

# de ploeg: history

In 1923, the architect and graphic designer Cees de Haas designed a revealing logo for the Cooperative Production and Consumers' Society 'De Ploeg', which had been established early that year in Bergeyk. In accordance with the wishes of the idealistic cooperative, he incorporated in his logo both a plough (Dutch: ploeg), 'which ploughs the world for the new seed that will rid it of militarism, alcoholism, exploitation, prisons, etc. in order to make room for freedom', and a rising sun, which symbolised 'the rise of socialism' in contrast to the 'musty curse' of capitalism.

Members of the cooperative ran both 'a retreat and sanatorium on vegetarian principles' and, in the same building, a weaving mill with eight old looms, a 'name machine' for weaving names into textiles and a dobby loom, acquired in 1922, for weaving towels with a pattern. Both initiatives went under in 1928, but the 'products and articles with the greatest possible practical value, while taking the simple demands of good taste into account' clearly appealed to so many kindred spirits that factories elsewhere were found to be willing to take over the production. This meant that the textile trade would continue to be a means of livelihood for De Ploeg.

One of De Ploeg's greatest successes in the period up until 1940 was the so-called Colora series: curtain fabrics that were woven with a cream-coloured warp, with the different colours of the weft determining the horizontal stripes. The later inclusion of other colours in the warp led to chequered fabrics as well, which were sold under the name Colora Carré. Around 1935, the entire Colora series comprised more than a hundred different designs.

In addition, the Dobby fabrics (named after the type of loom) were also a great success. These fabrics had irregular, diagonal cords dyed originally in bright colours like grass green, sky blue and sunflower yellow but later also in less vivid tints.

Only after the Second World War did De Ploeg start up a weaving mill of its own once again. Initially this was in the attic of an empty diamond-cutting factory on Zwanenburgwal in Amsterdam, but in September 1946, the 24 handlooms located there were moved to De Ploeg's birthplace, Bergeyk, where an old 'Hofnar' cigar factory had become available. Starting in 1950, the handlooms were slowly but surely replaced by mechanical ones, a process that reached completion in 1958, when an entirely new factory, designed by Gerrit Rietveld, was brought into use (see in this connection 'The History of the Factory').

In that period up through 1957, which also included a real boom in the development of printed fabrics in particular, it was designers like Trude Guermonprez-Jalowetz, Nico Daalder and Frits Wichard who set the tone for De Ploeg. Their work also began to appear more and more often in exhibitions in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Bouwcentrum in Rotterdam, among others, while they commanded international admiration at prestigious shows like the Triennale in Milan.

The post-war reconstruction of the Netherlands in the 50s and early 60s also brought a period of economic growth for De Ploeg. This was further stimulated by a more general acceptance of De Ploeg's originally revolutionary ideas about architecture and living spaces among an ever-growing segment of the population. In the same period, stimulated by the BKI (Bond for Art in Industry) among others, there was also considerable cross-pollination with other like-minded organisations such as Artifort, Gelderland and Pastoe. This joint endeavour in the public eye would lead to close collaborative efforts.

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In this period of growth that coincided with the opening of the new factory, there was a demand for a large number of new designs. In addition to Daalder and Wichard, mentioned above, numerous other designers were brought in, including Johan van Loon, Ulf Moritz, Hetty Coster and Tiny van Alphen. More and more use was made of freelancers as well. The need for more design capacity also arose because De Ploeg had brought not only interior fabrics to the market, but also a collection of fashion materials. This resulted in a second source of growth until the rise of the ready-to-wear industry in the early 1970s.

Starting in 1965, Wil Fruytier was responsible for the collection policy, which gave room to young talent like Joke van der Heyden, among others. After that, first Angelika Caviezel and later Peter Moorrees took over the creative direction until the 1990s. In the early '90s, a new course was charted. After an era of massive decline in the textile industry as a whole in the '80s, the time now seemed ripe to breathe new life into the ingredients from the rich and illustrious past with a renewed vision in order to guarantee continuity for De Ploeg. The key concepts in this regard were the tactility of the product, innovation in the areas of yarn, colours and design, working with interior concepts and international cooperation with renowned furniture brands. As a result of this approach, De Ploeg's innovative collections of curtain and upholstery fabrics continue to offer an added value for interior decoration that finds appreciation on an international level.