



# intensely dutch

image, abstraction and the word  
post-war and beyond

## EDUCATION NOTES

INVESTIGATING KEY ARTWORKS IN THE GALLERY  
[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education)

## INCLUDES DA VINCI PROJECT MATERIAL

STARTING WITH ART For children with a mild to moderate intellectual disability  
HOT ART For children who are gifted and talented

ART  
GALLERY  
NSW

# intensely dutch

Uncompromising, confronting, optimistic – after the Second World War a new generation of Dutch artists, writers and architects took to modernity as never before. For them it was a time of renewal. Born in the 1920s, they were in their twenties after the war, and as youthful survivors of the violations and hardships of German occupation, past successes, apart from the most revolutionary, just didn't interest many of them.

Some of the most gifted banded together to form the Dutch Experimentele Groep (Experimental Group) in Amsterdam in 1948 and forged close associations with like-minded artists from Denmark and Belgium, which quickly led to the formation of a rebellious new art movement they called CoBrA. Dutch CoBrA artists weren't the only artists working in post-war Netherlands, but CoBrA was very much at the fiery hub of contemporary art in Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s. With its irreverent dada like disregard for convention, CoBrA shook conservative taste, and in the process dramatically re-cast the character of Dutch art. It was an ambitious, raw and vibrant new international art movement from three of the smallest European nations, up-staging, if only briefly, the dominance of the French avant-garde, which CoBrA artists felt was given to tedious theorising.

## Influences upon CoBrA

This new art movement suited the 'northern' Dutch temperament, emphasising individuality, bold expressive imagery and strong colour, though it didn't seem so to many at the time. Part of its freshness and power was because its artists admired and emulated child art, folk art, the art of the untutored and mentally unstable, as well as art from Africa, New Guinea and Alaska. The work of Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee and Joan Miró were formative influences too, as was the emerging art of Jean Dubuffet. CoBrA artists met and occasionally worked collectively in Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands, but felt most unhindered in Paris. Almost all of the artists included in Intensely Dutch lived and/or worked in Paris at some time – Bram van Velde, Edgar Fernhout, Wim Oepts, Karel Appel, Constant, Corneille, Lucebert, Jaap Nanninga, Jaap Wagemaker, Bram Bogart. The Dane Asger Jorn, Netherlanders Karel Appel, Corneille and Constant, and the Belgian Pierre Alechinsky are the best known CoBrA artists internationally, but CoBrA had many adherents and followers in Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as in Germany, England and France, and well beyond its short existence from 1949 to 1951.

## Origins of CoBrA

The name CoBrA derives from the cities Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. 'Snake' references appealed to CoBrA artists, who, from the beginning, produced images of snakes for use in their various activities and publications. Animals, real and imaginary, were generally important in CoBrA iconography, birds particularly, but also cats, dogs, horses and fish. Associations of freedom, independence and sheer enjoyment in the otherness of animals, rather than any suggestion of anthropomorphism, prompted the attraction to animal imagery.

Constant, the group's secretary and self-appointed spokesman, wrote a stirring manifesto published by the Experimentele Groep in their periodical Reflex 1 1948 and again in 1949 in the fourth issue of the periodical Cobra, which was devoted to the Dutch artists. It reads like a call to arms:

*Our art is the art of a revolutionary period ... and the herald of a new era ... it is the expression of a life force that is all the stronger for being resisted, and of considerable psychological significance in the struggle to establish a new society. ... a painting is not a composition of colour and line but an animal, a night, a scream, a human being, or all of these things together.<sup>1</sup>*

## Art and literature

One of the most interesting aspects of post-war Dutch art is the connection between art and literature, especially poetry. Apart from various collaborations between artists and poets, a number of literary periodicals like *Blurb* and *Braak* began to appear that promoted the writings of the new post-war generation, which were often illustrated by artists. They were modest productions but influential nonetheless, as were various publications by members of the Experimentele Groep and CoBrA.

**With its irreverent dada-like disregard for convention, CoBrA shook conservative taste, and in the process dramatically re-cast the character of Dutch art ... This new art movement suited the 'northern' Dutch temperament, emphasising individuality, bold expressive imagery and strong colour, though it didn't seem so to many at the time.**

Hendrik Kolenberg, *Intensely Dutch* curator, 2009

## War, post-war

The Second World War had a debilitating effect on Netherlanders, quite apart from its brutality. The country capitulated quickly to Germany following devastating air raids in May 1940, especially on Rotterdam, its principal port. Neutral during the First World War, this was an unexpected assault on Dutch soil by a close neighbour. Nazi Germany aimed to absorb the Netherlands into its Third Reich, based on the mistaken assumption that Netherlanders were essentially German. Artists were also required to subject themselves to the insidious scrutiny and censorship of the Nazi *Kultuurkamer* (Chamber of Culture), set up by the occupiers in order to control and direct creative activity in the Netherlands. Artists required the sanction of the *Kultuurkamer* to buy art materials, sell or exhibit during the war years. Many Dutch artists refused to comply and went into hiding, emerging only after the entry of Canadian forces and the retreat of the German army, in May 1945. The last year of the war was particularly difficult and the winter one of the coldest on record in Europe. Food was only available on the black market. Dubbed the *hongerwinter* (hunger-winter), many people died from starvation and/or the cold. The young artist Corneille was just one who faced starvation, weighing barely 40 kilos at the end of the war. Soon, the new generation of artists to which Corneille belonged feared another enemy – cultural stagnation or a return to how things were before the war. As Constant expressed it in his manifesto: the cultural vacuum has never been so strong or so widespread as after the last war, when the continuity of centuries of cultural evolution was broken by a single jerk of the string.

For many artists, particularly those involved in CoBrA, post-war Netherlands was stiflingly conservative. The close-knit homogeneity of the population and its established social and cultural values were firmly set against change. The general Dutch population wanted nothing more than a return to pre-war conditions, free from conflict and occupying forces, re-establishing their lives and homes and looking forward to a return to relative prosperity. There is often cultural resurgence following war, associated with the inevitable reconstruction of towns and cities.

## International influence

Although CoBrA disbanded in 1951, its influence continued, but it wasn't the only new art movement of consequence to artists in the Netherlands. Significantly, there were manifestations of *art informel* by various artists, just as there were in France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The best known and most successful of these artists in the Netherlands were Jaap Wagemaker, Jan J Schoonhoven and Bram Bogart.

The work of two Dutch luminaries of 20th-century abstraction, Bram van Velde and Willem De Kooning, foreshadowed the generation that grew to prominence after 1945. Van Velde lived and worked for much of his life in France, having left the Netherlands in 1922 for Germany, then moving to Paris in 1924. De Kooning spent most of his life in America after jumping ship in 1926. Both artists worked at their art instinctively, developing slowly but deliberately until both won acceptance as major abstract painters in the years immediately after the Second World War. Van Velde was associated with French post-war *École de Paris* abstraction; De Kooning was a key figure in North American abstract expressionism.

## Modern Dutch art and Australia

Just as Dutch CoBrA artists were inspired by child art and the art of Africa, the Australian artist John Olsen, for example, was attracted to Australian Aboriginal art. He also greatly admired the early 20th-century moderns Picasso, Klee and Miró, and nearer in time, Dubuffet. He met Asger Jorn, Lucebert and Corneille in Paris. There is a clear similarity between the work of Olsen and some CoBrA artists, especially Corneille, though it is naïve to suggest that this is simply a matter of direct influence. Nevertheless, Olsen shares a great deal with CoBrA and his Dutch, Belgian and Danish contemporaries.

Arthur Boyd's potent expressionist paintings of cripples and eccentrics from the war years (*Lovers on a bench* 1943 and *The gargoyles* 1944) are very like Constant's fiercest CoBrA images, or those inspired by the war, such as *De brand* and *Gevalen fietser*, painted in 1950, though Boyd and Constant never met and were unlikely to have known of one another's work. Indeed Constant's imagery (and that of other CoBrA artists) brings to mind the early work of a number of the Melbourne Antipodeans apart from Boyd – Sidney Nolan, John Perceval and Albert Tucker. Edgar Fernhout's late paintings may remind some of the late phase of Ralph Balson's work; to others Karel Appel's *Paysage à la tête noire* 1959 may seem akin to recent paintings by Kevin Connor. Similarly, it is interesting to consider Elwyn Lynn's work with Jaap Wagemaker's in mind or the works of Ian Fairweather and Tony Tuckson with Bram van Velde's.

## The exhibition

Viewers to this exhibition may notice other similarities between Dutch and Australian artists.

Too often it is the activity of artists working in London, Paris and New York that takes precedence in Australia. When faced with the familiar attractions of nations with bigger populations, smaller countries like the Netherlands tend to be overlooked here. However, what at first appears to be unknown or foreign, need not be so. Australians often have to rely on secondary sources – the written word (books, art magazines), film/video – to access European art. Language may also be a barrier to those who rely on the English language alone in seeking answers to their enquiries.

This exhibition has been curated for an Australian audience to provide a rare first-hand introduction to the work of 15 important post-war Dutch artists. Furthermore, it provides a pathway between Dutch and Australian experience and encourages a re-consideration of our connection with European art and culture. Each of the artists is representative of the most telling features of new Dutch art after the Second World War and beyond. A closer look at the art of the Netherlands from a time when Australian art was also compelling will not just help us to arrive at a fuller appreciation of a rich culture with a substantial post-war migrant population in Australia, but also cast fresh light on our own.

Adapted from curator Hendrik Kolenberg's introduction to the exhibition catalogue.

### Notes

1 All quotes from Constant's 'Manifesto' are from the English translation by Leonard Bright in Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: an international movement in art after the Second World War*, Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona 1987, pp 29–31

2 Stokvis 1987, pp 29–31

3 Stokvis 1987, p 30

4 Jan Vrijman, 'Appel rot ver van de stam', *Vrij Nederland*, 29 Jan 1955

5 Peter Hofman, *De jonge Lucebert*, De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam 2004, p 157

## Intensely Dutch artists

Karel Appel 1921–2006

Gerrit Benner 1897–1981

Bram Bogart b1921

Constant 1920–2005

Corneille b1922

Edgar Fernhout 1912–74

Willem de Kooning 1904–97

Theo Kuijpers b1939

Lucebert 1924–94

Jaap Nanninga 1904–62

Wim Oepts 1904–88

Jan Riske b1932

Jan J Schoonhoven 1914–94

Bram van Velde 1895–1981

Jaap Wagemaker 1906–72



Constant

**L'animal sorcier (The animal sorcerer) 1949**

oil on canvas, 110 x 85 cm

Collection: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

© Constant/Pictoright. Licensed by Viscopy, 2009

Constant

**L'animal sorcier (The animal sorcerer) 1949**

oil on canvas, 110 x 85 cm

Collection: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

© Constant/Pictoright. Licensed by Viscopy, 2009

## Related poem

### Goede morgen haan (excerpt)

Snel! een vredespijp  
voor het te laat is!

Een Indiaan is een aardige heer.  
hij heeft veel jaren jeugd in  
zijn maag, maar zijn wigwam  
sprong uit zijn prairie de stad  
in. En wie van de stad is  
kijkt uit...

Kijk uit in de parken  
verveling  
wat bleef er over?

Het hart klopt nog wel, klopt  
niettegenstaande de mist, laag  
hangende mist, maar wat  
bleef er over?

Een hand die mag  
schrijven  
kuchende  
l  
e  
in de kamer van de t  
t  
e  
kubus- r  
beschaving- s  
kubus

wordt gij **OVERVALLEN** eens.  
uit het buffet wuiven veren  
de zilverbuks schiet de vredespijp  
**STUKKEN.**  
gebroken de hopende vrede

de medicijnman verdort al.

© Gerrit Kouwenaar

### Good morning cock

Quick! A peacepipe  
Before it's too late!

The Indian is a pleasant fellow.  
He has many years of youth under  
his belt, but his tepee jumped  
from the prairie into the city.  
And he who is of the city  
looks out...

Look out in the parks  
boredom  
and what remains?

The heart still beats, beats  
despite the mist, low-  
hanging mist, but what  
remains?

A hand that can  
write  
coughing  
l  
e  
in the room of the t  
t  
e  
cube- r  
civilization s  
cube

you are **AMBUSHED** into consensus.  
feathers wave from the buffet  
the silver-rifle shoots the peacepipe to  
**SHARDS.**  
the anticipated peace has been broken

the medicineman is already withering.



Karel Appel  
**Ontmoeting (Encounter)** 1951

oil on canvas, 130 x 97.5 cm  
Collection: Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (on loan to Centraal Museum,  
Utrecht) © Karel Appel Foundation/Van Lennep Producties, Amsterdam

Karel Appel

## Ontmoeting (Encounter) 1951

oil on canvas, 130 x 97.5 cm

Collection: Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (on loan to Centraal Museum, Utrecht) © Karel Appel Foundation/Van Lennep Producties, Amsterdam

## Related poem

### Hongerwinter

Ik wou dat ik een vogel was  
en ze vlogen over de akkers  
waar de boer niet zaaide  
het ploegende paard niet was  
de mensen zuchtend in kampen zaten  
maar de vogels vlogen vrij

Ik wou dat ik een vogel was  
niet het konijn dat ik aansprak  
om de honger te stillen

Toen de mensen uniformen aantrokken  
en geen mensen meer waren  
en geen gezichten meer hadden  
vlogen de vogels vrij  
de kraai (niet het konijn) de merel  
ik wou dat ik een vogel was.

### Karel Appel 1945

© Karel Appel Foundation, courtesy of Meulenhoff, Amsterdam

### The hunger winter

I wish I were a bird  
and flew with them above the fields  
where no farmers sowed  
and no horses ploughed  
and the people sighed in the camps  
while the birds flew free

I wish I were a bird  
and not the rabbit I waylaid  
to ease my hunger

when the people put on their uniforms  
they were no longer people  
they no longer had faces  
but the birds flew free  
the crow and the blackbird (but not the rabbit)  
I wish I were a bird



Lucebert

**Dierentemmer (Animal tamer) 1959**

oil on canvas, 88 x 128.5 cm

Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam © the estate of the artist

Lucebert

**Dierentemmer (Animal tamer)** 1959

oil on canvas, 88 x 128.5 cm

Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam © the estate of the artist

## Related poem

ik draai een kleine revolutie af  
ik draai een kleine mooie revolutie af  
ik ben niet langer van land  
ik ben weer water  
ik draag schuimende koppen op mijn hoofd  
ik draag schietende schimmen in mijn hoofd  
op mijn rug rust een zeemeermin  
op mijn rug rust de wind  
de wind en de zeemeermin zingen  
de schuimende koppen ruisen  
de schietende schimmen vallen

ik draai een kleine mooie ritselende revolutie af  
en ik val en ik ruis en ik zing

i spin a little revolution round  
i spin a little pretty revolution round  
i am no longer of the land  
i am water again  
i carry foaming breakers on my head  
i carry shooting shadows in my head  
on my back rests a mermaid  
on my back rests the wind  
the wind and the mermaid sing  
the foaming breakers rustle  
the shooting shadows fall

i spin a little pretty rustling revolution round  
and i fall and i rustle and i sing

**Lucebert**

© Lucebert, courtesy De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam

# ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

## Constant

'Our art is the art of a revolutionary period ... and the herald of a new era ... it is the expression of a life force that is all the stronger for being resisted, and of considerable psychological significance in the struggle to establish a new society.'

Constant, 1948 <sup>2</sup>

- Identify the various elements in *L'animal sorcier* (The animal sorcerer). List the range of colours you can see. Describe the mood of *L'animal sorcier*. How does the painting make you feel? Analyse the use of personal imaginary developed by Constant in this work. Explore occult references in this painting. What type of sorcery is involved? Invent a story to accompany this work. Develop it into a creative writing piece and create a series of drawings to illustrate the narrative.
- Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys was the spokesman and theorist for the group of artists known as the Dutch Experimentele Groep (Experimental Group), which eventually became CoBrA. In his 1948 manifesto, Constant proclaimed the necessity of 'experimental art', stating: The creative act is more important than that which it creates.<sup>3</sup> Reflect on the process of an expressive, uninhibited and experimental approach to art-making. Discuss how the CoBrA artists celebrated a subjective approach to the art-making process and responded to the world around them. Consider the CoBrA artists' attitude to the finished art object. Discuss how events in post-war Europe and changes in technology affected the role of art and the practice of artists.
- Many of Constant's paintings were characterised by a brutal painterliness and anguished subject matter, as in *L'animal sorcier* and *De brand*, inspired by his memories of the war. Research the experiences of Dutch artists during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Why do you think artists were required to register with the Nazi *Kultuurkamer* (Chamber of Culture) in order to purchase materials, sell or exhibit? Contemplate the impact of censorship and suppression on artists during this period. Survey the *Intensely Dutch* exhibition and identify what the Nazi regime may have found offensive in the work of avant-garde artists. Imagine how the audience of the day received these works.
- Why did many innovative abstract artists leave the Netherlands after the Second World War? Discuss the significance of Paris in the art world during the post-war years. Research the formation of the CoBrA group. Investigate the artist Christian Dotremont, and explore what he meant by his distaste for the over-interpretive and theorising about art. Compare and contrast the objectives and artworks exhibited by surrealist and CoBrA artists.

## Karel Appel

'I paint, I mess about a bit ... I put it on particularly thick just now, I smack the paint on with brushes and spatulas, and my bare hands, I sometimes throw on whole pots...'

Karel Appel, 1955 <sup>4</sup>

- Observe how the composition of *Ontmoeting* (Encounter) occupies the whole canvas. Would the impact of this work have been the same if the animals were surrounded by space? Note the vibrant colours and brushstrokes. Imagine the size of the brushes used and the movements the artist made across the canvas to create this work. Consider what birds symbolise. Find other images of birds. Has Appel realistically depicted a bird? Describe the style he has worked in. Draw your own bird using this style. Create a history for your bird.
- Read Appel's poem *Hongerwinter* (The hunger winter). Examine its symbolism. What images does it prompt? Use mixed media to make an artwork inspired by the poem. Compare your work with Appel's *Ontmoeting*. Discuss the CoBrA artists' practice of combining the process of writing and creating artworks. Explore the *Intensely Dutch* exhibition by looking at the artworks and reading the accompanying poetry. As a group, discuss your experiences of the exhibition.
- Survey the exhibition. Compile a list of descriptive words for the range of artworks. Identify and compare the styles and techniques of the artists. Discuss the qualities these artists have in common. In the exhibition catalogue, the curator writes that the CoBrA artists 'admired and emulated child art, folk art, the art of the untutored and mentally unstable, as well as art from Africa, New Guinea and Alaska'. Research these types of art and evaluate their influence on Appel and the CoBrA artists. The CoBrA artists also admired the 20th-century masters Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee and Joan Miró. Research the practice of these artists and discuss the elements emulated by the CoBrA artists.
- Appel was an uncompromisingly figurative painter. He believed that pictorial solutions had to be found and resolved in the manipulation of his chosen material – paint, which he mixed with 17th-century stand oil, damar varnish and raw eggs – and not from any pre-conceived image or formula. Research Appel's career. Examine his transition from 'outsider' artist in the 1940s to a state-sponsored artist in the late 1960s and '70s.

## Lucebert

'I permit myself much freedom, in choice of words and grammar.'

Lucebert <sup>5</sup>

- Identify the animals in *Dierentemmer* (Animal tamer). Examine the formal qualities of the work. Observe the layering of drawing upon drawing. Discuss the impact of this layering of images. Contemplate the significance of the title. Compare the black line work in this painting to his pen-and-ink drawings *Oerolifant* (Ancient elephant) and *Hintergedanke* (Ulterior motive).
- Many of the painters associated with the Experimentele Groep wrote, and several of the poets drew and painted. Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk, known as Lucebert, illustrated his own work and that of fellow writers with his drawings. Read his poem *I spin a little revolution round ...* and discuss the ideas within it. Use the poem as the basis for a semi-abstract painting in the style of Lucebert.
- Lucebert admired the work of the French artist Jean Dubuffet, as did many CoBrA artists. Research Dubuffet's art practice and examine the innovative qualities that impressed Lucebert. Compare and contrast the works of these two artists.
- Animals, real and imaginary, were generally important in CoBrA iconography. Associations of freedom, independence and sheer enjoyment in the otherness of animals, rather than any suggestion of anthropomorphism, prompted the attraction to animal imagery. Select an animal as a metaphor for an idea. Create a series of drawings within a limited timeframe. Choose the strongest pieces and develop them into mixed-media artworks. Build up the texture by using collage materials and then working into the composition with black ink. Title and exhibit your finished works.
- *Intensely Dutch* has been put together in order to show art that is not well known here, to offer something unfamiliar from a time that remains within reach, and from a people who have many representatives within the Australian community. Contemplate the role of the museum and discuss why it is important to balance an exhibition program with blockbuster shows and exhibitions that broaden the audience's experiences with local and international art.
- Read the press release for the *Intensely Dutch* exhibition in the Press section of the Gallery's website ([www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media)). Locate an article or review on the exhibition. Write a critical review of the exhibition, highlighting your favourite artist.
- In the exhibition catalogue, the curator describes CoBrA as an ambitious, raw and vibrant new international art movement from three of the smallest European nations, upstaging, if only briefly the dominance of the French avant-garde, which CoBrA artists felt was given to tedious theorising. Create a timeline mapping modern art movements. Discuss the reasons why the periods after both the First and Second World Wars were so vibrant with experimentation. What is meant by the term avant-garde? Research how CoBrA, as an avant-garde group, responded to events and ideas that were influencing post-war Europe.

## Collection connections

A selection of related artists and their work in the Art Gallery of NSW's collection.

### INTENSELY DUTCH ARTISTS

**Jan Riske** b1932

*Coding graph 1* 1990

*Coding graph II* 1990

**Willem de Kooning** 1904–97

*Minnie mouse* 1971

### ARTISTS RELATED TO THE THEME OF IMAGE AND WORD

Australian

**Brett Whiteley** 1939–92

*Remembering Lao Tse (Shaving off a second)* 1967

**Imants Tillers** b1950

*Monaro* 1998

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

**Richard Bell** b1953

*Devine inspiration* 1993

**rea** b1962

*Highly Coloured: My Life Is Coloured By My Colour* 1994

European

**Anselm Kiefer** b1945

*Von den Verlorenen gerührt, die der Glaube nicht trug, erwachen die Trommeln im Fluss* 2004

**Joseph Beuys** 1921–86

*Output 8* from the portfolio *Output 1978* 1972–78

Asian

**Wu Changshuo** 1844–1927

*Loquats* 1918

**Otagaki Rengrtsu** 1791–1875

Calligraphy (poem)

Contemporary

**Ian Burn** 1939–93

*'Value added' landscape no 11* 1993

**Susan Norrie** b1953

*Model seven* from the series *Room for error* 1993

**Joseph Kosuth** b1945

*One and three tables* 1965

Photography

**Simryn Gill** b1959

*Forest* 1996–98

**Duane Michals** b1932

*The pleasures of the glove* 1974 (printed later)

## Sources and further reading

Exhibition catalogue: Hendrik Kolenberg, *Intensely Dutch: image, abstraction and the word, post-war and beyond*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney 2009

Rudi H Fuchs, *Dutch painting*, Thames & Hudson, London 1978

Ludo van Harlem, *CoBrA: the colour of freedom: the Schiedam Collection*, Stedelijk Museum/Nai, Rotterdam 2006

Kees E Schuurman, *Trends in Dutch painting since Van Gogh*, exhibition catalogue, Gemeentemuseum, Hague 1961

Peter Shield (ed), *Cobra: Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London 2003

Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: the last avant-garde movement of the 20th century*, Lund Humphries, Hampshire 2004 (condensed English version of *Cobra: de weg naar spontaniteit* 2001)

Film

*The reality of Karel Appel*, 35mm film, 1961, 15 mins, director Jan Vrijman, music by Dizzy Gillespie and Karel Appel

Websites

Cobra Museum  
[www.cobra-museum.nl](http://www.cobra-museum.nl)

Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris  
[www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

Gemeentemuseum  
[www.gemeentemuseum.nl](http://www.gemeentemuseum.nl)

Jaski Art Gallery  
[www.jaski.nl](http://www.jaski.nl)

Stedelijk Museum  
[www.stedelijkindestad.nl](http://www.stedelijkindestad.nl)

# SUPPLEMENT

# DA VINCI PROJECT

## TEACHERS NOTE

This Da Vinci Project supplement has been written to highlight key artworks, ideas and activities for students with a disability and for gifted and talented students, to be used in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition *Intensely Dutch: image, abstraction and the word, post-war and beyond*. This resource has been designed to complement the issues for consideration in these *Intensely Dutch* education notes, which will also be of value to Da Vinci Project education audiences.

## STARTING WITH ART

### OVERVIEW

The *Looking and Making* activities in this section are specifically designed for K-6 and 7–12 students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, and include discussion, art-making, role-play and the use of sensory materials.

The *Pre-visit* and *Post-visit* activities aim to provide students with pre-exhibition familiarity and post-exhibition reinforcement to support understandings of, and engagements with, the artworks. *In the exhibition* activities aim to link classroom investigations to the original art objects on display within the exhibition.

This concrete and sensory approach to the looking at and the making of artworks can offer something to students of all ages and abilities and as such teachers of all students may find relevant ideas in these activities.

## HOT ART (Higher order thinking skills)

### OVERVIEW

The *Investigation, writing and research* activities in this section are specifically designed for Stage 3 and Stage 4 gifted and talented students and support the development of meta-cognition through critical thinking, problem solving, the generation of ideas and evaluation.

The *Pre-visit* activities aim to provide teachers and students with a greater understanding of the artists and artworks in their historical and cultural context prior to the exhibition experience. *Post-visit* activities will enable students to synthesise their knowledge, and reinforce the experience of the exhibition and their understanding of art, history and literature and Dutch post-war culture.

### PRE-VISIT

Stages 3 & 4 Visual Art/English/HSIE

CoBrA background research

*‘Our art is the art of a **revolutionary period** ... and the **herald** of a new **era** ... it is the **expression** of a **life force** that is all the stronger for being **resisted**, and of considerable **psychological significance** in the struggle to **establish a new society**. ... a painting is not a **composition** of colour and line but an animal, a night, a scream, a human being, or all of these things together.’*

- **Research** each of the **coloured** key words and terms in this excerpt from Constant’s manifesto and make notes. **Re-write** the excerpt in your own words. **Write** your own manifesto about something of importance to you.
- **Research** the CoBrA art movement. **Select** a CoBrA artist or poet (each student should select a different one). **Create** a five-minute presentation on their work, including images or poetry, and **present** it to the class creatively. **Impersonate** your artist or poet through costume or dramatic interpretation. **Design** posters to advertise your presentations, and display them around your school.

Constant

**L'animal sorcier (The animal sorcerer)** 1949

See pages 5 & 6 for artwork and related poem

## STARTING WITH ART

Looking and making activities

### PRE-VISIT

- What is a sorcerer? Where do you think the sorcerer is in this painting? If you were a sorcerer, what type of magic would you create? **Draw** a picture of yourself as a sorcerer.
- What magical powers do you wish you had? **Discuss** these powers in class. **Draw** a picture of yourself with these magical powers.
- Animals were very important in Constant's art. **Find** other images of his work and compare them. **Talk** about the way Constant worked – from his imagination and in a child-like style. Do you like these images? **Explain** your answer.

### IN THE EXHIBITION

- **List** the shapes and colours you can see in this painting. **Count** all the eyes you can see. What animals can you find in this work? How many ladder-like shapes can you see? Do you think the animals and shapes are floating in the painting?
- Is this a quiet or loud painting? **Imagine** what sounds you would hear if you were to float into the painting.
- **Walk** around the exhibition and find your favourite artwork. **Explain** why you like this work to your classmate.

### POST-VISIT

- **Find** and **read** stories about magical animals, such as dragons or unicorns. **Talk** about the special qualities these animals have.
- **Invent** your own magical animal. Does it have legs, and if so, how many? Does it have fur, scales or feathers? **Think** about the special qualities your magical animal has. **Create** a series of drawings using oil pastels and watercolour based on your magical animal. **Choose** colours and textures that you think will suit it. **Use** toothpicks to scratch into the oil pastel to create the texture. **Write** a poem in class to go with your artwork.

## HOT ART

Investigation, writing and research activities

### PRE-VISIT

Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys was born in Amsterdam on 21 July 1920. As a boy he was interested in all the arts, especially poetry and music. He spent 1938 at the Kunstnijverheidschool (School for Arts and Crafts) in Amsterdam, where he learned **techniques** which would prove useful to him later, especially for his *New Babylon* project. Germany **occupied** the Netherlands from 1940 to 1945 and bombed Dutch cities. Constant was deeply affected by the destruction, and particularly by the occupation of his native city. Like many other artists he went into hiding in 1943 after refusing to **subscribe** to the **Nazi Kultuurkamer** (Chamber of Culture) and, during the following years, suffered hardship, hunger and lack of art materials. **Enforced isolation** enabled him to read great **philosophers** including **Plato**, **Descartes**, **Hegel** and especially **Marx**, whose ideas left an **indelible** mark on his thinking about art, **architecture** and **urbanism**. He was an **expressive** painter with a colourful **palette**. His early portraits and still lifes were soon replaced by subjects that reflected a private child-like world full of imaginary and playful creatures. Animals remained important throughout his life – he usually had a pet dog or monkey. After the war, Constant lived in Amsterdam opposite the zoo for 30 years. In November 1948, CoBrA was founded in Paris by Danish, Belgian and Dutch artists including Karel Appel, Corneille and Constant. Many of Constant's paintings were characterised by a brutal painterliness and anguished subject matter, as in *L'animal sorcier* and *De brand*, inspired by his memories of the war.

- **Research** the coloured words in this edited extract from the exhibition catalogue. **Discuss** some of the influences on the artist during the war. **Explain** how the meaning of Gerrit Kouwenaar's poem *Goede morgen haan* (Good morning cock) relates to Constant's painting *L'animal sorcier* (The animal sorcerer). **Draw** a picture that represents animals and magic.

### IN THE EXHIBITION

- **Locate** Constant's *L'animal sorcier* in the exhibition and **draw** a small sketch of the work into your sketchbook. **Write** how you feel standing in front of the original painting. **Discuss** this with your class. **Find** other works by Constant in the exhibition. **Compare** the different styles that he uses in each work.

### POST-VISIT

- **Research** concrete poetry then read the excerpt from Kouwenaar's poem while viewing the image of Constant's painting. **Describe** the effect of the patterns and spaces used in the format of the poem. **Write** a poem using the techniques found in concrete poetry. **Display** your poems, and the drawings made before your visit to the exhibition, in the classroom.

Karel Appel

**Ontmoeting (Encounter)** 1951

See pages 7 & 8 for artwork and related poem

## STARTING WITH ART

Looking and making activities

### PRE-VISIT

- **Imagine** you saw a bird and rabbit in the garden. **Invent** a name for each of them. What do you think they eat? What sort of sounds would they make? Do the birds in Appel's painting seem friendly or frightening? **Explain** why.
- **Talk** about what it would feel like to be a bird. How would it feel like to fly through the sky? Draw a picture of your local area from a bird's eye view.
- **Read** the poem *Hongerwinter* (The hunger winter) by Karel Appel. **Think** about the idea of being 'free as a bird'. Have you ever been very cold and hungry? **Talk** about how it felt. **Talk** about the poem and reflect on why the artist would rather be a bird than a rabbit. What would you choose to be and why?

### IN THE EXHIBITION

- **Describe** what you can see in Appel's painting. **List** the colours the artist has used. How does this work make you feel? Would this work feel different if these animals were in a cage?
- Do the bird and rabbit look like they are playing? **Invent** a conversation between the two animals, describing why each would prefer to be the other.
- Do you think this painting looks like a child's painting? **Explain** your answer.

### POST-VISIT

- **Invent** your own imaginary bird. **List** the special features it has. Use textured pieces of paper, fabric or newspaper to create a collage of your bird. **Use** a black marker pen to define the outline of your bird. **Display** the works in class.
- **Talk** about visiting the exhibition in class. **Think** about the artwork you liked the most. **Tell** your group why you enjoyed your favourite work. **Make** a painting of the work from memory. **Write** a story about visiting the exhibition.

## HOT ART

Investigation, writing and research activities

### PRE-VISIT

Karel Appel was born 25 April 1921 in the **Dapperstraat, Amsterdam**. In 1928 his family moved to a house opposite the **Tropenmuseum (Ethnographic Museum)** in Amsterdam.

As a boy, Appel enjoyed drawing and painting, and his uncle Karel Chevalier, a talented **amateur** painter, gave him an easel and paint-box when he was 15. They painted together and both went to the realist painter Jozef Verheijen for tuition. In 1936 Karel left school to work in his father's barber shop, but left home at 18 determined to be an artist. During the German occupation of the **Netherlands** in the Second World War, Appel lived in an attic room that served as his studio in the old centre of Amsterdam. He admired **Vincent van Gogh** most of all and tried to emulate his style of drawing and painting. At the National Academy of Fine Arts, Amsterdam, Appel met **Corneille** and they formed a close bond, attracted to the work of **Picasso, Matisse, Chaim Soutine** and **Max Beckmann**. Corneille wrote poetry; as did Appel, in private at first (his favourite poet was **Walt Whitman**). In the final year of the **Second World War**, to avoid being sent to Germany, Appel went into hiding, only returning to Amsterdam after the war.

- **Find** out the meaning of the words coloured in this edited extract from the exhibition catalogue. **Choose** one of the artists that influenced Appel and write a paragraph about them. **Read** Appel's poem *Hongerwinter* (The hunger winter).

### IN THE EXHIBITION

- **Locate** *Ontmoeting* (Encounter) in the exhibition. **Read** Appel's poem again with your class. **Discuss** what you think the poem means and whether you can see a link between the poem and the painting. **Discuss** whether you think artists should be both painters and poets. **Write** your own poem to accompany the painting *Encounter*.
- **View** other artworks in the exhibition by Appel. **Choose** one work that inspires you, and write a short poem about it.

### POST-VISIT

- **Write** a poem about the Second World War using animals to portray emotions of fear, sadness and greed. **Create** a painting or drawing using the imagery in your poem. **Exhibit** the works in your classroom.

Lucebert

**Dierentemmer (Animal tamer)** 1959

See pages 9 & 10 for artwork and related poem

## STARTING WITH ART

Looking and making activities

### PRE-VISIT

- What types of animals can you see in this painting? What do you think they are doing? Do they look wild? **Make up** a story about this painting.
- What types of animals need to be tamed? **Talk** about how you might tame an animal. **Imagine** and draw yourself taming the animals in this painting. Would you be excited or afraid?

### IN THE EXHIBITION

- **List** all the colours you can see in *Dierentemmer* (Animal tamer). If you were going to create a similar painting, what colours would you use? **Compare** the colours in this painting to those in Karel Appel's *Ontmoeting* (encounter). Which do you prefer and why?
- **Look** closely at the surface of the painting. Is it smooth or rough? What do you think Lucebert has mixed into the paint? What size of brush do you think he used? What tools do you think he used to make the marks on this painting? **Compare** the surface of this painting to Constant's *L'animal sorcier* (The animal sorcerer).
- **Compare** *Dierentemmer* to other works by Lucebert. **Talk** about how the works are similar and different.

### POST-VISIT

- **Imagine** how Lucebert made this painting. **List** the steps he might have taken.
- **Make** a collage using newspaper and coloured paper then use bold lines of black to draw into your work over and over again to develop a layered effect.
- **Listen** to different types of music. **Talk** about how the different pieces make you feel. **Experiment** with printmaking techniques such as monoprinting to create quick, exciting and energetic abstract works about an animal you have discussed

## HOT ART

Investigation, writing and research activities

### PRE-VISIT

Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk was born on 15 September 1924 in Amsterdam and was given the same name as his father, a house-painter and signwriter. Lucebert and his family lived in the poor but colourful **Jordaan** district of Amsterdam, where in 1934 he witnessed a rowdy demonstration against the reduction of the unemployment benefit that left a strong impression on him. When his family moved to another part of Amsterdam, he continued to play in the Jordaan with friends, including Johan van der Zant (later the poet **Hans Andreas**). Lucebert was introduced to poetry at school by his German language teacher and to drawing by the musician Johan van Hell. In 1939 Lucebert left school to help his father with painting and wall papering. Lucebert's love of **spontaneously** drawing on walls was soon noticed and he was encouraged to attend the Kunstnijverheidschool (School for Arts and Crafts) in Amsterdam. The new director, Mart Stam, architect/furniture designer and former teacher at the **Bauhaus**, greatly impressed him and opened his eyes to **dada** and **surrealism**. But after only four months, his father needed him to work in order to contribute to the family's living costs. Lucebert subsequently worked at a variety of jobs, but remained close to his school friends, with whom he shared an interest in art, poetry and **philosophy**.

- **Find** out the meaning of the words coloured in this edited extract from the exhibition catalogue. **Research** the life of Lucebert after 1939. **Compare** the three images by Appel, Constant and Lucebert in these education notes and the three corresponding poems in a PowerPoint presentation. **Discuss** the use of animals in all three images and why the artists used them to express their feelings.

### IN THE EXHIBITION

- **Locate** Lucebert's *Dierentemmer* (Animal tamer). **Look** carefully at the black outline in the painting. **Discuss** what you can see, including the layers of paint and colour and texture in the work.
- **Read** aloud Lucebert's poem *I spin a little revolution round ...*, and talk about its meaning of. **Locate** other works by Lucebert in the exhibition. **Choose** one and write your own poem based on it. **Read** your poems to each other in the exhibition.

### POST-VISIT

- Lucebert was a painter and a poet as were many of the artists in the *Intensely Dutch* exhibition. Organise an artist and poet day at your school to celebrate students' various talents. Invite students to dress up as artists and poets and create artworks and poems for exhibition and performance within the school. Teachers may like to participate too.

During the German occupation of the Netherlands in the Second World War, Karel Appel lived in an attic room that served as his studio in the old centre of Amsterdam. Lucebert wrote this poem for his friend Karel Appel which references the artists experience during the war and his time in the attic.

This poem can be used as a HOT art extension resource suitable for stage 4 students.

### Tantrum in the attic and Enquiring children (Drift op zolder en Vragende kinderen)

the gold T-shirt cost millions  
and the bronze despot's head robbed even

God of his beckoning bell  
but all this is over now  
a wig is just as expensive as real hair

and it is evening, you shut up shop, lower  
the shutters and stare a moment in a puddle  
on the footpath: 'what a magnificent white animal'  
and then you turn off the lights,  
not that above the mirror  
and above the fruitbowl,  
fruit which has lain there for centuries  
the apple of Paris,  
the grapes of Bacchus, the hard nuts  
of Loki and you scrape the fur from your tongue,  
think of tomorrow, knock on unpainted wood  
and finally remove the iron in your head from the fire

the clock travels round  
centuries completed themselves, dog after dog  
soiled the booted foot of the cross  
the mouse bore the stone tail of the mountain  
and everyone went to live in a teacosy  
between lukewarm radiovalves

but you moved to the attic,  
nice and close to the sun  
and the light there just not quite regulated  
by the 1001 national still life painters  
you built a tree of soapwhisks  
for a lovely din previously  
only spread by those visionary seabirds  
the Irish love to see  
and you built yourself a road of garbage  
the road the children take  
at the hands of ragged fairies

so:

between boxes of enough paperclips  
to merge all the shares of Montgomery Ward  
with those of Bethlehem Steel  
between sackfuls of mouthorgans on which to play  
everything from bustle to bother  
between loads of pocketmirrors soapbubbles  
bakingpowder  
corks skimmers umbrellas crayons knives  
toycars gardensprinklers pipecleaners newtonrings  
academic busts prepared intestines lemonadestraws  
you extract from life all the intertwined  
and all the clashing colours

and now you know what red does  
red loves to walk in the green grass  
now you know what yellow knows  
that the sun shines because no-one really wants to die  
and of blue: that skyblue looks black  
to a child given nothing

#### Lucebert for Karel Appel

© Lucebert, courtesy De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam

## Exhibition visit and program bookings

Bookings are essential for primary and secondary school and access and gifted and talented programs.

For further exhibition and program information for *Intensely Dutch*:

Years K–6 [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/k6/exh](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/k6/exh)

Years 7–12 [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/712/exh](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/712/exh)

For bookings, contact the Public Programs Department, or the coordinator, access programs or coordinator, gifted and talented programs, depending on your needs:

tel: (02) 9225 1740

fax: (02) 9225 1842

email: [pp@ag.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pp@ag.nsw.gov.au)

For further information about Da Vinci programs and other access and gifted and talented programs offered year-round:

Years K–6 [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/k6/access](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/k6/access)

Years 7–12 [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/712/access](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/712/access)

## EXHIBITION SPONSORS

Principal sponsor ING

Cultural program supported by Royal Netherlands Embassy, Canberra; Netherlands Consulate-General, Sydney

Film series supported by Hulsbosch Strategy and Design

Access program partner Clayton Utz

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Coordinated and written by Danielle Gullotta, Sherryl Ryan, Tristan Sharp and Leeanne Carr, Public Programs Department, Art Gallery of NSW

Design Mark Boxshall

Editing Kirsten Tilgals

Poems translated into English by Cornelis Vleeskens

All works © the artist unless otherwise indicated

Cover: Constant, *L'animal sorcier* (The animal sorcerer) 1949 (detail)  
Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris  
© Constant/Pictoright. Licensed by Viscopy, 2009

Published to coincide with the exhibition

*Intensely Dutch: image, abstraction and the word, post-war and beyond*  
Art Gallery of NSW

5 June – 23 August 2009

Produced by the Public Programs Department  
Art Gallery of NSW

Art Gallery Road, The Domain, Sydney 2000 Australia  
[pp@ag.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pp@ag.nsw.gov.au)

© 2009 Art Gallery of New South Wales  
[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au)