

'Objective' Symbolism in the Netherlands: Community Art and the programme of decoration of Berlage's Beurs (Stock Exchange) in Amsterdam.

Lieske Tibbe

Influences from abroad

In the eighties and nineties of the past century, 'Symbolism' had a more limited meaning than nowadays, both in Holland and in France, where it was introduced. Initially several stylistic labels referred to divergent tendencies, particularly in the literary field. 'Symbolism' was only one of those labels. Later on, the name 'Symbolism' was given to all these divergent tendencies together.

The origin of the term is generally ascribed to the 'Symbolist Manifesto', edited in September 1886 by the poet Jean Moréas. The periodical *Le Figaro*, in which this manifesto was published, was known to some of the Dutch avant-garde artists at that time. Moreover, they could find it in the Belgian avant-garde magazine *L'Art moderne*, entitled there as 'le Symbolisme'ⁱ. To Dutch artists *L'Art moderne* was a very important channel of information. The majority of its content was about progressive literature and music. As for the visual arts, first it championed realism (from the start of the magazine at 1881), and somewhat later French Impressionism.

At about 1885/'86 in several articles in *L'Art moderne* the significance of the term 'realism' was extended. The aim of realist art up to that time had been to give a representation of all possible aspects of real human life, including follies and horrors. Now, the idea developed that art should also try to grasp the realm of the human spirit: the realm of dreams, of the fantastic and the metaphysical, and also of every possible aberration and perversity. For a while, this new tendency in art was introduced as a logical outcome of the realistic aspirations, but by October 1886 already it was thought to be something quite different. This tendency totally turned round the well-known slogan of realism defining art as 'la nature vue à travers un tempérament' or 'la nature vue à travers un cerveau'. From now on the formulation was 'Le cerveau vu à travers la nature, et même sans la nature'. This new direction in painting was introduced under the name of 'les Visionnaires'ⁱⁱ.

In 1885 Edmond Picard, chief editor of *L'Art moderne*, tried to make an inventory of such new tendencies in the literary field. One of those he called 'Les Décadents': a group proclaiming the total decline of Western civilisation, and even enjoying this declineⁱⁱⁱ. Picard stated that he did not share this attitude any more than that of the would-be mysterious, enigmatic mentality of the second group which he named 'Les Incohérents'. His next grouping was 'Les Verbolâtres': authors obsessed by each separate word instead of by words in their logical context^{iv}. Finally, there was one direction of which he approved: 'Les Symbolistes'. According to Picard, this was a tendency to express essential feelings and ideas in a way that would make them recognizable to future generations. Essential, everlasting symbols had to realize this effect^v. Thus, in the writings of Picard, 'Symbolism' was defined as a part of a wider movement (and this actually was before the Symbolist Manifesto was published).

At about the same time as the publication of the Symbolist Manifesto of Moréas, in September 1886, the author and co-editor of *L'Art moderne* Emile Verhaeren showed in a publication that he too was familiar with the term 'Symbolism'. He tried to transfer this name to the visual arts, but

finding a clear description of the characteristics of 'symbolist' painting proved too difficult. April 1887, Verhaeren made another attempt. In his words, the new movement in painting now aspired to 'le cerveau vu à travers la nature'. This new art, according to Verhaeren, was not an art of improvisation, depending on sensory impressions, but one thoughtful and deliberative. 'Symbol' was defined by him as 'un sublimé de perceptions et de sensations'. Symbols could be detached from their actual context and combined to a new unity, in the same way as authors considered a sentence as an independent, living element, coming into being by the arrangement of words^{vi}.

In some aspects, this new painting maintained the realist way of representation. Symbolist painters did not break with the naturalistic idiom of representing their subjects. Even the most fantastic situations were depicted as if existing in reality, with light and shade, plasticity and depth. In the same way, Symbolist artists held on to the self-conception of the realist artist, the idea that an artist had to express his individual sensations and feelings.

The lithograph *Anangkè* (plate 1) by the artist Richard Roland Holst (1868-1938), for a short time one of the leading artists of Dutch Symbolism, is a typical example of this kind of Symbolist painting. The subject seems overcrowded with meaning, but yet there is no direct relation with any literary work. Jan Veth (1864-1925), painter, art critic, and close friend of Roland Holst, described this work in a rather flamboyant style, following the literary trend at that moment:

'The nightmarish expression in the burning eyes of the sufferer, threefold doomed to survive, keeps haunting you; in his exhausted brain he feels the straining force of horrowful chimeras. This is a great crucified inhabitant of the ghostly spheres of Redon, a modern offspring of Prometheus, his titanic qualities stripped off, hopelessly tortured and chained up on some Scythian rock, a rock of black neurosis - a diseased king, feeling the pinching weight of a wringing claw of doom...'^{vii}.

An example of a different branch of Symbolism is the cover of the catalogue of an exhibition of Dutch nineteenth-century progressive art, the so-called *Keuzetentoonstelling*, of 1892 (plate 2). This cover was designed by the same Roland Holst. The subject -a ploughed up field, a rising sun, some flowers and a young tree- is inspired by the ornamental heading of *l'Art moderne* at 1892. This heading, designed by Georges Lemmen, shows a naked woman ploughing a field, against the background of a rising sun and fruitful rain. Lemmen had also designed in the previous year a catalogue of the Belgian group *Les Vingt* with symbols of sun and flood. These subjects are symptomatic for the optimistic view the avant-garde after 1890 gradually acquired on the future of the new art. From about that time, art was symbolically represented as something that developed in an organic way, as forces working in nature itself (before that time, images of avant-garde warlike spirit had prevailed). Roland Holst added to this theme a girl in traditional regional costume, to give it a typical Dutch flavour or to give a reference to the primal sources of art in simple life^{viii}.

These two tendencies, on the one side literary, epic, stylistically realistic symbolism and on the other side symbolism expressing itself in an iconic way, developed in Holland from about 1892 side by side. Sometimes, as in the examples mentioned, they appear united in one and the same person.

The crystallization of the two symbolist tendencies in the visual arts had

started in France around 1890. Next to the stilistically realistic and thematically mostly very intricate and individual literary symbolism, emerged the direction that strove towards expressing ideas of a general, enduring significance, using simplified, decorative forms. 'Synthetism' was the name of this new movement, developed by Gauguin and his followers. Dutch artists had the opportunity to get acquainted with works of Gauguin and his school at the exhibitions of *Les Vingt* at Brussels, as early as 1889.

Gauguin and his circle claimed the term 'Synthetism' from 1889 on^{ix}, but initially the word was also connected with the Neo-Impressionists, as we can read in for instance *L'Art moderne*. In this periodical, the method of painting of Seurat, 'si essentiellement synthétique et plastique', was set against the rapid brush technique the Impressionists practised to catch the everchanging effects of light and shadow. In this way, the work of Seurat was considered to be connected with archaean traditions: the tradition of the static poses of the figures in the art of Egypt and archaic Greece^x. A connection with primeval static traditions was also found in *L'Art moderne* with regard to the Synthetists themselves^{xi}. Furthermore, as important characteristics of both movements were signalized: the gradual tendency towards the decorative, the dropping of details and the increasing abstraction of forms^{xii}.

An art of Ideas

The taste of both Synthetism and Neo-Impressionism for expressive and decorative arrangement of line, colour and composition was deeply rooted in contemporary science and philosophy. As for Neo-Impressionism, departing from the study of optical functioning, the accent shifted towards the characteristic qualities of the organ one is perceiving with, and towards the psychological background of perceiving. Charles Henry for instance, often consulted by the Neo-Impressionists, elaborated scientific analysis of visual perception as absorbing the vibrations of rays of light^{xiii}. But measuring those vibrations did not imply the knowledge of seeing. Seeing starts when we consciously interpret the perceived beams of light. And so experiments like those of Charles Henry touched a primal philosophical question: the question of the relation between outer and inner world, between concept or idea and perceptible reality.

This question was treated in 1889 in the Dutch avant-garde periodical *De Nieuwe Gids* (New Guide) by the philosopher Bolland (1854-1922). His article was entitled 'De lichamelijke verschijnselen en hun gewaande zelfstandigheid' (Physical Appearances and Their so-called Substantiality). His conclusion was that our senses only can offer us phenomena, whereas knowledge of the essence of being depends on mental intuition. Colours, odours, sounds, flavours, warmth and coldness are subjective impressions, brought to consciousness, interpreted and objectivated by our mind. Outside our mind there is no consistency^{xiv}.

Many young painters were fervent readers of *De Nieuwe Gids*, so it is very probable that they did take notice of this philosophical discourse. One cannot say if it had any influence at that time. But surely they were influenced by an art-theoretical essay appearing somewhat later in Holland: the well-known 'Le Symbolisme en peinture - Paul Gauguin' by Albert Aurier. It was published in the *Mercure de France* of 1891^{xv}. The art-theoretical principles explained by Aurier in this publication had their origin in the same philosophical ideas as the article by Bolland in *De Nieuwe Gids*.

Aurier announced the bankruptcy of realistic art. According to him, realist art belonged specifically to the world view of the nineteenth century, to the positivist concept of science and to the philosophy of life

according to which mankind would finally be able to explain every aspect of life by scrupulous observation, anatomizing and description. As many scientists believed, microscope and dissecting knife would in the end solve whatever mystery. But, at the closing of the century, those optimists had to admit they had been wrong: they had only pursued the surface of things.

In a comparable way, artists turned away from realistic art, from depicting merely anecdotal scenes, impressions, imitations of nature. They re-claimed their rights to dreams, to the supernatural, to the spheres of heaven. Merely imitating and thus superficial art, Aurier said, is no more than an accumulation of separate details. The whole cosmos is made up of an enormous mass of various phenomena. Amongst all those phenomena, we understand best those closely related to us, and the very thing we really are able to understand is our own consciousness, our own being. Outside our consciousness, our thinking activity, no knowledge can exist: neither of our own self nor of all the things surrounding us. Only the thinking subject can fuse the various phenomena surrounding us into an essential and comprehensible whole. In this way the artist has to act towards the various appearances of outer reality: to accomplish a synthesis.

But on the other hand, man as a thinking being can only manifest himself by his body. Our body contains and manifests our consciousness. Likewise, the spiritual essence of everything can be expressed only by outward appearance, by formal shape. And thus, still according to Aurier, anything we perceive actually is the concrete visual expression of an Idea. Only by searching beyond the outer appearances of things can the artist get through the content expressed by formal shape - form is only a sign, a container that transfers the essential meaning. Formal shapes on their own do not have meaning, just as a sound in itself has no meaning. The artist should no longer try to imitate consciously the outward aspect of things. This cannot do justice to their essential quality. On the contrary, the artist should reduce the various outer characteristics of his object, to simplify it to the most essential, to reveal its original signification. In the terminology of Aurier, the artist should be 'l'Exprimeur des êtres absolus'^{xvi}.

As is well-known, Aurier also formulated five elements necessary to a work of art: it had to be 'Idéiste, Symboliste, Synthétique, Subjective' and 'Décorative'. With 'Idéiste' Aurier meant that the Idea had to be expressed by concrete forms. 'Synthétiste' meant that the signs -forms, lines, colours- had to be joined together in a not too specific and individual way. Having stated this, Aurier positioned synthetic art in opposition to literary symbolism. 'Subjective' according to Aurier meant that objects should not be portrayed for their own sake but for the sake of the Ideas they were enclosing. Finally, art had to be decorative because only decorative, socially purposeful art was true art. The purpose of decorative painting is to decorate the daily environment with the ideas and ideals of mankind. In his opinion, the origins of art in primitive, unspoiled societies were decorative, for instance in Egypt and Greece. Aurier called free painting, the easel picture, typically an illogical product of the declining civilisation of the nineteenth century, just like thoughtless imitation of nature was. That art and esthetic, that empirical scientific mentality, he thought, was doomed to fade away^{xvii}.

Albert Aurier did not only defend the synthetist art of Gauguin and his circle, but also that of Vincent Van Gogh. Whether or not he includes Van Gogh in the synthetic-symbolist group is open to interpretation, but surely in some way he saw Van Gogh as a congenial spirit of Gauguin. The

characteristics of Van Gogh's work (force, expressivity, nervousity, exaggeration or simplification of form, bright colours) he labeled as a vocabulary to express Ideas. This image of Van Gogh as related to the synthetists was introduced in Holland^{xviii}. A typical example of this view was an article by the aforementioned Jan Veth, written on occasion of the Van Gogh-exhibition of 1892 in Amsterdam, organized by Roland Holst. His style of writing reminds one of the somewhat overloaded literary idiom in which he described *Anangkè* by Roland Holst, as quoted before. Van Gogh struggled with his subjects, Veth wrote, with 'rebellious agitation', 'energy of resignation' and 'violent penetration'. Nevertheless, Veth stated clearly what he thought to be the essence of his painting: 'To summarize', he said, 'one could roughly say he is a painter synthetizing the impressions of reality like revelations of fierce pathos'. Van Gogh did not want to surrender to disconnected pictorial effects; after all, what he was searching for with his tormented lines was something decorative and stable, enclosed within the frame of the picture, something spacious and plain at the same time^{xix}.

As Roland Holst wrote to Veth, he was very enthusiastic about this review^{xx}. Probably the combination of expressive lines and touches of paint with landscape as a subject attracted him. Thus, landscape could be transformed into the signifier of an Idea. In some simultaneous studies of landscape by Roland Holst (plate 3) the influence of Van Gogh is clear.

Art reviews by Roland Holst himself at that time show that he nearly immediately assimilated some of the theoretical notions of Aurier. An example is his article 'De beteekenis van Derkinderens nieuwe muurschildering' (The importance of the New Mural Painting of Derkinderen) in *De Nieuwe Gids* in 1892. Antoon Derkinderen (1859-1925) was the first artist in Holland to turn the realistic, anecdotal style of historical wall painting into a more decorative one. In 1889 he completed the painting *Processie van het H.Sacrament van Mirakel* (plate 4), representing a procession in memory of a miraculous event that was said to have happened in Amsterdam in the fourteenth century. Initially, Derkinderen had designed this wall decoration as a colourful painting with a lot of realistic, historically correct details. Under the impression of a journey to Italy and France, where he admired tre- and quattrocento frescoes and the art of Puvis de Chavannes, he re-organized his design. The result was a frugal composition in faded colours, which was refused by the clergy of the church which had commissioned it^{xxi}. Roland Holst, in his article, spotted the importance of Derkinderen's recent work for Dutch painting: Derkinderen, he said, used reality only to depict the abstract meaning behind that reality. He avoided naturalistic portraiture of individuals and costumes, and moreover, he also avoided beautiful effects of pictural virtuosity. Roland Holst contrasted this art to what he called 'the overruling delightful art of the impressionists'. In his opinion, merely depicting reality, or merely expressing the emotions aroused by that reality in the artist, could only be fully appreciated by contemporaries sharing the same view of life. Therefore, realistic art could never be of eternal value - unlike art devoted to the Ideas behind the concrete world. Essential feelings of mankind would survive in all circumstances and all cultures, and would be recognized by any member of present and coming societies^{xxii}. In accordance with those social implications, such art was named 'Community Art' (Gemeenschapskunst). In 1891 and 1896 Derkinderen completed two large wall paintings at the town hall of 's Hertogenbosch (plate 5); they showed an increasing tendency towards stylizing and linearity. This development continued in the next commission of Derkinderen: mural paintings in the stairwell of the office of the Life

Insurance Company in Amsterdam, built by the architect Berlage (1856–1934). The paintings were completed in 1900 (the work is now lost, plate 6 shows a preliminary study). Several reviews accentuate the tendency to essentialism in form and content of this art, like the following quotation:

'These new pictures have a very grand and general meaning. They can also be instructive for beholders not trained in philosophical ideas and archeological knowledge. Derkinderen did not portray real historical individuals as personifications of Ideas, nor any allegorical figures representing by gestures or attributes the virtues of past centuries. But, looking for the spiritual principles in the function of the building he had to decorate, he showed in some lucidly eloquent images the everchanging conditions of the irrevocably advancing years of life. Every physical movement expresses the life of the soul. The movements are graceful and beautiful, as we only rarely see in everyday life, and now refined and spiritualized by the purifying flow of a high-spirited aspiration'^{xxiii}.

Another critic wrote:

'These images [...] have simple outlines, and pale and plain colours; no scenery, no secondary details enliven the surface. The groups personifying the abstract ideas stand out against plain, softly-green coloured walls, in noble forms, in firm but softly drawn contours'.

This latter review points to Puvis de Chavannes and the German Romantic tradition –the Nazarenes– for stylistic aspects^{xxiv}.

Roots and concepts of Community Art

There is a lot of resemblance between the social esthetics of Derkinderen and his followers and those of the Nazarenes. The mural paintings of the Nazarenes were intended to be 'readable' by the common man and accordingly they adopted religious, folkloric and historical themes, in opposition to baroque and Neo-Classical art mostly glorifying an important person in an artificial allegorical setting. Art had to be rooted in the community. Many of their iconographic programs recall idealized past times, to formulate at the same time ideals for the future^{xxv}. Dutch Community Art thus fits into a broader European 'social art' tradition; a tradition starting at the beginning of the 19th century with the Nazarenes, continued from about 1850 onward by the Pre-Raphaelites and later on by William Morris. This tradition is characterized by artists mostly working in a collective way, not individualistically, by a shared stylistic idiom (mostly decorative) and a shared range of subjects (mostly Idea art). Social commitment was connected with all this – they did not want to be 'l'art-pour-l'art' artists. At the beginning of the century, this social commitment was of a very religious kind; by the last quarter it had changed into political engagement. During the nineteenth century, this tradition was a minor one beside the dominant individualistic and pictorial current^{xxvi}. In Holland the visual arts of the nineteenth century were particularly orientated towards the 'picturesque', realistic landscape and genre painting tradition of the glorious seventeenth century. However, the other tradition cannot have been wholly unknown. In Roman Catholic circles, there was some notion of the Christian art of the Nazarenes^{xxvii}. Later in the century, John Ruskin, the theoretical spokesman of the Pre-Raphaelites, was known in intellectual and artistic circles. Especially his writings about Italian art, closely related to Pre-Raphaelite art theory, were well-known in Holland at the last quarter of the century^{xxviii}.

The decorative tradition in art was furthermore characterized by a specific basic view on the genesis, nature, means and ends of art, and the role of the artist. For the Nazarenes this basic principle included the rejection of the rationalistic, objective, impersonal, formal and outwardly representative art of Neo-Classicism. Their later followers were opposed to the outwardly and wordly orientated art of realism and Impressionism. It was their ambition to be neither classical and rhetorical, nor purely imitative. On the contrary, their point of departure was the pure intuition of the artist while choosing his subject; at the same time the pursuit of individual expression and originality was rejected. Their aim was to surpass outward reality, to create something new but with an objective value, a profound philosophy of life^{xxix}.

In this tradition is rooted the 'natural' and 'simple' iconography, as opposed to allegorizing classicism, of the Community Art of Derkinderen, Roland Holst, and some others of their generation. The use of a so-called 'natural' vocabulary was connected with the Romanticist reaction against Neo-Classical art theory which situated the origins of a work of art in selecting and arranging a set of fixed canons and images. Romanticist art theory no longer considered and represented Nature as populated by gods and mythological creatures; such mythological subjects did not reveal the truth behind the outward appearances of nature. The use of classical mythology, instead of spiritualizing nature, led to rhetorical abstraction. To express nature truly, new, pure means of expression had to be found, not artificially constructed but arising from the bottom of the soul of the artist, like plants grow spontaneously. The soul or mind of an artist was now ascribed an active, creative role: making a work of art was now an act of creativity, and the artist a creator. Consequently, moral qualities of an artist could be seen expressed in his work. A real artist had to be morally good as well^{xxx}.

To the adherents of Community Art this did not imply a work of art to be something purely subjective, or the spontaneous result of individual emotions. The work of art originated from the soul of the artist, but the artist had to make an effort, so to say, like a craftsman, to help it to come to its full, clear and pure expression. Words, sounds, colours and forms were considered as autonomous elements. The artist could acquire skill in using them by disciplined working, not by letting himself go in his emotions. A combination of those autonomous elements could bring out something far exceeding the individual person of the artist. This conception of the artistic calling distinguishes the Community Art-way of thinking from the individually expressive self-conception of the artist underlying Romantic art, and, later on, literary Symbolism^{xxxi}.

This 'objective' conception of artistic calling was related to another basic concept of Romanticist art theory, namely the idea that the soul of the artist was an integral part of an organically inter-related universe. Human nature, feelings and ideas of mankind are fundamentally the same everywhere and at all times. Every living being is subjected to the cyclical movement of birth and growth, maturity, decline and death. This is also the course of history of mankind. These fundamental experiences are shared by all human beings; they concern the most natural feelings of mankind. They are the real truth of existence, and can be recognized in all external phenomena of life. Primitive societies, not yet spoiled by the outside and the material, succeed best in expressing this truth in their art^{xxxii}.

From this set of ideas stem some topics frequently occurring in the Dutch Community Art around 1900, like the seasons, the stages of human life, periods in the history of mankind. Also related is the representation of the

development of art as the growth of a plant, a tree, a bare-laying field, seeds growing by the beneficial effects of sunshine and rain. Art is like a plant, consuming water, earth and sunlight but nevertheless unfolding from its own inner self. An example is the cover of the *Keuzetentoonstelling*-catalogue by Roland Holst (plate 2); another, less optimistic example is the cover of the catalogue of the aforementioned Van Gogh-exhibition, also by Roland Holst (plate 7). The combination of floral decoration and human life topics is also based on the idea of the cyclical movement of the human being inside the cosmic whole^{xxxiii}.

Finally descending from Romantic art theory is the concept of simple iconography, like a language, or a language of images, rooted in and responding to the imagination of a community or culture. The metaphor of the soul branching out or developing in a cyclical, organic way can also be applied to the collective soul of a people. Fairy-tales, folksongs, primitive and medieval art and architecture are closer to the origins of this collective soul, closer than worn-out classicist symbols^{xxxiv}. By using those authentic images one could return to the original, natural order of society, as opposed to the mechanical, artificial and unnatural contemporary civilisation. Pointing to the past, one could leave the present behind.

Amsterdam as an ideal community

The Middle East, Egypt, and archaic Greece were mentioned before as exemplary primitive periods in the history of art. But such an exemplary period was also tre- and quattrocento Italy, especially in Tuscany. To young Dutch artists in the nineties Florence rapidly grew into a resort of pilgrimage, not only because of the works of art to admire, but also because of the ideal relationship between artist and society they believed to have reigned there.

Berlage visited Italy in 1880; his journey would leave its mark on the structural and decorative principles of his Amsterdam buildings. He was followed by several painters, like Derkinderen, as mentioned before, and Jan Verkade (1868-1946). In his autobiography Verkade describes his delight in seeing in Florence art and daily life united. He wrote enthusiastic letters to his friend Roland Holst, who was also touched by the general enthusiasm for the Italian tre- and quattrocento^{xxxv}. In 1896 Roland Holst spent three weeks of his honeymoon in Florence, where he studied Cimabue, Angelico, and Giotto^{xxxvi}.

Roland Holst probably consulted Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence* during his honeymoon. We know he possessed an edition at that time^{xxxvii}. *Mornings in Florence* describes seven morning walks in Florence, visiting Ruskin's most favourite works of art: the Baptistery, the S.M. Novella, a selection of paintings at the Uffizi, the Spanish chapel, and the Campanile. Ruskin analysed and evaluated those works in a compelling way. In another work, *Val d'Arno. Ten lectures on the Tuscan Art*, Ruskin integrated his art criticism in lectures on the development of Tuscan society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Almost lyrically, he describes the rise of Florence and the important contribution to that rise by the class of craftsmen and tradesmen. The three social classes fitted together to an ideal, harmonious community. Their activities complemented each other: together they contributed to the benefit of the State, 'the knights remaining true to the State, the clergy to their faith, and the workmen to their craft'. In this ideal social structure art could flourish. Ruskin described how art fulfilled the demands of the inhabitants of Florence: 'The knights for the most part demanding only fine goldsmiths' work, stout armour, and rude architecture; the priests commanding both the finest architecture and

painting, and the richest kinds of decorative dress and jewellery, - while the merchants directed works of public use, and were the best judges of artistic skill...'. And, according to Ruskin, no distinction existed between artist and artisan, except that of higher genius or better conduct. The best artist was also the best artisan, and the most simple workman could use his imagination as well as his fingers. 'The architect was always a stonecutter, and the stonecutter not often practically separate, as yet, from the painter, and never so in general conception of function'^{xxxviii}.

In another writing, *The Two Paths*, Ruskin exalted the visual beauty of such a society:

'On each side of a bright river [...] a line of brighter palaces, arched and pillared, and inlaid with deep red porphyry, and white serpentine; along the quays before their gates were riding troops of knights, noble in face and form, dazzling in crest and shield; horse and man one labyrinth of quaint colour and gleaming light - the purple, and silver and scarlet fringes flowing over the strong limbs and clashing mail, like sea-waves over rocks at sunset. Opening on each side from the river were gardens, courts, and cloisters; long successions of white pillars among wreaths of vine; leaping of fountains through buds of pomegranate and orange and still along the garden paths, and under and through the crimson of the pomegranate shadows, moving slowly, groups of the fairest women that Italy ever saw...'^{xxxix}.

As mentioned before, Berlage visited Italy in 1880 and was inspired there by late-medieval architecture, and also by the idea of an ideal community, exemplified in late-medieval Florence. Like the Florentine Palazzo Vecchio and the Palazzo Pubblico in Siene, Berlages Stock Exchange had to be the heart of an industrious community. At about the same time, Berlage was building the office of the Amalgated Society of Diamond Workers; the Florentine Bargello, symbol of popular democracy, is said to have been the model for this building^{xl}. The twofold building activity (plate 8) intensified the idea of an industrious community: capital and labour were -at least, architecturally- striving for the same: a materially and culturally prosperous town. In the Council Room of the Union building Roland Holst executed a series of mural paintings (plate 9).

It seems to me that Berlage and the literator Albert Verwey (1865-1937), who planned the decoration programme of the Stock Exchange Building, attributed a positive role to the merchant class within the organism of municipal life. Ruskin had done the same in respect of medieval Florence: the presence of a class of tradesmen guaranteed to him a government of peace, justice, and stability. Business was not compatible with warfare and pillage. The rise of the merchant class meant to him also 'the gradual ascendancy of foresight, prudence, and order in society'. In his social-economic essay *Unto This Last* Ruskin even assigned to merchants and factory owners an important social responsibility: to produce for the benefit of the nation. As employers, they were also responsible for the quality of life of a lot of people^{xli}.

Before designing the Exchange Building decoration programme, Verwey had already shown a positive attitude towards certain aspects of business life; for instance where he praised the Life Insurance Company at Amsterdam for having their office built by Berlage and decorated by Derkinderen (plate 6). While he considered insurance companies to be a result of a growing awareness of mutual responsibility, he saw the insurance office as a centre of social life. In its building, art and society were united^{xlii}.

In several aspects the decoration program of the Stock Exchange Building

suits the ideas of Community Art. Firstly, the content is related to Ruskin's views on business life as a stabilizing factor in society. Point of departure for the programme formed an essay, 'Bijdragen tot de versiering van de Nieuwe Beurs' (Contribution to the Decoration of the New Exchange Building), by Verwey in the *Tweemaandelijksch Tijdschrift* (Bi-monthly Magazine) of 1898. Here Verwey described rise and development of Amsterdam as a result of increasing expansion of business activity. He proposed that this expansion was a process of emancipation, of severing the confining ties of feudalism. Verwey's history is not without critical notes about later consequences of this liberation movement: he mentions warfare, naval battles, colonial expansion, pursuit of profit and enrichment at the cost of others. Nevertheless he saw it as the foreshadowing of the final abolition of slavery and dependence. This dialectical development in history would in the end bring an ideal society. All men would be free and able to maintain themselves in their own-chosen way. In his imagination Verwey foresaw a new, free generation looking at the Exchange Building as the temple of the then forgotten god Mammon. They would read in the stained-glass windows and wall-paintings the stories of heroes of the past and their deeds. Somewhat melancholically and with respectful admiration they would memorialize the dead enemy that had opened the gateway to their own better times^{xliii}.

The 'heroes' Verwey mentioned were concrete historical personalities figuring in his story. Now and then, Verwey indicated in his essay the position of some topics in the Exchange Building. In a series of poems, entitled 'Twintig kwatrijnen. Bijdragen tot de versiering van de Nieuwe Beurs' (Twenty Quatrains. Contributions to the Decoration of the New Exchange Building) he prescribed the theme of decoration for each part of the building. This was elaborated into a programme; the participating decorative artists had to follow this program, but were permitted to execute their theme more or less at their own discretion. Each artist was assigned some quatrains for inspiration^{xliiv}.

Roland Holst decorated the walls at the staircase at the left of the entrance. He also was given four quatrains; two of those point out to the merchant and the manufacturer their social responsibility. Their resemblance to the words of Ruskin in *Unto This Last* is striking^{xlv}. Roland Holst, at that time a fervent socialist, represented the theme 'The Merchant' with four toiling dockworkers, and 'The Manufacturer' with two steelworkers and two miners (plate 10). Jan Veth called these two paintings the essence of the decoration program, in his words: 'the two deciding factors of stock market in its full glory: trade and industry'^{xlvi}.

But there are some more profound elements of the philosophy of life of Community Art in the decoration program. Jan Toorop (1858-1928) summarized, in a strictly personal interpretation, the view of history underlying the program. For the entrance hall he designed three tile mosaics, *Past*, *Present*, and *Future* (plate 11). A contemporary critic wrote the following explanation:

'The past of trade, the barter trade, is symbolized by two men at the left and right, and a woman between. The woman is being exchanged for a sword [...]. In the background slaves, whipped by a slave driver, are dragging a block of stone. Seeing this we are reminded of the times when the enormous building activity of the pyramids demanded all the time, all the working powers of a slave nation, under the reign of an Egyptian despot.

The Present of commercial enterprise is imagined in the center by a man; his pensive head resting on the right hand, the left hand resting on a clockwork. He is surrounded by attributes of telegraph and telephone.

At his left, the figure of a woman symbolizing the work of women and women's liberation; she holds a flower and an instrument. At his right a workman, flanked by wheels. At the back of these figures walk, in opposite directions -significantly symbolizing our times- businessmen and labourers. Further in the background means of transport, steamers, trains on an overpass, and factory chimneys.

Future is represented by the person of Christ in the center; at his left a woman at a well, reminding one of the Samaritan woman. Passing through a gateway comes, like an immaterial phenomenon, a grey and blind worker, his tool falling out of his hand, stumbling in an unbalanced society towards the union of spiritual and material existence. At the background we see Hope like a dream, symbolized by happy couples walking in a flowered garden'.

The well mentioned signified the source of eternal life, the spiritual^{xlvii}.

The exterior of the front entrance was decorated by the sculptor Lambertus Zijl (1866-1947). He designed a large relief (plate 12) called *Hun omgang* (this can mean 'their moving on in history' as well as 'their relationships to each other'). Source of inspiration was again a poem by Albert Verwey, referring to different arrangements of society. The reliefs show the successive stages of the development of social life towards a collectivity. At the left *Paradise*, at the right *Spoiled Civilisation* and at the center the Future. 'Labour' has a crucial position in this perspective of the future; it is, so to say, consecrating a union between equal men, participating in a free society without slavery and exploitation^{xlviii}. Here again, the thread of the decoration program, the history of trade, is connected to a cyclical view on history.

In this way, the designers of the decoration programme of the Stock Exchange Building tried to represent the essential, the cycle of life and the universal human values in history, according to the ideas and traditions of Community Art. The eternally returning referred at the same time to the dawn of a new and better society and to the return to a primeval, purer way of life. Ruskin's ideas on an ideal society, exemplified by industrious medieval Florence, a democracy of citizens, were connected with the history of Amsterdam and with a cyclical concept of history.

Lieske Tibbe.
Catholic University Nijmegen,
Holland.

Notes.

An earlier version of this article was presented as a lecture delivered at the Amsterdam Summer University, August 1994, as part of the course 'Symbolism in Art: in Search of a Definition'.

i. 'Le Symbolisme', *L'Art moderne* vol.6 (1886), p.313.

The best survey of Symbolism in Dutch painting is still Bettina Polak, *Het fin-de-siècle in de Nederlandse schilderkunst. De symbolistische beweging 1890-1900*, The Hague 1955; see here especially pp.6-10.

- ii. Edmond Picard, 'Les Visionnaires', *L'Art moderne* vol.6 (1886), p.330.
- iii. Edmond Picard, 'Essai de pathologie littéraire. Les Décadents', *L'Art moderne* vol.5 (1885), p.237. To illustrate the feelings of crisis and decline of the avant-garde Picard cited from *Essais de la psychologie contemporaine* by Paul Bourget:
- 'Pour que l'ensemble fonctionne avec énergie, il est nécessaire que les organismes composants fonctionnent aussi avec énergie, mais avec une énergie subordonnée. Si les cellules deviennent indépendantes les organismes qui composent le total cessent pareillement d'être soumis à l'ensemble et l'anarchie qui s'établit, constitue le décadence soumis de l'ensemble [...]. Car l'organisme social n'échappe pas à cette loi, et il entre en décadence aussitôt que la vie individuelle s'est exagérée sous l'influence du Bien-être acquis et de l'hérédité !!!'.
- The same quotation -translated into Dutch- can be found in: J.N. van Hall, 'De "Décadents" in Frankrijk', *De Gids* vol.52 (1888), no.I, pp.418/419.
- iv. Edmond Picard, 'Essai de la pathologie littéraire. Les Incohérents', *L'Art moderne* vol.5 (1885), p.245, and id., 'Essais de la pathologie littéraire. Les Verbolâtres', *L'Art moderne* vol.5 (1888), pp.253 and 261.
- v. Edmond Picard, 'Essai de la pathologie littéraire. Les Symbolistes', *L'Art moderne* vol.5 (1885), p.269:
- 'Le symbolisme [...] est la dominante des oeuvres qui durent. Il consiste à dégager et à exprimer si fortement une ou plusieurs des grandes généralités de l'humanité ou de la nature, que, longtemps après que l'oeuvre a été créée, les générations s'y retrouvent encore dans quelques-uns de leurs sentiments, et la tiennent pour aussi vraie, aussi émouvante, aussi belle qu'aux premiers jours. Le symbole ainsi compris, c'est le type. Il incarne une passion [...], il résume une époque brillante ou sinistre, il formule une grande vérité, il matérialise une loi naturelle. De là vient sa force et sa persistance'.
- vi. Emile Verhaeren, 'Silhouettes d'artistes - Fernand Khnopff', *L'Art moderne* vol.6 (1886), p.290, and id., 'Un peintre symboliste', *L'Art moderne* vol.7 (1887), p.189. See also: I. Higgins, 'Towards a Poetic Theatre: Poetry and the Plastic Arts in Verhaeren's Aesthetics', *Literature and the Plastic Arts, 1880-1930. Seven Essays*, ed. by I. Higgins, London 1973, pp.1-23.
- In the opinion of Polak (note 1), p.19, the term 'symbolism' with regard to the visual arts was not used before 1891.
- vii. Jan Veth, 'Anangke. Een lithografie door R.N.Roland Holst', *De Nieuwe Gids* vol.8 (1893), no.I, pp.435/436.
- viii. The meaning of the heading-ornament of *L'Art moderne* was explained in *L'Art moderne* vol.10 (1891), p.1. For the adoption of this combination of symbols in Holland see Polak (note 1), p.241, and Ernst Braches, *Het boek als Nieuwe Kunst. Een studie in Art Nouveau*, Utrecht 1973, pp.148-152.
- ix. John Rewald, *Post-impressionism: from van Gogh to Gauguin*, New York 1962 (2nd ed.), pp.196-206 and 281.
- x. 'Aux XX', *L'Art moderne* vol.9 (1889), p.33.

- xi. Octave Mirbeau, 'Paul Gauguin', *L'Art moderne* vol.11 (1891), p.92.
- xii. G. Lecomte, 'Des tendances de la peinture moderne', *L'Art moderne* vol.12 (1892), pp.50, 57 and 65. See also: Emile Verhaeren, 'Les XX', *La Société nouvelle* vol.8 (1891), nr.I, p.248.
- xiii. W.I. Homer, *Seurat and the science of painting*, Cambridge 1964, pp. 216/217 and 246.
- xiv. G.J.P.J. Bolland, 'De lichamelijke verschijnselen en hun gewaande zelfstandigheid. Proeve eener wijsgeerige kritiek der waarneming', *De Nieuwe Gids* vol.5 (1889), no.II, pp. 24 and 29/30.
- xv. For this essay I used the reprint of 'Le Symbolisme en peinture' in Albert Aurier, *Oeuvres posthumes*, Paris 1893, pp. 205-220. This volume also contains his basic article 'Les Peintres symbolistes' (p.293-309), also a reprint from *Mercure de France*. Roland Holst was a reader of this periodical.
- xvi. Aurier (note 15), pp. 213/214, 293/294 and 300/301.
- xvii. Aurier (note 15), pp. 215/216.
- xviii. Aurier (note 15), pp.261/262 and id., 'Vincent van Gogh' *L'Art moderne* vol.9 (1890), p.20. For the introduction of Van Gogh in Holland see: Carol M. Zemel, *The formation of a legend. Van Gogh criticism, 1890-1920*, Ann Harbor (Mich.), especially pp. 4 and 24.
- xix. Jan Veth, 'Studiën over moderne kunst. Tentoonstelling van werken door Vincent van Gogh in de Amsterdamsche Panorama-zaal', *De Nieuwe Gids* vol.8 (1893), pp. 427-431.
- xx. R.N.Roland Holst to J.Veth, undated letter [March 1893 ?]; Amsterdam, State Print Room, Jan Veth collection, letter 22. See also: Lieske Tibbe, 'Wisselend kunsthumeur. Brieven van Richard Roland Holst over Van Gogh en het symbolisme', *Jong Holland* vol.13 (1997), no.2, pp.37-43.
- xxi. Catalogue *Antoon Derkinderen*, Amsterdam/Assen/'s Hertogenbosch 1981, pp. 29-32.
- xxii. R.N.Roland Holst, 'De beteekenis van Derkinderens nieuwe muurschildering in onze schilderkunst', *De Nieuwe Gids* vol.7 (1892) no.I, pp.321-324.
- xxiii. D.H. van Moerkerken Jr., 'De jongste muurschilderingen van A.J. Derkinderen', *De Nieuwe Gids*, New Series vol. 5 (1900), pp. 494/495.
- xxiv. G.H.Marius, 'Antoon Derkinderen's nieuwste wandschilderingen', *De Gids* vol.64 (1900), no.II, p.546.
- xxv. Sabine Schulze, *Bildprogramme in deutschen Kunstmuseen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a.M. 1984, pp. 11-32.
- xxvi. Compare Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Gemeinschaftsideale unter den bildenden Künstlern des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 1931, pp. 125-154.

xxvii. H.F.A.M. van der Grinten, *Nederlandsche aesthetica in de negentiende eeuw*, Helmond 1947, pp. 52-63.

xxviii. For instance G.H.Marius (note 24) wrote *John Ruskin. Een inleiding tot zijn werken* (John Ruskin. An Introduction to His Works), The Hague 1899 (*Moderne denkers* vol. II). Translated were around 1900, beside several anthologies: *Stones of Venice* (a selection, 1900), *Unto this last* (1901), *Fors clavigera* (1901), *The elements of drawing* (1902), *Time and Tide* (1908).

xxix. Cf. A.L. Sötemann, 'Poetics and Periods in Literary History, a first draft', *From Wolfram and Petrarch to Goethe and Grass; studies in literature in honour of Leonard Forster*, ed. by D.H. Green, L.P. Johnson and D. Wuttke, Baden-Baden 1982, pp. 623-631. In this article Sötemann suggests redividing literary history: instead of the traditional idea of alternating styles and 'periods' a diachronic survey of poetics. He describes four rather continuous theoretical streams throughout 19th and 20th-century literature: those of 'expressive', 'objective', 'mimetic' and 'pragmatic' poetics.

xxx. M.H. Abrams, *The mirror and the lamp. Romantic theory and the critical tradition*, New York 1958, pp. 69, 104, 229, 266-269 and 283-285.

xxxi. Cf. Sötemann (note 29), He opposes an 'objective-symbolist' against an 'expressive' or 'romantic' tradition in poetics.

xxxii. Abrams (note 30), pp. 104/105 and 218.

xxxiii. Some authors (for instance P. Singelenberg, *H.P. Berlage. Idea and Style. The Quest for Modern Architecture*, Utrecht 1972, pp. 133-136), connect the use of floral symbolism in nineteenth-century monumental and applied art with Darwin's theory of evolution. But probably from the theory of evolution is derived only the notion that finally all species in nature stem from the same archetype. 'The struggle for life' and 'The survival of the fittest' are not in harmony with the general concept of Community Art.

xxxiv. Abrams (note 30), pp. 281 and 296.

xxxv. For Berlage's trip to Italy see Singelenberg (note 33), pp. 23-59.

According to A.M. Hammacher, *De levenstijd van Antoon Derkinderen*, Amsterdam 1932, pp. 31/32, Derkinderen went to Italy winter 1892/'93. However Frans Erens, a contemporary literator, remembers in his autobiography a dinner at Jan Veth's, around 1887/'88, with Derkinderen telling about his recent trip to Italy (Frans Erens, *Vervlogen jaren*, Amsterdam 1987, pp. 258/259). Derkinderen himself mentioned his journey in an exhibition review in *De Amsterdammer* (weekly magazine) 1890 No. 782, describing his surprise at the works of Giotto, Raphael, Fra Angelico, Michaelangelo and especially of Titian and Tintoretto.

Verkade visited Italy for the first time in 1892; see his autobiography *Van ongebondenheid en heilige banden*, 's Hertogenbosch 1919, pp. 169/170.

Jan Veth also planned to go to Italy, but addition to the family caused him to give up (J. Huizinga, *Leven en werk van Jan Veth*, Haarlem 1927, p.39).

xxxvi. Henriëtte Roland Holst-van der Schalk, *Het vuur brandde voort. Levensherinneringen*, Amsterdam 1979 (4th ed.), pp.87/88. The journey also included Pisa, Assisi and Milano.

xxxvii. John Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence. Being Simple Studies of Christian Art for English Travellers*, John Ruskin, *Works*, Library edition, vol. XXIV, London 1906. The 1894 edition owned by Roland Holst and his wife still exists in the Royal Libray, The Hague.

xxxviii. John Ruskin, *Val d'Arno. Ten Lectures on the Tuscan art*, John Ruskin, *Works*, Library edition, London 1906, vol. XXIII, pp.45/46, 52 and 134.

xxxix. John Ruskin, *The Two Paths. Being Lectures on Art and Its Application to Decoration and Manufacture*, John Ruskin, *Works*, Library edition, London 1908, Vol. XVI, pp. 239/240.

xl. Manfred Bock, *Anfänge einer neuen Architektur. Berlages Beitrag zur architektonischen Kultur der Niederlande im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert*, 's Gravenhage 1983, p.86; Singelenberg (note 33), p. 86.

In *Val d'Arno* (note 38), pp. 156/157, Ruskin exalts Florentine civil democracy between 1290-1350: 'So perfect a type of national government has only once been reached in the history of the human race'. He compares Florence to the Holy Jerusalem, calling it the most fertile breeding-ground for the artistic achievements of Giotto, Orcagna, Brunelleschi and other artists.

xli. John Ruskin, *Unto This Last. Four Essays in the First Principles of Political Economy*, John Ruskin, *Works*, Library edition, vol. XVII, London 1905, pp.40-42.

xlii. Albert Verwey, 'Boekbeoordelingen', *Tweemaandelijksch Tijdschrift* vol.3 (1897), pp.442-444.

xliii. Albert Verwey, 'Bijdragen tot de versiering van de Nieuwe Beurs', *Tweemaandelijksch Tijdschrift* vol.4 (1898), No.II, pp.183-212. See also: Madelon Broekhuis, 'Ideologie in steen. Het beeldhouwwerk van Lambertus Zijl aan het Beursgebouw te Amsterdam', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* vol.34 (1983), pp. 196-200.

xliv. Albert Verwey, 'Bijdragen tot de versiering van de Nieuwe Beurs' (1898-1900), *Oorspronkelijk dichtwerk*, Vol.II, 1914-1937, Amsterdam/Santpoort 1938, pp.730-735, and Albert Verwey, 'De eenheid in Berlage's plan van Beursversiering', *In memoriam H.P. Berlage.Bouwkundig Weekblad Architectura* vol.55 (1934), pp.8-11. For descriptions of the realized decoration programme see Singelenberg (note 33), pp. 112-135, and Broekhuis (note 43), pp.200-212.

xlvi. Verwey, *Oorspronkelijk dichtwerk* (note 44), p.731; cf. note 41.

The quatrains (in translation):

The merchant.

The merchant, his vessels sailing all over the seas

- workmen in factories and farming land toiling for the cargo-:

his Trade is beautiful if practised for the benefit of the nation

but it's a bad thing if he only tries to fill his own purse.

The manufacturer.

Factory owner, governing the people's labour,

multiplying it hundredfold, providing mechanical tools:

do not withhold from them too large a share:

you seal the fate of the people with the gold they amassed for you.

xlvi. Jan Veth, 'Wandschilderingen van R.N. Roland Holst in de Nieuwe Beurs te Amsterdam', *De Kroniek* vol.9 (1903), p.164.

xlvii. D.B., 'Toorop's Sektiel-tableaux in de nieuwe beurs', *De Kroniek* vol.9 (1903), pp.203/204.

xlviii. Broekhuis (note 43), pp.204-206.