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Artist studios in churches, a hidden bar in a burger joint, hippie beaches in the center, a restaurant in a greenhouse, thrilling views from the old docks ... Discover an Amsterdam beyond canals and coffeshops in 38 hours.

Amie Dicke

Obvious Secrets



Amie Dicke

Most people expect artists to paint, but that's the one thing this Dutch visual artist doesn't do. Her artistic expression is more diverse, expressed with sculpture, works on paper and research into found objects that share a common essence. Through her works, Dicke subtly brings light to the unseen and forgotten—it's about shifting perspectives. She challenges our perceptions of both the everyday and the extraordinary. After graduating from Willem de Kooning Academy in her hometown of Rotterdam, Dicke moved to New York City for a few years before returning to the Netherlands to make Amsterdam her home eight years ago. Today, she is deeply rooted to the city she calls home.

Amie's work shows that even amid consensus, our perceptions are ultimately our own. Looking at Amsterdam through her eyes, ordinary tourist attractions become secret hide-outs and insider spots become accessible. Her favorite places are as unique as her studio, which is located in a church (it still holds occasional services). The altar serves as a conference table. Amsterdam is not only Amie Dicke's home and workplace, it's her source of inspiration, too.

Photo: Jordi Hulsman/FvF

**Oude Kerk
Centrum**

**Hortus Botanicus
Centrum**

You are originally from Rotterdam. What made you move to Amsterdam?
Love and work. My boyfriend already worked here so he was commuting back and forth between the cities to make sure that we saw each other. And my home gallery is located here, so moving here felt like a logical consequence.

Amsterdam has many nice neighborhoods. Which one did you decide on?
The so-called Plantage buurt. We still live in the same place. It's a very nice area: close to the zoo, Rijksacademie and Hortus Botanicus. It's not too crowded with tourists and it has a lot of green spaces.

As an artist you express yourself visually. How would you show the essence of Amsterdam in one image?
Through a photograph of a bicycle bell stuck in asphalt.

To illustrate that cycling plays an important role in Amsterdam's everyday life?
Yes. It's no cliché—there are a lot of people cycling in Amsterdam. It makes up the feel of the city. It's even something that I really miss when I am away, as being on a bike is a very essential part of my life in Amsterdam—it's how you get around. But the streets in Amsterdam are still old and paved with cobblestones, so you'll get shaken when biking here. That's why bicycle bells fall off so often. Especially the tops of the bells. Every Dutch person knows that you'll lose your bell once in a while. It's normal. If you're aware of them, you can see them lying around everywhere. I've been obsessed with them for a year and always picked them up when I find them. Even when I've been in a hurry, quickly going from A to B, I've stopped when I've seen one, manoeuvred between the

traffic, gotten it and put it into my collection. I have more than 100. The ones I like most are the ones that get stuck in the pavement because a car drove over it. But I can't take these ones with me as I can't prise them out. For me, they are the piercings of the city. They are wonderful, strange signs that tell of damage, loss or an accident. So this is one of the things that I tell people who come to Amsterdam: "Try to look out for the bike bells in the streets. This is the typical Amsterdam. But it happens in the periphery of your vision. Don't try to search for them, you will see them along the way. It's impossible to find them deliberately."

Where will you bike with your guest who visits you for 38 hours?
To the Oude Kerk. It's the oldest church of Amsterdam and currently the oldest building in the city. It dates back to the 14th century. It's in the middle of the red light district, surrounded by sex, drugs and a lot of tourists. In fact, it's almost impossible to bike there as it's so crowded. But it's worthwhile to cut one's way through. Most people go there to visit the grave of Saskia van Uylenburgh, Rembrandt's wife. But I go there for another reason. Just when you enter the church, there are two spiral staircases. One is on the right side, another is on the left side. One is open, the other one is closed. If you go to the closed one, you can press your spine against the spine of the staircase. You don't need to walk up to do that. You have to do it when you are still on the ground floor. When you stand there and look up, you get the most wonderful vertigo.

Stigter van Doesburg
Jordaan

Galerie Fons Welter
Jordaan

Annet Gelink
Gallery
Jordaan

Martin van Zomeren
Jordaan

Hoftuin
Oost

Restaurant
Merkelbach
Oost

Brasserie Schiller
Centrum

Your studio is at the Church De Duif at the Prinsengracht. You seem to have some kind of connection to churches?

Maybe, yes. At the same time it's also a coincidence. The Oude Kerk is still working as a church, although it's also rented out sometimes as it tries to find its position in today's society. And that's what I find so interesting. People still love the church as a place to sightsee and reflect, but they have mainly lost their religion. So how can we deal with these buildings today? Can we find a new soul for them? Their structures still breathe meaning and even consolation to us.

What about Amsterdam is similarly touching for you?

To walk around the *Hortus Botanicus* in summer nights. Of course, the botanical gardens are also nice from the inside during daytime, but there is something magical that you can only experience at a late hour: you'll hear wonderful sounds that may remind you of birds—it's something like whistling. But it's frogs, in fact. I've never heard anything as magnificent as that. And in the winter I love to bike through the Vondelpark at nightfall. Then, the lights in the park are not on yet. So, you only see the bike lights. And they are moving around in the air to the movement of the bikes. That's very funny. And dogs have lights on them, too.

As an artist, you probably know where to see good exhibitions.

Yes. I recommend *Stigter van Doesburg*. That's the gallery I'm working with. And also *Galerie Fons Welter*, *Annet Gelink Gallery* and *Martin van Zomeren*. They are all located in the Jordaan district and not too far from each other—perfect to walk around all of them.

And what place do you propose for food?

I just discovered the *Hoftuin*. It's a new restaurant in an old building just behind the Hermitage museum. You can have a perfect lunch there.

And where do you like to go to dinner?

My favorite place is the *Merkelbach* restaurant. It's located in an old land house, has a wonderful garden and good food. Especially the smoked fish is great. But you should make a reservation to ensure you get a seat. If you just like to walk in somewhere easily, I suggest the *Brasserie Schiller* at the Rembrandtplein. It's a crowded area, but it's a nice place to have simple food and good wine. You can have everything from a good stampot to pasta. It's not starred chef food, but I like the laid-back atmosphere.

Talking about traditional food, which is your favorite traditional dish?

It is not a dish, but I like drop, licorice, and—this may sound disgusting now, especially as part of the same sentence—herring. Especially the pickled ones.

Where do you get the best herring?

There are little fish shops all over the place. But the best ones, surely, are on Utrechtsestraat.



Photo: Julie Veltuijpe

It is not known if this is Amie's preferred position for a siesta. Since January 2014 her studio is located in Church De Duif at the Prinsengracht.