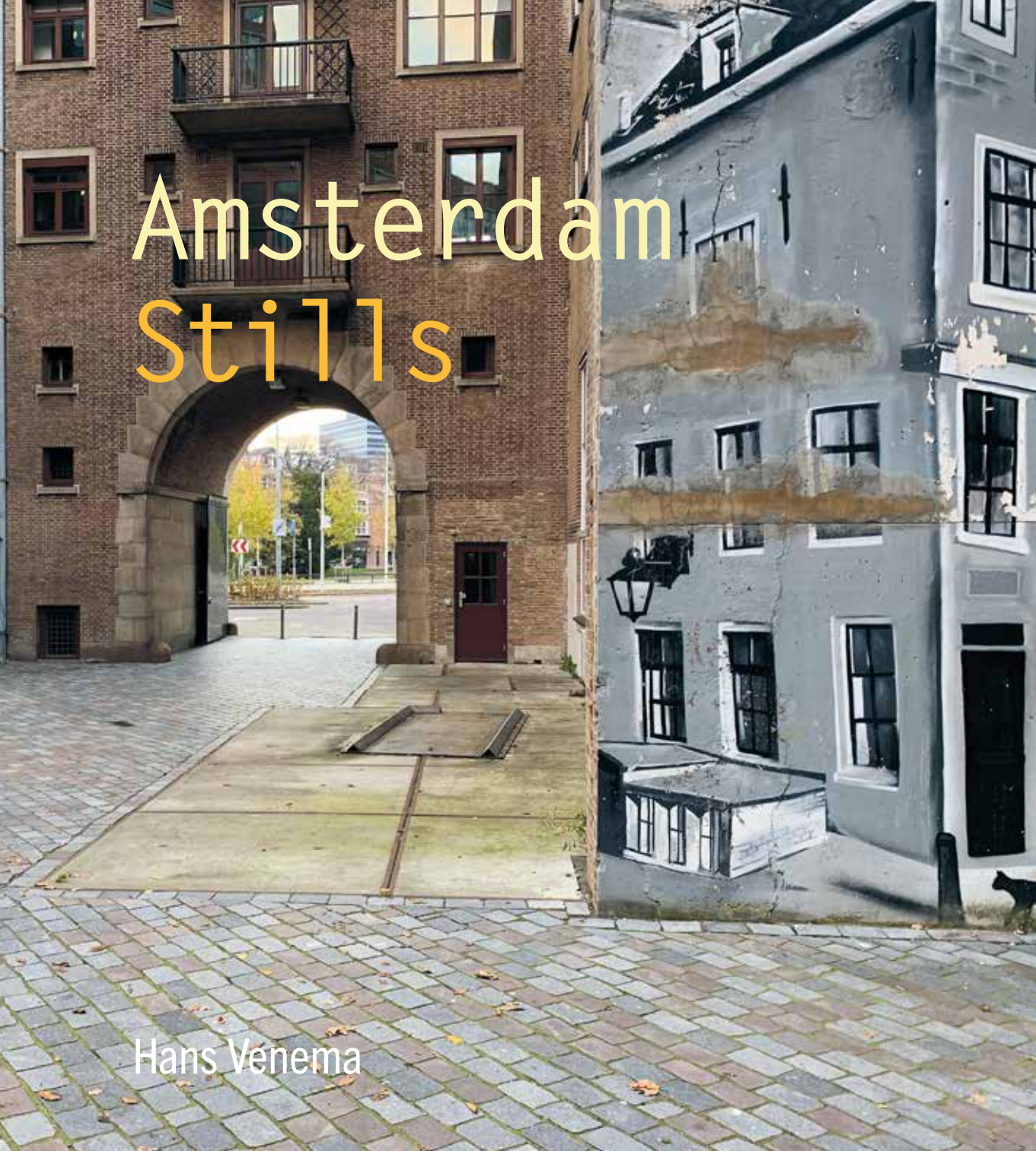




Amsterdam Stills

Hans Venema



1 OUDEKERKSPLEIN



2 OUDEZIJDS ACHTERBURGWAL





Notes on the locations



1 Oudekerksplein, west side between Oudezijds Voorburgwal and Warmoesstraat. The oval outline of the square preserves the memory of its past as a cemetery. The original open space has largely been swallowed up by the church building, which expanded between 1300 and 1560 from a simple chapel into a vast complex consisting of a three-aisled hall church with choir, transept and side chapels. Behind the tall pointed-arch windows, a surprisingly transparent space unfolds in every direction. Not the vertical hierarchy one might expect in a Gothic church, but a horizontally egalitarian space that for centuries served as the 'living room of the city': a genuine city square beneath wooden barrel vaults where religious and urban life, prayer and begging, stock trading and mending fishing nets coexisted without difficulty.



2 Oudezijds Achterburgwal, the final stretch looking north towards the IJ, with the rear façades of the houses along Zeedijk standing directly in the water. Unlike canals on the Nieuwezijde or wind side of the city west of the Damrak, the canals on this Oudezijde or church side were never filled in. The canal of the Oudezijds Voorburgwal had to be wide enough to defend the city, while the Achterburgwal was dug primarily to improve the drainage of the marshy land behind it. A narrower canal was therefore sufficient, resulting in the striking contrast between the broad Voorburgwal and the intimate space of the Achterburgwal.



3 Molensteeg, viewed from Oudezijds Achterburgwal towards Zeedijk, in the heart of 'De Wallen'. Prostitution was already mentioned here before 1500, while window prostitution is only documented from the 1930s on, at first modestly with curtains slightly parted and, from the 1960s onwards, openly displayed behind an ever-growing number of windows. Unlike in Antwerp's Schipperskwartier, where prostitution is segregated within a kind of open-air erotic zone, window prostitution is spatially and socially interwoven with everyday life in the city's oldest residential neighbourhood. Despite, or perhaps because of, every official attempt to reduce prostitution, the Red Light District still tops the list of Amsterdam tourist attractions.



4 Nieuwendijk, at the Bocht, with Haringpakkerssteeg on the right leading towards Damrak. In 1955, the weekly magazine *Vrij Nederland* published a widely discussed feature by Jan Vrijman and photographer Ed van der Elsken about the 'unruly adolescent street youth' who were said to be making Nieuwendijk unsafe. Vrijman coined a memorable label, writing: 'The nozems stand on the corners of Nieuwendijk. The nozems stand on the corners of streets and squares in every major city.' Yet behind this word picked up from the street, *nozem*, were working-class youths who, after the war, increasingly received vocational training and, for want of anything better, sought entertainment in shopping streets such as Nieuwendijk, then lined with countless cinemas.



5 Dam Square, looking towards Kalverstraat and named after the structure that gave rise to the city: a dam built across the mouth of the Amstel to hold back the unpredictable Zuiderzee. Dam Square has been a place of commemoration, celebration, rebellion and resistance — a place where *nomen est omen* or 'this far and no further' has often proved apt. The square regularly serves as the setting for major demonstrations, the gathering place from which protest marches make their way through the city to the other principal site for public demonstrations, Museumplein. On 1 June 2020, Dam Square was overtaken by a hastily organized Black Lives Matter demonstration protesting the brutal police killing of the Black American George Floyd. That afternoon, the square was unexpectedly flooded with thousands of outraged citizens calling for racism to be brought to a halt.



6 Handboogstraat, viewed from the Spui with the Maagdenhuis of 1780 on the left. Originally built as an orphanage for Roman Catholic girls in a sober, austere classical style of the city architect Abraham van der Hart, it has served as the administrative centre of the University of Amsterdam since 1961. The building is best known for its five-day occupation in May 1969 by hundreds of students demanding shared decision-making and democratic reform. As all entrances to the Maagdenhuis had been hermetically sealed, the occupiers constructed a temporary aerial bridge across the street as their only link with the outside world. More than 55 years ago, a shaky ladder was silhouetted against the evening sky high above Handboogstraat.



7 Raadhuisstraat, looking towards Herengracht. The wave of nineteenth-century urban modernization, epitomized by the Parisian boulevards cut through the existing city, passed Amsterdam by. The capital produced no Haussmann of its own. The canal belt seemed untouchable until valuable merchants' houses along Herengracht and Keizersgracht were sacrificed with little resistance to make way for a new road leading to the new districts in the west. The new route cut diagonally across the urban block because the streets on either side of the canals did not align. The elegant shopping arcade is credited to Van Gendt, better known for the Concertgebouw and the roof structure over Amsterdam Central Station.



8 Zeedijk, viewed from the bridge across Oudezijds Kolk where the Voorburgwal and Achterburgwal drain into the IJ, looking towards Nieuwmarkt. 'The dike was a snake: head, tail and in between a long, narrow winding body.' A striking comparison by Kees van Beijnum in his novel *Dichter op de Zeedijk*, of the street's meandering course and its countless faces and transformations. Most recently by shedding the old skin of crime and urban decline that characterized the 1980s to emerge in the multicoloured new guise of Amsterdam's Chinatown.

9 Sint Olofspoort, viewed from the head of Zeedijk towards Warmoesstraat.



10 Warmoesstraat, looking towards Dam Square. By the sixteenth century, the former river dike had developed into Amsterdam's 'gold coast', where wealthy merchants lived in houses on deep plots with warehouses on the waterside of the Damrak. Known as 'spijkers', these warehouses were used to store goods brought in directly from the IJ. The nineteenth-century façade of Warmoesstraat 90, just beyond the rearmost rainbow flag, turns out to conceal not only The Eagle, a well-known club on the gay scene, but also the city's oldest house, with a timber frame dating from 1485.

11 Warmoesstraat, looking back towards the head of Zeedijk.