

ARTSTALK

Colour Supplement

Number 13

November 2023



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Two stories close to home this month, Delft to be precise where we visit a new(ish) contemporary art gallery and a long established museum.

And two pieces a long way from home. We were in Koblenz and visited the excellent Ludwig Museum and *en route* we stopped off in Maastricht and discovered the amazing Dominicanen Bookshop.

Song of the Dark Forest is a brand new piece by Rotterdam's Scapino Ballet in collaboration with Opera2Day and the Doelen Ensemble. Director Serge van Veggel gives us an insight into the production.

Another outstanding dance piece we saw was *Breathe* by Kalpanarts at the Korzo in The Hague. Also in The Hague, at the Kunstmuseum, is a fascinating exhibition contrasting and comparing the work of the ubiquitous Piet Mondrian with the lesser known Swedish artist Hilma af Klint.

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Cover

Breathe by Kalpanarts
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The Ludwig Museum in Koblenz, Germany

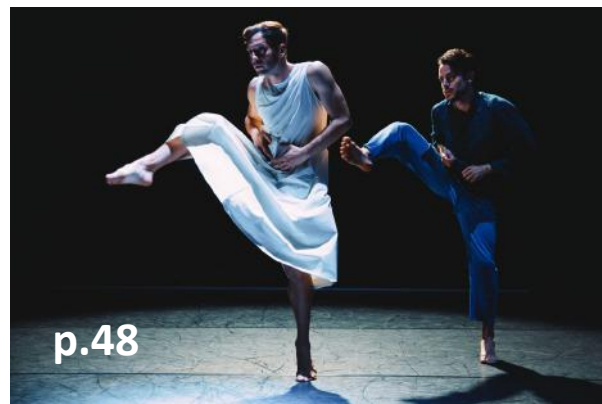
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Hilma af Klint and Piet Mondrian: Forms of Life at Kunstmuseum in The Hague

Serge van Veggel on *Song of the Dark Forest*

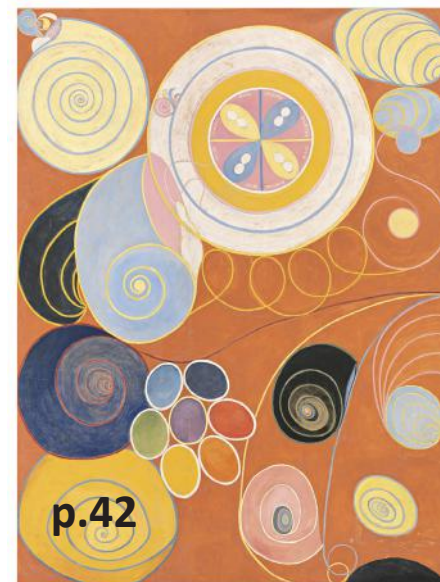


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Breathe by Kalpanarts at the Korzo Theater in The Hague



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The **VAN MEERTEN HOUSE in DELFT**

**The grand canal-side house of a former
wealthy industrialist is now a fine museum**

Photos by Michael HASTED







Delft is one of the most beautiful towns in the Netherlands. It has a network of canals, two magnificent churches and a fine town hall in the Markt. The finest, grandest canal is the Oude Delft and one of the finest, grandest houses on that canal is the house of Lambert van Meerten, which is now a museum.

Born in Delft in 1842, Lambert van Meerten made his substantial fortune distilling spirit. He was an enthusiastic collector of architectural fragments, Delft pottery and furniture with an extraordinary interest in the Golden Age. His collection became so extensive that he had a house built specially for it.

Based on a design by Adolf le Comte and the glazier Jan Schouten, Van Meerten commissioned the house in 1892 to be built on the site of an old mansion where the Spijkerboor once stood. Neo-Renaissance in style, he wanted to create a study place for students of the Polytechnic School who were interested in art. He lived in the house with his sister Dina van Meerten.

Together they designed and manufactured furniture. In his will he stated that the house should belong to the municipality after his death on the condition that it would become a museum.

He collected bits of old buildings for inspiration, to study but certainly also to enjoy. Lambert and Dina surrounded themselves at home with the objects that Lambert had collected during his life.

The house consists of two parts: at the front are the rooms where Lambert received his guests and where the most important part of his collection was displayed, and at the rear were the family rooms, such as his sister's living room and his office.

Both rooms overlook the splendid garden with some huge, fully mature trees. It is perhaps surprising to find such a large green space in the centre of town. From the street there is no hint that there is such a beautiful garden hidden at the rear.

Old building fragments have been incorporated everywhere in the interior: consoles, wood carvings,



It is perhaps surprising to find such a large green space in the centre of town. From the street there is no hint that there is such a beautiful garden hidden at the rear





box beds, tile panels and fireplaces along with wood panelling, mosaic floors and stained glass. Lambert van Meerten clearly did not hide his great love for arts and crafts.

Yet there was also room for modern touches. The house was equipped with comforts such as under-floor heating, gaslight and electricity which was still an expensive novelty at that time.

In van Meerten's office at the back of the ground floor is an impressive walk-in safe which is concealed by wood panelling when closed.

From the moment it was built, it was clear that this house and Van Meerten's collection would be opened to the public. Lambert wanted craftsmen, artists and



students to come and learn about the arts and crafts of yesteryear. They could gain knowledge and inspiration there. The large hall provided space for lectures, performances and concerts. The Old Dutch Room was furnished as a period room.

In 1901 Lambert van Meerten went bankrupt. Thanks to the decisive action of Schouten and Le Comte, who set up a foundation that took ownership of the house for several years, the Lambert van Meerten Museum was built in 1909. He himself died in Delft in 1904, five years before the project was completed

This arts and crafts museum closed in 2013 but has since re-opened. It is only open at specific times so check before you visit



PRAYER BOOKS

**We discover an amazing bookstore
in Maastricht**

Text and photos by Michael HASTED





Wanderlust

MANY MORNINGS



I do know a thing or two about bookshops. I worked for Waterstones for a few years in the UK and I was the proud owner of The English Bookshop in Montolieu, the book village in the south of France. My shop was in the shadow of the village's 13th century church and the small bookshop across the narrow street was actually built against the church walls. I know a bit about churches too. I've seen lots of bookshops, I've seen lots of churches and I've seen bookshops near to churches but I'd never seen a bookshop in a church—little chapels perhaps—but never a church of cathedral-like proportions in the centre of a city. Boekhandel Dominicanen in Maastricht is certainly the most spectacular bookshop in The Netherlands and must rank fairly highly on any international list as well. The only thing I don't understand is why I didn't know about it until I discovered it by accident on a recent visit to the city *en route* to Germany.

In December 2006 a bookstore was established for the first time in Maastricht's 13th century Dominican Church, right in the centre of town. After the intensive restoration of the monument, architectural firm Merckx & Girod designed the interior of the bookstore with 1200 square meters of retail space – in spite of the fact that there was only 850 square meters of floor space available.

The architects wanted to emphasize the height and space of Gothic architecture. They saw the solution for this in a monumental walk-in bookcase with multiple floors, placed asymmetrically in the church. This means that the full height of the church remains intact on the left, while on the right visitors are led to the top floor of this 'steel book flat'. Climbing has been turned into an experience and voyage of discovery. When the bookstore opened it was as part of Boekhandelsgroep Nederland under the name Selexyz Dominicanen and later Polare.

After Polare went bankrupt the bookstore was re-launched as the independent Boekhandel Dominicanen in March 2014. There you will find a beautiful range of books, from children's to art, from literature to Limburgensia and from law to travel. There is a very

large and comprehensive English language section. In 2015 a fully-fledged music department was added on the first floor with an extensive range of CDs and vinyl.

Blanche Dael Coffeelovers, a coffee bar/café was established in the former choir of the church and this area also serves as the cultural hub of the bookstore. Signings, debates, lectures, interviews and musical performances take place there on a weekly basis.

The Dominican Church in Maastricht, the first Gothic church in the Low Countries, is a special building, not only because of its colourful and varied history, but also because of the exceptional ceiling and wall paintings which are of great importance to art historians.

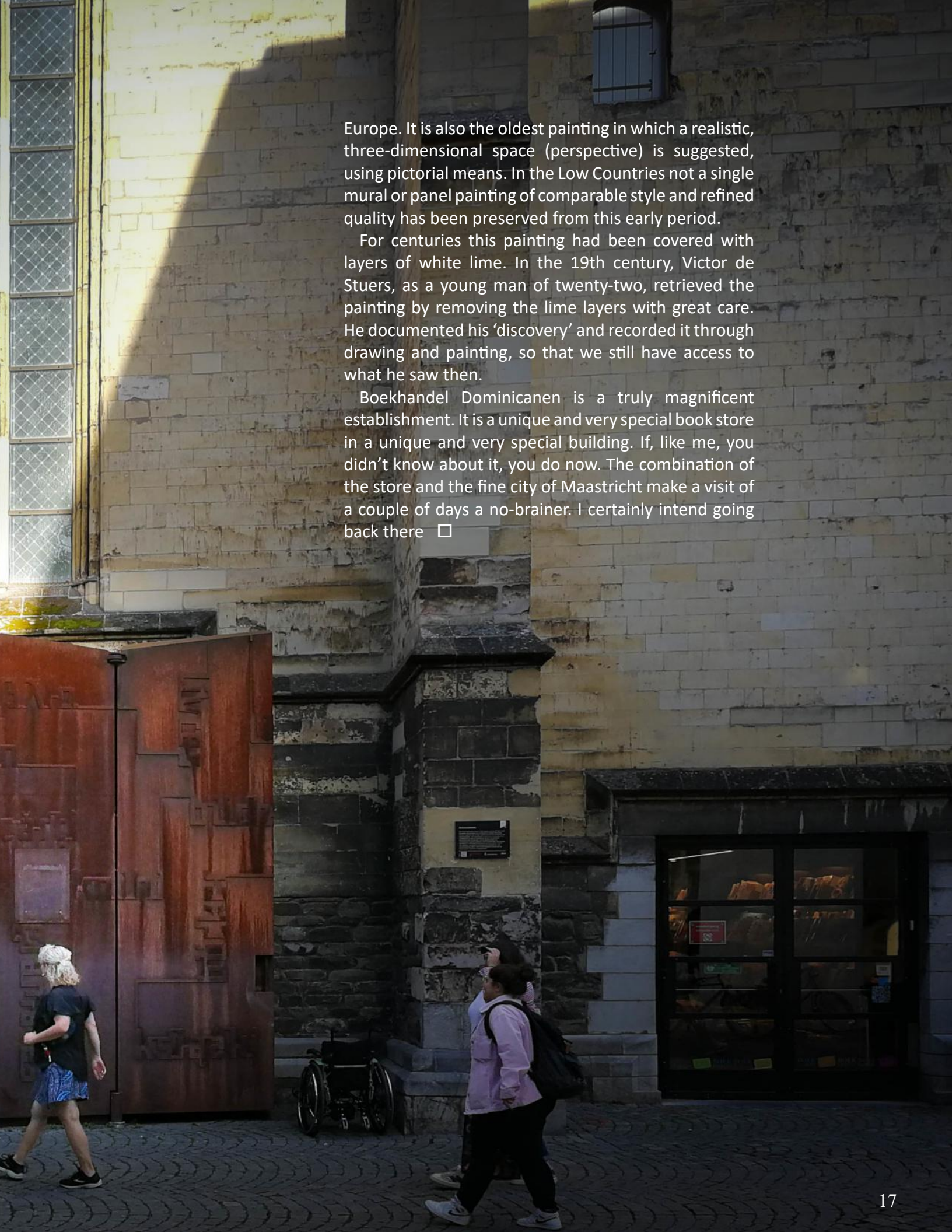
In 1261, the Dominicans were given permission to found a monastery in Maastricht. It stood there for five hundred years on the site where the Entre Deux shopping mall now stands. On 4th November 1794, the French army conquered the city, and in the following years it was incorporated into the French Republic. This put an end to the history of this religious mendicant order in Maastricht and the church was used as stables by the French cavalry.

In the two centuries that followed, the building served as a depot for the city, a concert hall (MSO), slaughterhouse, snake house, boxing temple (Bep van Klaveren), bicycle shed and (children's) carnival temple. Many Maastricht residents remember this as the place where they first 'gepuund' (kissed).

The ceiling vaults of the church contain centuries-old, but also heavily damaged, frescoes. The restorers of the Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL) paid a lot of attention to the consolidation and restoration of the paintings, doing everything possible to preserve them for future generations. The ceiling paintings are of exceptional quality for this part of Europe. Most of the paintings are by Jan Vassens and were painted around 1619.

There is a wall painting with an image of Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), painted in 1337. This is not only the oldest church wall painting in the Netherlands but also the oldest image of Saint Thomas Aquinas in





Europe. It is also the oldest painting in which a realistic, three-dimensional space (perspective) is suggested, using pictorial means. In the Low Countries not a single mural or panel painting of comparable style and refined quality has been preserved from this early period.

For centuries this painting had been covered with layers of white lime. In the 19th century, Victor de Stuers, as a young man of twenty-two, retrieved the painting by removing the lime layers with great care. He documented his 'discovery' and recorded it through drawing and painting, so that we still have access to what he saw then.

Boekhandel Dominicanen is a truly magnificent establishment. It is a unique and very special book store in a unique and very special building. If, like me, you didn't know about it, you do now. The combination of the store and the fine city of Maastricht make a visit of a couple of days a no-brainer. I certainly intend going back there ☐





**FUCK THE
DICTATOR**

**ANNE WENZEL's *Carte Blanche*
at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam**

Photos by Michael HASTED

“**F**uck The Dictator” was written on the boxing cloak that artist Anne Wenzel wore when she entered the boxing ring at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam on 14th September in 2019. Her challenger was the then museum director Deirdre Carasso. Wenzel defeated Carasso and won *Carte Blanche* in the museum. Current museum director Anne de Haij is now fulfilling the promise and giving Anne Wenzel complete freedom on a floor in one of the wings and the cooperation of the museum team to do what she wants.

'When then director Deirdre Carasso invited me to fight her in the boxing ring in 2019, I had doubts.' says Anne Wenzel. 'Not only because – unlike Carasso – I had never boxed before, I also think that a museum should mainly invite me as an artist to an exhibition, not to events that have nothing to do with my profession. But a boxing match against the director did give me the opportunity to finally fight my battle on an equal level.'

Carte Blanche (Fuck the Dictator) breathes struggle, protest and drive. Here Wenzel bridges the gap between worlds of art and political engagement. The structure *Under Construction*, rises like a barricade on the forecourt of the museum. (Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, 2023). Wenzel temporarily occupies the museum with flags and protest signs. Once inside, old 'heroes' such as Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Johan Maurits, King Leopold II of Belgium and Christopher Columbus appear to be in a shaky position. The historical figures in this new, space-filling installation *House of Fools*, 2023, are disintegrated and mutilated as if struck by a contemporary iconoclasm. The once glorious past is in ruins. The ceramic reliefs with scenes of violence and struggle, shown in the same room, are based on images of uprisings, demonstrations and state violence, found on the internet and in books and newspapers. In *Carte Blanche (Fuck The Dictator)* is also a monumental work *Splendid Surrender*, 2012, (from the collection of Stedelijk Museum Schiedam). It can be interpreted as an indictment against the draconian cuts to the culture budget during the neoliberal policy of then minister Halbe Zijlstra, cuts that had – and still have – a far-reaching negative impact on artists and art institutions.

In preparation for the boxing match, Anne Wenzel trained intensively for eight months at the Schiedam De Jong Boxing School. To underline the special bond she built with the boxing gym and its trainers, she recently donated a work that she made especially for this place. The statue, which is a cross between a patroness and a boxing star, has now been permanently placed above the boxing ring. From there she will watch over the boxing gym as patron saint for the duration of *Carte Blanche (Fuck The Dictator)*. The statue can be visited in the boxing gym.

Anne Wenzel (Schüttorf, 1972) makes monumental ceramic sculptures and installations that are shown at home and abroad. She is also actively committed to a better position for visual artists. She sits on various boards and committees, because she believes it is necessary for the voices of the artists to be heard at these tables. In her studio in Rotterdam she is currently working on the Razzia monument, which will be unveiled in November 2023 at the Parkkade in Rotterdam □



Extracurricular

The
LUDWIG MUSEUM
in the Deutschherrenhaus Koblenz

Photos by Michael HASTED







Rafael Canogar
Toledo 1960
Oil & acrylic on canvas



Eduardo Chillida
Abesti Gogrra IV 1959-1964
Poplar wood

The Ludwig Museum im Deutschherrenhaus is located in Koblenz in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Opened in 1992, this was the fifth of twelve museums in Germany opened by Peter and Irene Ludwig bearing the name Ludwig.

The museum is housed in the thirteenth century Deutschherrenhaus between the Kaiser Wilhelm Monument and the Basilica of St. Kastor, two hundred

meters from the Deutsches Eck, the confluence of the rivers Rhine and Moselle. The back of the giant Kaiser Wilhelm monument can be seen on the left on the previous page.

The Ludwig Museum exhibits French art, with an emphasis on the years after the Second World War, making it unique in Germany. The museum collection is on display on four floors and includes works by among others Pablo Picasso, Jean Dubuffet, Daniel Buren,



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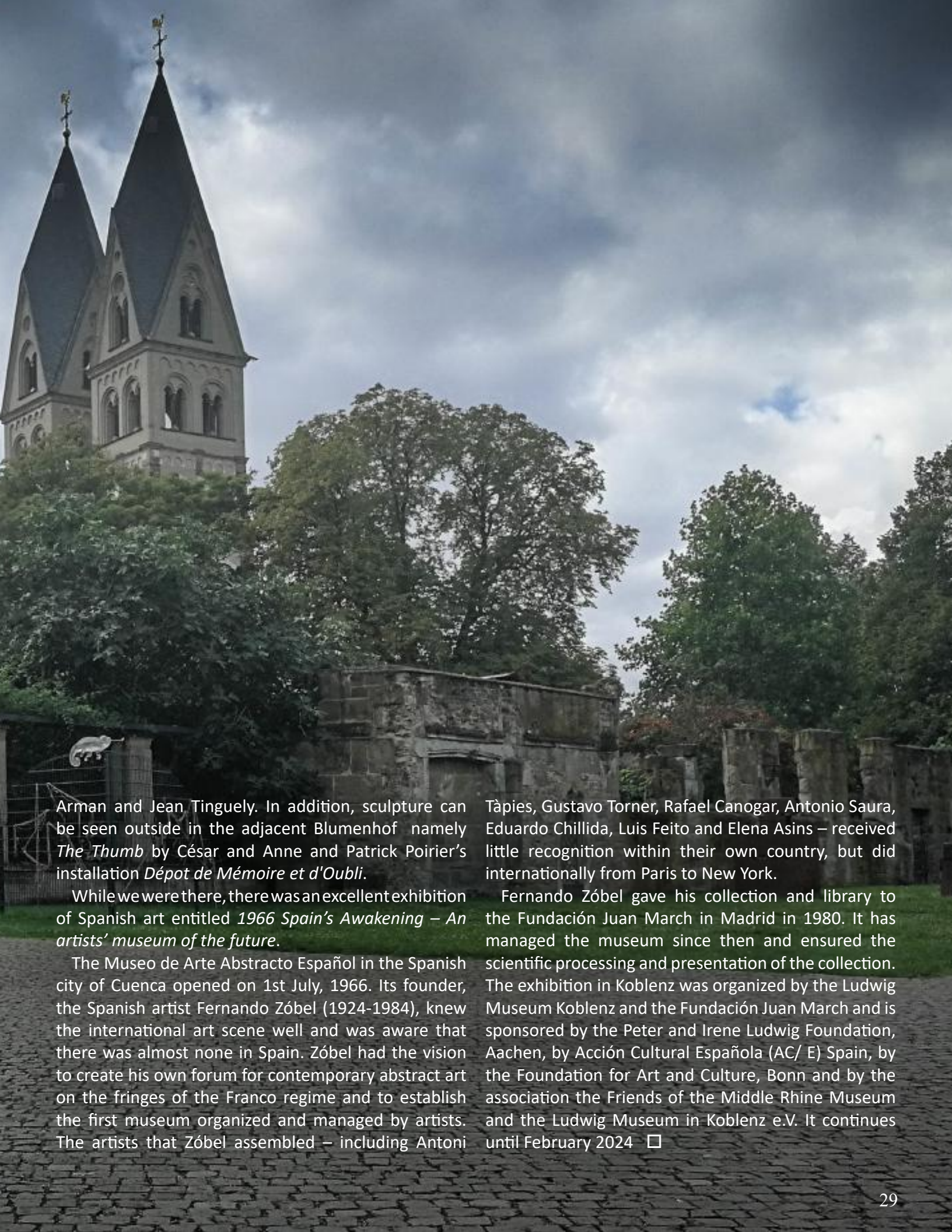




Anne and Patrick Poirier's installation *Dépot de Mémoire et d'Oubli* 1990
with Kaiser Wilhelm popping his head above the trees



The Thumb by César 1963



Arman and Jean Tinguely. In addition, sculpture can be seen outside in the adjacent Blumenhof – namely *The Thumb* by César and Anne and Patrick Poirier’s installation *Dépot de Mémoire et d’Oubli*.

While we were there, there was an excellent exhibition of Spanish art entitled *1966 Spain’s Awakening – An artists’ museum of the future*.

The Museo de Arte Abstracto Español in the Spanish city of Cuenca opened on 1st July, 1966. Its founder, the Spanish artist Fernando Zóbel (1924-1984), knew the international art scene well and was aware that there was almost none in Spain. Zóbel had the vision to create his own forum for contemporary abstract art on the fringes of the Franco regime and to establish the first museum organized and managed by artists. The artists that Zóbel assembled – including Antoni

Tàpies, Gustavo Torner, Rafael Canogar, Antonio Saura, Eduardo Chillida, Luis Feito and Elena Asins – received little recognition within their own country, but did internationally from Paris to New York.

Fernando Zóbel gave his collection and library to the Fundación Juan March in Madrid in 1980. It has managed the museum since then and ensured the scientific processing and presentation of the collection. The exhibition in Koblenz was organized by the Ludwig Museum Koblenz and the Fundación Juan March and is sponsored by the Peter and Irene Ludwig Foundation, Aachen, by Acción Cultural Española (AC/ E) Spain, by the Foundation for Art and Culture, Bonn and by the association the Friends of the Middle Rhine Museum and the Ludwig Museum in Koblenz e.V. It continues until February 2024 □





ARTLINE

A gallery for contemporary art in Delft

Text and photos by Michael HASTED

Being the birthplace of Vermeer and the home of the famous blue porcelain Delft has a rich history in art. Apart from the pottery factory there are several small private ceramic studios/galleries in town and a few small picture galleries. What the city has not had is a gallery dealing in large scale contemporary art.

That situation has now been rectified by Heleen van Haften who last year opened her Galerie Artline in the centre of Delft, a few meters from the Vermeer Center on the picturesque Voldersgracht.

Artline specializes in abstract work by international artists and, although a new venture for Delft, it is not Heleen's first gallery. In 1976 Heleen and her late husband opened a gallery in The Hague, in the Toussaintkade. The first one man show was of American Cy Twombly at the beginning of 1978. Since then the gallery has shown Blythe Bohnen, Max Bill, Enrico Castellani, Michael Goldberg, Giorgio Griffa, Frank Stella, Lon Pennock, Paul Citroen, Sjoerd Buisman and many others.





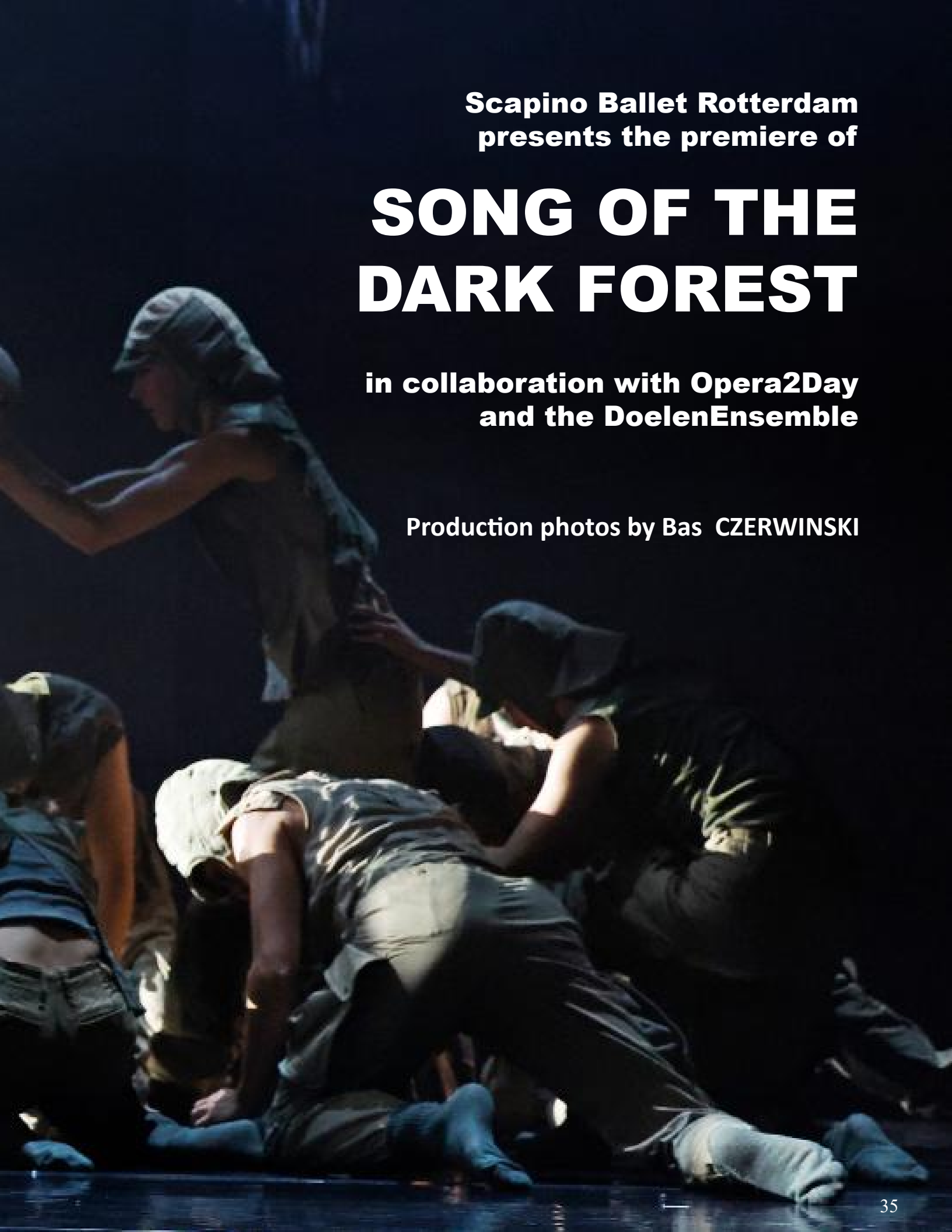
In 1995 the gallery moved to Bloemgracht in Amsterdam and in 2010 to Aalsmeer where it stayed until 2021. Heleen then moved to Delft, where she had family, but it wasn't long before she had the urge to open another gallery and the Voldersgracht premises in the heart of Delft provided the ideal location.

Not only is Artline a gallery of fine contemporary art, it is also a gallery with a conscience. Although there are mixed and one-person exhibitions there is a common theme running through everything that happens there. Heleen is passionate about sustainability and will expound her beliefs at every opportunity. Now, while Heleen concedes that very few people would throw away a piece of art, artists can do a lot to help save the planet. It is not uncommon for artists to recycle old canvases and paint over old picture, but Heleen thinks a lot more can be done. "It's not only the painting itself," she says, "but it must have the message of sustainability. It's a way of thinking that we must encourage in order to change it all."

In the old days artists would use materials that were almost entirely organic. The oils were mainly obtained from plants and most pigments were obtained from plants or natural minerals. But in the last fifty years acrylic paints have become more and more prevalent and many pigments are now synthetic and produced industrially. But even Heleen is susceptible. "Even I cannot entirely avoid plastics," she said, indicating the pile of large canvases swathed in bubble-pack leaning on the walls, awaiting hanging.

Heleen and Galerie Artline aim to be a focal point for the artistic and cultural life of Delft and in pursuit of that she initiated a occasional Artists' Table at the wonderful De Waag, a café directly behind the city's town hall on the main square □





**Scapino Ballet Rotterdam
presents the premiere of**

SONG OF THE DARK FOREST

**in collaboration with Opera2Day
and the DoelenEnsemble**

Production photos by Bas CZERWINSKI



Antidote

Director Serge van Veggel on the creation of *Song of the Dark Forest*

“N ever like this again!”, we say about the great wars of the twentieth century. But again and again we are bombarded by images of trenches, ruins and flows of refugees. The development of tonight's performance started in the spring of 2022, shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And since that moment, major waves of violence have broken out in several places around the world, overshadowed by events in the Middle East which coincided with the premiere. To process the feelings of disbelief and sadness, and to find comfort somewhere for all that suffering, we decided to create this performance: a timeless requiem about war.

We wanted to process our experiences, but we also looked for hope, above all for the war in Ukraine. Where is that hope to be found? This is essential, especially if a different wind were to blow in Russia. That now seems like a vain hope. And that is bitter, because twenty years ago I got to know a completely different Russia. The contrast between my experiences then and the aggressive war of today cannot leave me.

In 2001 I was responsible for the Rotterdam Philharmonic Gergiev Festival. A festival around the Russian conductor Valery Gergiev, then chief conductor of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. That year the festival was dedicated to composer Dimitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975), who, in times of war and Stalinist terror, managed to create an oeuvre that, despite a constant battle with Soviet censorship, provided a personal reflection on his time. For example, on the occasion



Photo by Henk Bleeker

of the end of the Second World War, he did not write a jubilant symphony, but a symphony in which the war haunts him like a nightmare. Shostakovich captured his individual human experience in music. And because his work was so personal, he embodied the experience of millions and brought comfort. It made it clear that behind the face of the regime lay the suffering of an entire people.

The Gergiev Festival started on 13th September, two days after the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, an event

that put a pall over the entire Festival. Yet there was hope: there were pacifist words from Gergiev and many others, and there was a great fraternization of Russian and Rotterdam musicians, also playing together on stage. Shostakovich's music sounded as if we were trying to process our shock and grief.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the fraternization of 2001 has become divisive. We seem to have been thrown back decades in time, with the renewed war rhetoric of the Russian regime sounding like an echo from the time of Shostakovich. It gave me the feeling that his music and story could bring us something again. After all, in times of hardening, shouldn't we also remain open to other voices from Russia? Voices that preach a different message, that aim for a different future. Weren't they always there in Russia? Are they there now?

In my search for 'other sounds' in Russian music history, I did not find a great tradition of denunciation or protest, but in all times an almost humanistic reflection on the individual suffering caused by wars and the great movements of history. Shostakovich

In battle there are heroic deeds, but true heroism is found in patience, love and prayer . . .





stands in that tradition. In all times, the monster of war has been looked in the mouth. This applies to the songs of Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky from our performance. You cannot imagine that after listening to those songs you can still see any heroism or resolution in the phenomenon of war. There was also often a longing for better times, for peace and quiet.

Even today this desire still resonates, for example in the work of Sergei Akhunov. This composer was born in Kyiv (Ukraine), but he has lived in Saint Petersburg (Russia) for a long time and emailed us that he wants to be called a Russian, because he wants to be the voice of another Russia. After the outbreak of war he wrote his *Adagio: Prayer for Peace*. He sent this 'prayer for

peace' around the world, hoping that many would want to perform it, which happened on several continents. We end our performance with it.

Our requiem has been composed based on the collected works. We find ourselves in the metaphorical dark forest that is sung about in Borodin's Song of the dark forest. A destructive 'will and power' is palpable, which has often led to war. That forest may also contain the poisonous Antjar tree that Pushkin describes in a song performed by Rimsky-Korsakov. A servant must fetch deadly poison from the tree for his master, which costs him his life. The ruler then uses the poison against his neighboring countries.

We enter the mind of an 'unknown soldier', who symbolizes people during a war. In all times, all



countries. Our unknown soldier floats between life and death and cannot find his eternal rest, his 'requiem aeternam'. He longs for his wife, child and family, but the life he left behind has been destroyed and only exists in his memories. He lets himself be carried away by his desire, but is just as often overcome by terrifying memories of the battle scene and overwhelming nightmares. He again imagines how death reigned on the battlefield, as Mussorgsky shows in his *The Field Marshal*: this song is the 'dies irae' ('day of wrath') of our requiem. The soldier is ultimately left dying on the battlefield, *Forgotten*, according to the title of another song by the same composer.

"In battle there are heroic deeds, but true heroism is found in patience, love and prayer," is the sound of

Tchaikovsky's *Heroic Deed*. It is our unknown soldier's inevitable conclusion about what he experienced.

Making this performance was a search for a glimmer of hope. And although you will not find direct protest in Russian art, there is a great tradition of the human and empathetic gaze. The works of this performance emerged from that spirit. We hope that this soft power will also become a more important factor in reality. Also in all other conflicts in the world. There aren't many signs of that, but let's keep hope. Even if only for ourselves. It's like stretching against a cramp: a counter-movement, an antidote. It is reminiscent of the Soviet dissidents who reportedly gave the following toast at the end of their meetings: "Cheers to our hopeless mission!" That's how we now say: "Cheers!" □





Hilma af Klint, *The Ten Largest, Group IV, No. 3, Youth*, 1907, Courtesy Hilma af Klint Foundation

and HILMA AF KLINT PIET MONDRIAN

at Kunstmuseum in The Hague

The paintings of the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint had their first European showing outside Sweden at the Kunstmuseum Den Haag in 1987 in the exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985*, initiated by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The fact that this exhibition presented Af Klint, then a completely unknown artist, as one of the five pioneers of abstract art – alongside Wassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian – raised quite a few questions. But times have changed. Af Klint's colourful, visionary work is now embraced by both the art world and the public all around the world. In partnership with Tate Modern in London, the

Kunstmuseum Den Haag is now presenting her groundbreaking work together with that of her pioneering contemporary, Piet Mondrian. Although the two painters never met, their idiosyncratic oeuvres reflect a period in which scientific discoveries and new ideas about spirituality radically altered our view of reality.

The Kunstmuseum Den Haag owns more than three hundred works by Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). Nowhere else in the world can his path to abstraction be followed so clearly. This year, we are interweaving his remarkable artistic odyssey with that of his contemporary, Hilma af Klint (1862-1944).

Around 1900, a succession of discoveries, such as X-rays, the electron, radio waves and radioactivity,

'Those granted the gift of seeing more deeply can see beyond form, and concentrate on the wondrous aspect hiding behind every form, which is called life' Hilma af Klint



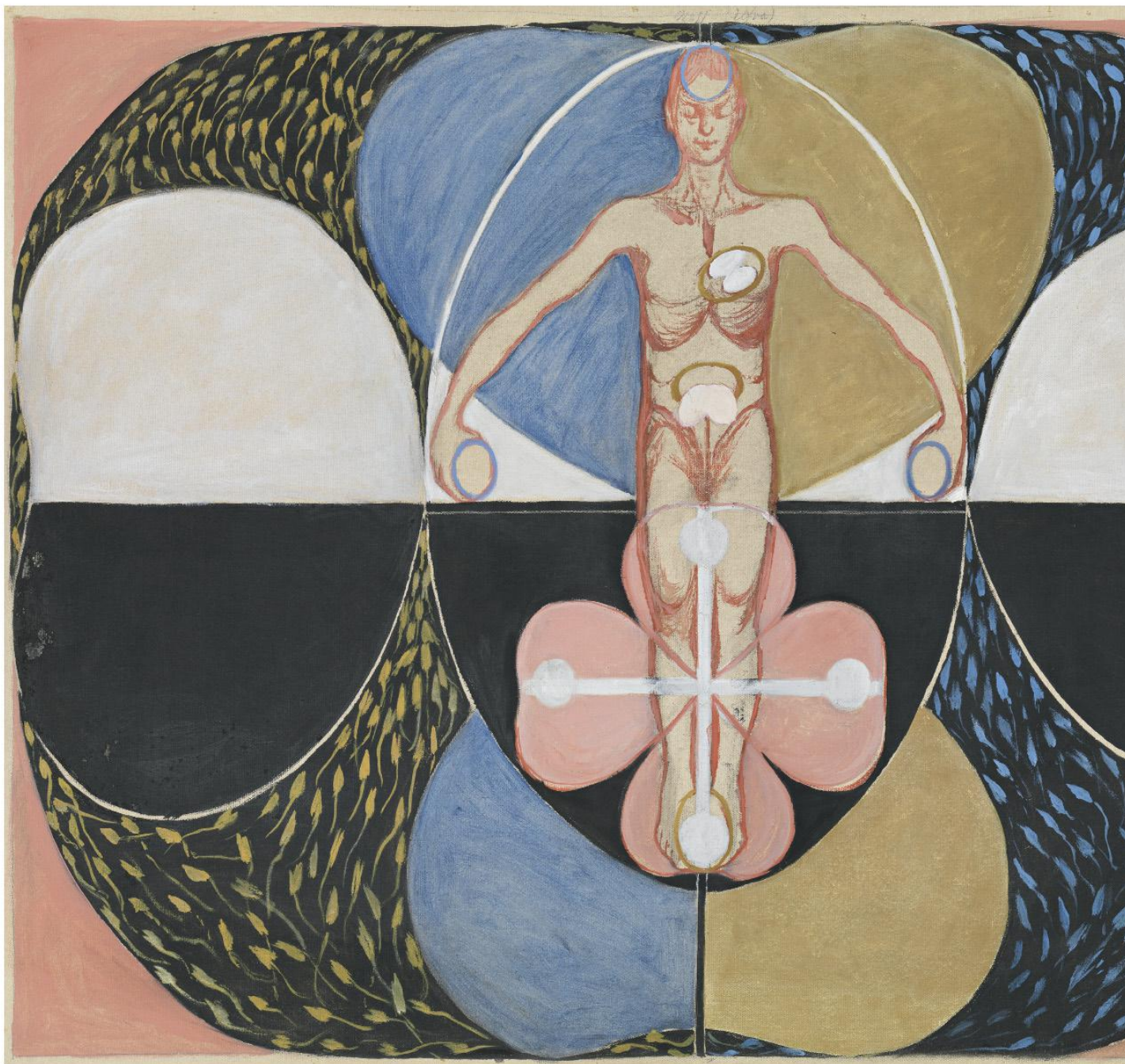
Alfred Waldenburg (1873-1942), *Portrait of Piet Mondriaan*, 1909, RKD – Netherlands Institute of Art History

undermined much of what science had long believed to be true. It became clear that reality extends far beyond the visible and that what we can observe is only a fraction of it. Af Klint and Mondrian developed their powerful bodies of work against the backdrop of this changing world view. They both began as landscape painters and almost simultaneously developed their own highly personal visual languages, moving away from natural forms.

Af Klint, who incorporated abstract elements into her work a little earlier than her contemporaries, developed a symbolically charged visual idiom that includes spirals and geometric forms in pastel colours. Whereas, in many of her series, Af Klint allowed her abstract works to flow from figurative ones, Mondrian arrived at abstraction more gradually. He ultimately developed a universal visual language based on horizontal and vertical lines and the primary colours.



Hilma af Klint in her studio in Hamntgen, Stockholm, 1895. Courtesy Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint, *The Evolution*, The WUS Seven-Pointed Star Series, Group VI, No. 11, 1908, Courtesy HaK Foundation



There are fascinating parallels between their oeuvres, however different their visual languages may be.

The exhibition and accompanying publication are based on new research. This scholarship investigates, for example, how the concept of evolution is central to the work of both Af Klint and Mondrian and how their unique formal languages were inspired by new ways of looking at nature. The two artists' paintings and drawings of flowers, which are usually considered separately from their main bodies of work, are interesting in this respect. Mondrian mainly depicted cultivars such as chrysanthemums and amaryllises, betraying his interest in 'modern nature'. By contrast, Af Klint focused on wild plants and flowers, and even made a survey drawing in which she combined them with diagrams that seem to systematise the natural world.

The exhibition also examines both artists' interest in theosophy and anthroposophy and how these new movements attempted to unite the latest scientific discoveries with a spiritual life.

The exhibition explores Af Klint's and Mondrian's development through six themes: landscape painting, evolution, flowers, trees, the universal, and the relationship to space. This enables visitors to observe how Mondrian derived his forms from trees, piers and oceans, and to experience the rhythm and dynamism of his later grids. Visitors will feel the rhythm of life in Af Klint's 'evolutionary images', series of paintings in which she allowed swans, for example, to morph from cubes to circular composition.

In addition to being an artist, Af Klint was also a medium who claimed that many of her works were commissioned by higher powers. These include her most famous series, *The Ten Largest* (1907): ten monumental works of about 3.2 metres in height, which she painted in just forty days that represent the stages of life from childhood to old age. Visitors to the Kunstmuseum will be able to immerse themselves in the remarkable atmosphere that is evoked by this impressive series full of lively signs, forms and colours. *The Ten Largest* were part of a collection of paintings that Af Klint made for a temple of her own design. In her will, she stipulated that these works could not be displayed in public for at least twenty years after her death. Like Mondrian, she was a true visionary. Both artists made art for the future.

After several exhibitions abroad, it is high time that the Kunstmuseum Den Haag showed her work again for the first time since 1986. *Hilma af Klint and Piet Mondrian: Forms of Life* not only gives the Dutch public an opportunity to become acquainted with Af Klint's work but also provides a fresh perspective on the work of Mondrian, who pursued a lifelong goal 'to make the beauty of life visible, tangible and experienceable' □

Hilma af Klint and Piet Mondrian: Forms of Life runs at Kunstmuseum in The Hague until 25th February 2024.

Breathe

by Kalpanarts on tour

Text by Michael HASTED Photos by Bowie VERSCHUUREN



We first saw the Kalpanarts company at the Korzo almost exactly a year ago with *True Life* which explored aspects of death and mourning. Founded by Kalpana Raghuraman and Gysèle ter Berg in 2016 and based in The Hague, their new work, *Breathe*, examines freedom and how to attain it. Indian philosophy believes that achieving a free soul is more important than struggling to overcome the limitations of day-to-day existence and the act of breathing is fundamental to that. Ms Raghuraman grew up learning various Indian meditation





techniques. “Breath was always at the core. You come to yourself through breathing,” she says.

Although Kalpanarts is essentially an Indian dance company in as much as its founder, artistic director and choreographer is Indian, it is a lot more than just that. If you didn’t know it was Indian, it wouldn’t immediately register. The Indian aspect was a starting point rather than a goal, establishing an intellectual and spiritual foundation rather than a physical stylistic one. There are clearly influences and moves from Indian dancing, a lot of foot stamping and agile fingers for example, but there are many other inputs as well, including a multinational group of dancers all of whom influence and shape what we see on stage.

Breathe begins with the company, five dancers and four musicians, standing silently on the stage, the performance area being established by neon strip light forming a line on the ground



on three sides of the stage. The performers slowly begin to sway and you gradually pick up the sounds of breathing.

Breathe is essentially an ensemble piece but there are several solo sequences and a fine duet by two of the male dancers. The Matangi Quartet were always fully integrated in the action and played a significant part in, what for me, were the two most exciting sequences in the piece. In one, the quartet was centre stage, lit from above in a chiaroscuro tableau. The dancers were in shadow but each moved slowly backwards and forwards into spotlight beams which just shone on their eyes. The other sequence involved just the cello player, also centre stage lit by a dramatic single spotlight, accompanying one of the solo passages by one of the male dancers. The violin is often used in Indian classical music - there is a wonderful album from the 1960s called *East Meets West* by Ravi Shankar and Yehudi Menuhin . . . but I digress. I was going to say that while the violin is not uncommon in Indian music I am not aware that the cello is often used. This sequence was the only one where the music was overtly Indian and the cello with its rich brown tones turned out to be eminently suited. There was some taped tabla percussion used occasionally but it was the excellent original music by Simone Giacomini which provided the cement that held the performance together.

The Matangi Quartet played beautifully but I was not convinced that it was a good idea to involve them in the actual choreography. When you put dancers next to non-dancers and ask them to do the same thing, the differences are very obvious. The four musicians were clearly ill equipped and ill at ease. This did not bother me unduly but would constitute my only real issue with the otherwise excellent *Breathe*.

The décor and often stunning lighting by Jeffrey Steenbergen and costumes by Aziz Bekkaoui completed the package and once again Kalpanarts has demonstrated, with *Breathe*, that the whole can often exceed the sum of the parts □

Kalpanarts is on tour with *Breathe* until the end of February 2024





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