



Handle with care

The Gemeentemuseum Den Haag recently lent some of its Piet Mondrian paintings to several locations in Brazil. Art transporter Hizkia Van Kralingen wrapped the works and transported them to Schiphol, from which they were flown to South America by KLM. Van Kralingen tells us how such a delicate process works.

It is fair to say that Hizkia van Kralingen literally grew up with art. That is, his father had a moving company, and one of his clients was the famous Dutch painter Karel Appel. Van Kralingen: “Many of his paintings were stored in my father’s warehouse. As a small boy of just six years old, I was playing there, surrounded by Appel’s works. I was interested in art from a young age, and it still touches me; I can really be emotionally moved by a beautiful painting. So, not surprisingly, Van Kralingen combined his love for art with his logistic background and, in 1990, made it into his career.

He is now one of the most prominent art transporters of the Netherlands and an expert when it comes to packing art. Recently, his company was responsible for packing and transporting more than 70 artworks from the Gemeente Museum Den Haag’s Mondrian collection to four venues in Brazil. This project was initiated by cultural agency ArtUnlimited and sponsored by Banco do Brasil.

Placed in ‘Turtles’, transported by experts

The transportation of valuable artworks is a complicated logistic challenge. Where does Van Kralingen start? “Before the move, an art conservator puts together a condition report for each painting. This is a standard procedure that takes the insurance into account; if a painting is damaged upon arrival, it has to be clear that it was still in good condition before it was transported.”

After the inspection, the artworks are carefully wrapped in plastic, sealed and placed in so-called ‘Turtles’. These are safe, flexible, and sustainable boxes, developed by Hizka, in which the art is protected from humidity and temperature changes.

Ideal temperature: 18° Celsius

The Turtles are loaded into special trucks, with a specific climate, and transported to the next destination. The Mondrian paintings, for instance, had to go to Schiphol Airport. When art is transported, there are always two drivers and an employee of the museum in the truck.

Van Kralingen: “When the cargo is moved by plane, we always make sure that we are at Schiphol five hours before departure. We build the pallets with someone from the museum and a KLM employee. This is a crucial moment, because there can’t be any pallets with fluids on top of the Turtles. And all the paintings have to be placed in the flight direction to minimise shaking. When the pallets have been arranged properly, we seal everything and place it in the vault of KLM Cargo.”

Before the Turtles take their final place in the cargo hold of the aircraft, one of Van Kralingen’s employees checks whether the temperature, which is normally set at 5° Celsius, has been changed to 18° Celsius, which is the ideal climate for artworks. Then, the pallets are positioned, and the location in the cargo hold is communicated to the destination. Van Kralingen’s employees wait until the airplane has left the airport to make sure the pallets are actually transported and not taken out at the last moment because the cargo is too heavy, for example. During the flight, turbulence isn’t a real problem for the valuable art works: the Turtles have been tested intensively and absorb most of the shaking.

Sharing Dutch heritage

In the case of the Mondrian paintings transport, a transport company in Brazil took over, once the paintings had arrived. An employee from the Gemeente Museum Den Haag did travel with the plane to accompany the transport of the canvases and to inspect the paintings once they had arrived.

Van Kralingen is extremely proud that his company has played an important role in the process of making the famous Dutch paintings visible in Brazil. “In the end, that is my biggest motivation, to help make the beautiful Dutch heritage available to the rest of the world. That’s the reason why I do what I do.”

