

## Visual Arts

### Light and Balance

#### Museum Voorlinden

Light and balance are the two cornerstones of Museum Voorlinden, which opened its doors in Wassenaar, just outside The Hague, in September 2016. The art collector Joop van Caldenborgh (b. 1940), a former chemical industry magnate, commissioned a building to house his extensive collection of contemporary art in a setting characterised by clarity and clean lines. Tucked just behind the dunes of the Dutch coast, Museum Voorlinden sits almost unnoticed in a park landscape. It is a large building covering an area the size of a football field and with the proportions of a Greek temple. But its single-story construction from sand-coloured travertine limestone, and its elegant steel pillars and wide expanses of glass, give the building an aura of almost ethereal lightness. Transparency and soothing simplicity also characterise the interior of the building, which provides a welcome setting for both the art collections and the visitor. It is all in marked contrast to some of the loud, showy museums which seem to have been designed only for the greater glory of the architect.

Until five years ago, Joop van Caldenborgh did not even want his own museum. He felt there were already enough. Moreover, his generous lending policy meant his art could be seen all over the world. However, when he built an exhibition from his personal collection in the Kunsthal in Rotterdam in 2011, he liked it so much that he decided to commission a building of his own. At that time, Van Caldenborgh had already built up the biggest private collection of contemporary art in the Netherlands, with thousands of works by artists ranging from Giorgio Morandi, Andy Warhol and Marcel Broodthaers to James Turrell, Richard Serra and Roni Horn. He has no time for great theories of art. 'Artists have taught me to look at the world differently, to think more freely', he said in an interview with Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*, adding, 'a work of art is either good or it isn't. A good work of art evokes an emotion, anything from revulsion to joy'.

Van Caldenborgh, who according to the Dutch business magazine *Quote* is worth 300 million euros, likes to describe himself as 'a simple seller of chemicals with a passion for art'. As a teenager, his talent for drawing prompted dreams of becoming an artist. It was a talent he had probably inherited from his grandfather, who was a good amateur artist and frequently took the young Joop along to exhibitions. Van Caldenborgh bought his first work of art at the age of sixteen. Yet collecting art was not a carefully considered decision. 'Looking back, I would say that I began buying art when I realised that I would probably never be a really good artist myself', he said in an interview with the Dutch newspaper *Trouw*. Van Caldenborgh studied economics and chemistry and at the age of twenty-nine founded the Rotterdam chemical company Caldic. He has built up his art collection over a period of fifty years. When his son took over as CEO of Caldic, he was able to devote himself to his collection again. He purchased the Voorlinden estate in Wassenaar in 2011 for 15.5 million euros; it is a landscaped park where Hugo Loudon built a stately English mansion in 1912. The house is now home to the museum restaurant. The new museum building, designed by the Rotterdam firm, Kraaijvanger Architects, stands no more than a hundred metres away.

The pavilion-style architecture is reminiscent of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, designed by Mies van der Rohe. 'Other sources of inspiration were the Beyeler Foundation in Basel and the Menil Collection in Houston, both designed by the architect Renzo Piano', says Suzanne Swarts, artistic director of Museum Voorlinden. 'Another example is the Louisiana Museum in Humlebaek, near Copenhagen; they are all museums which allow daylight in and which create a dialogue with their environment.'

What immediately strikes the visitor on entering the building is the lightness, transparency and clarity of the generous space. There is no signage. Even electrical sockets, fire extinguishers and emergency lighting have been almost manically hidden away. The result is that the white box remains a perfect, virgin white. 'We want to remove any disruptive elements and ensure that nothing gets in the way of experiencing the art', explains Suzanne Swarts.



© Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar

The museum is laid out in a way that is both simple and easy to read. Two visual axes run across the building, which is divided into three parts: one housing a collection presentation, another for a temporary exhibition and the third containing a handful of large, permanent art works. The latter include the specially built *Skyspace* by James Turrell, a maze sculpted from over 200 tonnes of steel by Richard Serra, the hyperrealistic, more than life-size *Couple under an Umbrella* by Ron Mueck, and the trompe l'oeil swimming pool by the Argentinian artist Leandro Erlich. Works such as these are not easily relocated.

The first collection presentation is entitled *Full Moon* and starts with a confrontation between the canvas *Moonnight* by the Dutch artist Jan Sluijters (1912), a fragile painting by the Belgo-Mexican artist Francis Alÿs (2012) and an abstract landscape of brightly coloured panels, an installation by the Dutch artist Esther Tielemans, created in 2011. The display plays emphatically on correspondences in colour, form, theme and genre between Rineke Dijkstra and Michaël Borremans, Marcel Broodthaers and René Magritte (all Low Countries artists), Yves Klein and Katja Mater. Information on the labels is kept to a minimum; a visitor guide provides all the information, once again illustrating the museum's desire not to distract visitors from the works of art. The art on display is given lots of space, though the collection presentation is perhaps slightly too serene and could benefit from a little more fire, sharpness and dissonance.

The first temporary exhibition was dedicated to the American minimalist painter Ellsworth Kelly, one of Van Caldenborgh's earliest favourites. The fact that top museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, Tate Modern and the Centre Pompidou in Paris have loaned works to the museum says something about the reputation that Joop van Caldenborgh has built up in the international art world.

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*Translated by Julian Ross*

The temporary exhibition *Say Cheese!* can be seen in Museum Voorlinden until 7 May 2017. This exhibition brings together around 40 works to form a coherent reflection of the versatile and characteristic oeuvre of the British artist Martin Creed. It has been realised in close collaboration with the artist (see [www.voorlinden.nl](http://www.voorlinden.nl)).

### **Rocky Mountain Landscapes, Vast Distances and Mysterious Valleys** **Hercules Segers and his 'Printed Paintings'**

The work of the painter and etcher Hercules Segers (1589/90-1633/40) has always appealed to the imagination. This is chiefly because of his painted and etched landscapes, which make no attempt to depict the reality of the surroundings, but are founded largely on fantasy. For most of his life Segers worked in Amsterdam and probably never travelled abroad. It is most likely that he owed his penchant for landscapes to his studies under the Flemish landscape painter Gillis van Coninxloo. His influence is apparent in the early painting *River Valley*, which is built up using shades of green, yellowish-brown and greyish-blue oil paint. The dark foreground with the traveller leads into a desolate rocky landscape through which a river meanders.

Segers presents a more individual and unconventional face in his landscape etchings. He was born in Haarlem and became familiar with the innovative printmaking of his fellow artists Willem Buytewech and Esaias van de Velde, who, like Seger, enrolled in the Guild of St Luke in Haarlem in 1612. These were the artists who discovered