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Joan E. Greer

Johan Thorn Prikker's Mural for De Zeemeeuw: Community Art, Mysticism, and the Socio-Religious Role of the Dutch Artist/Designer

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Abstract:

In 1902, the Dutch artist and designer, Johan Thorn Prikker (1868–1932), produced a monumental mural painting with a complex decorative program featuring a Christ-figure centrally positioned within an intricate geometric framework for the entrance hallway of De Zeemeeuw (The Seagull), a house located in The Hague designed by the Belgian architect Henry van de Velde (1863–1957). This article examines the significance of the mural for its patron, W. J. H. Leuring (1864–1936) and considers it in light of Thorn Prikker's theories of ornamentation and of the role of the artist—the former being tied to Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Eastern mysticism and the latter reflecting the ideals of social anarchism at the turn of the century and the related Dutch and Belgian concept of *Gemeenschapskunst*, or Community Art.

Johan Thorn Prikker's Mural for De Zeemeeuw: Community Art, Mysticism, and the Socio-Religious Role of the Dutch Artist/Designer

by Joan E. Greer

If an artist has understood his true mission and understands the importance of art itself, he must rally behind the people, not as master but as comrade in arms; he must devote his talent to the revolution, show the people what their position is in present-day society; show clearly the baseness of our society, so that the people will rise up and come to life. As soon as the people come to life art will be as pure and as good as ever because art itself remains the same throughout the ages. Therefore let us begin now, [let us] become revolutionary, let us unite, because we know that the beautiful, the sublime, in short, life, is with those who rebel, who fight for light, for humanity.^[1]

With these words, written in 1895 by the Dutch artist and designer Johan Thorn Prikker (1868–1932) to his friend the poet and sinologist Henri Borel, Thorn Prikker allied himself with the ideals of social anarchism at the turn of the century and with the related Dutch and Belgian concept of *Gemeenschapskunst*, or Community Art.^[2] Rejecting all forms of central authority, Thorn Prikker expressed his conviction that it was the artist's task in modern society to be instructive and not only to support but to stimulate and actively take part in a people's revolution. It followed that art should serve the people rather than the entrepreneurial interests of art dealers, the artists they represented, or the small elite group to whom they catered. This was the sector of society which Thorn Prikker most detested, and which he saw as representing the worst of the bourgeois world. He postulated in his writings that once the painters in these corrupt art circles were gone, art would be set on the right course, saying,

then we will have an art that is naturally just as great as [that of] the Buddhists, the Egyptians, the Primitives, because it will then again be that which is born of the people, [it] will arise in purity, without [the artist] first having asked what the taste of this or that rich man is.^[3]

Thorn Prikker, along with a number of other artists in Holland, was convinced that an art of and for the people, must be applied art. As he was trained as a painter, hence as a fine artist, this meant a considerable shift. By the turn of the century his work, in addition to small-scale pictorial works, included furniture, graphic and textile design, and monumental mural painting.^[4] It is this last aspect of Thorn Prikker's artistic production—monumental mural painting, and more specifically the artist's first major work in this genre, a mural for De Zeemeeuw (The Seagull), a house located in The Hague and designed in 1902 by the prominent Belgian designer and architect Henry van de Velde (1863–1957)—that is the subject of this study. This large wall painting, located in the entrance hall of the home (figs. 1, 2), presents a complex decorative program featuring a Christ-figure centrally positioned within an intricate geometric framework. Despite the mural's positive reception and a general consensus as to its significance within early twentieth-century Dutch visual culture, the work has, until recently, received little attention.^[5]

In this article I will investigate the significance of the mural for its patron, W. J. H. Leuring (1864–1936), situate the work within Thorn Prikker's oeuvre, and consider it in light of his theories regarding ornamentation and the role of the artist. I plan to show that this mural,

containing imagery that was arguably incomprehensible to all but a few was, in part, an artist's image of self. I will also attend to the apparent contradiction between this private commission, created for a privileged member of the bourgeoisie, and the social anarchist rhetoric found in the artist's writings.



Fig. 1, Johan Thorn Prikker, Mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Sgraffitto.
Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 2, Johan Thorn Prikker, Mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Photography:
Ruud de Kimpe. [\[larger image\]](#)

The Zeemeeuw Mural's Reception

Judging by his correspondence and the early publications that discussed it, the mural, which Thorn Prikker finished in 1902, appears to have been praised by the few people who saw it. The artist himself must have been pleased with the work, writing in a letter to Van de Velde, at the beginning of 1903, that the mural had been seen by the Viennese Secessionist Koloman Moser who, according to the artist, described it as "the most beautiful thing in human imagination."^[6]

This comment needs to be seen in light of the probability that Thorn Prikker was writing to Henry van de Velde at least in part in hopes of obtaining a future commission.^[7] Moser's appreciation of the mural is nonetheless corroborated by the fact that an entire room was dedicated to Thorn Prikker and his work twelve months later at the Vienna Secession.^[8]

In Holland, Philippe Zilcken published an article on the mural for De Zeemeeuw in the Dutch periodical *Elsevier's Maandschrift*, in which, prompted by his admiration for the mural but also wanting to recognize the artist in a broader sense, he suggested that Thorn Prikker be named "painter of the month" in recognition of his overall artistic achievement. Zilcken, who had visited the artist when he was still on the scaffold working on the painting, described the mural as "a strange, very modern-beautiful and extremely remarkable wall decoration."^[9] Thorn Prikker, he explained, was in The Hague for the first time, applying his "theory of ornamentation," which had been "brewing" within him for a long time. Zilcken included a number of long passages from Thorn Prikker's correspondence in order to illustrate the muralist's artistic ideas, creating an image of the artist as an extraordinarily intelligent and gifted individual, a "seeker" of "the secrets of beauty in life as well as in art."^[10]

The mural was also well received in an article that appeared in 1905 in Julius Meier-Graefe's German periodical *Dekorative Kunst*. Here, the anonymous critic presented the mural as an integral and successful part of modern architectural and interior design. The author also identified the mural as a visual art credo, called the three kneeling figures most beautiful and expressive, and commented on the symbolic significance of the connecting geometric ornamentation.^[11]

The Zeemeeuw and its Patron

Thorn Prikker created the mural at De Zeemeeuw for the medical doctor W. J. H. Leuring.^[12] While the architect for Leuring's new residence (figs. 3, 4), Henry van de Velde,^[13] was in charge of most of the interior design and furniture, Thorn Prikker had responsibility for the living room (fig. 5), a child's bedroom (fig. 6), and the large mural in the central hall.^[14] The house, which was built between September of 1901 and June of 1902,^[15] was called De Zeemeeuw (The Seagull) and its roofline with central peak and two rectilinear "wings," created the impression of a bird in flight. The layout was informed by the design of Bloemenwerf, the residence which Van de Velde had built for himself five years earlier in Ukkel, Belgium.^[16] In both houses, the staircase was in the center of the building. Whereas Bloemenwerf had been designed as both residence and design studio, however, De Zeemeeuw functioned solely as a private home; Leuring's medical practice was located elsewhere in The Hague.^[17] The mural for De Zeemeeuw was a monumental work created for a specific architectural setting, something Thorn Prikker had wanted to do for close to a decade, but it was not public art.^[18]

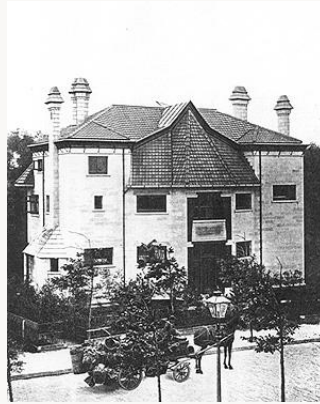


Fig. 3, Henry van de Velde, Residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst* 8, 1905, 179. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 4, Henry van de Velde, Residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst* 8, 1905, 177. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 5, Living room of W. J. H. Leuring Residence in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst*, 8, 1905, 186. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 6, Johan Thorn Prikker, Screen and cradle in W. J. H. Leuring residence in The Hague), photograph from *Dekorative Kunst* 8, 1905, 187. [\[larger image\]](#)

Little is known about the extent or nature of Leuring's involvement in the planning of De Zeemeeuw or in the home's program of interior decoration, as his personal papers were lost during the Second World War.^[19] But given his broad artistic interests and his numerous ties to the contemporary Dutch art world,^[20] Leuring probably assumed an active role in the development of the artistic program of his future residence. In the introductory essay he wrote in 1928 for the issue of the Dutch periodical *Wendingen* that was dedicated to Thorn Prikker, Leuring mentioned the mural only briefly, presenting it as an important forerunner to the artist's later work and stating that the mural symbolized "eternal changing life rendered in line interspersed with flat figures."^[21] His eulogy written for Thorn Prikker in 1932 was more informative in its commentary on both the relationship between the two men, and on the mural. According to Leuring, the two had met at an exhibition in The Hague in 1888 when Thorn Prikker was twenty and Leuring twenty-two years of age—an encounter that formed the beginning of an artistic "meeting of the souls" that would endure throughout the artist's life.^[22]

One of the functions of De Zeemeeuw was to house Leuring's collection of work by contemporary artists, among them Thorn Prikker, Jan Toorop, and Vincent van Gogh,^[23] as well as his collection of Indonesian art objects.^[24] Leuring was also an amateur photographer who had been active in art circles since his student days in Leiden.^[25] He had been present among those who had received and dined with the French poet Paul Verlaine during the latter's renowned visit to Holland in 1892,^[26] and his association with Thorn Prikker, some of whose work he had photographed, continued when both became members of an anarchist circle of artists, students, and teachers in Leiden that met in the studio of the young artist-critic H. P. Bremmer.^[27]

Leuring maintained his artistic contacts in The Hague and Leiden when he moved to Groningen in 1893. There, in 1896, he took part in the organization of a series of exhibitions, including one in which works by Thorn Prikker were included.^[28] Census information from The Hague City Archives indicates that Willem Jan Hendrik Leuring, medical doctor and member of the moderate Remonstrant branch of Protestantism,^[29] moved from Groningen to The Hague in the spring of 1898. That same year he married Wilhelmina Mathilda Dolk,

with whom he had 3 children between 1901 and 1904, and established a medical practice.[30] Like many artists and architects during this period, Leuring became a Freemason in 1901.[31]

Thorn Prikker's Mural and *Nieuwe Kunst* (New Art)

De Zeemeeuw was built during a period of renewed interest in interior design[32] that developed in Holland at the turn of the century in the context of *Nieuwe Kunst*,[33] the Dutch variant of Art Nouveau. There were two competing, but not always entirely distinct, regional tendencies in *Nieuwe Kunst*, and both are found in architecture and in the decorative arts. The first, associated with The Hague and its surroundings, was marked by a strongly dynamic curvilinear aesthetic linked to Belgian and French Art Nouveau. The second, centered in Amsterdam, was more sober and rationalist. It was championed by its proponents as the more legitimately national or Dutch of the two styles. While Thorn Prikker's early designs (especially of furniture) generally belong to the first of these tendencies, his later ones do not. Nor, however, do they belong to the second tendency. The mural is typical of neither. Its intricate decorative linearity, combined with its focus on geometry and harmonious proportion, elude any such characterization.

"Johan Thorn Prikker: Wanddecoratie in Scheveningen"

Director, camera, editing: Bert Koenderink; Research: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and Christiane Heiser

As one enters De Zeemeeuw, the vestibule opens onto a large hallway with a central staircase that splits in two and curves up to the gallery encircling the second floor. The entire hallway is illuminated with natural light entering through a large skylight. Located against the back wall of this hallway, above the staircase, the mural is immediately visible upon entry (figs. 7, 8). The technique employed by Thorn Prikker, who was assisted in its execution by sculptor Johan Altorf,[34] has recently been analyzed by Christiane Heiser.[35] Heiser points out that the technique the two men used was composite in nature, involving *sgraffito* (in which a sharp instrument is used to incise or scratch into a surface to reveal a layer below), *secco* (painting on dry plaster or ground) and *intarsio* or inlay (in which some areas are cut or scraped away and filled).[36] *Sgraffito*, a technique which was common during the Renaissance period in northern Italy, Bohemia and southern Germany, underwent a revival during the nineteenth century, especially in Austria, Switzerland, Germany and Belgium.



Fig. 7, Mural and top of staircase in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 8, Central staircase in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst*, 8, 1905, 181. [\[larger image\]](#)

The mural is large, measuring approximately 8 x 4 meters. Its size, its striking colors—black, red, blue, yellow, gold, green and gray—and its bold design give the mural an imposing presence—one that stands in stark contrast to the sober exterior of the house. The focus is the centrally-positioned, stylized figure of Christ, whose head is framed by a series of concentric haloes. Another circle, above, encloses a double cross motif. Within the unusual tangle of plant forms that appear like a strange, biomorphic headdress to this figure, is a hand with fingers directed toward the head. The central figure's right hand is pierced with a nail and encircled by thorns. These details, as well as the twelve heads in profile—presumably the apostles—that appear at the top of the composition, identify the figure as Christ.

Three haloed figures (figs. 9, 10) are kneeling in the foreground against a complex background that includes stylized heads and motifs enclosed in a clearly defined geometric framework. These figures, which are the least stylized part of the work, are situated in front of and outside the main composition, creating the illusion of depth in an otherwise flat conceptualization of space. The woman on the left, wearing a headpiece with veil and an intricately decorated robe, gazes toward the center while her hands, from which a cascade of drapery falls, gesture

towards the composition's outer edges, suggesting both a connection with and an orientation away from the central Christ-figure. On the right are a man and a boy. The man is dressed in priest-like garb with his hand, over which a small white cloth is draped and on which a cone-shaped object rests, held out as though in offering. The boy wears the gown of a choir boy and stands with hands folded. These figures constitute a transitional zone between the three-dimensional world of the viewer and a more abstract two-dimensional zone behind, representing an ideal or elevated realm. The overall result would cause Albert Plasschaert to write seven years later that the Zeemeeuw mural belonged more in a church than a house.^[37]



Fig. 9, Johan Thorn Prikker, Detail of the mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Sgraffito. Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 10, Johan Thorn Prikker, Detail of the mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Sgraffito. Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[larger image\]](#)

The foreground figures, which suggest a family of three, are ones with whom the Leurings, who at this time had one child, could identify and be identified. This, and their relative naturalism, suggests that the three foreground figures may function as portraits. The Leuring's first child, however, was a daughter and only a few months old when Thorn Prikker began working on the mural. And Leuring was a much younger man than the figure depicted here.

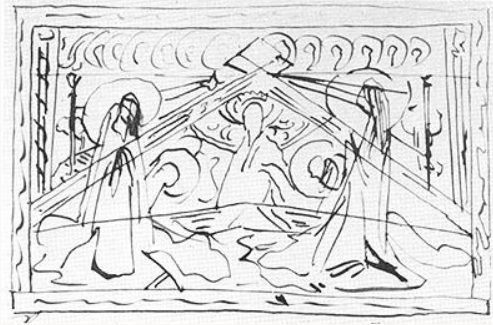


Fig. 12, Johan Thorn Prikker, Sketch in letter to Henri Borel, January 11, 1894. Pen on paper. Dutch Literature Museum (Nederlands Letterkundig Museum), The Hague. [\[larger image\]](#)

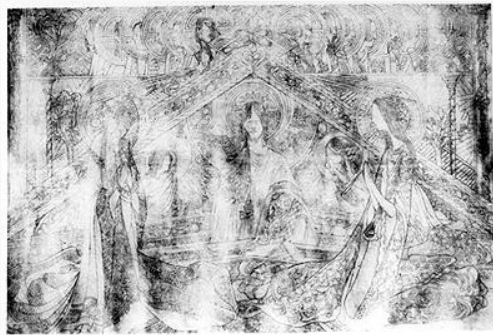


Fig. 13, Johan Thorn Prikker, Project for a wall painting, *Maandschrift voor Vercieringskunst*, May/June 1896, Plate V. [\[larger image\]](#)

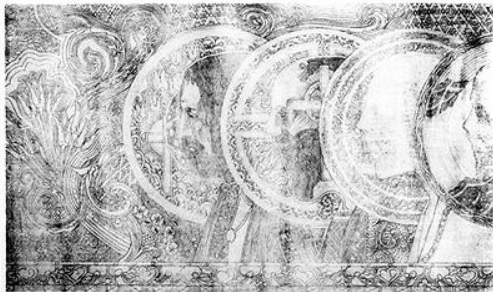


Fig. 14, Johan Thorn Prikker, Project for a Wall Painting (detail), *Maandschrift voor Vercieringskunst*, May/June 1896, Plate L. [\[larger image\]](#)

In his letter to Borel, Thorn Prikker described the work as a painting of a Christ figure, flanked by two haloed angels, to the left of which was “the Madonna, with richly pleated robes,” and to the right, Mary Magdalene, referred to by the artist as “another Mary, less devout and more passionate.”^[41] He drew Borel’s attention to the large circular halo which belonged both to the Christ figure and to the overall ornamentation; to the area behind the triangle, filled with blooming flowers, columns and the sky; and to an upper band at the top of the work in which

appear the twelve apostles with haloes and highly ornamented clothing. He commented further on the richness of ornamentation and, echoing Arts and Crafts theories of the day, the pleasure of labor such a work afforded him.[42]

The richness of surface found within the finished drawing (fig. 13) strikes one immediately, decorated as it is with numerous patterns based on floral, other plant, and geometric motifs. Thorn Prikker commented repeatedly on this aspect of the work, and concluded his letter to Borel by attributing his commitment to extensive ornamentation, carefully calculated proportions, and geometric structure within his art to the influence, both negative and positive, of two artists: Matthijs Maris, a fellow Dutchman whose evocative and indistinctly rendered scenes Thorn Prikker found “ugly and deceptive”; and Jan van Eyck, whose well-defined compositions and meticulous use of intricate detail he found “astonishingly beautiful.”[43]

The precise episode from the life of Christ represented in the drawing that was reproduced in *Maandschrift voor Vercieringskunst* is unclear, as its relationship to traditional Christian iconography is highly idiosyncratic. The youthful, crowned Christ with peaceful, unlined face seems to convey a message of triumph over earthly trials, as in a scene of Resurrection. This reading is not supported by the surrounding figures, however, and the drawing, when exhibited in December 1895 at the opening of Siegfried Bing's *Maison de l'Art Nouveau*, was identified in the catalogue, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, as an “Adoration,” a label which it would again receive when exhibited at the Vienna Secession of 1904.[44]

What is clear about the drawing, in addition to the fact that Thorn Prikker (and others) considered it important enough to represent him at these important international venues, is that it served as a starting point for the mural at De Zeemeeuw, both in subject and in composition. There are significant differences, however, related to a great degree, no doubt, to the different scales and media. The geometric framework in the mural, for example, has become much more dominant within the whole. It is at once more clearly defined and more complex, with two interlocking equilateral triangles added to the single, wide isosceles triangle. In addition, the mural's composition is not bracketed on either edge with a single tall column as in the drawing; rather, it extends past what is a double column to end in a series of triangles within triangles that create a pattern pointing away from the composition, implying a continuation and, in effect, linking the mural to the architectural space beyond. The figures, too, are quite different. In the earlier work, the foreground figures are biblical and the Christ is a much larger, more realistically depicted figure. There is no doubt, however, that in both works the Christ imagery is idiosyncratically rather than conventionally conceived.

The Applied Artist as Christ

The figure of Christ is a recurring and dominant motif within Thorn Prikker's oeuvre. The image of the suffering Christ figure, both in Holland and elsewhere—most notably France and Belgium—was a common means of representing artistic self in avant-garde circles.[45] Many of Thorn Prikker's early representations of Christ, such as his paintings *The Bride* and *Descent from the Cross*, both of 1892 (figs. 15, 16), functioned within this tradition.[46] Unlike Paul Gauguin or James Ensor, Thorn Prikker never represented himself in the guise of Christ. Instead, his Christ images, including the two from 1892 reproduced here, represented a more generalized idea of “the artist” which included, but was not confined to, self-representation.[47]



Fig. 15, Johan Thorn Prikker, *The Bride*, 1892–93. Oil on Canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.
[\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 16, Johan Thorn Prikker, *Descent from the Cross*, 1892–93. Oil on Canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.. [\[larger image\]](#)

The dominant image of the Dutch artist in the 1880s and early 1890s, in both the visual and literary arts, was that of an elite figure; one removed from the everyday world, working in an ivory tower.^[48] This early view of the artist, akin to the French construct of the *poète maudit*, the cursed poet, was one of an isolated genius, doomed by the very God-given gift of creativity which he possessed, to be misunderstood and isolated from his community. I use the gender-specific pronoun consciously, as the general construction of the artist at this time was masculine. The suffering Christ figure was frequently employed to embody these ideas of the male suffering artist.^[49]

Thorn Prikker, however, was never comfortable with the view of the artist as an isolated genius. He preferred a contrary view, one that developed later in the 1890s and maintained relevance into the twentieth century: the notion of artist as an engaged spiritual leader. This side of the imagery is evident in a lithographic poster he designed for the Dutch applied arts magazine, *Maandschrift voor Vercieringskunst*, also known by the French title *Revue Bimestrielle pour l'art appliqué* (fig. 17). This poster, visually linked to the drawing that the magazine had reproduced the previous year, was also used as a cover for the magazine in 1897. It represents the artist—here the applied artist—as a Christ figure.



Fig. 17, Johan Thorn Prikker, Poster for *Revue Bimestrielle pour l'art appliqué*, 1896. Lithograph. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. [\[larger image\]](#)

Thorn Prikker did the lithograph during a time of a burgeoning production of art and design periodicals—and a growing number of artists' groups^[50]—a time when the journal cover and the poster were two art forms increasingly used to make a visual statement about the artist and about artistic production.^[51] In Thorn Prikker's poster/cover design, the figure representing the artist-designer appears to once again be the familiar suffering Christ figure. There are, however, further ideas encoded within the image that relate directly to those that would feature in the mural for *De Zeemeeuw*, including the idea of artistic engagement and the politicized notion of the artist as worker.^[52] Albert Plasschaert, writing about the lithograph in 1909, referred to the social anarchist qualities of this "Christ on the Cross," and linked it to the artist in general, and to Thorn Prikker in particular, saying, "it is a worker, an anarchist, and the one hand, which resembles that of the draughtsman, becomes separate from the cross and seems entangled with flowers."^[53]

The lithograph, like the related 1894 drawings, continued to be of relevance to Thorn Prikker's artistic production and contributed to the shaping of his growing recognition. It gained further recognition in 1902 when it was exhibited at the International Exhibition for the Decorative Arts in Turin, Italy, and reproduced twice in German design publications.^[54]

In the lithograph, a rich ornamentation of intertwining plant stems enliven the lower and upper parts of the composition. The crucified Christ is hunched over, his face and body furrowed like an old gnarled tree trunk. The hands are disproportionately large and serve to underline the two sides of Christ's—or here, the applied artist's—work; that is, the pain and suffering that unavoidably accompany the introduction of a new ideology, represented by Christ's right hand with open wound and surrounding leafless branch of thorns; and also the hope and regeneration that come with such innovation, represented by Christ's left hand with the wound now no longer visible and a healthy, growing plant form gently encircling the hand.^[55] This more positive conceptualization of growth and rejuvenation is reinforced by the upward movement found in the crown of thorns encircling Christ's head which turns into, first a thornless, living vine, and then continues into the minimally articulated, stylized image of a

crucifixion within the large central circle above Christ's head. This in turn is linked to the cross motif which is contained in a double circle from which emanate sun-like rays.

The idea here is of spiritual ascension toward ultimate enlightenment or perfection. Building on the more positive content within the imagery are the heads in profile at the top of the lithograph which serve as disciples to the Christ figure—that is, they represent figures who support Christ and who, positioned as they are facing outward, will take up his mission and disseminate his word. These six figures are important within the overall language of imagery, especially when the connection is again made between the Christ figure and the applied artist, as these figures imply the concept of community. Their presence results in the Christ figure being situated within a community of like-minded people, thus breaking with the tradition of earlier Christ-artist constructions which focused on isolation and alienation. These six figures also embody the idea of a link to the larger community, and the idea of being engaged in teaching or conveying to the people an understanding of a new ideology. The connection to Thorn Prikker's theories concerning the artist's role in instructing and leading people in embracing a new ideology, quoted at the outset of this essay, is evident.

The lithograph, then, with its Christ/applied-artist motif, is one of several early variations which ultimately led to Thorn Prikker's mural for Leuring's house, and one that in its comparatively wide dissemination as both poster and periodical cover, served as a backdrop against which the mural's iconographic program would be understood. The Christ figure, and in particular his right, nail-pierced hand surrounded by thorns, the roundels containing heads at the top of the composition, and some of the decorative plant motifs are key elements repeated in the mural.

Thorn Prikker's Christ Image, Religion, and Community Art

The figure of Christ in Thorn Prikker's work undoubtedly found resonance within avant-garde art and design circles at this time as an image of the artist. It was, however, first and foremost a Christian image, albeit one represented in a non-traditional manner.

Protestantism was the dominant religion in the coastal provinces of the Netherlands, which included the city of The Hague, and Thorn Prikker, although in practice not associated with any church, was registered in the city records as officially belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk), and had had a Protestant upbringing.^[56] Leuring was also Protestant, belonging to the more liberal Remonstrant Church.^[57] It was Catholicism, however, which since the time of its emancipation in Holland in 1853 had begun to flourish,^[58] that attracted Thorn Prikker and affected his own artistic production. This attraction was not uncommon in artists' circles at this time, and led two of Thorn Prikker's personal acquaintances, Jan Verkade and later Jan Toorop, to convert from Protestantism to Catholicism.^[59]

How the Catholic Church fit into Thorn Prikker's view of artistic production on a theoretical as well as a practical level is paradoxical in nature. While not a Catholic himself, Thorn Prikker was interested in the Catholic Church for both its traditional imagery and the opportunities it provided for artists. His use of haloes indicates a gesture toward the Catholic Church, and he had long had the ambition of securing commissions for church murals. The reason for this was twofold. First, as the Catholic Church in The Netherlands was experiencing a period of

resurgence, with its accompanying building activity, it was, from a purely practical point of view, an opportunity for obtaining commissions—a pressing concern to Thorn Prikker whose financial position, although better than it had been during his early career, was still precarious.^[60] And second, the church mural was, to Thorn Prikker, *the* ideal art form; that is, it was monumental, public, spiritual, and an integral part of a larger architectural whole.

This theoretical point of view had its basis in a movement known in the Netherlands and Belgium as *Gemeenschapskunst* or Community Art.^[61] As an alternative to the individualism of the *l'art pour l'art* approach that had dominated art production in the 1880s and the early '90s, the ideas of Community Art had taken firm hold in The Netherlands by the turn of the century. The theories of the French writer and critic Albert Aurier, who felt that art should be symbolist, decorative, and engaged, gave impetus to the movement.^[62] So, too, did the ideas of the English theorists John Ruskin and William Morris,^[63] whose writings concerning a socially oriented art were especially well received by artists with socialist sympathies.^[64]

Community Art embodied a number of ideas. As the name suggests, it was intended to serve the community. It was to convey basic ideas and values with a clear, simple iconography or “language” of form, and be created with its intended destination in mind. “Fine” art should give way to an “applied” art. Ideally, the work should be a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that is, a unity of the arts coming together to represent a whole. Furthermore, the “pre-individual” period; that is, the time before the Renaissance, should be turned to for artistic models, with the Middle Ages and the medieval cathedral being held up as the ultimate examples of a model society and art form.^[65]

The concept of community comes into play in a number of ways in relation to the medieval cathedral. That is, a number of art forms combined to create one architectural whole that was made to serve the community; and was carried out *by* the community, in a spirit of contented cooperation and pleasure in labor. Artists embracing the idea of Community Art turned to other models, including Egyptian art, art of the Near and Far East, and art from so called “primitive” societies, but not as consistently as they turned to that of the Middle Ages in Europe.

There were many variations of Community Art, but among these were three main tendencies. The first of these linked the ideas above with the mystical-religious focus of pre-Renaissance societies; the new art would therefore be a religious art—and to most this meant a Christian religious art. This point of view found a solid basis within Holland in the influential ideas of the advocate for Catholic emancipation and professor of aesthetics and art history, J. A. Alberdingk Thijm, and in the ideas and works of the architect, P. J. H. Cuypers, whose theories, in turn, were grounded in the gothicism of the French architect and theorist Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. The second of these tendencies was more socialist than the first, focusing on the public nature of the art and on the labor relations of the artist/craftspeople of earlier periods as representing an ideal alternative to existing artistic practices. While these directions were perceived as mutually exclusive by some,^[66] others, including Thorn Prikker, saw a third tendency—one that represented a mixture of the first two. That is, he combined the mystical-religious emphasis of the first, with the concern to create a public, socially conscious art of the second. In this comprehensive understanding of *Gemeenschapskunst*, Thorn Prikker was allying himself closely and consciously with art theories emanating from Belgium and, in particular,

with the ideas of Henry van de Velde and Auguste Vermeylen.[67] A number of decisive impediments prevented Thorn Prikker from establishing a working relationship with the Catholic Church. Foremost among these was the fact that he himself was not a Catholic, and although he had considered converting to Catholicism in order to secure artistic commissions, it was never a serious option for him.[68] While he was strongly attracted to mystical Catholicism and medieval Christian poetry, painting, and art theory, Thorn Prikker, as mentioned, rejected organized Christian religion, both Protestant and Catholic.[69] In addition, he felt that the artist should never be the spokesperson for religious dogma and, in fact, that one should always avoid a dogmatic approach to any belief system.[70] His own views, which were informed by his readings of eastern philosophy and religion, were, in fact, more related to theosophy, which was well represented in Holland, than to any form of Christianity.[71]

These general impediments to acceptance by the Church were compounded by the fact that an anti-clericalism aimed specifically at the Roman Catholic Church occurs several times in Thorn Prikker's art and writings.[72] It is not surprising, then, that the Catholic Church rejected his art and, although this would change after he moved to Germany in 1904 and began to receive many opportunities to carry out murals, including works for churches,[73] he did not receive a single Church commission while in The Netherlands, even when he offered his services free of charge.[74] Complaining in his correspondence that those in power in the Catholic Church did not consider him able to appropriately communicate Christian ideas, he wrote, "they think at the very least that I am involved in sorcery so that in place of reasonable saints I'd make cabalistic signs or a portrait of the devil himself on the wall." [75]

Thorn Prikker's rejection by the Church, it will have become evident, was tied in no small way to his own strong views and personality. This radical persona is clear even from his early days at the Hague Academy of Fine Arts, from which he was expelled in 1887 for disorderly conduct; from later descriptions that refer to him as a fierce anarchist; [76] and from his image as an unruly rebel who found it difficult to hide his derision for those in positions of authority. [77] This leads to another key aspect of the image of the artist, that is, the artist as anarchist. Before exploring this radicalized image of the artist, however, it is necessary to point to another aspect of the broader context of visual production related to *Gemeenschapskunst*: the revival of interest in the art form of the mural.

Mural Painting in Holland

Dutch mural painting from the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries is a rich and historically significant subject, and the relationship between Community Art and mural painting deserves attention. [78] Often conceived from either a religious or socialist point of view, murals were usually done for public buildings, although notable exceptions, including Thorn Prikker's mural for De Zeemeeuw, exist in domestic architecture.

In 1895 Thorn Prikker wrote that he found mural painting to be a much more logical art form than that of small scale "painting in a frame." He continued, saying that that a mural "becomes one with its environment, with the building in which it is painted" and that "a work should be made for a specific place," beginning "where the architect could go no further" and conveying "the ultimate meaning of the building." [79] Thorn Prikker was well aware of the increased activity in, and focus on, mural painting in Holland, and of others working in this area. In fact,

in the letter quoted from above, he compares himself favorably (if somewhat bitterly due to his own lack of recognition) to one of this art form's leading figures, Antoon Derkinderen.[80]

Derkinderen holds a key position within the history of Dutch mural painting. Indeed, it was in relation to Derkinderen's mural painting for the city hall of 's-Hertogenbosch that in 1892 the critic Jan Veth coined the word *Gemeenschapskunst*. [81] And it is with Derkinderen that Albert Plasschaert begins his 1926 overview of Dutch mural painting that was published in the series *The Applied Arts in The Netherlands*, acclaiming him as, in the history of Dutch mural painting, "the instigator, the innovator." [82]

The development of Dutch mural painting at the time De Zeemeeuw and its mural were being designed was also tied to a major project, the Amsterdam Stock Exchange (*Beurs*), undertaken by the architect H. P. Berlage, who was a champion of the Wagnerian idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. [83] The Stock Exchange, begun in 1897, was just being finished in 1902, at the time of the completion of Thorn Prikker's mural, and opened early in 1903. [84] It was a much-discussed example of Berlage's work in which he attempted to bring together different art forms, including paintings by Derkinderen, Roland Holst, and Toorop, sculptures by Joseph Mendes da Costa and Lambert Zijl, and inscriptions by poet and critic Albert Verwey. True to the idea of *Gemeenschapskunst*, Berlage not only wanted to bring together the arts, but also intended the building to represent an art "of and for the people, of and for the community," [85] tying the project to political and, more specifically, socialist ideas. [86] In other examples of projects relating to *Gemeenschapskunst*, however, the ideological underpinnings were more closely affiliated with the related but divergent ideas of social anarchism.

The Image of the Artist, Social Anarchism, and the Anarchist/Christ Figure

Radical politics were often closely bound to avant-garde artistic discourse of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries. The relationship between anarchism and cultural production, particularly strong in France and Belgium, [87] was also important in The Netherlands. [88] The terms social anarchism or anarcho-communism are more appropriate here than anarchism itself, as anarchist ideas embraced by artists at the turn of the century usually combined the economic theories of communism with the focus on the individual found within anarchism. Although anarchists and Marxists had begun to go their separate ways in Dutch party politics during the early 1890s, [89] the ideological ties between anarchy and the labor movement in general remained strong into the twentieth century. [90] While extreme individualism and the embracing of violence are often associated with the term anarchy, the movement had many variations. In Holland, in addition to being connected to socialist economic theory, it was also adapted by different groups to combine variously with Christian beliefs, theosophical ideas, pacifistic concerns, and an interest in nature communes. [91] What all these factions had in common was the rejection of central authority.

Thorn Prikker's interest in, and personal identification with, anarchism appears repeatedly in his correspondence. His image as an anarchist was constructed in the writings of others—for example, Henri Borel and Henry van de Velde. It was also consciously reinforced by Thorn Prikker himself. [92] In his own writings, as is clear in the quotation cited at the outset of this paper, Thorn Prikker attached a specific significance to the conjuncture of art and radical politics: the artist should, by definition, be an anarchist.

Thorn Prikker directly addressed the theme of anarchy in a number of his works, including an 1894 drawing (fig. 18).^[93] In this work, at the top of which are the words "*Quo Usque Tandem*" ("For How Much Longer"), a man is represented carrying two objects: a pickaxe, associated at the time with anarchy and social revolution, and, of relevance to the artist-anarchist construct, what looks like an artist's palette. The anarchist, here, is represented as the worker-artist. He is enframed by an architectural archway above which is written the word "Anarchie." Bodies of members of the bourgeoisie, one still wearing a top hat, hang from lampposts and are strewn on the ground.



Fig. 18, Johan Thorn Prikker, *Anarchy*, 1894. Charcoal on paper. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

[\[larger image\]](#)

Thorn Prikker shared his anarchist views with Henry van de Velde and Van de Velde's wife and fellow artist-designer, Maria van de Velde-Sèthe,^[94] and developed his theoretical ideas as much in the context of anarchist circles and publications originating in Belgium and France as in those of his native Holland. Of particular significance to Thorn Prikker and the Belgian artists with whom he associated, including Van de Velde,^[95] was the anarcho-communism of Peter Kropotkin, an expatriate Russian living in London, whose writings had a specific relevance to artists. In Kropotkin's theory, the artist held a central position in the creation of a new order: not only was it the artist's task to reveal to the people the extent of the misery and corruption of modern life and society, it was also up to the artist to envision and represent alternatives to the existing conditions. Thorn Prikker's words concerning the artist's role as a revolutionary could be taken almost directly from Kropotkin's writings, especially from his *Words from a Revolutionary* (*Paroles d'un révolté*).

Thorn Prikker admired this work, as well as Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* (*La conquête du pain*), both of which he read in the late 1890s.^[96] He also read Jean Grave's anarchist periodical *Les Temps Nouveaux*, published between 1895 and 1914, in which Kropotkin's point of view was dominant.^[97] Thorn Prikker had planned to contribute what he called a "propaganda print" to this periodical, and although the print was never published and its present whereabouts is unknown, he described the work in a letter from the spring of 1896. Entitled *Aut Caesar Aut Nihil* (*Either Caesar or Nothing*),^[98] the work represented a wrestling match between a heavily armed member of the bourgeoisie and his unarmed opponent, presumably an anarchist, who had the body of a gorilla and in Thorn Prikker's words "a kind of Christ's

head."^[99] Representing the radical, anti-bourgeois figure with the body of a gorilla underlines its sheer strength and power and, perhaps, also alludes to the natural superiority of the so-called primitive being, an important concept in Kropotkin's theories (although Kropotkin found these qualities in rural, non-industrialized peoples as opposed to the animal kingdom).^[100] Of particular relevance is that Thorn Prikker gives the anarchist figure a Christ's head^[101]—a conflation of anarchist and Christ that was not unfamiliar in anarchist circles, the most obvious example being the case of the prominent Dutch anarchist, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis who was frequently identified, both by others and by himself, with the figure of Christ.^[102]

Using Christ to signify both the radical artist and the social reformer at that time, then, was not uncommon. Conversely, constructing Christ as a social revolutionary was part of a larger tendency in discourses concerning the life of Christ: on the one hand was the Christ-like anarchist; on the other the anarchist-like Christ. By the time Thorn Prikker was working on his mural, a body of material existed outside dominant Christian discourse which focused on the historical Jesus as a human, rather than divine entity, and on his role as a social reformer or revolutionary. The religious theorists Ernest Renan, David Friedrich Strauss, and the translator of Strauss, Emile Littré, all contributed to the construction of an image of Christ as an anarchist-like social revolutionary.^[103] Thorn Prikker's imagery, in this respect, although not conforming to traditional Christian ideas related to Christ, did function logically vis-à-vis this alternate tradition.

If, in Thorn Prikker's drawing entitled *Anarchy*, he conflates the figures of the artist and anarchist (with oblique autobiographical references included in respect to both parts of this conflation) he also, in his description of his print *Aut Caesar Aut Nihil*, conflates the figures of anarchist and Christ. The three—anarchist, artist, and Christ—are, in fact, closely related conceptually in Thorn Prikker's overall body of imagery, to the point that a representation of one automatically calls up associations of the other two. In this way, the central Christ figure in his mural for De Zeemeeuw functions implicitly as an image of the anarchist-artist. This aspect of the symbolism would have been recognizable within contemporary avant-garde circles, as indicated by Plasschaert's description of the earlier image of Christ in Thorn Prikker's poster/periodical cover (fig. 17).

The question of the relatively hermetic nature of this imagery arises. Arguably comprehensible to only a limited number of initiates, it seems to fall short of the artist's goal of creating an art for the people. Part of the answer to this seeming rupture between theory and practice, at least in the case of Thorn Prikker, may be because the figure of Christ, in spite of its idiosyncratic appearance, *did* belong to the most widely recognizable topos in Western culture. As such, it functioned in a general and accessible way as a spiritual image of hope and change. Another part of the answer, however, may be found in the artist's "theory of ornamentation," returning us to that important component of the mural at De Zeemeeuw.

Theosophical and Masonic Resonances: Geometry as the Rhythm of Life and Cosmic Foundation

The ornamentation in Thorn Prikker's mural is dominated by the triangles and spheres of the geometric framework.^[104] It is this framework, according to contemporary artistic theory,

that would lead the work to communicate in a universal way, and therefore speak directly to all.

The geometry and structure found in the mural were grounded to a large and growing body of theory concerning geometric principles in artistic production, ranging widely in conceptual underpinnings from functional rationalism to esoteric mysticism, and many variations between the two. While the geometry found within Thorn Prikker's furniture design may have been informed in part by a tendency toward functional rationalism, his use of structure and geometry in the mural for De Zeemeeuw is tied more closely to the mystical conceptions associated at that time with geometry in art and, more specifically, to those ideas being presented in Theosophical and Masonic circles.

The relationship between Theosophy and art in Holland, in the period from 1880 to 1920, is the subject of a recent comprehensive study by Marty Bax.^[105] The study reveals that Theosophy had an impact on Dutch symbolist, expressionist, and abstract currents, and cut across media, appearing in painting, but especially in the applied arts and expressionist architecture. It also underlines the relationship between Freemasonry and Theosophy in nineteenth-century Dutch society, with the two sometimes overlapping and the former providing an important foundational impulse for the latter.^[106]

Theosophists, who were frequently sympathetic to anarchist views (and vice versa),^[107] accepted Christ as being one religious leader among many, and included in their belief system the concept of the evolution of humanity and of the cosmos based on ideas found in contemporary western science and in traditional Indian ideas of cosmic cycles. Indeed, the imagery evoked by the name and façade of De Zeemeeuw may be considered in light of theosophical ideas in which the bird is the symbol of the true spirit or pure truth.^[108]

The aspect of Theosophy most relevant to the mural is the importance attached to mathematical and geometrical principles, especially as they were widely disseminated in artistic circles in the writings and teachings of the Dutch Theosophical architects and designers Karel de Bazel and Mathieu Lauweriks. In drawing classes given between 1897 and 1904, De Bazel and Lauweriks taught that mathematics was "the rhythm of life" and that all life, and the universe as a whole, had its origin in, and was governed by, geometric principles.^[109] Geometry held within it the secrets of universal harmony and, as such, was the single most important consideration in all creation. Just as mathematical principles formed the basis of all natural creation,^[110] so too must a geometric framework provide the foundation and be a dominant component in artistic production. The artistic process was in this way associated with divine or cosmic creation, and the artwork provided a link between heaven and earth. In Thorn Prikker's 1894 writings about mural design^[111] he seems to have anticipated this growing concern with geometry, although it was in the mural for De Zeemeeuw that this component of his work became particularly emphatic.

De Bazel and Lauwerik's ideas and teachings in this area, it should be emphasized, were part of a wider discourse. The ideas concerning geometry and harmonious proportion as set out in their numerous theoretical writings are diverse and often idiosyncratic in their individual variations. One recurring and widely adopted idea of relevance to Thorn Prikker's work found both within Theosophical circles as well as in the theoretical ideas of other more rationalist-

oriented architects and designers, is the importance of the triangle, especially as set out in the contemporary writings and teachings of Jan and Jacoba de Groot.^[112] In their widely read book *Driehoeken bij ontwerpen van ornament voor zelfstudie en voor scholen* (*Triangles in the Design of Ornament for Selfstudy and for Schools*) of 1896,^[113] a system was set out which so closely relates to the mural at De Zeemeeuw that it almost seems to be a description of that later work. Based on the use of the triangle, the De Groots developed a method of working in which the “rhythm” (“rhythmus”) or geometric framework was created first and the motif made to fit within the framework. In this system, the artist could represent living, natural forms growing, as it were, from and within the geometric framework.

Jan de Groot—who himself was described by contemporaries in Christological terms—as having a “Christ head” and an apostle-like charm^[114]—was not a Theosophist but was, like Leuring, a Freemason.^[115] There were close ties at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries between Freemasonry and Theosophy,^[116] and an article entitled “Theosofie en Vrijmetselarij” (“Theosophy and Freemasonry”) published in 1904 in the periodical *Theosophia* drew attention to this relationship.^[117] Many Theosophists were Freemasons and Theosophist thought concerning the relationship between geometry and cosmic harmony was informed by Dutch Masonic symbolism.^[118] This symbolic use of geometry and the concept of the Grand Architect of the Universe (which conflates artist/architect with the cosmic creator), both central to Masonry,^[119] find clear points of resonance in Thorn Prikker’s mural. The columns in the mural (fig. 2) may function as a variation of important symbols in Masonic iconography: the mural’s large columns representing “Jaquin” and “Boaz,” the two columns to the right and left of the entrance of the temple of Solomon—itsself an important symbol in Freemasonry referring to the temple of humankind,^[120]—and the mural’s smaller columns, with garlands of foliage forming spirals around them, representing the sacred image in Masonic iconography referred to as the Solomonic column.^[121] Such imagery would have held particular relevance for Leuring.

Leuring’s official association with Freemasonry began in November of 1901,^[122] at the very point when Thorn Prikker must have been developing concrete plans for the work. This, too, may explain the stylized, somewhat rough, lump or cone-shaped object held in the hand of the large male foreground figure on the right. While this object may well include an oblique reference to Theosophy (the “Diamond of our Wisdom”), it also takes part in the esoteric symbology of Freemasonry. The Freemason saw himself or herself as a “rough stone” which needed to be polished into a “cubic stone,” as both builder and building block in the temple of humankind.^[123] Taking into consideration the extent of abstraction found elsewhere in the mural, it is possible to see in this object a stylized, not yet cubic, stone. If one accepts the hypothesis that this male figure functioned as a non-realist representation of Leuring, it is plausible that he is dedicating himself, together with other family members, in the form of a rough stone, to the central figure of the Grand Architect of the Universe, here represented idiosyncratically in Thorn Prikker’s Christ figure.

The other geometric shape that featured prominently in the mural, the sphere, was also of interest for its universal implications. The Theosophist designer Jacob van den Bosch, for example, developed a sphere system, which has been associated with both Theosophy and Freemasonry,^[124] in which spheres were compared to the ever-widening circular ripples created when a stone is thrown in water; the spheres, becoming circles in their two-

dimensional transposition, represented the stages of transformation from the material into the non-material world.[125]

Theosophical and Masonic ideas in the mural are further encoded in the interlocking equilateral triangles—one pointing up, the other down—which enframe the Christ figure. Together they form an emblem sometimes called the seal of Solomon that served as an element in the seal of the Theosophical Society and was used repeatedly in its literature.[126] The two triangles denote a balance between the positive and negative universal forces, as well as between the spiritual and material worlds. Here, too, there was a connection with Freemasonry in which triangles are important symbols with the double triangle being a symbol of the Deity.

The Christ-Atman-Anarchist World View

There is no evidence that Thorn Prikker was either a Mason or a Theosophist. He had, however, motivation for the use of, and access to, Freemasonry ideas through his close affiliation with Leuring.[127] Furthermore, he had a long-standing sympathy for Theosophical concerns.[128] He was particularly interested in Theosophy's focus on mystical eastern religions,[129] with which he was familiar both through his own readings and through his association with Borel.[130] Philippe Zilcken, in his 1902 article previously referred to, reproduced the mural with, in the caption below the reproduction, the phrase "as one who has not wandered over the earth"—an allusion to a verse from the Sanskrit collection of animal stories,[131] derived from ancient Indian oral tradition, the *Panchatantra*. [132] Through the inclusion of the fragment from the *Panchatantra*, Zilcken, albeit somewhat obliquely, identifies the mural with, and links it to, the theme of a world wanderer or seeker, and, in general, relates the mural to eastern thought. This would be corroborated by Leuring's description of the mural in his 1932 eulogy for Thorn Prikker,[133] in which he called the mural *The Game of Life* (*Das Spiel des Lebens*) and stated that it was based on a poem from the *Panchatantra*. [134] He also stated that the mural's ornamentation included the circle, as symbol of all religions, with a cross at its end, as a reference to Christianity.[135]

This reference to eastern mysticism is a relevant note on which to end, emphasizing, as it does, the mural's metaphysical content while still allowing for the polysemous nature of its pictorial language. It is Thorn Prikker's letter to Henri Borel written in November of 1895, that best represents this kind of complexity; he wrote about a Christ drawing—known only through Thorn Prikker's letter as its present whereabouts is unknown. Above the "furious" figure of Christ is Atman, the soul or true self in Hindu thought, who represents "Christ himself." Thorn Prikker relates this conflated Christ-Atman imagery to "the conscious anarchist" whom he sees as representing "the life of the future." [136]

Conclusion

In the mural for De Zeemeeuw, the central Christ figure functions as an image of the artist. Moreover, the entire mural is a visual manifesto for Thorn Prikker's theoretical notions concerning an art that was spiritual, revolutionary, and modern. The imagery may also relate in a personal way to the one who commissioned the work, Leuring, and his new membership in the Freemasons.

By breaking with mainstream convention, Thorn Prikker's work fits logically within avant-garde norms by the very fact that it functioned idiosyncratically in respect to mainstream art, and reinforced the existing avant-garde image of the artist as anarchist and spiritual seeker or leader.

While the imagery and ornamental program found within the mural—the figure of Christ and a geometric framework—were compatible with Thorn Prikker's ideas concerning an art for the people, the few people who saw the mural in the original all belonged to the financial and cultural elite. The irony here is that while the mural falls short in this respect when considered in light of Thorn Prikker's theories, and those of Community Art (*Gemeenschapskunst*) in general, it was with this work that he reached a turning point in his career, began to gain critical recognition, and saw his work begin to engage not just a small elite group, but society as a whole. When considered in the context of the Zeemeeuw hallway for which it was done, the work was, and remains, a powerful and enigmatic work that continues to evoke an experience of awe, contemplation, and even transcendence in the person entering the house.

Joan Greer (Ph.D., Free University of Amsterdam) is Associate Professor in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture, Adjunct Professor in Religious Studies, and member of the Science and Technology in Society Interdisciplinary Program at the University of Alberta, Canada. Her research centers on late 19th- and early 20th-century European (especially Dutch and Belgian) visual and material culture with a particular focus on the convergences of art and design discourses with those of religion and radical politics. Areas of concentration include constructions of genius and artistic identity; the relationship between artistic and religious discourses; representations of Christ; Vincent van Gogh; art and design periodicals; and constructions of nature. Her current major research project is a monograph dealing with artistic identity in late nineteenth-century Holland. She is also completing work on a Virtual Exhibition of Folkways record cover art and design.

Email the author at [jegreer\[at\]ualberta.ca](mailto:jegreer[at]ualberta.ca)

Notes

An earlier version of this article appeared in my dissertation "The Artist as Christ: The Image of the Artist in The Netherlands, 1885–1902, with a Focus on the Christological Imagery of Vincent van Gogh and Johan Thorn Prikker" (PhD diss., Vrije University Amsterdam, 2000). I would like to thank Carel Blotkamp for his valuable suggestions and Betsy Boone for her careful reading and insightful commentary. Others whose assistance I gratefully acknowledge are Mrs. J. C. Ellerman, for kindly providing me with the opportunity of studying and photographing the mural discussed here; Marty Bax for discussions on Theosophy and Freemasonry; and my late husband Rudy de Kimpe for assistance with photography and archival research. I would also like to acknowledge the useful commentary contributed by the anonymous reviewers of this article.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author and photographs are by Ruud de Kimpe. Thorn Prikker to Henri Borel, May 1, 1895, in Joop M. Joosten, ed., *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker aan Henri Borel en anderen 1892–1904: Met ter inleiding fragmenten uit het dagboek van Henri Borel 1890–1892* (Nieuwkoop: Heuff, 1980), 218 (letter 35). Much of what has been written

about Johan Thorn Prikker, to date, has its basis in his correspondence. The letters were written primarily to Henri Borel, between the years 1892 and 1896, when Borel was working as a translator in China and the Dutch Indies, and by 1902 they had already been published and often quoted from. Thorn Prikker's correspondence appeared first in 1895 and 1896 as a series of articles in the *Tweemaandelijksch Tijdschrift*, a bimonthly magazine for the arts begun by Albert Verwey and Lodewijk van Deyssel in 1894, and then in 1897 in book form. For a discussion of the history of the correspondence see Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 59–62. While many of the letters are dated precisely, sometimes this information was partially or even completely missing from the archival material. Joosten has provided estimations of dates, which are clearly annotated and rationalized, based on careful analysis of the letters' content and context.

[2] The composite term "Social Anarchism" reflects the dynamic but ill-defined and shifting relationship that existed between socialist and anarchist movements in the Lowlands in the latter half of the nineteenth century and first part of the twentieth century. I have written an article and an essay that deal specifically with these questions, the first in a broader sense and the second specifically in relation to Johan Thorn Prikker: "Labour, Nature and the Decorative in Late Nineteenth-Century Print Culture: Representations of the Socially Engaged Artist in Dutch and Belgian Art Periodicals," in *Commitment and Imagination: Changing Perceptions of the Social Question*, ed. Ilja van den Broek, Christianne Smit, and Dirk Jan Wolffram (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 83–100; and "De gevestigde sociale orde omverwerpen: Vroege anarchistische tekeningen (Demolishing the Old Social Order: Early Anarchistic Drawings)," in *Johan Thorn Prikker: De Jugendstil Voorbij*, ed. Christiane Heiser, Mienke Simon Thomas, and Barbara Til, exh. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen; Düsseldorf: Museum Kunstpalast, Bruges: Dukkerij Die Keure, 2010), 54–63. This catalogue, written in Dutch and German, warrants special mention as it represents an important addition to Thorn Prikker scholarship and is the most comprehensive body of work that has appeared on this artist to date.

[3] Thorn Prikker to Henry van de Velde February 1895, Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 213–14, (letter 34).

[4] This shift took place ca. 1895–96, although there are indications that even prior to this Thorn Prikker was moving in the direction of the applied arts.

[5] For discussions which consider Thorn Prikker's mural see Joop M. Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland 1892–1902: De Belgische Art Nouveau en De Nederlandse Nieuwe Kunst," *Cahiers Henry van de Velde* 13 (1974): 6–48, figs. 19–21; Joop M. Joosten, "Zu Ornamententwürfen von Jan Thorn Prikker im Clemens-Sels-Museum," in *Neusser Jahrbuch für Kulturgeschichte und Heimatkunde*, ed. Irmgard Feldhaus, (Neuss: Clemens-Sels Museum, 1969): 5–11; Albert Plasschaert, *Muurschilderingen, Toegepaste Kunsten in Nederland* (Rotterdam: W. L. & J. Brusse's, 1926), 37–38; and Bettina Polak, *Het Fin-de-Siècle in de Nederlandse Schilderkunst, de symbolische beweging, 1890–1900* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), 300–301, 400. The house and mural have been reproduced and discussed more recently by Marjan Groot in "Revolutionaire weelde en ambachtelijke schoonheid: Van Wisselingh en Arts and Crafts," in *Van Neo-Renaissance tot Postmodernisme: Honderdvijfentwintig jaar Nederlandse Interieurs 1870–1995*, ed. Ellinoor Bergvelt and others (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 1996), 99, 105–6; Jacqueline Knudsen, *Art Nouveau Architectuur in Den Haag: Een fotografisch overzicht* (Blaricum: V & K, 1998), 42–43; Sigrid de Jong "Communicatie in Huis," in *Leven in Toen: Vier Eeuwen Nederlands Interieur in Beeld*, ed. Frans Burkom and others (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001), 224–25; Christiane Heiser, "Johan Thorn Prikker (1868–1932): Een 'kunstarbeider' op zoek naar sociale gerechtigheid en religieuze ervaring," in Heiser, Thomas, and Til, *Johan Thorn Prikker: De Jugendstil Voorbij*, 18–21; and Marjan Groot, "Schoonheden in de toegepaste kunst: Batiks en meubelen voor Arts and Crafts en Binnenhuis 'Die Haghe' in Den Haag," in Heiser, Simon, and Til, *Johan Thorn Prikker: De Jugendstil*, 80, 82, 84. More comprehensive studies of the mural appear in my dissertation "The Artist as Christ," 84–102, and in that of Christiane Heiser, "Kunst. Religion. Gesellschaft. Johan Thorn Prikker: Das Werk zwischen Symbolismus zum Deutschen Werkbund" (PhD diss. University of Groningen, 2008), 105–22.

[6] "das Schönste was mann sich denken kann." Ibid.

[7] Between 1900 and 1902 Henry van de Velde had been working for Karl Ernst Osthaus on the Folkwang Museum which opened in the summer of 1902, one month after the completion of the Zeemeeuw mural. Given Van de Velde's past and ongoing endorsements of Thorn Prikker's work, it seems likely that Thorn Prikker harbored hopes of once again securing Van de Velde's support. Indeed, although not for eight years, Thorn Prikker, too, would work for Osthaus in Hagen. See Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland 1892–1902," 35; and Reinhold Happel, "'Van verbazingwekkende kracht en abstractie': Het stationsraam en werk voor Karl Osthaus in Hagen," in Heiser, Simon, and Til, *Johan Thorn Prikker: De Jugendstil Voorbij*, 128–45.

- [8] Thorn Prikker's participation in the 19th exhibition of the Vienna Secession (January 22–March 6, 1904) that came about as a result of Kolomon Moser's visit is noted by Joop Joosten in *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 6, 273.
- [9] Philippe Zilcken, "Johan Thorn Prikker," *Elsevier's Maandschrift* 12, 1902, 147–60.
- [10] *Ibid.*, 147.
- [11] "Das Landhaus Dr. Leurings in Wittebrug," *Dekorative Kunst: Eine Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Angewandte Kunst* 8 (1905): 177–80.
- [12] Leuring had previously engaged Thorn Prikker to carry out an interior design commission for him in The Hague. This is clear from a short article in the 1899 summer issue of the periodical *De Tuin*. "De Tentoonstelling van Batiks door J. Thorn Prikker," *De Tuin* 1, no. 3, July 1899, 35.
- [13] An important study on Belgian Art Nouveau architecture that considers Henry van de Velde's domestic architecture is Amy Ogata, *Art Nouveau and the Social Vision of Modern Living: Belgian Artists in a European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- [14] Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland," 33, 38–39.
- [15] *Ibid.*, 32. When Leuring sold his house in 1920, he left it in its original state. The house was in a zone depopulated by the Nazis during the German occupation of Holland, however, and it underwent a period of abuse and neglect during the Second World War. Subsequent owners partially restored the house, but pre-war photographs (figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8), included here alongside others which were taken in 1999, better reflect the original state of the house's interior. They also show the rural surroundings of the house, which is now in a populated urban area.
- [16] An early version of the floor plan is reproduced in Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland," 35. As Joosten has noted, however, some changes were made to this floor plan in the building of the house. For a discussion of Bloemenwerf, see Ogata, *Art Nouveau and the Social Vision of Modern Living*, 95.
- [17] Leuring's medical practice was at Willemstraat 38 in The Hague. Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland," 46n76.
- [18] Thorn Prikker to Henry van de Velde, December 1902/January 1903, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 274 (letter 86).
- [19] Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland," 35.
- [20] Hildelies Balk, "H.P. Bremmer en Leiden," in *Dageraad van de Moderne Kunst: Leiden en Omgeving 1890–1940*, ed. Doris Wintgens Hötte and Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999), 46, 47, 49.
- [21] W. J. H. Leuring, "Johan Thorn Prikker," *Wendingen* 9, no. 9 (1928): 3.
- [22] W. J. H. Leuring, *Gedächtnisrede für Johan Thorn Prikker Professor an den Kölner Werkschulen* (Cologne: Kunstgewerbe-Museum der Stadt Köln, 1932). Leuring speaks of the relationship that sprang up at that meeting date: "und so entstand eine Art 'Seelenverwandtschaft.'" *Ibid.*, 3.
- [23] "Das Landhaus Dr. Leurings," 178.
- [24] Henry F. Lenning, *The Art Nouveau* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1951), 42.
- [25] Thorn Prikker to Borel, January 22–28, 1893, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 95 (letter 7).
- [26] Verlaine delivered his two talks on November 3 and 4, 1892 in The Hague branch/lodge Freemason building. See A. B. G. M. van Kalmthout, *Muzentempels: Multidisciplinaire Kunstkringen in Nederland tussen 1880 en 1914* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), 474.
- [27] See Greer, "De gevestigde sociale orde omverwerpen," 56; Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen, "De presentatie van eigentijdse kunst in Leiden tussen 1890 en 1940," in Wintgens Hötte and De Jongh-Vermeulen, *Dageraad van de Moderne Kunst*, 46–47; and Hildelies Balk, "De Kunstpaus: H. P. Bremmer, 1871–1956" (PhDdiss. Vrije University of Amsterdam, 2004), 20.
- [28] Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland," 33, 35.
- [29] The Remonstrants, known for their liberal theological views within Dutch Protestantism formulated in the early seventeenth century, stood out against Calvinist views to the extent that the Remonstrants were originally banned and did not gain official recognition until the late eighteenth century. The movement continues today. For a discussion of its history, see Otto J. De Jong, *Nederlandse Kerk Geschiedenis* (Nijkerk: Uitgeverij G. F. Callenbach, 1985), 183–99.
- [30] Census information from Bevolkingsregister (Census register), 1895–1913, 130:241. The Hague City Archives. Leuring's children, Johanna, Hillegonda, and Johan Cornelis were born in 1901, 1903, and 1904 respectively.

[31] Leuring became a Freemason on November 16, 1901 and remained one for the rest of his life. Later, in the 1930s, he would also become a member of the Freemason *Vereeniging Tempelbouw* which concerned itself specifically with art and art theory.

[32] The history of interior design is a subject that has recently become an area of rich enquiry. Of particular note among recent publications relevant to the period dealt with in this article are Penny Sparkes, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008); Sandra Afoldy and Janice Helland, *Craft, Space and Interior Design, 1855–2005* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and Penny Sparke and S. McKellar, eds., *Interior Design and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

[33] For an early overview see L. Gans, *Nieuwe Kunst: De Nederlandse bijdrage aan de Art Nouveau* (Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1966).

[34] Johan Altorf had worked for Thorn Prikker on a number of projects. The most significant of these was the work he had done several years earlier carrying out Thorn Prikker's designs for the façade of *Arts & Crafts*, an art and design dealership operating in The Hague between 1898 and 1904, of which Thorn Prikker was the artistic director in the first two years. For a recent discussion that compares The Hague firm with Siegfried Bing's Salon de l'Art Nouveau in Paris, see Marjan Groot, "Siegfried Bing's Salon de L'Art Nouveau and the Dutch Gallery Arts and Crafts," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2005), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer05/siegfried-bings-salon-de-lart-nouveau-and-the-dutch-gallery-arts-and-crafts> (accessed November 16, 2011). For the most complete overview of Thorn Prikker's association with the firms "Arts and Crafts" and "Die Haghe' Binnenhuis," see Heiser, "Kunst. Religion. Gesellschaft," esp. 26–93. For Altorf's work with Thorn Prikker on the mural see Zilcken, "Johan Thorn Prikker," 147.

[35] Heiser, "Kunst. Religion. Gesellschaft," 110–12.

[36] Ibid. Heiser also points to the collaborative opportunities provided by the interior design program as a whole, relating this to the earlier mentioned concern for creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Ibid., 105–8.

[37] Albert Plasschaert, *XIXde Eeuwse Hollandsche Schilderkunst* (Amsterdam: Mij. voor goede en goedkoope lectuur, 1909), 194.

[38] Leuring, born in 1864, would have been 38 years old. His first born child, Johanna, was born August 4, 1901.

[39] See Thorn Prikker to Borel, January 11, 1894, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 162–69 (letter 20); *ibid.*, 294n3; *Maandschrift voor Vercieringskunst*, May/June, 1896, Plates V and L; and Polak, *Het fin-de-siècle in de Nederlandse schilderkunst*, 395–96, nos. 172 and 173. The drawings were identified in this publication as a project and a fragment (it is, in fact, a variation rather than a fragment) of the project for a wall-painting planned for a monastery in Belgium. Thorn Prikker had had close artistic connections with Belgium since 1893. The monastery, however, is referred to only as "the monastery H..." and as there is, to my knowledge, no existing information regarding this commission or any references to it in the correspondence where Thorn Prikker refers specifically to these drawings, it seems unlikely that the commission ever existed.

[40] Thorn Prikker to Borel, January 11, 1894, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 162–67 (letter 20).

[41] Ibid. 165.

[42] The artist-worker or artist-laborer construct at this time of increasing social unrest in the Lowlands, and how this image fits in with the artists who conceive of the artist's task in spiritual and/or revolutionary terms, is further explored in Greer, "Labour, Nature and the Decorative." In respect to the reference to Arts and Crafts theory here, it is of relevance to note that the terms *Nieuwe Kunst* (the Dutch Art Nouveau), and Arts and Crafts do not represent two mutually exclusive tendencies. The interconnections between Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau represent a historiographical problem that has yet to be fully addressed in the literature concerning this period.

[43] Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 166.

[44] A reproduction of the work was exhibited in Groningen between these two dates in December 1896 at which time it was merely identified as a design for a mural. *Ibid.*, 294n3.

[45] Greer "Artist as Christ," 59–62.

[46] I have explored these issues in greater depth in "Artist as Christ" and in two articles (in Dutch): "Three Christ Paintings of 1892 by Johan Thorn Prikker: 'An Art of their own Flesh and Blood'" Part 1, "Christ on the Cross," *Jong Holland* 19, no. 1 (2003), 18–26; and Part 2, "A Love and The Bride," *Jong Holland* 19, no. 2 (2003), 28–36, 56.

[47] Polak, *Het fin-de-siècle in de Nederlandse schilderkunst*, 157.

[48] Greer, "Artist as Christ;" and Greer, "Three Christ Paintings of 1892," Parts 1 and 2.

[49] While this was the dominant Christ/Artist image at the turn of the century, it should be noted that there is a small, sub-category within this kind of imagery which involves a degree of sexual ambiguity, androgyny, or even explicit feminization of the Christ figure.

[50] See Joan Greer, "De Tuin (*The Garden*) and the Genre of Artists' Periodicals in Late Nineteenth-century Holland: A Case Study with Reflections on Methods," in *Centering the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Art*, special issue of *Nineteenth Century Studies* (forthcoming); and Anna Brzyski, "What's in a Name? Artist-Run Exhibition Societies and the Branding of Modern Art in Fin-de-Siècle Europe," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 6, no. 2 (August 2007), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn07/whats-in-a-name-artist-run-exhibition-societies-and-the-branding-of-modern-art-in-fin-de-siecle-europe> (accessed November 16, 2011). For a discussion of multi-disciplinary artist societies specific to Holland see Kalmthout, *Muzentempels*.

[51] The images represented in these forms of graphic design ranged widely. For example, in a catalogue cover by Jan Toorop for an exhibition of the Belgian artist's group *Les XX* in *The Hague Art Circle* (*Haagsche Kring*) in 1892, and in the earlier design by Selwyn Image for the title page of *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* of 1884, to which Toorop—whether consciously or unconsciously—was making reference, the artist or artist's group is represented as a mediaeval knight; and, in Gustav Klimt's poster for the first Vienna Secession Exhibition in 1898, as Theseus slaying the Minotaur. See Joan E. Greer, "Radical Beeldtaal in *Van Nu en Straks: De Nederlandse bijdragen aan het Van Gogh-nummer*" (*Ghent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, 2005) 145–61.

[52] Greer, "Labour, Nature and the Decorative," 85–88.

[53] Plasschaert, *Muurschilderingen*, 194.

[54] Georg Fuchs, "Holland und die Gross-Deutsche Kultur," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 10 (April 1902–September 1902): 533; and Georg Fuchs, *Internationale Ausstellung für moderne dekorative Kunst in Turin* (Koch:Darmstadt, 1902), 17–24, fig. 23.

[55] There is here a strange reversal of the tradition in Christian iconography of associating Christ's left side with evil and right with good. The reversal cannot be explained simply by the mirror imaging that takes place in printmaking as Christ's right hand in the Leuring mural is also surrounded by thorns, and as the reversal also appears elsewhere, but not consistently, in Thorn Prikker's Christ images.

[56] Bevolkingsregister (Census register), 1895–1913, 218:63, The Hague Municipal Archives.

[57] *Ibid.*, 130:241.

[58] It was 1798 when freedom of religion was introduced; however, the actual emancipation of the Catholics did not take place until fifty-five years later when the Episcopal hierarchy was restored. This situation and its significance in terms of visual culture is discussed in Carine Hoogveld, ed., *Glas in Lood in Nederland 1817–1968* (The Hague: SDU, 1989), esp. 29–33.

[59] Verkade converted to Catholicism in 1892, Toorop in 1905. Others in literary circles who did the same during this period were Frederik van Eeden and Jan Kalf. For a discussion of this phenomenon see Elisabeth Leijnse, *Symbolisme en nieuwe mystiek in Nederland voor 1900: Een onderzoek naar de Nederlandse receptie van Maurice Maeterlinck* (Geneva: Droz, 1995), 163–64.

[60] It was not until 1904 when Thorn Prikker moved to Germany, and began teaching at the new Krefeld school of craft, that he began to gain financial security. Heiser, "Johan Thorn Prikker (1868–1932)," 20. For Henry van de Velde's assistance in securing this position, see Joosten, "Henry van de Velde en Nederland," 39.

[61] For *Gemeenschapskunst* see Lieske Tibbe, *R. N. Roland Holst 1868–1938: Arbeid en schoonheid vereend: Opvattingen over Gemeenschapskunst* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1994); I have also explored aspects of this question, especially as related to the exchange of ideas between Belgium and Holland in this area. Greer, "Labour, Nature and the Decorative," 83–100. See also Caroline Boot and Marijke van der Heijden, "Gemeenschapskunst," in *Kunstenaren der Idee: Symbolistische tendenzen in Nederland, ca. 1880–1930*, ed. Carel Blotkamp and others, exh. cat. (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1978), 36–47; and Ernst Braches, *Het boek als Nieuwe Kunst 1892–1903: Een studie in Art Nouveau* (Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1973), 24–42.

[62] Aurier stated that art should be "Idéiste," "Symboliste," "Synthetique," "Subjective," and "Decorative." For a complete discussion of Aurier see Patricia Townley Mathews, *Aurier's Symbolist Art Criticism and Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986).

[63] Lieske Tibbe, "Theorie vs Praktijk: De invloed van Engelse socialistische idealen op de Nederlandse Kunstnijverheidsbeweging," in *Industrie en vormgeving in Nederland 1850–1950*, ed.

Ellinoor Bergvelt, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1985), 31–43; and Tibbe, *R. N. Roland Holst*, 109–16.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Boot and Van der Heijden, "Gemeenschapskunst," 36–47.

[66] Tibbe, for example, discusses this in the case of Henriette Roland Holst. Tibbe, "Theorie vs. Praktijk," 39.

[67] Three articles I have written that include discussions of these ideas are "Labour, Nature and the Decorative"; "The Artist's Correspondence and Radical Cultural Theory within Print Culture: Van Gogh's Letters in the Belgian Periodical '*Van Nu en Straks*,'" *Van Gogh Studies* 1 (2007): 112–35, and "Radical Visual Language in '*Van Nu en Straks*,'" (in Dutch), in *Niet onder een vlag: 'Van Nu en Straks' en de paradoxen van het fin de siècle*, ed. Raf de Bont and others (Ghent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 2005), 145–61.

[68] Thorn Prikker to Borel, January 11, 1894, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 168 (letter 20).

[69] Thorn Prikker to Borel, March 20, 1894, *ibid.*, 172 (letter 22).

[70] Ibid.

[71] For a discussion of Theosophy in Holland, see Geurt Imanse and John Steen, "Achtergronden van het Symbolisme," in Blotkamp and others, *Kunstenaren der Idee*, 21–35, esp. 28–32.

[72] Examples in which this element is obvious include Thorn Prikker's drawing *La fin d'une ère* of 1895 in Polak, *Het Fin-de-Siècle in de Nederlandse Schilderkunst*, 395, no. 175, his design for a painting for the Exhibition for Woman's Labour in 1898, *ibid.*, 399, no. 186a, and Thorn Prikker's letter to Borel of September 27, 1895, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 230 (letter 38).

[73] See, for example, Myriam Wierschowski, "Het Katholieke Gezellenhuis en de Driekoningkerk in Neuss," in Heiser, Thomas, and Til, *Johan Thorn Prikker: De Jugendstil Voorbij*, 146–67. Thorn Prikker's reputation as a radical with an anti-clerical stance was made more palatable and easy to overlook once he was in Germany, given his increasing recognition and reputable position as designer. This increased recognition began following his appointment as instructor at the Krefeld School of Arts and Crafts in 1904, and his subsequent membership in the Deutsche Werkbund in 1909. This latter year seems to have been pivotal with respect to the acceptance of Thorn Prikker's religious art, with his participation in the 1909 "Exhibition of Christian Art" in Düsseldorf, leading to support and commissions of his religious works. See Christiane Heiser, "Johan Thorn Prikker: Een 'Kunstarbeider' op zoek naar sociale gerechtigheid en religieuze ervaring," in Heiser, Thomas, and Til, *Johan Thorn Prikker: De Jugendstil Voorbij*, 20–28.

[74] Thorn Prikker to Borel, February, 1895, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 212 (letter 34).

[75] Ibid.

[76] Greer, "De gevestigde sociale orde omverwerpen," 54, 56.

[77] Ibid. While this reputation caused him some problems, it was one in which he took pride and which he repeatedly reinforced and cultivated in his own correspondence.

[78] This revived interest in mural art within Holland also received important international impetus from a number of sources, including the murals of Puvis de Chavannes in France and those from the Beuron School in Germany.

[79] Thorn Prikker to Borel, February 1895, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 212 (letter 34).

[80] Ibid.

[81] Boot and Van der Heijden, "Gemeenschapskunst," 36.

[82] Plasschaert's list of Dutch muralists includes Johan Thorn Prikker (with a reference to the mural in De Zeemeeuw), as well as Jan Toorop, R. N. Roland Holst, W. van Konijnenburg, Matthieu Wiegman, and Joep Nicolas. Plasschaert, *Muurschilderingen*, 14.

[83] Artists associated with Berlage's Stock Exchange, and especially Roland Holst, who would become a member of the SDAP (*Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij* or Social-Democratic Labor Party) in 1897, often had links to the Dutch socialist movement. Boot and Van der Heijden, "Gemeenschapskunst," 42. For the notion of a Gesamtkunstwerk in Berlage's work see Titus M. Eliëns, *H.P. Berlage: Ontwerpen voor het interieur* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1998), 66.

[84] Eliëns, *H.P. Berlage: Ontwerpen voor het interieur*, 64–77.

[85] H. P. Berlage, "Over architectuur," *Tweemaandelijks Tijdschrift* 1, no.2 (1895): 427, quoted in Boot and Van der Heijden, "Gemeenschapskunst," 42. It is also of relevance to note that Berlage had designed a house in The Hague in 1898 for Carel Henny. There is no indication, to my knowledge, however, that either Van de Velde or Thorn Prikker were responding in any way to Berlage's architecture or interior design for the house when conceiving their plans for De Zeemeeuw. It is, however, interesting to note that within Henny's large collection of art, both Johan Thorn Prikker and J. C. Altorf would be represented. Eliëns, *H.P. Berlage*, 30. The competition or rivalry that arose between Berlage and Van de Velde falls outside the scope of this article, but is part of the wider historical picture.

[86] Boot and Van der Heijden, "Gemeenschapskunst," 39. See also Tibbe, *R. N. Roland Holst*, 150.

[87] Robert Herbert and Eugenia Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac and Others," *Burlington Magazine* 102 (November 1960): 472–82; Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Allan Antliffe, *Anarchy and Art, From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), esp. chaps. 1 and 2; Robyn Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape* (Hampshire, Eng.: Ashgate, 2007); Greer, "Labour, Nature and the Decorative," 83n3.

[88] Imanse and Steen, "Achtergronden van het Symbolisme," 21–35. See also A. C. J. de Vrankrijker, *Onze anarchisten en utopisten* (Bussum: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1972).

[89] Tibbe, *R. N. Roland Holst*, 21–35; For a work which deals specifically with this period in the history of the Dutch Labor movement see D. J. Warnsink, *Het socialisme op de tweesprong: De geboorte van de S.D.A.P.* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1939).

[90] Warnsink, *Het socialisme op de tweesprong*.

[91] For the complex radical and idealist tendencies that came together during the period see Jan Bank and Maarten van Buren, "Utopisten en socialisten," chap. 11 in 1900. *Hoogtij van burgerlijke cultuur* (The Hague: SDU, 2000).

[92] I have discussed this issue in relation to Thorn Prikker in "Three Christ Paintings," Part 2, "A Love and The Bride," 30–31; and more recently in "De gevestigde sociale orde omverwerpen," 54–63.

[93] Another drawing, *Anarchie*, dealing with this theme, was done by Thorn Prikker in 1894. Inv. no. 568gr.14, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands. Both are discussed in Greer, "De gevestigde sociale orde omverwerpen," 54–63.

[94] Thorn Prikker to Maria van de Velde-Sèthe, Spring 1897, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 256 (letter 58).

[95] See Greer, "Labour, Nature and the Decorative," 92–94; and Greer, "Radical Beeld Taal in 'Van Nu en Straks,'" 152, 153, 159–61.

[96] Thorn Prikker to Maria van de Velde-Sèthe, Spring 1897, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 256 (letter 58).

[97] Louis Patsouras, "Les Temps Nouveaux and other Activity, 1895–1900," chap. 5, in *Jean Grave and French Anarchism* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1978).

[98] The Latin title given to this work and the words "Quo Usque Tandem," appearing in the drawing reproduced as fig. 24, are unusual within Thorn Prikker's oeuvre.

[99] Thorn Prikker to Borel, Spring 1896, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 247 (letter 49).

[100] The human-animal combination may also be related to Kropotkin's concept of "mutual aid," which he derived from Darwin's research on animals and applied to his theories of natural cooperation in the context of human socialization. This concept was not widely known, however, until the publication of Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (London: William Heinemann, 1902).

[101] The conflation of anarchist and Christ had also appeared in Thorn Prikker's oeuvre several months earlier in a drawing which, according to Thorn Prikker's correspondence, is now lost. Thorn Prikker to Henri Borel, November, 1895, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 236 (letter 43).

[102] The literature on F. Domela Nieuwenhuis is extensive; a good discussion is Jan Meyers, *Domela, een hemel op aarde: Leven en Streven van Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1993).

[103] I have considered this radicalized image of Christ within nineteenth-century religious discourse in "Artist as Christ," 73–74.

[104] It should be noted that, in a general sense, Thorn Prikker's interest in ornamentation also developed in relation to his batik design (see Heiser, "Kunst. Religion. Gesellschaft," 75–85; 109; and Groot, "Schoonheden in de toegepaste kunst," 64–85) although, in respect to the *Zeemeeuw* mural's program of ornamentation, his batik design did not play a central role. While the nature of the ornamentation within Thorn Prikker's batik designs is quite different from those found in De Zeemeeuw, the related interest in using simple linear forms in developing new, decorative languages of form (a tendency that in fact may be traced from the artist's paintings from the early 1890s) does represent an important aspect of Thorn Prikker's artistic formation. The significance of batik design as an aspect of Thorn Prikker's cultural production was explored in a research paper delivered at the UAAC (Universities Art Association of Canada) in 2005: Joan E. Greer, "Breaking Loose from 'Golden Frames': Community Art and Colonial Example in Dutch Fin-de-Siècle Material Culture," November, 10–12, 2005, Universities Art Association of Canada, Victoria, B.C., Canada.

[105] Marty Bax, *Het Web der Schepping: Theosophie en Kunst in Nederland van Lauweriks tot Mondriaan*, (Amsterdam: Sun, 2006). Other important contributions in this area include Imanse and Steen, "Achtergronden van het Symbolisme," 28–32; and Carel Blotkamp, "Annunciation of the New Mysticism" in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*, ed. Maurice Tuchman and others, exh. cat. (New York: Abbeville, 1986), 89–111.

[106] Bax, *Het Web der Schepping*, chap. 4.

[107] A good example of this is the Dutch periodical *Licht en Waarheid* which in the 1890s incorporated both anarchist and (increasingly) theosophical ideas. On the occurrence of this combination in the journal and the similar combination in the journal's publisher Willem Meng, see Bax, *Het Web der Schepping*, 329–30.

[108] Marty Bax, "De onbekende Walenkamp," *Jong Holland* 4, no. 4 (1988): 12.

[109] Braches, *Het boek als Nieuwe Kunst*, 110–11; and Mienke Simon Thomas, *De Leer van het Ornament: Versieren volgens voorschrift -1850–1930* (Amsterdam: Betaafsche Leeuw, 1996), 66–67. An important recent study on De Bazel is Yvonne Brentjens, *K. P. C. de Bazel (1869–1923)* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2006).

[110] Bax, *Het Web der Schepping*, 335–48.

[111] Thorn Prikker to Borel, January 11, 1894, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 162–69 (letter 20).

[112] For an excellent overview of the art historical debate concerning the scholarly positioning (esoteric/Theosophical vs. rationalist) of the triangle in Dutch visual and material production at this time, see Bax, *Het Web der Schepping*, esp. 335–48.

[113] For a discussion of this book see Braches, *Het boek als Nieuwe Kunst*, 112.

[114] This was discussed in his biography by the designer and adjunct director of *t Binnenhuis*, Jacques van den Bosch. Marty Bax, "Het Sfeeren Systeem 1898–1900: Berlage, Van den Bosch, De Groot Lauweriks en Walenkamp," *Jong Holland* 6, no. 4 (1990): 17–29.

[115] Ype Koopmans, "In het voetspoor van Pythagoras: Kosmische symboliek in de Nederlandse architectuur tussen 1900 en 1940," *Jong Holland* 5, no. 5 (1989): 23–34.

[116] Ibid.

[117] "Theosofie en Vrijmetselarij," *Theosophia* 12 (1904): 638–39.

[118] Koopmans, "In het voetspoor van Pythagoras." Some of the common motifs in the iconography of Freemasonry are outlined in the "Glossary of Terms" in James Stevens Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry: An Introductory Study* (London: Batsford, 1991), 233–46. For discussions of the history of Freemasonry in Holland see Anton van de Sande and Joost Rosendaal, eds., *"Een stille leerschool van deugd en goede zeden": Vrijmetselarij in Nederland in de 18e en 19e eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1995). For a visual overview of this subject see J. Hanrath, P. H. Pott, and B. Croiset van Uchelen, *De Beoefening der Koninklijke Kunst in Nederland: Een cultuurgeschiedkundige platenatlas der vrijmetselarij in Nederland* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971).

[119] Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry*.

[120] In 1905 Thorn Prikker designed a mural entitled *The Judgment of Solomon* which has stylistic and symbolic points in common with the mural done for Leuring. See Julian Heynen, *Johan Thorn Prikker: Werke bis 1910*, exh. cat. (Krefeld: Krefelder Kunstmuseen, 1982), 94 (no. 78); Heiser, "Kunst. Religion. Gesellschaft," 191–97; and Martina Padberg, "Terug naar de toekomst. De periode Krefeld: van toegepaste naar monumentale kunst," in Heiser, Simon Thomas and Til, *Johan Thorn Prikker: De Jugendstil Voorbij*, 98–111, fig. 112.

[121] Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry*, 244.

[122] I am grateful to Marty Bax for providing me with information on Leuring's affiliation with Masonry.

[123] I am consciously including both genders here, as at this point in time in Holland there was a stream of Masonry in which women were welcome as members. See Koopmans, "In het voetspoor van Pythagoras," 30. For discussion of the Freemason as a rough stone, see Bax, *Het Web der Schepping*, 189.

[124] See Marjan Groot's lexicon entry on Jac. van den Bosch in Titus M. Eliëns, Marjan Groot, and Frans Leidelmeijer, eds., *Kunstnijverheid in Nederland 1880–1940* (Bussum: V&K, 1997), 210.

[125] In this system Van den Bosch made use of the method of calculation in the Cabala, widely known in Theosophist circles. Bax, "Het Sfeeren Systeem," 23.

[126] For an analysis of this image see Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (London: Reaktion, 1994), 24.

[127] Freemasonry also played an important role in Belgian architecture, with which Thorn Prikker was familiar. For a discussion of this in respect to the architecture of Victor Horta see David Hanser, "Victor Horta, Art Nouveau, and Freemasonry," *Belgium, The Golden Decades 1880–1914*, ed. Jane Block (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 11–40.

[128] As Marty Bax has pointed out, Thorn Prikker's use of esoteric ideas in his art, similar to those of Jan Toorop, were loosely rather than directly tied to Theosophy and did not develop within the circles of a Theosophical Society. See Bax, *Het Web der Schepping*, 189.

[129] See, for example, Thorn Prikker to Borel, May 1895, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 216–19 (letter 35).

[130] Thorn Prikker's knowledge of this area was by no means limited to the writings of Borel. In May of 1895, for example, he writes that he had just read the epic of Hindu mythology, the *Mahabharata*, in German. Ibid., 216. Nor did Thorn Prikker always concur with Borel's conclusions concerning eastern cultural production or philosophy. See, for example, ibid., esp. 218–19.

[131] Zilcken also pointed out Thorn Prikker's interest in "the purity of ancient Chinese or Hindu philosophy." Zilcken, "Johan Thorn Prikker," 147.

[132] Ibid., 154. Curiously, the phrase was written in German in Zilcken's Dutch article, suggesting that his knowledge of the *Panchatantra* was based on a German translation rather than Van der Waals's 1895 translation. Zilcken's precise words, in his caption under the illustration of the mural, were: "Middenstuk van een wandversiering in de hal van Huis" De Zeemeeuw", te 'S Gravenhage. Motief: "Wer nicht die ganze Welt rundwandert enz. (Pantschatantra)."

[133] Leuring, *Gedächtnisrede für Johan Thorn Prikker*, 3–14.

[134] Ibid., 7. Leuring was referring to the three-volume 1895 translation by H. G. van der Waals with illustrations by Th. van Hoytema, *Pañcatantra: Arische levenswijsheid uit het oude Indië*, trans. H. G. van der Waals (Leiden: Kapteijn, 1895). Leuring indicates that Thorn Prikker based his knowledge of *Panchatantra* on this translation.

[135] Leuring, *Gedächtnisrede für Johan Thorn Prikker*, 9.

[136] Thorn Prikker to Borel, November 1895, in Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 236 (letter 43). Joosten has also related this "Atman motif" directly with the main figure in the *Zeemeeuw* sgraffito. Joosten, *De Brieven van Johan Thorn Prikker*, 305.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Johan Thorn Prikker, Mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Sgraffitto.
Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Johan Thorn Prikker, Mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Photography:
Ruud de Kimpe. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Henry van de Velde, Residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst* 8, 1905, 179. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Henry van de Velde, Residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst* 8, 1905, 177. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Living room of W. J. H. Leuring Residence in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst*, 8, 1905, 186. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, Johan Thorn Prikker, Screen and cradle in W. J. H. Leuring residence in The Hague), photograph from *Dekorative Kunst* 8, 1905, 187. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, Mural and top of staircase in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 8, Central staircase in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, photograph from *Dekorative Kunst*, 8, 1905, 181. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 9, Johan Thorn Prikker, Detail of the mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Sgraffitto. Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 10, Johan Thorn Prikker, Detail of the mural in the residence of W. J. H. Leuring in The Hague, 1902. Sgraffitto. Photography: Ruud de Kimpe. [\[return to text\]](#)

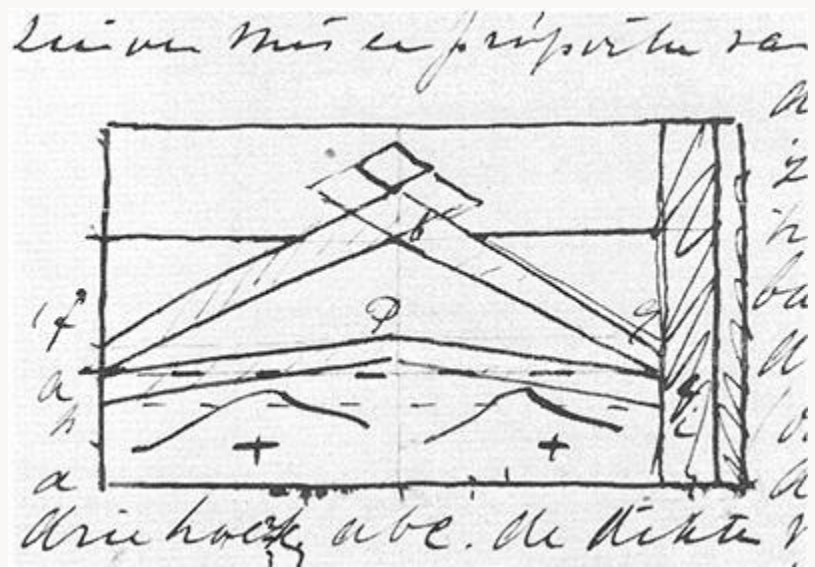


Fig. 11, Johan Thorn Prikker, Sketch in letter to Henri Borel, January 11, 1894. Pen on paper. Dutch Literature Museum (Nederlands Letterkundig Museum), The Hague. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 12, Johan Thorn Prikker, Sketch in letter to Henri Borel, January 11, 1894. Pen on paper. Dutch Literature Museum (Nederlands Letterkundig Museum), The Hague. [\[return to text\]](#)

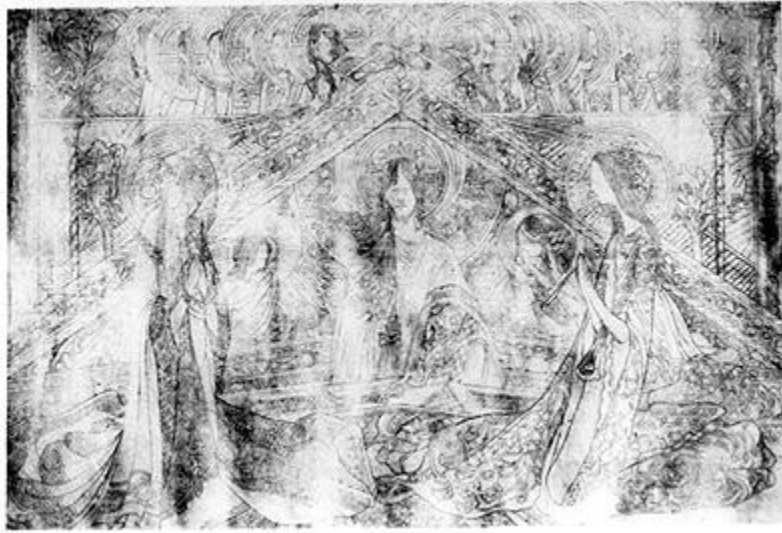


Fig. 13, Johan Thorn Prikker, Project for a wall painting, *Maandschrift voor Vercieringskunst*, May/June 1896, Plate V. [\[return to text\]](#)

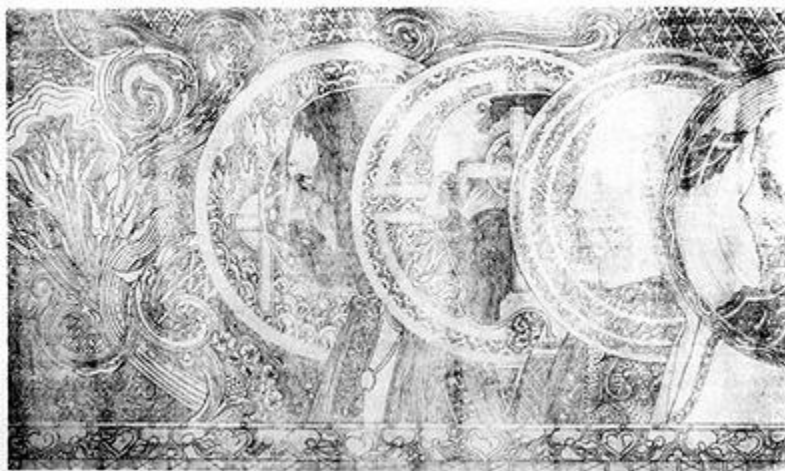


Fig. 14, Johan Thorn Prikker, Project for a Wall Painting (detail), *Maandschrift voor Vercieringskunst*, May/June 1896, Plate L. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 15, Johan Thorn Prikker, *The Bride*, 1892–93. Oil on Canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 16, Johan Thorn Prikker, *Descent from the Cross*, 1892–93. Oil on Canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 17, Johan Thorn Prikker, Poster for *Revue Bimestrielle pour l'art appliqué*, 1896. Lithograph. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 18, Johan Thorn Prikker, *Anarchy*, 1894. Charcoal on paper. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo. [\[return to text\]](#)