



THE BOY IN THE ATTIC

The Johannes Kunst Legacy

ABSTRACT

In 1940, the streets of Leeuwarden echoed with the "click-clack" of Nazi boots. For young Johannes Kunst, survival from the realities of war meant building a "safe world" in his grandparents' attic in Opeinde—a mental fortress that would become a lifelong visual vocabulary. This is the story of a boy who survived the brutality of an occupied nation to state his identity as an artist at eighteen, and the woman, Harmanna, who honored a fifty-two-year "ink bridge" of devotion to protect his legacy. It is a haunting, heart-filled map of resilience, proving that while a pen tells a story, a brush can heal a soul.

Pete Nelson

“The Boy in the Attic”- The Johannes Kunst Legacy

Dedication: To the Heart of the Homeland

To Leeuwarden: The city of Johannes Kunst’s birth, where the childhood encounters of WWII first shaped his eyes. You taught a young boy, through perseverance and hope, how to find the golden light in his grandparents’ attic in Opeinde and gave him the resilience to cross oceans.

To Heemskerk: The sanctuary of Johannes’s return. You welcomed him home and gave him the peace to live his art and turn his most haunting memories into a message for the world.

To the Families of the Resistance: We honor the courage of those like Harmanna Kunst’s family, including her father, who stood in the Dutch resistance against the brutality of the occupation. Their defiance was the foundation upon which this love story and Johanne’s art were built.

To the Children of the Occupation: This story serves as a vital mirror to the legacy of Anne Frank. While Anne and Johannes shared the same occupied soil and the same stolen childhood, his story is of the perspective of the non-Jewish Dutch child—not hidden away but forced to walk the streets of a strangled nation. Where Anne used a pen in her "Secret Annex" to document reality, Johannes used his imagination in an Opeinde attic to build a "safe world" where the boots could not reach, and the brutality of the WWII was held at bay. This book honors the universal truth they both discovered: that war leaves no child untouched.

To Harmanna, the Guardian of the Legacy: This book is dedicated to you, the modern sentry of a staggering archive. Your life finds its historical parallel in the fierce devotion of Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, Vincent Van Gogh’s Sister-in law. Just as Johanna refused to let Vincent’s genius be lost to time, you have dedicated your life to your own sacred vow—meticulously preserving every stroke of Johanne’s hand and every letter of Johannes's soul.

May we always remember that a legacy is born twice—once by the artist who creates it, and once by the heart that refuses to let the light go out.

Preface

By Pete Nelson

When I first met Harmanna Kunst, our connection quickly evolved into a special friendship. I was drawn to her straightforward persona and the profound strength of her character. A woman whose life is defined by an unwavering dedication and a sacred vow to her husband, Johannes Kunst to protect his art and preserve his legacy.

As our friendship grew, she introduced me to the love of her life, Johannes. What began as an introduction to a stranger's art soon became witness to a monumental journey. I began to see the beauty, the complexities, and the symbolic language of a man who used his brush to survive.

Johannes was born into a world defined by the rhythmic "click-clack" of Nazi boots against the bricks of Leeuwarden. His story offers a vital parallel to that of Anne Frank; while they shared the same occupied soil and the same looming shadow of the Holocaust, Johannes represents the perspective of the Dutch child who was not hidden away but forced to walk the streets of a strangled nation. Where Anne was confined to her "Secret Annex," Johannes found his refuge in his grandparents' attic in Opeinde.

This attic was not a place of hiding, but a sovereign sanctuary. Like Anne, Johannes felt a desperate, universal need as a child of the war to process the world around him. While she used a pen to record reality, Johannes used his imagination in those rafters to build a "safe world" where the tragedies of conflict could not reach. It was here where he traded the language of war for a mental vocabulary of symbols—proving that while a pen records a story, imagination preserves the soul until it is ready to heal. This sanctuary became the wellspring of his art, birthing the motifs of resilience that would follow him from the polders of Friesland to the war of Vietnam, and eventually to Los Angeles.

Johannes saw things no child should ever have to see: the hollow eyes of hunger and the sharp fear of a Nazi glance. At the war's end, as the Royal Canadian Dragoon soldiers rolled in, he watched young men in different uniforms—boys not much older than himself—bleed into the same green

grass. In the harrowing silence of those moments, he heard them calling out for their mothers. In his startling childhood wisdom, he realized they were all just "young and hurt." He carried that raw, universal compassion through every decade of his life, painting every single day to keep the "grey" of reality at bay. For Johannes, art was not a choice; it was his breath.

To know Harmanna today is to understand the lifeline of devotion that sustained them through five years of separation and 52 years of marriage. They were married on February 12, 1965, beginning a half-century journey of shared dreams and artistic creation. Now, Harmanna serves as the sole sentry of this staggering legacy. Despite living on a modest fixed income, she works nearly every single day on his collection—meticulously cataloging thousands of works and preserving the handwritten letters that once crossed an ocean. She is driven by that same straightforward dedication I first admired: a solemn vow to ensure that Johannes's life's work is not lost on time.

My role as Legacy Manager for the Johannes Kunst Archive is not merely a professional title; it is a commitment born from the deep love of Johannes and Harmanna and an urgent necessity. I realized I was not just managing art; I was protecting a survival story told on paper and canvas. I have come to know Johannes through every stroke of his brush. This book is an effort to bring him back into the light—spanning the distance from that solitary attic in Opeinde to the massive archive he built through decades of daily devotion.

Today, my work focuses on three pillars: preservation, visibility, and legacy. Because Harmanna operates on a modest income, every resource we gather is a vital brick in the wall protecting these thousands of works from the passage of time. My goal is to ensure that the "boy in the attic" is seen by the world he spent a lifetime documenting. To support this ongoing mission or to view the digital gallery, please visit the [Johannes Kunst website](http://www.hankeart.com) at www.hankeart.com.

Johannes once said, "War is something I have thought about every day of my life." Through these pages, we invite you to see what he saw—and to find the beauty that grows even in the darkest of times.

The Guardians of the Flame: A Historical Parallel

History has shown us that some of the world's most profound artistic legacies were not saved by museums, but by the fierce devotion of a single woman. In the late 19th century, Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, sister-in-law to Vincent Van Gogh, was left with hundreds of "worthless" canvases and a massive archive of letters. Critics told her to discard them, but she spent her life translating every word and cataloging every stroke to prove Vincent's genius.

Harmanna Kunst walks in that same legendary shadow. From a family of the Dutch Resistance, she inherited a spirit of quiet defiance. For almost seven decades, through a five-year "ink bridge" of love letters and a 52-year marriage—she has been the anchor for Johannes's humanitarian heart. Today, as his widow, she works tirelessly to preserve thousands of works the world needs to see.

Both women prove that a legacy is born twice: once by the artist, and once by the heart that refuses to let the light go out.

Historical Prelude: The Destruction of the Dikes (Polders)

Leeuwarden: The Calm Before the Storm

Before May 1940, Leeuwarden was a city of quiet dignity, the beating heart of Friesland. It was a place of wide-skied polders and the iconic *Oldehove* leaning tower. For a young Dutch family, life was governed by the rhythm of the markets and the tolling of church bells. The Dutch followed a policy of strict neutrality and believed, as they had in the Great War, they could remain an island of peace.

The “Click-Clack” of the Occupation

That peace shattered on May 10, 1940. The German Luftwaffe, the aerial warfare branch of Nazi Germany's armed forces, roared over the flat landscape, and by May 15, the Dutch military was forced to surrender. For the citizens of Leeuwarden, the transition from "normalcy" to "occupation" was a slow poisoning of daily life.

The most terrifying sound for a child was the "Click-Clack"—the synchronized rhythm of hobnailed Nazi boots striking the cobblestone streets. This wasn't just noise; it was the sound of a city losing its soul. Neighboring houses were seized to billet German officers, and the local school lawns, once places of play, became barbed-wire triage centers and staging grounds for the invader.

The Nazis' occupied Leeuwarden, Friesland, Netherlands from May 1940 to April 1945, serving as a vital northern stronghold for the Third Reich. Fliegerhorst Leeuwarden, a major Luftwaffe night-fighter base, was used to intercept Allied bombers. The city was overseen by a rotating garrison of 2,000 to 5,000 personnel, with the Burmaniahuis, the Nazi Command Center, serving as the feared regional headquarters for the SD and SS. While the city functioned as a strategic railway hub and a support link for the Atlantic Wall coastal defenses, it also became a center of defiance; this culminated in the legendary December 1944 prison raid where the Resistance freed 51 prisoners. The occupation finally crumbled on April 15, 1945, when the Royal Canadian Dragoons liberated

the city, ending years of persecution, strict curfews, and starvation perpetuated by the Nazi administration.

To the children of Leeuwarden who grew up in the shadow of the Oldehove, the "Leaning Tower of Leeuwarden", we honor the resilience of a generation whose playgrounds were transformed into garrisoned streets and whose schools became halls of propaganda. You were the small, silent keepers of dangerous family secrets, enduring the cold of the Hunger Winter and the terrifying thunder of the Fliegerhorst air raids, with courage far beyond your years. Whether you were carrying hidden messages in your socks or sharing your meager crusts of bread with those fleeing the famine, you kept your humanity in a world that had lost its own. We remember the awe of your first taste of freedom—the simple, miraculous gift of Canadian chocolate from the soldiers—and we pay tribute to the strength you found to rebuild a future from the ruins of your childhood.

The Stolen Childhood: Life for the Non-Jewish Civilian

While the Holocaust is still the war's darkest chapter, the non-Jewish Dutch population endured a "slow-motion" catastrophe that targeted the very structure of the family and the heart of the Dutch people.

“The Boy in the Attic”- The Johannes Kunst Legacy

Chapter One: The Boy with the Metal Tag

Johannes Kunst entered the world on November 22, 1938, in a Netherlands that was about to go dark. He was the eldest boy, a protector by nature, sandwiched between his older sister and his younger siblings.

But the war didn't just stay outside the front door. Inside the house, a different kind of battle raged. Johannes's father was a man of violence. Johannes, even as a small child, would step between his volatile father and his mother. He still carried the chilling memory of the day his father tried to heave him through a Gable Window for the crime of protecting her.

Eventually, his father vanished into the fog of Amsterdam to avoid the German work camps, leaving the family behind. He never looked back. Johannes was left with a broken home, a hungry family, and a country under the heel of an invader.

The Click-Clack of the Occupation

By 1940, the "click-clack" of Nazi boots on the Leeuwarden bricks became the heartbeat of the city. Life became a game of survival:

- **The Identification:** Perhaps nothing illustrates the terror of a Dutch mother better than the Identification Necklace. Around the necks of children like Johannes Kunst, mothers hung small metal tags or pouches. They weren't jewelry; they were insurance. If a child was separated during a bombardment, or if a mother was killed in a bread line, the tag ensured the child wouldn't become an "Anonymous Orphan." It was a constant, cold reminder that the family unit could be severed at any moment.
- **The Blackout:** Families lived behind "tarpaper" windows. To show a sliver of light was to invite a bullet from a patrol.

- **The Hunger:** By 1944, the Nazis cut off food and fuel shipments to the western and northern provinces. This was state-sponsored famine. Dutch families were reduced to 400–800 calories a day. Mothers walked for days—"Hunger Treks" into the countryside to trade wedding rings for a single sack of potatoes.
- **The Loss of the "Common":** Children watched as their world was cannibalized. Bicycles were fitted with wooden tires because rubber was seized for the German war machine. Central heating died; families burned floorboards and books just to stay above freezing.
- **The Trauma of Silence:** Children were taught a lethal lesson: Keep your mouth shut. They saw men chained in the marketplace and shot; they saw the "Roundups" (*Razzias*) where able-bodied men were snatched off the streets to be sent to labor camps in Germany.

The Sanctuary in the Sky

When the oft times of fear and hunger in Leeuwarden became too much, his mother would load the children onto a heavy Dutch bicycle and pedal toward Opeinde, over twenty kilometers away. There, on his grandparents' farm, Johannes found his life's true North: The Attic.

While the Nazis occupied the streets, tormenting the lives of Leeuwarden, Johannes would climb into the rafters of the attic to imagine and create. For most children in Leeuwarden, a "toy" was less a purchased item and more a product of their own imagination, often built from the very debris of the war surrounding them. The attic was a kingdom of "forgotten things." Amidst the dust and old trunks, Johannes built a stage. He invited others to imagine and play, turning a place of hiding into a place of creation.

This wasn't just play; it was survival. In the attic he could paint over the trauma he saw "Outside." This sanctuary would eventually become the soul of his art, the foundation for his famous Attic Series, where he let the bright colors of his imagination temporarily wash away the shadows of the war.

The Lawn of Crying Children

One of the most haunting moments of Johannes's childhood occurred on the lawn of a Leeuwarden school in 1945. At seven years old, he stood before a sea of wounded men as the soldiers of Canada solidified the Nazi surrender.

There were Nazis in gray and Allies in khaki, but to Johannes, the uniforms had dissolved. They were all just maimed, bleeding, and crying. He realized then that when men are broken, they all speak the same language. They did not call out for generals or for victory; they called out for their mothers.

Johannes could not tell who the "enemy" was because their pain looked identical. He carried this universal empathy with him for the rest of his life. He did not just paint pictures; he painted the shared soul of humanity that was "young and hurt."

The Two Attics: A Parallel of Survival

History rightfully centers on the Secret Annex at Prinsengracht 263, where a young Jewish girl named Anne Frank spent 761 days in hiding. While her story ended tragically after her deportation to Westerbork, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen, her time in that Amsterdam attic produced a diary that would change the world.

Johannes's journey offers the essential, other half of that history. As a non-Jewish child, he was not the target of the genocide that claimed Anne, but he was an inseparable part of the world from which she was hidden. When the fear in Leeuwarden became too much, his mother would pedal the 20 plus Kilometers toward Opeinde. There, at his grandparents' farm, Johannes found his own attic—a sovereign sanctuary.

In the quiet of those rafters, Johannes did not have a brush yet; he had his imagination. He spent those years cultivating a "safe world" within his mind—a place where the Nazi boots and the violence of his home could not reach. While Anne used a pen to document the reality she was forced to hide from, Johannes used his imagination to build the world as it should be.

Comparison: The Two Attics

Feature	The Secret Annex (Anne Frank)	The Sovereign Sanctuary (Johannes Kunst)
Perspective	Internalized: The world from which she was kept.	Observed: The world he was forced to see.
Safe Space	A place of hiding to save her life.	A place of imagination to save his soul.
Survival Tool	The Pen: Documenting reality as it was.	The Imagination: Building a world as it should be.
Childhood Path	Taken from the Netherlands in 1944.	Remained to survive the brutality of WWII on the streets of Leeuwarden

The Vanishing World: Leeuwarden 1939 vs. 1944

This table illustrates the transition from a sovereign nation to a brutalized territory through the eyes of a child.

Life Feature	Before the War (1939)	The Occupation (1944–45)
Soundscape	The rhythmic song of church bells, market chatter, and the bright ring of bicycle bells.	The metallic "Click-Clack" of hobnailed Nazi boots and the low, mourning wail of air-raid sirens.
Nighttime	A warm amber glow spilling from streetlamps and family hearths.	Total Blackout. Windows sealed with tarpaper; a single sliver of light was a death sentence.
The Streets	Families walking freely to the Sunday market in the crisp Frisian air.	Razzias (Roundups). Men snatched from doorsteps for labor; the silence of pets eaten for survival.
The Table	The scent of fresh bread, sharp Frisian cheese, and rich farm milk.	The "Hunger Winter." Tulip bulbs, woody sugar beets, and the watery broth of desperation.
The Journey	Shiny Dutch bicycles with humming rubber tires and polished chrome.	Wooden tires. Rubber was seized by the occupiers; bicycles were stripped or hidden in haystacks.
The Landscape	Open polders and the limitless freedom of a child's horizon.	Barbed wire. Curfews at 8:00 PM; the once-familiar shadows became lethal.
Childhood Identity	A name called out by a mother across a sun-drenched park.	The Metal Tag. A heavy necklace worn so a child wouldn't die as an "anonymous orphan" in the ruins.

Chapter Two: The Moon and the Military

As the gray dust of the war settled, a new Johannes appeared. To the people of Leeuwarden, he was distinctive. He walked with creative confidence that was present and electric. He was not just a survivor anymore; he began to design and shape the artist he was to become. One of his first real jobs was to transform the window scenes of local shops into displays of light and color.

It was during this time, at age 18, that he met 15-year-old Harmanna Vanderveen. When she asked who he was, he did not say "a student" or "a worker." He looked her in the eye and said, "I am an artist." She giggled. She did not know yet that those words were a sacred vow.

Harmanna had fallen in love. He had style and wore jeans sent to him by his uncle in America. She thought "He was so modern and different."

The Departure for the Moon

One year later, in 1958, Johannes's family made the life-altering decision to immigrate to America. To Harmanna, it felt as though the boy she loved was "leaving for the moon." On the day he left, they shared a kiss—and he promised to return in two years.

Johannes landed in Glendale, California, a world of neon and palm trees. He had been working on his English, and his hands knew how to work. He moved from odd jobs to designing fabric layouts for Peterson Baby Products, proving that his artist's eye could find beauty even in the industrial world.

But the "two-year promise" shattered from the drums of a new war: Vietnam.

The Soldier in the Library

Because of the Military Selective Service Act, Johannes was drafted. In 1962, a man who hated war because he had seen its teeth as a child, was now forced to wear its uniform.

Johannes was a "Resident Alien," a Dutch citizen in an American coat. This created a legal loophole that likely saved his life. While he trained at *Fort Hood and Fort Benning* with the experimental "Airmobile" units, the very men who would later suffer catastrophic losses at the Battle of Ia Drang, Johannes was pulled back. The military was hesitant to send non-citizens into "hot" combat zones.

Instead, they sent the artist to work at the military library. Surrounded by books, Johannes survived while his platoon was "wiped out." He lived with the survivor's guilt of a man who saw his friends vanish into the jungle while he held a pen instead of a rifle. He processed this trauma the only way he knew how: he painted the war of Vietnam. He captured the scenes of Vietnam, adding them to the memory and imagination he had started as a child in Leeuwarden.

The Ink Bridge and the Hope Chest

For five long years, the Atlantic Ocean was bridged by paper. Johannes and Harmanna did all they could to keep the love and exploration of their connection alive. They wrote back and forth to each other three times a week—hundreds of love letters in total.

This chapter of Johannes's life is defined not just by his art, but by the resilient spirit of the woman who waited for him: Harmanna. Their love story, preserved in years of devoted correspondence, reached a pivotal and tragic crossroads in 1963.

By then, Harmanna had received an engagement ring from Johannes, lived independently, and had completed her plans to join him in America. On August 3, 1963, twenty-one-year-old Harmanna stood before her parents to announce her departure; she had not seen her fiancé in four years and was ready to begin her life in the United States. Her father, overcome with the prospect of her leaving, pleaded with her, uttering the haunting words: *"I will die if you leave."*

In a cruel twist of fate, the very next day, August 4th, her father suffered a fatal heart attack and died in front of her.

Devastated and bound by duty, Harmanna put her dreams of America on hold to move back in with her mother. Johannes, ever the partner in spirit, understood the gravity of her grief. He returned home on a month's leave in December 1963 to celebrate their engagement with the family and offer the support she so desperately needed.

It was not until August 1964, following the end of Johannes's military service, that he finally returned to his future wife for good. Harmanna met him with the simple, evocative assurance: *"Her hope chest was ready."*

On February 12, 1965, they were married in Groningen at City Hall at 9:30 AM. In a charming nod to Dutch culture and Johannes's own steadfast habits, the wedding was scheduled early for a specific reason. In the Netherlands, coffee was traditionally never served until 10:00 AM; as Harmanna fondly recalls, "He wanted an early wedding because he had never missed his coffee in his life".

With the ceremony concluded and the coffee poured, the couple began to plan their journey. They set sail back to Glendale, California on June 1, 1965, to begin the life they had built through years of ink and patience.

Chapter Three: The Malibu Modernist

In June 1965, the "Boy from the Attic" finally touched down in the Land of Tomorrow. Johannes and Harmanna arrived in California with little more than a Dutch work ethic and dreams of a future. After a couple of months living with his mother, and with Harmanna now pregnant, they rented a \$92-a-month apartment in Glendale.

Johannes was a man of quiet, electric ambition. He was rehired by Peterson Baby Products to work in their advertising department. The company was so fond of him they paid for the birth of his first son. Johannes was strategically building a new world. As he had studied photography and graphic art at Glendale College, he turned his "eye for detail" into a professional weapon.

The Art Director and the Hillside Studio

In 1969, against a sea of elite competition, the Dutch immigrant was named Art Director for the City of Los Angeles and its regional planning. By day, he designed the visual future of Los Angeles; by night, he retreated to the sanctuary of his studio.

"The war affected my whole life," Johannes often said. "You live it every day." To cope, he painted. In every home they owned, Harmanna made sure there was a "second bedroom" for his therapy. In 1971, they bought a home in the *Studio City hills*, where Johannes finally had a studio separate from the house.

It was here that the Attic Series was born. He began to pull the "forgotten things" from his grandparents' rafters in Opeinde and splash them onto canvas with vibrant, defiant colors.

"You're Gonna Make It, Kid"

The turning point came in 1973 at the *Chomsky Gallery in Beverly Hills*. As the elite of L.A. admired his work, the gallery owner, Cynthia Chomsky, leaned in and whispered: "*You're gonna make it, kid*". For the first time, Harmanna saw that the "artist" she had chuckled at as a teenager was not just a dreamer, he was a master.

Johannes soon became a pillar within the Dutch Artists of the West Coast, showing his work from San Antonio to Brussels. He was a humanitarian who was "terrified of the world," but he chose to fight that terror with "really nice, bright colors."

The Hanke Empire

By 1979, the now family of four moved to Malibu and set their sights on building a modern home Johannes designed himself. As Harmanna recalls, "He was an artist and wanted to design a piece of art for us to live in".

But the biggest design success was Hanke Design, a card company born from the hand-drawn "Love" stationary Johannes would often make for Harmanna.

While Johannes painted, Harmanna, who learned English from her children, became a powerhouse who silenced skeptics with her growing tenacity and built an aspiring business. She managed 37 reps worldwide, placing Johannes's card art in museums and luxury shops from coast to coast. Johannes was her biggest cheerleader, constantly telling her, "You can do it," as she conquered the business world.

The Gallery of Giants

In 1989, after twenty years of service as the Art Director for Los Angeles, Johannes resigned. He did not want a nine-to-five job; he wanted a paintbrush.

The couple moved to Seattle, where the success of Hanke Design allowed them to open the Hanke Modern Art and Design Gallery. Suddenly, the boy who once hid from Nazi patrols was showing his work alongside the likes of Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Frank Stella.

He had transitioned from the intricate "line" style of his early years to the bold, symbolic work that took on his past life, his humanitarian thoughts, and the symbolism of his afterthoughts. He was no longer just processing the war; he was making sense of the universe. He painted every single day because, for Johannes, art was not a choice, it was the air he breathed to keep the shadows at bay.

Chapter Four: The Royal Return

In 1990, after thirty years in the neon glow of California and the misty hills of Seattle, Johannes and Harmanna returned to the salt air of their homeland. They arrived as tourists on vacation, but they left as souls reclaimed.

“Everyone has art in Holland,” Harmanna observed. In the Netherlands, art was not a luxury for the few; it was the heartbeat of the many. Johannes saw how his country cherished its creators, and he knew he had finally come home.

They made a life-altering choice: their grown sons, Peter and Hans, would remain in Seattle, while Johannes, Harmanna, and their young daughter, Natasha moved to Heemskerk, located in the province of North Holland in the Netherlands. Johannes officially registered as a Dutch artist, finally reclaiming his place in the long lineage of the Great Masters.

The Conscience of the Canvas

The Holland Era was the birth of Johannes’s most profound humanitarian works. He no longer painted just to survive; he painted to protect. He looked at a world in pain and responded with a series of visual manifestos:

- **The Amazon Series:** A vibrant, haunting cry against the destruction of the rainforests and the abuse of the natural world.
- **The Sleeping Bag Series:** Intricate, symbolic works that gave dignity to the global homeless crisis, turning a simple survival tool into a haunting icon of neglect.
- **The Chernobyl Series:** A chilling exploration of man’s impact on the earth.

But most importantly, this was the beginning “War Series” era. Johannes finally took the "crying children" from the school lawn of 1945 and gave them a permanent home in his art. These were not just paintings of battle; they were a complex language of symbols—a way for Johannes to finally speak the unspeakable. These paintings took on an autobiographical importance for Johannes as he faced the demons and the internal reflection of his life.

From the Attic to the Palace

Johannes’s talent was no longer a secret kept in a studio. Represented by his own agent and supported by the Art & Inter Design Agency, he became a fixture of the European art world. He moved from the galleries of Beverly Hills to the prestigious Lineart in Belgium and the Jaarbeurs in Utrecht.

In 1997, he exhibited for Royal Dutch Shell in Amsterdam. But the ultimate validation of the "Boy in the Attic" came when his work was recognized by the highest level of Dutch society. His art was entered into the Royal Collection of H.R.H. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands.

The boy who had once watched Nazi boots from a farmhouse window was now a celebrated son of the House of Orange.

The Ilford's and the Infinite Play

Even as he tackled the heavy themes of war and environmental collapse, Johannes never lost the playfulness he discovered in the Opeinde attic. During his time in Holland, he began to create a cast of characters he called "*Ilford's*." These whimsical figures were his companions—a reminder that even in a world of "heavy" history, there is always room for the imaginary, the colorful, and the strange.

Johannes had elevated his career to its highest peak. He was a registered Dutch artist, a chosen royal artist, and a global voice for the voiceless. He was often interviewed and began to share his humanitarian voice and unique perspective. He had turned his trauma into a treasure for the world to see.

Chapter Five: The Coastal Calm and the Eternal Promise

In 2002, Johannes and Harmanna returned to the United States. They settled in the quiet, mist-shrouded border town of Blaine, Washington. It was between the mountains and the Salish Sea, Johannes found his final, peaceful studio.

He continued to paint every single day. In this "Blaine Era," his work became deeply autobiographical. He was no longer just looking at the world; he was looking inward. His canvases became maps of his own soul, utilizing a sophisticated language of symbolism to reconcile the tragedies of his childhood with the beauty of his life. He remained a pillar within the local art community, participating in juried shows and mentoring flourishing art centers, always the "cheerleader" for creativity.

The Final Stroke

Johannes Kunst passed away in November 2017 after a courageous battle with cancer. He died as he lived: surrounded by the vibrant colors of his imagination and the unwavering love of his wife and family. In his final days, a sacred promise was made. Harmanna vowed that the "Boy in the Attic" would never be forgotten—that his art and his message of universal empathy would be preserved for the world to see.

The Lone Sentry

Today, at 83 years old, Harmanna Kunst is a force of nature. While others her age might rest, she is a woman entrenched in a mission. Five days a week she can be found at her small private gallery space, meticulously cataloging a lifetime of genius.

She is the "Lone Sentry" of a massive Kunst legacy, protecting their love letters, sketch books, and a treasure trove of canvases that serve as a monument to the Dutch resilience of WWII. But the weight of their story cannot be carried by one person alone. The collection needs a sanctuary; the story needs a voice.

Afterword: The Light in the Attic

As you close these pages, you are not just leaving behind a collection of art; you are stepping out of a sovereign sanctuary that took a lifetime to build.

Johannes Kunst spent his early years navigating the brutality of an occupied nation and the shadows of a violent home. He saw the world at its most broken, the "click-clack" of boots, the hollow eyes of the hungry, and the wounded soldiers calling out for their mothers on a blood-stained lawn. Yet, because of the "safe world" he first imagined in his grandparents' attic in Opeinde, he refused to let the darkness win.

His art was never a choice. It was the essential breath of a humanitarian heart, the only tool strong enough to manage the weight of his memories and the depth of his empathy. Every brushstroke was an act of defiance—a visual vocabulary of hope that he spent fifty-two years sharing with the woman he loved and cherished.

While Johannes made his declaration to be an artist at eighteen, his sacred vow was to Harmanna. Through the five-year "ink bridge" love letters during their separation and a half-century of marriage, she remained the anchor of his world. Today, as his widow, she honors her own vow: acting as the sole sentry of this staggering legacy. Like Johanna van Gogh-Bonger before her, she has turned her modest life into a monumental mission, preserving these works against all odds to ensure the "boy in the attic" is never forgotten.

We share this story to honor a simple, universal truth: that even in the most brutal times, beauty can still grow. Every time someone looks at a canvas by Johannes Kunst, the "safe world" expands, the "ink bridge" grows stronger, and the light in the attic stays on.

Johannes once said, *"War is something I have thought about every day of my life."* Through his art, and through Harmanna's devotion, he invites us to see what he saw—and to find the courage to build a world as it should be.

Back Cover Blurb

Imagination can heal what a war has broken.

In 1940, the streets of Leeuwarden echoed with the rhythmic "click-clack" of Nazi boots. For young Johannes Kunst, a child forced to witness the brutality of an occupied nation, survival meant finding a border the enemy could not cross. He found it in his grandparents' attic in Opeinde—a sovereign sanctuary where his imagination built a world as it should be.

A humanitarian's heart. A life-long vow.

At eighteen, Johannes looked at a young girl named Harmanna and stated: "I am an artist." She giggled at him then, but she would soon become the anchor of his world. While his art was a vital instrument, he needed to manage the harrowing memories of the war and navigate his humanitarian heart and his vow to Harmanna. It was a promise of devotion that survived five years of separation, an "ink bridge" of love letters of letters, and the survivor's guilt of a second war in Vietnam.

The lone sentry of a staggering legacy.

Throughout 52 years of marriage, they built a life of shared dreams. Today, as his widow, Harmanna Kunst honors her own sacred vow: to protect the thousands of vibrant works Johannes left behind. From the "Safe World" conceived in his grandparents' attic to the monumental canvases of his later years, Johannes's art serves as a universal map of resilience.

The Boy in the Attic is more than a biography; it is a bridge between the old world and the new. It is the story of a boy who traded the language of war for a visual vocabulary of hope, and the woman who has dedicated her life to ensuring his light never fades.

Book Metadata & Submission Sheet

- Main Title: *The Boy in the Attic*
- Subtitle: *The Legacy of the Artist Johannes Kunst*
- Target Audience: Art historians, WWII history enthusiasts, the Dutch American community, and readers of redemptive biographies (like *The Diary of Anne Frank*).
- Short Description: In 1940, the streets of Leeuwarden echoed with the "click-clack" of Nazi boots. For young Johannes Kunst, survival from the realities of war meant building a "safe world" in his grandparents' attic in Opeinde—a mental fortress that would become a lifelong visual vocabulary. This is the story of a boy who survived the brutality of an occupied nation to state his identity as an artist at eighteen, and the woman, Harmanna, who honored a fifty-two-year "ink bridge" of devotion to protect his legacy. It is a haunting, heart-filled map of resilience, proving that while a pen tells a story, a brush can heal a soul.

The Infinite Line: A Geographic & Artistic Journey (1938–2017)

1938–1957 | The Leeuwarden Roots & The Opeinde Sanctuary

- **Location:** Leeuwarden and Opeinde, Netherlands.
- **Artistic Era:** *The Observation of Survival*.
- **Visual Style:** Raw, pencil-on-paper sketches
- **Key Event:** Discovery of the **Attic in Opeinde**. He begins building "imaginary stages" to process the dual wars of his home life and the Nazi occupation.
- **Technique:** High-contrast, realistic sketching born from a child's need to "scan" the environment for danger.

1958–1962 | The Moon & The Ink Bridge

- **Location:** Glendale, California (USA).
- **Artistic Era:** *The Architecture of Longing*.
- **Visual Style:** The birth of the **Ink Bridge**. Thousands of margins in hundreds of love letters to Harmanna become a canvas for his dreams of a future together.
- **Key Event:** Immigrating to the US ("The Moon"). He takes a job at Peterson Baby Products and begins formal studies in Photography and Graphic Art at Glendale College.

1962–1965 | The Uniformed Artist

- **Location:** Fort Hood, TX & Fort Benning, GA.
- **Artistic Era:** *The Library Triage*.
- **Visual Style:** Darker, symbolic works processing the loss of his platoon. He paints jungle scenes and the symbolism he connects to the Vietnam era.
- **Key Event:** Drafted into the Army. His status as a Dutch citizen keeps him in the library, while his heart remains on the front lines with his friends.

1965–1989 | The California Modernist

- **Location:** Malibu & Hollywood Hills, CA.
- **Artistic Era:** *The Prolific Compulsion*.
- **Visual Style:** Bold, expressive, and often abstract palettes evolving into a graphic artist's intricacy. His work enters a phase of high-end graphic abstraction and symbolism.

- **Key Event:** Named **Art Director for L.A. County Planning**. He launches **Hanke Design** with Harmanna, taking his "uplifting" cards to 37 reps worldwide.

1990–2001 | The Royal Homecoming

- **Location:** Heemskerk, Netherlands.
- **Artistic Era:** *The Humanitarian Manifesto*.
- **Visual Style:** Large-scale symbolic series: **Amazon, Sleeping Bag**, and the definitive **War Series**.
- **Key Event:** His work is entered into the collection of H.R.H. Queen Beatrix. He is celebrated by Royal Dutch Shell and European art fairs. His story is told in his homeland.

2002–2017 | The Final Sanctuary

- **Location:** Blaine, Washington.
- **Artistic Era:** *The Autobiographical Infinite*.
- **Visual Style:** Deeply personal symbolism. He moves toward an autobiographical era with abstract shapes and memorable symbols, reconciling a lifetime of duality.
- **Key Event:** Settling on the coast. He paints every single day until his passing in 2017, leaving a legacy of "really nice, bright colors" that mask profound human truths.

2017–Present | The Lone Sentry Era

- **Location:** The Storage Archive.
 - **Mission:** **Harmanna Kunst** works five days a week to document the life efforts of her husband, ensuring the "Boy in the Attic" is remembered by the world.
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The "Answers" to the Darkness: The Top 10 Selection

Hero Image Type	The War "Shadow" it Answers	Visual Goal for the Book
1. The Golden Attic	The claustrophobia of the "blackout."	A large, vibrant Attic Series piece with soaring yellow/gold rafters.
2. The "Scanning" Landscape	The fear of the open polders/patrols.	An intricate, "Where's Waldo" style piece where the detail is a joy, not a danger.
3. The Universal Soldier	The "young and hurt" on the school lawn.	A War Series mixed-media piece (gouache/ink) showing the shared humanity of soldiers.
4. The Infinite Circle	The "broken" world and hunger.	A bold, late-career Abstract Circle—representing wholeness and a full belly.
5. The Ilfort on Stage	The silence and the "Keep Quiet" rule.	A whimsical caricature on a theatrical stage—proving imagination cannot be silenced.
6. The Amazon/Greenery	The "gray" famine and no animals.	A lush, green Amazon Series painting—vibrant with the life that was missing in 1944.
7. The Sleeping Bag	The "Anonymous Orphan" tag.	A Sleeping Bag Series piece—giving a "home" and identity to the displaced.
8. The Ink Bridge Collage	The 5 years of physical separation.	A high-res photo of the Love Letters layered with a California sunset painting.
9. The Royal Geometric	The "loss of sovereignty" to Nazis.	The piece held by Queen Beatrix—proving the "Boy in the Attic" reclaimed his nation.
10. The Final Light	The lifelong fear of the dark.	His most vibrant, luminous final work—the ultimate victory over the Leeuwarden night.

How You Can Help: Preserving the Kunst Legacy

The "Boy in the Attic" has left behind a treasure trove that belongs to history. However, as the lone sentry of this massive collection, Harmanna Kunst needs your help to ensure these works are protected for the next century. Your support will go directly toward the professional preservation and global sharing of Johannes's life's work.

1. Professional Archiving & Storage

Dozens of Sketchbooks, hundreds of hand-written love letters, and a vast collection of art- require specialized archival-grade materials (acid-free folders, UV-protective sleeves, and climate-controlled environments) to prevent deterioration.

- **Goal:** Move the collection from standard storage into a permanent, museum-standard archive.

2. Digital Preservation

To share Johannes's story with the world, we must digitize his entire portfolio. This includes high-resolution scanning of his sketchbooks and the transcription of his "Ink Bridge" love letters for future publication and research.

3. Curating the Legacy Tour

We are seeking partners, museums, and cultural institutions in both the Netherlands and the United States to host exhibitions of the *Attic Series* and the *War Series*.

- **Goal:** Facilitate the donation of key pieces to permanent collections, such as the Royal Collections of the Netherlands

Act Now

- **Donate:** Contributions to the Johannes Kunst Legacy Fund support the purchase of archival supplies and the costs of digital cataloging.
- **Connect:** If you are a curator, archivist, or represent a cultural heritage organization, please reach out to help us find a permanent home for this collection.
- **Share:** Helping us spread this story ensures that Johannes's message of empathy reaches a new generation.

"Every page you turn helps us ensure the boy in the attic can finally rest."