
Spaarndammerhart, Amsterdam

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Spaarndammerhart in Amsterdam honors tradition from the past and brings architecture, art and nature together / Carpet of paving bricks as part of architectural artwork by Martijn Sandberg

The early twentieth-century Spaarndammerbuurt consists of characteristic urban ensembles from the Amsterdam School period. The neighborhood is still largely intact, but has suffered scars here and there over time that are slowly being healed.

The residential complex on the site of the former Spaarndammerschool that Korthtielens architects designed in collaboration with Marcel Lok_Architect is an example of this. The new building is based on the richness of the Amsterdam school tradition in which architecture, art and nature go hand in hand.

The heart is the collective green courtyard, which is suitably accessible in the neighborhood through gates that connect to the informal routes in the neighborhood. There are communal gardens in which the existing large trees have been regrouped, so that there is a spacious green view for both the residents in the new building and the residents in the existing adjacent homes.

The project is in line with the progressive Rainproof policy of the municipality of Amsterdam. Green roofs collect rainwater and the public space is paved as little as possible. In the event of heat stress, the abundance of greenery and the robust facades provide cooling. The planting is geared to food supply for the expected urban animals such as small songbirds, bats and insects. Nesting boxes for small birds, swifts and bats are located in the upright eaves and facades.

De Oude Weg Naar De Nieuwe Tijd

Martijn Sandberg has created an integrated artwork for the gateways and the floor of the new building project 'Spaarndammerschoollocatie' in the Spaarndammer district, Amsterdam.

While walking through the archways over the paving 'De Oude Weg Naar De Nieuwe Tijd', 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 passageway with a different numerical combination, providing us with the entrance code for a journey through time: 'Anno 2020', 'Anno 1917', 'Anno 3025'.

Through the gates and into the courtyard, step by step, letter by letter we enter: 'The Old Path To The New Time, The New Path To The Old Time'.

The aim was 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 writing has been applied as a 'tattoo' directly into the skin of the architecture: in brick relief at the three gates, in a contrasting two-tone combination in the stonepavement of the gates and the courtyard and as house numbers in both facades on the street side and the courtyard.

The yellow Wasserstrich pavers and Septima Vanille as the dominant color provides the whole a fresh and clear look, while the dark gray Septima Titan creates contrast and shapes the graphic aspect.

Martijn Sandberg: "'You'll never walk alone', that's the feeling I get in the Spaarndammerbuurt. A walk along the Amsterdam School architecture is like a journey through time. Walking through and thinking about the neighborhood I came up with my first idea in 2016 - and these are often the best - for this project: a text as a brick relief in the masonry of the gates and laid with clinker bricks in the floor.

Nearby are many underpasses, I see them as a transgression, a portal from one to the other. In these gates I wanted to let bricks - the 'pixel' of this special architectural style - speak, in a sentence that can be read from left to right and from right to left. And which, just like a gate, has no beginning or end, because it depends on which side of the gate you stand.

The design has three ports. In every gate I have captured the time with the word 'anno'. What happens if you write 'anno 1917' on a new building?, I wondered. Or '3025'? A year so far in the future causes a clash of the imagination, while '2020' generates an awareness of the present.

The construction of the Spaarndammerhart project took two years. The masonry of the three gates and the laying of the clinkers in the floor was quite a process. Even during construction, the neighborhood already came to take a look. I did that myself regularly to check the performance. The postman also came to have a look, even when there were no residents who received mail yet. I heard him mutter to himself, "This is it, it fits right in with this neighborhood." Thus the work began to live even before its completion."

Neighbourhood traces

Martijn Sandberg: "On the floor of the courtyard garden, six sentences have been incorporated into the design, which were created in consultation with local residents. They were able to provide sentences that they would like to see in the work. Some did real literature research for this, others wrote poems .

Three women represented these voices from the neighborhood during the three sessions we organized in Het Schip. The three Graces I called them: those who gave breath and inspiration to art.

During the meetings I talked about the plan and presented them with the design drawings, they responded with suggestions from the neighborhood and themes that were considered important. The premise was: a maximum of 30 characters, including spaces. And I didn't want incomplete sentences, the statements had to fit in both the figurative and the literal sense.

Step by step sentences appeared, the letters became vowels. During this process, the contributions from the neighbourhood kept coming in. The meetings were very interesting. The residents realized that it was not just something, it almost felt like some kind of madness to which I invited them.

After much deliberation, fitting and measuring, I opted for the final sentences. Not only do I find these sentences very beautiful or special, but they can also stand the test of time. Each sentence should be ambiguous and show something different when rereading.

Once incorporated in the floor of the interior courtyard, the whole becomes a journey of discovery. So in the final figuration literally traces from the neighborhood have been incorporated, originating from the mouths of the local residents or in a word such as 'workers' palaces', originating from the Amsterdam School jargon.

Ultimately, the people who walk over it and talk about it are the people who make the work. With the figuration in the gates and the text on the floor I give the chorus, you make the couplets yourself. That is what is now encapsulated in vowels. That is the contribution set in stone."

Article: Tapijt van straatbakstenen als onderdeel van architecturaal kunstwerk van Martijn Sandberg

Website: Brickworks Van de Moortel

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