



SVENJA KAUFMANN

The intimate Chiellerie gallery—aka the Hangplek voor Kunstenaars—is the city's newest nightspot.

## HANG THE DJ, AND LONG LIVE THE ARTIST

By Marinus de Ruiter

Just after its move from Amsterdam West to the city centre last March, the Chiellerie—the low-key art gallery led by Chiel van Zelst—made a noticeable statement by putting a big sign on its front door saying 'Hangplek voor Kunstenaars' ('artists' hangout'). It quickly became the gallery's chief nickname.

'With a name like this you can stir up the artistic tendencies in people,' says Van Zelst. 'This place immediately became approachable, and a lot of spontaneous responses came in from artists all over who wanted to show their work.'

Van Zelst's gallery already had a low threshold for artists because of its exhibition schedule. 'Every weekend we have an artist of the week,' he says, 'and every

first weekend of the month there's a group show, hosted by a curator of the month. The exhibitions are in a pretty wild and random order, and they [include] all kinds of art forms.'

Performer Saskia te Dorsthorst is artist of the week this weekend, and she's used the opportunity to act as curator and invite some artist friends for a group show, *What's Your God?* 'I've known Chiel for three years now, since just before he started the Chiellerie,' she says. 'He's able to realise good projects with a low budget.'

Van Zelst says, 'I see myself as a visual-art jockey—mixing art instead of records.' But although he compares himself to a DJ, music isn't his game. 'Integrating DJs into presentations has become so common in the last ten years,' he says. 'It seems that even when I'm buy-

ing underwear these days there are DJs playing. Our place is free of them.'

But don't think the Hangplek is a sterile space where the audience is meant to quietly muse upon a set of photographs over a glass of white wine. 'This place is definitely meant as a meeting point for artists,' Van Zelst assures me. 'Our bar is open, and people can talk and expand their network. Many of our weekly visitors are not related to the artists at all. They like to be surprised. And sometimes they're enthusiastic, sometimes not.'

Open from five to ten in the evenings, the Hangplek has become a part of the city's nightlife. Despite being DJ-free, it gave a presentation at the Nachtcultuurprijs award ceremony during the DJ-friendly Amsterdam Dance Event. It came in second for the prize, behind new magazine *LFTFLD*.

The Hangplek voor Kunstenaars is a uniquely personal place. Chiel van Zelst has a past in the squatters' movement, and has organised art events in squats. 'Ten years ago I started doing similar things in Vrieshuis Amerika on the Oostelijke Handelskade, which was torn down in 2000. At the Vrieshuis a lot of things were going on at once, and it was the model for other similar places,' he explains.

But putting on shows in large buildings means endless discussions, he says. 'With the Hangplek, I didn't have to anticipate anything; I just started doing it. I like the idea of not putting all the activity in one building, but spreading it across the city, with studios and galleries in kitchens and attics everywhere. Cities like Berlin and New York have proved this can make things more pleasant for the artists, the organisers and the audience.'

Making Amsterdam a more pleasant, less stiff place is a goal Saskia te Dorsthorst can identify with. In her Hangplek show this weekend, she'll show new textile work, but also act as hostess, as she usually does. In that role, Te Dorsthorst is in a class of her own: she dresses in self-made attire based on various Dutch traditional costumes.

With every playful variation comes a different personality. 'When I come into the room in my costumes, people often burst out laughing, which is exactly my intention,' she says. 'For example, as *kaasmeisje*, I carry a portable bar, from which I serve cheese and fish.'

These days traditional costumes are worn only in a couple of small communities, mostly by elderly women, and Te Dorsthorst fears that they'll soon disappear into museums. 'I think it would be a pity to lose a rich tradition like that,' she says. She's working on several projects to bring more attention to it. 'I made a proposal for the Amsterdam *stadsnacht*. In my plan, their uniforms would be replaced with costumes, like [one called] the *stedenmaagd*, which refers to the Amsterdam coat of arms.'

Te Dorsthorst, performance artist Emily Buttle, photographer Maria Morales, video artist Timothy van Vliet and conceptual artist Aad Kruiswijk will give their views on the divine through new and existing works in this weekend's exhibition, *What's Your God?*. Te Dorsthorst says she chose these artists because of the energy and dedication visible in their work.

Those are important criteria for Van Zelst, too. 'Of course I must be critical in admitting artists to this place,' he says. 'But it's not my intention to show a specific line or category of work. If someone is convinced of his work and puts a lot of energy into it, often that's enough to make me interested.'

*Chiellerie, Hangplek voor Kunstenaars, Raamgracht 58 (www.hangplekvoorkunstenaars.nl), is open Friday until Sunday from 17.00 to 22.00.*