

Lifestyle

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Beloved character actor Harry Dean Stanton dies

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A model presents a creation of Agatha Ruiz de la Prada' Spring/Summer 2018 collection during the Madrid Fashion Week in Madrid. — AFP (see more on page 31)



Art restorers Leonoor Speldekamp (R) and Jorinde Koenen work on a raised platform during restoration work on the "Panorama Mesdag".



360-degree beachfront painting gets public facelift

Perched on a platform up in the air, two restorers are vacuuming the "sky". A quick wipe from a sponge follows and then a touch-up with a pencil. Little by little, the enormous clouds above The Hague are returning to their original color. Every two decades the Panorama Mesdag, the world's oldest panorama painting still on its original site, gets a facelift under the watchful eyes of visitors to the museum just outside the stately city centre.

Painted by the 19th-century Dutch master Hendrik Willem Mesdag from 1880 to 1881, the masterpiece gives visitors a 360-degree view of the beach at Scheveningen, a famous seaside suburb of The Hague, creating the illusion the viewer is standing right in the heart of the scene. As in the late 1800s, sightseers today are still amazed by the three-dimensional quality of the cylindrical painting.

Visitors climb circling stairs to emerge in the centre of a purpose-built wooden rotunda, built on real sand that slopes down to the floor. Surrounded by the painting itself, the optical illusion is complete. On the beach, flat-bottomed fishing boats are coming and going from the North Sea. Elsewhere on the sand, soldiers are riding their horses. Look in yet another direction, and there's the fishing village of Scheveningen, with The Hague's tall church towers on the horizon — as it was almost 140 years ago. "We really believe we're at the beach in 1880," one Chinese visitor whispered. "It's very impressive."

Phoenix rising

But currently the restorers of the Mesdag are stealing the spotlight. "Sometimes people even call out 'hello,'" smiled Leonoor Speldekamp, as she gently wiped the dust from a church steeple gradually regaining its ochre color. "Some people visit the museum especially to come and look at how the work is being cleaned. When we're absent or on a lunch break, they're disappointed not to see us on the scaffolding," she said. She also took part in the previous restoration mission 20 years ago. "There were holes in the canvas. It was badly damaged because a bird had destroyed a joint in the museum's roof, causing a leak," the restorer said.

That was the first time the painting got such a thorough cleaning. Before then it was "cleaned and restored occasionally," said Suzanne Veldink, a member of the Mesdag's management team. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes every two decades, all of the Panorama Mesdag — 14 meters high and 120 meters in circumference — is being carefully cleaned, starting at the top where most of the dust gathers. "There's no layer of varnish, which means the dirt, dust, soot and lots of



things can penetrate the painting," Speldekamp said. Time seems to stand still for the restorers as they remove dust with meticulous swipes and retouch colour with deft strokes.

Major attraction

The presence of the restorers, who blend into the painting's 19th-century landscape, is as unusual as it is inevitable. "The Panorama Mesdag has remained a private museum and we cannot afford to shut down during the three months' restoration," said Veldink. "For the public however there's real added value to the visit (at the moment). It happens only every 20 years, so it's very special to witness," she told AFP. "We came on purpose to see the restoration of the canvas," said one art-loving visitor from Israel with her husband nodding in agreement who both declined to be named. "It is impressive and very rare to see," she added.

One of the best-known painters of the time, Mesdag was assisted by friends in his greatest work. He also created and co-financed the museum, and even had the forethought to install rails on the ground to allow future restorers to move scaffolding around the painting. It is now a major drawcard in The Hague, welcoming some 150,000 to 200,000 visitors per year. Restoration work is expected to be completed by mid-September. — AFP

OD's Horan brings soft touch with new album

One Direction's Niall Horan on Friday released a soft breakup ballad with echoes of the heartthrob boy band as he announced his debut solo album. Horan announced on social media that his album "Flicker" will come out on October 20 followed by a tour in 2018 of the United States and Canada. The 24-year-old Irish singer marked the announcement by releasing a track off the album entitled "Too Much to Ask," a piano-led ballad in which Horan, his voice turning soulful, mourns the end of a relationship.

The song is produced by Greg Kurstin, the increasingly

in-demand musician best known for co-writing Adele's smash hit "Hello." Kurstin also worked with Horan on the first track off "Flicker," the acoustic guitar ballad "This Town." Horan's soft touch is more consistent with One Direction than the solo music of his two most successful bandmates.

Zayn Malik cast away One Direction's squeaky-clean image to go for a sensual, urban vibe, while Harry Styles surprised critics with an album that sounded influenced by 1970s David Bowie. One Direction, formed when the five young men auditioned for the British reality show "The X Factor," turned into one of the best-selling bands of the

decade, packing arenas worldwide with screaming teenage girls. The band went on an indefinite hiatus after an album at the end of 2015 while stopping short of calling it quits. — AFP



This file photo taken on May 12, 2017 shows Niall Horan performing onstage during 102.7 KIIS FM's 2017 Wango Tango at StubHub Center on May 13, 2017 in Carson, California. — AFP