

The Arrangement of the *Nationale Konst-Gallery* in 1800, the Year of its Opening

The Nationale Konst-Gallery, the first public museum in the Netherlands and precursor of the Rijksmuseum, was opened in the Huis ten Bosch near The Hague in May 1800 (Fig. 1). The inventories and draft catalogues of the years 1800-9 published by Moes and Van Biema (Note 1), reveal the composition of the collection and the first additions made to it, but little has so far been said about the fundamental aspect of display, which reveals the intention behind a museum. The reconstruction of past presentations is an indispensable part of research into museum history and this article constitutes an attempt to fill this gap in respect of the Nationale Konst-Gallery. In the complete list given here of the paintings and historical objects shown there, the data regarding their provenances have been revised and links made with the recent publications of the Orange inventories and the latest catalogues of the Rijksmuseum and the Mauritshuis.

The collection of the Nationale Konst-Gallery primarily consisted of the remains of the Stadholder's collections. In 1795 the French had removed William V's art collection to Paris (Note 2) and a start was made in that year on selling off what remained in the royal houses up and down the country. A stop was finally put to this in 1798 when the Stadholder's domains came under the control of I. J. A. Gogel, Financial Agent of the Batavian Republic (Fig. 2), who also seems to have taken the initiative of founding the museum in the Huis ten Bosch. In January 1799 C. S. Roos (Fig. 3) was appointed director and after the opening J. G. Waldorp (Fig. 4) was made superintendent.

Waldorp made six plans showing the arrangement of the various rooms, which can be dated to the winter of 1800-1, since they contain paintings that were only bought on 10 November 1800 and he was paid for them on 9 February 1801. In September 1801 he was paid for two more plans, of the corridor and the entire museum complex. Moes and Van Biema used these plans (Figs. I-VIII) to compile a list which they refer to as the Waldorp catalogue (Note 3) and there also exists a draft catalogue made by Roos in 1801 but never published (Note 4).

The collection comprised around 225 works of art, mainly paintings. The provenances of 60 of the paintings are known for certain, those of 100 more with varying degrees of certainty and those of the remaining 60 not at all.

Some of the paintings acquired a place because of their artistic as well as their historical value, but others were included primarily for historical reasons, notably the 12 paintings of the Batavian Revolt by Otto van Veen from the Chamber of the States-General. These had been bought from the artist in 1613, when they had an obvious symbolic value for the new Republic. In 1699 they were given to William III and in 1713 they were put up for sale, but as no buyer was forthcoming, they were given back to the States-General again. Their symbolic worth obviously came to the fore again with the advent of the Batavian Republic.

The museum also contained some other symbols of national freedom. A few months after the flight of William V, the French presented the Batavian Republic with some national relics from his collection, the Ball of the Union and objects connected with the Beggars and Admiral de Ruyter (Note 5), and these were accorded a place of honour (Figs. 5, 6). The patriotic note further dominated the first purchases for the museum: that in June

1800 of Asselyn's *The Threatened Swan*, which had been turned into an allegory of Johan de Witt (Note 6), those in August 1800 of a portrait of Johan van Oldenbarneveldt and a painting of a sea battle and those in November 1800 of portraits of admirals from the Van Nes family.

In a published description of the museum (printed here in full), which was established on the first floor of the west wing of the *Huis ten Bosch* (Fig. 7), Roos reveals that the aim behind it was the bringing together, conservation and opening to the public of works of art belonging to the State. Further details were recorded later by Cornelis Apostool (Note 9), who succeeded Roos in 1808 and left two accounts of the foundation and earliest history of the museum, written in 1817 and 1834 (Notes 10, 11). In the second of these he mentions a motive that will certainly have played a role in the establishment of the museum, but was only referred to later as one of its principal aims: the offering of an opportunity to practise the art of painting. Right from the start artists were permitted to copy paintings in the museum on payment of a fee, but not until 1807 did Louis Napoleon charge it with an official role in the training of artists (Note 12).

In addition to being an art gallery, the museum was also a pantheon for Batavian heroes from Claudius Civilis to William III – in which there was naturally no place for the 18th-century Stadholders (Note 13). The *Huis ten Bosch* was ideal for this, since the *Oranjezaal* could form part of the museum and, indeed, its apotheosis. The first room with its cabinet, known as the 'Fatherland Room', and the Monuments room were devoted entirely to the national heroes and relics (some of which were later so disregarded as to vanish without trace). The second room was installed as an international room, though it could scarcely lay claim to being such. The third was given over to Dutch painting, but its contents failed to measure up to those of contemporary private collections and the only masters of note represented were Jan Steen and Melchior d'Hondecoeter. The fourth room was devoted mainly to Gerard de Lairesse and the Claudius Civilis series. Finally, some large and also good Flemish paintings were hung in the Antechamber by way of introduction to the *Oranjezaal*.