

The Amsterdam Trans-Idiomatic Arts Practicum
Stanford University Overseas Seminar in Amsterdam
OSPGEN 32: **Syllabus**

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Location: Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Local Affiliate: CIEE Amsterdam Study Center (Annabel Thomas, *Projects & Activities Coordinator*; Renée Spruit, *Resident Director*)

Timing: Arrival in Amsterdam on August 25, Departure on September 13, 2014.

Synopsis: Students will make and observe art in different media.

Location

Amsterdam is among the world's great arts cities, a vibrant and diverse center of both traditional and contemporary culture. For centuries artists have moved to Amsterdam to contribute to its vitality and exuberance, its high quality and density of artistic expression, and to enjoy the stylistic tolerance, ethnic diversity, and collision of colonial and post-colonial values that defines its continually evolving and often controversial identity.

It is an ideal place to experience art as both a creator and observer, and to reflect—through the prism of art—on the difference between *home* and *away*. Amsterdam's compact central area—with its beautiful canals and parks, charming buildings, world-class museums, and casual eateries—makes it an easy city to get around and an ideal space for an arts-oriented practicum. And, as a practical matter, English is widely spoken, and Amsterdammers are generally friendly and inviting hosts who are proud of their city.

Seminar Description

The *work of art* is both a noun (the artwork) and a verb (the working of art). The *Amsterdam Trans-Idiomatic Arts Practicum* invites students to both observe and make art in Amsterdam. During the course students will review four arts events and complete four modest art projects.

The work of art as noun. Students will observe, appreciate, and criticize the local artistic landscape through an examination of its diverse (and often overlooked) cultural offerings. The course will be built around field trips to concerts, museums, and events throughout Amsterdam that will serve as catalysts for critical discussions and formal written reviews, an understanding of the manner in which differing artistic media operate, and a comparison of the expressive parameters in each medium.

We will investigate—according to student interest—current trends in architecture, theater, opera, experimental music, jazz, popular music, painting, sculpture, installation art, photography, film, dance, and cuisine. Students will choose their own events to attend and review—albeit with an imposed diversity of media—thereby encouraging each to discover his or her own Amsterdam. Through collective student observations the

class will attempt to circumscribe a Dutch aesthetic and discuss the manner in which Amsterdam is both a unique and globally generic setting.

In addition to self-guided examinations of Dutch culture, the students will be treated to a canal tour of the city, a concert at the legendary Concertgebouw, outings to the Aalsmeer flower auction and Aalkmar cheese market, and a multi-course dining extravaganza of Indonesian rijsttafel.

The work of art as verb. *The Amsterdam Trans-Idiomatic Arts Practicum* is also a laboratory course in which students create works of art inspired by the local environment. Students will choose to participate in several projects including, but not limited to: sonic scavenger hunts to record Amsterdam's sound ecology and transform these recordings into electronic music works; solo and group performance art, original dance or movement pieces, and public poetry readings related to and staged throughout the city at idiosyncratic locations; video documentaries that examine life in Holland and prose web "blogs" that artistically treat current Dutch events; temporary public visual art such as chalk art; experiments in photographic voyeurism; bricolage art projects that result in sculpture and two-dimensional visual art constituted by found objects salvaged from the Amsterdam cityscape; and Fluxus art walks and guided tours of esoteric Dutch arcana.

Prior experience as an art practitioner is welcome but **not required**; the projects will be tailored to novice artists and will make abundant use of the skills and interests of the participants. (Note: this is an ideal forum to experience artistic enterprise for the first time *or* to extend one's prior skills.) Among other goals, students will have the opportunity to experience the act of creation through multiple art forms, to develop an eye and ear for a foreign city through art production, to develop a collective body of work that chronicles artistic reactions to a city, and to transform Amsterdam itself—however modestly—through the energetic presence of the Stanford artwork. In short, despite our status as "visitors" we will contribute to the city's cultural vitality.

Evaluation

In addition to participating in class discussion and the review of colleagues' artworks, each student will complete:

- Four "beginner" artworks of modest scale, each varying in medium. Students will self-report their prior experience level—if any—and hold themselves to a basic or high standard accordingly. The first artwork has no restrictions; the second artwork must palpably respond to Amsterdam in content and/or form; the third artwork will be a duo collaboration with another student; the final artwork will be site-specific and presented on location. (40%)
- Four short written critiques of local art events or experiences (e.g. concerts, museums, architecture, cuisine). These reviews will be uploaded to a community blog website: Stanford BAMsterdam: <http://stanfordbamsterdam.blogspot.com/> (40%)
- Three small collaborative class projects: a Fluxus tour of the city (in which fact and fiction intermingle uncomfortably); an orientation scavenger hunt; and an optional group sound performance piece or analytic soundscape. (20%)

Diversions

Amsterdam's richness includes legendary "diversions." Alongside dedication, seriousness, and rigor, the seminar aspires to playfulness, levity, and entertainment: the work will be intrinsically fun. However, students are urged to exercise common sense, maturity, and prudence; to avoid harmful situations; and to take responsibility for their actions. The successful applicant and participant will remember that our seminar is an academic enterprise first and foremost.

Resources

Lodging: Students, along with the Seminar Assistant, will live together on the *Waterland* boat hotel. The boat is charming, cozy, convenient, and safe, and Stanford will have it entirely to itself. It is centrally located in Amsterdam's Oosterdok. Students very much appreciate the kind, if idiosyncratic, Captain Roel who is also the ship's excellent chef. The cabins are modest in size and students must be prepared for intimate communal living. Each student will have a roommate during one half of the seminar and enjoy a single cabin during the other half of the seminar. In addition to bunk beds (with provided linens and towels), there is a sink and mirror in each cabin. The boat has two separate toilets and two separate showers that are shared by guests. There is also a very pleasant and comparatively spacious communal room for eating, gathering, and working, as well as a large deck on top of the boat. The boat can be taken through canals or out to sea; our trip to Alkmaar, for example, will be an overnight excursion by boat.

[Note: the boat's steep staircases and tight passages may not be suitable for students with a disability.]

Meals: Breakfast is provided on the boat. Some group lunches and dinners are planned for the class. An ample stipend will be distributed for all other lunches and dinners.

Art Supplies & Event Tickets: Students are provided with a budget of 100 euros for art supplies or other materials, and 100 euros for event/admission tickets. Many art-viewing and art-making experiences in Amsterdam will be free (e.g. dumpster diving for found art supplies or writing a poem, watching street performances or analyzing public architecture); others will be pricey (e.g. oil paints, ballet tickets). Students will learn to allocate their budget in a resourceful manner that accommodates their curricular agenda.

Transportation: One can walk to almost everything in Amsterdam. However, the tram and bus are welcome for farther sites, or when in a hurry. Students will be provided with a transportation card for this purpose. The card can also be used on many Dutch inter-city trains.

Principal Seminar Locations:

- Boat Hotel "Waterland," Oosterdok Steiger 4
- Atelier & Classroom Space: Binnenkant 29

Schedule (subject to modification)

INTRO

Spring: BOSP Winter Orientation by February 12, noon-1:00 pm, Braun 102;
Orientation Dinners Chez Applebaum: April 27 (7:15-10:00) & May 28 (7:15-10:00).

READING BEFORE ARRIVAL IN AMSTERDAM

Shorto, Russell. *Amsterdam: A History of the World's Most Liberal City*. Doubleday, 2013.

Please read the book carefully and take notes. You needn't bring your copy of the book with you to Amsterdam, but you must bring your notes. Your notes should consist of 50-75 important "takeaways," ones that may be expressed in a single sentence or in bullet point form: a powerful idea; a peculiar insight; a significant historical event; a relevant city location; a surprising fact; a historical figure worthy of further exploration; a dubious hypothesis; a concept that connects to your major area of study; etc. Please jot down these takeaways—approximately one per five pages (or more or less as you are inclined)—as you read the text. We will solicit these over the course of the seminar to scrutinize them in context.

WEEK 1

Monday, August 25

Arrive in Amsterdam by 3:00

4:00 Orientation (on the Boat Hotel "Waterland"); check-in from 11:00am

5:30-6:30 CIEE Orientation (on the boat): Annabel Thomas

7:00 Group Dinner: Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA)—V&D La Place
Restaurant (on library's 7th floor balcony overlooking the city)

8:30 Evening Canal Tour (by boat, Hilton Hotel Dock; Bonny Wassing, guide) **Note:**
rescheduled to August 27 evening

Tuesday, August 26

9:45 Departure from boat to Binnenkant 29

10:00-Noon Lecture 1: Exchange Value in the Arts

12:00 Group Lunch, Orloff Café (Kadijksplein 11, tel. 020 320 3347)

1:30-6:00 ASH: Amsterdam Scavenger Hunt (three teams of four students learn the city
by walking and gathering)

8:00-10:00 Evening Debriefing: *ASH Presentation Reports*, Binnenkant 29

Wednesday, August 27

6:30 Field Trip: Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer; Alpha Tours Bus (company "Aalsmeer") from
Kadijksplein at 6:30 am (tour is from 7:30-9:30, returning around 10:00)

Assigned reading: Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*,
chapter on 17th C Dutch Tulip Mania

10:30-12:30 Lecture 2: Art-Making Tips & Techniques: Considerations across Media

4:30-6:30 PIC Tour, De Wallen (Enge Kerksteeg 3)

Evening: Student Choice—Arts Event #1

Thursday, August 28

10:00-Noon Lecture 3: Creativity Techniques, Alex Hay
12:30: Student flashmob performance of *Wristwatch: Geology*, Dam Square
4:00 Boat Departure to Alkmaar; dinner in route to Alkmaar

Friday, August 29

9:50 Alkmaar Cheese Market (Waagplein). Lunch at noon in Alkmaar at Heeren van Sonoy (Hof van sonoy 1, Alkmaar); 2:00 return to Amsterdam by boat.
3:00-6:00 Alex Hay, individual artwork mentoring sessions, Boat Hotel Waterland
Evening: Student Choice—Arts Event #2

Saturday, August 30

12:00 Arts Criticism #1 due via e-mail

Sunday, August 31

1:00-5:00: Presentation of Artwork #1
Edited versions of Arts Criticism #1 are returned

WEEK 2

Monday, September 1

10:45-Noon Lecture—Algorithms, Systems, and Oulipo Restraints
Noon-12:30 Cobra Workshop
8:30: Monday Match: Dance & Music Impro Lab, Bimhuis, Muziekgebouw (optional)

Tuesday, September 2

3:30 Arts Criticism #1 & #2 due via upload
5:30-8:00 Fluxus Tour
8:00 Group Dinner: Tempoe Doeloe (25-course rijsttafel), Utrechtsestraat 75

Wednesday, September 3

Work Day; sign up for individual mentoring sessions
Evening: Student Choice—Arts Event #3

Thursday, September 4

10:00-Noon & 2:00-4:00 Presentation of Artwork #2, Brian McWhorter, professor of music and guest “juror”
7:30 Dinner at De Kas, a greenhouse (optional)

Friday, September 5

10:00-Noon Lecture: Alex Hay, composer
3:30 Arts Criticism #3 due via upload
4:00 Screening: *I Live 4 Art*, Binnenkant 29
7:00-11:00 Dinner: Special Secret Dinner Project (TBA)

Saturday, September 6

Free Day

Evening: Student Choice—Arts Event #4

Sunday, September 7

11:00 Group Brunch: The Pancake Bakery (Prinsengracht 191)

1:30-5:00 Presentation of Collaborative Duo Artwork #3

8:15 Atlas Ensemble Kleurconstrasten concert, Muziekgebouw; arrive by 8:00 latest

WEEK 3

Monday, September 8

Atelier Day; sign up for critique of work in progress

Tuesday, September 9

Atelier Day; sign up for critique of work in progress

5:00 Arts Criticism #4 (optional) due via upload

Wednesday, September 10

Atelier Day; sign up for critique of work in progress

Thursday, September 11

1:00-5:00 Presentation of Final Site-Specific Artwork (students 1-6)

Friday, September 12

1:00-5:00 Presentation of Final Site-Specific Artwork (students 7-12)

8:15 Farewell Dinner: Hanneke's Boom (Dijksgracht 4)

11:30 Wrap-Up, Boat Hotel Waterland

Saturday, September 13

Departure Day

Note: ***Student Choice—Arts Event*** appears in the itinerary during periods of unscheduled free time. It serves merely as a placeholder to make sure that ample time exists for students to attend events. For example, instead of attending the ballet, a concert, or a play on the evening of Friday, August 29 (where *Student Choice—Arts Event* is listed), a given student might visit a museum or review a particular work of architecture on the afternoon of Saturday, August 30 or the evening of Sunday, August 31. In either case, the corresponding review is due on Tuesday, September 2.

CODA

Reunion Dinner Chez Applebaum, Menlo Park (subject to everyone still talking to one another).