

## Masonic & Esoteric Heritage (Den Haag, 10/20-21/05)

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Masonic & Esoteric Heritage. A New Perspective for Art and Conservation  
Policies

Conference 20-21 October 2005, Royal Library, Den Haag (The Netherlands)

The renovation of the building of the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij in Amsterdam (1919), carried out to accommodate the Amsterdam Municipal Archive, has stimulated a heated discussion between experts on western esotericism, art history, conservation and cultural heritage. The building was designed by the renowned Dutch architect K.P.C. de Bazel, who was a member of theosophical and masonic organizations. The architectural design, as well as the use of specific materials and decoration, encompasses a rich theosophical symbolism. Should this original symbolism be kept intact or be allowed to be radically altered to suit the needs of the Amsterdam Municipal Archive? The case has highlighted a problem area in current art and heritage policies, that will be addressed at the conference for the first time in an international context.

While it is widely accepted that world religions such as christianity, islam, judaism and hinduism have profoundly influenced art and architecture, it has not been acknowledged that western esoteric currents (such as freemasonry and theosophy) have influenced many celebrated artists and architects in the same way. The traditional approach to western art is based on christian iconography, which does not reflect the much wider range of cultural and religious currents that have shaped western society and art. As a result of this oversight, surviving examples of the material culture of western esoteric currents are not recognized as an integral part of our collective cultural heritage and are insufficiently documented, studied and preserved.

The conference will offer participants an introduction into the rich material culture of western esoteric currents, including 18th-20th century architecture, lodge and temple interiors, ritual and decorative objects, works of art, prints, books, archival and photographic materials.

The study of western esoteric currents and the study of freemasonry have developed into new academic disciplines with chairs at universities in Paris, Sheffield, Amsterdam and Leiden. Recent research has offered important new insights into the influence of these currents on western society, literature and art since the renaissance. These insights have stimulated the call for a change in current art and heritage policies.

Most art historians, conservation specialists and cultural policy makers are unfamiliar with western esotericism, and subsequently are unable to recognize alchemical, rosicrucian, masonic, theosophical, anthroposophical or other esoteric symbolism in a work of art or an architectural design. This can adversely effect art historical interpretations, decisions made during a restoration process, and the outcome of applications for alterations to protected buildings. The renovation of the building of the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij has illustrated the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation between experts in the field of art history, conservation and western esotericism.

The conference will bring these experts together for the first time. Scholars and PhD-students in various academic disciplines will address the relevance of esoteric symbolism to art and the problems affecting esoteric heritage, in order to create an international and interdisciplinary dialogue, facilitate solutions and stimulate research and education. This event will be an eye-opener for anyone interested in art, cultural heritage or western esotericism.

Conference organizers and sponsors

The conference is organized by:

- the OVN, an independent Dutch Foundation for the Advancement of Academic Research into the

History of Freemasonry in the Netherlands, in cooperation with:

- the Sub Dept. History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (University of Amsterdam),
- the Chair for Cultural Heritage, Conservation and Restoration (University of Amsterdam),
- the OSK, the Dutch Postgraduate School for Art History (Onderzoeksschool Kunstgeschiedenis).

Preliminary conference program

Thursday 20-10-2005

09.15-10.00 Registration and coffee

Theme: The Relevance of Western Esotericism to Art:

10.00-10.15 Welcome and introduction

10.15-10.45 prof. dr. Wouter Hanegraaff, Chair for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, Univ. of Amsterdam: 'Western Esotericism and the Status of the Image'.

10.45-11.15 dr. Hendrik Bogdan, researcher Dept. Religious Studies, Univ. of Gotheborg: 'Illustrated Alchemical and Esoteric Manuscripts in the Collection of Gustav Adolph Reuterholm (1756-1813) in Sweden'.

11.15-11.45 Diane Clements, director Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London: 'The English Grand Lodge as Patron of the Arts. The Commission of Architecture and Art for Freemasons Hall (1776) in London'.

11.45-12.05 Questions

12.05-13.30 Lunch break

13.30-14.00 dr. Christopher McIntosh, independent historian and author, Hamburg: 'The Symbol-Strewn Landscape. Esoteric and Initiatic Symbolism in European Gardens in the 18th and 19th Century'.

14.00-14.30 drs. Melanie Öhlenbach, student Comparative Religion, Philipps-Univ. Marburg: 'The influence of Jacob Böhme's theosophical ideas on the "Farbentheorie" by Philip Otto Runge'.

14.30-15.00 dr. Helmut Zander, political scientist, Inst. For Historical studies, Humboldt-Univ. Berlin: 'The First Goetheanum in Dornach by Rudolf Steiner (1913-1922). Understanding Occult Space'.

15.00-15.20 Questions

15.20-15.40 Tea Break

15.40-16.10 dr. Marijo Ariëns, independent art historian, The Hague: 'Alchemical, Kabbalist and Occult Symbolism in the Work of Pablo Picasso and his contemporaries'.

16.10-16.40 dr. Giovanna Costantini, art historian, Dept. of Communications and Visual Arts, Univ. of Michigan-Flint: 'Wall & Pylon: Freemasonry in the Art of Giorgio De Chirico'.

16.40-17.10 dr. Verena Kuni, art historian and media theorist, Inst. for Media Studies Univ. Bazel: 'Entered Apprentices, Master Artists. Tracing Masonic Heritage in the work of Joseph Beuys and Matthew Barney'.

17.10-17.30 Questions

17.30-17.40 Closing remarks

Friday 21-10-2005

09.15-10.00 Registration and coffee

Theme: Attitudes towards Western Esoteric Heritage. Public and Private Policies:

10.00-10.10 Welcome and introduction

10.10-10.40 Erik Westengaard, curator Nationalhistoriske Museum, Frederiksborg / Danske Frimurerordens Museum, Copenhagen: 'Masonic Symbolism in Gardens in Northern Germany and Denmark (1750-1810). Salvaging Public and Private Gardens from Destruction of their Esoteric Content'.

10.40-11.10 dr. Eugène Warmenbol, Egyptologist, Univ. Libre de Bruxelles, '19th Century Masonic Temples in Egyptian Style in Brussels and Antwerp. Shared Responsibilities for Heritage Organizations and Masonic Orders'.

11.10-11.40 dr. Malcolm Davies, independent music historian, The Hague: 'Masonic Musical, Theatrical and Poetical Heritage of the Netherlands. Unexplored Territories in Public and Private archives'.

11.40-12.00 Questions

12.00-13.30 Lunch break

13.30-14.00 drs. Andréa Kroon, art historian and PhD-student, Univ.

Leiden: 'The Material Culture of Freemasonry in the Netherlands in the 18th-20th Century. History, Destruction and Conservation'.

14.00-14.30 dr. Marty Bax, independent art historian, Amsterdam: 'The Building of the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij in Amsterdam by K.P.C. de Bazel. The Conservation and Adaptation of Theosophical Architecture to its Future Utilization by the Amsterdam City Archive'. Theme: The Future of Western Esoteric Heritage. Interdisciplinary Research and Conservation:

14.30-15.00 dr. Andreas Önnersfors, researcher Centre for European Studies, Univ. Lund: '18th Century Membership Records of the Swedish Order of Freemasonry. A Digital Database with 4300 names and Places as a Source for Future Research'.

15.00-15.20 Questions

15.20-15.40 Tea Break

15.40-16.10 prof. dr. Andrew Prescott, director Centre for Research into Freemasonry, Univ. Sheffield: 'Freemasonry as a Part of National Heritage. The Conservation of Esoteric and Fraternal Heritage in Great Britain'.

16.10-16.20 prof. dr. Frans Grijzenhout, Chair for Cultural Heritage, Conservation and Restoration, Univ. Amsterdam / Head of Education, Inst. for Cultural Heritage: 'The Future of Esoteric Heritage. New Perspectives for Art and Heritage Policies'. Introduction to the debate.

16.20-16.50 Questions, followed by a debate amongst speakers and invited experts on 'The

Future of Western Esoteric Heritage'.

16.50-17.00 Closing remarks and presentation of several new projects

For more information and a registration form, please contact:  
info@stichtingovn.nl.

Reference:

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