

SONYA SPRY
PROPOSAL: bijlmAIR PROJECT 2005

Being a foreigner myself in the Netherlands, I had never heard about the Bijlmermeer until a few months ago. I mean, I knew that Amsterdam Zuidoost existed but there were no preconceived ideas about it. I simply hadn't, up to this point in my 6 year residency, been enlightened by its history.

After asking around I got mixed reactions and soon realised that this place had significance in the eyes of the Dutch;

"*Bijlmermeer!*" with a screwed up face was one outburst. "*That's that area where they can't get it together culturally or socially.*" Further questioning with another friend led to the premature interruption; "*Why on earth would you want to go and live there?*" Once I'd had time to fully explain myself, they said, "*Oh,*" and shrugging at the same time, "*You'd fit in there well then.*" However, considering their first comment, I'm not quite sure what that was supposed to mean. Someone else indignantly proclaimed that it would probably prove a very interesting place for an artist to work in; but definitely not to live in. Needless to say, it was rather a fruitless exercise because I wasn't any the wealthier in knowledge about this area.

My next course of action was to plough through a few articles I had been given. They were interesting enough but I immediately found myself coming to conclusions before I had even set foot inside the Bijlmermeers' boundaries. Seems everyone has an opinion about this place. Putting them aside and along with blocking out my friends comments, I then asked myself. "What is my work about?" and "How can I contribute something to a district such as the Bijlmermeer?"

I suppose firstly and my automatic answer is that I basically work with or around people. I like to study them and look at their environment. I investigate through all forms of documentation: video; photography; writing and drawing; and only after this process can I determine what the outcome will be. It is therefore difficult to say exactly what form the artwork will take on. What I believe to be most important is that the people's aspects and perspectives are mirrored in the work. They could be social, cultural or political. Who knows? It depends entirely on the situations I would experience and the people that I would get to know. The identities of the residents in the Bijlmermeer will be the inspiration for the end product.

Secondly, I like to build things that the onlooker can interactive with. The bureaus and mobile cases in my former work are all designed to invite you to participate in some way. Also they can belong and adapt in different environments however, they still possess and create their own atmosphere. Whatever form shall develop from this project will naturally have these same elements. Essential, is the necessity to replicate a feeling of the Bijlmermeer. Whether that structure takes on a literal or figurative form is still uncertain. Gut feeling at this moment is architectural. That said however, I don't want to jump to conclusions. The Bijlmermeer will need to persuade me to build whatever it is that will echo its existence.

Thirdly, depending on progress with the main work and, of course time and money permitting I'd like to publicise something along side the installation. This would record the events that had taken place while walking around, talking with the residents, buying a loaf of bread, watching children play in the playground and just simply asking questions. The latter always leads to answers. Answers that will be heard in, not only the publication, but the installation itself. Answers direct from the Bijlmermeer folk.