

In memoriam W. Arondéus

**Written as a preface to the reprint of Arondéus' book about
Matthijs Maris, named 'The tragic of the dream' (1945)**

Willem Arondéus, the writer of this noble book about Matthijs Maris, was arrested on 1 April 1943 by the German SS and police forces due to violent resistance against the occupying powers. During summer that year newspapers reported he and his fellow-fighters had been sentenced to death and the sentence had been executed.

An artist found his grave like a soldier. Because this comes first: Arondéus died like a soldier. For him no unworthy death in camp or cellar, by starvation or psychic depression, the worst an enemy can do to his enemy. For him the death he wanted. Free and stout he took up arms, when it seemed unavoidable to him; without hesitation he fulfilled a well prepared war plan and payed for the fulfillment with his brave life. Things went like they should go: *à la guerre comme à la guerre*. Even the German police report, which accurately describes his actions, expresses admiration for his posture. It states that he was soldier-like in everything. Any higher praise from this side is hardly conceivable, and do not hesitate to translate the word soldier-like by 'heroic'. Wherever the shot in the dunes sounded, near Waalsdorp or Bloemendaal, that put an end to the life of Arondéus, the field where it happened was the field of honour.

Though Arondéus' act of resistance – the attack on the Amsterdam Population Registry – is well-known because of the disturbance it caused at the time throughout the entire country, some details should be remembered.

Mr. Van Royen, the organiser of the artists, the chairman of the artists support fund, was early 1942 by a request to Seyss Inquart in connection with the foundation of the Kulturkammer, transported to camp Amersfoort from which he would not return. His work was illegally continued, or better picked up again – because the support fund was discontinued by the Germans – by Sandberg, the today's director of the Amsterdam City Museum. Sandberg found Arondéus and Gerrit van der Veen willing to provide money to the artists and intellectuals who were not connected to the Kulturkammer.

Also, from the summer of 1942, fraud identity cards were given to the illegal artists, especially the Jewish artists and intellectuals, and later on, when the student raids started, also to students. With it, Jews could pretend to be Arian. The number of distributed identity cards must have, according to the German report, been a couple of thousand. This is very likely.

Arondéus worked quickly and dynamic. Day in day out he could be seen walking through Amsterdam, with in his briefcase a little drum and in it an inkpad for manufacturing the fingerprints. He called himself Smit, later Kochius. What eventually started to bother him was the registry. In order not to be exposed, there should be corresponding cards to the fraud identity cards, when there would be an investigation. Constantly new cards should be taken out and replaced by new ones.

This registry, drawing up about a tenth of the entire Dutch population, was also the main aid to the enemy when the large scale forced labour deportations to Germany started.

Thus the plan grew, to blow up the registry. From the Gooi area explosives were secretly transported to Amsterdam, preparations were made, meetings were held with friends and helpers, a.o. the 'Rat Powder Boys', a group calling itself that way because it published an illegal magazine called 'Rattenkruit' (Rat Powder).

On 27 March 1943, in the evening around nine o'clock, Arondéus, dressed like a captain of police in uniform, cap, leather belt and pistol bag, reported to the Plantage Middenlaan at the building of the registry and demanded admission because he had to conduct an inspection. He was accompanied by a group of nine men, just like himself partly dressed up like policemen.

The building was guarded by four men, two policemen, two civilian guards. As soon as they admitted 'the captain', they were overpowered, and, because Arondéus specifically ordered no one was to be killed, rendered harmless in the following way. Arms were bound to the back, eyes and mouth were taped. Next - therefore Arondéus had two doctors in his company - they were injected with luminal-sodium solution and left unconscious in the neighboring garden of Artis (zoo). The same happened to the relief of the guards, an hour and a half later, who were waited upon by two members of Arondéus' group, in police uniform and on guard outside.

Meanwhile the others, inside the building, turned the registry upside down, spread the cards from the containers and cases over the floor, drenched it with benzol, planted the trotyl explosives and connected them, in short prepared everything for the explosion which took place at about eleven o'clock. Despite eighteen fire-engines, ordered from everywhere, the inside of the building mainly burned to the ground. Four days later, Arondéus, and most of his combattants, presumably because of treason, were arrested.

How could an artist - an artist of the utmost lyric kind, who is completely dependent for his expressions on his emotional life - become this illegal fighter? It can not be explained solely by the common state of war. An artist does not live through a common state, but lives through particular details of it with great sharpness. From these details, and often driven by mercy, he creates an Idea, and for this creation he is prepared to die. The dreamer turns out to be a dormant hero. Arondéus himself strikingly depicts this phenomenon.

On page 80 of this book you will find out why Matthijs Maris, during the war of 1870 living in Paris and experiencing the siege, enrolled as a volunteer to the French army. - 'They're still dreamers' - Arondéus says - 'in whom, suddenly and unstoppable, the enthusiasm for a grand reality, for the intense reality of the heroic, erupts most intensely. It only seems like, in everyday life, dreamers flee for life, have no courage to act, no will for victory, it only seems like it, but - in truth dream and heroic are from the same blood, both know the deep ecstasy, the wild romance, the drunken surrender to the Idea.' - And he continues: 'Timid in everyday life, powerless in the tricks of self-interest and incompetent in the compromise, every *full* truth, every *big* truth finds them prepared for the final sacrifice - as soon as this truth, absorbed in the speed of imagination, has become the Idea.' - Thus Arondéus wrote in the year before the outbreak of war. He already seems to feel the Idea that will free him to his actions.

Arondéus' first talent was painting. Led - misled, he would say later on - by his honoured older friend N. Roland Holst, he developed towards monumental-decorative art. Huge, pondering figures were created by his hand, framed by symbolic decorative patterns, often illustrated by verses of Leopold and others. He seemed to be very talented. There was not a contest he did not win if he participated. The windows from the city hall in Rotterdam, the walls of other public buildings, they keep a living memory of his artistic skills. But self he remained unsatisfied. He was, contrary to Roland Holst, an anti-social being, loaded with irony, which he used to keep himself under control and the outside world at a distance. The decorative art, demanding so much adaptation, eventually was not the area for him to express his own high-handed emotional life.

He left the figurative 'signs' and turned to the living 'language'. He started writing, novels, short stories, a study named 'Monumental art of painting in The Netherlands', in fact a fierce, personal settlement with met Roland Holst. With it he stripped himself of an obsession: art for art's sake.

Finally he wrote a book about Matthijs Maris, the most beautiful and personal work he created. In Matthijs Maris, the dreamer who broke new grounds, the painter who was not a painter, but used the art of painting to time and time again temporarily express his imagination, he recognized himself, no, met for the first time the greater kindred spirited brother, whom he had yearned his entire life for. The winter in the Amsterdam museum – where he met Sandberg – in a deadly quiet room bended over the hundreds of seeming unimportant notes in the correspondence of Matthijs Maris, was, except for the last months, the happiest time of his life. How gladly, he once told me, I would have taken one of Thijs' numerous memo's, with no value for history, and kept it for myself, to always have his handwriting with me... Arondéus fell in love.

Then the war came and the occupation. And while the occupation grew in atrocity, it neutralized the pressure which society had on Arondéus' personal emotional life. He could not stay hostile against this oppressed society. He felt one with all. The occupation became his liberation, and as a liberated man he died.