
Inventory Post-War Wall Art Amsterdam

In the last two years at the request of the City Council, Amsterdam monumental wall art from the post-war reconstruction period (1945-1975) was listed and evaluated.

The inventory was drawn up by art historian Yteke Spoelstra, in collaboration with Norman Vervat, Heritage Association Bond Heemschut. The Soundboard group consisted of Frans van Burkom, art historian, Simone Vermaat, Government service agency for Cultural Heritage, and Martijn Sandberg, artist.

On Thursday 6 December 2018, the Amsterdam city council organised a symposium around the inventory and the survey. A number of speakers at this symposium, including Martijn Sandberg, discussed post-war monumental wall art from different perspectives.

Nothing on the Wall? Nothing the Matter!

Martijn Sandberg delivered a lecture at the symposium, with the title: 'Nothing on the Wall? Nothing the Matter!'

In his plea for a Public Works Service - serving public art -, Martijn Sandberg spoke of the brick relief by Aart Roos on the Zeeburgerdijk, a Johan Haanstra façade artwork hidden from view, the Peter Struycken railings at De Nederlandsche Bank, the artworks in the Oostlijn metro stations and metro tubes, and a wall artwork by Hans Koetsier in Amsterdam North which has quietly vanished.

A Hans Koetsier Was Here

"In 1977, visual artist Hans Koetsier created a mural on the end façade of a block of flats in Amsterdam North - Amerbos. The capital letter "Y" can be made out within the cloud form figuration as a reference to the nearby IJ.

When I wanted to view the work on location for the first time last year, it turned out not to be there anymore; it had 'silently' disappeared from the flat's façade. Then I asked myself out loud: how is that possible? Why is it not there? Who, or what agency, is concerned about the artwork? 'A Hans Koetsier Was Here'.

Might it be an idea to realise Hans Koetsier's demolished artwork on the façade of the block of flats once more? A "Public Works Service" might also dedicate itself to the revival of lost wall art. 'Out of sight' does not necessarily have to mean 'for always'."

A brochure has been published on the inventory of post-war monumental wall art in Amsterdam, and was introduced at the symposium. The publication contains a textual contribution by a.o. Martijn Sandberg:

The Handwriting of Time

"Public artworks integrated in architecture are therefore not works of art on a pedestal. They really are part of the environment. You may walk past them countless times and then suddenly you discover something extraordinary about them. They are the city of Amsterdam's public secrets.

There was naturally a great deal of discussion in the sounding board group when assessing more than two hundred works of art. Take the brick relief by Aart Roos on the Zeeburgerdijk for instance. Initially this was not designated a 'top work'. But actually it is, precisely because he has used no paint but allowed light and the relief to do the work. Superb, isn't it?

We functioned as a sort of 'Public Works Service', guardians of the Muse. If you're going to renovate or alter something, then take the artwork into account; it is the handwriting of time. That is what contractors and owners must get into their heads. And we're managing to do that increasingly often.

Inspiring? Sure. As an artist I inevitably regard things from the viewpoint of the work I myself am doing. Consequently, you feel an affinity and you perceive quality and craftsmanship extra acutely, in that Aart Roos brick relief for instance. And furthermore you realise you're in a tradition, that you're literally and figuratively building on something. The artwork not as a pin-head or pimple on the architecture, but as a constitutional component of it."

Project: Post-war Wall Art Amsterdam

Inventory: Yteke Spoelstra, Norman Vervat

Sound board group: Frans van Burkom, Martijn Sandberg, Simone Vermaat

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See also, website Martijn Sandberg, 'blog':

Text: 'Demolition Ball and Battle of Waterloo', artworks metro Oostlijn, 29 June 2011

Text: 'Instead of 'DNB Must Not Be', railings Peter Struycken, 9 June 2015