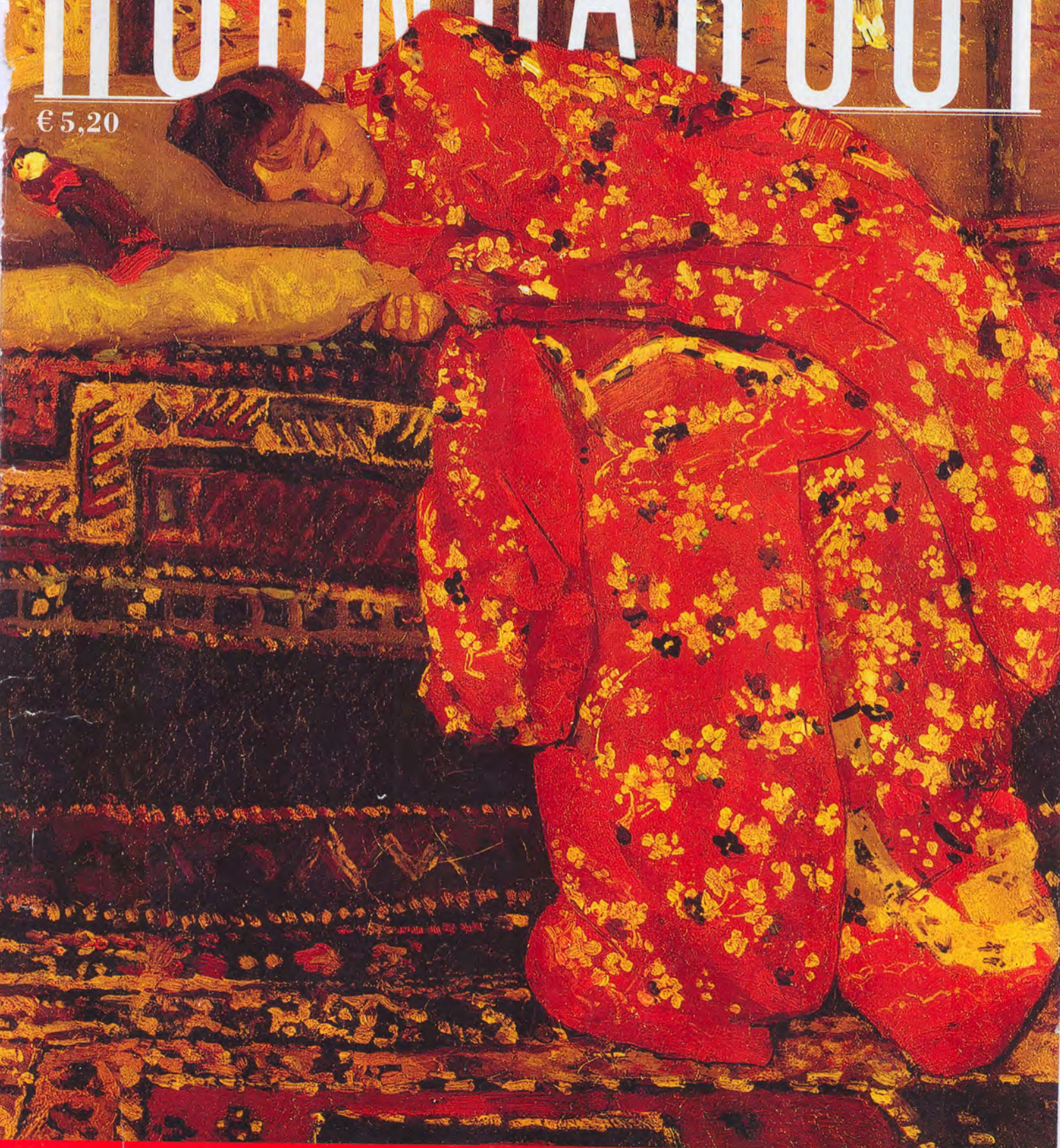


THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO WHAT'S ON IN THE NETHERLANDS

OCTOBER 2003

# ROUNDABOUT

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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HOLLAND THAT MATTERS



# 'Rajasthan'

by Vanessa Everts

## An Interview with Pauline van Lynden, whose book 'Rajasthan' is published this month

Pauline van Lynden was born in Paris into a family of Dutch diplomats and artists. She grew up in Brussels and studied Political Sciences at the Catholic University of Louvain. Marriage took her to the Netherlands, where she practised and taught art-bookbinding for many years. Later she returned to art school to train as a painter and sculptor. 'Rajasthan', a 300-page volume of photographs and text, is her first book.

ROUNABOUT: One could say that, through your book, you have brought a part of India to the West, showing it from an extraordinary point of view.

PAULINE VAN LYNDEN: I hope it works in two directions. I absolutely wanted this book to be published in English, because I felt it needed to go back to India. While I was working on the book, I noticed that it was somehow important to Indians and Westerners alike. I hope that, in a small way, this book can give them an appreciation for that culture. Almost all books on Rajasthan, by Indians or outsiders, deal only with the gilded side of its culture, and most guides don't take you, for example, to the small villages. Guides and locals tend to think everything has to be modernised. And tourists often make this worse, because they don't stray outside the cities, for fear of diseases, dust and poverty. And they don't see beyond that.

So, in order for the book to go back to India, I initially looked for a publisher in America, and then found Assouline in Paris, who are publishing both English and French editions. Their enthusiasm, and the fact that a Dutch co-publisher then took it up almost on impulse, came as a surprise to me, because it turned out that my approach and the way I had given shape to my material was interesting enough on its own to Western 'art book' standards.

R: I have heard that someone in the publishing world described it to you as 'a kind of U.F.O.', and that it is a kind of book that has not been seen for twenty years. Why is that?

PvL: I think it is because everybody is trying to make fast money, so nowadays people play it safe and publish books without taking any risks.

R: What is it that makes your book risky?

PvL: My lay-out. I gave myself total freedom and spent a great deal of time on each of the pages. I could cut and slice and carefully weigh each photo against another in order to get the right visual and atmospheric effect. That kind of approach takes time and if I were publishing sixty books a year, that would be unfeasible.

Also, I didn't use any computer programmes. When I started out, many people advised me against working by hand. I used a scalpel and scissors only. I am sure that such work would have been considered impossible to publish a few years ago, when Photoshop was still up and coming. So I consider it a gift from my publishers that they were willing to invest in something so unorthodox and insisted on



publishing it without any changes to my lay-out.

R: Are there no other photographers who work in the same way?

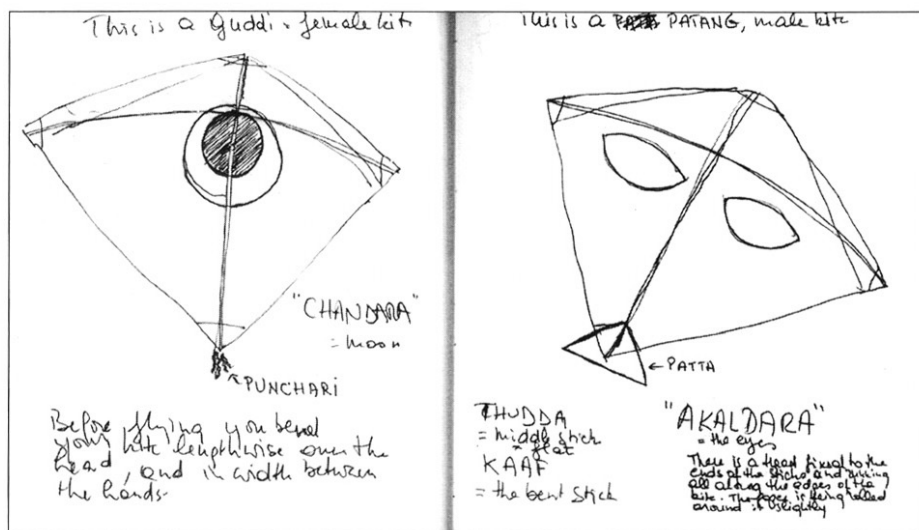
PvL: Apparently not. Partly because they are much better photographers, I think. The quality of their work is such that one of their photographs on its own on a page is enough. I didn't think my photographs were always that good, so I felt that I could improve and play around by adding good parts of other photos I'd taken.

R: As a result of that form of play, which expresses itself for example in collage and overlays, the book has a great density. Much like the hustle and bustle of Rajasthan, in fact!

PvL: I am glad you say that. I think the book's density may come across as overload at first. But people tell me that, just like a visit to Rajasthan, it is as a result of that density that one is gradually drawn in. That is when what I call the game of the book begins; once one has discovered the rules, so to speak, one can start playing with it. So, in a way, this book requires a bit of effort.

At the same time I have tried to take the viewer by the hand, by arranging the pictures in a particular sequence. I wanted to take people on a visual journey; the pictures and their sequence tell a story. Actually, that is why initially I didn't want to add any text.

My publishers then asked me to add some





COW = MOTHER = gives life gives milk  
 COW + OX = symbol of SHIVA  
 CAMEL is for the working

The landscape is very characteristic = flat, sandy, with rocks



AIDS - protect yourself with condom. in Hindi on walls -

In sea area, the moon influences tides, high water can come and high suddenly

In Rajasthan there is more peace, acceptance, and if there is rain for 3 days, OK, no rain, OK, they live with what comes, there is enough space.

100 meters on any street and make a book about it. There is always so much to see anywhere. You don't have to travel to India for it. It is just a question of looking.

## Rajasthan

French and English edition published by Assouline, Paris, ISBN 284 323 44 68.

Dutch edition published by Walburg Pers, Zutphen, ISBN 905 73 02 764

text. I had no experience as a writer, but these added chapters gave me an opportunity to write about what I had seen and to tell some of the many stories I had heard on my travels and jotted down in my notebooks.

R: Apart from a few direct quotes, 'Rajasthan' does not show any pages from those notebooks.

PvL: No. That was a conscious choice. At the moment there is a real hype about notebook-publishing and I wanted to avoid that. I think it has become a bit of a formula and isn't so interesting any more.

Of course, there are exceptions, such as Peter Beard's beautiful African notebooks. I have his book 'The End of the Game'. But he clearly worked very hard on them, and certainly didn't just publish what he had jotted down there and then. Most notebooks, although they can be fun, contain little craft. I think that kind of work, and craft in general, tends to be underappreciated these days.

R: So, by requiring more effort from you and more effort from the viewer, this book is quite different from what might otherwise have been termed a coffee table book.

PvL: I never wanted 'Rajasthan' to be the kind of book that you can pick up twice and then leave on your coffee table without needing to look at it again. I hope it will keep people engaged, in bits and pieces. It is a bit heavy to carry around, but I hope it will be the kind of book that people will want to come back to.

R: You wanted to make people, both locals and visitors, see Rajasthan in a different way. Do you find that, through making this book, you have started to observe things differently yourself?

PvL: Yes. What is fun is that, now that I have completed 'Rajasthan', I find myself working on material that has been virtually on my doorstep all my life. I do think you could walk