



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Grey and Blue*, 1921, oil on canvas, 59,5 x 59,5 cm. Collection Gemeentemuseum Den Haag © 2007 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International, Warrenton (VA, USA).

time, the publication almost playfully contradicts the expectation of 'The story of De Stijl' which is evoked by the title, with its fragmentary structure reinforcing the affinity with Dadaism. The book enjoys this ambiguity and takes time to explore how Van Doesburg and Kurt Schwitters felt about the relationship between Dadaism and Neo-plasticism.

While the book and its fragmentary narrative come to an end in 1939, the exhibition also highlights the influence of De Stijl on later artists, architects and designers. The final rooms contain work by Wim Sinemus, Constant, Donald Judd, Imi Knoebel and Piet Hein Eek. This is a limited selection which could have been very different, and precisely because of that it is a selection which, like the book, holds out the promise of more.

LUT PIL

Translated by Julian Ross

- *Mondrian & De Stijl*, until January 1st, 2014, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, www.gemeentemuseum.nl.
- HANS JANSSEN, MICHAEL WHITE, *The Story of De Stijl. Mondrian to Van Doesburg*, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag & Ludion, Antwerp, 2011, 267 p.

Closed yet Close By

The Royal Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp

A number of large museums in the Low Countries are in scaffolding at present. In Amsterdam work has been going on for years on the *Rijksmuseum* and the *Stedelijk Museum*. Now the Royal Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp has also closed its doors for extensive alterations. The three museums are housed in buildings that date from the end of the nineteenth century and urgently need to be modernised to the standards appropriate for a museum of the twenty-first century.

The renovation of the Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp will take at least six years, and it is hoped that it will be able to reopen in 2017. That it will take so long is due, of course, to the far-reaching nature of the work needed, but also to the fact that the majority of the works of art will remain in storage in the museum, so that people will have to take care how they go about things.

However some six hundred works of art are being transferred to other locations. The museum management has devised a programme: "Closed yet close by", with which they wish to indicate that although the museum is closed at present, the collection is still accessible. The works of art are going to other locations where they will supplement other collections or where they will form part of temporary exhibitions.

A first batch of paintings left the museum as early as the end of 2009 to return to the place they were originally made for: Antwerp Cathedral. A great many altarpieces were taken from the cathedral during the period of the French Revolution and placed in various museums. Eight of these altarpieces, including work by Quinten Metsijs and Peter Paul Rubens, which currently form part of the collection of the Museum for Fine Arts, now hang again in the place where they hung until the end of the eighteenth century. The original intention was that the exhibition would be dismantled at the end of 2009, but because the museum was being closed anyway the canvasses will continue to hang there until 2017.

Important nineteenth and twentieth century works from the Royal Museum for Fine Arts are displayed in the exhibition “De Modernen. Topstukken uit het Koninklijk Museum” (The Moderns. Highlights from the Royal Museum). The museum has about 5,000 works from this period and some of them are exhibited in the restored Fabiolazaal in the centre of the city. Modigliani, Botero, Chagall, Degas, Magritte, these are just a few of the names the organizers can draw on for various exhibitions. A first exhibition closed its doors on 8 January this year, but there are still partial exhibitions to come dealing with art in the Netherlands, abstract art, Constant Permeke and further trends in contemporary art.

The Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), which is housed in a striking new building, opened its doors in Antwerp on 17 May 2011. Such a short time ago, yet already it has become the most visited museum in Belgium. For the opening exhibition MAS drew on key works from three important museums in Antwerp, including the Royal Museum for Fine Arts. Through the works the exhibition sketches the evolution of the culture of images from the Middle Ages to the present day. The Royal Museum for Fine Arts provided masterpieces by the Flemish Primitives, as well as genre paintings and works of art by Rubens and his contemporaries. This exhibition is open for visits until the end of 2012.

In Lier, a small town some twenty kilometres from Antwerp, the “Bruegelland” exhibition will be on show throughout the period that the Royal Museum is closed. Its main theme is the folk tradition in Flemish and Dutch art from the time of the sons of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Painters such as Adriaen van Ostade, David Teniers and Jan Steen interpreted the Bruegel-like fair and ale-house scenes in their own manner. In the 18th and 19th centuries artists such as Ferdinand De Braekeleer and Jan Josef Horemans followed in Bruegel’s footsteps with folksy subjects, and at the beginning of the twentieth century the Flemish Expressionists in their turn discovered Bruegel all over again. Artists such as Constant



Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of a Man*, around 1619, oil on canvas, 119 x 126 cm. This painting is going on long loan to the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, USA. © Royal Museum for Fine Arts, Antwerp.

Permeke, Gustave De Smet and Gustave Van de Woestyne breathed new life into his rustic scenes. The Royal Museum for Fine Arts lent the City Museum of Lier a hundred or so works for this purpose. The focus of the exhibition changes every six months so that visitors can keep finding new emphases. “Bruegelland” will run to the end of 2017.

Thanks to a gift from a collector in Antwerp in 1989 the Royal Museum for Fine Arts came into possession of 13 paintings, 36 drawings and watercolours and 8 sculptures by Rik Wouters. The Antwerp Museum now has a total of 109 works by this talented painter and sculptor, who died in 1916 at the age of thirty three. During the alterations to the Royal Museum for Fine Arts this rich collection is going to Mechelen, where Rik Wouters was born. Until the end of 2017 the Schepenhuis Museum there is being transformed into a veritable Wouters museum, where the



Rik Wouters, *Rik with a Black Eye-Patch*, 1915, oil on canvas, 102 x 85 cm. This painting is part of the Wouters collection that is temporarily going to Mechelen, where the painter was born. © Lukas – Art in Flanders vzw / Sabam Belgium 2012.

under the best conditions. The old nineteenth-century building will have been restored to its full glory by then, but the interior will have been extended and adapted to suit the needs of a museum in the 21st century. It will be a new magnet to draw people to Antwerp.

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collection from the Royal Museum will be supplemented by works from the Mechelen City Museums. The intention is to put the spotlight on a different aspect of Wouters' work every year.

In addition to these lengthy exhibition projects some works are being lent by the museum for a specific period to museums both at home and abroad. For example, Anthony van Dyck's "Portrait of a Man" is going on long loan to the famous Worcester Art Museum in the American state of Massachusetts, where it will also undergo restoration. Works are going to Zürich and Mexico City too. Work by James Ensor, of which the Royal Museum for fine Arts has the largest collection in the world, is travelling to Silkeborg, in Denmark, among other places, but especially to Japan, where the exhibition "Ensor in Context", which was shown in Brussels in 2010, will be on display in five different museums from April 2012 to March 2013.

If everything goes according to plan, all of these works will come back in the course of 2017 to a fully renovated and enlarged museum, where they will be exhibited to the public at large