

January 2010

We moved to a new apartment in September, and I thought this year as my New Year's greeting, I would send you a drawing - Our Busytown Neighborhood- a sketch for the beginning of 2010- see if you can spot everything!

To start, our apartment is "in the clouds" on the 5th floor in Amsterdam, Oud-Zuid (the old south), overlooking a big canal and a lot of skyline, because the other buildings around are shorter and older than our 1990's apartment, we can see far away church steeples and construction cranes. Outside our window, we can see a gang of 9 geese who patrol the canal and make a lot of noise. I can feed the gulls right from our balcony (though I shouldn't do it often, but it's so fun!) The Slotervaart is working canal- giant boats go through it, hauling sand inland and water out (the constant story in the lowlands). My favorite boat is the Esther, because we see her often. The canal has a drawbridge which opens many times a day, and displays a message for all the stalled drivers to read while they wait for it to close. "If the water level reached this high, we wouldn't need this bridge. Keep driving; maybe someday we will achieve this." Maybe all the waiting bikers can feel a little bit proud that they're not driving.

Lots of trams and busses run around our neighborhood- Pinaki gets up at 6:40 to take a bus, the train and another bus to his job in Alkmaar at an insurance company. He likes the work, because he's a Software Architect, and has a lot of challenges. Alkmaar is famous for its cheese market and its old center district- tourists go there in hoards, but he works in a modern office building away from the cheeses! I usually bike to work at the Filmmuseum, about 4 miles away, except when it's really cold, and then I take a tram to the metro. I love my job and my colleagues, and I just got a promotion to coordinate the department of restoration and digitization. We're taking care of all kinds of film, from ancient crumbly ones to new digital ones. Right now we are one of the biggest film restoration projects in Europe.

Some days, if the wind is blowing in a particular direction, our neighborhood is suddenly in the flight path to Schiphol airport, 9 miles away. That's not as nice as this: Every day, our apartment is in the flight path of hundreds of green parrots, who spend the day at Vondelpark goofing off, and spend the night in an undisclosed location, somewhere behind us. They are noisy when they fly over, but not as noisy as the planes.

There is so much in our neighborhood square, and we've done so much this year! I tried to put it all in the drawing, so you can see it:

There is an Apotheek, a bike store, a game store, a Turkish/Greek takeout place that is our "default" place to get dinner when we're tired, a butcher shop run by a husband-wife team who have probably been there since the 70's, there's a café called the Pleinzicht, which has big windows that overlook the square and daily specials like "stamppot" and "kip sate", and an Indonesian takeout place, which also has spices, papadam and Surinamese-Indian food. Near that is a cheese store with big yellow rounds of Gouda in many subtle and sober variations for the Dutch palate- like 30 days- and 60 days- old, or a little bit of mustard seed, but not much else. Next there is a wine store, which right now is pushing champagne and gluhwein for the season. Down the street there is a natural food store run by a ruddy, woolen couple, a fish store with lots of local herring and mussels, a Halal butcher with bearded fellows in jellabas, and 2 more Turkish/Italian takeout places, 2 more Indonesian takeout spots and 3 cellphone stores. It seems lively, but on Sunday everything is closed except for a French/Turkish Croissanterie, which I think is all the more blessed for being open! Our

neighborhood also has 2 bakeries, 2 grocery stores, 2 butchers, a fancy cooking store, 3 real estate agents, a camping store, a 3 tanning salons, a glasses store, 3 house wares stores, at least 10 clothing shops, 3 bike stores, even a sushi takeout spot.

One of my favorite things about the Netherlands -one of the little things that made me say, "I want to live here someday!"- is that you get a free cookie with your coffee. And that flowers are cheap- we have 5 flower shops within a few blocks of our house, and tulips are sold in bunches of 50. And of course I also love that you can bike almost everywhere, and it's usually faster than taking a car.

I've added some holiday things in the drawing- Olliebollen are chewy doughnut/beignets with or without raisins- they're usually fried fresh and sold hot- and the smell of the hot oil is very specific- a little bit resinous and spicy- and seasonal. Mistletoe!- the other day I saw an old guy with a white beard who had a whole Volkswagen van stuffed with mistletoe. He was selling enormous bundles of it out of the sliding door of the van, as if he's just were cut them straight from a tree. I've never seen so much mistletoe - I think he was a druid! (That's an Asterix & Obelix reference for you.) And of course, even though it's not a holiday thing, I had to add a rookworst in the drawing, because they are all over the place, and are the signature smell of HEMA, the Dutch equivalent of a 5&dime. I drew the big gorgeous Saint Bernard who lives in our neighborhood. In 2010 we're going to be friends with him, along with his owners. As my Dutch improves, I can be friendlier to our neighbors and more involved in our community. Right now I'm still in "observation mode."

2009 had some great moments- we had 12 people over for American Thanksgiving. Everyone cooked or brought something special from their own country and I made fresh cranberry sauce and stuffing. In July, Pinaki rescued a giant Nintje/Miffy doll which was floating in a canal (he had to hop into a boat to get her) and I took it on as a private "restoration project" to get all the water and grime out. I graduated cum laude from the University of Amsterdam in March. My classmates from that program are some of my best friends over here- lots of us got jobs in the film archives around Europe, which makes a nice network. Pinaki and I took some trips last year: to Maastricht and to Athens. We loved Greece, and gained a new appreciation for Nescafe frappes, the way the Athenians make it. And in December we went to Costa del Sol to celebrate Pinaki's new job- I ate a fish that was baked in salt that was cracked open at the table. Cool!

Artwise, I'm still blowing glass at Vrij Glas with Durk and Anna, who are also great dinner party hosts for the various visiting artists- Durk makes bread in the annealers, and we drink wine from handblown goblets. I had two shows this year, one in Amsterdam at Studio K, and one in Corning, NY during the annual glass conference, at Exhibit A. My work is still in Atlanta at Belvedere Showroom. In 2010 I have a show at Limestone in upstate NY, and hopefully more to come. My dear colleague here, Jata Haan, made a film of my work, which is on the website: www.gantglass.com. Pinaki composed original music for it, which is lovely. He continues to work on his own music as much as possible, and has composed hundreds of tracks that he is mastering and mixing.

2009 was a busy and somewhat difficult year for almost everyone I know! But every year brings joy in small things, in our neighborhood or in the world, the micro to the macro- we get by with love and happiness thanks to our friends and family. Wishing you a vibrant start to 2010, with only pleasant surprises,

yours, Anne