

# Classically modern

Twenty-one past and living Dutch artists apply tradition to a variety of media with modernist interpretations and results

BY VINITA BHARADWAJ  
Special to Weekend Review

**D**utch artists are acutely aware of the weight of tradition of their country's artistic history. With heavyweight names such as Rembrandt, Vermeer and van Gogh looming large, the challenge facing most of the country's contemporary artists is one of balance.

Preparing for an all-Dutch exhibition in Dubai, curator and sculptor Josine Croin, who says the "big names are more an asset than a liability", has brought together the works of 21 artists — past and living — and says the layman may have a certain preconceived notion about Dutch art.

"We're a modern country as well and I think that we've adapted from our tradition of painting to working with other media extremely well. Because we are a flat country we have this special ingredient of light which our Masters have used superbly and subsequent artists have trained well to retain that quality," Croin says.

The exhibition may not feature the best-known names from the Dutch movement but past artists will include Ernst van Leyden, Elias Boonen and Marius Richters. (Leyden's works are on display at London's Tate Gallery among others.) "Modern artists include Harjo Martinus who uses colour exuberantly to depict cows in a meadow, and Wim Zorn whose modern landscapes are executed in such a way that they draw you into the scene," says Croin.

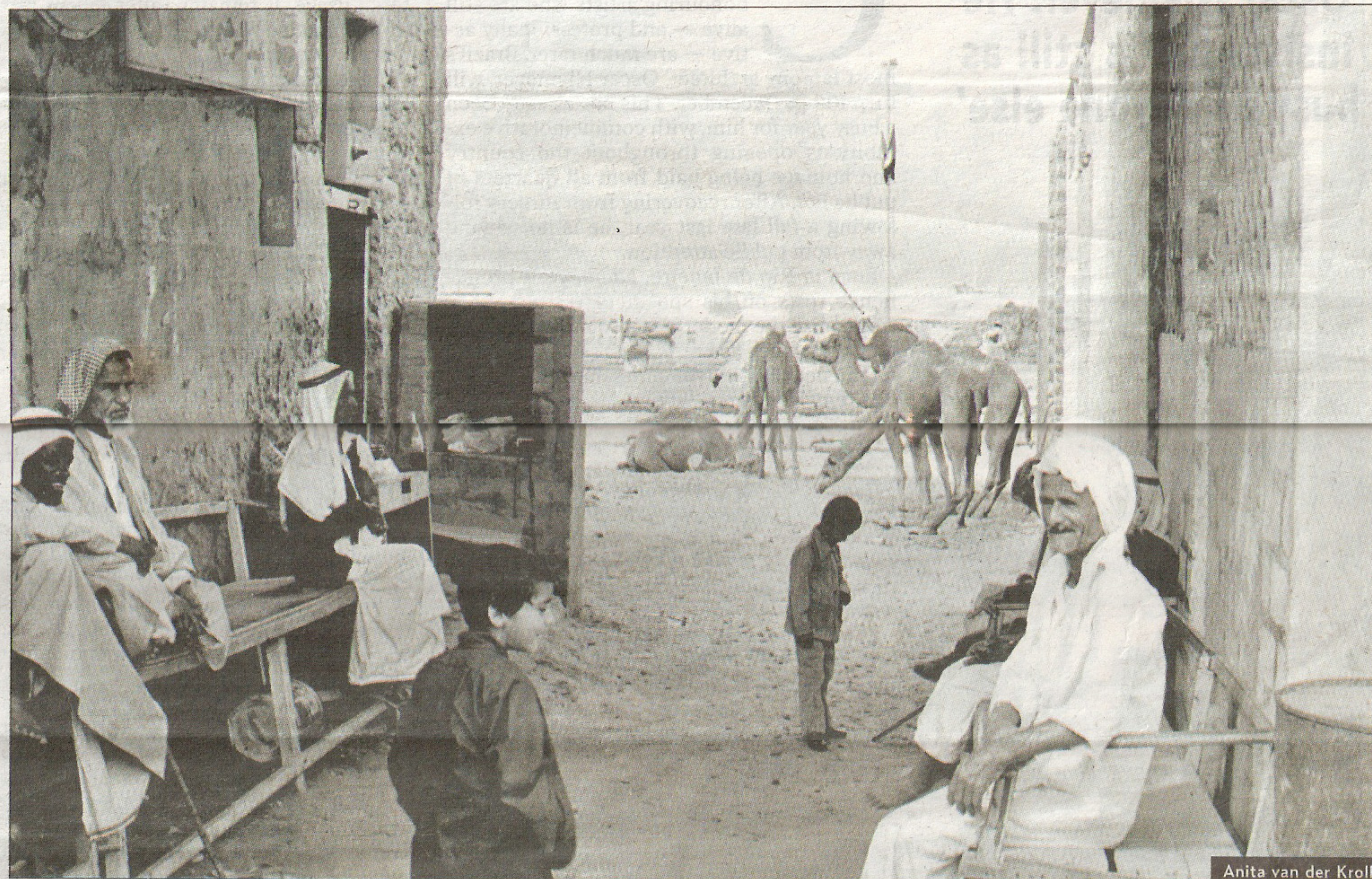
Glass sculptors Han de Kluijver and Tineke van Veen will display their works alongside Anton ter Braak and Gabriel Sterk who will exhibit their interpretations — both classical and modern — of the horse form. Also present will be Loek Prins who specialises in sculpting birds of prey in bronze.

## Dubai souqs

A Dubai element will feature in the group show in the form of photographs by Anita van der Kroll who lived in the city between 1975 and 1980. Speaking to *Weekend Review*, van der Kroll says it will be the first major exhibition of her photographs from that period. "My husband was working here at the time and I would head out every day with my camera to the souqs in Deira and Bur Dubai or the Creek and sometimes to Al Ain."

She recalls her five-year sojourn as a laid-back part of her life. "I used to take prints of the previous day's shots and show them to the people I had photographed and I suppose they were quite happy to let me mingle with them."

Her black and white photos are mostly people-centred — in contrast to the photographs of changing cityscapes one is accustomed to. "I'm definitely more interested in the personalities of people — like striking up a conversation with them or just taking a photograph when they're unaware," says van der Kroll. "There was this massive road-building project when we had just arrived in Dubai. Though it was before the boom time so to speak, I think it was defi-



Anita van der Kroll



City of Wonders by Henriette Dingemans and Sjoerd Bras

nately a sign of things to come. You could feel the energy everywhere. That's what makes Dubai so different. Its energy — I found it so photogenic," she says.

Since leaving Dubai in 1980, van der Kroll has returned only once in 1996 and will be visiting again during the upcoming exhibition. "In 1996 I got a sense of the expansion of the Shaikh Zayed Road. It has definitely changed," she says. "I prefer the Dubai of the past. And I hope that with all its commercial development they will still hold on to their old values."

Having collected many photographs over the five years she was here, van der Kroll describes the selection process as a difficult one. "I had to find them all as I had so many diapositives. But with a master print-

er here who printed all the photos again, it should be a good show," she says. Henriette Dingemans and her partner Sjoerd Bras, who brought their creative energies together to form The Living Image, will present a specially made piece for the exhibition. Titled *City of Wonders*, the 5x2.4 metre canvas is made up of "hundreds of photographs" digitally stitched together to form "a garden of paradise".

Dingemans works in the digital medium and Bras is trained in Renaissance techniques and the resulting project, she says, fuses the technological know-how of her art with Bras's traditional perspectives.

"Paradise is something that we're all searching for today. And when you see photos of the different projects that are on in

## Seven Wonders

Within the main exhibition there will be a series of sculptural models of the ancient seven wonders. In the 16th century, Dutchman Maarten van Heemskerck made sketches and engravings of the seven wonders of the world. Fascinated by van Heemskerck's works, Chris Blackwell, an academician, brought together 12 English artists to create models of these wonders. The works took more than a year to create and were then exhibited at Fortnum & Mason in London and will be on display in Dubai.

Dubai, with the sun, sand and beaches, it is the kind of paradise we think of," Dingemans says.

The smaller, individual photos used to make the larger image were all taken by Dingemans during her travels through Ireland and other parts of Europe. "The images of Dubai were provided by a friend whose husband is a photographer. It was the combined database that generated the shots and took five months of non-stop work to create," she says.

Describing the Dutch evolution as one that has adapted well to the times, Dingemans says that photography is now hugely popular as a medium. "Some painters do still train in the classical tradition but I think Dutch artists have moved on to more modern interpretations and are exhibiting these avant garde pieces to great success."

Dutch Art and Culture exhibition will run from May 3-5 at the Madinat Jumeirah. Timings are from 10am-11pm.