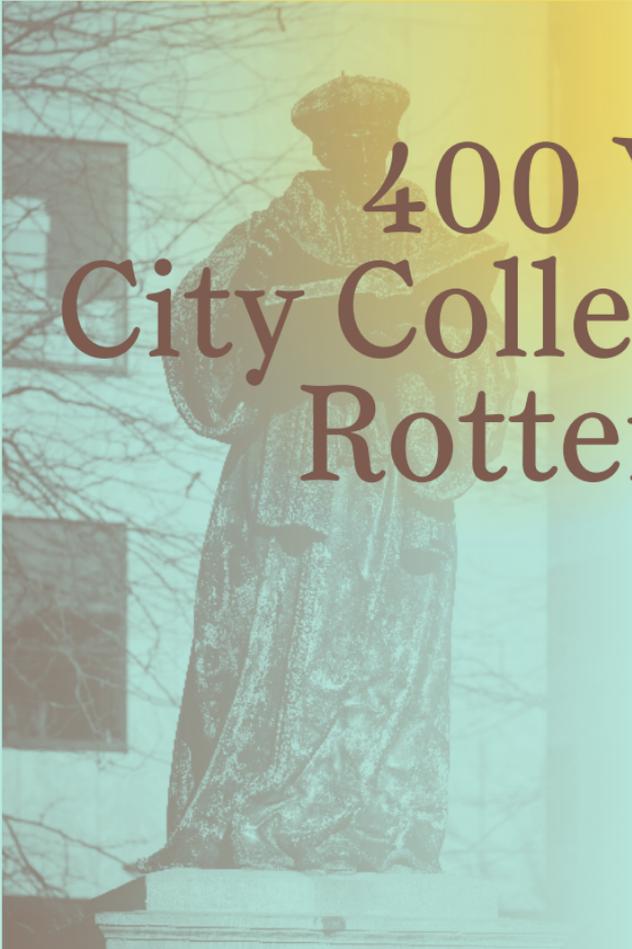


Σ-Files #30

# Symposium Erasmus Statue 400 Years



400 Years  
City Collection  
Rotterdam



Symposium Erasmus Statue  
400 Years City Collection Rotterdam

Beeldende Kunst & Openbare Ruimte  
Sculpture International Rotterdam  
CBK Rotterdam

CBK ROTTERDAM

Symposium Erasmus Statue

400 Years City Collection Rotterdam

Desiderius Erasmus

Rotterdam, 1466, 1467 of 1469 – Basel, 1536

*Erasmus* (1622)

Hendrick de Keyser

Utrecht, 1565 – Amsterdam, 1621

Esther Didden

Ronald van Raak

Frits Scholten

Siebe Thissen

Annet Zondervan

Sandra Smets

<b>Esther Didden</b>	15
Introduction	
<b>Ronald van Raak</b>	23
Freedom according to Erasmus	
<b>Frits Scholten</b>	37
The statue of a champion of the mind	
<b>Siebe Thissen</b>	49
What is a statue?	
<b>Annet Zondervan</b>	63
The statue as a (contemporary) problem	
<b>Sandra Smets</b>	77
Erasmus as an icon of art in the modern-day city of Rotterdam	
<b>Jannes Linders</b>	107
Erasmus statue from all sides	
<b>The artwork</b>	199
Erasmus	
<b>The artist</b>	203
Hendrick de Keyser	

The texts in this publication were delivered by the authors during the symposium that was held on 29 April 2022 at the Laurenskerk (St. Lawrence Church) Rotterdam.

<b>The humanist</b>	207
Desiderius Erasmus	
<b>Sannetje van Haarst</b>	211
Timeline of statues of Erasmus in Rotterdam	
<b>Oren en Ogen Tekort Foundation</b>	219
Visual description	
<b>Z-Files</b>	225
Z-Files, Art and the City	
<b>BKOR</b>	227
Visual art and the public space	
<b>SIR</b>	229
Sculpture International Rotterdam	
<b>CBK Rotterdam</b>	231
CBK Rotterdam	
<b>Image credits</b>	235
<b>Authors</b>	243
<b>Colophon</b>	247



# Introduction



Tomorrow, 30 April 2022, the bronze statue of Erasmus, that was created by Hendrick de Keyser will have been standing in Rotterdam for four hundred years. It is the oldest statue in the Netherlands. Today, during the *Symposium Erasmus Statue 400 Years | 400 Years of the City Collection Rotterdam*, this will be our explicit focus. It is hard to grasp what it means for something to be four hundred years old.

Every time I look at the statue, which has been quite often during the run-up to this symposium, I naturally find myself looking for signs of those four centuries. My eyes keep searching for traces of all the rain, storms, sunlight, and the millions of gazes the statue has been subjected to. Yet each time I am forced to conclude that the statue does not reveal the passing of the centuries.

It is too grand a concept for my eyes. My need to still experience those four hundred years in some way, cannot be satisfied through perception, so I have to find a different solution. That is why I am now embarking on a journey through time, and I invite you to join me on my trip.

In 1621, a year before the Erasmus statue was erected, the members of the States General of the Dutch Republic founded the West India Company (West-Indische Compagnie, WIC). Similar to the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC), with its monopoly on trade with the Dutch East Indies, the WIC was granted a monopoly on the Dutch trade with West-Africa and the Americas. One of the most profitable enterprises of the WIC was the slave trade, a dismal chapter in the history of our country. In 1623, Piet Hein also joined the WIC. He was living in Rotterdam at that time, so how probable is it that he saw the statue? In 1870, Piet Hein himself would also be given a statue, in Delfshaven, a fact that these days is not uncontroversial. The debate concerning statues of controversial figures is one the themes discussed here today.

Apart from Erasmus, the Dutch can boast another great philosopher: Baruch de Spinoza. He was born in 1632 and died in 1677. During his entire lifetime, was standing

here in Rotterdam. I cannot be certain that Spinoza ever saw this statue, I have not been able to find that out. But we are sure that Spinoza's grandfather, Isaac de Spinoza, had settled in Rotterdam around 1616 and died there in 1627. Might he ever have seen the statue of Erasmus, unaware of the future reputation of his yet unborn grandson?

Which people who determined the course of history may also have seen the Erasmus statue? Perhaps Napoleon Bonaparte. During the winter of 1795, French armies crossed the frozen Merwede river and occupied the Republic. The reason for this was the strategic location of Holland opposite England, the enemy of France. The French occupation had some major consequences. In numerous places around the province of Zuid-Holland (South Holland), for instance in Rotterdam, the local governments were taken over by revolutionary committees consisting of the patriots who also called themselves Batavians. One day after stadtholder William V had fled to England, the Batavian Republic was declared. It lasted until 1806 and was ended by Napoleon Bonaparte, who subsequently ratified the constitution for the Kingdom of Holland, although that too would not last long. On 2 December 1813, William I officially began his reign. Napoleon visited Rotterdam in late October 1811. He stayed in the Schielandshuis, situated on the street Korte Hoogstraat. On the 1839

cadastral map of Rotterdam, the statue of Erasmus is sketched in on the location Groote Markt, near the address 89 Hoogstraat. At number 1, the Hoogstraat bends to the left and becomes Korte Hoogstraat, the street where Napoleon resided for a couple of days. Will Napoleon have seen the Erasmus statue during that time?

Four centuries of the Netherlands: the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, the Batavian Republic, the Kingdom of Holland, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. During that entire time, the statue of Erasmus was standing in Rotterdam. That is an impressive fact, and it is a good thing that we are taking some time to contemplate that today. After all, the past is something that needs constant re-evaluation. New interpretations are being added all the time, and each time the events from collective history are explained in a different way. The controversies surrounding statues is an excellent example of this, just like the different artworks by and about Erasmus in Rotterdam that will also be discussed today.

What none of the speakers will be talking about today is a 2004 live television programme – shown by the Dutch broadcasting corporation KRO – during which the ‘greatest Dutch person’ was elected. Regardless of the question whether an election like that is ever a good

idea, I do want to take some time to reminisce about it at the start of this symposium. Following a first selection round, two hundred candidates were presented to the audience in the run-up to the live broadcast. Out of these, people could subsequently choose their favourite by televote. Erasmus ended in fifth place, ahead of Johan Cruijff, Michiel de Ruyter, Anne Frank, Rembrandt, and Vincent van Gogh – a rather peculiar line-up. And the composition of the top ten also left much to be desired: it included only one woman (Anne Frank) – which today would absolutely be out of the question –, and the hero status of Michiel de Ruyter has been much-discussed since then. But for today, let’s just marvel about the fact that a man who died in 1536 ended up in fifth place. All other candidates were born later. Here Erasmus is again bridging a huge timespan. So, what’s the deal with this extraordinary thinker? Today we will hopefully get a better insight into that, although Erasmus will always continue to elude us to some extent as well.

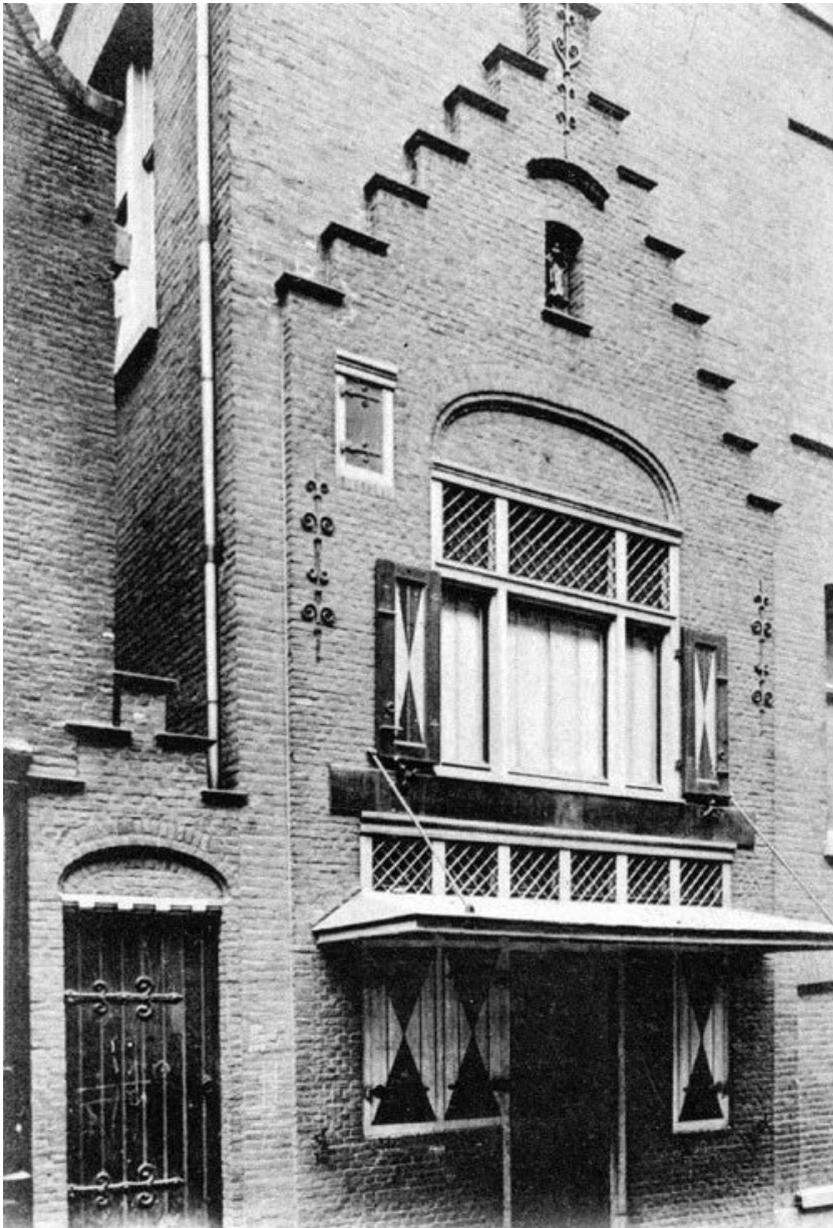
During my journey through time I chose to revisit Piet Hein, (the grandfather of) Baruch de Spinoza, and Napoleon Bonaparte, but I could very well have taken a different route – history offers many options. I selected these historical giants so I could get a better grip on the four centuries that the Erasmus statue has since bridged. I only partly succeeded: four hundred years is and remains a huge period of time, and I am glad that

we are celebrating that today. The bronze likeness of Erasmus that has been standing on its pedestal for four hundred years by now, is on its way to its fifth century in an as yet unknown version of the Netherlands. However, we will not live to see that.

# Freedom according to Erasmus

Rotterdammers walking past the statue of Erasmus will see a man who is wearing a strange hat and carrying a big book: a scholar from a bygone age. Who was Erasmus, what were his values, and why are these so well-suited to the city of Rotterdam? In 1954, the former Rotterdam mayor Pieter Oud argued that Erasmus had been ‘the profoundly sincere preacher of the general kind-heartedness that the world still so desperately needs.’ Wonderful words, and yet... ‘general kind-heartedness’, would we ever describe that as a trait that is typical of Rotterdam?

Erasmus wasn’t exactly kind-hearted when it came to expressing criticism, and he would never spare anyone in a position of power, certainly not politicians. He has Folly describe the administrator of his age as follows:



‘a man ignorant of laws, little less than an enemy to the public good, and minding nothing but his own, given up to pleasure, a hater of learning, liberty, and justice, studying nothing less than the public safety, but measuring everything by his own will and profit.’

For Erasmus, two things stood in the way of gaining knowledge: ‘modesty that casts a mist before the understanding, and fear that, having fancied a danger, dissuades us from the attempt.’ To him, foolishness was the best way to overcome those obstacles, because it ‘sufficiently frees us, and few there are that rightly understand of what great advantage it is to blush at nothing and attempt everything.’ As spoken by Folly herself in Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folly* (1511).

Erasmus was conceived here in Rotterdam as the illegitimate son of a priest and his housekeeper. He would become one of the most highly esteemed thinkers in Europe – and certainly also one of the most feared. An elusive man who would scrounge and beg his powerful contemporaries for money and attention, but who also did not shy away from mercilessly criticizing the same people. A man who was never afraid to write about any subject, but who at the same time refused to pick sides in political and religious arguments.

Erasmus is an enigma and the more I immerse myself in his life and work, the more unfathomable he becomes. No matter how harsh he was in his criticisms, scientists, monarchs, and even popes were standing in line to welcome his comments and advice. He personally preferred to be a teacher of the people and wanted to teach them how to think for themselves and not to trust authority – not even his. The wonderful statue of Erasmus has been standing in Rotterdam for four centuries now. But do we know what kind of man he actually was?

### **The Erasmus enigma**

Erasmus was probably born in 1469 and called himself ‘of Rotterdam’, even though he only lived here for three years. He was then taken to Gouda, where his father was as a priest. The social position of this illegitimate child was very bad, especially after his father had left for Rome and his mother died from the plague. Nevertheless, this very intelligent boy was given a good education: his mother sent him to Deventer, to a school where humanist ideas were being taught for the very first time.

During that period, our country was under the spell of something called ‘modern devotion’, a movement that called for church reforms. The clergy condemned abuse by the church and laypeople united in societies that were preaching a more personal religious experience

and aimed for educating the common people. A unique philosophical movement and a breeding ground for the humanist ideas that would also influence the teachings and work of Erasmus.

After the death of his mother, the inquisitive young teenager was first sent to a monastery in Steyn, near Gouda, where he felt horribly out of place. Among other things, Erasmus studied theology and was ordained to the priesthood in 1492, but he could never get used to monastery life. He fundamentally criticized the teachings and rituals of the church and vehemently opposed scholastic theology during that period. It was the dawn of a new age, and he would soon become its central figure.

While Erasmus did not feel at home in monasteries, he felt equally out of place at the universities where he studied, including the one in Paris. The printing establishments that published his books, such as Froben in Basel, formed the natural habitat of this writer. The art of printing was still a recent invention at that time and offered thinkers like Erasmus unprecedented possibilities for spreading new ideas – a ‘Republic of Letters’ where scholars from all over Europe were corresponding and debating with each other.

Although Erasmus called himself ‘of Rotterdam’, he actually never made a home for himself anywhere. Forever in search of funding and support he travelled through Europe for his entire life – from monastery to university, and to printing establishment. Significant in this respect is his description of how *The Praise of Folly* had come into being in a letter that he wrote to his friend Thomas More in 1508. In it Desiderius describes how he came up with the idea for Folly’s discourse while traveling on horseback from Italy to England, without having many books at his disposal and completely from memory.

### **The teachings of Erasmus**

To many people Erasmus is an elusive person, not only as an individual, but also with regard to his teachings: writers primarily consider him to be a philosopher, while philosophers primarily consider him to be a writer. Above all else, however, he was a theologian, as Sandra Langereis established in her wonderful new biography of Erasmus. Described as ‘the better Bible’ by Langereis, he wrote his *Novum Instrumentum* (1516), a Bible translation that caused a great deal of controversy and led to some major personal problems for Erasmus.

For over a thousand years these sacred texts had been copied by hand by thousands of monks. This had led to many mistakes and all kinds of different interpretations.

Teaching people how to empathize with someone else and see something from a different point of view is a skill that is just as relevant today as it was in Erasmus's time, more than five centuries ago. Daring to think, stray from the beaten track, and venture into unknown territory. Erasmus allows Folly to speak for herself in this book. He lets her show us how much even she is able to teach us, and that nothing could ever be too foolish during this process. Without shame (or modesty) or fear – the emotions that obstruct our way to the truth.

### **Erasmus of Rotterdam**

Our country can boast three great philosophers: Spinoza, Hugo de Groot, and Erasmus. We also have three great cities: Amsterdam, The Hague, and of course Rotterdam. It is no coincidence that each of these cities has claimed one of these philosophers for itself. That evolved out of some kind of city marketing, or image building. But it is more than that: the way in which cities identify with these philosophers tells us something about how these cities see themselves, and what values they consider to be important.

Amsterdam presents itself as a city of liberty and tolerance, often mentioning Spinoza in the same breath, even though he was only honoured with a statue in 2008, standing near the Amsterdam City Hall. The Hague

Taking, among other things, the ancient Greek texts as his point of departure, Erasmus retranslated the *New Testament*, and that translation turned out to be quite different. According to him, the whole idea of original sin – an essential element of religious doctrine – was founded on a flawed interpretation. To many people, ideas like that were unacceptable.

Erasmus wanted to teach his contemporaries not to rely on authority – regardless of how longstanding and powerful it was –, but rather to read, and even write, for themselves. With the help of three thousand *Adagia*, i.e. ancient Greek and Latin proverbs and expressions, he taught people how to write rhetorically strong and above all humorous texts. The commentaries that Erasmus wrote to accompany these expressions, which also provided him with a welcome source of income, were also punctuated with humour.

Erasmus wrote all the time, by day and by night. On any subject, but especially about bringing up children and educating adults. That combination of biting humour and brilliant didactics can also be found in *The Praise of Folly*, which he wrote to teach people perhaps the greatest skill of all: thinking for yourself. He did so by showing them that choosing a different perspective, in this case Folly's, can help us see reality in a different light.

Erasmus is not only connected to the past, but also to the future of the Erasmus University where a wide-ranging discussion – that I am also contributing to – about ‘Erasmian’ values is currently taking place. It is a discussion about the values of universities in general and those of the Erasmus University in particular. About the role we, as an academic community, have in society, and more in particular about how we are connected to the people of Rotterdam.

### **Freedom According to Erasmus**

Erasmus is an enigmatic man who keeps surprising us, and he remains a person we eagerly want to keep researching, as is obvious from Sandra Langereis’s recent biography. Even after five centuries, also his work continues to intrigue us, in particular the over three thousand letters he wrote during his lifetime that have recently been published again, as a 21-volume set, in Rotterdam. These letters offer us an extraordinary glimpse into the head and heart of this exceptional thinker.

They show us a man who would always speak out, but would never be pinned down. Someone who was always (self-)critical, but never picked a side. A man who asked his readers to choose their own perspective and to always think for themselves. He was a great thinker

showcases itself as the city of international law with the help of Hugo de Groot, the philosopher of law whose statue has been standing near the Dutch Supreme Court since 1938. But whether it was 2008 or 1938, dates like these have nothing on Rotterdam, where Erasmus has been standing for four hundred years.

It is still a remarkable feat that someone who, as a young boy, only spent three years of his life in Rotterdam was able to become an icon of this city. The university and the most important bridge have been named after him, and the city is filled with numerous other manifestations of both his name and the statue. The depiction of Erasmus’s hat alone reminds people of Rotterdam. The question of how that process of appropriation took effect is the subject of a study conducted at the new Erasmus of Rotterdam Research Centre (ERRC) of the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

The ERRC is part of the Erasmus School of Philosophy (ESPhil) and, besides me, consists of Professor Han van Ruler and Sanne Steen who, as a PhD candidate, is specifically focusing her research on the appropriation of Erasmus and the role the Rotterdam statue has played in this process. For this study we are collaborating with the Erasmus Collection of the Rotterdam City Library, the largest and most extraordinary collection of works by Erasmus in the world.

and an amusing author – there are not many books I enjoy reading as much as *The Praise of Folly*. A book in which Erasmus claims his freedom to think, with little regard for hurt feelings or offended egos.

That may all be fine and dandy, but what does any of this have to do with Rotterdam? This statue has been standing here for four hundred years, and now we would finally like to find out why. For that, let's return to former mayor Pieter Oud whom I quoted earlier with regard to Erasmus's supposed 'general kind-heartedness'. He spoke these words in 1954 in the Dutch Lower House, where he was chairman of the liberal VVD party at that time. But we have certainly not been able to find evidence of this kind-heartedness in Erasmus's language and tone of voice.

However, this former mayor said much more during his speech in the Lower House, things that indeed teach us much more about Erasmus and Rotterdam, namely about the necessity of tolerance: 'There is no need to come up with unnecessary contradictions. What our world needs to this day is tolerance (...) The city where I was fortunate enough to enter into outstanding partnerships with representatives from all constructive groups during difficult times, is also the city where the statue of Erasmus stands, the greatest figure among the Dutch humanists.'

Pieter Oud was referring to the time of war and crisis, when the Rotterdammers were fighting for their right to be free and critical and to think for themselves. But that freedom is only possible if we grant it to others as well. All freedom starts with tolerance, with the space we allow other people to have. Erasmus never wanted to pick sides, because he refused to cancel. Erasmus's freedom still has the capacity to bring the people of Rotterdam closer together. His statue can help remind us of that.

The quotes by Pieter Oud were taken from *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer* (Proceedings of the Lower House), 5 October 1954.

The quotes from Erasmus's *Stultitiae laus* (The Praise of Folly, 1511) were taken from the 1668 English translation by John Wilson.

The biography by Sandra Langereis: *Erasmus. Dwarsdenker. Een biografie* (Erasmus the Maverick. A Biography, 2021).

*De correspondentie van Desiderius Erasmus* (The Correspondence of Desiderius Erasmus) includes 3,141 letters, spread out over 21 volumes (2004-2020).

# The statue of a champion of the mind

On 22 November 1996, Erasmus took a step forward and tumbled off his pedestal. His face smashed against the pavement of the Laurensplein square in Rotterdam and in that painful and pitiful state the statue was found by some passing workmen the next morning. The bolt that had anchored Erasmus's cloak to the back of the pedestal had come loose, making the top-heavy bronze statue an easy prey for vandals who were then able to pull it from its pedestal without a great deal of effort. This was by no means the first time that Erasmus had become the object of violence, slander, and all kinds of political-religious controversies. Already in 1622, the year in which the statue was erected, there were serious attempts to make the bronze humanist – whom the Rotterdam city council had commissioned the Amsterdam sculptor Hendrick de Keyser to make –



disappear from the cityscape. Fortunately, those early efforts turned out to be in vain, and since then the statue has been miraculously surviving all kinds of threats to this day. The crash it made in 1996 did not result in major damage, partly because the sculpture had been cast with such thick walls. Apart from a couple of dents and bruises to his face, beret, and book, Erasmus came out unscathed. During a restoration in 1997-1998 these injuries were carefully eliminated.

Erecting a statue was no mean feat in the early seventeenth-century Republic; initiatives like these involved navigating all kinds of religious and prejudicial issues. The Reformation – and more in particular the 1566 iconoclastic fury that left a trail of destruction throughout the Low Countries – had resulted in a hostile climate towards sculpture in the public space. This was something Hendrick de Keyser would also experience thirty or so years later when orthodox churchgoers in Hoorn started protesting against a monument in their church to the local physician Hogerbeets. According to a local chronicler either the monument's ornamental frame that De Keyser had made would be removed from the monument, or the memorial would be 'presently smashed to pieces' by 'a great many unwise folks'. The parties concerned wisely chose the diplomatic route. Barely twelve years later, De Keyser was prohibited by the Amsterdam church

council to supply an alabaster statue of John the Baptist to the Roman-Catholic cathedral of Den Bosch, under penalty of excommunication and being banned from the Lord's Supper. The sculptor, however, was in no way deterred by this and the sculpture was delivered as planned in 1614, apparently without any further consequences.

Regardless of the different outcomes of these two incidents, they are typical of the hostile climate towards sculpture in the public space in the young Dutch nation. After all, sculptures were associated with papal heresy and idolatry. That was also the case in Rotterdam in 1621, when the local orthodox Calvinists faction spread the rumour that 'a certain person had knelt for said sculpture', referring to a stone predecessor of De Keyser's statue of Erasmus. In other words, the statue of the Roman Catholic freethinker had provoked idolatry and that alone was reason enough to ban it. As it turned out, the reality behind the rumour was a lot more prosaic: the devout kneeler was a woman who had squatted down in the shadow of the statue to urinate. On the whole, reformed protesters were rather hypocritical. For instance, there were no protests at all by hardcore Calvinists against the plans to erect a sumptuous memorial to William of Orange in the New Church in Delft, even though it would be made in exactly the same period by the same sculptor.. But when De Keyser's

bronze Erasmus was erected shortly after, one of the orthodox clergymen immediately saw cause to protest against this 'idol', this horrific symbol of freethinking. Despite a petition that was signed three-hundred times, however, it was to no avail.

It was understandable that Rotterdam emotions ran so high against the backdrop of the political crisis the young Republic found itself in at that time, with Prince Maurice's revolt against the more moderate factions in the country and the imprisonment of many important figures such as Hugo de Groot and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (including the public beheading of the latter). The Erasmus statue, however, had been commissioned by the former city government that favoured the Remonstrant Brotherhood, and was undoubtedly motivated by the weighty argument of local pride and civil self-awareness. Because erecting the statue was not a matter of the church, but a political affair, the 1622 Gorkum Synod did not side with the protestant clergyman. They argued that Calvin himself had tolerated those 'political monuments, statues, images, trophies and the like, which are simply erected for the adornment of cities and countries and for the preservation of the good memory of some memorable events and persons.'

Already in 1549, on the occasion of the joyous arrival

of King Philip II in the city on the river Maas, civil pride had also led to a temporary statue of Erasmus being erected to welcome the new ruler. Eight years later, this provisional statue – most likely made from papier-mâché and plaster over a wooden frame – was replaced by a more durable stone version on the bridge at Grotemarkt. The stern of the Rotterdam galleon *Erasmus*, that under its new name *De Liefde* (The Love) had stranded on the coast of Japan in April 1600, can perhaps give us an impression of what that new monument looked like. A mere fifteen years after it was erected, the Erasmus on the bridge had fallen prey to iconoclastic Spanish soldiers, stirred on by a monk for whom Erasmus was the embodiment of heresy. It almost seems as though it was an act of revenge for the removal – by the people of Antwerp in 1570 – of a bronze statue of the Duke of Alba that had been erected in the citadel of the city on the Scheldt as an assertion of his tyrannical authority in the Low Countries. The assaulted statue of Erasmus, however, was repaired and reinstalled on the Grotemarkt until it made way for the current imposing bronze version in 1622.

A little over fifty years after the statue was erected, De Keyser's Erasmus would again be under fire. When, during the 'Rampjaar' (Disaster Year) 1672, the young stadtholder William of Orange had seized power in the battle against the French, and the regents' republican

factions had to make way for conservative, Orangist powers, the Rotterdam city council decided in 1674 to sell the bronze Erasmus to Basel, the city where the humanist had lived for a long time and died. The statue had already been taken of its pedestal, but that turned out to be premature as three years later Basel declined the offer and Erasmus had to return to his old plinth. He would stay there until 1940. Miraculously, the statue survived the criminal bombing of Rotterdam and was brought to safety immediately after: during the war years it lay buried between walls and sandbags in the courtyard of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and was reinstated on the Coolsingel after the war. After a number of relocations it was given its final spot, at least for now, on the Grotekerkplein square.

As the first true monumental statue in the Republic, De Keyser's Erasmus was a novelty, but also in a technical sense the sculpture was an unprecedented accomplishment. Never before had a sculpture of this size been cast in bronze in this country – and certainly not in one piece. Until that time, bronze foundries limited themselves to primarily producing mortars, bells, and cannons. The bronze founder Jan Cornelisz Oudenrogge, who was hired for the job, therefore also mainly produced artillery and bells. Research has shown that Erasmus was indeed cast in *bronzó bombardá*, the traditional alloy for cannon casting. Furthermore, after

the statue's fall in 1996, it turned out that its interior had a brick core, pointing to a technique used in bell foundries. These are all clues that De Keyser had relied on the advice of Oudenrogge, and perhaps also a number of other Amsterdam bronze founders, for the realization of this huge technical enterprise. Dating from November 1619, the sculptor's specified invoice regarding the purchase of metal for the statue shows that in order to acquire the necessary amount of bronze, a cannon had to be melted down as well. The sculptor had furthermore bought bell metal and 'red scrap' (copper) – a total of around six hundred kilos for over twelve hundred guilders. It was agreed that nearly a third of the bronze would be taken back by De Keyser: this additional part was used for all the pouring and ventilation channels that were sawed off after the statue had been cast before ending up in the crucible again. The sculptor may well have thought of reusing it for casting the bronze sculptures that were part of the other large project he was working on during those years: the mausoleum of William of Orange. In the end, Oudenrogge would not finish the job until the spring of 1622, in his Rotterdam workshop. He casted an extra thick-walled bronze in order to avoid all risks of casting mistakes, and this has definitely played an important role in the sculpture's conservation. The entire operation must certainly have contributed to Oudenrogge's good reputation, as even before the statue had been cast he was already

approached for a post in the service of King Christian IV of Denmark and also received an invitation to inspect Danish cannon at the Norwegian copper mines.

But even if Erasmus was a technical tour de force, it was also an extremely innovative and ground-breaking piece in an iconographical sense. It is not a monument to a monarch, a ruler like Alba, or a military hero – figures who this genre was generally reserved for –, but one of the first public statues in Europe for a champion of the mind. There had been predecessors, but only very few and mostly of a temporary nature. Ephemeral sculptures of scholars and artists had, for instance, been erected for special royal entries – comparable to the 1549 Rotterdam Erasmus mentioned earlier. In fifteenth-century Padua there had been an initiative to erect a durable statue of Livy, and around 1490 there was a similar plan in Mantua to realize a monument in honour of Virgil. Neither of these projects, however, ever made it past the drawing board. A design sketch by Mantegna for the Mantuan sculpture still exists today.

Also new was the fact that De Keyser chose not to show the great humanist in a rigid way, but to portray him while striding, reading and leafing through a book. It was a bold choice that can be traced back to a pictorial tradition where scholars – also including Luther, interestingly enough – were depicted in their studies. But choosing

a composition as dynamic as this also shows that in the latter years of his career De Keyser was fully aware of – and had even mastered the principles of – the new, early-Baroque style of sculpture that was coming to fruition in Italy. Above all, by using this unorthodox iconography, the sculptor was defying the most intrinsic quality of a statue: facing eternity by standing motionlessly on a pedestal. The word statue comes from the Latin *statua* and is derived from the verb ‘stare’ meaning ‘to stand still in an upright position’. A fixed *statua* like that obviously needs a pedestal that permanently anchors the artwork to the floor while at the same time elevating it to a higher level. In case of a ‘walking’ statue such a pedestal is a contradiction, and that is exactly what makes Erasmus on his plinth even more valuable from an art-historical perspective. The sculpture marks a special moment in sculptural history where the sculptor consciously explored and reformulated the relationship between pedestal and sculpture – a process that only around 1900 would have radical consequences in the work of Auguste Rodin. Incidentally, to De Keyser and his patrons, that cube-shaped plinth must also have had an additional meaning. After all, its shape is reminiscent of Erasmus’s personal motto, *concedo nulli* (I yield to no-one), which was represented by a head on a square plinth to symbolize *stabilitas*, stability. Seen from that perspective, Erasmus’s unlucky ‘fall’ in 1996 also has ironic and tragical connotations.

The stone cube that Erasmus tumbled down from (and which he has again been standing on since 1998) is, incidentally, not the original pedestal from 1622 that already disappeared in the seventeenth century. The current plinth dates from 1964 and is an almost exact copy (including inscriptions) of its predecessor that, in turn, dated from 1677. Or at least, so it seems from one of the inscriptions which mentions the fact that De Keyser's original pedestal apparently showed an unfortunate crack in 1674, a time during which the statue was still standing on a dilapidated bridge across the Steigersgracht canal. Because of this situation, the pedestal was substituted for a new one three years later. After being replaced in 1964, the statue's second seventeenth-century pedestal would lead a rather pitiful existence. As it happened, Erasmus's symbol of stability was put on the grounds of the Gymnasium Erasmianum secondary school, its skirting half sunken into the ground. There, the orphaned block of stone gradually became a hangout for the students and the location of choice for their adolescent rituals. Fortunately that situation ended, after which the object became an integral part of the entirely new artwork *Der Stein des Weisen*, by Kathrin Schlegel, that has been standing on the campus of the Erasmus University Rotterdam since 2018.

A number of times Erasmus narrowly escaped destruction, but even after four hundred years he is still standing firmly in the centre of his native city. And yet I would now like to present my closing arguments for safeguarding its future. An extraordinary sculpture like this, one that is not only important to Rotterdam, but also to the Netherlands as a whole, as well as to European cultural history, requires a safe, museum environment. In the open air, the bronze will gradually disintegrate even further; a process that may take a long time but is irreversible. Also, there is no guarantee that the statue will never again be subjected to ordinary vandalism, copper pirates, or new iconoclastic furies – after all, these are turbulent times for statues. In short, isn't it about time to make an exact copy of Erasmus and give the original statue a permanent place at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen when it reopens? Technically speaking it is no longer the tour de force it was in De Keyser's age. Moreover, in sculpture-loving countries such as Italy this has already been a generally accepted practice for years. It would be the best guarantee for preserving the oldest and most important sculpture in the Netherlands and keeping this figurehead of freethinking safe. After four hundred turbulent years, Erasmus truly deserves it.

# What is a statue?



A statue leads an uncertain existence. All over the world people are just as easily put on a pedestal as taken off it again. The statue of Erasmus met with that same fate. Erected in 1549, the first Rotterdam statue of Erasmus was made of wood and rotted away. A second statue, this time made from stone, was destroyed by furious Spanish soldiers in 1572, an act of revenge in response to the Capture of Brielle. Although the third statue is celebrating its four-hundredth birthday today, the fate of this bronze sculpture remains in the hands of future generations. *'Haec est'*, Erasmus might say: it is what it is. On 25 November 1974, just after midnight, the very first act of the newly independent Republic of Surinam was dismantling the statue of Queen Wilhelmina on the Oranjeplein in Paramaribo. In former Eastern bloc countries, thousands of Soviet statues

have been removed from the public domain since 1989. The Ukrainians even passed a law prohibiting communist statues and symbols in the public space, much to the anger of Russia. Statues come and go. That is their tragic fate.

Statues have an aura of grave importance. Both their placement and removal are symbolic acts. The object, preferably placed on a high pedestal, represents a regime, an era, an alleged hero, or a historical achievement. A statue is a sacred-secular object with a mnemonic function. Or in plain language: a statue is a beautifully executed memory aid, a tool for remembering names, events, objects, and dates.

Despite the authority these statues are supposed to convey, they have a problematic relationship with the histories and historical characters they represent. Statues do not belong to the domain of scientific historiography, but to the domain of remembrance culture. The purpose of a statue is to evaluate a person or event in a *positive* way. The statue is solidified emotion. In communicating with the outside world, the statue usually highlights heroic aspects and extraordinary accomplishments while unsuitable or less fortunate events are pushed aside. The statue has an educational and unifying purpose. Located on the streets, it is the object's intention to share feelings of appreciation

- captured in bronze or stone - with the users of the public space. In charge of generating an interest in, or a love of, a shared past the statue thus contributes to shaping a collective identity.

Most statues, however, have an expiration date. The knowledge of the depicted historical figure or event will someday become lost in time. The person who once made an important contribution to society, will eventually wither away and become nothing more than a lonely figure standing on a pedestal. Europe is full of figures like that. Also, there may be users of the public space who can no longer recognize themselves in the favourable recognition this statue wants to convey to them. They question the positive message of the statue and deny the notion of that shared heroic past. In cases like this, the statue will no longer be a connecting force, but rather a symbol of a mental distance in society.

Changes in viewing habits are an often-discussed theme in the world of fine art, photography, and theatre. The way in which we look at things may change under the influence of time. In our current, media and information driven society, the viewer is no longer simply served up images. Images should be questioned - in education this is referred to as 'media wisdom'. That process of questioning not only takes place in the digital realm, but also in the analogue world: in the public space. The statue's

function on the streets is no longer purely propagating, but also calls for interaction with the city residents and passers-by. Within the context of these changing viewing habits, statues are no longer self-evident, but have become problematic.

Sometimes the relationship between the statue and the viewer becomes so disturbed that the statue has to be removed from the public space. Since the George Floyd protests of May 2020, more than two hundred statues and monuments have been removed from the streets in the United States alone. This clean-up operation targeted statues connected to the history of slavery, the extermination of Indigenous peoples, and institutional racism. This purging operation is still far from completed.

The scope and seriousness of these efforts is reminiscent of the campaigns of Vichy France during the Second World War. In October 1941, the government of Marshall Philippe Pétain – that collaborated with Nazi Germany – issued a decree to demand the removal and destruction of nearly two thousand statues and monuments. As a justification for these actions, they pointed to the acute shortage of metals in French agriculture and industry. In reality the scrap materials were transported directly to the German war industry and to the studio of Adolf Hitler's favourite artist Arno Breker. The statues were

not selected at random. The list had been compiled with great care and attention; the denounced statues represented historical figures who were deemed insulting to the Nazi regime and the Vichy government. In the blink of an eye the French sculpture collection was purged of all persons and symbols that might be associated with democracy, liberalism, socialism and the avant-garde. It came as no surprise that these were the statues that had to bear the brunt of this purification. After all, they had played an important role in the formation of the Third French Republic (1870-1940) and the development of democracy in France. Pétain's government had ended both.

The Third Republic's policies concerning statues is often describe with the term 'statuomanie', or statue mania. This drive to produce monuments was exemplary of the modern urbanist and liberal-secular programme embraced by the French state. In 1870, there were scarcely a dozen statues in Paris; in 1914 the city already had more than a hundred and fifty, and at the beginning of the Second World War the collection boasted two hundred and seventeen statues. Statue mania was not limited to the capital managed to find its way the smallest of French hamlets and deep into France's overseas colonies.

Kings, generals, and prelates were traditionally placed on pedestals. During the years of the Third Republic, however, writers, philosophers, artists, actors, scientists, physicians, politicians, and philanthropists could be immortalized in bronze and stone as well. In this modern democracy, the statue was the artistic expression of choice. The people hoisted onto pedestals were, of course, predominantly white men. And yes, historical figures who represented France's colonial past or had expressed racist views were indeed placed on pedestals along the boulevards too. But freethinkers like Nicolas, Marquis de Condorcet were also given statues in the public domain. This eighteenth-century thinker and politician had pleaded for public education, fought for equal rights for men and women, and had denounced any form of racism. His statue was also pulverized by the Vichy regime's wrecking balls, and the bronze it was made of found its way to the sculptors of Nazi Germany.

From France this 'democratic artform' fanned out to other nation states in Europe and beyond, particularly to the United States, a country in desperately need of re-evaluating its history and identity after the Civil War (1861-1865). The nineteenth-century fashion for statues also reached the Netherlands where, in newspapers and magazines, liberals and radicals passionately spoke out in favour of erecting more statues in our cities. However, the response to these pleas remained remarkably tepid.

The writer Carel Vosmaer, who had committed himself to an initiative to realize a statue of the philosopher Spinoza in The Hague, blamed this lack of interest in statues on our 'weakened inclination toward the monumental' and our 'all too sedated prosaism that feels no need to express itself openly'. Theologians pointed to the prevalent Protestantism in Dutch cities that supposedly linked statues to idolatry. Finally, some art historians suggested that the soft soil of our country was the reason why the art of sculpting remained unable to reach full maturity.

Because of this, there was hardly any question of statue mania in the Netherlands. Amsterdam was even especially frugal in placing statues in the public space. Only the statues of Rembrandt (1852), Vondel (1867), Thorbecke (1876), Prince Henry (1885), and Domela Nieuwenhuis (1931) are worth mentioning in this respect. The city of The Hague did have an active policy with regard to erecting statues in the public space – not that surprising for an administrative and royal capital. In the city centre alone over twenty five statues and monuments arose between 1845 and 1940, including statues of William of Orange (1845), Spinoza (1880), Johan de Witt (1918), and a number of legal scholars (1938).

Contrary to Amsterdam, Rotterdam was more interested in statues. Nineteenth-century provincial



towns that were developing into more sizeable cities would usually turn to Paris for inspiration. In the French capital, Baron Haussmann had demonstrated how a city could be redeveloped and given a new, monumental appearance through urban planning. Statues were placed along brand-new boulevards, in city parks, and near government buildings. Rotterdam followed that pattern, though not to the exaggerated extent of the French. Between 1849 and 1935, sixteen statues were realized in Rotterdam. Main characters from the history of the port city were placed on pedestals, for instance the hydraulic engineers Thomas Stieltjes (1884) and Pieter Caland (1907), and the urban planner Gerrit Jan de Jongh (1935). Writers such as Hendrik Tollens (1960) and Willem Schürmann (1916) were also honoured with a statue, as were the physical chemist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry Jacobus van 't Hoff (1915).

During the heydays of statue mania, a number of statues were erected in Rotterdam that could be linked to the Dutch colonial past: the statue of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1920), for instance, placed in a niche of the new city hall on the Coolingsel. Although this was mainly an homage to his status as an exemplary politician, Van Oldenbarnevelt was also one of the founders of the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC). Earlier, in 1867, a statue of one of the authors of the Dutch constitution,

Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp, had been placed near the Schielandshuis building. He came from a family that was opposed to slavery and the trade in enslaved people. The statue of the seafarer and privateer Piet Hein, that today is considered to be controversial, however, was not a Rotterdam initiative. This statue was realized in 1870 in the town where Hein was born: Delfshaven, which at that time was still autonomous. Although the Dutch and Rotterdam colonial past is definitely present in a number of the statues, it is by no means the collection's leitmotiv.

Today, no-one would consider statues to be the artform of choice in a democracy; the collection is too biased and not inclusive enough for that. And no-one will claim that statue mania has made our cities grand and exalted. Nevertheless, statues have certainly made our cities *more interesting*. Statues are part of the cultural memory of the city, that mental archive of human actions. Statues are also beacons and landmarks in the urban landscape. Even their nocturnal shadows contribute to how we experience the city. As whimsical objects along boulevards, on squares, and in parks they give old and new locations a personality, history and identity – no matter what we might think about the depicted persons or events.

Regardless of how imperfect, incomplete and non-inclusive this visual culture has manifested itself, the statue was able to flourish in the shadow of democracy. And just like democracy needs debate and argument to mature, statues also need to be debated and argued about. The German-Jewish cultural philosopher Walter Benjamin advocated a critical, dissenting interpretation of statues in the city. Every statue not merely owes its existence to the achievements of great minds, but also to the efforts and exploitation of their anonymous contemporaries. 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,' Benjamin wrote. 'And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, [...] A historical materialist [...] regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.'

And that is exactly why the removal of a statue should only be proposed as a last resort. Rather than removing statues from the city, new additions might be an excellent alternative, as was recently the case in Bristol where the artist Marc Quinn created a statue for the *Black Lives Matter*-activist Jen Reid. The statue was illegally placed on the empty plinth on which Edward Colston once stood, a seventeenth-century merchant and enslaver who had been dragged off his pedestal by activists. Unfortunately, the more recently placed statue was torn down only a day later by order of the mayor of Bristol.

Rotterdam also seems to be opting for new statues of activists who took a stand against slavery during the colonial past. A 2021 motion submitted by the political parties PvdA, Groen Links and D66, stated that ‘statues of historically important people [...] are vitally important [...] for acquiring more knowledge of slavery and the colonial past.’ In this way, ‘the streetscape would be balanced out more evenly’, and the statues could become ‘the point of departure for conversations between Rotterdammers about social themes.’ This motion illustrates that there is still support for the idea that statues, much like our democracy and public debate, are constantly evolving. Finally, the motion recognized the fact that it is the city’s task to brush history against the grain, because ‘*Fata viam invenient*’, the fates will find a way, as Erasmus liked to say.

Maurice Agulhorn, ‘La ‘statuomanie’ et l’histoire’, *Ethnologie française* (2/3, 1978), 145-172.

Markus Balkenhol, ‘Over standbeelden, totempalen en de herinnering aan de slavernij’, *Beleid en Maatschappij* (2, 2019), 294-299.

Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’, *Selected Writings IV 1938-1940* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004), 389-400.

James Hall, ‘At the Mercy of the Public. Is It Necessary to Kill Some Statues, Or Could We Add to Them?’, *Times Literary Supplement* (9 April 2021).

Peter Hughes, *A History of Love and Hate in 21 Statues* (London: Aurum, 2021).

Pierre Jahan & Jean Cocteau, *La mort et les statues* (Paris: Les Editions du Compas, 1946).

A.Th.C. Kersbergen, *Rotterdamse standbeelden, monumenten en gedenktekens* (Rotterdam: Ad. Donker/Roterodamum, 1948).

‘List of Monuments and Memorials Removed During the George Floyd Protests’, *Wikipedia* (Geraadpleegd op 1 januari 2022).

*Motie verzetshelden in zicht* (Motion Heroes of the resistance in view, Rotterdam City Council, 6/8 July 2021), submitted by the political parties PvdA, D66, GroenLinks.

Henk Oosterling, ‘Het museum als infotain-totaaltheater? Bildung, verbeelding, beeldcultuur en branding in de 21ste eeuw’, *Museumvisie* (33/04, 2009), 32-37.

L.J. Rogier, *Rotterdam in het derde kwart van de negentiende eeuw* (Rotterdam: Ad. Donker/Roterodamum, 1953).

Siebe Thissen, *Beelden. Stadsverfraaiing in Rotterdam sinds 1940* (Rotterdam: Japsam Books, 2016).

Siebe Thissen, ‘Museale zorg. Over de sokkel van Erasmus’, Vincent van Velsen (red.), *Der Stein des Weisen* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam/Kathrin Schlegel, 2018), 6-7.

# The statue as a (contemporary) problem



When I received the invitation to contribute to this symposium, I was asked to explain something about my experiences surrounding the realization of two special outdoor sculptures in Amsterdam: the statue of Anton de Kom, created by Jikke van Loon, and the Nelson Mandela Memorial, created by Mohau Modisakeng. The first dating from 2006, and the second from 2021 – both commissioned by the municipality of Amsterdam, and supervised during the process of realization by the Centrum Beeldende Kunst Zuidoost (CBK Zuidoost, Centre for Visual Arts Southeast Amsterdam).

I responded positively to this invitation, taken with the idea of sharing some of my memories with regard to ‘the making of’ as well as the later reception of these artworks. Fifteen years after the tumultuous unveiling

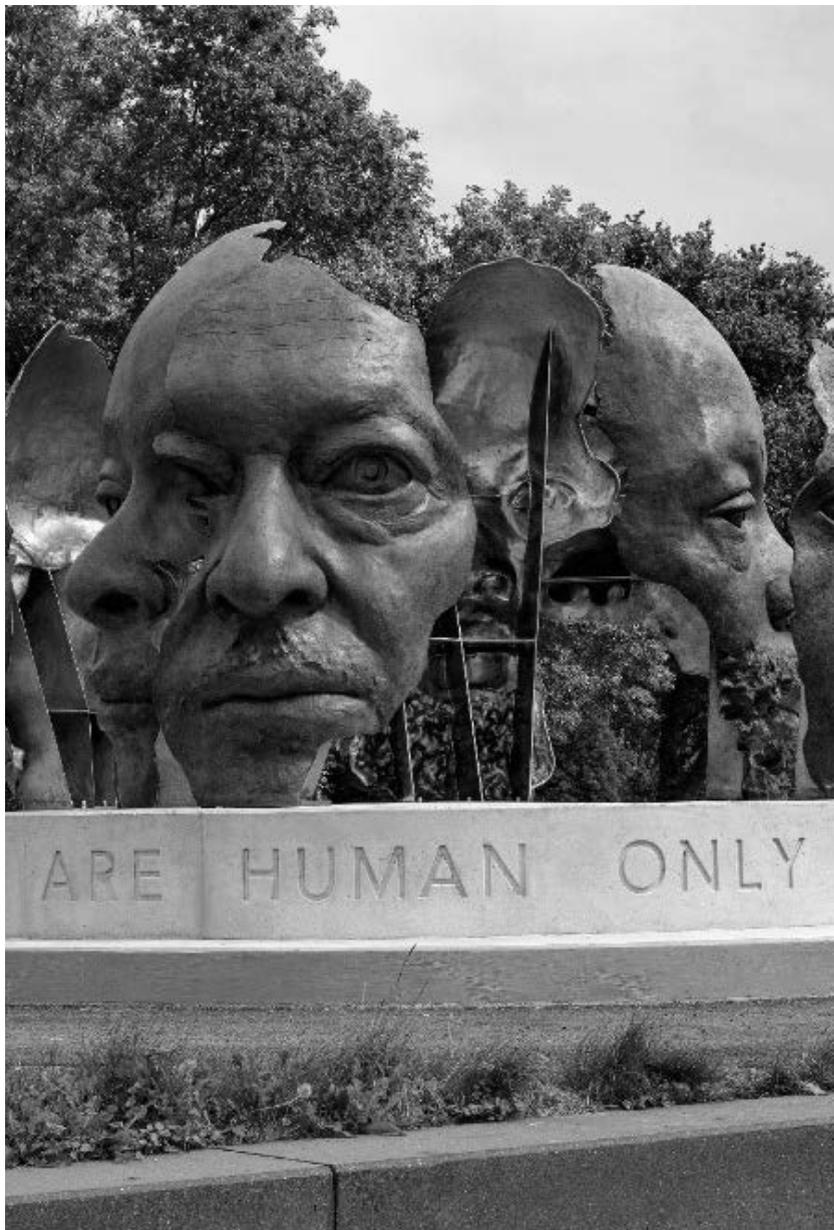
of the statue of De Kom, it is now a good moment for looking back. Especially with the festive unveiling of the Mandela memorial still fresh in mind.

When the announcement for this afternoon was distributed, I read that the organization had given my contribution the title 'The statue as a (contemporary) problem.' Um ok, I thought. So I have to discuss a problem... but what problem would that be exactly? The problem of the white woman who commissioned sculptures representing two Black men? The one about the unsuccessful or successful process of participative commissioning during which residents - rightly or wrongly - felt misunderstood? Or the one about the public outdoor space of a city that insufficiently accounts for its past and insufficiently represents its inhabitants through the statues that are already standing in the streets?

This will be a story in which all those questions will be addressed, chronicled by a person who is directly involved and therefore insufficiently able to maintain the distance of 'the outsider'. This will be a story without definitive answers. Those are the responsibility of the listener.

First some facts.

Anton de Kom was a writer, trade union man, freedom fighter, and hero of the resistance. That is what it says on the pedestal of the bronze statue that was erected in his honour. Born in 1898 in Surinam, his father had still lived in enslavement. De Kom grew up in a colonial system under Dutch rule. Although slavery had officially been abolished in 1863, during that time society as a whole was still imbued with colonial thought and actions. In 1932, De Kom wrote *Wij slaven van Suriname* (We Slaves of Surinam) in which he appealed to his people to be proud of their own heritage and strive for autonomy. His voice found an audience in communist circles in the Netherlands as well as among the multi-ethnic inhabitants of Surinam. During the revolutionary 1930s this was considered to be such a threat that De Kom was arrested and exiled to the Netherlands. There he settled in The Hague, where he would never succeed in finding employment again. He was seen as an enemy of the state. Nevertheless, his need to fight injustice was so deep-rooted that he decided to join the resistance against the German occupation in order to save the Netherlands - the same nation that oppressed him and his native country - from tyranny. In 1944 he was betrayed and sent off to Vught Concentration Camp, and later murdered at Sandbostel Concentration Camp. Anton de Kom was a Maroon who helped Javanese contract workers, a Black man who married a white woman, a freedom fighter for Surinam,



and a hero of the Dutch resistance. In today's words: someone who thought and acted in an intercultural way. A hero, a role model to many, but especially to the people of Surinam and the Surinamese community in the Netherlands.

Nelson Mandela was a lawyer, freedom fighter, politician, statesman. He was born in 1918 and therefore only twenty years younger than De Kom. In 1994, Mandela became the first Black president of democratic South-Africa after having been imprisoned for nearly thirty years. Mandela led his people away from Apartheid and towards freedom. Also in this case the history of slavery is never far away. The system of Apartheid was rooted in the long history of the transatlantic slave trade. It has been spread around the world by the Dutch via the state-owned East India (VOC) and West India (WIC) Companies, and with Cape Town serving as a way-station for their ships. Mandela was a Black man who did not shy away from armed struggle, yet also decided to negotiate peace with the white minority. A hero and a role model as well.

I work in the district called Amsterdam Zuidoost (Southeast). It was originally built as Bijlmermeer – generally referred to as 'the Bijlmer' – in the late 1950s according to Le Corbusier's urban planning principles. In the 1980s and 1990s the district grew with the

addition of residential neighbourhoods like Gein and Venserpolder and went through a transformation after that. A large number of the original high-rise flats have since been demolished. Zuidoost is now the size of a city, with a hundred thousand inhabitants. A city where migrant life in the Netherlands can be experienced in all its glory. A city with an Afro-Caribbean, African, and Latin-American - one might say Black - identity. It was therefore not surprising that, in the summer of 2020, the major Black Lives Matter protests took place here. In this location, CBK Zuidoost is functioning as a venue for presentation and creation. We make programmes for the whole of Amsterdam and beyond, but are mainly inspired by the context of Zuidoost and the issues and themes that resonate in the hearts and minds of our primary audience. The CBK makes exhibitions, hosts an artist in residence programme, has an art library and an educational programme, and plays a coordinating role in realizing art in the public space. Because of this we were also involved in the realization of the Anton de Kom and Nelson Mandela sculptures. In both cases, this meant a long-term process that included participatory commissioning. Neither the municipality or the district, nor CBK Zuidoost had the power to decide what the outcome would be. Instead the people for whom it was intended, the citizens of Zuidoost, were given a decisive role.

At the beginning of 2000, another part of Zuidoost changed. A new district office building and a square were constructed. Some residents of Surinamese descent decided to ask the municipality to name this square after Anton de Kom. This new square was of course the place of choice to honour ADEK, as he was sometimes referred to. But when you name a square after a hero... you also need a statue of that hero. The Working Group Anton de Kom Monument was set up, with CBK Zuidoost as the coordinating party, functioning as a link between the working group and the city district. Members of that working group were the people who first took the initiative - the residents - as well as a specialist in the field of art in the public space, an urban planner, and one of Anton de Kom's four children. During various meetings they discussed what the statue should represent. After determining the substantive criteria, the portfolios of possible artists were discussed. Four artists were then asked to make a full-scale model. The reason behind this was that it was thought to be too difficult to judge a design for this memorial on paper. Therefore four artworks were exhibited, respectively by Jikke van Loon, Henri Renfurm, Henk Visser, and Erwin de Vries. People were able to vote: on paper, after seeing the artworks on location, or via the internet, on the basis of photographs. The outcome of this public vote was factored in during the final evaluation by the working group. And in the end, the working group opted

for the artwork by Jikke van Loon. It had, however, been an extremely difficult process. The working group had failed to reach a consensus. There were suspended votes and when the decision was finally made, one of the residents walked off angrily. The fact that De Kom's son did not use his right of veto turned out to be a decisive factor in the final decision. Thus, the selection procedure was a toilsome democratic process in which the artwork with the majority of the votes won.

On the day of the unveiling, all hell broke loose. The newspaper *Het Parool* even printed an article with the headline 'Racist Statue'. The majority of the Surinamese-Dutch people living in the Bijlmer had expected a figurative, true to life, bronze statue; an exact physical representation of the man wearing a tie and carrying a briefcase. Instead they were given a statue that showed De Kom as an enslaved person, naked with his genitals showing, and with one hand cut off. This specific narrative was so engrossing that it nearly obscured the other story that was also encapsulated in the bronze statue. Van Loon's portrait is not an exact likeness, but a metaphoric depiction of De Kom's strength and significance. A male figure who is partly still a captive, but also rising from his native soil; a man who, as the Dutch say, is 'cut from the right wood'. Van Loon literally carved the figure from a tree, a 'yellow kabbes' (*Vatairea guianensis*) that was cut down in the Surinamese interior and subsequently

transported to the Netherlands by ship, just like De Kom and his family. She depicted De Kom as a classic Greek hero who, with his proud demeanour, exudes strength and victory, the closed eyes referring to his inner strength.

I can find arguments for both sides of the story. What's more important is analysing the process. Because when a statue is perceived in this way by a large section of the people for whom it is intended, you might wonder: Where did it go wrong?

Firstly, the working group consisted of a very diverse group of people. A family member seeking recognition for his father, residents with a political-activist agenda, and professionals from the field of art in the public space. Furthermore, the professionals in this group were all white while the residents were Black. Although we were all on the same committee, we did not speak the same language. Think, for example, of the possible misunderstandings surrounding the meaning of concepts such as 'a sculpture', 'a statue', 'an artwork', 'a memorial', and 'a monument'. Or of the imbalance with regard to the visual memory concerning colonial history and slavery. Secondly, a choice was made to create a platform through organizing a public vote. Although this seemed like a great idea at first, in reality this instrument was by no means fraud-proof and thus contributed to a

vague concept of who was believed to have 'won'. Thirdly, the role of CBK Zuidoost – as supervisor of the process on the one hand and advising party of the district council on the other – had not been clearly defined.

In 2018, nearly twelve years later, CBK Zuidoost was given a second chance. Following Mandela's death in 2013, the former Bijlmerpark was renamed Mandelapark after a referendum, and CBK Zuidoost was asked to coordinate the realization of the Nelson Mandela Memorial Amsterdam. All administrators and residents immediately added: 'but preferably not a second Anton de Kom!' They explained that this did not necessarily refer to the statue itself, but rather to the way in which it is supported by the community. In short, our assignment was to make sure everyone liked the sculpture.

In September 2021, the time had come. The Mandela Memorial Amsterdam, created by the South-African artist Mohau Modisakeng, was unveiled. The most moving moment took place after the official ceremony. Built up from fragments of faces of Bijlmer residents – silent heroes from the community who Modisakeng wanted to pay homage to in support of their struggle for autonomy, corresponding to Mandela's struggle – the monumental group of sculptures was literally embraced by the people for whom it was intended. Everyone was feeling proud: residents, administrators, and art

professionals. You might wonder: Why did it succeed this time? What lessons have we learned from all the fuss surrounding the statue of De Kom?

This time around, the role of CBK Zuidoost was clearly defined and strictly facilitating, as established in a preliminary memorandum that was taken up by the District Zuidoost. All choices were again made by a working group. The composition of this group was vital and that is exactly where CBK Zuidoost had an important role to play. Although this group included people who were informed about South-Africa, Zuidoost, and art, there were no specific experts. The group fundamentally adjusted and amended the starting conditions set by District Zuidoost. They were adamant about not wanting a physical representation of Mandela... after all, there were already enough of those saint-like statues. They wanted the memorial not just to be about Mandela, but to also address the growing self-awareness of the people of Zuidoost. The sculpture should not create distance, but become a place for coming together. And from the start it was obvious that this sculpture had to be made by an artist of colour. Although this may have been a debatable political choice, it was certainly one the people in the working group – mixed and of colour – immediately embraced. The process of selecting the artists who could realize the sculpture took place in different stages. A group of professionals from the artworld compiled a

longlist that was subsequently submitted to the working group.

Three artists, Dineo Bopape, Sokari Douglas Camp, and Mohau Modisakeng, were invited to travel to the Bijlmer and make a sketch design. After a public meeting during which the artists further explained their designs and the public was given an opportunity to react, the working group unanimously selected Modisakeng's entry. Apart from its artistic quality, people were especially taken by the participatory element in his proposal. For instance, the process of scouting the faces of the silent Bijlmer heroes who would feature in the Mandela Memorial. Accompanied by young makers from Zuidoost, Modisakeng himself took to the streets to find these faces. This process, as well as the creative process that followed, was extensively communicated via the local media. In short, people were constantly working on creating a support base.

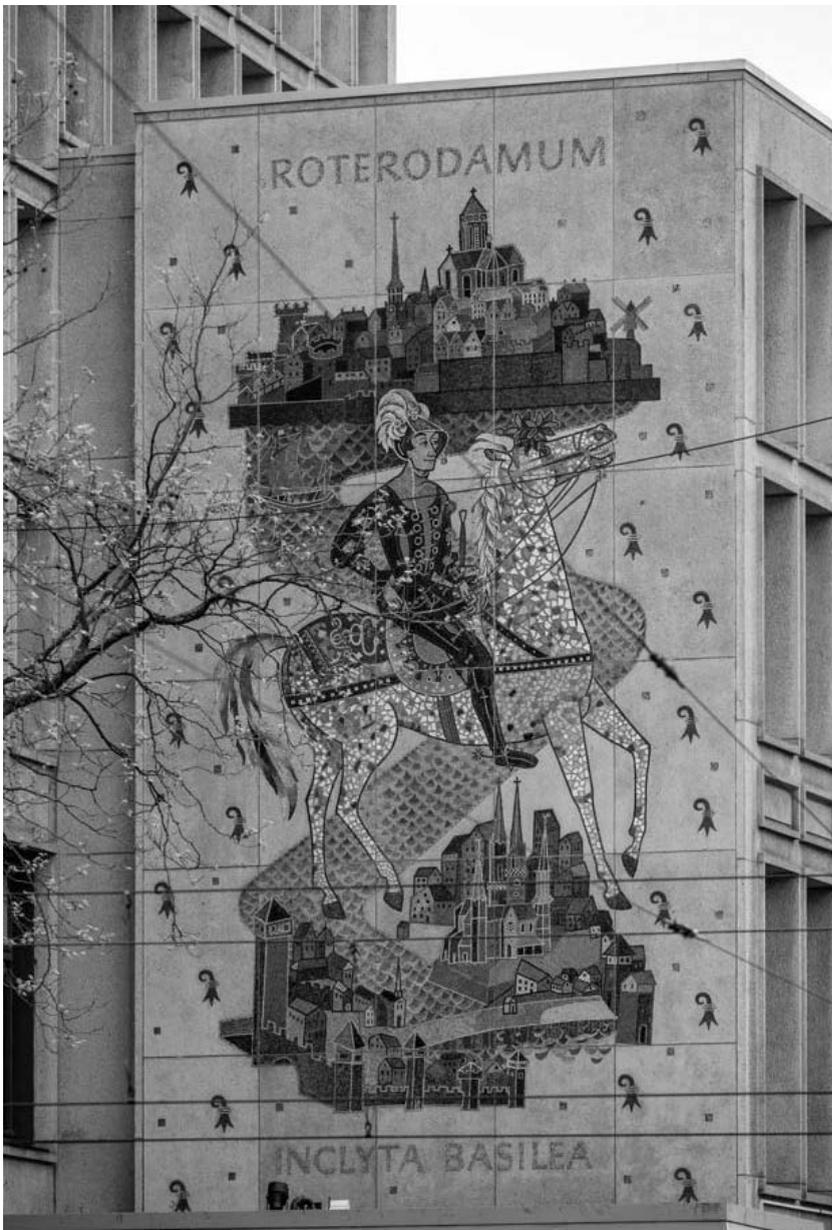
With the monument for Anton de Kom and the Nelson Mandela Memorial, Amsterdam Zuidoost now has two sculptures that reflect the physiognomy of people of colour. In this way, the district is contributing to a better representation of the multifaceted society in the public domain. After all, how many actual sculptures are there that represent women, people of colour and/or other people who are not white, heterosexual men in power,

i.e. other kinds of carriers of our history that all of us can relate to? In my opinion, trying to make up for this is a legitimate objective, and if people want to complain about that, so be it. Only in this way will we ever be able to make amends for the lack of representation.

To conclude, the complaints about the Anton de Kom statue have long since subsided. The statue has been used as an icon for Zuidoost in the media on several occasions. Time has apparently also healed this wound. It is good to see that this memorial has also been able to find its place within the community while simultaneously continuing to encourage discussions about colonial history. After all, today that is more urgent than ever.

# Erasmus as an icon of art in the modern-day city of Rotterdam

At the beginning of the 1950s, a Swiss insurance company did not just want to acquire decorative art for its new office building on the Rotterdam Coolingsingel. The proposed artwork on the façade had to meet multiple demands: not only did it have to represent the economic, social, and geographical connection between Basel and Rotterdam, but it also had to feature a likeness of the figure of Erasmus, based on an engraving by Holbein that shows the humanist clad in armour and on horseback. Furthermore, they wanted all this to be presented on a monumental, metres-high scale. Out of the submitted entries for this closed competition, they chose Louis van Roodde's design, which ticked all the boxes. His design for a mural mosaic measuring over twelve metres high depicted both cities, and in between them showed Erasmus crossing the Rhine on horseback. It does,



however, make you wonder whether Van Roode had actually felt restrained by the lack of artistic freedom of this commission.

Because Erasmus originally hailed from Rotterdam and had spent most of his active life in Basel, the commissioning party thought this would be a great way to use this fact to suggest a bond between the two cities. Erasmus and this artwork were thus used as a PR tool – in keeping with a long Rotterdam tradition of using this fellow citizen for publicity purposes, a practice that already began with De Keyser’s famous statue in 1622.

In 1954, Van Roode’s creation for this office building – the so-called Holbein House – was unveiled. The media raved about its dimensions and the glass mosaic technique, for which assistants had carefully cut imported glass to size with a diamond steel chisel. But all in all, the fact that an artist had been asked to realize a socioeconomic-geographic assignment with so many mandatory visual elements did go a bit far. Alfred Kossmann, who wrote for the *Vrije Volk* newspaper at that time, thought so too: ‘It is quite easy to commission something like this; it is, however, not easy at all for a contemporary artist to execute it in good conscience.’

And that was not the only reservation Kossmann had. He also wondered ‘whether the figure of Erasmus

signified much more to Rotterdam than merely a statue and a reasonable amount of pride, and it is equally questionable whether someone who lives in Rotterdam will feel connected to Basel simply because of the biography of this scholar.’ He continued that Rembrandt and Vondel were still very much alive in Amsterdam because that city still breathed something of the atmosphere in which these people had worked and of the work itself. ‘Erasmus, however, is dead in Rotterdam.’ The gist of the article was that in light of all this, Van Roode had produced the best result anyone could possibly have hoped for, although little honour was to be gained from a commission like this.

### **Prestige and wisdom**

In his later work, Van Roode had indeed been able to develop a much more liberal and autonomous style. Still his mosaic became a glorious example of how ambitious mural art was used during the reconstruction period in Rotterdam. And, contrary to what Kossmann had claimed, it had actually revived Erasmus in that city. Using Erasmus as a famous Rotterdammer especially took flight in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Art, in the sense of portraiture and other likenesses, contributed to that.

Some of these artworks date from before the Second World War, when the city still looked a little more like

Erasmus's Rotterdam. Sculpted in 1916, his portrait can, for instance, be seen on the façade of the City Hall where he is surrounded by other distinguished Rotterdammers. On the one hand it is a logical place to honour him, while on the other his presence also gives the city a touch of prestige. That same reciprocity applied to the choice to depict Erasmus on the façade of the Gymnasium Erasmianum secondary school, which he had given his name to after all. The school was initially located on the Coolsingel in a building that was destroyed in May 1940. This had also meant the devastation of the tympanum on its façade that had been sculpted by Stracké and showed a full-length portrait of Erasmus surrounded by students. Prior to the war, however, the Gymnasium had already started constructing a new building – opposite the location of the current Erasmus MC –, with a portrait relief of the humanist created by Leendert Bolle in 1937.

On it, Erasmus is shown as the epitome of erudition, which is also the reason why the city's university was named after him. Apart from in name, Erasmus of course also had to be physically linked to that institution, and for that reason Charlotte van Pallandt made a bronze relief that is now displayed in its auditorium. Another version of it can be found in the Erasmus MC. Van Pallandt took advantage of the fact that, as a scholar, Erasmus had his portrait taken many times during his lifetime. She took one of these likenesses as the point

of departure for a portrait that, despite the distance in time, she was able to breathe a great deal of life into. It is clear that this Erasmus is a living and breathing person who is lost in – undoubtedly very highbrow – thought. The fact that she managed to express all this in such an understated work says a lot about Van Pallandt's talent, as well as about her wish to present him as an example for the students, as a shining example of wisdom and intelligence.

### **Ambassador of tolerance**

While Rotterdam continued to rebuild itself, 'Erasmus' became an increasingly popular prefix. Not because of his scholarly qualities, as had been the case at the Gymnasium and the university, but on account of his fame. His name and signature became visible all over the place. A bridge was named after him, a metro line, a dental practice, taxi company, a two-star hotel, a radio station, and there is also the Erasmus House, an Erasmus Prize, an Erasmus Medal, and of course street names like Erasmussingel, Erasmusstraat, and Erasmuspadi.

But while Erasmus stayed the same, the times changed and gave rise to a different need to make use of him. Especially since the turn of the century, he is being presented as an ambassador of multiculturalism and tolerance. This happens both in images and texts,

for instance by including some of his quotes in the streetscape. Rotterdam is also the city of Poetry International and has a great deal of experience in incorporating lines of poetry – in settings designed by artists – in the public space. Although Erasmus was not a poet, he certainly wrote enough lines.

‘Heel de aarde is je vaderland’ (The whole world is your fatherland) is written in neon on the façade of the Central Library, a message that perfectly matches this city of immigrants and newcomers. A similar message, ‘Waar ik mij goed voel ben ik thuis’ (Wherever I feel good I am at home), can be seen on the façade of the Albeda College, located behind the Central Station. Another text in the same vein is ‘Laat iedereen zijn overtuiging eren zonder die van een ander te beledigen’ (Allow everyone to honour their own convictions without giving offense to others), a call for tolerance that was incorporated in the public space in 2015. Even for a spot of twenty-first century individualism, Erasmus is your man. The text ‘De belangrijkste voorwaarde voor geluk is dat je wilt zijn wat je bent’ (The most important condition for happiness is that you enjoy being who you are) – a slogan that would not look out of place in a hipster commercial for oat milk – also found its way to the streets. And on the Wilhelminaplein square the sentence ‘Jonge mensen zijn de hoop van een land’ (Young people are the hope of a nation) refers to Rotterdam’s young demographic.

That versatility is mainly caused by the fact that Erasmus was such a prolific writer that his work is sometimes referred to as an ‘ideological lucky dip’. For instance, he also wrote the words ‘*Non est homo, qui literarum expertus est*’, i.e. A person without schooling is not really a human being. It would be out of the question to use this quote in the context of present-day Rotterdam. And yet that versatility makes Erasmus extremely multifunctional, like a Swiss Army Knife, to again return to the connection with Switzerland. ‘Ruimte scheidt de lichamen, niet de geesten’ (Space separates the bodies, not the minds) is written above Rotterdam Central Station, thus also making it applicable to public transportation.

In other words, when combined with art, it turns out that Erasmus can be used for Swiss commercial interests, prestige, city branding, a symbol for wisdom, signposting in metro stations, as well as securing market stalls. Since 1996, a number of anchoring tiles designed by Adriaan Geuze – with metal loops for anchoring market stalls to and adorned with little portraits of Erasmus as well – have been incorporated in the pavement of the Binnenrotte market in the city centre. While reading in his book Erasmus looks like a symbol of wisdom here, but in fact he is only needed for strapping the market stalls to the ground in order to keep them from being swept away by the wind.

### The whole world is my fatherland

Over the course of these artistic developments, the portrait of Erasmus gradually became less important while the attention increasingly shifted to his words. The saying ‘All the world is my fatherland’ is especially popular and has been incorporated in multiple artworks that colourfully honour the multicultural city. It is, for instance, the title of a 2008 painting by André Smits, located in the Jan Sonjé street. This work consists of two panels decorated with pink, floral-like branches – a cosmic composition around which national symbols float like heraldic shields in such an extravagant way that its title could also very well have been *The Praise of Folly*.

Dating from 2007, another work entitled *The Whole World is my Fatherland* is a painted frieze at the Zuidplein metro station, created by Jorge Kata Nuñez and Juan Heinsohn Huala. Of all places, it is located near the escalators – apparently a spot where humanists thrive. This equally colourful painting is covered in all kinds of international and Rotterdam symbols. The makers used these to emphasize the necessity of respect, transparency, and a dialogue between all cultures. It is displayed very close to paintings by the Chilean ‘painting brigade’ from the 1970s, artists who were political refugees and used their art to call for solidarity between nations, very much in keeping with Erasmus’s saying.

That Erasmus’s words can be used as a call for tolerance was also apparent in the Erasmusstraat in 2008. In this street a mural was realized featuring a duo portrait of Erasmus together with the thirteenth-century Persian poet-philosopher Rumi, a.k.a. Mevlana. Surrounded by both Dutch and Persian visual elements, the artist Ahmad Haraji thus united these two main representatives of – ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ – humanism. This initiative had its origins in the Mevlana Year in 2007 and was the starting signal for a renovation of the neighbourhood. Underneath the portraits is a verse by Rumi: ‘We come to unite, not to divide.’

And there are more examples: there is an old sculpture near the Maritime Museum, a sculpture by Huib Noorlander inside the Gymnasium Erasmianum, and a bronze sculpture by Willem Verbon. In 1995, the statue of De Keyser was incorporated in a conceptual artwork by Kees Verschuren: the statue was moved a quarter turn and a platform was installed on which visitors were able to relate to the humanist at eye level. In 2016, on the other side of the Laurenskerk, a monument for Erasmus was erected in the shape of a little house with blue and white tiles, also including quotes. The reason for this was that in 2010, at the request of the Mayor and Alderman of Rotterdam, the Stichting Erasmus Icoon van Rotterdam (Foundation Erasmus, icon of Rotterdam, or Erasmus Committee) was established to promote the positioning

of Erasmus in the Rotterdam cityscape. They apparently thought Erasmus was still underexposed in the city.

### **Erasmus and the Erasmus University**

In this way Erasmus found his way all around the city. But at the Erasmus University he was less well-represented. Even though, in 1989, that same university had commissioned an interesting sculpture entitled *The Praise of Folly*, which is standing on the Burgemeester van Walsumweg street. This monumental sculpture by Geert van de Camp is an orange ball embellished with curls and with a tap on top, the whole thing hoisted onto a sizable plinth. On the CBK Rotterdam website bkor.nl it says: ‘The point of departure for this design was the classic equestrian statue, in this case featuring a donkey as a symbol for stupidity. The donkey has been transformed into a stylized construction with balls and cones, and its legs have been turned into a stylized wave.’ In older cities you often come across venerable equestrian and other statues made of bronze, but Rotterdam is not a city like that. And so Rotterdam’s equestrian statue is an orange ball with a tap on top. Talk about folly!

The university itself did not have a monumental statue of Erasmus to pose next to after graduating. They did once have a polystyrene copy, nicknamed ‘the Styrofoam contraption’, that was manhandled to such an extent

that its remains had to be disposed of in 2006. But an alumnus of the university thought that having a photo opportunity was an absolute must and therefore had a bronze copy of De Keyser’s statue made in 2008 – a Chinese fake.

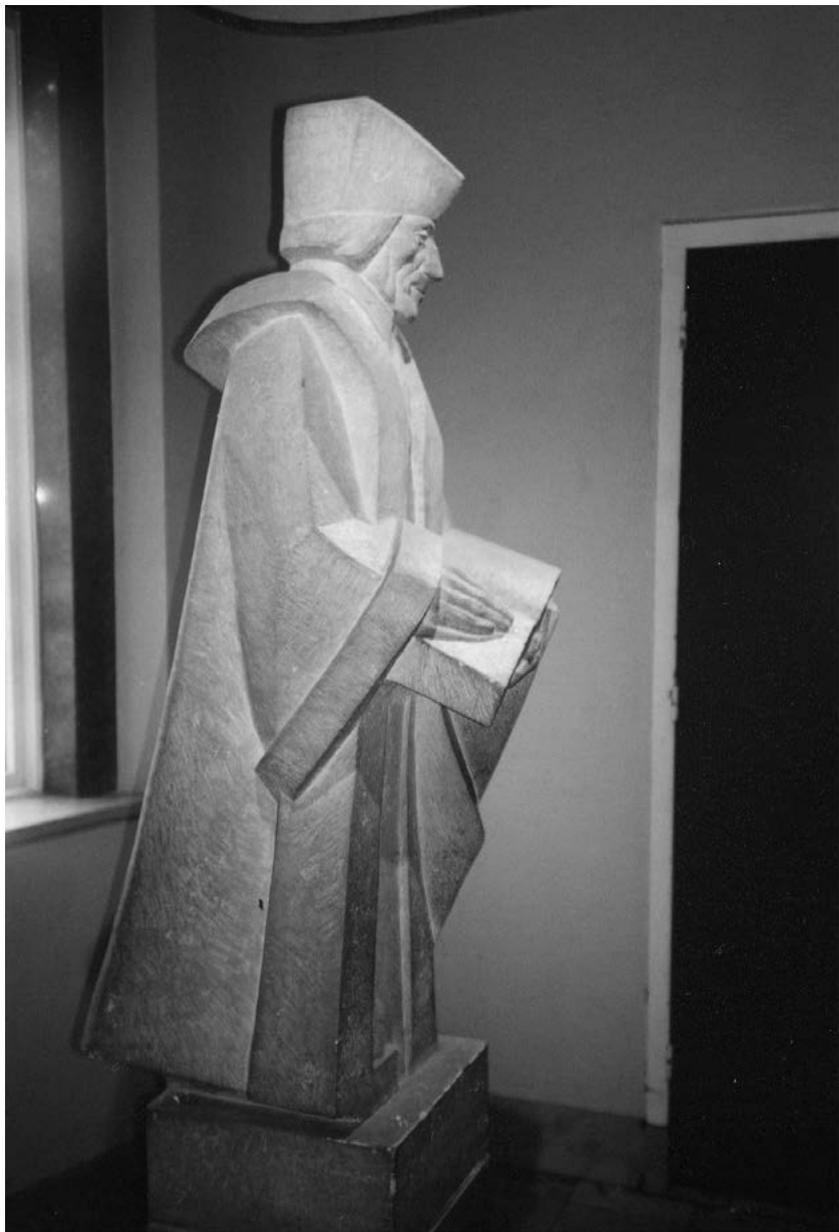
Although it is not an equestrian statue, it is a gift horse and it is still standing there. On top of that, the following year it was joined by the so-called *Desiderius Multiplex*, a work that, in any case, is literally layered. Despite of all this, the university still wanted to have another artistic ode to its name giver. That opportunity arose when a couple of years later the campus was renovated, and the university decided to commission an artwork. Kathrin Schlegel designed an artwork, *Der Stein des Weisen* (The Philosopher’s Stone), about Erasmus as a thinker and example for the students. She designed a shiny metal shape that resembles a speech or thought balloon and, in order to bridge the time gap, wanted to combine this with the original pedestal of the Erasmus statue by De Keyser.

The balloon is made from stainless steel that has been polished to such an extent that it looks like a mirror, thereby referring to the practice of alchemy through which non-precious metals could supposedly be transformed into precious metals. In Erasmus’s time this was still the holy grail. Schlegel thought that would

be an excellent reference to symbolize the human predilection for material wealth as well as for knowledge and enlightenment. But the notion of a transformation from profane into valuable materials would come back to haunt this same artwork. The pedestal from 1677 is the oldest publicly owned pedestal in the Netherlands. For centuries it supported the Erasmus statue by De Keyser, until it was replaced in 1965. The old pedestal was installed on the schoolyard of the Gymnasium Erasmianum, where it was withering away until Schlegel decided to incorporate it in her sculpture. Just like De Keyser's Erasmus statue had been standing on it, other people would now also be able to stand on it: the pedestal is thus the philosopher's stone referred to in the title.

But just like Erasmus has since been hyped, this stone itself is now also considered to be a sacred object. As a result of Schlegel's request to use the pedestal, the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands) compiled a 43-page report that led to a whole lot of fuss. Because even though the pedestal had been neglected and standing outside for four centuries, it now had to be protected as a national monument and therefore put in a glass case. This has detracted from the original purpose of Schlegel's artwork. An empty pedestal would have been great if people had actually been able to stand on it, like Erasmus, and from that raised position would have

been able to see their reflection in the stainless steel balloon – but that was not to be. As it turns out, the relics surrounding Erasmus are also subjected to some kind of alchemy: this ordinary stone has been transformed into a precious material. That is unfortunate, as we may have gotten closer to Erasmus without the glass case. But one thing is certain, Kossmann is no longer right. Because of Styrofoam, soundbites, multiplex metaphors, escalators, orange balls, anchoring tiles, and stainless steel speech balloons, it is clear that Erasmus has not been dead in Rotterdam for a long time.



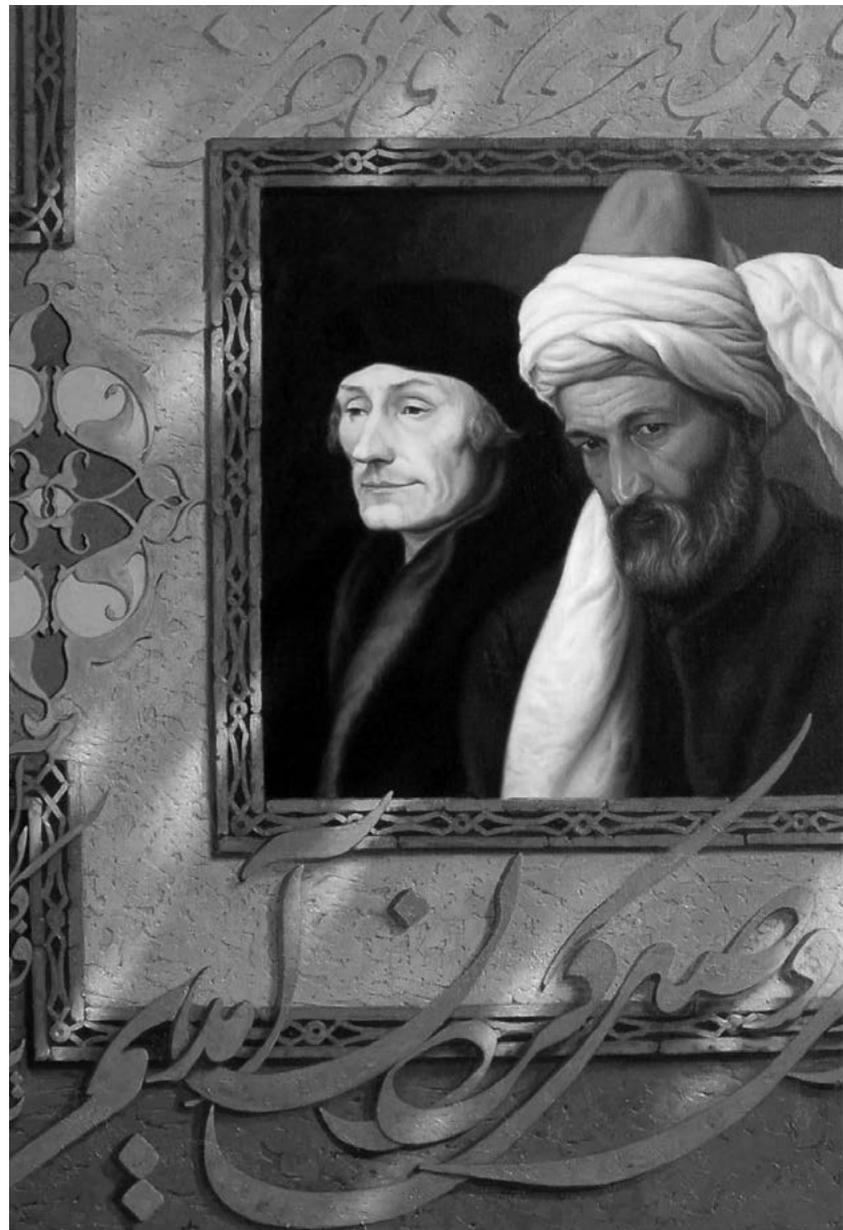




ERASMUS ROTERODAMUS  
1469-1536











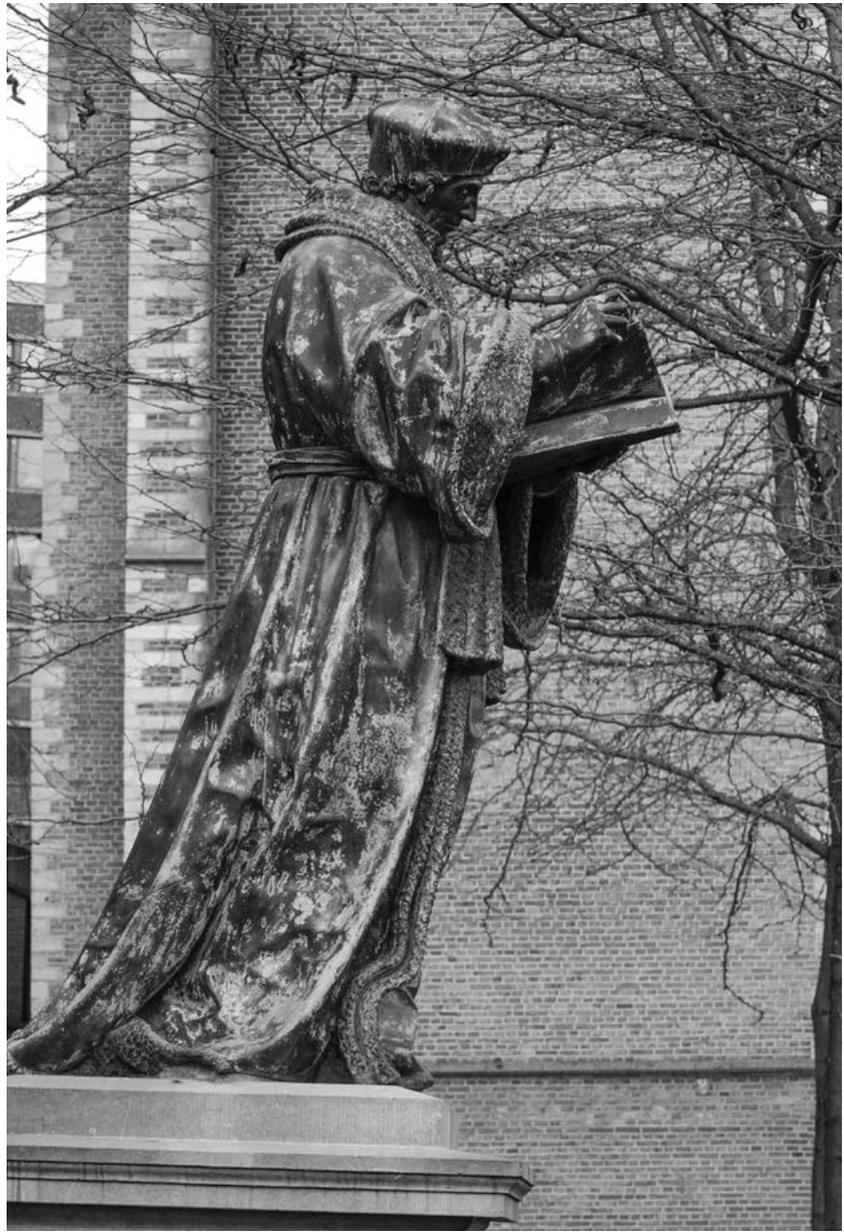
# Erasmus statue from all sides

Flip book consisting of thirty six photographs of the Erasmus statue (1622) by Hendrick de Keyser, Grotekerkplein, Rotterdam. The photographs were taken on 13 March 2022 between 17:01 and 17:25 hrs.

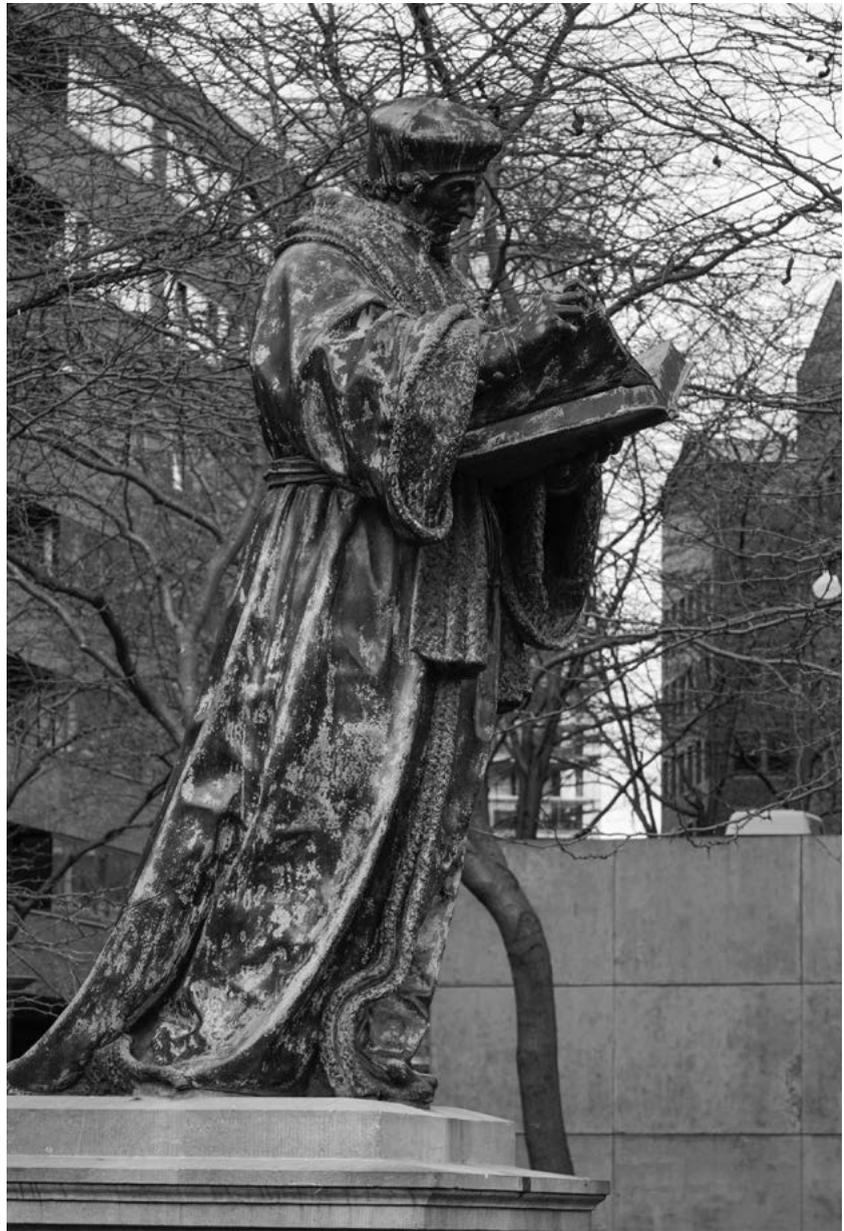


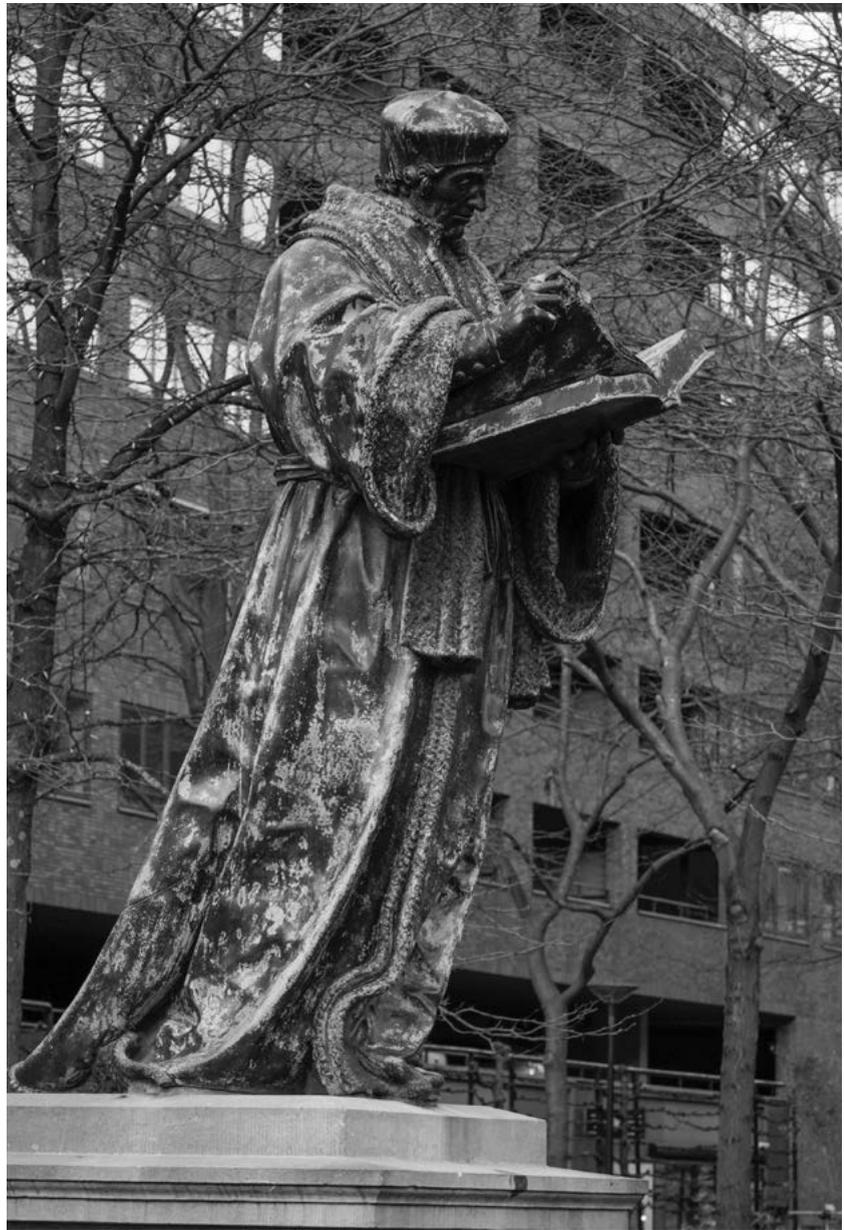


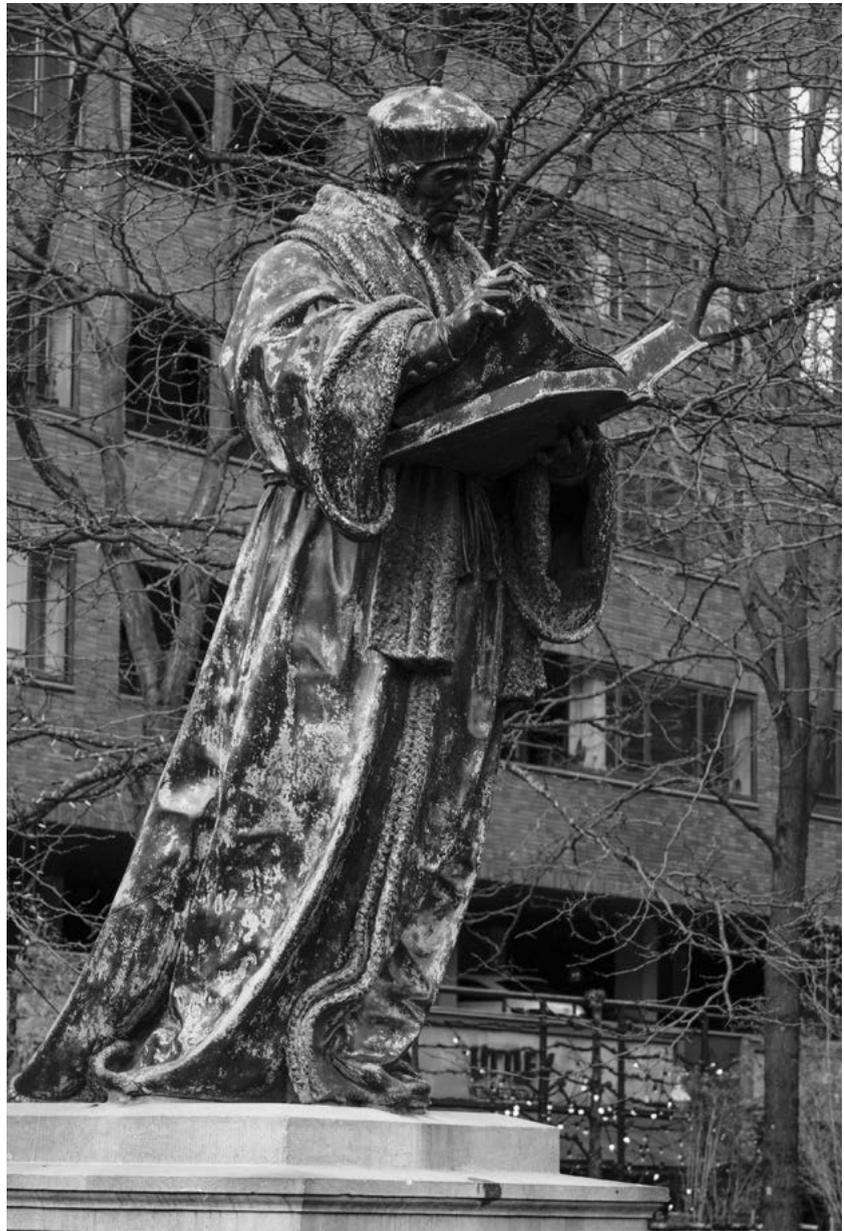


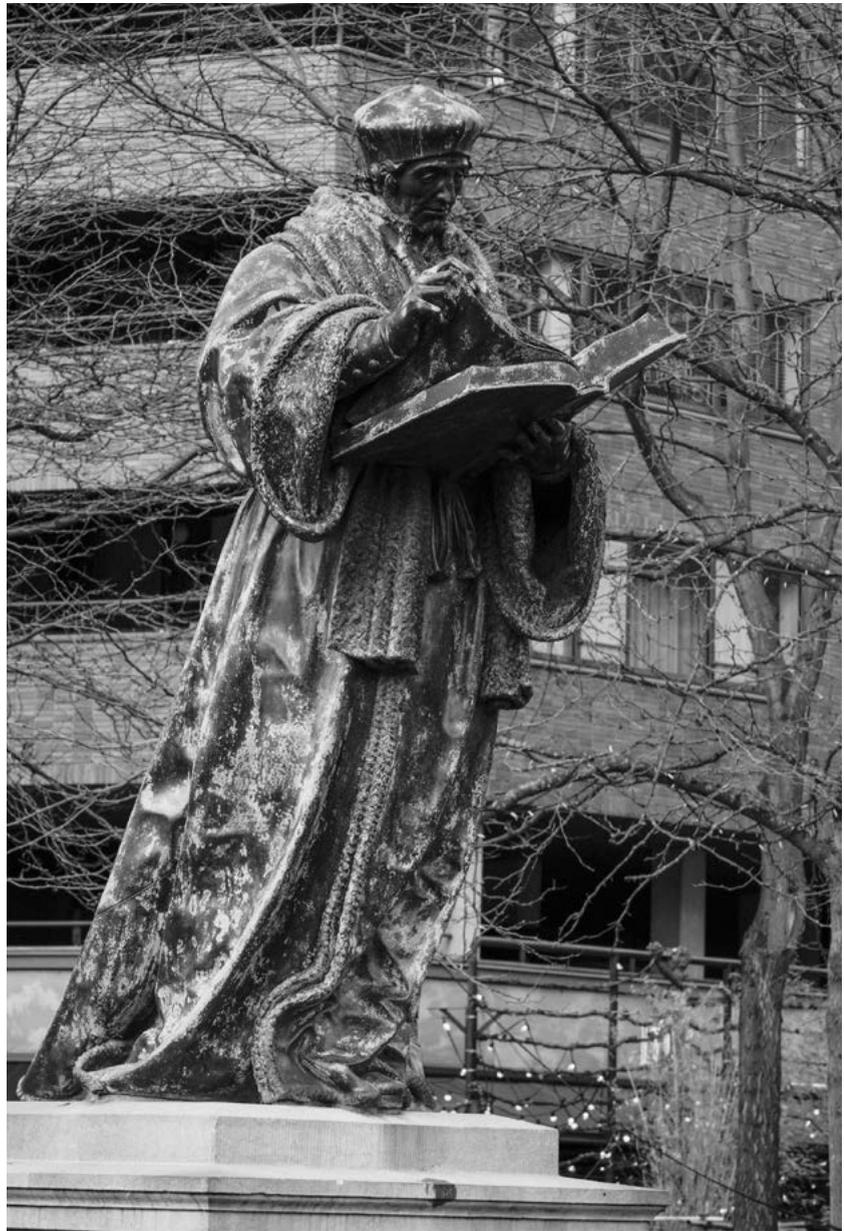


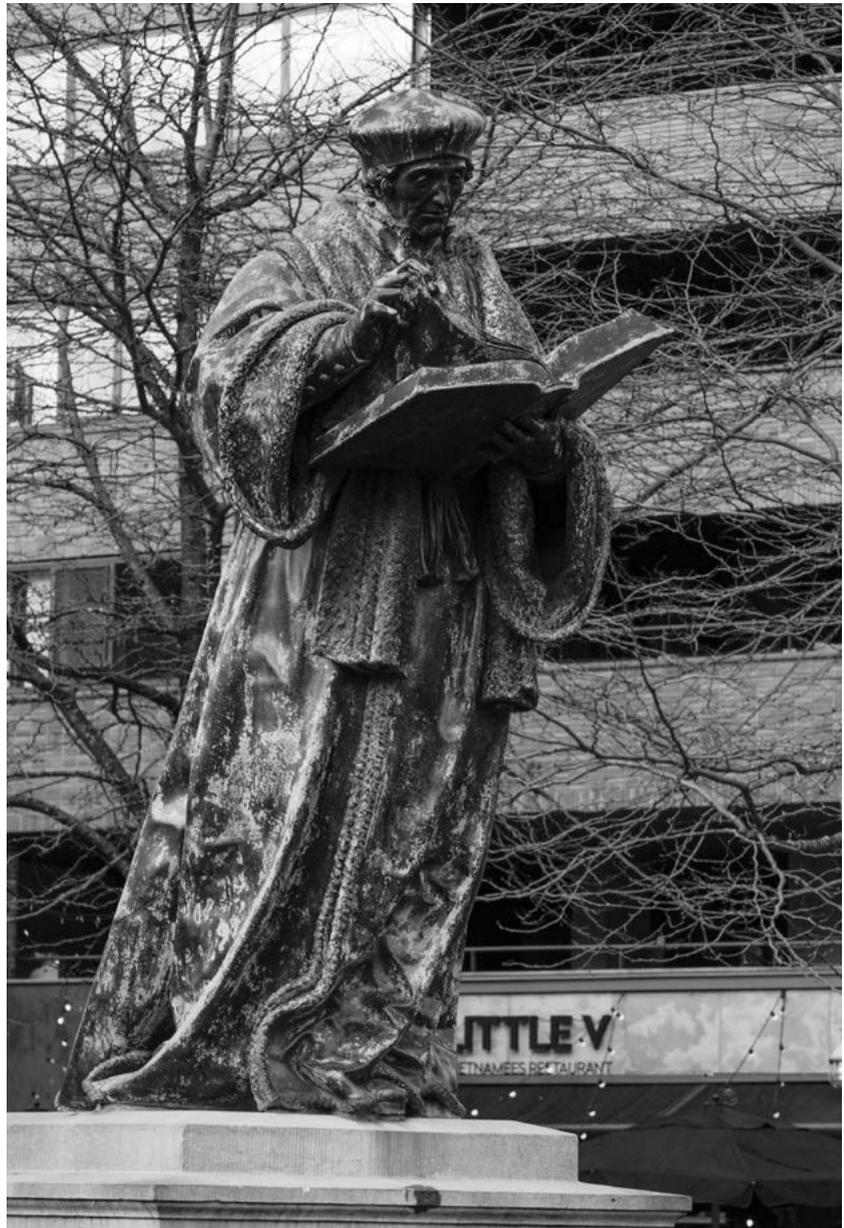


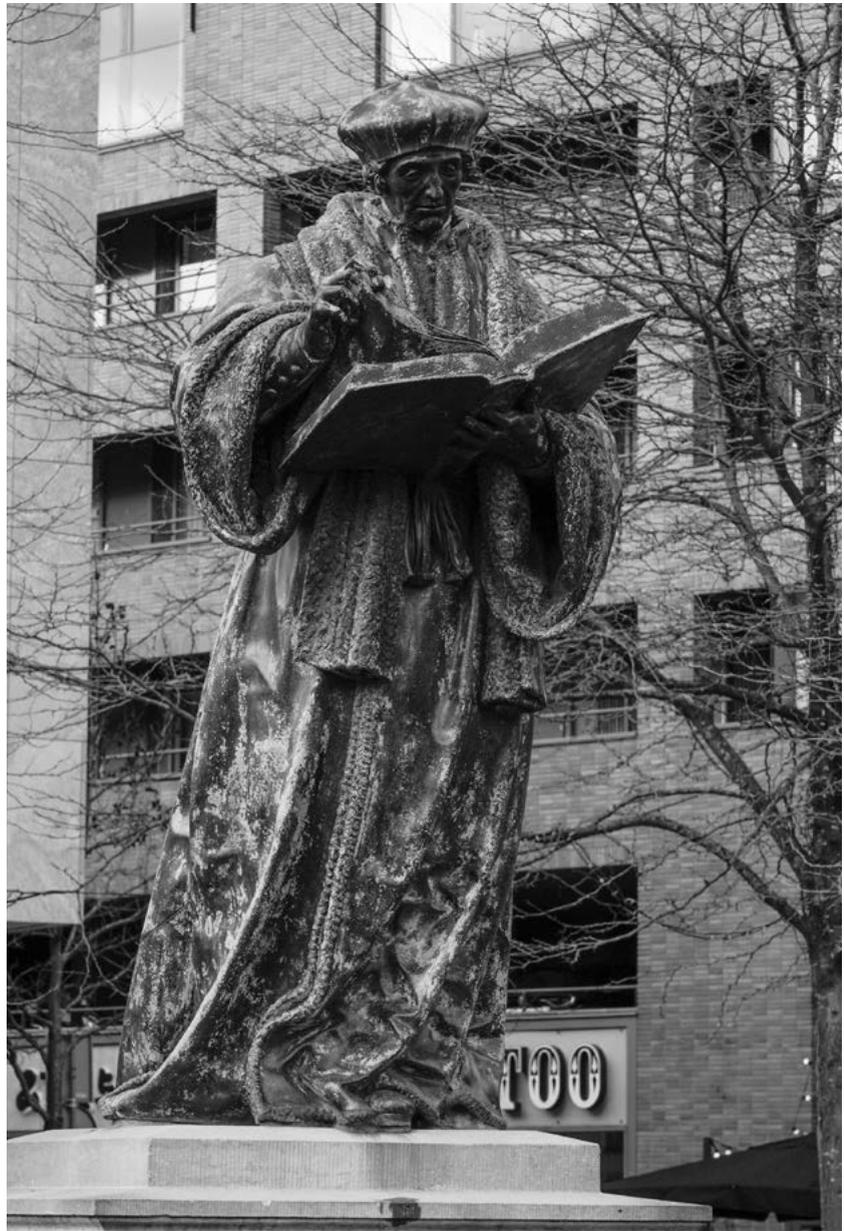


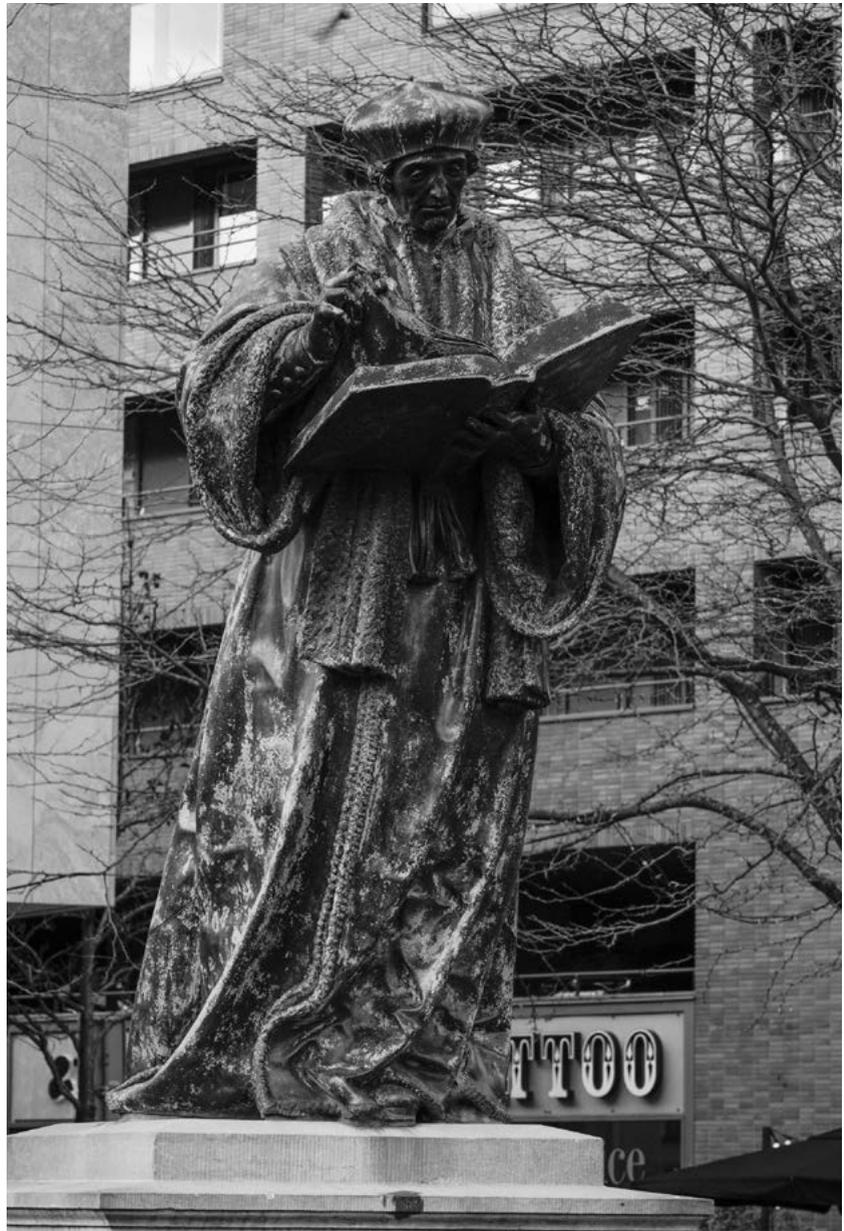


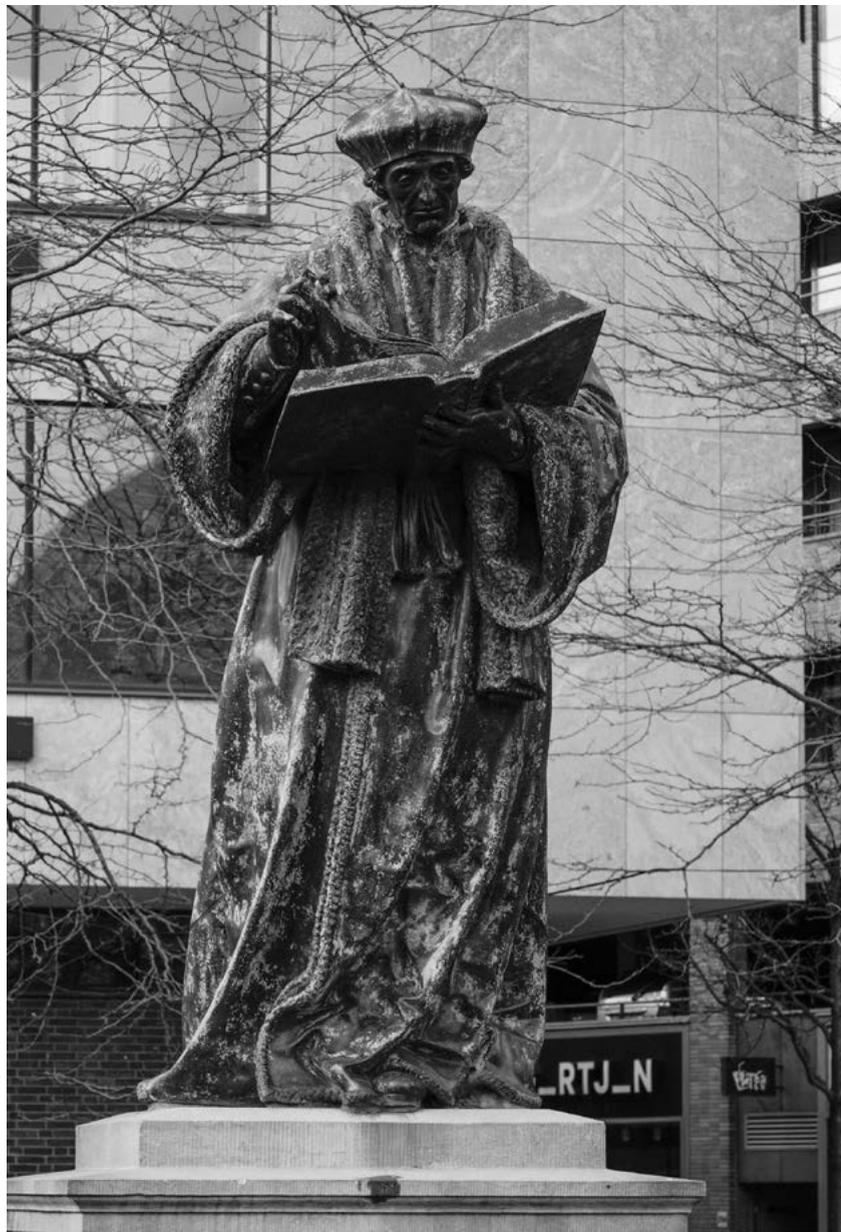


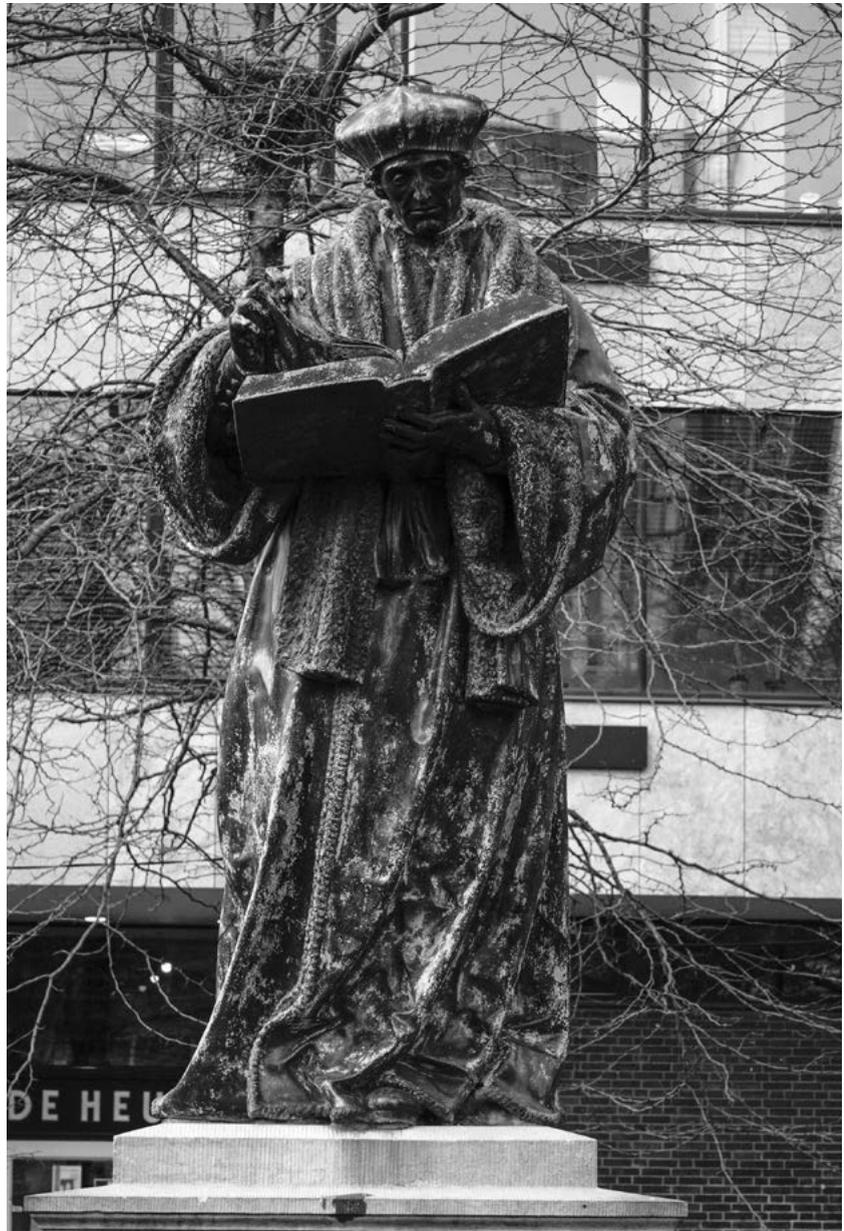


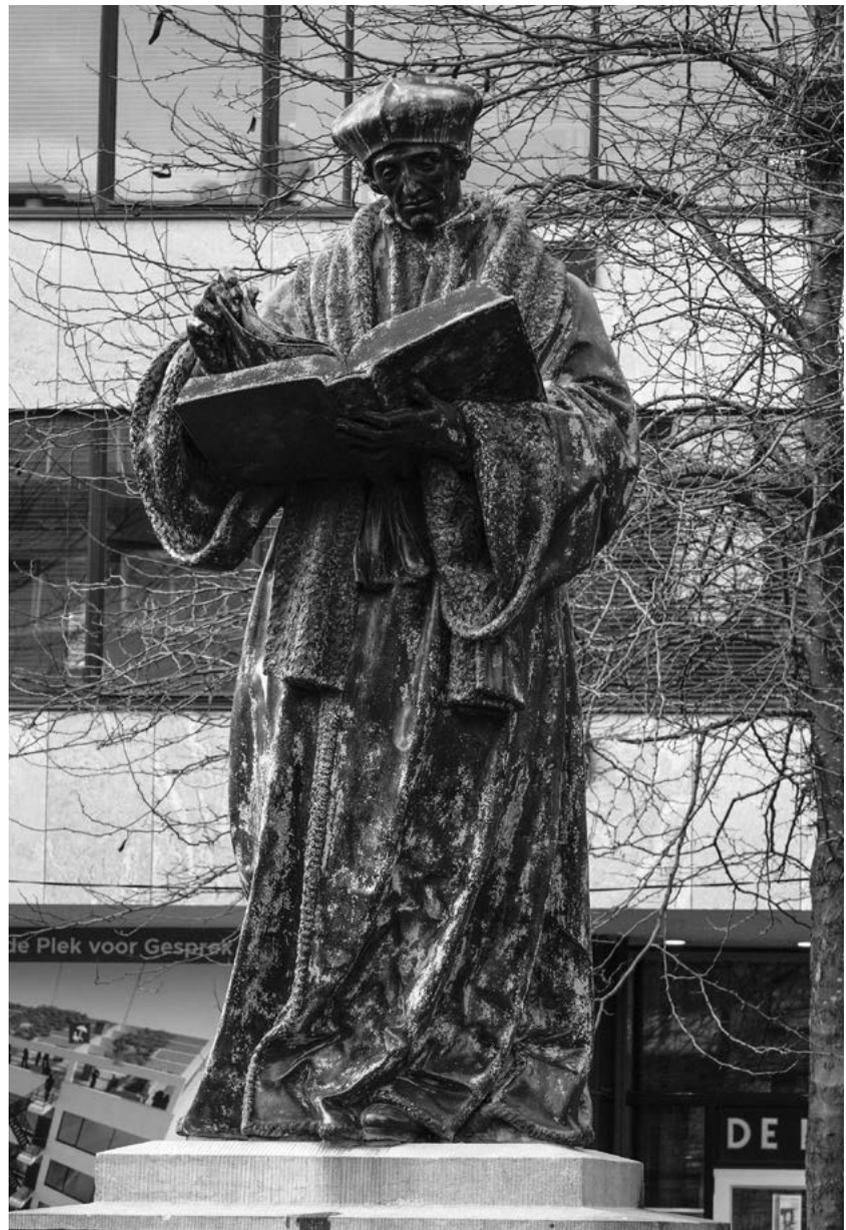


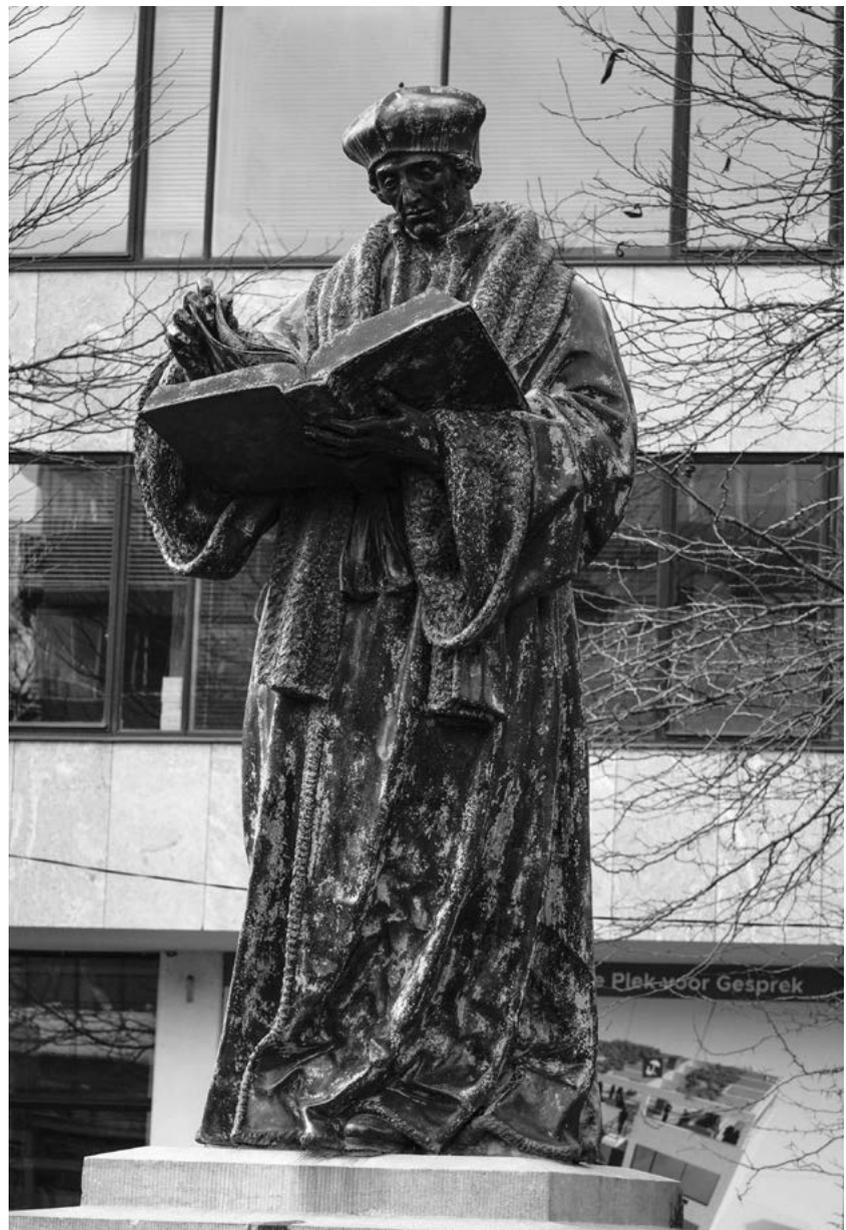


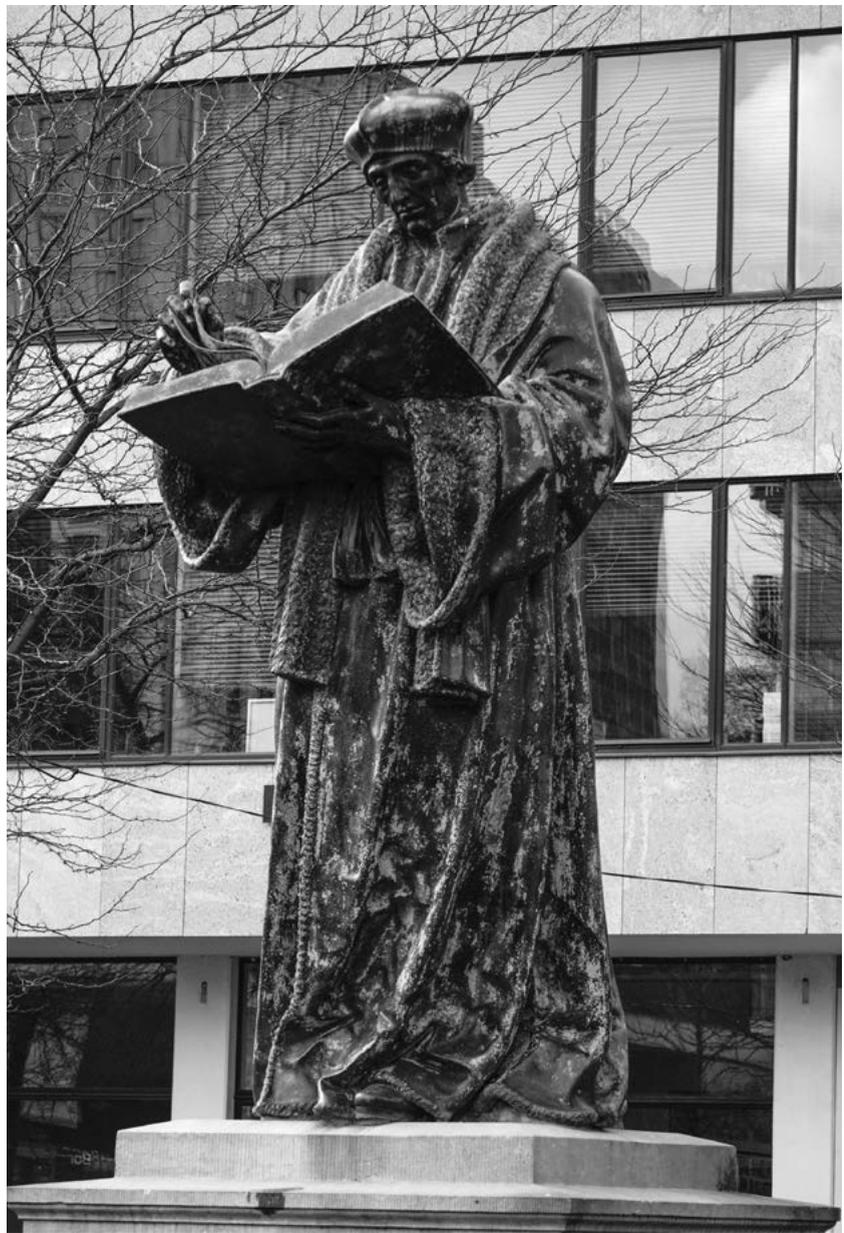


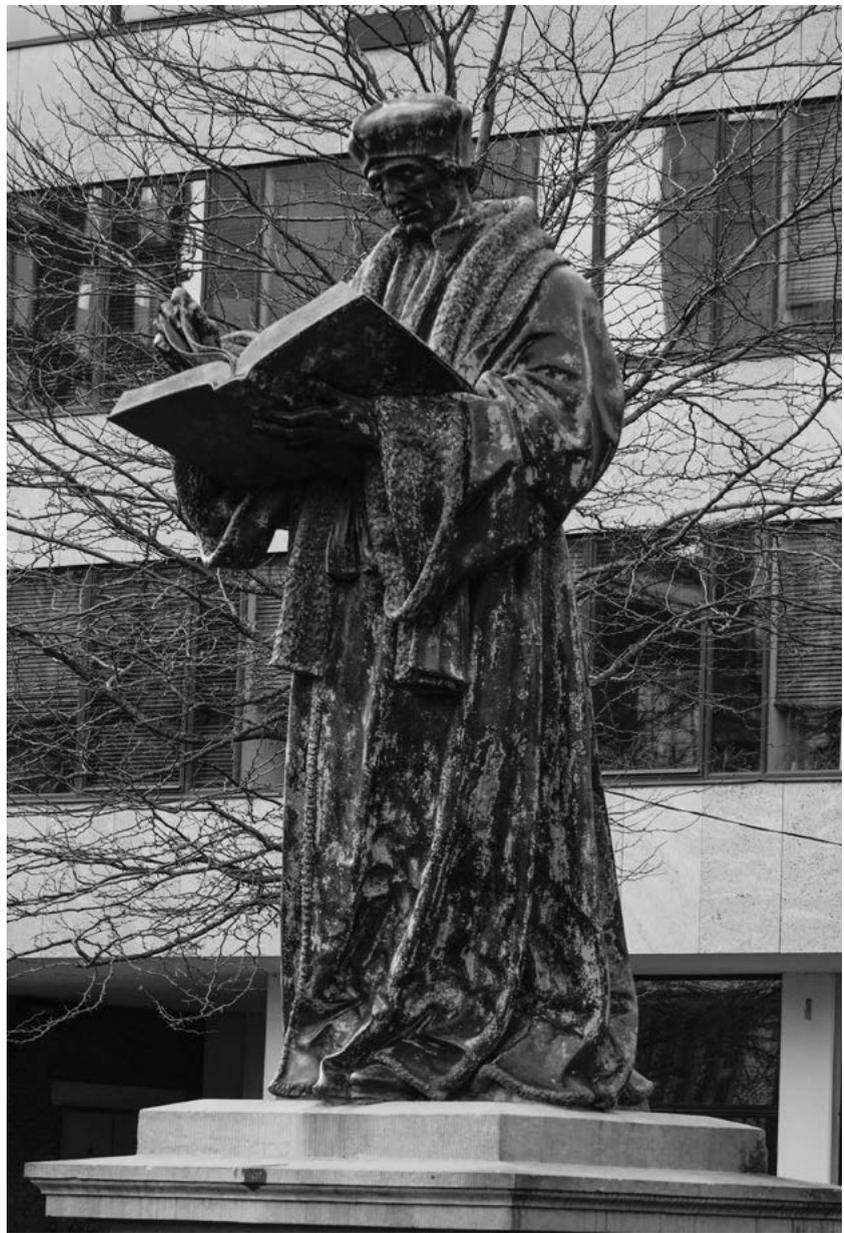




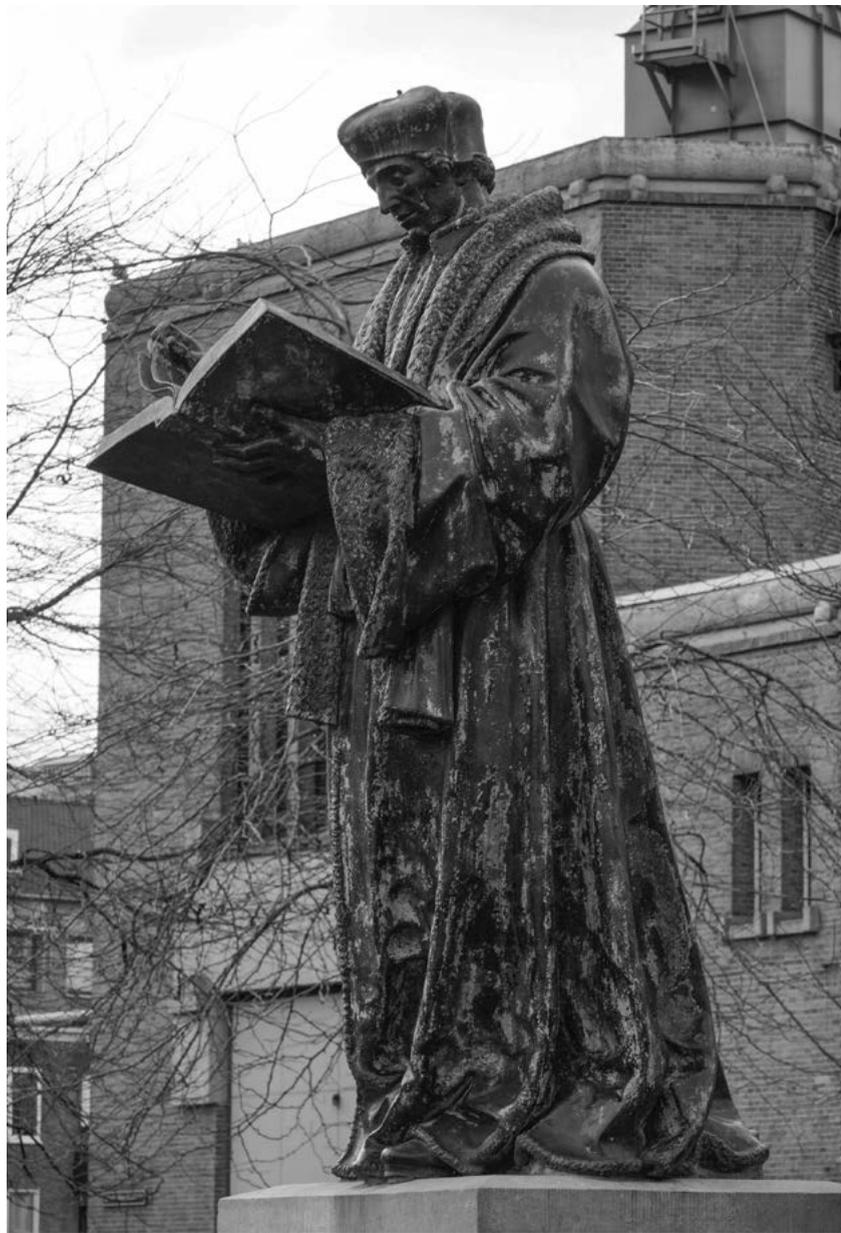


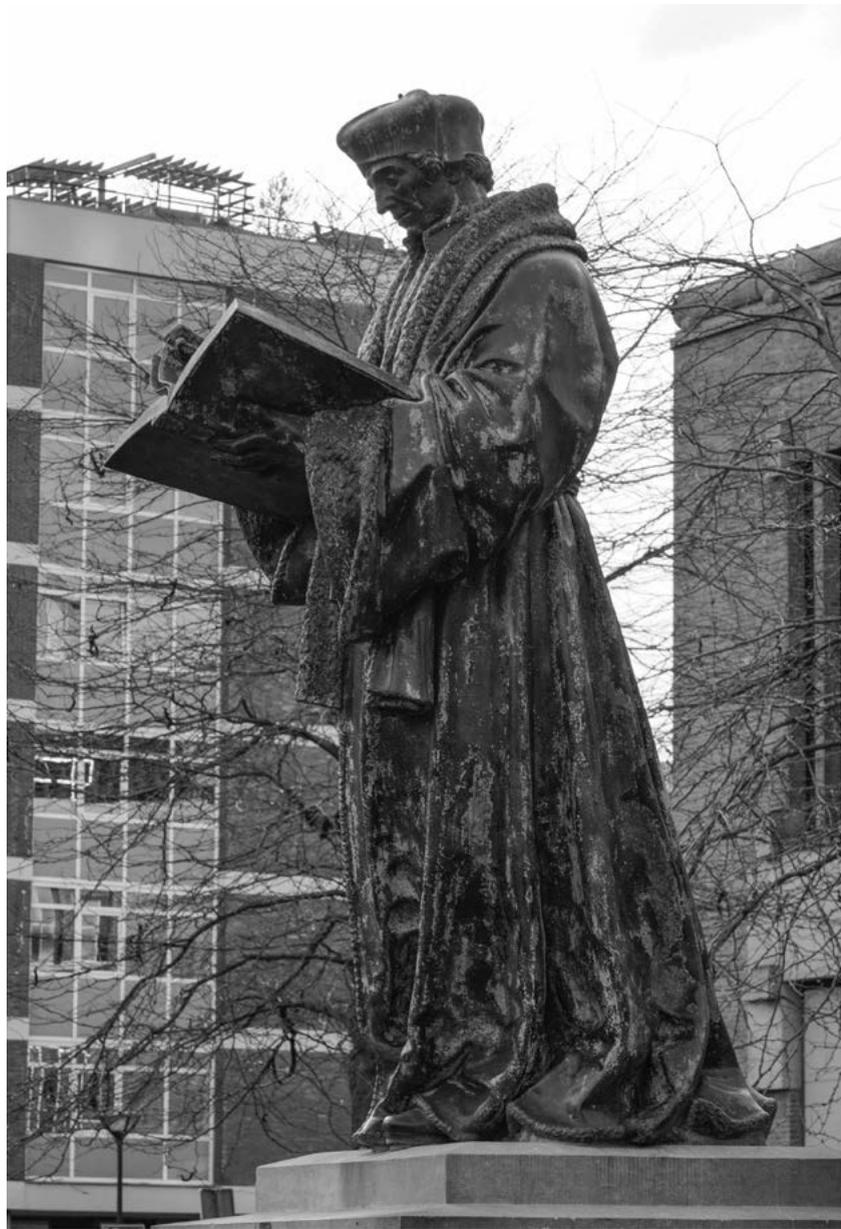




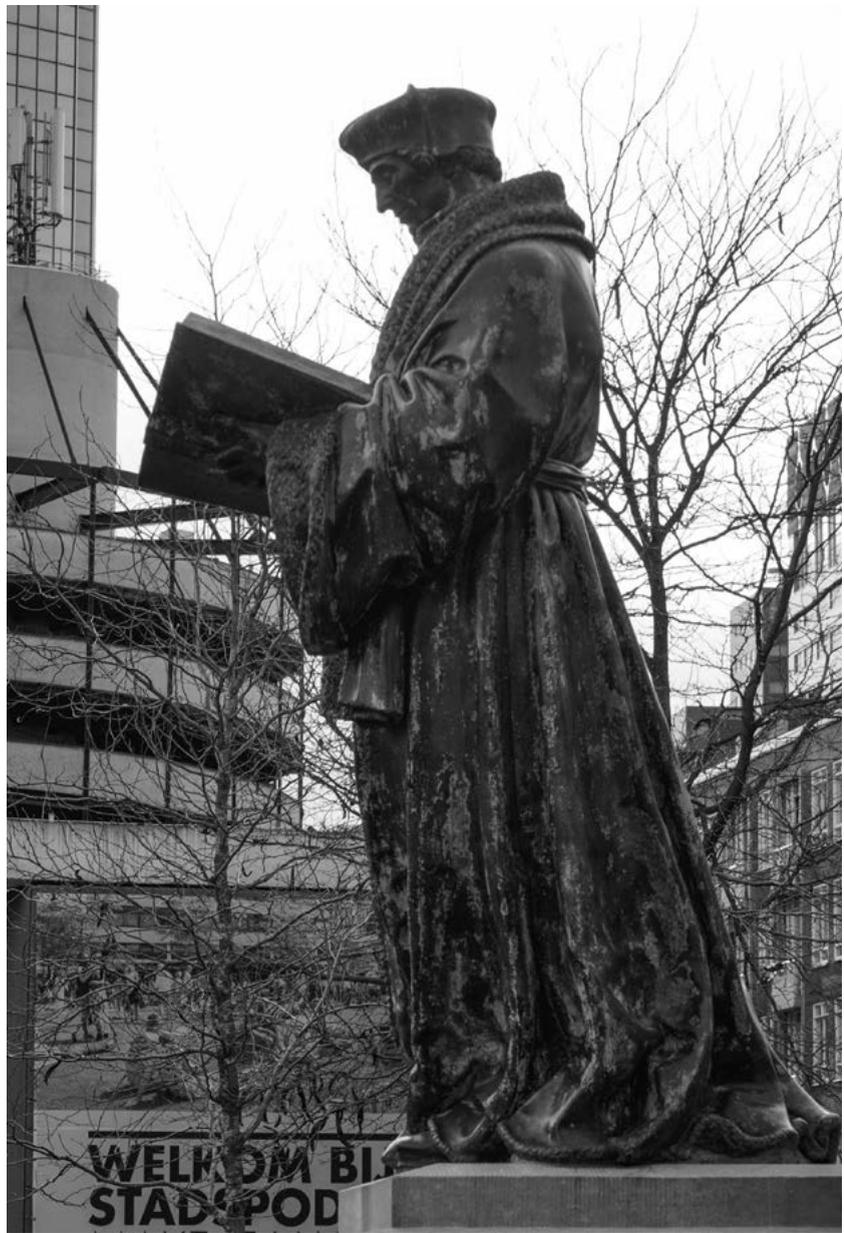


















































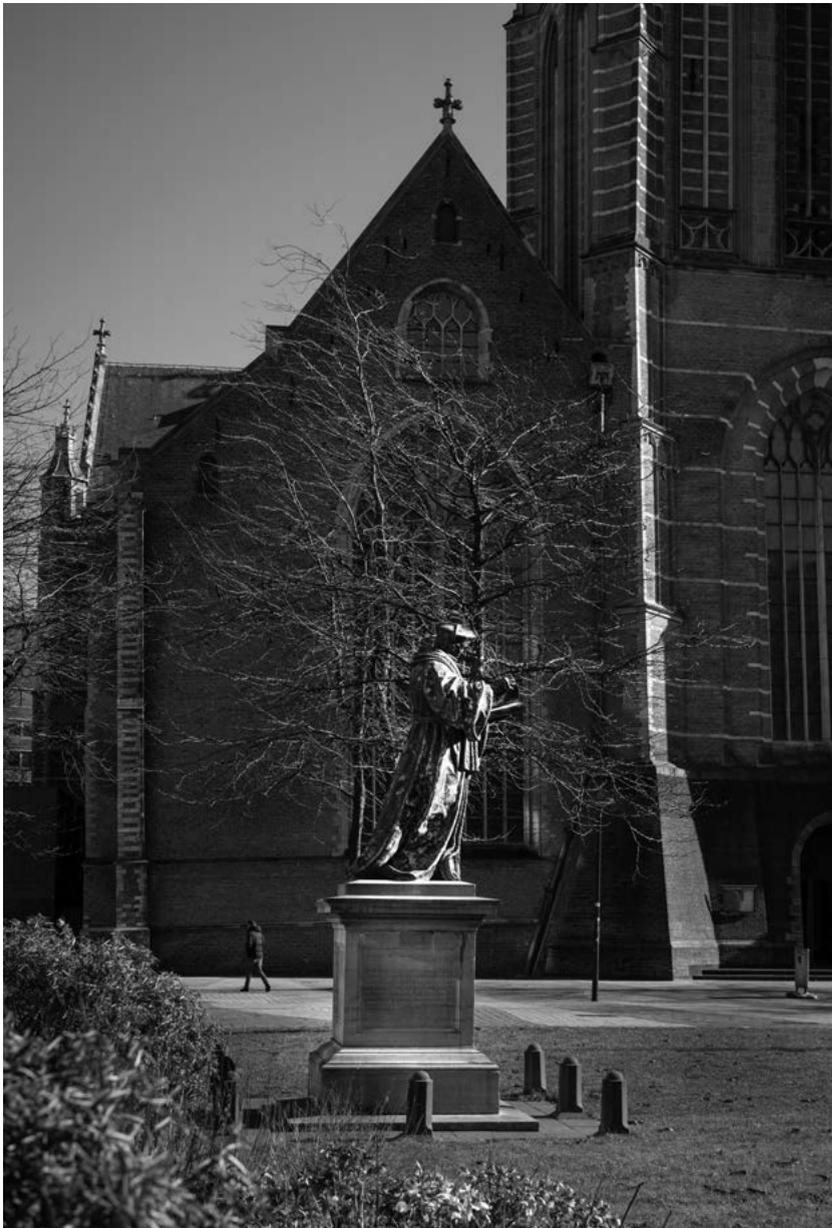








# Erasmus



Hendrick de Keyser based his design for the bronze statue of Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus on portrait paintings and drawings of Erasmus that were made during his lifetime, among others by Hans Holbein the Younger. In these portraits, Erasmus is often depicted with a distinctive cap on his head – a bonnet – and wearing a cloak with a fur-trimmed collar. The Rotterdam Erasmus statue has these same characteristics. This oldest statue in the Netherlands, depicting one of the founding fathers of Humanism, was commissioned by the citizens. Since its unveiling on 30 April 1622, the Erasmus statue has been standing in the heart of Rotterdam.

Visibly posing in the immediate vicinity of the residents and other passers-by for a period of four centuries, in

both turbulent and less turbulent times. A reading and walking Erasmus. His left hand is supporting the large, chunky book while his right hand is turning a page.

### **Aliases**

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus

### **Acquisition**

1618

### **Realization**

1622

### **Bronze cast by**

Artillery and bell foundry  
Cornelis Ouderogge, Rotterdam

### **Location**

1964, Grotekerkplein

### **Genre**

Classical Realism

### **Components**

Erasmus on pedestal

### **Inscription**

Four text areas, one on each side of the pedestal

### **Dimensions**

223 × 100 × 138 cm

### **Material**

Bronze, over time its patina changed from a shiny gold colour to bright green and eventually to dirt black

### **Commission**

City Council of Rotterdam

### **Owner**

Municipality of Rotterdam

# Hendrick de Keyser



HIER LEEFT DIE LEVEN GAF AEN MARMER, AEN METAEL,  
 VVOOR, ABAST EN KLAY; DIES LAET ZICH UYTRECHT HOOREN:  
 IS ROOME OP KAYSERS PRAT, EN KAYSERLYCKE PRAEL;  
 DE KATSER VAN DE KUNST IS UIT MYN SCHOOT GEBOREN.

Hendrick de Keyser (1565-1621) was born in Utrecht as the son of the master cabinetmaker Cornelis Dirkszoon de Keyser. He studied with the architect and sculptor Cornelis Bloemaert. When Bloemaert relocated to Amsterdam in 1591, De Keyser followed him. Shortly after that he decided to start working for himself. In 1595, De Keyser was appointed city stone mason and master builder of the city of Amsterdam. Together with the mason Cornelis Danckaerts and the carpenter Hendrik Staets, De Keyser was responsible for the sculptural elements of all public buildings in Amsterdam. In 1612, De Keyser was appointed city architect of Amsterdam. He is an important representative of Dutch renaissance-style architecture and became famous for designing the first Protestant churches that were built after the Reformation. Among other things, he designed the

offices for the board and administrators of the VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or Dutch East India Company). He also built the Zuiderkerk (southern church) and Westerkerk (western church) in Amsterdam, the city hall of Delft, and many private dwellings. In 1619 a wooden steeple designed by De Keyser was put on the tower of the Laurenskerk (St. Lawrence Church) in Rotterdam. This steeple was demolished in 1642, probably because of wood rot.

As a sculptor, De Keyser was mainly influenced by the Delft artist Willem van Tetrode. De Keyser was technically gifted, experimented with marble and bronze, and had several inventions and patents to his name. Apart from the decorative sculptures and reliefs he produced for buildings, he also created busts and freestanding sculptures. Among his best-known works are the marble tomb of Prince William the Silent in the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church) in Delft, and the world-famous bronze statue of Erasmus in Rotterdam. After Hendrick de Keyser's death, a number of his projects were completed by his son Pieter, including the statue of Erasmus. Hendrick de Keyser was buried in the Zuiderkerk in Amsterdam, a church he had designed himself.

# Desiderius Erasmus



Erasmus was born in Rotterdam on 28 October in either 1466, 1467, or 1469. After spending his youth in various boarding schools, he went on to study theology in Paris. Erasmus was already considered to be a great scholar during his lifetime.

He became a prominent humanist. Humanism focuses on being human; as a human being you need to self-consciously, with a great deal of care and attention, think about how to interact with yourself and your environment. On his travels through Europe, Erasmus would meet other famous humanists. He published various theological and humanist books that reached a lot of people. *The Praise of Folly* (1509), in which he mocked a variety of negative human characteristics and expressed satirical comments about people in power, became his most famous book.

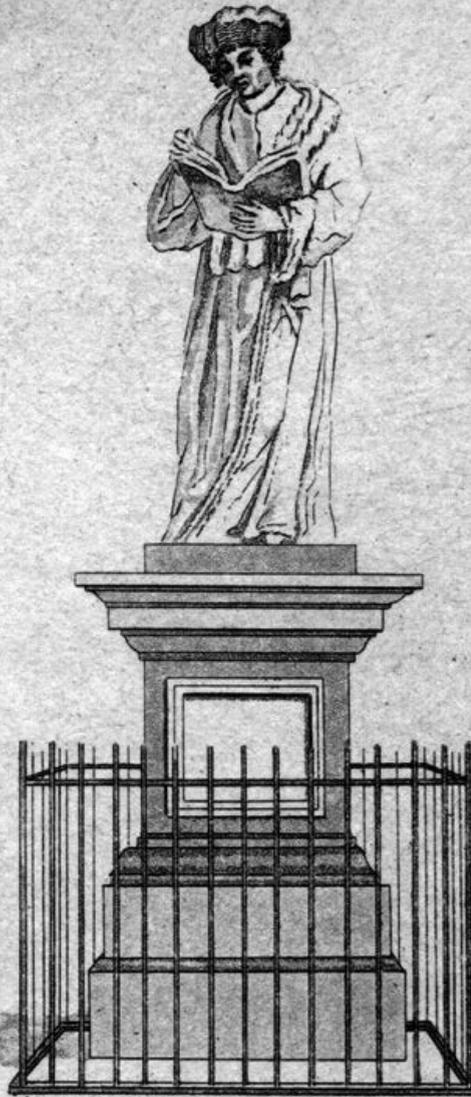
According to Erasmus the Latin translation of the Bible, which was used in the church at that time, was neither accurate nor clear enough. Therefore, he decided to make a new translation, from Greek into Latin, of the New Testament. He thought it extremely important to have knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and hoped that one day everyone could become acquainted with the Bible. Although critical of the church, Erasmus was never willing to sever his ties with it. He was in favour of bridging differences of opinion with common sense, thus proving himself to be a true humanist. However, his unwillingness to take sides also led to criticism.

Erasmus died in Basel in 1536. He was a world citizen with a universal philosophy of life: he chose knowledge above ignorance, order above chaos, and considered humanity of greater importance than any doctrines. The fundamental goal of his scholarly efforts was to arrive at a better understanding of humanity. He strived for a humane type of philosophy, defended the incorruptibility of the intellect, and pleaded for moderation and tolerance.

To this day, Erasmus's ideas are still propagated around the world.

# Timeline

## Statues of Erasmus in Rotterdam



*Statue d'Erasmus à Rotterdam.*

*à Amsterdam chez E. Maaskamp près du Palais.*

- 1549** Temporary statue of Erasmus made of papier-mâché and plaster in the Wijde Kerksteeg street on the occasion of the arrival of Philip II of Spain.
- 1550** Small, sandstone sculpture of Erasmus, possibly placed in a niche of the façade of the house where he was born.
- 1557** Second statue of Erasmus, made from Belgian bluestone, is placed on the bridge across the Steigersgracht canal.
- 1572** The second statue is destroyed by Spanish soldiers and thrown into the Maas river.

- 1572** Installation of the figurehead – featuring a likeness of Erasmus – of the ship *De Liefde* as a temporary replacement of the destroyed second statue.
- 1572** Relocation of the second statue of Erasmus, now salvaged from the Maas.
- 1575** Placement of the third statue of Erasmus, this time made from wood and painted blue.
- 1593** Fourth statue of Erasmus, this time made of stone.
- 1616** Resolution by the Rotterdam City Council to acquire a new statue of Erasmus, this time made of bronze.
- 1618** The master builder and sculptor Hendrick de Keyser is commissioned by the Rotterdam City Council to make a bronze statue of Erasmus.
- 1622** The statue is cast in bronze in Oudenrogge's foundry in the Hoogstraat. On 30 April 1622, the bronze statue of Desiderus Erasmus Roterodamus by De Keyser is placed on Groote Markt.

- 1674** The statue of Erasmus is removed as a result of a smear campaign against the humanist.
- 1674** The possible sale of the Erasmus statue to the city of Basel falls through.
- 1677** Installation of the Erasmus statue on its new pedestal.
- 1752** Relocation of the Erasmus statue, a little bit more to the north, because of the dilapidated condition of the bridge vault.
- 1881** The Napoleonic army wants to melt down the Erasmus statue and use the bronze for canons and bombs. This plan was probably bought off.
- 1940** The Erasmus statue survives the bombing of Rotterdam in May. The statue is taken of its pedestal and buried in sandbags in the courtyard of Museum Boymans.
- 1945** Relocation of the Erasmus statue to the Coolsingel.

- 1963** Because of the construction of the metro line, the Erasmus statue is temporarily stored at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.
- 1964** The Erasmus statue is moved to the Grotekerkplein square, next to the 'Grote of Sint-Laurenskerk' and is placed on a copy of the 1677 pedestal.
- 1965** The 1677 pedestal is taken to the Gymnasium Erasmianum school on the Wytemaweg street.
- 1973** The Erasmus statue, the oldest bronze statue in the Netherlands, is recognized as a national heritage site.
- 1996** The Erasmus statue 'falls' from its pedestal.
- 1997** Research into possibilities for replacing the Erasmus statue with a replica. Eventually a decision is made to put the original statue back in the public space.
- 1997** Restoration of the Erasmus statue.
- 1998** Re-installation of the Erasmus statue on Grotekerkplein.

- 2008** The city council receives a new proposal to relocate the bronze Erasmus statue to, for instance, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and use a replica to replace the original in the outdoor space. The response of the then alderman is that the Erasmus statue was made for the outside space and that a copy would detract from the experience of the statue and the square, both for residents and tourists.
- 2009** The Erasmus statue is moved about five metres because of the renovation of Grotekerkplein.
- 2012** Restoration of the Erasmus statue.
- 2017** Rotterdam Partners places a bright green 3D-print of the Erasmus statue in the garden of the Schielandshuis.
- 2018** The original pedestal from 1677 is incorporated in the artwork *Der Stein des Weisen* (The Philosopher's Stone) by Kathrin Schlegel on the campus of the Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- 2022** Erasmus statue 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

Hans Baaij, *Erasmus. Beelden van Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus in Rotterdam*. CBK Rotterdam, 1997

Erasmus Center for Early Modern Studies

Lucy Schlüter, *Standbeelden van Erasmus in Rotterdam. 1549-2008*, Stichting Erasmushuis, Rotterdam, 2008

# Visual description



To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Erasmus statue, the Oren en Ogen Tekort Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping people with a sensory challenge, has created a so-called *Beeld in Geluid* (Image in sound) of the Erasmus statue. This can be accessed and listened to by scanning the QR code.

The Oren en Ogen Tekort Foundation aims to make art and culture accessible to everyone. One of the ways in which the foundation hopes to realize this is via the project *Beeld in Geluid*, that offers audio-descriptions of artworks in the public space. The project was initially set up by the foundation to help people with a visual challenge develop a clear mental picture of an artwork in the public space, with audio fragments offering a description of the visual characteristics. In this way people no longer have

to depend on someone else to do that. *Beeld in Geluid* thus offers support in experiencing art.

Not only the visually challenged will find *Beeld in Geluid* interesting. The foundation wants everyone, including people who can see, to truly experience art. By listening to the visual description they may experience things differently, or notice new things – details they may not have discovered otherwise, or a perspective they had not yet thought of.



# Z-Files, Art and the City

BKOR (i.e. Visual Art & Public Space) and SIR (Sculpture International Rotterdam) closely collaborate with each other. They work to enhance and update Rotterdam's public space. Their main assignment is involving as many Rotterdammers, and visitors, as possible in the collection. The city is constantly on the move, and art moves along with it. BKOR and SIR offer everyone an opportunity to participate in activities that involve art in the public space. They do this in various ways: via the website, events, and walking guides. They also regularly organize so-called Z-Files. The Z is for Zadkine, whose sculpture is the benchmark in the Rotterdam collection. Through lectures, presentations, and excursions, Z-Files deal with art and the city, shedding light on the extraordinary collection from the perspective of current developments in the city.

# Visual Art & Public Space

No other city in the Netherlands has such a large collection of art in the public space as Rotterdam. Although this tradition is rooted in a distant past, the development of the collection only really took flight after the German bombing of Rotterdam in 1940. BKOR is in charge of maintaining and updating the extensive city collection in collaboration with involved Rotterdammers, the Municipality of Rotterdam, and companies. BKOR coordinates the conservation and maintenance of over five hundred artworks and advises the Municipality, citizens, and artists about the realization, installation, relocation, and redevelopment of public artworks. BKOR is furthermore a centre for knowledge and documentation with regard to all public artworks in Rotterdam.

# Sculpture International Rotterdam

A special section of over sixty sculptures from the Rotterdam sculpture collection are categorized under the label SIR (Sculpture International Rotterdam). After the war, the city craved new sculptures. Passionate individuals, foundations and companies – often assisted by art historians and artists – started acquiring artworks of international quality (like the Gabo, the Zadkine, the Moore). In 1960, the Municipality set-up a Committee to ‘beautify’ the city, resulting in the acquisition of many sculptures of international stature until the end of the 1970s. Since then, sculptures have been added intermittently, most notably in 2001 when Rotterdam was Cultural Capital of Europe. In a city that is constantly subjected to major changes, SIR is always searching for ways to link the collection to new developments, both in the city and in the international art discourse.

# CBK Rotterdam

CBK Rotterdam focuses on visual art in the city. It has three main priorities: the Art Office supports and encourages artists, BKOR and SIR are responsible for the quality of the public space, and TENT offers a platform to Rotterdam artists. CBK Rotterdam is able to do all this with the help of many makers, residents and partners in the city. CBK Rotterdam is right at the heart of the city and involved in everything that is going on there. CBK Rotterdam works everywhere, from the west to the east – from Hook of Holland to Nesseland –, and from the north to the south – from Schiebroek to Lombardijen. All for the purpose of creating a fertile climate in which art, artists and Rotterdammers can continue to grow, together.



**Page 14**

Map of Rotterdam, 1839

Photo: rotterdamkaart.nl / Stichting Voorouder  
/ CC-BY-SA 4.0

**Page 22**

The house where Erasmus was born,  
Wijde Kerksteeg, Rotterdam.

Photo: 1904, Rotterdam City Archives

**Page 36**

Hendrick de Keyser

*Erasmus* (1622) has fallen of his pedestal  
Grotekerkplein, Rotterdam.

Photo: 1996, photographer: Levien Willemse

**Page 48**

Gerard van Lom

Removal of the *Statue of Queen Wilhelmina* (1922)

Paramaribo, midnight, 24 November 1975.

Photographer: Bert Verhoeff / Anefo / Dutch National Archives, CC0

**Page 56**

Joseph Graven

*Piet Heyn Monument* (1870)

Piet Heynsplein, Rotterdam.

Photo: 2012, Stadsbeheer Rotterdam (Rotterdam City Management)

**Page 62**

Jikke van Loon

*Anton de Kom* (2006)

Anton de Komplein, Amsterdam.

Photographer: P.G.J. de Rooij

**Page 66**

Mohau Modisakeng

*Nelson Mandela Memorial Amsterdam* (2021)

Nelson Mandelapark, Amsterdam.

Photographer: M. Oudshoorn

**Page 76**

Louis van Roode

*De reis van Erasmus* (The Journey of Erasmus, 1954)

Holbeinhuis, Coolsingel, Rotterdam.

Photographer: Jannes Linders / BKOR Archives / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 90**

Huib Noorlander

*Erasmus* (year unknown)

Gymnasium Erasmianum, Rotterdam.

Photo: BKOR Archives / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 92**

Leendert Bolle

*Erasmus* (1939)

Gymnasium Erasmianum, Rotterdam.

Photo: BKOR Archives / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 94**

Charlotte van Pallandt

*Erasmus Roterodamus* (1973)

Erasmus Medical Centre, Rotterdam.

Photo: BKOR Archives / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 96**

Geert van de Camp

*Lof der Zotheid, monument voor een ezel* (The Praise of

Folly, Monument for a Donkey, 1989)

Burgemeester van Walsumweg, Rotterdam.

Photo: BKOR Archives / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 98**

Kees Verschuren

*Dialogo met Erasmus* (Dialogue with Erasmus, 1995)

Grotekerkplein, Rotterdam.

Photographer: Rick Messemaker / BKOR Archives / CBK  
Rotterdam

**Page 100**

Ahmad Haraji

*Erasmus & Rumi* (2008)

Erasmusstraat, Rotterdam.

Photo: BKOR Archives / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 102**

Kathrin Schlegel

*Der Stein des Weisen* (The Philosopher's Stone, 2018)

Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Photographer: Otto Snoek

**Page 106 t/m 197**

Hendrick de Keyser

*Erasmus* (1622)

Grotekerkplein, Rotterdam.

Photo: 2022, photographer: Jannes Linders / Collection  
Sculpture International Rotterdam / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 198**

Hendrick de Keyser

*Erasmus* (1622)

Grotekerkplein, Rotterdam.

Photo: 2022, photographer: Jannes Linders / Collection  
Sculpture International Rotterdam / CBK Rotterdam

**Page 202**

Jonas Suyderhoef, after Thomas de Keyser

*Portrait of Hendrick de Keyser* (1623-1686)

Photo: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-60.737

**Page 206**

Hans Holbein the Younger

*Portrait of Desiderus Erasmus* (1523)

Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Photo: CC-PD 1.0

**Page 210**

Ludwig Gottlieb Portman, after

Franciscus Andreas Milatz

*Statue d'Erasme á Rotterdam* (Statue of Erasmus in

Rotterdam, 1520-1530)

Tinted copper engraving

Photo: Rotterdam City Archives, M-701

**Cover**

Hendrick de Keyser

*Erasmus* (1622)

Grotekerkplein, Rotterdam.

Photo: 2022, photographer: Jannes Linders / Collection

Sculpture International Rotterdam / CBK Rotterdam

**Esther Didden** holds various executive and advisory positions in the cultural sector and in the field of (public) philosophy. CBK Rotterdam engaged her to organize and moderate this symposium. For *BK-informatie*, a professional magazine for visual artists, she writes about commissioning and the public space. She also chairs philosophical debates, for instance at the Stadsgevangenis (City Prison) Rotterdam. In addition, she is the treasurer of both the Stichting Maand van de Filosofie (Month of Philosophy Foundation) and the Centrum Kinderfilosofie Nederland (Centre for Child Philosophy the Netherlands).

**Ronald van Raak** is professor of Erasmian Values at the Erasmus School of Philosophy (ESPhil) of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Prior to that he was

a member of the Dutch Lower House for the political party SP. He is the author of, among other things, *Denken op de dijken. Het Nederland van de filosofen* (Thinking on the Dikes. The Netherlands According to Philosophers, 2020).

**Frits Scholten** is senior curator of Sculptural Art at the Rijksmuseum and is professor of History of Western Sculpture up to 1800 at the University of Amsterdam.

**Sandra Smets** is an art historian and writes on the subject of visual art, among other things about art in the public space. For over a decade she worked for CBK Rotterdam and has been working for the visual arts section of the newspaper NRC since 2006. In addition to this she writes for various magazines and publications. In collaboration with Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, she is currently researching the history of artists in Rotterdam during the Second World War as part of the project '75 Years of Freedom'.

**Siebe Thissen** was head of Visual Arts & Public Space (BKOR) at CBK Rotterdam until 31 December 2021. He writes about art, pop culture, and the city, for instance in publications like *Mooi van ver. Muurschilderingen in Rotterdam* (Beautiful from Afar. Murals in Rotterdam, 2007) and *Beelden. Stadsverfraaiing in Rotterdam*

*sinds 1940* (Sculptures. City Beautification in Rotterdam Since 1940, 2016).

**Annet Zondervan** is general director of Centrum Beeldende Kunst Zuidoost-Amsterdam (Centre for Visual Art Southeast Amsterdam, a.k.a. CBK Zuidoost). Under her leadership, CBK Zuidoost evolved from a small art lending library to a locally rooted and internationally oriented dynamic art venue for everyone. The institute showcases contemporary art from an intercultural, inclusive perspective and introduces a wide audience to the art of today. In addition she holds various, alternating, executive and advisory positions in the field of contemporary visual art.

This book, *Symposium Erasmus Statue 400 Years / 400 Years City Collection Rotterdam*, was published by CBK Rotterdam on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Erasmus Statue (1622) by Hendrick de Keyser. The symposium took place in the Laurenskerk in Rotterdam on 29 April 2022.

**Symposium organizer and moderator**

Esther Didden

**Symposium editors**

Esther Didden, Sannetje van Haarst, Siebe Thissen

**Speakers / authors**

Esther Didden, Ronald van Raak, Sandra Smets, Frits Scholten, Siebe Thissen, Annet Zondervan

**Graphic design**

Jeanine van Berkel

**Typography**

Rungli Neue

Helvetica Light

**Publication editor**

Esther Didden, Sannetje van Haarst

**Picture editors**

Sannetje van Haarst, Nienke Post

**Final editors Dutch version**

Xandra Nibbeling, Nienke Post

**Final editors English version**

Esther Didden, Sannetje van Haarst,

Marie Louise Schoondergang

**Translation (Dutch into English)**

Marie Louise Schoondergang

This publication is also available in Dutch

**Thanks to**

Erasmus Committee

**ISBN number**

978-90-9036402-5

[www.bkor.nl](http://www.bkor.nl)[www.sculptureinternationalrotterdam.nl](http://www.sculptureinternationalrotterdam.nl)[www.cbkrotterdam.nl](http://www.cbkrotterdam.nl)

The symposium and this publication were developed as part of the series Z-Files (with a Z for Zadkine). The two CBK Rotterdam programmes Beeldende Kunst & Openbare Ruimte (Visual Arts & Public Space, BKOR) and Sculpture International Rotterdam (SIR) regularly organize Z-Files: lectures, presentations, symposiums, debates, and excursions on the subject of art, the public space, and the city.

in collaboration with the Erasmus Committee

Erasmus is a Rotterdam icon, not only in a philosophical sense, but also from the perspective of citizenship and within the scope of city marketing. On 29 April 2022, initiated by CBK Rotterdam, the *Symposium Erasmus Statue 400 Years / 400 Years City Collection Rotterdam* took place at the Laurenskerk in Rotterdam. It was entirely dedicated to Hendrick de Keyser's statue of Erasmus which was unveiled on 30 April 1622 in the city centre of Rotterdam. This book was published to mark that occasion. It includes texts that were delivered during the symposium.

Apart from the history of the Erasmus statue, and an explanation of Erasmus's body of thought, the symposium delved deeper into other visual representations of Erasmus in Rotterdam, the value of a city collection and how to manage it, the current debate surrounding statues, and the future of existing and new statues.

in collaboration with the Erasmus Committee

**CBK R'DAM**



SCULPTURE  
INTERNATIONAL  
ROTTERDAM



ART  
OFFICE



9 789090 364025