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Blue Bliss

The Art of Enjoying Water

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Blue Bliss

The Art of Enjoying Water

Blue Bliss shows how the Dutch have been seeking to make contact with nature and with water through the ages by boating, fishing, swimming and ice-skating. These types of water recreation in the Dutch landscape have a long local tradition. Ice-skating and pleasure yachts originate from the Low Countries, and are still very popular here. [1] However, not only these leisure activities themselves have a long history: the representation of these activities in art is also a tradition that goes back to the Golden Age. [2] In the seventeenth century, the style of landscape painting as seen in the Low Countries was a true artistic sensation, and was internationally heralded as a new art genre.

At the time, it was considered remarkable that the Dutch artists would ‘only’ depict the landscape they saw and knew, without an additional mythological, biblical or historical context. From the start, the Dutch landscapes show people enjoying their surroundings. Even Rembrandt’s bathing woman, with the gold in the background referring to a royal or mythical backstory, remains a simple bathing woman, ‘his’ beloved Hendrikje, who carefully steps into the cold water. [3] After the heyday of Academism in the eighteenth century, which revisits the themes and motifs from classical antiquity, in the nineteenth century landscape painting experiences another revival.

Dutch Romantic artists are again inspired by the Dutch landscapes of the seventeenth century. However, they do include more poetry, by applying special lighting methods and colours and consciously blurring contours. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the painters of the Hague School put more emphasis on mood and atmosphere in their landscapes. Twentieth-century modern artists are more interested in the sensational aspects of what goes on in the landscape. Their work is more abstract, with colour and form suggesting light and movement. From the end of the nineteenth century onward, photography and video art offer artists new opportunities to depict these sensations. Contemporary photographic artists, after 2000, seem to fall back on the old style of painting.

For *Blue Bliss*, the works are divided in three categories, on the basis of artists’ approach. These roughly coincide with

time periods: ‘Dutch common sense’ refers to the observational Realism the seventeenth-century artists excelled at. ‘Poetry’ refers to atmosphere and mood that nineteenth-century artists treasured when depicting landscapes. ‘Sensation!’ refers to the effects of light, colour and unexpected crops, which artists of the twentieth century use to depict what they see in the landscape. Although these themes roughly form a journey through time, there are also many crossovers: old and new and different media are displayed alongside each other, enabling visitors to see how artists from various periods and genres and using different media can apply the same motifs.

Dutch Common Sense

The Dutch painters from the Golden Age specialised in the portrayal of the joy of being outdoors, in the landscape. The Dutch landscapes contain people, however, they are no gods or celebrities, but simply ordinary people. [4, 5] The portrayal of Dutch landscapes is characterised by a sober observation of those landscapes and of people going about their daily activities. It was quite novel in the visual arts to present the world around you in a realistic manner. There are several explanations for the emergence of this type of landscape art in the Netherlands. Firstly, it is linked to the emergence of a local and national consciousness, which was in turn inspired by the war against Spain, the formation of a new state and the economic prosperity of the seventeenth century. Secondly, the large-scale land reclamation programme played a role: The Dutch have a thing about creating land, and, as a result, also about the portrayal of that man-made land.

Thirdly, a specific activity is becoming the new subject of art: leisure. Enjoying the landscape is, however, not only determined by experiencing a pleasant activity, such as boating and ice-skating in that very landscape. The pleasant views that the landscapes offer, because of their aesthetic or the pleasant atmosphere, also play a role. This can be clearly seen on early-seventeenth century prints and drawings. Because the Dutch landscape is a waterscape – a delta where several rivers flow into the sea – this enjoyment often takes place in, on or near the water. We regularly see people tak-



1

Hendrick Avercamp

Ice skating in a village

Fun on the ice outside a village.

Winter village scene with lots of people on the ice, skating, playing playing mall. To the left, two persons went through the ice. In the distance, we see a drawbridge and a mill.

c. 1610

oil on panel

54.3 × 89 cm

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

SK-A-1320

2

Ludolf Bakhuizen

View of the IJ near Amsterdam

1704

oil on canvas

75 × 103 cm

The National Maritime

Museum, Amsterdam

inv.no. 2008.0726



3
Rembrandt van Rijn
Hendrikje Stoffels, bathing in a river
1654
oil on panel
61.8 × 47 cm
National Gallery, London



4
Willem van de Velde de Jonge
Ships on a calm sea
1653
oil on canvas
42 × 48 cm
The State Hermitage Museum,
Saint Petersburg



ing a walk, throwing out a line from a bridge or just enjoying the view. [p. 23]

This simple way of enjoying yourself can also be seen in a series of prints by Jan van de Velde. These prints show human activities in the landscape, with the corresponding month of the year listed above. This is a painting tradition well-known from medieval Christian tide books. These books show which prayers people used to address God at various times of the year. Traditionally, illustrations in those tide books depict necessary livelihood activities: tilling, sowing, harvesting, etcetera. This series, however, shows 'Pleasant landscapes and entertaining view, drawn after real life and engraved on copper by Jan van de Velde': 'Pleasant landscapes and entertaining view, drawn after real life and engraved on copper by Jan van de Velde'. The landscape – drawn as it really is – mainly seems to exist to be enjoyed: by being in the landscape or by looking at it. In the winter months, we see people skating on the ice; in April, some men are out fishing.

This simple enjoyment is also visible in a small but fine drawing by Hendrick Avercamp. [p. 19] An elegant troupe is sailing on a pleasure yacht, enjoying a beautiful day out, with no more than a soft breeze. One of the men is pointing at a small boat with three fishermen, one of whom is holding up a fish, as if to show everyone what he has caught. It is a small scene of a beautiful day out on the water, with everyone looking equally happy and friendly. It is a recurring theme: on the water, all social differences disappear. This mainly applies to ice-skating: everyone is equal on the ice, as they say in the Netherlands. [1]

If the artists from the seventeenth century had lived today, they would have been photographers. If you observe your surroundings closely and want to make a realistic image of a three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional plane, photography is the obvious choice. Just like the painters of the seventeenth century who visually explored their world – often with optical devices such as the camera obscura and lucida – and who depicted everyday life, the photographers of today still see it as their mission to show the world to

us as it really is. The seventeenth century resistance to idealism and the predilection for the sometimes shockingly everyday life lives on in documentary photography. This has an impressive history in the Netherlands. Photographs such as the one of an abandoned swimming pool with slide, by François Hendrickx, show us in a very straightforward way which environments we seek out in our search for water fun. [p. 57] Korrie Besems shows us the new face of the landscape, which has been especially created for leisure and recreation. [p. 27, 44]

Photographers in the Netherlands are very aware of the art historical baggage of the Dutch landscape, which they automatically have to deal with when they depict that landscape. Sometimes they refer to it intentionally. Wout Berger, for example, photographed people skating on the Gouwzee from a height. This makes the photograph look like a historic ice-skating painting, comparable to the ones that can be found in this publication [see e.g. p. 61 and 67]. The people are also small and almost disappear into the landscape because they hardly extend beyond the horizon because of the high vantage point. Photographer Ellen Kooi, who, like many earlier landscape painters, also lives in Haarlem, avoided certain types of landscapes, such as the dunes, for a long time. And she is not the only one. Because historically, dunes have so often been depicted in art, this environment already has a stereotypical feel from the outset. It should be noted, however, that photographers have recently started to revisit these well-known landscapes. These landscapes are obviously deemed suitable again for the development of a contemporary visual language.

Poetry

The Romantic painters of the beginning of the nineteenth century pick up the themes and compositions of seventeenth-century painting. The Dutch waterscape, with the people enjoying it, also gains popularity in art. Artists do, however, put more of an emphasis on the subjective experience of the Dutch water landscape. Some examples of painters of Dutch Romanticism were Barend Cornelis Koekkoek, Andreas Schelfhout and Charles Leickert. As with the painters from the Golden Age, we see lots of landscapes with

skaters and all the related winter fun, such as stands selling 'koek en zopie' (baked goods, hot chocolate and soup) along the ice-skating rink, windmills and Dutch cloudy skies in the background.

These wintry scenes are equally a template from seventeenth-century landscape paintings as the river scenes with pleasure yachts or fishermen. [p. 81–84] However, softer contours and pleasant lighting make the special atmosphere of this landscape tangible. In contrast to German art, the lonely wanderer is less of an artistic motif in Dutch landscape painting. This is a motif which is however a subject of contemporary photographers and video artists. The romantic, almost mystical experience of the landscape is explicitly reflected in the installation *Experiencing yourself experiencing* by video artist Noortje Haegens. In this work, she focused on the experience, while walking, of the special character of the Dutch water landscape. [p. 89]

This quest for a typical Dutch landscape is stimulated later in the nineteenth century by a need for a national identity perceived by society as a whole. The painters of the Hague School further develop this image of a 'typical Dutch landscape'. The seventeenth-century art of landscape painting remains a great source of inspiration. However, the painters of the Hague School develop a characteristic essence of this landscape, which they are depicting in a poetic manner. Jozef Israëls sees the fisherman or bathing man as a poetic motif, which he depicts in isolation. [6, 7] Environments such as 'polders' or marshland are selected as an archetypical Dutch prehistoric landscape and depicted with a lot of atmosphere.

The templates of the Dutch landscape, which originate in the seventeenth century and were elevated to poetry in the nineteenth century, can again be seen in the photography of the pictorialist movement. Pictorialist photographers tried to turn photography into art. They did this by copying themes and topics, compositions and styles from painting, drawing and printmaking. More than simply depicting vacationers, they preferred to photograph fishermen, farmers and shepherds at work. This also applies to the tourist

photography of Dutch rural areas, which emerges at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the post-war period, it is the human interest photographers – documentary photography, which focuses on the 'condition humaine' – such as Emmy Andriess, but also Willem Diepraam, who make people enjoying the Dutch landscape the artistic motif again. [p. 40, 41, 43]

Sensation!

In the twentieth century, the Modernist movement focuses on pure forms and colour in art. Artists dissect the world around them to abstract forms, and reassemble these to a synthesis, creating new impressions and perceptions. The town of Domburg attracts a lot of artists, who are drawn by the space and, mainly, the special light of the province of Zeeland. While these artists follow various directions of abstract modern art, holiday makers in the water landscape are a recurrent motif in their work. Jan Toorop paints a sailing boat, floating peacefully along the canal between Middelburg and Vlissingen, while two figures look on from the waterside – entirely in the tradition of the 'plaisanterie' we know from Hendrick Avercamp and Jan van de Velde. [8] More than a realistic representation of the scene, Toorop applies a pointillist style. Dots and spots in different colours of paint convey the sweltering sun light and the summer atmosphere.

Closely related to cubism, futurism and the work of the artists from the Stijl movement, such as Theo van Doesburg, the Hungarian artist Vilmos Huszár shows a very stylised version of the well-known Dutch theme of the winter fun. [9] He reduces the activity of ice-skating to an interplay of rectangular and triangular forms, which express movement and fun. Less reductive and more synthetic and imaginative are the paintings of sailing boats on the water by Jacoba van Heemskerck, who often stayed at Domburg as well. Around 1920, she made a series of paintings and prints around the recurrent motif of sailing boats on the water. Her compositions are wild, with the geometric forms of the sails playfully battling it out with spheres and movement in the atmosphere, which she paints on the canvas in bright, almost hallucinatory forms. [10] The joy of sailing, of man enjoying the sun, wind and water, radiates off the canvas in summery colours.



5

Jacob van Ruysdael
Beach view with some ships, walkers
and swimmers

end 1660/beginning 1670

oil on canvas

52 × 68 cm

The State Hermitage Museum,
Saint Petersburg

6

Jozef Israëls

An angler

second half nineteenth century

colour brush on paper

73.5 × 61 cm

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

SK-A-2614

7

Jozef Israëls

Bathing boy

c. 1890

oil on canvas

74.8 × 62.8 cm

Gemeentemuseum Den Haag



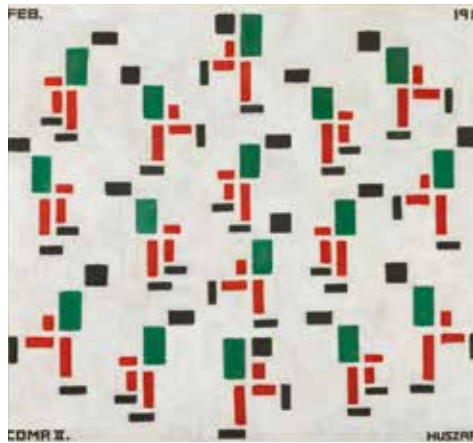
8

Jan Toorop
Canal at Middelburg
1909
oil on canvas
31 × 38 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag



9

Vilmos Huszár
Composition II (ice skaters)
February 1917
79 cm × 85,3 cm
oil on eternite
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag



10

Jacoba van Heemskerck
Bild no. 109
1920
oil on canvas
98,5 × 183,5 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
inv. no. 0332274



Photography adds a new visual language to art, enabling the expression of speed and motion. In the nineteenth century, George Hendrik Breitner is already very aware of this possibility. Photography is still a favourite medium to capture dynamic sensations. Photographer of kite surfers Harry Roekens, for example, dons his wader and stands in the waves of the North Sea. To capture the action, kite surfers are surfing towards him and around him, while he takes photographs. [p. 6, 7, 149, 150] Waves and the splashing water sometimes take on an almost sculptural form, showing the forces of the elements. Other phenomena of the new age are also given attention in Modernism, such as urban culture or – in times of summer heat – the massive scale of twentieth-century beach tourism.

Landscape Art – Landscape and Art

Art depicting water recreation shows us how the landscape is experienced. This applies to the drawings, prints and paintings dating from the seventeenth century, as well as contemporary painting, photography and video art. The importance of the depiction of that experience is also recognised outside art history, namely by cultural geography, by the discipline of landscape design, and in tourism. Landscape art – heritage in general – is attributed a key role when it comes to visual communication of the *genius loci* – the ‘spirit’ of the place. Heritage can provide visitors of landscapes insight in the cultural history and the *genius loci* of a place.

Cultural geography is the science that maps the cultural value people attach to landscapes; the science that explains the *genius loci* in landscape values. Landscape art can help us ‘read’ these values. The book *Iconography of Landscape* teaches us that we can understand the landscape in conjunction with the cultural representation of it – either as text or as an image. This is stimulated by the digitisation of both geographical information – maps – as well as cultural information – image banks with digitally stored information about the heritage in and about the landscape. After some searching, landscape paintings or photographs can be associated with points on the map using geographical coordinates.

On these culturally enriched maps, we not only see the heritage elements in the landscape – bridges, castles, old

farmhouses, locks, etc. – but also the ‘expressive’ heritage about the landscape: songs, poems, paintings, etc. This makes it easier to gain an insight into which cultural expressions are related to which specific locations. Culturally enriched geographic information systems and tourist apps with walking, sailing or cycling routes which are derived from this information, are interesting for tourism. They add a cultural-historical dimension to the experience of the landscape, what can ultimately promote tourism in an area.

As can be read elsewhere in this publication, large parts of the Dutch landscape changed from a working landscape into a leisure landscape. The new age offers challenges to link up the needs of employment and recreation in the water landscape. Traditionally, economic and hydrological requirements played a prominent role in the development of the water-rich Dutch landscape. The requirements of nature conservation and recreation become more important. As it becomes apparent that the latter requires an understanding of the cultural history of a location, it becomes increasingly important to study the cultural heritage that preserves and communicates this *genius loci*. The long traditions of landscape art, with boating, fishing, swimming and ice-skating, not only teaches us which art forms were developed in this country; These rich art historical traditions also teach us how we appreciate our landscape.

Maartje van den Heuvel

Salomon van Ruysdael
City on a river / 1647

Salomon van Ruysdael (1600–1670) is the star of seventeenth-century Dutch river scene painting. With great elegance and on the basis of landscapes at various locations in the Low Countries, he created images that have become iconic for the Dutch water landscape. The light in the sky and on the waves of the water is expressed in paint in a wonderful manner. His river paintings often feature ferries. The great atmosphere of a day out sailing on calm water is emphasized by the manner in which the people on board of the sailing and rowing boat raise their jugs for a toast. This scene is characteristic for the Netherlands and can still be found today.

oil on panel / 72 × 114 cm / Cultural Heritage Agency of
the Netherlands (RCE) / Amersfoort / Rijswijk / inv. no. NK 2393







Willem Bastiaan Tholen
Marina Het IJ in Amsterdam

chalk on paper / 24.5 × 34.1 cm / Zuiderzee Museum / Enkhuizen / inv. no. ZZM 009059

A glimpse of the marina Het IJ in Amsterdam. In the foreground, we see a classic Lemster barge, covered with tarpaulin. On the other side of the pier, there are various smaller boats, also with tarpaulins.



Jan Altink
Moored ships on the Paterswolde Lake

oil on canvas / 40.4 × 50.3 cm / Simonis & Buunk / Ede / inv. no. 17289

The artist, part of the Groningen art circle 'De Ploeg', had a predilection for outdoor painting, 'en plein air'. Here we see a number of sailing boats along a pier in the Paterswolde Lake. The lake was created in 1740 after the peat was dug up. The total surface area comprises around 900 hectares of water, forests, islands, beaches and water sports facilities, such as a marina just south of the city of Groningen.





Emmy Andriessse
Angler at the Vinkeveense Plassen / 1950

The historic motif of the fisherman in the water landscape lives on in photography, as in this photo by Emmy Andriessse (1914–1953). This ‘human interest’ photographer, who managed to capture the human emotion in photography so well, managed to capture the atmosphere on a quiet summer’s day out fishing on the Vinkeveense Plassen. It is fascinating to see how such a traditional motif is being interpreted by a modernist photographer. The modernist aspect is also reflected in the surprising viewpoint chosen by Andriessse, which makes the grass blades dominate the image and creates an open composition.

gelatin silver print / 35 × 35 cm / Leiden University Library /
inv. no. PK-F-2016-0033



Reinier Craeyvanger
The angler / after 1842

watercolour / 12,7 × 10,9 cm / Teylers Museum / Haarlem / inv. no. BB 006

Reinier Craeyvanger (1812–1880) was influenced by the works of Jan Steen, which is especially noticeable in his interiors. The angler shown here could well have a deeper moralistic meaning. Maybe the ‘hooking’ or ‘biting’ applies more to the couple behind the angler?



Carel de Moor (II)
The angler / 1700-1738

oil on canvas / 62.5 × 76 cm / Rijksmuseum / Amsterdam / inv. no. SK-A-640

Carel Moor (II) (1655–1738) painted this idyllic scene in the tradition of the ‘fine painters’ from Leiden. The painting is full of symbolism. The man in the foreground has ‘caught’ a pretty young girl, while the man with the pipe looks at the woman next to him with hungry eyes. The new pipe is a symbol for a new wife. The flower in the woman’s hand is a symbol of young life. The dog sitting to the left of the angler stands for loyalty to the man and faith. In the background, we see a typically Dutch landscape and the Dutch Reformed church of Warmond, the village where the artist lived and worked for a while.

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