





29 — Michel de Klerk, portraits of Bu Sawia and Mas Badjuri, 1910. Nieuwe Instituut.

How did De Klerk view Sawiah and Mas Badjuri? As ‘noble savages’ perhaps? That might sound crude, but there are grounds for posing the question thus. De Klerk’s cover design for the novel *Grenzen* features a turbaned figure rubbing a genie lamp, a common orientalist caricature (fig. 30), so we know he was not immune to such stereotypes. Moreover, many of De Klerk’s contemporaries and colleagues idealised non-Western and Asian cultures for their ‘primitivism’. Take Hendrik Wijdeveld, architect and editor-in-chief of *Wendingen* magazine and a close colleague of De Klerk. Wijdeveld was prone to idealising Bali, writing for instance of the ‘mysterious veil’ and ‘exotic beauty’ of the Balinese people and the ‘naivety that characterises everything they do.’<sup>30</sup> Art and society supposedly operated in perfect harmony in Bali, something the West had supposedly lost. This idealisation did not necessarily exclude criticism of colonial oppression. However, the culture of the other was understood from a European perspective and set of corresponding desires. While we cannot possibly know what De Klerk thought of Sawiah and Badjuri as he sketched their portraits, we can observe that these are not the typical caricatures of *volkstypen* (‘common folk’) that were widespread at the time. De Klerk depicted them as human beings, with fine details such as Sawiah’s lustrous hair bun with its loose lock.

The Brussels world expo seems to have marked an important turning point in the careers of De Klerk, Kramer and Van der Meij, all of whom worked on or visited the colonial pavilion.<sup>31</sup> There, they got to see and touch thousands of photographs and objects from the Dutch East Indies.<sup>32</sup> Although cultural objects and knowledge of the Indonesian archipelago were widespread in the Netherlands, this direct contact with Indonesians and their material culture must have made an impression. Indeed, if one wished to find the origin of the Amsterdam School’s Indonesian fascination, the colonial pavilion in Brussels would not be the worst place to start. A caricature by De Klerk, dated 1910, suggests that his visit to Brussels had been inspirational at the very least. It depicts his teacher Cuypers as a radiant Buddha or ascetic meditating atop a triangular tympanum. His jacket – which resembles the top half of a safari suit – is half off, as though Cuypers were in the process of casting off all worldly possessions, as Prince Siddharta Gautama had done before becoming the Buddha (fig. 31, 32).



30 — Michel de Klerk, cover design for the novel *Grenzen* by E. d'Oliveira, 1921. Museum Het Schip.

The early twentieth century saw significant legislative changes following the implementation of the Decentralization Act and the proclamation of autonomous cities, resulting in a building boom. Professional organisations such as the Society for Building Sciences and the Union for Local Affairs were established, facilitating communication between local officials, planners and builders. At a central level, the government in Batavia developed blueprints for 'hygienic building types' that included both practical and aesthetic guidance regarding architectural design.<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of commercial outfits like Technisch Bureau Biezeveld & Moojen in 1904 marked a shift towards private architectural practice, and the founding of the Netherlands East Indies Architects Circle (NIAK) in 1923 and the Technische Hoogeschool (Polytechnic) in Bandung in 1921 contributed further to the development of the field.<sup>6</sup> Lively debates on subjects of modernity, identity and topicality within academic and professional circles led to the evolution of the 'Tropisch Indische' architectural style. These debates reflected the maturity of the discourse within the Indonesian field and the advancement of the modernisation process in the region.

The traffic of ideas and practices went in both directions and was manifested in a variety of settings. Traditional bamboo and timber buildings in Indonesia inspired Henri Maclaine Pont, a Dutch architect born in Indonesia (1884-1971), to explore the structural principles of contemporary 'inverted Indies Gothic' roof construction (fig. 7). Pont's ideas later influenced Frei Paul Otto, a German architect (1925-2015), who incorporated the former's principles in his design for the tensile membrane structures of the roof of the Olympic Stadium in Munich (1972), among other projects.<sup>7</sup>

The influence of the Amsterdam School also filtered into Indonesia during this period, specifically between 1910 and 1930. It shaped architectural developments with its expressive brickwork, intricate detailing, nature-inspired ornamental motifs, dynamic forms and asymmetrical compositions. The ensuing integration of forms again created a unique fusion of European influences and indigenous elements, resulting in buildings that served functional purposes while simultaneously embodying a sense of progressiveness and cultural synthesis reflective of the spirit of the age (fig. 8, 9).

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7 — Henri Maclaine Pont, designs for an apartment building employing the structural principles of 'inverted Indies Gothic' roof construction, 1957. Nieuwe Instituut.



8 — Job & Spreij architectural practice, house for an agent of the Javasche Bank in Surabaya, 1921. Photo by Obbe Norbruis.



9 — Richard Schoemaker, Villa Merah in Bandung, the house that the architect built for himself in 1922. Photo by Dr. C.J. van Dullemen.



2 – Hildo Krop and Hendrik van den Eijnde, portrait sculptures of Pieter Both, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Cornelis de Houtman, and Jacob van Heemskerck, 1913-1916. Photo by Loek van Vlerken.

involved in the commission certainly suggests as much, particularly in the part that reads: ‘dominating structure in brick, modern in form and decoratively exuberant’.<sup>3</sup> Van der Meij was the ideal candidate for the job, and he invited several fellow architects, artists and craftsmen to work with him to create the total work of art that is the Shipping House.

However, the shipping companies’ desires went beyond their aesthetic preference for intricate brickwork. Three of these companies – Royal Netherlands Steamship Company (KNSM) and its subsidiaries the Royal West India Mail Service (KWIM) and the New Rhine Navigation Company (NRM) – served the Western hemisphere of the globe, the Dutch colonies in ‘the West’ (Suriname and the Antilles) and Europe. The other three – the Netherlands Steamship Company (SMN) and its subsidiaries the Royal Packet Navigation Company (KPM) and the Java-China-Japan Line (JCJL) – served the Eastern hemisphere, including the Dutch East



3 – Michel de Klerk, sketches of sculptures for the Shipping House’s facade, 1912. Nieuwe Instituut.

Indies, and, in the case of the lattermost company, Java, China and Japan. Although none of these patrons were directly related to the Dutch East India Company (1602-1799) or Dutch West India Company (1621-1792), they nonetheless saw themselves as their spiritual descendants, which was part of the image they wanted the building to portray.

To this end, Van der Meij was asked to create an office building that ‘is constructed with modern means and is modern in essence, yet does not deny our ancient art from the golden age, in which the voice of our national greatness echoed across the Ocean’.<sup>4</sup> The location of the building was chosen for the same purpose:<sup>5</sup> it was the spot from which the Compagnie van Verre’s fleet had departed in 1595 – an expedition that marked the start of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. In other words, the portrait sculptures on the lower part of the facade are just one of the many expressions of the Netherlands’ ‘proud’ maritime history and ‘golden age’. Endless variations of the same story are to be found across the interior and exterior of the building. Other decorative elements include sculptures of marine life – such as seahorses, jellyfish and octopuses – inspired by or copied from the book *Kunstformen der Natur* (Art Forms in Nature) by Ernst Haeckel.

Among the guiding principles of the Amsterdam School was the employment of symbols that could be understood by the general public. Subscription to said principle was shared the Shipping House’s main sculptors, Hendrik van den Eijnde, the lead sculptor, and Hildo Krop, who was brought in by Piet Kramer. The pair sculpted symbolic representations of each shipping company and integrated them into the facade. SMN’s, for instance, includes a sculpted pair of scales, symbolising the equator (the company served the Dutch East Indies) and the company’s initials in vertical letters. On each side of the sculpture are belts with

# LOUIS BOGTMAN STUDIO'S ORIENTALIST DESIGNS

TAMARA KLOPPER

As a designer, Louis Bogtman is best known for his batik wooden *objets d'art* – lamps, bowls, boxes, hand mirrors – designed in the expressive style of the Amsterdam School. These include objects such as the bulky cabinet in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (fig. 1) and the red table clock with black, curling tentacle-like feet that was on show at the *Indonesia and the Amsterdam School* exhibition at Museum het Schip (fig. 2). The first is impossible to miss, not only on account of its size but also because of its striking batik decoration. The colours, shapes and motifs employed in both clock and cabinet, which were designed in or around 1925, are clearly reminiscent of Indonesia.

Like many architects and designers working at the start of the 20th century, Bogtman created dreamy 'oriental' worlds through the use of a bold visual language that captured elements of far-away places. As a source of inspiration, especially the Dutch East Indies, present-day Indonesia, was of great importance to the designers of the Amsterdam School. This is evident in their decorative brickwork, furniture, and interior objects, which incorporate Indonesian motifs such as the *naga* (dragon snakes) and the eaves of the Rumah Gadangs (the houses of the Minangkabau people of Sumatra), which mirror the upward-curving shape of the water buffalo's horns.



1 – Batik cabinet, Kunstnijverheidsatelier Bogtman, ornament design by Louis Bogtman, c. 1925, 180 x 220 x 70 cm. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photo by Erik and Petra Hesmerg.



### TOURS OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIES

Dutch artists of all kinds, including musicians, writers, actors and dancers, toured the Dutch East Indies on a regular basis during this period. So did Leistikow, who performed in Java and Sumatra in 1924 (fig. 17) and hoped to gain a better understanding of Indonesian dance while she was there, as reported in an interview with the *Deli Courant* newspaper, in which she said she wanted to see it performed in person in the place where it originated, rather than in 'transplanted' form in Dutch theatres.<sup>5</sup> Upon her return, she published three articles on her impressions in *De Telegraaf* newspaper. The first was about a professionally staged wayang wong performance in Surakarta. The next was on the performances she attended at the Royal Palace of Surakarta. And the last described a srimpi dance performance at the Royal Palace of Yogyakarta.<sup>6</sup>

Leistikow goes into great detail in her descriptions and compares and contrasts what she saw with equivalent performances in the Netherlands. For instance, she describes the way the srimpi dancer positions her foot as she places it on the ground – she turns it outwards, heel first, then the ball of the big toe and then the whole foot – similarly to what she'd seen in the Netherlands. She also describes being struck by the beautiful ease of movement of ordinary people in everyday life: how they were able to squat on the ground for long periods without discomfort, how lightly and beautifully they treaded and balanced things on their heads. It was as though their movements were stylised, she said, as in dance.

What she couldn't stand were the European influence she noticed everywhere: the heron feathers in the hair and headdresses of the srimpi dancers in Yogyakarta, the Venetian chandeliers in the palace, the sultan wearing Western style garments instead of 'traditional' Indonesian ones. It was all such a pity, she thought, as they were so out of place. However, her aversion to these influences was somewhat inconsistent. For instance, she was glad that the wife of the sultan of Surakarta, hadn't had her teeth filed and blackened, as was the practice at the time. To Leistikow's credit, she understood that Javanese society was negotiating the tricky process of preserving its traditions while moving with the times, hence the adaptations of Western aesthetics and changes to the customs of their rulers.

In Yogyakarta, Leistikow met German painter and composer Walter Spies, who led a Western orchestra on behalf of the sultan. She recounted her experience of the srimpi performance, which Spies later mentioned in a letter: 'she said this would forever be the most beautiful experience of her life, as nowhere else in the world, least of all in dance, existed as much spiritualisation, existed such softness, gracefulness, perfection and as much expression. Nor was there as much peace anywhere in the



17 – G.J. Ensink, poster for Leistikow's Dutch Indies tour, 1924. Allard Pierson, Theater Collection.

world (...) it's truly akin to a bird singing, a flower blooming or a shadow falling – it encapsulates that soundless, untouchable, intangible quality of shadows!<sup>17</sup> But despite how much she'd loved what she saw, she felt the dances lacked spontaneity. They didn't feel alive, and came across as more museum pieces than contemporary dance performances. And this, she felt, suggested a gulf between the East and the West. Conversely, 'Javanese intellectuals' had struggled to understand her particular style of dance, with its big movements and expressions of emotion. They'd loved her mask dances, though.<sup>8</sup>

# 'IT'S LIKE COLONIALISM NEVER ENDED'

## A KAMPUNG NEGOTIATING ITS SPACE IN JAKARTA'S KOTA TUA

KAMIL MUHAMMAD

Jakarta is a city of many ambitions. It wants to be global, smart, child-friendly, tolerant, flood-free, green, historic – to name but a few. However, infrastructural and private sector developments aimed at realising these ambitions have resulted in the forcible eviction of kampungs, the informal working-class settlements that often occupy potentially valuable sites. Kota Tua (Old Town), a heritage-listed part of Jakarta that was once the bastion of the Dutch East India Company or VOC when it went by the name Batavia, is an example of such a site. The kampungs located on or adjacent to sites such as this are at odds with the story of urban development in which historic buildings are the heroes, rendering them the first victims of such developments. This raises questions about the relationship between everyday life in kampungs and Kota Tua as a site of colonial heritage. To what degree must kampung residents be compelled to accommodate the remnants of colonial history?

The Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation reported that between 2015 and 2018, 412 cases of forced evictions took place in Jakarta, affecting 10,157 families. The threat of eviction is an existential one that trumps all others, including flooding and fire. During the 2017 gubernatorial election, 23 kampungs organised themselves under the umbrella of the Urban Poor Network (*Jaringan Rakyat Miskin Kota*, or JRMK) and reached an agreement with then-candidate Anies Baswedan for a moratorium on evictions



Top: Kunir prior to eviction in 2014. Bottom: Kunir after the eviction in 2017. Photo by Koperasi Konsumen Kunir Pinangsia Sejahtera.





Presentation of drawings by the community. Photo by Aryo Danusiri.

The process of designing with kampung residents is quite unconventional in the sense that project briefs are not created but rather accumulated. What this means is that non-technical requirements are not formulated through interviews, but rather gradually arrived at on the basis of extended periods of observation of how people live. We spent the first three years conducting a series of workshops designed to foster lasting and trusting relationships between the architects and the community and, with it, a receptive space for mutual constructive criticism. As things progressed, some of the necessary tasks following from these relationships came under the management of institutions. Kunir, for instance, formally established its cooperative in 2018 as a means by which to organise itself and as a point of coordination with outside parties. This lent clarity and order particularly regarding the distribution of tasks and responsibilities. For example, it was soon understood that the best time to conduct workshops was 10:00 a.m. on Saturdays, right after the women returned from the market and the children had gone out to play.

Two workshops in particular stood out. The first was on the mapping of the 'lost' settlement of Kunir, in which twenty-two residents congregated to create a timeline of their strongest memories of the kampung and produce a collective drawing of the settlement from memory. By virtue of doing this communally, the participants became each other's self-correcting mechanism, which was crucial to the establishment of a reliable chronology of events. What the residents drew was equally interesting: the participants used their memories of the fruit trees that

grew in front of their houses to recall both the facade of their house and that of their neighbours. Each of the families then drew their own house and the trees without assistance from the architects, which yielded a more colourfully human picture of the settlement than would have been possible with more conventional methods. These gave us a better understanding of street life in Kunir as we stitched them together and turned them into three-dimensional drawings.

The results of the first workshop fed into the second, which involved an exercise to design a 36m<sup>2</sup> unit. The design was conceived from the inside out: we began by identifying and discussing the numerous household activities, which the participants then illustrated by drawing, with assistance from the participating architects. The purpose of this exercise was to enable the participants develop the ability to both verbally and visually articulate their needs. Upon completion, the new drawings were placed side-by-side with those of the old houses, so that participants could reflect on the differences between the two.

These workshops yielded important information for the design of Kampung Susun Kunir. They also raised some difficult questions that required much thought, among which matters of economic sustenance, the provision of informal social spaces, questions regarding building alterations and infrastructure planning – all of which were to be considered within the framework of cooperative management.

#### A DIFFERENT KIND OF OCCUPATION

Kampung Susun Kunir was finally completed in 2022. The 33-unit, four-storey building sits exactly where Kunir used to be, and its semi-basement houses an archaeology gallery on the spot where the excavations took place. The apartments are naturally cross-ventilated, the roof collects rainwater and the ground floor of the building is open to the street for the benefit of the shops therein.

What was once a row of houses on a long strip of land has become a four-storey building connected by semi-open corridors. This obviously changes the way people move through the 'settlement': as a sign of respect, the older generations were allocated homes on the first floor to spare them from having to take the stairs. The corridors are used on a rotating schedule for the communal reading of the Quran (*Yasinan*) on Friday nights and as a shared living room for receiving relatives. Private balconies, on which residents hang their laundry, are strategically located to facilitate air circulation and daylight admission without having them face directly onto the street. At the same time, these activities are partly visible to passers-by to create a sense of public visual transparency in contrast to the more forbidding and inward-looking colonial buildings.