

## Mariël Polman



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Architectural paint researcher

Master painter

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### ***The meaning of colour in collective housing during the Modern era in the Netherlands: the example of Drachten by Theo van Doesburg (1921)***

*The Parrot district in Drachten of Theo van Doesburg could be considered to be a forerunner of colour schemes of modern housing in the twentieth century in the Netherlands. Though a contestable point of view, I will have a try to give this thesis a solid ground.*

#### **DRACHTEN**

*Drachten is a small town in Friesland, in the north of the Netherlands. In 1920-1921, Theo van Doesburg, co-founder and key figure of De Stijl, worked on a highly controversial project, in popular speech known as the parrot district. He ended up in Drachten by the agency of his friend Evert Rinsema, a shoemaker and writer of poetic and philosophical texts whom he had met during the 1914 mobilization. Theo van Doesburg made colour schemes for houses and schools by the temporary district architect Cees de Boer. The most important projects consisted of a row of middle-class housing and opposite this an Agricultural School.*

#### **DESIGN**

*The houses got a colour scheme in primary colours, the Agricultural School in secondary colours, besides white, black and grey; In a Van Doesburgian vein, the schedules are to be interpreted in different ways. From an architectural point of view, it was extraordinary. This met with opposition and the houses were painted over within a year.*

#### **THE CURRENT SITUATION**

*In the eighties the colour schemes were reconstructed. Recently, one of the houses is put at the Museum Drachten's disposal by the local authority as museum house / accommodation for artist in residence. The architects Alenca and Bertus Mulder, WVAU architects, will reconstruct the interior. The University of Amsterdam, the Rijksmuseum and the Cultural Heritage Agency carry out scientific research of the paint layers of the houses in situ and the design drawings. This will bring us as close as possible to the reality of these early, rough colour schemes which turned out to influence generations of architects and urban planners. Not only the ones who worked with Van Doesburg, like J.J.P. Oud and Cornelis van Eesteren, but also the next generations of modernism.*