

Dear teacher,

You and your class will soon be visiting Escher in The Palace. What you have here is an in-depth information pack about the museum which you can use to prepare for your visit. The students can view the exhibition with the accompanying viewing guide. You can use this document at your own discretion. We ask you to read through the museum house rules with the students in advance.

The document contains an introduction to the life and work of the world-famous artist M.C. Escher. You will also find information about the permanent exhibition in the museum, the winter palace of Queen Mother Emma, the parquet floor by minimal artist Donald Judd, the chandeliers by artist Hans van Bentem and some reading and viewing tips.

We look forward to seeing you. Have fun during your visit!

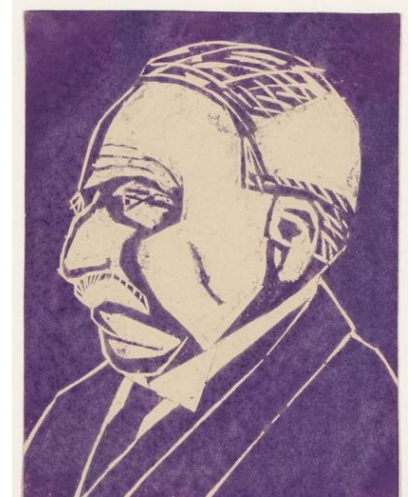


Photo: Gerrit Schreurs

The life and work of M.C. Escher

The younger years

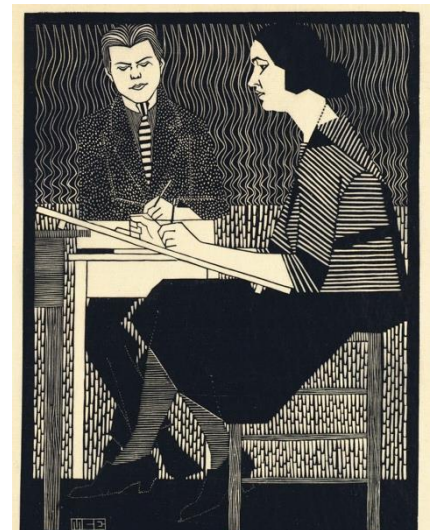
Maurits Cornelis Escher was born in Leeuwarden in 1898. His parents rented the Prinsessehof, a former home of the House of Orange. However, Escher mainly grew up in and around Arnhem, where the family had moved to in 1903. He was the youngest of five sons. Escher's parents were well off and gave their sons a broad education. From an early age Escher had a clear preference for creative pursuits, including playing the cello and woodwork. He produced his first graphic work, a linocut of his father G.A. Escher, at a young age. Escher had a strong bond with his father and was also very much like him. He made relatively few portraits in his life, but his father was his model on several occasions.



M.C. Escher, Escher's father, G.A. Escher, linoleum cut, 1916

Education

Escher's parents were not quite so enthusiastic about his focus on creative pursuits, not least because his grades at school were variable. The idea was for Escher to go on to become an architect. Despite the fact that Escher failed his final exams, his father arranged for his son to study Architecture at Delft University of Technology. Escher did not fit in here and was unable to complete his first year. He subsequently went to the School for Architecture, Decorative Arts and Crafts in Haarlem, where he enrolled in the Architecture department. However, his passion was graphic art. Teacher Samuel Jessurun de Mesquita saw his work and his talent. He convinced Escher's parents to transfer their son. Ultimately, he was able to fulfil his heart's desire and start training as a graphic artist.



M.C. Escher, In Mesquita's Classroom, woodcut, 1920 or 1921

From Italy to the Netherlands

M.C. Escher made quite a few trips over the course of his life, including to Spain and along the Italian and French coasts. In 1923, during one such trip, he met the Swiss Umiker family in the Italian village of Ravello. He fell in love with the youngest daughter Jetta. In 1924 they married in Viareggio, Italy, and they lived together in Rome until 1935. They had three sons, George (born 1926), Arthur (born 1928) and Jan (born 1938).

The family lived in a variety of places in Europe. After spending twelve years in Rome, they travelled to the Swiss mountains and then, after living in Belgium for a short time, settled in Baarn in the Netherlands in 1941. M.C. Escher lived in the Netherlands until his death in 1972. Despite missing Italy, he was happy to be back in his native country.

From the 1950s on, Escher's work became increasingly popular, partly through publications about his work in major magazines in the US and the United Kingdom. He sold more and more prints and had exhibitions in the Netherlands and abroad. He created less and less new work and increasingly focused on reprinting old prints. In 1969 he created his last new woodcut: *Snakes*. M.C. Escher eventually died in the Diakonessenhuis in Hilversum on 27 March 1972.

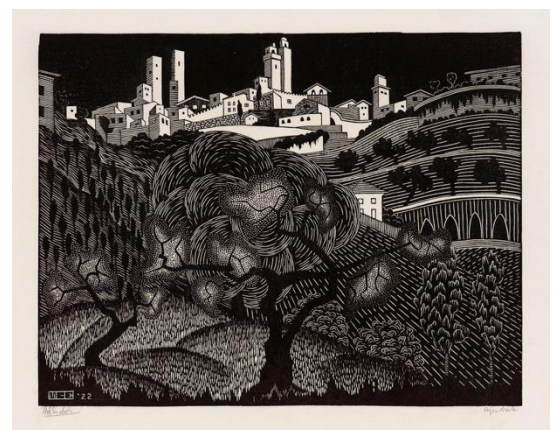


M.C. Escher, *Snakes*, woodcut, 1969

Over the next few pages we will present important themes in the life of M.C. Escher as an artist.

Italian landscape prints

During his Italian years (1924-1935), Escher mainly created prints that are close to reality. This work arose from drawings he made in nature. He subsequently developed these drawings into prints at his workbench. These were mainly woodcuts and wood engravings, but gradually Escher also moved towards lithography. You will find more information about these techniques later on in the manual. In his early work, Escher was and remained fascinated by nature and the Italian landscape. Escher was observant and this is clearly reflected in his graphic work.



M.C. Escher, *San Gimignano*, woodcut, 1922

Perspective fascinated him from an early age. He experimented with it at an early stage, often by selecting an unusually high or low spot on which to draw. The mountainous landscape of Italy made this easy and enabled him to create a lot of depth in his work. In a print like *San Gimignano* (1922), Escher worked in a valley, through which he looks up to the town on higher ground.

Tessellations

In 1922, during one of his trips, he visited the Alhambra for the first time, a medieval palace and fortress in the Spanish city of Granada. Here he saw all kinds of colourful geometric patterns, which had been applied to the walls in the form of tilings. As a result of this discovery, Escher began to make tessellations himself. A tessellation is a motif whose outlines connect seamlessly on all sides. This allows the motif to be repeated endlessly. It is a commonly used technique in Islamic art.

Escher became immensely fascinated by this art form. However, he gave it a new twist. In the Islamic tradition it was very unusual, and often even forbidden, to depict humans and animals. Hence these cannot be found in the Alhambra. Escher saw plenty of new possibilities in depicting living things in his tessellations.



M.C. Escher, Regular division drawing with lizards, no. 25, India ink, pencil and watercolor, January 1939

In 1936 he visited the Alhambra again, which prompted him to sketch tessellations with renewed fanaticism. In his notebooks he experimented extensively with the possibilities that tessellations offer. He then included the preliminary studies from his notebooks in his prints, often as part of a cycle or metamorphosis.

From *landscapes* to *mindscapes*

In his early work, Escher focused on depicting landscapes. This period is referred to as his landscape period. Later, from 1935 onwards, Escher moved away from landscapes. His ideas for prints were conjured from his imagination and then rendered in wood or on a lithographic stone. These works are often called his mindscapes.

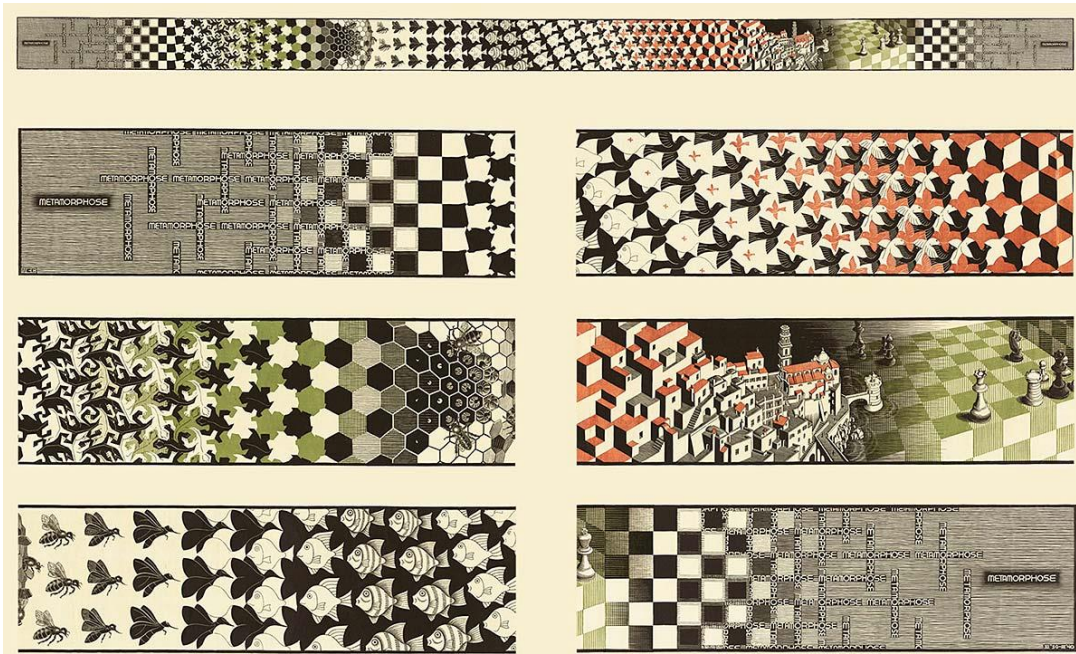
In the work that Escher created after 1935, the correspondence between a direct observation and the final work is increasingly lost. He increasingly put his own spin on reality. Whereas the other works from this period are still fairly true to life, *Still Life with Mirror* (1934) and *Still Life and Street* (1937) mark the beginning of Escher's quest for the optical illusion. At first glance, the latter print looks like an ordinary representation of a table with objects on it, in front of a street. If you look a second time, you suddenly notice that the books on the table are also part of the street behind them. Escher succeeded in cleverly misleading the viewer.



M.C. Escher, Still Life and Street, woodcut, 1937

In this transitional period Escher began to combine stylistic tools that he had also been investigating in Italy, such as playing with perspective, tessellations and reflections. Tessellations played an important role in this. Escher sometimes said that without the tessellation his work would not have blossomed to the extent that it did. Escher connected his primary and secondary fascinations through his use of tessellations. This interplay between the artistic and the mathematical signals Escher's stepping out of the traditional art framework. His fascinations allowed him to tell imaginative stories of eternity and infinity in his prints. These concepts were essential to Escher and were ubiquitous in his work.

Perhaps the metamorphosis is the most beautiful form he used for this. He experimented with it for the first time in 1937. Two years later, the four-metre-long *Metamorphosis II* was created. It blends earlier themes such as perspective, tessellation and three-dimensionality on the flat surface in a unique print. He seamlessly turned reptiles into bees and a town into a chessboard.



M.C. Escher, *Metamorphosis II*, woodcut in black, green and brown, printed from twenty blocks, on three combined sheets, November 1939 - March 1940

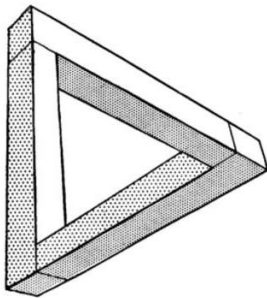
Escher and Mathematics

Escher's mathematical view of art was also picked up on by several mathematicians and physicists over the course of his career. For example, two iconic prints were the product of correspondence between M.C. Escher and the famous mathematicians Roger Penrose and his father L.S. Penrose. Roger Penrose had discovered Escher's work at his one-man exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in 1954, on the occasion of the International Mathematical Congress that same year. In the lithograph *Ascending and Descending*, Escher uses the famous Penrose staircase, which seems to go on endlessly. It is a good example of Escher's talent for making complex mathematical principles visually comprehensible and appealing.

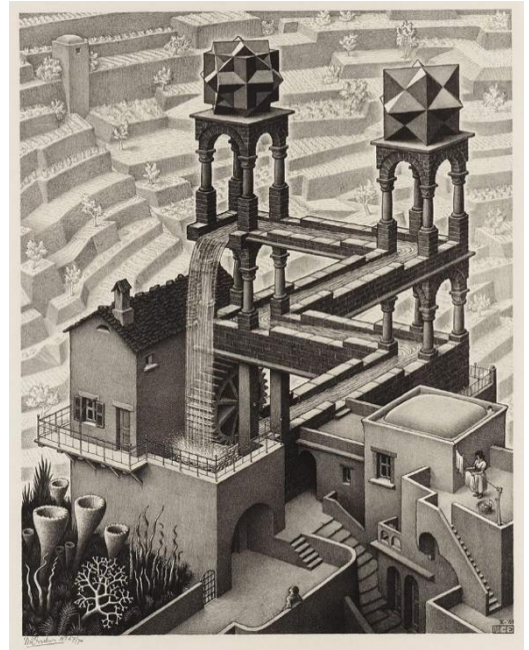


M.C. Escher, *Ascending and Descending*, lithograph, 1960

In the following year, Escher produced another print that is clearly based on Penrose's mathematical principles. In *Waterfall* (1961), Escher used an impossible triangle. Penrose came up with this after seeing Escher's exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum. By using the Penrose triangle as the basis for the watermill in *Waterfall*, Escher closed the cycle and managed to get water to flow not only downwards but also upwards.



Impossible triangle as depicted in
'Impossible objects: a special type of visual
illusion' by L.S. Penrose and R. Penrose

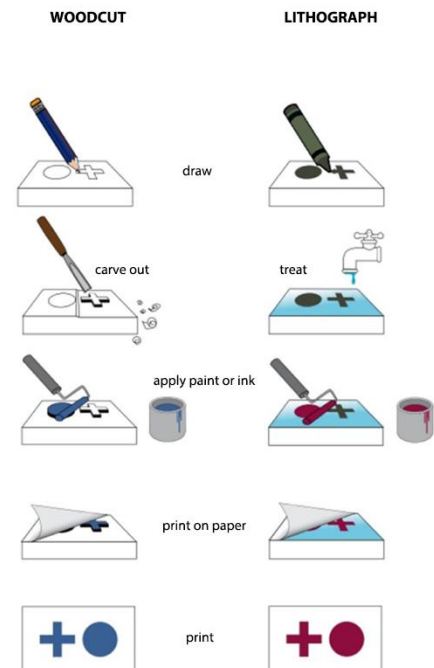


M.C. Escher, *Waterfall*, lithograph, 1961

Graphic art & technique

M.C. Escher was a graphic artist, an artist who specialised in making prints. Three types of graphic technique can be distinguished: relief printing, intaglio printing and planographic printing. Escher mainly created woodcuts (relief printing) and lithographs (planographic printing).

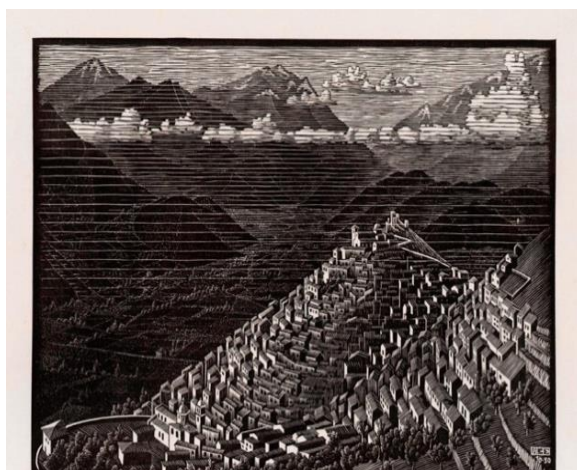
Woodcuts are images that are cut in wood and are examples of relief printing. In relief printing, prints are created from the higher parts. Using a gouge, pieces are cut away from the wood block, thereby exposing the representation. Ink is applied to these higher parts. Then a sheet of paper is placed on the inked wood block and printed. The higher parts transfer the black ink to the paper, and the paper remains white where the recesses are. This creates a stark contrast between the black and white parts of the print



Lithographs are drawings that are created on a specially processed flat stone. They fall under the category of planographic printing, where nothing is cut away. The image is applied to the lithograph stone using special greasy ink or chalk. This stone is then made water-repellant and ink-repellent with a number of chemical treatments. Only the greasy, drawn lines soak up the ink, allowing the image to be printed. With a lithograph, a greater variety of shades of grey can be achieved, in contrast to the woodcut.

Creating a beautiful print using this technique is quite complicated. For example, you need a special, rather heavy press. Escher therefore always used a professional lithographer to create the prints.

Printmaking makes it possible for several prints of a work to exist. The number of printed copies is called an edition. The design that the graphic artist applies to the woodblock or the lithograph stone is ultimately printed in mirror image. An example of this can be found in the drawing and woodcut from *Morano, Calabria*.



M.C. Escher, Morano, Calabria, woodcut, 1930



M.C. Escher, Morano, Calabria, pencil on paper, 1930

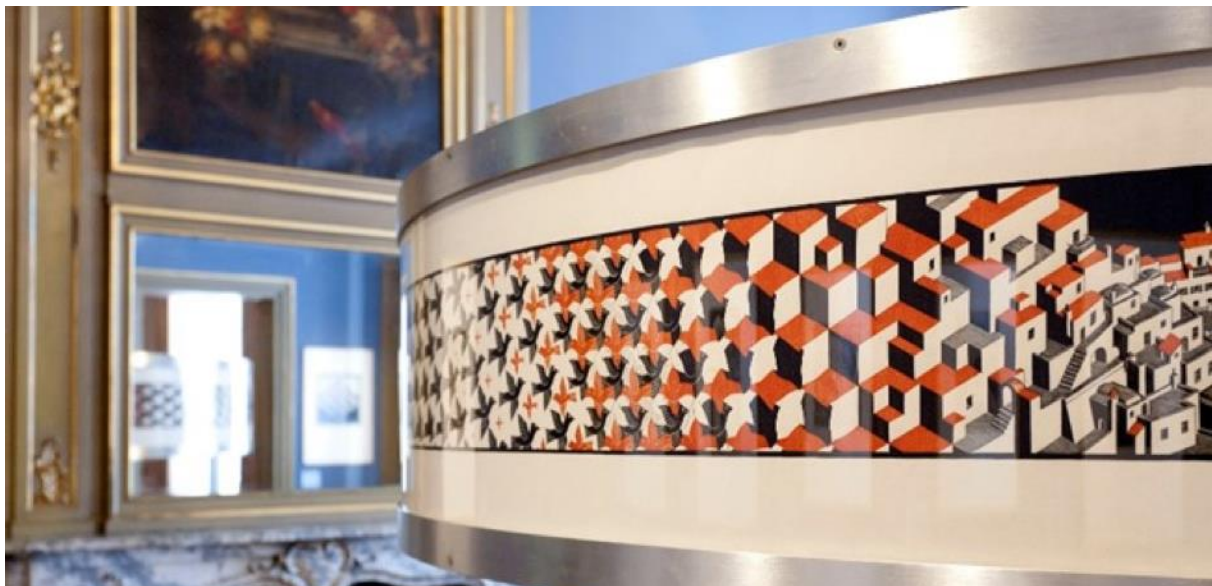
The museum

Permanent collection presentation

The world-famous, imaginative pieces by the artist M.C. Escher are always on show at Escher in The Palace, which is housed in the former winter palace of Queen Mother Emma. There is a permanent exhibition of Escher's work on the ground and first floors of the museum.

Escher's development as an artist is a key focus in the museum. His early work consists of early woodcuts of people and unrivalled depictions of nature and landscapes, in which he explores his talent. In his later work he develops his revolutionary tessellations, metamorphoses and optical illusions. His playful prints delight the eye and have been a rich source of inspiration for mathematicians, film-makers and architects throughout the world for many years.

In addition to the permanent exhibition, the museum regularly hosts temporary exhibitions on themes from the life and work of M.C. Escher. Check the [website](#) before your visit to see if there is a temporary exhibition, so you can take that into account.



Presentation of *Metamorphosis III* in the museum

Interactive exhibition 'Through Escher's Eyes'

On the second floor visitors have the opportunity to see the way M.C. Escher did, immersing themselves in his perception. There are a number of interactive areas where students can absorb themselves in different forms of optical illusion. In the photo room, the tallest person can shrink and vice versa. In the Op Art room, the works of art seem to be moving, but appearances are deceptive. Just like in Escher's work, Op Art plays with the viewer's eye.

About the palace

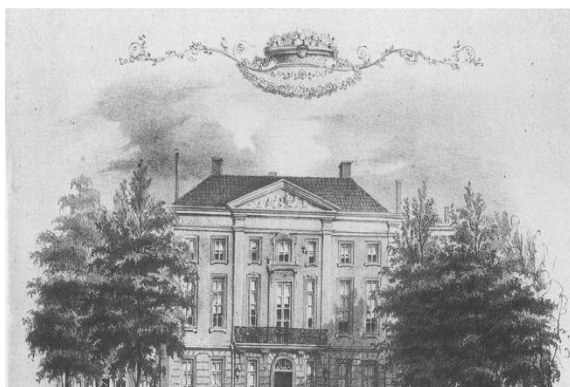
The palace at Lange Voorhout 74, where Escher in The Palace is now located, has a long history. Pieter de Swart designed a house on Lange Voorhout for Anthony van Patras in 1760. The building was completed between 1760 and 1764. Patras was Mayor of the Frisian town of Sloten and a delegate in the States General. In the end, the building was bought by Archibald Hope in 1796. At the time, the Hope family was financing the European nobility and sometimes lent money to both sides of a conflict for their warfare. It was therefore perhaps not entirely coincidental that Napoleon, while passing through our country, stayed at Lange Voorhout 74 for fourteen hours in 1811.

Queen Mother Emma bought the property in 1896 from the estate of her deceased brother-in-law Prince Hendrik. She had it extensively renovated before moving here in 1901, after the wedding of her daughter Queen Wilhelmina.

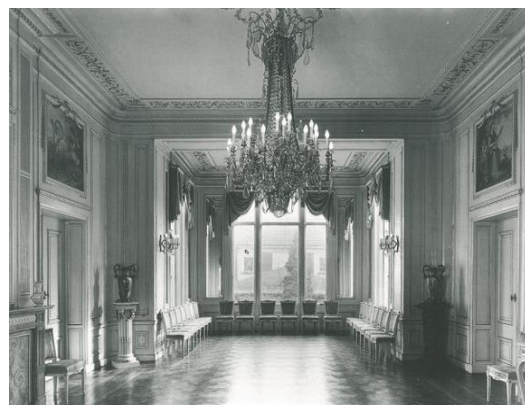
This renovation included a new staircase to the first floor with a copper handrail, which had to be polished weekly at the time. Her Majesty was quite particular about that. This beautiful staircase seems to continue to the second floor, but that is an (optical) illusion. The stairs lead to the first floor.

Queen Mother Emma used the Palace as a winter palace, staying instead at Soestdijk in the summer. For Queens Wilhelmina, Juliana and Beatrix, the building mainly functioned as their working palace. Queen Juliana was the first queen to start her journey from this palace in the golden carriage on the occasion of the opening of the States General on Little Prince Day. The traditional waving of the royal family on the small golden balcony at the front façade is a famous spectacle.

Queen Beatrix and Prince Claus worked here until the Noordeinde Palace was made suitable as their working palace. In 1991 the family sold the property to the municipal council of The Hague, on the proviso that only cultural activities would be held here. Kunstmuseum Den Haag has held some successful exhibitions here featuring work by Rodin, Frida Kahlo and Venetian glass. Escher in The Palace has been housed here in since 2002.



A.P. Langenhuysen, Lange Voorhout (Huis van Hope), lithography, 1844



Ballroom

Chandeliers

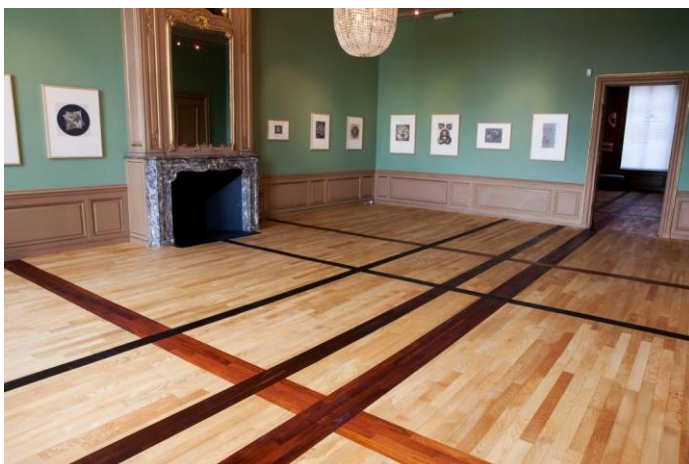
The museum is lit by spectacular chandeliers by Hans van Bentem (1965). Van Bentem is a ceramicist and glass artist as well as a designer of chandeliers. These ones are produced in the Czech region of Bohemia. This is because Van Bentem prefers the crystal and craftsmanship local to that region. The chandeliers in this palace form a surrealistic combination with Escher's prints. The large chandelier in the stairwell is inspired by the palace. The globe, compass and bow also feature in the white stucco decoration of the walls.



Chandeliers By Hans van Bentem in the stairwell

Donald Judd's parquet

In addition to the lighting, Escher in The Palace's floor is also a work of art, designed by leading minimal art artist Donald Judd (1928-1994). The American Judd was of the opinion that art should not portray something, but that a work should be able to exist as an independent object. Judd designed the pattern for the parquet flooring on the ground floor and first floor in 1992. He translated his geometric shapes and special use of colours into a uniquely striped palace floor, comprising five different types of wood.



Parquet floor by Donald Judd. Photo: Isabel Nabuurs

House rules

We would greatly appreciate it if you would discuss the museum's house rules with the supervisors and students of your school prior to the museum visit. We kindly request that teachers and supervisors to take an active role in ensuring compliance with the house rules.

The house rules:

- The artworks are to look at, and may therefore not be touched, unless stated otherwise.
- The Palace is a listed building, so please do not lean against walls and display cases.
- Eating and drinking are not allowed in the museum, except in the museum café.
- Be considerate of other museum visitors, do not talk too loud and walk slowly.
- In the museum you are allowed to take pictures without a flash. The use of a tripod or selfie stick is not allowed.
- Umbrellas and bags that are larger than A4 size are not allowed to be taken into the rooms. You can store these in our free lockers during your visit. There will be a lockable roll container for the students' bags.



Background information

Visit our website

www.escherinthepalace.com

For more information on major events in the life of M.C. Escher you can view our [timeline](#). The [Escher today](#) section contains many background stories and anecdotes about the life and work of M.C. Escher.

To watch

Keen to learn all about M.C. Escher? Follow this wonderful interactive tour about the artist: <https://escher.ntr.nl/en/>

How do you create a lithograph? In this video from the Van Gogh Museum, artist Sarai de Haan explains how this flat printing technique works: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HauFUcKTcOk>

Artist Hanna de Haan shows how you can also create a lithograph at home: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbihAE6glpQ>

How do you create a woodcut? Artist Sarai de Haan explains in brief: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=146VhMfTWrw>

To read

- ***The Graphic Work***, M.C. Escher (Taschen 2013)*
- ***The Magic Mirror of M.C. Escher***, B. Ernst (Taschen 2007)*
- ***Impossible Worlds***, B. Ernst (Taschen 2006)*

The two books below are seen as the standard works on Escher's life and his prints:

- **M.C. Escher, His Life and Complete Graphic Work**, edited by J.L. Locher (Abradale Press, 1982) *
- ***M.C. Escher, een biografie***, W. Hazeu (Meulenhoff 1998)*/**

For maths teachers the standard work is:

- ***Visions of Symmetry***, Doris Schattschneider (W.H. Freeman & Co Ltd 1990)*

Children's books about M.C. Escher

- ***Nadir and Zenith in the World of Escher***, Wouter van Reek in collaboration with Escher in The Palace (Leopold 2019)
- ***Escher tovenaar op papier***, B. Ernst (Wbooks 2009)*

* Only available second-hand

** Only available in Dutch