

= Jacobus Anthonie Meessen =

Jacobus Anthonie Meessen (Dutch pronunciation : [ja??ko?b?s ?n?to?ni ?me?s?n] ; 5 December 1836 ? 14 November 1885) was a Dutch photographer who took over 250 portraits and landscapes of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) between 1864 and 1870 . Born to a carpenter in Utrecht , Meessen worked in that trade in the Indies before marrying in the Netherlands in the early 1860s . He returned to the colony in 1864 , intent on documenting its land and people . He worked mostly in the capital of Batavia (now Jakarta) , Java , and Padang , Sumatra ; he also photographed Bangka , Belitung , Borneo , and Nias .

When Meessen returned to the Netherlands in 1870 he established a short @-@ lived partnership with Abraham Vermeulen and began disseminating his photographs . Selected images were gifted to King William III in an elaborately decorated album in 1871 , while more were published by De Bussy in 1875 and exhibited in Paris and Amsterdam . In his final years Meessen worked predominantly as an architect . Collections of his albumen prints , some of which were hand @-@ tinted or annotated , are held in four institutions in the Netherlands .

= = Biography = =

Meessen was born in Utrecht , the Netherlands , on 5 December 1836 to the carpenter Hermanus Johannes Meessen and his wife Megteld Legué . In 1858 the younger Meessen first went to Batavia (now Jakarta) , the capital of the Dutch colony in the East Indies , where he worked as a carpenter . By 1860 he was living in the Purbalingga area . Two years later he returned to the Netherlands , where he served as a special inspector for the Bureau voor den Waterstaat . On 11 December 1862 he wed Johanna Alida (Jansje) Steenbeek in Utrecht , and the couple settled in that city for the next two years . Their marriage produced three daughters , born in 1865 , 1866 , and 1869 ; the first , Antonia , died in infancy .

= = = Photography = = =

Meessen and his wife departed for the Indies in 1864 , first arriving in Batavia , where Meessen established a photo studio in early 1867 . He was one of the few photographers active in the Indies in the 1860s ; contemporaries included Isidore van Kinsbergen , Adolph Schaefer , and the commercial firm of Woodbury and Page (operated by Walter B. Woodbury and James Page) . Meessen hoped to eventually take images of the Indies ' various lands and people . From May to August he was in Sumatra , first in Padang and later in the Minang Highlands . There he offered various photographic services , including double and family portraits . When he returned to Batavia in September , he opened another studio , offering portraits and selling prints of landscapes .

Three months later Jacobus and Johanna sold their belongings and moved back to Padang , where the Meessens established a photography studio . In their biography of the photographer , Mattie Boom and Steven Wachlin suggest that this was likely a commercial necessity , as Meessen may have been unable to compete with the Batavia @-@ based Woodbury and Page . By November 1868 Jacobus was advertising his first album , titled Sumatra 's Westkust (Sumatra 's West Coast) . Bound in Moroccan leather , the album contained more than sixty landscapes of Padang and surrounding cities (including Padang Panjang and Fort de Kock) . By June 1869 , his studio at the Sumatra Hotel was offering workshops , as well as images from northern Sumatra and Nias .

Altogether , Meessen 's photographic ventures in the Indies ? and the resulting albums ? cost some 34 @,@ 000 Netherlands Indies gulden , which included camera equipment (though it is not known what model (s) he used) , chemicals , transportation , and accommodations . Meessen worked alone , never taking a partner while in the Indies , and documented the land and people in the colony in his albumen prints . In his ethnographic photography of the indigenous peoples of the Indies , he often had to overcome superstitions which , the Bataviaasch Handelsblad wrote , " made taking images of the people outside Java almost impossible " . Others were more enthusiastic , including the villagers of Nias : " Upon arrival I fired a few shots and flew the Dutch flag . Soon the

villagers came and asked what I wanted . Once I told them , they promised their assistance . At exactly 5 a.m. the following morning I found some 60 warriors waiting for me on the beach . "

= = = Return to the Netherlands = = =

In June 1869 , Meessen and his wife returned to Batavia , and the following year they returned to Utrecht . There , in late 1870 , Meessen partnered with Abraham Adrianus Vermeulen to open a new studio , named A. A. Vermeulen & Company . They signed a contract for five years , but this collaboration collapsed in March 1873 . Boom and Wachlin suggest that Vermeulen ? best known for portraits ? had been interested in the possibility of expanding his range with landscapes , whereas Meessen required a place to print and market his images of the Indies . Indeed , in February 1871 Meessen gifted an album of his better @-@ executed photographs from his time in Java and Sumatra to King William III . This album of 153 images was lavishly decorated with silver and gold , and featured the names of Java , Sumatra , Borneo , and Nias in the corners . In the center were silver coconut and banana trees surrounding Dutch and Batavian weapons .

Over the next few years Meessen continued marketing his images of the Indies . In 1875 he published a collection of 250 ? consisting of 175 landscapes and 75 portraits ? through the Amsterdam @-@ based printer De Bussy ; this collection was titled *Verzameling Fotografien van Nederlandsch Indië* (Collection of Photographs of the Dutch East Indies) , sold for 225 gulden , and came in a walnut box . At the 1875 Exposition Géographique in Paris , he exhibited these images to critical acclaim . The *Bataviaasch Handelsblad* , in one review , wrote that the attempt to document the Indies was commendable , and expressed hope that images of animals could also be taken . In 1883 Meessen again exhibited his photographs , this time at the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition in Amsterdam . Ultimately , however , he does not appear to have made a return on his investment .

Meessen 's final years were migratory , with some time spent in Gorredijk and other parts of Opsterland , Friesland . He worked as a building superintendent , and later municipal architect . One of his projects in this capacity was an elementary school on Zuidwest Dubbele Street in Gorredijk , a Neo @-@ Gothic building ? possibly influenced by similar schools in Raamsdonkveer and Amsterdam ? constructed to replace an older school which had been demolished . Meessen died in Opsterland on 14 November 1885 after being stricken by an illness three days earlier . The incomplete school was finished by Hidde Petrus Nicolaas Halbertsma .

= = Style and legacy = =

Reviewing the quality of Meessen 's photography , Boom and Wachlin write that his Javanese pictures are among his best , whereas those from other islands are of more variable quality . They note considerable detail in his cityscapes . He chose buildings to photograph that were popular with other photographers , including the Governor General 's Palace and the home of Raden Saleh . Many of his studio portraits appear to be purely commercial , leading Boom and Wachlin to suggest that they were meant to fund Meessen 's landscape photography . Some of his images , particularly the portraits , were hand @-@ tinted .

Meessen 's photos from the album he gave to King William III are kept in the Hague at the National Library of the Netherlands . This album features a travelogue regarding Meessen 's photography , as well as images from six islands (Java , Sumatra , Bangka , Belitung , Borneo , and Nias) and various ethnic groups , including the Javanese , Chinese , Dayaks , and Malays . He includes commentary on several images of people , noting in an image of *njai* (concubines) : " [They are] a necessary evil for the military . They preserve , in and outside the barracks , the best discipline , and prove invaluable in expeditions or sea journeys . "

Two further photographs , one of the river Ciliwung in Batavia , and another of Kali Mati in Padang , are held at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam . The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies holds a copy of the De Bussy publication , and the Leiden University Library holds 281 prints , 7 of which are of disputed provenance , which were donated to the Royal Dutch

Geographical Society by Pieter Johannes Veth in 1891 . The four extant collections of Meessen 's work are considerably fewer than those of his contemporaries such as Woodbury and Page , and his oeuvre has been little studied or collected .

= = Explanatory notes = =