

Het Parool

‘Schattige babyvoetjes’ op ruige NDSM-werf: ‘Vrouwelijke kunst in de publieke ruimte is zeldzaam’

De ruige NDSM-werf is door Lily van der Stokker opgesierd met een zacht en liefdevol kunstwerk. ‘Decoratief werk wordt vaak onderschat.’



→ Lily van der Stokker: ‘Toen ik de locatie met overal graffiti voor het eerst zag, dacht ik: wat een prachtige, inspirerende plek.’ Gert Jan van Rooij

A jumble of graffiti can be seen at the NDSM wharf. Suddenly, above this multi-colored chaos, a text appears in enormous, soft green letters: Cute (tiny) Baby Feet.

It's an artwork by Lily van der Stokker, who spent two years creating an artwork for the former shipyard, now a creative hub. Van der Stokker: "When I first saw the location, covered in graffiti, I thought what a beautiful, inspiring, rugged place."

NDSM had previously been interested in an older work. The enormous text work, "Roof Terrace with Jacuzzi,(Dakterras met Bubbelbad)" had stood atop her house on Valeriusstraat in 2022, but it had since been demolished, so she was asked to create a different text. "I initially thought about putting enormous texts representing household objects on those buildings. Shower caps, dirty socks, baby clothes, a mop. As a kind of ode to housekeeping. But they couldn't finance something that large."

Van der Stokker ultimately opted for a single text piece, on the so-called "sloping building" where the NDSM-werf foundation is also housed. After back-and-forth emails and brainstorming, the choice was: "Cute Baby Feet (Schattige Babyvoetjes)." Soft and loving, yet powerful in contrast to the surroundings. Her reasoning for the light green color was simple: "I thought pink was too obvious; blue is the same as the sky, and I'd already done yellow. So, it became light green."

For Van der Stokker, it's a political work. "It's feminine art in public spaces. You don't see that much these days. The area around NDSM is dominated by boys who create graffiti. I love graffiti and used to design these myself. But with this feminine text, I wanted to send a powerful counter-message—not bitter, but cheerful and sweet."

For the next two years, "Adorable Tiny Baby Feet (Schattige babyvoetjes)" will remain on the facade. It's been well-received. One person questioned whether the words truly reflected the site's industrial history: "Surely this isn't about the dockworkers who worked so hard here?" Van der Stokker replied: "But weren't they also working for their wives and children? I once heard my brother, a big guy and a successful businessman, but also a caring grandfather, say tenderly: 'Look at those adorable baby feet.' That tenderness inspired me to choose this text."

The artwork belongs to a long tradition of feminist art. Van der Stokker's decorative work is often underestimated. "Yet, there's something liberating precisely in that superficiality." Van der Stokker has been painting ornaments, clouds, and flowers since the 1980s, forms that are often dismissed as "contentless." "That decorative contentlessness has always fascinated me. People used to walk away in anger from my cheerful, friendly work because they didn't understand it. But it's clear that with these subjects, I've touched upon taboos that deserve even more attention."

Fluorescent

Lily van der Stokker (71) is internationally renowned for her monumental, colorful murals and drawings that focus on everyday themes such as housework, kindness, and old age. She often uses fluorescent colors and seemingly lighthearted texts like "Thank you, Sweetheart" and "Best Mooi Weer Vandaag" (Beautiful Weather Today).

Galerie van Gelder

Van der Stokker currently has a solo exhibition at Galerie van Gelder, Planciusstraat 9A. There she created Nothing Wall, a mural spanning forty meters. The black lines are derived from meaningless scribbles, drawings made without a thought.

More Nothing

Another Nothing Wall by Lily van der Stokker is currently being built for a construction fence surrounding the future Hartwig Museum on Parnassusweg. The wall will be 92 meters long and will be completed in October.