

After the frenetic, football-induced orange crush that swept the city for the first two weeks after my arrival, Amsterdam has returned to a slightly sleepy state. This is holiday time, and coinciding with what is turning into a hot sticky summer, residents are retreating to the countryside or to the beach.

The M4 Gastatelier, which faces East, has its thin white curtains drawn for the mornings in an attempt to keep the ambient temperature down a bit. The masking tape which has been holding up various things in the studio is melting and slipping, and every now and then there is a crash as things fall to the floor.

Four weeks in, and plans and objectives are beginning to take shape. It's flip-flop warm. The city is revealing itself by degrees, and finding landmarks to gather bearings – the fire station, the spiral car-park – the map is increasingly redundant. It's hard to go too far wrong.

I have found supplies of paper and ink, and oil crayons, and coloured foam. Making (drawings) so far has been intuitive and rewarding. Research in the (excellent) public library O.B.A has been combined with some site-visits out of town by bicycle to see places and things with my own eyes. It feels as if you can do a great deal with a day here – one of the benefits of a compact city, but also one of time spent without interruption, with few distractions, and without going out each day to work.

Several of the main public galleries are currently closed for refurbishment: the Stedelijk Museum is still scaffolded and dusty from half-finished renovations, the Maritime Museum is closed until the end of the year. The Rijksmuseum which was being noisily sand-blasted last week is open only in part – though that part is thick with Rembrandts and others, so most people seem happy for the time being.

As in London, it is a slow time for exhibitions after the degree shows close. Several of the smaller art spaces also seem to have a break in their programming from early July until late August to coincide with the summer exodus. But, there are plenty of other things to see, and a number of outdoor festivals and summer-events swing into action as the other things wind down:

- 1) Music in the Vondelpark - which is quite special even without the music, has a series of (free) concerts Friday, Saturday and Sunday throughout the summer afternoons.
- 2) JuliDans contemporary Dance festival –(not free) in different venues across the city for a week in early July. Blink and you miss it though, as I stupidly did.
- 3) Plukdenacht Outdoor film festival (free again) 5 -15 August. Screenings begin as soon as the sky is dark.
- 4) De Parade 2010 – Music, Theatre and an array of unidentifiable happenings comes to Amsterdam (the last of four touring cities) 6 - 22 August. Cue drinks and BBQ's in the park if the weather holds.

Museum-wise: (those I can recommend - aside from the big ones)

[De Appel](#) – gallery, publishing house, curatorial resource and producers of the fine, twice-yearly, F.R.David journal are open, and have a lovely two-floor space in a classy building. Also, [Huis Marseilles](#) for contemporary photography. The setting again is gorgeous, and they have an attractive garden in the back, too. Buy a Museumscard for 44 Euro. It's valid for a year, makes everything free to visit, and in the truest sense of bargainous things, it pays for itself very quickly indeed.

For smaller galleries:

I had been told that Witte de Withstraat held a few artist-run spaces, but those looking for a Vyner / Redchurch equivalent will be disappointed. There are window galleries – to view from outside, and a project space which is closed between sporadic events. For a concentration of galleries it's best head to the area around Prinsengracht / Rosengracht cross where there is lots to see. Highlights so far are [Galerie Gabriel Rolt](#), and a bit further up, [Grimm Fine Art](#), both of which feel more exciting programmes, and support a roster of emerging international artists. New-ish artist-run spaces include 1K Projects, and the newly repositioned Kulter, both of which are in the Oud-West / Westerpark area close to M4. Somewhat out of place, nestled in the dark heart of stagdo-central is the distinctly arty [W139](#) – gallery/bar/hangout, which has a large and versatile exhibition space. I'm looking forward to forthcoming shows.

Amsterdam also has a rich design tradition, and contemporary Dutch Design is booming. [Frozen Fountain](#) has an excellent selection of new and established Dutch Designers (interiors and furniture). Some favourites, including [Piet Hein Eek](#) are well represented. [Droog Design](#), close to Waterlooplein is also recommended for those with an interest in such things.

This might be jumping the gun a little, as it's based on my reading only two editions, but a free and comprehensively-distributed newsprint publication called [HTV De Ijsberg](#) is well worth checking out both for its surprising and well-chosen content, as well as its arts ad's & opportunities. It also welcomes submissions from artists and writers in English or Dutch. I like it.

Below, a list that will grow exponentially...
Best of times in the first four weeks

Cafes:

Icecream at the corner of Elandsgracht & Prinsengracht – the best spent 2.50 so far.

Apple cake at Café Winkel – in fact apple cake in general...

Northern Light café at NDSM Shipyard

Galleries, Museums and Libraries:

Central Library - www.oba.nl

De Appel – www.deappel.nl

Huis Marseilles – www.huismarseilles.nl

Grimm Fine Art – www.grimmfineart.com

Galerie Gabriel Rolt - www.gabrielrolt.com

1K Projects – www.1kprojectspace.com

Kulter – www.kulter.nl

W139 – www.w139.nl

Droog Design – www.droog.com

Frozen Fountain – www.frozenfountain.nl

Piet Hein Eek – www.pietheineek.nl

What's on:

Exhibition agenda – www.akka.nl/agenda

HTV newspaper – www.htvdeijsberg.nl

Art Supplies:

Peter van Ginkel – www.petervanginkel.nl

Van Beek – www.vanbeekart.nl