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Big Adventure, Big Opportunity

Gertjan van Beijnum realizes
glass wall in The Netherlands

By GLAS Magazine

In January of this year stained glass artist Gertjan van Beijnum installed a glass and lead wall of almost 9 square meters in a house in his town of 's-Hertogenbosch in The Netherlands. It is not the first commission undertaken by van Beijnum but it is the most recent in a long series of leaded glass and other kiln work projects.

"About a year ago I met the owners of the property," he said, explaining the commission. "They were still living in their old house and were busy building their new one in 's-Hertogenbosch. This was in a new housing development where people can build their own house, provided it is energy neutral. I had previously repaired some stained glass in their old house, so they knew how to contact me."

"Their original idea for the commission was for me to make a relatively small, round window on one of the internal concrete walls, but during the discussions it became clear that they had not yet found a solution for another large internal wall and so the idea of the wall of glass came about.

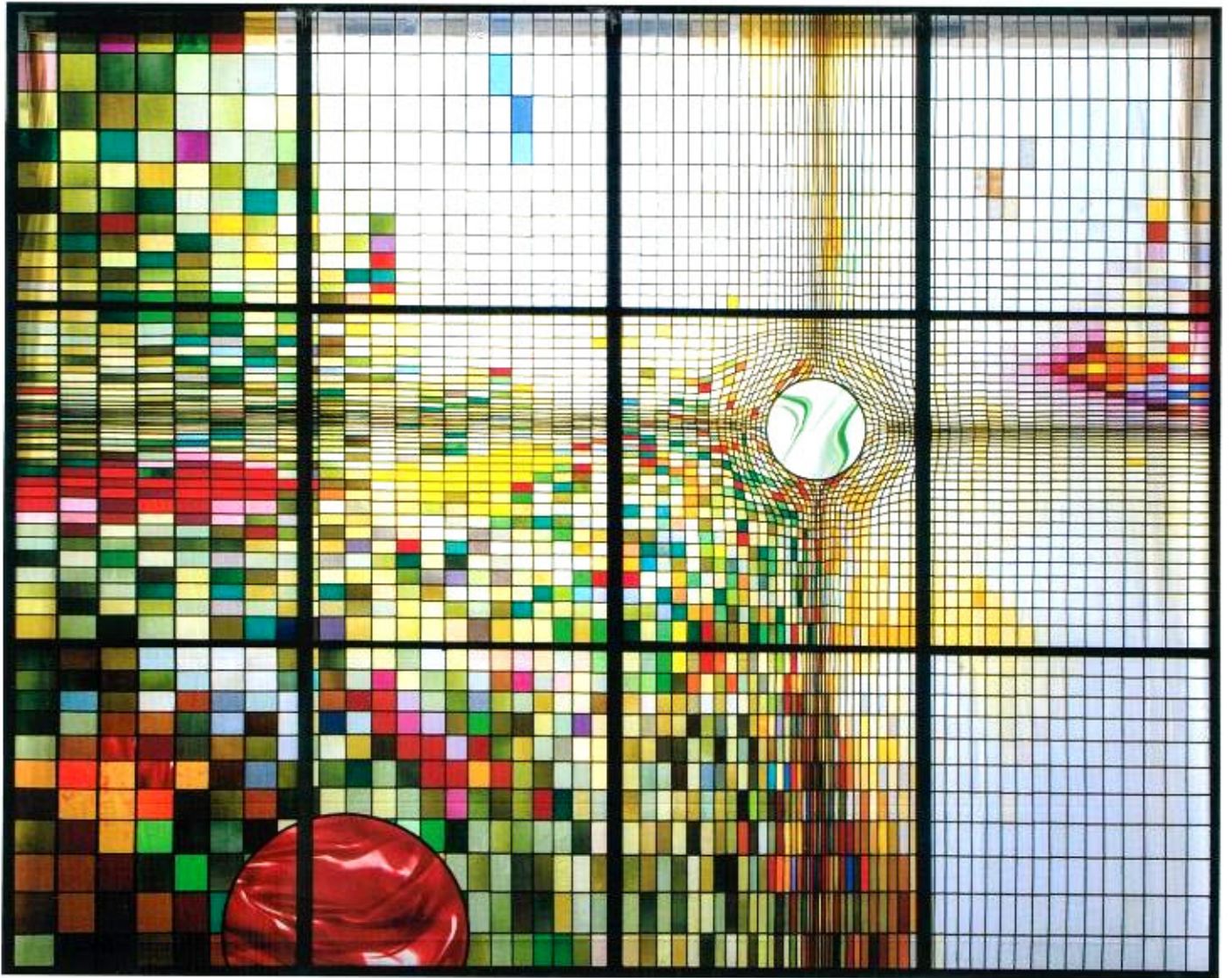
A few years earlier I had made a similar, though smaller, glass wall for a vinyl record shop in the neighborhood and after they saw that, they became really enthusiastic about the idea of the large glass wall and so I began designing it."

The interesting part of the project for him was its scale.

"I had to work very precisely so that all the lead-lines fit through all 12 panels," van Beijnum said. "Because there are so many tiny pieces of glass, it is difficult to stay in tune with the design and it was a big adventure and

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Photo: Dave Maas





an opportunity that these clients gave me the trust to make such a big glass wall in their house.”

Gertjan van Beijnum was born in Nijmegen in 1956 and moved from Heumen to 's-Hertogenbosch to study at the Royal Academy of Art and Design. He left after having completed half of the Monumental Course. He dropped out of his studies, where he had been a pupil of the famous stained glass artist Marius de Leeuw (1915-2000), on account of his strong involvement in the squatters and activists movement in 's-Hertogenbosch.

“In April 1978, along with a lot of people, we occupied the empty former hospital of Joan de Deo in the centre of the city and took it over for use as housing,” van Beijnum said. “We finally took over the management of the property including the maintenance, after it became part of a local housing association, and today we still rent it from them.

“Because we managed and maintained the property ourselves, I set about repairing the existing stained glass in the building and through this became absorbed in the subject. Sometime around 2000 I enrolled in a course run by Frans van Noppen in Heusden.

After the stained glass artist Arnoldus Lelijveld stopped working in 2006, I started up my company, Glaslicht—Glas in Lood, a year later. At first I mostly did repairs of damaged stained glass and I did a lot of work on my own account.”

“Slowly I began getting lots of inquiries and at present there is demand for what I call demand based free projects. People give me very much confidence to design and create my own glass-panels. I feel very free to create my own panels as if I make am making them for myself, but I know already that my future client is happy with them.”

Gertjan van Beijnum doesn't see himself as an artist but as a craftsman. After vocational training in stained glass was transferred from Schoonhoven to Boxtel, he started taking on trainees from the MBO department of Sint Lucas in Boxtel at his workplace for six months placements.

“It helps me to improve my craft and to pass it on,” van Beijnum said. “Besides making stained glass panels I work with a gas-fired HOAF-Speedburn glass kiln, which I bought in 2007.”

The recent glass wall is made up of 12 separate panels, each one about 90 by 90 cm, within a steel frame. The designer of the frame has also been commissioned to design the stairs to the upper floor with the result that the glass panel and the stairs are unified.

“Practically all the glass that I use is German Lamberts glass, which I have collected over the years in hundreds of colors and textures,” he said. “But I also have a lot of plain transparent glass, which I think is ugly if used in large areas but which, when used in small pieces breaks up the light in a pleasing way.”

The stained glass panel was made for a private dwelling and is thus not open to the public. Those who are interested can, however, contact the owners to arrange an appointment to see the work: Bart Houweling (b.houweling@bestcon.nl) or Mieke van der Sanden (info@toonlief.nl). ■

Dutch stained glass artist Gertjan van Beijnum completed a commission of a glass wall in a private home in the Netherlands. Photos: Dave Maas