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2008

Spirit of Place

Jeroen Boomgaard

The Virtual Museum Zuidas (VMZ) searches for ways to present good works of art in public space of Zuidas. It gives commissions for large artworks that put a permanent stamp on the landscape but also for temporary, almost coincidental artworks that change the area for a short moment.

The VMZ has requested the Gerrit Rietveld Academy's Lectoraat Art & Public Space to critically investigate the role of art in this equally ambitious and complex district. One of the ways the Professorship is conducting this research is to ask prospective artists to study the area and come up with ideas for it.

Artists nowadays seek their audience in all sorts of places. No longer do they make a principled distinction between an exhibition space and the outdoor environment. However, making 'art for the street' does have its demands and requirements. In January of 2007, Zuidas was offered to (ex)participants of the Sandberg Institute as an area in which to experiment. Since November, the results of this exercise have been worked out under the guidance of Mark Kremer into definitive proposals and forms of presentation.

In order to present the core idea of their proposals, the artists are taking their audience on a tour* through Zuidas in April 2008. The tour will be directed by dramaturg/critic Jellichje Reijnders. In addition, the proposals are being presented on the website of the VMZ and in a special supplement of the VMZ newspaper. Here, the seven designs have been 'brought to life' with the help of illustrations and artists' statements as well as texts written by Master's in Art History students at the University of Amsterdam.

The artists were challenged to capture the 'genius loci' of Zuidas, but what really is the 'spirit of place'? The proposals above all show that the artists have remained close to their own practice. Perhaps that's logical, for after all, you must know yourself in order to come close to another.

The departure point for five of the proposals is the placement of objects at one site or another in Zuidas: an office building for birds, a freestanding lift, a propaganda image, a dragon sculpture and a beaded tree as a statue. There is also an idea for adding a decorative pattern of bling-bling to the façade of a building. One proposal relates to a specific location: transforming a cold underground corridor by camouflaging it with upholstery, so that the corridor becomes something else and yet remains the same. The audience's experience of these works will be quite different. Some you have to enter or walk through, and at one of them you can even leave an offering.

In conclusion, it would appear that instead of presenting an artistic counter-reaction to the streets of Zuidas with these proposals, the artists have wanted to introduce a daydreamy, poetic element, something which perhaps is already present below the surface in Zuidas.

Now it's the VMZ's turn to make the next move. It will decide whether a number of all these good ideas are to be actually realized.

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**The tour through Zuidas will take place in the middle of April. For up-to-date information, see www.virtueel-museum.nl.*

This publication is a collaborative effort by the Lectoraat Art & Public Space, the Sandberg Institute and the Virtual Museum Zuidas.

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