



## Framing the Sea

### Turning Tides

Can one frame the sea? Kris Martin tried to, using the frame of the Ghent Altarpiece, a polyptych known also as the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb. *Voilà*.

The theme of this edition is the sea, water in all its forms, turning tides.

Everything is water, claimed Thales of Miletus round 600 BC. Some assert that that statement was the beginning of philosophy. Water is life. All life comes from the water. The land is what is left behind by the sea. The Low Countries, and the Netherlands in particular, know all about that. They have been won from the sea. But that victory is never definitive. Dikes and dams have to tame the sea and the rivers. Dredgers repair and maintain the coastline with additions of sand. And in the meantime climate change threatens to raise the waterline - of both the rivers and the oceans. Will the Low Countries still exist in five hundred years' time? Are the tides turning?

But we're nowhere near that point yet. The Low Countries border the North Sea. I readily admit that its countless different shades of grey are a more fascinating spectacle than the beautiful but monotonous blue of the Mediterranean Sea.

In this book, then, we take a closer look at water in all its forms, water which has been such a determining factor in the formation of the Low Countries.

You can travel the length of the Belgian coast by tram, from De Panne to Knokke. You can sail from Vlissingen to Texel. You'll find it all in this book.

We wonder whether the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp could coordinate their activities, but perhaps, as far as China is concerned, Zeebrugge, Ghent-Terneuzen and Vlissingen are just hubs of one and the same mega port offering access to Europe.

There is a portfolio of pictures, too, showing what people do on the wide sandy beaches of the Low Countries in their summer hours of idleness. The great pirates of the past are also honoured: Piet Hein who captured the Spanish Silver Fleet near Cuba, and Jan Bart from Dunkirk, who fought not only for the Republic but for the French Sun King too - pirates go where the money is - without speaking a word of French. Today, Somali pirates raise the problem of the law of the sea. In his *Mare liberum* (1609) the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius was the first to deal with the legal status of the open waters (the sea belongs to everyone; everyone may trade freely on it) but today we still need an international law of the sea, especially where pollution and overfishing are concerned. With regard to the latter, however, what food can we still obtain from our North Sea? And finally, there's no sea without seascapes and poems, of course, a flood of words to conjure up the roar of the surf, the eternal lapping of the waves.

And the tides? They keep on turning.