

# Short notice

## A Dance Mask Made of Metal: *Satire on Modern Dance* (1933) by Siem van den Hoongaard

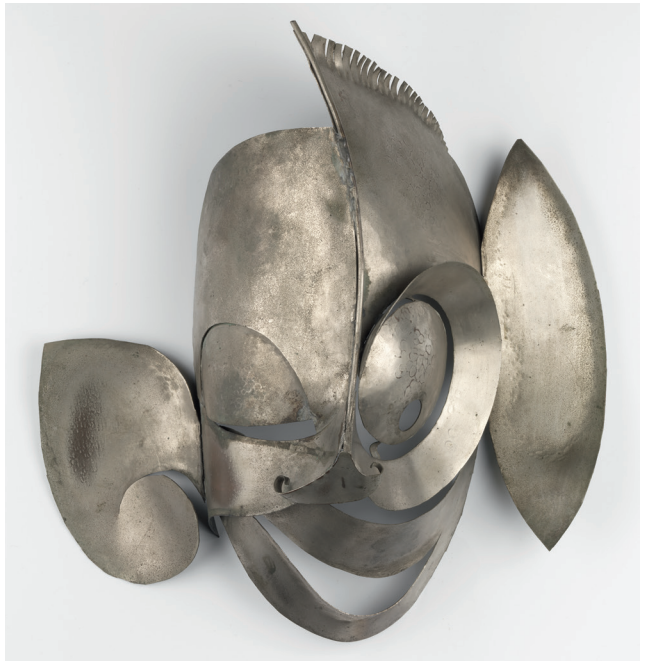
• FRANS VAN DUIJN •

The worker in precious metals and sculptor Siem van den Hoongaard (1900-1938) is regarded as one of the pioneers of Dutch metal sculpture. The art historian and critic A.M. Hammacher maintained that the Rotterdam-born artist was the only Dutchman who made ‘figural open metal sculptures’ in the years between the wars.<sup>1</sup> He was also ‘the only one in our country’ to make metal wall masks;<sup>2</sup> his *Clown* is the best known (fig. 2).

Van den Hoongaard began his career in 1922 as an independent worker in precious metals in the centre of Rotterdam. He called himself a ‘kunstedelsmid’<sup>3</sup> – an ‘artsmith’ – and from the outset concentrated on breaking down the barrier between art and industry. The art critic W. Jos de Gruyter said that Van den Hoongaard’s clocks betray ‘a free artist rather than a practical artist’.<sup>4</sup> From 1931 onwards Van den Hoongaard also turned his hand to sculpture, mainly inspired by classical mythology, Balinese culture and modern jazz music and dance in Rotterdam. In 1932 he made *Mask Dance*, a small metal sculpture of a masked female dancer moving with elegant, flowing grace (fig. 3).

< Fig. 1  
SIEM VAN DEN  
HOONGAARD,  
*Satire on Modern  
Dance* (dance mask  
for Gerie Folmer), 1933.  
Tombak, textile,  
32 x 25 x 21 cm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. BK-2019-100.

Fig. 2  
SIEM VAN DEN  
HOONGAARD,  
*Clown*, 1931.  
Brass, 41 x 38 x 17,5 cm.  
Rotterdam,  
Museum Boijmans  
van Beuningen,  
inv. no. BEK 1447 (MK).  
Photo:  
Tom Haartsen



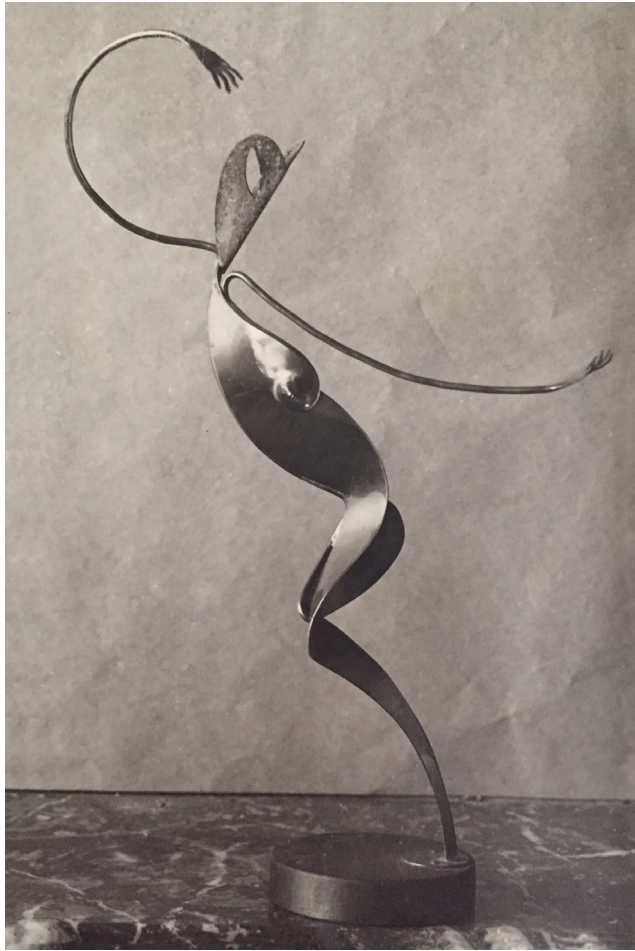


Fig. 3  
SIEM VAN DEN  
HOONAARD,  
*Mask Dance*, 1932.  
Frans van Duijn  
Archive.  
Photo: Cas van Os

Less than a year later, Van den Hoonard went on to try an interesting experiment: a metal dance mask for the Rotterdam dancer Gerie Folmer (1901-1983) (fig. 1).

The arrival of the mask dance in the Netherlands was brought about by another pioneer, the German dancer Gertrud Leistikow (1885-1948), who performed for the first time in the Netherlands in 1914. Her modern approach to dance soon aroused great interest in her performances. In her biography of Leistikow, the historian Jacobien de Boer writes that the changes in the art of dance were just as revolutionary as the transition from figurative to abstract in the fine arts that had taken place around the same time: 'This must have been abundantly

clear to Leistikow's audiences. They had never seen dancing like that before. Dance used to be made up of beautiful, elegant, flowing movements, but Leistikow also made ugly, angular movements. She showed emotions: she could dance sadness and joy. She turned herself into an ugly monster and danced wearing a mask. All this was new for the audiences of that time' (fig. 4).<sup>5</sup>

Gerie Folmer was one of Leistikow's students – as were so many dancers at that time – for the German pioneer had opened schools in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. In an interview Folmer gave to the 1 February 1930 issue of *Het Centrum*, she said she had had 'all her training' from Leistikow. And in the same conversation she went



so far as to say 'she has become my artistic mother' (fig. 5). From 1928 onwards, Folmer was the prima ballerina at the N.V. Italiaansche Opera, a company that performed Italian operas, from Verdi to Puccini, for a wide Dutch audience from 1897 to 1943 (fig. 6). But she was also active with her own ballet group which performed modern dance à la Leistikow, including the mask dance. In 1934 she opened her own dance studio on the corner of Mauritsweg and Aert van Nesstraat in the heart of Rotterdam.

In the early nineteen-twenties, Leistikow collaborated with Hildo Krop (1884-1970), Amsterdam's famous city sculptor. In 1921 and 1922 he made two masks for her from a variety of

materials including felt (from an old hat), polychromed papier-maché and strands of wool (fig. 4).<sup>6</sup> The success of Leistikow's mask dances encouraged other dancers to team up with artists, too: Tilly Sylon had dance masks made by Jaap Pronk, and Hein von Essen made them for his wife Dini. The mask maker Grietje Kots (1905-1993) actually had several regular clients. Almost all these dance masks were made of plaster, fabric, wood or papier-maché and their makers all belonged to the circle surrounding the expressionist, architectural and art magazine *Wendingen* (1918-33).<sup>7</sup> Issue 6-7 of 1920 was completely devoted to masks.

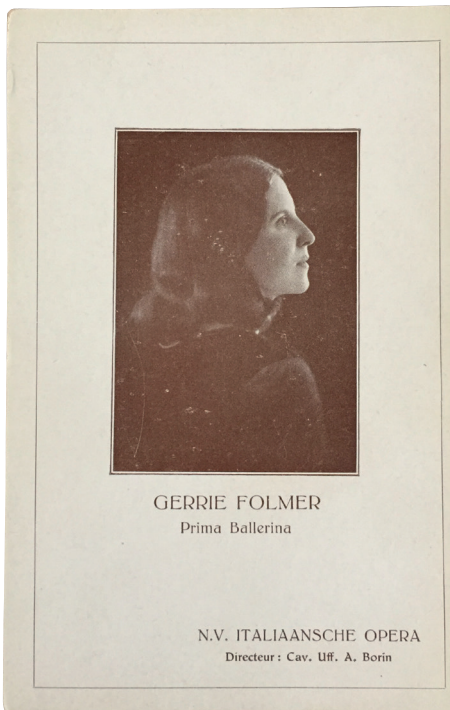
Siem van den Hoonaard and Gerie Folmer met in the autumn of 1932.

Fig. 4  
Gertrud Leistikow  
with 'African Mask'  
by Hildo Krop, c. 1921.  
Amsterdam, Allard  
Pierson, University of  
Amsterdam, theatre  
collection, inv. no.  
50xx90933.0016-1.



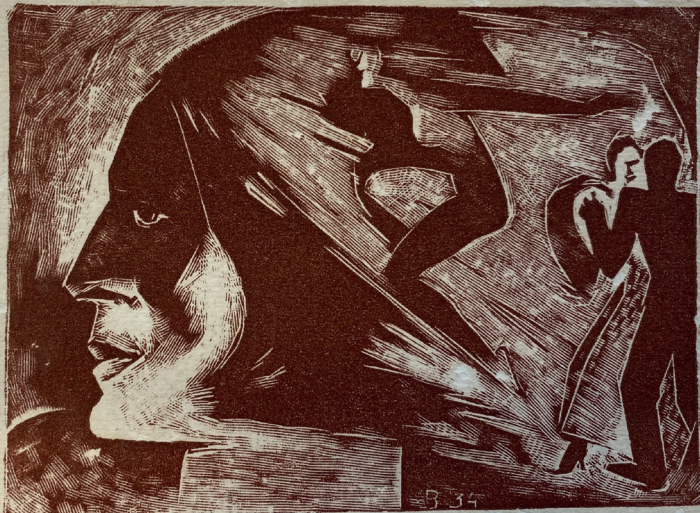
Fig. 5  
ATELIER  
J. MERKELBACH,  
*The Dancers  
Gerie Folmer  
and Claire  
de Jongh with  
Right Legs  
Raised*, 1927/28.  
Amsterdam,  
City Archives,  
image no.  
80000002872.

Fig. 6  
Postcard of Gerie  
Folmer as prima  
ballerina with the  
n.v. Italiaansche  
Opera.  
Frans van Duijn  
Archive.



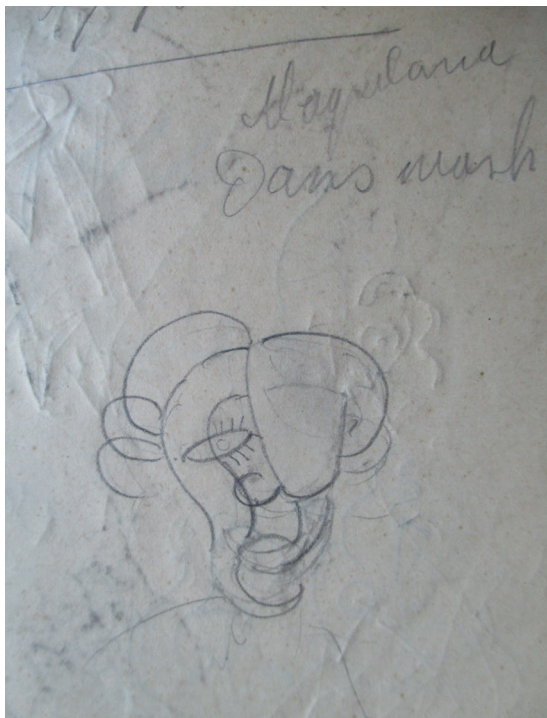
The painter and sculptor Herman Bieling (1887-1964) probably introduced them. Bieling was an important figure in the world of modern art and modern dance. He was a tireless networker and was friends with Van den Hoonaard and with Leistikow and Folmer (fig. 7). Van den Hoonaard and Bieling were both members of the R 33 artists' association and for a long time had their home and workshop in the little village of Hillegersberg, just to the north of Rotterdam.<sup>8</sup> Folmer's name, address and telephone number are written in pencil halfway through one of Van den Hoonaard's sketchbooks, dated 1932-33. This contact gave the artist, who was well known for his 'desire for adventure and passion for experimentation',<sup>9</sup> the opportunity to put an unusual idea into action: to make a *metal* dance mask for a leading dancer. It is interesting that Van den Hoonaard immediately

## GERIE FOLMER NOODIGT U



*Fig. 7*  
Invitation to the opening of Gerie Folmer's dance studio, 1934. Woodcut probably by Herman Bieling. Private collection. Photo: Ludo van Halem

*Fig. 8*  
Detail from Siem van den Hoonaard's sketchbook with a sketch of a metal dance mask, 1932. Frans van Duijn Archive.



made a sketch of it on the pages that followed Folmer's contact details (fig. 8).

On 7 July 1933, an article about Van den Hoonaard was published in the weekly newspaper *Groot Rotterdam*, accompanied by a photograph of Folmer dancing, wearing a dance mask based on that first rough sketch (fig. 9). In a draft of a letter to someone called 'Nic', the artist wrote 'I enclose Groot Rotterdam where there are photographs of my work. The new dance mask is a great success. You can see a photograph of it there.'



Fig. 9  
Newspaper page  
showing work  
by Siem van den  
Hoongaard and Gerie  
Folmer dancing in the

dance mask in fig. 1,  
*Groot Rotterdam*,  
7 July 1933, p. 524.  
Photos upper right  
and bottom left:  
Cas van Os

There are still a great many possibilities there.<sup>10</sup> He went on to make the dance mask *Humor* for 'his' dancer, a mask that has survived but unfortunately is incomplete and badly damaged (fig. 10).

Folmer's mask dance was called *Satire on Modern Dance*. Perhaps the title was designed to poke fun at the rival 'modern' dancers – the countless dancers who had not been trained by Leistikow and who in Folmer's opinion were clueless. We will never be able to find out the precise meaning of this performance, but at least there is one piece of written evidence about this dance, in which the dancer ultimately

dies. Frans van den Hoongaard, the artist's younger brother, was there and in 1967 talked about it with Hans W. van Os, a student of architecture in Delft who wrote a thesis on Siem van den Hoongaard. Van Os noted that 'the appearance of the dancer Gerie Folmer, dressed entirely in black with a tombak mask and pointed tombak extensions to her fingers in the Balinese style, must have made an impression. There were more masks (Hein von Essen) in the same performance, but Van den Hoongaard's design stood out because he had introduced a new element – asymmetry – which could be used to great effect in dance. Moods could be conveyed by showing changing aspects to the audience: the right side with the closed eye – melancholy – and the left side with the open eye – happy. A static design took on life, movement and variation through its use as a dance mask, and many who attended the performance never forgot the impressive death scene with the closed side of the mask turned to the audience.'<sup>11</sup>

Siem van den Hoongaard's interest in Balinese culture is evident in the 'pointed extensions' to Folmer's fingers (fig. 11), copied from the Balinese Legong dance. The artist was also enchanted by the shadow puppetry from what was then the



Fig. 10  
SIEM VAN DEN  
HOONGAARD,  
*Humor*, 1933.  
Nickel-plated brass,  
32 x 26 x 24 cm.  
© heirs Gerie Folmer  
Photo: Rijksmuseum

> Fig. 11  
Gerie Folmer  
dances with pointed  
extensions to her  
fingers, 1933-36.  
Otterlo, Kröller-  
Müller Museum  
Archive.







Fig. 12a



Fig. 12b

Dutch East Indies, which we can see in the 'shadow play' of the expressive *Witches' Dance* (1934) (figs. 12a-b). It is very likely that while creating *Satire* he took into account the light and shade effects during a dance in the spotlights. It is also interesting that the metal mask is quite heavy, much heavier than dance masks made of the materials that were customary at that time, like papier-maché and felt. This must have affected Folmer's dance style. *Satire* probably forced her to move more slowly.

Metal dance masks were extremely unusual, so it was distressing that both the unique masks by this artist who died young – Siem van den Hoonard passed away at the age of thirty-seven from a fungal infection of the lungs – were destroyed during the Nazi bombardment of Rotterdam on 14 May 1940. At least, that is what Frans van den Hoonard always believed. He managed his brother's estate until his own death in 1979 and was convinced that the two

masks had been burned. Beneath the photograph of Folmer dancing *Satire* he typed: 'Dance mask. Gerie Folmer danced in it. Lost during the bombing of Rotterdam' (fig. 13).<sup>12</sup> His assumption was an understandable one: Folmer's dance studio was inside the area of the bombing and the fire in the city that followed. In all probability, though, the dancer kept her dance masks at home, which was outside the area of destruction. The joy of Siem van den Hoonard's family and the lovers of his work was thus all the greater when *Satire* surfaced at the Botterweg auction house at the end of 2019 and was purchased by the Rijksmuseum.<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 12a-b  
SIEM VAN DEN  
HOONARD,  
*Witches' Dance*, 1934.  
Frans van Duijn  
Archive.  
Photo: Cas van Os

> Fig. 13  
Gerie Folmer  
dances *Satire*  
on *Modern*  
*Dance*, 1933.  
Frans van Duijn  
Archive.  
Photo: Cas van Os



Satyre op moderne dans

Dansmasker Werd mede gedanst door Gerie Folmer.  
Tijdens bombardement van Rotterdam verloren ge-  
gaan.

## NOTES

- 1 'figurale open metaalplastieken'. A.M. Hammacher, *Beeldhouwkunst van deze eeuw en een schets van haar ontwikkeling in de negentiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1955, p. 47.
- 2 Anonymous, 'Bij een Rotterdamschen edelsmid', *Groot Rotterdam*, 7 July 1933.
- 3 Frans van Duijn, *Siem van den Hoonaard. Pionier in de metaalplastiek*, Leeuwarden 2020, p. 29.
- 4 'eer den vrijen kunstenaar [verraden], dan den gebruikskunstenaar'. W. Jos. de Gruyter, *Het Vaderland*, evening paper C, 21 October 1932, p. 1.
- 5 'Dit moet voor Leistikows publiek volstrekt duidelijk zijn geweest. Zij hadden nog nooit zo zien dansen. Dans bestond voorheen uit mooie, elegante, vloeiende bewegingen, maar Leistikow maakte ook lelijke, hoekige bewegingen. Zij toonde emoties: kon verdriet en vreugde dansen. Zij veranderde zichzelf in een lelijk monster en danste met een masker. Dit alles was nieuw voor het publiek van die tijd.' Jacobien de Boer, *Dans voluit, dat is leven. Gertrud Leistikow (1885-1948), pionier van de moderne dans*, Weesp 2014, p. 10.
- 6 See [www.theaterencyclopedie.nl/wiki/Gertrud-Leistikow](http://www.theaterencyclopedie.nl/wiki/Gertrud-Leistikow) (accessed 28 May 2020)
- 7 Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935*, Berkeley 1997, p. 198.
- 8 According to De Boer 2014 (note 5), p. 15. Herman Bieling gave Gertrud Leistikow a mask as a gift when she officially left her Rotterdam dance school in 1934. Gerie Folmer opened her dance institute in that same year. Bieling most probably provided the invitation to the opening with a futuristic portrait of the dancer. This is described in detail in Van Duijn 2020 (note 3)
- 9 'avontuurzucht en experimenteerdrijf'. W. Jos. de Gruyter, 'Kroniek. S. van den Hoonaard in de toonzaal Hélène Meyer Timmerman Thijssen', *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* 43 (October 1933), pp. 285-87.
- 10 'Ik sluit hierbij in Groot Rotterdam waar photos van mijn werk in staan. Het nieuwe dansmasker is wel geslaagd. Je ziet er hier een photo van. Er bestaan nog wel veel mogelijkheden op dat gebied.' Sketchbook owned by Siem van den Hoonaard, 1932-33. Privately owned by Frans van Duijn, Haarlem.
- 11 Hans W. van Os, *Siem van den Hoonaard*, Delft 1967 (unpublished thesis Technische Hogeschool), p. 14. Privately owned by Hans W. van Os, Groningen.
- 12 'Dansmasker. Werd mede gedanst door Gerie Folmer. Tijdens bombardement van Rotterdam verloren gegaan.'
- 13 *Humor* was then discovered through Gerie Folmer's family (fig. 10).

