
With A Colleague's Regards

Louis van Gasteren (1922-2016) was a filmmaker, visual artist and "seismographer of his time". My first encounter with Louis van Gasteren's oeuvre was the documentary 'Hans Het Leven voor de Dood', which I saw in a Leiden filmhouse around 1983.

The film sketches a portrait of the generation living in the city of Amsterdam during the turbulent fifties and sixties, and is based on a montage of interviews highlighting the short life of poet and composer Hans van Sweeden.

Completely captivated by the film and 'begeistert' by the soundtrack, I immediately sat down to the piano at home and played for hours, getting my fingers round the monotonous succession of sounds Misha Mengelberg presses and pushes as it were from the keys.

And even now, when I hear the melody 'On Some Faraway Beach' by Brian Eno again, I see the city with a bird's-eye view - through the lens of Louis van Gasteren.

Our personal contact began in 2011. Louis van Gasteren rang to invite me to visit him, in response to my contribution to the call for preservation and restoration of original artworks during the Amsterdam metro stations' Oostlijn renovation.

Louis Van Gasteren created the Gesamtkunstwerk 'Greetings from the Nieuwmarkt' in the metro station Nieuwmarkt with Jan Sierhuis, Bert Griepink, Roel van den Ende and Tine Hofman.

During our inspiring conversation in the Kloveniersburgwal house, just a few canals from the studio here, I also had a look at his archive. It contained visual material from divers public artworks, either executed or concept proposals. And then I began thinking: a wealth of draft projects and artworks by Louis van Gasteren that could be realized at a specific location, anew or for the first time.

After our meeting we remained in touch, keeping each other informed about the progress of the Nieuwmarkt artwork. In the period that followed, Louis van Gasteren also surprised me several times by announcing on the telephone or at length by letter, that he had seen one of my Amsterdam artworks on site: 'The Key Is Under The Doormat', 'You Have Ten Saved Messages' in the Synagogue LJJ, and the floor-piece 'Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright'.

"Yes, Martijn, I called my driver and we went off by car, like an invalid to Plein Kraaipan, near the Afrikanerplein. And then during that short journey the curtains were ripped aside, and we're back in the middle of The Second World War. One opens all those drawers again if one goes off to your floor artwork.

It proposes that 'tomorrow' means that it'll all happen in our lifetime, that we'll just manage to witness it. But goddamn, it only happens after our death and we've got to stretch out time until tomorrow, and have faith that everything will be alright post mortem.

What would you say to elevating your floor artwork to a space where we could hold a Service? A church with no walls and roof, only a floor. And you've made that floor, and a message emerges from that floor. And three or four speakers come from the pulpit, the lectern of course. And there's a lecture there about the issue and the thesis you postulate: 'Tomorrow everything will be alright' between those two blocks of houses.

So there they are, a trio of heavyweights scrutinizing the course of time: your staircase, the synagogue and now this square. I think both your artwork and your message require verbal justification for the institutionalization of the optimistic message. In other words, dear Martijn, we're going to raise that floor. With a colleague's regards, Louis."

I had to "come and drink a glass soon", and then I could collect my order of his recently released film 'Nema Avonia za Zagreb' at the same time. After our conversation he gave me the dvd along with a published scenario.

It is Louis van Gasteren's last film. A retrospect of his life including the beautiful scene shot in Abcoude - a Dutch village with two churches lying in line with distance between them - where the vanishing of one tower behind the other tower is masterfully portrayed.

Martijn Sandberg, Amsterdam, 1 March 2018