

Speeches delivered at the opening of the exhibition *Allart van Everdingen (1621-1675) – The Rugged Landscape* in Alkmaar, 17 September 2021

1. Speech Patrick van Mil, museum director

Madam Mayor, patrons, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen – a warm welcome to you at the opening of Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar's exhibition *Allart van Everdingen: The Rugged Landscape*.

A special welcome to the Minister Counsellor of the Embassy of Norway and to our foreign guests.

The speeches this evening will be in Dutch but we have handed out English translations to you to make sure you'll be able to follow the programme. We are very glad you are with us tonight.

And, of course, a warm welcome to those who are unable to be here this evening and are following this opening on line via a live stream.

What a treat it is, eighteen months after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, to be able to be together again to celebrate the opening of an exhibition. And not on screens, but face to face. And, the icing on the cake, in this beautiful Great St Lawrence's Church.

Or perhaps I should actually have said welcome to 'Everdingen Central'. And not because of the queue at the entrance that might have made you wait for a while this evening, but because five years ago Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar staged the first retrospective about the seventeenth-century Alkmaar painter Caesar van Everdingen and now presents the first monographic overview of his younger brother Allart van Everdingen. In fact, I contend, without any false modesty, that Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar has developed into *the* Van Everdingen knowledge centre. This role also goes hand in glove for a museum that focuses on the art and cultural history linked to the city and the region. We are, of course, talking about artists with roots in Alkmaar and whose work is represented in our collection.

This evening we're actually opening three exhibitions. You could call it a triptych. And that triptych reflects exactly what Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar stands for.

The central part of the triptych, the principal exhibition *Allart van Everdingen: The Rugged Landscape* presents a surprising overview of his oeuvre on the basis of a critical selection of highlights. Buttressed by thorough research undertaken in collaboration with specialists from partner organizations, we can tell a new story that places an artist who is linked to this city and our collection in an international context thanks to loans from all over the world.

In the years ahead we will continue on this course with the exhibition *Van Gogh, Cezanne, Le Fauconnier & the Bergense School* about the international influence of this first Dutch Expressionist movement, and with the first major retrospective of the sixteenth-century North Holland painter *Maarten van Heemskerck*, which we plan to stage in 2024 in cooperation with the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem.

What makes old art relevant to our era? The photographer Pascal Vossen answers this question in the left-hand part of this exhibition's triptych by following in Allart van Everdingen's footsteps and capturing with great skill, through the Scandinavian landscape, how the relationship between mankind and nature has changed. Nothing can be more topical than that. We at Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar will be doing this more often in future, for example by commissioning a contemporary artist to create a large artwork in 2023, together with the residents of Alkmaar, that underlines the current significance of the 450th anniversary of the Siege of Alkmaar. This will also be the case with the exhibition next year about the unique artist Rudi van de Wint, whose work is as timeless as it is topical.

I'm confident that what will surprise you most will be the third part of the exhibition, the right-hand side of the triptych, which is about Reynard the Fox as illustrated by Allart van Everdingen's striking drawings that bring the animals in the fable and all their characteristics to life. In this section children and families can really enjoy themselves and be inspired to start sketching. There's a reason why we're doing this. Education is at the core of our mission. We are accomplishing this mission for Alkmaar and also the entire region. For example, we've just started a three-year programme for technical secondary school students throughout northern North Holland. We thank Fonds 21 most gratefully for their support. In 2022 we will unveil a completely new collection display in which quality and accessibility go hand-in-hand, with inspiring and stimulating educational programmes for primary and secondary schools.

We can only achieve all these plans and ambitions with the support of Alkmaar City Council and many others. And the same is true of this exhibition. It has been made possible with the support of the Mondriaan Fund, Fonds 21, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Welfare, the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, the Samenwerkende Maritieme Fondsen, Vereniging Rembrandt and TAQA Cultuurfonds. Thank you all.

A special word of thanks goes to the museums and private collectors in Europe, the United States, Canada and the Netherlands who were willing to lend us their precious possessions for this exhibition. Without your cooperation we would never have been able to stage this exhibition. Thank you.

I thank our project partners the Rijksmuseum and the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History for the extraordinarily fruitful and enjoyable collaboration, which has demonstrated yet again how important it is that museums undertake research and share new insights and connections with the public.

Last but not least, I want to compliment the project team whose years of preparations have succeeded in making the Allart van Everdingen a real dream exhibition – under the inspiring leadership of curator and compiler Christi Klinkert and project leader Sara Bletz, with an exhibition design that is as subtle as it is theatrical by Jelena Stefanovic of Studio OTW and graphic designer Sappho Panhuysen of Studio Vrijdag. Congratulations!

So what sort of programme can you expect this evening?

To begin with, Christi Klinkert will guide you through Allard van Everdingen's oeuvre and explain the story behind the exhibition. This will be followed by the world premiere of a piece of music composed especially for this occasion by Jaco Benckhuijsen, who is not only a musician and composer but goes on solo kayak expeditions through inhospitable regions and reports on his experiences.

Bernice Notenboom, who joined Jaco Benckhuijsen in recording the audio tour for this exhibition, is a climate journalist who has travelled to both the South and the North Pole and won numerous awards for her books and documentaries. She will try to discover what so attracted Allart van Everdingen in the rugged north.

The mayor of Alkmaar, Anja Schouten, will then open the exhibition. After that, you will have an opportunity to visit the exhibition.

As you will understand, coronavirus restrictions mean that we will have to do this in groups. You will find stickers on your table showing the time that you can visit the museum and the exhibition. Drinks will be served at your table while you are waiting for your turn.

I should like to conclude by asking you to remain seated as much as possible during the evening and adhere to the 1.5 metre social distancing rule.

2. Speech Christi Klinkert, museum curator

Dear guests, people who are watching the livestream, colleagues, friends, family members,

It is the spring of 1644 – April, May. Allart van Everdingen, a young artist from Alkmaar, boards a ship, probably in Amsterdam. It sails to the North Sea, setting course for Gdansk or Riga on the Baltic, I imagine, or perhaps for Risør, a port in Norway. Many of Allart's contemporaries are heading *south*, to Italy, in search of inspiration. It is perhaps odd that Van Everdingen is setting his sights on more *northerly* climes, but his idiosyncratic plan is eminently practical. In those days hundreds of vessels a year sailed from Holland to the Baltic to pick up grain and to Norway for timber [SLIDE]. These ships regularly took paying passengers.

A few days out at sea, the ship Van Everdingen is sailing on runs into a huge storm and fetches up, damaged, on the south coast of Norway. Allart has already *painted* ships in distress [SLIDE], but being caught up in such a storm himself is a new and doubtless much less pleasant experience. Badly shaken, I would guess, he goes ashore and decides to stay where he is for the time being – in Norway.

The many Hollanders who work in the southern Norwegian ports as ship's captains or merchants help him find his way around. Most of his travels would have involved water, for there are no decent roads in the rugged Norwegian countryside. But this harsh beauty makes a profound impression on Allart. How different it all is from the flat, empty Republic! [SLIDE] He carries his drawing things with him all the time to record what strikes him on his travels.

Van Everdingen roams the region for a few months before he returns to Holland, no doubt with a portfolio full of sketches and a head full of inspiration. He marries Janneke Cornelisdr, a girl from Haarlem, and they settle in her home town. It is there, in Haarlem, that Allart paints his first Scandinavian mountain landscapes [SLIDE]. He signs and dates every one, as if he wants to put it on record that he is the first to make paintings like these. For they are new on the Dutch art market, his scenes of rocky landscapes with pine trees, log cabins and waterfalls [SLIDE]. Allart does very well with them, and famous contemporaries like Jacob van Ruisdael follow his lead [SLIDE]. This all happens in the period when Van Everdingen is living and working in Amsterdam, from 1652 onwards.

Around 1662 he is awarded a prestigious commission which proves that many years after his trip to the north he is still the undisputed master of the rugged landscape. The fabulously wealthy brothers Hendrick and Louys Trip ask him to paint Scandinavian scenes for the Trippenhuys – their magnificent double mansion on Kloveniersburgwal [SLIDE].

By now, Allart has done much more than paint and draw waterfalls. In Amsterdam he begins to produce *prints* of rocky landscapes [SLIDE]. From the start of his career, he also makes numerous *Dutch* landscapes [SLIDE] – paintings but above all drawings.

Pay particular attention to them, to Van Everdingen's drawings [SLIDE] – for this artist could do *anything* on paper. He worked in ink or in lavish watercolours, on large sheets and tiny 'playing cards' [SLIDE], he could sketch swiftly with a sureness of touch and work out the finest details.

In a singular departure from his usual work, around 1670 Van Everdingen made a series of prints illustrating the tale of Reynard the Fox. Most unusually, the sketches for these prints have survived [SLIDE]. The series must have been one of Allart's last major projects. He died in November 1675 at the age of fifty-four, and was buried in the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam.

Around 2010 we came up with a plan to devote an exhibition to this versatile artist in Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar. But first it was the turn of his older brother and fellow painter Caesar van Everdingen. He was born in Alkmaar in 1616 or 1617 so it was appropriate to honour him in 2016 [SLIDE]. Allart was born in 1621, so his time would come in 2021. And indeed, we opened the retrospective of Caesar's work on this spot in 2016. As soon as it closed, we embarked on the preparations for the retrospective of *Allart's* work.

Because Allart's oeuvre is so large and varied, we soon realized that we would have to work with a group of outside experts if we were to get a good grip on it. We were able to put together a veritable dream team of researchers [SLIDE]. Yvonne Bleyerveld, senior curator at the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History, focused on the drawings. Ellis Dullaart, also a curator at the RKD, concentrated specifically on the oil on paper drawings. Erik Hinterding, curator at the Rijksmuseum, investigated Van Everdingen's landscape prints, while I studied the paintings myself. We were able to appoint the young art historian Marjan Pantjes for the Reynard the Fox series thanks to a grant from the Vereniging Rembrandt's Ekkart Fund.

Each member of the team undertook extensive research into 'their' part of Allart's oeuvre, wrote an essay for the catalogue, made a list of works that ought to be in the exhibition and consulted on an effective arrangement in the galleries.

As things progressed, I had a growing feeling that I should visit the places in Scandinavia that Allart saw in 1644 [SLIDE]. His trip through Norway had determined the course of his career, and I wanted to get some sense of what had struck him *there*, coming from *here*. So in 2019 [SLIDE] I visited the waterfalls in Mölndal and Trollhättan and Bohus Fortress (all three in Sweden now, but then Norwegian territory), and the small Norwegian ports of Risør and Langesund. I travelled with a photographer, Pascal Vossen, who took photographs of motifs and locations that I recognized from Allart's paintings and drawings [SLIDE]. This trip was an exceptionally valuable experience, thanks in no small measure to the local guides who showed Pascal and me around. I should like to mention in particular Kristofer Torkildsen and Roar Isaksen, who spent a lot of time with us in Risør and Langesund respectively, and told us at length about the history and character of their country.

Pascal's photographs appear in the exhibition guide and in the catalogue. You can also admire some impressive blow-ups in our *first*, small exhibition gallery. They will help you to get into the Scandinavian mood and ready to travel, before you set out through Allart's landscapes in the *second* large gallery next to it [SLIDE]. Finally, you can see the master at work in the *third* gallery – our middle gallery – where the sketches and etchings of Reynard the Fox take centre stage.

It was a great pleasure and privilege to work on this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue with Yvonne, Ellis, Erik and Marjan. Yvonne – after we compiled and edited the books on the two Van Everdingen brothers together, it feels as if we are as close family as they were. I should like to ask you and our fellow researchers Erik, Ellis and Marjan to come up on stage so that I can shine the spotlight on you in gratitude for our brilliant and fruitful collaboration.

[flowers are offered]

There are many more experts who shared their special expertise with us during the preparations for this exhibition. And I should also like to say how much I enjoyed working with all the designers and translators, with conservators and my colleagues here in the museum. I can't mention them all by name here, but I take this opportunity to express my immense gratitude to them all.

I'd like to close by thanking two eminent scholars and great experts on Allart's work: Alice Davies, author of weighty tomes about Allart's paintings and drawings, and Frits Duparc, former director of the Mauritshuis. Frits is here tonight; Alice is following the opening online from the US.

Back in 2014 they agreed to support our exhibition project as consultants. In the intervening years they have made countless invaluable suggestions for loans and put us in touch with collectors; they helped us make choices so we could arrive at a strong selection and a sharp narrative line. Frits repeatedly said 'no more than three waterfalls, Christi! Or it will get boring'. I hope you'll forgive me, Frits, because I've included three painted and three drawn waterfalls, plus one in an etching ... Alice constantly encouraged us to develop our own insights and urged us not to regard her books as immutable truths. I know you want to share the title with me, Alice, but to me you will always be the only true *Everdingen Lady*.

Without the two of you, this exhibition and this book would never have happened. Your support was indispensable. To show our great gratitude we should therefore like to present *you both* with the first copies of the catalogue. Alice has received the English catalogue at home and I hope is opening it now, sitting behind her screen. I should like to ask Frits to come up to the stage now so that we can present him with the Dutch catalogue.

[catalogue is presented]

This is where I end my speech.

Thank you for listening.

3. Music by Jaco Benckhuijsen, writer, solo-sea kayaker and musician

4. Speech Bernice Notenboom, climate journalist

There are people with a compulsion to explore unknown regions, people for whom every journey is a road you don't have to travel again. It is a conviction that if you don't conform to a civilization, you will discover the secret of ultimate freedom that the civilized world has lost. The reasons are not monetary but nostalgic and irrational, driven by the spirit of adventure.

Only a small percentage of people have these nomadic genes, and these people become unhappy if they stay for too long in one place. They constantly have to go out into the world, and I am one of them. From time to time, something in my subconscious impels me to go travelling and this is the driving force behind my restlessness. I've crossed deserts, climbed mountains, explored canyons and been white water rafting. But nothing is as humbling as the desolate landscape of the North Pole [SLIDE].

Nothing can grow or flourish there: no tree, no plant, no insect, not even a bird dares to cross it. I remember the brilliant pastel colours of the polar sky, the diffuse light of the midnight sun, the stranded icebergs, Orcas diving in the Arctic Ocean, and on the coast polar bears on the prowl, looking for sleeping seals. Everything was right here – nothing was disturbed, so pure, so real, nature in her perfect order. I enjoyed the unadulterated simplicity of snow and ice, and saw how, with the slightest change in temperature, the ocean transformed into a thick ice slush or opened up on a still, windless day when the sun did its utmost to melt everything again. I could not get enough of the inhospitable, frozen places. I became addicted to that overwhelming sense of isolation, to all those innumerable shades of white and the realization of my own insignificance. I grew to love the harshness of the polar wilderness, that glittering Arctic puzzle of fragmented ice floes and ridges. I witnessed the unseen forces and fell in love.

We do not know precisely what restlessness or attraction prompted Allart van Everdingen to travel to Norway and it may well have been coincidence that that was where he ended up. But perhaps, like me, he had an innate curiosity, had the urge to paint exotic landscapes that were utterly different from the Dutch countryside [SLIDE]. The south coast of Norway is not the North Pole, but in his day the journey to Scandinavia was just as magical and ominous. Exploring those merciless regions demands extreme vigilance, razor-sharp intuition and an all-encompassing understanding of your surroundings. Only then can you build up an intimate bond with the landscape. Almost certainly, Allart was intimidated by the ruggedness of the Scandinavian terrain. The dark waves that crashed against the rocks during a storm, the inaccessibility of the jagged mountains. The more difficult the conditions, the more you feel that you're alive (unless, of course, you're seasick).

But beside all the natural disasters, there are also stories of beauty and kindness in the Norwegian region; beside all the tragedy, some tenderness. And we see this reflected in Allart van Everdingen's art. Towering cloudscapes pierced with sunbeams alternate with ferocious waves that drive a merchantman on to the rocks [SLIDE].

Why Allart remained in Norway for months is a mystery. Did he realize, like me, that only then does life in the far North really come into its own? Away from all the clutter, certainty, safety nets and springboards into a raw, pitiless world which confronts you with yourself every second. These are life lessons you cannot get anywhere else. Perhaps Allart recognized this drive and we have in common the fact that we were really happy there.

Over the years I have seen the Arctic region change enormously [SLIDE]. The last ten years have been the hottest in 1,500 years and 2020 was the absolute record. It is twice as bad in the far North as in the rest of the world. In the summer I turn seventy, the North Pole could have disappeared altogether. Seven million square kilometres, one percent of the earth's surface, vanished in eighteen years.

What we humans don't realize is that the North Pole is not the victim of climate change, it has become the driving force behind it. The ice at the North Pole is melting at a much faster rate than was originally thought, and since ice influences ocean currents, which in turn are all-dominating for the climate on earth, the result can be a disaster for humanity. The ice keeps our planet at a cool 16 degrees as long as the plug of the air conditioning stays in. But at some time in the last ten years it has been brutally pulled out and we are in defrost mode.

If Allart lived now, would he have been able to capture the threat of climate change in his paintings? Would he have noticed that it's raining in the mountains, not snowing? That the oceans have been emptied of fish and birds no longer migrate south? We admire Allart's seventeenth-century work. It radiates awe of the unspoilt nature around him [SLIDE]. With great detail he drew larches and blue spruce needles, mountainsides covered with vegetation. In this exhibition we can enjoy the pure beauty of that age. And perhaps Allart van Everdingen has something to teach us. If we start to believe that beauty will save us because we are really prepared to devote ourselves to it. [SLIDE]

5. Speech Anja Schouten, Mayor of Alkmaar

A very good evening to you all. Here we all are together. Really looking forward to this no doubt beautifully staged exhibition of works by one of our home-grown Alkmaar talents – Allart van Everdingen. Like me – and probably many of you – born and raised in our beautiful city.

2

In Allart and his brother Caesar's time, Alkmaar was a hotbed of talent. They were not the only stars.

Many of them moved away at some point in their lives to other cities and even other countries, but they all came from here.

And although we are of course, as good North Holland folk, sensible and sober, we can permit ourselves to be proud of this heritage.

Previous speakers have already told you something about Allart's life and work. About his passions, his talents and his life, which to an extent were overshadowed by his big brother Caesar.

3

This exhibition finally puts him in the limelight which, as you have heard and will shortly be able to see for yourselves, is long overdue and richly deserved.

If we can believe the stories, he was a somewhat strong-willed lad. He was someone who didn't run with the pack. He set his own course.

In exactly the opposite direction. If you ask me, that's very much Alkmaar...

Through his eyes and his talent, he portrayed our own city for us in a unique way.

4

But he also set out from Alkmaar to see the world and showed us, for instance, the beauty of Scandinavia.

He sketched what he saw on his travels with photographic precision. Later he worked up his sketches and bequeathed us beautiful drawings, prints and paintings.

We can feel his love for what he saw.

In this exhibition there is also a special focus on his drawings and prints of Reynard the Fox. Young and old alike find them delightful to see and enjoy.

5

These drawings invite you to talk to one another and, who knows, perhaps even start making some sketches together.

It's wonderful that, during the fourth centenary of his birth, we can honour Allart with this exhibition in our own Stedelijk Museum.

He left us a treasure trove, which we can learn more about in this exhibition.

And I can tell you that our Stedelijk Museum has created a marvellous tribute.

As always, they have devoted no end of care, time and love to present our priceless heritage.

Thank you!

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And that's good ... heritage has to be cherished. Because someone who knows their heritage, knows where they come from.

And if you know where you come from, you also know where you're going. Ready to face the future.

It's time to stop talking. I declare this exhibition open. Let's all go and enjoy it!