

An incomparable, encyclopedic collection of drawings

In the 1920s the German banker and businessman Franz Wilhelm Koenigs (Kierberg/Brühl 1881-1941 Cologne) put together a large collection of Old Master drawings that became world-famous for its superb quality. It is now known as the Koenigs Collection out of respect for its creator, who also owned more than 50 paintings.

Koenigs, the fifth of six children born to a Catholic German father and a Lutheran mother of Dutch descent, became a member of the board of the Delbrück Schickler & Co. bank in Berlin in 1913, and in 1920 he was the co-founder and owner of the Rhodius Koenigs Handel-Maatschappij N.V., which provided credit to German companies and was thus also regarded as a bank. It had its seat in the Netherlands (Keizersgracht 117-121, Amsterdam) in order to get around the trade restrictions imposed on Germany by the Allies after the First World War. In 1921 Koenigs also became a director of the Delbrück von der Heydt & Co. bank in Cologne, and also held many non-executive directorships in major companies at home and abroad, including the Hollandsche Buitenland Bank in 1925. He also had a widespread network of contacts in the financial and industrial worlds, as well as relatives in politics and the army, especially in Germany.

In 1922 he was joined by his wife and five young children, who came over from Germany (Cologne). The following year the family moved into a large villa at Florapark 8 in Haarlem.

[>SOURCE](#)



Franz Koenigs, c. 1915-1920, portrait by his father-in-law Leopold von Kalckreuth

Koenigs made a fortune in the Netherlands thanks to the favourable economic climate and low taxation in the 1920s, as well as to his keen business sense, and although he too was hit by the worldwide crisis triggered by the Wall Street crash of 1929, he and his company managed to weather the storm.

In addition to drawings, Koenigs bought several dozen paintings by old and modern masters (mainly the Impressionists). Although he acquired his first works of art before moving to Holland (he bought his first Impressionist works during his time in Paris in 1903-1904), most of his drawings entered the collection in 1921-1931.

One important source of inspiration for his collecting activities was his uncle Felix Koenigs (1846-1900), a banker and director of Delbrück Leo & Co. in Berlin, who played a leading role in the cultural life of the German capital and had a collection of contemporary art which he left in part to the city's Nationalgalerie and in part to his family. The Koenigssee and the Koenigsallee in a new luxury villa district in Berlin were named after him. In fact, cultural interests were in Franz Koenigs's blood, for his mother Johanna Bunge (1851-1934) was a gifted amateur artist and musician. On 26 April 1914, in Eddelsen/Hittfeld (near Seevetal below Hamburg), Franz Koenigs married Anna (Mucki) von Kalckreuth (1890-1946), daughter of the German Symbolist artist Count Leopold von Kalckreuth (1855-1928). The couple met in 1910 when Von Kalckreuth painted the portrait of Koenigs's mother in her Neo-Gothic castle in Sinzig-am-Rhein (between Bonn and Koblenz).



Franz and Anna Koenigs, Berlin, c. 1915



Franz Koenigs at Florapark 8, Haarlem, c. 1930

“He had the collecting urge very early on, when as a young man in Paris he bought the French paintings and lithographs of Lautrec. He found it such a shame that the museums and printrooms were always closed after his busy working day, and wanted to have something himself that he could always look at.”

(Anna Koenigs, Countess Von Kalckreuth, 1946)

Koenigs was an avid and decisive collector who set himself a clear goal. He wanted to build up an encyclopedic collection that provided the broadest and most complete overview of the development of drawing in Western Europe. He wanted it to be the most important private collection in the world in that respect.

Koenigs was an energetic businessman who travelled widely. He was often in his home city of Cologne, where he was a bank director, and his office there was his contact address and temporary storage facility for the works of art he had bought, and he often visited, even after moving to Haarlem. In 1931 he spent some time in a sanatorium there, recovering from an illness. He contacted local art dealers whenever he visited European capitals, most notably Berlin, Paris, London, Madrid and Vienna, as well as in New York, and they were more than happy to visit him in his hotel, bringing their stock with them. Dealers also got in touch with him when he was abroad, proposing purchases by letter. However many drawings he bought, though, Koenigs was always highly selective.

He often bought extensively at major auctions in the 1920s, and in this he was assisted by the staff of the Paul Cassirer gallery in Amsterdam and by other dealers like Nicolaas (Nic) Beets (1878-1963, the grandson of the well-known Dutch author and poet), who bid for him up to preset limits. Beets also acted for him when he lent 119 drawings (almost half of the 261 works of art in the show) to the major exhibition of Italian art in Dutch collections in Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 1934. For many years Koenigs was also in regular contact with the well-known collector F.J. (Frits) Lugt (1884-1970) in Maartensdijk and later The Hague in order to arrange which of them would bid for what at auctions, and to buy and exchange drawings and paintings. Koenigs bought many of his works from the dealer Gustav Nebehay in Leipzig, and later in Vienna. He was usually far too busy to attend auctions himself.



'Now I know why you were in Berlin recently! Best wishes, Huldshinsky'. Franz Koenigs is seated in the middle of the room (second row, behind the man with the glasses) at the Huldshinsky auction at the Cassirer & Helbing premises in Berlin on 10 and 11 May 1928 (newspaper cutting with a handwritten message from the collector Oscar Huldshinsky)

He also profited from the favourable climate for dealing and collecting, and made maximum use of his contacts, particularly in Germany. When the grand-ducal collections were disposed of in Weimar in 1923 he acquired the most important drawings as well as the two famous Gabburri albums containing 401 drawings by Fra Bartolommeo. In 1929 he bought the entire private collection of Julius Böhler in Luzern, a German art dealer with whom he had been doing business since the early 1920s. That group of 238 drawings included sheets by Rembrandt and Giambattista Tiepolo, who were among Koenigs's favourite artists.

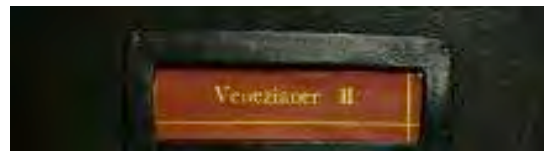


The interior of Florapark 8 in Haarlem. The boxes of drawings were stored in the cupboards

Franz Koenigs took good care of his collection. In 1926 he added a wing to his large villa in Haarlem to house his growing collection. He also went to great lengths to store his drawings properly. His wife made the mounts and boxes [ill.]. [>SOURCE](#) The latter were kept in wooden cupboards [ill.]. Visitors came regularly to view the collection, and if Koenigs himself was not at home they were received by his wife and eldest daughter.



Original black boxes for the drawings, with red labels



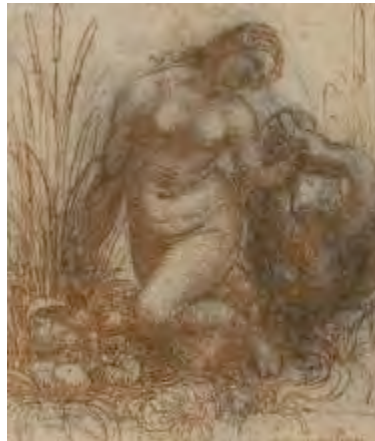
The drawings were arranged by school (Netherlandish, Dutch, Flemish, German I and German II, French I and French II, Italian, English, Spanish) and then alphabetically by artist. The German and French drawings were subdivided chronologically: before and after 1600 and before and after 1800. There was a separate section for drawings by Rembrandt and his pupils. The drawings were numbered sequentially within each section and a brief description of each one was entered in an inventory. Koenigs did not do this himself but left it to his advisers from the Cassirer gallery: Dr Helmuth Lütjens and Walter Feilchenfeldt. The first reference to these inventory numbers dates from 1927 (D I 11, 18 and 41).

The Koenigs Collection soon became famous internationally. The collector Frits Lugt, with whom Koenigs was in regular touch, wrote: 'Rarely has such a choice assemblage been put together in such a short space of time, in ten years or so'. [>SOURCE](#) In 1930 and 1933 the well-known German art historian, Prof. Max J. Friedländer, director of the Kupferstich-Kabinett in Berlin, edited two large, de luxe facsimile volumes titled *Meisterzeichnungen aus der Sammlung Franz Koenigs, Haarlem*, each containing 21 high-quality reproductions of French and Venetian drawings respectively, which were published by Prestel-Verlag in Frankfurt.

A selection of showpieces from the Koenigs Collection



Albrecht Dürer, inv. no. D I 19



Leonardo da Vinci, inv. no. I 466



Rembrandt, inv. no. R 10



Lucas van Leyden, inv. no. N 13



Claude Lorrain, inv. no. F I 120



Cézanne, inv. no. F II 149



Rubens, inv. no. V 81



Gainsborough, inv. no. E 5



Goya, inv. no. S 16

The Koenigs Collection as collateral for a bank loan (1931-1940)

On 9 September 1931 Koenigs transferred the vast majority of his drawings, some 2,500 sheets, in fiduciary ownership (a commercial form of surety between 1929 and 1992, alongside guarantee and mortgage) to the N.V. Bankierskantoor Lisser & Rosenkranz in Amsterdam, a bank with largely Jewish major shareholders in which he himself had a holding of around 2.4%. [>SOURCE](#) This was collateral for a loan of 1.5m guilders that he needed to boost the capitalisation of his company. The agreement was ratified in a document of 2 October 1931 in which the loan was stated to be only 1,150,000 guilders.

It is this group of drawings that is now known as the Koenigs Collection. He did not transfer the entire collection to the bank but held on to the paintings and an unknown number of drawings which formed the basis for a subsequent collection which he put together unobtrusively, known as 'the second Koenigs Collection' (see below).

Koenigs needed this substantial loan because the worldwide recession had damaged his business interests and his company had got into financial difficulties. The situation became acute in the summer of 1931 when the crisis worsened, affecting banks as well as commercial companies. On 1 September 1931 money transfers were frozen under the Standstill agreement between international and German banks, whereby German banks and industrial and commercial companies were granted extensions of payment for six months (which was repeatedly prolonged) on their short-term debts to foreign banks. [>SOURCE](#) One of those foreign banks was Koenigs's company, which did most of its business with Germany, where it had most of its borrowers. At the same time, because he was a German national, Koenigs was himself protected by the Standstill agreement in his obligations to foreign banks (his bank borrowed from foreign banks in order to provide lines of credit to German companies). That ceased when he became a naturalised Dutchman in 1939 and received demands to pay his debts to English banks. The situation in which he found himself warrants further study by an economic historian as part of a wider examination of Koenigs's business dealings and companies in the two decades between the world wars.

The conditions of Koenigs's loan were tightened when the world economy failed to recover. The loan and the bond (the Koenigs Collection) were reaffirmed and renewed for five years (unless the lender went into liquidation at an earlier date, as was stipulated in a special clause) in a registered document of 1 June 1935. The amount of the loan had increased to 1,375,000 guilders and £17,000 as a result of currency conversion and a transfer of debt. [>SOURCE](#) In addition to the collection of drawings Koenigs now transferred 47 paintings in fiduciary ownership to the Lisser & Rosenkranz bank.

This agreement was modified on 15 July 1935. [>SOURCE](#) If the loan was repaid the bank would renounce its fiduciary ownership, which would then revert to Koenigs. So unless he repaid the loan within the stipulated period of five years he had no rights of ownership to the Koenigs Collection. One feature of fiduciary ownership is that the construction is not made known to outsiders, to whom it appeared that Koenigs was the owner. Since the collection could no longer be housed in the collector's home, a new location had to be found for it, and the choice fell on Museum Boymans in Rotterdam (renamed Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in 1958 and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in 1996, referred to below as Museum Boijmans). While it was on loan to the museum it would be accessible to the public and scholars. That was the express wish of the collector, who had long been familiar with the museum and had made a financial contribution, together with D.G. van Beuningen and others, for the purchase of Hieronymus Bosch's famous *Prodigal Son* in 1931, which has been one of the museum's icons ever since.

From Florapark in Haarlem to Museumpark in Rotterdam (1935)

On 6 July 1935, at the opening of the new Museum Boijmans, an official announcement was made about the acquisition of the Koenigs Collection on loan in the presence of the collector and his wife. [>SOURCE](#) In his foreword to the catalogue *Museum Boijmans Rotterdam. Verzameling F. Koenigs schilderijen* published specially for the occasion, the

museum's director, Dr Dirk Hannema wrote: 'Only those with intimate knowledge of this world-famous collection, which has been put together over the years with a rare understanding of aesthetic values, can appreciate what such an enrichment means for a museum'. And he continued: 'With what Boijmans has of these masters, the Rotterdam museum outstrips all the Dutch collections and can rival the greatest in Europe'.

The collection was insured in 1935 against fire and against damages during transport for 2.5m guilders, with the drawings accounting for 1.8m of that total. This insurance was added to the museum's main policy. [>SOURCE](#)

The loan of the collection had probably been planned for some time. The museum had already received the painting *Les Deux Amies* by Toulouse-Lautrec on loan at the beginning of 1933. [>SOURCE](#) Two exhibitions were held in Schielandhuis in December 1934 and January 1935, prior to the closure of the museum's old premises on 31 March: *Dutch Drawings of the 15th, 16th and 17th Centuries*, *The F. Koenigs Collection*, and *One Hundred Old French Drawings from the F. Koenigs Collection*.



The old Museum Boijmans, 1890



The new Museum Boijmans and the Museumpark, 1935

The new museum was built on the Dijkzigt estate in a small polder between the Westzeedijk, Westersingel and Mathenesserlaan. It was designed by the architect A.J. van der Steur in close consultation with Hannema, both of whom made detailed preparations and visited new museums in Europe and the United States in order to create a museum in Rotterdam that met all the latest requirements.

The arrival of the loan of 47 paintings and more than 2,000 drawings from the Koenigs Collection had already been taken into account. The new museum had a well-equipped printroom occupying various rooms on the ground floor: a storage room, a study room in the library, and three interconnected exhibition galleries. The curator was the art historian Dr J.G. van Gelder (see 'In conclusion' below). Hieronymus Bosch's *St Christopher*, which was one of the loans from Koenigs, marked the beginning of the chronological display, and there were also several works from the Koenigs loan in the Rubens gallery.

Further exhibitions of works from the Koenigs Collection were staged in 1935 and 1936. Nineteenth-century French drawings were on show from December 1935 to January 1936 in the exhibition *Drawings by Ingres, Delacroix, Gericault, Daumier from the Koenigs Collection*. Paintings from the loan formed part of the large 1936 summer exhibition *Hieronymus Bosch and the Northern Netherlandish Primitives*. Several sheets were also lent to other exhibitions at home and abroad. [>SOURCE](#) Two important drawings by Dürer and Grünewald were actually in New York when war broke out and were not returned until 1947. [>SOURCE](#) / [>SOURCE](#)

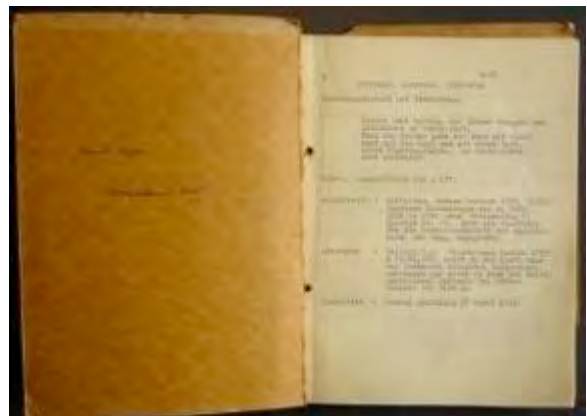


The Museum Boijmans printroom: the exhibition gallery (1935-1971), 1947

Dr Helmuth Lütjens, who had advised Koenigs for years and was also a German (he took Dutch nationality in 1939), became the director of the Paul Cassirer gallery in Amsterdam on 12 June 1923. When the loan was made to the museum he handed over a typescript inventory book [ill.]. The German art historian Dr Ernst Scheyer had started work on a typescript catalogue of the 17th-century Dutch drawings before emigrating to the United States in 1935. These two documents formed the basis for the full catalogue of the collection, and provided scholarly access to it together with the exhibition catalogues. The museum continued photographing the collection on glass negatives in 1935-1940.



Inventory book by Dr Helmuth Lütjens, c. 1931-1935
See [specimen pages](#) (Spanish drawings)



Typescript catalogue by Dr Ernst Scheyer, 1935
See [specimen pages](#)

In view of the transfer of the collection to the museum the drawings were given the collector's mark of 'FK' in a horizontal oval (see the illustration on the following page). [>MORE](#) This mark was added inconspicuously to every drawing, usually in the bottom left corner on the reverse. The stamp and the tin with brown ink were presented to the museum in 1973 by a son of the collector [ill.]. The drawings and prints from the second Koenigs Collection (see below) are not marked.



The tin of brown ink and Koenigs's collector's stamp



Koenigs's collector's mark (L. 1023a)

The correspondence between Dirk Hannema and Mr and Mrs Koenigs, which is preserved in the museum's archives, testifies to mutual respect and trust. At the end of 1937 Mrs Koenigs asked Hannema to support the couple's application for naturalisation. [>SOURCE](#) It had to be done in a hurry due to the approaching adulthood of their son F.F.R. Koenigs (1918-2000), who ran the risk of being called up for military service in Germany (children who were minors were automatically naturalised along with their parents). The family became Dutch citizens on 9 February 1939, which eliminated the threat of their son's conscription.

The Koenigs Collection becomes the property of the liquidating bank (1940)

One feature of fiduciary ownership is that it is hidden from third parties. The correspondence about the loan of the Koenigs Collection in the period 1935-1939 was between the museum, in the person of its director, Dirk Hannema, and the collector, and was not conducted through the bank, [>SOURCE](#) / [>SOURCE](#) so it is very possible that the museum only learned the precise details about ownership in 1939, having assumed up until then that the loan came directly from the collector. In any event, the museum and the trustees of its recently formed foundation were taken completely by surprise by the announcement in the summer of 1939 (there is no known correspondence on the subject) that the Koenigs Collection was being offered for sale *en bloc*. Everyone immediately set to work to find financial backers in order to keep the collection in the Netherlands, and specifically in Museum Boijmans.

From the manuscript Minute Book of the Museum Boijmans Foundation, which was founded on 17 July 1939, (first) meeting of the Board of Trustees, 26 October 1939. 'The chairman then announced that the collection of paintings and drawings of Mr F. Koenigs, which has been in the Museum on loan since 1935, will leave next year. This represents an exceptionally great loss for the Museum. The sum of money required for any purchase is so substantial that it will not be easy to retain this collection for Rotterdam. The main question is what can be done to prevent this loss. Mr Hannema gives a brief résumé of the many important pieces in this collection. In addition to the paintings, which are dominated by Hieronymus Bosch and Rubens, there is a unique and exquisite collection of Old Master drawings. The Dutch, German, French and Italian schools are represented in abundance. In particular, the speaker sings the praises of the series of drawings by Peasant Bruegel, by Watteau, Rubens and the 50 sheets by Rembrandt. The Museum has been able to mount many exhibitions in recent years from this lavishly compiled collection. Its loss would be a disaster for Rotterdam. Mr Heldring asks what will happen to the collection. Mr Van der Vorm announces that the American Museums are interested in it. As a whole it is pledged for around 2 million guilders, not including interest. He asks whether the Government can do something in this exceptional case. Dr Schneider considers it to be a matter of national interest that the collection remains

here. He will enquire at the Department of Education, Arts and Sciences whether support might not be forthcoming. Mr Van Beuningen wonders whether it would not be possible to form a syndicate. One could then, if needs be, sell anything that was not so important for the Museum. In the end it is decided that the Executive Committee will examine this matter further.' [>SOURCE#1](#)

By this time negotiations to acquire the Koenigs Collection for Museum Boijmans had been going on for more than two months. The asking price was 2.2m guilders. The art dealer Jacques Goudstikker had been appointed the agent by the bank and the collector. He immediately approached the collector D.G. van Beuningen, who had been a regular customer of his for years and who was also the museum's chief benefactor. In a letter to him of 29 August 1939, in which he confirmed Van Beuningen's purchase of a painting by Dieric Bouts, he wrote: 'In my opinion, your recent purchases have made your collection by far the best in the Netherlands, and the entire country can be proud that something like that is possible within its borders. I would be very happy if I could continue negotiating with you and Dr Hannema over the K. Collection. It is a matter which, to my mind, Museum Boijmans should not let pass by, and there is every chance of that if one does not take the plunge at this critical moment.' [>SOURCE](#)



The wealthy Rotterdam businessman Daniel George van Beuningen (1877-1955) was director of the Steenkolen Handelsvereniging (SHV). [>MORE](#) He was a leading collector of paintings and the most important benefactor of Museum Boijmans. [>MORE](#) He was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Museum Boijmans Foundation from its inception in 1939, whose mission was (and still is) 'to promote the good fortunes of Museum Boijmans in Rotterdam'. [>SOURCE](#) Van Beuningen was primarily a collector of paintings. He was less interested in drawings because their sensitivity to light means that they have to be stored in boxes and cannot be hung up for long. Although he had several irons in the fire at the time, he actively supported the efforts to preserve the Koenigs Collection for the museum, and it was thanks to his bold actions that it was saved - in the nick of time.



The bank's representative at the sale of the collection was Jacques Goudstikker (1897-1940), a Jewish art dealer of Amsterdam whose main client since 1916 was Van Beuningen. [>MORE](#) Goudstikker had also acted as his adviser for the purchase of many of the paintings and bronzes from the bankrupt Austrian banker Stephan von Auspitz in 1929. In 1958, those works of art entered Museum Boijmans along with Van Beuningen's collection, where they now form the core of the collection of Italian paintings.

In 1939 there was 'a great deal of interest from several parties', more specifically Americans, but it evidently did not take on firm shape. The negotiations did not make much headway due to the tense situation in Europe, the start of the Second World War in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland, and the absence abroad of some of the key figures. Eventually the museum tried to persuade Willem van der Vorm (1873-1957, [>MORE](#)), another Rotterdam industrialist and patron of the museum, to buy the Koenigs Collection for the museum. Hannema sent him an urgent letter on 13 March 1940, enclosing the valuation Van der Vorm had asked for, informing him that Koenigs had rung to say that the collection would be shipped to Lisbon (where the major shareholder and bank director Kramarsky had been living since late 1939) within a fortnight, and that Koenigs 'wanted to do everything possible to keep it here'. [>SOURCE](#) Hannema sent the same documents to Van Beuningen eight days later.

The Koenigs Collection had still not been sold when the Lisser & Rosenkranz bank went into voluntary liquidation on 2 April 1940 (probably, as a Jewish concern, so as to avoid German interference if the Netherlands was occupied). Koenigs had announced that he would not be repaying the loan, so the bank became the full owner of the collection on 2 April 1940, as Koenigs immediately informed the museum by letter. [>SOURCE](#) On the basis of the agreements (see p. 6) [>SOURCE](#) the bank was entitled to sell the entire collection and charge Koenigs for any difference (sale of the surety). The bank accordingly cancelled the loan to the museum by letter that same day, and asked the director to pack the Koenigs Collection up and prepare it for shipment. [>SOURCE](#) The museum replied that it was packing the drawings in a responsible manner, and that they could be collected by a shipping agent on 16 April. [>SOURCE](#) Their destination was still Lisbon, to which the major shareholder and two bank directors had moved in 1939 on their way to the United States.

According to W.O. Koenigs, the collector's youngest child (a former banker, former chairman of the Rembrandt Association and former trustee of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Foundation), his father had no intention of buying back the title to the collection because he did not have the funds to do so after having put together another collection. He regarded the first one (the Koenigs Collection) as complete and already in the most suitable location: Museum Boijmans.

The bank's sale of the Koenigs Collection to D.G. van Beuningen (1940)

On 2 April 1940 the bank accepted the collection of drawings and 47 paintings in settlement of Koenigs's debt. [>SOURCE](#) / [>SOURCE](#) A week later, on 9 April 1940, the bank sold the drawings and 12 paintings (eight by Rubens and four by Bosch) to Van Beuningen, [>SOURCE](#) preventing shipment abroad and allowing the collection to remain in the museum.

From the Minute Book of the Museum Boijmans Foundation, meeting of the Board of Trustees, 18 April 1940. 'The minutes of the previous meeting were read out and approved. The Chairman then announces that the Koenigs Collection, which has been on loan to the Museum since 1935 and which has been discussed on several occasions by the Board of Trustees of the Museum Boijmans Foundation, has now been preserved for Rotterdam. Mr Hannema relates that a request was received on 2 April that preparations be made for dispatching the entire collection to Lisbon. The Museum there had already agreed to take the collection into safekeeping. On 5 April, at half past eight in the morning, there had been a meeting at the museum between Messrs Koenigs, Van der Vorm and Van Beuningen. That afternoon Mr Van Beuningen went to Amsterdam to discuss the matter with the banking firm of Lisser & Rosenkranz, which had become the owner of the entire collection. Mr Van B. then made an offer, but it was not accepted. A second urgent letter arrived on 8 April. Everything would be collected in a few days. On the morning of 9 April there was a meeting in Mr Van Beuningen's office with Mr Goudstikker, who acted as the representative of the firm of Lisser & Rosenkranz. The result was that the transaction was finalised that afternoon. The purchase comprises the entire collection of drawings, without exception, the four paintings by Hieronymus Bosch as well as eight by Rubens, among them the superb landscape from the former Northbrook Collection. Mr Van Hasselt, speaking for the Rembrandt Association, wishes Museum Boijmans and the initiators luck. It is an achievement that far transcends any local interest.' [>SOURCE#2](#)

The collapse of the art market had reduced the purchase price to below the 2.5m-guilder insured value of 1935 and the 2.25m-guilder valuation of March 1940. [>SOURCE](#) The stipulated sale *en bloc* naturally acted to reduce the price as well. Van Beuningen was business-like, and offered less than half the asking price of 2.2m guilders. The bank's sale of the collection to him for 1m therefore did not meet its full claim against Koenigs of around 1.8m guilders. In order to pay off his remaining liability of 844,557 guilders Koenigs also transferred full ownership to the bank on 2 April 1940 of 35 of the 47 paintings on loan to Museum Boijmans. [>SOURCE](#) / [>SOURCE](#) The bank then sold them on to the Goudstikker gallery, which picked them up from the museum on 19 April 1940. [>SOURCE](#)



It is clear from a letter he wrote on 17 April that Franz Koenigs was happy with the bank's sale of his collection to Van Beuningen, because it meant that it could be retained for the country in its entirety, and in the museum that he had selected himself, where it had been preserved for an indefinite period since 1935. 'We are also delighted that the collection has remained in Holland, and of course we prefer to see it in Museum Boijmans. In order to express our sentiments I have sent you by hand of Mr Lütjens two drawings by Carpaccio from the Oppenheimer Collection for Museum Boijmans. They may perhaps help fill the gap I have always felt in the sequence of the Venetian drawings.' [>SOURCE](#) Koenigs had bought the drawings at an auction at Christie's in London on 10 July 1936. [>SOURCE#4](#)

When the Koenigs Collection was sold to Van Beuningen, the seller (the bank) did not stipulate that nothing could be sold from it or that the entire collection should be donated to the museum. The buyer did agree that for the time being it would continue to be presented as the F. Koenigs Collection. This emerges from the bank's letter of 9 April 1940 to Van Beuningen. 'We have noted with gratitude from your undertaking to that effect that the above-mentioned collection of drawings and paintings will continue to be known under its existing name of the F. Koenigs Collection for as long as it remains in the museum.'

[>SOURCE](#) The bank wrote the museum director a letter the same day with a very similar passage but without the limitation to the time the collection remained in the museum. 'The undertaking given to us by Mr D.G. van Beuningen, namely that the present name of the collection of drawings and paintings will be retained, also meets the wishes of Mr Koenigs'.

[>SOURCE](#) The undertaking to keep the name was confirmed by Hannema in a letter to Koenigs of 12 April 1940. 'However, I want to assure you that the collection to which your name will continue to be attached will be looked after with the greatest of care in the future as well. I therefore hope most sincerely that the ties between Museum Boijmans, the Koenigs Collection and both of you will continue.' [>SOURCE](#) In 1942, a year after the collector's death, his widow Anna Koenigs-von Kalckreuth (1890-1946) wrote to Hannema: 'I am happy about everything that has remained in Museum Boijmans and the Netherlands, because my husband always wanted his collection to remain in our country. I found the lines you have written about my husband as a collector most characteristic of him and of his way of collecting.' [>SOURCE](#)

Sadly, Franz Koenigs died in an accident at Cologne Station on 6 May 1941 on his way to visit one of his sisters who was living in the parental home in Sinzig-am-Rhein. He fell while trying to jump aboard a departing train and broke his spine, and died on his way to hospital.

Van Beuningen sells 20% of the Koenigs Collection to the Germans and donates 80% to the museum foundation (1940)

In December 1940 D.G. van Beuningen donated the Koenigs Collection, four paintings by Bosch and five oil sketches by Rubens to the Museum Boijmans Foundation. He only did so after selling part of it (528 drawings, amounting to roughly 20% of the total, including all the German drawings but two) for 1.4m guilders on 3 December 1940 to Dr Hans Posse, Hitler's 'Special Envoy for Linz'. Van Beuningen kept three paintings by Rubens for himself and had them collected from the museum on 27 June 1940. The City of Rotterdam acquired them in 1958 as part of the Van Beuningen Collection, and they returned to the museum.



Hans Posse (1879-1942) was the director of Dresden's Staatliche Gemäldegalerie from 1913 to 1942, [>MORE](#) and was given the secret mission of acquiring works of art for Hitler's planned Führer-Museum in Linz. [>MORE](#) Van Beuningen was not personally involved in the negotiations in the summer and autumn of 1940. He left that to his German-born son-in-law Lucas Peterich. The prices were based on valuations by Prof. Max J. Friedländer. [>SOURCE](#) Frits Lugt wrote in 1956: 'It should be realised that the experts enlisted by the Germans managed to protect Dutch interests with their very high appraisals and valuations'. [>SOURCE](#)

This sale of a portion of the drawings collection to the German occupier was prohibited by Dutch legislation (Decrees A1, A6, E133 and H251) and thus null and void. [>MORE](#) / [>MORE](#) Although apparently voluntary, in the longer term the transaction would have been inevitable, because the Nazis would have insisted on acquiring the drawings for the Führer-Museum, especially the German ones, and Van Beuningen risked having them confiscated as private property without financial compensation. As a businessman he decided to make the best of a bad job, partly because he had other irons in the fire as well. In the first place he had his eye on some very expensive 'Vermeers' (which later turned out to be forgeries by Van Meegeren), and secondly he had bought the painting *The Three Marys at the Tomb* by Jan and Hubert van Eyck for 2.2m guilders from the Cook Collection in London at almost the same time as his purchase of the Koenigs Collection. [>MORE](#) He bought the painting on 30 April 1940 and it arrived just before the German attack on Rotterdam, but it survived the air raid. It too, was acquired for Museum Boijmans in 1958 as part of the Van Beuningen Collection.

The 528 drawings that the Germans had bought from Van Beuningen were sent to Dresden in the spring of 1941 in four crates that were collected from Museum Boijmans on 5 March. [>SOURCE](#) Hans Posse sent an acknowledgement of receipt from Dresden on 26 May. [>SOURCE](#) After the occupation by Soviet troops in 1945 the crates with the drawings were shipped off to Moscow together with the contents of the Dresden museums. [>SOURCES#6+7](#)

The state recovers drawings sold illegally (1945-)

The Koenigs Collection, or at least the bulk of it (around 80%) has been in Museum Boijmans uninterruptedly since 1935. After the war ended, 178 missing drawings were returned by various routes and restored to the collection under international agreements, among them the Joint Declaration (*Inter-Allied Declaration against Acts of Dispossession Committed in Territories under Enemy Occupation and Control*) of 1943. [>MORE](#) They are all loans from the State of the Netherlands, since Museum Boijmans is not the owner. As a result of Van Beuningen's illegal sale, the state became the owner of all the recovered drawings under the above legislation. It gives the recovered drawings on permanent loan to the museum through the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency (formerly the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage), which administers the state-owned collections. The restitution of 33 missing drawings from Dresden and Leipzig in January 1987 by the government of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) turned the spotlight once again on the at that time virtually unknown Koenigs Collection. The State of the Netherlands then decided to renew its old claims to the remaining missing drawings from the Koenigs Collection, and in 1989 published a research catalogue to that end: *Missing Old Master Drawings from the Franz Koenigs Collection claimed by the State of The Netherlands*. [>MORE](#) That publication [ill.] was distributed worldwide among diplomatic missions, museums, art galleries, auction houses and art-historical libraries and documentation centres. It was followed by an article titled 'Lost Treasures' in the periodical *ARTnews* [ill.], which gave details of the claim and examined allegations that most of the missing drawings were in Moscow. [>MORE](#)

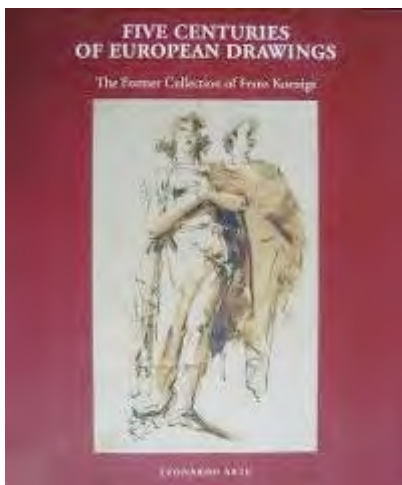


The 'Koenigs catalogue' of 1989



Article in the periodical *ARTnews*, February 1990

In 1992 the Russian Ministry of Culture announced that many of the missing Koenigs drawings had been found in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. A Netherlands-Russian bilateral working group on the restitution of the Koenigs Collection was formed by both governments, and in November 1993 Dutch experts carried out an inspection during an official visit to Moscow that established the size of the group of rediscovered drawings: 307 out of the 528 sheets. In 1995 those drawings were exhibited in the Pushkin Museum as its own property, accompanied by the illustrated catalogue *Five Centuries of European Drawings. The Former Collection of Franz Koenigs* [ill.]. The Netherlands government simultaneously organised its own exhibition *Counterparts* of Koenigs drawings from Museum Boijmans, elsewhere in Moscow, in order to draw attention to the Netherlands claim [ill.]. The restitution of those drawings demanded by the Netherlands government has been the subject of ongoing diplomatic consultations ever since.



Pushkin Museum exhibition catalogue, 1995



Catalogue of the *Counterparts* exhibition, Moscow 1995

In 2004 the government of Ukraine returned 139 missing drawings (and three prints) from the Koenigs Collection to the Netherlands government in acknowledgement of the Dutch claims [ill.]. [>MORE](#) In the summer of that year they were officially handed over at the opening of the exhibition *German Master Drawings from the Koenigs Collection. Return of a Lost Treasure* in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen [ill.] in the presence of Crown Prince Willem-Alexander and his wife Princess Maxima, the prime minister and the state secretary for Cultural Affairs, the President of Ukraine and Mr W.O. Koenigs, a son of the collector [ill.]. [>MORE](#) The drawings and prints were then reunited with the Koenigs Collection on permanent loan to the museum from the State of the Netherlands. In addition to the 307 drawings that have not yet been returned from Moscow there are a further 44 sheets that are still missing. They are described in the 2004 catalogue (pp. 149-155). [>MORE](#)



Rediscovered Koenigs drawings, Kiev 2004



Exhibition catalogue, Rotterdam 2004



W.O. Koenigs (left) at the opening of the exhibition *Return of a Lost Treasure* with the Netherlands Prime Minister Dr J.P. Balkenende, Princess Maxima and Crown Prince Willem-Alexander Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 9 July 2004

The second collection inherited by Koenigs's descendants

Koenigs continued collecting after the fiduciary transfer of ownership of his collection in 1931, which was renewed in 1935, but now more unobtrusively and on a more modest scale. He regarded his first collection, which went to Museum Boijmans on loan in 1935, as a self-contained whole. He then started on a new collection of drawings and prints (by Rembrandt, above all), and in 1937 he acquired dozens of works from Frits Lugt. He kept the better sheets in the Cassirer gallery in Amsterdam and the less important ones in his Berlin apartment, where they were discovered after the war and inventoried by Dr Helmuth Lütjens. After the death of Koenigs's widow in 1946 the collection of some 200 drawings and prints and a few paintings was divided among the five surviving children. These drawings and prints do not have Franz Koenigs's collector's mark.

Parts of this dispersed second collection were later disposed of by the various heirs. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen had the inheritance of Mrs C. van der Waals-Koenigs (1915-1995), the collector's eldest daughter, on loan from 1976/1982 until 2000. It consisted of three paintings by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 41 drawings by various artists and 46 prints, most of them lithographs by Toulouse-Lautrec. The loan was terminated by her heirs at the end of 2000, and the works were auctioned at Sotheby's in New York on 23

January 2001. [>MORE](#) Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen was unsuccessful at the auction itself, [>MORE](#), but later it did manage to acquire *The Twelve Months*, a series of drawings of 1580-1581 by Hans Bol for 2.1m euro. [>MORE](#) In 2001 another daughter donated 21 drawings from her share of the inheritance to Teylers Museum in Haarlem. [>MORE](#) Six Old Master drawings from the inheritance of Franz Koenigs, son of the collector, were auctioned at Christie's in New York on 25 January 2007. Several drawings and prints from the same source, among them watercolours by Cézanne and Manet, were then sold at Christie's in London on 6-7 February and 28 March 2007. Back in 1994 Edouard Manet's oil sketch for his famous painting *Bar at the Folies Bergère*, which had been on loan to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam since 1938, had been auctioned in London, as had *Elles*, the ten-part suite of prints by Toulouse-Lautrec. An important painting by Cézanne from the inheritance of Mrs A.K.M. Boerlage-Koenigs, which was on the list of protected works of art drawn up under the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Preservation Act and risked being exported for sale in New York, was preserved for the nation (and as a loan for the Rotterdam museum) when a private individual bought it at the very last minute in 1998 and transferred it to the Willem van der Vorm Foundation, which continued the long term loan to Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. [>MORE](#)

Claim of ownership by a granddaughter of the collector

The entire Koenigs Collection has been claimed since 1997 by Mrs C.F. (Christine) Koenigs (b. 1952), a granddaughter of the collector, who states that she is also acting for 'the Koenigs heirs' (see, *inter alia*, the interview with her in *Vrij Nederland* of 5 November 2005). She has since submitted claims to the State of the Netherlands, the City of Rotterdam, the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Foundation and several foreign museums regarding parts of the Koenigs Collection and the paintings sold in 1940 (see [List of claims](#)). For further information see her [Franz Koenigs Official Site](#) and [weblog](#).

When the Koenigs drawings were returned from the former German Democratic Republic and Ukraine in 1987 and 2004, Mrs C.F. Koenigs submitted claims to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in 1997 and 2004 relating respectively to 28 paintings and 37 drawings and 139 drawings and 3 prints. [>MORE](#) She also claims ownership of the 307 unrecovered drawings in Moscow, which are claimed by the State of the Netherlands.

The Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science submitted the first two claims to the Advisory Committee on the Assessment for Items of Cultural Value and the Second World War, better known as the Restitutions Committee, which was set up in January 2002. This independent committee examines and assesses individual requests for the restitution of cultural assets lost during the Second World War, based on the relaxed restitutions policy dating from 2000. [>MORE](#) This covers claims to works of art of which the original owners involuntarily lost possession due to circumstances directly related to the Nazi regime. Although the remit of the Restitutions Committee concerns works of art owned by the state, Article 2, Paragraph 2 of the advisory committee establishing decree also makes it possible for private individuals and non-governmental bodies to submit disputes relating to works of art that are not owned by the State of the Netherlands to the adjudication of the Restitutions Committee through the Minister of Education, Culture and Science for a binding recommendation.

On 3 November 2003 the Restitutions Committee advised the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science to reject the claims for restitution submitted by Mrs C.F. Koenigs (case number RC 1.6).

The committee judged (p. 5, point 15) 'that Koenigs's loss of property was not due to circumstances directly related to the Nazi regime but was related solely to economic conditions in Germany', and observed: 'The threat of war on all sides at the time of the negotiations and the actual sale of the collection does not detract from the foregoing'. [>SOURCE](#)

The claim was rejected by the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science on the basis of the closely argued negative advice from the Restitutions Committee. [>MORE](#) In

January 2007 the Council of State decided on appeal that no administrative law procedure was open to Mrs C.F. Koenigs, thereby reversing an earlier judgement by the Amsterdam district court. The consequence is that those who disagree with the decisions on restitution claims must have recourse to the civil courts. [>MORE](#) A request to reopen consideration of the earlier claim on the basis of alleged new facts (nova, case number RC 4.123) was rejected after the negative advice from the Restitutions Committee of 12 November 2013. [>SOURCE](#) Mrs C.F. Koenigs's subsequent claim to the drawings and prints which the State of the Netherlands received from Ukraine in 2004 (case number RC 1.35) was also rejected after negative advice from the Restitutions Committee of 14 April 2014. [>SOURCE](#)

Mrs C.F. Koenigs's claim to the drawings and paintings owned by the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Foundation, which make up the bulk of the Koenigs Collection, amounting to around 2,000 drawings and 8 paintings, had already been rejected by the trustees of the foundation in 1997. A proposal put forward by Mrs C.F. Koenigs in December 2006 to jointly submit a request for a binding recommendation to the Restitutions Committee was rejected by the trustees of the foundation in 2007.

In December 2006 Mrs C.F. Koenigs submitted a request for restitution to the City of Rotterdam for the four drawings and four paintings from the Koenigs Collection that were acquired for the museum with the collection of D.G. van Beuningen from the latter's heirs. She proposed asking the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to jointly submit the matter to the Restitutions Committee for its binding recommendation, which was rejected by the Burgomaster and Aldermen of Rotterdam in 2007 with reference to the committee's advice of 2003.

In 2013 Mrs C.F. Koenigs and five of the thirteen other heirs requested the District Court of Rotterdam to appoint experts who would have to investigate, amongst other things, several facts and circumstances concerning the Koenigs Collection in the period 1935-1940. This request was rejected by the District Court of Rotterdam, and, subsequently, by the Court of Appeal of The Hague. [>SOURCE](#) Within the framework of these proceedings, Mrs C.F. Koenigs *et al* argued for the first time that F.W. Koenigs never lost possession of a part of the Koenigs Collection and that this part of the collection is still on loan. Relying on the same reasoning, Mrs C.F. Koenigs *et al* lodged proceedings on the merits against the City of Rotterdam and the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in 2016. These proceedings are still ongoing.

The claim that Mrs C.F. Koenigs submitted to The Courtauld Institute of Art in London in 2000 in relation to three paintings by Rubens from the collection of F.W. Koenigs was rejected by the British Spoliation Advisory Panel in 2007, in part because of the following consideration.

'35. [...] it must be borne in mind that it is an intrinsic part of the claimant's case (see paragraph 9 above), that it was Koenigs' intention in 1939 and 1940 that about two-thirds of his collection would remain in the Museum, where it was then on loan; and that the smaller part would be sold to discharge the loan owed to the Bank, which she legitimately points out was about a third of the then estimated value of the collection. Consequently, it is hard to see why she or any other descendants of Koenigs have any moral claim at all. There is no evidence that he ever intended to leave these drawings and paintings to his heirs. If anyone suffered here it was one of two other parties. Either the Bank suffered because Goudstikker did not pay it the money that it was owed and, therefore, its assets were reduced; or the Museum suffered because otherwise it would have acquired more of Koenigs' art collection. In these circumstances the Panel cannot see what moral claim the claimant has to the paintings.'

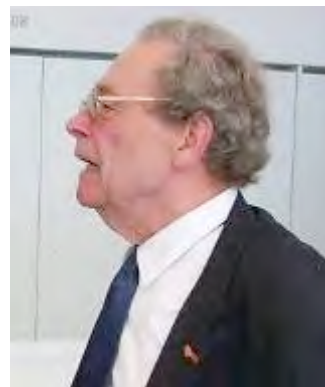
[>SOURCE](#)

There are differing opinions within the Koenigs family regarding the above actions by Mrs C.F. Koenigs aimed at recovering parts of the collection. In July 1997 Mr W.O. Koenigs (1926-2009) and his sister Mrs A.K.M. Boerlage-Koenigs (1922-2004), children of the collector, dissociated themselves from the actions of their niece (who is the daughter of their elder brother F.F.R. Koenigs) and have denied her the right to act in the name of the Koenigs family. [>SOURCE](#) / [>SOURCE](#) In her claim procedure against the State of the

Netherlands in 2003 (case number RC 1.6) she acted only for herself and for her mother, Mrs A.C. Koenigs-Hers. On 24 March 2003 Mr W.O. Koenigs asked the Restitutions Committee to reject the request for restitution of the Koenigs Collection. [>SOURCE](#)

Until his death in December 2009 Mr W.O. Koenigs actively supported the claim of the State of the Netherlands to the missing drawings in Moscow (and elsewhere), and at the same time felt that the descendants of Franz Koenigs could not lay claim to the collection because his father had parted with it voluntarily and because of the economic situation prior to the Second World War. In the autumn of 2006 Mr W.O. Koenigs repeated and explained his standpoint in an interview with Frank Kuitenbrouwer in *NRC Handelsblad* [>SOURCE](#) and in a letter to the directors of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and to the ministries of Education, Culture and Science, and Foreign Affairs [>SOURCE](#):

‘My father was a businessman. His initial success made him rich, providing him with the funds with which to amass a collection. However, there are risks to doing business, and he took them deliberately. In the process he gambled, and partly lost. However, he won, because his world-famous, homogeneous collection has remained largely intact despite all the financial and political ups and downs, and found a place while he was still alive in the museum where he wished it to be. [...]



There is no question of a claim by the Koenigs family, at most by the individual Christine Koenigs, one of my father's 14 grandchildren and only eligible to inherit a very small percentage. The actions of my niece Christine and the associated misinformation that has circulated in the media in recent years are solely to the detriment of F.W. Koenigs, collector of a homogeneous collection. That inner consistency was essential to him. As a true collector his aim was not so much to satisfy his own taste, but completeness.' [>SOURCE](#)

Franz Wilhelm Koenigs (1881-1941)

In conclusion

On 28 March 1941, when the transactions around the ownership of the collection and its constituent parts had been completed, and not long before the collector's sudden death, Dr Jan G. van Gelder (1903-1980), who was curator of the Museum Boijmans printroom from 1924 to 1940 and became Acting Director of the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) in The Hague on 1 December 1940, wrote to Franz Koenigs in his new capacity:

‘My dear Mr Koenigs. Today we received the catalogue of your Collection from Dr Lütjens. I thank you most warmly for this welcome gift, which later generations will also admire as an important document on the subject of collecting in our country. We are delighted to preserve this memento of that wonderful period that is now behind us.’ [>SOURCE](#)

Almost 70 years later, on 17 January 2009, during ‘The day of the collector’ in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Koenigs's son, Mr W.O. Koenigs, closed his address titled ‘What compelled a private individual to collect drawings’ with the words:

‘We are left with the hope and the expectation that one day the collection will once again be on display, complete, in Museum Boijmans, as my father wished. To know that his collection, which he cherished and assembled with such passion is now housed with care and devotion in the new, climatologically controlled printroom, with the opportunity that many people can enjoy the greater part of his unique collection of drawings, as was once customary in Haarlem, that, above all, would have gladdened my father. I express the hope that all who hold art dear can enjoy the drawings in peace and quiet, perhaps in combination with the paintings.’ [>SOURCE](#)

Rotterdam, December 2010, updated March 2017 (esp. pp. 8, 16-19)

This document and its hyperlinks to sources and further information in the literature and on the internet will be modified and expanded as necessary.

Text: Albert Elen
Translation: Michael Hoyle

See also:

[Koenigs Collection / Claims](#)

[Koenigs Collection / Archival material](#)

[Koenigs Collection / Publications](#)

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