

ARTSTALK

Colour Supplement

Number 34

August 2025



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A rather oriental feel this month. We have an article about Chinese architect Ma Yansong, designer of the amazing Fenix in Rotterdam, an exhibition at Rijksmuseum curated by Dutch/Indonesian artist Fiona Tan, and the work of women prisoners of the Japanese in WW2. We saw two one-act operas by Dutch National Opera Academy in The Hague and we were at Wonderfeel Festival in Utrecht and *A Celebration of Queerness in Classical Music* in Amsterdam.

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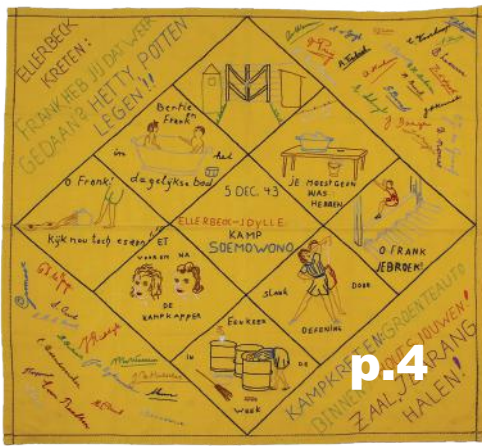
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Der Kaiser von Atlantis (The Emperor of Atlantis) by Dutch National Opera Academy at Amare in The Hague.
Photo by Reinout BOS



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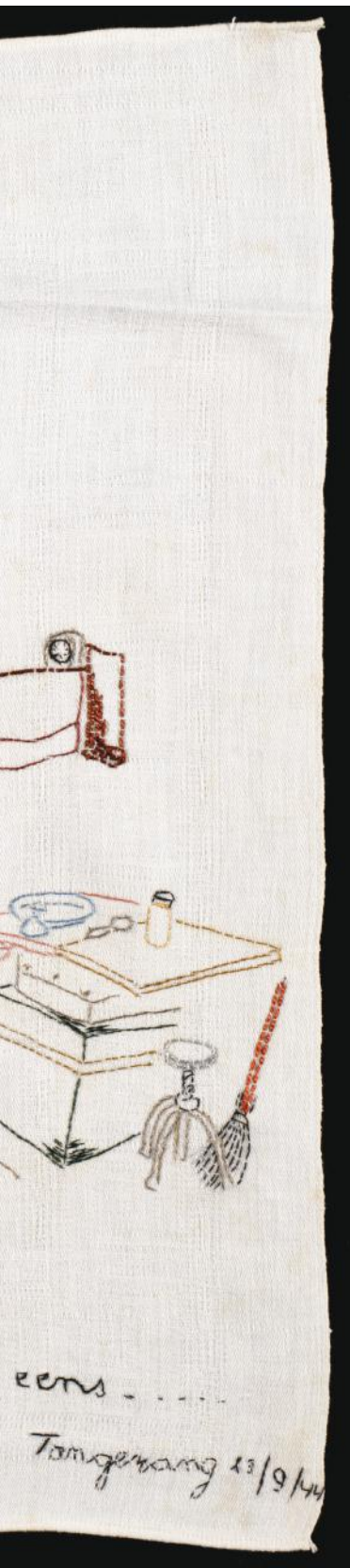
Museon-Omniversum in The Hague
presents stories of the Japanese
occupation of the Dutch East Indies during
the Second World War told in textiles



Tot op de Draad



It was



Tot op de Draad (*See you in the Thread*) highlights the Second World War in the former Dutch East Indies and tells the story of interned women who used needle and thread to express resistance and creativity. With this, The Hague museum commemorates eighty years of freedom.

For the first time embroidery and clothing from the women's camps are the focus of an exhibition. "The story of the collection takes place in a time of enormous uncertainty and scarcity," says Didi van Trijp, curator at Museon-Omniversum and creator of the collection. "The fabric creations show how women expressed their creativity and resilience, while there was little room for this during this period. Think of embroidered tablecloths and napkins, dresses made of parachute material and even personalized camp numbers. With needle and thread, the women told stories about the Japanese occupation. In this way, they embroidered painful, but also moving and sometimes even funny camp scenes."

The exhibition also contains an inspiring message for the current generation. “We can learn a lot from the ingenuity of these powerful women. For example, the parachute dress is a good example of the creative use of existing materials, which was necessary due to the great scarcity during the war. The museum involves the public in the exhibition with repair and embroidery workshops, in which visitors get to work with textiles themselves, inspired by stories and techniques from the collection. In addition, the museum, with the help of the youth work group Jong 1508, organizes a meeting in which different generations talk to each other about this past. In this way, we keep the important lessons from this difficult time alive for all generations, even after eighty years.” □

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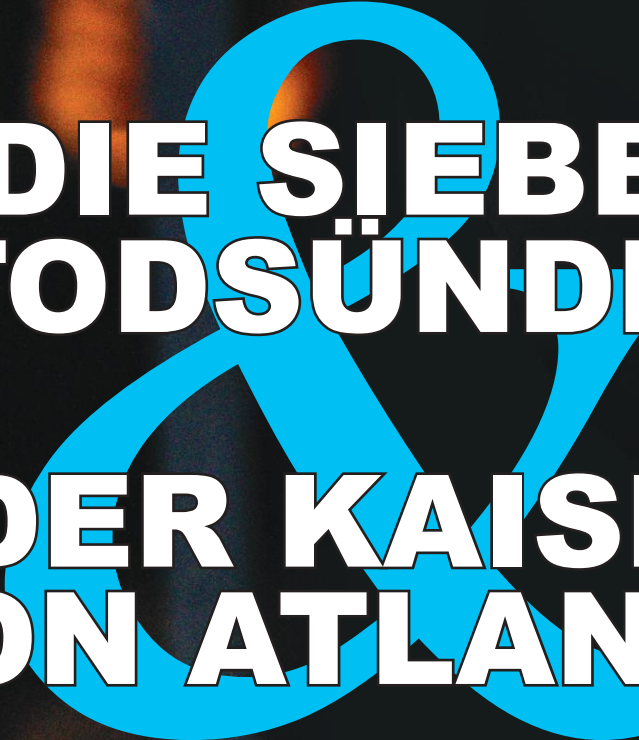
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DIE SIEBEN TODSÜNDEN

DER KAISER VON ATLANTIS

performed by students of the Dutch National
Opera Academy alongside the Residentie
Orkest at Amare in The Hague. Carmen BULZ
was there for ArtsTalk

Photographs by Reinout BOS

Antis



On the same day NATO leaders gathered in The Hague to deliberate military budgets and defense priorities, a very different kind of gathering unfolded just a few streets away, in the Conservatoriumzaal of the Amare. There, the talented young artists of the Dutch National Opera Academy, alongside the Residentie Orkest, invited the audience into a space of reflection with two one-act operas that confront the realities of war, power, morality, and the human cost of survival. The evening featured Kurt Weill's *Die Sieben Todsünden (The Seven Deadly Sins)* and Viktor Ullmann's *Der Kaiser von Atlantis (The Emperor of Atlantis)*, brought to the stage under the direction of Floris Visser and the baton of Sam Weller.

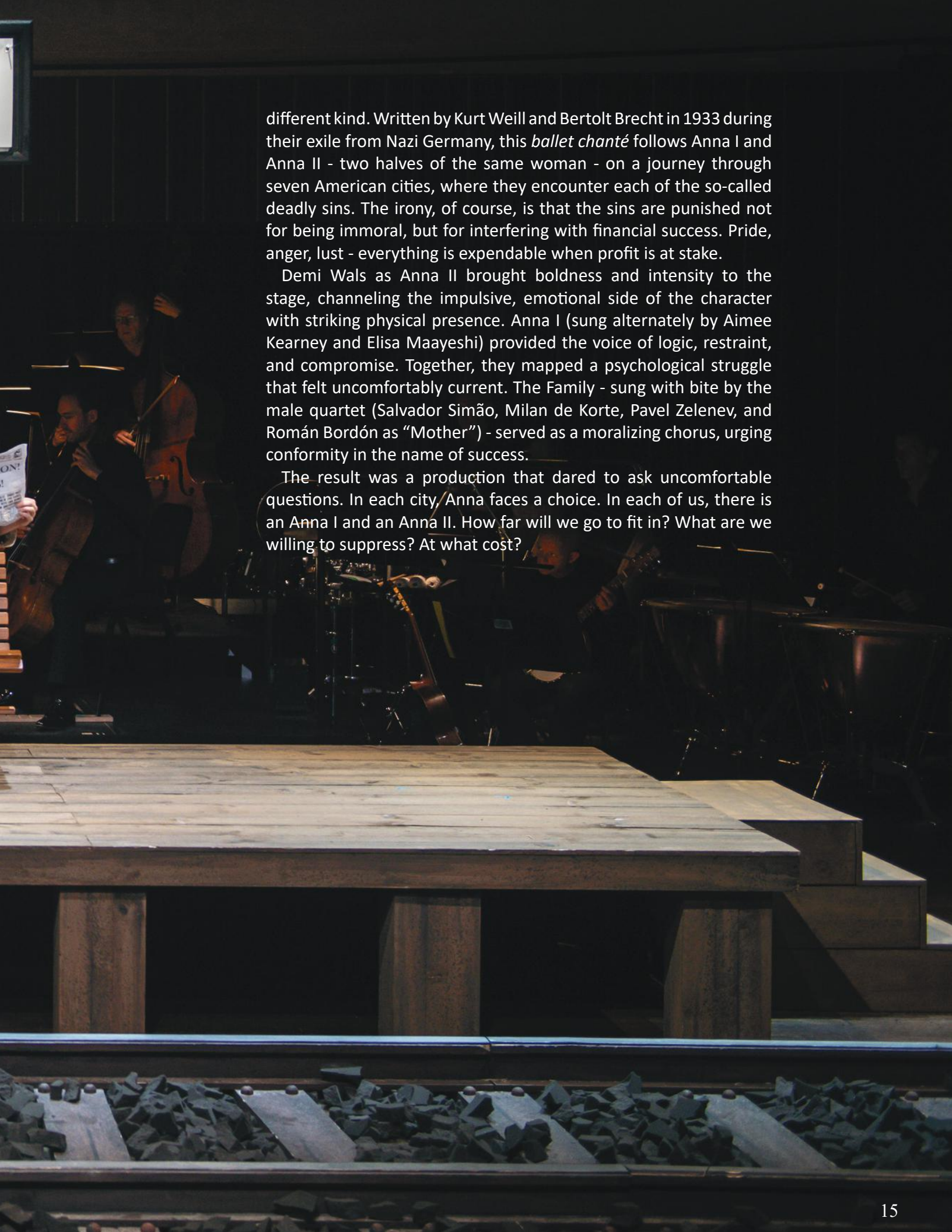
I begin with *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, performed in the second half of the evening - fittingly so, as it directly confronts the absurdity of war and the corruption of absolute power. Composed in 1943 by Viktor Ullmann, with a libretto by Peter Kien, the opera was written and first rehearsed in the Nazi concentration camp of Theresienstadt. Neither composer nor librettist lived to see it performed; both were killed at Auschwitz. This gives the work a chilling weight that goes beyond allegory.

The story is surreal but unsettlingly familiar: a tyrant, Kaiser Overall, declares universal war. In response, Death - offended that his function has been hijacked - goes on strike. No one dies anymore, and the world descends into chaos. Life without death becomes unbearable. The only way to restore balance? The Emperor must be the first to die. The opera's historical significance is matched by the force of this production. Visser's staging, Esmée Thomassen's costumes, and Gertjan Houben's lighting combined to create a world that was both grotesque and intimate. Every choice was deliberate. Nothing was left to chance.

The young artists fully inhabited their roles, not only vocally but physically. I found myself drawn into the theatrical space they created, where sound, gesture, and silence carried equal weight. One could sense not only their talent, but their joy at being on stage. They reminded us that the theatre, even when it is about death, can be alive. There was no posturing, no distance - only presence.

DIE SIEBEN TODSÜNDEN





different kind. Written by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht in 1933 during their exile from Nazi Germany, this *ballet chanté* follows Anna I and Anna II - two halves of the same woman - on a journey through seven American cities, where they encounter each of the so-called deadly sins. The irony, of course, is that the sins are punished not for being immoral, but for interfering with financial success. Pride, anger, lust - everything is expendable when profit is at stake.

Demi Wals as Anna II brought boldness and intensity to the stage, channeling the impulsive, emotional side of the character with striking physical presence. Anna I (sung alternately by Aimee Kearney and Elisa Maayeshi) provided the voice of logic, restraint, and compromise. Together, they mapped a psychological struggle that felt uncomfortably current. The Family - sung with bite by the male quartet (Salvador Simão, Milan de Korte, Pavel Zelenev, and Román Bordón as "Mother") - served as a moralizing chorus, urging conformity in the name of success.

The result was a production that dared to ask uncomfortable questions. In each city, Anna faces a choice. In each of us, there is an Anna I and an Anna II. How far will we go to fit in? What are we willing to suppress? At what cost?

What united both pieces was the extraordinary synergy between the youthful energy of the cast and the musical maturity of the Residentie Orkest. You could feel the excitement of early-career artists sharing the stage with seasoned professionals. And the audience - likely filled with friends, family, mentors, and curious concertgoers - was warm, engaged, and visibly moved. Last night, the room was full. The applause sincere.

It offered no utopian fantasies, no cheap catharsis. Instead, it holds up a mirror - and for me, that mirror felt especially sharp in a week dominated by political statements about security and force.

If nothing else, it is a reminder that even in turbulent times, art can still do what it does best: question, disturb, and - in its most honest form - connect □







MA YANSONG

Architecture and Emotion

at the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam



The Tornado dominates the new Fenix Museum in Rotterdam. Photo by Michael Hasted



Ma Yansong Photo by Greg Mei

If you have been down to the Rotterdam waterfront recently you can't have missed the latest addition to the city's already imposing skyline – the astonishing Tornado which crowns the new Fenix Museum of Migration.

This imposing metal structure rivals the city's other recent triumph of contemporary, thinking-out-of-the-box architecture - the equally shiny Depot at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.

The amazing shell-like Tornado (actually a double-helix – just like our DNA) is in fact the museum's main staircase which leads the visitor to the museum's two, huge first-floor galleries and on to a viewing platform high above the rooftops. It was designed by Chinese architect Ma Yansong of MAD Architects and the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam (just across the road from The Depot) is currently offering an insight into the work and mind of this extraordinary visionary and his company.

The Nieuwe Instituut is the Netherlands' national museum for architecture, design and digital culture and this exhibition showcases the work of an architect who was recently named one of the *100 Most Influential People of 2025* by *Time* magazine on its renowned annual list of leading individuals in culture, design, politics and society.

Through dynamic models, artistic interpretations, and multimedia installations *Ma Yansong: Architecture and Emotion* takes visitors on a journey through Ma's pioneering ideas and working methods. Beginning with his early critiques of modernism to the daring, flowing forms rooted in Chinese tradition for which he is known today. Responding to what he sees as the dehumanising legacy of modernist architecture with its rigid rationalism and oppressive grids, Ma draws from classical Chinese aesthetics and philosophies to reconnect architecture with notions of nature that are linked to emotion and to propose a futurism rooted in tradition. The exhibition bridges the gap between MAD's revolutionary designs and the profound emotional responses they elicit.

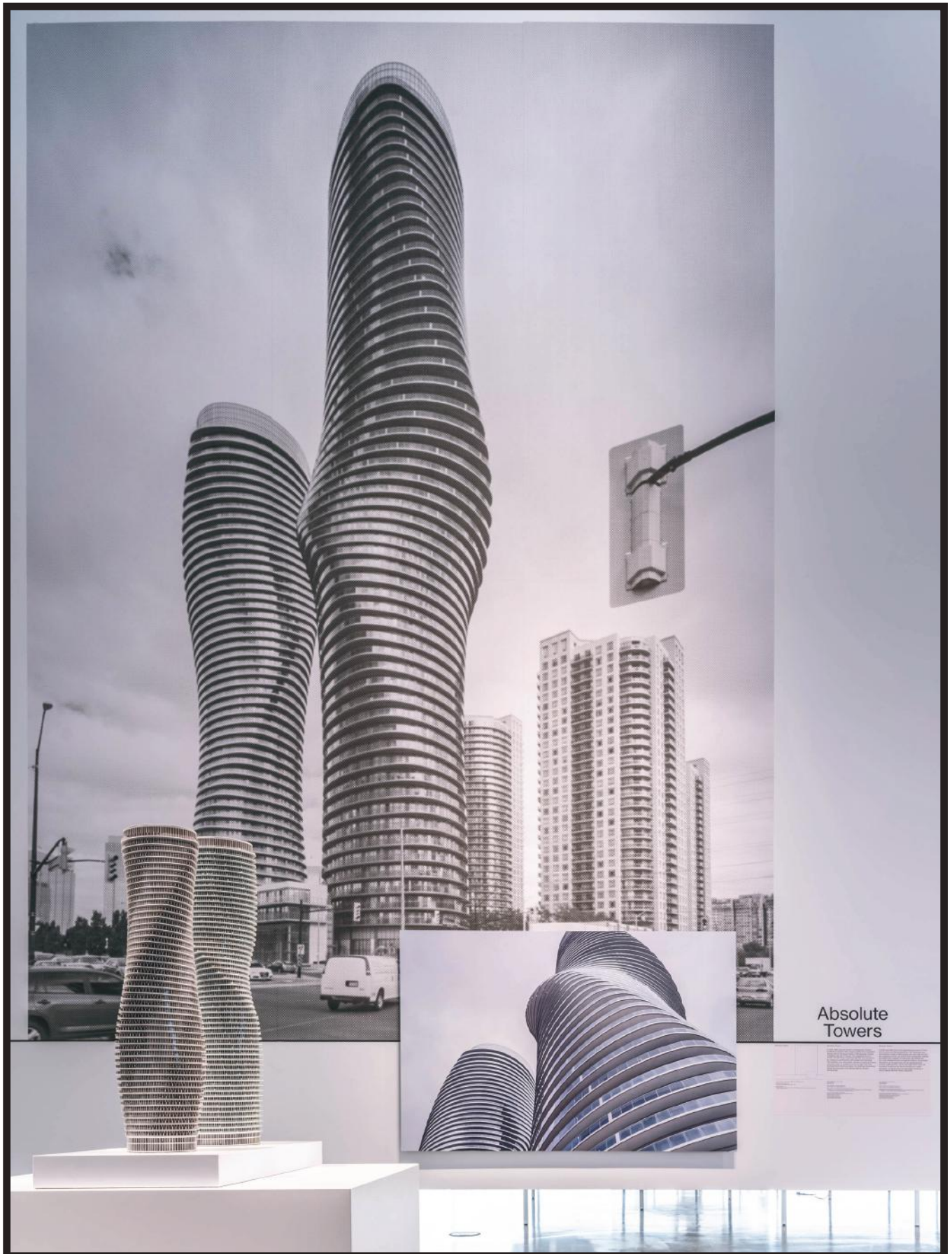
Ma Yansong founded MAD Architects in 2004 and has led the office alongside Dang Qun and Yosuke Hayano ever since. The exhibition begins with the firm's formative years in China in the early 2000s, a period of rapid social change and unprecedented economic growth. During this period, Ma organised a series of conversations about the role of architecture in this new era. These discussions, published in a 2008 book called *MAD Dinner*, coincided with Ma's earliest, speculative projects, which open the exhibition.

“In an astonishingly short period, China produced some of the world’s most influential and ground-breaking architecture, and now that work is making its mark around the world. Ma Yansong and MAD are at the forefront of this . . . ” Aric Chen, General and Artistic Director of the Nieuwe Instituut and curator of the exhibition





Beijing2050 Hutong Bubble 218.
Courtesy of MAD Architects,
Photo by Tian Fangfang



Exhibition display of photos, models etc of Absolute Towers in Mississauga, Canada. Photo by Ossip

These include the Floating Island, an imaginative canopy over the site of the former World Trade Center site in New York; the transformation of Beijing's Tiananmen Square into a green park; an 800m tower, bent over itself as a play on the era's obsession with supertall buildings and an aquarium designed from a fish's perspective.

The exhibition then transports visitors back to the early 2010s. In response to China's alienating urban architecture, Ma sought an alternative to modernism. He found it in *shanshui* (mountain-water), a philosophical concept from traditional Chinese painting that depicts landscapes as a representation of the relationship between humans and nature. A striking example of this can be seen in the model of the speculative design for the Shanshui City, which is based on the landscape of southwestern China and was inspired by the brush technique used in shanshui paintings.

The Embodied Nature section of the exhibition further explores the role of nature in MAD's work. The designs for the Shenzhen Bay Culture Park and the Amsterdam Zuidas demonstrate that incorporating greenery into built environments is not the only consideration; the symbolic significance attributed to natural elements in traditional Chinese painting, and the emotional response this evokes, are also integral to MAD's work.

One can also experience the new piece, *Unbound Echo* by sound artist Aimée Theriot, which evolves in response to its surroundings and audience throughout the duration of the exhibition.

MAD Architects' work is often described as futuristic, but the firm sees the organic forms of its designs as reconciling the past with the future. MAD's designs are not digitally generated, but instead always begin with hand sketches by Ma. This can be seen in the

biomorphic design of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, currently under construction in Los Angeles and the new Fenix museum in Rotterdam, both of which are featured in the Layered Futures section. The futuristic Tornado is integrated into the existing buildings and, like the museum itself, it pays tribute to arrival and departure, and to the past and the future.

Visitors can use an AI installation using algorithms trained on MAD's archive to have their own sketch rendered into an actual MAD design, referencing the now-famous sketch that Ma Yansong made for the Tornado.

The Connecting Landscapes section delves deeper into the fluid forms of MAD's designs, by zooming in on the human perspective. During the design process, MAD considers how future users will perceive, use and experience the space, and the emotions this will evoke, in ways that aim to repair ruptured urban fabrics.

For instance, this approach was applied to the Baiziwan Social Housing project in Beijing, where low-cost residential towers are connected by paths and walkways, helping to mend an urban context of large superblocks cut off by wide roads and fostering community spirit through human-centred design.

A large screen shows the video installation *Beyond the Wall* by Weichao Xu, a filmmaker who lives in the Baiziwan complex. This is the first time that the film has been shown □

Ma Yansong: Architecture and Emotion continues at the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam until 12th October 2025



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Text by Cicek Isiksel SONMEZ
Photograph by Foppe SCHUT

Wonderfeel is a three-day outdoor festival in Utrecht which took place over the first weekend of July and dedicated to classical music. This year marks its 11th edition. The concept of presenting classical music in the style of a rock or pop festival is both refreshing and imaginative.

This was my first time attending Wonderfeel, and I truly enjoyed every moment. What stood out most was the impressive variety in the programme. I immersed myself in genres ranging from Baroque to jazz, all while surrounded by the serene natural beauty of Landgoed Groeneveld.

The festival featured seven stages, four of which were the main ones. Each offered a unique interpretation of classical music, showcasing a diverse range of styles and performers. Every stage delivered a distinct experience, allowing audiences to enjoy classical music in varied forms and sounds. The stages were all within walking distance, and each performance lasted approximately 45 minutes. The open, doorless setup let visitors move freely between performances, creating a relaxed atmosphere where you could explore what resonated with you—without feeling obligated to stay for a full set that didn't.

One of my favorite moments was listening to the interpretations of works by Valentin Silvestrov, Rachmaninov, and Mel Bonis, performed by Anastasia Kobekina, Veriko Tchumburidze, and Alexey Botvinov. I was deeply moved by the emotional depth they conveyed—the audience sat in complete silence, with only birdsong from the surrounding trees filling the air. Listening to the Maarten Combrink Quintet's jazz set left me feeling light and uplifted. In contrast, the soulful performance by the young and talented İdil & İrem Yunkuş stirred a profound sense of homesickness. The music of Peltomaa Fraanje Perkola transformed the atmosphere with the gentle tones of the medieval harp.

A photograph of a string quartet performing outdoors at night. The musicians are seated, and the scene is illuminated with warm, golden light, creating a bokeh effect in the background. The focus is on the musicians, with some blurred to create a sense of depth.

This year's spotlight on the Western Balkans reaffirmed for me the depth and beauty of the region's cultural heritage, brought to life through the performances of Petrit Çeku, Julija Hartig, and Barbara Kozelj. Their performances were a remarkable blend of classical artistry and regional character.

Another highlight of the festival was its flawless organization. Pre-event information was clear and thorough, signage onsite was plentiful, and catering options were both abundant and accessible. I especially appreciated the inclusion of the Wijnlokaal, which added a cozy, relaxed touch to the festival experience. The venue itself was spacious, allowing attendees to find their own peaceful spot to enjoy both music and nature.

I'm already looking forward to next year's programme and wholeheartedly recommend Wonderfeel to anyone who appreciates classical music in a fresh, open-air setting □



MONOMAN

curated by Indonesian-born Dutch artist Fiona Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. This summer, for the first time in the museum's history, a contemporary artist was invited to curate a major exhibition to take up the space of the Philips Wing.

Exhibition photographs by Albertine DIJKSTERHUIS



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This summer, for the first time in the history of the Rijksmuseum, a contemporary artist has been invited to curate a major exhibition, spanning the entirety of the Philips Wing.

Fiona Tan (1966) is a visual artist and filmmaker. She is best known for her research-based installations in which explorations of memory and identity and the deceptive nature of representation are key. Her work is included in numerous national collections and solo exhibitions have been held all over the world including in Austria, Germany, Norway, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and the United States. Tan represented the Netherlands at the Venice Biennale in 2009. The Dutch artist has lived in Amsterdam since 1998 and was born in Indonesia and raised in Australia.

Tan's fascination with the birth of psychiatry at the beginning of the 19th century serves as the starting point for the exhibition that draws from Rijksmuseum's extensive collection including works by Francisco Goya, Edvard Munch, Raden Saleh as well as Japanese masks and christening gowns. The exhibition concludes with *Janine's Room* (2025), a new work by Fiona Tan commissioned by the Rijksmuseum.

Taco Dibbitts, General Director of the Rijksmuseum said, "With *Monomania*, Fiona Tan creates a layered, almost cinematic exhibition with extraordinary objects from the Rijksmuseum collection, of which many will be shown for the first time in decades. Tan's associative journey confronts us with questions about the psyche, and the thin line between recognition and alienation." Fiona Tan has created a new work, *Janine's Room*, a large spatial video installation encompassing three projections. Within this expansive and immersive video installation the viewer is gradually overtaken by the sense that appearances are deceiving, as reality and imagination begin to merge in an ever-deepening interplay. *Janine's Room* forms the final part of the exhibition.

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*years I have been asking myself about the
and its visual representation. To what extent
sible to see from the outside of a person what
ening on the inside? Seen through the prism of
arch into the beginnings of psychiatry, I have
into the rijksmuseum collections, which in turn
ulted in a new work.”* Fiona Tan



Portrait of a Kleptomaniac (c.1822) by the French artist Théodore Géricault (Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent) serves as the starting point for Fiona Tan's research into the development of psychiatry at the beginning of the 19th century. The painting is part of *Les Monomanes*, a series of ten portraits of individuals believed to have an obsessive fixation. Only five of these paintings still are known today. Géricault, along with many other 19th century artists, was fascinated by the extremes of the psyche. They were keen to explore, like the physicians of the time, the idea that mental afflictions could be read upon the face.

As Tan delved into the Rijksmuseum's collection, she was guided by questions such as: What did monomania mean? How were people with mental health issues perceived at that time? And, perhaps most importantly, how were they portrayed? In her exploration, Tan focused on the 19th century, without restricting herself to a specific genre or kind of artwork. This resulted in a carefully curated selection of over 250 pieces; surprising combinations of painting, decorative art, and everyday objects.

Wilmotte & Associés, Paris designed the exhibition in close collaboration with the artist. Irma Boom Office is responsible for the graphic design of the exhibition guide and publication. The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated publication, including an in-depth essay by the artist and contributions by Douwe Draaisma, psychologist and Mayken Jonkman, curator of 19th century paintings at the Rijksmuseum □

Monomania continues at Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam until 14th September 2025



Fiona Tan, *Self-portrait with mask*, 2025, courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

A Celebration of Queerness in Classical Music


LUDWIG and Boys Won't Be Boys presented a unifying musical spectacle casting new light on the classical repertoire at Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ in Amsterdam. Nicholas STANLEY was there for ArtsTalk

Photos by Casper Koster









Having already enjoyed one of Boys Won't Be Boys' (BWBB) *Queer Friday's* at the CC Amstel Theater, I was looking forward to this collaboration with music cooperative LUDWIG, nicely timed to kick off *Pride 2025* at the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ on 23rd July and I wasn't disappointed - even if the show does not really do what it says on the tin.

BWBB's shows are a revue-style selection of music, narrative and, in this case, dance. Vincenzo Turiano was a wonderful opening to the show. Their solo dance to Tchaikovsky's *Pezze Elegiaco*, as we discover later, documents their own personal coming out as non-binary. The balletic and yet contemporary choreography sees them transform from man to woman. Not unique in the performing arts but I've never seen it so convincingly done as here; with the subtlety and detail that I often sadly miss in drag. Drag this is certainly not and Vincenzo are nothing short of mesmerising in all their pieces in this show.

As mentioned above, this 'celebration' veers somewhat off its promised theme in that not all the music is actually classical. Additionally one passionate, narrative piece is really more about colonialism and racism and I missed how this was connected with queerness. But this is a small niggle about a show which was largely satisfying. Plus, unlike most theatre experiences and unexpectedly in a large auditorium, it's strangely comforting! This is almost entirely owing to our MC for the evening, Rikkert van Huisstede.

Rikkert's first entrance is through the auditorium and his gorgeous counter enor voice (singing *Poor Wayfaring Stranger* - writer unknown) is at once ethereal and calming. Once he addresses the audience this calming effect is carried through and he has a unique talent, displayed only by the best radio presenters, of making each audience member feel that he is talking just to them and no-one else. Not only that but his monologue, which almost verges on stand-up, is philosophical, wonderfully observant and very, very funny. He starts with his penchant for supermarket shopping in a frock; but we are soon being reminded of the perils of the school corridor and the schoolboy insult to top all insults 'homo!' But even if its truth



gave the gay audience contingent reason to shudder with painful nostalgia, his delivery calms us with humour. I genuinely snuggled into my hardish seat to enjoy the rest of the show. It was only a pity that Rikkert didn't link all the contributions as this opening and his other songs leave us wanting more. Who remembered, for example, that one of his numbers, *Sorry dat ik besta* comes from the popular 1970s TV series *Ja Zuster, Nee Zuster*? A show that was quietly subversive and trail-blazingly tolerant in the best possible way.

Accompanying this musically, with tremendous skill and panache are classically trained musicians Bas Treub, Marc Alberto and (as we discover later) a heart-melting gay couple Seán Morgan-Rooney (piano) and Kalle de Bie (cello). Morgan-Rooney's *Irish Sonata*, written for his lover provides a much needed romantic element to the evening's proceedings.

There will be further dates around The Netherlands so catch one of them if you can and put your feet up for 80 minutes of sheer pleasure □



NALATA

Aug 15—
Oct 31, 2025

BRAZILIAN SOUL

Artwork by Deco Treco

NDSM-Plein 1, Amsterdam — straatmuseum.com

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Enivo
Lobot
Speto
Magrela
Mundano
Zéh Palito
Deco Treco
Pri Barbosa
Dolores Esos

STRAAT

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