some time appreciated the recreational value of the countryside, and the increasing urbanisation of rural areas heightened this awareness.

It is interesting to note that in the early 17th-century theory of art set out by Van Mander, landscape painting is not classed as a separate art form. In his scheme of things landscapes should always contain a narrative element, such as an episode from the Bible or from antiquity placed in a landscape setting. The Flemish painters who settled in the north in the late 16th century were the first to paint the Dutch landscape as such, thus starting a tradition that was to continue far into the 19th century. Amongst them are Gillis van Coninxloo (1544–1607),

David Vinckboons (1576–c. 1632) and Roeland Savery (c. 1576–1639).

Hendrik Avercamp (1585–1635)
One of the Dutch artists who were influenced by the Flemish migrants was Hendrick Avercamp, a deaf and dumb painter born in Amsterdam who specialised in typically Dutch ice scenes. The anecdotal quality of his paintings is strongly reminiscent of Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1525/30–1569). To enhance their attraction for potential buyers, Avercamp enlivened his scenes with all sorts of comic touches to make people laugh, like a defecating or urinating figure, a prostrate skater or a child who has fallen through the ice. The woman skater by the bridge in the background whose buttocks are exposed as she falls will certainly have achieved the desired effect.

portraits of leading Dordrecht citizens. When he died in November 1691 he was one of the wealthiest residents of Dordrecht.

Jan van Goyen (1596–1656)

Jan van Goyen, born in Leiden, was a landscape painter of the realist school. In his youth he studied with a number of masters. That was not unusual. It was a way for aspiring painters to acquire as much knowledge and experience as possible before entering the Guild of St. Luke as professional artists. After a stay in France he studied for a short time with Esaias van de Velde (1587–1630), a Haarlem landscape painter whose influence on much of Van Goyen's early work is very marked, particularly in the positioning of trees, houses and stoffages in his compositions and in his use of colour.

vast output was achieved partly by working rapidly with quick, impressionistic brush strokes and a simple colour palette. Van Goyen also tried to augment his earnings by speculating in money and property.

Frans Post (c. 1612–1680)

Amongst the most highly paid 17th-century landscapists were Rembrandt, Salomon van Ruysdael, Jan Asselijn and the Haarlem painter Frans Post. Post occupies a separate place in the history of Dutch art. In 1637 he and Albert Eckhout (c. 1610–1666) went to Brazil as artists in the retinue of the new governor-general, Count Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen. Parts of the country were at that time a Dutch colony. The two artists executed drawings and paintings of exotic plants and beasts and above all, in the case of Post, of topographical views. One of his first Brazilian works is a view of the island of Itamaraca. On his return to Holland in 1644 he continued to represent the New World until his death in 1680. Eckhout made paintings, drawings and watercolours of the natives and the flora and fauna of Brazil.

The Island of Itamaraca, oil on canvas by Frans Post (1612–1680). 63.5 × 89.5 cm. Mauritshuis Museum, The Hague.



Hercules Seghers (c. 1589–c. 1638)

Many aspects of Hercules Seghers' life are still shrouded in mystery. Some years after his death Samuel van Hoogstraeten (1627–1678) published a biography in which he wrote that Seghers had achieved little recognition in his lifetime and had consequently lived in poverty and become a heavy drinker. It appears from contemporary inventories that this account may not be altogether true, as his paintings are listed in a number of collections of wealthy residents of Amsterdam, thus justifying the conclusion that his work was in demand both before and after his death. Rembrandt,

River Valley with Houses, oil on canvas by Hercules Seghers (c. 1589–c. 1638). 70 × 86.6 cm. Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam.

Aelbert Cuyp (1620–1691)

Like Jan Asselijn (c. 1610–1652) and Jan Both (c. 1618–1652), Aelbert Cuyp painted Italianate landscapes. His mountains, shepherds, travellers and classical ruins are bathed in a warm golden light suggestive of Italy. Landscapes of this kind were highly esteemed in the 17th century. Cuyp did not have to work for a living, for he inherited a small fortune on the death of his father and teacher, Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp (1594–1652), and moreover married a rich Dordrecht widow. Her wealth and position brought him into patrician circles, which yielded him several official posts as well as commissions for

Van Goyen settled in The Hague in 1632, though not in the expectation of commissions from the stadholder's court, which was more interested in history paintings. Like other artists, he sold his work on the open market. Civic authorities were among the few public officials who sometimes commissioned landscapes, and in 1651 Van Goyen received a commission from the town magistrate to paint a panoramic view of The Hague. He was paid the exceptionally large sum of 650 guilders, much more than was usual for this type of picture. Higher production could yield higher earnings, as Van Goyen apparently realised, for about 1200 of his paintings are recorded. His



who was deeply impressed by Seghers' landscapes, owned eight of his paintings in 1656.

Seghers' imaginary landscapes are often characterised by a remarkable combination of soaring crags and quiet, peaceful valleys. It is not known whether he ever travelled abroad, and it is possible that he had never seen a mountain range but drew his inspiration from the paintings and drawings of others, as many artists did. One who is known to have worked this way is Simon de Vlieger (c. 1601–1653), who painted rocky Scandinavian coasts without ever having been there. Others painted Italianate landscapes though they had never been in Italy.

The many 17th-century landscapists included such celebrated artists as Rembrandt van Rijn, Salomon Ruysdael (c. 1600–1670), Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29–1682) and Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709). Unfortunately only a few of these figures can be discussed here, and other great landscape painters like Karel du Jardin (c. 1622–1678), Aert van der Neer (1603–1677) and Philips Koninck (1619–1688) must necessarily be left out of account.

Portraiture

Portrait painting was not held in high esteem by the 17th-century art theorists. Van Mander

regarded it as a pleasant but lesser form of art. As stated above, he found it more important for painters to concentrate on history themes. But this did not prevent a large number of artists from specialising in portraiture because there was a constant demand for good portrait painters. A portraitist who worked according to the prevailing tastes could be fairly sure of a good income.

As with landscapes, there were many variations on the theme of portrait painting. They might feature one person, a husband and wife, or whole families. Portraits were full length, half length and three-quarter length. The background might be a bare wall, a building or a garden. Husbands and wives were sometimes portrayed together, but it was more usual for them to be painted separately, as companion pieces. For dual portraits of this nature artists worked according to fixed conventions. For instance, the wife's portrait generally had to hang to the right of her husband's. The more the sitters paid, the more detail was added in the form of hands, coats of arms and symbols. The Haarlem artist Johannes Cornelisz. Verspronck (1597–1662) painted many such portraits.

Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*

The numerous portraits of families, militia companies and regents are a typically Dutch phenomenon. Group

portraits were commissioned by many prominent persons and companies. Though important figures were portrayed in all countries, no other country produced group portraits in such quantity. Many militia companies were painted in Amsterdam and Haarlem up to 1650. Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613–1670) and Frans Hals (1581/85–1666) established their reputations in this way. A group portrait made by Rembrandt in 1642 is perhaps the most celebrated of all. This colossal picture now known as *The Night Watch*, was trimmed on all four sides when it was removed in 1715. It shows a militia company headed by Captain Frans Banning Cocq on patrol. Prior to this militia companies had not been depicted in motion but Rembrandt broke with this convention. His composition is remarkable for its tremendous sense of movement which he achieved by means of diagonal lines and a brilliant use of light and shadow.

Frans Hals (1581/85–1666)

Portraiture being influenced by changing tastes, Amsterdam patricians wished to be portrayed differently from, say, court nobility or Haarlem militiamen. In other words, the social status of the sitter was a factor determining the form of the finished product.

Artists also gave close attention to facial expressions. The work of Frans Hals

Antonie Charles de Liedekercke and Wilhelmina van Braeckel, oil on canvas by Johannes Cornelisz. Verspronck (1597–1662). 84 × 66.5 cm. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. As coats of arms did not always appear in portraits, and they were often later sold at auction, the identity of many sitters is unknown.





The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch (*The Night Watch*), oil on canvas by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669). 359 × 438 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

shows that he shared with Rembrandt and other portraitists an absorbing interest in the expression of human emotions, particularly those relating to the joyful moments in life.

Gerard van Honthorst (1590–1655)
Some portraitists worked in a more international style. One such was the Utrecht painter Van Honthorst. At first, like other members of the Utrecht School, he was heavily influenced by the Italian painter Caravaggio, whose dramatic *chiaroscuro* effects and particular use of colour were followed by the Utrecht painters known as the *Caravaggisti*. Van Honthorst's portraits were closer in style to Anthony van Dyck. As court painter, he made several official portraits of Prince Frederick Henry and his wife, Amalia van Solms.

Still lifes

Still lifes were another speciality of Dutch painters. The term itself did not come into use until after 1650. Before then still lifes were referred to by their subjects, which covered a very wide



Prince Frederick Henry and Amalia van Solms, oil on canvas by Gerard van Honthorst (1592–1656). 213 × 201.4 cm. Mauritshuis Museum, The Hague. The regal bearing of Frederick Henry is typical of state portraits in general. His armour and the tents in the background refer to the stadholder's many military campaigns.

Laughing Boy, panel (round) by Frans Hals (1581/85–1666). Diameter 29.5 cm. Mauritshuis Museum, The Hague.



Still Life, panel by Willem Claesz. Heda (1594–1680). 59 × 79 cm. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem.



Prince of Wallis and Brabant, gouache from Tulip Book by Judith Leyster (1609–1660). 38 × 27 cm. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. There were very few women painters of the Dutch School, and it was rare for a woman like Judith Leyster, wife of the painter Jan Miense Molenaer, to achieve the same recognition as men.

range: flowers, fruit, hunting trophies, fish, meat, other comestibles, pipes, household utensils, Delftware and so on, sometimes singly and sometimes in combination.

Kitchen scenes

The kitchen scenes painted by Pieter Aertsen (c. 1509–1575) and his pupil Joachim Beuckelaer (c. 1533–1573) in the 16th century were greatly admired. Besides human figures and animals, they often depict fruit, vegetables, and meat and fish laid out on a table. More or less concealed religious symbolism was sometimes inset in the form of biblical scenes like *The Marriage at Cana* and *Jesus in the House of Mary and Martha*.

Breakfast and banquet pieces

The pictures thus referred to are still lifes of food, dishes, glasses, etc. The Haarlem painters Pieter Claesz. (c. 1596–1661) and Willem Claesz. Heda (1594–1680) are the leading protagonists of this genre. Their unpretentious compositions are marked by textural differentiation and the subtle use of colour.

Many still lifes depict ornate silverware like ornamental ewers, nautilus cups, goblets, platters and candlesticks, proof of the fact that the silversmith's art flourished in the 17th century. Highly skilled silversmiths were established in a number of towns. The brothers Paulus (1555–1614) and Adam van Vianen (1565–1627), both accomplished chasers, lived and worked in Utrecht; a celebrated Amsterdam silversmith was Johannes Lutma (1585–1669).

Vanitas paintings

Many people in the 17th century will have recognised symbols of mortality in some of the objects displayed in still lifes. This is most forcefully expressed in *vanitas* paintings. There was a profound awareness in those days that life was short and full of worldly pride. Death was a frequent visitor. This awareness was expressed in the form of objects associated with vanity, the transitory nature of life and the passing of time. Such symbols are watches, jewels, soap bubbles, hourglasses, guttering candles, skulls, globes, burning pipes, books, flowers and art objects.

Flower pieces

Religious significance of many kinds was attached to flowers as early as the Middle Ages. Lilies, for instance, signified the Virgin Mary's purity, and roses her love. Carnations represented resurrection and eternal life. In a more general sense,

flowers symbolised sweet perfumes, purity, Spring, worldly love and morality. All of this imagery is found in 17th century flower pieces. It also explains why they frequently show flowers which bloom at different seasons of the year.

Tulips and the tulip mania

More than 500 varieties of tulips were known in the Netherlands in the 17th century. The flower was extremely popular, indeed so popular that the so-called tulip mania swept the country about 1633. This craze stemmed in part from the glut of capital and a consequent interest in the most bizarre investments.

Tulip bulbs, fetched astronomical prices. As more and more speculators joined the scramble for riches, the bulbs were resold at increasingly high prices. In 1637, the authorities intervened and the market collapsed, putting an end to the tulip mania and leaving many people destitute. One of the losers was the painter Van Goyen. The bulb trade then resumed more normal proportions, and traders continued to offer their different varieties for sale, sometimes by way of illustrated catalogues. Collectors, too, commissioned catalogues. One such catalogue dating from 1643 has been preserved. It contains a number of gouaches of tulips by the Haarlem artist Judith Leyster (1609–1660).

Genre painting

Though the term *still life* was known in the 17th century, *genre* was not. It was used for the first time in the 19th century to describe the many 17th-century pictures of ordinary life, which were thought to be realistic representations, though this is only partly true. While the 17th-century masters were indeed taught to paint as naturally as possible, the reality they depict is by no means always the true reality. Nowadays it has been shown convincingly that their so-called realism often masks a deeper allegorical or moralistic significance. The attributes in a picture give the clue to its real meaning. One method used to uncover the symbolic or moralistic significance of particular attributes is the study of 17th-century *emblems*, which consist of three components: a motto or heraldic device, the representation of the scene and an explanatory, moralising text. The scene usually illustrates the text. A sound knowledge of contemporary Dutch manners and customs, literature, theology and biblical exegesis is a prerequisite for research of this kind.



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675)

Some of the paintings of the Delft master Johannes Vermeer have modern titles which would be incomprehensible without some explanation. *The Love Letter* is an example. A richly clad woman playing a cithern has just been handed a letter. In view of the title it must be a love letter, but that is not immediately apparent. However, the picture has several details which explain the title. The cithers and the lute are often used to indicate an amorous element. One of the pictures on the wall behind the two women also signifies love. The lower picture is of a ship sailing in calm waters, a device used in the same way by other 17th-century artists, comparing a lover with a ship, and his love with the sea. Vermeer painted a calm sea, from which

it may be deduced that the relationship between the letter writer and his beloved is a happy one. There are likewise paintings showing a woman tearing up a letter before a picture of a ship in distress.

Jan Steen (1626–1679)

Many of Jan Steen's pictures show disreputable figures indulging in drunken revelry. An expression used in Dutch to describe disorderly domestic situations is in fact 'a Jan Steen household'. *After the Drinking Bout* makes this amply clear. In an interior strewn with the debris of a drinking party a woman lies slumped against a man holding a raised glass. A cat, symbol of lust, peers under her skirts. In the background, three musicians are leaving, while an old woman removes or steals a coat hanging over a

The Love Letter, oil on canvas by Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675). 44 x 38.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

After the Drinking Bout,
panel by Jan Steen
(1626–1679). 52.5 × 64 cm.
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam.



The Quack, panel by Gerrit
Dou (1613–1675).
112 × 83 cm. Boymans-van
Beuningen Museum,
Rotterdam.



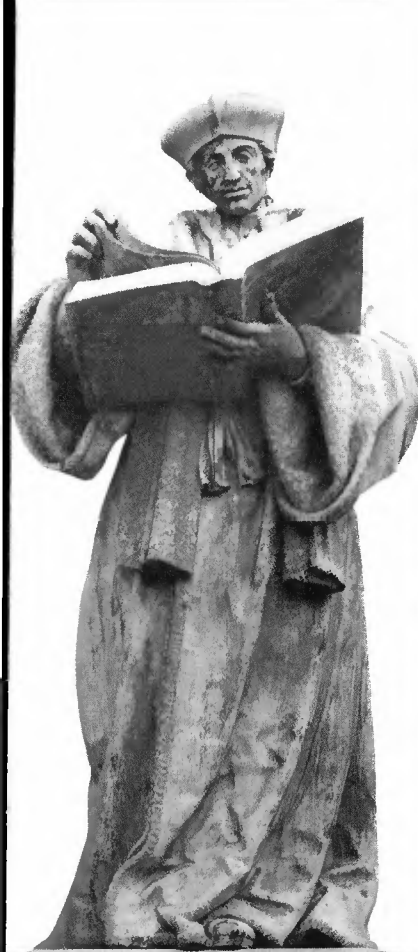
partition to which is affixed a print of a bespectacled owl and a burning candle. Written underneath are the words 'What use are candles and spectacles if the owl will not see?' The 'stupid' bird thus chooses darkness above light. Although the owl also appeared as a symbol of wisdom at that time, here it symbolises stupidity. The print is a moralistic commentary on the stupidity and degeneration of drunkards.

Gerrit Dou (1613–1675)

Gerrit Dou was one of Rembrandt's first pupils in Leiden. His pursuit of technical perfection and his detailed and meticulous style made him one of the best-paid of contemporary Dutch artists. He painted many scenes of everyday life with a moralistic undertone. One example is *The Quack*, a warning against deception and false appearances. The moralistic aspect is perceptible in the woman listening open-mouthed to a mountebank, unaware that he is picking her pocket. She is impressed by his costly instruments and his seemingly impeccable credentials. That he is talking nonsense is evident from the pan of raw dough, which was then synonymous

with humbug. Dou adds another warning in the figure of a boy trying to lure a bird. If the bird takes the bread held out as bait, it will be caught by the boy. In other words, no matter how tempting things may seem, one must guard against being taken in.

A striking feature of the painting is the number of occupations it depicts: a mountebank, a peasant wheeling a barrow of vegetables, a painter holding a palette, a woman wiping a child's buttocks and a hunter with a hare. These activities relate to the 17th-century division of attitudes to life into the three categories of the contemplative, the active and the sensual. The sensual attitude is the lowest category, portrayed here by the child being attended to. The peasant represents the active life, and the artist the contemplative, most superior approach to life. It is clear that those of a sensual bent are the first victims of trickery and deception. To withstand temptation, one must consciously opt for an active, or better, a contemplative existence.



Sculpture and the Royal Palace at Amsterdam

During the 17th and 18th centuries people were generally more interested in painting than in sculpture, which may be attributable to the fact that there is no suitable stone in the Netherlands. There are, however, some great 17th-century sculptors, such as *Hendrick de Keyser* (1565–1621) and two Flemish sculptors who worked for many years in the Republic, *Artus I Quellien* (1609–1668) and *Rombout Verhulst* (1624–1698), both of whom spent some considerable time on the elaborate sculptural ornamentation of the town hall of Amsterdam, now the Royal Palace.

The old town hall no longer met the needs of the increasingly prosperous and populous city, so its four burgomasters decided to build a new one. The ground in Dam Square had been bought some years before, after the necessary expropriation procedures. The architect *Jacob*

van Campen (1595–1657) was commissioned to design the building. In 1648, the year in which the *Eighty Years War* was formally ended, the first pile was driven into the ground, and seven years later part of the building was in occupation.

The civic authorities supervised all aspects of the work. They were closely involved in the decoration of the building, for which Van Campen had drawn up a programme. It provided for symbols and allegories representing the might and status of Amsterdam. The Baroque forms and classical style combine in a magnificent whole. Quellien and Verhulst, as well as several painters, were asked to take part in the execution of the programme. Most of their work is in the Hall of Judgment, a court of law in which death sentences were pronounced, and on the first floor of the building, where the most important officials were housed. The significance of the reliefs and sculptures is connected with the functions of the rooms. Over the doors of the town clerk's offices, for instance, are reliefs of loyalty and silence, two qualities which a good civic dignitary must possess.

Hall of Judgment in the Royal Palace (former town hall) at Amsterdam, by Artus I Quellien (1609–1668) and others. Most of the sculpture symbolises the administration of justice.

Desiderius Erasmus, bronze statue by Hendrick de Keyser (1565–1621). Erected in Rotterdam in 1622, the statue now stands in the square before St. Laurenskerk, Rotterdam.

Ceremonial entry of Stadholder-King William III into The Hague after his coronation as king of England, etching by Romein de Hooghe (1645–1708). Historical Topographical Atlas, Municipal Archive, The Hague.



Study of a Dog, drawing by Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617). 40.9 × 32.4 cm. Teyler Museum, Haarlem.



The graphic arts

There were various masters of the graphic arts in the 17th century. Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617) of Haarlem, a friend of Karel van Mander's, produced a vast body of drawings and prints, each displaying his perfect mastery of these techniques.

The graphic works of Hercules Seghers are famed for their technical perfection and originality. Rembrandt, too, was prolific in this field. Many of his drawings and etchings were studies for later compositions.

Many graphic artists specialised in prints of historical events, but few of them were objective representations. Prints of this kind tended to be propaganda connected with the numerous 17th-century political conflicts. Burgomasters, administrators of the Republic and stadholders commissioned prints of themselves in heroic roles, such as that by the versatile Romein de Hoogh (1645–1708) depicting the ceremonial entry of Stadholder-King William III into The Hague in 1691.



The Penny Extravagance, panel by Cornelis Troost (1696–1750). 69 × 86.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Scene from a play entitled *The Penny Extravagance, or the Spendthrift Woman*, of 1693. It depicts the moment when the principal character sells her new clothes for a mere trifle.

Political and economic decline set in towards the end of the 17th century. The Republic's significance as an international trading centre gradually waned after 1700, and by 1750 had lost its pre-eminence. In addition, the costly wars waged against France between 1672 and 1700 by William III were a heavy drain on the Republic's financial resources.

For most of the 17th century the stadholder-princes of Orange had occupied an important place in the political life of the nation. This came to an end when William III died without heirs in 1702, the next stadholder was not elected until 1747 in the person of William IV (1711–1751), a member of the Friesland branch of the Nassau dynasty, whose father had succeeded to the title of Prince of Orange. The present royal family are direct lineal descendants of this branch. William V succeeded his father as hereditary stadholder. It was his son who was proclaimed King William I of the Netherlands after the fall of Napoleon in 1813.

The visual arts in the 18th century

It was not only trade and commerce which declined at the end of the 17th century. The creative impulse of Dutch art underwent a similar decline. Painters no longer worked to the high artistic standard of the previous generations, and old forms were often repeated. Generally speaking, being occupied with art seemed to be more important than the art produced, though it should not be concluded from this that the interest in art had subsided. There were many distinguished collectors and amateurs, par-

ticularly in the societies which were then beginning to flourish and which provided opportunities for drawing lessons and the cultivation of connoisseurship.

Jacob de Wit (1695–1754)

De Wit was born in Amsterdam, but received most of his training in Antwerp, where he was sent because he was a Catholic and wished to learn more of religious art. On his return to Amsterdam his talent was soon recognised and he received many commissions from Protestant patrons. Even the municipali-

PERIOD OF DECLINE ?

by René Dessing

ty became one of his clients when he was commissioned in 1736 to decorate the council chamber in the town hall.

His skill as a *grisaille* artist won him an international reputation, and illusionistic pictures of this type are still sometimes called *witjes* ('wit' means white) in the Netherlands. His painted imitations of marble, stone, wood and stucco sculptures are masterly. The absence of a Dutch sculptural tradition contributed to the popularity of this art form. Moreover, *witjes* were much cheaper than marble sculptures.



The Dutch Maid, oil on canvas by Jacob de Wit (1695–1754). 477 × 78 cm. Royal Palace, Amsterdam.

Cornelis Troost (1696–1750)

Another interesting 18th-century painter is Cornelis Troost. Little is known of his life. He first studied with the Amsterdam portraitist *Arnold Boonen* (1669–1729), and Troost concentrated on portrait painting up to about 1732. He then turned to *genre* pictures which are commentaries on the life of his times, to pictures of theatrical performances and to pictures depicting the pleasures of life such as were enjoyed by wealthy patricians in their handsome country houses on the river Vecht, not far from Amsterdam. A journey along the Vecht is still full of interest today.

Troost's theatrical paintings may be attributed to the fact that in his youth he was a professional actor at the theatre in Amsterdam. Many of these works show scenes from popular plays of the time. A number of paintings dating from the last years of his life have military scenes as their subjects.

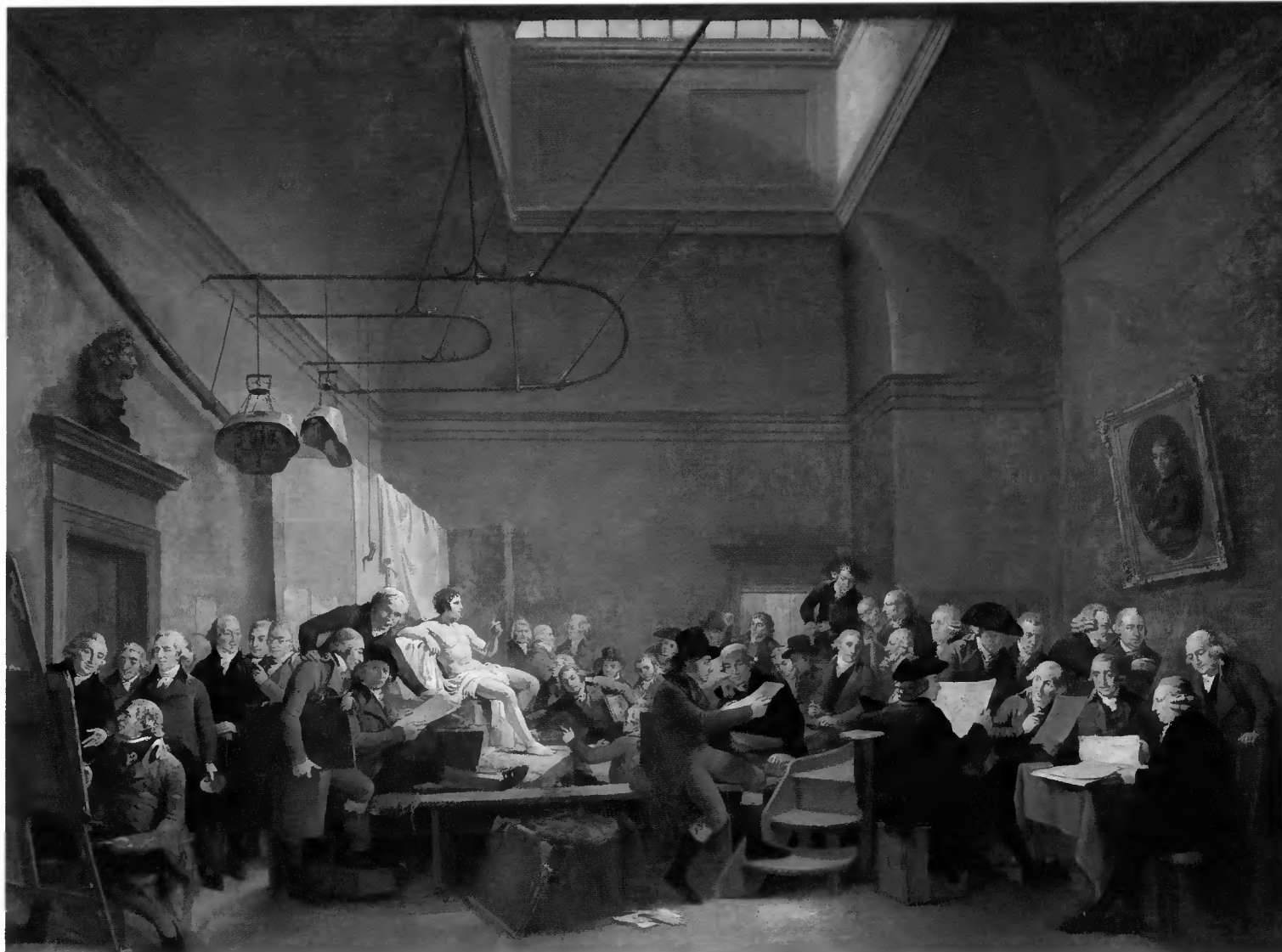
The Felix Meritis Drawing Studio, oil on canvas by Adriaan de Lelie (1755–1820). 100 × 131 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Painting and drawing academies

The Netherlands, like other European countries, was influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, as manifested in the establishment of numerous institutes aimed at the all-round development of the human mind. Societies of all kinds flourished. *The Holland Society of Sciences* was founded in Haarlem in 1752, and was followed a few years later by the establishment of *The Netherlands Society of Literature* at Leiden. But interest was not confined to scientific activities alone; it also encompassed artistic development. Prominent people in all parts of the country set up painting and drawing academies, and in this context it is interesting to consider the history of *The Royal Academy of Art* at The Hague.

In 1655 painters in The Hague were given permission by the magistrate to leave the Guild of St. Luke. They felt that their status no longer allowed them to associ-

ate in the same guild with all manner of 'ordinary' artisans like house painter and glassblowers. Though the new organisation they set up bore the elegant name of *Confrérie Pictura*, it retained the character of a guild. In 1682 the organisation established a drawing academy modelled on the art academies in Rome and Paris. One of the prime movers was Augustinus Terweste (1649–1711), who was later active in the establishment of a drawing academy in Berlin. Now, three hundred years later, the drawing academy still exists in The Royal Academy of Art at The Hague. Similar academies came into being in the 18th century in Amsterdam, Leiden, Middelburg, Dordrecht, Breda, Deventer and Schiedam. Not all of them were founded by the artists' guilds; the academy opened in Amsterdam in 1718, for instance, was quite separate from the Guild of St. Luke. In 1777 a number of prominent Amsterdam citizens estab-



lished the *Felix Meritis Society* with the object of promoting activity in all branches of the arts and sciences. The 'department' of drawing, which covered the visual arts and architecture, had a sculpture studio and a drawing studio in which life classes were held and the critical faculties were sharpened by the study and discussion of prints and drawings. A group portrait of the members which the president of the Society commissioned from Adriaan de Lelie (1755–1820) in 1797 was painted in the drawing studio.

The 19th century

Scholarly interest in Dutch art and artists of the 17th century has always been great, and research on 18th-century art has been gathering pace for some time. Research on the art of the 19th century, however, comes off badly in comparison. A history of the visual arts in the Netherlands in the first half of the 19th century has in fact still to be written. The little that has appeared on the subject is mostly outdated. The majority of authors state that 19th-century painters lacked originality in their choice of subjects because they constantly modelled themselves on the 17th-century masters. Moreover, the academic approach of some of the internationally-oriented painters finds little favour in their eyes. They judge it to be arid and dull, supporting this pronouncement with numerous subjective and emotional arguments. All in all, it could be concluded from their verdict that early 19th-century Dutch art has little to recommend it. But this is not true, for the artists active at that time included several who were highly accomplished, such as Jan Adam Kruseman and Barend Cornelis Koekkoek, both of whom are representatives of a style which is encountered more frequently in this period.

Jan Adam Kruseman (1804–1862)

Kruseman is classed as an academic painter. He specialised in *genre*, portrait and history painting. Academic art is defined as working in a particular style in accordance with established rules. Kruseman worked in the style of the French Neoclassicists, which reached the Netherlands around the turn of the century, when the country was under the political domination of France. One of the foremost representatives of Neoclassicism was Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), who as Napoleon's official painter had executed many state portraits in this style. After the fall of Napoleon David retired to Brussels, where Kruseman was one of his pupils.



Barend Cornelis Koekkoek (1803–1862) Koekkoek, born in Middelburg, worked more in accordance with Romantic ideas and was less academic than Kruseman. But he is not regarded as a true Romantic as his work is too obviously influenced by 17th-century traditions.

His first teacher was his father, the marine painter Jan Herman Koekkoek (1778–1851). Barend devoted most of his attention to woodland scenes and summer and winter landscapes, drawing his inspiration from the works of Aelbert Cuyp and Meindert Hobbema. His work was immensely popular, and amongst his many clients were the Czar of Russia and King William II. He died in Cleves, a wealthy and successful artist, in 1862. The Netherlands mourned the loss of 'the country's greatest landscapist', not knowing that just a few years later *The Hague School* of painters would revitalise landscape painting. Not surprisingly, as admirers of the French Impressionists, they rejected Koekkoek's style, regarding Romanticism as belonging to the past.

Oak Wood, oil on canvas by Barend Cornelis Koekkoek (1803–1862). 134 × 157 cm. Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam.

Portrait of a Lady, oil on canvas by Jan Adam Kruseman (1804–1862). 65.8 × 78.7 cm. Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam.



DUTCH ART SINCE 1850

by Mathilde Roskam



Detail of the Mesdag Panorama in The Hague. The Panorama is 120 m in circumference and 14 m high, measuring a total of 1620 m²

Fishing Boat, 1878, oil on canvas by Jacob Maris (1839–1899), 124 × 105 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

The Hague School

It is tempting to view the 17th-century landscapists and the painters of the Hague School as the international representatives of visual art in the Netherlands. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Hague painters won recognition in their own country only when they had been acclaimed abroad, after favourable reviews had appeared in the French press and American and British collectors seemed happy to pay large sums for their works. Their compatriots clearly found it difficult to appreciate the atmospheric scenes painted by the Hague masters, in whose 'dismal' canvases, it was felt, reality too readily dissolved into mist.

In historical terms, the popularity of the Hague School, the Dutch counterpart of the French *plein air* painters, was connected with the 19th-century revival of landscape painting, which had long been little appreciated as a separate genre. As classified by the French Académie, an internationally authoritative body, landscapes shared the lowest place with still lifes. A landscape was merely a background, a minor part of a composition. The highest form of art was held to be history painting, which would have a morally uplifting effect on the viewer. In the course of the 19th century it increasingly assumed the character of an exercise in erudition devised to demonstrate the artist's intellectual accomplishments. It was only with the advent of Romanticism, when man first perceived his relationship with nature as problematical, that landscape painting slowly gained ground as an art form in its own right. The 17th-century Dutch landscapists were once more relevant, and both the French Barbizon

School and the early 19th-century English landscape painters drew inspiration from Van Goyen and Ruysdael. The 'old' Dutch School of the 17th century and the Hague School, which was regarded as its reincarnation, became increasingly fashionable. For a short time the Netherlands was to foreign artists and art lovers what Italy had been in the Renaissance. Monet, Liebermann and other celebrated artists of the time, wishing to see Dutch landscape paintings in their natural state, as it were, travelled at least once to 'picturesque' Holland, a strange, watery land of low horizons and vast skies in countless shades of grey. In the Netherlands itself the tradition of landscape painting had persisted almost without interruption since the 17th century. In their youth, the painters of the Hague School had all diligently copied the works of the Dutch masters in the Mauritshuis Museum, so that, notwithstanding their admiration for the French Barbizon group, landscape painting was in a sense part of their artistic heritage. The Hague School as such came into existence in 1870. Its principal representatives were Bosboom, Jozef Israëls, Jacob and Willem Maris, Mauve, Mesdag, Roelofs, Weissenbruch and Bilders, who died young. Though widely different in temperament and age – four generations being in fact represented – these artists were remarkably similar in their conception of art. They were in-





from the painting is a strip of real sand planted with shore grass and scattered with fishing tackle. Hendrik Mesdag's creation is unique among 19th-century panoramas in not depicting the customary spectacles of battles and other historical events.

In addition to outdoor scenes, the Hague painters liked to portray interiors with figures. The minor masters among them were often highly romantic, even sentimental, in their approach. The struggle waged by the painters of this generation to break free of the convention of explicitly literary themes is most clearly discernible in the work of Jozef Israëls (1824–1911). Only gradually did he dare to rely on the evidence of his eyes and to exchange the express symbolism characteristic of his early work for a more poetic portrayal of mood. The church interiors of Johannes Bosboom (1817–1891) constitute a category apart. Here, too, light is the dominant factor, the true theme. The restrained nature of the composition coupled with his sweeping vision of the subject endows Bosboom's paintings and watercolours with a religious undertone reminiscent of the 17th-century artist Saenredam.

Watercolours were elevated by the Hague School to a genre in their own right. Their technical achievements in the creation of 'water' colours have seldom been equalled. J.H. Weissenbruch (1824–1903), in particular, produced works of a quite extraordinary clarity. His watercolours have a

St. Peter's Church, Leiden, c. 1868, oil on canvas by Johannes Bosboom (1817–1891), 81 × 68 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

innovators in the viewpoint they adopted and in their use of colour, achieving a subtle gradation of tone while avoiding bright colours. Their choice of subjects was unpretentious. Besides landscapes, they painted aspects of everyday life in simple farming and fishing communities. Such objects as a tumbledown fisherman's hut or a solitary fishing boat on a beach, portrayed in muted tones of grey with just a few dramatic accents, give perfect expression to the life of fisherfolk. There are none of the anecdotal details which seem to have been essential to Romanticism.

The weather and the atmosphere in the paintings of these artists are evoked in an almost physical form; one feels that the humidity could be measured. There is a tang of salt in the air, and the sensation of sand underfoot is easy to imagine. Mesdag (1831–1915) must have been intent upon reproducing the overwhelming effect of nature in an overwhelming way when he conceived the idea of the gigantic work known as the Mesdag



Landscape in the Dauphiné, 1878, watercolour, by Johan B. Jongkind (1819–1891), 35 × 57 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Panorama. This composition, still to be seen in The Hague, is probably the most curious seascape in the history of Dutch art. It consists of an enormous canvas attached to a circular frame, 120 m in circumference and 14 m high, measuring a total of 1680 m². Separating the viewer

transparent, washed quality which creates the illusion of wetness.

Jongkind

The greatest master of watercolour painting, however, was Johan Barthold Jongkind (1819–1891),

who spent most of his life in France. Monet called him 'mon vrai maître'. Though he is rightly regarded as one of the pioneers of Impressionism, he took no part in the heated debates of the Paris avant garde, but followed his own way. Early in his career he was especially interested in seascapes. Many years after settling in France he still continued to paint Dutch landscapes from sketches to satisfy the demand of his French buyers. From the 1870s onwards his work largely depicted French scenes. Towards the end of his life Jongkind worked almost exclusively in watercolours, a medium eminently suited to his virtuosity in capturing a panoramic landscape in just a few strokes and planes of colour. With his profound understanding of composition and his preference for wide-angled perspectives, he was a true descendant of the 17th-century Dutch landscapists. At the same time, his work was consistent with contemporary developments in France. In his use of brilliant, luminous colour, applied in a fashion at once plastic and abstract, he was far in advance of his contemporaries in the Netherlands.

Horse-drawn Trams on the Dam, Evening c. 1895, oil on canvas by George H. Breitner (1857-1923), 101 x 105.5 cm, Central Museum, Utrecht

Two Women Dancing, 1891, drawing in black chalk, by Isaac Israëls (1865-1934), Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem



The Amsterdam Impressionists

By the 1880s, when the Hague School was at last accepted in the Netherlands and its reputation as the major innovating force of the century was established, Amsterdam had become the principal centre of the arts. The economic strides made by the city

citement such as to bring me to the edge of madness'. Sensitivism may be defined as an intensified form of Impressionism which had reached the Netherlands by way of French art and literature. The leading exponents of *Amsterdam Impressionism* were George Hendrik Breitner (1857-1923) and Isaac Israëls



were reflected in its cultural life. Institutions which still form an essential part of the artistic climate of Amsterdam, such as the Rijksmuseum, the Concertgebouw and the National Academy of Art, were founded at that time. These developments acted as a magnet on the young artists and writers who shared the ideals of the movement which was to become known as the Eighties Movement. Their identification with each other was such that the writer Van Deyssel, asked by the king if he was a painter, said proudly, 'Yes, Your Majesty, with the pen'.

Most of the painters, such as Breitner, Veth, the later portraitist and art critic, and the painter and photographer Witsen, had studied together at the National Academy. From the 1890s onwards Witsen's studio was a meeting place for artists and prominent writers like Kloos, Verwey, Van Deyssel, Gorter, and the writer and painter Van Looy. The movement found expression in the innovatory magazine, *De Nieuwe Gids* (1885). The writers and poets associated with the magazine called themselves Sensitivists, reflecting their efforts to express the most intense sensory perception in word or image in accordance with the concepts of the Hague School. It was described by Gorter as 'giving immediate expression to what is experienced through the senses by eliminating the mind. This induced in me a state of ex-

(1865-1934), who were the first to exhibit an affinity with the French Impressionists, not only in the pictorial sense of a style notable for its looseness of touch and schematic approach, but in the subjects they chose. Adopting the French maxim 'Il faut être de son temps', they opted for the dynamic bustle of city streets rather than the tranquil beauties of nature and the tumbledown fisherman's hut of the Hague School. Isaac Israëls, the precocious, highly erudite son of Jozef Israëls, who had spent some time in Paris, set out with Breitner to follow the example of Zola's naturalist novels and paint the rougher side of life in a modern metropolis. Disreputable waterfront bars, dance halls, factory girls, washerwomen, everyone and everything they encountered was reproduced true to life in a few dynamic lines and brush strokes. In Breitner the Dutch world of art has a unique chronicler of his times. His splendid collection of photographs combining documentary interest and a high degree of artistry came to light many years after his death: photos of steaming horses, demolition, excavation and building activities (the 'jerry building' needed to solve the housing shortage in the rapidly expanding city), and motley crowds of people recorded at a particular moment in time. Breitner's photographs and paintings vividly evoke the hustle and

bustle of life in Amsterdam at that time, to which the thud of pile-drivers seems to have provided a permanent background. His colours are not the clear colours of the French Impressionists, but the dark, turbid earth tones of wet pavements and melting snow, unexpectedly enlivened with glowing yellows, reds and blues. Although Bretnier was already an accomplished painter when he took up photography, it seems to have deepened his powers of artistic perception. As in the photography of the time, moving figures become blurred silhouettes, while abrupt breaks in the composition give some of his paintings an unusual directness.

Israëls' un-Dutch sparkling virtuosity is in sharp contrast to the sombre strength of Bretnier. He brings his subjects to life with effortless grace. A cosmopolitan at home in all circles, he later concentrated more on the world of elegance and fashion. Some of these paintings display a certain superficiality.

Vincent van Gogh

No more than ten years elapsed between Van Gogh's first drawings and the pistol shots which put an untimely end to his life in 1890. In that short space of time he produced almost 900 paintings and more than 1100 drawings and watercolours: 'I work as one possessed...'. His production capacity was like a jet of flame which burned steadily on, even during the many crises he had to endure in the last phase of his life. We know from his letters that he executed a large number of drawings and at least 15 outstanding paintings between 29 April and 14 May 1890. Yet more remarkable, however, is what Van Gogh (1853-1890) accomplished in those ten short years. Progressing from the muted tones of the Hague School to the most brilliant intensity of colour painted in the 19th century, he not only absorbed all the new trends of his time but created an expressive visual language of his own, becoming one of the formative influences on 20th-century art.

At 27, he was rather late in deciding to become an artist. He had failed at careers as an assistant art dealer and, after an abortive study of theology, an evangelist in the Borinage mining district of Belgium. He was virtually self-taught. He learned to draw by copying the work of others, notably the etchings of Millet, whom he admired throughout his life. In 1881 he received some formal training from his uncle, the Hague painter Anton Mauve, whose craftsmanship he also ad-

mired. The somewhat awkward studies of this period and before already reveal the angular, intensely personal hand of the later artist as well as the compassion of the downtrodden and the outcast which had first prompted him to become an evangelist. In 1883 he spent some time in Drenthe and Nuenen, recording the

poverty and social deprivation of farm labourers and weavers in the hope of drawing attention to their plight. His masterpiece of that 'dark' period, *The Potato Eaters*, was painted after the completion of many preliminary studies. The two final versions, however, were painted entirely from memory. He con-



The Potato Eaters, 1885, oil on canvas, by Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), 81.5 x 114.5 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam



La Berceuse, 1889, oil on canvas, by Vincent van Gogh, 92 x 73 cm, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



Wheatfields with Crows, 1890, oil on canvas by Vincent van Gogh, 50.5 × 103 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

sciously sought to convey the 'coarseness' of his subjects, portraying them as essentially deformed creatures of the soil in the colour 'of a very dirty potato... If a peasant painting smells of bacon, smoke, potato steam, very well, that's not unhealthy... that's quite healthy, especially for city people'.

In 1886 Vincent left Holland for Paris, where he lived with his brother Theo, who gave him constant encouragement and financial support throughout his life. There he discovered the work of the Impressionists and the Neo-Impressionists which, like his first confrontation with Japanese woodblock prints, was a revelation. He became acquainted with other painters, among them Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec, and his palette changed almost instantly. Although he had been familiar for some time with the modern theories of colour advocated in particular by the Neo-Impressionists, he now made deliberate use of colours and their complementaries to suffuse his pictures with light.

But he in no way resembled 'scientific' Impressionists like Seurat and Signac; on the contrary, 'I often don't know what I am doing, working almost like a sleep-walker... The painting comes to me as in a dream,' he wrote from Arles, where he had gone in February 1888 with the idea of founding a working community of artists (the Yellow House). Artistically, his stay in Arles was to be one of his most prolific periods. Inspired by new motifs, he painted fruit trees in bloom, gardens, wheatfields and drawbridges in brilliant,

vibrant colours, alternated with bleached, almost insipid tones. He found his own painting style, short brush strokes which he called 'drawing in colour'. Under the influence of Gauguin, his first guest in the Yellow House, he made a number of paintings in a decorative, symbolic style. One of the most celebrated is *La Berceuse*, of which he said that sailors, seeing it in the cabin of their boat, 'should feel the old sense of cradling come over them and remember their lullabies... The vivid contrasts of bright pink, bright orange and bright green are muted by the minor notes of the red and green'. He envisaged the picture flanked by paintings of sunflowers, like candles on an altar. Despite the musical significance he adds to the symbolic and psychological significance of the colours, Vincent rejects the abandonment of reality for a more abstract 'colour music': 'Reality means so much to me that I think I would rather be a shoemaker than a colour musician'.

Gauguin's visit to Arles proved a disaster, precipitating the first of Vincent's periodic mental breakdowns. In 1889 he arranged to be admitted to the hospital at Saint Rémy; his desolation is reflected in ominous landscapes with flame-like cypress trees, spiralling skies and double suns. Though not the last picture he painted, *Wheatfields and Crows*, showing a road ending in vast fields of wheat under troubled skies, is generally regarded as a symbolic conclusion to his oeuvre.

Symbolism

Until quite recently the overwrought, often morbid world of Symbolism was regarded by art historians as an uninteresting side line, a break in the history of modern art. The movement was seen as a last spasm of the 19th century, a typical product of the *fin-de-siècle*. More recent research, however, has shown that in the Netherlands, in particular, Symbolism played a key part in the emergence of abstract art.

The artist assumed the role of the visionary, the blessed one who would reveal to ordinary mortals a glimpse of the Mystery of the World. When it came to the point, however, the Symbolists were fascinated more by the powers of darkness than the powers of light. Stimulated by the mysticism and occultism fashionable at the time, they were intent upon deepening rather than unveiling the mystery. After all, as Mallarmé said, three-quarters of the pleasure of a poem was deciphering it piece by piece. It is told of Jan Toorop (1858–1928) that in a public lecture on his painting *The Three Brides*, the best-known Dutch Symbolist work of the time, he became hopelessly entangled in the ideas he was trying to convey. Seating himself at the piano, he saved the day with a series of brilliant improvisations.

Released from the need for a realistic portrayal of the visible world, the Symbolists denied the descriptive function of art. They endowed it with a separate significance; like notes of music, it was an abstract conveyor of emotions and sen-

sory sensations. Toorop spoke of 'lines of aroma and sound'. Lines are placed together in rhythmic, undulating patterns. One line may pass round the motif like a melody or a purely sensual suggestion. While not yet daring to move away from the representational tradition, the Symbolists treated it in a highly decorative and abstract fashion. Indeed, it is interesting to note in this context just how often the art critics of the 1890s used the term 'abstract,' though there was as yet nothing in the nature of abstract art proper.

Women are the central element in the symbolist works produced between 1890 and 1895 by Jan Toorop and Johan Thorn Prikker (1868–1932). It is a symbolist theme par excellence, an obsessional view of women as beings whose essential nature is either that of the 'pure' and innocent bride or that of the *femme fatale* as personified by the savage Salomé, the chilling but seductive Cleopatra and the inscrutable Sphinx. In

the pre-Freudian sexual ethic women were either destroyers who lured men to their doom or the personification of 'the higher spheres', and thus unattainable. There could be no compromise. This polarity, which generated considerable tension in real life, is expressed in Toorop's *The Three Brides*. The bride in the centre, according to the artist, symbolises 'the inner longing for beauty and excellence... the suffering of the Intellect'. The bride on the left symbolises the suffering of the soul, and the bride on the right the suffering of the senses, 'containing the expression of material and worldly things' (Thorn Prikker spoke in terms of a prostitute). At a higher level, these symbols may of course be interpreted as the dichotomy of mind and matter. At that time Toorop sought a solution to his pessimistic view of life by endowing the world with spiritual values. In Thorn Prikker's *Bride* the pact between Eros and Death is shown as inevitable by the heavy black lasso-type

line binding the bride to the cross. The symbolism is repeated in the transparent suggestion of phalluses and skulls in the abstract pattern of the veil.

By the end of the 19th century the gulf between the artist and the public had become unbridgeable. Artists responded to this in two ways, both of which are apparent in Symbolism. Some, making a virtue of necessity, withdrew to the proverbial ivory tower, often surrounding themselves with an aura of mysticism, while others sought to formulate a new mission for the artist in society. This gave rise to Communal art as represented in the Netherlands by Roland Holst and Derkinderen. In the most literal sense Communal art means the integration of all art forms into one complete whole (as in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*). Applied to architecture, it implies the integration of ornamentation – tile pictures, stained-glass windows, reliefs, sculptures, etc. – into the structure itself. In time, the accent shifted more towards the ideal



The Three Brides, 1893, drawing, black chalk, tinted, by Jan Toorop (1858–1928), 78 × 98 cm, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

The Bride, 1893, oil on canvas, by Johan Thorn Prikker (1868–1932), 146 × 86 cm, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo



meaning of the term: art relating to a communal ideal, whether political, social or religious.

These concepts, in forms adapted to different periods, were to be of long-lasting influence in the Netherlands. However differently they may have been applied in practice, the ideals of *De Stijl* group and the Amsterdam School concerning the integration of architecture and the visual arts derived directly from the Communal art of the 1890s. Moreover, a distant echo of it is still apparent today in the post-war regulations requiring 1 to 2 per cent of the construction costs of official buildings to be reserved for works of art to embellish them.

Modernism

Exhibitions of Modernist French art were rare in the Netherlands before 1909. The media coverage, good reproductions and informed reviews that now prompt lively international debate and facilitate the rapid spread of artistic trends were virtually non-existent at the beginning of the century. How could an artist become acquainted with the avant-garde art of his day? And how could he become personally involved? The answer was simple: by going to Paris, the wellspring. This explains the fact that so many major Dutch artists left their native land. Jongkind, Van Gogh, Van Dongen,

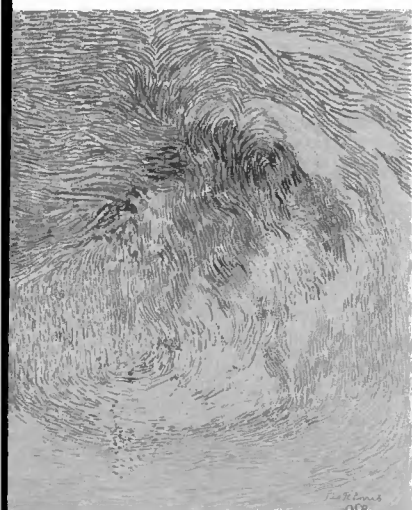
Mondrian, Van Doesburg, De Kooning and Bram van der Velde all spent much of their working lives outside the Netherlands.

Confrontation with new ideas could come as a tremendous shock. The compass of an artist could suddenly swing a full 180 degrees. That is what happened to Jan Sluyters (1881–1957) when he first encountered Fauvism in Paris in 1906. Two years earlier he had been awarded the prestigious *Prix de Rome* for a biblical scene painted entirely in accordance with the academic rules, a distinction which gave an aspiring young artist automatic entry to the official art world. He spent a year in Rome, dutifully copying the old masters. But when he sent the committee his Paris paintings, their verdict was that he was 'treading the false path of Modernism' and his grant was withdrawn. The furore that followed divided the home front into two camps. In his new role of 'enfant terrible' Sluyters was welcomed back to Amsterdam by the younger generation with open arms. It was not long before they, too, succumbed to the Modernist virus.

But the ground was not altogether unprepared. Since the 1890s Jan Toorop and, to a lesser extent, Thorn Prikker had functioned as a link between the Netherlands and the major centres of innovation, Brussels and Paris. They had both exhibited in Brussels with the ultramodern group *Les XX*, which continued after 1894 as *La Libre Esthétique*, and they had introduced pointillism into the Netherlands about 1890. Toorop was also involved in the organisation of international exhibitions, and through his cosmopolitan activities had many international contacts. After the Symbolist intermezzo, he had returned to pointillism at the beginning of the century, but now covered his canvases with bright luminous mosaic pieces rather than films of dots. In the following years Toorop was the acknowledged leader of the Modernists as a painter and, even more importantly, as an unflagging intellectual driving force.

Around 1904 Thorn Prikker developed a highly original near-abstract style in his crayon and pastel drawings. The vibrant, undulating lines betray the influence of both Van Gogh and the *art nouveau* artist Henri van der Velde. Thorn Prikker left the Netherlands for good in 1904, partly out of frustration at being denied recognition.

The more or less simultaneous awareness in the Netherlands of the different French Modernist schools gave rise to a specifically Dutch variant known as



Les Xhorres (Tree), 1904, pastel on paper, by Johan Thorn Prikker, 55.8 x 44.8 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



The Old Clown, 1910, oil on canvas, by Kees van Dongen (1877-1968), 66 x 55 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

emotional response. Colour and motif are transformed, endowed with spiritual meaning. Sluyters, Mondrian and Gestel were the foremost representatives of this movement, which reached its peak between 1908 and 1910.

Though Mondrian (see below) also worked with brilliant colour at this time, *Leo Gestel's* (1881-1941) handling of it and the subject was such as to invest his painting with spiritual significance. Another, higher dimension of reality, at times mysterious and *unheimlich*, obtrudes upon the perceived reality. In some of the paintings dating from this period, which rank among the best of his work, Sluyters achieves a light effect of beautiful silvery tones. Kees van Dongen (1877-1968), the only Dutch artist among the Paris avant garde at that time, was one of the celebrated Fauves who exhibited at the Paris *Salon d'automne* of 1905. His entire working life was spent abroad, away from the Dutch art world, but his work nevertheless attracted a great deal of attention in the Netherlands around 1910. He developed a Fauvist style of his own in his cynical portraits of the Paris beau monde which flocked to his notorious studio parties. *The Old Clown* shows an entirely different side of the artist, who later tended to identify rather too closely with the shallow personalities of his sitters.

Luminism aroused awareness in the Netherlands of developments elsewhere, and from 1910 onwards Dutch artists joined the ranks of the international avant garde.

Mondrian

A photograph of Mondrian's New York studio shortly after his death in 1944 shows a half finished painting on the easel: lozenge-shaped, *Victory Boogie-Woogie* dominates the room like a marvellous, glow-

ing icon. It is as though Mondrian wished to leave tangible proof that he had remained true to his code of artistic development - 'always further' - to the last. For even in this, as in *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, the other of his two last paintings, the drastic innovations with which he responded to his move to New York at the age of 68 in 1940 seem to have been taken further. The uncompromising grid of black lines characteristic of his earlier work has given way to a colourful kaleidoscope of interwoven yellow, red and blue bands, interspersed at irregular intervals by different-sized blocks of colour. The sounds of the street seem suddenly to have pierced the ascetic stillness of his earlier work; the syncopated rhythms of jazz - Mondrian's favourite music - have shaken loose its uncompromising order. In New York, a great metropolis constructed entirely artificially of vertical and horizontal lines, Mondrian obviously felt at home.

The few existing photos of Mondrian's various studios tell us a great deal about his concepts of art. What is at once apparent is that wherever he lived, whether in London, Paris or New York, the precise balance in his paintings was echoed in his surroundings. Cupboards are placed against the wall with geometric precision, rectangular strips of coloured cardboard are pinned to the wall in proper balance, sheets of hardboard transform the central heating radiators into planes, and the intrusive rounded corners of the chimney are covered over. This is the artist's studio as a preliminary study for the New Society in which, according to Mondrian, the balance he had achieved in his paintings would also be realised in the surrounding architecture. In one photo the artist, wearing a black suit, stands upright beside a lozenge-shaped picture; his arm seems to be carefully placed as an extension of the oblique outer line. Was this pose intended to exemplify the modern artist? 'The truly modern artist regards the metropolis as an embodiment of abstract life... In the metropolis, beauty expresses itself more mathematically; therefore it is the place out of which the mathematically artistic temperament of the future must develop, the place out of which the New Style must emerge.'

We are fortunate in possessing the writings of artists like Mondrian, explaining their theories and concepts not only in relation to their work but in a wider context, inviting reflection on aesthetic questions in a general sense. Mondrian's ideas were not confined to painting

Luminism. In contrast to the French 'empirical' painters who sought to record the sensory perception of light with the utmost fidelity, at least in principle ('just an eye, but what an eye', as Cézanne said of Monet), the Dutch school produced a more subjective translation, being so engrossed in the study of light and its effect on nature that their canvases are charged with their own

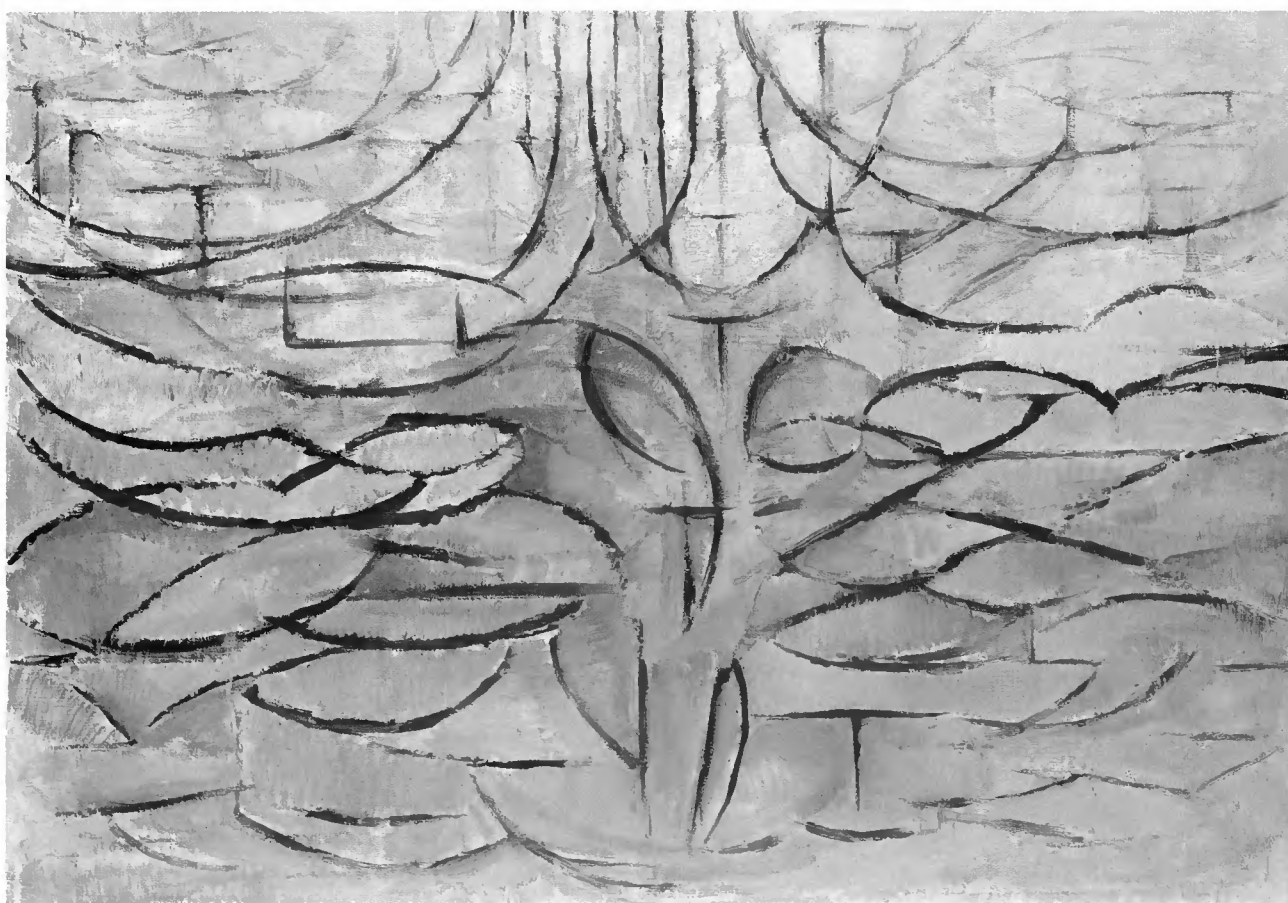


Moonlit Night II (Laren), 1911, oil on canvas, by Jan Sluyters (1881-1957), 50.5 x 71.5 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

The Red Tree, 1908, oil on canvas, by Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), 70 × 99 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague



Apple Tree in Blossom, 1912, oil on canvas, by Piet Mondrian, 78 × 106 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague



Right page:
Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue, 1921, oil on canvas, by Piet Mondrian, 103 × 100 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

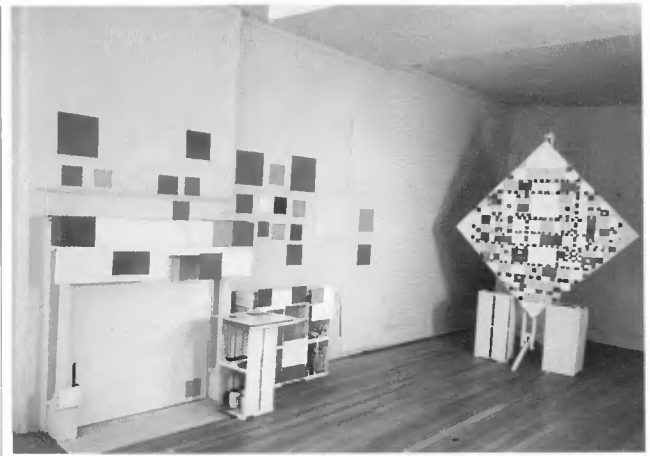
lone. His aesthetic philosophy encompassed all the arts – painting, architecture, music, dance – and their relation to life and to society. As we have seen, he himself provided a perfect example of such integration in that his life, his philosophies and his work formed one, indivisible whole.

H.L.C. Jaffé, author of an authoritative monograph on Mondrian, reconstructs his development – always further – step by step. He shows convincingly that each successive step was the logical consequence of the stage of development preceding it. Jaffé shows too that the search for objectivity and generality, though not defined as an aesthetic objective until the founding of *De Stijl*, is already discernible in Mondrian's representational work of the Luminist period, when colour, no longer realistic, is limited to primary reds, yellows and blues, and forms are simplified ever further. *The Red Tree* is based on the primary contrast of red and blue, of warm and cool colours. The short, vigorous brush strokes of the tree are reminiscent of Van Gogh. But whereas Van Gogh deliberately allowed nature to be deformed by his tormented emotional life, Mondrian placed what he later regarded as the *tragic* individual tree against a serene blue background symbolising the infinite mystery of nature.

The revolutionary, detached approach of Cubism, which Mondrian first encountered in Amsterdam in 1911, could hardly have failed to hold an irresistible attraction for him. Further acquaintance with this new movement must have been his principal reason for settling in Paris early in 1912. As Apollinaire noted, though the origins of the Cubist experiments on which he embarked soon afterwards may be readily apparent, they cannot simply be dismissed as epigonism, for they clearly evidence a highly personal interpretation and enhancement of the concepts of Cubism. In the series of drawings and paintings of trees dating from that time it is possible to follow precisely how Mondrian, step by step, strips nature of all its arbitrary visual manifestations until only the universal essence remains. In the last of the series the tree is reduced to its abstract structure, a skeleton of lines and structures from which even the natural curves have gradually been removed. But the last step towards abstract art, i.e. art no longer based on visible reality, awaited the advent of the avant-garde magazine *De Stijl* and the movement which followed from it.

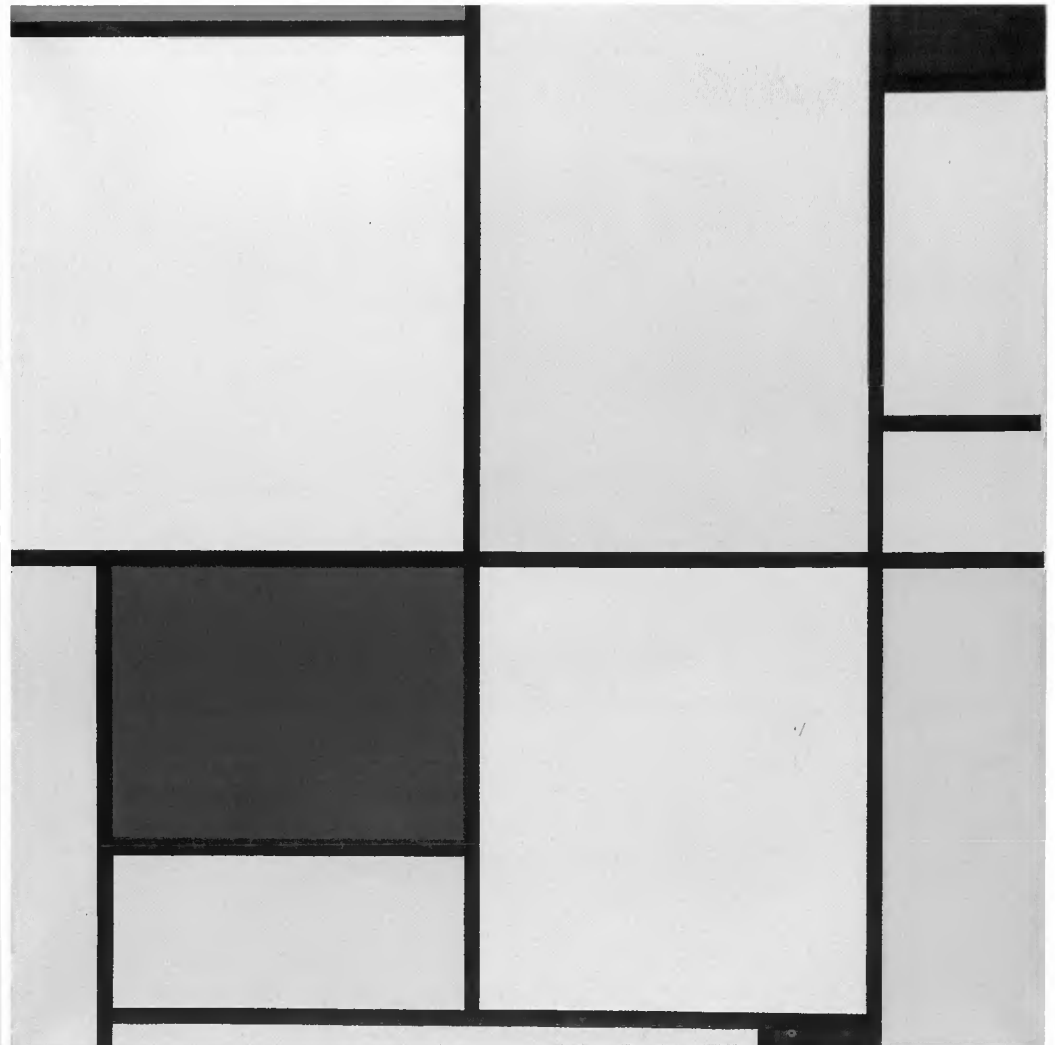
Mondrian was forced to spend the war

years in the Netherlands. This proved to be a turning point in his artistic development. In Laren, where he lived, he came into contact with the near-abstract geometric work of Bart van der Leek, and with the philosopher M.H.J. Schoenmaekers and Theo van Doesburg, the critic, essayist and painter who was later the moving force behind *De Stijl*, both of whom profoundly influenced his further conception of art. *De Stijl* was launched in 1917 by a group consisting of Van Doesburg, Huszar, Van der Leek, Mondrian and the architect J.J. Oud. Shortly afterwards they were joined by many others, including the architect and furniture designer Gerrit Rietveld. By expressing his views in a series of articles Mondrian not only contributed to the collectively formulated *Stijl*: the use of basic forms, particularly cubes, verticals and horizontals, the three primary colours of red, blue and yellow, and the three tones of black, grey and white. His writings also proved to be essential to the further development of his own ideas. His most important *De*



Stijl essays were published in Paris under the title of '*Le Néo-Plasticisme*' in 1920, the year in which he developed his characteristic planes of primary colour in a grid of straight black lines to achieve an abstract balance of form and colour. The meaning as defined by Mondrian is 'a true vision of reality', encompassing both universal, cosmic harmony and the ever more abstract reality of modern life.

Mondrian's New York studio in February 1944, with the unfinished painting *Victory Boogie Woogie*, photograph Frits Glarner, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague



Kruyder

Herman Kruyder (1881–1935) is one of the most intriguing artists of the interwar years. He lived as a recluse, and little is known of his personal life. He had no formal training, but devoted himself entirely to painting from 1910. His most important works date from after 1919. He found his subjects in his surroundings: simple rural life with its seemingly harmonious symbiosis of man and nature. Kruyder depicts this world as a closed universe whose enchantment is still intact. In pictures like *The Pig Farmer* the colours, in keeping with the subjects, are earth tones enlivened here and there with warm greens and reds, and the forms are simplified. The farmer is linked to his land in an organic framework of interweaving lines and planes of colour. The idyllic world of these pictures is shattered dramatically in later works like *The Pig Killer*, painted in lurid colours. Suggestive rather than explicit, it shows pigs and a face contorted with sadistic pleasure in surroundings with Freudian undertones. The erotic theme is more open and more menacing in a series of animal paintings (*The Dog*, *The Bull Calf*, *The Rooster*) done between 1928 and 1935. The brighter compositions in a totally different style modelled on the

The Pig Farmer, 1919–1923, oil on canvas, by Herman Kruyder (1881–1935), 54 × 72 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

The Pig Killer, 1925, oil on canvas, by Herman Kruyder, 55.5 × 68.5 cm, Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven



primitive art of Rousseau, such as *The Milkmaid*, which date from the same period, only seem to be different. They are in fact the other side of the coin; it is still the same world, but seen through the eyes of a child. The naive style corresponds to the child's view, a perspective from which life is still uncomplicated, offering possibilities of escape. The mother figure (*The Milkmaid*) is heaving

milk cans, the dog is securely tethered and the small boy, wearing white clogs and clasping a flower, is blithely moving the other way, out of the painting.

It is tempting to interpret Kruyder's entire oeuvre in a Freudian light. In a late triptych, the outer panels of which consist of a male and a female still life, the artist himself provides the key. His life ravaged by the frequent mental breakdowns which were eventually to cause his death, also invites a more psychoanalytical study of his work. Following this line of interpretation, many of his earlier works may also be viewed as a consciously or unconsciously camouflaged interplay of male and female forms. The two most important works of his earliest period, *Paradise I* and *Paradise II*, provide a logical starting point for such an interpretation.

Kruyder's strength lies in his capacity to infuse an element of mystery into his work without ever hinting at its nature. In every patch of colour, however abstract, lurks some dark suspicion. Everything lends itself to such a projection. But sooner or later all speculation founders on the realisation that Kruyder's world of the imagination is impenetrable.

The Plough

Shortly after the First World War a focal point of contemporary art was established in the northern university town of Groningen with the advent of *The Plough*, a group of artists who sought to foster interest in new developments by means of exhibitions and lectures. The breakthrough came in 1921, when Jan Wiegiers (1893–1953)





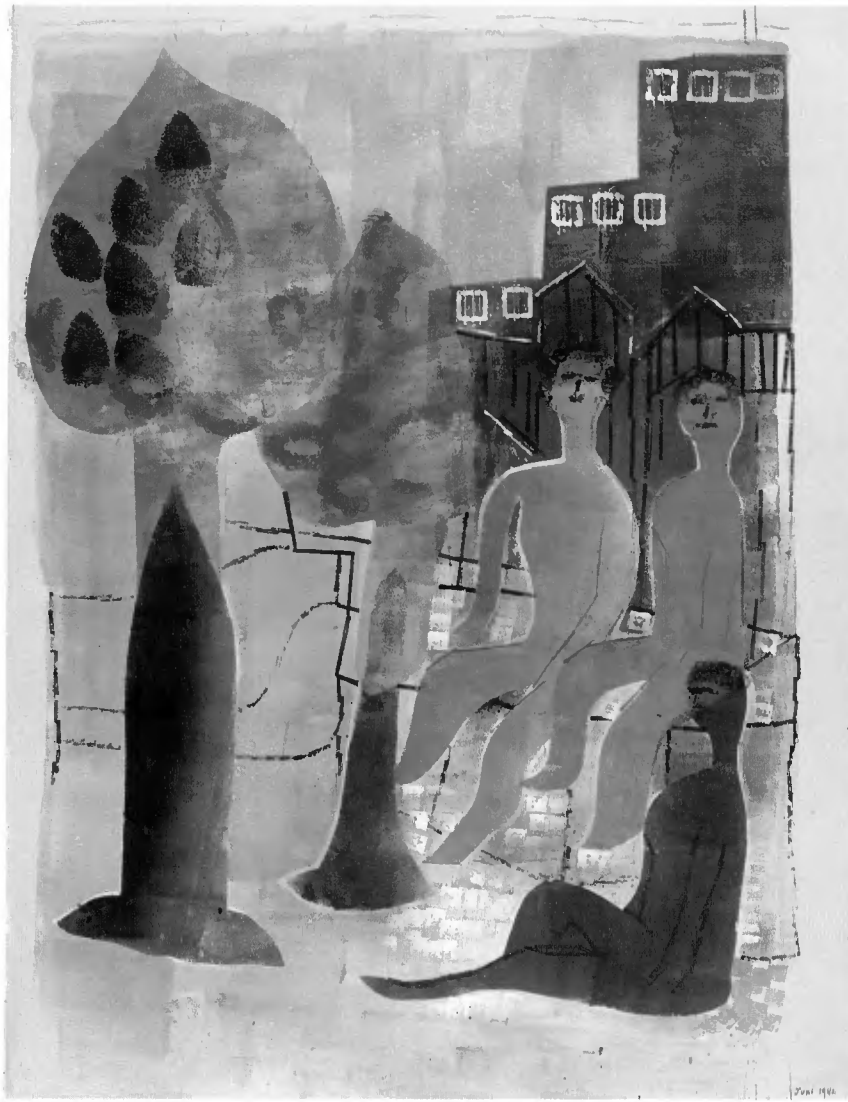
Landscape with Red Trees, 1924, wax-based paint on canvas, by Jan Wiegiers (1893–1953), 70 × 70 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

returned from Davos, where he had met the German Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Wiegiers' bold colours, and the compelling, primitive force and intensity of his oils and woodcuts, which owed much to Kirchner but were nevertheless in a style of his own, had a revolutionary impact in the provincial Groningen. The other members of the group were inspired by his example, and before long there was a flourishing Expressionist school in the north which resembled the German Expressionist group *Die Brücke* in its anarchistic approach and its advanced communal principles.

Werkman

In retrospect, however, the printer and artist Hendrik Werkman (1882–1945) was the most striking member of *The Plough* group. A man of reserved temperament, he was something of an odd man out, an enigma, to his fellow artists. The international recognition accorded his work after World War II largely owing to the efforts of Willem Sandberg, director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, came too late for Werkman himself. His life, like that of so many of his contemporaries, was a succession of dramatic events, with only art to sustain him. Werkman's execution by the Germans, just a few days before the end of the war,

was the tragic culmination of a series of misfortunes. After owning a printing firm for many years, he was forced by financial setbacks to sell it in 1923, and thereafter worked alone in an attic. It was in these changed circumstances, in which the letters of his typecase were almost all he had left, that he conceived the idea of using printing type purely for its form, its visual effect. His first experiments, which he called 'scraps,' are similar to the experimental typography of Dada and *De Stijl* in a very elementary way. With remarkable inventiveness and originality in exploiting the shape of letters and their associated sounds, he gradually developed a unique printing process which in its subtle gradations is in no



Prison Camp for Hostages, St Michelsgestel II, 1942, hand printed, by Hendrik N. Werkman (1882–1945), 65.5 × 50 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

way inferior to anything produced by hand. Before long, Werkman added other materials from his surroundings, such as a padlock section and pieces of cardboard. The next stage was the use of paper stencils and a paint roller for the direct application of ink to the paper. In the last years of his life he worked with stamps and dies. Each stage of the composition was printed separately on the handpress, thus enabling him to check and vary each individual element at will, and to regulate the thickness, thinness or transparency of the ink with precision. The colour and type of paper were carefully chosen to match the composition. Werkman's printing method was highly labour-intensive. Fifty printings were not unusual for one print. Each print is in fact unique.

The growing refinement of Werkman's work is clearly discernible in the nine issues of *The Next Call*, an experimental magazine which he edited and published between 1923 and 1926. Its pages are

Five Zeeland Farmers, 1930, oil on canvas, by Charley Toorop (1891–1955), 101 × 125 cm, Central Museum, Utrecht



filled with preceptive texts and sound poems as well as his 'scraps'. It was his channel of communication with the international avant-garde magazines and it explains how his work came to hang at the historic *Cercle et Carré* exhibition, though he never travelled; it had been arranged by Michel Seuphor, a fellow magazine editor who organised the exhibition.

Werkman produced his best work in the last decade of his life. During the German occupation of the Netherlands he supplied the illustrations for the series of underground publications entitled *De blauwe Schuit* (The Blue Barge.) In those years he perfected his style: large fields of colour, substantial but at the same time insubstantial and spatial; half abstract anonymous figures wrapped in ethereal hues fade and reappear. Are they resistance fighters in an uncertain world, or shadowy phantoms of the imagination?

Realism

Generally speaking, interest in experimental styles and techniques ebbed in the 1920s and 1930s. Art was dominated by a tradition-oriented realism. This somewhat dull scene did however produce a few progressive figures.

One of the most interesting personalities of those years is Charley Toorop (1891–1955), daughter of Jan Toorop who turned to art after first studying singing and the violin. Her style, after an Expressionist phase, became less equivocal and 'feminine', more monumental

about 1930. Her subjects – farmers, workers, artisans, friends – are painted in a harshly realistic manner, a form of 'vivisection' that is nevertheless constructive rather than destructive. Her 'ruth' reveals the inner strength of the individual. Her style expresses self-confidence, conviction and a love of independence. The labourer's hands, roughened and coarsened, symbolise the dignity of work. Though seemingly related to German Verism (the rigorous realism adopted by politically left-wing artists), her conception of art was in fact more profoundly influenced by Soviet films like Eisenstein's 'The Battleship Potemkin' and Dovzhenko's 'The Earth', on which her close-up technique, montage' of the figures in groups and photographic style were modelled. These films were screened in the Netherlands by the Film Society, of which Charley Moorop was one of the founders. Socialists in the 1920s debated the respective merits of Abstract and Realist art. Though far from dogmatic, Charley Moorop took the side of the Realists. Those favouring Abstract art argued that the universal character of its imagery would help to eliminate individual differences and to create an international culture. Like her father, Charley Moorop kept in touch with the international avant garde. Her house was the artists'

village of Bergen was for many years a meeting place for leading Dutch writers, film directors and artists.

Dick Ket, Raoul Hynckes, Carel Willink and Pyke Koch are painters who each responded in his own way to the economic depression, threat of war and political radicalisation of the 1930s. All except Dick Ket belonged to the school of Magic Realism. Many of the works of Koch and Willink reflect the pessimism of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, which was widely read at that time. It is this atmosphere which pervades Willink's paintings of Pompeian buildings set in desolate landscapes.

Cobra

The immediate post-war years saw an upsurge of optimism and energy. There was a widespread feeling that with the lifting of the social and cultural restrictions imposed by the occupying forces a fresh start could be made. The nation seemed to be entering upon a new era. This sense of vitality manifested itself most markedly in the

arts with the birth of COBRA, an acronym formed from the first letters of the cities Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. The post-war generation of painters – Appel, Corneille, Constant Nieuwenhuys – set out to escape from the isolation into which Dutch art had retreated in the 1920s. Joining forces with Danish and Belgian artists (notably Jorn and Pederson in Denmark, and Dotremont in Belgium), they founded COBRA in 1948. Though its impact was felt in all three countries, the shock waves were heaviest in the Netherlands. COBRA set something in motion with which artists, writers (the Experimentalists of the 1950s) and anarchistic spirits of all kinds could identify. The Netherlands was again in the contemporary world for the first time since the days of *De Stijl*.

Group photograph showing the Dutch members of the COBRA movement in 1949. Appel is standing on the left; Nieuwenhuys, Constant and Corneille are seated third, fourth and fifth from the right respectively. Photograph Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



COBRA was first and foremost a state of mind, an attitude to life, and the artistic style associated with it sprang from this. Like Dada and Surrealism, COBRA envisaged life and work as one. Constant, the Dutch COBRA ideologue, declared: 'Now that western culture has proved to be a fiasco, and all faith has fallen away, only life remains: so *live* ... A painting is no longer a composition of colours and lines, but an animal, a night, a cry, a man, or all of these together' (Manifesto, 1948). Painting was a spontaneous explosion of vitality expressed through the paint and held in the picture as a galvanising force which conveyed itself to the viewer. Beauty and ugliness were concepts belonging to the past... 'Ugliness is simply the absence of life force'. COBRA had distinct elements of the philosophy of Surrealism, which had first reached the Netherlands after 1945, partly through the contacts with Denmark, where it was known before the war. If the artist wished to return to the

wellsprings of his creativity, which had silted up in the course of the development of western civilisation, he would first have to rid himself of the standards and rules imposed throughout the centuries. He would have to rediscover the freedom of imagination of the child. Following exploratory, experimental paths, the artist would seek the laws to govern the new creativity. Experiments were an essential part of COBRA. A work of art had its origins and its *raison d'être* in the adventure of creating art, in the unpredictable dialogue between the artist and his materials. In Constant's view, art was the testing ground for a new consciousness which would be shared by all when a new 'folk art' had come into being. In the new society everyone, not just the artist, would be creative.

The Dutch members of COBRA at first drew considerable inspiration from children's drawings. The lively, colourful paintings of Karel Appel (1921) found particularly little favour with the public,

which was no doubt aggravated by such provocative remarks by the artist as 'just mess about a bit'. Later, the artist achieved an organic fusion of colour and line in one dynamic flow of paint, representational by suggestion only.

In the 1950s Constant began to develop utopian architectural models and spatial constructions on the basis of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* and of earlier ideas of his own. He called this project New Babylon. His concepts appeared in various publications, including *Probleem* (1965), the journal of the Amsterdam-based movement of the same name, which inaugurated the social changes of the 1960s.

Zero

The work of art may not be a vehicle for the maker's formative desires; it must be entirely objective ... The zero artist merely chooses, merely isolates, sections of reality ... and presents them in the most neutral manner. The artist, according to Jan Schoonhoven, one of the founders of the Dutch Zero group in 1961, makes changes only in that which is essential in order 'to heighten the intensity of reality'. Such pronounced statements set the tone for a new decade. The post-war period was characterised by a pattern of international oscillating movements, in which action was followed by reaction. By about 1960 the vitalistic emotional eruptions of COBRA had spent their force. The new key words were *impersonality*, *detachment* and *objectivity*. The doctrines of the Zero group were in many respects identical to those of the German Zero group and the French New Realists, and showed an affinity with the philosophy earlier expressed in the music of the anti-composer, John Cage. The spiritual legacy of Marcel Duchamp and the Dadaists was rediscovered, and combined here and there with a generous dash of Zen Buddhism.

Characteristic examples of Zero work are the freezer cabinet exhibited by Peeper at the Stedelijk Museum in 1962, and the same artist's 'tactilistic' objects, like artificial fur, designed to heighten the sense of touch. Almost fifty years earlier Duchamp had sent a urinal, signed R. Mutt, to an exhibition; in 1962, the Zero artist Hendrikse signed two department stores as 'ready-mades' of contemporary consumer goods. The artist 'resembled the maker of a camera who allows someone else to take the picture,' as John Cage so graphically put it. The artist as a maker, as a personality, had become transparent. He was no longer primarily

The Meeting, 1951, oil on canvas, by Karel Appel (b. 1921), 130 x 97.5 cm, Netherlands Office for FineArts, on loan to the Central Museum, Utrecht



concerned with the manipulation of the material, but with the manipulation of the viewer, by delineating the conceptual framework through which reality could enter the eye.

Schoonhoven

Jan Schoonhoven (b. 1914) undoubtedly made the most lasting contribution to Zero. His work, transcending the historical significance of the movement, accords perfectly with the Zero philosophy, a basis which is still evident in his more recent work. However, even his work of the early 1960s carries a strong suggestion of the quite different sensors which emerge, ostentatiously emphasized and contradictory, in the later work.

Schoonhoven is best known for his white reliefs, shallow lattices which are not compositional in the traditional sense. The constant repetition of the same elements is a principle of design derived from the standardisation of industrial mass production. The materials – papier-maché, cardboard and corrugated paper – suggest the same origin. White is used not as a colour, but to indicate neutrality, the absence of colour. Some of the reliefs relate to reality, such as the *Venetian Blind Reliefs*; others are entirely abstract. Between these ‘things’ and the viewer Schoonhoven places a third factor, light, an unpredictable, mysterious co-factor which in fact determines the artistic effect of the reliefs. The never changing basic structure is affected by the corrosive, capricious play of light over the surface, so that the patterns of shadow in the hollows are constantly changing.

Schoonhoven's Indian ink drawings are a corollary to the reliefs. Like an automatism, they comprise endlessly repeated lines within a broad white framework. They might be described as flat reliefs, with light playing between the black lines. Just as in the reliefs, an irregularity occasionally creeps in, betraying the human hand with seismographic precision. The deviations were at first of little significance, but in the drawings of the last ten years they serve to provide a more marked contrast. Originally more or less regular structures, the lines are now more sweeping, more intense, as in oriental character painting. In both the reliefs and the drawings executed in the 1980s Schoonhoven has achieved a dynamic balance between cool detachment and emotional involvement – the two extremes which seem to govern his work.

Visser

If Mondrian's development can be said to have followed a path of almost exemplary straightness, the metaphor of a railway yard would be more apt in the case of Carel Visser (b. 1928), the foremost contemporary sculptor in Holland.

His career has been an intricate network of branch lines, destinations and tracks which have reconverged as if by chance. Many wagons have been abandoned on side tracks. His work as a whole is remarkable first of all for its diversity of styles, each representative of a different period. It is not readily apparent that it is all the work of one man: ‘I jump like a flea... I have never thought there was only one way for me’. Even at the time when changing one's image was not at all an accepted thing to do in the art world, Visser never denied himself the freedom to pursue his ideas, and was never concerned about what this could mean in terms of sales. He simply went ahead and

explored the various possibilities this opened up.

But despite the many avenues he has investigated, a number of constant factors, of coordinates determining the direction followed, are apparent. The first is Visser's exploratory attitude to the potential inherent in materials. Towards the end of the 1940s, when sculptures – at least in the Netherlands – were still chiselled or modelled, he was one of the first to work with iron. In the 1960s, the decade of Minimal art, he worked with sheet steel, which he often used in combination with leather: ‘Leather puts metal in perspective, and metal does the same with leather’. Through the leather connecting the plates, Visser's minimalism breathes a sensibility altogether different from that of comparable works by Carl Andre or Serra. In 1975 he surprised his public anew, this time with collage sculpture, unexpectedly suggesting the impingement of Postmodernism on his awareness. Incorporating, amongst

Relief 1982 (R 82-1), household paint on corrugated cardboard, by Jan Schoonhoven (b. 1914), 106 x 106 cm, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague



other things, cut-outs from advertising posters, such as fruit, these photocollages are ornamental pieces recalling 17th-century garlands. The photos, in some cases reproductions of his own sculptures which are often further elaborated with drawings, simulate a three-dimensional object, thus rendering the term 'collage sculpture' ambiguous. Other collages use real materials like hair, rope, shells and ostrich eggs. They represent the first step in the totally different direction which Visser's three-dimensional work was henceforth to follow with the aid of an arsenal of such 'found' objects as walking sticks, umbrellas, tractor tires and parts of the bodywork of cars. These materials are now the principal compo-

nents of his sculpture. Of course the use of such materials is in itself nothing new. The *objet trouvé* has become an established tradition in modern art. What is unique, however, is the way in which Visser succeeds in incorporating organic and car industry materials in his sculptural language in such an altogether natural manner. In these arrangements of objects, in which he makes a highly selective use of the 'found' form and the associative value of the materials, the strictly mathematical structure which has characterised his work from the beginning has been reduced to an inconspicuous, weightless skeleton.

Another constant factor of importance in Visser's work is his involvement with nature. His earliest sculptures are animal figures welded in iron. Though quite different superficially, the constructivist sculptures which followed in the 1950s are a continuation of the same theme. For they are essentially a translation of the underlying structural principles of nature, i.e. symmetry, rotation, reflection and balance, into abstract sculptural structures. Since 1974 nature has appeared in a more recognisable or representational form in Visser's work which, as we have seen, features natural materials with specific emotional values like peacock feathers, wool, ostrich eggs, horns, shells, and so on. Moreover, as from the 1960s his actual working methods have also become more natural in the metaphorical sense. Instead of welding, which might be construed as a

forcible attempt to withstand the disintegrating forces of nature, he has chosen loose assemblages and connective techniques less geared to durability. His most recent works no longer seem to need confirmation as sculpture in the conventional sense. Not robust, but fragile, vulnerable and ephemeral, they are exercises in balance performed with the utmost precision, and sometimes with humour, in a *panta rei* allowing no foothold at all.

In addition to exploring a wide diversity of sculptural concepts in the course of his long career, Visser, an artist aware of what is happening in the world, has succeeded as no other in revealing something of the spirit of the items in a purely sculptural manner. He has literally created images of the age, and herein lies the elusive fascination of his work.

Dibbets and Van Elk

It was not just a matter of chance that the two Dutch artists who achieved international status in the 1970s, Jan Dibbets and Ger van Elk, did not work in the traditional media of painting or sculpture. Both had deliberately chosen photography as the medium for their philosophical reflections on artistic problems, in keeping with the conceptual climate which characterised the 1970s.

In 1967 Dibbets (b. 1944) painted his last picture. From that moment on painting no longer existed for him. Paradoxically however, his work since then has developed ever more distinctly on the lines of the great Dutch painting tradition of Vermeer, Saenredam and Mondrian. He first came to the fore with his *Perspective corrections* series. For *Perspective correction - my studio II* he attached white strips to the floor in the form of a trapezium widening toward the top. The photo, however, shows a floor with a white square. The changed shape resulted from Dibbets' precise calculation of the perspective distortion of the camera lens. The distortion used to 'correct' the trapezium has a further consequence for the way in which the interior is perceived in the photo, for the square seems to be the sole element in the interior that is not subject to the laws of perspective. It seems to be separate from its surroundings, floating or upright in space.

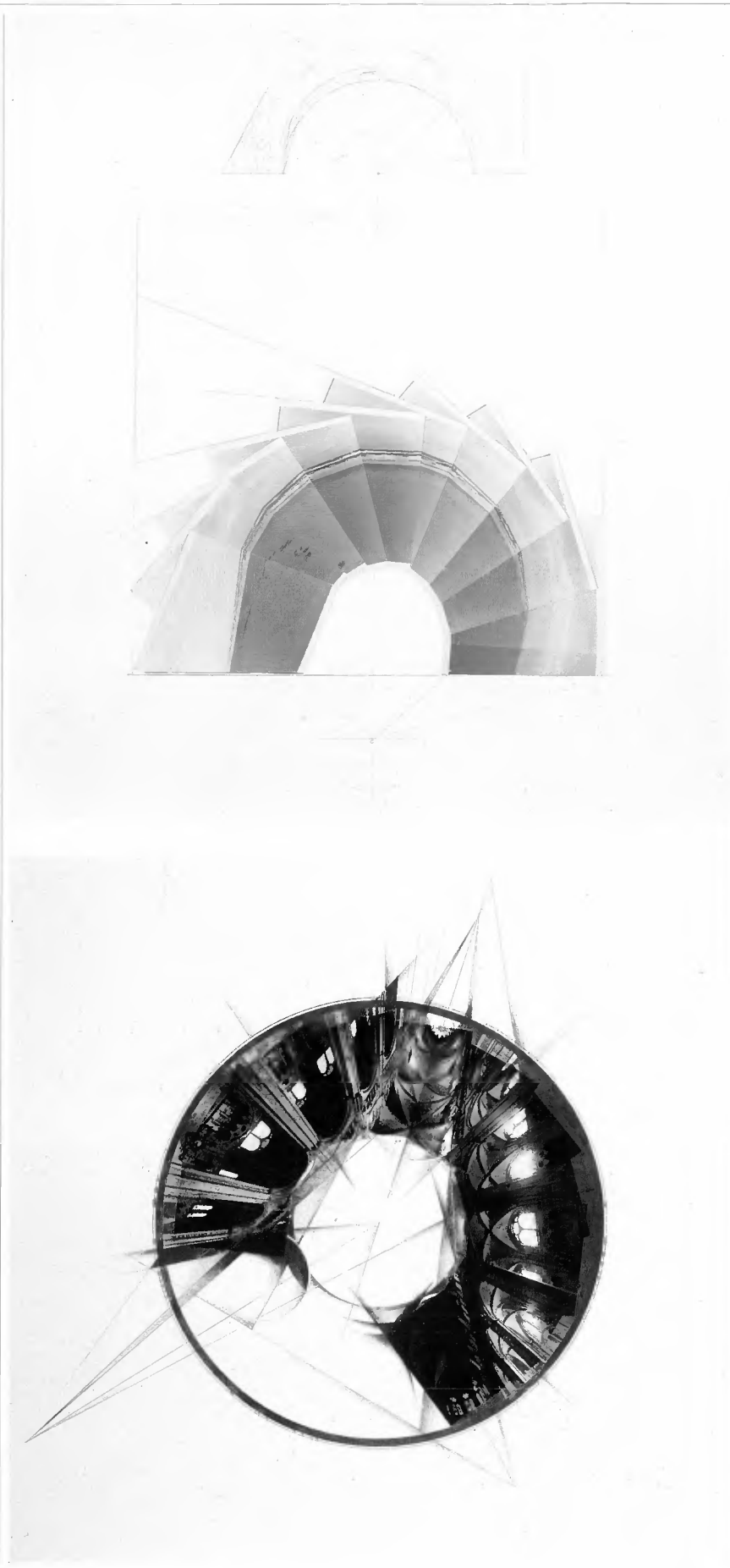
In another series of *Perspective corrections* Dibbets stretched two white tape diagonally across a trapezium marked out on a field. In the photo, they correspond exactly with the diagonals traversing the focal plane. The age-old dilemma of how to fit the perception of reality into



Eagle, 1980, branches, twigs, sheepskin, cardboard bird, plaster, horn, 7 parts, by Carel Visser (b. 1928) 160 x 130 x 130 cm. (photograph T. Haartsen)

the formal two-dimensional compositional scheme imposed by the artist on his own conventions of perception is graphically illustrated here. Reality is translated into the abstract. In the next series Dibbets pushes the interface between the 'actual' photographically documented reality and his insistence on formal construction to its uttermost limits. *Ebb and Flow* (1979-70), for instance, is a composite of a number of photographs of the tide line taken from the same point at different times. The gradually shifting line of the horizon transforms it into a fascinating abstract composition. Such a presentation of reality is entirely at odds with our experience of perception and with our conception of photography as recording a particular moment in time. In the *Dutch Mountains* series Dibbets explores what photography can do still further by setting the camera on a tripod and turning it on its axis. The resultant montage is an arched or curvilinear horizon. In his playful contrasts of empirical observation and artistic interpretation, he clarifies both the characteristics of photography and the role of the artist, who recreates reality in accordance with his own aesthetic perception.

Bourges is an especially arresting example of his more recent work. The interior of the cathedral is photographed in the round, from below, and the resulting panoramic view is supplemented with pencil lines and paint. Dibbets' photographic reconstructions of church interiors recall the geometric perspectives and pictorial 'purification' of Maenredam, the 17th-century painter of church interiors, whose work he admires. The upward tilt of the camera and the strong contrasts of light and shadow show that Dibbets has abandoned the strictly formalist approach based on the psychology of perception which he pursued in the 1970s, and is moving with the spirit of the times in allowing more scope for the associations of depth psychology. The versatility and lightness of touch of Ger van Elk (b. 1941) are in direct contrast to Dibbets' analytical, systematically developing temperament. Van Elk's photographs, placed in a reality elevated to theatre, scintillate with irony, understatement and absurdity. Though at first glance his work might seem to be no more than spectacle, closer examination reveals subtly interwoven threads linking it with the history of art. Typical examples are *The Symmetry of Diplomacy* and the related *Russian Diplomacy* series. In the former the sterile, theatrical rituals of protocol are

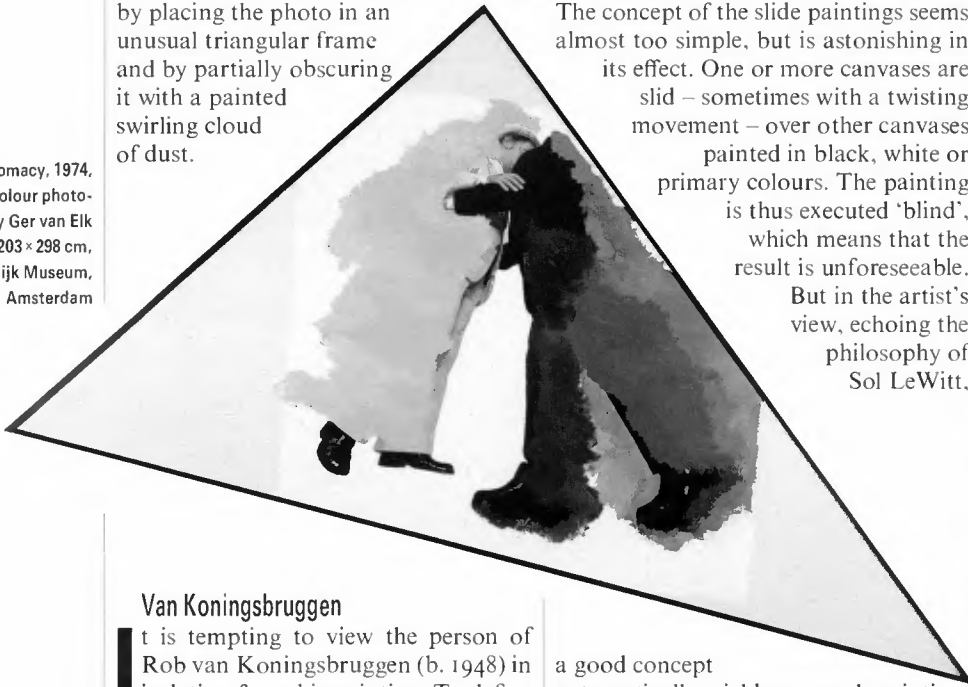


'Universe', A Construction, 1971/72, by Jan Dibbets (b.1944), 65.5 x 70.5 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Bourges I, 1981, colour photographs, pencil and paper on plasticised chipboard, by Jan Dibbets, 185 x 185 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

held up to ridicule by the exaggerated stylization of the poses and the ambience, and by the symmetrical duplication of the scene. The expressionless faces of the diplomats have been retouched with incongruous blushes. The camera is here revealed as an effective instrument for investing the empty proprieties surrounding official political occasions with credibility in the eyes of the public. At the same time, the series refers to the iconography of groups in art history. Van Elk underscores the banal nature of the iconography of the modern press photo so as to cut through the conventional way of looking at things. In *Russian Diplomacy* he achieves this effect by placing the photo in an unusual triangular frame and by partially obscuring it with a painted swirling cloud of dust.

Russian Diplomacy, 1974, acrylic on colour photograph, by Ger van Elk (b. 1941), 203 x 298 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



and a Dutch level-headedness which may manifest itself in either irrefutable logic or a sense of the absurd. It may be that his greatest talent lies in his capacity to put an uncompromising end to all obvious expectations, in conversation as well as in art. He operates in a vacuum, in an emptiness in which experience is still unknown or undefined, so that for him too the shock of discovery remains undiminished.

His work may be divided into two periods: the conceptual period before 1980, when he produced his slide paintings, and the period since then, in which he has produced more painterly works through his renewed use of the brush. The concept of the slide paintings seems almost too simple, but is astonishing in its effect. One or more canvases are

slid – sometimes with a twisting movement – over other canvases painted in black, white or primary colours. The painting is thus executed 'blind', which means that the result is unforeseeable.

But in the artist's view, echoing the philosophy of Sol LeWitt,

method bear out Van Koningsbruggen's claims. Though many were rejected by him at the time, the quality of the remaining paintings is inexplicably exciting. Van Koningsbruggen considers this technique to be a logical consequence of an earlier period incorporating elements of the automatism of Schoonhoven whose work he admires. In the early 1970s, for instance, he concentrated on drawings consisting of phrases or figures repeated in vertical and horizontal lines. At that time he also made grey, knitted figures which were related in form to the drawings. He next experimented with paintings executed by stroking the brush dry on an empty canvas. Using consistently wider brushes, at a certain point he 'saw the painting in the brush', which gave him the idea of using the painting itself as a brush.

Apart from his unconventional techniques, what Van Koningsbruggen had to say about his work must have perplexed many visitors to his studio at that time. In an interview in 1975 he said, 'Actually I'm not interested in how the idea works out... I scarcely ever look at my paintings. I glance at them for a moment, and then I lose interest'.

The possibilities of the slide paintings were exhausted in 1980. But even though he now works again with the brush, this has not brought about any fundamental change in the original concept. He is still preoccupied with the study of colour, with the unpredictable behaviour of paint and the enigma of mixed colours. He still regards painting as a form of automatism, a kind of trance experienced at the level of the unconscious and the intuitive. The only difference now is that the process is very much slower, entailing long deliberation, and that he employs more colours such as orange, purple, brown and green, with

Van Koningsbruggen

It is tempting to view the person of Rob van Koningsbruggen (b. 1948) in isolation from his painting. To define the special quality of his personality in a few words is difficult. In any case, it is made up of a certain naivety, a certain feeling for understatement and timing,

a good concept automatically yields a good painting. The blending of primary colours can suddenly produce deep blacks, while a brightly painted section may emerge as practically blank. The results of the

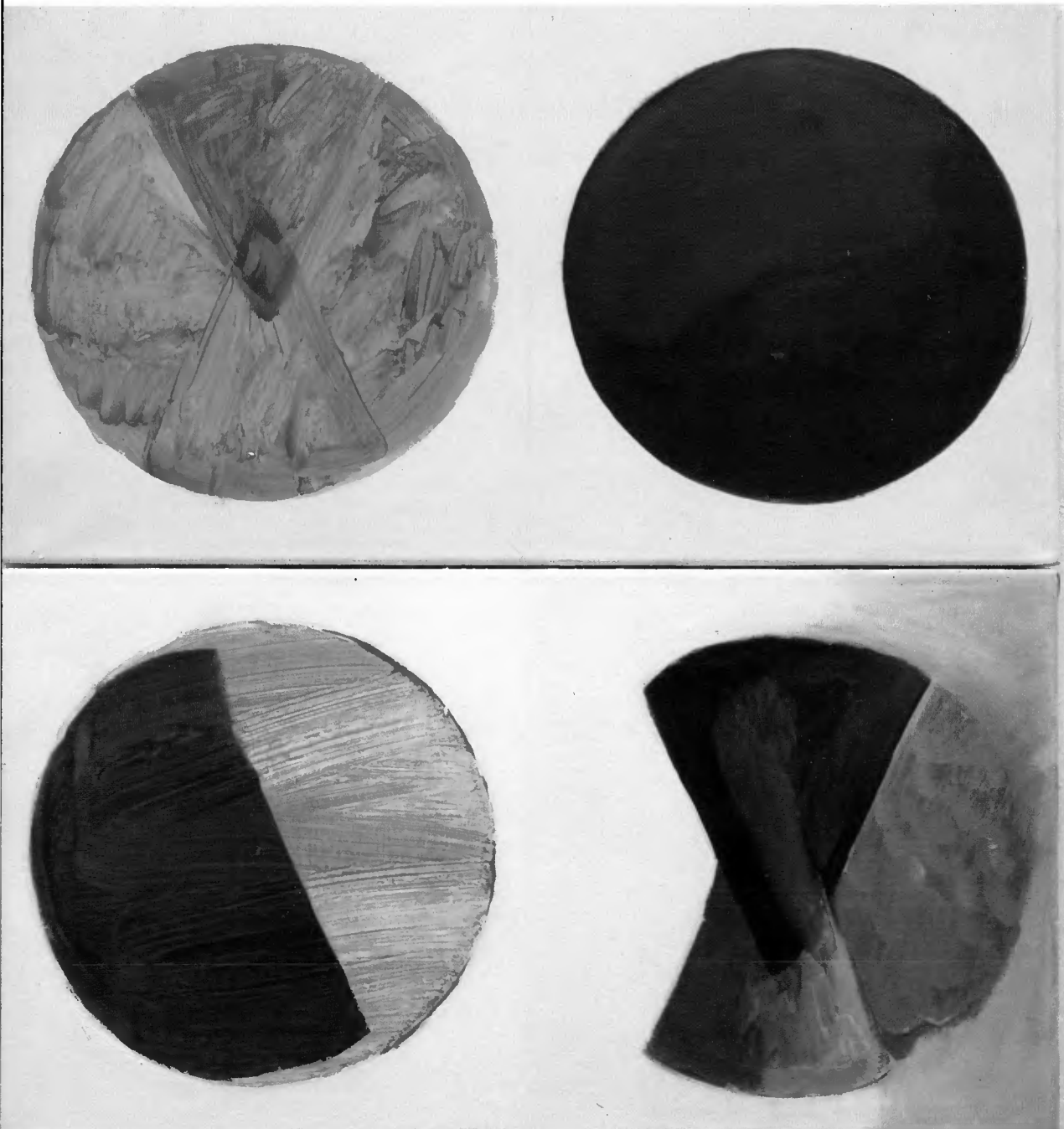
Slide painting, 1975, oil on canvas, by Rob van Koningsbruggen (b. 1948), 60 x 180 cm, artist's collection

results that are both intensely pure and extremely turbid.

Although the representations, which are reminiscent of free-hand circles of colour in *Farbkugeln*, suggest a systematic, analytical approach, the opposite is in fact the case. The intention is to move in an entirely different direction, to reveal the total derailment of every theoretical expectation. 'The colour circle doesn't tally with reality. It progresses from yellow to orange and red, but then, between red and blue, you should get purple. If you try that, however, you get black.' Colour has no symbolic significance for Van Koningsbruggen; like

form, each colour simply indicates itself. He firmly rejects all comparison with Goethe's or any other theory of colour. He describes his works as 'feverish', and the essence of his art, 'discovery'. 'The paintings that you can't account for later are the best. My conception of art has stayed essentially the same. I always say that when I went back to the brush after the slide paintings, I made a 180-degree turn.' The brilliant, spectral colour, the form like windmill sails (a remnant of an earlier period when the triangle was one of his basic forms) and the deliberate disharmony endow Van Koningsbruggen's work with an ominous quality that

brings to mind the mystical, meditative 'heads' of Jawlensky (whom he admires), the late Rembrandt and the darkest depths of Romanticism. However, comparisons merely reflect the desire to place the work of this artist in the context of the familiar, and are therefore superfluous. A documentary film about Van Koningsbruggen could consist simply of speeded-up shots, with no spoken commentary, showing his works in his studio at the same time every day for a year. That way his paintings could be seen to grow slowly, like plants. To follow this process would be wondrous enough in itself.



Untitled, 1986, canvas by Rob van Koningsbruggen, 77 x 69 cm, Boymans-Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam

The 1980s

Contemporary art in the Netherlands is, as elsewhere, in the grip of Post-Modernism, sometimes involuntarily. Though it is true that international trends do not pass unnoticed in the Netherlands thanks to the active exhibitions policy of the museums and galleries, the scene is set by individuals. There is nothing in the nature of a prevailing style. The lines dividing the various arts, thought not so long ago to have been firmly fixed by the theoretists of Modernism, have grown

indistinct. Anything goes. Nowhere is this blurring more obvious than in sculpture, which at present seems assured of a more flourishing existence than ever before.

The works of the duo Fortuyn (b. 1959) and O'Brien (1953–1988) and of Niek Kemps (b. 1953), the most successful of the present generation of sculptors, are somewhere between sculpture, design, architecture, stage design, codes and philosophical texts. The term 'domestic art' may be somewhat misleading in respect of Fortuyn/O'Brien's refined, boudoir-like furniture sculptures covered with transparent silk. For it is not the object itself with which they are concerned, but the complex of questions which it conjures up. The work of art is a track on which the wanderer is plunged into a dialogue with his surroundings. *If you go down in the woods today* is a graphic operationalisation of a multiplicity of meanings associated with the concept of nature: its reality, its imitation, its stereotyped romantic image (and the power of the stereotype to engender an authentic experience through its denial). Moreover, the site of the installation opens up to discussion the question of the museum and of art as institutions.

Kemps' mirror cabinets sweep the viewer

along in an even more dizzying and unfathomable adventure of enticement, illusion, loss of meaning, galaxies and black holes... 'The gaze searches until it finds something. Transparency invites voyeurism, but regrettably has no inner life, no depth. It is a mirror whose gleam is a hurricane.'

The popular icons painted with photographic precision by Rob Scholte (b. 1955) with the aid of projection equipment are an affront to the conception of reality which preceded Post-Modernism. Scholte uses an immense archive of anonymous photos and other pictorial material from the mass media. On the lines of cover versions in pop music, an area in which he has also been active, he recreates or recycles existing images. This often involves no more than a slight change, enough to give the imitation a sudden new penetrating force or to reveal, as in a flash of perception, a paradoxical significance.

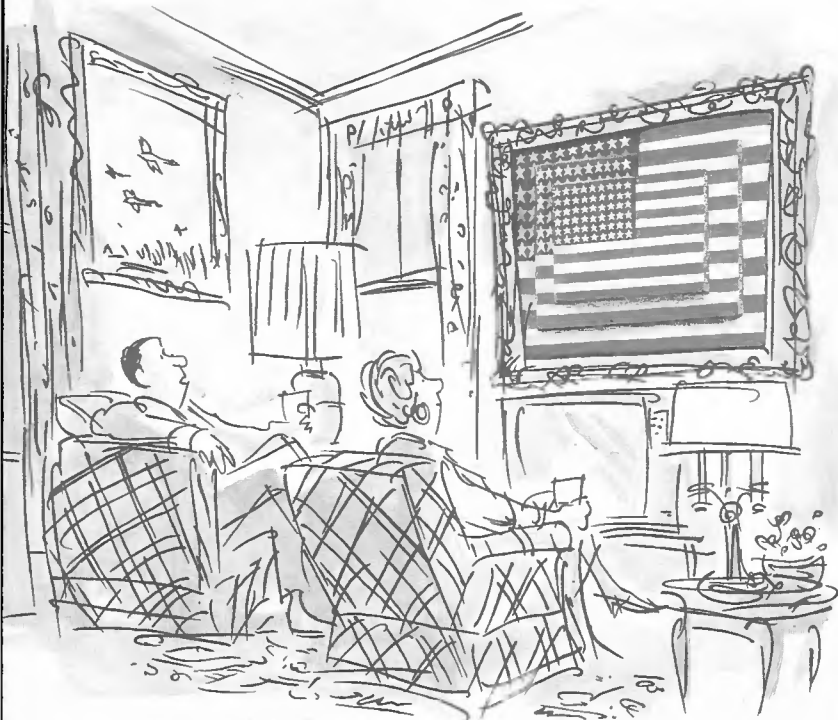
Marlene Dumas (b. 1953) is another artist who uses pictorial material from the mass media, sometimes in conjunction with collage techniques, as a point of departure. The literary titles are an essential part of the substance of her work. *Martha, Sigmund's Wife* is painted from the projection of a photograph. Photographs frequently lay bare an aspect of the sub-



Installation, 1988 by Han Schuil, Photo Thijs Quispel



If You Go Down in the Woods Today, 1987, installation by Fortuyn/O'Brien (b. 1959 and 1953–1988)



"If that were a Jasper Johns, dear, we could sell it for three million dollars."

ect's emotional life of which he or she is unaware. Dumas regards the photographic models as anonymous material from which she excises, like a surgeon, the hidden psychological dimensions and presents them to the viewer under a magnifying glass.

the object-like paintings of Han Schuil (b.1959) and their unusual mounts of tin and wood, while specific and tangible, are at the same time somehow elusive abstractions evaporating into transparency. His starting point is always direct observation, but this is rendered indistinct and prompts an indescribable feeling, a sensation of speed and of space.

Fotografia Buffa

The busy port city of Rotterdam now seriously rivals the more celebrated Amsterdam as a cultural centre. The city's distinctive artistic climate is graphically conveyed in the name and the 'over-designed' products of *Hard Werken*, a Rotterdam designers' collective.

Photographers, in particular, are in the forefront of developments in the arts. The photographic gallery *Perspectief*, which publishes a magazine of the same

name and '*ZIEN Magazine: The Precious Picture Paper*' (edited by Van der Kaap and designed by *Hard Werken*), are at the heart of the 'staged photography' of *Fotografia Buffa*, a group of art photographers who have raised photography from the lowly status of non-art and whose work now features in exhibitions of contemporary art. The traditional view of the camera as a dependable, truthful recorder of reality has been undermined by the manipulations of these photographers. The camera has become literally obscure, a magic lantern that creates fiction: a dream box. Their photos are slices of consciousness, daydreams and fantasies, sometimes in a film setting. In many of them, pop music seems to have found a plastic equivalent. The technique of staged photography has much in common with the animation techniques used in the television and pop video industry.

Lydia Schouten (b. 1948) seems to be the photographer most directly influenced by the oracle of Post-Modernism, the French theorist Baudrillard. Her photo series and videos are a thematic treatment of the hyper-realism of the modern media, the enervating, narcotic effect of round-the-clock television that super-

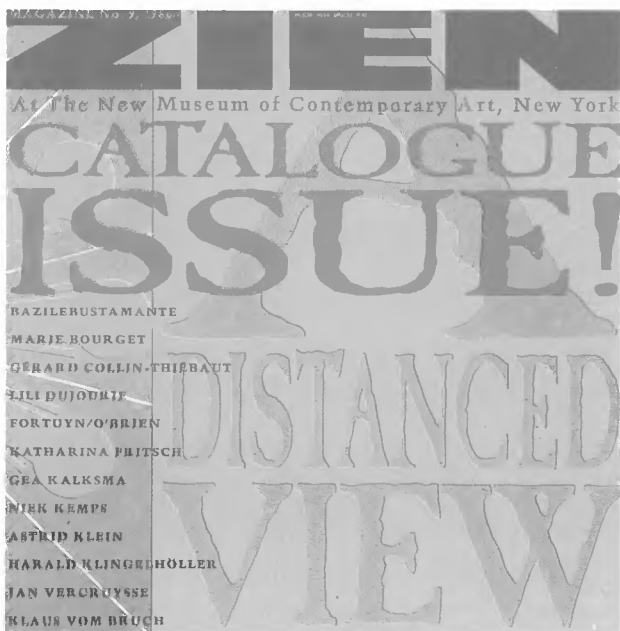
sedes the mundane reality of everyday life.

Henk Tas (b. 1949) invests the glamour of the media with sardonic undertones. He mounts his photos in seemingly primitive frames, and chooses such subjects as the Everly Brothers, for whose fan club magazine he has long designed the cover, Elvis Presley and comic strip figures. His photos are modern-day parables of evil in which belief, hope and stardom are turned inside out to show the bleaker aspects concealed within. The compulsive 'fun' of the entertainment industry is unmasked in its full defeatism: *fun is all there is*.

Rommert Boonstra (b. 1942) uses the camera lens for science fiction-type expeditions in the microworld of plastics and paper, revealing unsuspected interiors of eastern palaces and monumental structures.

The majority of these artists are active in such diverse fields as pop music, video, design, computer photography, performance, and so on. 'Showman of the Arts' *Wunderkind Kaap* (b.1959), a singer and songwriter for *Save the Robots*, is also one of the masterminds behind *Rabotnik TV*, an Amsterdam cable TV station presenting a weekly cultural programme for young people which can best be described as *art-info-*

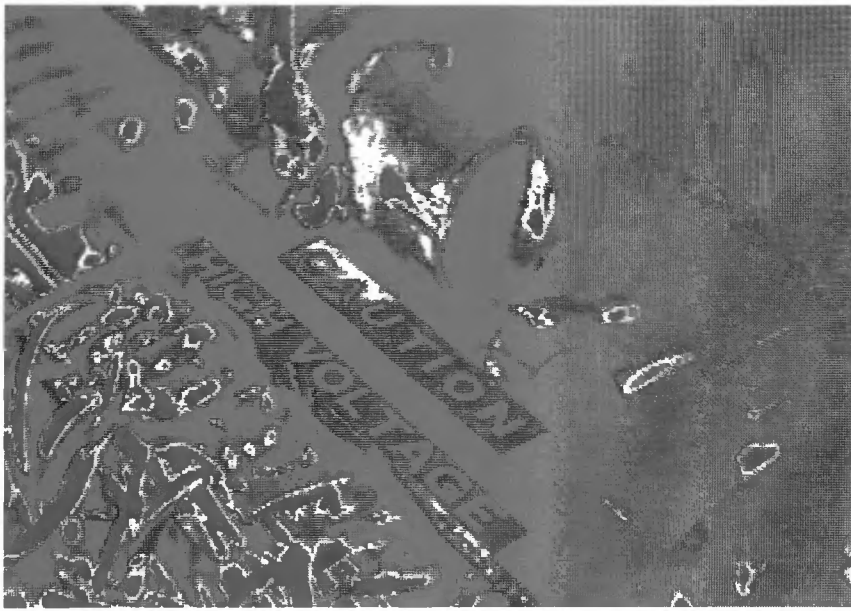
If This Were, 1988, acrylic on linen by Rob Scholte (b. 1955), 175 x 175 cm, courtesy of Galerie, Amsterdam



tainment or art television. Though some of the programmes are vacuous, inducing only boredom 'at top speed', others are in fact genuine artistic experiments, an area too often ignored by the 'official' media.

Cover of an issue of Zien magazine

Collage of scenes from the Amsterdam cable television station, Rabotnik TV. Digital video stills (computer prints by J. Shaw). Scenes from a number of broadcasts. The Rabotnik team produces a weekly TV magazine programme which lasts for approximately 60 minutes. The content is determined by the personal interests, obsessions or fixations of the producers. Production times are very limited, and improvisation is paramount. The team takes a joint decision on how to edit the films which come in, so the suspense is maintained until the very last moment. Films are often intercut on the basis of visual connections rather than similarities of content. In combination with the provocative underground sound which is characteristic of Rabotnik TV, this formula is extremely effective.



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