



Editorial

In this Bulletin, various contributions address the political history of the Netherlands. As this issue includes a series of acquisitions in the history department of the Rijksmuseum, as well as articles on art as a form of engagement, one gets an overview of relevant political moments and how they relate to objects now in the museum's collection.

One acquisition concerns Dutch history two centuries ago. The reverse of a one cent coin dating back to the time of King William I shows the crowned coat of arms of the Netherlands reworked by hand into an image of a coronated donkey – a satirical medal reflecting the Southern Netherlands' dissatisfaction with inequitable power relations in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands circa 1830. Another acquired work illustrates how many Indo-Dutch people, such as the artist Jan Schlechter, found themselves living between two worlds, when after more than three centuries of colonial domination Indonesia declared itself a free nation in 1945. Very recent Dutch history is also represented. The pistol used to assassinate the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002, the leading candidate of the new, populist party LPF about to win the elections, recalls the first political assassination in over four hundred years. The Netherlands' recent immigration policy is a theme manifest in another acquired item: a maquette of the Klompjan Asylum Seeker Centre in Markelo, built by asylum seeker Karen Gegiazarian to re-create his own surroundings, where many displaced persons like him found a safe haven from 1991 to 2012. An acquisition uniting past and present is a pair of ribbons that adorned a wreath laid by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima at the 2023 slavery commemoration. In his speech, the king apologized for the Dutch colonial period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century and recognized that, even in today's society, slavery's history continues to have an impact.

Two articles discussing works of art likewise involve political themes. Mineke Bosch examines how the Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht in the Netherlands commissioned a portrait of their leader Aletta Jacobs to coincide with the constitutional enactment of women's right to vote in 1919. For the portrait to hang in the Rijksmuseum was the ultimate goal, ensuring that Jacobs could take her place alongside men of historical consequence. At the time, a pictorial tradition for portraying women of historical consequence was non-existent. Isaac Israëls sought to find the appropriate form by painting several different portraits of this seminal feminist figure. The chosen portrait never entered the collection of the Rijksmuseum. Instead, it was accepted by the Groninger Museum.

Cees de Boer and Rob de Windt discuss a white relief in landscape format by Herman de Vries, an artwork more than six metres in length that hung for many years in the entrance hall of the ITBON, a research institute for biology. As an employee of this institute in the nineteen sixties, de Vries was involved in pest control research and the (semi-political) debate on chemical versus harmonious methods of pest control. In trial setups, de Vries worked with random numbers to determine what samples were subjected to which conditions. His affinity with random numbers shaped the development of his artistry, resulting in what he called random objectivations, artworks depicting the dynamics of nature, also fundamental to de Vries's later and current work.

Many of these themes still dominate Dutch politics today. Acquired rights are never irrefutable: time and again, people are forced to defend their right to self-determination, equal treatment, freedom of speech, asylum and a clean living environment. The Rijksmuseum collects and researches objects that show us how these issues and others were dealt with in the past.