

Andries Copier

Andries Dirk Copier (1901-1991) was a Dutch designer of glass. He was the best-known designer of Leerdam's glass factory, where he worked between 1914 and 1971. Copier not only created numerous works in glass, but he was also head of the design department, meaning that he was in charge of all the glass the factory created and its graphic designs.

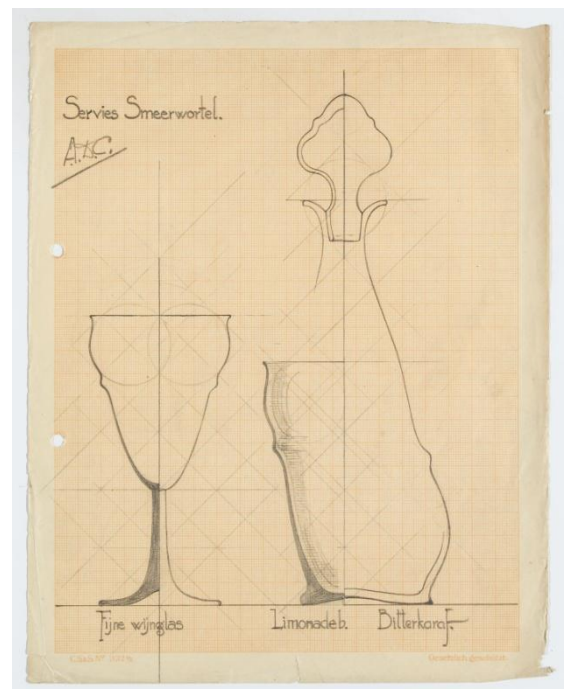
Copier is famous for his 'Guild Glass', a wineglass that he designed in 1930 in cooperation with the Association of Dutch Wine Merchants and is still in use today. Next to utility wear Copier also created several thousands of 'Unica', unique one of a kind pieces that were the result of experiments of Copier and the glass blowers.

Son of a glass-blower at the Leerdam factory, Andries started work there at the age of 13, and at the age of 17 was selected by Managing Director Cochius for a course in typography in Utrecht, returning to Leerdam to work on exhibitions, publications and shop displays. Following a second period of study at the Rotterdam Arts Academy (under Jacques Jongert) followed by private tuition sponsored by the factory, he mounted his first exhibition of hand-made work at the Boyman's Museum in 1923, and he was given control over the design of Leerdam's advertising and publishing activities.

The Rising Star

Building on his experiences of managing the production of designs by De Bazel, the first Copier design to go into production was Smeerwortel (Comfrey) in 1923, quickly followed by a collection of popular successes; Winterbeker, Viola vase and his first water set, a narrow necked jug and glasses with a 'three-finger base'. The positive response from the market encouraged more designs with Romanda and New Model (N.M.) following in 1924. By the time Karel Wasch (factory director at Leerdam) published his first book on 'Glas en Kristal' in 1925, he, like Cochius, was happy to praise the up-and-coming young designer and confident of his future.

Copier also worked extensively in the glass studio to create one-off ('Unica') pieces and the most popular of these were also issued as 'Serica'; limited editions of varying quantities. As well as allowing the master to experiment with a wide range of techniques, their sale as 'art-objects' continued to enhance the name of both designer and factory.



The Innovator

In an effort to diversify the range of products, Copier was also an industrial innovator responsible for new materials and improvements in design-technique.

Graniver (made of half-melted grains of glass), for instance, was initially produced in 1929 and was mainly used for cactus pots and plant-holders. In practical use the material was not really resilient enough for horticultural use and was easily damaged by discoloration, chips and (hairline) cracks. Tiles of graniver were produced for use in mozaiek arts and several notable examples of this use can be seen in contemporary photographs.

In 1934 Copier created the Rondo decanter. The simple style of Rondo was new, and led a stylistic shift in Leerdam's crystal products.

Distinguished by the completely round ball which acted as its stopper, the subtle color was modern and chic, and the heavy base made it solid and practical. In these streamlined designs there were no decors used, no more etching or cutting, no bright or heavy colors and no optic ribs.

Rondo inspired a range of simple forms for vases, vessels and bowls which were very successful. As a group the style became known as 'dikwandig' (thick-walled) and brought Copier's work to the notice of a newly emerging upper middle class. Although some moulds were used by the glass-blowers many of the designs contained other elements of handwork, and the designer's monogram was often placed prominently on the item.

Like many of the world's most famous glass-designers, he did not blow glass himself, and his involvement in production was usually purely managerial.

Industrial Artist

The term 'Kunstnijverheid', meant promoting named designers and design quality of industrial products. It was a critical and commercial success, emulated by the competitors at Kristalunie Maastricht as well as by manufacturers of ceramics, furnishing and fabrics. Although Cochius was increasingly criticized for his management style, Copier continued through the 1930s, filling the catalogues with popular designs, and launching three collections to cater to low-, middle- and high incomes.

Adding to the established catalogues of Crystal and Sonoor products, the Household collection (H-collectie) was aimed at the mass market and featured robust pressed glass for the kitchen.

Although Copier himself was tee-total himself, he understood the need for commercial alliances with the hospitality and food manufacture industries. The Guild glass was originally designed in 1930 and made using the traditional ('hand-blown') method. After the war, with labor costs high and increasing need for mechanization which would lead to cost reductions, the factory re-launched the design, and it was promoted through the National Association for the Wine Trades. In 1958 it became the first Leerdam design to be produced on a new generation of industrial machinery, and was commended at the Milan Triennale of 1960. Also benefitting from the dramatic fall in price, the glass became a successful and profitable product for the next 50 years!

Few new designs were released during the war years (1940-45) but the Leerdam factory emerged from it undamaged, and took advantage of the Marshall Plan to invest in new machinery (from Libbey-Owens of Illinois) and establish new export markets in the USA. The consequent rise in tooling-up costs and falling unit-costs quickly led to fewer designs and increasing production quantities. It was the beginning of the end for glassblowing in industry, and over the next 50 years the glass designers had fewer chances to produce new industrial designs and with increasing focus on craftsmanship, turned back to the glass-blowing studios.



Not only the best-known glass-designer in The Netherlands, Copier developed an international reputation too, but after the war he focused increasingly on producing 'art glass' for the upper end of the market. Having worked hard to establish and maintain the Glass School at Leerdam (which was closed during government education reforms in 1950), it was his pupil Floris Meydam who became responsible for a new generation of machine-made designs for the mass market.

1950's

After 1949, with Meydam producing many designs for the factory, Copier was increasingly free to mount his own exhibitions and travel. His last major designs for the factory included the popular ribbed vases (1953) and much-awarded Gourmet stemware (1958).

1960's

Copier produced many unica pieces through the sixties, his exhibitions included general and

retrospective shows, and several major editions of Serica, ceramics for Eschenbach and plastic flatware for KLM.

Advances in technology meant that smaller glass ovens were possible and therefore glassmakers were no longer dependent on the Leerdam site to produce their work. The kristal workshops became increasingly independent from the industrial factory next door, and were eventually sold as an independent business making expensive kristal art for special occasions and collectors. In 1964 Copier produced more than 250 unique pieces at Leerdam, but thereafter increasingly turned to the smaller studios run by individual glass-blowers.

After leaving Leerdam in 1971, and especially after the death of his wife in 1976, Copier travelled in Europe and America, meeting with other glass artists and designing only Unica (one-off) works. As well as several museum exhibitions, he visited colleagues at factories in Italy, Germany, USA, Czechoslovakia and Scandinavia, and inspired major exhibitions with master craftsmen Lino Tagliapietri, and Peter Novotny. He worked at various small glass ovens including de Oude Hoorn in Acquoy alongside Funnekers, Willem and Bernard Heesen, leading to a series of exhibitions.



In 1987 Copier was awarded the important David Roell Prize for the Guild glass and his other contributions to industrial design'. In accepting the prize he revealed a more moderate attitude to alcohol, saying: *"Glasses are like typefaces. A well-designed font is certainly a thing of beauty, but when you're reading a book you don't want it to distract you from the text. It's the same thing with a wineglass, the important thing is the wine!"*

