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# Acquisitions

## Twentieth Century

### Art and Design from the Machine Age

• LUDO VAN HALEM AND HARM STEVENS •

#### 1 FREDERICK (FRITS) KOOLHOVEN (1886-1946)

*F.K. 23 Bantam*, executed 1918

Wood (spruce), metal, linen, rubber, etc.,

wingspan 7.62 m, length 5.61 m, height 2.06 m, weight 378 kg

Engine (static): All British Engine Company A.B.C. Wasp Mark I

The *F.K. 23 Bantam* was designed in 1917 by the Dutch aviation pioneer Frederick Koolhoven, who was then working as chief designer for the British Aerial Transport (BAT) Company, an aircraft manufacturer in Willesden, London. BAT was set up by furniture maker Samuel J. Waring in 1917. The biplane was designed as a fighter aircraft. The metal-clad nose of the fuselage originally housed the high-tech components of this flying machine: two 7.7 mm Vickers machine guns and the seven-cylinder 170 h.p. radial engine. These machines provided firepower and speed, decisive elements in modern warfare.

Cleverly designed weight distribution and wing surface ensured that the machine was stable and had the ability to glide. Horizontally hinged ailerons in the wings, tail planes and the vertical rear rudder provided the steering. They were moved by a system of cables and pulleys which the pilot operated by means of a control lever and a rudder bar.

The wings consisted of a frame of wooden ribs that were cut away to reduce the weight as much as possible. The frame was tightly covered with linen cloth that had a smooth layer of lacquer on it.

Flying wires between the wings provided the rigidity needed to absorb the huge forces during flight and landing. The structure of the fuselage was made of sheets of plywood that were bent around five ribs. Five longitudinal girders (or 'longerons') ran the length of the fuselage. This wooden structure was a departure from the more common cloth-covered frame used at that time. The three-ply wooden skin transmitted the forces during flight and created the smooth, rounded appearance of the torpedo-shaped fuselage.

The compact, dynamic look of this aircraft is also due to the fact that the upper wings were attached with metal fittings at the highest point of the fuselage. This means that the distance between the lower and upper wings is much smaller than in most biplanes. Koolhoven also had an oval opening installed at the site of the cockpit to make room for the pilot's head, which protruded slightly above the wings.

In the years before 1918, the last year of the First World War, when the *Bantam* went into production, Frits Koolhoven had caused a sensation as an aircraft designer in Great Britain and emerged as a rival of his fellow Dutchman Anthony Fokker, who had achieved success with his aircraft factory





in Germany. Koolhoven's 'Bantam' (the aircraft's name refers to a Javanese fighting cock) was the hope in the Royal Flying Corps' darkest hour. The machine would have to do battle with the dreaded Fokker fighters of the German Air Force. Apart from the occasional mock battle with a Fokker captured by the British, the two 'Dutch' fighting cocks – Fokker and Koolhoven – had never actually confronted one another by the time the armistice was signed in 1918.

In 1919 Koolhoven took part in the Amsterdam First Air Traffic Exhibition (E.L.T.A.) with three Bantams. For that occasion our machine was painted the current civilian colours and given a British registration number (K 123). The aircraft

was also stripped of its weaponry. Two machine gun apertures in the cowling are reminders of the original function of the aircraft. The E.L.T.A. marked the beginning of Dutch civil aviation and of the country's aircraft industry, which boomed in the years that followed with the Fokker factory (in Amsterdam) and the Koolhoven factory (in Rotterdam). With the spectacle of the E.L.T.A. the aviation age had dawned in the Netherlands.

The fact that this F.K. 23 Bantam – the last remaining product of the design genius Frits Koolhoven – has survived is thanks to the Koolhoven Aeroplanes Foundation (founded in 1986). From 1990 onwards this foundation painstakingly





restored the surviving wreckage into the plane in its present condition: a non-flying museum-piece that epitomizes the great technical leap forward at the beginning of the previous century.

#### LITERATURE:

Harry van der Meer, *F.K. 23 Bantam. Serie Koolhoven vliegtuigen. Technische en historische beschrijvingen van vliegtuigen ontworpen door Frits Koolhoven*, Schiphol Centre 1996

#### PROVENANCE:

C.P.B. Ogilvy (England), c. 1920-53; transferred to the Richard Shuttleworth Collection (Old Warden, England), 1953-late 1980s; purchased by the Stichting Koolhoven Vliegtuigen in 1991. Purchased with the support of the M.B.T. de Groot Family (inv. no. NG-2011-1).

The F.K. 23 Bantam in 1918, probably at a British test centre. This is the machine acquired by the Rijksmuseum. In this photograph it still has the number F.1654 and is in First World War colours with a British roundel of the Royal Flying Corps. This aircraft was later repainted and given the registration number K-123. Photograph Stichting Koolhoven Vliegtuigen.



2 GERRIT TH. RIETVELD (1888-1964); executed by Meubelmakerij Rietveld, Utrecht  
*Armchair*, c. 1919 (design), 1923 (executed)  
 Wood, paint, 87 x 65.5 x 84 cm

Over the course of the twentieth century the simple, cheap armchair Gerrit Rietveld made in his furniture workshop in Adriaen van Ostadelaan in Utrecht in 1919 became an icon of modernism. It is true that critics disputed the originality of the design, pointing to predecessors and influences, and sceptics regularly questioned its comfort, but the chair is now one of the few works of art to be included in the historic *Canon van Nederland*, and illustrations of it adorn dozens of publications on modern design. The design is still being made more than ninety years later by the Italian furniture manufacturer Cassina, which acquired the rights in 1971 and by legions of DIY enthusiasts who invariably claim to have worked from the 'original drawings'.

'Originality' is a difficult concept to establish in terms of this chair. We do not know whether the very first example from the workshop in Utrecht still exists somewhere and no designs or sketches

from 1919 have survived. The chair was probably made by trial and error and the first working drawing with measurements and the materials required was not produced until 4 January 1923, when a few more orders were received. The chairs by Cassina differ from this drawing in terms of measurements, and the handmade examples from Rietveld's workshop and those made by his former assistant Gerard van de Groenekan also display all kinds of tiny variations. Design and construction changed many times, in the details and sometimes even in the main features. There are, for instance, examples with and without rectangular or bevelled side panels and narrow and wide armrests. We also know of a smaller 'lady's armchair'. The seat and back were initially made of solid wood but later of plywood; various types of wood were used for the frame. That wood was left plain, stained or painted in one colour or more. The chair with the red back, blue seat and black frame with the crosscut frame ends painted yellow became the most famous. This colour combination gave it its name: the 'Red/Blue Chair'.

'Slat armchair' is a more neutral name which refers to the one-inch timber from which the frame is made and is used by experts who know about the differences in construction. 'Stijl chair' is a term that Rietveld himself sometimes used to indicate the context in which the design was initially greeted with enthusiasm. A picture of the chair was published in the small avant-garde magazine *De Stijl* in 1919 and the first orders came from its devotees. This is true of the chair acquired by the Rijksmuseum, which was formerly owned by the writer Til Brugman (1888-1958). She translated articles for *De Stijl*, was friendly with many of its artists and made her debut in it with a Dadaist sound poem.



The room at number  
 20 Ligusterstraat,  
 The Hague, designed  
 by Vilmos Huszár,  
 1923. Photograph  
 Collection Stedelijk  
 Museum Amsterdam.





In 1919 she and her friend Sienna Masthoff moved into a new apartment in Ligusterstraat in The Hague. The Daal en Berg district was being built nearby with as its centre the now famous Papaverhof, designed by De Stijl architect Jan Wils. Lena Milius went to live there; she was the ex-wife of *De Stijl* editor Theo van Doesburg, who often went to stay with her with his new lady friend Nelly van Moorsel. Wils lived in nearby Voorburg, like Vilmos Huszár, the Hungarian artist and co-founder of *De Stijl*; together they modernized the studio of the Hague photographer Henri Berssenbrugge. For a short time The Hague was the centre of Stijl activities,

which climaxed in 1923 in several collective projects by a group of friends, all like-minded artists. One project was the redecoration of Brugman's apartment: Huszár, Van Doesburg, the German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters and the Russian Constructivist El Lissitzky were to redecorate one room each. We do not know if the latter two ever implemented designs and Huszár's room is the only one documented. His design consisted of a composition of black, white and grey surfaces that overlapped each other on the different walls. They formed an entirely natural setting for the furniture ordered from Rietveld: an armchair, a high-backed chair, an occasional





The room designed by Vilmos Huszár, 20 Ligusterstraat, The Hague, used as studio by Til Brugman's friend Hannah Höch, c. 1926-1929. Photograph Berlin, Collection Berlinische Galerie, Hannah Höch Archive, BG HHE-F 66, 79.

table and one or two accessories such as a piano stool and a letter box for the mantelpiece.

The harmonious Stijl interior did not survive for long, however. In 1926 Brugman's new friend, the German Dadaist Hannah Höch, turned the room into a studio and reintroduced the everyday cosiness of houseplants, cushions and cats. Brugman held on to Rietveld's chair until the 1950s when financial difficulties forced her to sell it and a then curator at the Haags Gemeentemuseum acquired it.

#### LITERATURE:

- Daniele Baroni, *The Furniture of Gerrit Thomas Rietveld*, Woodbury, New York 1978  
 Nancy J. Troy, *The De Stijl Environment*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London 1983  
 Sjarel Ex, Els Hoek, *Vilmos Huszár, schilder en ontwerper 1884-1960. De grote onbekende van De Stijl*, Utrecht 1985

Marijke Küper & Ida van Zijl, *Gerrit Th. Rietveld 1888-1964. Het volledige werk*, Utrecht 1992

Peter Vöge, *The Complete Rietveld Furniture*, Rotterdam 1993

Marleen Slob, 'De mensen willen niet rijpen, vandaar'.

*Leven en werk van Til Brugman*, Amsterdam 1994

Carel Blotkamp, 'Liebe Tiltel. Brieven van El Lissitzky en

Kurt Schwitters aan Til Brugman, 1923-1926', *Jong Holland* 13

(1997), no. 1, pp. 32-46; 13 (1997), no. 4, pp. 27-47

Ida van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld*, London 2010

Marijke Kuper & Lex Reitsma, *De stoel van Rietveld | Rietveld's Chair*, Rotterdam 2011

#### PROVENANCE:

Til Brugman and Sienna Masthoff (1923- c.1926);

Til Brugman (c.1926-1950s); private collection (1950s-2007);

sale Christie's Amsterdam (20th Century Decorative Arts),

23 May 2007, lot 302; Leigh Keno American Antiques,

New York (2007-2010). Purchased with the support of the

BankGiro Loterij

(inv. no. BK-2010-1).



## 3 H.P. MUTTERS &amp; ZOON, THE HAGUE

*Passenger seat from a Fokker F.XII or F.XVIII of the Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij (KLM), c. 1930*  
 Aluminium frame, upholstery of canvas and leather-cloth (part reconstructed), 91 x 55 x 81.5 cm,  
 with a metal plate with the legend: H.P. Mutters & Zoon  
 Den Haag Holland

In the 1920s, a major ambition of Dutch aviation was to establish a fast, reliable and regular scheduled service to the Dutch East Indies. In September 1930, after a series of test flights, the Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij (KLM) began a fortnightly service between Schiphol and Batavia; a year later they introduced a weekly service. The distance of around 14,000 km was flown by the newly-developed type F.XII tri-motor Fokker aircraft, succeeded in 1932 by the F.XVIII, which also flew to the West Indies. At that time the longest airline journey in the world was extremely important economically, and it also dramatically shortened the psychological distance from the colony. The fact that the route could be flown in ten to twelve days awakened feelings of national pride and solidarity. The record flight in four days by the F.XVIII 'Pelikaan' around Christmas 1933 actually led to euphoria.

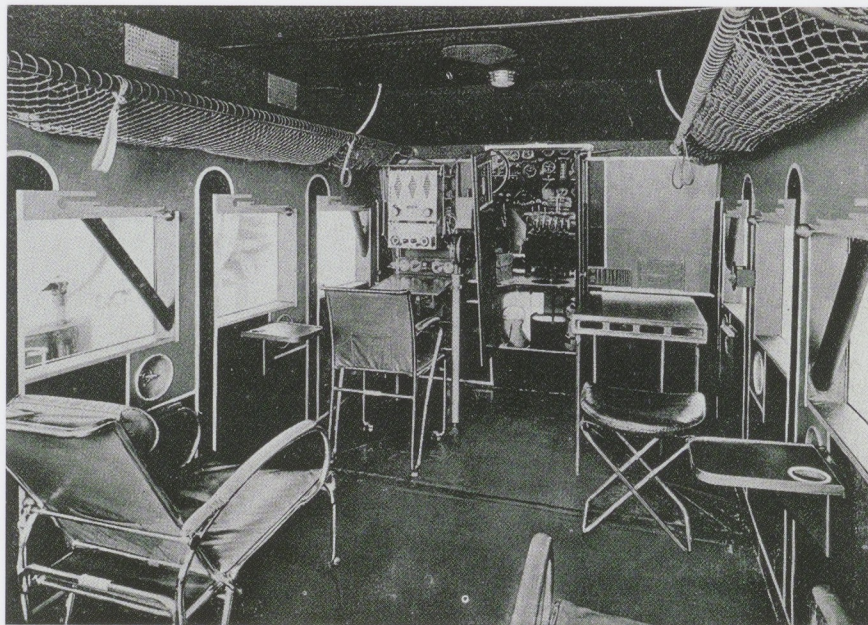
The service was mainly intended for postal traffic, but three or four passengers could also be carried, depending on the layout of the cabin. From 1923 onwards, KLM aircraft were equipped by the firm of H.P. Mutters & Zoon in The Hague, which also fitted out the new East Indies aircraft with luxurious panelling with geometric art-deco motifs and special furniture. For the long flight – interrupted by meals and overnight stays – Mutters developed a passenger seat that consisted of an armchair with an adjustable back and an extending footrest. The seat also had an adjustable pillow, a seat pocket on the back and a safety belt. A special set of two suitcases, one of which fitted under the seat while the other could be secured to the back of it, completed the ensemble. The suitcases were included in the price of the ticket. Obviously it was only very wealthy travellers to the East Indies who could afford a seat in this exclusive business class.

Since 1926 Mutters had been making aircraft seats from metal tubing instead of the usual cane or rattan, which had the advantage of being light, but was also flammable and could shatter on

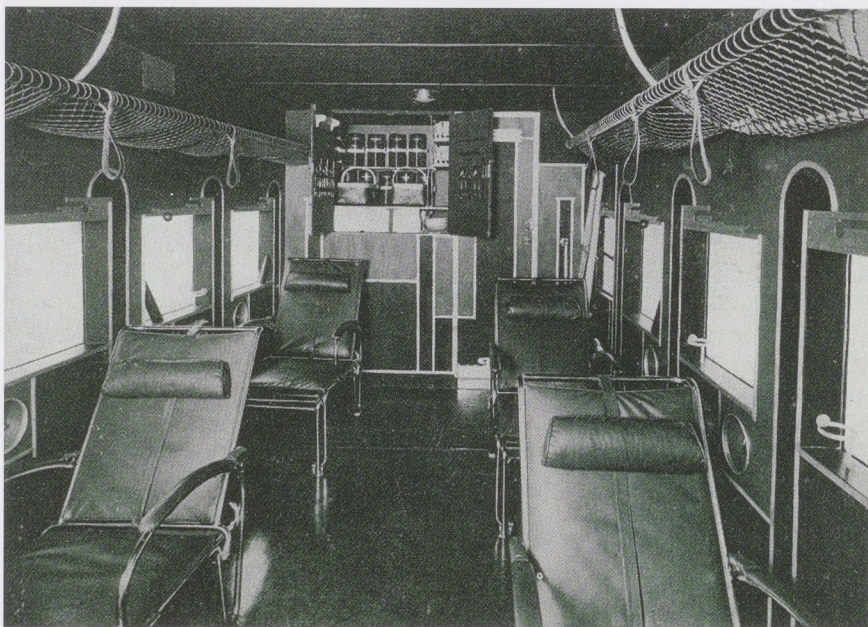
hard landings with unpleasant consequences. The tubular metal furniture introduced in the mid-1920s, which quickly found its way into the modern domestic interior, appeared ideal for use in aircraft too because of its lightness and rigidity. Yet not every airline opted for this practical innovation. The cabins on the new transcontinental and intercontinental routes were often fitted out extremely conservatively as if they were ships' luxurious saloons or first-class train compartments in order to compete with the traditional means of transport. The passenger seats in KLM's aircraft flying to the East Indies are indeed reminiscent of the adjustable deckchair but they were also utterly contemporary – entirely in line with the modernistic designs by Gerrit Rietveld and Willem Gispen, for example, whose design idiom was widely plundered. The construction was also modern: made of lightweight aluminium which was seen as the material of the future. In many respects these interiors symbolized the airline's pioneering spirit.

With the sole exception of the cockpit section of the F.XVIII 'Snip', none of the Fokkers with their unusual art-deco panelled interiors and functionalist tubular furniture that flew on the East and West routes have survived. The basic armchair acquired by the Rijksmuseum is one of the only two still known to be in existence. The beautifully made, yet not entirely safe adjustment mechanism with a movable bar seems to indicate that it was made early in the history of their production; the other example in the Aviodrome Collection – in poorer condition but with a footrest – has been adapted so that the bar cannot come off. The speed of developments in air travel in the 1920s and 30s would appear to have contributed to the rarity of this tubular furniture: as early as 1938, writing in the magazine *De 8 en Opbouw*, Mart Stam described Mutters's aircraft seat as a model that had by then been superseded.





Interior of a Fokker F.XII, illustrations from the album *De Vliegende Hollander*, N.v. Biscuitfabriek Patria, [c. 1931].



## LITERATURE:

*De Vliegende Hollander*, Amsterdam, N.v. Biscuitfabriek Patria, [c. 1931]

Mart Stam, 'Nieuwe stoelen', *De 8 en Opbouw*, 9 (1938), pp. 147-48

Jochen Eisenbrand, 'More Legroom Please. A Historical Survey of the Aircraft Seat', in *Airworld. Design and Architecture for Air Travel*, Weil am Rhein (Vitra Design Museum) 2004, pp. 124-42

A. Joshua van Scherpenzeel, 'Mutters', in *Koninklijk Goed-*

*gekeurd. Horrix en Mutters. Twee Haagse meubelfabrikanten*, The Hague (Gemeentemuseum)/Zwolle 2010, pp. 89-186

## PROVENANCE:

Private collection; sale Quittenbaum Kunstauktionen (Design), Munich, 15 June 2010, lot 48; De Andere Tijd Gallery, Kampen. Purchased with the support of the Johan Huizinga Fonds (part of the Rijksmuseum Fonds)

(inv. no. NG-2010-137).







## 4 DEUTSCHE PHILIPS GMBH

*Volksempfänger VE 301 Dyn*, 1938 or later

Bakelite (cabinet), cardboard and cloth (loudspeaker covering), 26 x 30 x 18 cm

The cabinet of this radio receiver with its bang up to date design is formed from a single piece of Bakelite. This early plastic was ideal for products mass-produced by the electronics industry. It was durable, easy to mould, cheap and had insulating properties. The national arms in the form of an eagle and swastika on either side of the tuner unmistakably identifies this modern means of communication as part of the Nazi state's advanced propaganda machine. Volksempfänger (people's receiver) radio sets were used on a large scale as the mouthpieces of Nazi ideology. The Volksempfänger, like the Volkswagen (1938), was a product that embodied the Nazi's utopian promise of mass consumption and technical prosperity for the good of the German people. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels saw the radio as the most important instrument for influencing the masses. Radios had to be introduced into as many German homes as possible to make this modern medium the heart of Nazi propaganda. Under pressure from the Nazi party, a consortium of twenty-eight manufacturers was licensed to produce a cheap radio, the VE (Volksempfänger) 301, which was designed in 1933 by Walter Maria Kersting. The designation 301 refers to 30 January 1933, the day Hitler assumed power. Up to 1939, 12.5 million Volksempfänger were sold at the relatively low price of 76 Reichsmarks.

This VE 301 Dyn, a successor to the Volksempfänger of 1933, had an inbuilt electro-dynamic loudspeaker (hence the type designation 'Dyn'). The VE 301 Dyn made its debut at the Funkausstellung (wireless exhibition) in 1938. With its rectangular loudspeaker and tuning window it certainly looked more utilitarian than the original model, which still had echoes of Art Deco.

Deutsche Philips Gesellschaft in Berlin, the name on the plate on the back of the cabinet, was set up as a distribution organization in 1926 by Philips, the Dutch electronics company. As such the DPG was part of the expansion of the company's sales network in many European and overseas countries. Germany was one of the most important markets for radios. After the Nazi party's initial attempts at state intervention,

Deutsche Philips nevertheless supplied the market with more expensive wireless sets as well. From the outset, however, the company was also obliged to supply the cheap Volksempfänger. Initially DPG ordered these sets from other German manufacturers.

## PROVENANCE:

Galerie Eureka, Amsterdam

(inv. no. NG-2009-110).







## 5 EDMOND LABBÉ

*Rapport général: Exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne, Paris 1937*

Imprimerie nationale, Paris, 1938-41

11 volumes, 14 parts

The amalgamation of modern art and industrial products: that was the concept for the Paris World Exhibition in 1937, which was aptly entitled *Exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne* (International exhibition of art and technology in modern life). The photographs presented here are in a portfolio which forms part of the *Rapport général* compiled by the French ministry of trade and industry on the occasion of the world exhibition. As well as this portfolio, the publication runs to eleven lavishly illustrated volumes that also include photographs by well-known photographers like Laure Albin-Guillot. This set is part of the tradition of prestigious publications and catalogues of world exhibitions illustrated with photographs, a number of important examples of which are in the Rijksmuseum's collection, starting with the famous publication on the first world exhibition – London's Great Exhibition of 1851.

It is no exaggeration to state that the ambition that 'art and technology should be inseparably linked' was realized most successfully in the *Pavillon de l'Aéronautique* (Aeronautical Pavilion). The building's streamlined shape referenced the flying machine and the design of the exhibition precisely captured the dynamics of air travel. The artists Félix Aublet and Robert Delaunay, founders of the *Art et Lumière* group, were responsible for the interior design.

The photograph presents an impressive image of this showcase for the 'genius of aviation'. The cropping at the bottom, cutting the ground from under one's feet, creates a dizzying effect. The high room is traversed by two large rings with a footbridge curling around them. The structure is both an imitation of light rays and a facility for visitors, who were able to get a good view of the central aircraft, made by Caudron-Renault, thanks to the footbridge. The whole thing is enclosed by a wide arch which, like the rings and the footbridge, is covered with the brand-new synthetic material Rhodoid. The shimmering effect of this transparent corrugated material makes the arch look like a halo. Behind it is a view of the structure of the building which is partially accentuated by

rays of light. At the bottom are a number of radial aircraft engines that have been placed on a pedestal. In the background a large mural by Robert and Sonia Delaunay is partially visible.

After sunset the exhibition grounds and architecture were transformed into a light show, exploiting the exciting and comparatively new possibilities of electric light. The visual power of artificial light was a favourite subject for photography, which was unequalled (save for film) in its ability to represent the merging of art and technology. In the centre of this photograph there is a pillar wound around with an illuminated spiral ribbon structure reaching up into the sky. At the bottom the silhouette of branches and foliage stands out sharply against the illuminated pillar. The photographer used a long exposure to capture the car headlights in sweeping curves on the wide road. The light gleams off the cars parked on the right-hand side. Some human figures can be seen in the lamplight on the left side of the road.

## PROVENANCE:

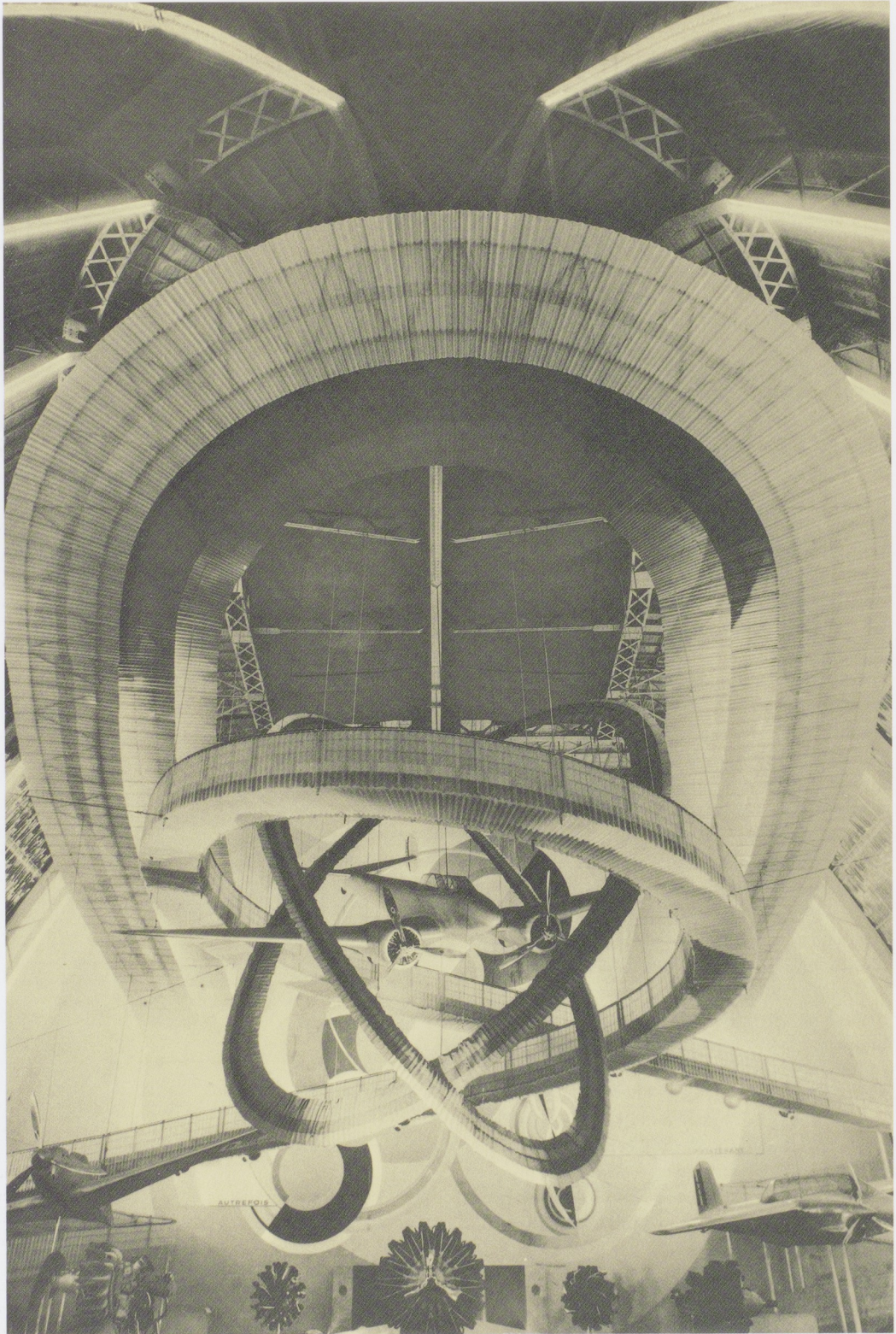
Antiquariaat J.A. Vloemans, The Hague. Purchased with the support of the Van der Vossen-Delbrück Fonds (held by the Rijksmuseum Fonds)

(inv. no. Library 2010/3495-3508).



BARANGER,  
*Intérieur du pavillon de l'aéronautique and Porte No 31 sur le Quai d'Orsay, vue de nuit, copper-plate print, 298 x 444 mm.*







## 6 JAN CREMER (1940)

IN COLLABORATION WITH WIM VAN DER LINDEN (PHOTOGRAPHER)

*Cover design for the book Ik Jan Cremer, 1963*

Gelatin silver print, cardboard, 327 x 250 mm

This design for a book cover is composed of photographic paper on which two text elements, likewise on photographic paper, were mounted with adhesive tape: the title lower left and a slogan diagonally in the upper left corner. This mock-up is affixed to a cardboard backing with a different type of sticky tape. Instructions for the layout are noted in pen on the photographic paper and the cardboard backing.

The design was entirely the work of Jan Cremer, the Dutch artist and 'rare breed of writer', who made his debut in 1964 with *Ik Jan Cremer*, a picaresque novel which W.F. Hermans later called 'a riotous explosion between autobiography and compulsive lying'. It was highly unusual at the publishing house De Bezige Bij and in Dutch publishing circles in general for a writer to make his own cover design. Nevertheless Cremer got his own way, supported by the publisher Geert Lubberhuizen.

This cover design, again entirely at odds with the conventions of the Dutch literary world, became the central image of the unprecedented publicity campaign that Cremer himself had already thought up long before publication. That image was entirely in keeping with the book's content. As Cremer said himself, 'the cool-headed eyewitness report by a one-man guerrilla driven by romance, sex and sensation – the adventurous life of a modern pirate, desperado and playboy'. The original photograph was taken by Wim van der Linden. This design mock-up was made by sticking the cut-out figure on to a white background and then photographing it again to create the freestanding effect. Cremer is wearing a denim suit with a New York City police cap and goggles on his head. A Harley Davidson Liberator was borrowed from the Amsterdam police for the photo shoot (Cremer left the Harley Davidson and sidecar, which features as the 'silver monster' in the book, behind in Spain). The photograph was taken outdoors. A sheet borrowed from Van der Linden's mother was spread against a wall at the corner of Gerrit van der Veenstraat and Raphaëlstraat in Amsterdam to serve as a background.

Cremer had already devised the pose with the motorcycle in an early design as well as the position of the title on the cover and the advertising slogan '*n onverbiddeijke bestseller*, (an inevitable bestseller), which proved to be prophetic in view of the worldwide sales of twelve million copies. The font used for the title is Playbill, a typeface that makes one think of Wild West 'Wanted' posters. When *Ik Jan Cremer* was published in the Netherlands it shocked the country. With the unstoppable impetus of a restless wild child, Cremer had crashed the small-minded national culture. In this cover design he had created a lasting monument to himself – a classic image of the 1960s.

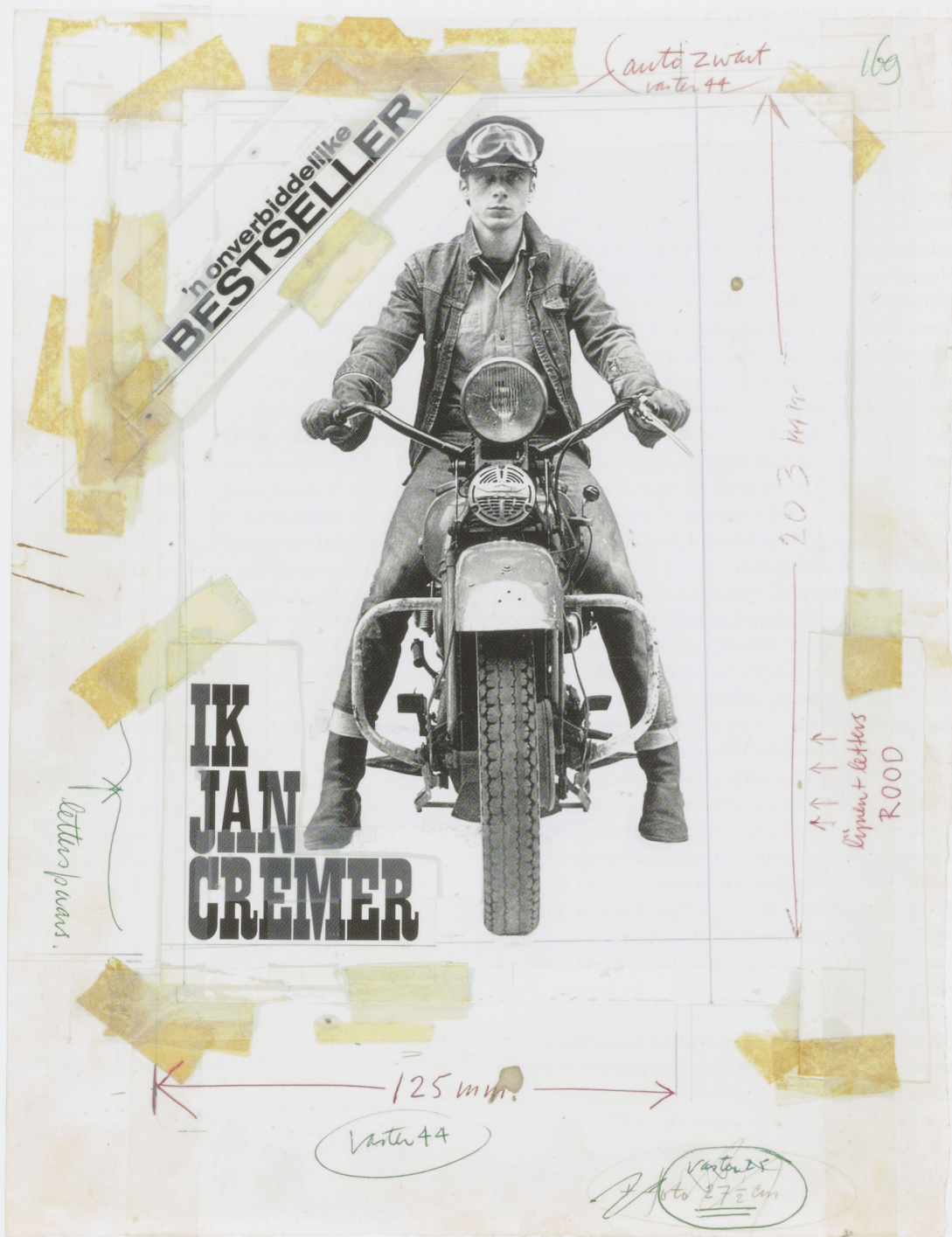
## LITERATURE:

Onno Blom, 'Jan Cremer is back in town! De geschiedenis van een onverbiddeijke bestseller', in *Auction sale 3. De onverbiddeijke veiling van het manuscript van Ik Jan Cremer, 2 oktober 2010*, Adams Amsterdam Auctions

## PROVENANCE:

Transferred by Jan Cremer, September 2010  
(inv. no. NG-2011-8).







## 7 JAN J. SCHOONHOVEN (1914-1994)

*Dish Relief*, 1963

Wood, cardboard, paper, paint, 113 x 85 x 14 cm

Signed and dated on the back: J.J. Schoonhoven 1963

Jan Schoonhoven admired Paul Klee. Anyone who sees his drawings from the 1950s will have no difficulty spotting his adulation of this *Bauhaus Meister* and will recognize all the elements so typical of Klee: the hatching, the delicate colours, the strange structures of hesitant lines, the deliberate irregularity of the plane in which the composition is conceived. This admiration for Klee remained even when Schoonhoven had found his own style in the decades that followed. He wanted to continue Klee's work, but expressly without romanticism. 'The aim is to establish reality as art in an impersonal way,' is the much-quoted last sentence of Schoonhoven's artistic credo of 1964, which was printed in the magazine *De nieuwe stijl*.

Alongside his text, which was preceded by a quotation from Marten Toonder's strip cartoon *Mr Bommel and the Killers*,\* there was a reproduction of his *Dish Relief* of 1963. In style and composition it is very different from the distinctive geometric reliefs he embarked on in 1960 and continued to make throughout his life. These consist of fields of orderly squares and rectangles, linked together and sometimes filled with slanting surfaces. They were made from cardboard and papier maché and invariably painted white. He called them *Reihungen* (juxtapositions). At first glance monotony prevails, but on closer examination tiny irregularities and subtle variations catch the eye, and the spirit of Paul Klee actually becomes apparent.

The *Dish Relief* is not a *Reihung* of rectangles, it is built up from a central point. From there, triangular and trapezium-shaped pieces of different sized cardboard overlap. The radial structure runs from the centre up to a raised rim, which is rounded off in the corners of the rectangle. Stagnation and movement, volume and surface balance one another in this relief. The illustration of this work can be interpreted as the visual equivalent of Schoonhoven's artistic credo: it places the emphasis on a centre, a 'zero point' as the point of departure. In so doing, it also makes direct reference to the names of the Dutch Nul and the German Zero groups in which he

was active, as well as alluding indirectly to the new aesthetic of the space age when the count-down to zero marked the starting point for the exploration of space.

Schoonhoven only made a few of these rectangular *Dish Reliefs*, possibly no more than five or six. He did not number them, unlike his other work, and most of them ended up with other artists with whom he was friends. However, during or shortly after the 'nul – o – zero' exhibition in the Haags Gemeentemuseum (1964), this relief was purchased by the then Dienst voor 's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen, the department responsible for the Dutch national collection which was deployed to decorate government buildings. For almost thirty years, from 1974 onwards, it hung in the Dutch chancellery in Bonn. This existence in relative obscurity contributed to the fact that a restoration in 2008 brought to light a rare, untouched relief that reveals in a monumental way the subtlety of Schoonhoven's 'impersonal' hand.

\* *Nothing, my dear fellow. Nothing at all. Only darkness and cold clouds circulate in this tube. I shall call this unknown gas zero because it reduces everything to nil.*

## LITERATURE:

- nul – o – zero, The Hague (Haags Gemeentemuseum) 1964  
 nul negentienhonderd vijf en zestig, Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum) 1965, 2 vols.  
 J.J. Schoonhoven, 'Zero', *De nieuwe stijl*, 1 [April 1965], pp. 118-23  
 Jan Schoonhoven Retrospectief | Retrospektiv. Tekeningen en reliëfs | Zeichnungen und Reliefs, The Hague (Haags Gemeentemuseum) | Nuremberg (Kunsthalle) | Karlsruhe (Badischer Kunstverein) 1984-1985  
 Janneke Wesseling, *Schoonhoven. Beeldend kunstenaar | Visual Artist*, [The Hague] 1990  
 Renate Damsch-Wiehager (ed.), *Nul. Die Wirklichkeit als Kunst fundieren. Die niederländische Gruppe Nul 1960-1965. Und heute | Nul. De werkelijkheid als kunst fundieren. De Nederlandse groep Nul 1960-1965. En heden*, Stuttgart 1993  
 ZERO – Internationale Künstler-Avantgarde der 50er/60er Jahre, Düsseldorf (Museum Kunst Palast) 2006





## PROVENANCE:

Purchased by the Dutch State in 1964 (inv. no. K64136).  
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