

Cover Page



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ENGLISH SUMMARY

A Love of Dutch Architecture

Architecture and Applied Arts at Kosmos Publishers 1923-1960

This book studies and discusses the publications produced by the Amsterdam publishing house Kosmos (full name Uitgeversmaatschappij Kosmos) on architecture and applied art in the period between 1923, when the firm was founded, and 1960. In these years Kosmos published 526 books and 176 instalments in the popular science series *Weten en kunnen* (Knowing and practising). The man responsible throughout this period was Jacobus (Jac.) van der Kolk (1887-1980). Van der Kolk began his career in 1916 in the technical bookshop of Weduwe J. Ahrend & Zoon, a supplier of drafting and office equipment founded in 1896 by Jacobus Ahrend. Two years later he was promoted to head of Ahrend's technical publishing department, which had been founded in 1904. In 1923 the Ahrend catalogue became that of Kosmos, with Van der Kolk being made director of the new firm. (Ahrend's technical publishing department would revive its activities after 1923 and in 1950 Jacobus Ahrend gave the then recently-founded public limited company Uitgeverij Argus responsibility for its interests.)

In 1974 Kosmos was transferred from the Ahrend Group to Kluwer Publishers. These days Kosmos is part of VBK/media, a consortium of eight publishing houses: AnkhHermes, De Fontein, Kok, Kosmos, Omniboek, Ten Have, Van Dale and Veen Media.

Research questions

The research questions emerged after drawing up as complete a catalogue as possible. The subsequent analysis was aimed at gaining an understanding of Kosmos's publishing programme, which aspects of it were stressed and how the various segments of the catalogue developed. The most important question, the one underlying this study as a whole, concerns the circumstances, working methods and decisions that produced the Kosmos catalogue in the years 1923-1960. Further questions arising in its wake are about how the books were acquired; how communications were with the actors involved with the production, provision and sales such as authors, translators, designers, photographers, printers and booksellers; how fees, rights and obligations were agreed upon; how the books were financed, meaning not just the revenues from sale of the books in shops but also co-financing, the inclusion of advertisements, subsidies and co-editions; how the supply, distribution and sales were organized; what the publishing house's expertise, experience and insight were; and lastly, how Kosmos rated in the competition with other publishers operating in the same fields.

The catalogue

In the period under study, Kosmos was a general publisher of fiction and non-fiction. In order to get an idea of the main focal areas the catalogue has been divided into seventeen segments, stepping off from the subjects given most weight by the publishing house itself.

From 1925 onwards Van der Kolk turned to publishing books on general subjects and novels, rather than focusing exclusively on technology and architecture as it had done until then.

Kosmos's first stirrings in the realm of fiction were translations of the better light reading books, originally in English, promptly followed by translations of works by the likes of Charles Dickens, Panait Istrati and Maurice Maeterlinck. Van der Kolk played it safe, publishing in translation just those authors with an established reputation. This changed in 1937, when the publishing house launched a new venture, the 'Kosmos first-timers award' (Kosmos-Eerstelingen-Prijs), a literary prize intended to draw fledgling Dutch authors to the catalogue. The year 1939 marked the debut at Kosmos of two authors who would later prove

to be its key contributors for literature, Jan Mens and Belcampo (born Herman Pieter Schönfeld Wichers). Jan Mens published 21 books for Kosmos up to 1960 and Belcampo seven. All the same, fiction had a modest role to play in the catalogue with just thirteen per cent of the titles. With the emergence after the Second World War of publishers specialized in literature such as De Bezige Bij and Van Oorschot, Kosmos gradually dropped literature from its catalogue.

Besides fiction, Kosmos distinguished itself quantitatively *and* qualitatively with three other segments of its catalogue, namely Architecture, Nature, plants & animals and Health & sexual reform. In the segment on nature, no less than 37 authors contributed to Kosmos's success. Ten of them had additionally been charged with 34 instalments in the series *Weten en kunnen*. J.F.Ch. Dix was the most productive author in this segment, with six titles to his name. What Dix was for plants, C.S.Th. van Gink was for small livestock farming. He wrote comprehensive guides on breeds of poultry and pigeons and was in charge of the 'small livestock' department in *Weten en kunnen*.

In the 1930s Kosmos was definitely a pioneer when it came to health and more particularly sexual reform. Two series take up the lion's share of its publications in these fields:

Gezondheidsbibliotheek (Health library) and *Sexueele hervorming* (Sexual reform).

The remainder of the Kosmos catalogue has been categorized for purposes of analysis in thirteen segments. Technology was represented by books on physics and mechanical engineering, electricity and mathematics. Several of the authors had first been published at Ahrend. Highway and hydraulic engineering is treated as a category in its own right.

Cars and motorcycles became increasingly popular in the 1920s and 1930s. There was a keen interest in the technology of these modes of travel, which not surprisingly was seized on by Kosmos as a market worth exploiting. Radio and television were just as popular. Several manuals published by Kosmos stimulated the construction of homemade radios and fostered an understanding of the technology involved.

Of the social sciences and humanities, psychology headed the field with eleven books. Other books published by Kosmos in this segment were about economics, pedagogy, philosophy, graphology, history and politics. A key author on board was the doctor, biologist, physiologist and psychologist F.J.J. Buytendijk. Another was the neurologist Th. van Schelven.

The catalogue segment devoted to language and literature falls naturally into four categories: linguistics, language guides, spelling and literature. Fred Fry enjoyed great success with courses in English and German. With twelve titles on the subject, cooking took up a modest share of the catalogue. The most important of its eight contributors was the Swiss authoress Frieda Nietlispach.

There was a brief period when Kosmos turned to sports and games. A total of 28 titles by 23 authors were published between 1934 and 1960, most of them before the war. A number of publications were devoted to home gymnastics, a very popular activity in those years. Table tennis, baseball, gliding, football, walking and tennis were among the sports assembled in Kosmos's sports library (*Kosmos' sportbibliotheek*).

After 1939 Van der Kolk, wishing to broaden the catalogue, made several attempts to gain a foothold in the children's book segment. Translations of books on Louis Pasteur and Madame Curie by Eleanor Doorly, the celebrated British writer of children's books, sold poorly, as did classics featuring Don Quixote and Robin Hood in versions adapted for children. The most popular publication was the 1950s series *De bloeiende perelaar* (The flowering pear tree) by Jan Mens, eight reading books for primary schools. This would be Kosmos's first and last attempt to penetrate the school book market.

The publishing house had more success with travel guides, which made their first appearance in the catalogue in 1955. Over the next five years Kosmos would produce no less than 36

titles; these give a good impression of where the Dutch liked to spend their holidays in the 1950s.

Weten en kunnen

Popular science series such as *Weten en kunnen* (Knowing and practising) were all the rage in the early years of the twentieth century. Science, technology and the arts made giant advances accompanied by a growing thirst for knowledge among the general public. This was increasingly well educated and prosperous and took an interest in technology and ways of applying it. *Weten en kunnen* has four ‘departments’ – plants, flowers & fruit, small livestock farming, sports & games and cars & motorcycles – and many of its instalments fell under these headings. Each department had its own editor, an expert in that field. In addition, some instalments were grouped in the catalogues under such headings as civil engineering, electrical engineering, metalwork, experiments, home craft activities, product knowledge, photography and miscellaneous. The series served the same purpose for this predominantly non-fiction publishing house that a literary magazine would for a publisher of mainly fiction. It acted as a testing ground for fledgling authors who, if they proved successful here, moved on to the mainstream catalogue. Conversely, authors from the catalogue were regularly asked to contribute an instalment.

The first 57 instalments were published between 1911 and 1922 by Weduwe J. Ahrend & Zoon. In 1923 the series was acquired and continued by Kosmos, the final instalment appearing in 1936. Two years later the series was revived as *Weten en kunnen. Nieuwe reeks* (new series). This would continue until 1980, making it the Netherlands’ longest-lasting series ever.

Architecture and applied art

The predominantly technical nature of the Kosmos catalogue of the early years, due to the influence of Ahrend’s technical publishing department, gradually faded into the background. This was not the case with books on architecture. It was here that Kosmos would develop into the country’s number one publisher, vying only with Van Mantgem & De Does in Amsterdam for building construction and with the Rotterdam publisher W.L. & J. Brusse for architecture. It was the economic upsurge in the early twentieth century that prompted Ahrend’s publishing department to concentrate on the practice of architecture. The upswing in the building industry gave a generation of young talented architects the opportunity to actually see their buildings onto site. The best-known, amongst whom J. Gratama, J.M. van der Mey, J.F. Staal, P. Kramer, M. de Klerk and H.Th. Wijdeveld, all born around 1880, joined forces in the Amsterdam-based architectural society ‘Architectura et Amicitia’. Taking their cue from H.P. Berlage, the godfather of modern Dutch architecture, they brought about an unparalleled revolution in architecture that drew international attention. This widespread interest spurred J.G. Wattjes, a professor in civil engineering at Delft Polytechnic, to make a selection from this new architecture in photographs and drawings and add a brief introduction. The result was *Nieuw-Nederlandsche bouwkunst* (New Dutch architecture), published by Kosmos in 1924, whose sheer size makes it the first Dutch coffee-table book on architecture. Its captions were translated into English, German and French.

Wattjes was the Kosmos catalogue’s foremost author on architecture, with 26 books to his name. His most important contribution was *Constructie van gebouwen* (The construction of buildings), a manual that eventually reached ten volumes. He also followed up the innovative and successful *Nieuw-Nederlandsche bouwkunst* (1924) by compiling a number of internationally slanted picture books of contemporary architecture at home and abroad. A battery of authors wrote about subjects relating to architecture and structural engineering, including C.W.J. Schorteldoek on the provision of water in buildings, G. Arendzen and J.J.

Vriend on perspective drawing and modern plastering, P. Bergsma on reinforced concrete, A.W. de Goey on steel windows and J. Wieland on aluminium in facades. J. Godefroy and J.J. Vriend published books on architectural history. In a portfolio on rural architecture, A. Bontebal provided self-builders with drawings that enabled them to erect their own small country houses and other one-family dwellings. Architect J.B. van Loghem argued fervently for functionalist architecture in his *Bouwen, bouwen, bâtir, building* (1932). A second overview of Dutch architecture, after that of Wattjes, entitled *Hedendaagsche architectuur in Nederland* (Contemporary architecture in the Netherlands), was published in 1937 under the auspices of the Royal Institute of Dutch Architects (Dutch acronym BNA). J.P. Fokker, Paul Bromberg, F. Hausbrand and J.J. Vriend wrote on the subject of homes, an increasingly important theme in the Kosmos catalogue.

Another subject to receive key consideration at Kosmos was interior design, with books by Paul Bromberg, Miep van Rooy-Berlage, W. Retera Wzn., D. Bierens de Haan, Ep Simons and Jaap Penraat giving advice on how to fit out one's home. As for town planning, the key titles were authored by J.C.L.B. Pet and S.J. van Embden. G.J. Pannekoek and J.J. Schipper compiled a two-volume standard work on designing, laying out and planting gardens. The drawings in H. van Dorp's portfolio *Moderne eenvoudige meubels* (Basic modern furniture, 1923) were an example for those wishing to make their own furniture.

Kosmos published on a wide variety of applied art. This included Persian carpets, Javanese batik, craft handweaving, ornamental and useful objects in the home and, for Museum van den Arbeid (Museum of Labour) in Amsterdam, three small brochures on iron, glass and earthenware. Photography is represented by four publications about a photographic competition ('Mother and child in front of the lens'), small cameras, colour photography and a pocket guidebook for the amateur photographer. They give a broad picture, from photography as artistic expression to the technology of the medium. Film is represented by a book about the 'talkies' and the subsequent rise of the movie star. As for graphic techniques, Kosmos published books on the modern woodcut and Dutch graphic work. There were also books on hand lettering, compiled by the designers Jacob Por, André Vlaanderen and Stefan Schlesinger.

The publisher's practice

After analysing the catalogue, we can gain an understanding of its origins by examining how Kosmos worked in practice. Publisher Jac. van der Kolk followed two strategies, one long-term and the other short-term. The first entailed keeping a constant eye on the continuity of the key catalogue segments that had already established Kosmos's reputation. One example in the architecture segment was the work of J.G. Wattjes, whose manual *Constructie van gebouwen* required making a major investment fraught with risks. After a successful first print of what had originally been a series of four volumes, Kosmos spent years investing in expanding and updating it. The idea behind such standard works was to make the best book on a particular subject with the best author or authors, thereby guaranteeing the largest possible print run and going for the maximum number of prints.

The long-term strategy could also apply to specific categories of books. On the architectural front, Van der Kolk took an unfailing interest in the home, varying from the likes of Wattjes' *Moderne Nederlandsche villa's en landhuizen* (Modern Dutch villas and country houses, 1931) to J.J. Vriend's *Na-oorlogse kleine landhuizen in Nederland* (Small post-war country houses in the Netherlands, 1954). As these titles suggest, Van der Kolk held a strong preference for Dutch architecture, which he felt was of a high calibre. A second strong ingredient in the catalogue was home interiors and Van der Kolk was always on the lookout for new authors who could compile a book on the subject for Kosmos.

The short-term strategy was to quickly publish on a subject while it was topical. The condition for such decisive action is that the publisher stays abreast of developments in society and has a nose for whatever it is that the general public is to embrace next. Van der Kolk amply satisfied that condition, keeping a close eye on the daily papers, magazines and professional literature. He had the additional advantage of having Ahrend's technical bookshop within reach, so that his knowledge of what was being published on architecture and technology both at home and abroad was second to none.

The way Van der Kolk worked was as simple as it was effective: he thought of a subject and looked for an author to write about it. It was of the utmost importance that this author was an authority in the field in question. Whenever he could, he contracted professors, whose status alone gave them an air of expertise, but in the vast majority of cases he had to be satisfied with authors whose academic status was lower down the scale, not that this necessarily meant that these authors were not the greatest authorities in their field.

Books on architecture are expensive to produce. They require drawings and photographs to show the buildings they describe. The drawings often need to be made specially for the book and the photographs, if not supplied by the architects, require commissioning a photographer to take them. Add to that the rights those photographers require as part of the transaction. All these expenses serve to drive up production costs.

For a publisher of non-fiction like Kosmos, there were several ways of reducing the risk, namely co-financing, advance orders, advertisements, subsidies and co-editions. Authors would regularly co-finance books at Kosmos if sales were not expected to be strong, say for a dissertation or another such academic publication. Securing advance orders was an established means, providing the book's subject matter made it suitable for a promotional gift. But the most prevalent form of external financing for Kosmos was to include advertisements in the books. A recurring question in such cases was that the author/compiler had to retain complete editorial independence. The advertisers were not to have any influence on the text, in the sense that their products were given additional attention there or shown in a better light. Kosmos's dealings with government subsidies were not a success. If Kosmos did apply for one, Van der Kolk left this to the author or authors. Applying for subsidies was a time-consuming activity and this simply didn't appeal to Van der Kolk. Besides, as a businessman through and through, he would have been contemptuous of the inevitable substantive and financial meddling that comes with subsidizing.

Photography and design

The importance Van der Kolk attached to good photography is best expressed in Kosmos's books on architecture. In principle, photographs of buildings were supplied by the architects themselves. Whenever the architects had none to supply, Van der Kolk resorted to the archives of photographers, another money-saving strategy. He often turned to the architectural photographer Bernard F. Eilers, who possessed a vast collection of shots of buildings. If the pictures he wanted were not to be found, Van der Kolk then commissioned an architectural photographer to take them. Others he chose for this purpose besides Eilers were C.W.J. Schorteldoek, Wattjes' assistant at Delft, C.A. Deul, the architect Dudok's regular photographer, and E.M. van Ojen.

What could we call 'the face of Kosmos' in the period in question, in terms of book design? Of the traditional typographers, only Sjoerd de Roos designed a publisher's device for Kosmos and Jan van Krimpen the stamping dies for two books. Of those who took up the decorative typography of the architect H.Th. Wijdeveld, only Anton Kurvers can be found in the catalogue. Functionalist typography is represented by a single book, J.B. van Loghem's *Bouwen, bouwen, bâtir, building* (1932), for which Paul Schuitema designed the binding, jacket and interior.

In a number of instances, authors designed the covers of their books themselves. This made perfect sense if the author was an architect or a designer. Thus we see architect L. Zwiers and applied artist J. Godefroy designing their own covers. But even if the author wasn't a designer, Van der Kolk often asked if they 'wouldn't mind drawing something' for the cover. Of course, this was another way of keeping expenses down.

For the interior, Kosmos itself was usually responsible for the compositor's instructions, drawing on all the expertise available at the printworks. This was general practice among publishers in the first half of the twentieth century. For the cover Van der Kolk enlisted the services of an 'illustrator'. These artists, often active in the advertising world, were expected to make attractive covers whose primary purpose was to entice potential customers into buying the books.

For some publishers the 'look' of the catalogue was the work of one designer. This was Sjoerd de Roos in the case of Busse and Helmut Salden for the literary publisher G.A. van Oorschot. The quality of their typography and design did much to define the publisher's image. Kosmos did things differently. There the look was the product of an array of draughtsmen and women, each with their own style. These are conspicuously absent from the written histories of Dutch graphic design, where the standard names have prevailed to this day. Those established names include typographers such as De Roos and Van Krimpen, functionalist designers such as Piet Zwart and Paul Schuitema and a third group consisting of followers of Wijdeveld, amongst whom Anton Kurvers and Fré Cohen.

One of the key illustrators for Kosmos was André Vlaanderen, who designed all the covers for the instalments in the series *Weten en kunnen*. Among the many other cover illustrators and designers were Jan Rot, Peter Lutz, A. Muratti, H. Schuyt, Rein van Looy, Titus Leeser, Ger Soutendijk, Karel Hoekendijk, Nancy Schotel, Co-op 2, Alice Horodisch-Garnman, Janric van Gilse and Frans Hazeveld.

For the practically minded Van der Kolk, the importance of a good design increased in direct proportion to its role in ensuring a book's commercial success. The attention bestowed on a book about mechanical engineering was not that bestowed on a book about architecture. Add to this the fact that there were 'costs to be met'. On each occasion Van der Kolk weighed the need for a good design against the surcharges this brought with it, as hiring professionals such as illustrators and typographers increased production costs.

Conclusion

The Kosmos catalogue is typical of that of the general publishers to be found in large numbers in the Netherlands in the first half of the twentieth century. A key departure-point was to continue and expand strong segments of the catalogue. In addition, the importance at that time of a particular subject or occurrence had a bearing on how the catalogue was compiled.

However, Kosmos was never swayed by political, social or religious ideals or ideas.

In the period under study, Kosmos was the Netherlands' foremost publisher of books on architecture and applied art, with 108 titles to its name. Busse followed closely behind with 89. Other publishers with an important segment of mainly technical architecture books were Van Mantgem & De Does, Ahrend (publishing again since 1933) and L.J. Veen.

A comparison with Busse shows that Kosmos published many more books on architecture than on applied art. Busse by contrast treated the two categories equally. Whereas the Kosmos catalogue leaned more towards the technical, that of Busse was predominantly culturally oriented. If Kosmos had Wattjes as its figurehead author, Berlage fulfilled that role for Busse. Wattjes advocated the practice of building. Berlage represented the cultural elite, an elite that was foreign to Van der Kolk. We can see differences even in how they financed their publications. For the Kosmos books, targeted as they were at the world of practice, the

costs had to be recouped by sales but Brusse's cultural publications could not have seen the light of day without being subsidized.

Besides his business activities, Van der Kolk distinguished himself as a board member of numerous institutions related to the book trade, a position that suited him to perfection. That said, these activities made no lasting impression on the catalogue. We can characterize Van der Kolk as a self-assured, somewhat formal person who took the advice or opinion of the expert author seriously but always had the last word. He was the publisher, after all, the one who was to get the books to the public.

In the period under study, Kosmos publishing house was number one when it came to books on architecture. This was largely due to the tireless efforts of the publisher Jac. van der Kolk to bring this segment of the catalogue to full flower. The love of Dutch architecture that Wattjes attributed to him was real, although Van der Kolk was not averse to the commercial potentials that this specialization offered. After his departure Kosmos would plot a different course. New publishing houses clamoured to take over where he had left off.

Recommendations

Research done in the Netherlands into twentieth-century Dutch publishing houses is dominated by a concern for literary publishers and, in the case of general publishing houses, for the fiction in their catalogue. Then the publisher as a person and their role in assembling the literary part of the catalogue gets most of the attention. There have been books written about Bert Bakker, Reinold Kuipers, Geert Lubberhuizen, Johan Polak, Emanuel Querido and A.A.M. Stols, with no mention of the catalogue's often substantial non-fictional segment. Geert van Oorschot has even had two dissertations devoted to him. The above-named examples can be better described as publisher's histories rather than histories of publishing houses.

Most books about general publishing houses in the twentieth century have been commemorative publications, usually to mark an anniversary. Often, they just skim the surface and pick out the crowning achievements. Serious publications are thin on the ground. Before now, there had been just two dissertations on publishers of non-fiction, these being *Ontwikkeling/De Arbeiderspers* and *De Erven F. Bohn*. This dissertation on Kosmos is number three. So there really needs to be much more research done into general publishing houses. This is not just to gain a better understanding of the overall picture of Dutch publishers in the twentieth century, but also to be able to compare individual publishing houses in terms of authors, subjects and how their catalogues are constituted. And then the people who publish general books might also get the attention they deserve.

In order to get a complete picture of all books produced by a publishing house – fiction and non-fiction – it is to be recommended that the first step in any serious history of a publishing house should be to assemble a complete catalogue of the publisher in question. This gives an objective stepping-off point for every researcher who, for whatever reason, seeks to explore that catalogue. For this reason, the catalogue should be made publicly accessible, so that others are able to verify and possibly correct and/or supplement the information in it. This can be in printed form or by placing the catalogue on a website that everybody can access and search.

