

---

## Site-specific artwork Spaarndammerschoollocatie, Amsterdam

2016

Martijn Sandberg has designed an integrated artwork for the new building development at the Spaarndammer School location in the Spaarndammer district, Amsterdam. This artwork is an integral part of the building complex by Korth Tielens Architecten, Marcel Lok Architect MLA, and DS Landschapsarchitecten.

### Image language and location

Designing the site-specific art for the new Spaarndammer School location development has been an exciting and challenging task. For this concerns developing an artwork concept within an exceedingly special, inspiring and historic urban planning and architectural environment. It is at the heart of the Spaarndammer neighbourhood, a district famed for its Amsterdam School architecture and monumental art.

The aim is to develop an artwork in which image language, 'the expression of the image' is in a direct relationship to its material and the urban environment nearby.

The figuration covers both the walls and ceiling of three curved archways, a stunning optical spectacle. It is also integrated into the entire floor surface of the building complex's accessible public space.

This image language, present in brick relief upon the wall and the ceiling of the three archways, flows like a continuously repeating sequence into the paving of the Spaarndammer School location. From wall to floor, from floor to wall. From brick to stone, from stone to brick.

### A journey through time

A round trip through the Spaarndammer district, along the many Amsterdam School buildings, is like a journey through time. We enter a 'black and white' film at the Zaanhof and the Patrimonium. Before our very eyes, the characteristic 'red-brick neighbourhood' changes into grey tints here.

When one gazes at the undulating façades, in the Zaanstraat for example, then one sees the attention to brickwork and the skin of the architecture expressed through its materialisation. It is literally in the details. Brick predominates and can be considered the guiding principle (the 'Leitmotif') in Amsterdam School architecture.

The spirits of those who created the Amsterdam School - architects and craftsmen - still roam hand in hand through the streets of the neighbourhood. Awareness of or a reference to this historical context is now appropriate. And is obvious. Our task is to look, to look behind (but not imitate) and look ahead.

### A contribution in stone

Saying 'A' also means saying 'B'. Talking about the Amsterdam School entails talking about 'brick'. Brick, the 'pixel', a symbol of the Amsterdam School in particular and architecture in general, is the point of departure for materialising my site-specific artwork.

Everything I, as artist, touch turns to stone. Stone is the basic material for this artistic contribution, as an evocative ornament, incorporated into the stretching bond of the archways' brickwork and the paving stones of the pavement.

### Figuration and vision

The archways of the new Spaarndammerbuilding welcome the visitor, the residents and their neighbours. The archway allows access and invites one into the new Spaarndammerhof.

Just as the archway is the entrance, the brick paving motif begins under our feet, advancing to where it disappears and then returning in the opposite direction, backwards. Step for step, step after step, we tread the 'stone carpet' and we read letter before letter, letter after letter, back and forth in the paved track: 'The Old Path To The New Time, The New Path To The Old Time' ('De Oude Weg Naar De Nieuwe Tijd, De Nieuwe Weg Naar De Oude Tijd').

The brick motif in high relief spreads out like a 'never-ending loop' over the full length of the wall in the archway. The figuration on the wall within the archway follows the curve upwards and runs from one side to the other side of the archway, down to the wall situated opposite.

While walking through the archways over the paving 'The Old Path To The New Time, The New Path To The Old Time', a figuration appears before our eyes - as if in a vision.

In the constantly changing play of light and shadow, brick letters become visible upon the wall and the curved ceiling. It is a figuration deploying four letters and four numbers, in each archway with a different numerical combination, providing us with the entrance code for a journey through time: 'Anno 2020', 'Anno 1917', 'Anno 3025'.

### Archway and passageway

An archway is like a passageway, a transition from light to dark gradations of tone, and from dark to light. We look ahead in the archway, then we look back, in space and time.

The sequence of the words - 'anno' and the year - in the motif of the three archways, may be read in the reading order left to right, but also from right to left.

For it depends on how you see it and how you view it. An archway has two sides. The beginning of the archway is essentially equal to the end of the archway. Beginning is end, end is beginning.

#### Illusion and allusion

Looking, looking back and looking ahead. Past, present and future. The site-specific art in the three archways, which is open to many interpretations, appeals to our imagination. The brick figuration alludes to the wealth of symbolic implication attributed to the architectural phenomenon of an archway, by everyone and in every age.

Three gateways, in three separate ages, a trinity. The figuration within the left archway on the street side, '2020' the year of completion, actually makes us aware of the present. The second archway on the right-hand side with the date '3025', more than a thousand years in the future, challenges the imagination and makes tangible the distant future, the imaginary, this prospect.

And the third archway offers a view of the past. In the inner courtyard through the 'Anno 1917' archway, the well-known building 'Het Schip' may actually be seen, directly behind the Spaarndammer School location.

#### From date to house number

The artwork's initial figure design depicting the dates '1917', '2020' and '3025' in 'brick script' within the three archways, naturally resulted in a plan to apply this numerical design to the house numbers.

The house numbers are executed in concrete as a sculptural element on both opposing street façades of the complex and the inner courtyard. Thus there is also a direct reference to the design focus on the house number, which is typical of architectural façade at the time of the Amsterdam School.

'A condensing effect' arises, when the essentially 'unambiguous' house numbers are viewed in combination with the poetically layered 'ambiguity' of the dates '2020', '1917' and '3025'. The latter are an intrinsic part of the artwork 'content', and transcend the application of 'a number simply and solely as number'.

#### Unity in multiplicity

Brick figuration in the three archways, paving stones on the floor, and sculptural façade detail in house numbers - in the varied manifestations to each other, there is the intended 'unity in multiplicity'. A 'timeless' contribution in stone - combining yesterday, today and tomorrow, for always, of and for every age, in which the new is united with the old and - in retrospect - the old with the new, all in paved stretching bond.

A public artwork for the residents of the complex and their neighbours, for all the visitors and random passers-by, it is expected to be completed in 2020. Those who build for the future lay the first stone and tread 'The Old Path To The New Time, The New Path To The Old Time'.

#### Neighbourhood traces

The history and character of the neighbourhood is moulded by memory and experience - right up until the present day. Traces have been left on 'the old path to the new time, the new path to the old time'.

As an addition to the artwork, words and short sentences, offered by neighbourhood residents as inspiration, are incorporated at specific spots in the stretching bond floor figuration paving of 'The Old Path To The New Time, The New Path To The Old Time'. During the ensuing development of the site-specific artwork's definitive design for the Spaarndammer School location, this part of the floor figuration concept was filled in by the artist in participation with the neighbourhood.

Martijn Sandberg, Amsterdam