

Speech Mathijs van Houweningen, Chairman of the Henry van de Velde Family Foundation, the Netherlands

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Dear attendees,

It is a special moment to speak here on behalf of the heirs of Henri van de Velde. First, I offer my apologies in advance for my German. Although I have done everything possible to avoid written mistakes, my accent immediately reveals that German is neither my mother tongue nor a language I often speak. Therefore, it is very likely that I will occasionally cause you to raise an eyebrow. Hopefully, despite these slips, my story will be easy to follow.

My name is Mathijs van Houweninge, and I stand here as the great-grandchild of my great-grandfather Henri van de Velde. I am also here as the chairman of the Henri van de Velde Family Foundation. Together with my cousin and fellow board member Anneke Seley, who is present today as well, we supported the creation of the online catalogue raisonné. We offered support not only from our foundation but also as professionals who have both worked in the software industry for many years. For us, this digital catalogue is a natural and desired step to make our great-grandfather's legacy as accessible as possible to everyone.

The generation in our family that knew Henri personally has, sadly, passed away. We only know stories about him second-hand. As a small child, I knew that we had a famous architect and designer as a great-grandfather. My father referred to him as "Api"—which I found a peculiar name as a child. In Dutch, "api" sounds like you're talking about a little monkey ("een aapie"). We had a shelf in the cupboard with large books in which I looked at pictures of everything he had designed. I remember "the tent," for example, as it referred to a prefab house—a house partly assembled in a warehouse. That was truly remarkable; why would you do that?

There was a sense of pride in our well-known relative, for everything he had designed and created, and for his role in art history. But there was certainly no "fame claim." As I grew up, Api faded into the background, only occasionally enjoying the photos in the books on the shelf when I visited my father's home.

We are a small family. In my generation, there are 12 of Api's great-grandchildren still living: three in Germany, descendants of Hélène van de Velde, and nine in the Netherlands and America, grandchildren of Anna van de Velde.

Occasionally, we organize a family day with the "Anna descendants," where cousins try to meet each other. For example, in April 2011 on La Cambre in Brussels, where Régine Carpentier welcomed us warmly. Here, we learned about Api's role at the academy—as first director and driving force behind the development of La Cambre as a leading art

school. We also visited residential houses he designed in Brussels, enthusiastically guided by Luuc van der Steenkiste. It is at such a moment that one experiences how much time and energy scholars spend describing and researching all his works.

During this visit, we were asked why—as I would phrase it—heirs are so difficult and always want to receive money for every publication of a photo or drawing. Why do we make things hard for researchers? We knew nothing of this. Rights? Money? Income? Who demanded and collected it? Certainly not us. Our parents, who might have known, were no longer alive, and had never mentioned it.

The question intrigued—and somewhat irritated—us. We didn't want to be seen as heirs interested in money. This led, in various steps, sometimes forward, sometimes backward, to more and more knowledge about Api's legacy. With help from jurist Henri Katz, then a lecturer on intellectual rights at La Cambre with a private practice, we managed to solve the puzzle and return the rights to Henri's inheritance to his living great-grandchildren.

Since we are not focused on any financial gain, we decided in 2016 to create a family foundation that manages the rights and pays income to researchers: the Henri van de Velde Family Foundation. Our foundation's goal is to promote knowledge about Henri. We do this by financially supporting research projects that contribute to our mission.

A side effect of the quest for the real heirs was getting to know the "German branch." We were unaware of each other's existence. It led to sharing memories and stories, and looking through old photo albums. Meeting unknown relatives with whom family stories overlap was intimate and educational.

The real reward is getting to know a remarkable group of Van de Velde scholars: driven professionals in Belgium, Germany, and America, each researching our great-grandfather from their perspective. For all of us, this has been a very enriching and cherished experience.

This became especially clear at the Van de Velde symposium in Chemnitz in 2019. More than 75 scholars, collectors, and enthusiasts gathered for two days of lectures and tours. It was during this event, at a dinner with scholars, that we brainstormed about projects our foundation could support.

The top suggestion was completing the Catalogue Raisonné that the Klassik Stiftung Weimar had been working on since 2001, but which unfortunately stalled as a project in 2017. We knew the first three volumes—the final product sits in our home and we page through it with gratitude. What we did not know was that the chance of publishing the next three volumes was very slim.

A second major project appeared later: Ruben Mantels asked our foundation to support the biography he wanted to write, under the auspices of Ghent University.

With our board, we decided to dedicate most of our resources to these two projects: finalizing the Catalogue Raisonné under the auspices of the Klassik Stiftung Weimar and Ruben Mantels' biography. Additionally, our foundation supports some smaller projects financially and waives copyright fees for researchers' publications.

At the symposium in Chemnitz, we met Sabine Walter and Annette Ludwig's predecessor, Wolfgang Holler. Anneke Seley and I discussed with them the first outlines for a restart of this extensive project.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Sabine Walter, the project gained traction at KSW, and a small but dedicated team worked hard to revive the research—driven by strict timelines and budgetary challenges—and repeatedly delivered interim results.

An important step was letting go of the book as the most desired format. By the end of 2023, the focus shifted completely to a first full online catalogue raisonné. We fully supported this as a foundation, convinced that low-threshold web access is the best way to lay the groundwork for further research. For us, making Henri's knowledge broadly accessible is the primary purpose behind solving the puzzle of the real heirs all those years ago.

This project is a first for the KSW, and we are grateful that the KSW took on this challenge. Being the first is risky, especially when technology determines success. We worked together to achieve as complete a result as possible through a smooth process. I would also like to mention the pleasant cooperation we have had with everyone: transparent, respectful, and purposeful. The end product of our efforts is a notable achievement—a comprehensive online catalogue of most of our great-grandfather's objects assembled.

We learned during the process that a catalogue raisonné is never finished. There is always new knowledge and insights. The good news is that, in an online environment, it is easy to add, correct, and expand. We are pleased that we will continue working with the team for some time to make the important essays of the first three volumes available online, so that in time we can truly speak of the most complete possible online catalogue raisonné.

Thanks to everyone who made this project possible and continued to support it—both in front of and behind the scenes. It is thanks to all of you that Api is not only a significant historical figure, but also a continuous source of inspiration and research. Thanks to all members of the advisory committee for their selfless scientific feedback. Thanks to KSW for its organizational and financial commitment to the project. Thanks to Annette Ludwig for the collaboration and German/English correspondence with me. Thanks to Manuel Schwarz for his contribution to research over the past year. And very special thanks to the project's core team: Sabine Walter and Bea Maybach. It is thanks

to your perseverance that we are able to celebrate this milestone today. Without you, there would be no online catalogue raisonné. Praise!