‘From a hygienic and aesthetic point of view’

Jan Toorop, Portrait of Marie Jeannette de Lange, 1900

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In November 2005 the Rijksmuseum acquired the pointillist portrait of Marie Jeannette de Lange painted by Jan Toorop in 1900 (fig.1). The painting, which had been in the subject’s family until then, is one of only two portraits for which Toorop adopted this style. And it is not just the portrait that is unusual – Jeannette Bouman-de Lange, as she was known at that time, was equally out of the ordinary. We know a lot about her from her surviving letters and diaries, and they also provide a first-hand account that allows us to reconstruct the creation of this painting.

Toorop painted Jeannette in the drawing room of her house ‘Vall’di Rhena’, at number 31 Scheveningseweg in The Hague’s chic Van Stolkpark district. She had her first sitting on 14 February 1900. As we learn from her diary, she found it a daunting experience: ‘Posing is very demoralising; doing nothing; wanting to look beautiful; being confident in yourself whether you want to or not.’ Toorop, in contrast, threw himself enthusiastically into his work. By the end of the third session on 22 February, he had completed the head, the neck and the hand, ‘in full likeness and in true human fairness,’ as Jeannette noted. ‘He is stippling the portrait: divisionism they call it, in oils on smooth white canvas. “This is it,” he says, “this is the only thing; this is the way we all have to go to make true, pure art.” “Nature, following nature as faithfully as possible, as carefully and faithfully as possible, if you feel it’s good, then it will be good,” he says.”

Toorop and Pointillism

Jan Toorop (Poerworedjo, Java 1858 – The Hague 1928) probably encountered the recent Neo-Impressionist styles during his first stay in Paris in 1884, although at that stage he thought that they were rather ‘loud’. Pointillism made its international breakthrough when Georges Seurat’s large painting A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte was shown at the eighth Impressionist Exhibition in Paris in May and June 1886 (fig. 2). At that time, however, Toorop was in Kent for his wedding to Jane (Annie) Hall, and he went straight back to the Netherlands from there. This meant that the first time he saw La Grande Jatte was at the beginning of 1887, when Seurat showed the painting at the exhibition of Les Vingt, a group of avant-garde artists based in Brussels to which Toorop had belonged since 1885. He started experimenting with the pointillist technique in 1888. Other members of Les Vingt, among them the Belgian painters Willy Finch and Théo van Rijsselbergh, were also
inspired to work in this style after seeing Seurat’s masterpiece. 

As appears from Toorop’s explanation to Jeannette, the underlying principle of pointillism is the dividing or breaking of colour into individual pigments. Pointillism, or ‘divisionism’, is based on a scientific theory derived from optics about the structure of colour and light. This holds that there is a difference between colour that is composed of physical components, and colour consisting of light. Mixing colour in material form results in turbidness, whereas mixing coloured light produces brilliance. The more that paints are mixed together, the ‘muddier’ the colour becomes, until eventually all the colours together produce black, whereas all the colours of light produce white. Seurat consequently decided to stop mixing his colours on the palette. Instead he placed dots of unblended colour beside one another directly on the canvas. The idea was that their juxtaposition on the prepared
white linen would achieve an optical effect similar to that of coloured light. Toorop’s remarks about true art and following nature must therefore be understood in the first place to mean following the physical rules about the creation of colour.

At the same time he talks about feelings: ‘if you feel it’s good, then it will be good’. The rational application of colour was simply a means of expressing the emotion that the depiction of the outside world evoked in the artist. In his first pointillist period (1888-1890), Toorop experimented. In Bulb Fields in Oegstgeest (fig. 3) he used the pointillist technique to achieve a decorative effect that is truly modern. The largest group of pointillist paintings in the 1888-1890 period, however, focuses on social themes with fairly traditional compositions. Seduction of c. 1889 (fig. 4) uses considerable contrast between light and shade, with the seduction scene playing out in the dull, grey foreground, set against a sunny landscape with a church, the symbol of a better world. The illusionary effect, particularly in the use of depth, is in line with the best academic traditions. After 1890 Toorop gradually abandoned pointillism and moved into his symbolist period with its emphasis on line and boldly-defined outlines in all sorts of media (pencil, chalk, gouache, oils and watercolour).

It was not until May 1899 that Toorop picked up the thread of divisionism again. He returned to the seaside town of Katwijk, where he had lived from 1890 to 1892. In the next two years the sea and the shore inspired him to paint a series of pointillist seascapes. He also made the portraits of Marie Jeannette de Lange and the art critic Dr Aegidius Timmerman, both likewise pointillist. Toorop’s pointillism of around 1900 is different from both that of his earlier period and that of the French painters and his fellow members of Les Vingt. He is less rigid and scientific than they, allows himself greater freedom in his brushstrokes and tries above all to generate a mood or atmosphere through the use of colour, just as the light governs the mood of a day. This is superbly illustrated in Misty Sea of 1899, a translucent impression in which the subject is light and atmosphere (fig. 5).

Toorop’s working methods are well demonstrated in the two pointillist

Fig. 4
JAN TOOROP,
Seduction, 1889. Oil on canvas, 67 x 77 cm.
Museum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo (inv. no. KM 782-13).

Fig. 5
JAN TOOROP,
Misty Sea, 1899.
Oil on canvas, 39.5 x 43.5 cm.
Triton Collection.
portraits of 1900 (fig. 6). Although they were not conceived as such, they can almost be compared as pendants. Both Jeannette and Timmerman are placed in the foreground, partly cut off by the lower edge of the painting. Jeannette is engrossed in an unidentified book; Timmerman is intent on a lithograph from his collection, Portrait of Marcelle Lender by Toulouse-Lautrec. All the same, their poses are significantly different: Jeannette leans towards the viewer and is presented in three-quarter profile, whereas Timmerman turns away and is painted in what is virtually profil perdu. The backgrounds are also similar and yet at the same time different: Timmerman sits at a low table with a book rest in Toorop’s studio; we can see parts of some of the artist’s pictures in the background. On the table on the right stands a tall, narrow glass vase containing a single narcissus and a gracefully dangling tulip. The setting for Jeannette de Lange’s portrait is her own drawing room: the table at which she sits is covered with a floral-patterned tablecloth. On it stand two vases of flowers, artlessly arranged. Everything is placed before an ill-defined background in orange and green, possibly a batik cloth that hung in the room (fig. 7). In contrast to the straight, almost hard lines in Timmerman’s portrait, the forms here are curved and soft and flow from one into the other.

Fig. 6
JAN TOOROP, The Print Lover. Portrait of Dr Aegidius Timmerman, 1900. Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 76 cm. Museum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo (inv. no. km 105.338).
The use of colour and the play of light and shade also contribute to the difference in the mood of the two paintings. The palette is actually much the same, but the dark green of Timmerman’s jacket is the dominant tone in his portrait, whereas Jeannette’s pink dress establishes a light note in hers. The writer and art critic Lodewijk van Deyssel described her portrait as being of a ‘precious and tender, fair delight, wholly light in both meanings of the word’. Jeannette herself referred to ‘true human fairness’. The light of the desk lamp casts harsh blue shadows on Timmerman’s face, while the oil lamp beside Jeannette lights her with gentle chiaroscuro.

The pointillist technique is not used consistently in either of the paintings. In rendering the roses in the glass to Jeannette’s right (fig.8) and the basketweave of Timmerman’s chair, Toorop followed the structure and texture of the material he was painting (fig.9). The paint in Jeannette’s portrait appears to have been applied directly to the white ground, while in the painting of Timmerman there is a thin,
almost transparent layer of colour under the more impasto brushstrokes. This may explain the greater translucency of the woman’s portrait. Pencil underdrawing can be discerned in both works, particularly in the hands and the outlines of the faces (fig. 10). Infrared reflectography reveals that it took Toorop several attempts to get Jeannette’s head right (fig. 11).

Toorop took a fairly relaxed, open-minded approach to pointillism, subordinating it to his interpretation of his subject. Comparing his work with, for instance, Théo van Rijsselbergh’s portrait of his wife (1892), we see that Toorop avoided the static impression that a pointillist painting can all too easily make (fig. 12). He achieved this primarily by avoiding strong colour contrasts, so that the areas of colour almost merge into one another and there are no hard outlines. This makes the space less easily definable and creates an overall decorative effect.

**Toorop and Jeannette de Lange**

Toorop probably first met Jeannette Bouman-de Lange (1865-1923) during or just before the National Exhibition of Women’s Work that ran from 9 July to 21 September 1898 in The Hague. This exhibition marked the start of the women’s movement in the Netherlands and female liberation was put on the political agenda for the first time. Jeannette was involved with the organization and attended a number of the associated conferences, keeping newspaper cuttings about them. They included the ‘maidservants’ conference’ about the position of domestic servants and a lecture by Dr Catharina van Tusschenbroek about the psycho-
Fig. 11
Infrared reflectograph of figure 1. Rijksmuseum. This shows clearly how Toorop blocked in the outlines of the face several times.

Fig. 12
THÉO VAN RIJSSELBERGHE,
Portrait of Mrs van Rijsselberghe, 1892. Oil on canvas, 186 x 97 cm. Museum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo (inv. no. km 101.877).

Fig. 13
JAN TOOROP,
Poster of the National Exhibition of Women’s Work, 1898. Lithograph, 1160 x 665 mm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (RP-P-1912-2398).
logical causes of 'a lack of vitality in girls and young women'. Toorop had designed the catalogue cover and the poster (fig. 13). In the summer of 1899 he stayed with the Boumans in Villa Vall’di Rhen and, as Jeannette noted in her diary, ‘when we were standing by a bed of waving petunias he said “I must make your portrait one day”. “I would be delighted,” I said.’

It proved to be by no means plain sailing. Toorop already had his studio in Katwijk in the summer of 1899, but he did not move into his new house with his wife and daughter until September. The first two sittings in February 1900 were disrupted by toppling oil lamps, Toorop missing his train and poor light because of a snowstorm. Jeannette, like so many women, was infatuated with Toorop. ‘He has an imperturbable disposition. There is a Buddhist peace in him. He reminds me of the sphinx … His movements are slow, phlegmatic. Very slowly he slides his great heavy legs forward, very slowly and in great tranquillity he pushes the chair beneath him with his handsome, plump hand. A real Oriental’s hand, with square nails; a hand with an expression of gentle goodness.’

Maria Jeannette was born in Batavia (present-day Jakarta) on 20 December 1865. She was the youngest of five children. The only son died when he was two, so that she grew up in a family of girls. Her father, Geldolph Adriaan de Lange (1824–1897), born in Alkmaar, worked as an engineer for the East Indies Geographical Service and was one of the founders of the Koninklijke Nederlandse Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van Petroleumbronnen (later Royal Dutch Shell). Her mother was Margaretha Jacoba Joanna Wiggers van Kerchem (1832–1899). On 6 February 1884 in Batavia, Jeannette married Jan Cornelis Bouman (1853–1909), a senior official at the Department of Finance in Batavia (fig. 14). In the late eighteen-eighties they moved by way of Almelo and Amsterdam to The Hague, where Jan Bouman became the director of the records, mortgages and land registration department at the Ministry of Finance. In 1898 they moved into the house in Van Stolkpark. The marriage remained childless.

Their shared background in the East Indies certainly created a bond between Jeannette and Toorop. In early July 1899 he was looking forward ‘to spending a few days with you in a real East Indian style as you wrote a couple of months ago’. During a boat trip that summer, he made a lovely, intimate little portrait of Jeannette that he gave to her husband (fig. 15). At the beginning of 1901 he wished her ’slamat tambaroe’, Malay for Happy New Year.
Jeannette had already moved in artistic circles before they met and her portrait had been made on several occasions – by Isaac Israels, among others (fig. 17). She herself drew and painted and she also took lessons, first from the painter Maurits van der Valk and later from the etcher Philippe Zilcken (fig. 16).4 Her diaries and correspondence reveal a woman who, in part because of her childlessness, is restlessly seeking something meaningful to do with her life. She took her work very seriously and got painters of the stature of Jacob Maris and Isaac Israels to give her their opinions of it.5 Toorop, too, regularly enquired about her progress in their correspondence. They discussed Jeannette’s furniture designs and Toorop recommended his furniture maker to her. This shared interest also emerges from a very long and detailed letter about paintings and stained-glass windows by the Arts and Crafts movement, which he had seen for the first time during a trip around England in the summer of 1900.6

In February 1900 Jeannette’s restive nature and unfulfilled ambitions had led her to suffer a bout of what we would nowadays call depression, but she described as ‘nerves’.7 While the portrait was being painted she was
receiving treatment from Dr Eykman, a well-known 'physiatrist' or naturopath, who was also the Netherlands' first radiologist.  

He had established a clinic for the treatment of mental patients by natural means not far from the Boumans' house in Van Stolkpark. Jeannette was treated 'in a cage of electricity' and was given water treatments. She also had to live a regular life, eat healthily, take plenty of exercise and not fret. As we have already seen, she found this last injunction difficult to follow while sitting for her portrait. Toorop was evidently aware of her problem: 'You can practise rest. He says that the restlessness in me is a beautiful thing, but that I must learn to control it; practice, through practice, he says'.

Reform Dress

In her portrait Jeannette is wearing a pink dress with a short bolero. She may well have made this outfit herself in line with the principles of the dress reform movement, since at that time she was chairwoman of the board of the Vereniging voor Verbetering van Vrouwenkleding (VvVvV). This society, whose aim was to improve women's dress, was a direct spin-off from the National Exhibition of Women's Work of 1898. As part of that event there had been competitions to design 'hygienic, practical and tasteful clothes for women and children' and steps had been taken to establish a Reform movement and vocational training. Expressions of support from 219 visitors led to the foundation of the VvVvV on 18 March 1899 in the Temperance Hall in The Hague. Jeannette was appointed president at the first public meeting on 9 June 1899, after which most of the meetings of the board were held at her house.  

Her network of friends and acquaintances and many members of her family can be found among the sympathisers. Philippe Zilcken also became a member of the board, his participation stemming from his own experience: 'Almost everything in this area is inappropriate and impractical. And it's almost as bad for men as for women!' To which he added the unintentionally risqué observation that 'Mrs Bouman-de Lange can tell you that I have seven buttons on my jackets!' Through Zilcken, the artist Johan Thorn Prikker was approached and asked to design a stamp. Toorop was another convert: 'I think this is an excellent endeavour on the part of the ladies who have started this society. Later I hope to design a drawing myself from a hygienic and aesthetic point of view.' In a letter to Jeannette he wrote: 'You must make me a member of this society of dress Reforming. I'm making a very hygienic-aesthetic summer jacket for men, to be worn with cycling trousers and walking dress.'

The society set itself the goal of designing healthy, comfortable clothes for women and girls by means of competitions, exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations of models and a monthly journal, by promoting vocational training for 'specifically skilled dressmakers' and by opposing fashions 'that offend against common sense and the demands of hygiene and propriety'. Corsets, heavy fabrics and high, constricting collars hampered free movement and caused the muscles to become weak. Trains brought dirt and germs from the street into the house. A fashion fad like the veil was also injurious to health: the machine-made lace was rough and caused skin complaints. The advocates of the reform movement realized that their cause could not succeed unless the new designs were fashionable, flattering and chic. The society's monthly journal, the Maandblad der Vereniging voor Verbetering van Vrouwenkleding, which commenced publication in 1900, was consequently more than a theoretical plea for rational, healthy dress; it was also a practical guide.
Each month it featured two garments with patterns and instructions for making them at home (or getting them made). The members of the board themselves were the best ambassadors of the new spirit: they came from wealthy circles, and they hoped that by wearing the new clothes they would make them socially acceptable. As Jeannette wrote during a stay in Beaulieu sur Mer on the Cote d'Azur in 1901: ‘The unnaturalness of the clothes here is beyond all rational imagination. I am regarded as a savage wherever I show my face. Uncurled hair, no corset, short skirts, no hat, when we’re outside here, not, of course, in Nice or Monte Carlo’.57

Jeannette also took the lead in disseminating this new gospel by means of lectures, which were advertised and commented on in the national press. The society wanted to set up local branches, where women would work together on new clothes and designs, which would then be shown. The primary purpose of the lectures was to get these branches off the ground, but they also had to reach a wider public who would be interested in wearing reform clothes. The events were very successful: by 31 October 1901 the number of members had risen to 1317, fifty-two of them in other countries, chiefly the Dutch East Indies. Among them were well-known feminists like the physicians Aletta Jacobs and Catharina van Tusschenbroek, writers like Cécile Goekoop-de Jong van Beek van Donk, Hélène Lapidoth-Swarth and Henriette Roland Holst and, along with Zilcken and Toorop, the painters Arnold Gorter and Willem Witsen. There were also more unexpected members, although with related interests: Dr Eykman, the Ladies’ Reading Circle in The Hague, the Amsterdam corset manufacturer Hunkemöller-Lexis and the Ten Cate textile factory in Hengelo.

In September 1901 Jeannette took on the editorship of the journal alongside her duties as president. In her characteristic, rather high-flown style she wrote in the editorial: ‘And now I may assume the work. Enjoyable work for me, inspired heart and soul by the desire to see hunched backs and bent heads straightened, hollow chests lifted and swelled, weakened stomach walls supple, shattered constitutions vital; I burn with the desire to open people’s eyes to what is normal and consequently beautiful, and what is abnormal and thus ugly’.59 This work brought her into contact with the Vrouwenbond, a women’s association whose aim was to improve the position of women in society, which made it a political organisation. The genteel ladies of the Hague VvVV shrank from becoming part of the more militant women’s movement, but did encourage the Vrouwenbond to set up a branch.60

Just how open Jeannette was to innovation in dress, health and medicine is clear from the next step in her career as an activist. In the spring of 1901 she and her husband went to the South of France for three months for his health. However, his condition deteriorated, and on the advice of her sister, Margo Kessler-de Lange, on their way back they went to see the Amsterdam physician Johann Georg Mezger (1838-1909) in Paris. He had introduced a new method of treatment, which we now call physiotherapy: he tackled internal complaints with remedial exercises, massage and tapping with a rubber hammer. Mezger had already made a name for himself in the Netherlands in the eighteen-seventies, when he had a surgery in Amsterdam’s exclusive Amstel Hotel. A very well-to-do clientele consulted him there and, from 1886 onwards, followed him to the seaside town of Domburg in Zeeland every summer. These rich patients, many of them aristocrats, helped Domburg to flourish as a fashionable resort.61 Toorop started visiting Domburg in the summer of 1898; the Boumans went for the first time in August 1900 and continued to go there until 1905.62
Jan Bouman did well on Mezger's therapy, and he and his wife became involved in spreading Mezger's fame. From then on Jeannette combined her lectures on reform dress with the promotion of Mezger's method, and even sold the Mezger hammer by post. This brought her into conflict with the board of the VvVvV, who naturally took a dim view of the adulteration of her mission with what many people then regarded as charlatanism and urged her in no uncertain terms to confine her lectures to the subject of reform dress.

In 1901 Jeannette was also under attack in reform circles for another reason. While she was in Paris she had made the acquaintance of a dressmaker, Madame de Vroye, who, according to Jeannette, had solved the problem of healthy and yet elegant clothes. She brought her to The Hague and published an illustration of her designs in the Maandblad. It caused a controversy that brought to a head the already simmering disagreements between the board in The Hague and the Amsterdam branch of the VvVvV, whose members were more practically-minded, socialist women. Madame de Vroye's gowns had a small train and also seemed to be supported by a corset (fig. 18). The train in particular became the subject of a fierce debate between the proponents of partial acceptance and the more radical reformers. Jeannette and her supporters insisted that women in the upper echelons of society would only find reform dress acceptable if concessions to fashion were made. Opponents categorically rejected the train, which according to an Italian study presented 'a vast mass of bacilli to the eyes of the researchers: tuberculosis and diphtheria bacilli etc. And we bring all this into our drawing rooms and bedrooms, right up to the child's cradle!'

The criticism of her promotion of Mezger and the train issue eventually led Jeannette to resign from the board in February 1902. She decided to start her own magazine, Schoonheid door Gezondheid (Beauty through Health), but it only lasted a year. Her involvement with Mezger also tailed off after a while, but her quest for a meaningful purpose in life and her fascination with new medical and spiritual movements,
so typical of the early twentieth century, continued. In about 1908 she joined the
Christian Science Church, a movement that believes, among other things, in
healing by the power of the mind.
Jan Bouman died in 1909, and in 1911
Jeannette married her cousin Hendrik
J. de Lange. He also became a Christian
Scientist and was later a well-known
‘teacher’ in the United States. She and
Hendrik settled permanently at her
country estate, De Polberg near Wapenveld in Gelderland, where they led a
busy social life. She died at De Polberg
on 7 July 1923. She was only 57.49

The Portrait
While Jeannette regularly made it into
the press in her own right, her portrait
also had a public unveiling. As early
as the autumn of 1900 it could be seen
in an exhibition of the Haagse Kunst-
kring (Art Circle of The Hague).
Its effect was intriguing. Jeannette
described in her diary a meeting with
the elderly painter Jozef Israëls who,
like his son Isaac, admired the portrait
very much, but thought that it was very
badly placed – and this, while Toorop
himself was on the hanging committee.
Jeannette noted her conversation with
Israëls verbatim in her diary: ‘I told him
that it had been hanging well at first;
and that it made all the others look dirty
and that Toorop had consequently hung
it on the bad side.’ The old painter
thought this very noble, but incom-
prehensible. ‘I can well believe that it
beat all the other work. It is amazingly
pure and clean and strong.’50

This unofficial first opinion was
echoed in the reviews of subsequent
exhibitions. Toorop showed the
portrait at his retrospectives at the
Vereniging Kunst en Kennis in Arnhem
(March 1901), the Rotterdamse Kunst
kring (April 1901), the salon of the
Brussels society Libre Esthétique
(1902), which meant his international
breakthrough, and a major retrospec-
tive at the Amsterdam gallery Frans
Buffa en Zonen in 1904.51 The critic
N.H. Wolf wrote of the two pointillist
portraits: ‘On the other hand, the
stippled portrait of Mrs Bouman-de
Lange is another example of Toorop’s
art. I think this is the most successful
of the stippled portraits’.52

The work was exhibited with
unabated frequency and to continued
critical acclaim until 1909.53 The Nieuwe
Courant wrote of Toorop’s largest
retrospective so far, at the Larense
Kunsthandel in February 1909: ‘The
portrait of Mrs Bouman-de Lange is a
pointillist work. But what fair purity
and tenderness has been achieved with
the process, such that one would think
it almost impossible to achieve in a
different technique.’54 Equally
interesting is the comparison with an
earlier portrait of Annie Toorop-Hall
(fig. 19) shown on the same occasion.
‘It is, by the way, extremely instructive
to make a careful comparison of the
portraits of Mrs Toorop and Mrs
Bouman-de Lange. Many years lie
between the completion of the former
and the latter work. On a superficial
inspection, one is struck only by
differences. The earlier work is what
is sometimes called “Impressionist”
and the later is painted more in the
style of the luminists. The setting is
more important in the first than in
the second. Mrs Toorop, in her white
dress, is placed in her room as a largish
figure in a painting of an interior. Mrs
Bouman de Lange, pictured half-length,
is conceived wholly as a model for a
portrait, and the surroundings, although
very powerfully eloquent, were clearly
of less significance to the painter. His
wife had to be the woman in her home.
The elegant lady had to be the woman
in an appropriate interior. There is also
more atmosphere in the old portrait
and more light in the recent work.
But in both of them the main thing is
capturing the character of the model.
It is this that has been Toorop’s great
strength from the outset. He never sees
his model as a dummy that one can set
down wherever one likes, it does not

Fig. 19

JAN TOOROP,

Portrait of

Annie Toorop-Hall

in Lissadell,

Kenley, Surrey, 1885.

Oil on canvas,

99 x 73 cm.

Stedelijk Museum,

Amsterdam

(inv. no. A.50).
had had and who, after Jeannette’s death in 1923, spent much of his time in the United States in connection with his work for the Christian Science Church.57 This was compounded by the fact that interest in Toorop’s work declined after his death in 1928. It was to be another fifty years or so before the art of the turn of the century was to get proper attention again. Two exhibitions in The Hague were crucial to this revival, Licht door kleur, Nederlandse luministen (1976) on Dutch Neo-Impressionism and Kunstenaren der Idee. Symbolistische tendenzen in Nederland, ca. 1880-1930 (1978) on the Dutch Symbolists, both in the Haags Gemeentemuseum. These shows sparked renewed interest in the work of Jan Toorop, who had after all been a pioneer in both movements. An exhibition devoted to the artist alone soon followed: in 1978 the Kröller-Müller Museum staged the first retrospective covering the years 1885 to 1910, from Toorop’s period with Les Vingt in Brussels up to his Catholic period. The Portrait of Marie Jeannette de Lange was seen here and again at the complete retrospective in the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1989.58 The portrait had its most recent showing in 2003 in the exhibition Jan Toorop. Portraitist, where the praise was as glowing as ever, albeit formulated in rather more measured tones than a century earlier: ‘The use of a clear, blond, unifying light enabled Toorop to achieve a serene and harmonious atmosphere.’59

Toorop also regarded the portrait as one of his best works, witness the fact that he asked to borrow it for his exhibitions almost as soon as it had been delivered. The Boumans must often have had to do without it: after the exhibition in the Haagse Kunstkring, where the painting was badly hung because otherwise it would have ‘beaten all the other work’, it went on virtually at once to retrospectives at the Kunst en Kennis Society in

matter where, so long as the light is good.55 The only critical note was sounded by the socialist writer Israël Querido, who opposed the bourgeoisie in all its manifestations: ‘You can see the voluptuous portraitist in the portrait of Mrs Bouman de Lange. To me it is too slickly charming, too pretty, too clever, too Japanese flower arrangement, too sensual in its lilac-gold flickering light, too consciously cold despite all that false glow.’56

The painting was seen less often after the exhibition in 1909. This was probably due not to Querido’s attack but to the death of the official owner of the portrait, Jan Bouman. Jeannette’s second marriage in 1911 meant that the work became the property of Hendrik de Lange, who had fewer ties with the Dutch art world than the Boumans
Arnhem in March 1901 and at the Rotterdamse Kunstkring a month later. Bas van Lier has published a delightful correspondence between Jan Toorop and the secretary of the Arnhem society, Johanna Langelaan, which reveals how the extremely engaging but often vague Toorop did his utmost to bring the portrait to the public's notice. In response to Mrs Langelaan's proposal to publish a review of the Arnhem exhibition, he not only told her the best newspaper to approach but also wrote what was effectively a draft version of the review. This duly appeared a little while later, almost word for word, in the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant – the paper Toorop had recommended.

The sentence Toorop suggested, ‘the pointillist portraits “Mrs Bouman” and “Dr Timmerman” generated considerable discussion’, was paraphrased by Langelaan in the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant of 28 March 1901 as, ‘Fierce debates about those [the portraits] of Dr Timmerman and Mrs Bouman!’. Elsewhere in the review we read: ‘The artist has rendered the portraits of Mrs Bouman and Dr Timmerman in the sparkling sunlight in characteristic style.’ The fact that pointillism provoked discussions can be inferred from the reactions when the portrait of Jeannette was shown for the first time at the Haagse Kunstkring, although professional jealousy would undoubtedly have been a factor there. In Arnhem, though, the pointillist seascapes, for instance Misty Sea (fig. 5), also seem to have caused a stir. This time unprompted by Toorop, Langelaan wrote: ‘I know that there is considerable debate about what is and is not beautiful, can and cannot be understood. The painter has also often been accused of not seeing things as they are. But one should not be too quick to make this judgment. Who has studied the sun in all its hues? Very few of us, for people tend to retreat from the bright light into the shade.’

Despite all the success and debate, Toorop never repeated the experiments of the Portrait of Marie Jeannette de Lange and The Print Lover. In 1919, during the Toorop exhibition organized by Kunstzaal Kleykamp in the galleries of the Arti et Amicitiae Society, the possibility of a commission for a portrait of Hendrik de Lange was raised. It would probably have been the same size as Jeannette’s portrait and perhaps in the same style, but nothing ever came of it. Toorop’s spontaneous outburst during Jeannette’s third sitting, ‘this is it, this is the only thing, this is the way we all have to go to make true, pure art’, is no more than the enthusiasm of the moment, and was probably prompted by the realization that he was on to something good. Toorop would not have been Toorop had he not swiftly moved on to explore other avenues. His artistic temperament craved diversity and was characterized by a desire to search for new forms of expression; it was not in his nature to study a single solution to the exclusion of all else. After 1900 he did, it is true, increasingly turn to portraits – but in drawing. With the pointillist portrait, he had stopped at his peak.

NOTES

1 Sale Christie’s Amsterdam, 29 November 2005, lot. no. 244, Portrait of Mrs M.J. de Lange. The painting was acquired with the aid of the BankGiroloterij and the Rembrandt Society. I am greatly indebted to various members of Jeannette de Lange’s family for their assistance and for making available archive material for this study and objects for photographs.

2 In 1900, when the portrait was painted, Marie Jeannette de Lange was married to Jan Bouman. He died in 1909, and in 1911 she married her cousin Hendrik de Lange. Until 1909 the portrait was exhibited under the

3 M.J. de Lange’s diary, 14 February 1900 and 21 February 1900. Private archives: ‘Poseeren is sterk demoraliserend: het niets doen; het mooi willen zijn; het vervuld zijn van je eige of je wilt of niet.’ (…) ‘in volle gelijkenis en in oprecht menschelijke blankheid’ (…) ‘Hij stippelt het portret: diviseeren heet het, in olieverf op glad blank doek. (…) “Dit is het”, zegt hij, “dit is het enige, dit is de weg dien we allen op moeten om ware pure kunst te geven.” (…) “De natuur, zoo getrouw moge de natuur volgen, zoo voorzichtig en getrouw mogelijk, voelt je het mooi, dan wordt het ook mooi”, zegt hij.’


6 Toorop expert Gerard van Wezel concludes in Bosma op. cit. (note 2), p. 35, that Toorop did not embark upon pointillism until 1888 but that, in competition with Seurat and in response to adverse criticism of his Impressionist work of 1887, he antedated a number of pointillist works to 1886. See also notes 9 and 10.


9 We know from a preliminary study that Bulb Fields in Oegstgeest (original title: November Sun), which was antedated to 1886, actually dates from 1889. See Bosma, op. cit. (note 2), p. 36 note 12.

10 Seduction was also antedated to 1886 and was probably painted in 1889. See Bosma, op. cit. (note 2), p. 36 note 12.

11 The portrait of Aegidius Timmerman is now known as The Print Lover. In his autobiographical essay Tim’s herinneringen, Timmerman describes the sittings in Toorop’s studio in Katwijk, constantly interrupted by the entrance of one of the host of admiring ladies with whom Toorop surrounded himself. He erroneously dates the work to around 1907. Aegidius W. Timmerman, Tim’s herinneringen, Amsterdam s.a., pp. 171-175.

12 The blue boats and the turquoise sea correspond to the background of the pencil drawing Procession of Souls by the Ocean, 1900, while the figure group behind the table lamp appears to refer to another pencil drawing, The Strike (Thirst for Justice) of 1899.


15 De Lange Family Archives Trust, Alkmaar Regional Archives, C 60, no. 597: Newspaper Cuttings.

16 We do not know exactly what Jeannette did for the National Exhibition of Women’s Work. After the event she received a note of thanks for her efforts. De Lange Family Archives, op. cit. (note 15), no. 593: postcard 30-12-1898, The Hague.

17 M.J. de Lange’s diary, 22 February 1900. Private archives: ‘en toen we ook bij een park wuivende petunia’s stonden zei hij “ik moet uw portret ook eens maken”. “Heel graag”, zei ik’.

18 Ibid.: ‘Hij heeft een onverstoorbaar humeur. Er is een boodistische rust in hem. Hij doet mij denken aan de sphinx (…) Traag, legematrisch zijn zijn bewegingen. Heel langzaam schuift hij zijn zware reuzen beenen voort, heel langzaam in groote rust schuift hij de stoel onder zich met zijn mooie mollige hand. Een echte hand van een oosterling, met vierkante nagels; een hand met een uitdrukking van zachte goedheid.’


21 Toorop to Jeannette Bouman-de Lange, letter from Katwijk aan Zee, Wednesday [probably early July 1899]. Private archives: ‘om bij u in echt Indischen trant zooals u mij een paar maanden geleden schreef een paar
dagen door te komen brengen'.

22 The portrait was later dated 27-5-1900, but this must be a typical Toorop mistake, since he sent it to Jan Bouman in a letter postmarked 13 July 1899. See Jan Toorop to Jeannette Bouman-de Lange, letter from Katwijk aan Zee, Tuesday, postmarked Scheveningen, 13-7-1899. Private archives. See also notes 6, 9, 10 and 33 on Toorop’s unreliable dating.

23 Jan Toorop to Jeannette Bouman-de Lange, letter postmarked Katwijk aan Zee, ...01. Private archives.

24 M.J. de Lange’s diary, 29 January 1897 ff. Correspondence between Maurits van der Valk and Jeannette Bouman-de Lange, 17 January 1899 and 16 June 1899. Private archives.

25 M.J. de Lange’s diary, 29 January 1897, visit by Zilcken and Jacob Maris to Jeannette’s studio and idem, transcript of a letter to Isaac Israels, 6 October 1898; 12 October 1898, undated note after October 1898. Private archives.


27 M.J. de Lange’s diary, Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 February 1900. Private archives.


In the list of members of the VvVvV Eykman’s clinic is recorded as a Psychiatric institution. ‘Ledenlijst op naam der plaatsen op 31 October 1901 van de Vereening voor Verbetering van Vrouwenkleding’, Archives of Koninklijke Bijenkorf Beheer NV (K.B.B.) with predecessors, entry number 929, no. 2838, Amsterdam City Archives.

29 M.J. de Lange’s diary, 22 February 1900. Private archives: ‘Rust kun je oefenen. Hij zegt, dat die onrust die in mij is iets moois is; maar dat ik moet leeren die te beheersen; oefening, door oefening, zegt hij’.


32 VvVvV Archives, op. cit. (note 28), folder 112: minutes of the meetings of the main board, September 1899. The function of the stamp is not clear; it may have been used as a stamp of approval on the designs.

33 VvVvV Archives, op. cit. (note 28), folder 3, Jan Toorop to Suze Groshans, completed VvVvV brochure, dated 9 May 1898, Katwijk aan Zee. Amsterdam City Archives: ‘Ik vind dit een uitmuntend streven van de dames die deze vereening op touw hebben gezet. Ik hoop later zelf eens eene teekening te ontwerpen uit een hygiënisch-aesthetisch standpunt’. We see yet again just how unreliable Toorop was when it came to dates: the National Exhibition of Women’s Work ran from 9 July to 21 September, so his postcard must date from 1899.

34 Jan Toorop to Jeannette Bouman-de Lange, letter from Katwijk aan Zee, Wednesday [probably early July 1899]. Private archives: ‘U moet mij maar lid maken voor die vereening van dress Reforming. Ik ben bezig een zeer hygiënisch-aesthetische heeren-zomerjas te maken, die gedragen moet worden op een fietspantalon en wandelkostuum’.

35 Koninklijke Bijenkorf Beheer NV (K.B.B.) archives with predecessors, entry number 929, no. 2837: ‘Statuten der Vereeniging voor Verbetering van Vrouwenkleding’, Maandblad der Vereeniging voor Verbetering van
Vrouwenkleding, Bijblad 1-2-1903, p. 1. Amsterdam City Archives: a vakopleiding van ‘bekwame kleedermakers’ te bevorderen en de modeshow te bestrijden ‘die indruischen tegen het gezond verstand en de eischen van hygiëne en zedelijkheid’.


37 VvVvV Archives, op. cit. (note 30), folder 18: Jeannette Bouman-de Lange to M. (Greeth) Meijboom, secretary of the VvVvV, Beaulieu sur Mer, Hotel Bristol, 9 Febr. 1901. Amsterdam City Archives: ‘De onnatuur in kleeding hier is buiten alle redelijk voorstellingsvermogen. Ik word dan ook aangezien voor een wilde, waar ik me ook vertoon. Ongefriseerd haar, geen corset, korte rokken, geen hoed, als we hier buiten blijven, natuurlijk wel in Nice of Monte Carlo’.


42 Jan Bouman to his sister-in-law Margo Kessler-de Lange, Grand Hotel de l’Athénée, Paris, 6 April 1901: ‘I am so grateful to you … particularly for your urging me to go to Dr Mezger … There has been an improve-
ment since the first day of the treatment … He has given us very valuable information about self-massage and asked us to spread it among the public in Holland … Jeannette will include the announcements in the speech she is giving in Alkmaar on the 26th of this month. We find doing this very satisfying.’ B. Kessler ed., Tussen moeder en zoon. Briefwisseling tussen Margo Kessler-de Lange en haar zoon Dolph, 1901-1938, Kessler-de Lange Foundation, Amsterdam 2005, pp. 33 and 34. With thanks to Beppe Kessler and Gijs van der Ham.


44 De Lange Family Archives, op. cit. (note 15), no. 593: letter from the board of the Amsterdam branch of the VvVvV to Jeannette Bouman-de Lange, Amsterdam, 22 May 1901.

45 Van Dijk, op. cit. (note 30), pp. 94-95.


50 M.J. de Lange’s diary, A visit to Joseph Israels on Tuesday eleven-thirty on 20 Nov. 1900. Private archives: ‘Ik vertelde hem dat het eerst goed gehangen had; en dat het al de anderen vuil gemaakt had en dat Toorop het daarom maar aan de slechte kant had gehangen’. De oude schilder vond het zeer edemoezig, maar ook onbegrijpelijk. ‘Ja dat wil ik wel geloven, dat het al het andere werk sloeg. Het is verbazend zuiver en blank en sterk.’ This must have been the exhibition Portretten van Nederlandse meesters in the Haagse Kunstkring, 20 August to 15 October 1900. See A.B.G.M. van Kalmthout, Muzen-

51 Schilderijen en Teekeningen van J.W. Toorop, Rotterdamse Kunstkring, Rotterdam, April 1901, cat. no. 8; *18me Salon* Libre Esthétique, Musée Moderne, Brussels, February-March 1902; Tentoonstelling van schilderijen, aquarellen en teekeningen door Jan Toorop, Fr. Buffa & Zonen, Amsterdam, 1904, cat. no. 9.


53 Tentoonstelling van schilderijen en teekeningen van Jan Toorop, Kunsthandel Kruger & Cie. The Hague 1907, cat. no. 59; Tentoonstelling Jan Toorop, Laurense Kunsthandel, Amsterdam, February-March 1909, Portraits, cat. no. 19.

54 ‘Jan Toorop. Tentoonstelling Toorop’, *Nieuwe Courant*, 18 February 1909: ‘Het portret van Mevrouw Bouman-de Lange is gepointilleerd. Maar welk een blanke zuiverheid en malsheid is met het procedé bereikt, zoools men haar met een anderen schildertrant nauwelijks bereikbaard achten zou’.


57 See for example the catalogue of the *Eere-tentoonstelling Jan Toorop, Kunstzaal Kleykamp in the galleries of the Arti et Amicitiae Society, Amsterdam, February 1919, no. 28: Mrs de Lange. Property of Mr H.J. de Lange, Wapenveld.

58 J. T. Toorop, op. cit. (note 2), cat. no. 95 and Hefing, op. cit. (note 2), cat. no. 77.


60 Bas van Lier, ‘Jan Toorop over Jan Toorop’, NRC, CS 17 February 1989.

61 Letter from Toorop to Johanna Langelaan, Katwijk aan Zee, Sunday 17 March 1901, as quoted in Van Lier op. cit. (note 60). ‘De gepointilleerde portretten “mevrouw Bouman” en “dr. Timmerman” wekte nogal heel veel discussie op’.

62 Schilderijen en Teekeningen van J.W. Toorop, Rotterdamse Kunstkring, Rotterdam, April 1901, cat. no. 12. ‘Ik weet dat er veel strijd gevoerd werd over mooi en niet mooi en niet en wel begrepen. Ook menig keer werd de schilder verdacht niet 200 gezien te hebben. Dat oordeel mag men niet te spoedig vellen. Wie heeft de zon bestudeerd in zijn scha-koeringen, slechts weinigen, want den mensch is geneigd zich van het felle licht dadelijk naar de schaduw te keeren.’

63 Jan Toorop to Jeannette de Lange, 1 February 1919, v. Merlantstraat 124, The Hague. Private archives. ‘I should be very happy to paint your husband’s portrait and I shall be able to do it at your house. Then I will come and stay with you for a week, when the weather is more conducive to a trip to Wapenveld … You ask me the price of a painted portrait like this. Such a portrait, as big as the one of you, in oils works out at somewhere between 1500 and 1800 guilders.’ It is hard to say whether this is an indication of the price of Jeannette’s portrait.

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