

From Pop Temple to Cultural Venue: Kosmos at Paradiso



INTRODUCTION

At Paradiso in Amsterdam, four members of staff reflect on their plans to reposition the venue, currently best known for live music, as a wide-ranging cultural platform. Operating under the name Kosmos, they develop programmes beyond the standard concert schedule, bringing together art, science, literature, politics and culture, while exploring how to make these initiatives (more) visible to a wider audience. They discuss the strategies and methods they employ, draw on Paradiso's rich history for guidance, and describe how Kosmos is helping to reshape the venue as a living room 'for and by the city', as it once was.

↑ Cover photo: Team photo of the Kosmos team, from left to right: Sanne Lohof, Senna van Ruiten, Tamar Bruls, Rosa Cherim



Facade exhibition: Every three weeks, different works by various artists are highlighted on the front facade of the building. Posters by Steven van Lummel

Kosmos aims to reshape Paradiso from a ‘pop temple’ into a cultural platform: “This was always our starting point.”

Paradiso has been more than a music venue from the very beginning. It is now up to the Kosmos team, a sub brand within the organisation, to highlight events beyond the regular concert schedule, both online and offline. How do they see Kosmos contributing to Paradiso’s return as a cultural platform for the city?

On the wall of Paradiso’s office hangs a framed poster announcing the venue’s opening in 1968. The blue and red Art Deco design features a goddess like figure, surrounded by angels and palm leaves. “Cosmic Relaxation Centre” Paradiso opens its doors on 30 March 1968, the poster declares.

“Every weekend there will be magnificent light shows, sultry dancers and exceptional pop groups, dazzling scenes, incense burners, conjurers, acrobats, poets, beautiful films, glorious colours, magicians, exceptional gramophone records, artists from home and abroad, fakirs and clowns at Paradiso.”

The poster was designed by Willem de Ridder, at the time one of the new faces involved in establishing Paradiso as a youth centre in the recently squatted building on Leidseplein. The Main Hall was decorated with plants, the Upstairs Room featured large sofas and tea sets, and ponchos were sold at the entrance.

This living room atmosphere provided the backdrop to legendary performances by artists such as Pink Floyd, as well as controversial productions including those by Hans Hirsch.



Original poster from 1968, announcing the opening of the cosmic relaxation centre Paradiso

Even today, Paradiso offers far more than its evening concerts, although these activities have not always received the attention they deserve.

Within the organisation, a new generation has stepped forward to highlight Paradiso’s non music programming: Sanne Lohof, 46, programmer; Tamar Bruls, 32, producer; Senna van Ruiten, 22, content marketer; and Rosa Cherim, 31, senior marketer. Together, they form the team behind Kosmos, a sub brand of

Paradiso that unites a diverse range of programmes beyond the regular concert schedule.

From cocktail evenings intertwined with lectures to exhibitions on the façade, fundraising performances for squatters and late-night programmes dedicated to erotic poetry. A space where literature, science, activism, art and politics converge.

“This programming was always part of Paradiso, but as the concert schedule expanded it was gradually pushed into the background,” Rosa says. “It needed a framework, a shared name.” She sits with her colleagues from the Kosmos team in a dressing room next to their office, high above the Upstairs Room. In her role as a marketer, she was asked to restore Paradiso’s identity as a cultural platform rather than simply a pop venue. The name Kosmos emerged as a unifying label, echoing the ‘Cosmic Relaxation Centre’ it once set out to be.

When people talk about Paradiso, the phrase ‘pop temple’ is never far behind.

Rosa: “Whenever an artist is mentioned, ‘pop temple’ seems to follow. When one of our programs, Knits and Tits in December 2024, received widespread attention, it challenged the way Paradiso was being labelled. That’s why I feel Kosmos is helping move us in the right direction.”

Sanne: “The term ‘pop temple’ dates back to the time when bands like The Rolling Stones performed here. And to be fair, we still work with a lot of musicians. Not only pop music, but plenty of genres for that matter. So it makes sense that we are mostly perceived as a music venue.”

Senna: “I always feel slightly irritated when people refer to Paradiso as a pop temple, because it gives the impression that music is what defines us. Music is, of course, a very prominent aspect, but that description misses a crucial part of our ethos: responding to cultural shifts, whether through music or through other artistic disciplines and media.”

Why is it essential, for Kosmos, to emphasise social programming as well as music?

Sanne: “I don’t think you can separate the two. Culture and music are deeply connected. When artists take a stance on particular issues, it resonates with people, especially younger audiences. They are worried about climate change, inequality, and developments in the United States. You can see it in the resurgence of punk and in the way young people are actively engaging. As a venue, we have to respond to this generation. First and foremost, you need to be there for young people.”

Why specifically younger audiences?

Sanne: “Young people are the audience of the future. As a venue, you need to stay relevant and in touch with the present. This may sound harsh, but older audiences do not usually set the tone. They have formed their preferences and tend to stick to them.”

How do you encourage young audiences to attend Kosmos programmes?

Sanne: “In many ways, it is simply about who you put on stage. If you programme Roxy Dekker, you draw in a younger audience. If you programme The Rolling Stones, the crowd tends to be older. Kosmos functions in the same way.”

As an example, Sanne mentions *Druk* (lit. ‘Print’), previously known as *Beurs van Bijzondere Uitgevers* (‘Fair for Independent Publishers’), the longest running programme at Paradiso, showcasing independent publishers from the Netherlands and Belgium. “We realised the audience was ageing. Simply changing the name or refreshing the branding is not enough, you have to innovate on a substantive level. In the recent edition, we included zine publishers for the first time, and you could immediately sense a younger audience engaging.”

Tamar: “It was great to hear publishers who have been involved for years say how wonderful it was to see such a young crowd this time.”

Kosmos also intends to strengthen the connection between Paradiso and the city. How connected do you currently feel to the city, and why is it important to work on that connection?

Rosa: “Before the pandemic, I think we had forgotten that Paradiso is meant to be a cultural venue for everyone. The spotlight was on the big names, and we became known for what we show on the main stage. Along the way, we lost sight of the fact that we began as a youth centre, rooted in and shaped by the city. Kosmos revives that idea by creating a platform for young makers and new initiatives. People can come to us with a small concept and use the venue as a space to grow. It brings us closer to our audience.”

An important part of this is creating an online community. What does that look like at this stage?

Senna: “Social media plays the most significant role. I see it as a way of raising awareness of Kosmos and increasing its

visibility. Rather than treating Instagram solely as a marketing tool, I want our page to function as a cultural hub in its own right.”

Rosa: “Exactly. We could have just posted a straightforward announcement that the *Korendagen* (‘Choir Days’) are coming up. Instead, Senna produced a video interview, including a conversation with the local Zeedijk Choir.”

Senna: “People are selective about what appears in their feed and tend to stay within their algorithm. I try to cut through their curated space and become part of someone’s everyday scrolling. There is certainly a general fatigue around advertising. People want authenticity, something that feels human. I think our approach aligns well with the Kosmos community.”

Now that these events have a name of their own, do you feel there is more room for them within Paradiso?

Sanne: “There are several factors at play. It depends on the size of the programming team and on how full the schedule is. If we believe in an idea, we look for a way to make it happen.”

Rosa: “I would say that over the past three years we’ve been rather steady with Kosmos. There is consistently more than one programme each month, and occasionally several events in one week. It fluctuates between around 30 and 60 events a year.”

Sanne: “Aside from that, I want to emphasise how important it is that we now have a shared framework for these events. It makes it much easier for everyone to explain this branch of Paradiso. And that is no small thing, because Kosmos spans

Druk: the annual book festival was expanded in 2025 with a special zone for zines on the balcony of Paradiso



Erotic Poetry Night: A recurring poetry program that celebrates eroticism in all its diversity



Erotic is an intimate game of arousal and power
in which people climb higher and higher over
each other, all aimed to reach that super-
ultimate blissful heaven."

a wide range of programmes. Thanks to Rosa, it now has a clear identity. The consistency lies not only in how often we programme, but also in the overarching concept that shapes how we organise.”

Prior to Kosmos, how did people refer to the non-music programming?

Sanne: “For quite some time it was referred to as ‘special programming’, which always felt like an odd description. It was also briefly known as *Ook Paradiso* (lit. ‘Also Paradiso’), but we discontinued this name as soon as I joined.”

How would you describe Kosmos in a single sentence?

Senna: “With friends, I just call it the non-concert side of Paradiso.”

Sanne: “I usually need to elaborate a little when I first describe it. At its core, it is non music programming, spanning art, science, literature and culture in the broadest sense. There is something adventurous and communal about it. We have a soft spot for the strange.”

Do you ever see overlap between Kosmos and Paradiso’s other programming?

Sanne: “Yes, definitely. At times we programme a band as part of a Kosmos event, and concerts can also include elements such as exhibitions. The programmers are in close contact. Ideally, I would like to see even more crossovers.”

What makes that your ideal scenario?

Sanne: “It means extending the Kosmos philosophy to the

wider programming. There is often more to explore than just the story of the artist on stage. A broader perspective of multiple voices helps bring us closer to our audience.”

How does a Kosmos programme typically take shape?

Sanne: “It really varies. For our event with the online youth platform De Marker, things moved very quickly. Elections were around the corner, and I wanted to engage with that moment. I had been following De Marker for a while, and Senna was instantly on board. In other cases, we develop programmes entirely in house. With *Druk*, for instance, we begin preparations roughly nine months in advance.”

Are you involved in the production from beginning to end?

Tamar: “In music programming, artists tend to bring a tour manager and a clear technical plan. Our Kosmos events do not have that built in support. That means that I oversee the production and makes sure everything comes together.

Sometimes it is quite a challenge. Early on, just two months into my role, we collaborated with Judy Young, a circus artist who organises cabaret evenings blending poetry and performance. She wanted to stage a circus act in the Main Hall, with a performer flying across the space. That really pushed me to explore the limits of what we could do. A year later, I can confidently say that Kosmos spans a large range of formats.”

Your events seem to engage with left wing or activist themes. Is that central to Kosmos?

Sanne: “I would not necessarily call it left wing, though there is definitely an activist element. The term left wing feels too simplistic to me. If Paradiso had to position itself politically,

it might sit somewhere on the left, but that does not mean we automatically open our doors to left wing parties. We have declined those requests as well. We are guided by values such as solidarity and equality, and today that is quickly labelled activism.”

Rosa: “I struggle with the idea that Paradiso is just a left-wing bastion. When we address topics such as climate change or the genocide in Gaza, we are engaging with issues that are socially significant. It is the political right that has decided that giving attention to them makes you left wing.”

Senna: “You see that spirit of solidarity in the staff at Paradiso. A diverse mix of personalities works here, and that is something we consciously aim to draw attract.”

Still, a programme with a strong activist focus is not going to appeal to everyone.

Sanne: “Facts are facts. Climate change is not a matter of opinion; it is taking place. People may disagree about the solutions, but we will not host programmes that question its reality. I do hope that those who vote for the PVV do not feel excluded here, they are welcome. However, we are not prepared to reshape our narrative simply to make them feel at ease.”

Rosa: “It is interesting that people assume we are a left-wing echo chamber that fuels polarisation, when we are actually trying to do the opposite, a space where people can engage in dialogue without dismissing the facts.”

Have you ever looked back at an event and thought: perhaps that one was a one-off?

Rosa: “There are times when a programme does not feel provocative or unique enough. In that case, it might just as well have taken place at any other cultural venue in Amsterdam, for example.”

Would you say Kosmos is still developing?

Rosa: “I suspect we will always be evolving. Right now, we are working on the next step: giving Kosmos a stronger physical presence. So not only online or within the venue, but also out in the open. It would be great if audiences recognised that they are attending a Kosmos programme, rather than simply visiting Paradiso.”

Senna: “We once spent five hours in a meeting debating what makes something a Kosmos programme and what values Kosmos should represent. I feel we have laid solid foundations.”

Rosa: “It really evolved organically. Other projects were launched with substantial budgets from the outset, and then it was simply a matter of seeing how they unfolded. I preferred to wait at least a year and let things take shape naturally. We are now seeing that allowing ourselves to experiment has been effective. In many ways, it reflects how Paradiso started.”



AT6 LIVE 2024: What happens when you invite the guys from AT6 (a Dutch podcast described as “the real sound of Amsterdam”) to the Main Hall of Paradiso? This. This is what happens.

De Marker: Live presentation of the BNNVARA podcast *Over Morgen* (lit. *About Tomorrow*), hosted by Gijs Sanders and David Breebaart of *De Marker*



CONTEXT

This text is one of the pilot studies of Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action. In these contributions we explore and reflect on artistic practices and experimental approaches in the cultural field that can engage and activate audiences and communities to address ecological, social, and political challenges. The pilot studies provide an overview of practices of cultural organisations that can serve as models, recipes, or tools for transformation for current and future generations of cultural workers and artists.

Re-Imagine Europe: New Perspectives for Action (2023–2027) is a four-year transnational co-creation and circulation project of fourteen interdisciplinary art organisations across Europe. The project aims to equip and empower young Europeans through artistic practices to better withstand societal challenges triggered by rapid climate change.

The Re-Imagine Europe partnership is a collaboration of:
Paradiso (NL), Sonic Acts (NL), Elevate Festival (AT), INA grm (FR), A4 (SK), Borealis (NO), KONTEJNER (HR), BEK (NO), RUPERT (LT), Disruption Network Lab (DE), Semibreve (PT), Parco Arte Vivente (IT), Kontrapunkt (MK) and Radio Web MACBA (ES).

BIOGRAPHIES

Tamar Bruls is the Creative Producer for Kosmos at Paradiso, overseeing the realisation of its cultural programming and contributing to key curatorial decisions. She is inspired by projects that challenge convention, embracing the unexpected, the contrarian and the socially engaged. Beyond Paradiso, she founded the Circusbende Festival and produces concerts and festivals at Het Groene Veld, a space dedicated to experimental and forward-thinking culture.

Rosa Cherim is Senior Marketing and Communications Specialist at Paradiso, leading the strategy and execution behind its arts and socially engaged programming. Since April 2023, these activities have been brought together under Kosmos, the sub label she helped to launch. Through Kosmos, she works to reposition Paradiso as a cultural

venue closely connected to the city and its communities. Her work centres on linking grassroots organisations, emerging initiatives and makers. She also researches the intersection of art, culture and nightlife, and curates the small museum, a tiny museum with big stories on Paradiso's façade.

Sanne Lohof works as a programmer at Paradiso, focusing on socially engaged and cultural projects. While some initiatives stem from her own concepts, most are developed in partnership with external collaborators. She is motivated by a wish to deepen understanding, foster connection and offer space to young creators and underrepresented voices. In addition to her role at Paradiso, she is Managing Director of the international hip hop dance festival Summer Dance Forever and holds supervisory positions with Imagine Film Festival and Stichting INC.

Senna van Ruiten works at Paradiso Amsterdam, where he is involved in developing

Kosmos as a cultural hub and in supporting communities and subcultures in Amsterdam. He also writes on culture, community and self-expression in both digital and physical spaces. Drawing on a background in media studies, he navigates pop culture, literature and social commentary with curiosity and a particular interest in what falls outside established frameworks. His work explores the relationship between sound and language, performance and authenticity, the individual and the collective.

Malou Hart (author) is a journalist at Het Parool, where she works as a news and arts reporter. She focuses primarily on current affairs in Amsterdam, with particular attention to developments in the art world, from increasing protest on festival stages to questions surrounding the artistic freedoms and constraints of graffiti artists. She previously wrote for the economics and national news desks at de Volkskrant.

AUTHOR	Malou Hart	re-imagine-europe.eu
CONTRIBUTORS	Tamar Bruls Rosa Cherim Sanne Lohof Senna van Ruiten	
PHOTOS	Courtesy of Paradiso	
TRANSLATION	Helena Julian	
PUBLICATION COORDINATION	Annette Wolfsberger	
GRAPHIC DESIGN	Henri Kutsar	
PUBLISHER	Paradiso Press 2026	
CC	Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0	

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Paradiso

