

ARTSTALK

Colour Supplement

Number 31

May 2025



ARTS TALK

Colour Supplement

Number 31

May 2025

The emphasis is very much on the visual arts this month with some excellent exhibitions in Rotterdam, Venlo, The Hague and Amsterdam plus two amazing installations at Museum Beelden aan Zee in Scheveningen/The Hague. We also cover two outstanding dance events - the Dutch National Ballet's *Lady Macbeth* and NDT2's brilliant *Falling Into Shadow*.

Michael HASTED
Publisher and Editor

Contributors

Cicek Isiksel SONMEZ
Eleonora MURA
Astrid BURCHARDT

Photographers

Altin KAFTIRA
Gregorio GONELLA
Alessandro CELLI
Rahi REZVANI

Cover

Timothy van Poucke and Olga
Smirnova in Dutch National
Ballet's *Lady Macbeth*
Photo by Altin KAFTIRA





p.5

Khaled Dawwa and
Anna Oosting at
Museum Beelden aan
Zee in Scheveningen/
The Hague

Contents



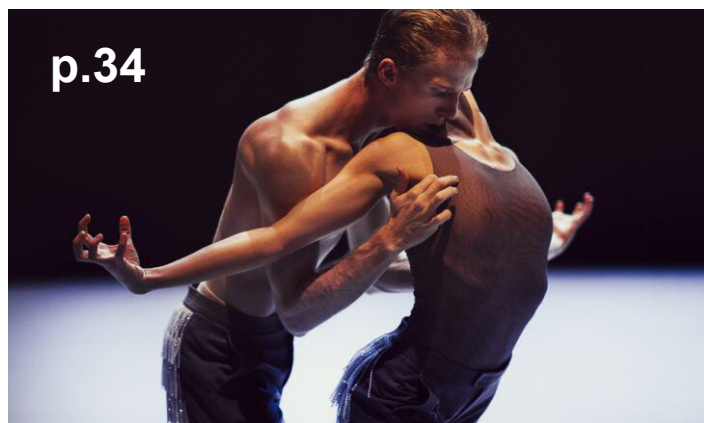
p.14

Dutch National
Ballet's
Lady Macbeth



p.20

Max Pechstein
at Kunsthal
Rotterdam



p.34

NDT2 *Falling Into Shadow*



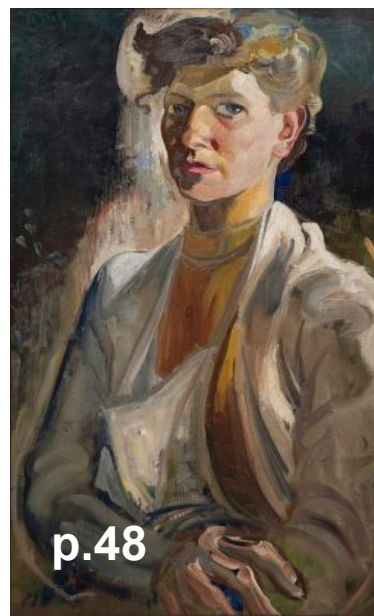
p.26

New New Babylon at
Kunstmuseum Den Haag



p.40


Oltre Terra by Studio
Formafantasma at
Stedelijk Museum
in Amsterdam



p.48

Giselle Kuster at Van
Bommel van Dam
museum in Venlo



The background image is a photograph of a severely damaged building, likely a historical structure, with large sections of its facade missing and exposed brickwork. In the foreground, there is a pile of rubble and debris, including a large, dark, rectangular object with a white, spoked wheel, possibly a cart or a piece of machinery. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, yellowish light source creating strong shadows and highlighting the textures of the stone and rubble.

extraordinary exhibitions at Museum Beelden aan Zee

**Astrid BURCHARDT was at Scheveningen/
The Hague for ArtsTalk to see spectacular
installations by Khaled DAWWA and Ana
OOSTING**

**Photos (except for artist's portrait)
by Michael HASTED**



Khaled Dawwa, born in 1985, began working on a monumental installation in 2018, *Voici Mon Cœur- Here Is My heart* which was presented at the International City of Art in Paris in 2021 and is now showing at the Museum Beelden aan Zee in Scheveningen/Den Haag.

In 2011, together with his family, Khaled Dawwa fled his home country of Syria, first to Lebanon, then to France, the legendary country of artists in exile. Hence the title *Voici mon Cœur* of this exhibition at this beautiful seaside museum. I was not familiar with Dawwa 's work – it is broad and varied, depending on his subject matter.

While in Lebanon, in an effort to preserve his work, he created the Facebook page, "Clay & Knife", keeping his name secret to put on record most of the work he had destroyed in order to flee. Included in the destruction were earlier sculptures such as a series of obese, if not at times obscene old male figures, clearly meant as political caricatures of imaginary tyrants.

It is not hard to see what inspires his imagery. In this current exhibition we see a wall of bombed-out houses – in fact, it shows a whole street that was once a community. As he explains, each house is different, as if originally built by the hands of its occupants as their means allowed and tailored to the needs of a family. In Dawwa's piece there is the stillness of an annihilated town scape and social fabric, the sadness of a lonely grandmother figure slumped on the steps of her former home showing its broken contents to the world, a body split open. She sits staring at the dusty ground, prayer beads in hand.

Is this a work of Khaled Dawwa's imagination? I rather feel it is the ghost of what he experienced, a visual memory etched on his brain. Anyone who was around to see the post-1945 destruction of Europe's cities understands this work. Some four or five years after the end of the war I saw such vistas. As a three-year-old I saw whole sides of houses ripped away, exposing rooms still containing furniture flung about by the bombs. I was especially scared of a large bath tub that stood perilously close to the edge of such a three-walled room, exposed to the elements. My sister and I ran past that house on our way to kindergarten, knowing that the next rain storm would surely fill the bath and send it tumbling down to crush us. And during a stormy night it did.





The saddest aspect of this work is that we know that this very thing has recently occurred, not only in Syria but also in Lebanon, Yemen, Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine. Tomorrow, who knows? People's lives all over the world are destroyed, left to fall into ruin like the rubble around them. And there we were, the Baby-boomers, thinking we would never again see such devastation. Here Kaled Dawwa's creation brings home what it is to lose your home and move from country to country to find refuge.



The Khaled Dawwa exhibition is in a small room at the back of the museum. In the main room is a spectacular installation that fills the whole space. Dutch artist Ana Oosting's *Breaking Waves* emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings, both human and more-than-human entities. Her approach extends beyond the living world. Using extremely precise patterns of carefully made, repeating 'water bomb folds', she makes her materials come to life. It embodies the idea that even non-living matter can react and act, rather than being just an object subject to the human will.





Breaking Waves emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings, both human and more-than-human entities . . .

For her first major museum solo exhibition, curated by Louise Bjeldbak Henriksen, Oosting has created the enormous site-specific installation *Breaking Waves*, which brings the sea into the museum. This kinetic work is inspired by the wave patterns of the North Sea. Seen from the front, the ten soft sea creatures seem to float effortlessly through the air, but as you move through space, the group gradually transforms into a dynamic seascape. Their presence is accompanied by a symphony of natural sounds that reinforces a deep connection with the environment. Everyone can hear something different – from the song of a whale to the whisper of the coastal wind or the thundering sound of waves crashing against the shore.

Research along with collaboration are essential in Oosting's artistic practice. She works closely with scientists from various disciplines, with her background in both neurobiology and visual arts intertwining in her work □

Khaled Dawwa's *Voici mon cœur - Here is My Heart* continues until 2nd November 2025 and Ana Oosting's *Breaking Waves* until 9th June 2025, both at Museum Bleeden aan Zee in Scheveningen/The Hague.



LADY MACBETH

Cicek Isiksel SONMEZ was in Amsterdam to see the Dutch National Ballet's new take on William Shakespeare's grim masterpiece of conspiracy and murder

Photographs by and © Altin KAFTIRA

11



The Dutch National Ballet *Lady Macbeth* provides a fresh take on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, nearly 400 years after it was written. This dance version shifts the spotlight to Lady Macbeth herself, exploring her ambition, strength, and eventual downfall in a male-dominated world. Through her eyes, we see a woman struggling to claim space and power, only to be met with fear, betrayal, and loneliness. Emotion drives the entire piece.

For me, two things truly stood out: the music and the lead dancers. Peter Salem's score was incredible — it carried the tension and emotion of the story from start to finish, blending classical and modern sounds seamlessly. I felt like it was the perfect fit for the story. It felt like the heartbeat of the ballet. I only wish there was a recording so we could revisit it.

It is always a pleasure to watch Olga Smirnova dancing, and she was breath-taking in the title role. Her performance was filled with raw emotion. She was very successful in expressing all the power and tragedies she has been through. Her journey from strength to fragility was striking — she went from commanding to almost doll-like in her vulnerability. The role demands more expression than movement, and she delivered it with grace — from her dramatic arm gestures to her beautifully controlled lines and penchés. Timothy van Poucke gave a precise and intense performance as Macbeth. His strong presence and dynamic turns captured the power-hungry character well. Although there weren't many pas de deux between Smirnova and van Poucke, their chemistry and timing on stage were impressive. Supporting roles by Floor Eimers as Lady Macduff and Joseph Massarelli as Banquo were also a pleasure to watch. Both danced with passion and technical precision, making their characters feel real and layered.





Overall, *Lady Macbeth* is a powerful adaptation that feels more like a theatrical drama than a traditional ballet. At times, it felt like watching a Nederlands Dans Theater piece — but with more narrative depth in the choreography. Choreographer Helen Pickett and dramaturge and director James Bonas focused on storytelling through emotion, with no breaks between scenes, creating a seamless and immersive experience. One highlight was the kitchen scene — a clever blend of sound and visuals that reminded me of *The Green Table* by Kurt Jooss (1932), also performed by the Dutch National Ballet in the past.

I left the theatre deeply moved by Lady Macbeth's tragedy — and thoroughly impressed by the emotional depth and artistic quality of this production □

The Dutch National Ballet's *Lady Macbeth* premiered in Amsterdam on 5th April 2025



Max Pechstein

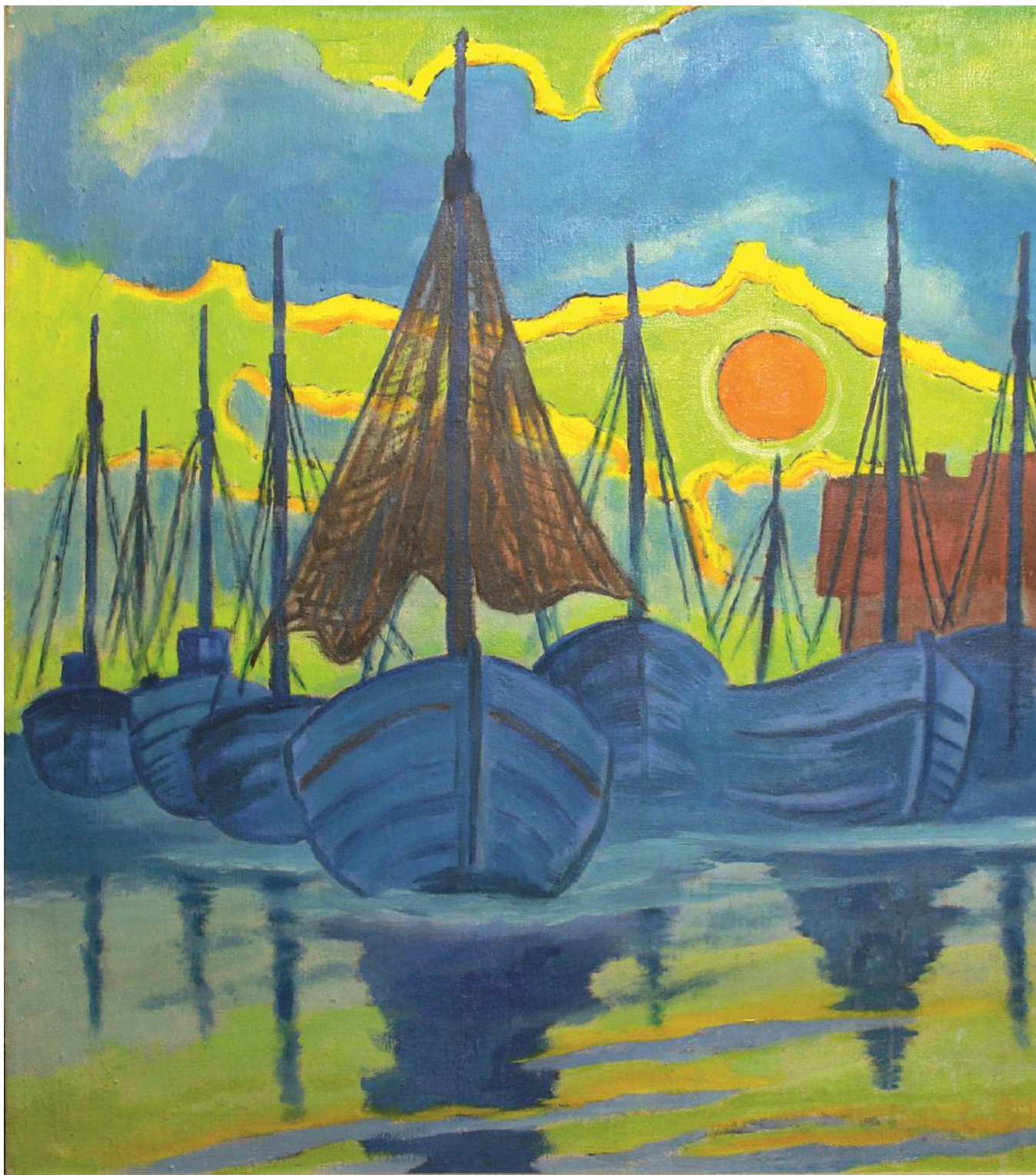
Max Pechstein. *Self-portrait with Pipe*, woodcut, 1921. © 2025 Pechstein Hamburg / Berlin.
Photo © KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN ZWICKAU Max Pechstein Museum

MAX PECHSTEIN

Expression of Harmony

at Kunsthall in Rotterdam

This spring, discover an extensive retrospective of the German expressionist painter and *Die Brücke* member, Max Pechstein (1881-1955) at the Kunsthall. Pechstein's dynamic and colourful compositions have had a major influence on the development of the visual language of expressionism. Much of his work reflects a search for a harmonious relationship between man and nature, inspired in part by Pechstein's travels to the Prussian villages of Nidden and Leba and the Palau Islands. In his work, he reflects on an era of profound change in Europe, including the suppression of his art by the Nazi regime. On the basis of more than fifty paintings supplemented with prints, woodcuts, drawings, photographs and personal objects by the artist, the Kunsthall shows his broad oeuvre and gives you an insight into the personal life of Max Pechstein.



Max Pechstein *Evening at Leba port*, Oil on canvas 1951 © 2025 Pechstein - Hamburg / Berlin. Photo © Foto-A
LORENZ, Zschorlau; KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN ZWICKAU Max-Pechstein Museum



Atelier

Max Pechstein began his career as a decorative painter in Zwickau at the end of the nineteenth century, after which he moved to Dresden to study at the Royal Academy of Art. In 1906 he joined *Die Brücke*, an influential art movement that also included artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Emil Nolde. The name symbolizes the ambition of artists to build a bridge to a new approach to art, free from the established norms of academic art. Early work by Pechstein, including the oil painting *Girl in the Forest* (1910), shows how realistic representations of reality in painting give way to bright colours, rough, expressive brushstrokes and experiments in form.

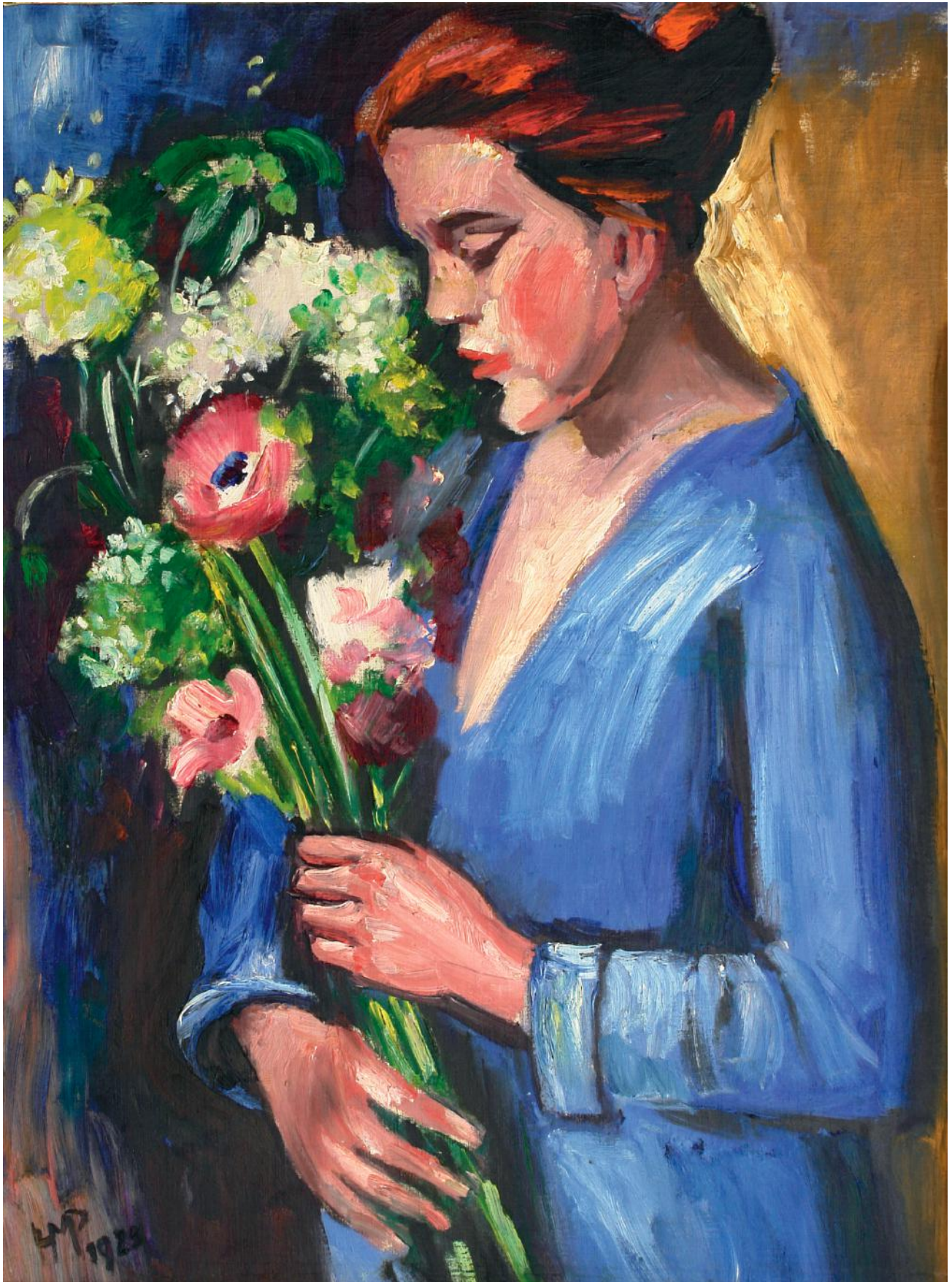
As an artist, Pechstein is looking for harmony, an aspiration that is evident both in his choice of subjects and in his use of colour. His concept of harmony is closely linked to the relationship between man and nature. For example, he is inspired by his travels to the East Prussian fishing village of Nida (Nidden), where Pechstein spends long periods of time. This picturesque village is known as one of the oldest artists' colonies in Europe. Pechstein, like many other artists, considers this place a paradise and finds inspiration in its natural surroundings. Leba, a fishing village in former Prussia, also often serves as the subject for his work. During the period that Pechstein stayed here, he painted the harbour, fishing boats and fishermen in vivid colours, and later in his career also *Evening in the Harbour of Leba* (1951). A painting that almost emits light because of the bright shades of yellow and blue. Pechstein is closely involved with the people from these villages. He regularly accompanies them on land or sea and captures this with his camera. The numerous photographs he takes during these moments show how Pechstein's dynamic compositions of rural life were created in his paintings and prints.

Inspired by Paul Gauguin's paintings of Tahiti and the Marquesas, Pechstein leaves for the Palau Islands, which were part of the German colonial empire at the time. Diary fragments from his stay on the islands

provide insight into the artist's perception of the world. His journey has to be cut short due to the outbreak of the First World War, but the artist often returns to this place of longing in his mind. Once back in Berlin, he draws on his memories of Palau and bases his colorful oil paintings on the sketches he made of the paradisiacal environment there. He paints the rustling palm trees, tropical flowers and clear blue waterfalls that are located on the islands, and he also brings the local population – fishing and sailing – to life on his canvas

With his work, Pechstein explores the contrast between simple rural life and the sophisticated urban world. Both in his paintings and in his prints, which cover a large part of his oeuvre, Pechstein uses the expressive power of sharp contrasts of light and dark. In this way he vividly captures the people in the countryside, in contrast to the urban portraits he makes of, among others, his son – stately dressed in tuxedos – various acquaintances and himself, often depicted with a smoking tobacco pipe. Despite the great differences between life in the countryside and the city, Pechstein tries to capture the inner world of his sitters in all his portraits □

Max Pechstein *Expression of Harmony* continues at Kunsthal Rotterdam until 15th June 2025



Max Pechstein *Girl in blue*, Oil on canvas 1925. © 2025 Pechstein - Hamburg / Berlijn.
Photo © Foto-Atelier LORENZ, Zschorlau; KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN ZWICKAU Max PechsteinMuseum

NEW NEW BABYLON

Visions for Another Tomorrow at Kunstmuseum Den Haag

This spring, the Kunstmuseum Den Haag provides a platform for visionary new perspectives. In *New New Babylon: Visions for Another Tomorrow*, leading and emerging visual artists, designers, collectives and activists from around the world share their views of the future. Where do we come from, where are we now and where do we want to be?



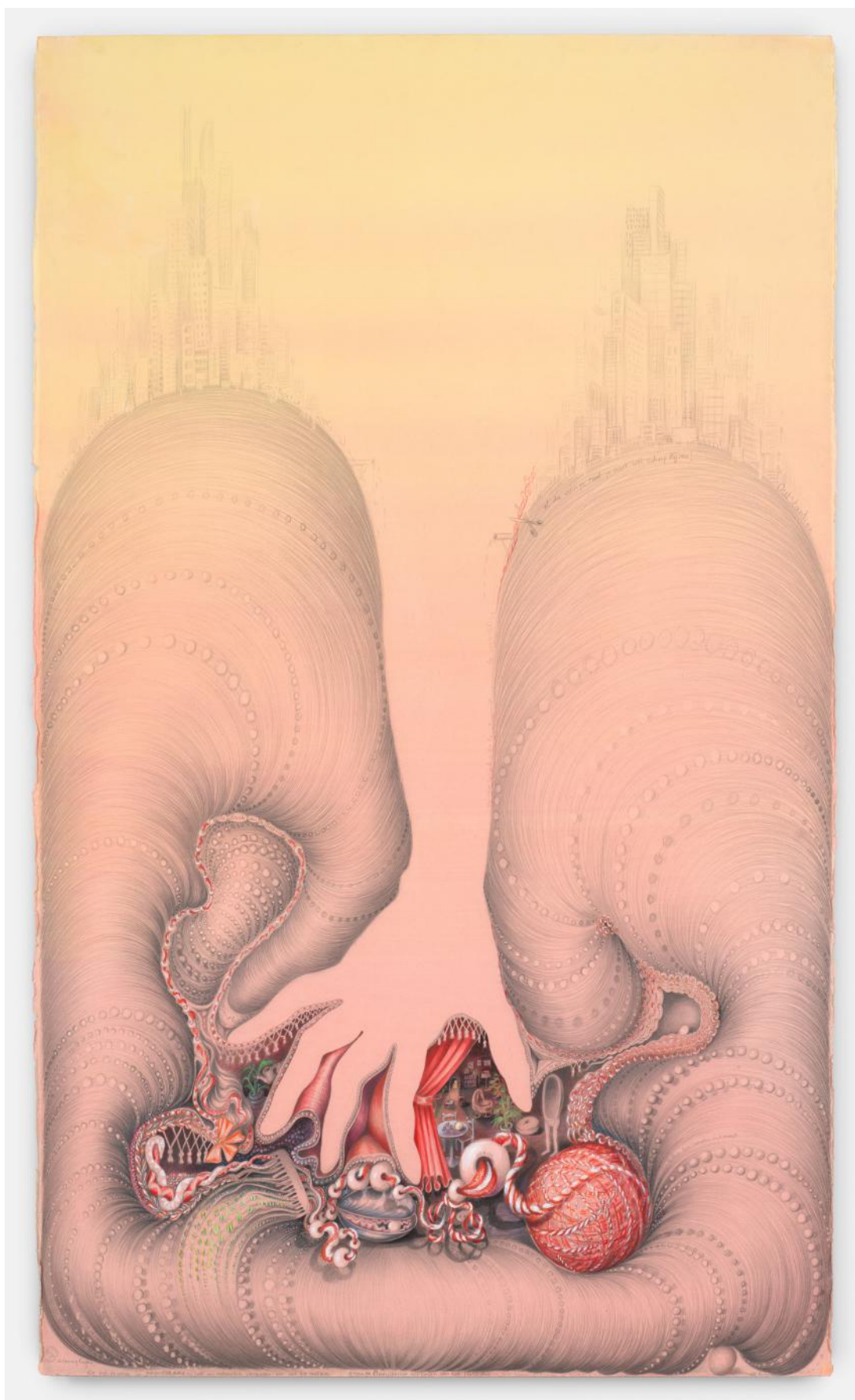


Edwin Zwakman, *At Night I See The Future*, augmented reality, 2019 - ongoing

A world without borders. Where people are free to play and travel without the burden of work and possessions and the threat of war. Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005) expressed his ideas about a new world in one of the most visionary and extensive visual art projects in post-war art history: New Babylon . Witnessing post-war reconstruction and social changes in the 1950s due to increasing automation, CoBrA artist Constant emerged as a true visionary, using models, constructions, maps, paintings, drawings, watercolours, prints, films, texts, lectures and temporary environments to show what a new world could look like.

No fewer than 25 contemporary makers from around the world show that Constant's quest is more relevant than ever. What would New Babylon look like if it were conceived today, by other people and bodies? Can we still imagine and dream as freely 75 years later? The contemporary works propose radical visions of possible other worlds, in which existing boundaries and contradictions are lifted.

In the augmented reality project *At Night I See the Future* (2019-ongoing), Edwin Zwakman asks what we will see when we look out of our windows in the year 2084. What would it be like if we had to leave our homes due to ecological or social circumstances? A sea of children's drawings from around the world merges continents in Oscar Murillo's installation *Disrupted Requencies* (2013-22), while *Ambassade van de Noordzee* gives a political voice to the sea and all the creatures that live in and around it.



Kinke Kooi, *Digging for Origin*, 2013, Private collection



"Constant Nieuwenhuys wrote manifestos, founded artist groups, painted intriguing scenes and made designs for the future. He was creative and disciplined: a bold and well-read thinker, very concerned with society, an animal and music lover, and truly passionate about the arts. Constant longed for what could be possible post revolution and beyond capital: ultimate equity and radical play! An ever topical and familiar desire that today's artists critically reflect on, too." Zippora Elders, guest curator

"New New Babylon shows that many contemporary makers are keenly engaged in utopian thinking and imagining a new society. Their works share courage and a love for the world: an alternative, more communal world. Artists make us aware of our interdependence as well as everyone's individual ability to bring about change. It is very special to bring these forward-thinking visions together in our historic Berlage building." Yasmijn Jarram, curator of contemporary art



Moshekwa Langa, *Mogalakwena*, 2018, collection Kunstmuseum Den Haag

"New New Babylon shows that many contemporary makers are keenly engaged in utopian thinking and imagining a new society. Their works share courage and a love for the world: an alternative, more communal world. Artists make us aware of our interdependence as well as everyone's individual ability to bring about change. It is very special to bring these forward-thinking visions together in our historic Berlage building." Yasmijn Jarram, curator of contemporary art



Moshekwa Langa, *Mogalakwena*, 2018, collection Kunstmuseum Den Haag



Frank Ammerlaan, *Concentric Model*, 2017 Collection Kunstmuseum Den Haag

Emma Talbot's impressive, 14-metre-long painting on silk *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (2022) takes a dreamy, philosophical and linguistic approach to the state of our world and the ecological decline we find ourselves in. With *World Sensorium* (2000), Gayil Nalls has created a fragrance from plants around the world. Each nation selected an aromatic plant that held the deepest cultural and historical significance for them, such as the (originally Turkish) tulip for the Netherlands. Some of these plants are now threatened with extinction because of the climate crisis.

In *Maladapted* (2019), Harrison Pearce has created pulsing kinetic sculptures derived from a scan of the artist's brain. In *Mogalakwena* (2018), Moshekwa Langa has devised an associative map of his coming of age in South Africa during the apartheid era. Connected by strings of yarn, objects from Langa's past form a landscape based on feeling and memory rather than geopolitical borders. This work – recently acquired by the Kunstmuseum Den Haag – will be shown for the first time in the museum □

NEW NEW BABYLON: Visions for Another Tomorrow continues at Kunstmuseum Den Haag until 31st August 2025

FALLING *into* SHADOW

NDT2's current production reprises pieces by Marco Goecke and Johan Inger plus a new work by young British choreographer Botis Seva.

Text by Michael HASTED

Photos by Rahi REZVANI

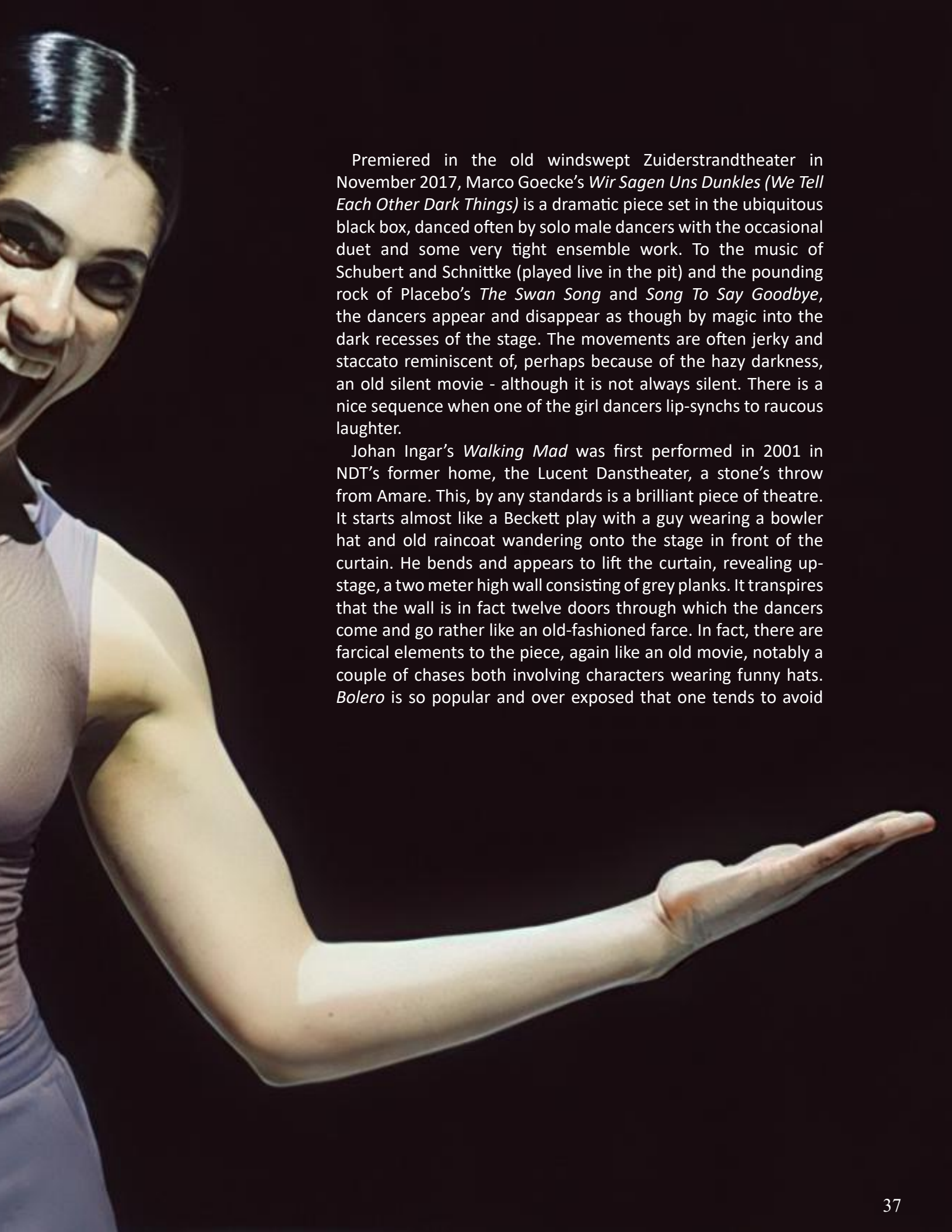
To think of NDT2 as in some way secondary, as the name implies, to the main Nederlands Dans Theater company – NDT1 – would be a mistake, as their current production, *Falling Into Shadow*, demonstrates. NDT2 is nominally a feeder company where young dancers are brought on, but believe me when I say that you'd need a very keen eye to spot they difference. Perhaps on paper they are subordinate but in every practical way there is no discernable difference. In fact, I would go so far as to say *Falling Into Shadow* is probably one of the best triple-bills I have seen from NDT - 1 or 2.



Watch Ur Mouth



Wir Sagen Uns Dunkles



Premiered in the old windswept Zuiderstrandtheater in November 2017, Marco Goecke's *Wir Sagen Uns Dunkles* (*We Tell Each Other Dark Things*) is a dramatic piece set in the ubiquitous black box, danced often by solo male dancers with the occasional duet and some very tight ensemble work. To the music of Schubert and Schnittke (played live in the pit) and the pounding rock of Placebo's *The Swan Song* and *Song To Say Goodbye*, the dancers appear and disappear as though by magic into the dark recesses of the stage. The movements are often jerky and staccato reminiscent of, perhaps because of the hazy darkness, an old silent movie - although it is not always silent. There is a nice sequence when one of the girl dancers lip-synchs to raucous laughter.

Johan Ingar's *Walking Mad* was first performed in 2001 in NDT's former home, the Lucent Danstheater, a stone's throw from Amare. This, by any standards is a brilliant piece of theatre. It starts almost like a Beckett play with a guy wearing a bowler hat and old raincoat wandering onto the stage in front of the curtain. He bends and appears to lift the curtain, revealing up-stage, a two meter high wall consisting of grey planks. It transpires that the wall is in fact twelve doors through which the dancers come and go rather like an old-fashioned farce. In fact, there are farcical elements to the piece, again like an old movie, notably a couple of chases both involving characters wearing funny hats. *Bolero* is so popular and over exposed that one tends to avoid



Walking Mad



it, but in *Walking Mad*, played live by the Dutch Ballet Orchestra conducted by César Ramos in the pit, Ravel's best known work takes on a new lease of life. For one of the best sequences, the music just stopped as the wall was transformed into the corner of a room while three dancers interacted with their shadows until, quite suddenly the music started up again from where it left off. The final sequence, to the more esoteric tones of Arvo Pärt, was a completely different, more melancholic affair with just two dancers.

Walking Mad demonstrates the value of having some sort of décor rather than the omni-present black box so beloved of dance companies the world over and it's a pity one doesn't see some sort of set more often in dance performances.

Watch Ur Mouth represents the first production of a new work by young British hip-hop inspired choreographer Botis Seva and very exciting it was too with never-remitting movement by the eight street-cred dancers. With very much an urban, down 'n' dirty vibe, it also had the feel of a science fiction film, one of those dystopian stories where everyone wears the same clothes and has no name. The dramatic, always changing lighting by the ever brilliant Tom Visser and original music by Torben Sylvest made *Watch Ur Mouth* a visual and audio feast which, with no disrespect to either the performers or choreographer, could have easily have been staged without the dancers.

As I said, *Falling Into Shadow* is probably one of the best shows I have seen from either NDT company but I often think that it would be nice if, rather than their usual triple-bill programmes, they would occasionally produce a full-length piece. That said, seeing Nederlands Dans Theater is always a treat, whichever the company and whatever the format □

NDT2's *Falling Into Shadow* continues on tour until 7th June 2025

OLTRE TERRA

Studio Formafantasma explores the intricate interdependence between humans and animals at Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Eleonora MURA went to see the exhibition for ArtsTalk . . .

Oltre Terra, transhumance, narrates the journey of men and sheep across the soil and, by extension, the built environment. Studio Formafantasma explores the intricate interdependence between humans and animals, challenging the boundary between tamer and tamed. Wool serves as the threshold of the evolutionary tale of men and sheep's mutual relationship, an intertwining of living beings interwoven in wool strands.





Joanna Piotrowska and Formafantasma, *Tactile Afferents*, 2022, still from movie. Commissioned and co-produced by Nasjonalmuseet, co-produced by Fondazione In Between Art Film, creative producer Alessandro Rabottini © Joanna Piotrowska, Fondazione In Between Art Film, Formafantasma



Natural ecosystems hinge on cooperation between species, as animals and plants rely on each other for survival. The plant nourishes the lamb while the lamb disperses the plant's seeds, fostering its growth. For centuries, humans relied on sheep for food and fibre while sheep on humans for protection. Wool grew on humans as a second skin, providing thermal insulation and water repellence. Shielded by wool, humans progressively reached physical and evolutionary milestones once considered unattainable. Growing in size, humans grew in power and retracted from the agreement of mutual care, the one that once grouped them in the same flock.



Steel sheep shears. Collection Dutch Open Air Museum

*Wool serves as the threshold
of the evolutionary tale of men
and sheep's mutual relationship,
an intertwining of living beings
interwoven in wool strands*





William Henry Davis, *Mr Healey's Sheep*, 1838. Collection Lincolnshire County Council: Museum of Lincolnshire Life.



Formafantasma, seasonal transhumance from Austria to Italy,
2022, Val Senales, South Tyrol, Italy © Formafantasma. Photo:
Alessandro Celli

Studio Formafantasma's *Oltre Terra* traces the evolution of co-domestication between mankind and sheep, inquiring the relation between technological evolution and biological development. Did the sheep stop moulting or did they lose the ability to moult due to humans shearing them periodically? From shears and shepherds' crooks to genetics online database, the crescendo of the exhibition showcases how sheep slowly twist into commodities for maximising production. Sheep become clay, shaped geometrically by human cupidity. Skin folds multiply exponentially, together with infections and parasites. A living entity has been reduced to a symbol of men's wealth, by the old rule "bigger is better". Throughout technological and scientific development, humans got a hold of sheep genetic pools – now profit and productivity dictate sheep genetic evolution. An entire life-strain whose genome sequences mirror market demand.

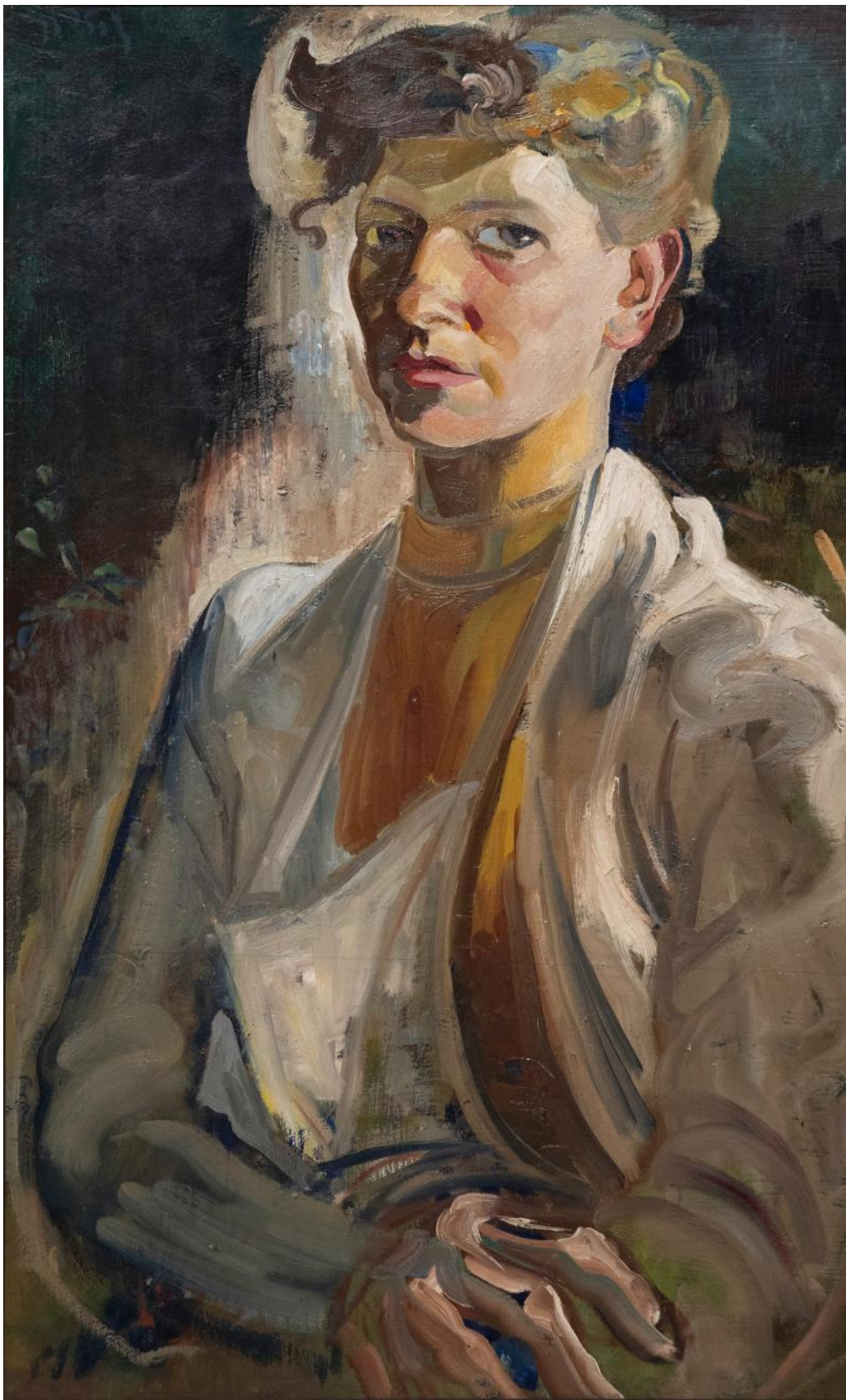
Oltre Terra reunites tamer and tamed in an immersive experience composed of a wide range of interconnected clues, spanning from visual to audio to tactile. The exhibition culminates with the 2023 video installation *Tactile Afferents* by Joanna Piotrowska and Formafantasma. Through touch, gestures, proximity and feel, the film portrays the unspoken and ancestral modes of communication between beings. The artwork conceptualises touch as a new *lingua franca*, where sheep and men can meet again, since one can never touch without being touched in return. The visitor, astonished, is left to wonder: why can't we no longer synchronise with nature, although we are ourselves part of nature?

Oltre Terra continues at Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam until 13th July

UNLIMITED - The Life & Work of
**GISSELLE
KUSTER**

**The Van Bommel van Dam museum in
Venlo is presenting an exhibition about
the fascinating life story and versatile
work of a largely forgotten artist and
gallery owner**





Giselle Kuster, *Self-portrait*, c.1968

In addition to works from the museum collection, the presentation includes 'missing' paintings and designs that the museum has tracked down through an appeal to people at home. The exhibition also includes art by well-known contemporaries and sources of inspiration such as Charley Toorop, Jan Sluijters and Otto van Rees, who place Kuster's work in a national context. "In art dealers in the 1940s and 1950s, her paintings hung next to those of Toorop and Bart van der Leek and her work went over the counter for the same price as that of Sluijters. Kuster has so far been unjustly underexposed," concludes curator James Hannan.

Giselle Kuster (Venlo, 1911 - Heerlen, 1972) is relatively unknown, although her work has already been cherished by many throughout the Netherlands outside the collection of the Van Bommel van Dam museum. In early November, the museum for modern and contemporary art began a search for missing paintings through a targeted poster, flyer and social media campaign. With a view to the exhibition and publication, the staff wanted to map out Kuster's oeuvre. After archival research, it was suspected that around a hundred works of art could be in circulation. "The campaign was many times more successful than we had dared to hope. In the meantime, around 125 works of art have been tracked down in people's homes," says Hannan enthusiastically. Thanks to the search, the museum has also found paintings that the team did not know existed. From the earliest known painting by the then 17-year-old Kuster to a large work that was saved from the scrap metal just in time. Hannan: "A huge enrichment of the research. We have always suspected and heard that she was a very versatile artist. What we have now seen confirms that image. Kuster was at home in many styles: from expressionism to cubism. An artistic and technical all-rounder."





But why is this artist forgotten? Previously, this was attributed to Kuster's variation in styles and subjects. In the publication accompanying the last exhibition of her work in the Van Bommel van Dam museum in 1997, it was stated that the artist would undoubtedly have become one of the better-known Limburg painters if she had chosen one discipline, such as portraiture. According to Hannan, this can hardly be the only reason for her obscurity: "Artists such as Pablo Picasso are admired precisely because of their strong urge to experiment and mastery of various styles and subjects." The curator believes that there is another reason behind this. Kuster's most active years as an artist and cultural entrepreneur took place during the German occupation and the years of reconstruction after the Second World War. During that period, museums had little budget for purchasing contemporary art. "They preferred to spend it on art by established names. These were often men, because women did not have the same opportunities to become artists or to make a successful name for themselves." With Kuster's discovered oeuvre, the Van Bommel van Dam museum is putting one of the most talented and liberated female artists in Limburg in the spotlight.

Giselle Kuster grew up among the fabrics, yarns and buttons of her parents' fashion store and clothing studio in Venlo. Creativity was not foreign to her. In 1934, she won a prize at an exhibition in Florence for her serene painting of the Virgin Mary. It was not until later that year that Kuster began an art education at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts de Liège in Liège, Belgium. In addition to being a virtuoso painter, she was also a cultural entrepreneur.

During the Second World War, Kuster moved to Leiden where she started a celebrated art gallery for contemporary art - however challenging that was



Giselle Kuster, *Composition with figures*, date unknown. One of the 125 found “missing” paintings.



during the German occupation. Here, she nevertheless managed to show presentations with work by artists such as Charley Toorop, Jan Sluijters, Otto van Rees and even Vincent van Gogh.

After the war, Giselle Kuster briefly stayed in Indonesia during the war of independence.

In 1950 she returned to the Netherlands where she fully immersed herself in the Leiden art world. She became chairwoman of the Leiden artists' association *Ars Aemula Naturae* and participated in many exhibitions. "In addition to her work as an artist, Kuster fulfilled an important and very active role as a driving force behind cultural life, in a time and social context that made this difficult. She brought the work of unknown artists into the limelight and connected artists to relevant networks", according to Rieke Righolt, director of the Van Bommel van Dam museum. From the end of the 1950s Kuster lived and worked in Maastricht, but spent large parts of the year on the Spanish island of Formentera. While her environment and style changed, artistic and personal freedom remained the common thread in her artistic existence. Kuster's life provides insight into a period of social change, in which it was not the norm for a woman to have her own career □

Unlimited - The Life & Work of Giselle Kuster can be seen until 17th August 2025 in the Van Bommel van Dam museum in Venlo. The publication of the same name, designed by Dana Dijkgraaf and published by Jap Sam Books, contains contributions from Madeleine van den Nieuwenhuizen and Pauline Broekema, among others.

ARTS TALK

Radio

THE ARTS IN HOLLAND

NEWS, REVIEWS, PREVIEWS & INTERVIEWS

