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Stand Well Back To Appreciate. Murals in Rotterdam

One of the most intriguing of murals is *La América Tropical* (1932), painted in Olvera Street, Los Angeles, by the famous Mexican artist and political activist David Alfaro Siqueiros. The work emerged from obscurity in the 1970s when the layer of whitewash which had long covered it started flaking off. When Siqueiros first unveiled the work back in the 1930s, the comfortable property owners of the neighbourhood stood aghast. They had expected the painter to deliver a sleepy Mexican village scene. Instead, the mural depicted what was clearly a Meso-American native, crucified, with an American Eagle perched above his head. The background was formed by a Mayan pyramid partly engulfed in vegetation, and two armed peasants taking aim at the emblem of their imperialist oppressor, the United States. Within days of completion a large part of the mural was whitewashed over, and within a year it was completely hidden. Since 1988, the work has been under the protection of the Getty Foundation, who earmarked millions of dollars for its restoration. The restored mural is scheduled for completion in 2009.

It is inconceivable that such a politically explicit work could appear uncensored in the public space today. But mural painting has attained that superlative of salon respectability - it's *museumfähig*. While *La América Tropical* has undeniable artistic value, its quality is primarily measured against the criteria of historical importance and its cultural significance to the Latino population of the USA. Indeed, the Chicanos of Los Angeles have adopted it as their monument. As a historical phenomenon, murals lack a clear-cut relation to the wider practice of art in the public space. Murals have sometimes ventured into the domain of fine art, but more often than not they have ignored the artistic discourse or have taken a conscious stance against art history.

Most murals have been a product of community art, as was *La América Tropical*. The main dividing line between conventional fine art and community art, Malcolm Miles writes in *Art, Space and the City* (1997), lies in the artist's role. The community artist addresses specific groups within society, and ascribes more importance to the development of political consciousness and to communal imagery than to artistic quality(1). Collaborating with other artists, allowing non-artists to participate in realizing the work, and creating an image that invites social recognition and identification, are considered to be the hallmarks of community art. Since aesthetics and the intrinsic quality of the work are subordinate to other imperatives, the practice of community art has a problematic relation to the general artistic discourse.

The underlying tension was analysed in a book by Suzanne Lacy. Her study *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art* (1995), already a classic, explored the no-man's land between conventional art in the public space and community art.(2) Her "new genre" has since been extended to include a variety of artistic practices, such as society-oriented and process-oriented art, anonymous works of art,

collectively produced works and collective projects. These practices involve, almost without exception, a close-knit relation between the artist and a specific social group - specific, in the sense of having common socioeconomic interests or a particular ethnic background. Instances of such groups that spring to mind in the Rotterdam context are the residents of the Nieuw-Crooswijk restructuring scheme, loitering youths in the Zuidplein shopping centre, ethnic Turkish women's groups in a Delfshaven neighbourhood centre, and the players and supporters of the Surinami-Hindustani football club Jai Hind.

Quite a few Rotterdam artists such as Jeanne van Heeswijk, Wapke Feenstra and Hieke Pars have made a speciality of this genre. Their quality criteria are not in the first instance the same as those of fine art. Aspects such as the potential to spark social protest, the degree of public participation, the effect of the work on art education and its capacity to impart meaning and identity to specific social or ethnic groups, also play a role in evaluating the work.

The thought-provoking studies published by Miles and by Lacy treat mural painting as the primary form in which community art and the "new genre of public art" are expressed. It is precisely in murals that aspects such as public participation, a focus on process, art education and the collective production of works of art come to the fore. In an era when art is putting new emphasis on participation and education,⁽³⁾ it makes sense to take a fresh look at the public mural. Besides, an exploration of this kind is desirable from the viewpoint of fine art and local art history.

It is remarkable that no standard work exists on the history and development of murals in the Netherlands. Murals, especially in Rotterdam, have been a lively and characteristic feature of the street scene since about 1970. The paintings have added colour and excitement to a cityscape in which greyness, brownness and uniformity have been the dominant visual cues. "I want to add some colour to the boring architecture of Rotterdam," the artist and muralist Cor Kraat once said. This wish was endorsed in 1977 when the Rotterdamse Kunststichting (the Rotterdam Art Foundation or RKS), the leading patron for public murals, won the Sikkens Prize in recognition of its success in promoting colour in the public domain.

Murals have been a welcome source of employment for artists, and at the same time they have offered many Rotterdam citizens a low-threshold introduction to visual art. Three outlooks have been prominent in mural art in Rotterdam since 1970 and have continued to exist alongside one another. Firstly, there has been a classic, strongly sociological approach in which the mural is intended to address the social and political problems of a given neighbourhood or community sector. Secondly, there has been a moderate version of community art, in which local residents can participate in the artistic process and influence the basic design of the mural. Finally, fine art has figured in the public domain: in this case, the artist works autonomously, rejecting outside participation in either the design or its execution.

Mural art in Rotterdam is not rooted in *Muralismo*, for which the mural is seen as a weapon in the arsenal of political agitation and propaganda (as exemplified by *La América Tropical*). That is not to deny that a politically-inspired group of muralists, led by Chilean exiles and left-wing artists, developed in Rotterdam. But the starting shot for the mural art movement came from RKS. It was the fine arts that took the

initiative in 1970, bolstered by a new city policy towards promoting art education and public participation, and giving art a presence at a local or neighbourhood level. The ivory-tower situation into which fine art had manoeuvred itself was attracting increasing criticism. Public mural art offered a way of counteracting the isolation of artists and bringing them into contact with society. It was not just the public who needed re-education, but the artist.

Walls were of course a readily available support for painting long before 1970. Commercial sign painting had become an increasingly common occupation since about 1900 and was conducted by studios of varying sizes. The pressure of competition and the desire to improve the quality of output stimulated the sign painting studios to escalate their level of artistic skill. Some of the famous Rotterdam advertising agencies such as Atelier Engelman and Atelier Leo Mineur sent their employees to study at art school, and sometimes employed fine artists as freelancers when particularly professional work was required. Sign painting still provided a fallback for artists in times of need until the 1960s. The high point of this commercial genre of mural art must have been the hand-painted film publicity posters, which in their day formed the most colourful and stirring ingredient of the city scene.

The objective of this book is a first attempt at inventoring the public mural art of Rotterdam, and this introduction presents a preliminary exploration of the subject. It will be useful to draw some borderlines that delimit what we mean by mural art. The main scope of this book is that of commissioned, hand-painted works of art in the public domain - preferably those that are visible from the street or from a school playground. The commissioning aspect implies that the mural has an officially sanctioned presence in the public space, as opposed for example to ordinary graffiti which may be classed as vandalism. This does not mean there is no cross-fertilization between these two domains: commissioned graffiti art is here considered as falling within the scope of the book. The patrons who commission the murals are either organizations in the cultural sector (such as the RKS and the Centrum Beeldende Kunst or CBK), or are concerned with managing public space (such as housing corporations, schools, neighbourhood centres and residents' organizations). In practically every case, the commissioned artist, who may be amateur or professional, is paid a fee for creating the mural.

The history of graffiti, tags and other illicit forms of wall painting in Rotterdam has recently been set down in words and pictures by Rens Muis and Wessel Wessels in their book *Graffiti in Rotterdam* (2007).⁽⁴⁾ The existence of their survey relieves me from any obligation to explore that particular domain, although there will be frequent crossovers between that book and this. The section on "Lijnbaan Youths" below inevitably treads the border territory between art and graffiti.

The above definition says nothing about how the commissioned murals are made. A mural can be painted directly onto a bare wall, but alternatively it can be on an area of wall prepared specifically for the purpose. In the 1990s, old *reclamelijsten* or wall frames were reused for murals; these are plastered areas of wall surface enclosed by ornamental mouldings, which were formerly used for displaying hand painted advertising signs. Finally, an artist may prepare a mural in the studio and paint it on wooden or aluminium panels, which are then affixed to the intended wall. Besides these support types, the repertoire includes more sporadic or mixed forms of

execution, such as paintings on the ground, painted trams and paintings on street furniture. A mural is not necessarily executed by the artist in person: the artist may entrust execution of the design to an advertising agency, to children, to local residents or the artist's own assistants.

Terms like community art and Muralismo imply a degree of globalization. We must not ignore the phenomenon of public murals in an international context. Rotterdam's hand painted film advertisements could be seen as a way of importing the outside world into the city - the romance and glitter of Hollywood and the thrills and violence of Westerns, cops and robbers. The Rotterdam works of the Chilean muralist brigades depicted not only the Red Flag of World Socialism but also expressed the solidarity of Rotterdam's citizens with the people of their home country. The murals painted under the *Townpainting* project in the 1970s bore connections to the community art of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. The mural in the Lijnbaan painted by Lee Quinones in 1982 was the first European example of New York graffiti art. The murals of contemporary Rotterdam collectives such as Urban Arts and Cariffiti have visual links to the subculture of hip-hop and to the Caribbean. Like fine art, mural painting thus has an international dimension. A study of mural art is thus warranted by the light it could shed on globalization, migration and demographic trends in Rotterdam.

The main part of this introduction consists of five sections each devoted to a characteristic episode in the history of public mural painting in Rotterdam. These episodes are the film-poster artists or "cinema painters" (1919-1979), the Chilean muralist brigades (1974-1980), *Townpainting* (1972-1982), the Lijnbaan Youths (1982-1998) and the most recent developments in Rotterdam mural art (1992-2007). The period since 1970 receives the greater emphasis, but earlier examples will also be considered. The individual sections may well be inhomogeneous, but together they present some insight into the twists and turns in the history of mural painting, against the background of local and international developments.

The book does not pretend to be an exhaustive inventory. Rather, it resembles an exhibition catalogue in which some selection has been performed on the available material. The choices are based in the first place on the protagonists of mural painting in Rotterdam. Some artists inevitably played a more prominent role in developing the genre than others, and some programmes have had more influence than individual murals, intriguing though the latter may be. Some works merit special attention as high points of mural painting in Rotterdam. These include murals by notable artists, such as Karel Appel, Co Westerik, Lawrence Weiner, Mathieu Ficheroux and Lydia Schouten, and prominent works such as the "Chilean Tower", "The Lee Piece", the "Hatbox" by Kunst & Vaarwerk and Martin Lodewijk's painted tram. These names are generally popular labels given to the works rather than formal titles.

The Cinema Painters (1919-1979)

Leo Mineur was not well-known as an artist, but, according to certain accounts, he was "a great Rotterdam artiste".⁽⁵⁾ His fashionable clothes and knowledge of the Paris art scene went along with a fascination for the French Impressionists. It is clear

that a love of fine art penetrated deep into the dark, dusty studios of the advertising industry in the early years of the twentieth century. Mineur's friendship with the prominent Rotterdam artist Dolf Henkes added unmistakable cachet to his "artistic" image. Contemporaries described him as living in a kind of artistic haze not unlike "a priest trailing a cloud of incense". He was an expert decorator of tiles, and gained local renown for the tile tableaux he made for the De Gruyter grocery shops; these large tiled images were cemented to the walls above the counters. But Mineur had higher ambitions and, in 1919, he offered his services to Hendrik Engelman whose Atelier Engelman had been among the Netherlands' leading advertising agencies since 1900. In its heyday, Engelman's studio premises were located between Pompenburgsingel and Noordmolenwerf in Rotterdam, close to the later site of the Grand Theatre, the splendidly exuberant cinema built by Tuschinski.

"Promotion? Come to Engelman!" was the agency's own marketing slogan. Engelman was the first Rotterdam entrepreneur to prove that a well-organized advertising business could be combined with high artistic quality. He employed several offbeat artists, such as Jan Korpershoek, "a party animal whom the boss could never rely on, for you could never be sure whether he would turn up again after the lunch break. But when he was there he painted incredibly beautiful artwork." Engelman himself had studied at art school. He taught newcomers the craft in house, but also required them to follow evening classes. It was his son Jo who remodelled the company to modern standards.(6) He learned the basics from his father, and would start work painting at five in the morning, and then go to evening art school classes to refine his skills. Engelman's advertising artwork appeared all over the Netherlands. The studio had commissions for facade billboards from leading chain stores - De Bijenkorf, Vroom & Dreesmann and C&A - as well as from countless smaller enterprises in Rotterdam. Engelman made his biggest mark, however, in hand-painted film posters for cinemas. The audience for cinema films expanded rapidly after 1920, and the demand for effective film advertising grew accordingly. The posters were initially displayed on mobile billboards mounted on handcarts. Later they were mounted on fixed billboards above cinema entrances. During the twenties and thirties, Atelier Engelman produced as many as thirty film posters weekly. Rotterdam was impressed by this productivity: "For God and Engelman, anything is possible" became a local saying (*engel* being Dutch for angel).(7)

The hand painted film scenes should not be dismissed as mere advertisements. They formed, as it were, the missing link between advertising and art. Their colourful scenes appealed to a longing for entertainment, fantasy, romance and adventure, and moreover hinted at the wider world beyond the city in a time when Rotterdam's cosmopolitan ambitions were growing. The poster painters often used frames from the celluloid films in their work. A retired cinema doorman at the Asta cinema recalled how that happened. "I used to get scraps of film from the projectionists. They would snip off small pieces for the fellows who painted those big posters. The poster artists would blow up a frame onto a big panel and trace the outlines of the cowboy or whatever."(8) With the aid of this technique, the cinema paintings became more and more realistic. The painters were often keen to test the limits of acceptability: sensual women and scenes of violence formed popular subjects and naturally went down well with the potential audience. But not every cinema owner was keen on such tasteless imagery, and the film approval board intervened increasingly often. At a certain point it became compulsory to submit

poster designs to the film censor, a Rotterdam municipal official who held a weekly open office at the city hall. The censor would not hesitate to amend a design by taking his eraser to an injudiciously low décolletage.(9)

Leo Mineur was one of the driving forces behind the increasingly uninhibited imagery - or declining standards of decency, as some would have it. His designs combined thinly veiled sex and violence with an idiosyncratic painterly style. This led to a clash with the well-mannered cinema-owner Tuschinski. Engelman, afraid of losing a good customer, was furious with Mineur and gave him a dressing-down. Mineur made a last attempt to convince his employer of "his artistic quality and the need for today's special effects" but his pleas fell on deaf ears. So he handed in his resignation.

Thus was born Atelier Leo Mineur. It was in 1925, and the studio got off to a slow start. Initially located in 't Hang and then in Kievitstraat, Mineur's business struggled to survive. Besides, Mineur had little talent for marketing - the bigger the client, the more nervous he became. He would swallow aspirin by the bottleful in an effort to suppress his nerves, but this made him so drowsy he could no longer remember what the client had requested of him. Eventually he was approached by a former fishmonger who now ran a rather seedy, third-rate cinema called Centraal Theatre. Mineur's business then picked up, and his studio prospered until it was completely destroyed in the Rotterdam Blitz of 14 May 1940. He had in any case been feeling increasingly keen competition from a new generation of cinema painters who arose during the 1930s, for example Ab Schrijver who supplied creditable work mainly to the Luxor cinema. Unlike Mineur, Schrijver documented his work thoroughly: the city archives possesses two splendid albums of his photographs.

Most of Rotterdam's cinemas were destroyed in the huge conflagration set off by the blitz: Thalia, City, Asta, the Oostertheater, Tivoli, Lumière, Cineac, Olympia, Centraal, the Grand Theatre and Scala all succumbed, although Arena, Capitol and the German-owned UFA Theater were spared. After the war, however, the construction of new cinemas generated a surge in work for the advertising sector. The reputation of Atelier Leo Mineur revived, while Atelier Engelman became a mere echo of its former self. In the fifties, Mineur painted posters for Arena, Passage, Thalia, Rex, the Prinses Theater, Cineac A.D., Cineac NRC and Colosseum. The city's major exhibition *E55 (Energy 1955)* also yielded ample work for his firm.

The company is still active today in the advertising sector, and has also executed many mural paintings on behalf of non-commercial artists since the 1970s. Atelier Leo Mineur is reputed with the most extensive knowledge of mural painting of anyone in the Netherlands. The firm's considerable technical knowledge about wall surfaces, primers, weathering, paints and colour, and the artistic level of their execution, have persuaded many artists to opt for this company to execute their murals.

Cinema painting found its definitive form in the post-war period.(10) The painters generally used three types of brush: the *lionder* (a wide, long-bristled hogs hair brush for blocking in larger areas of colour), the *centimeterpenseel* (a narrower brush suitable for detailed work e.g. on faces and for lettering) and the *lakschrijver* (a fine-pointed brush for retouching lettering and ornamentation). For paintings

exposed to outdoor conditions, colophony was an important ingredient of the paint medium. The paints were made using powdered pigments: “white, black, lemon yellow, chrome yellow, vermillion, dark red, azure blue, cobalt blue, chalk blue, middle green, billiard-table green”. The billboards consisted of linen canvas stretched on wooden frameworks. The canvas could be reused for new paintings as often as six times. No wonder so little remains of this heritage (a single surviving work still decorates the office of Atelier Leo Mineur).

A good cinema painting took three days to paint. Besides artistic skill, the painter was required to have a good head for heights and a fondness for climbing. “A firm who had on its books people with these unusual capacities combined with quick working and artistic ability, obviously had an advantage over its competitors.”(11) Examples of such workers included Leo and Henk van den Berg. The brothers indeed shared a fondness for climbing, and had no fear of conducting breakneck manoeuvres at considerable heights. Leo Mineur commissioned them to paint a gigantic work on the Euromast, a piece by Lawrence Weiner called *As Long As It Lasts*. It was part of an exhibition of the same title in the Witte de With gallery in which a number of prominent international artists addressed the relations between painting and architecture. Weiner’s vertical line of painted lettering extended over the height of the mast, over 90 metres, and may be considered one of the most interesting mural art achievements in Rotterdam. It is a great shame that this work was not preserved for the city. Writing in *NRC Handelsblad*, Bas Roodnat reported, “Each letter was six metres tall. It had been agreed that the work would be removed without trace after the exhibition. So normal painting was out of the question. After much experimentation and ingenuity, it was discovered that three coats of anti-graffiti paint could be used as a ground. The coating is a potato flour derivate which dissolves at a temperature of seventy degrees and can be washed off with a high-pressure spray. The lettering could be applied to this ground using thin latex wall paint. The brothers guaranteed that the lettering would hold out against the weather for three months. [...] For Leo and Henk van den Berg, the background knowledge and technical skills needed for this have become part of their artistic professionalism. But they fear that in the long run the characterless mega-possibilities of photographic methods will oust the old handwork, as has already happened to those lovely hand-painted film posters”.(12)

Leo Mineur produced a whole generation of “forgotten” artists, among them Albert Wayers, Joost Visser, Nico Straatman, Kees Sparreboom and Willem Kerssemeijer. Sparreboom left secondary school to work as a trainee at Studio Marten Toonder, but moved to Atelier Leo Mineur under pressure from his parents: “Painting didn’t earn a lot of money. You did it out of love - for free expression and spontaneous form. It still hurts that nothing is left over of our work. Looking back, what we made was art.”(13)

Fine art was the benchmark, but other rules often applied in the workplace. Willem Kerssemeijer, from the Leo Mineur stable, recalls that his in-house training advocated a memorable criterion of quality: “Far from beautiful, but beautiful from afar.”(14) You had to step well back to appreciate the work. Mural art was a question of scale, suggestion and illusion.

The sign painter’s craft was indeed poorly paid. Sparreboom earned only fifteen guilders (now equivalent to about seven euros) a week in the 1950s. “Uncle

Leo was a tightwad, and he thought coffee was a waste of money. You had to work standing up just to stay awake. And if you wanted to light the heater, you'd have to go outside to beg someone for a match.”(15) The cinema painter returned to his old love after working for Atelier Leo Mineur, and is today a strip cartoon artist. Under the imprint of Fort Media Uitgeverij, Sparreboom publishes his own thrillers in covers that recall the cinema paintings of old. He is the only former employee of Atelier Leo Mineur who has put his memoirs of the firm into writing, and has published them himself. His autobiographical reminiscences in *Atelier Leo Mineur. Rotterdamse bioscoopschilders in de jaren '50* (Rotterdam Cinema Painters in the 1950s, 2002) are in strip cartoon form. This strip book gives a unique insight into the practice of the cinema sign painter. The last hand painted film poster in Rotterdam was made for John Carpenter's classic *Escape From New York* (1979) which starred Kurt Russel as the solitary cult antihero Snake Plissken.(16)

In June 2003, Atelier Leo Mineur went into liquidation. The firm had demoted mural painting to a secondary activity and found a new, lucrative market in building stands for trade exhibitions. But this segment collapsed after the events of 9 September 2001. The studio was unprepared for this turn of events and applied for bankruptcy. The employed painters watched the firm's decline with dismay. After discussions that went deep into the night (“dominated by ten percent reason and ninety percent emotion”), Willem Kerssemeijer and Michelle Geurts purchased the firm's goodwill and resumed activities as an advertising studio, Reclame Atelier Leo Mineur. They made a hesitant start in a lock-up in the nearby town of Schiedam, but within four years they were in a position to rent large industrial premises in Berkel en Rodenrijs.(17) The firm is now making mural paintings again on commission of (among others) the CBK. Examples are a work by Lydia Schouten on the corner of Witte de Withstraat and Eendrachtstraat and a painting by Arthur van de Pols on Schiedamsesingel. The Rotterdam zoo Diergaarde Blijdorp also numbers among their clients.

The borderlines between commercial painters and fine artists were not all that rigid until the 1970s. Practitioners of both professions usually trained at the art academies, and opportunities to earn a living as a non-commercial artist were limited.(18) It was not uncommon to combine the two forms of practice in the fifties and sixties. After the Second World War, the Rotterdam art academy opened a publicity department which offered training in skills such as stage design and commercial art. This speciality had a distinctly lower status within the domain of visual art compared to “drawing and painting”, but an applied art training was not necessarily an impediment to success as a professional artist. Some renowned Rotterdam artists, among them Willem de Kooning, Mathieu Ficheroux, Klaas Gubbels, Daan van Golden and Toni Burgering, also worked in the commercial sector. De Kooning supplied work to the Rotterdam decorative studio of the Gidding Brothers when he was only twelve. Ficheroux studied publicity before dedicating himself entirely to fine art. Gubbels learned commercial art at technical school. Van Golden was a window-dresser for De Bijenkorf for a period, and Burgering did similar work for Vroom & Dreesmann. Burgering also painted billboard posters for cinemas.

The Chilean Brigades (1974-1980)

“This isn’t art,” Raul Schneider declared in Rotterdam in the mid seventies, indicating a Chilean mural, “it’s graffiti!”(19) Schneider was a member of Brigada Murales Unidad Venceremos, a group of Chilean artists who painted socio-politically committed murals and who fled to Europe after the Pinochet coup and the assassination of left-wing president Salvador Allende (1973). Rotterdam was one of the main destinations of the Chilean refugee muralists. Besides the Venceremos group, the Brigada Murales Luis Corvalan was active from a Rotterdam base.(20) The latter was responsible for the most monumental piece of work produced by the brigades: a painting on a 10 metre tall tower by André Volten, originally located on the station forecourt and later moved to Weena. In the late nineties, the City of Rotterdam demolished the Chilean Tower, as it came to be known, and put it into storage. The tower clashed with urban renewal plans for the Weena area. This informal Chilean work had developed over the years into an alternative but authentic monument, with an international status on a par with Ossip Zadkine’s *Destroyed City*. The tower was significant mainly to Chilean exiles in Europe, but later it became popular among young people and found a place in the subculture of popular music and graffiti art.(21) It has figured in several foreign documentaries. In *1991: The Year Punk Broke*, a portrait of the American groups Sonic Youth and Nirvana, the director Dave Markey chose the Chilean Tower as a backdrop for his scenes in Rotterdam. In 2006, however, a Chilean TV crew was disappointed not to be able to find the well-known work of art when they arrived in Rotterdam. The tower was an essential ingredient in a documentary on Chilean exiles in Rotterdam and their continuing involvement in contemporary politics in Chile. Destruction of the tower robbed Rotterdam of its first intercultural monument.

Why did Schneider dismiss the work of the brigades as a prima facie work of art? In his intriguing book on New York graffiti art, *Aerosol Kingdom* (2002), Ivor Miller mentions the murals and graffiti pieces in the same breath as Argentinean tango, Brazilian samba and Cuban son. “In the same way that [these urban forms] have become global phenomena, played and enjoyed by people of all nations, aerosol art has come to be practised today by urban youth around the world”.(22) The history of modern mural art is strongly intertwined with the history of the Latin American cultural diaspora. Claes Oldenburg described the phenomenon of mural painting as it reached the United States as being “like a big bouquet from Latin America”.(23)

Mexican and Spanish revolutionaries turned eagerly to murals in the early twentieth century, making the wall a primary medium through which the artist could express his solidarity with the general public. More than any other medium, murals corresponded to the public domain and public opinion. The wall was the mass medium of the people; mural art was politics. Unless the artist dedicates the magic of his paintbrush to the struggle against exploitation and repression, he can never be a great artist, the Mexican muralist and revolutionary Diego Rivera argued.(24) Rivera gained wide recognition from the 1920s onwards for his politically hard-hitting murals in Mexico and the United States (quite apart from his fame as the spouse of Frida Kahlo). Besides stressing the social relevance of his art, he saw his mural work as a provocative snub to art history.

Well into the twentieth century, slogans and images daubed on walls remained the main way for politically invisible social movements to announce their existence in

the public domain. Their wall markings were evidence of their physical presence, and celebrated historical events, movements and figures, thereby forming an autobiographical record of minorities and movements disregarded by official history. Pictures from the Mexican and Spanish Revolutions show how mural art was inseparable from political agitation. Decorative paintings, revolutionary slogans and political propaganda alternated in a vibrant, colourful spectacle. The murals formed the backdrop to a bitter life-and-death struggle. Muralismo arose in Mexico around 1910, and formed part of the revolutionary education of the oppressed population. The wall became a theatre and backdrop for images of the class struggle, and its inspiring leaders and martyrs were portrayed as heroes.(25) People did not refer to this work as mural art, but as the muralist movement. The revolution in Barcelona (1936-1939) - a local up-rising against the monarchist forces of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War - similarly resulted in a near-total collectivization of the private sector. The extent to which the public domain expanded at the expense of the private was unprecedented. Artists played a prominent role in marking the newly won territory. The union of draughtsmen and painters, for example, established numerous *brigadas* who set about painting the newly collectivized buildings, trains and buses.(26) "The city belongs to the people," the artists proclaimed.

The later "graffiti crews", whose pieces lacked any of the social realism of the older mural paintings, introduced new techniques and new themes that were often taken from comics. It was not only the nocturnal, illicit character of their activities that indicated a descent from the Latin-American muralists; their predilection for decorating trains, their youthful age and their strict division of labour similarly seemed inherited from the brigades. The graffiti crews, like the brigades, included line artists (*tracadores*), colourers (*rellenadores*) and background fillers (*fonceadores*).(27) In this light, Raul Schneider's remark in Rotterdam becomes more understandable.

The first large, colourful murals in Rotterdam were a direct outcome of globalization. Chilean artists took up their brushes again in their land of exile, and organized themselves into brigades once more. Mural painting had been introduced into Chile in the 1940s by the Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros, painter of *La América Tropical*. He had previously offered his services to the Spanish Revolution, and after 1939 returned to South America and made his way to Chile. By the early 1970s, Chile already numbered hundreds of muralist brigades. Most of the brigades were allied to a specific political party, movement or union. An exception was the Luis Corvolan Brigada, later also active in Rotterdam, which was considered politically heterogenous. As stated, the brigades remained active in European exile, creating murals first in Paris in 1974 and shortly afterwards in Rotterdam.

This was, however, anything but a spontaneous reaction.(28) André van der Louw, the Mayor of Rotterdam (1974-1981), was chiefly responsible for revival of the brigades in his city. With his background in the popular culture of his time (he had edited the underground pop music magazine *Hitweek*) and even more with his New-Left political outlook (he fought his way to the chairmanship of the Dutch Labour Party PvdA), he was understandably interested in the Chilean artists. A personal episode added to his sympathy for the exiles. On a visit to Chile, the socialist Van der Louw had been arrested, held in a police station for some while and then released, an incident which only exacerbated his disgust with the Pinochet regime. As Mayor of Rotterdam, he initiated the Salvador Allende Centrum, a cultural centre run for and by

Chilean exiles, in 1977. A number of Rotterdam artists had moreover met their Chilean counterparts at the Venice Biennale in 1974. Their personal intervention with the RKS resulted in the Chileans being invited to Rotterdam. The City instructed the RKS to hold a Chile festival, *Por la Solidaridad Antifascista*, in 1975. The brigades of Luis Corvalan and Venceremos were commissioned to paint a number of murals in Rotterdam. This marked a revival of mural painting in Rotterdam. A newly established programme called *Townpainting* enabled the RKS to fund artistic activities such as those of the brigades. The aim of the program was to spread visual art at a suburban and neighbourhood level, while simultaneously offering a left-wing counterweight to conventional fine art, which was widely considered too elitist. Some fifty murals were completed under the *Townpainting* programme in a period of ten years. Besides spontaneous and in some cases illicit murals, the Venceremos and Luis Corvalan brigades fulfilled a number of commissions - paintings on Stationsplein (the Chilean Tower), on the corner of Westkruiskade and Sint Mariastraat, in Coolhavenstraat, on the columns of the Zuidplein metro station and in Boezemsingel. Of these murals, only the paintings on the metro station columns are still visible.

The political activism the Chileans embodied in their work found admirers among the socially committed artists of Rotterdam such as Will Rockx, Joop van Meel and Hans Abelman. They too mobilized residents of the run-down inner suburbs, using art to promote critical consciousness and to stimulate discussion on the social realities. Abelman opposed the expenditure of public funds on commissions for murals motivated by purely aesthetic ideas. In his view, an impoverished neighbourhood had no need of jollyng-up. "It's scandalous when art serves as a mere distraction from what I believe is lacking in society," he said in an interview.⁽²⁹⁾ He painted murals in Rotterdam with themes not unlike those of the Chilean muralists, addressing issues such as severe income disparity and power asymmetry. Comments like that quoted above place Abelman firmly in the tradition of the muralists. Assisted by local children, he painted a large mural on the clubhouse in Rubroekstraat, Crooswijk - a work which recently received new attention in the art journal *Metropolis M* (5, 2003) under the heading of "strategic painting". Abelman's work was saturated with political thinking. Rockx and Van Meel took similar standpoints. Rockx hoped his paintings would shake people awake, but abjured imposing his own views on the public. Van Meel's main focus was on community experiences: "Perhaps people who barely know one another but live close together will at last make acquaintance, will get into conversation and maybe do something together."⁽³⁰⁾

These artistic activists not only contributed to the integration of the Chilean artists into the Rotterdam art community, but exchanged techniques, for example the use of stencils, a method subsequently often used for painting murals. The work of Jorge "Kata" Nuñez and Julio Moréno Robles proved to have a lasting influence on Rotterdam mural art. Their works still adorn the street scene of Rotterdam. In 1995, Moréno Robles painted two splendid portraits in Coolhavenstraat, at precisely the location where the Brigada Venceremos had painted a classic Chilean mural twenty years earlier. The impassioned use of colours and the light touch with which social and ecological themes are incorporated in the post-Chilean image is still evident today in the work of the Cariffiti collective. "Looking back, we introduced a multicultural dimension into Rotterdam art", the poet and artist Juan Heinsohn Huala said. He is currently a co-organizer of the *Dunya Festival* and was formerly active in

the Salvador Allende Centrum. "But we could have been much more open to other cultures in Rotterdam. Maybe we were too focussed on Chile."(31)

This was a view shared by Kata Nuñez. He arrived in Rotterdam in 1977. An activist, he too fled the Pinochet regime and assumed that he could put his paintbrush away for good in his home of exile. "Back in Chile, I painted in the Brigada Murales Ramona Parra (named after an activist murdered in 1946). As I escaped, I dreamed of getting a factory job in Holland, something that would put some money in my pocket and give me a life without repression and without Pinochet. But things turned out very differently. The Chile Committee in Amsterdam asked me to establish a brigade. We named it after Luis Corvalan, and we had a lot of work. In practically every city in the Netherlands, we painted banners for Chile demonstrations, and we also painted murals here and there. Hardly any of our work has survived. We painted on any surface that came to hand, on any old rubbish."(32)

The brigades enjoyed a short but exhilarating summer in the Netherlands. Within a few years, however, the political enthusiasm evaporated. The muralists, used to working frantically at night for fear of being arrested, discovered a new luxury: time. The idea that you could take your time over a painting was something new. Suddenly you could stop part way to discuss the nature of the work, the techniques being used or the influence of other artistic outlooks on mural painting. The works of art made in the *Townpainting* context were so varied in nature that new ideas suggested themselves to the Chilean artists. "I started with a flat, direct style - really fast, always pacy, full of colour ... but I realized I couldn't carry on that way. I had to develop my own style. I also started collaborating with Dutch artists who had very different ideas. We swapped technical knowledge. Suddenly we had turned into modern artists, and modern artists started thinking Chilean. It was a weird experience but it was exciting. I developed over the years and eventually became a full time artist. On the advice of several Rotterdam artists, I went to the art academy. Later I also took a course at the graphic art academy in Utrecht. Now I have lived in Rotterdam for thirty years. I think I must have made about eighty murals in that period."(33)

Kata Nuñez is today among the best known mural painters in Rotterdam. He painted the large mural on the wall of the "bird hospital" Vogelklas Karel Schot on Afrikaanderplein (2002) and other works in various locations in Bloemhof (2001). He painted a mural on Gerdesiaweg (1997) together with the homeless people of Havenzicht in Kralingen, and collaborated with Juan Heinsohn Huala to paint a huge mural on the Zuidplein metro station (2007). His monumental *La Trotamundos* (2007) is to be seen in Zwarte Paardenstraat, Cool. The only painting of Kata's that still recalls Chile and Allende is his mural on Kruiskade above the entrance to the Humanitas home for the elderly (1998). "Although I have put the Chilean muralism of the old days far behind me, I still believe that the artist has a social role. It is an outlook which is particularly evident in my murals. I also paint on canvas, make designs and illustrate books - often quite introspective work - but the murals will always be a part of the way I aim to relate to society."(34) That is a modest statement. In 2003, Juan Heinsohn Huala wrote an essay dedicated to Kata Nuñez, *Hijos de la Tierra*. The article marked the completion of a work on the corner of Dortselaan and Putsebocht on Feijenoord. The mural *Hijos de la Tierra* (2003) is a homage to Latin America's indigenous inhabitants - to populations threatened by

colonization and globalization. Besides describing the painting, the author also sheds light on the Nunez socio-political outlook: "To Kata Nuñez, it is a necessity to say something about these peoples. He understands the light-hearted, often amusing, motives behind the large paintings painted by his Dutch colleagues, but to Nunez art is a serious affair, especially murals. He takes into account the techniques, the use of space, the context in which the mural appears and, definitely, the fundamentally communicative rationale of this art form. Above all, he brings along his own background, his cultural roots, his social and political convictions to today's realities. For Kata Nuñez, a mural painting has a content and a message. If it's purely decorative work you want, Kata Nuñez isn't the man for you."(35)

The Chilean heritage seems to be a durable one, even if not a single monumental work remains to recall the short episode of the exiled muralists.(36) City-dwellers quite often ask about what happened to the Chilean Tower, and recently a group of hip-hop artists launched an initiative to repaint the tower, together with a number of Chileans. No trace of the tower remains, however. No one in the Municipal Works Department can recall what happened to the work of André Volten. The tower was probably disposed of as scrap. Painting in the public space has only a limited shelf life.

Townpainting (1972-1982)

In 1974, with a subsidy from the Ministry of Culture in his pocket, the artist Cor Kraat set off for the United States. The purpose of his trip was to study the mural art of America and to learn the methods and techniques of its artists. It had not been all that long since mural painting began to receive official recognition in Rotterdam. The RKS, the city's organization responsible for financing the arts, had started their multi-year *Townpainting* programme in 1972. In the thinking of RKS director Adriaan van der Staay, murals could not only play a part in visually improving the rundown suburbs, but they presented a unique opportunity to bring art closer to the people. Urban improvement and public education thus became the new mainsprings of mural art in Rotterdam.

It was around 1970 that professional artists started taking an interest in public murals, so that the genre started finding a place in Rotterdam's art history instead of being dismissed as merely the ephemeral products of commercial artists and untrained activists. The political climate of the time favoured the spreading of art into the suburbs, and the impact of the Chilean murals was not negligible. Mural painting thus became a spearhead of the city's art policy.

Prior to 1970, purely artistic outdoor mural painting had been a rarity, although certain Rotterdam artists showed an interest in the medium. In the early years of the Second World War, murals were painted on a modest scale to decorate emergency housing and shops. Little is known about the murals made during the German occupation, such as those on the end walls of buildings in Russischestraat and Engelsestraat in Oud-Mathenesse. A commotion about these old "Nazi" wall paintings unexpectedly flared up in 1991.(37) They were believed to have been made in June 1941 by a Rotterdam artist with links to the *Kulturkammer*. "I saw them being painted myself," one local resident recalled. "The winged staff and circle, which used

to have a swastika in it, was the emblem of the German navy. They had bases here, near Merwehaven and Lekhaven, and German sailors were quartered in this block of housing. There was a text under the picture saying 'Germany is winning on every front'. People changed the painting after the war and blotted out the text." Another resident contradicted him, however. "The murals were painted over older paintings, and what we see now has nothing to do with the war. Those circles with wings were the symbol of Dutch Railways."

But artists' murals were generally painted on interior walls, both before and after the war. They were normally a form of promotional art financed by businesses and executed in offices and factories. The best known artist to carry out this kind of work was unarguably Dolf Henkes, who displayed his huge paintings to the public in the *Rotterdam Ahoy!* exhibition of 1950. This great exhibition was dedicated to the industrial and cultural reconstruction of Rotterdam and its port.(38) Henkes' monumental murals portrayed a unique visual history of a hundred years of harbour activity. The paintings occupied a total area of 780 square metres, and Henkes needed the help of five assistants to complete them. Besides painting murals on commission of Rotterdam companies, Henkes provided some renowned works in the De Kuip football stadium and for Dijkzigt University Hospital.

Grand exhibitions like *Rotterdam Ahoy!* were not just a Rotterdam way of acquainting the general public with art in a low-threshold setting, but were an important source of paid employment for local artists. *Ahoy!* 1950 and its successor *E55 (Energy 1955)* were a considerable boost to the city's art climate. Art served to illustrate the themes of the main event, to decorate the pavilions and refreshment facilities, and to form art exhibitions. During *E55*, some ten artists painted large murals. They included Wally Elenbaas, Dick Elffers, Gust Romijn, Jan van Keulen and Lex Metz. Well-intentioned though their work may have been, "not much of it was any good," Jac van der Ster wrote in *De Groene Amsterdammer*. "Artists are forever crying out for commissions, and we would add our own voice to those appeals, but it is a pity the results are so often disappointing. Perhaps it is because some false pride in the hearts of the artists rebels against working on commission." The resulting murals, the critics decided, were a chaotic medley which overwhelmed the viewer with a flood of impressions which rarely had any bearing on the energy theme. But that was practically inevitable: "Whenever that mettlesome word energy comes up in the Netherlands, you shouldn't expect to find much place or attention being given to art. Maybe that's a good thing, for energy always has a well-defined purpose while art hardly ever does."(39)

The ambitious *E55* exhibition occasioned one of the first modern-art murals commissioned for the public domain - only a stone's throw away from Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. Karel Appel painted his magnificent *Muur der Energie* (Wall of Energy) at the entrance to the exhibition pavilion. It was a colourful mural which, with a certain stretch of the imagination, might be called the first piece of graffiti art. The work, measuring 100 metres in length, consisted of an interlocking succession of dazzlingly coloured abstract patterns. The work's sheer size and directness of form laid total claim to the viewer's attention. A provocative modern work like this could only be temporary, the critics held: it was too overwhelmingly obtrusive to be seriously considered as a permanent feature of public space. The execution of the mural was meticulously documented by the photographer Ed van der

Elsken. His reportage conveys the impression that Appel acted largely as an organizer, keeping a stern eye on the small army of acolytes who painted the lines and filled in the colours according to his instructions. One of Appel's assistants was the fifteen year old Jan Cremer, then still a window dresser.

The organizers of *E55* declared that Appel's mural depicted "the history of the world, humanity and civilization". It moreover expressed the tension between the "formless, prehistoric chaos" and the "awe-inspiring technical possibilities of today".(40) Ambitious? Certainly it was, but many a critic reacted with disdain as though it were a crude piece of graffiti rather than a serious work of art. Appel used "shock tactics", according to Van der Ster, writing in *De Groene Amsterdammer*. "Naturally, one cannot gauge colossal ephemera of this kind against some measure of eternity; a certain magnification, or indeed a simplification, is unavoidable here. These are not murals but monstrously enlarged posters, eye catchers that scream out from the wall. The trouble with Appel is that he is here trying to drown out everything else, including himself and his artistic intuition. Still, he is a painter, and one day may even become a great painter, as long as he no longer succumbs so often to the admiration he nurtures for his own audacity, if he expends more care on his forms, and if he stops suppressing what is at heart an exceptionally pure and refined sense of colour while straining after effect."

Striking and audacious though Appel's work was, the mural failed to usher in a new trend or development. The next grand public exhibition, the 1960 *Floriade*, involved hardly any artists, and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen treated the event as an opportunity to hold a show of conventional sculpture in the park. Public space was still far from being a canvas in its own right - at most it might be taken as an open air museum. The next year, however, the Rotterdam city council adopted several proposals relating art in the public space, including the "percentage" rule under which a fixed portion of major project budgets would be reserved for art. Art was now no longer a matter solely for private individuals, but official patronage was to play an active part in visually enhancing the public domain. New public buildings would henceforth be embellished with facade mosaics or statues and other works of sculpture. Murals, however, were still not on the agenda of art policy and art history, and decisions about commissioning works of art under the percentage scheme remained the preserve of a small group of specialists.

Ten years after *Floriade*, the Rotterdam art world experienced a new bout of raised emotions, and it again involved a grand public exhibition: *Communicatie 1970*, better known as *C70*. In the 1950s artists were still accommodating, whether from idealism or necessity, towards the social goals of events of this kind, but by 1970 artistic autonomy went before all else and tractability was no longer considered a virtue. Art had to be itself, and could contribute to the city only on its own terms. But the artists who sought commissions for *C70* had little success with this standpoint. Most of their proposals were rejected by businesspeople and the event organizers as unworldly, unfeasible or unrealistic. Art, at last autonomous, now risked falling victim to pride.

A more politically motivated antipathy to *C70* also developed. A number of critical Rotterdam artists, among them Hans Abelman, had united as "Groep Idee" (Group Idea) and proffered their own alternative, unsolicited, ideas for art at *C70*.(41)

They believed that the event primarily served the interests of commerce, and that *C70*, despite its claim to being about communication, would fail to reach the general public of Rotterdam in any way whatsoever. The event's 30 million guilder budget might better have been invested in urban renewal, Abelman argued, for the condition of housing in the inner city was deplorable. In the city's Oude Westen district, artists joined with residents organizations in holding protest meetings. The city was in ferment, and artists were eager to support the rundown inner city neighbourhoods.

One artistic achievement was to the credit of *C70*, however: commissioning André Volten to design a "communication tower" on the forecourt of the central railway station. It was of course the very tower that was soon to be transformed into a Chilean monument, but the structure was first conceived as an urban medium for communication. Neighbourhood associations and action groups were, by the late sixties, distributing more and more wall newspapers, posters, flyers and graffiti in public places. Volten responded to this trend with his communication tower, on which unofficial flyposting was freely encouraged. More than 25 years before the first legalized flyposting facilities were instituted, the artist created an alternative venue for unauthorized printed and handwritten matter. Assignment of the tower less than five years later to a single action group, the Luis Corvalan Brigada, was not its originally intended use.

Pressure from socially committed artists, and also from the city council and then the RKS, was increasingly challenging the elitism of art in the public space. They no longer wanted "ivory tower situations" but "attention for the role art could play in the public sphere," as the RKS noted.⁽⁴²⁾ In 1970, the RKS had opened the Lijnbaancentrum gallery, whose remit was not just to show experimental art to a narrow circle of insiders, but to be a venue for exhibitions addressed to a wide public and to present work with a bearing on society and popular culture. And what better location could there be for an art centre of this kind than the Lijnbaan shopping district? Its artistic director Felix Valk was a talented inspirer, and he could also rely on Gosse Oosterhof from the RKS who was excellently informed about international artistic developments. Exhibitions of work by strip cartoon artists (*Wordt Vervolgd*) and for example an exhibition about "how motorbikes are portrayed in sculpture, painting and strips" (*Motorr*) highlighted the Lijnbaancentrum's novel attitude towards art and public space.⁽⁴³⁾

In 1972, the RKS launched the *Townpainting* programme, again on the initiative of Adriaan van der Staay. He was strongly influenced by a new series of exhibitions that had been held in the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, including *People's Park* (1970) and *De Straat* (The Street) (1972), both organized by the Van Abbe's director Jean Leering.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Van der Staay was not just a man of action and an optimist, but also a child of the sixties. His standpoint was one of all power to the imagination, and he intended to bring the world to Rotterdam. He also wanted to shake up Rotterdam's torpid artistic community and outdated cultural infrastructure. As he explained to *NRC Handelsblad*, "When I came to work in Rotterdam, I saw artists functioning as though in a cloistered order, upheld by the community, and I got the feeling that we had to grasp every opportunity to improve contact between artists and the public. Our exhibition *Paint Up* was one of our efforts in this direction. The project also formed part of a whole programme meant to improve the long neglected cultural climate in the city. We are in the process of a kind of revival."⁽⁴⁵⁾

Townpainting was an extremely ambitious programme to promote mural painting in Rotterdam, while also encouraging artists to fulfil a more socially-inclined role. *Paint Up* was a warmup exercise, through which the RKS hoped to test whether Rotterdam artists would willingly emerge from their studios. After all, murals in the public space still had scarcely any status in art. The foundation hoped that mobilizing well-known artists would help to convince others that they would “not lose face by taking part”.(46) *Paint Up* began very amateurishly (“make something - anything - for a hundred guilders”) and it soon became clear that something with greater depth was warranted. The artist Cor Kraat was sent to the USA to gather information about public mural art. He visited New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles, shooting hundreds of photographs and slides.

In New York, especially, he saw the potential of the genre. The City Art Workshop, established in 1970, was painting socially committed murals in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with community issues such as poverty, drugs and violence as their subject matter. The works were usually the result of collective, participative actions. Neighbourhood residents or children would cooperate with the artist to decorate a wall with figurative images. “The City Art Workshop does not give precedence to the quality of work itself,” Kraat told a reporter from *De Havenloods*, “but to the sense of involvement among local residents. Art becomes part of the community; art has above all a social and educational function.”(47) “If you really want to make art for the people,” he continued, “the public must be able to understand the murals and recognize their thoughts and problems in them.”

Another group that made a profound impression on him was City Walls. This organization had purely artistic motives and worked with professional artists to produce abstract paintings. The owner of the premises on which the mural was painted often sponsored the work, on the assumption that a professional work of art would add to the value and quality of the building. Kraat saw some fifty of these works in New York, most of them on Manhattan. Around 1980, this professional branch of mural painting foundered because the insurance premiums were too high - after all, working high up on scaffolding was not without its dangers. Kraat retained an enduring preference for figurative work from his sojourn in the USA. “I saw that figurative paintings had a much stronger impact on the street and the community. The abstract, ‘real’, works of art were sometimes nicely decorative, but they never had a public impact like that of the figurative murals.”(48)

Cor Kraat developed during the seventies and eighties into one of the most active mural painters. His company, Kunst & Vaarwerk, which also included the artists Hans Citroen and Willem van Drunen, specialized in this genre, and was the first of its kind in Rotterdam. Like studios with a primarily commercial rationale such as those of Engelman and Mineur, Kraat’s firm won commissions from the business world. The Port Authority and the city public transport corporation RET were among his clients. Kunst & Vaarwerk also carried out a project of megalomaniac proportions in the Maasvlakte industrial zone: *De Hoedendoos* (The Hatbox, 1983). They transformed an oil tank belonging to Pakhoed (a company later taken over by Vopak) into a magnificent hatbox. Although Kraat has a predilection for figurative work, his approach was closer to that of City Walls than to that of the City Art Workshop. He wanted his mural paintings to be a colourful feature of the public space; fresh,

accessible works of art that related to the dull surrounding architecture and which pushed the prevailing greyness into the background. "Colour in grim cities" was his motto. "Murals should make the neighbourhoods nicer to live in," he stated elsewhere.(49)

This purely aesthetic approach produced tension between Kunst & Vaarwerk and the muralists such as Hans Abelman and the Chileans, who took the classic standpoint that mural art was primarily a political medium. Abelman's notorious mural on Frederikstraat in Crooswijk was the most unambiguous example of this political form. In this mural, workers and local residents march shoulder to shoulder, advancing on the local and international forces of capitalism. Even the Rotterdam alderman for housing was cast as a villain in this picture story. The mural was a painful embarrassment to the RKS. It had been placed before they had the chance to pass artistic judgement on it. Abelman was not recompensed with the 2,000 guilders he had invested in the mural, but the RKS promised him they would make the deficit good in a subsequent commission. The local press portrayed Kraat and Abelman as protagonists of the two opposing tendencies in mural painting. "Cor Kraat sticks colourful plasters over the city's injuries, but Hans Abelman has effectively torn existing wounds wider open", a correspondent wrote in *Het Vrije Volk*.(50)

Local residents alternated in their favours between the aesthetic and the political options. In a stencil circulated by the Bloemhof Residents Association, some local people trained their fury on a series of murals Cor Kraat had painted on Ericaplein in the Bloemhof neighbourhood. "Instead of the council maintaining its houses properly and forcing other housing owners to do the same, our miserable living conditions are now hidden behind murals. If something has to be painted on the wall, then it ought to reflect the real problems we face in our neighbourhood: housing shortages and substandard maintenance of the houses."(51) This circular prompted a local referendum, but in the end the great majority of residents gave Kraat's mural their blessing.

Some fifty commissions for mural paintings in Rotterdam were granted under the *Townpainting* scheme between 1972 and 1982.(52) The social and political content of the first commissioned murals was unmistakable. The muralists succeeded in winning a number of the commissions. As mentioned, Hans Abelman painted a mural with children from Crooswijk (1974) and the Chilean Brigades were responsible for five of the commissioned works. The political dimension began to fade from 1975 onwards, however, and the painting of murals was simply absorbed into the city's official arts policy. As the RKS concluded by as early as 1979, a good mural is after all "communicative" and should give the neighbourhood a "visual pick-me-up".

The communicative aspect emerged most forcefully, perhaps, in six murals that Joop van Meel painted on the arches of the Hofplein railway line along Voorburgstraat. Lien Heyting, writing in *NRC Handelsblad*, described Voorburgstraat as "the ugliest street in the Netherlands", and expressed surprise that the murals had been painted in this particular location. "Four of the paintings are based on ideas from members of the local community, whom he [van Meel] set sketching in the neighbourhood centre, and the other two sprang from his own imagination. The result is remarkable. The first four murals are more or less chaotic and very impersonal, but anecdotal nonetheless. The last two are more refined and stylized - in other words,

more artistic. It is no coincidence that nothing has been scrawled or scratched on the latter murals. They apparently command more respect than the other four, which like the Chilean creations and the collective paintings have been defaced with obscenities.”(53)

Street art, Heyting continued, does not usually make a downtrodden neighbourhood any more congenial. The depressing atmosphere is more likely to be accentuated than alleviated. But several of Rotterdam’s most famous murals were nonetheless realized in this period, such as the portrait of Multatuli by Matthieu Ficheroux (1975) and Co Westerik’s “girl with a skipping rope” (1976). Westerik received about 18,000 guilders for his mural, and carried out the huge task of painting it himself. “It was a very special piece of work,” Westerik recalled, “because I wanted to show every muscle, every fibre, of the girl. My daughter Christine was my model. I started by applying a relief in cement, and then painted the girl over that surface. That’s why I didn’t hire Leo Mineur to execute the painting. I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I still feel emotional about the painting.”(54) Demolition of the old police station behind Coolsingel meant the destruction of Westerik’s work. Murals are, of course, a temporary medium. But the memory of the first blow of the wrecking ball, hoisted by a city alderman, smashing into the girl’s back still upsets Westerik even today. “I wanted to murder that man. What crassness! It was my little girl. I could have wept.” Westerik has since firmly opposed any efforts to have the mural re-created. The last such attempt was an initiative by city alderman Lucas Bolsius, who undertook to restore the skipping girl to the city in 2006. “I can’t stomach the idea of painting my little darling all over again. It’s better to leave things as they are. It was a good work; let’s cherish the memory.”

The Multatuli portrait by Mathieu Ficheroux has been blessed with a longer lifespan. The work is one of the few remnants of the *Townpainting* era. The portrait, which bears the text “Seen from the moon, none of us is greater than another”, was painted in Mauritsstraat opposite the poetry bookshop Woutertje Pieterse, named after a well-known Multatuli character. After the shop was demolished in 1985, the work moved to its present location in Van Oldenbarneveltstraat. It was decided in 1998 to completely renovate the work, damaged as it was by long exposure to the weather. Temporary removal of the painting caused a commotion among local residents and shopkeepers: *Multatuli* had become a landmark and had vanquished the bane of temporariness. When the refurbished mural was restored to its place, the event was marked by exuberant festivities.

Cor Kraat’s painting *De Lijst* (The Frame) on Oostzeedijk, Kralingen, has had a similar history. The work was mounted in a classical ornamental frame on a block of apartments opposite Café De Pui and its upstairs restaurant De Lijst. When the block was demolished in 1988, the work was transferred across the street to the wall above the café entrance. Twelve years later, the work was found to be in poor condition, but the proprietor of the premises showed no interest in having it restored. Combined pressure from local residents, the submunicipal council and a housing corporation resulted in complete restoration, and *De Lijst* was granted a new location on Oostzeedijk.

Pop culture was also an ingredient of *Townpainting*. The Rotterdam comic strip artist Martin Lodewijk (originator of the series *Agent 327*, a long-running Dutch

James Bond spoof) painted a tram in 1975 - a work meant not so much as a visual enhancement to the civic scene ("the city ought to look so good that urban paintings are superfluous")(55) as an homage to the tram as illustrated in comics. The outcome was brilliant and fascinating - a tram decked out with typical cartoon tram noises such as "TINGELINGELING, RRRVRRRRR, KLIKKLIKVRRR" and "VROARRRRRRR". Carla Kaper and Cor Kraat also decorated trams. Their designs were a presage of the techniques and designs painted on trams and trains by the graffiti artists of the 1980s. Kaper's tram would have cut a dash even in New York City. Kraat had observed the painted trains of New York in his research on mural painting the year before. He also noted that the painting of trams by artists was a current practice in Vienna and Zurich. The artist Gust Romijn designed a "conceptual tram": it was decorated only with dimensions, arrows, verbal references and sketchy drawings. The tram decoration never came to a final design, but it illustrated the artist's conceptual approach well enough.

November 1979 saw the publication of the first book on mural painting in Rotterdam. It was issued by the RKS under the title *Couleur Locale*. Two years beforehand, the RKS had won the Sikkens Prize in recognition of its success in giving an important place to "colour as a medium" in Rotterdam.(56) The prize of fifteen thousand guilders was earmarked for a study on how the public, artists and architects perceived and appreciated the results of the *Townpainting* programme. *Couleur Locale* is a chaotic and confusing book, but it has a high entertainment value. The numerous unedited quotes and interviews present a disarming picture of a new artistic elite and their aspiration to a "democratic art in which everyone gets his due share". The book also gave a hearing to more critical contributions. Hans Abelman dismissed the "slick art" of the RKS, claiming that their mission could only be to "jazz up poverty". He also complained of RKS censorship, for the organization had explicitly requested him not to put "all those slogans" in his murals. Cor Westerik also had some criticisms, but they related to resident participation. "If you put a good worker on the job, someone who has a keen nose for what needs to be done, he should be left to get on with it. Arduous consultation is bad for the quality of the work: nobody benefits." The comic-strip artist Martin Lodewijk thought on the other hand that the artist should be at the service of the public: "I don't want people to get down in the dumps when they see my painted tram going by."(57)

The unfiltered commentaries and the wealth of photographs make *Couleur Locale* into one of the most enjoyable books about public art in Rotterdam. Topics like democracy, consultation, education and participation dominate the study, which is highly typical of its period. It also presented some hesitant answers to the questions Lien Heyting had raised in *NRC Handelsblad* in 1976: do murals really contribute to the improvement of proletarian neighbourhoods, or do they instead accentuate the misery of such districts? The book subjected Joop van Meel's works in Voorburgstraat (Heyting's "ugliest street" which the RKS saw more favourably as "a highly diverse neighbourhood") to a not particularly scientific residents' poll: "Pleasing (18 votes) and beautiful (7 votes) are the most common replies to a question on what people thought of the murals. Three respondents knew nothing about them, and, of the remaining two, one had no opinion and the other thought they were unattractive. People explained why they thought the murals pleasing or beautiful as follows: 'now it's much better than it was with nothing but drab walls - it's not exactly a cheerful neighbourhood here.' People were concerned about the

damage by youthful vandals (scratches, obscene graffiti and a fire). One person thought the paintings were getting a bit tiresome and it was time for something new. A large number of people (21) must have been inspired by the paintings, because the number of ideas about what else could be done with the walls has been considerable. A striking number of the suggestions have something to do with nature (perhaps because there is a total lack of greenery on this side of the viaduct). Opinions about whether the paintings should be removed or should stay are divided. Seventeen people gave a definite yes [*sic*], while thirteen had no opinion or just shrugged their shoulders.”(58)

Townpainting also made an international impression. The book *Street Murals* (Penguin Books, 1982) surveyed “the Most Exciting Art of the Cities of America, Britain and Western Europe”.(59) Its introduction specifically mentioned work in London, Bremen, Grenoble and Rotterdam. Six Dutch murals were selected for reproduction in the survey, three of them by Rotterdam-based artists: Co Westerik (“the girl with a skipping rope”), Louis-Anne Looyseghder(60) (on Oude Binnenweg) and Hans Citroen (*Groeten uit Rotterdam* on Putselaan/Klosstraat).

The Lijnbaan Youths (1982-1998)

In the autumn of 1995, a group of building workers destroyed a work of art on a wall in the centre of Rotterdam. They first overpainted it with grey wall paint, then tore it brusquely from the wall and finally dumped it in a damp cellar under the office of the RKS who owned the work. The mural was located in the Berenkuil (the “bear pit”), a dark, rather dreary level built below the Lijnbaan shopping street. The same basement level housed a jazz club of notorious reputation, Thelonius, and a popular strip-cartoon bookshop. The concrete steps that joined Lijnbaan to the Berenkuil below became a popular evening rendezvous especially at the weekends. This is where the Lijnbaan Youths thronged - the multi-ethnic crowd who made up Rotterdam’s hip-hop generation, aficionados of breakdance, rap and graffiti. Baseball caps, sneakers, ghetto blasters, mixtapes, tattoos - all the accoutrements of hip-hop music and fashion - were *de rigueur* in this gloomy subterranean space.

The work of art in the Berenkuil was a piece of graffiti art, known informally as “The Lee Piece”. It consisted of just three letters - Lee - painted in sumptuous lettering on large wooden panels. The style was one of incomparable simplicity and beauty, without the least hint of any typographical or graphic style that people recognized as familiar in Europe, not even the wild scrawls and tags that had been turning inner cities into scribbling boards ever since the days of Provo and punk. Lee, an alias of Lee George Quinones, was of the same generation as Keith Haring, Jean Michel Basquiat and Dondi White. Born in 1960 in Ponce de Leon, Porto Rico, he emigrated to America and soon found himself in the vanguard of graffiti art. By 1982, Lee enjoyed rock-star status and, like Haring and Basquiat, came down on the side of fine art in preference to a life of anonymity and poverty. He took a role in the famous hip-hop cult film *Wild Style* (Charlie Ahearn, 1982) and was invited to show his work in the Kassel *Documenta*, one of the world’s foremost art events.

Gosse Oosterhof of the RKS persuaded Lee to stop off in Rotterdam on his way to Kassel. The *Townpainting* programme made it possible for them to

commission a work for a fee of five thousand guilders - no small sum at the time.(61) Lee sought out the Berenkuil, directly under the Lijnbaan Centre, as his location. Not only did its denizens seem to be a suitable public for the kind of work he was doing, but it was possible to mount the painting high and dry, out of the reach of vandals and sheltered from the worst of the weather. Lee had largely abandoned his graffiti work by that time, but Europe, not yet familiar with graffiti art, could benefit from a masterpiece of the genre. Far from its artistic origins in the subways of New York, "The Lee Piece" was one of the first public expressions of the hip-hop and graffiti culture in Europe. It also became a local mascot.

That was exactly the aspect that the art establishment failed to see. In 1982, the RKS accepted that a graffiti piece might be considered a contemporary variation on the mural art theme, but aesthetically the work made little impression on the local art community. What did impress them was Lee's working methods. The Rotterdam artist Bob Kemper, charged by the RKS with overseeing realization of the work, was surprised that Lee placed his work so high off the ground, out of the reach of tag scrawlers. "In my view Lee should have sought out a forbidden place," Kemper recalls. "Graffiti is an aggressive art form, which naturally goes along with illicitness and risk-taking. But it was a good piece of work which really belonged in the city at that time."(62)

Outside art circles, the reputation of the work grew steadily. "The Lee Piece" turned into an emblem, a hip-hop icon, a source of inspiration for homegrown graffiti artists and a motivation for some to take up art. Artist Navin Thakoer, originally one of the Lijnbaan Youths, later wrote: "The work represented not only Lee himself but the whole group of New York artists who have exerted a huge influence on the Netherlands, especially in Rotterdam. Just remember the youngsters who came from all over the country to see the work, the young people who congregated below it, and the artists who came here to chat about their own work and who then went off to create similar things themselves."(63)

Thakoer was a member of the Friends of Lee, an action group of young artists and designers who formed out of concern about the secretive removal of Lee's piece. In the course of 1997, they grew into a veritable lobby who publicized their issue in the press and drew the attention of art institutions, municipal agencies and artistic colleagues to the disappearance of the remarkable work. Hip-hop had arrived as a massively popular subculture by about 1997, and rap, breakdance and graffiti were no longer purely marginal or ethnically-specific phenomena. The film *Wild Style* had its first screening in Rotterdam at the International Breakdance Event in the Rotterdam music venue Nighttown. The Friends of Lee grasped the occasion to bring their issue to the attention of a new, young, interested audience.

In retrospect, a special significance must be accorded to this group. The Friends were a striking reflection of the heterodox generation of artists and cultural entrepreneurs who put Rotterdam on the map as a swinging art city in the 1990s. This cohort opened a new discourse, with an intense interest in street culture, murals, the entertainment culture and the cross-fertilization between different disciplines. The initiative for forming the Friends of Lee came from Boris van Berkum, founder and curator of the brand-new Showroom Mama, Rotterdam's first gallery for street art and hip-hop art in the Witte de Withstraat. Other members were Rens Muis, Hans Foks,

Navin Thakoer, Gyz La Rivière and Mark Huige. Rens Muis, a designer, was a member of the studio 75B, a youthful firm which first gained a name for its outlook on visual design and public space which sprang from graffiti and street culture. 75B also designed the colourful floor of the skating park on Westblaak - a design of huge size and lasting interest. Hans Foks similarly came from a design background and had established the studio Rotterdam DC. Navin Thakoer was a member of one of the first notorious graffiti crews in Rotterdam, Bad Boyz Inc., and was a driving force behind the hip-hop/DJ collective Transformerz. He subsequently gained a name as the founder of Cool Asia, Rotterdam's first bhangra club, together with Ayatollah Musa. Gyz La Rivière was a fashion designer with roots in the skateboard subculture. He would later start De Humobisten, a multimedia two-man team which blended art, design, music, street culture and comedy. Mark Huige runs Urban Unit, now housed on Nieuwe Binnenweg near the CBK. Urban Unit has specialized in the sale of hip-hop fashion, sneakers and graffiti materials.

The campaign of the Friends met with failure. Lee's work was so badly damaged that it would cost a fortune to restore it. But the marketing effect of their action was huge. Emerging as though from nowhere, an entirely new young, creative generation emerged on the local art scene, complete with its own art history and its own programme. Their later street art and murals bore no connection with the older *Townpainting*, but drew inspiration from the hip-hop phenomenon. The junking of "The Lee Piece" acted as a fantastic catalyst. The issue also exposed the intimate links between graffiti, design, art and hip-hop culture; in no sense was this anti-art.

Hans Sonnenberg of Galerie Delta, Rotterdam, had already discovered Jean Michel Basquiat in 1982 and held the first Basquiat exhibition in Europe. The next year, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and the Groninger Museum joined forces to put on a major survey of the new masters from New York. Wim Beeren and Frans Haks, the organizers, rejected arguments that graffiti did not belong in a museum: "We believe we perceive a huge vitality, even in the tiny details. It results in overwhelmingly engrossing, beautiful paintings of fascinating directness and passion."(64) A particularly fierce riposte came from the critic Anna Tilroe. Writing in *Haagse Post*, she denounced "the cult of the trivial", arguing that graffiti belonged in the world of advertising, comic strips and sport, but not in that of fine art.(65) A group of twenty squatters reacted more militantly. They swept into the museum brandishing cans of spray paint and came to blows with the museum attendants. The action resulted in six arrests on charges vandalism and assault.(66) But the incident remained an isolated one. A rift had already developed between punk graffiti and the new, multicultural graffiti crews who found their inspiration in hip-hop aesthetics rather than in anarchism or the squatting movement. The best-known graffiti crew in Amsterdam, United Street Artists (USA), formed after its members saw a TV documentary about the graffiti art exhibition in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

Lee Quinones also exhibited work in art museums without feeling compromised. Speaking to art historian Jan van Adrichem in 1983, he explained why he had abandoned the world of illicit graffiti. "I never go to museums or galleries. My paintings are aimed at society, and many people sense the connection. Nowadays all the work on New York trains and subways is cleaned off. Thanks to the museums, at least the work of the leading subway artists is being preserved."(67) This statement

makes it understandable why Lee decided to place his piece in the Berenkuil out of the reach of aerosol cans and other vandalism.

The rising interest in this genre of art gave a considerable boost to graffiti culture around Rotterdam. On Noordereiland in 1986, the artist Joe Cillen and architect Maarten Struijs organized the first exhibition of purely local graffiti art, by among others Jean and Alien.(68) The retailers of Lijnbaan, fashionable chain stores such as Profoot, Levi's, Broekhuizen Opticiens and Pour Toi, were already commissioning graffiti artists to decorate their interiors and shutters. The art world and fashion retailers were the main promoters of the graffiti style during the 1980s, bringing it to the attention of young people and endeavouring to bring it to a higher artistic level. Against this fascinating background, the iconic status of "The Lee Piece" rose ever higher.

The removal of Lee's work in 1995 threw light on another urban transformation that was in progress, outside the domain of art. Rotterdam's developing self-image as a global city had far-reaching consequences for the way people thought about public space - and about graffiti. The new Erasmus Bridge opened in 1995, followed the next year by Beurstraverse retail development, popularly given the wry nickname *Koopgoot* or "shopping gutter". These icons of globalization and gentrification brought post-modern aesthetics and architecture into the limelight, while their counterparts of two decades earlier, the Willemsbrug and Lijnbaan, turned into down-at-heel reminders of Rotterdam's former, now hopelessly outdated, modernist aspirations.

New York, the cradle of graffiti art, set the precedent for Rotterdam. The golden age of graffiti in New York was around 1969 to 1982. Under mayor Rudy Giuliani's zero tolerance policy towards minor crime, and the globalization of world cities and world economies, graffiti were first banished to the outer suburbs and then all but eradicated. The biggest talents among the graffiti artists found a hospitable place of exile in the world of fine art. That was not strange, for fine art had shown an earlier interest in graffiti in the community art context. The artist Gordon Matta-Clark launched his *Photoglyphs* project, which combined photography and graffiti, in 1970. He drove his truck into South Bronx in 1973 and invited the local aerosol wielders to decorate his vehicle, which was then exhibited as part of the *Washington Square Art Fair*. The following year he made a short documentary about the graffiti on the New York's train and subway carriages, a project which would inspire Charlie Ahearn to make *Wild Style* nearly a decade later.(69) There were also exhibitions of graffiti in New York galleries from 1973 onwards.(70) The distance between art and graffiti was much smaller than the mythology would have us believe.

But within a mere ten years of that period, graffiti art had become a nostalgic memory. Graffiti had no place in the post-modern city, nor thus in the new Rotterdam. The Lijnbaan shopping centre made a last-ditch effort not to be completely overshadowed by competition from the post-modern Beurstraverse. All the graffiti were removed, youth hangouts were eliminated, the Lijnbaan Youths were chased off and the Berenkuil was locked up. The Berenkuil was eventually sold to a businessman who turned it into a large record shop. "The Lee Piece", the last mural to be painted under the *Townpainting* umbrella, inevitably fell victim to the cleanup. The "old fashioned" mural had become an anachronism: public space was now

suffering from a plague of spontaneous, illicit graffiti. In this respect, Lee's work marked a paradigm shift.

The Friends of Lee, driven by their passion for street art and hip-hop, were children of their post-modern city in a way not paralleled by the generations that preceded them. The clubs, galleries, hip-hop events, art stores and skateparks that flourished in Rotterdam in the late nineties were an inseparable part of the city of the Erasmus Bridge and Beurstraverse. This is what makes the action of the Friends so equivocal but nonetheless intriguing: for many youths, graffiti was their first acquaintance with visual art, but it was the removal of "The Lee Piece" that gave them their identity. Eliminating the Lijnbaan Youths from the scene pushed art in an unexpected new direction. It gave rise to hip-hop oriented art and street art.

When Navin Thakoer visited Lee Quinones in New York in 1998, the latter showed frank surprise at the action the Friends had taken in Rotterdam. He had, after all, commented fifteen years earlier in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen that in the long run public art would always fall victim to the forces of urban renewal. He was astonished that his own piece had even survived for so long, let alone that his work now had a legendary status. Thakoer had already written a vehement manifesto on behalf of the Friends back in Rotterdam: "At last there is a youthful generation that stands up for its cultural heritage - a generation that feels a need for works of art and wants to be inspired by them. This art movement, which Lee represents, stands for the feeling that things really make a difference, that art is something for everyone, and that art has a social background. We believe that Lee's work was removed illegally. We therefore demand its full restoration." (71) Seldom in Rotterdam had young people held such an impassioned plea for art in the public space. It also revealed the role art was playing in the development of a multi-ethnic community.

Lee's piece has not been restored to its location - fortunately, perhaps, for the myth and the story are all the better. But there is an epilogue to that story. Rotterdam alderman Lucas Bolsius, the city planning department (dS+V) and the public transport corporation RET commissioned the two remaining members of Bad Boyz Inc., Faisal Rajjab and Navin Thakoer, to create a mural in the metro tunnel between the Wilhelminaplein and Rijnhaven stations (2006). To fill out their crew, they invited Lee Quinones to join them, and he had no hesitation in showing his sense of responsibility towards the scions of the Lijnbaan Youth. An urban legend became art history, and the street subculture gained a monument.

Inside and outside the frame (1992-2007)

The same year *Couleur Locale* celebrated the mural art of Rotterdam, 1979, another book also appeared: *C'est Klote. Kalken in Rotterdam* (roughly, C'est Bollocks. Daubing in Rotterdam), a bizarre, intriguing, almost anthropological picture essay on spray-paintings, splotches and scrawls on the walls of the city. In their preface, the authors wrote: "We have spent six months pounding the streets in search of everything painted or felt-tipped. The result is 1,600 photos of texts and drawings. It is a survey without any pretence to treating the daubs as art, or to conducting high-flown sociological research. Daubing on walls is an illegal form of self-expression. If they catch you, you will be punished. Despite that, Rotterdam is smothered with the

stuff.”(72) The daubing was then divided into categories such as irony, commerce, frustrations, love, names, racism, politics, neighbourhood actions, feminism and puzzling slogans. Five years later, the anonymous authors of *Rood Rotterdam in de jaren '30* (Red Rotterdam in the 1930s) documented the slogans and rallying cries whitewashed on walls in the interwar years.(73) A new generation had discovered its own art history. This episode was recently brought to a conclusion by Rens Muis and Wessel Wessels, whose bulky survey *Graffiti in Rotterdam* (2007) deals with the rise and breakthrough of illegal wall writings and paintings in Rotterdam.

Three years after the publication of *Couleur Locale* and *C'est Klote*, the *Townpainting* programme was wound down. The polls reproduced in *Couleur Locale* did not apparently reveal a wholly undiluted support for mural art. The inhabitants of Rotterdam had embraced a number of cherished works, among them Co Westerik's skipping girl, but in many cases indifference prevailed. The debate on whether murals actually contributed to the pleasantness of a neighbourhood or instead marked it out as a disadvantaged area had provisionally ended undecided. There was after all no unanimity on whether a mural should be primarily aesthetic or should be an expression of neighbourhood solidarity. The traditional artistic discourse had overshadowed Van der Staay's social criteria and had brought the discussion on the utility of mural art to a dead end. There was another factor at work: while these discussions were still in the air, the phenomenon of unauthorized street graffiti had mushroomed. The wall was no longer a tacitly shared territory of advertising and art. Kids, squatters, punks and finally the hip-hop generation had discovered the wall as their mass medium.

In this climate, it was hardly surprising that the art world started re-evaluating its relation to mural art. Hans Abelman once again played a prominent role. This critic of the official Rotterdam art strategy had, by the late 1980s, himself become a policymaker. As the CBK's project leader for art in the public domain, he made spreading art to the neighbourhoods a spearhead of the city's art policy. Mural painting once again formed part of the repertoire. An example was the *Blinde Muren* (Blank Walls) project which the CBK initiated in Oude Noorden (1989) and followed up with a similar project in Crooswijk (1991).(74) The bare, neglected walls at the ends of rows of housing were embellished with visual art. A notable instance was a series of eleven abstract murals which Frans van Bommel painted in Oud-Crooswijk. Van Bommel demonstrated that non-figurative art could also attract public support. Residents were informed about his modus operandi, helped erect the scaffolding and even mixed the paint in the street. The artist looked back on his project in 2005: “Crooswijk was a neighbourhood scheduled for demolition - the windows already had plastic sheeting stuck over them. The people there were nobody's fools. The first thing I did was to get into conversation with them, simply chatting in the street. I didn't speak about art because that's not their language. Instead we talked about their surroundings, about what they felt about it and what they would like it to become. I would propose ideas to the residents and in fact we always came to an agreement. Still, I stopped doing those art commissions in 1995. I was fed up with all the meetings, and besides it was getting much too demanding physically.”(75)

Blinde Muren was discontinued after Oud-Crooswijk. The CBK shifted its focus to the ornamental wall frame, starting the programme *100 Ornamentlijsten* in 1992. This programme is still in effect today.(76) The aim was to dedicate the disused

ornamental wall frames - formerly used for painted advertisements - to artistic purposes. The idea of filling these frames with murals had already been explored on a modest scale by artists like Cor Kraat, Bob Kemper and Mathieu Ficheroux. The wall frames had been a characteristic feature of the streets of Rotterdam since the beginning of the 20th century. A builder or house owner would provide a blank wall with a smoothly plastered area and surround it by a frame of plaster moulding, which might be simple or baroque in style. The framed area could then be let or leased to a business or advertising agency, who would use it to promote their wares to the public. The wall frames were not only a colourful element of the street scene, but also helped bring an end to the untrammelled growth of unauthorized posters on walls. This early commercial medium was highly successful and its use continued until the 1960s and even 1970s. By then the wall frames had largely given way to other forms of advertising in newspapers and magazines, to commercials on radio and television and to the much larger posters on freestanding billboards. A few of the wall frames are still in use today although their function is mainly a nostalgic one.

Concentrations of wall frames occurred in the Oude Noorden area of Rotterdam, on Noordereiland and on Katendrecht. These districts flourished towards the end of the twentieth century as bulwarks of the new mural painting. The presence of the wall frames made it possible for art to pull back from its exposed position. Murals were no longer painted onto a simple brick or plastered walls, but were constrained within the ornamental frame - the archetypal domain of fine art and of art history. In this respect art broke with the older traditions of muralism and *Townpainting*, and distanced itself from the new graffiti culture. It was a clever move, anticipating the declining image of graffiti, increasingly interpreted as vandalism. The art of painting reclaimed its place in the street scene and turned the city into an open-air art gallery. Like museum rooms, various streets and squares were now dedicated to the work of different Rotterdam artists. The paintings of Dolf Henkes, Daan van Golden, Co Westerik, Louis Looysehelder, Hans Wap and Woody van Amen, to mention just a few artists, were fully visible to the general population in the public space. Remnants of the *Townpainting* era, for example *Multatuli* by Mathieu Ficheroux and *De Lijst* by Cor Kraat, were incorporated into the new collection. The majority of the works were still executed by the firm Atelier Leo Mineur, who moreover had good contacts with the paint manufacturer Sikkens - a connection which ensured a measure of durability for the paintings. Even though the new murals were enclosed in frames, they were still vulnerable. The owner was still free to demolish the building, to use the frame for different purposes, or to lease the framed area to an advertising agency keen to exploit the nostalgia of the medium.

Completion of the fifteenth framed mural occasioned the CBK to commission art historian Cees de Boer to write an essay, *De schilderijenoptocht te Rotterdam* (The Procession of Paintings in Rotterdam, 1995). Although he praised the exertions of Rotterdam and appreciated the mural painting tradition it had cultivated, he feared that the new paintings risked "succumbing to their own diversity and to the visual tumult of the city". For example, he considered that the splendid mural on Katendrecht by the Chinese artist Li De Cai was overwhelmed by the surrounding architecture. "The cardboard products of urban renewal that surround it are repulsive. It can be termed neither architecture nor restoration - it is a kind of junk shop of aluminium panels and unsuitable window frames. The impression of superfluity is inevitably so dominant that little remains of it [the painting] except a pinup

postcard.”(77) The author held a dismal opinion of urban renewal in Rotterdam. It was a context in which art could not avoid being degraded into second-rate decoration. Since only a few works proved capable of surviving the city’s hectic visual environment (such as the paintings by Daan van Golden and Mathieu Ficheroux mentioned above), De Boer turned to a different domain: spontaneous paintings and drawings by children. It was only children’s street art, on the walls of school playgrounds and on street furniture, that could rise above the dynamic of the city. The adventure of the story was more important than decorative quality of their images. This change of direction is puzzling. Was De Boer suggesting that art belongs in museums and galleries, and that the street was a fitting place only for other kinds of image? Or was there a hint of nostalgia for the old *Townpainting* - for the direct, low-threshold mural painting which obeyed criteria different from those of fine art?

De Boer’s recommendations languished in a desk drawer somewhere in the CBK offices. Abelman was unhappy with his ideas. Perhaps rightly so, for despite De Boer’s reservations, the number of wall-frame paintings gradually rose to about forty and the programme still enjoys success today. Its popularity among housing corporations and home owners is undiminished. For example the estate agency Ooms Makelaars BV financed a work by the artist Anton Vrede on Noordereiland in 1995, “as an expression of gratitude to the city that has enabled our company to prosper”.(78) But popularity is still no guarantee for the preservation of a work. Woody van Amen saw the disappearance of both his murals - a *Public Buddha* with Lorraine cross in Kralingen (destroyed on demolition of the Havenzicht shelter) and an untitled work in Oude Noorden (the building owner tired of it) - both within a few years of painting them. That this is not an inevitable course of events was demonstrated on Noordereiland. The artist Joe Cillen took his own initiative in 2005 to restore ten murals and frames, including his own work *Orgon, Orgon, Orgon* (1995) portraying a vividly coloured parrot “tired of his own image and refusing to say a word”.(79) Elsewhere, on Katendrecht, the mural *Jinjielingyun* (1993) by Li De Cai has been completely restored. This, the first Chinese mural in Europe, owed its second life to the importance of Chinese-Dutch commercial relations.(80)

Sometimes the wall frame offered a place for topical concerns. Hans Wap made a tribute to Amnesty International, with the cooperation of the organization itself, on Noordereiland (*Icarus*, 1991). An unusual work by the South African poet Breyten Breytenbach, a poignant memorial to victims of the Apartheid era, appeared on the corner of Gaffelstraat and Nieuwe Binnenweg. The mural was painted in 1992 in the context of the *Poetry International Festival*, and contains a list of names of authors imprisoned because of their literary work. Every year, *Poetry International* adds a new name to the list on the mural and strikes through the names of writers who have been released.

Literary connections have in any case been not infrequent in Rotterdam murals.(81) Examples include Lucebert’s *Het verhaal is zo goed* (The Story is Complete, 1994), also on the corner of Nieuwe Binnenweg and Gaffelstraat, and *Pinokkio* (Pinocchio, 1989) by Arie van der Geest in Zaagmolenstraat. Toni Burgering painted *Het schoolrapport van Bob den Uyl* (Bob den Uyl’s School Report, 1989) on the wall of the present education museum in Pannekoekstraat, although in this case it lacks a wall frame.

Murals surrounded by wall frames were seldom designed for specific locations in the public space, however. A new generation was much more street-aware. Around the end of the millennium, a new market opened up for paintings in the public space. Small organized groups of young artists, raised in the torrid atmosphere of the Lijnbaan Youths and influenced by the mural art of South America and the Caribbean, responded to the rising demand for participative art in the residential neighbourhoods. Housing corporations, submunicipalities, residents organizations, community centres and schools rediscovered the mural. Rotterdam had changed considerably in demographic respects, and civic organizations assiduously sought examples of intercultural art that would be closer to the cultural identifications of children and young adults. The CBK played a role in the "Cultural Reach" action programme (Actieprogramma Cultuurbereik) by mediating between artists and patrons. It was this situation that saw the rise of collectives like Bad Boyz Inc. (originating in the Lijnbaan Youth and the Rotterdam hip-hop scene), Urban Arts (from the graffiti subculture) and Cariffiti (inspired by Surinami and Antillean painting). But old hands like Jorge Kata Nuñez and Juan Heinsohn Huala, both Chilean refugees of the 1970s, also found new work in this market.

These groups and individuals have been responsible for many recent murals in Rotterdam, including the dragon on Kruiskade (Urban Arts), the icons and idols in Jaffa (Cariffiti), the mural on the building of the Turkish association Tema in Boomgaardstraat (Navin Thakoer of Bad Boyz Inc.) and a colourful, socially committed work, *La Trotamundos* (The Globetrotter, Kata Nuñez) in Zwarte Paardenstraat.

Children's art, earlier praised by Cees de Boer, has also left a storybook of adventurous, playful picture tales through the whole city. The artist Vera Harmsen specialized in this category. She succeeded in involving hundreds of children in participative projects which brought colour to streets, school playgrounds, electricity stations and children's recreation areas. Chris Ripken painted the railings of the Johan de Graaffschool in the Agnieszka neighbourhood, so transforming an inherently repressive structure into a distinctive and colourful instance of urban design. Artist and ex-graffitist Onno Poiesz painted a gigantic mural on the school grounds of the Nieuw Rotterdam VMBO (pre-vocational secondary education) school on Beukelsdijk; titled *Bling Bling*, the work was based on the living situation and imaginary universe of the students.

During the last five years, more public paintings have been realized than under *Townpainting* and *100 Ornamentlijsten* put together. The new murals have also added a contemporary visual ethnocultural verve: images of black children, Chinese children, South-American Indians, women with veiled faces and internationally recognized figures such as Prince Claus, Gandhi and Tupac Shakur suddenly started appearing in the streets of Rotterdam. The mainspring has not been fine art, but popular culture: comic strips, graffiti, product design, fashion and music have supplied both the imagery and the stylistic idioms.

The mural painting of old lacked practically any multicultural dimensions (aside from the works of the Chilean brigades). The sole exception was provided by artist Ronald Heilbron, who executed a few socially committed murals under the *Townpainting* programme, such as *De Surinaamse Hut* (The Surinami Hut, 1980) and

Allochtone Vrouwen (Minority Women, 1980), both painted on the arches under the Hofplein railway line. His work *Geef Racisme Geen Kans* (Don't Give Racism a Chance, 1988) on the corner of Jachthuisstraat and Gerrit Jan Mulderstraat also exuded a optimistic and assertive longing for a multicultural society. The last of these murals was funded by the Anti-Fascism Committee.

Meanwhile, the young activists of the Rotterdam Youth Council lobbied for the provision of free zones where budding graffiti artists could legally polish up their aerosol skills. A bold proposal by Phyllis Ebecilio, then leader of the youth council, fell short of acceptance by a single vote when put before the city council in 2005. She modelled her idea on the Five Pointz "museum" of graffiti, a postindustrial complex occupying a whole city block in Queens, New York, where the exterior is covered from top to bottom with the work of graffiti artists, producing a surreal architecture of picture stories. Ebecilio even persuaded alderman Lucas Bolsius to visit Five Pointz. But he lost any enthusiasm for the idea on observing that the young street artists were also deploying their talents into neighbouring areas.

Back in Rotterdam, Bolsius initiated an alternative programme, *Graffitibriljanten* (Graffiti Brilliants). Together with the submunicipalities and the city's housing department (dS+V), he selected a number of zones where graffiti would be allowed. The alderman was against giving the young aerosol artists a free hand in choosing their own places of operation, but he agreed that the visual subculture of graffiti could be taken seriously as long-lasting mural art. His efforts against illicit street graffiti meanwhile continued undiminished. In the period from 2005 to 2007, his approach yielded large wall paintings in a metro tunnel (Wilhelminapier), in the Jaffa neighbourhood (Berkelplein), in a bicycle tunnel (Lagelandsepad). Locations such as Oostzeedijk, Kleinpolderplein and Schieplein have also been earmarked for the attentions of new mural artists. Lucky Trifonas, a graphic designer, illustrator and ex-graffiti artist also known as Lucky Dubz, was responsible in early 2007 for one of the largest mural works since Karel Appel's *Wall of Energy* (1955) and *The Hatbox* by Kunst & Vaarwerk (1983). His work in the Lagelandsepad tunnel occupies two sixty-metre long stretches on opposite walls. The wish to make a lasting work motivated the use of vandal-proof printed panels. Although the result cannot strictly be regarded as a painting, its historicizing interpretation of the Het Lage Land district was a prominent example of a new trend: the use of new media for paintings in the public domain. Another work painted specifically for the public space, *Schieland* (in Witte de Withstraat, 2004) by outsider artist Laan Irodjojo, was already transformed into a printed form.

It is remarkable that this pop-culture category of mural art flourished under the civic regime of the right-wing Leefbaar Rotterdam party, 2002-2006. Was it a counter-reaction by the city to the relatively repressive political climate? Ayatollah Musa, curator of the Bad Boyz Inc. exhibition in the CBK (2002), believes it was more a matter of coincidence: "Hip-hop culture had just come out of the shadows and found its own route to the 21st century. Remember the Word Lounge, the Friends of Lee, Showroom Mama, the Bad Boyz show and the Hip-hop House. Artists like Faisel Rajjab, Navin Thakoer and Aniel Mohanlal suddenly discovered there was a market - with demand from the community and from the cultural sector. Suddenly there was money to be earned with mural paintings. Aniel founded Urban Arts together with Bas de Vries and Onno van Leeuwen, while Navin Thakoer chose his own way. The idea

that you could earn a living from art was a definite boost to creativity. Young artists profited from an inspiring climate the older generation had never known.”(82)

Phyllis Ebecilio was one of those younger artists. She left the Rotterdam Youth Council and set up the collectives UBehave and Cariffiti. These two groups both make murals and other works, commissioned by public organizations such as the city Public Works department. They also painted the portrait of Pierre Bayle in Aert van Nesstraat on a commission of the CBK. The portrait formed part of the *De Vreemdeling* public space art route which celebrated the life and work of Pierre Bayle, “Rotterdam’s philosopher”. Curiously, the artists decided to place an ornamental frame around the work. Were the new muralists implicitly claiming a place in art history?

Phyllis Ebecilio, like Ayatollah Musa, denies any explicit connection between their culturally-inclined mural art and the politics of Leefbaar Rotterdam. “But our efforts did give Leefbaar Rotterdam a better understanding of the value of painting in the public space. Quite a few members of the party were in the delegation that went to New York with alderman Bolsius to visit Five Pointz. They saw some amazing pieces and murals, like nothing they had ever seen. I remember the Leefbaar Rotterdam party leader Ronald Sörensen and his colleagues taking loads of photos of a splendid portrait of Karel Appel. I think the visit opened their eyes to this art form.”(83)

The revival of mural painting also triggered a new interest in the genre within the fine art establishment. *The Bloemhof Art Route* (2001/2003) yielded the first series of murals where it was no longer a wall frame but the wall itself the formed the support for an autonomous artistic genre. The Vestia housing corporation and the CBK commissioned artists like Kata Nuñez, Moritz Ebinger, Tanneke Barendregt and Pauline Stoopman to paint in a number of crucial locations in the Bloemhof neighbourhood. Stoopman’s work, situated in the passage under a modern building between Oleanderplein and Odastraat, consists of a distinctive, abstract colour composition based on fabrics and patterns she encountered in the vicinity. The work aims to connect the living room with public space. The artist Erne Thuys executed a series of works in the Nieuwe Westen district on behalf of the Woonbron housing corporation (2004). The works were all on the theme of poetry, as was conveyed by the punning project name *Dichter bij de Buurt* (Closer to the Neighbourhood, or Poet in the Neighbourhood, according to how the first word is interpreted).(84) Artists such as Abdol Motavassel, Dragan Strivokic, René Duinkerken and Carlos Blaaker painted murals which explicitly addressed topics such as globalization and migration.

In *Beukelsblauw* (2004), Florentijn Hofman painted an entire building complex blue. The large block of properties, neglected and unsightly, was transformed shortly before its impending demolition into one of the most photographed sights of Rotterdam. The artists Ivo van den Baar and Nicole Driessens started the project *A Sleeping Beauty* (2006) in Rosestraat, Feijenoord. Working as the organization Wandschappen, they invited ten artists to tackle part of a block of unoccupied housing. The Rotterdam Urban Development Department (OBR), the housing corporation De Nieuwe Unie and the CBK financed the enterprise. The project not only resulted in a remarkable display of contemporary painting, but turned the street

into a bizarre jungle. Trees, creepers, lianas and ivy smothered the block, as though nature had reclaimed possession of Rosestraat.

A no less remarkable painting was applied to the ground of the Binnenrotte market square by the illustrator Luuk Bode. His *Oorsprong van Rotterdam* (Origins of Rotterdam, 2007) was a strip-cartoon ode to the dam in the Rotte waterway that gave the city its name, and depicted a city wrestling its way up out of marshes, mud and water to become a modern metropolis. The work, sponsored as part of Rotterdam Year of Architecture 2007, could only be viewed from a lookout tower. Recalling how Martin Lodewijk introduced the strip-cartoon aesthetic into the *Townpainting* of the 1970s, Bodes work sneaked comics into the domain of art and architecture.

Epilogue

“Rotterdam is unique. Rotterdam is the only city with such a fantastic tradition of mural painting,” Willem Kerssemeijer said when asked about the character and extent of mural painting in the Netherlands.⁽⁸⁵⁾ There may have been a touch of tongue-in-cheek civic chauvinism here, but some authoritative knowledge in this area may be expected from a mainstay of Atelier Leo Mineur. Murals have been and still are being painted everywhere, but it is especially Rotterdam where the phenomenon has developed into one of the most widespread forms of artistic expression in the public domain. It is hard to make an exact tally of the genre, however. We could of course estimate the number of commissioned works (several hundred since 1970) and make an even more approximate guess at the number of Rotterdam residents of all ages who have been involved in executing the murals (several thousand). But the murals which have been commissioned and which have reached us through archives and oral histories form only a fraction of the volume of mural painting that has existed in Rotterdam.

Many mural painters who decorated neighbourhood centres, schools, refuse bins, metre cupboards, transformer boxes and empty buildings with their art have vanished into anonymity or, at least, are missing from the archives of newspapers and cultural institutes. Groups like Lastplak and Antistrot, whose work makes one strongly suspect that trained artists are hiding behind the collective identity, are always popping up unexpectedly in Rotterdam. Lastplak, for example, recently painted the walls of the Pauluskerk, a church due for demolition, in Mauritsweg. This book, like that other survey *Graffiti in Rotterdam*, can only illustrate a fraction of the wall art in the city, and it specifically covers that part of it which stays closest to the domain of commissioned art in the public space. Even given this focus on the more official artistic products, passing judgement on mural art since 1970 would be a tricky enterprise. The complexity of community art, in which each individual work claims its own social criteria and own performance indicators, looms continually.

A number of works can naturally be placed without difficulty in the canon of fine art. *As Long As It Lasts* by Lawrence Weiner or *De Muur der Energie* by Karel Appel are both worthy of inclusion in the documentation of Sculpture International Rotterdam. Many of the paintings executed in the wall frames are similarly closely allied to the ongoing artistic discourse. The works by Dolf Henkes, Daan van Golden, Co Westerik and Woody van Amen seemed so perfectly at home in their ornamental

wall frames - which is not to deny their quality - that they seem made for showing in museums, galleries and catalogues. But should these works be categorized as exceptions, as typical examples or even as high points in the mural painting of Rotterdam?

The wall has its own rules and customs. An outside wall has social functions that a sheet of paper does not, Lene ter Haar wrote in an essay on Hadassah Emmerich, who painted a mural of three hundred square metres in area on the Dutch embassy in Jakarta in 2006.⁽⁸⁶⁾ “The multilayered traits of the city and its population manifest themselves on walls,” and it is the artist’s duty “to grasp the societal significance of the wall and to deliver commentary on it”. From this point of view, it is tempting (as Ter Haar herself argued) to take Muralismo as the departure point and benchmark for evaluating mural art rather than formal fine art. But again that tradition does not yield a fully satisfactory foothold for comprehending all Rotterdam’s murals. The work of the Rotterdam muralists is rarely referenced today (with the exception of the Chilean Tower). At their best those murals portrayed situations in other parts of the world, or were welcomed as a visual expression of the international solidarity that leftist Holland aspired to. Here, unlike in Latin climes, people lack the mental and cultural makeup needed for this form of political propaganda to take root. After Kata Nuñez broke away from the muralist brigades, the quality of his work advanced and his involvement with the world took on a freer and more diverse character. Cariffiti and Urban Arts similarly express more personal outlooks on globalization, multiculturalism and ecology than the muralists did. The descendants of the muralists tend to prefer more an amicable, veiled or ironic method of transmitting their social message. The text “Sterker door strijd” (“Stronger Through Struggle”) which appears in Navin Thakoer’s untitled mural in Boomgaardstraat (2007) seems to come from Rotterdam’s civic coat of arms. The fairly abstract painting contains only two figures, a veiled woman and Rotterdam zoo’s famous gorilla Bokito. The motto, granted to the city by Queen Wilhelmina in 1948, is here clearly loaded with irony.

Besides the motives of fine art and Muralismo, mural art has often claimed to serve the goal of urban improvement. Murals were held to enhance the civic climate, adding colour to the otherwise dull uniformity of the architecture and public space. This argument is seldom heard nowadays, after Lien Heyting dismissed it as a myth in 1976. By their very nature, murals have always appeared in districts and neighbourhoods with dilapidated housing, which have a high proportion of rented housing (owner-occupiers do not generally commission murals), which are ethnically diverse, and where official social organizations are more likely to initiate actions than the residents themselves. Like graffiti, murals are usually found in older districts on the verge of urban regeneration - indeed, they may be considered to herald it.

Murals painted in Rotterdam’s ornamental wall frames form an exception to this. Housing corporations and individuals who own the buildings concerned and real estate developers recognize that a “real” work of art adds value to the property. In the same way as the work of City Walls in New York helped shift a neighbourhood upmarket, wall frames can boost economically-motivated urban renewal.

A final motive has been participation: the capacity of mural painting to promote an interest in art among the local population. The *Townpainting* programme and the hip-hop movement murals of the 21st century placed a high value on participation.

Although they both entailed very different participation processes, and the level of participation moreover depended strongly on the wishes and capacities of the individual artist, very few complaints about the quality of participation ever found their way into newspapers or archives. On the whole, the artists (at least when they willingly opted for participation) enjoyed the cooperation greatly, as did the residents, children and adults, who took part. That enjoyment also ensured public support for the murals. Neighbourhood polls conducted by *Couleur Locale* in 1979 revealed that “most people gave the murals a positive rating”.(87) The “emotional involvement” of the artist with the neighbourhood and the way the artist realized the mural also received positive reactions. The residents’ contributions to the initial design of the mural were very disappointing to the artists, however: there were just too few good ideas. Only a lengthy, intensive collaboration between an artist and residents would eventually yield results and make people more sensitive to art. The authors of the report questioned in their conclusions whether the RKS was really the right organization for educative experiments of this kind. Perhaps the organizers should not aspire to anything more than providing a visual shot-in-the-arm: “the public won’t object, and it makes life easier for the artists.” Today, in 2007, the call for in-depth participation schemes is louder than ever: people and art must be brought closer together. Art education is a phrase on everyone’s lips, and it may be expected that murals will be a welcome part of that repertoire.(88) The *Icons & Idols* mural by Cariffiti (2006), for example, already forms part of a long-term youth programme for Berkelplein in the Jaffa district.

It is too early to pass final judgement on the nature and quality of mural art in Rotterdam. The exploration of this territory does however make it clear that *La América Tropical* cannot be a benchmark for mural practice in Rotterdam. Another project in Los Angeles, *The Great Wall* (1974-1979) may present a better meta-phor. The wall concerned is nearly a kilometre long and carries hundreds of picture stories portraying the histories and fascinations of youth, subcultures and ethnic groups in a metropolitan culture.(89) *The Great Wall* offers a marvellous compendium of trends in mural painting and graffiti. Similarly, the innumerable murals of Rotterdam, realized in response to all kinds of motives and nourished by all kinds of assumptions, dreams and wishes - together form a “Great Wall”. Metropolitan layers, themes and opinions have been imaged over and over again in the public space. Sometimes the resulting images have been time-bound and hence quickly dated, but in other cases they remain astonishingly topical and persuasive. The better a mural succeeds in collecting urban narratives or giving meaning to social minorities, the larger the public support for the work will be. This effect is all the more powerful when the artist concerned is of above average talent. Take Lydia Schouten, for example. She painted a mural for the streetwalkers of the Keileweg district (2002). A beautiful, seductive woman, breasts bared and lips brightly painted, looks tenderly and proudly from on high, onto to the mundane business going on in the sex workers’ “finishing area” below. The mural exudes compassion and empathy, and served for four years as an icon for this anomalous community of women. Even the closure of the streetwalking zone in 2006 has not succeeded in enfeebling the mural’s impact. The Cool district residents’ organization saved the work from destruction and gave it a new location in the city centre, in Witte de Withstraat. The conclusion from this rescue action must be that here, too, a community art dimension was present.

Endnotes

- 1 Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City. Public Art and Urban Futures* (London-New York 1997) 8-12.
- 2 Suzanne Lacy (ed.), *Mapping The Terrain. New Genre Public Art* (Seattle 1995). See also Tom Finkelpearl on “community oriented public art”, *Dialogues in Public Art* (Cambridge-London 2000) x-xi.
- 3 See e.g. *Participatie en cultuur*, Nota van de Rotterdamse Raad voor Kunst en Cultuur (Rotterdam 2007) and *Culturele Staalkaart Rotterdam 2007*, Sectoranalyse Rotterdamse Raad voor Kunst en Cultuur (Rotterdam 2007).
- 4 Rens Muis & Wessel Wessels, *Graffiti in Rotterdam* (Rotterdam 2007).
- 5 Quotations relating to Leo Mineur originate from *Memoires van Albertus Jordanus Wayers* (2003), Archief Atelier Leo Mineur. Considering the tense relationship between Wayers and Mineur, the memoires (and hence the remarks about Mineur) must be interpreted with some caution. Interview with Ton de Vos, September 2007.
- 6 Hans Soeters, ‘Engelman van de bioscoopreclames’, *Rotterdams Dagblad* (17 March 1990).
- 7 Ibidem.
- 8 Herman Romer, *Fantasie, illusie en betovering. Herinneringen aan Rotterdamse bioscopen 1896-2004* (Zaltbommel 2004) 122.
- 9 Eppo König, ‘Het vergeten kunstwerk van de Rotterdamse bioscoopschilder’, *Rotterdams Dagblad* (22 November 2002).
- 10 Kees Sparreboom, *Reclame Atelier Leo Mineur. Rotterdamse bioscoopschilders in de jaren '50* (Vlaardingen 2004) 3-4.
- 11 Idem, 23.
- 12 Bas Roodnat, ‘Schilders zonder hoogtevrees’, *NRC Handelsblad* (8 September 2000).
- 13 König, *Het vergeten kunstwerk* (2002).
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- 16 Hans Soeters, ‘Bioscoopschilder: een uitstervend vak’, *Rotterdams Nieuwsblad* (20 March 1984).
- 17 Interview with Michelle Geurts, August 2007.
- 18 Gepke Bouma, *Van Amen tot Zekveld. Reportage over de beeldende kunst in Rotterdam in de jaren zestig* (Rotterdam 1994) 15-18.
- 19 From graffiti archives of Rens Muis.
- 20 Anne-Marie Plasschaert, *Venceremos! Van massamedium tot geschilderd protest: Chileense schilderbrigades* (Rotterdam 1999) 29.
- 21 For historical relations between “muralism” and graffiti in Los Angeles, see Steve Grody, *Graffiti L.A. Street Styles and Art* (New York 2007).
- 22 Ivor L. Miller, *Aerosol Kingdom. Subway Painters of New York City* (Jackson 2002) 5.
- 23 Ibidem.

- 24 Florence Arquin, *Diego Rivera: The Shaping of an Artist 1889-1921* (Oklahoma University 1971) 14.
- 25 See *Tierra Y Libertad. Photographs of Mexico 1900-1935* (Oxford-Mexico City 1985), a survey of the work of photographer Augustin Victor Casasola.
- 26 See the photo album in the double single of The Ex, *1936: The Spanish Revolution* (Amsterdam 1986).
- 27 Plasschaert, *Venceremos!*, 20.
- 28 Interviews with Jan Donia , Gosse Oosterhof (December 2006), Kata Nuñez and Juan Heinsohn Huala (May 2007).
- 29 Plasschaert, *Venceremos!*, 27.
- 30 Maarten Regouin & Marcoen Roelofs (eds.), *Couleur Locale. Stadsschilderingen in Rotterdam* (Rotterdam 1979) 47.
- 31 Plasschaert, *Venceremos!*, 34.
- 32 Interview with Kata Nuñez (May 2007).
- 33 Ibidem.
- 34 Ibidem.
- 35 Juan Heinsohn Huala, *Hijos de la Tierra* (unpublished, Rotterdam 2007) 2.
- 36 See also Jella Pichotte, 'Het romantische beeld van Chili raak ik niet kwijt. Kunstenaar Kata Nuñez vertelt over de Chilenen in symbolen', *Rotterdams Dagblad* (19 January 1999).
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- 39 Jac van der Ster, 'De E55 en de kunst. Te weinig van het goede', *De Groene Amsterdammer* (11 June 1955) 9.
- 40 Anna Bosselaar, Bea van Golen en and Siebe Thissen, *Drie nijverheidstentoonstellingen in Rotterdam: Nenijto 1928, E55 en C70. Een analyse van opvattingen over technologie* (EUR unpublished study, Rotterdam 1987) 28.
- 41 Bouma, *Van Amen tot Zekveld*, 136-137.
- 42 Regouin & Roelofs, *Couleur Locale*, 11.
- 43 Jan van Adrichem, *Beeldende kunst en kunstbeleid in Rotterdam 1945-1985* (Rotterdam 1987), 113-114.
- 44 Interview with Jan Donia and Gosse Oosterhof (December 2006).
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- 47 'Muurschilderingen kunnen leefbaarheid in stad bevorderen. Cor Kraat maakte studiereis naar Amerika', *De Havenloods* (18 March 1975).
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- 57 Idem, 33-70.
- 58 Idem, 84.
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- 62 Interview with Bob Kemper (April 2005).
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- 64 Wim Beeren & Frans Haks, 'Inleiding', Wim Beeren & Talitha Schoon (eds), *Graffiti* (catalogue, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam 1983) 4.
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- 73 Raket, *Rood Rotterdam in de jaren '30* (Rotterdam 1984).
- 74 Hans Abelman (ed.), *Kunst in het Oude Noorden II* (Rotterdam 1990) 44-45.
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- 79 Joe Cillen, *Orgon, Orgon, Orgon* (archives CBK Rotterdam 1995).
- 80 Gu Deqing, 'A Chinese Mural in Rotterdam', *China Pictorial* (# 654, December 2002) 38-39.
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