

Het Parool

Review: AkzoNobel's art collection is among the international top and is now on display at the Kunstmuseum.



→ Yael Bartana's 2.5-meter-high neon piece "What if Women Ruled the World" further underscores that museums still have something to learn from corporate collections when it comes to gender balance. Image Richard Theemling

The days are gone when exhibitions of corporate collections were mainly an opportunity to 'show what otherwise remains hidden.' *True Colors* demonstrates how AkzoNobel's contemporary art both complements and refreshingly interacts with the Kunstmuseum's collection.

Edo Dijksterhuis June 12, 2024

Emma Talbot had an exhibition five years ago at the GEM, the satellite of the Kunstmuseum that was later renamed KM21. At that time, the Hague's institution purchased a few drawings but none of the textile works that are so characteristic of her oeuvre. And that is likely not to happen again anytime soon.

The demand for and price of Talbot's work, which is featured in major exhibitions such as the current Venice Biennale, have significantly increased since then. That her *Meeting Place* is now

on display in The Hague is thanks to the paints company AkzoNobel, which is showcasing pieces from its corporate collection under the title *True Colors*.

Talbot's work illustrates the difference in dynamics between museum and corporate collections. Companies generally operate faster and take more risks. They purchase work from emerging artists, while museums, which claim to collect for posterity, tend to buy only when there is proven quality. Due to the volatility of the contemporary art market, museums often end up missing out.

Macho and Black Woman

AkzoNobel's art collection ranks among the international top of corporate collections. It consists of over two thousand works, assembled since 1996. AkzoNobel often lends works and displays part of the collection in its own freely accessible exhibition space in the Zuidas. However, it is through a museum-scale display like *True Colors* that the full scope and quality of this collection are truly showcased.

In the past, the Kunstmuseum has often opened its doors to corporate collections, including those of Rabobank and Bouwfonds. What sets *True Colors* apart is the combination of the guest collection with works from the museum's own holdings. This results in a particularly lively interaction between the established masters of the canon and the artists currently writing the next chapter of art history. This dynamic is evident from the very first room.

A relief with turbulent color fields by Frank Stella, an exponent of the macho abstraction era, engages in a conversation with Tyna Adebawale's confident portrait of a black woman set against a background of similar hues.

Robot Sculpture

The interplay between museum anchors and fresh-from-the-studio works is particularly effective. For example, it feels completely logical that Tabor Robak's continuously changing digital painting is displayed opposite Nam June Paik's robot sculpture made with now-antique disc players, a work by the video art pioneer.

Less obvious is the combination of Piet Mondrian's dune landscape from 1909 with Steven Aalders' *Hellya* (2000). Aalders paints rectangular color fields in the geometric tradition of De Stijl, but next to this early figurative work, his kinship with Mondrian becomes evident on a deeper level. His use of yellow, red, and blue echoes Mondrian's touches, and it's easy to see the sunlight breaking through the clouds and falling on the sand in the large white areas.

There are more delightful pairings, such as Jan Hendrik Weissenbruch's 1870 Hague School landscape with Jan Andriess's *Rainbow* (2004), which almost dissolves into thin air. Andriess, who passed away three years ago, was a regular visitor of the Kunstmuseum, often coming specifically for the Weissenbruchs. Now that they hang opposite each other, it's clear why. Both artists tried to capture the light.

Visual Ping-Pong

Rainbow is a 'typical AkzoNobel work,' as are the stripe paintings by Bernard Frize and the ingenious block sculptures by Krijn de Koning. These works largely focus on color, the logical core theme of a collection curated by a global player in the paint and coatings market.

This is hinted at by the exhibition title. But *True Colors* also means 'to show one's true colors,' aligning with the collection's other thematic pillars: identity and the human condition. These

themes are particularly highlighted in the largest room, featuring predominantly female artists. Yael Bartana's two-and-a-half-meter high neon *What if Women Ruled the World* underscores once again that museums could learn something about gender balance from corporate collections.

The exhibition theme is applied rather loosely. Many ensembles are formed associatively, such as Jean Arp's cloud-like wall sculptures with JCJ Vanderheyden's airplane windows and Sam Samiee's pink cloudscape. Just as the visual ping-pong starts to feel a bit gimmicky, the rhythm is expertly broken by cabinets with mini solo exhibitions. It is a pleasure to see multiple works by Otobong Nkanga together again. The hyper-realistically painted back-of-the-head portraits of women by Louise Giovanelli also merit extended viewing.

Fragrant Lavender Carpet

Anyone who still thinks corporate collections mainly play it safe, catering to the tastes of conservative managers and office decor, should reconsider in the penultimate room. Herman de Vries' fragrant lavender carpet might not often be displayed in the corporate setting, but it shines here. Especially in combination with the display cases holding jars of 72 raw pigments.

Above is a photo of artist Pieter Laurens Mol looking down on his collected color splendor while hanging from a crane. Within AkzoNobel's premises, no wall is high enough to hang the photo correctly. For the first time, the work is displayed as intended. Another win-win situation.

True Colors: through September 29 in Kunstmuseum Den Haag