

### See and feel time

The Oude Kerk is a space for contemporary art within Amsterdam's oldest building. Every corner of the church is steeped in history, with each era leaving visible traces of its influence. Immerse yourself in this unique location, and discover the interplay between the past, present, and future that makes the Oude Kerk a cultural gem.

### Interwoven with Amsterdam's history

Beginning as a wooden chapel around 1250, the Oude Kerk (Old Church) grew into a prominent stone hall church circa 1570. The church was dedicated to Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors and prostitutes, in 1306. Following the construction of a second church, de Nieuwe Kerk (the New Church), near Dam Square during the 15th century, the Nicolaaskerk became known locally as the Oude Kerk. As Amsterdam's prosperity grew during the late medieval period, the Oude Kerk expanded to accommodate the city's growth. Over time, the church served many purposes, including religious and public functions.

In the early centuries, it was a seafarers' church, where prayers were offered for safe voyages and the secure return of ships. Numerous residents of Amsterdam found their final resting place here. The Iron Chapel housed the first municipal archive. Thus, the Oude Kerk tells the story of Amsterdam's history.

### Old Church, New Art

The Oude Kerk has been a haven for artists and musicians for centuries. Over time, numerous artists have created works here, including drawers, sculptors, and painters such as Emanuel de Witte, glazier Dirck Crabeth, and composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck.

The Oude Kerk continues to invite artists to make new works that engage with its history and the world around us. Annually, we commission two major site-specific works to leading artists, including previously: Ibrahim Mahama and Susan Philipsz, that inspires our public programme. You can find our programme at: [oudekerk.nl/en/whats-on](https://oudekerk.nl/en/whats-on).

### The richly painted vault

The Oude Kerk boasts one of Europe's largest wooden vaulted ceilings. In the early 16th century, numerous paintings adorned the wooden beams, depicting saints, and the coats of arms of guilds and families. However, after the Alteration (1578), the images were painted over several times, and it was not until the Oude Kerk's extensive restoration in the 1950s that the original paintings resurfaced. In the South Aisle, a series of images are visible from left to right, including depictions of Crispinus and Crispinianus, the patron saints of the Shoemakers' Guild; the consecration of Saint Martin; and the province of Holland's coat of arms, with the Amsterdam coat of arms on each corner. Another painting features Mary cradling Christ's dead body in her lap, a subject commonly explored in art history. However, this painting is unique due to the presence of a boat in which the figures are portrayed. Is this a reference to the origin of the building as a seafarers' church?



Gert Eijkelboom

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### A world-famous organ

The Oude Kerk's monumental organ is one of the world's best-preserved historic organs. Built in 1724 by the Hamburg organ builder Christian Vater, it had to be dismantled shortly after due to tower subsidence. The organ was replaced in 1742 and expanded by Casper Müller, hence the name Vater-Müller organ. Music enthusiasts worldwide have been coming to listen to its unique sound and to the special acoustics of the building for centuries. The Oude Kerk has played a significant role in European organ history. In the 16th century, the renowned composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1561–1621) served as the city organist here. His compositions greatly influenced the work of contemporaries and musicians after him, including J.S. Bach.



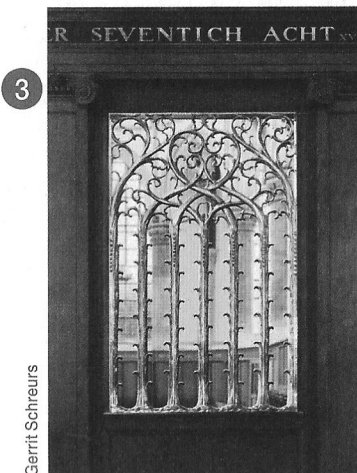
Maarten Nauw

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## The choir screen: a Beeldenstorm monument

The Oude Kerk is one of Europe's most important Beeldenstorm (Iconoclastic Fury) monuments. In the summer of 1566, the Iconoclasm erupted here. Fanatical Protestant iconoclasts ransacked the church, destroying altarpieces, saint statues, and liturgical artefacts, claiming they were manifestations of a decadent religion. Twelve years later, on 26 May 1578, the Catholic city council was overthrown. In the church, sermons were now delivered in the vernacular, and the Latin mass was a thing of the past. The choir screen inscription recalls the church's drastic transformation from Catholicism to Protestantism, emphasising 'the misuse, gradually brought into God's church, was here again undone in the year seventy-eight.' The term 'misuse' referred to Catholic practices such as processions and veneration of saints. The richly decorated gold-coloured choir screen was made according to the latest fashion in 1654. This so-called lobate style is known as the Dutch Design of the seventeenth century.



Gerrit Schreurs

## Medieval carvings

Here in the high choir are the Oude Kerk's oldest pews from around 1500 in late Gothic style. Underneath these folding seats are misericords (from Latin *miseri-cordia*: 'mercy'), which are ledges intended to provide support for standing during long services. The carvings on the misericords depict humorous, worldly scenes, including a man defecating coins. The majority of these wooden reliefs date back to the sixteenth century. Some have been lost, and for those six seats, sculptor J. van Huisstede created new depictions in the 1970s. We see a jovial drinking reveler, two figures on a ship, a face with three eyes, but also animals and an archivist of the Oude Kerk, Mrs. Bijtelaar. The medieval misericords depict Dutch proverbs, such as 'Finding the dog in the pot' and 'Gently does it to prevent the line from breaking.'



Gert Jan van Rooij

## Stained-glass windows

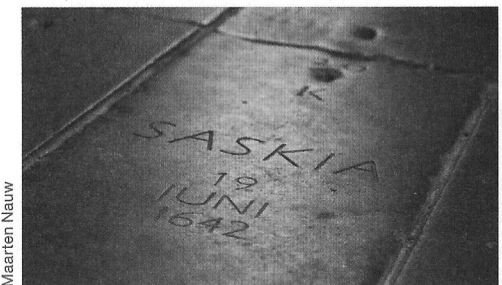
The Oude Kerk had 33 stained-glass windows, mainly from the late Middle Ages. However, the only surviving windows from that era are in the Lady Chapel, which form a biblical scene. The left window shows the Annunciation and the Visitation, announcing Christ's birth, with the patron Jan Claesz van Hoppen, his wife, and children at the bottom of the window. The right window depicts the Adoration of the Shepherds with the Oude Kerk's patron saints – Saint Nicholas and John the Baptist – below. Additionally, the Oude Kerk has secular stained-glass windows, including two displaying the coats of arms of Amsterdam mayors between 1578 and 1795. In the choir aisle is a stained-glass window marking the end of the Eighty Years' War with Spain in 1648, installed in 1656 to commemorate the peace. The window depicts Spanish King Philip IV handing over a signed and sealed document to the representatives of the States General of the Netherlands.



Maarten Nauw

## Special tombstones

From the 13th century to 1865, approximately 60,000 people were buried in the Oude Kerk under more than 2,000 tombstones, including mayors, wealthy traders, seafarers, and artists. Perhaps the most famous is Saskia Uylenburgh (1612–1642) ⑥, Rembrandt's first wife, who lies near the transept organ. Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1561–1621) ⑦, the city organist and the Netherlands' most renowned composer, rests at tombstone 99 in the choir aisle. The Lady Chapel (Mariakapel) is home to another remarkable grave belonging to Jacob Matroos Beeldsnijder (1780–1817) ⑧, the only person of colour buried in the Oude Kerk. He was the son of a high official in Surinam and an enslaved woman. His life story connects the history of the Oude Kerk to the African diaspora in Europe. Jacob and his mother were owned by his father, but were freed by him in 1781. In addition to graves, the church houses several sumptuously decorated commemorative plaques. One such plaque belongs to Dutch sailor Jacob van Heemskerck (1567–1607) ⑨, renowned for his winter expedition with Willem Barentsz on the island of Nova Zembla in 1597.



Maarten Nauw

## Contemporary stained-glass window in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel

The Holy Sepulchre Chapel is bathed in a mesmerising red light. Acclaimed Italian artist Giorgio Andreotta Calò (1979) meticulously crafted a unique stained-glass window from mouth-blown glass to adorn this chapel in a radiant ruby-coloured hue. The work is open to several interpretations. Some associate the colour with the surrounding district, while others see it as a reference to the red sanctuary lamps typically found in Catholic churches. As sunlight filters through the window, a crimson glow envelops the chapel. This work also pays homage to the first centuries of the Oude Kerk's history, when the church featured countless vibrant stained-glass windows depicting various religious scenes.



Maarten Nauw

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## Emanuel de Witte's church interior paintings

Emanuel de Witte (1617–1692), a contemporary of Rembrandt, painted the interior of the Oude Kerk multiple times between 1650 and 1675. He was renowned for his church interiors, particularly his ability to capture the interplay of light and shadow. Even in De Witte's time, the Oude Kerk was a bustling hub of activity. His paintings show a woman breastfeeding by the pulpit, passers-by chatting, merchants haggling, and a funeral procession. For centuries, the church was a covered square, which was used to cut the road, sell stuff, mend fishing nets, or play dice. Stray dogs also walked in and out of the open church doors. The pillars invited them to lift a leg and were therefore tarred black at the bottom. As these scenes attest, the church has always been integral to urban life.

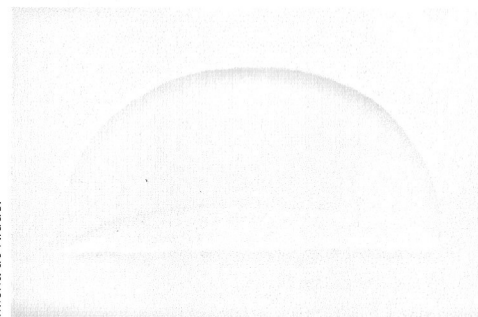


Gert Jan van Rooij

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## A pictorial photograph

Artist Misha de Ridder (1971) was given the key to the church for a year, allowing him access day and night with his camera. He captured details of the white-plastered church walls and the play of light and shadow in the numerous alcoves in razor-shape detail. One of the photos from the series is on display here in the Church Warden's Office. The photo is so detailed that you can see the bristle hairs of the paintbrushes, as well as the flaking imperfections in the plasterwork. Like many, De Ridder was captivated by the vibrant light in the church. 'Daylight filters through the tall, sometimes vividly colored windows onto white-painted walls. It changes with the minute, the hour, and the seasons. I went to look, to look again, to look better in order to penetrate to the essence of the building. I observed how what is outside manifests itself inside.'



Misha de Ridder

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### Restoration work

In an effort to preserve the Oude Kerk for generations to come, on-going restoration work is underway. At present, we are restoring two stained-glass windows in the Lady's Chapel. For more information about our current restoration, please visit [oudekerk.nl/en/restorations](http://oudekerk.nl/en/restorations).

### Support us

Our programme is supported by the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, the Mondriaan Fund, and the Friends of the Oude Kerk. With our friends, we share the love for contemporary art, heritage and music. The Oude Kerk is a national monument and a registered museum. Become a friend and visit: [oudekerk.nl/en/support-us](http://oudekerk.nl/en/support-us).

## Hand-painted wallpaper

The Mirror Room is one of the Oude Kerk's most exquisite spaces, enveloping visitors in an eighteenth-century kaleidoscope of colour, flowers, and birds. This elegant chamber features hand-painted wallpaper created around 1760 and 1770, as well as intricately carved shell motifs and a large gilded-framed mirror. The wallpaper is particularly remarkable for its flora – including primroses, tulips, roses, and nasturtium – gilded with silver and gold leaf in the heart of the flowers. Over time, the Mirror Room has served various functions. Between 1565–1811 The Mirror Room served as the marriage commissioner's office, with countless couples signing their marriage certificates here, including the painter Rembrandt van Rijn and his beloved Saskia Uylenburgh. The old name of the room is, therefore, the Marriage Banns Room.



René Gerritsen

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### De Koffieschenkerij

Nestled in a historical annexe of the Oude Kerk, our coffee house offers a serene retreat in the bustling city centre. Here, you can enjoy delicious coffee, teas, and cakes, and as a token of our appreciation, they offer a 10% discount on coffee and tea when you present your Oude Kerk ticket. On the map at the back, you'll find the location of the Koffieschenkerij.