



## HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF THE DUTCH STATE COLLECTION

In addition to the works of art in the former national museums, the State of the Netherlands also owns more than 140,000 works of art which are not currently in museums, but are managed by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands. The history of the acquisition of this heterogeneous group of art works is the subject of doctoral research by Fransje Kuyvenhoven, a member of staff of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands. The makers, buyers, commissioners and managers of these works of art, the period in which they were accessioned, the reasons why and the way in which they were purchased, the price paid and their intended purpose are discussed.



*Pyke Koch, Vrouwen in straat (K65048), 1962-1964. Rijksaankoop commissie schilderkunst 1965.*

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### Introduction

The former Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences set up a special field organization for the management of this collection in 1949: the Dienst voor 's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen (Netherlands State Art Object Collections Service). In 1975, the name of the institution was changed into the Dienst Verspreide Rijkscollecties (Netherlands Art Collections Service). In 1985, this service merged with the Nederlandse Kunststichting (Netherlands Art Foundation) (1955) and the Bureau Beeldende Kunst Buitenland (Office for Fine Arts Abroad) (1974) to form the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst (RKB = Netherlands Office for Fine Arts) which, in turn, passed on the management of the state collection to the ICN in 1997.

The 140,000 works of art include approximately 23,000 twentieth century works of art and applied art objects which were accessioned in the period 1932-1992. This group of art works and the history of their accession has never received much exposure in literature. Only a few found the existence of these works of art worth publishing. The cause is undoubtedly the fact that they have not been permanently exhibited anywhere, but lead a hidden and, therefore, less accessible existence as a result. It is still, however, an extremely interesting collection.

### **Content of research**

This heterogeneous group of works of art is the subject of doctoral research by Fransje Kuyvenhoven, a member of staff of the Cultural Heritage Agency. The makers, buyers, commissioners and managers of these works of art, and the period in which they were accessioned, the reasons why and the way in which they were purchased, the price paid and their intended purpose are discussed.

The relationship between the policy of the State of the Netherlands (the Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences and its successors) and its practical elaboration is central to the research. One would, after all, assume that of all institutions, the central government, as opposed to a private collector, would pursue a written policy for the spending of public moneys which have to be accounted for. A number of restrictions have been applied to the research. Firstly, only modern visual and applied arts are studied, that is, art which was made in the twentieth century. The research is also restricted to the active role played by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences and its successors in the accessioning of these objects.

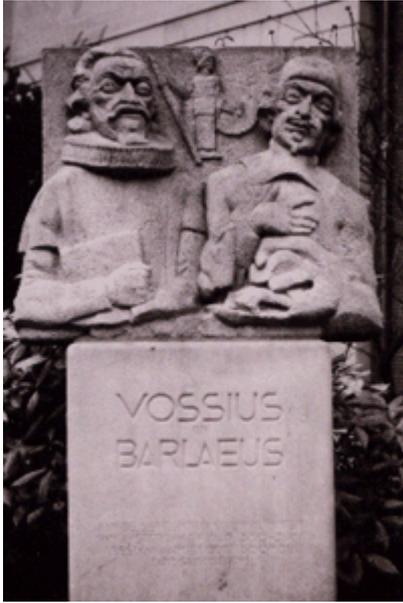
Initiatives taken by other ministries, such as the 'percentage schemes' which have been applied since 1951 and in which a percentage of the building budget for public buildings was spent on visual art, are not included. The approximately 4,000 works of art which came into public ownership after the Second World War through restitution from Germany are not included either. The same applies to the works of art which were accessioned within the framework of social schemes such as the Contraprestatie (Quid Pro Quo) (1949-1956) and the Beeldende Kunstenaarsregeling (scheme to provide additional opportunities for employment in the visual arts) (1956-1987). They always came under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Acquisitions not based on any form of policy, such as donations and specific legacies, have not been taken into consideration either.

In order to be able to properly assess the relationship between the written policy and what actually happened in practice, the research was divided into four periods, depending on the most important organization or committee responsible for the accessions:

- the period between the two wars (1932-1940)
- the Second World War (1940-1945)
- the period of the rijksadviescommissies (national advisory committees) (1945-1984)
- that of the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst (RBK=Netherlands Office for Fine Arts) (1984-1992).

## Period Between the Two Wars



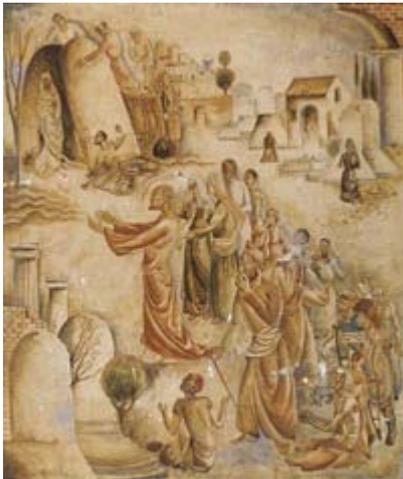
Starting in 1932, after a one-off attempt in 1923, money was structurally reserved in the national budget for the accessioning of contemporary art that was not intended for a national museum. The budget amounted to € 4,545.- ( NLG 10,000.-). This amount may seem small, but against the background of the economic depression and the enormous reluctance shown by the Lower House to building up an art collection, it was a milestone. Until 1992, money was to be reserved annually in the national budget for the same aim, without intervals, until in 1992 the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, as a field organization of the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture, had to hand over its accessioning funds to the recently-founded Mondriaan Stichting (Mondriaan Foundation) in Amsterdam, which was governed by private law. The public accessioning of objects not intended for a national museum came to a definitive end with this move.

## Decoration of government buildings



The officials of the 'art' or 'culture' ministries, respectively, have never accessioned the objects themselves, but have always left this work to committees formed by the Minister. Thus, in March 1932, the Rijksc commissie van Advies voor Opdrachten aan Beeldende Kunstenaars (State Advisory Committee for Art Commissions, hereinafter abbreviated to the Advisory Committee) began accessioning works of art and applied art objects. The aim of accessioning the objects was solely to decorate (government) buildings, both inside and out, although over the years works of art were sometimes bought without a specific purpose. Acquisitions were also made for special occasions such as festivities, commemorations, etc. The Minister had instructed the Advisory Committee, which was chaired by the monumental artist and professor of the Amsterdamse Rijksacademie (Amsterdam Academy of Art) R.N. Roland Holst, only to accession art which was of a high artistic quality. He explicitly wanted to leave the social position of the artist aside; that was the job of the Ministry of Social Affairs and its Voorzieningsfonds voor Kunstenaars (Benefit Fund for Artists). He had made this reservation for good reason. With the economic recession of the late nineteen twenties still fresh in everyone's memories, he was, after all, providing money in a time that was already showing signs of the next crisis. The Advisory Committee was, however, inundated with applications for support.

### **Social assistance for artists**



In 1937, the assignment of the Advisory Committee was expanded with control over the spending of the money yielded by the sale of summer postage stamps. This was almost four times the amount that had been reserved for the commissions. In the case of the summer stamp money, however, it was the intention that the social circumstances of the artist be looked at when accessions were made. The function of the works of art remained the same: the decoration of government buildings. While the Advisory Committee accessioned a broad range of different types of works with the budget money, (facade sculptures, tables, leaded glass windows, batik shawls, vases etc.), the summer stamp money was primarily used to purchase prints and paintings that were not by definition intended for a particular building or occasion

### **Mobilier National (national furniture collection)**

In the nineteen thirties, Mr. Jan Karel van der Haagen, head of the Department of Arts and Sciences, and since 1939 also Secretary of the Advisory Committee, developed the idea of a national art store along French lines: a Mobilier National (national furniture collection), which France had had since the time of King Louis XIV. The works of art managed in this store could serve to decorate not only public buildings in the Netherlands but also Dutch embassies abroad. The works could also be used for exhibitions in the Netherlands and

abroad. Because of the outbreak of the Second World War and the resulting termination of the Advisory Committee in 1942, Van der Haagen's contribution to the growth of the national art collection came to an end. He used the occupation period to elaborate his ideas further. In 1949, this led to the establishment of the Dienst voor 's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen (Netherlands State Art Object Collections Service), the Dutch equivalent of the French Mobilier National. In the period between the two wars, approximately 325 works were purchased.

## **The Second World War**

In the Second World War, the visual arts policy changed radically in comparison with the previous years. The visual and applied arts, architecture and the visual artists have never been supported as they were during the war years. The national socialists saw both education and cultural life as spearheads in their policy to 'nazify' the population. The artist had to be exalted, because he played an important role in the propagation of the new ideology. The government therefore spent a great deal of money on art purchases (almost 700), commissions, grants, lessons, studio layouts, materials, tram season tickets, etc., and organized exhibitions of the work of living artists in the Netherlands and Germany.

Contrary to the situation in the nineteen twenties and thirties, the government had clear criteria during the war: artists had to register with the Nederlandsche Kultuurkamer (Dutch Chamber of Culture), which functioned for visual artists from May 1942, and were not allowed to make any corrupt art. Jewish, 'half-Jewish' and 'quarter-Jewish' artists (in accordance with the Nuremberg race laws) were, of course, excluded. The occupiers had laid down their policy on paper and implemented it as such, with the odd exception. In order to achieve their aim, a new ministry was set up for the (visual) arts: the Ministry of Public Relations and Arts, under which the purchases and exhibitions fell. On the other hand, the old Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences was given the name Ministry of Education, Science and Cultural Protection, under which the (national) museums fell.

## **Commissions from London**

The large amounts of money spent by the national socialist government on the arts contrasted sharply with the few accessions acquired by the Dutch government in London. The latter commissioned five Dutch artists, who stayed in Great Britain during the war, to paint portraits of the members of the royal family and of the government. The government in exile had taken with it to England the spirit of the nineteen thirties, that is, showing a great deal of restraint with regard to artistic matters, particularly with respect to finances. When the liberation approached, all ties with these so-called war artists were broken. Nevertheless, the stay in London made the Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences see that the pre-war visual arts policy in the Netherlands had to be changed.

## **Cultural spread**

Between 1945 and 1982, the visual arts policy fell under two successive ministries: Education, Arts and Sciences (1945-1965) and Culture, Leisure and Social Work (1965-1982). This is the period in which most art purchases were made: the national collection was expanded by more than 18,000 works of art. Various purchasing committees were active in the period 1945-1982. After the limited activities of the pre-war Advisory Committee (1945-1946), a committee was set up in 1946 whose primary aim was to purchase the work of recognized artists. Because this emphasis on representative art meant that young artists disappeared from the picture, a second committee was formed in 1952 whose task was solely to purchase art by artists under 35 years of age. As this set-up did not satisfy the idea of the spread of culture, five new committees were formed in 1957; the

task of each of these committees was to purchase from a single discipline: paintings, sculpture, prints and drawings, applied art and monumental works of art. The social circumstances of the artist could also be taken into account, which was previously not the case.

### **Bare patch plan**

At the end of the nineteen sixties, which in many respects formed a break with the past, these committees were abolished as being insufficiently socially relevant. The principle of independent art purchases for the State disappeared. The so-called bare patch plan was introduced by the government. From that point, art had to be shown in places where it would otherwise not be seen. To this end, in 1972, the Adviescommissie voor de Programmering van Collecties van Tentoonstellingen in Nederland (Netherlands Advisory Committee for the Programming of Exhibition Collections, in short: the Programming Committee) was set up. It no longer made separate purchases, but only made proposals for exhibition topics. Artists could send in work which the Nederlandse Kunststichting (Netherlands Art Foundation) would transform into an exhibition. The Nederlandse Kunststichting not only had to arrange exhibitions, but also ensure their circulation. The bureaucracy and the practical problems this involved were such that, after a few years, change was inevitable. Furthermore, the intended result was not realized. The Minister, Mr. Pieter Engels, abolished the Programming Committee in 1982.

### **Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst (RBK=Netherlands Office for Fine Arts)**

In 1984, the Minister decided to merge the Nederlandse Kunststichting (Netherlands Art Foundation) and the Bureau Beeldende Kunst Buitenland (Office for Fine Arts Abroad) to form the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst (RBK = Office for Fine Arts), which would organize exhibitions within the Netherlands and abroad (the task of the former Nederlandse Kunststichting and the Bureau Beeldende Kunst Buitenland), manage the national collection (the task of the former Dienst Verspreide Rijkscollecties (Netherlands Art Collections Service) and purchase contemporary work (the task of the former ministerial committees) as a reservoir for Dutch museums.

There was another important reason for the merger. In 1984, the national collection consisted of a total of almost 370,000 objects. The collection had increased in number in the late nineteen seventies and eighties by approximately 20,000 objects per year as a result of the Beeldende Kunstenaarsregeling (scheme to provide additional opportunities for employment in the visual arts) and had become unmanageable. The Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst was given instructions to split the collection into two for the sake of manageability. One category would, in time, be removed from the direct control of the State and the second group would be kept and given a museum status. The Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst began giving away the objects in the first category in 1992. Three years later, the project was ended when the national collection had been reduced to approximately 140,000 works of art.

The Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst mainly had its purchasing of contemporary art to thank for its reputation. The Minister, Mr. Elco Brinkman, had provided € 454,545.- (NLG 1,000,000.-) for a policy which was clearly defined: to buy art from living Dutch artists that was less than ten years old. He had also reserved a separate amount in his budget to enable the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst to fill gaps in the past, such as art from the period between the two wars. The staff of the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst searched the whole of the Netherlands with the intention of purchasing a wide range of Dutch modern art to display and to publish on annually. In this way, almost 3,500 works were purchased.

## **Mondriaanstichting (Mondriaan Foundation)**

The Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst reached the peak of its fame at the end of the nineteen eighties. It was involved in or consulted by the Ministry for every conceivable visual art activity. As a result, many institutions saw the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst as a threat or competitor. The museums wanted the million guilders of purchasing money distributed over their own institutions and realized their wishes by the lobby of a number of museum managers. In 1993, the Mondriaan Stichting took over the purchasing task of the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst.

After 1993, the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst continued as an advisory institution. It no longer organized exhibitions or implemented the Wet tot Behoud van Cultuurbezit (Cultural Heritage Preservation Act). The restitution of art from Germany was housed in a separate department, which rapidly headed for total separation from the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst. This separation took place in 1997. The remaining tasks of the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, the management of the national collection and the advisory task, were taken over by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN).

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