

“A Holland Winter Sketch”

or, my first Holiday season in Amsterdam, trying to make sense of it all!

25 items for 25 days:

1. The little **houses** on the side are modeled on some pictures I took of houses near my neighborhood, overlooking the canals.
2. The **GVB tram** in this drawing is running around the corner, going DING! These trams are quite quiet and creep up unexpectedly on bikers and pedestrians. They have a very friendly DING sound to indicate that they are about to run you over.
3. The tram is chasing a bunch of **cyclists**, who are showing off a variety of cycles-basic “grandma bike”, basket bikes (with dog), delivery bike with big basket, riding side-saddle with a friend, baby in front and flowers on back, moving house with a freight-bike...
4. **An umbrella**, because in Amsterdam it seems to rain 3 times a day, hail twice, and have sunshine and rainbows in between.
5. The triple **XXX** on the umbrella is the old symbol of Amsterdam, and nothing to do with the red-light district, though it’s certainly a poetic coincidence.
6. **Coots** are birds that live in all the canals. They are quite creepy to me because they have feet with blue-ish and yellow-ish flaps of skin, and a big white bone above their nose. To their credit, they make their nests by making rafts of floating garbage between the houseboats, so they are excellent recyclers.
7. Coots like French fries, or **frites**. The frites in this drawing have fritessaus on them, which is like mayonnaise. That’s okay for coots, but I prefer them with green peppercorn sauce.
8. The coot is saying “**Lekker!**” Lekker is an all-purpose Dutch word, which means delicious, tasty or nice.
9. It’s traditional to give people **chocolate letters** during the holiday season. They are even sold at drug stores and department stores.
10. **Pepernoten** are small, round spice cookies that are tossed around and handed out during the holidays, especially when Sinterklaas arrives.
11. **Rookworst** is smoked sausage, like a kielbasa, and it is traditionally sold hot in the HEMA department store (which is like a Woolworth’s), so HEMAs always smell like sausages, which is funny when you’re shopping for socks, or paint thinner!
12. **Ossenworst** is raw beef sausage, very lightly smoked, high grade beef, cold and sort of mushy. It is cut and served as an appetizer, but for some, it can act as a deterrent!

13. **Marzipan Meats!** Along with all the types of raw meat, around this time of year the stores sell marzipan in the shape of real-size lamb chops, steaks and salami, and also giant pig’s heads.

14. Another traditional treat is cold, lightly **smoked herring**. There are little herring stalls all over town, where one might expect newspaper stalls! It is served with a little Dutch flag toothpick...

15. ...and of course it has to be served with **chopped onions**.

16. **Half a loaf of bread**. In Holland, you can buy just half a loaf of great bread at the baker for about 85 cents. How sensible; then it never goes stale!

17. The towns of Edam and Gouda are famous worldwide for their eponymous cheeses. This is a piece of **komijnekaas**- cumin-flecked Gouda.

18. The table is covered with an **oriental rug**, old-school painting style (see Vermeer, Young Woman with a Water Pitcher, and Holbein’s The Ambassadors)

19. Pigeons are much bigger here.

20. This pigeon doesn’t mean any harm, he’s saying, “**Doei!**” which is a friendly way to say “bye!” Women say it in a sing-song way “Doooo, doooei!” and gruff men say it like Homer Simpson, “DOH!”

21. **Sinterklaas** is thinner and more serious and saint-like than Santa Claus, and his actions are less magical. He arrives in Holland via boat in mid- November, and tours the provinces on a published schedule. His favorite sound is children singing. Sinterklaasavond comes on December 5th, so Christmas and Sinterklaas are separate here.

22. Sinterklaas is saying, “**Dag!**” Good day!

23. Kids set out their **shoes with carrots** in them, for Sinterklaas’ horse during the period when Sinterklaas is travelling around. These are traditional yellow Dutch clogs. In the mornings, they may get a treat in their shoes, like pepernoten or a chocolate letter.

24. **Speculaas** are spiced cookies. These ones are quite big, in the shapes of men and women, and they’re hanging on the tree.

25. Finally, in the corner there are 5 tulip **bulbs** that are just starting to grow. These are sitting on my windowsill, and I am looking at them right now.

Happy Holidays, to my friends and family!