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# Pemmy's Alphabet Book: On the Power of Creativity by Women in a Japanese Concentration Camp 1942-45

• MATTIE BOOM AND SUZAN MEIJER •

In 1944 Pem Hagers celebrated her fifth birthday in the Brastagi prison camp on Northeast Sumatra where the Japanese occupying forces held Dutch women and their children captive during the Second World War. It was 28 December and it was Pem's mother Mies Aalbersberg's birthday on that day too. Pem remembers a few things about it, above all a gathering with a lot of children.<sup>1</sup> What Pem does not recall, though, is that she was given a special gift: a picture book made of fabric (fig. 1). Amazingly, her first memory of the book dates from after the war, from 1947, when she and her mother were living in The Hague. Mies herself had kept the gift like a treasure for all that time and her daughter was hardly allowed to touch it when she saw it again. Her mother liked to talk about it when they looked at it together at home on the sofa: about how she had made sure that the women who had worked on it in the camp did it neatly and made no mistakes. If anything was not right, she removed the finished work and corrected it.<sup>2</sup> Mies Aalbersberg must have copied and enlarged all twenty-six pages of the 1936 ABC book *A is een aapje* by the author Rie Cramer (fig. 2) in pencil, page by page, on to pieces of cotton cut from rice or flour sacks. With it, she created her own unique sewn version on fabric (fig. 3). The task

< Fig. 1  
Various makers supervised by Mies Aalbersberg, cover of the picture book in fabric *ABC van Pemmy* (*Pemmy's Alphabet Book*), Japanese Brastagi camp, Sumatra, 1944. Cotton, jute and other materials, approx. 23.5 x 33.5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. NG-2018-329; gift of Mrs Pem Hagers, Deventer.

would have been divided up among several women, said Pem Hagers, in order to spread the work and the risk somewhat, because owning books and individual creations of needlework or handicraft made by the internees was forbidden and was punished. The result was extraordinary: cheerful, optimistic and powerful. It shows what these imprisoned women were capable of.

In 2018 Pem Hagers donated the book to the Rijksmuseum's Dutch History Department, as a memento

Fig. 2  
Cover of Rie Cramer, *A is een Aapje*, The Hague 1936.\*



Fig. 3  
Overview of  
all the pages  
in *Pemmy's  
Alphabet Book*  
(fig. 1).





A is een Aapje  
Dat stak daar een handje  
Zomaar in 't zakje  
Met kookjes van Jantje



C is Charlotje  
Die kreeg van haar Maatje  
Twee cacao kranstjes  
En één chocolaatje









of her mother and an ode to the women who managed to make something beautiful together in such a situation. In particular it serves to show in the museum that the suffering of children in wartime should never be allowed to be forgotten. As a museum object, the children's book in fabric has many layers of meaning that change over time. In the first place, there is the viewpoint of the makers and the circumstances in which they made the book in captivity. If we look further, there are the memories of Pem as a young girl at home and of Pem as she is now. It touches on emotional issues that continue to this day. The significance of an object can therefore change over time and actually 'grows' from generation

to generation. This is why it is important to record the story of the creation of this object as we now know it. We begin by briefly describing the people and the historical circumstances. Who was Mies Aalbersberg and what was her connection with the Dutch East Indies? We report on the preliminary technical research that gives us more insight into the making of the book, then place that in the broader context of what is known about objects like these in wartime.

### From Medan to the Brastagi Prison Camp

Mies Aalbersberg (1915-1997, fig. 4) was born in Soerabaja (Surabaya) on Java. She was the daughter of Gerard Aalbersberg, a Dutch physician and gynaecologist who was working there. After their time in the colony, the family returned to the Netherlands. Mies attended the Maerlant Lyceum in The Hague and then went on to train as a secretary with Schoevers. In the late nineteen-thirties, she returned alone to the East Indies to start work. It was there that she met Jan Hagers, whom she married on 5 June 1939.<sup>3</sup> Hagers was an interpreter and translator for a Belgian financial institution: the Société Financière des Caoutchoucs. The couple went to live in Medan in Northeast Sumatra where their daughter Pem was born. In the nineteen-thirties this town, which was built in the late nineteenth century, was home to around 75,000 people: four thousand Europeans, many tens of thousands of Chinese labourers (more than a third of the population) and many Javanese contract workers. Relatively few of the original inhabitants of the region lived there.<sup>4</sup>

Everyday colonial life came to an abrupt end at the beginning of 1942. It was war, and in February and March of that year the Japanese conquered the entire island of Sumatra, from south to north. The Royal Netherlands East-India Army (KNIL) was no match

Fig. 4  
Portrait of  
Mies Geertruida  
Maria Petronella  
Aalbersberg  
(1915-1997), c. 1940.  
Photograph  
property of  
Pem Hagers.

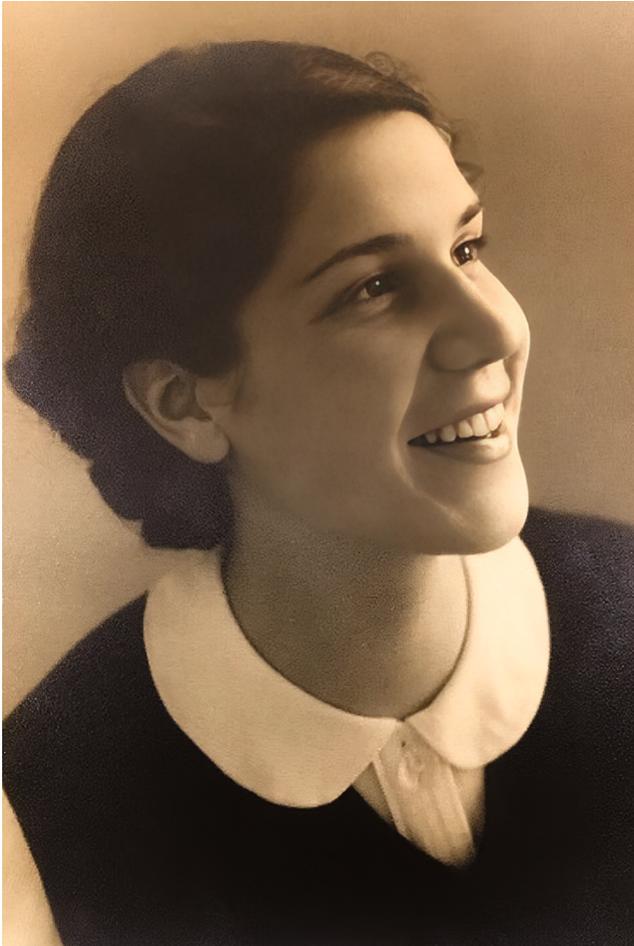




Fig. 5  
 Panoramic View of  
 Brastagi on Sumatra,  
 in *Reisalbum*,  
 c. 1900-20.  
 Gelatin silver print,  
 143 x 374 mm  
 (photograph).  
 Amsterdam,  
 Rijksmuseum, inv. no.  
 RP-F-F01149-FD.

for them. The Dutch civilian population were taken from their homes and imprisoned. The men were separated from their wives and children and sent to separate work camps, where they were used as forced labour to work on the railways or in the mines. The Japanese set up one of the internment camps for female prisoners and their children in the building of the Planters School Vereniging (psv), a boarding school built by Dutch settlers sixty kilometres to the south of Medan. Seventeen hundred and forty-four prisoners were housed in this school complex, crammed together in rooms that were far too small. Mies Aalbersberg, who by then was pregnant again, had initially fled from Medan with friends and their children to the hill town of Brastagi, for its cool climate and because they thought that they would be safe there. But shortly afterwards she too was interned; she was imprisoned from March 1942 until early 1945. In July 1942 she gave birth to her second daughter, Jos, in the camp. Mies, Pem and baby Jos probably lived in a small classroom with one or two other women and their children.<sup>5</sup> The contrast between the conditions in that prison camp and those of pre-war times could not have been greater. Brastagi is on the road to Lake Toba, not far from the extensive tobacco plantations of Deli, a source of wealth for the Dutch and other Europeans

from the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In the nineteen-twenties and -thirties it was a luxury spa town, a resort where the Europeans had country houses and bungalows and spent their holidays (fig. 5).

Eye-witness accounts, drawings and diaries illustrate what life was like in this camp in the war years: work, hunger, humiliation, rape, corporal punishment, disease and death.<sup>7</sup> Life in the camp in Brastagi is described by, among others, Kathleen Voûte, who was there with her three children: overcrowded spaces where sometimes eight families were housed together. Voûte wrote about the humiliations, corporal punishments, and death threats that ensued in response to smuggling food. But there was camaraderie among the women too; the older women, for instance, took care of the children of the young women who had to work on the land all day.<sup>8</sup> Joke Broekema's drawings of the housing and living conditions in the camp at Brastagi are also important. Broekema's essay entitled *Voorheen en Thans* (Then and Now) is a detailed eye-witness account of camp life, of washing, fetching water, working on the land and eating; one of her autonomous drawings shows the conditions in the barracks.<sup>9</sup>

As well as drawings and diaries, the prisoners took with them other objects from the camp, and these are now held as silent witnesses in various Dutch



Fig. 6  
Sack in which  
flour was delivered  
to the Japanese  
Brastagi camp.  
Fabric, 44 x 56 cm.  
The Hague, Museon-  
Omniversum,  
inv. no. 208976.

institutions.<sup>10</sup> The Museon-Omniversum in The Hague houses a collection of fabrics from the Japanese camps, including at least ten items from Camp Brastagi: embroidered covers for little books and memorabilia like a shawl with the names of female friends on it. The many references to food, in the embroidery as well as in the recipe books scribbled in pencil, in which the most extensive recipes are spelled out, are sardonic. This form of dealing with hunger in the camps is called *receptitis*. A number of objects and items made from fabrics from the Japanese camps can also be found in the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Verzetsmuseum (Dutch Resistance Museum) in Amsterdam. In the Rijksmuseum's collection, there is a school history notebook from Camp Brastagi made by Harmien Voorhoeve, containing short sentences in English and years pertaining to relevant historical moments; also in the collection are some board games (Reversi, Trik Trak and Draughts) created in the camp by I. Bernelot-Moens.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Making of *Pemmy's Alphabet Book*

The picture book entitled *A is een aapje* by the children's book author and illustrator Rie Cramer, who was born in the Dutch East Indies, came on to the market in 1936 and continued the centuries-old tradition of alphabet books for children.<sup>12</sup> Cramer illustrated the letters A to Z in twenty-six pages with simple images that are occasionally enhanced with one or more secondary colours: buying a roll from a baker, a scene in a school classroom, skating, spinning a top, feeding ducks and a birthday boy getting a cake with five candles. Each image has an accompanying rhyme. It is not clear who took Cramer's book to Camp Brastagi. In any event, it must have been well hidden under or in a mattress, because from a certain moment being in possession of books – even children's books – was forbidden in the camp. This measure had been taken by the Japanese as a punishment after the women had wanted to organize a school for their children.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 7  
Detail of the  
underdrawing  
in the letter L.

It is impossible to say for sure who came up with the idea for *Pemmy's Alphabet Book*, but in all probability it was Mies Aalbersberg herself: she must also have made the sketches and templates. After all, the names of her children are incorporated in them (see the title page and

the letter Q) and she kept it and owned it until she died. Cramer's pictures were copied in pencil on to pieces of unbleached cotton from old rice or flour sacks cut to size (fig. 6). The underdrawing can be seen with the naked eye on most of the pages (fig. 7).



Fig. 8  
Detail of various  
materials in the  
letter B.



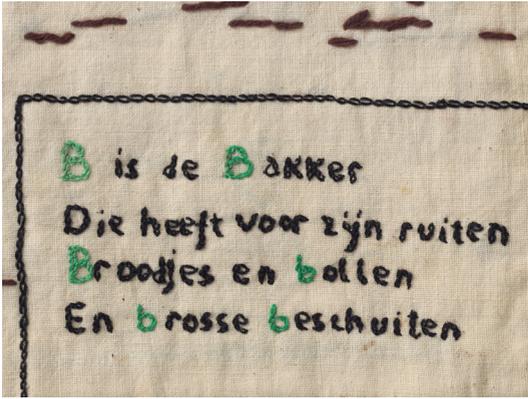
Fig. 9  
Detail of the  
buttonhole stitch  
in the letter F.

The images are taken straight from Cramer's book, but the pages in *Pemmy's Alphabet Book* are quite a lot bigger, very colourful and lively, and made with a wide variety of materials. The research into the materials used confirms that it was treated as a serious project.<sup>14</sup> There are scraps of plain fabrics in different colours (red, yellow, pink, blue, green, white and black) as well as printed materials with dots, checks or other designs. The makers used felt in different colours, ribbon, bias binding, narrow strips of lace, artificial fur or fabric from cuddly toys, as well as natural materials such as straw and maize kernels (fig. 8). The variation is enormous, even in the threads that secure the fabrics, mainly cotton thread but sometimes wool as well. We see some materials return on different pages, such as little pieces of shiny black and red oilcloth, plain cotton, felt, splinters of bamboo and sticks. Yellow hair from a wig or doll was used for a wavy hairdo for a number of the heads of children. A blush was applied to the cheeks of the little figures with a substance yet to be

identified; it could well be make-up (rouge, lipstick) or wax crayon. Accumulating these materials must have been an undertaking in itself. It is likely that the women got together to look for materials that could be used.

Fig. 10  
Detail of the table  
cloth that was  
changed in the  
letter S.





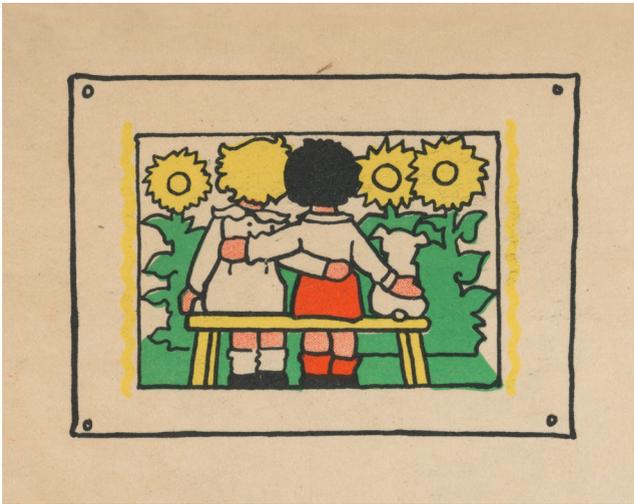
Figs. 11a, b, c, d  
Details of verses  
in different hand-  
writings, with  
different stitches.

Although the materials are very diverse, the style is extremely consistent. In each little scene, moreover, we recognize the same clear buttonhole stitch in the outlines of faces, hands, arms and legs, and the stitching in the embroidered parts of the images is very uniform (fig. 9). Although this does not chime with the oral tradition which has it that there were multiple makers of the images, the technical research suggests that this had been the work of one person, Mies Aalbersberg. As we have seen, she sometimes mentioned that she improved things after being given work by other women because she was not always satisfied with their sewing skills.<sup>15</sup> It is not evident from the research that she may have improved their work and reworked some of the parts. Although it is not

possible to see what is under the sewn pieces of material, the threads that were removed must have left pinholes that are nowhere to be seen around the figures. The only evidence to support this is in the letter S, where a tablecloth appears to have been placed over (remnants of) another cloth (fig. 10). By contrast, in the embroidered texts there are actually great differences to be discerned in the stitches and in the shape of the letters – ‘the handwriting’ – which indicates that the embroidery of the rhymes was the work of the other women (figs. 11a-d). It is likely that several women, maybe as many as fifteen, worked on this at the same time. The pages of *Pemmy's Alphabet Book* are sewn back-to-back. The whole thing was secured with endpapers of dark brown jute in the cover with the title of the object.



Cramer's *A is een Aapje* was generally followed closely, including the position of the blocks of text. For instance, the books on the desk and in the bookcase on the page with the letter I are copied almost exactly from the original.<sup>16</sup> Of course the materials used make a great difference. The textile pages are more colourful, for instance the letter K, which simple scene has been filled extensively with different colours. Nonetheless there are some interesting differences in details in Aalbersberg's version. The little painting in the background of the 'lezende Liesje' in the letter L actually depicts a lion, a clear patriotic reference to the Dutch lion, whereas in Cramer's picture two little figures are sitting on a bench surrounded by flowers (figs. 12a, b).<sup>17</sup> Aalbersberg used the names of her own children 'Pemmy' and 'Jos' in the letter Q (cf. fig. 13). And on the clock in Cramer's letter Z the time



Figs. 12a, b  
 a. Detail of the framed lion in the letter L in *Pemmy's Alphabet Book* (fig. 1).  
 b. Detail of the framed image in the same letter in Cramer's *A is een Aapje* (fig. 2).

Fig. 13  
 Spread with the letters P and Q in Cramer's *A is een Aapje* (fig. 2).





Fig. 14

ANNA GROENEWEGEN,  
Cover of *Kookboek*,  
Japanese Brastagi  
camp, Sumatra,  
1942-45.  
Fabric, 20.5 x 16 cm.  
The Hague, Museon-  
Omniversum,  
inv. no. 101033 (1/2).

is seven o'clock; Aalbersberg's clock appears to have adjustable hands.

From the end result it can be seen that Mies Aalbersberg must have been the 'director' and made an important artistic contribution. Even though she may have stitched the majority of the images herself, the materials were probably gathered together by several women, who also embroidered the lettering on the pages. What they produced was consistent, creative and exciting, with layering and depth, with beautiful colour accents and coherent compositions. The pages have lots to look at: the central scene with the little children in the foreground, and in the background the small scenes – like the baker with his shop window full of bread (kernels of maize) – that were executed just as well and in as much detail. Aalbersberg managed to achieve a surprisingly sophisticated image. Sadly, we do not know the names of the other women involved. The many less complex textile objects from Brastagi in other collections have no comparable needlework and so provide no decisive answer about

other possible contributors. In the Museon's collection there is only one item of needlework, a cover of a recipe book with a steaming cooking pot on an open fire, in the same techniques as *Pemmy's Alphabet Book* (fig. 14), made in Brastagi, and attributed to one Anna Groenewegen. It could be the starting point of further research in which it may also be possible to compare the handwriting in the fabric book with names known from Camp Brastagi that are embroidered on the other pieces of cloth.

### The Historical Object as a Witness

The interest in artefacts that were present as 'witnesses' to historical events has recently seen a huge increase in the museum world. Such exceptional – and unique – objects are contained in books that summarize the history of countries, societies and even world history. In his book *De geschiedenis van Nederland in 100 voorwerpen* Gijs van der Ham discusses the history of the Netherlands, based on a hundred objects from the Rijksmuseum's collection, for example, the embroidered handkerchiefs and drawings made in prison by Atie Siegenbeek van Heukelom in 1944 and the housecoat made from silk maps by Jeanne van Leur-de Loos dating from 1945-46.<sup>18</sup> The Dutch designer and illustrator Atie Siegenbeek van Heukelom embroidered a handkerchief with scenes and events from the prison in Amstelveenseweg in Amsterdam like a strip cartoon. After she had been transported to Camp Reichenbach in Germany she made a second handkerchief with scenes from camp life there. In February 1942 she was sent to Ravensbrück, where she recorded her experiences in drawings in East Indian ink – from scraping a barrel of food to the transports to the extermination camps. After the liberation the Indo-Dutch woman Jeanne de Loos used silk maps of areas in Asia

from the British air force to make a housecoat for herself. It had strong symbolic value for her. Her husband Job van Leur was killed in the Battle of the Java Sea. In the past the Rijksmuseum's Dutch History Department regularly acquired unique objects like these made in times of war.<sup>19</sup>

The eyewitness reports made by prisoners, often at huge risk to themselves, are completely unique and fraught with sadness and emotions. The fact that the prisoners regarded a pencil, a piece of charcoal, or a needle and a simple thread as something that was extremely precious is frequently described in camp literature. At least they provided the opportunity to make something personal, and for prisoners that meant retaining their identity, something to hold on to and an escape from a reality that was almost unbearable. This also explains why Aalbersberg cherished her book project for so long and always took her alphabet book with her in the difficult circumstances after the Japanese occupation of what was to become Indonesia (see conclusion). Personal possessions like these gave comfort while they were being made and the results were lasting keepsakes.<sup>20</sup> Henriette Roosenburg, interned in various prisons and camps, described embroidering during the time she spent in the Nazi concentration camps of Reichenbach and Ravensbrück as an opportunity to escape, as a remedy:

Embroidering, like every personal activity, was forbidden and so had to be done in secret. But through all of those difficult months it proved to be one of our important remedies. In one of the first prisons I had been sent to I had been forced to repair German army uniforms and socks. The mending work was never satisfactory, but I acquired two needles, which I kept until the end. One was very thin and had a rather large eye. It was my favourite and I never lost sight of it. The other was a bit thicker; I either lent it to good friends ... or

I swapped it with other prisoners for a limited time for such treasures as coloured bits of thread or the use of a pair of scissors.<sup>21</sup>

A simple needle served as a means of exchange, or was one of the few personal possessions that someone could cherish. Sewing embodied occupation and pride and helped to maintain identity; totalitarian regimes immediately took away from their captives anything that could contribute to this in order to break them.

To get hold of a small, seemingly insignificant, object was also a special experience. In his camp memoirs, Edmund Peter Wellenstein described in great detail why he so enjoyed a shiny cream egg cup while in confinement. Colours and shapes could mean everything to a prisoner, he wrote:

A child loves colour, just does, it's quite simple. An adult too, but he barely remembers that. He is surrounded by such an abundant wealth of beauty that he has taken its presence for granted. He is no longer able to become clearly aware of the impressions he gets. If he is isolated, for example in a cell, then his mind reacts promptly. Freed from excess, he finds pleasure in something tiny. If he reads a book, a description of nature will strongly affect him. The colours and shapes that the writer conjures up are no longer an unimportant setting, but an essential part of the story.<sup>22</sup>

This observation literally puts the lively, colourful children's book from Brastagi in a new light.

Later the object can acquire different meanings, including a strong symbolic value: an appealing, tangible object that stands for something and was literally present at defining historical events. The object was there, and through the object what went on there is now more comprehensible to a much wider audience. Such objects express human qualities like courage, despair, sadness, fear but

Fig. 15  
Detail of mother  
and child in the  
letter Z.



also the joy that can be achieved in spite of everything: a last straw and the connection with a normal life. Even the materiality of the object plays a role in this, because it concerns recognizable objects from everyone's daily life.

The examples mentioned show that women's contribution to these kinds of war objects was significant. Mies Aalbersberg's book project was unique in the sense that it was the result of a *collective* effort by the women in captivity.<sup>23</sup> Even though – as it appears now – there was apparently just one director, it is the product of a group of women – a collective – in extraordinary circumstances from which the world of conventional art is very far removed. The research into this object broadens our definition of art and of women's

art in particular.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless the pleasure involved in the making of this unusual example of women's art stands out. Everyone lost weight, their dresses had to be taken in, but that provided extra scraps of material. The collective 'party' on 28 December 1944 when the book was presented to Pem, was at the same time a reminder and also the hope of a return to a better life. The making of the book proved that there was still at least something of themselves in the camp, something over which they had control and enjoyed because they had succeeded in creating something beautiful together.<sup>25</sup> It was an act of hope and resistance, and at the same time a colourful expression of art.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

The innocent images of the world of children that the writer Rie Cramer devised for Dutch children were most convincingly executed in the *Pemmy's Alphabet Book*. It briefly returned the women to the carefree world it evokes, an escape from the reality of the miserable camp (fig. 15). The departure from Brastagi in April and May 1945 was as sudden as the arrival. All the interned women and children were brought together from the camps in North Sumatra to be transferred to Camp Aek Pamiénke. This was an old rubber plantation three hundred kilometres further south, where they lay side by side on wooden bunks in dark sheds.<sup>27</sup> After the capitulation on 15 August 1945, the Japanese were no longer camp officers but, for as long as it lasted, were 'security guards' against the attacks by revolutionary Indonesians who were fighting for liberation from their former Dutch rulers. The British were now temporarily in charge and were present chiefly in the coastal towns to evacuate and repatriate the 150,000 internees. Pem Hagers vaguely remembers that they had to make a hasty escape from Aek Pamiénke and that along with some other families

they were transported by a British soldier in a truck or on a train to Medan, in order to be shipped back to the Netherlands from the coastal towns, for the most part without possessions; back in Medan the houses proved to have been ransacked and plundered.<sup>28</sup>

After the liberation from the Japanese, times were hard for that generation of Europeans and Indo-Europeans: many of the still outstanding bills for the centuries of rule were paid by them. They had experienced the last outpouring of the old colonial life in which everything had seemed to be so matter-of-course: the Western Europeans' dominance, the relative wealth and the comfortable position of a small white minority and the oppression of the indigenous people. The Japanese occupation and the violent struggle for freedom that followed on from it, made that clear once again. Many left the camps destitute. Most of the Dutch who lived in the colony in the first half of the twentieth century – if they had survived – went back to Europe. The countries in Southeast Asia became independent. But the traumas and the suffering of war still make themselves felt in the generations that followed to this very day.

## ABSTRACT

An extraordinary book made from fabrics, titled *Pemmy's Alphabet Book*, has recently been gifted to the Rijksmuseum. This book is a copy of Rie Cramer's 1936 *A is een Aapje*. What makes this work so special is that it was made between 1942 and 1945 in the Japanese internment camp of Brastagi on East Sumatra, where handiwork and the possession of books were increasingly banned. Mies Aalbersberg made this book with the help of other women in the camp, to celebrate the birthday of her daughter Pem Hagers, the donor of the object. According to the stories her mother told her, Mies supervised the making of the pages. Research has shown that the consistently rendered images were probably all made by the same person, whereas the rhymes were embroidered with varying stitches and by several hands. This, like collecting the various materials that were used in the book, may have been the contribution made by the other women. Even though several examples of embroidered fabrics from Camp Brastagi have survived, none of them are as elaborate as this book. It shows the artistic power of those women, who in captivity jointly created a book, which may have allowed them to escape from their awful situation just for a moment. This book made from fabrics is a valuable historical artefact which not only shows the creativity and the resilience of the women in the camp, but is also a poignant reminder of a dark period in history.

## NOTES

- \* The cover of *A is een Aapje* was photographed in Tresoar, Leeuwarden; other photographs of this book shown in the present article were taken at the Rijksmuseum Research Library, sign. 952 D 22.
- 1 Conversations between curator Mattie Boom and Pem Hagers, 28 October 2018 and 25 February 2020.
  - 2 *Ibid.*, 25 February 2020.
  - 3 *Sumatra Post*, 5 June 1939. The marriage did not last long. Mies Aalbersberg and Jan Hagers divorced after the time spent in the camps.
  - 4 A census took place in 1930, see *Sumatrabode*, 14 October 1930.
  - 5 A.E. Prins-Röhrborn, *Schrift met samstelling Kamp Brastagi*, 25 March 1943, The Hague, Museon-Omniversum, inv. no. 71612. Mies, Pem and Jos are mentioned in this document. There is also a typed list of the children born in the camp in 1942; Jos Hagers's name is included in it. Pem Hagers only recalls Mrs Drijber and her children Noortje, Theo and Koos. Conversation with Pem Hagers, 25 February 2020.
  - 6 Mattie Boom, 'Fotografie in de Sumatralbums van Paul Sandel', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 53 (2005), pp. 242-69.
  - 7 The NIOD has three diaries from Camp Brastagi. An Jacobs, *Ontwortelden*, The Hague 1947; Kathleen Voûte and James Voûte, *Achter kawat en gedek: Japane internieringskampen Sumatra 1942-1945*, Bronbeek 1995 (with drawings based on war recollections in later life by James Voûte and the experiences of his mother Kathleen in Camp Brastagi and during the later journey to Camp Aek Pamiénke); Joke Broekema, *Voorheen en Thans: Geïllustreerd door Joke Broekema: Internieringskamp Brastagi 1942-1945*, The Hague, Museon-Omniversum, inv. no. 76936 (account in coloured drawings). See also Rolf Utermöhlen, *Japane vrouwenkampen in Nederlands-Indië 1942-1945: Een bibliografie*, Amsterdam 1993, pp. 47-50; Doetje van Velden, *De Japane internieringskampen voor burgers gedurende de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Groningen 1963 (dissertation University of Utrecht); and Lord Russell of Liverpool, *The Knights of Bushido: A Short History of Japanese War Crimes*, London 2005, pp. 205-12.
  - 8 Conversation with Pem Hagers, 25 February 2020. See further Voûte and Voûte 1995 (note 7), p. 23; Kathleen Voûte stated that women were sometimes in a cell for days on end or went mad and that children needed help from others for those reasons too.
  - 9 See Broekema 1942-45 (note 7) and autonomous drawing *Barakinterieur in Jappenkamp Brastagi, Sumatra, 1942-45*, pencil on paper, 21.8 x 14 cm, The Hague, Museon-Omniversum, inv. no. 111667.
  - 10 With thanks to Frits van Rhijn and Gisèle van Eick from Museon-Omniversum in The Hague for their great help in the research. Thanks also to Jet Baruch who helped us in consulting the collections in the NIOD.
  - 11 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. nos. NG-2001-9-A (school notebook), NG-2001-9-C-1 and 2 (games).
  - 12 For alphabet books from the twentieth century, see Bregje Boonstra, 'Alfa en Betje op het groen groen grasje. Oorspronkelijk Nederlandse ABC-boeken in de twintigste eeuw', in Jaap ter Linden, Anne de Vries and Dick Welsink, *A is een aapje: Opstellen over ABC-boeken van de vijftiende eeuw tot heden*, Amsterdam 1995, pp. 119-49.
  - 13 Kathleen Voûte, in Voûte and Voûte 1995 (note 7), p. 17, states that all books were then confiscated. In the drawing by Joke Broekema (see note 9) personal belongings still do appear to be present. Further research should reveal which possessions were prohibited in Camp Brastagi and when this took place.
  - 14 It is possible that a copy of the fabric book discussed here still exists; this has sometimes come up in conversations at meetings of former internees from the camp. However we have not been able to discover it. Conversation with Pem Hagers, 25 February 2020. Later Jos Hagers became a journalist for the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* and in that capacity often devoted attention to meetings of former prisoners from the camp.
  - 15 Conversation with Pem Hagers, 28 October 2018.
  - 16 The books in the bookcase have letters: in Cramer's book from A to I, in Mies Aalbersberg's book from A to M.
  - 17 With thanks to Gisèle van Eick from Museon-Omniversum in The Hague who pointed this out to us.
  - 18 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. nos. NG-1994-3-1 to 26 (handkerchiefs and drawings by Atie Siegenbeek van Heukelom); NG-2000-5 (Jeanne de Loos's housecoat). See Gijs van der Ham, *De geschiedenis van Nederland in 100 voorwerpen*, Amsterdam 2013, pp. 466-70; 471-75.

- 19 There are also 44 drawings by Aat Breur-Hibma, often on paper that was hard to get hold of, testifying to life in Ravensbrück. See Dunya Breur, *Een verborgen herinnering: De tekeningen van Aat Breur-Hibma uit het vrouwenconcentratiekamp Ravensbrück en de gevangenen in Scheveningen en Utrecht 1942-1945*, Nijmegen 1995 (second revised and enlarged edition). The drawings are held in the Rijksmuseum: inv. nos. NG-C-2003-1-1 to 65. See also Cor van Teeseling's 1942 series of self-portraits in the Rijksmuseum's collection, inv. nos. NG-1991-15-1 to 159.
- 20 See Clare Hunter, *Threads of Life: A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle*, London 2019, in particular the 'Captivity' chapter, pp. 49-64.
- 21 'Borduren, als elke persoonlijke werkzaamheid, was verboden en moest dus stiekem gebeuren. Maar door al die lange moeilijke maanden heen bleek het een van onze belangrijke redmiddelen te zijn. In een van de eerste gevangenenissen waar ik had gezeten, was ik gedwongen geweest uniformen en sokken van het Duitse leger te verstellen. Het verstelwerk was nooit naar genoeg, maar ik verwierf twee naalden, die ik tot het eind behield. Een was heel dun en had een redelijk groot oog. Het was mijn lieveling en ik verloor hem nooit uit het oog. De andere was een beetje dikker; die leende ik of aan goede vrienden ... of ik ruilde hem voor een bepaalde tijd met andere gevangenen tegen zulke schatten als gekleurde stukjes draad of het gebruik van een schaar.' Henriette Roosenburg, *En de muren vielen om*, Amsterdam 1957, p. 11. With thanks to Jet Baruch who pointed this out to us.
- 22 'Een kind houdt van kleuren, zomaar, heel simpel. Een volwassen mens ook, maar hij weet het nauwelijks meer. Hij is omringd door zo'n overvloedige rijkdom van schoonheid dat de aanwezigheid daarvan voor hem iets vanzelfsprekends heeft gekregen. Hij is niet meer in staat om zich van de indrukken die hij krijgt helder bewust te worden. Zondert men hem af, bijvoorbeeld in een cel, dan reageert zijn geest prompt. Bevrijd van de overdaad vindt hij genot in een kleinigheid. Leest hij een boek, dan zal een natuurbeschrijving hem sterk treffen. De kleuren en vormen die de schrijver in zijn fantasie oproept, zijn niet meer een onbelangrijk decor, maar een essentieel deel van het verhaal.' E.P. 'Mom' Wellenstein, *Nummers die een ziel hebben: Persoonlijke ervaringen in kamp Amersfoort, een concentratiekamp in Nederland*, Amsterdam 2013, pp. 116-18. With thanks to Klari Simonet who pointed this out to us.
- 23 See also Ad van Liempt, *De Tweede Wereldoorlog in 100 voorwerpen*, exh. cat. Rotterdam (Kunsthall Rotterdam) 2014, no. 085, about a blouse owned by Helen Lotichius-Sokolowski and embroidered by a group of women from the women's camp Banjoebioero 10.
- 24 Museums are currently undergoing a reassessment in favour of art made by women. A number of them have always been part of the canon, but museum staff are now compiling new lists and preparing new displays in which there is much more space for (also unusual) expressions by women (and minorities). This is introducing completely different objects into museums that have not been seen until now. *Pemmy's Alphabet Book* is one such unusual object that was never intended for the art world, but in the museum presents a redefinition of what art is and can be. A similar object is an embroidered sack in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington showing the history of an enslaved girl, see Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*, New York 2021.
- 25 Pem Hagers remembered even more 'Indonesian' cloths later at home in The Hague: images of Snow White and the seven dwarfs and Pinocchio which were also probably embroidered in Brastagi. Conversation with Pem Hagers, 25 February 2020.
- 26 Julia Bryant Wilson, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*, Chicago 2017, is particularly interesting in this respect. She made an inventory of fabric works and the products of illegal handiwork groups of women in the United States, and also in Chile during the dictatorship.
- 27 See the description in Voûte and Voûte 1995 (note 7), pp. 32-43.
- 28 Conversation with Pem Hagers, 25 February 2020. She also remembers sleeping in an abandoned bungalow, where they had to lie with their heads at least one and a half metres away from the window side because the revolutionaries would behead people through the windows with machetes.

