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A study of architect Cosman Citroen (1881-1935) and his works in Surabaya

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SUMMARY

This study presents an in-depth analysis of the works of the Dutch architect Cosman Citroen (1881-1935) in Surabaya, and their historical context, both architectural and non-architectural. The existence of architectural works *per se* cannot be separated from their location, their historical genesis and context, and their design and construction process.

Cosman Citroen (1881-1935) grew up in a Jewish-Dutch diamond worker family in Amsterdam. After a four-year study under among others W. Kromhout and K.P.C. de Bazel, he obtained a diploma from the Department of Architectural Drawing at the Quellinus School in Amsterdam in 1902. His first job was at the office of B.J. Ouëndag, where he assisted J.F. Klinkhamer and Ouëndag as a draughtsman for the project of the *Nederlands-Indische Spoorwegmaatschappij* office (Netherlands Indies Railway Company). He also became a teacher of geometry. At the same time, he joined the Association of Architectura et Amicitia (until 1907), although he rarely attended its meetings. From 1908 onwards, Citroen continued his career as a teacher by training young members of A et A. Thus, his profession in the Netherlands was mainly that one of an educator, rather than an architect.

His dream to be a full time professional and independent architect encouraged Citroen to closely follow the developments in architecture, art as well as archaeology in the Netherlands Indies (where he planned to work), by reading architectural publications and getting information from his colleagues and seniors. In 1915 Citroen arrived in Surabaya, which at the time had only a few of architects and architectural firms, to begin his career as a Municipal architect in charge of handling a development plan for the Kupang area. His contract was extended twice, in 1916 and 1927; it ended on 19 February 1930 due to the efficiency of the Municipal architects and a lack of backing after the demise of G.J. Dijkerman, Mayor of Surabaya from 1920 to 1929. Afterwards, Citroen became a fully independent architect until his death on 15 May 1935. During his working life, he produced twenty works - including town planning projects, various types of buildings, interior design, bridges, a viaduct and a monument - in Surabaya, and five other projects outside the city, as well as three designs which remained unexecuted. They were made for a variety of patrons (Municipality, individuals, social and religious communities, private companies and state institutions), and various ethnic groups (Dutch, British, Chinese and indigenous). His wide network cannot be fully understood without taking into account the role of Dijkerman.

Besides handling architectural projects, Citroen was involved in other activities. He was a member of the daily board of the *Soerabaiasche Jaarmarkt-Vereeniging* (Society of the Surabaya Annual Fair) from 1923 onwards; a member of the advisory commission of archaeological service and finally president of the *Archaeological Museum Association* for several years. He also served as a jury member for the photograph and sketch competition of vernacular houses in East Java organized by the *Soerabaiasche Kunstkring* (Surabaya Art Circle) and the *Java Institute*.

His early architectural ideas were strongly influenced by pre-modern European architecture as taught by his seniors, Klinkhamer and Ouëndag, and also by the work of

his former teacher in the Quellinus School, Kromhout. Nonetheless, Citroen tried to introduce elements taken from tropical architecture in his works. Circa 1920 onwards he adhered to the Modern Movement in architecture as it developed in Europe and in the Netherlands in particular. At the same time, he applied vernacular or local elements in his architecture. Most of his works of the 1920s show hybrid combinations of elements taken from local architecture and modern European styles, mainly Art Deco, and some also show affinities with the Amsterdam School, De Stijl and *het Nieuwe Bouwen*, without neglecting tropical architecture. Ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright, Georges Vantongerloo, Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondriaan can also be found in Citroen's designs. These stylistic changes are in line with his improvement in the understanding of Javanese architecture and his knowledge of architectural developments in his home country. Like his two teachers Kromhout and De Bazel, Citroen was a highly versatile architect.

His reputation was recognized not only in Surabaya, but also in the Netherlands Indies, the Netherlands and in international forums. After receiving a "Mention" Award in the 1925 Paris Exhibition for the design of the Gubeng bridge, he participated in the first architectural exhibition in Batavia held in the same year by the *Nederlandsch-Indische Architecten Kring* (Netherlands Indies Architects' Circle), and was invited, with three other well-known architects, to design the Netherlands pavilion for the colonial exhibition in Paris. His appreciation by W. Lemei in 1935 as one of the leading architects in the Netherlands Indies is therefore entirely justified.