



CRISSCROSSING

THE ART OF HENK KRIJGER

LEARNING RESOURCE



Unknown Artist, *Portrait of Henk Krijger*, ca. 1965, photograph

BIOGRAPHY

Hendrik (Henk) Krijger was born in 1914 to Christian missionaries in the colony of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). He was born and spent his early years in Karuni, a small village on the island of Sumba. We do not know very much about his early years, although we do know that Indonesian culture had a lifelong impact on his artistic style.

In 1928 at the age of fourteen, Krijger moved to Amsterdam in the Netherlands to pursue his education. He was formally trained in book design, typography, illustration, and type-design. Krijger pursued many kinds of fine art-making, including painting, drawing, collage, jewelry design, sculpture, and mural making. Krijger lived through World War II in Amsterdam, experienced Nazi occupation, and participated in the Resistance. After the war, he moved to North America, living in both Chicago and Toronto. In America, he worked at the Institute of Christian Art in Chicago, which later relocated to Toronto under Krijger and others' leadership as the Patmos Institute. Krijger returned to the Netherlands in 1973 and remained there until his death in 1979.



Henk Krijger, *Self Portrait*, charcoal and pencil on paper, 1937, Gift of the Senggih Foundation and Willem Hart, 2021.65.7

Much of Krijger's work explores his relation to and belief in Christianity, which was often relayed subtly and through symbolism. Krijger also created artwork related to themes of mythology, literature, and everyday life, as well as some works in response to World War II. He created a sculpture in the Netherlands celebrating the millionth home built after the destruction of the war.

The GVSU Art Museum holds the largest public collection of Krijger's art.

HONGERVINTER 1944-1945

From 1944-1945, Dutch citizens, including Krijger, experienced the Hongervinter, or the Hunger Winter. A six-week Nazi food embargo from September to October 1944, combined with crop failures, lack of transport or adequate roads and bridges, and a harsh winter, caused millions of people in the Netherlands to starve. During this time, Krijger helped to smuggle potatoes into Amsterdam, where the average adult was living on less than 1000 calories a day. Estimates say that between 16,000 - 22,000 people died of starvation during the Hongervinter. This period of starvation ended when the Allied forces liberated the Netherlands.

CLOSE LOOKING: THE SURVIVORS

Take a moment to look at *The Survivors*. This work was created in 1972, the year before Krijger returned to the Netherlands.

As you look, ask yourself:

What do you notice about the faces and bodies of the figures?

What kind of techniques did Krijger use?

Who do you think the survivors are?

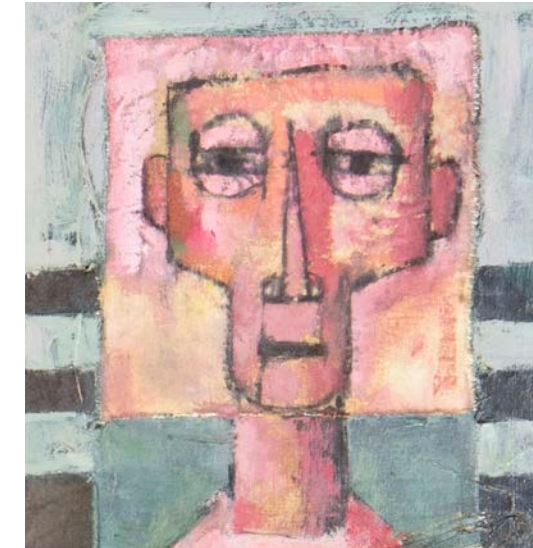
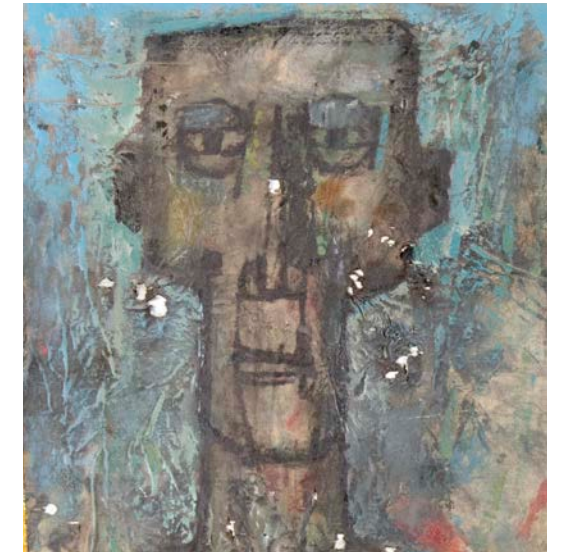
The survivors could be either those who survived the Nazi concentration camps or those who survived the Hongervinter. Here he paints four figures with gaunt faces, ribs showing, bodies cut into different sections, with eyes that confront us as we look at them. Despite their malnourished frames, all of the figures are standing tall. The trials and adversity these figures faced have not defeated them.

Krijger was influenced by the Indonesian totems he saw while growing up.

Look up Indonesian totems and compare them and Krijger's figures. In what ways can you see how Krijger was influenced?

For more background information on Krijger and the Dutch Resistance living in Nazi occupied Amsterdam, check out our resource on this topic at www.gvsu.edu/artmuseum/krijgerresource

Henk Krijger, *The Survivors (detail)*, oil and rags on masonite, 1972, Gift of the Senggih Foundation and Nienke Krijger, 2021.66.1



(Full image available on page 10)

CLOSE LOOKING

Artwork Questions:

How do these two artworks go together? What is the sequence?
What evidence do you see?



Henk Krijger, *How Beautiful on the Mountain...* (detail), gouache on paper, 1970, Gift of the Senggih Foundation, Rob and Marian de Lint, and Mark, Ingrid, and Michelle Hart, 2021.68.2

- What is the figure looking at?
- How do you think the figure feels? Why?
- Where do you think the figure is?
- Where is the figure going?



Henk Krijger, *Somebody Loves Me* (detail), *I wonder Who...*, giclee of photograph of original gouache on paper, 1972, Gift of Senggih Foundation, and Peter and Helen Hart, 2021.62.1

- What is going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- How do you think the figure feels?
- What do you think is inside the letter?



WRITING ACTIVITY

After examining these two artworks, write a story about the figure. Use ideas from your group discussion.

- Describe their actions and emotions.
- Who is the letter from?
- What does the letter say?
- What will the figure do next?

(Larger image available on page 9)

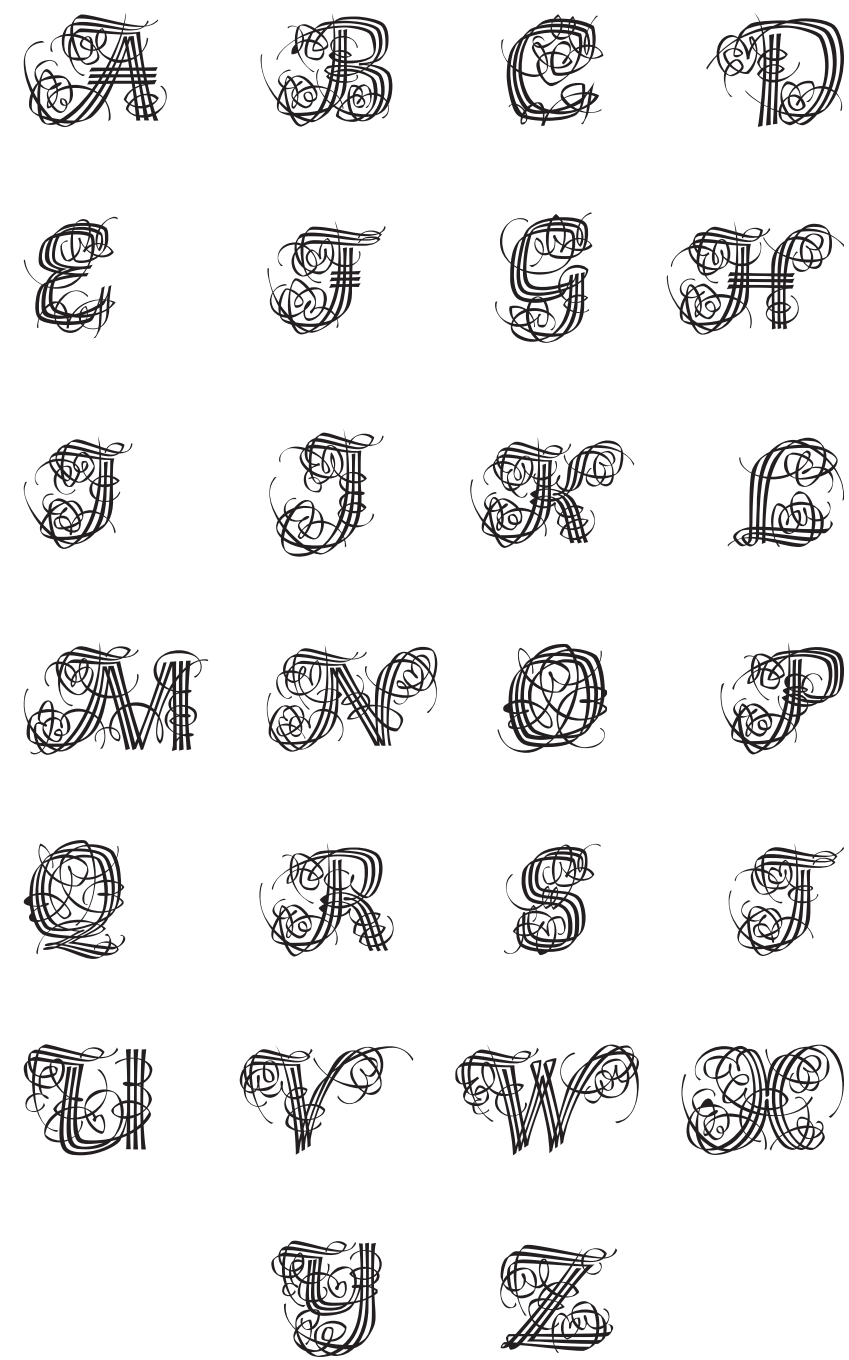
GRAPHIC DESIGN ACTIVITY

In Amsterdam, Krijger worked in type-design and created his unique typeface of Raffia Initialen. It was released in 1952 by Lettergieterij Amsterdam. The master drawings are part of the special collections at the Univeriteitsbibliotheek of the University of Amsterdam. This font was inspired by his time living in Indonesia and the organic form of raffia fibers. It also suggests the look of letters painted with a fine-tipped brush, as each line of the letters starts with a tin point and then grows larger in the middle before tapering back to a smaller point.

Creating fonts is a common part of graphic design instruction to this day. Look at the raffia alphabet pictured to the right. Give each student the first letter of the first or last name. Challenge them to create their initial following Krijger’s font. For an extra challenge, give them a calligraphy brush and watercolors. Students can see how using different pressures creates different lines and how colors interact with one another.

Take it one step further: Challenge your students to create their own unique font inspired by nature.

(Larger image on page 11)



Raffia Typeface, Canada Type



Hoe heerlijk zijn op de bergen de voeten van hem die het goede boodschap
How beautiful upon the mountain the feet of him who bringeth good tidings

Betapa elok atas gunung / perjalan orang yang segera /
membawa kabar penghiburan, kepada orang yang lelah

Isaiah 52:7
senggih Mahe 1970





