

# A pair of singing goldfinches

On Saturday evening 25 March 1995 Dobs and Ton van Dijk celebrated the 25th anniversary of their Galerie Petit in the Artis-lounge in Amsterdam in the presence of more than 250 friends: over 80 artists exhibiting in this gallery, their customers and their partners. Galerie Petit in Amsterdam specialised mainly in figurative visual art, described by the gallery as 'lyrical realism'. One of the artists who regularly exhibited there from the beginning was Peter Vos. He often did that with his friend, printmaker Charles Donker.

Peter Vos could not be present at the festive evening, for which he apologised also on behalf of his beloved Saïda Lokhorst in a letter, supplied with a drawing. For that reason he sent the gallery owner 'a pair of goldfinches (one of the few kinds where the female bravely sings along, Dobs) to sing to you on this memorable day: congratulations and many more years.' The letter and envelope obtained a place in the red guest-book of this party.

Birds were a beloved theme in the work of Peter Vos. Besides many birds drawn after nature he drew, based on nature observations, many kinds of hybrid bird people, equipped with human limbs and properties. Characteristic examples of this are a dozen colourful drawings that he made accompanying a short series of contributions of readers of *Vrij Nederland* on the theme of 'singles about couples, duo's about singles'. The wrapper of 31 July 1995 announced this with the header 'READERS WRITE: Being alone doesn't make one happy, living together isn't everything either', accompanied by a drawing of Peter Vos with two goldfinches, in which the male determinedly walks away from the nest from which the female beckons him. In Vos' drawings for *Vrij Nederland* these birds represent – pairs but also singles or threesomes –




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various human relations. Besides these goldfinches they are an owl, a lapwing, a singing blackbird and a nightingale, three gamecocks, three goldfinches and a few sparrows, to which nothing human is alien.

Saïda recently wrote to me that in the garden of their small country house in Lunteren, where Peter often worked in these years in the midst of these birds and their sounds, 'goldfinches were regularly seen whereby we could ascertain that not only the males but also the females of these birds sing (this is not the case with most singing birds).' Compared to the drawing on the wrapper of *Vrij Nederland* from 1993 the bird pair from the letter of March 1995 is drawn singing so harmoniously, that such an image in the context of the confessions of the readers of *Vrij Nederland* would not be appropriate. This drawing therefore must have been made especially for this letter. It characterises Ton and Dobs van Dijk in several respects: their energy, enthusiasm, humour and particularly their harmonious collaboration – in 1995 already lasting 25 years, but ultimately

**Envelope belonging to letter from Peter Vos to Dobs and Ton van Dijk, 1995**



20 more until Ton's passing away. In an interview in 1990 they answered the question 'is Galerie Petit the symbol of a good marriage?' with a wholehearted 'yes': 'because the two of us work, we are difficult to break. Together we always know of everything.'

The letters of Peter Vos in the RKD are part of the archives of Vos's teacher Otto de Kat and of his close friend Gerard van Rooij, and of the archive of Galerie Balans. In 2013 the last posthumous exhibition of the work of Peter Vos took place in Galerie Petit. After that, due to the passing away shortly after each other of gallery managers Dobs and Ton van Dijk, the gallery lost its basis of existence: everything that Peter Vos has characterised in his drawing of the two singing goldfinches.

Peter Vos, Nest with Two Goldfinches  
July 1993  
pen, brush in watercolour  
88 x 138 mm (image), private collection

**Letter (and envelope) from Peter Vos to Dobs and Ton van Dijk, 1995**  
pen, brush in watercolour, 158 x 113 mm  
Galerie Petit Archive  
(see also pp. 60-61)

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