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Adrian Wiszniewski,
Cup of Tea (detail), from the
exhibition Recent Works at City
Contemporary Art in Perth.
See ART NEWS page 11.

Everything and the girl

From the Dutch Golden Age to the Netherlands' most important contribution to modern design, art in The Hague spans five centuries.

The Netherlands' seat of government (though not the capital, which is Amsterdam). The Hague seems more spacious than other Dutch cities, with open squares, long, wide streets and grand buildings, while around the main station recent developments have added a cluster of thrusting highrise buildings.

The Hague's biggest highlight for visitors is the Binnenhof (Inner Court), a collection of medieval buildings which houses the Prime Minister's office and the Dutch Parliament

building, one of the oldest in the world still in use. One side of the complex plunges directly into the Hofvijver (Court Pond). This is an ideal starting point for a tour of art museums.

The jewel in the crown is, of course, the gorgeous **Mauritshuis**, with its heavy curtains, brocade wall coverings, ornately plastered ceilings, gold leaf trim and polished parquet flooring.

The building was commissioned as a private residence by Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen. Art-lovers may need to reconcile his

patronage of the arts (he employed artists to depict Dutch colonies in Brazil, of which he was Governor overseeing the sugar trade – hence the building's nickname, the “sugar palace”) with his involvement in slavery, from which he personally profited.

The Mauritshuis is officially called the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, its core collection having been transferred to the Dutch state by King William I and moved from its previous home, the Prince William V Gallery, an annexe of the Mauritshuis where some of the paintings are still on view. (More



The Mauritshuis celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2022.

later.) Inside this 17th century urban palace is an exceptional collection of some 850 Dutch, Flemish, German and French paintings, including portraits, seascapes, still lifes, domestic scenes and religious tableaux.

As visitors to the Louvre flock to the *Mona Lisa*, in the Mauritshuis it is Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* which draws the crowds. Other highlights include Vermeer's *View of Delft*, Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* and his final self-portrait (made in 1669, the year he died), Rubens' *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of*

The Mauritshuis with Vermeer's *Girl with a pearl earring*.
Photo: Ivo Hoekstra



Man, Carel Fabritius' *Goldfinch* and portraits by Van Dyck. Don't miss Willem van Haecht's amazing *Apelles painting Campaspe*, in which dozens of minutely detailed paintings cover vast walls within the painting of an artist at work in his studio. Other artists represented include Steen, Hals, Brueghel, Cranach and Holbein. www.mauritshuis.nl

On the other side of the Binnenhof from the Mauritshuis, the **Prince William V Gallery** is named after the last 'stadholder' (chief executive) of the Dutch Republic, who owned an impressive collection of paintings. In 1774

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Featured artist

Lynn Bradley



Storm approaching

he converted the top floor of the building (next to the Prison Gate Museum) into a long, narrow gallery to house it, with walls densely covered in paintings – around 150 portraits, hunting scenes, mythical scenes, still lifes, pastoral scenes, seascapes, landscapes – from floor to ceiling. Unusually, he opened it to the public, making it the first public museum in the Netherlands.

The gallery was closed in 1795 when French troops seized the paintings and they were transported to Paris to be shown in the Louvre. After the fall of Napoleon in 1815, part of the collection was returned to the Hague and later formed the basis for the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis.

www.mauritshuis.nl/en/what-s-on/always-on-show/prince-william-v-gallery

Housed in a former royal palace, the **Escher in the Palace Museum** has a permanent exhibition of almost the entire oeuvre of the graphic artist Maurits Cornelis – better known as M.C. – Escher (1898-1972), famous for changing fishes into birds, making water flow upstream and stairs lead nowhere.



Prince William V Gallery

Escher's primary method is tessellation, a technique inspired by visits to the Alhambra in Andalusia, where he encountered Arabic design. By interlocking graphic elements which change slightly as they move across the image, he transforms the scene from one side to the other so that white birds flying into daylight merge with black birds flying in the opposite direction into night (*Day and Night*) or a small town morphs into the tall


figure of a man (*Metamorphosis I*).

Escher also played with three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional medium, a sheet of paper. In *Reptiles*, for example, alligator-like creatures seem to emerge from the paper, crawl around the surface and slip back into the paper. He said: "I cannot resist messing with our irrefutable truths. It is fun, for example, to deliberately intertwine two- and

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A portion of Escher's *Metamorphosis III*

three-dimensionality and to poke fun at gravity."

Escher was rediscovered by the 1960s pop generation and posters of his work became a common sight in student apartments, sometimes with a new title, as with *Dream*, which was renamed – wait for it – *Bad trip*. Escher once turned down a request from Mick Jagger to design a Rolling Stones album cover, citing a heavy workload. In a letter to the singer's representative he wrote: 'Please tell Mr Jagger I am not Maurits to him.' Ouch.

You can have fun with Escher in the interactive exhibition *Through Escher's Eyes*, where you can get close to his illusionary view of reality, while the Op-art room will stretch credibility. (Is it you or the artworks which are moving?)

At the end of your tour, you may emerge through a door which seems part of the wall into the staircase where you started. www.escherinthepalace.com

Just north of the city centre are two attractions within a few minutes' of one

another which both owe their existence to the marine painter and art collector H.W. Mesdag (1831-1915).

Assembled by Mesdag and his artist wife Sientje, the **Mesdag Collection** of paintings and objets d'art became so large that they built a museum next to their house to accommodate it, opening it in 1887. Mesdag donated the museum to the Dutch state in 1903 and it is now managed by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

The Mesdags were particularly interested in the French Barbizon School and the Dutch Hague School artists whose perceptions of nature corresponded with his and Sientje's own fondness for landscape painting and scenes of everyday life. The Barbizon School collection, which includes works by Corot, Daubigny, Rousseau and others, is the largest in the Netherlands and the most important outside France.

In addition to fine art Mesdag owned an extensive collection of applied art. The Tapestry Room, for example, includes Japanese and Chinese items of the kind which

were popular in the late 19th century as well as 17th century tapestries from nearby Delft.

Some of the works in the museum were seen by Vincent van Gogh, who visited an exhibition when he lived for a short time in The Hague when still at the start of his career. He described them in glowing terms in a letter to his brother Theo. Look out for a miniature version of a painting you are about to see on the next stop on your tour.

www.demesdagcollectie.nl

A ten-minute walk from the Mesdag Collection is an art attraction which must have had the impact of a Hollywood blockbuster when it opened in 1881 and today continues to have a "Wow!" effect on visitors.

The **Panorama Mesdag** is the oldest panorama painting still in its original location. Invented in 1787 by the Irish artist Robert Barker, the first panorama was installed in Edinburgh the following year with a view from the Scottish capital's Calton Hill. The concept was seen on travelling exhibitions or in permanent installations in cities

throughout Europe and spread to the United States, where it was commonly referred to as a ‘cyclorama’.

In the Panorama Mesdag a circular viewing platform in the purpose-built museum is positioned as if at the top of a high sand dune completely surrounded by sand sloping down to a 14-metre high circular canvas on which is painted a sweeping, 360-degree view of the nearby beach resort of Scheveningen to the ‘west’, where fishing boats are lined along the surf line or bob in the open water, round to a scene of The Hague in the 1880s to the ‘east’.

The sand is dotted with tufts of seagrass and littered with bits of net, baskets, anchors, driftwood, even a discarded clog, while seaside sounds add to the atmosphere. The day is slightly overcast, a light moistness seem to hang in the air and you can almost smell the seaweed.

It took Mesdag and four other artists of the Hague School several months to complete the project by working from a scaffold which could be moved on rails, gradually filling in the scene on the giant cylindrical surface to complete the 120-metre long painting, the largest in the Netherlands. Mesdag’s most enduring work, it was painted as a protest against the levelling of the Seinpost dune, the highest in Scheveningen, on which it is based.

A permanent exhibition shows how it all works, while another room has a further

selection of paintings by Mesdag. There are also temporary exhibitions, such as Siebe Swart’s black and white photographic seascapes in Time & Tide. Sadly, the popularity of panoramas declined after the introduction of film.

www.panorama-mesdag.nl

A short tram ride from the city centre brings you to two star attractions side by side.

For a building which is a work of art in itself (it has been described as the most beautiful in the Netherlands), look no further than H.P. Berlage’s 1935 **Kunstmuseum**, a magnificent example of rationalism, a forerunner of modern architecture and the architect’s final masterpiece.

This world class collection of 19th and 20th century painting includes the world’s largest collection of works by Piet Mondrian (born Mondriaan, the Dutchman later dropped an ‘a’ because he thought it looked more French), including his last – and unfinished – piece, *Victory Boogie Woogie* and examples of his earlier, more naturalistic works before he reduced his vision of the world to primary colours and thick black lines.

Another key display is Mondrian & De Stijl, highlighting the movement considered to be the Netherlands’ most important contribution to 20th century design. Founded by Mondrian and fellow artist Theo van Doesburg, De Stijl advocated pure abstraction and reduction to the essentials

of form and colour. It is characterised by a combination of black, white, grey and primary colours and straight horizontal and vertical lines. (Mondrian later left the movement following van Doesburg’s adoption of diagonal elements in his work!) The movement’s central theme – How can design shape the society of the future? – has been taken up by today’s Dutch designers, who continue the tradition of blending form and function.

Other permanent displays include: Discover the Modern, featuring works from the museum’s collection by Monet, Picasso, van Gogh, Bacon, Kandinsky, Schiele, Riley and others; Delftware WonderWare, showcasing one of the most beautiful collections of this world famous aspect of Dutch cultural heritage; and Chamber of Wonders, a game-filled area designed to educate and interest younger visitors in art. There is also a large selection of applied arts, including ceramics, glass, furniture and rare Hague silverware.

Special exhibitions include Alphonse Mucha: Art Nouveau in Paris (until Jul 3); Grayson Perry (until May 15); and Great Danes: Porcelain Masterpieces, Copenhagen 1890-1930 (until May 15).

Outside, a group of skeletal-like ‘strandbeests’ (beach beasts) made of yellow tubing by Theo Jansen line up along an ornamental pond. www.kunstmuseum.nl

Next door the mission of the **Fotomuseum**



The leitmotif in the Museum Beelden aan Zee is the human form.

is to promote photography as art in all its layers and meanings rather than the common misconception that it represents ‘reality’. Over the years exhibitions have showcased work by Man Ray, Emmy Andriesse, Sally Mann, Anton Corbijn, Erwin Olaf, Bieke Depoorter, Robin de Puy and many others.

Currently showing is Photo American (until Apr 24). In the 1980s photographer Ernst Lalleman (1965) found six boxes containing 234 large screen negatives in a squat in The Hague. They turned out to be colour portraits of mostly unknown residents of The Hague made in the period 1959-1960 by Foto Americain, a photo shop and studio in the city centre of The Hague. The people portrayed form a cross-section of the city’s post-war population. Most are dressed in their Sunday best befitting the novelty of having a colour photo portrait taken in the late 1950s. The images have now been digitised and retouched and almost 50 people in them have been identified.

Coming up: Daniel Heikens, Rein Langeveld &

Joost Nijhuis: Matlas (May 1-22). This project about “The Hague mat” captures men with this iconic local haircut. www.fotomuseumdenhaag.nl

Museum Voorlinden is not the most accessible museum for visitors to The Hague, but the effort to get there will be richly rewarded. Technically, it is in neighbouring Wassenaar, but is very much part of The Hague art experience. Private car or taxi will get you to the on-site parking area in about 15 minutes from the city centre, while a bus will drop you off at the end of a quiet road in a leafy suburb lined with fine villas. From here it is a 15-minute walk to a 100-acre nature reserve.

The museum itself is a low, sleek building flooded with natural light. Opened in 2016, it displays around 500 pieces from a world class collection belonging to the Dutch chemical tycoon Joop van Caldenborgh and represents a trend of well to do collectors opening their own spaces to the public.

The many highlights include: Ai Weiwei’s *China Fairytale – 1001 Chairs*, although there are actually only 23, all that is left of an installation he created for the 2007 edition of Documenta in Kassel, Germany; Damien Hirst’s *Hidden Secret Blossom*, three large canvases depicting cherry blossoms in pink and white blobs and rough brushstrokes; James Turrell’s *Skyspace*, a serene wood-panelled room with sloping walls and a skylight kept open in all weathers so that visitors can watch the changing light; Richard Serra’s *Open Ended*, an enormous, labyrinthine, rust-coloured steel structure with a gorgeous, curved ‘corridor’ running through it which leads visitors round corners as if in a maze, opening onto floor to ceiling windows overlooking the surrounding leafy estate; Ron Mueck’s *Couple under an Umbrella*, hyper-realistic, outsize human figures relaxing in the sun; and Leandro Erlich’s *Swimming Pool*, which visitors can enter and feel that they are walking under water.

There is a restaurant in the villa next door



The Daubigny Room in the Mesdag Collection



Panorama Mesdag

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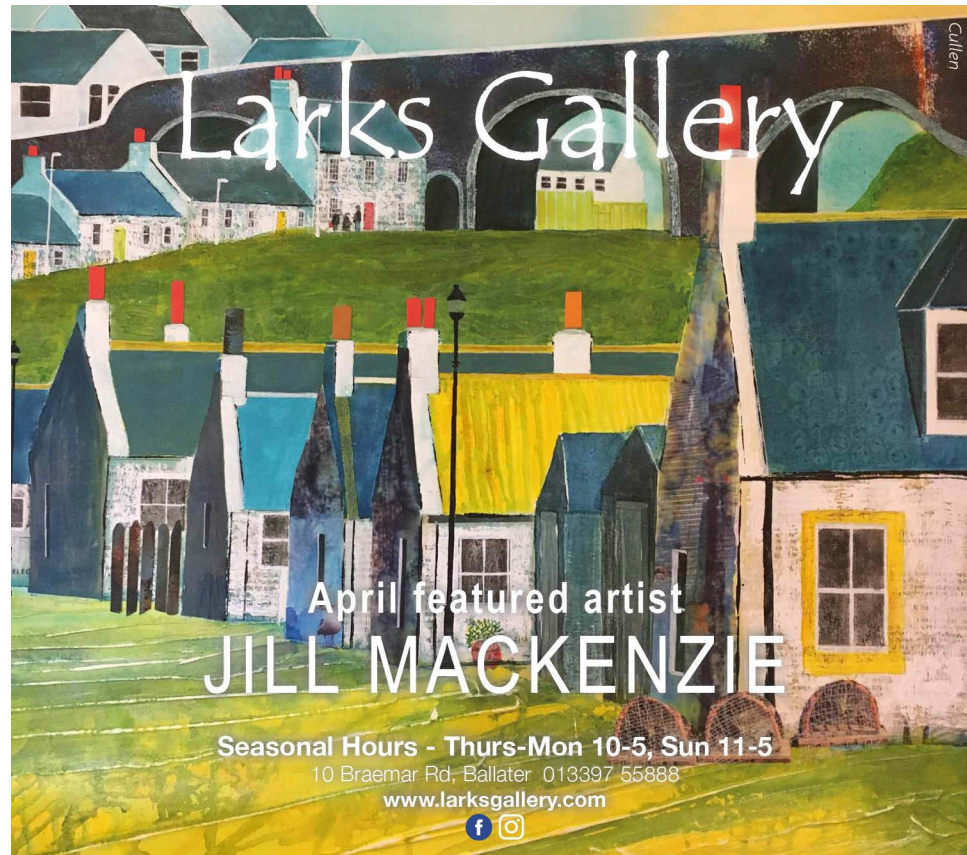
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and in the Piet Oudolf Garden (named for the Dutch horticulturist) stand a maquette of Sir Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* and Jan Fabre's *The man who measures the clouds*.

Coming up: Antony Gormley: *Ground* (May 26-Sep 25), a major retrospective which takes over the museum and the estate with work ranging from early lead sculptures to recent, large scale installations. www.voorlinden.nl

To end our tour we head out to The Hague's own seaside resort of Scheveningen, where there is a long, sandy beach, a bustling promenade lined with shopping booths and restaurants, a modern pier and Ferris wheel, apartments and the impressive Grand Hotel Amrath Kurhaus.

Here the main attraction for art-lovers is the **Museum Beelden aan Zee**, the only museum in the Netherlands which focuses exclusively on modern and contemporary sculpture, principally statuary, of which it has 5,000 pieces, including around 1,000 plaster models. Your head may swivel as work after work catches the eye.

Huge skylights illuminate the collection, which varies from portraits to monumental, larger than life sculptures. The human body is the main leitmotif with works created in diverse materials from bronze, stone, iron and ceramics to polystyrene, plastic, glass and textile.

Some of the biggest names in international



Fotomuseum

ART & TRAVEL



The Delftware WonderWare display showcases the world famous aspect of Dutch cultural heritage.

sculpture are represented such as Atelier van Lieshout, Stephan Balkenhol, Tony Cragg, Jaume Plensa, Marc Quinn, William Turnbull, Henk Visch and Karel Appel.

Dug into a dune, the building itself is constructed with sand-coloured materials to blend in with its surroundings and ever present views of sea and clouds from both within and the outside sculpture terraces create a serene atmosphere.
www.beeldenaanzee.nl



Leandro Erlich, *Swimming Pool*, Photo: Antoine Van Kaam (Museum Voorlinden)