

ARTS TALK

Colour Supplement

Number 6

April 2023

- 
- JACOBUS VREL at Mauritshuis in The Hague
 - PATRICIA PICCININI in Rotterdam
 - NEW EUROPEAN ENSEMBLE
 - ROYAL DUTCH YEAST AND SPIRITS FACTORY
 - VISCERAL ACTS by Proximity Music
 - *plus lots, lots more . . .*

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We are still in the grip of Vermeer fever. The main show at the Rijksmuseum has long been sold out but if you have already seen it or couldn't get a ticket, there are other Vermeer related exhibitions you can see. We visit the one at the Mauritshuis in The Hague which is showing the work of Jacobus Vrel, a near contemporary of Vermeer whose subject matter was very similar.

We also have a report on the spectacular but often shocking exhibition by Patricia Piccinini at Kunsthal in Rotterdam. There is a major article on something that may not seem like an obvious contender for inclusion in these pages - the Koninklijke Nederlandsche Gist en Spiritusfabriek (The Royal Dutch Yeast and Spirits Factory) in Delft. In the heart of this sprawling industrial complex lies an architectural gem.

For music we were at the Meral Polat Trio concert as well as the multi-media event inspired by the work of M C Escher presented by the New European Ensemble at the Kunstmuseum in The Hague. We also saw the new production by NDT2 called *Climb the Sky*. All this, and more, in the April edition of ArtsTalk Magazine *Colour Supplement* . . .

Michael HASTED
Publisher & Editor



Cover shows the sculpture
Sanctuary 2018 by **Patricia Piccinini**
currently on show at Kunsthal in Rotterdam

Photo by Michael Hasted

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PATRICIA PICCININI

at **Kunsthal in Rotterdam**

Text and photographs by
Michael HASTED

There was a time, when I was a child, when travelling fairs would feature freak shows. On display, in a usually smelly tent behind a gaudy façade, were bearded ladies, two-headed babies and myriad variations of human, or animal, deformities. These shows were hugely popular right up until the mid-twentieth century. Joseph Merrick, the Elephant Man was a celebrity in Victorian England fêted by royalty and Todd Browning's 1932 film *Freaks* is considered to be a classic and is still shown in art cinemas.

But interest waned, either by choice or imposition. Exploiting such unfortunate people was considered insensitive, intrusive and, of course, very politically incorrect. *The Guinness Book of Records* still lists the tallest, shortest, heaviest people but that's about it. The craving for the grotesque has faded in most of us and goes unsatiated in others.

*O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is!
O brave new world,
That has such people in't!*

William Shakespeare *The Tempest*



So, what is Patricia Piccinini's *Metamorphosis* at the Kunsthal in Rotterdam? Is it an old fashioned freak show or is it more than that? She describes her work as dealing with "unexpected consequences" and the bulk of the exhibition is made of life size, hyper-realistic sculptures of . . . err . . . freaks. The place where pigs and humans meet is prominent. There is *Prone*, a life-size human baby with a snout, a huge female pig suckling her off-spring that have distinctly human features. There is *The Comforter*, a young girl with very hairy

legs seated on the floor in a corner cradling something that is neither human nor animal but has features of both. And, more disturbingly, a very young girl playing on her crumpled bed with an *Alien*-like creature while a peacock looks on.

There are other figures, all life-size, that have anatomical details in places where most people don't even have places. What make these sculptures so disturbing is the fact that they are so real - a brave new world that is made of silicone, fibreglass, felt and human







hair. Every pore in the skin is shown, every wrinkle on the sole of the feet. Some figures you feel empathy for as with the old, Neanderthal-like hairy couple holding each other in a loving embrace, for others you feel revulsion. There is one, thankfully curtained-off, room showing a three-wall video of giant squirming and evolving close-ups of parts of a body, human or otherwise, that seems to focus on folds, creases and orifices. I'm not sure which bits of the body they were but they were certainly not bits to which I wanted to get up close and personal.

Now, it is difficult perhaps to use the adjectives grotesque and charming to describe the same thing but that's what many of the pieces are. Some however, it must be said, are just downright grotesque, many are disturbing and some, to be honest, are disgusting. It has always been the function of art to shock and disturb. All great art movements initially caused outrage and took some getting used to. But that was because they were new, propagating ideas and techniques that were

original and not adhering to any of the then accepted norms. Is this exhibition like that, is it work we will, in years to come, eventually accept as traditional like Rodin or Michelangelo or will we always find it odd, a novelty?

It is hard to decide if Ms Piccinini's work is exploring the human condition or exploiting it. While one can admire the technique, which is astounding, and marvel at *The Field* installation which is impressive, I honestly don't know what to make of this exhibition. Does it make me look anew at what it means to be human and think about what might have happened if genetics had developed differently and evolution taken a different path, or does it bring out the voyeur in me? I imagine you will have the same reaction but this is compulsive viewing. Many of the pieces are hard to look at, most of them are even harder to look away from ◻

Metamorphosis continues at Kunsthal in Rotterdam until 4th June 2023



The Royal Dutch Yeast and Spirits Factory

Standing uneasily at the northern end of Delft, literally just across the road from the old town and its network of canals and ancient buildings, is the Koninklijke Nederlandsche Gist en Spiritusfabriek, a huge sprawling industrial complex, at one time the largest of its kind in Europe

Text and photographs by
Michael HASTED





The factory's old office building overlooking a little canal basin with a flotilla of rather shabby boats bobbing in the water, hides a real architectural gem

Now, on the face of it, a factory making yeast, penecilin and methylated spirits may seem an unlikely, even inadmissible candidate for ArtsTalk Magazine's *Colour Supplement*. From the outside, either viewed from the road or from the train that passes through it, this is just a large sprawling industrial site. Most of the complex is shiny new buildings with lots of pipes, chimneys and storage tanks. On the town side there are a few old red brick structures which obviously date back a few years. It is in these old buildings that, for us, the interest lies.





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The beautiful coloured tiles, ornate fittings and stained glass windows are not quite Art Nouveau nor Art Deco but are uniquely Dutch . . .



The Koninklijke Nederlandsche Gisten Spiritusfabriek, covering a very large site to the north of the city, is a significant presence if you live in that part of town. If you can't see it and its tall metal chimney, you will probably be able to smell it.

The factory was founded in Delft in 1869 by Jacques Van Marken, who had studied in the city, together with his wife Agneta Matthes. The company produced, as the name implies, yeast (used in bread making), penicillin and methylated spirits and was once the largest plants of its type in Europe.

But, as with most things, there is more to this that meets the eye. The factory's main office block, overlooking a little canal basin with a flotilla of rather shabby boats bobbing in the water, hides an architectural gem that fully justifies the factory's inclusion in this magazine.

A close-up photograph of a light-colored stone pillar. The pillar features a large, circular, intricately carved medallion with a complex, symmetrical scrollwork design. The stone has a slightly weathered texture. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other parts of the building's interior.

The interior of the building is something very special indeed. Opened in 1906 the office block, although fairly plain from the outside, is typical of the Dutch style of the time known as *Um 1800* which culminated in the ten years before the First World War. The beautiful coloured tiles, fittings and stained glass windows and panels are not quite Art Nouveau, nor Art Deco, but are uniquely Dutch. The building's main, central hall has an ornate glass arched canopy and the balconies, reminiscent of cloisters, are supported by superb carved stone pillars.

The building was designed by Karel Muller and Bastiaan Schelling but sadly Jacques van Marken was not to see it finished having died the previous year. The overall impression is reminiscent of the Kunstmuseum (formerly the Gemeentemuseum) and the Hollands Spoor railway station, both in The Hague.

There is a small museum there which has been accessible to the public on occasional open days. The adjacent model village, the Agnetapark, named after Van Marken's wife, was created for the factory's workers. It has rows of attractive cottage-style houses, a lake, lots of trees and a community centre and is a pleasant place to walk around.

Van Marken left an important mark on the company and the internal organization. As an enlightened entrepreneur he strived for social entrepreneurship, his motto being, "The factory for all, everyone for the factory!" In real terms this meant, among other things, a profit share for the workers, a pension fund and a participation body set up in 1878 called De Kern, the first of its kind in the Netherlands. It also set up its own in-house magazine called *De Fabrieksode* launched in June 1882 which was also the first company magazine published in the Netherlands. The last edition was





Victaurus II 2020
Erik de Jong



in September 2001. On the occasion of its eightieth anniversary, in 1950, the Nederlandsche Gisten en Spiritusfabriek was awarded the Royal designation. Four years later the company, which then employed 1,741 people, was given a new department where antibiotics and related products were manufactured. In 1968 the company merged with Brocades to form Koninklijke Gist-Brocades NV. In 1998 that company was taken over by the chemical multinational DSM and consequently had its Royal appellation withdrawn. It is currently one of the world's largest producers of bulk penicilin.

At the time of writing the building is due for redevelopment and units will be available to rent as office space. Because of this it is not clear if there will be any more open days when the public are invited to

have a wander around. Watch out for them as a visit will provide an insight not only in to a unique style of Dutch architecture and design but also into the innovative and ground breaking approach to industrial relations and workers' rights and welfare.

The large barren, grassy area at the city end of the site is also going to be developed with a shiney new office complex which will hide a great deal of the factory. However, until then the space, right next to the railway, is home to a sculpture by artist Erik de Jong □

Much of the information in this article was gleaned from J. Muntendam's 1971 book *Loon naar werken: enkele sociale aspecten van het werk van J.C. van Marken* (*Pay for work: some social aspects of the work of J.C. van Marken*) Kluwer, Deventer.



METAMORFOSEN

**New European Ensemble
at Kunstmuseum Den Haag**

Michael HASTED

With all the fuss about Vermeer, a major exhibition by another Dutch artist is being slightly overlooked. MC Escher inspired a whole generation of illustrators and designers throughout the 1970s and 80s resulting in severe over exposure.

Escher has now regained some of his respectability and to complement the major exhibition at the Kunstmuseum in The Hague commemorating his 100th anniversary, The New European Ensemble has created a musical/visual spectacle *par excellence*.

The NEuE is orientated around the brothers Stanislav artistic director Emlyn on viola and Willem on cello. They created *Metamorfosen* in collaboration with Carolien Teunisse of Deframe, who did the visuals, and conductor Vlad Maistorovici.



major being whole t the bility the 25th ated am – cello. with and

The concert took place in the main central hall of the Kunstmuseum where a stage and the orchestra had been set up behind a huge gauze. The wonderful thing about the theatrical use of gauze is that if it is lit from the front it is opaque and appears solid but if lit from behind is totally transparent. Both these aspects were exploited in *Metamorphosen*. As the dimly lit orchestra played, images by Ms Teunisse, based on and inspired by MC Escher, were projected onto the gauze. A brilliant concept, brilliantly executed.

The first piece perfectly encapsulated what the evening had in store with Stam *frères* playing their interpretation of the prelude to Bach's *Cello Suite* BWV 1007 while, on the screen in front of them, two blue lines danced around, reacting to the music. As the piece

progressed the lines slowly morphed into pencils and then into one of Escher's best known images, *Drawing Hands*, two Dürer-like hands drawing each other.

For me, the highlight of the concert was Willem Stam and Hanna Shybayeva playing Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel*, a piece I will never tire of despite its Escherlike over exposure. It was accompanied by a variation on Escher's *Hand with Reflecting Sphere* which shows a reflection of the artist in what could be described as, and looks like, an early selfie. In Ms Teunisse's version the sphere was a live fish-eye view of Mr Stam and his cello which was then encompassed by Escher's famous pillars. Brilliant.

Further performances of *Metamorphosen* are planned, so watch out for those ☐



Jacobus Vrel. *Woman Waving at a Child Behind a Window*.
c.1654. Oil on panel. 45,7



VREL

Forerunner of Vermeer

at Mauritshuis in The Hague

Wendy FOSSEN

To complement the major Vermeer exhibition at the Rijksmuseum there are two related exhibitions, one at the Prinsenhof in Delft plus this one in The Hague. The show at the Mauritshuis is all about Jacobus Vrel (active 1640 -1660), a relatively unknown painter who painted similar street scenes and ladies in domestic interiors as Vermeer.

Scholars always complain about how little is known about Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), but compared to Vrel it is quite a lot. This exhibition is the result of intensive research trying to find more information on Vrel but not much was found, not even a date nor place of birth or death. Thanks to one signed and dated work, *Woman Leaning out of an Open Window* from 1654, we can at least place Vrel in the second and third quarter of the 17th century.

In addition to the signature and date, this painting was known to be part of the famous collection of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria. A written inventory dating from 1659 of this collection is the only written evidence of a Vrel in any collection. Between 1647 and 1656 the Archduke was governor of the Southern Netherlands and probably came across Vrel's work then. This suggests that Vrel must have been a known and appreciated artist, being present in such an important collection. But, curiously enough, no other inventory has been found with a reference to Vrel. So nobody else seemed to have owned one.



Jacobus Vrel, *Street Scene with a Bakery by the Town Wall*, presumably the Waterstraat in Zwolle, after 1646.
Private Collection

Since Vrel painted on panels, dendrochronological research had also given useful information about estimating the age of his works (about 50 in total).

By examining the growth rings of the wood it is proven that Vrel's street scenes were probably created from 1635-1640 onwards; his earliest interiors date from before 1650.

With this little information we can at least say for sure he was a forerunner of Vermeer and not a follower. The question then arises; did Vermeer see the work of Vrel? We simply don't know.

The street scenes of Vrel seem to be painted in Zwolle, looking at the cobbled streets and comparing them with old photographs of this city. When we built on this assumption there is a possibility that through Gerard

Ter Borgh, whom we know was doing something with Vermeer thanks to a contract they both signed, Vrel's work could have been introduced to Vermeer thanks to Ter Borgh. These are just hypotheses and without any evidence, that is all there is.

For now we just have to admire the thirteen paintings which museums from all over the world have so generously loaned to the Mauritshuis for this first ever monographic exhibition of Jacobus Vrel. □

Vrel - Forerunner of Vermeer continues at Mauritshuis in The Hague until 29th May 2023



CLIP

NDT 2 dances v



Out of Breath
Photo by and © Joris-Jan Bos

CLIMB THE SKY

works by Noé Soulier, Johan Inger and Crystal Pite



For obvious reasons dance, especially contemporary dance, is performed on large empty stages with only lighting and costumes providing the visual effects. These factors, along with the chosen music or soundscape, create the mood. And mood is very important. Without any text or other vocalisation, and often with no discernible lateral story line, emotion plays an important part in our reaction to modern dance.

The three pieces that make up NDT2's *Climb the Sky* each had a very different visual presentations and each had its own mood. The opening of *Ten Duets on a Theme of Rescue* by NDT stalwart Crystal Pite started quite aggressively with the audience caught in the beam of a pair of car-like headlights pointed straight at them. Slowly we made out a pair of back-lit dancers and as the piece progresses we saw that the action was taking place within a semi-circle of spotlights on stands, hence the lights themselves providing the décor.



Originally created in 2008 for New York's Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, the piece was performed by five dancers in a series of overlapping duets which explored and developed Ms Pite's love of the word "rescue". To the music of Cliff Martinez there was a lot of separation and coming together as new partners emerged from the darkness as the old ones left.

Five overhead wide-beamed spotlights created the mood for the premiere of Noé Soulier's *About Now*. This was a much more formal affair, danced to Bach fugues. At times, I guess, largely due to the music, the piece had a very classical, even baroque, feel to it with the five dancers, again often dancing in pairs, executing a lot classical ballet moves and sequences. There was an elegant simplicity to *About Now* that demonstrated that less is often more.

The evening's final piece, Johan Inger's 2002 *Out of Breath* was a very different kettle of fish. To start with, unusually (see above) it had a set. The décor consisted of a three meter high curved triangle, a cross between a giant sea-shell and a pyramid. This construction provided the focal point to the often playful and very aptly named piece which involved a lot of running around the stage, climbing and silly walks. The three girls were dressed in black lacy party dresses and two of the men were also in skirts. This was a very complete piece with Mylla Ek's wonderful décor and costumes and music provided by two string quartets, one by Jacob ter Veldhuis, the other by Lajkó Fólíx Es Zenekara.

Despite its humorous moments, *Out of Breath* was created as a consequence of a particularly traumatic personal event with Mr Inger aiming to demonstrate that "lust for life and fear of death almost go hand in hand." □



Proximity Music

VISCERAL ACTS

alongside the Rewire Festival in The Hague



Proximity Music is a joint exhibition programme initiated in 2021 by iii and Rewire, which seeks to connect music, architecture, technology, ritual and play through physical experiences engaging with all the senses. It runs alongside the Rewire Festival in The Hague from 7th to 9th April. It takes place around the Amare each day between 12.00 and 19.00 and access is free.





Naama Tsabar Flag Untitled
(Without) (2020)

Proximity Music's *Visceral Acts* is an exhibition inviting us to engage playfully with mind and body. Presenting a diverse range of works emerging from the backdrop of a health crisis, it brings into question ideas of health and sanity. Through the lens of personal, creative if not unorthodox approaches, artists help us trace paths backwards and forwards in time, connecting with different forms of knowledge. When old habits become inadequate to deal with an era of instability, what can we learn from the creative practices of artists, which can aid us in the search for a new equilibrium?

Featuring: Aernoudt Jacobs, Amos Peled, Dominik 't Jolle & Maria Komarova, Jeroen Alexander Meijer, Karel van Laere, Matteo Marangoni & Dieter Vandoren, Naama Tsabar, Naomi Rincon Gallardo, Vica Pacheco, Vivian Caccuri Diane Mahin, Frederique Pisuisse and Alexis Bellavance & Thiago Lanis


In Proximity Music: *Visceral Acts*, artists play with materials, technologies and rituals associated with health and healing. While advancements in the medical world have made it possible to cure better than ever, its treatments have become increasingly scary to us. At the same time, as medical science progresses, ancient knowledge and practices are lost. As a result, we have become either fearful or disconnected from the process of healing itself. The therapeutic use of art and music goes back millennia, with many practices still lively as alternative medicine.

Rather than having the ambition to cure, this exhibition reflects on our relation to health and the power of art, music and ritual to transform our consciousness. It presents works by artists who share their own creative perspectives, taking visitors on a journey connecting modern medical practices with traditional rituals, and joining them to propose completely imaginary new scenarios.

The interior of the body, and the tools to reach into it, are explored in the works of Amos Peled, hacking into an ultrasonic medical device to perform with the sounds and images intended for diagnostic purposes.

Surgical tools take the stage in Karel van Laere's audiovisual performance exposing the gestures and instruments used to operate within the human body.

The stethoscope of the family doctor is at the centre of the work by Aernoudt Jacobs, in which the architectural glass skin of the exhibition venue becomes a body to be explored inside out. The non-human as source of both contagion and evolutionary transformation and resilience is addressed in Vivian Caccuri and Thiago Lanis' performance attempting to become one with the sonic environment of the tropical jungle as a site of exuberant life, but also long associated in western consciousness with death and disease, as well as in Naomi Rincón Gallardo's DIY punk music video in which marginalised vermin and humans learn to co-evolve in an toxic landscape in Central America.

A swarm of sonic creatures creates an ecosystem questioning the boundaries of nature and technology and offering a delicate space of contemplation in the work of Matteo Marangoni and Dieter Vandoren. Music, theatre and ritual and the ancestral connection between art and healing come to the fore in the works of Vica Pacheco, who's audiovisual alchemy leaps into a dance of bodies playing a collection of digitally reinvented, pre-columbian ceramic whistling water vessels connected to ancient fertility rites, Jeroen Alexander Meijer, who's large scale audiovisual environment developed in response to ADHD invites visitors to slow down and regenerate their capacity for attention, Dominik 't Jolle & Maria Komarova's immersive installation conveying the auditory hallucinations of tinnitus and Naama Tsabar whose choir sings of body pain, healing and homecoming around a monumental white flag outside The Hague's City Hall 

Proximity Music: *Visceral Acts* is presented by iii and Rewire in collaboration with Amare and with the financial support of the Creative Industries Fund NL, Mondriaan Fund, the Municipality of The Hague, Stroom Den Haag and Creative Europe.






MERAL POLAT TRIO

on tour throughout The Netherlands

Singer Meral Polat presented her debut album *Ez Kî Me* (Who Am I?) with her new trio in mid-December in a sold-out Paradiso Noord. Currently the Meral Polat Trio are on tour throughout The Netherlands with the album which has received many favourable reactions in the press and has been included in various international charts. Within weeks, the album reached about 100,000 listeners online.

In addition to being a singer, actress and theater maker, Meral Polat is also known for *De Luizenmoeder* and the new VPRO series *Lampje*.

With the music *Ez Kî Me* the Meral Polat Trio (Meral Polat, vocals and percussion, Chris Doyle on guitar/keyboards and Frank Rosaly on drums) takes you on a journey through contemporary Anatolian folk, Kurdish sounds and the roots of the blues. Earthy, hopeful and soul-cutting.

With poems from the poetic legacy of Meral's father, Ali Ihsan Polat, the trio undertakes a quest and interprets the love, vitality and melancholy of the heart 

DE ZUS VAN FRIDA KAHLO EEN MUZIKALE MEXICO SHOW



spel / tekst: Serwaes Nelissen
muziek: SeaSession Regie: Pieter Kramer