

# Gallery texts ground floor permanent collection

## The Mesdag Collection

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## Hallway

windowsill

### Vase, 1892

earthenware

Haagsche Plateelbakkerij Rozenburg, The Hague

### Vase, 1889

earthenware

Haagsche Plateelbakkerij Rozenburg, The Hague

## First Gallery

### A distinctive collection

The collection in this museum was assembled by the 19th-century artist Hendrik Willem Mesdag and his wife Sientje. Mesdag was particularly interested in the work of French Barbizon School and Dutch Hague School artists. Their perception of nature corresponded with his own fondness of landscape painting and depictions of everyday reality. Although Barbizon School and Hague School painting was his greatest passion, Mesdag also appreciated and owned work by artists such as Gustave Courbet and Antonio Mancini.

In all of his acquisitions Mesdag seems to have been guided by a keen interest in the technique and painting style of their makers. He had a pronounced preference for sketchy works and studies, as a result of which his collection affords a unique image of this aspect of artistic practice. Mesdag also had a fine eye for unusual objects, with which he decorated his house and this museum. As a prelude to the rest of the museum, several works that typify The Mesdag Collection are on display in this room.

### Interior of the Great or German Synagoge in The Hague, c. 1880-1891

Johannes Bosboom (1817-1891)

oil on panel

Mesdag purchased several very loosely painted unfinished works from Bosboom's estate, including this oil sketch of the Great or German Synagogue (at present the Aqsa Mosque) in the Wagenstraat in The Hague. The sunlight streaming into the place of worship and reflected in the chandelier is particularly skilfully depicted.

### In Groenendaal (near Brussel)

Constant Gabriël (1828-1903)

oil on canvas

Mesdag lived in Brussels between 1866 and 1869, at which time he became acquainted with Constant Gabriël. This is one of the very first paintings Mesdag bought. The highly detailed rendering of this farmyard scene coincided with his own - at the time precise - painting style. Gabriël's bright palette and vivid colour accents, such as the red and blue flowers, later earned him the name of 'colourist of the Hague School'.

### Donkeystand on the beach at Scheveningen, c. 1876

Anton Mauve (1838-1888)

oil on canvas

In the summer, Scheveningen was a tourist attraction for many city dwellers from The Hague and surrounding area. This seaside resort also drew artists, who went there to paint the local scenery. Here Mauve depicted the stand with the donkeys that children could ride for just a few pennies. Mesdag greatly admired Mauve and acquired a total of fourteen paintings and drawings by his colleague.

### **Chalk Cliffs at Yport, 1872**

Camille Corot (1796-1875)

oil on canvas

### **The Calves**

Willem Maris (1844-1910)

oil on canvas

### **Portrait**

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)

oil on canvas

Courbet dedicated this painting to a certain Hippolyte in memory of their friendship. In this portrait he used various shades of green, brown and pink, brushing them freely and loosely onto the canvas. It is characteristic of Mesdag's taste that he had little interest in traditional, stately portraits, preferring more informal likenesses, such as this one.

### **Carapace, n.d.**

tortoise shell

### **Carapace, 19th century**

Japan

### **Egyptian indigo dyers, 1891**

oil on canvas

The American artist John Singer Sargent made this sketch of three indigo dyers during a trip to Egypt in 1891. Rather than choosing exotic scenes, he recorded this old craft, which had a long tradition in Egypt. A critic who saw the painting exhibited a few years later described it as 'briljant and summary work' but insufficiently elaborated. For Mesdag, this sketchlike quality was undoubtedly part of the painting's appeal.

### **View of the Pyrenees, 1871-1874**

oil on panel

This mountain landscape with a stormy sky is a good example of the kind of studies and sketchy paintings that Mesdag collected. It makes the impression of being a study on account of the transparent paint layers in the foreground and the loose brushwork. And even though the colours also look like mere notations in need of further elaboration, Diaz considered such works to be finished.

### **The birthday, 1885**

Antonio Mancini (1852-1930)

oil on canvas

Mesdag greatly admired the unconventional and experimental work of the Italian artist Antonio Mancini, whose benefactor he was for more than twenty years. Mesdag himself titled this painting *The birthday* when he lent it out for an exhibition in 1897. The model is Mancini's nephew Telemaco Ruggeri, who posed frequently for his uncle.

### **Harbour at Vlissingen, c. 1887**

oil on canvas

Mesdag's fascination with sketchy works by his fellow painters, which he eagerly collected, influenced his own style and technique. This is clearly visible in this harbour scene, which Mesdag painted coarsely and loosely on canvas.

## **Tapestry Room**

### **The Tapestry Room**

In addition to paintings and drawings, Mesdag owned an extensive collection of applied art with which he decorated his home and museum. It included a large number of Japanese objects. This was entirely in keeping with the spirit of his time, for Asian applied art was highly sought after in the 19th century.

This room showcases Mesdag's collection of decorative art. Arranged along the walls are Japanese and Chinese vases, bronzes, sacrificial cauldrons and braziers. The walls themselves are covered with 17th-century tapestries from Delft. The two graceful Japanese cranes adorning the windowsills were originally meant to be displayed outdoors. The collection attests to Mesdag's unflinching eye for quality and craftsmanship.

From left to right

#### **Vase, 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware, Japan

#### **Vase 19th century**

bronze, Japan

#### **Flower still life, 1705**

oil on canvas

Windowsill

#### **Pair of vases, second half 19th century**

Makuzu earthenware, Japan

#### **Vase, second half 19th century**

Kyoto Satsuma earthenware

#### **Vase, 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware, Japan

#### **Vase, 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware, Japan

### **Brazier, 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Brass alloy  
Iran

From left to right

### **Vase, 19<sup>th</sup> century**

brass alloy, enamel  
China

### **Altar Vase, 19<sup>th</sup> century**

bronze, Japan

Windowsill

### **Cranes, second half 19<sup>th</sup> century**

bronze, Japan

Mesdag bought these life-size cranes from the E.J. van Wisselingh art dealership in The Hague in 1889. He paid 500 guilders for them – as much as a Hague craftsman could hope to earn in a year at that period. Japanese art, cranes are symbols of longevity. They also symbolize marital happiness, because they usually mate for life.

### **‘Japanese’ vase, 1888**

earthenware

Haagsche Plaatelbakkerij Rozenburg, The Hague

Colenbrander’s designs were inspired by pottery from all parts of the world. At the Rozenburg ceramic factory in The Hague, this type of vase was described as Japanese, because the glaze was related to pottery glazes traditionally used in Japan. In comparison to Colenbrander’s other, livelier designs, the understated decoration of this vase is striking.

### **Peacock, 19<sup>th</sup> century**

brass alloy  
Iran

### **‘Japanese’ vases**

glazed earthenware

Haagsche Plaatelbakkerij Rozenburg, The Hague

From left to right

### **Altar Vase, 19<sup>th</sup> century**

bronze  
Japan

### **Vase, 19<sup>th</sup> century**

brass alloy, enamel  
China

### **Vases, second half 19<sup>th</sup> century**

bronze  
Japan

### **Vase, second half 19th century**

Kyoto Satsuma earthenware

Japan

Depicted on this vase is a figure from Japanese popular literature Endo Morito, who decided to become a monk after accidentally killing the woman he loved. One of his self-imposed trials consisted of spending three weeks beneath an icy waterfall. The depiction is delivered from a woodcut in the book by the famous painter and printmaker Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849).

### **Vase, 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware

Japan

### **Vase, 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware

Japan

### **Dish, c. 1850-1875**

Arita porcelain

Japan

### **Vase, 19th century**

bronze

Japan

### **Vase, 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware

Japan

## **Hallway**

Windowsill

### **Vases, second half 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware

Japan

### **Pair of vases, second half 19th century**

Satsuma earthenware

Japan

## **Gallery on the left**

### **Portrait of Sientje Mesdag- van Houten, 1906**

Jozef Israëls (1824-1911)

oil on canvas

## **Hendrik Willem and Sientje Mesdag**

Hendrik Willem Mesdag was a leading painter of the Hague School. He started out as a businessman, but retired at the age of 35 to devote himself fully to painting.



After training in Oosterbeek and Brussels, Mesdag specialised in marine painting. The gold medal he won at his debut at the Paris Salon in 1870 signalled his artistic breakthrough. His wife, Sientje Mesdag-van Houten, was also an artist; she primarily made landscapes and still lifes.

Hendrik Willem and Sientje Mesdag led an active public life and were pivotal figures in the Hague art world. Mesdag was chairman of the artists' society Pulchri Studio and organised large (group) exhibitions in the Netherlands and abroad. Sientje was also active at Pulchri Studio and was the president of Onze Club (Our Club), a society of women artists.

A visit to the former Mesdag Museum always began in the house next door, in the couple's ateliers. Their own paintings were also included among the works on display in the museum. It was open by appointment on Sunday morning and Mesdag gave guided tours himself.

### **Breakers on the North Sea, 1870**

Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831-1915)

oil on canvas

Mesdag made his artistic debut with this painting in the 1870 Paris Salon, at the time the most prestigious annual exhibition of contemporary art. To everyone's surprise, Mesdag – who had only been active as a painter for four years – won a gold medal and thus international recognition. He framed the congratulatory note he received from one of the jury members, the renowned painter Jean-François Millet.

### **Study for the Panorama of Scheveningen**

oil on canvas

Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831-1915)

This is a preliminary study for the so-called *Mesdag Panorama*, which is still in its original location in the Zeestraat near here. Mesdag first made this scale sketch (1:50) before painting the enormous, true-to-life scene of the Seinpost Dune in Scheveningen.

### **Portrait of Hendrik Willem Mesdag, 1904**

Sientje Mesdag- van Houten (1834-1909)

oil on canvas

### **Sheep's head, n.d.**

Matthijs Maris (1839-1917)

oil on paper

on loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

### **'Peacock' garniture, 1888**

earthenware

Haagsche Plateelbakkerij Rozenburg, The Hague

When Colenbrander's earthenware first came on the market in 1885, its surprising colour combinations and whimsical and stylised natural motifs made quite an impression. Mesdag was one of Colenbrander's first and most devoted admirers. As shareholder of the Rozenburg Royal Delftware Factory, which produced Colenbrander's pottery, Mesdag was able to assemble an important and extensive collection of his work.

### **Head of a dog: Nero, 1875**

Sientje Mesdag- van Houten (1834-1909)

oil on canvas

In addition to landscapes and still lifes, Sientje Mesdag-van Houten painted portraits. In this case she chose her dog Nero as her subject. This is not the only painting she made of him; he served as a model for two other works.

### **Stormy Sea, n.d.**

Hendrik Willem Mesdag (1831-1915)

oil on panel

### **Herring Smokehouse, 1869-1888**

Philip Sadée (1837-1904)

oil on panel

In Mesdag's studio, there was a sliding door with eight panels on which he got artist friends to do paintings. After his death, all the panels were removed, including this one bearing a painting by Philip Sadée of women smoking herrings. Curator Renske Suijver says, 'In 2018 we were able to buy the painting back. The work is damaged but because it was an integral part of the building, we can live with that. We are going to restore it though.'

### **Portrait of Hendrik Willem Mesdag, c. 1872**

Jozef Israëls (1824-1911)

oil on canvas

## **On the wall of the staircase:**

### **Photo: Scheveningen, seen from the Boulevard, c. 1900**

The Hague Municipal Archives

### **Photo: The Rauch Hotel in Scheveningen, seen from the Boulevard, c. 1900**

The Hague Municipal Archives

For years Hendrik Willem Mesdag rented a room with a view at the Rauch Hotel in order to study the sea and the ships in all kinds of weather conditions. He took the sketches he made there back to his home and worked them up into paintings in his atelier.

### **Photo: Van Dorpstraat, little studio in the dune, 1923**

The Hague Municipal Archives

Sientje Mesdag enjoyed working in the Scheveningse Bosjes along the Scheveningseweg, close to home. She built a small studio there, which was later moved to the top of one of the highest dunes behind the Van Dorpstraat.

### **Photo: Sientje Mesdag-van Houten sitting in a beach chair, n.d.**

Panorama Mesdag collection

### **Photo: Hendrik Willem Mesdag in his atelier, n.d.**