

---Press release---



JAN GIESEN

WERKEN AAN SCHEVENINGEN

4/3 T/M 28/10

Panorama Mesdag gives faces to anonymous workers

Jan Giesen: Scheveningen Works (1920-1930)

On 4 March, the exhibition *Jan Giesen: Scheveningen Works (1920-1930)* opens at Panorama Mesdag.

The haggard faces of labourers, a sunset in the dunes, and a stranded German cruiser: to the Hague artist Jan Giesen (1900–1983), Scheveningen and Kijkduin provided an endless source of inspiration in the 1920s. He made countless images of workers chopping, hauling, and digging, such as the nine impressive portraits he produced in 1927, reinforcing longitudinal embankments in the province of South Holland. Their weather-beaten faces reflect the strenuous work they were carrying out in the development of the resort. For this series, Giesen undoubtedly drew inspiration from Jan Toorop, whose portraits in this period were seen as the Netherlands' best. Contemporaries too were apt to make this comparison. Yet while Toorop's human figures often possess a certain intangibility, Giesen gave 'his' men substance and humanity. They stand quite literally with their feet in the sand. This series is exhibited here in a museum context for the first time since 1939.

Exhibition

Panorama Mesdag focuses on a single decade in Giesen's working life: 1920–1930, when he developed into one of the Netherlands' most highly-praised graphic artists. He closely followed the construction work in Scheveningen and Kijkduin and recorded it. His interest in working people arose from his social philosophy. In these years of economic recovery and cautious optimism, following the First World War, the young Giesen wanted to make art for society. He developed a figurative, simplified imagery, and chose to work in woodcuts, which were easy to reproduce. His best works arose from a combination of strong lines, large surfaces, black printing ink, and white paper. Giesen stripped his compositions of all superfluous detail, leaving only the most essential and distinctive elements. His work is figurative while at the same time exhibiting a large degree of abstraction.

Hendrik Willem Mesdag

For Panorama Mesdag, this exhibition initiates the year-long programme of events 'Seaside Celebration: 200 years of the resort of Scheveningen, The Hague'. Still a fishing village in Mesdag's day, Scheveningen grew to become a popular resort. Jan Giesen picked up where Hendrik Willem

Mesdag left off. Like his predecessor, he worked in the dunes and on the beaches of Scheveningen, but Giesen's art gives a more nuanced picture of the local community.

Jan Giesen

Jan Giesen was unquestionably an artist of The Hague. He was born in the city, trained at Bik en Vaandrager drawing institute, and taught at the local Academy of Fine Arts for many years. His work had slipped into oblivion, but thanks to the efforts of the Johannes Theodorus Giesen Foundation, with which Panorama Mesdag collaborated closely to mount this exhibition, this is now beginning to change.

With this exhibition, Panorama Mesdag places this Hague artist firmly in the spotlight, and gives faces to the anonymous labourers who helped to determine what Scheveningen and Kijkduin look like today.

The exhibition *Jan Giesen: Scheveningen Works (1920–1930)* is on view from 4 March to 28 October 2018.

This exhibition is produced in partnership with the Johannes Theodorus Giesen Foundation.

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Editorial note:

Fig.: Jan Giesen (1900–1983), *Portrait of a worker, Adriaan, Kijkduin*, 1927, Pencil on paper, Private collection (Photography: Bob Strik)

For more information on this exhibition, please contact Caroline Rijks, tel. +31 (0)70 752 1481 or mob. +31 (0)6 4125 3816; e-mail: media@panorama-mesdag.nl.

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