

# ARTSTALK

## Colour Supplement

Number 7

May 2023



- *Choosing Vincent at Van Gogh Museum*
- *Delft Fringe Festival*
- *Toren by Pavilions Hotel*
- *Lotti van der Gaag in Schiedam*
- *De Suz van Frida Kahlo*
- *Fidelio by Nederlandse Reisopera*
- *Scapino Ballet Two Tales*
- *Andre Sempfel at Merchant House, Amsterdam*
- *Plus lots, lots more . . .*

# ARTS TALK

## Colour Supplement

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A bumper forty-five page issue this month. The Vermeer show is still running at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam but the show at the nearby Van Gogh museum on the family life of the artist has just finished. We have a belated report. The Delft Fringe Festival is a highspot of the year and we look forward to that. The Stedelijk Museum Schiedam punches well above its weight and recently acquired some important picture by Lotti van der Gaag.

We loved Scapino Ballet's *Two Tales* and SeaSession's *De Suz van Frida Kohlo*. We have reviews of those two shows as well as *Yara's Wedding*. We also preview De Nederlandse Reisopera's *Fidelio*.

For the visual arts we have reports on the Andre Stempfel minimalist exhibition at the Merchant House in Amsterdam and *Dry30 - Design or Non design?* in Milan mounted by Rotterdam's Het Nieuwe Instituut.

**Michael HASTED**  
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**Rose FAWBERT MILLS**  
**Jacob John SHALE**  
**Anja HERRMANN**

Cover shows the main campaign image for the Delft Fringe Festival

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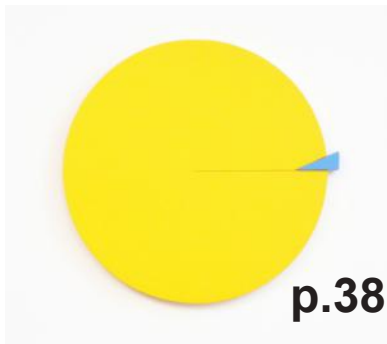
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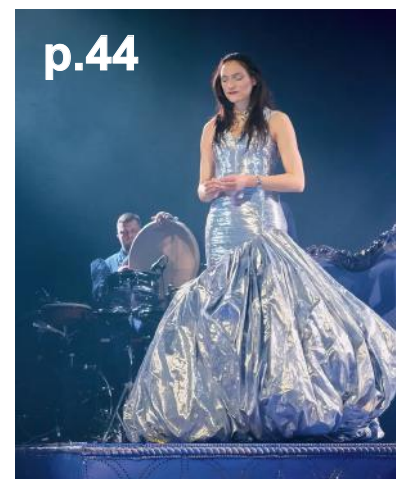
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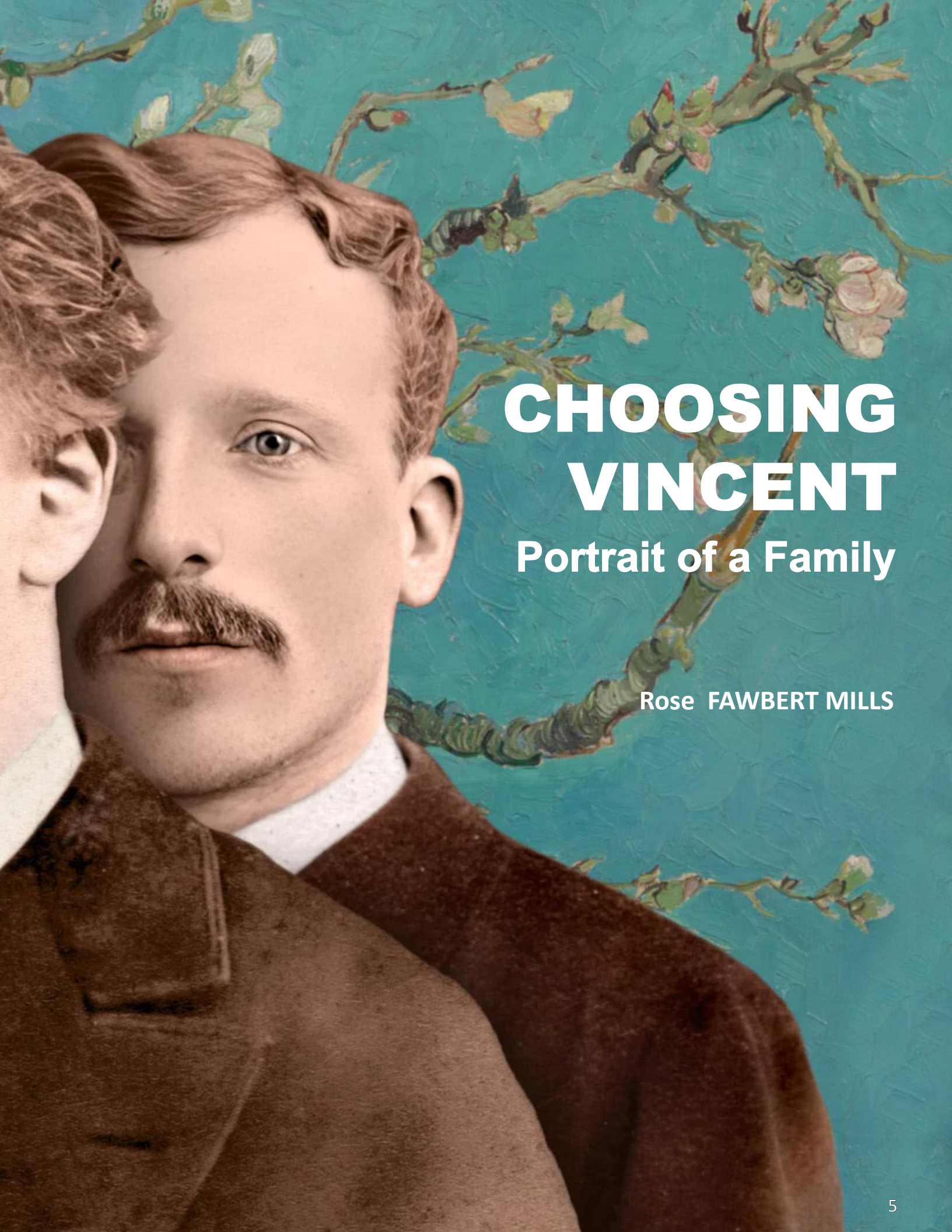


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# CHOOSING VINCENT

Portrait of a Family

Rose FAWBERT MILLS

To initiate a year-long programme of celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Van Gogh Museum, visitors are invited to experience a deep-dive into the unique relationship between the great artist and his family: Choosing Vincent. Portrait of a Family History.

A sentimental and informative exhibition, it provides insight into the seemingly unconditional, unfaltering support that the family offered Vincent Van Gogh. Despite his brief life, a life painted as a painful path of discovery of the self and of artistic ability, style and sanity, Vincent Van Gogh's artwork has taken a long road to public recognition. This exhibition is a reminder that, without his family, the museum itself simply would not exist.

Emilie Gordenker, general director Van Gogh Museum, and Lisa Smit, curator, felt it was time to turn the spotlight onto Vincent's supporters and enablers, to give attention to and show appreciation for their initiative, a praise (it is felt) they richly deserve.

Those who already know Vincent Van Gogh will recognise a life punctuated with setbacks, struggles and, some may say lamentably, only occasional success. The exhibit begins in the early years, in Brabant, with an overview of the Van Gogh family tree, where we see portraits of his mother and father and brothers and sisters, of whom Vincent was the oldest. It moves on to ponder the apparent tumultuous yet steadfast relationship between a younger brother Theo and Vincent. Smit informs that their decision to be 'brothers for life' was decided on a long walk to a windmill, known to the curator as this moment was often referred to in numerous letters between the pair. As you walk through Vincent's own lifeline, exhibited multi-modally with a mixture of fixed art work, video and interactive 'games', you reach the point of his ultimate decision: in the summer of 1880, he decides to become an artist full time with the financial support of Theo.

Lisa Smit, curator for this exhibition and also contemporaries at the Van Gogh museum, is also enjoying her anniversary with the collection this year. She stated that they "try to channel the vision of Theo and Vincent, when they exhibit contemporary artists." In this new exhibition they hope "to make Van Gogh human again".

We then begin the journey into the history of the museum. The current exhibition will be welcomed by fans with generous affection as it traces the story of the Van Gogh-Bonger family. This is not simply

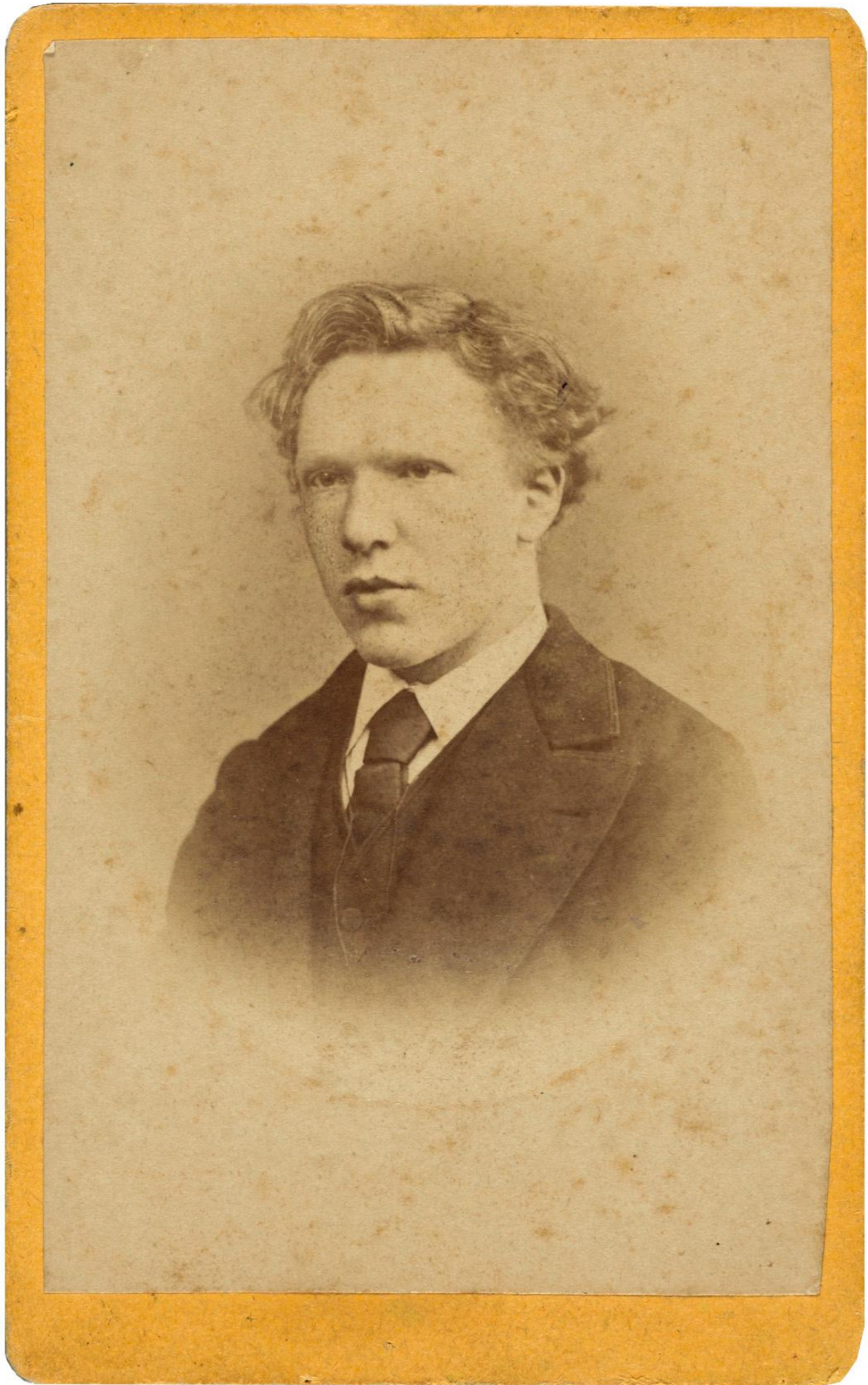
because this exhibition is unusual, nor because of the uplifting memories, but mostly because of the heartfelt optimism.

Theo Van Gogh had succeeded where Vincent had failed: he was established as a successful art buyer and seller, and climbed to the heights of branch manager for Goupil & Cie. This new exhibition takes visitors through the courtship of Theo and Jo Van Gogh-Bonger and their regrettably short marriage and birth of their son, Vincent. 1890 though proves to be the year of devastating double deaths, first of Vincent and then Theo.

Very few people will know that the museum, and the preservation and collection of Vincent's work, is the reward for the hard work and determination of Jo, and later their son Vincent 'the engineer'. After the deaths, Jo van Gogh-Bonger and Theo had been married for only two years; many of their courting period is evidenced with romantic letters passed between them while she lived in Amsterdam and Theo in Paris. She is left devastated by grief and with the sole responsibility of their son Vincent - Jo described in diaries as: 'having had the best years of her life, I am now faced with the worst'. As well as inheriting her brother-in-law's enormous collection of paintings, drawings, prints and letters, she possesses her husband and Vincent's collection of art by contemporaries that had been compiled over their lifetimes. But what was she to do? Contemplating the choices of each 'character' in this story, at each twist and turn, is something the exhibition encourages.

As we bear witness, Jo decides to pursue Theo's dream of promoting Vincent's art. For the rest of her life, she determinedly devotes herself to the ghostly hopes and dreams of the deceased; she and her son preserve and raise awareness of Van Gogh's work, as his brother had done. Burden or a blessing, this proved to be indispensable for the exhibition.

Later, Vincent's nephew (Theo and Jo's son Vincent) as a young man went on to become a successful mechanical engineer yet his destiny was to be the driving force for displaying Van Gogh's masterpieces. Aged 21 he gained control of his half of his inheritance. Vincent 'the engineer' had the wisdom to keep the collection and stopped selling in 1920. It was not until after 1945 that he took greater responsibility for the collection and took the initiative to found the Vincent Van Gogh Foundation in 1960, including his three surviving children and the Government Cultural representative, to accommodate the entire estate.



Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Case with photo's of Jo and Theo

Despite challenges and obstacles during the building of the Van Gogh Museum, he pursued this dream, turning his uncle's misfortune into a miraculous museum. Thus the Vincent Van Gogh museum was opened in 1973 by Queen Juliana.

Further on in the exhibition, the construction of the Van Gogh Museum is detailed. Visitors can view original sketches and reports (also available in a new publication with the same name, to complement the new exhibition), and learn how the placement of the collection came to fruition, right up to the opening in 1973.

Walls adorned with masterpieces are twinned with lesser known gems, including an astonishingly well kept, handmade cabinet built by their great grandfather. This, along with other bespoke pieces, are from the family's private collection - as the Van Gogh family are still

closely involved with the museum, this is a rare treat. One of the most iconic works of art is on display at the entrance of the exhibition: often seen on wallpaper, tote bags and tourist gifts across the city, the famous Van Gogh's 'Almond Blossom' (1890). Vincent painted this masterpiece whilst spending time in an asylum (receiving help for his mental health), as a gift to mark the occasion of the birth of his nephew and namesake Vincent, son of Theo and Jo. Another of the most striking parts of the journey is a large print of a photograph: it shows Jo with her second husband Johan Cohen Gosschalk and young Vincent in their dining room. Surrounding this hangs the original paintings and milk jug and liquor jug, as seen in the photo. The closeness, the personal touch, is almost visceral.

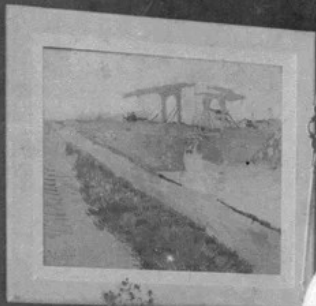
All together, these provide a powerfully visual and immersive family album. The exhibition tells a story that emphasizes a special bond between the brothers, Vincent and

Theo. It sheds light on the role that Jo (Theo's wife) and their son Vincent had and it is this, in particular, that helped shape the course of history.

It really is a unique exhibition; like Vincent Van Gogh himself, it is erudite without flaunting it. I like to think how many visitors to this new exhibition are going to admire the courage of this curatorship, revel in its storytelling, its sentimentality and take delight in its generosity of spirit. Tinged with tragedy, this exhibition proves that Van Gogh's oeuvre continues to surprise and, subsequently, is acknowledged by many to be a world-famous museum collection □

Vincent van Gogh, Jo Cohen Gosschalk-Bonger and Johan Cohen Gosschalk in the dining room of the house at 77 Koninginneweg, Amsterdam, late 1910 or early 1911. On the wall behind them are the paintings *The Langlois Bridge* and *The Harvest*. Bernard Eilers, Amsterdam. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)









# The Toren by Pavilions

An opulent and slightly eccentric hotel in the heart of Amsterdam, ideal for a cultural trip to the city. Michael HASTED paid it a visit . . .

We travel to Amsterdam quite often from Delft where we live and work. Usually, if we are seeing a concert or play, it means a late night dash to the station to get the train home – I wouldn't even think about bringing the car into the city centre. It just makes the whole thing a bit stressful and you start looking at your watch even before the event is finished. To be able to stay overnight is a great luxury, so much so that the hotel in which you stay ought to be somewhere special to complement your evening, not just a place to lay your weary head. And if you are visiting Amsterdam from further afield for a holiday or even a business trip, the hotel in which you stay can enhance or spoil the experience.

I know that modern hotels, the international chains with identical rooms, lots of glass and shiny chrome are very comfortable and convenient but they are all much the same, a bit sterile and not very cosy. Once you are inside you could be anywhere in the world. I like to stay somewhere a bit different, a place that has character and a unique style. We were lucky enough to find such a place when we were in town for the Vermeer exhibition followed by a visit to smart Indian restaurant in the evening. The Toren by Pavilions Hotels, in the heart of Amsterdam on the magnificent Keizersgracht, fitted the bill perfectly. It's handy for the station and there is a tram stop nearby.

The minute you walk up the carpeted stone steps past potted geraniums and tulips into the entrance hall you know you have made the right choice. The seventeenth century house exudes an air of opulence and comfort. The crystal chandeliers and antique furniture give a glimpse into the past glory and history of the house and there is even an original ceiling painting by one of Rembrandt's pupils – but more about the building later.

Despite its relative smallness and intimacy The Toren is, in fact, part of a large international chain of luxury hotels. The Pavilions group is based in Hong Kong and was created by Englishman Gordon Oldham and Frenchman Pierre Milchior. Most of their hotels are in the Far East but in Europe, in addition to Amsterdam, they have hotels in Rome and Madrid.

We made our way to our room on the second floor up a staircase that was relatively manageable compared with the usually steep stairs in many Dutch houses. There is lift to all floors if you feel inclined to conserve a little energy. There are forty rooms, including suites and chalet-like executive suites and a cottage in the garden. These outside rooms were home to the hotel's previous owner and his family.

We were lucky to have a room with views over the canal but rooms at the back feel more secluded and overlook the charming garden. Each room is unique with different décor and furnishing but they all have the same opulent and slightly eccentric style. On our table was a handwritten welcome note from the manager, Michel Meeues, and there was a bottle of wine and two glasses waiting for us. I was pleased to see there was a bathtub – so many hotels now just have a shower. And this was not just your ordinary bath; this was a whistles and bells Jacuzzi which, at the touch of button, engulfed you in an ecstasy of bubbles.









*The minute you walk up the carpeted stone steps past potted geraniums and tulips into the entrance hall, you know you have made the right choice*



The Toren house a few and reception as such but short menu in from the the lounge in the lounge the day the and during serving fine

The lounge some nice the idea of the first sculptures

After a room we v Klaasen w told me a house has





en has a fifteen room annexe in a very similar  
w doors away and residents there use the bar  
tion in the main house. There isn't a restaurant  
t small meals can be prepared in house and a  
u of main courses is available. They are brought  
e restaurant next door and you can eat these in  
r or in your room. Breakfast is served *à la carte*  
ge but can also be taken in your room. During  
e lounge serves as a quiet place to sit and relax  
g the evening becomes a sophisticated bar  
e wines and exotic cocktails.

ge and other public spaces are decorated with  
photographs but the hotel has just introduced  
f mounting temporary exhibitions. Currently,  
ch show, is of beautiful small bronze or stone  
by Ramon Schalkx.

nice cup of tea and a wash and brush up in our  
vent downstairs to talk to Annemieke Dassen-  
ho is Operations Manager. Over a coffee she  
bit about the history of the building. "The  
been a hotel for just over fifty years. Pavilions

acquired it and created The Toren about six years ago", she  
told me. "Before becoming an hotel it was a private house."  
But a house with an incredible history, as Annemieke was  
keen to tell me.

"It was built in the early 17th century and the ceiling  
painting by one of Rembrandt's pupils dates from then.  
Abraham Kuyper, who was the Dutch prime minister from  
1901 to 1905, lived here." Annemieke told me. "During  
that time the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which he  
founded in 1880, was housed in the building." But forty  
years later times had changed, as Annemieke explained.  
"During the Nazi occupation twenty Jewish people lived  
here and managed to survive by hiding in the cellars and  
secret cupboards, unlike Anne Frank and her family whose  
house, now a museum, is just around the corner."

You could spend your visit to Amsterdam just in The  
Toren soaking up its history and relaxing in the splendid  
lounge. Nice though that would be, it would be a pity not  
to take advantage of the hotel's central position in order  
to explore this unique and exciting city. The Toren will  
always be waiting for you when you return ☐



# DELFT FRINGE FESTIVAL 2023

**Between 31st May and 11th June a new generation  
of young makers will be in the spotlight**

**F**or nine days you can experience Delft in a different way. In the first two weeks of June, Delft is packed with a wide variety of performances at twenty eight special locations that you might not otherwise visit. thirty young makers, from cabaret to music, from dance to theater, treat residents and visitors of all ages to a multitude of experiences.

The program is complete and the locations have been selected. "I was surprised by the high number of

entries," says artistic director Tamara Griffioen. "We received no fewer than 285 entries. And all of high quality."

In the end, only thirty could remain, including a number of old acquaintances and many new talents. Remarkable this year was the large number of cabaret entries. "It was difficult to choose, but in the end we have put together a program that is as varied as possible with this selection, with something for everyone," says Griffioen.

According to tradition, the winner of 2022, dancer and choreographer Niek Wagenaar, will be back on stage in 2023. Last year he was unanimously awarded the highest rating by the public and won the public award. Wagenaar delves into current events with his performances. Last year this was the search for (gender) identity. This year he raises concerns about climate change and all its consequences with his new performance *After All*.

A new eye-catching maker this year is comedian Sebastiaan de Bie. In his cynical, but also romantic performance 'When starfish come ashore', he discusses expectations in life and how life often turns out very differently. "People are like starfish," he says: "life sweeps us along like the current of the sea."

Production manager Brenda Vernee found 28 special Delft locations for the Delft Fringe Festival. Vernee says: "It's nice to see that so many locations are enthusiastic to work with again. We have many well-known locations that remain worthwhile, because otherwise you don't get there so quickly, and also a number of new ones."

Vernee: "The council chamber in Delft Town Hall is once again a wonderful location this year. And what I am personally very happy about is involving the TU district in the festival. In the first festival weekend, the four locations in this district form a second festival hub, in addition to the hub in the city center."

To complete the experience, it is also possible to book a Fringe Tour. This year you can choose from an impressive collection of tour guides. From well-known Delvenaar to cultural stage animal. For example, experience the festival together with comedian Pieter Jouke, journalist Marco Dreijer from De Cultuurvlogger or artist Tijn Noordenbos. Together with them you will visit three performances at different locations.

Over the past ten years, the Delft Fringe Festival has grown into one of the important theater festivals for young makers. The festival offers makers a place to perform and receive feedback from both the public and professionals, including impresarios and scouts. There is a public award to be won, resulting in a lot of media attention. The festival organization offers extra guidance in the artistic career of the talents.

You may well see today's makers in the main halls next year. Some resounding names that once performed at the Delft Fringe Festival are: Vlamousse, Lisa Ostermann, Tappin-it Collective, Jasper Smit, Kirsten van Teijn, Matroesjka (Lisa Loeb), Kiki Schipper, Sanne Vleugels (De Prima Donna's), Dion van Rijt, LUDIQUÉ, Jasper van Kwijk and The Stamped Girls □



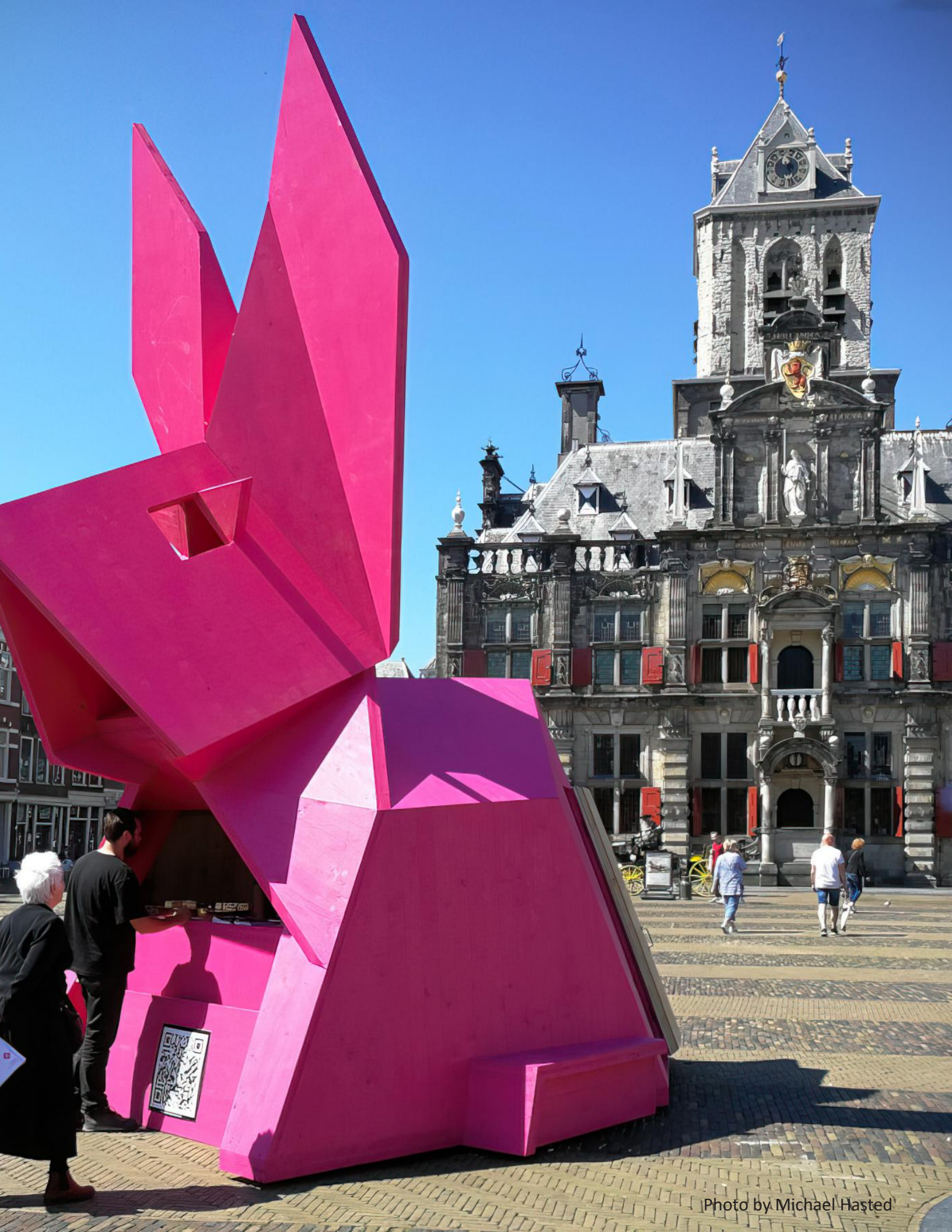


Photo by Michael Hasted



# **Stedelijk Museum Schiedam acquires nineteen works by Lotti van der Gaag**

**Thereby strengthening the position of this  
influential Cobra artist**



Photo by Nico Koster

Following the exhibition *Lotti van der Gaag - Festival of Love* which closed in January at the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, the Museum has recently enriched its collection with no fewer than nineteen works by the artist which were in that show. These include three paintings that were purchased with the help of the Mondriaan Fund: *Festival d'Amour* (1967), *Adam et Eve Chassés aux Paradis* (1965) and an untitled work from 1974. Thanks to a generous donation, the painting *Rouge et Jaune* (1978) was also acquired. The museum will also receive fifteen early drawings on long-term loan. All acquired works come from Isis van Bohemen, the daughter of the artist.

Lotti van der Gaag (1923-1999) started her artist career at the Free Academy in The Hague, to which she was affiliated until 1949. Halfway through the last century she left for Paris to become an apprentice to her inspirer Ossip Zadkine. She shares a studio space with Karel Appel and Corneille, two Dutch members of the international Cobra group. Van der Gaag started painting around 1960. Initially in a dark color palette with raw materials, following the art informel and material painting that were in vogue in France at the time. During this time, she also made the work *Adam et Eve Chassés aux Paradis* (1965). Later on, when she starts working in a more colorful way, she continues to experiment with shapes and materials. For example, she sometimes uses the back of a spoon to make lines in the paint or sticks buttons on her canvases, as in the work *Festival d'Amour* from 1967. Love, conflict, passion and sorrow: in Lotti's colorful paintings and drawings van der Gaag, all possible human relationships pass by.

Lotti van der Gaag draws all her life, in chalk, charcoal and ink. The fifteen drawings that the museum is now adding to the collection are made with dark Siberian chalk. With this she sketches all kinds of primeval animals: creatures with both human and animal characteristics. With a few powerful lines, they each get their own character. Her sculptures from the 1950s

are, almost as spatial translations of drawings from the same period, closely linked to this language of form.

About the frequently recurring imaginative human and animal figures, Cobra expert Willemijn Stokvis said in January 2023 during a lecture in the museum: 'Imaginary human beings that are so intertwined that they seem almost inseparable. There are eyes everywhere, hearts everywhere, hands everywhere and threads that make connections. One's thigh is

the other's arm. She painted this incomprehensible, nightmarish world that would not let go of her in bright, light, cheerful colors, but the facial expression of the human beings is usually not exactly cheerful.'

Lotti van der Gaag is often mentioned in the same breath as the Cobra movement. This group of artists from Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam existed between 1948 and 1951 and is inspired by the intuitive style of children's drawings and outsider art. Although she never participated in Cobra exhibitions during the existence of the movement, Van der Gaag is nowadays presented as a Cobra artist. There is a clear relationship



and mutual influence in the work of the artists.

Stedelijk Museum Schiedam gives priority to acquiring works by women artists and artists of color, because this work is still underrepresented in museums. Lotti van der Gaag's new acquisitions fit into this line and follow the purchase of two bronze sculptures in 2019

Van der Gaag once said: 'Almost all men like it when their wives draw, paint, sculpt a little, but it should stay with a sweet hobby.'

Cobra expert Willemijn Stokvis agrees that it is only in the last ten years that we have paid more attention to the oeuvres of important female artists. They were given little room, especially within the influential avant-garde movements, which were dominated by men and macho-like manifestos. Yet it was precisely artists such as Van der Gaag who brought the greatest innovation with their work □









# Scapino Ballet's **TWO TALES**

**Michael HASTED**

**S**ince its inception in 2018 the Rotterdam International Duet Choreography Competition – the RIDCC – has grown in stature and, despite having effectively lost two years because of Covid, it has become a major fixture on the international dance calendar. Created by two Scapino Ballet principal dancers Maya Roest and Mischa van Leeuwen, RIDCC owes much of its success to its links to that company. Scapino provides not only support but also access to a large, prestigious stage by giving RIDCC winners the opportunity to create pieces for the company. Their current production, *Two Tales*, which premiered last night in Rotterdam, is just that.





Now, I don't know if it was coincidence or a direction from the powers that be, but both works had a lot in common – two sides of the same coin almost. Both were about death and both were all black affairs.

The first piece, *Free at Last* by Danae Dimitriadi and Dionysios Alamanos, winners of the first RIDDC five years ago, was a very graceful but nonetheless sombre piece. Inspired by an event in 1803 when, rather than face a fate worse than death at the hands of the invading Ottoman army, sixty women of Zalongo, a village in northern Greece, committed mass suicide by jumping off a cliff, taking their children with them. This is a well-known story and has been interpreted in dance before but the five female dancers in this version by Danae and Dionysios bring to it a simplicity and elegance despite the impending and inevitable tragedy.

Equally black and equally focused on death, *The Mourning* had farcical elements to alleviate the gloom. In a strange way it put me in mind of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* in as much as the piece was centred around a recently dead corpse. Perhaps not surprisingly then, *The Mourning* is the creation of Erika Silgoner, a young lady of Sicilian origin. She was winner of the 2021 RIDCC XL Prize, of which the opportunity to produce this piece is the result.

The corpse in question was still warm when he was laid out, having danced solo in the opening sequence. A little unusually for dance there was a proper set consisting of a bed for the body, three chairs and wall with nice patterned wallpaper and a door, oh, and a hat-stand. After the corpse had taken up his position he was suitably attended by four mourners and a priest who wandered to and fro, reading from a book, The Bible I suppose. Suddenly there is a loud knock on the door and a smoking, menacing stranger joins the proceedings as the death knell tolls.

*The Mourning* was a very special piece, combining drama, humour and some outstanding dancing. It demonstrates the value of RIDCC in discovering and giving the opportunity for new talent to develop and be seen on a larger stage. Congratulations to all involved and a reminder that the fifth RIDCC takes place in the same theatre in June □

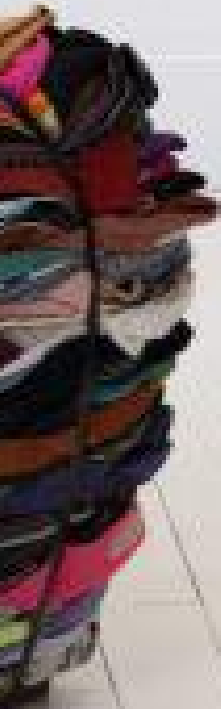
*Two Tales* continues on tour until 20th June





# Dry30. Design Non Design?

Rotterdam's Nieuwe Instituut/Droog  
design collective in Milan



**H**et Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam is currently celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the innovative and unruly Dutch design collective Droog. The exhibition *Dry30. Design or Non design?* show-cases iconic and ground-breaking designs from a brand that has been as controversial as it has been loved over the years. Their work was exhibited at the Triennale Milano during the Milan Design Week/Salone del Mobile in April.

*Dry30. Design or Non design?* celebrated the brutal and rebellious existence of Droog and the renewed appreciation for the iconic Dutch brand. Since its foundation in Milan in 1993, Droog has been doing things differently. The brand opposed 'dry' functional design, and saw design as an art form that could contain humour and should be accessible to everyone.

In doing so, Droog created its very own, ground-breaking design movement that was not just a trend, but a game changer. Droog's way of thinking has been copied by countless brands over the past thirty years, while the brand's designs have found their way to the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London as well as many others.

Aric Chen, general and artistic director of Het Nieuwe Instituut said, "Droog brought his dry humour and subversive designs to a global audience - and design would never be the same again. The brand made its mark on the world thirty years ago as the last design movement before the advent of the internet. When we look back on that history, we can wonder not only how far we've come since then, but also where it goes from here."

***Droog brought his dry humour and subversive designs to a global audience - and design would never be the same again . . .***

Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam is the national museum and institute for architecture, design and digital culture. The institute wants to show how powerful new (design) ideas can be. The goal is to imagine, try out and put into practice a better future by reflecting together on ideas from the past, now and later. Visitors are encouraged to ask questions, contribute ideas and thus make a contribution themselves. The exhibitions, research, events and other initiatives that the institute develops at home and abroad together form a testing ground. Leading designers, thinkers and diverse public groups work together on a critical approach to current issues.

Nieuwe Instituut houses the National Collection for Dutch Architecture and Urban Planning, and manages Huis Sonneveld, a leading example of Dutch functionalist architecture from 1933 in Rotterdam's Museumpark. Nieuwe Instituut is the world's first Zoöp, a pioneering organizational model in which all aspects of the museum's activities and programming are determined by its impact on and benefit to other forms of life. The institute is commissioning the Dutch pavilion at the International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, and in 2023 will act as artistic director of the fourth edition of London Design Biennale at Somerset House in June 





# DE ZUS VAN FRIDA

*(The Sister of Frida Kahlo)*

A Mexican Musical Show by Ensemble SeaSession

Anja Herrmann



# KAHLO

and Servaes Nelissen

We may know of the famous Frida Kahlo, the surrealist painter, whose artworks acutely translate the pain of her life and her experience in the horrific bus accident . . . However, her sister, Cristina, was not recognized as an artist herself, and was not involved in an accident but was at least a direct or indirect subject in several of her sister's paintings.

Ensemble SeaSession and theatre maker Servaes Nelissen shine the light onto the painter's hidden sibling in their Mexican musical show *De Zus van Frida Kahlo*.

Together with nine musicians, twenty instruments, a pianola "gone wild", animated puppets along with several short films, I and others find ourselves erratically lost "in a surrealistic dream world between life and death" as protagonist and Mexican connoisseur, Frederik de Waal, and Cristina herself, accompany us on this eccentric and comedic adventure.





Frederik, who is played by Servaes Nelissen, is attempting to find his Mexican roots as a conductor of an orchestra while experiencing a rapid decline in his health. Throughout the show, his gradually evident insanity and concurrent hallucinations drive him to take highly questionable actions, eventually leading him and the audience to meet the mysterious sister, Cristina Kahlo.

From beginning to end of the “muzikale Mexicoshow”, the utter delirium of Frederik is so exquisitely portrayed by the balanced transposition of theatre, light, music, and reanimation of Cristina (in the form of a puppet) that the totality of it effortlessly reaches a comedic threshold. You cannot not help but find yourself in constant fits of laughter for the whole duration of the show.

The additional alluring animated illustrations, created by Sjeng Schupp, which were projected onto a white curtain, not only facilitates in visualising the disordered surrealism of Frederik’s dreams with himself and Cristina, but also beautifully references Mexican culture.

Pauline Post, pianist and artistic director, explains that she wishes the audience to not only “have a really good time” but also to remark “the unmistakable Mexican roots in all the pieces.”

Much like one would recognize in Frida’s paintings, the association to the country’s culture was no doubt notably depicted in the dynamics and profuse colours tangled within the enchanting, musical ‘chaos’ of the show. The further ornamentation of the music and inclusion of effects to emphasise comedic elements was likewise immaculate, specifically when Frederik’s baton changed from a conducting stick, to a toilet brush, to a snake and then somehow to a window cleaner.

The show, which was originally intended to exclusively portray “Mexico, Mexican art & music, the day of the dead” (*Día de los Muertos*) and the differences to Western culture’s apprehension of death, only later surrounded the subject of the artist’s sister. Post further explains that she did not want to completely “ignore Frida Kahlo” despite the over-commercialisation of her life and art.

The juxtaposing themes of life and death within the show is something one would contemplate, regardless.

Where death is always met with grief and despair at the loss of a loved one, Mexican culture will also celebrate it with a sense of humour and joy just as *De Zus van Frida Kahlo* has wonderfully done.

Albeit performed in Dutch with the inclusion of some Spanish phrases, you cannot help but cackle at the brilliant spontaneity and unexpected happenstances of the show – from a waltzing bull, arm and arm with the crazy music connoisseur, to a sudden appearance of a dancing cactus – myself and others found ourselves in hysterics. Even if Dutch is not your native language, the show is a

must see. The incredible music, pronounced gestures and flawless theatrical timing of light and sound are adequate enough to put a smile on your face.

At the finale, I could not help but wonder what Frida and Cristina Kahlo would think had they been there, present with us in the room – I have no doubt they would also share a laugh with us ☐



The tour of *De Suz van Frida Kahlo* continues until 4th June

# ANDRE STEMPEL

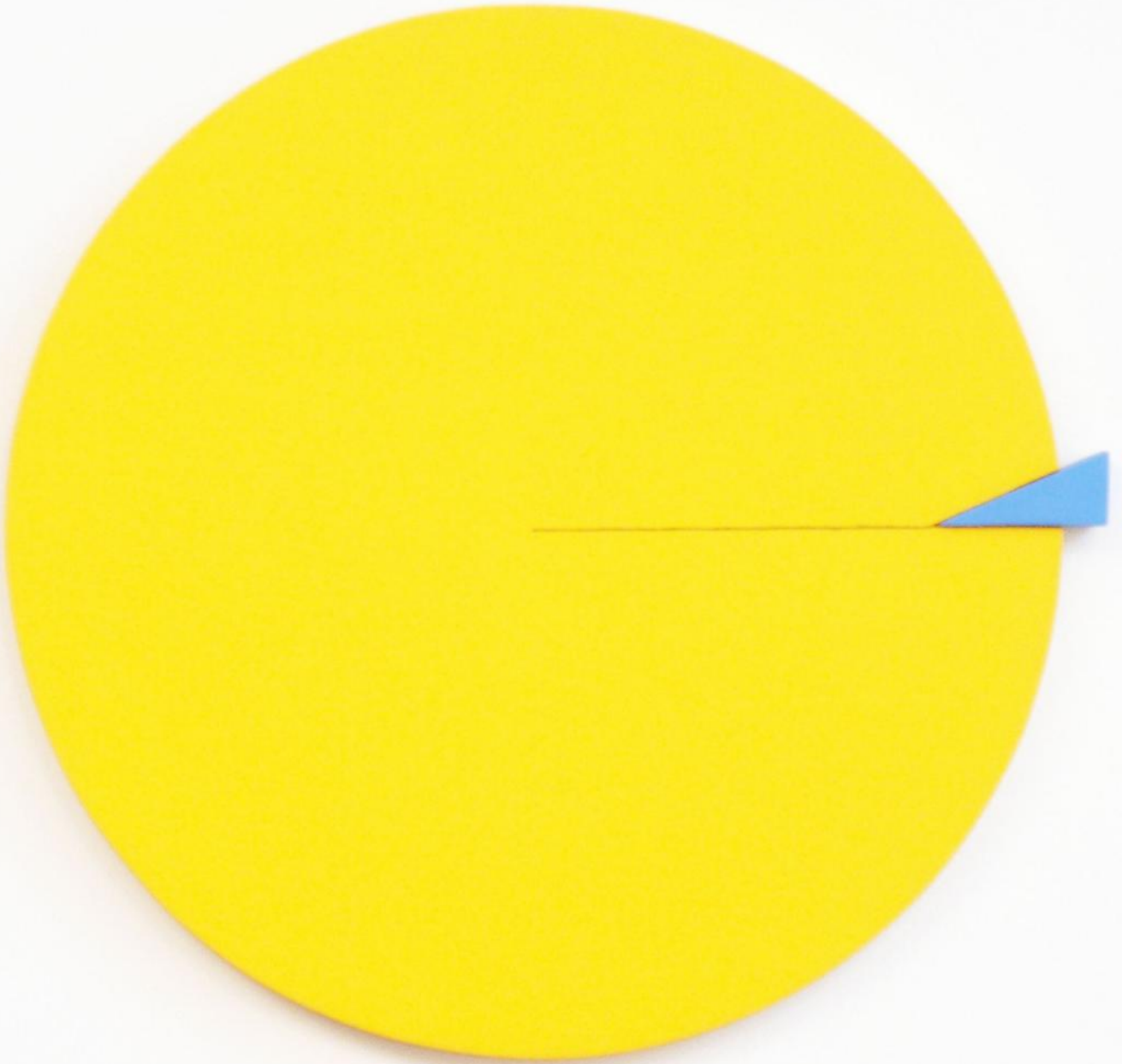
An Amsterdam Retrospective at the Merchant House

## Jacob John SHALE

In John Cheever's 1969 novel *Bullet Park* there is a character named Hammer whose feelings of depression can be exorcised by him sitting in an ordinary room painted yellow. 'My life had begun again,' Hammer writes in his diary, 'and I could see, from this beginning, how far I had gone from any natural course.' I quote the passage not only because I relish any excuse to bring public awareness to Cheever's writing, but because I think a description of the revivifying properties of the colour yellow is an apposite introduction to the work of Andre Stempfel, the nonagenarian French artist whose career is currently being commemorated by a retrospective exhibition at The Merchant House in Amsterdam.









Andre Stempfel is a minimalist who creates paintings and sculptures depicting geometric shapes in sundry shades of yellow (for the past fifty years, he has married himself to this one colour). Some of Stempfel's paintings are designed to look as though they are peeling away from the frame, the edges curling like a cheap paperback warped by too much sun. Others have had small chunks snipped from the corners. A human frivolity vandalises the mathematical orderliness of the shapes; two alien aesthetics are made to coexist in the same artwork □



De Nederlandse Reisopera presents

# FIDELIO

A beautiful new interpretation of Beethoven's only opera which deals with tyranny and the fight for freedom. It's about strong characters, invincible marital fidelity and hope. In *Fidelio*, the female protagonist, Leonore, changes identities and, as a man 'Fidelio', risks everything to free her lover from a deep dungeon.

De Reisopera developed this opera production together with Den Kongelige Opera (Copenhagen) and Teatr Wielki (Warsaw).

Beethoven shook up the musical world order, and his only opera *Fidelio* bears his strong signature. The music embraces the depths of despair and ecstatic hope of the soul, and the roles require extraordinary singing voices. The internationally renowned Dutch soprano Kelly God shines in the role of Leonore.

The nobleman Florestan (meaning: the wild and active) has been wrongly imprisoned by his political opponent, Governor Pizarro. Leonore has disguised herself as a young man, Fidelio ("faithful"), and goes to work in the prison to save her husband. Marzelline (the daughter of prison guard Rocco) falls in love with Fidelio. The situation escalates . . . □

Nederlandse Reisopera's *Fidelio* is on tour until 25th May



# YARAS WEDDING

An interdisciplinary performance by Guy Weizman,  
NITE (NNT + Club Guy & Roni) and Schauspiel Hannover

**D**o we really dare to question our prejudices? Have we maybe become too politically correct? How do we move forward without losing each other?

*Yara's Wedding* is an interdisciplinary performance directed by Guy Weizman, with text by Antigone Akgün, Rik van den Bos, Rasit Elibol and Mohamedou Ould Slahi Houbeini. Together this unique group of writers – inspired by the work of Edward Said *Orientalism* – wrote a play about framing based on origin, colour, orientation, social status and cultural conflicts. No confrontation is avoided in this very musical and lively performance with twelve actors, dancers, singers and musicians from different backgrounds and nationalities.

Yara, Greta, Sebastian and Tony are childhood friends. They grew up in the same neighborhood and spent long, wet summers together. They were inseparable until that one night. The night the mansion burned down.

Twelve years later, Yara married Sebastian. On the occasion of the celebration, (old) friends and family go on a trip. Far away from their familiar surroundings, new bonds are forged and old conflicts come to light. In the carousel of confrontations, encounters and situations at the wedding, everyone slowly becomes so drunk and emotional that no one wants to go to bed until everything that needs to be said or done has been said or done □



Esther Apituley presenteert

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De Sprong van Nijinsky is een coproductie  
met Scapino Ballet Rotterdam