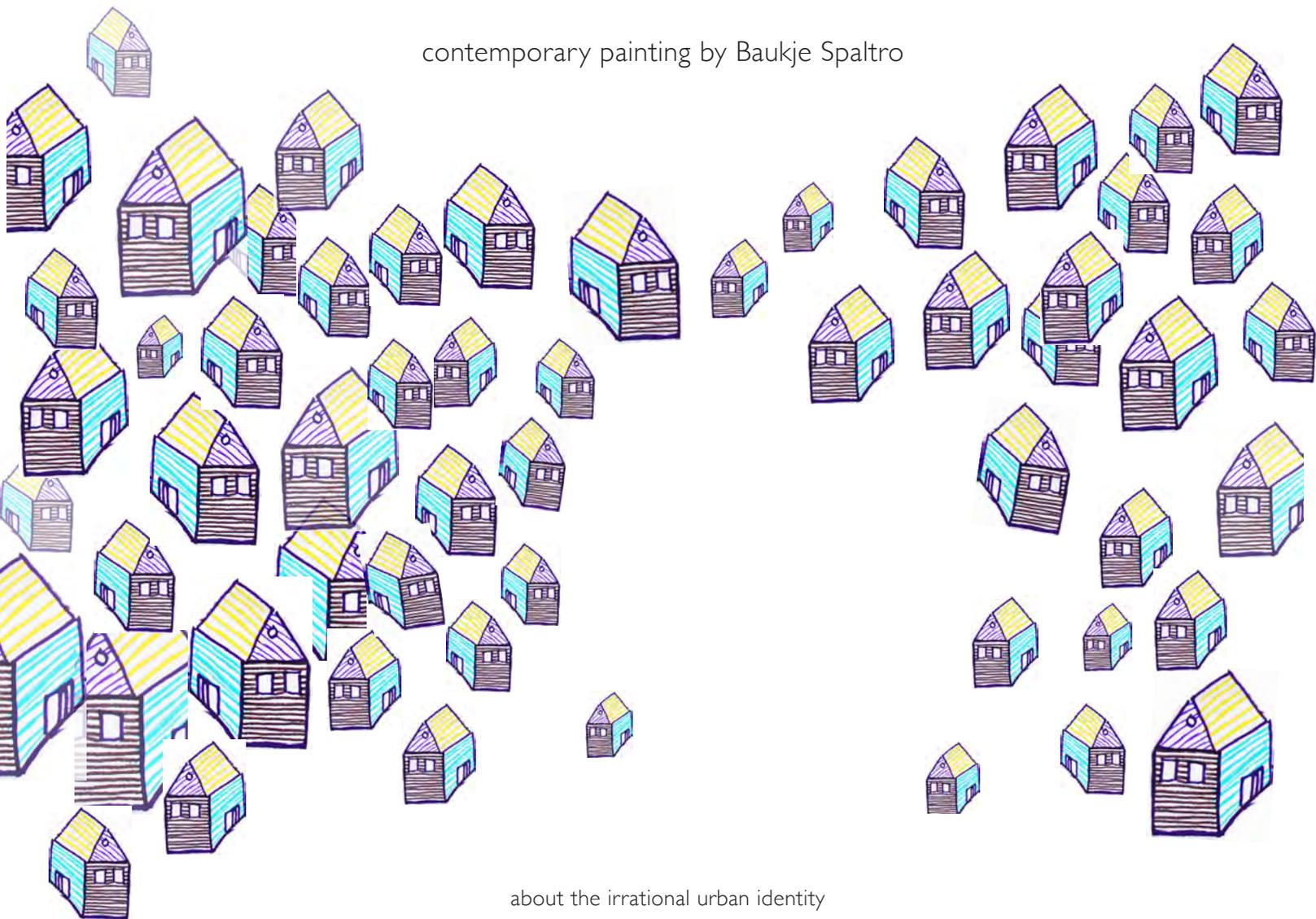


CITY SPHERES

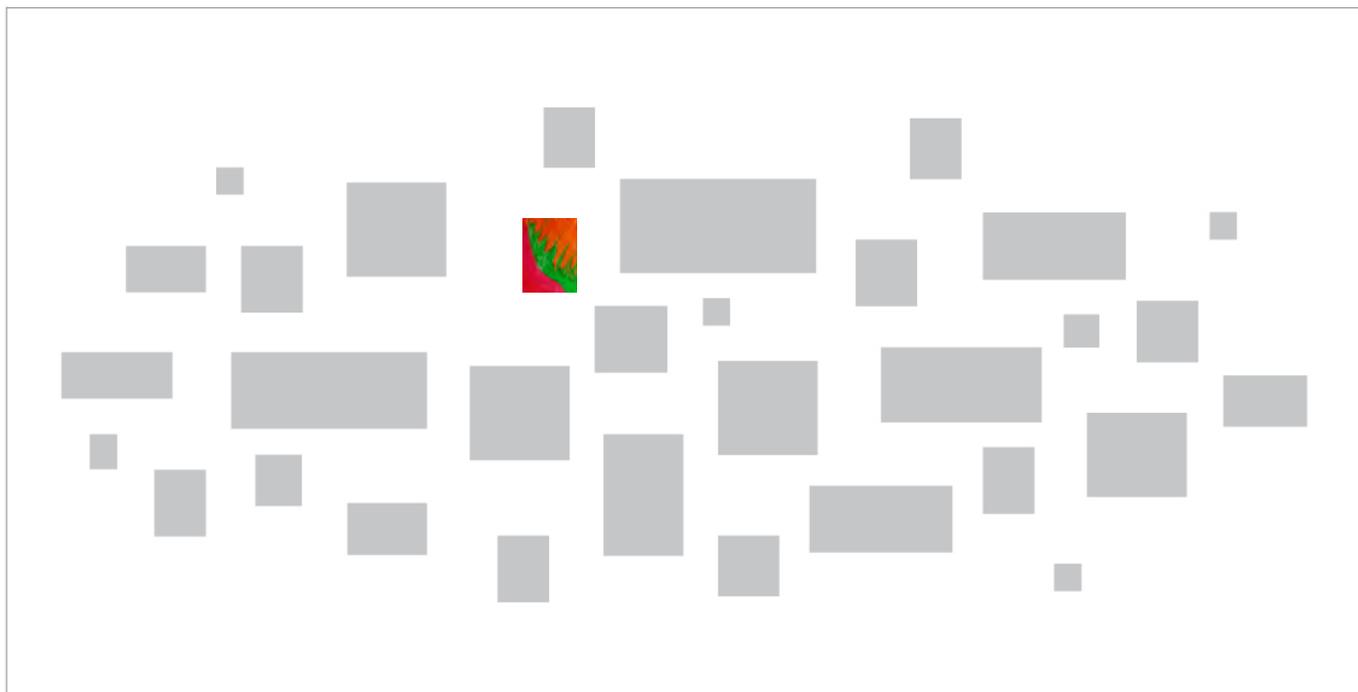
SCHALKWIJK KREUZBERG ISOLA



contemporary painting by Baukje Spaltro



about the irrational urban identity



City Sphere installation

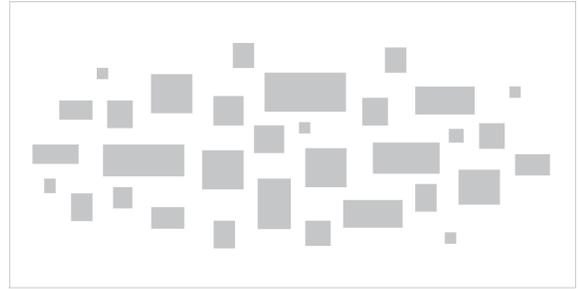
The colour map is the first canvas Spaltro paints in the district. The fluorescent colours in it define the background of each canvas in a City Sphere series.

Above, the colour card of City Sphere Schalkwijk with the fluorescent colours: orange, pink and green.

Each installation is a cloud-shaped composition of twenty-three paintings made on the spot.



CITY SPHERES



In City Spheres I research the city as an irrational space, as an ambiance resulting from the communal construction and use by its inhabitants and visitors. How can I, as a painter, catch this unique urban ambiance with specific colours on canvas?

I have grown up in different European cities with completely diverse atmospheres. This is how my fascination with the authentic city, as a living space and as an identity originated. What is this authentic identity and what shapes it?

The Irrational Space

The city is a constructed space, an assembly of concrete buildings and less tangible structures. What interests me is the fluid, non-tangible authentic character of the city.

As a source of creation and growth, which originates from an elusive power (force), which I could call irrational or authentic. I would rather call it 'the soul' of a place, not in any rational or religious sense, but more in the sense of the character nature of a person. In Roman mythology this is called genius loci, in other words the 'protecting spirit' or 'spirit of a location'. I have embraced this theme wholeheartedly.

Ever since 2015 I attempt to catch this genius loci of specific cities in my City Spheres series.

This is a site-specific research into urban authenticity, whereby I focus on this elusive character. Until today I have painted series in Amsterdam, Arnhem, Berlin, Den Helder, Haarlem, Milano and Turku (Finland).

With saturated colors I try to capture (strive to shape) the form of the experience of the urban identity in a way that diverges from the factual visual reality. This is somewhat distorted under the influence of the subjective experience and gaze, which add an dimension to how we normally look, and which could lead into a questioning of what this reality really is.

Besides, I wonder if the subjective perception is perhaps more true than that which is being considered the factually registered reality. In my work I focus on catching the unique urban character, her fluidity, with the experience of the impossibility of one, unambiguous interpretation.

I translate an urban quarter into a specific use of color: tonal and often grayish colors on fluorescent backgrounds, influenced by the local surroundings. Color is an important element in my work for indicating the irrational. 'Fluor' colors are highly saturated colors, they are dominant and determine my observation and enforce specific and instinctive painterly choices. On a pink fluor background each color is looking entirely different than on a white or a neutral background. The fluor causes an almost physical and direct reaction in me while painting, not my thinking but my intuition is being called upon. The amount of the unpainted layer of fluor strongly determines the composition of the work, because the fluor makes every color on top of it 'vibrate'. The top layer's colors are just about out of harmony with the fluor under-layer; they actually have an abrasive relationship with the fluor background. It becomes unclear which is foreground and which background. The question arises what exactly can be seen. In a similar way this use of color produces a direct, spontaneous reaction in the viewer's observation. This way I invite the observer to look from another point of view at their own environment, to reflect on the quarter that has been painted here.

Fluor colors are the real contemporary colors, they refer to the virtual reality, to the online RGB colors of our computer and smart-phone screens. What do we perceive and what is the truth? Is the truth that what we, on the spot, really see and experience ourselves?

Or, do we only have eyes for a 'truth' that is being defined online as being the reality, the city of the online pictures (and fables) instead of our own experience of that city? I use the portrait of a specific urban quarter, painted in colors that are dictated by the city, as a means to research these questions time and again.

I experienced the authentic, wayward character of a city for the first time in Berlin, during the collapse of the Wall in 1989. There was much energy, turmoil, hope, the air crackled with tension. It was the first time I was introduced to the irrational aspect of a city, an elusive energy or atmosphere. I felt that the city had its own 'soul' and voice, which, in my perception, radiated tension. There, I was searching for a new, not yet existing color. Later it became apparent that I had a psychosis while I was in Berlin, and that this profound experience shaped me as a painter. Back home, I experienced the urban character of Berlin as an intense, deep red color. This experience I have worked into one large, red painting, which I worked on for a year. It has led to contemplating what is true and real in our perception of a city. The realization of a parallel reality – in my psychotic state I saw different things than when I am stable – made me look at the world differently. Influenced by a small physical or mental nudge, we have entirely different experiences than that what we experience as being rational, such as chronology or causality. Is the one more true or valuable than the other? *In my opinion it is exactly the art of painting that at times approximates this experience of insecurity about what we observe.*

In 2019, thirty years afterwards, I have returned to Berlin and have painted City Sphere SO36 in the Kreuzberg quarter. In this entire series the color red, in all its warm gradations has remained crucial.

I draw much inspiration from the paintings of Jules de Balincourt and Jadé Fadojutimi. Balincourt because of his urban landscapes in saturated colors, that seem to blur the border between fantasy and reality. Fadojutimi's 'emotional landscapes' question her everyday experiences, memories and self-knowledge. In powerful lines and intense colors she researches the relationship between herself and her surroundings.

The city as atmosphere, what kind of world are we building together?

Regretfully, the authentic atmosphere of cities is under much pressure during the past years, because of the complex, contemporary world of globalization, efficiency and optimization. Dutch tomatoes in Italian supermarkets, garlic from China, Starbuck everywhere and foreign investors. Because of gentrification cities have started to look more and more alike and have become unaffordable and uninhabitable besides. The city seems to increasingly exclude, rather than include. To which extent do the inhabitants still have input in and added values to their own living environments? Are we aware of this, or have we succumbed to over-consumption and passive indifference? Is there still space and attention for the local identity? Or are we merely a little bolt in the larger mechanism of the Western capitalist society, where there is no room for individual input?

I'm inspired by the book 'Sferen' of the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. He says: "The question where we are is more important than ever and more important than the question who we are. We have to concentrate on the place that people create, in order to be who they are. This place I call (atom)sphere." Sloterdijk says that we, as humans, construct inner spaces on different levels. These human inner spaces are to be found in the intimate sphere within their own home, as well as in the larger sphere of urban inner spaces. Sloterdijk's concept of sphere, as a non-physical space which we construct together in order to be who we want to be and from which we derive our identity and reality, really speaks to me. Especially the spheres of old, lived-through neighbourhoods, that have originated organically, intrigue and fascinate me. This authentic urban sphere has largely been shaped, through the centuries, by the inhabitants and users of a place and can be experienced as an identity and as an intangible given, as soon as you walk through the neighbourhood. In City Spheres I research the urban character as a fluid and not concretely perceptible 'sphere'. I create images of this typical individuality of the local, the idiosyncratic character of a specific community with the exchange and input that exist in urban neighbourhoods.

Each urban district has its own identity, a non-rational and not visible sense, according to the Romans the Genius Loci. I capture this on canvas with local colors on floor color undergrounds. The first work depicts the local color card and the floor colors of that place and moment.



City Sphere Den Nieuwen Helder (nl) 2015.06



City Sphere Platform One (Amsterdam Z.) 2018.03



City Sphere Civic Pride (Bijlmer nl) 2016.02



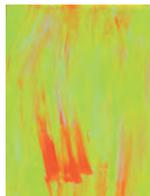
City Sphere KNSM (Amsterdam) 2018.09



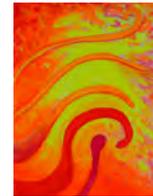
City Sphere Aura (Turku Fin) 2016.10



City Sphere Beek (Arnhem nl) 2019.03



City Sphere Isola (Milan) 2017.01



City Sphere SO36 (Berlin) 2019.09



City Sphere Schalkwijk (Haarlem) 2021

From my own experience I know the importance of people being able to shape their own environment, co-create the city, besides their own, concrete living space, also participating in the construction of the collective, less tangible space. I live and work for more than 30 years in artists' house Tetterode, www.wwpt.nl. I was part of shaping this place both as a construction worker and as a member of the Board. Motivated by idealism, without any money and at times running into problems, we have, as a community, build a mini village under our own administration. The direct involvement and input of the inhabitants, ultimately contribute to a greater connectedness and a higher quality of life. It also leads to the polyphony that gives each neighbourhood its individuality.

Work process

For the duration of one month I visit a European city quarter I don't know yet, so that I can work without foreknowledge. This is often a rather poor, multicultural suburb which is being threatened by gentrification.* I always take three suitcases along with same basic materials, among which are the same 9 fluor colors in acrylic and 30 colors in oil-paint. This equal, but limited starting position, helps me in optimally researching the genius loci of a specific neighbourhood.

On location I work in a temporary studio. Everything there is different from my own studio. The paint-tubes are positioned in a different way, the daylight is different, and I paint in a different position, sitting down, standing up, laying down. This is how I intuitively chose the local colors for that neighbourhood. Each neighbourhood has different characteristics and yields different color combinations. In Turku it became orange and green, in Den Helder blue and green.

On the first day I straight away determine the color chart of a neighbourhood, a small canvas with the selected fluor colors. These fluor colors I use as the ground for every canvas in the series. Every day I stroll through the neighbourhood while researching; I observe, meet people, take pictures, jot things down. After the stroll I paint my observations in the shape of concrete characteristics, such as buildings, trees and sidewalks on top of the fluor colors I determined earlier. The local, the architecture, culture and meetings influence my view. Besides, the inhabitants have co-created this genius loci; it is they who have defined the composition, colors and sphere of the place. I work concentrated and non-stop, because I only have three weeks; a real marathon. In the end the result is a painted installation, a composition of about thirty, carefully installed individual paintings, which I call a cloud. A cloud is spatial, just like a neighbourhood. Besides, the inhabitants have co-created this genius loci; it is they who have defined the composition, colors and sphere of the place.

Exhibition City Sphere Schalkwijk 09.09.2022 - 10.10.2022 De Vishal Haarlem



City Sphere Schalkwijk ca 20 meters large by 1.5 meters high
21 works by Baukje Spaltro and ca. 90 by locals from Schalkwijk
mixed technique on canvas/linen
made in 2021/2022
foto ©dominique panhuysen

I work concentrated and non-stop, because I only have three weeks; a real marathon. In the end the result is a painted installation, a composition of about thirty, carefully installed individual paintings, which I call a cloud. A cloud is spatial, just like a neighbourhood.

Another aspect of this research is the local intervention. This is a collaboration with local artists, in which I show my cloud next to the local art. This cloud is the starting point for a dialogue with artists and inhabitants about their urban identity and how they relate to it. Each neighbourhood yields a different collaboration. In the Milanese quarter Isola I organized a Painters Club with colleague painters, which became a grandiose public event. Because of the diversity of the paintings, an interesting dialogue originated between painters and the public about the value of painting in an urban context. In Turku, Finland, I collaborated with a choreographer during four dance performances, while I painted live, on stage, the atmosphere of Turku on a gigantic canvas. The interaction with the local creatives is very important. Through the arts and this interaction I experience the local identity even more intensely.

Back in my studio in Amsterdam I hang the cloud-installation on the wall, in order to experience the local sphere anew. I elaborate the cloud further with larger works in a more abstract visual language. In this phase color is more important than the recognisability of the physical characteristics of the city. Only at a distance, from the memory, I see the genius loci more clearly. In this I trust my experiences and intuition. Just like a music track from my youth that can call up an important memory and nostalgic feeling, so does the cloud of the researched place also evoke a melancholy image, which I further define with color. But how true is the memory? This studio image interprets the genius loci the best. Painting these works in my own studio is an intensive process that takes a lot of attention and sometimes takes years.

Schalkwijk

The specific of the genius loci of a quarter stands out best when series are being exhibited next to each other. This Autumn I present City Sphere Schalkwijk (Haarlem 2021/2022) next to City Sphere SO36 (Kreuzberg, Berlin 2019/2021) in the Vishal in Haarlem.

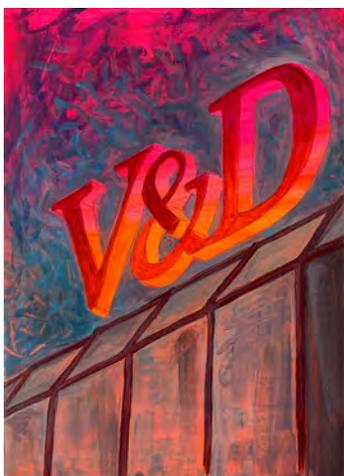
City Sphere Schalkwijk is a collective image of 120 small canvasses of 100 inhabitants and 20 of mine. It is the first time I have collaborated with inhabitants, who, each of them painted their own vision of the neighbourhood on a floor underlay. The floor as defining element of the image links all the works into a cloud about the sphere of Schalkwijk.

*Floor Milikowski "The future of super diverse cities lies right there in the suburbs, where there is an abundance of ambitious artists, entrepreneurs and social workers. Empowered by the communities they come from, they bundle their forces, for a more equal future in which nobody will be forgotten." from *We are the City* www.floormilikowski.com

City Sphere Schalkwijk 2022 Haarlem (nl)

a few single works made by Baukje Spaltro or inhabitants of Schalkwijk district.

All the works by Baukje Spaltro are made in a mixed oil technique on linen.



V&D - 24 x 18 cm



New Horizons, Californiëplein - 30 x 40 cm



De poort van Schalkwijk - 30 x 65 cm



Outside - 25 x 18 cm



Hema, my peeing spot - 24 x 30 cm
by Hennie van der Molen, The Morning Mayor



My district! - Mayamba
30 x 24 cm



Sand, Californiëplein 14 - 35 x 35 cm



Half-tree - 45 x 30 cm



Old structures - Baukje Spaltro
40x30 cm



Facade - Baukje Spaltro
24x20 cm



Laan van Berlijn - Baukje Spaltro
24x30 cm



Febo, Rivièrasquare - Baukje Spaltro
55x40 cm



Fireworks New Year's Eve - Romayna Taabouni
18x25 cm



Tango, Spijkerboorweg
40x24 cm



Costa del Sol - 40x30 cm



Andalusia - 20x25 cm



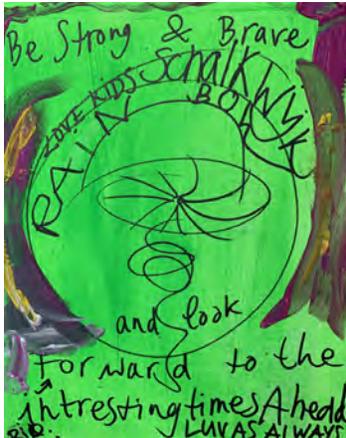
Toilet - 18x18 cm



United polders Old Schalkwijk, old meets new Schalkwijk - Hans Geerdink - 24 x 30 cm



Colorfull Schalkwijk - L.O.
24 x 30 cm



Be strong and Brave - Ria Wever
30 x 24 cm



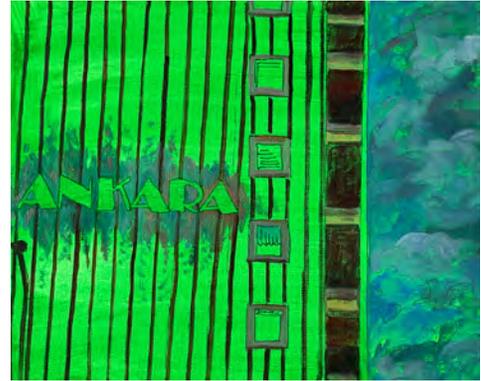
Life in Schalkwijk - Rezan
30 x 24 cm



Dead tree just won't be cut down Jannie - 24 x 30 cm



Tiles, shopping mall
25 x 18 cm



Ankara
24 x 30 cm



Dog on the lookout - Ingrid wolf
30 x 24 cm



The weeping elephant on construction site Hof van Jacob, Boerhaavelaan - Carla de V. - 24 x 30 cm

City Sphere Schalkwijk 10.10. -23.10.2022 shoppingmall Centrum Schalkwijk Haarlem





City Sphere Schalkwijk part with pink and orange paintings in mixed media on linen or canvas
approx. 20 metres wide and 1.5 metres high



City Sphere Schalkwijk part with green paintings in mixed media on linnen or canvas
approx. 5 meters wide and 1.5 meters high

Thanks!

City Sphere Schalkwijk is a co-production and made possible by the cooperation of various parties and residents from Schalkwijk.

Thanks to:

De Vishal, Centrum Schalkwijk, Vastgoed Lunee,
Blanka De Bruyne, buurtbewoners, lokale ondernemers,
Genootschap Oud-Schalkwijk Haarlem, Hertenkampgroep,
Kinderraad Schalkwijk, Kunstnest Schalkwijk,
MeeMaakPodium Schalkwijk (Bibliotheek Schalkwijk),
Stichting Culturele Activiteiten Schalkwijk, Hart Haarlem,
Stichting Dock en wijkteams, Stichting Palanka Negra,
Weekendacademie Schalkwijk en vele anderen.



Franswa during the opening at the Vishal 09.09.2022

Filmmaker Inge Willems for the beautiful film about the making process of City Sphere Schalkwijk.
Soon online www.spaltro.nl - films.

Franswa for the beautiful song City Sphere Schalkwijk.

Postman Paul for distributing our playful survey What do you miss in Schalkwijk? The results were remarkable.
There is a need for a museum, cosy restaurants, more greenery, meeting places and organic shops/markets.

Spaarne Stroom and Jaap Timmers (Haarlems Dagblad) for the nice articles.

ABC Architecture Centre Haarlem, De Vishal, 37PK and the participants for the Circle Talk.

Annet vd Vlugt, Lenneke Overmaat and curator Renée Borgonjen for the fantastic teamwork.

Cor Jabaaij for all your help and beautiful photographs.



Renée Borgonjen Baukje Spaltro



Circle Talk about Schalkwijk - 09.10.2022 De Vishal

City Sphere SO36 Kreuzberg Berlin Germany 2019.09



City Sphere SO36 (2 x 4 m) SOMA Art Space Berlin



Neo Liberalism RBS 40x25 cm



Tree Liegnitzer Str: 60x45 cm



Satellite Woldemar Str. 35 x 25 cm



Bürgersteig I, Reichenbergerstraße 75 x 55 cm
Sidewalk I, Reichenbergerstraße



Schatten (auto) shadows 40x35 cm



Bürgersteig 3 sidewalk 3 80×60 cm 2022



Bürgersteig 4, weis sidewalk 4, white 80 x 60 cm 2022

City Sphere ISOLA Isola Milan 2017.01



City Sphere ISOLA (2,5x7 m) VIR studio Viagarini-in-Residence Milan 2017.03



Painters Club an intervention by Spaltro and ten local painters, a collaboration with: Viafarini, Mars and Yellow



Ringhiere Pазze *crazy railings* 145x180 cm 2019



Baukje Spaltro (Milan, 1967) lives and works in Amsterdam. She studied at the HKU (Utrecht School of the Arts), painting at the AIS (Amsterdam Institute of Painting) and at the Accademia Belle Arti di Brera in Milan (Italy). She often works on commissions and in her own visual art projects. Her work is included in several art collections at home and abroad.

At the end of 2022, Spaltro will create her tenth City Sphere in Corvetto, a suburb of Milan. Looking back on the previous nine City Spheres, she is working on a five-point manifesto of City Spheres.

Manifesto concept

THE GENIUS LOCI as the local identity of an urban space.

FLUORISING COLOURS influence our perception of the outside and inside world.

MORE AWARE about an urban space.

THE VALUE of visual art combined with social intelligence for inclusive cities

photo: Viafarini.work



City Spheres is supported by Pictoright IDWIZW (nl) Stiftung MC (ch)

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