

# ARTS TALK

## *Colour Supplement*

Number 4

February 2023

- 
- SUZE ROBERTSON in The Hague
  - GUSTAV KLIMT in Amsterdam
  - RUTKAY ÖZPINAR at Korzo, The Hague
  - JONATHAN NAGEL
  - NICOLE BEUTLER PROJECTS
  - PRINSENHOF DELFT-
  - plus lots, lots more . . .



# ARTS TALK

## Colour Supplement

This month we have dance from Nichole Beutler Projects, the Korzo Theater in The Hague and performance artist Jonathan Nagel. Wendy Fossen was at the Gustav Klimt exhibition at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam as well as the Suze Robertson show in The Hague. The gemeente of Delft has revealed its plans for the Prinsenhof and we finally made it to the wonderful National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. We also have opera with a review of OperaZuid's *Lady in the Dark* tour and a piece on Nederlandse Reisopera's *Die Zauberflöte*. There is also an article on British renaissance man Steve McQueen's installation at The Depot at Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam.



Contributors this month include:-

**Astrid BURCHARDT**

**Wendy FOSSEN**

**Michael HASTED**

Cover shows painted figure heads at  
the National Maritime Museum in  
Amsterdam

Photo by Michael Hasted

# Contents



**Suze Robertson** at Panorama Mesdag  
in The Hague

p.4

**Paul DD Smith**  
at 1646 Art Space  
in The Hague

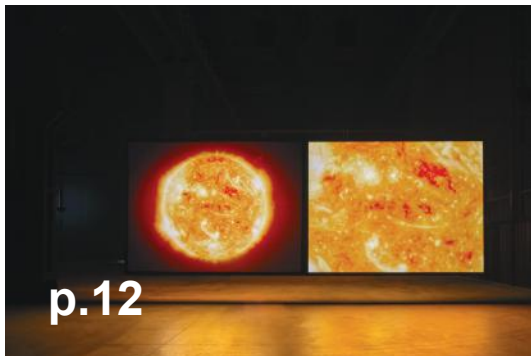


p.7



p.8

OperaZuid's *Lady in the Dark*



p.12

**Steve McQueen** at The Depot



p.14

**Gustav Klimt** at Van Gogh  
Museum in Amsterdam



p.18

National Maritime Museum



p.22

New plans for **Prinsenhof**  
in Delft



p.26

Nederlandse Reisopera's  
*Die Zauberflöte*

**Jonathan Nagel**

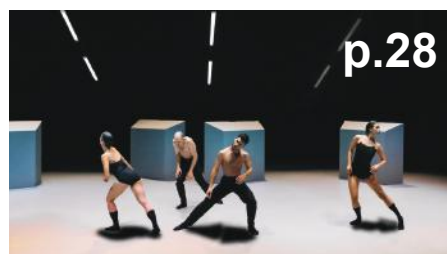


p.30



p.32

Nicole Beutler Projects  
*8: Metamorphosis*



p.28

*Work Line* at the Korzo Theater  
in The Hague









# SUZE ROBERTSON

at Panorama Mesdag in The Hague

Wendy FOSSEN

In the 19th century it was still practically impossible for women to become artists. Thanks to painters Sientje van Houten (1834-1909) and Suze Robertson (1855-1922) the way was paved for later generations. Being close friends, it is no surprise that Van Houten bought Robertson's work when she and her husband, Hendrik Willem Mesdag, founded their collection, part of which is located at the Panorama Mesdag Museum.

After her death Suze Robertson was quickly forgotten, even though she had played an important role in modern Dutch art. Her work was bold and expressive compared to her male colleagues who were part of The Hague school of painting. Instead of finely painted fishing boats at sea, ducks in the ponds or sheep in a meadow, Robertson painted ordinary women at work. I would therefore strongly suggest to visit the permanent collection at the Panorama Mesdag Museum before you go to the Suze Robertson exhibition, I promise you will be swept off your feet!



More than seventy works of Robertson, some of which haven't been shown before, have been brought together by the museum for the first solo exhibition in forty years. Robertson died 100 years ago and this commemorative show also presents the research conducted in the past decade, revealing more about her personal life thanks to the opening of the Robertson family archives.

Growing up without a mother is always difficult but for Robertson life took a turn for the better when she was sent to her art loving aunt and uncle who stimulated her talent for drawing. She attended the teacher training course at the The Hague Art Academy and when she left school her art teacher gave her painting materials stressing she should become an independent painter and not waste her life as an art teacher. However, her father didn't have enough money to set her up so she moved to Rotterdam to start teaching.

With some difficulty she found herself a job at a secondary school teaching girls who were not much younger than herself. In her free time she enrolled in the art academy of Rotterdam but was banned from taking model classes since women were not allowed study the male nudes. However, this didn't put her off and Robertson became a member. A smart move because being a member you were allowed to attend all classes so she had to be accepted. This caused quite a stir since it was deemed inappropriate for a female teacher to take model classes, who knows what she is going to teach her students!

Five years later she found a better paid teaching job in Amsterdam and she enrolled in the evening classes of the Art Academy of Amsterdam. Her uniqueness was noticed by the director, August Allebé, and he advised her to go back to The Hague to settle as an independent artist. In the 1880-1890s her hometown was still the centre of the arts in The Netherlands.

She was 27-years-old and ready to jump into the deep end. So she gave up her well paid teaching job even though she had never painted a painting before!

Her family and friends were aghast and thought she was reckless giving up her stable life. But headstrong as she was she chose to become a professional painter.

She settled in a one room apartment and became a member of Pulchri Studios, a male dominated institute. Only ten percent of the members were women and they were expected to behave modestly and stay in the background. This is where she met Sientje van Houten, who was married to Hendrik Willem Mesdag, both being founding members of Pulchri.

Of course, Robertson didn't sit quietly in the corner, she manifested herself and had to fight to be acknowledged. Her skills were appreciated, but her work was frowned upon.

The themes Robertson covered were atypical for women at the time, no cats like Henriette Ronner Knip, no portraits like Thérèse Schwartze (although both were extremely successful in their genres), Robertson painted the harsh life of working women, similar to the fishing



women of Jozef Israels. Her expressive brush strokes however, might bring the work of Antonio Mancini to mind.

Her colour palette is also much darker than Israels' and might remind you of the early work of Van Gogh, or maybe you could say Van Gogh's work looks like that of Suze Robertson.

Although highly appreciated by the avant-garde, many gallery owners tried to convince her to paint beautiful faces rather than those of ordinary women. Her reply was always, 'If you don't like it, I'll take it elsewhere,' and she did.

Her work was also criticized by the art critics for not being mainstream but most of all because she was an independent woman who followed her own path in her life and her work.

This exhibition runs until 5th March at the Panorama Mesdag Museum, so you can kill two birds with one stone: visit the unique panorama of Scheveningen and pay tribute to one of The Hague's most talented female painters, Suze Robertson □

# Paul DD Smith

# THE CHIRAL GATE

at 1646 Experimental Art Space in The Hague

Stepping through The Chiral Gate, we get a look into the man-made world of vivariums and terrariums, where animals live under the control of humans and humans play God.

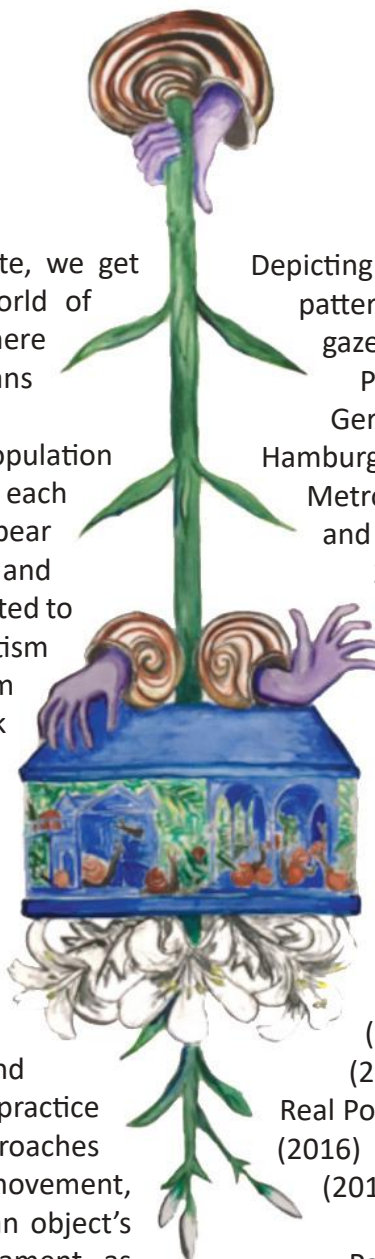
Paul's exhibition introduces you to a population of creeping and crawling creatures, who each carry the ability to both impregnate and bear children. In his paintings, installations and sculptures, the artist combines ideas related to asexual reproduction and hermaphroditism to ornament and symbolism from Christian mythology. This way, Paul's work stimulates an exploration of current prevalent notions of sexuality, gender and power, with the intention to open up new ways of thinking.

This exhibition was made possible by Kinderhook & Caracas and IFA Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen.

Paul engages in hand crafts like ceramics, silk painting, embroidery and printmaking. He approaches his artistic practice in a way that reminds us of the haptic approaches of Jugendstil and the Arts and Crafts movement, in which the ornament often exceeds an object's function. Smith understands the ornament as something that ties erotic forces and by doing so potentially enhances them.

Depicting figures which he veils and frames with patterns and ornaments, Smith channels the gaze while also sending it off on detours.

Paul DD Smith lives and works in Berlin, Germany. He holds a Master degree of HFBK Hamburg (class: Jutta Koether), a Bachelor of Leeds Metropolitan University and a Bachelor of Arts and English Literature of Sussex University. In 2020, Smith received the grant from the Kulturprojekte Berlin; he was nominated for the Hiscox Kunst Preis (2017) and participated in the residency program of Künstlerhaus Vorwerkstift in Hamburg (2016) after he received the grant of HFBK Hamburg Freundeskreis. He has had exhibitions at Misc. Athens, Athens (2021); Stroboskop, Warsaw (2021); CK Offspace, Leipzig (2020); Kinderhook & Caracas, Berlin (2020); ACUD Macht Neu, Berlin (2020); ChertLüdde, Berlin (2019); Kunstverein Tiergarten, Berlin (2019); Galerie Genscher, Hamburg (2019); Real Positive, Köln (2016); Electrohaus, Hamburg (2016) and PSL (Project Space Leeds), Leeds (2012) □



Paul DD Smith's THE CHIRAL GATE runs at 1646 Experimental Art Space in The Hague until 2nd April







# Kurt Weill's **LADY IN THE DARK** by OperaZuid

Michael HASTED

I wouldn't call myself a Kurt Weill aficionado but I have been aware of his music since I was about fifteen. I was also involved with the first ever UK production of *Happy End* at the Edinburgh Festival many years ago. But I have to confess this is the first time I have seen, or heard in full, *Lady in the Dark* which was not staged in the UK until 1981.

First produced on Broadway in 1941, this is very much a musical of that era and in no way could be described as an opera. But that is no reason why an opera company should not take it on and that is exactly what OperaZuid has done, and very successfully.

In a nutshell, the show is about an outwardly successful fashion magazine editor, Liza Elliott, who is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She can't decide which lover to go with or which cover to use for the next magazine. She needs to be more decisive, but can't make up her mind. She sees a psychoanalyst

and *Lady in the Dark* basically consists of a series of set pieces based on her dreams and on-the-couch recollection – the dark being the recesses of her mind. And, in another nutshell, it all boils down to the snippet of a tune which haunts her and which provides the piece's leitmotif. She can't remember the words but the complete song seems to hold the key to all her problems. That song, which we finally hear, is *My Ship* and is really the only well-known one in the show.

As I said, this is really a classic Broadway musical complete with white tie, top hat and tails – and nobody can question its credentials. With a book by Moss Hart and lyrics by Ira Gershwin, it had everything going for it. One wonders why it is not performed more often. OperaZuid's production certainly poses that question.

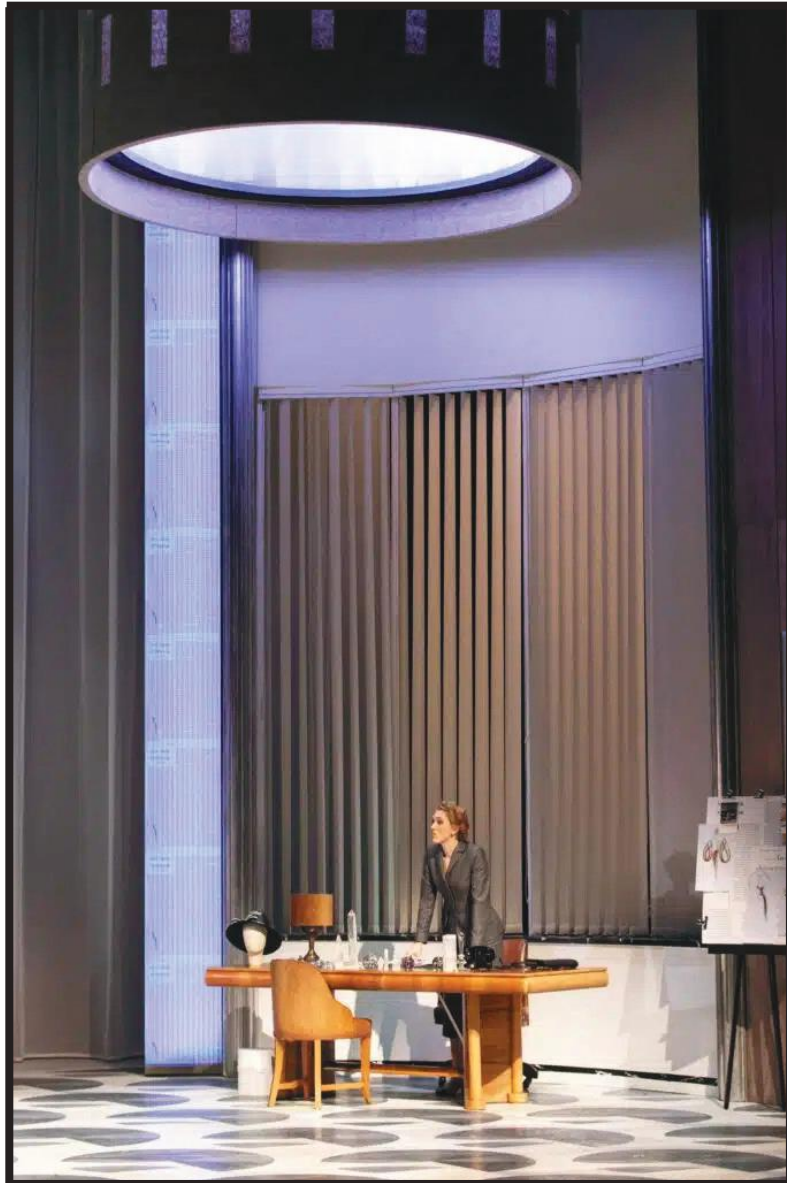
Anna Pool's production has all the glitz and glitter of "a big show" with Madeleine Boyd's beautiful décor and costumes oozing 1940s America. Of all the



*... this is really a classic Broadway  
musical complete with white tie,  
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question its credentials*







set pieces the circus sequence at the beginning of the second half was by far the most spectacular. A ballet was *de rigueur* in Broadway musicals at the time and choreographer Rebecca Howell, aided by a gravity defying aerial silks act by Drea Weber, undoubtedly provided the high-spot of the evening.

The strong cast was led by Maartje Rammello as the self-doubting magazine editor. She was totally believable and sang and acted convincingly. All the men were excellent but for me it was Simon Butteriss, in numerous guises, who was outstanding.

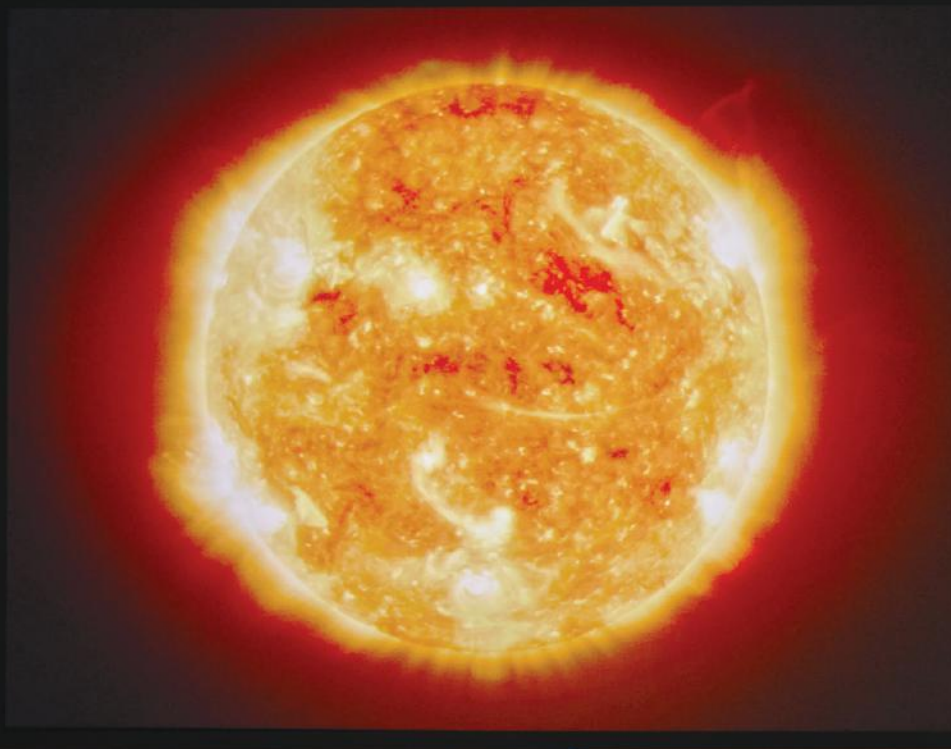
In the pit, the Philharmonie Zuidnederland under the baton of David Stern produced all the authentic sounds and Ms Pool's direction set and maintained a steady pace throughout. Kurt Weill's work, with or without Bertold Brecht, is a little out of fashion at the moment. OperaZuid's *Lady in the Dark*, a co-production with Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, could well spark a revival □



**Steve McQueen's**

# **SUNSHINE STATE**

**at The Depot, Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam**

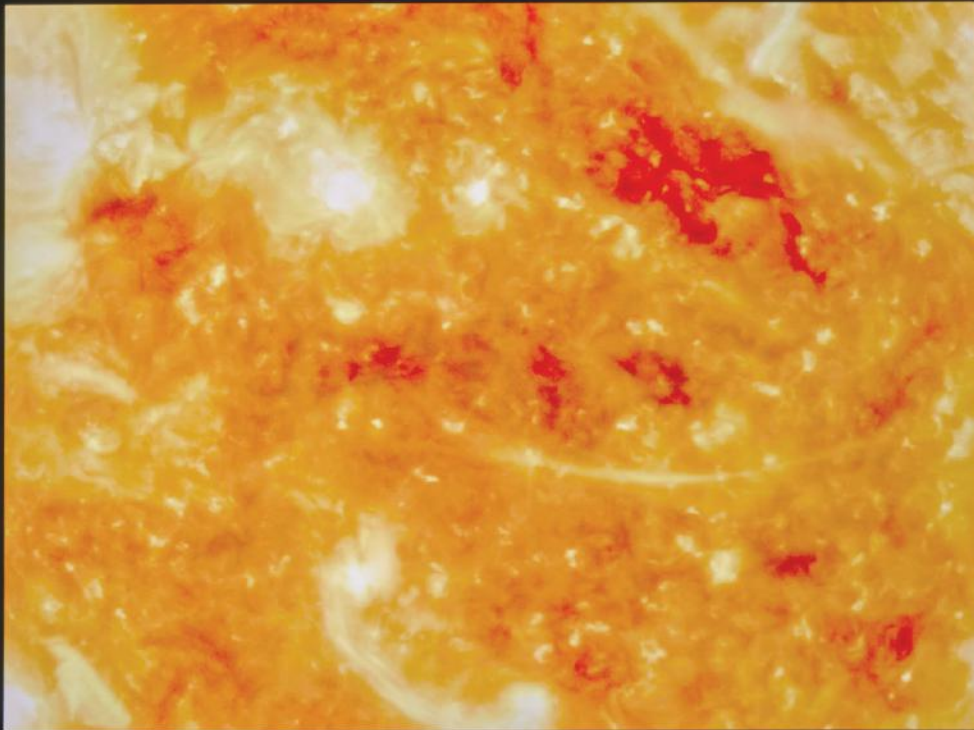


**T**he International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) presents *Sunshine State* by Steve McQueen commissioned by IFFR. The work is presented in collaboration with The Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen where it can be seen until 12th February.

*Sunshine State* is the latest work by British Oscar-winning filmmaker and Turner Prize-winning artist Steve McQueen. It is the first exhibition to be presented in the main hall on the fifth floor in The Depot since the

ground-breaking building opened in November 2021. The presentation, part of IFFR's Art Directions program, is made possible by Stichting Droom en Daad.

*Sunshine State* is McQueen's first new installation since his *Year 3* artwork at Tate Britain which was shown in in 2019. *Sunshine State* is a multi-channel video project consisting of two screens placed side by side. The work starts with a blazing sun unravelling, while alongside it, images appear and are analyzed from the



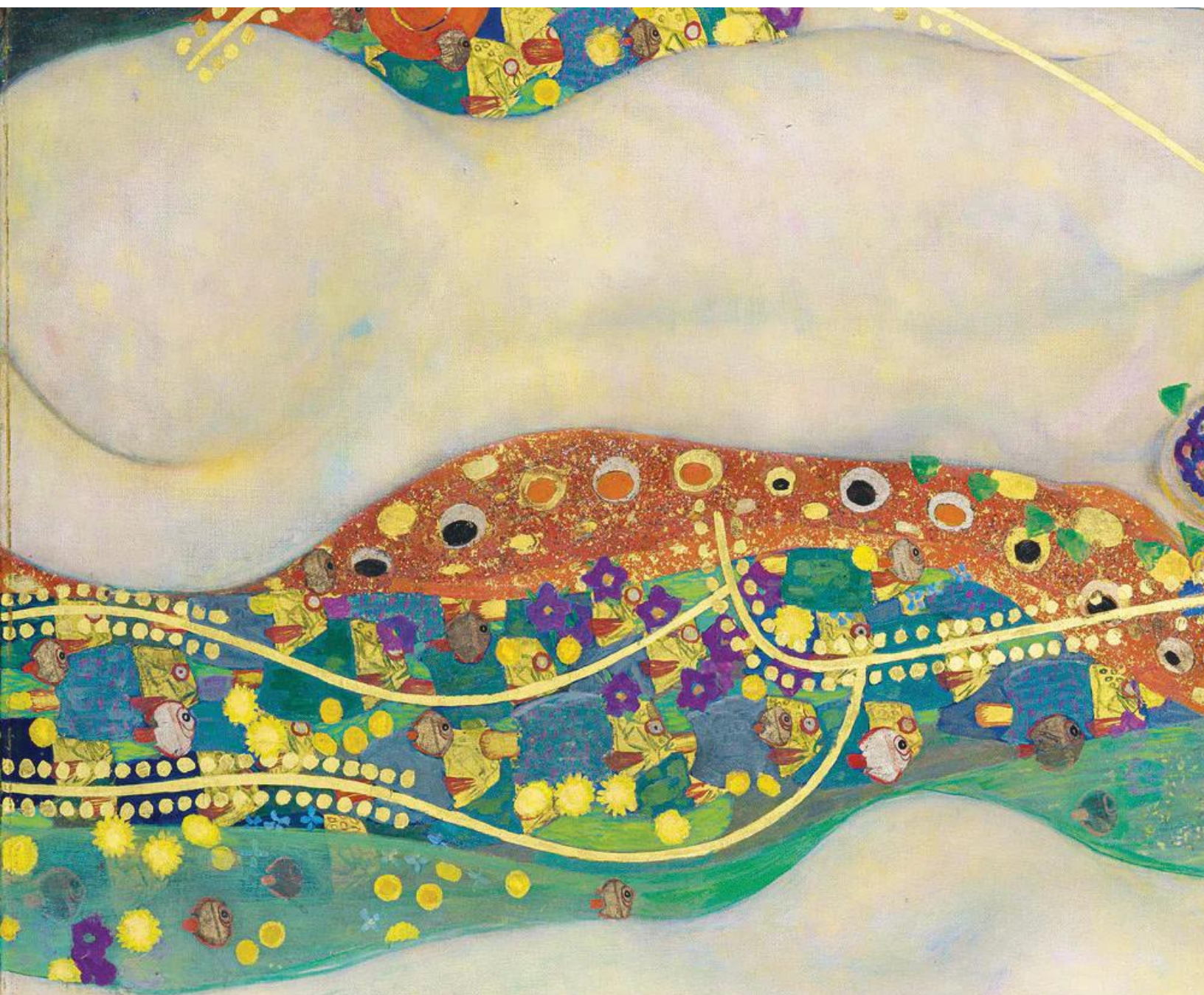
musical drama *The Jazz Singer* (1927), starring famed singer Al Jolson. The film is known as the first "talkie" in cinema history that used synchronized dialogue.

IFFR director Vanja Kaludjercic: "We are looking forward to the presentation of Steve McQueen's latest artwork *Sunshine State*, which we had commissioned for our 50th edition. McQueen is an uncompromising artist and filmmaker who shares our vision of all that cinema can be. The spectacular Depot in Rotterdam is

a fitting location for this monumental work that invites the audience for a moment of reflection."

Boijmans director Ina Klaassen: "The large hall on the fifth floor in The Depot is being inaugurated as an exhibition space in a very special and spectacular way with Steve McQueen's installation. It is fantastic that we are part of this international Rotterdam collaboration of the IFFR, Stichting Droom en Daad and Steve McQueen." □







# **GOLDEN BOY GUSTAV KLIMT**

at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam

Wendy FOSSEN





If you expect to see Klimt's "golden" paintings like *The Kiss* or the *Adèle Bloch-Bauer I* at the exhibition *Golden Boy Gustav Klimt* at the Van Gogh Museum, you will be disappointed. There is only *Judith*, which has already been in The Netherlands once, when shown at the Kunstmuseum in The Hague in 2016, and *The Golden Knight*.

You will, however, not be disappointed by the rest of the exhibition. Yes, Klimt is famous for those golden paintings but he only made a handful of them between 1901 and 1909. Klimt is so much more than that as the exhibition proves.

Many people don't know that Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) was fairly conservative on the one hand (he loved the outdoors) but was also considered a radical for wanting to introduce modern art in Vienna. Together with other avant-garde artists like Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, Klimt founded the Wiener Secession in order to break free from the conservative establishment.

The exhibition at the Van Gogh Museum starts with the beginning of Klimt's career showing he painted in an academic, i.e. conservative way. You clearly see the influence in his work of Laurens Alma Tadema, a Friesian painter who became extremely successful in England with his lazy women in Greco-Roman settings. Slowly but steadily the avant-garde art which was shown in the Wiener Secession exhibitions influenced Klimt more and more but he only once travelled abroad, to Paris in 1909.

First, there is influence from Belgian artist Fernand Khnopff who is known for his mystical ladies with a lot of symbolism, resulting in a more diffused way of painting by Klimt. On the other hand, his portraits of the early 1890s are painting with such detail that they almost look like photographs. Later that decade the background of these women becomes more blurred after Klimt saw work of James Abbott McNeill Whistler. The symbolism of Khnopff and another famous Dutch painter, Jan Toorop, inspired Klimt to paint more mysterious scenes where you see nude women floating through space with long wavy red hair, which always reminds me of the Pre-Raphaelite women.

In this period Klimt also decorates the Wiener Secession's building for a temporary exhibition. Knowing that this Beethoven Frieze will be removed after the show, he experiments with a collage technique which is inspired by the Glasgow artist Margaret Macdonald (better known as the wife of Charles Rennie Mackintosh).







For this frieze he makes numerous drawings, proving that he was an excellent draughtsman. A number of these are present at the exhibition showing his preference for depicting women. Some of them are pretty explicit which makes you wonder why women would like to pose for him in these positions. However, this is also the period of women liberating themselves, if it were only for the way they were dressed. Many of them, when posing fully dressed, wore the reform gowns made by his soul mate Emilie Flöge. Admittedly, when looking at the nude women they never look pornographic. They are clearly nudes and not naked women, he kept it respectful.

Unfortunately not everybody saw it that way, for he received a lot of criticism for his paintings commissioned by the Vienna University. He vowed never to take on any more public commissions and dedicated himself to painting portraits (even one of a girl on her deathbed) and landscapes. And that is where the Van Gogh influence shows up, the beautiful *Pink Orchard* hangs side by side with Klimt's *Avenue to Schloss Kammer* and you recognize the thick blue contours Van Gogh also used.

All in all an exhibition worth seeing for it shows you that Gustav Klimt was a golden boy in more ways than one ☐



# The National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam

Michael HASTED

There was a time when The Netherlands was a world power and was home to the world's first and most powerful multi-national company - The Dutch East India Company. Along with England and Spain, The Netherlands colonized all corners of the globe. Between the three of them they virtually monopolized the slave trade. And why? What gave them such power while other, larger countries had little influence outside their own borders? The answer is simple - the sea.

All three countries had large and powerful navies which had easy access to the Atlantic and from there, to anywhere they wanted to go. For nearly three hundred years they vied for superiority, resulting in spectacular naval battles, many of which took place in the English Channel.

The Dutch East India Company, (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC), was created in 1602 and soon became the most important trading company in the world. All because of its shipbuilding prowess and the quality of its navy.

Between 1602 and 1796 the VOC employed almost a million Europeans working in the Asia trade on 4,785 ships importing more than 2.5 million tons of goods. By contrast, between 1500 and 1795 the rest of Europe combined employed only 882,412 workers. The fleet of the English (later British) East India Company, the VOC's nearest competitor, was a distant second with 2,690 ships and a mere one-fifth the tonnage of goods carried by their Dutch rivals.

So, it is fitting that The Netherlands should boast a fine museum dedicated to the ships and the men who sailed in them, bringing wealth and power to this small country.

The National Maritime Museum is one of those museums that is worth visiting for the building alone. The 's Lands Zeemagazijn (Arsenal) dates from 1656 and was originally a storehouse for the Admiralty. At the time, Amsterdam was the largest port and trade centre in the world - and at the time the city was effectively on the open sea. The building has been the home of the Museum since 1973.





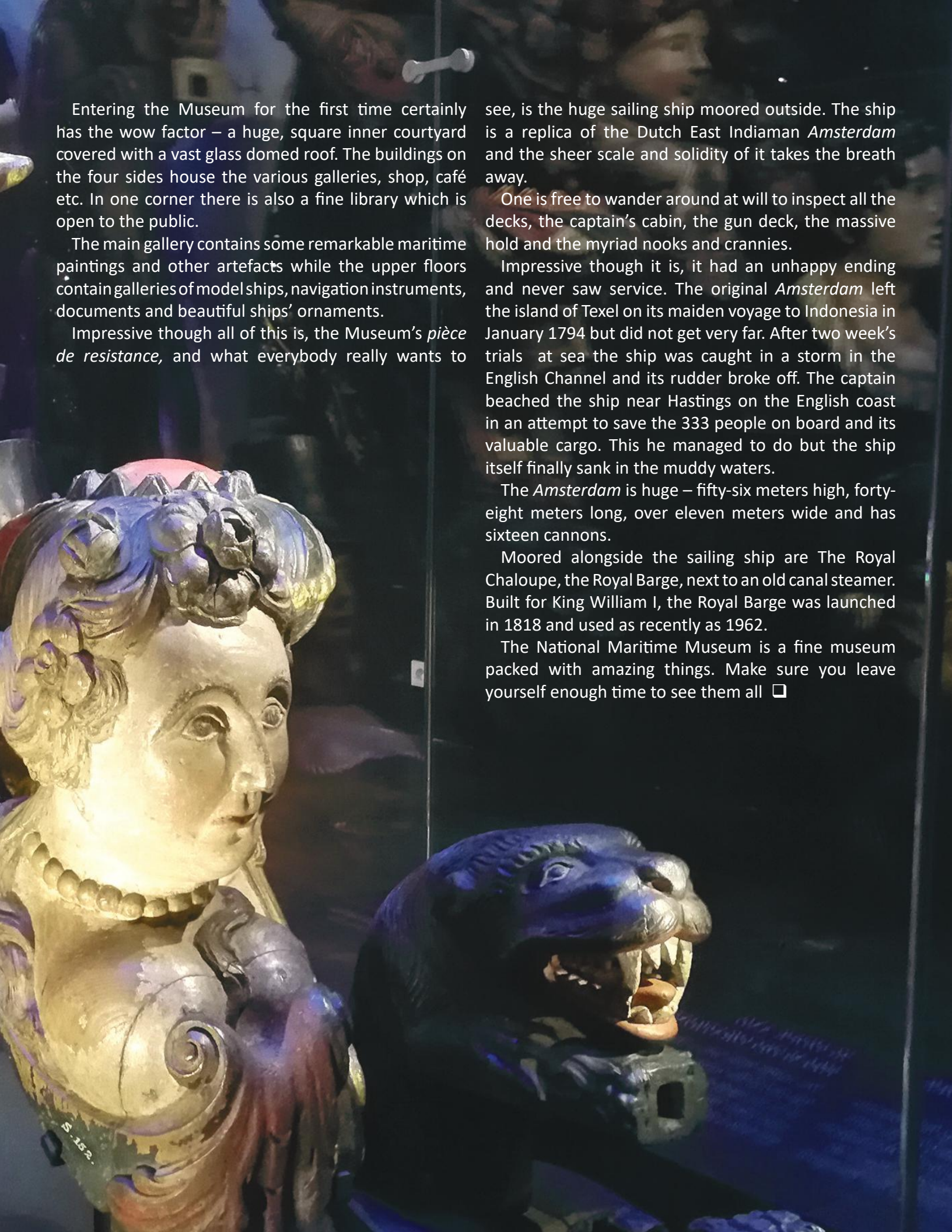


Photos by Michael Hasted









Entering the Museum for the first time certainly has the wow factor – a huge, square inner courtyard covered with a vast glass domed roof. The buildings on the four sides house the various galleries, shop, café etc. In one corner there is also a fine library which is open to the public.

The main gallery contains some remarkable maritime paintings and other artefacts while the upper floors contain galleries of model ships, navigation instruments, documents and beautiful ships' ornaments.

Impressive though all of this is, the Museum's *pièce de résistance*, and what everybody really wants to

see, is the huge sailing ship moored outside. The ship is a replica of the Dutch East Indiaman *Amsterdam* and the sheer scale and solidity of it takes the breath away.

One is free to wander around at will to inspect all the decks, the captain's cabin, the gun deck, the massive hold and the myriad nooks and crannies.

Impressive though it is, it had an unhappy ending and never saw service. The original *Amsterdam* left the island of Texel on its maiden voyage to Indonesia in January 1794 but did not get very far. After two week's trials at sea the ship was caught in a storm in the English Channel and its rudder broke off. The captain beached the ship near Hastings on the English coast in an attempt to save the 333 people on board and its valuable cargo. This he managed to do but the ship itself finally sank in the muddy waters.

The *Amsterdam* is huge – fifty-six meters high, forty-eight meters long, over eleven meters wide and has sixteen cannons.

Moored alongside the sailing ship are The Royal Chaloupe, the Royal Barge, next to an old canal steamer. Built for King William I, the Royal Barge was launched in 1818 and used as recently as 1962.

The National Maritime Museum is a fine museum packed with amazing things. Make sure you leave yourself enough time to see them all □



# Plans for Delft's historic Prinsenhof revealed



The preliminary design for the Prinsenhof Delft, including Museum Prinsenhof, is ready. The most important starting point - creating an attractive and contemporary museum for everyone, while enhancing the monumental character. In the design, the museum will be more accessible,

sustainable and will have a new entrance. Shutters open and more daylight enters, giving visitors a better view of the monument and the city. Meetings took place in November to inform the council and Delft residents. After the unanimous green light by the city council in July 2021, the design team started with the preliminary





ideas for the Prinsenhof. In addition to the programme of requirements, this also includes the design criteria from the vision for the future for the Prinsenhof area from 2019. The design team is led by architectural firm BiermanHenket and also consists of consultancy firms Huisman & Van Muijen (installation advice), Peutz

(building physics & fire safety), ABT (constructions) and Bremen Bouwadviseurs (calculation of construction costs).

"The preliminary design is a new milestone in the realization of an attractive and contemporary museum," says Frank van Vliet, alderman for culture, among





MUSEUM  
PRINSENHOF  
DELFT

ST AG

Photo by Michael Hasted



other things. "Due to its rich history, the Prinsenhof is one of the most important monuments for Delft and is also a national Top 100 monument. This building tells the story of Delft and that of the nation. Museum Prinsenhof Delft plays an important role as a cultural trigger and for many it is a starting point for a visit to our beautiful city."

"This preliminary design prepares the museum for the future," says Janelle Moerman, director of Museum Prinsenhof Delft. "With the proposed adjustments, we can continue to fulfill our important function for the city and beyond. Monument and museum come together wonderfully in this preliminary design."

"We have tried to make optimal use of the power of the monument," says architect Sjoekie de Bijl Nachenius of Bureau BiermanHenket. That already starts at the Oude Delft. Without intervening in the monument, you are already curious about the museum there. "If you walk along the Oude Delft, you will see through the windows the beautifully lit old ceilings of wooden beams and you will catch a glimpse of the objects on display in the museum."

In other places, too, the shutters open and the bulkheads disappear. "Allowing daylight into the spaces again creates an experience that does more justice to the monument," says the architect. "Light in and view out. Exactly as it was once intended. Not everywhere, of course: not all art tolerates daylight. The places where light is desired and where there is a good view to the outside are therefore carefully chosen."

In the proposed design, the museum will have a new, central entrance in the Prinsentuin, in line with the vision for the future. With this new entrance, visitors can see the monumental complex much better than now. "After the renovation, the route through the garden provides a beautiful view of the monumental facades of the beautiful building. You enter the heart of the complex in a beautiful space that reflects the beauty of the whole," says the architect.

The museum will soon be much more accessible, including for people with a physical disability. A stairwell with elevator has been designed against the facade in the inner garden, which connects all floors in the building. Ramps bridge the remaining small level differences.

To the left of the new entrance, in the Prinsentuin, the twentieth-century connecting corridor will be

demolished and rebuilt, partly with the reuse of the old materials. This is necessary to cancel out the current level differences. As an extension of this, on the Prinsentuin, the museum café will be built with a terrace overlooking the garden. It will be a beautiful place where Delft residents and other visitors can enjoy the garden and this beautiful monument, even without visiting the museum.

The architects are reluctant to intervene in the monument in their plan. "We only make interventions that are really necessary for the accessibility and proper functioning of the museum and as much as possible in the twentieth-century building layer. In this way we keep the older layers intact that characterize the historic character of the building."

Part of the plan is to improve the indoor climate. The exhibition spaces will have a high-quality museum climate. The other areas will have a good living environment. The improved indoor climate guarantees exhibitions with high-quality loans in the future.

Another important aspect is the improved durability. The monumental complex is insulated where possible, the installations are made sustainable and sustainable sources are used. For example, the building will become gas-free and heat pumps will be installed. Materials that are released during the renovation will be reused as much as possible.

The costs are estimated at €38 million. The municipality of Delft is making €18 million available to restore the monument and preserve it for posterity. The Vlek family is donating €10 million to guarantee the museum function of the Prinsenhof. The remaining funding must come from additional funds and subsidies.

In November 2022, the city council received proposals for the preliminary design and there was an information meeting for interested Delft residents later that month. After the presentation, the design team started work on the final design. This is expected to be completed in the autumn of 2023.


The preliminary design is now limited to the monument containing the museum. The landscape architect joined the design team at the end of 2022 and will start in early 2023 with the preliminary design for the Prinsentuin and the inner garden. This must become an integrated design together with the plans for the monument □







# Nederlandse Reisopera's DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE



Nederlandse Reisopera presents Mozart's beloved masterpiece *Die Zauberflöte* in a new, large-scale staging by director Floris Visser. The premiere of this co-production by the Reisopera and the Volksoper Wien was on 20th January at the Enschede Wilminktheater. The tour includes two performances at the Volksoper Vienna on 24th & 27th January and finishes at the Amare in The Hague on 23rd February.

It is 25 years after the tragic passing of the King of the Sun. The Queen of the Night tries to seize power over the world and the entire universe, with disastrous results. Will Tamino and Pamina succeed in restoring the balance between sun and moon, man and woman, man and nature? Can the withered earth still be saved from an inevitable climate crisis or will the children take up the gauntlet?

Director Floris Visser situates Mozart's opera classic in a world in which the balance on earth, between man and nature, man and woman, sun and moon and all the elements, is disturbed. The Earth is heading for destruction: can Tamino and Pamina still turn the tide?

Floris Visser has directed several successful productions for the Nederlandse Reisopera. His *La Traviata* (2017) received rave reviews and his *Orphée et Eurydice* (2015) was even voted Opera of the Year by Place de l'Opera. □



# Rutkay Özpinar's **WORK LINE**

at the Korzo Theater in The Hague

**A**s humans, we learn to strive for success and perfection. What does this drive for achievement do to us? The patterns we move in that lead to success bring satisfaction, but as soon as we fail to achieve it, we find it hard to accept. We are shaped by imposed structures.

In *Work Line*, Rutkay Özpinar brings to life this tension between our instinct and what we have been taught into a dynamic spectacle. Four dancers end up in a world where they are confronted with these imposed structures. How do they deal with this and what role does instinct play? □

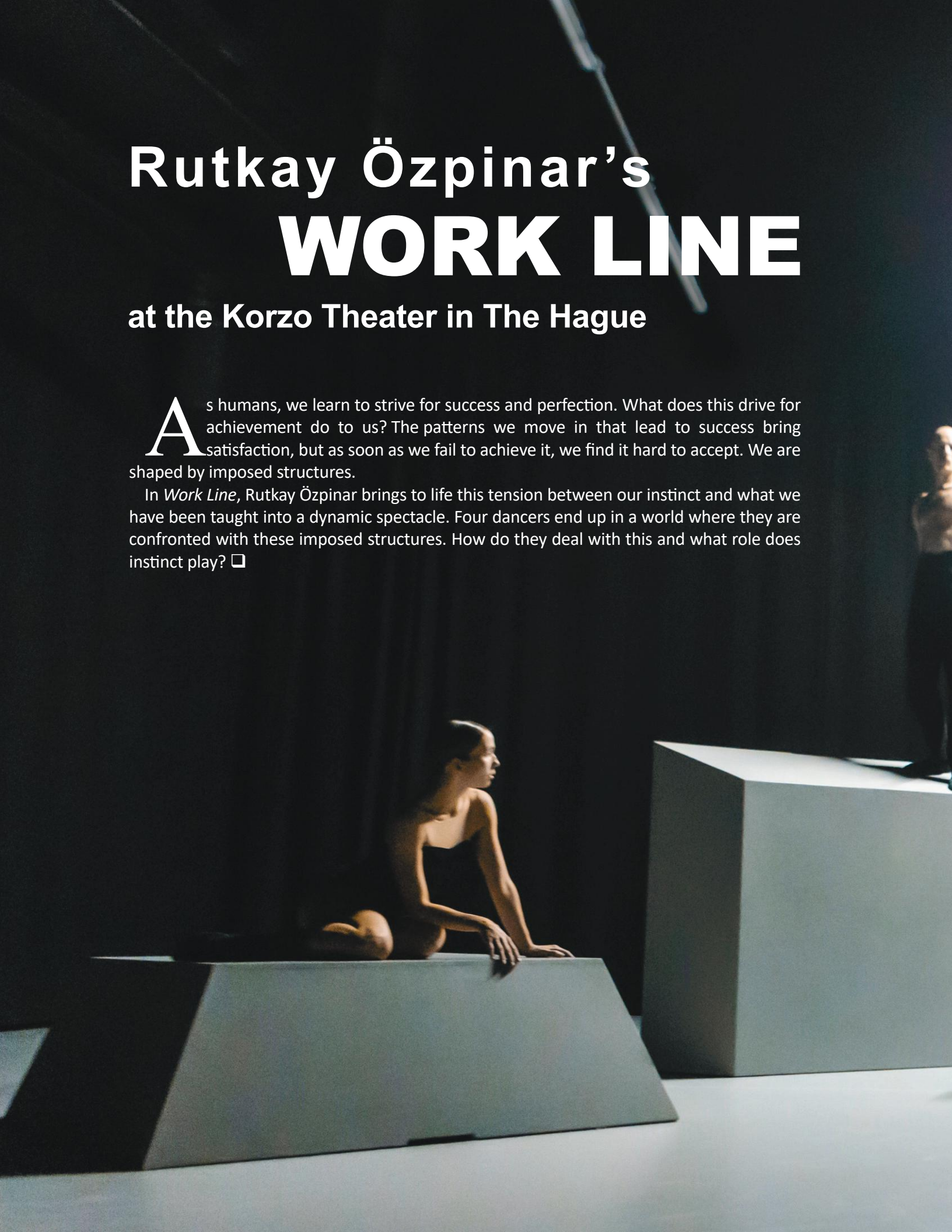






Photo by Joris-Jan Bos





# Jonathan Nagel's *eventual* in Amsterdam

Michael HASTED

The double bass is a sad instrument in many ways - slow, heavy and always standing, albeit tall, at the back. But in the hands of Jonathan Nagel, in his piece entitled *eventually*, the instrument comes alive, asserts itself, revealing its inner depths and possibilities.

Jonathan's act consists of him playing his bass, fed through an array of effects pedals, while three female dancers interpret the sounds and Mr Nagel's poems. The performance area is marked by a rough oval of strips of tiny LED lights in which the dancers perform while the audience sits around the performance area. The LEDs are the only light source and their changing intensity enables subtle changes of mood as the piece unfolds. Although Jonathan and his bass are still at the back, hidden in the shadows, the sounds that emerged flouted the idea that the instrument is only ever there for support and stability. The bass is the engine room, the foundation on which any band or orchestra stands and, like the ugly duckling, under Jonathan's bow the instrument emerges and demonstrates its beauty and asserts itself in all its glory. Sometimes like a roaring wild beast, sometimes shrieking like a banshee, the sounds he produces are amazing, they vibrate and penetrate your whole body.

Jonathan Nagel's *eventually* can be seen at Singelkerk, a magnificent centuries old church in the center of Amsterdam on the 17th February and on the 18th at Bethlehemkerk, a beautifully renovated neighbourhood church in Amsterdam Noord, which now houses a recording studio and provides superb acoustics □



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# Nicole Beutler Projects'

## 8: METAMORPHOSIS

Michael HASTED

The word metamorphosis has a certain ambiguity to it or, at least, different ways of interpreting it. Does it indicate change for the better as with a beautiful butterfly emerging from its cramped pupa or can it induce fear as with poor Gregor Samsa who awakes one morning to find himself transformed into an *ungeheueres Ungeziefer*, a monstrous vermin in Franz Kafka's story? Metamorphosis can be for better or worse.

Nicole Beutler, as part of her cycle about the state of our planet, has her own take on the word. Her *8: Metamorphosis* is billed as a dance opera about embracing the upcoming changes. Now, if you were expecting a bit of *pointe* work, the odd tutu and a fat soprano you'd have another think coming. This piece, as with most of Beutler's work, defies and has contempt for, bourgeois preconceptions. There are lots of ways of interpreting the Earth's plight, myriad ways of looking at remedies, and Beutler has many of them.

As we were ushered in we experienced the first metamorphosis – the stage of Het Koninklijke Schouwburg in The Hague had become the auditorium and we found ourselves, not in the spotlight, but certainly where the spotlight usually is. We were accompanied by a drummer sitting almost in the front row, hitting not only his drums, but lots more besides. As the lights dimmed he was joined by seven young men, all in smart suits, collar and ties who marched briskly onto the stage taking up their positions before executing a series of manoeuvres inspired by the bizarre





# MORPHOSIS

patterns and mathematical impossibilities of EC Escher. The drummer put down his sticks and the soundtrack became a beautiful *a capella* harmony rendition of Purcell's exquisite *Cold Song* from *King Arthur*.

It then all changed again with the drummer returning to his stool and bashing his drums so loud we realised why we had been offered earplugs upon entering. It rapidly turned into a Keith Moon moment with the rest of the performers joining in and wildly attacking the drums and smashing up the kit, scattering cymbals and tom-toms across the stage along with cast-off jackets and ties.

Then the metamorphosis started in earnest with the performers slowly disappearing into the shadows, gradually emerging as exotic and wondrous creatures with lots of feathers, fur and foliage in evidence. Then the gauze that had been the backdrop rose to reveal the theatre's fine auditorium bathed in swirling mist with a lone, dishevelled tree as a sad centre piece. The motley crew of creatures resignedly made its way into the haze until they were consumed by it, leaving behind the debris. And then, from the depths, slowly emerged a polar bear, familiar from other pieces in Beutler's *Rituals of Transformation* trilogy. The white bear, at the same time a symbol, perhaps, of survival in the face of overpowering adversity and one of the animals most at risk from climate change.

Two things are for sure. Firstly, that the end of the world has always been nigh and, secondly, that metamorphosis, for better or worse, is part of everyday life and the world we live in – *plus ça change* . . . ▣



# METAMORFOSEN:

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THE WORLD OF MC ESCHER



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