

Physics formulas on Leiden walls

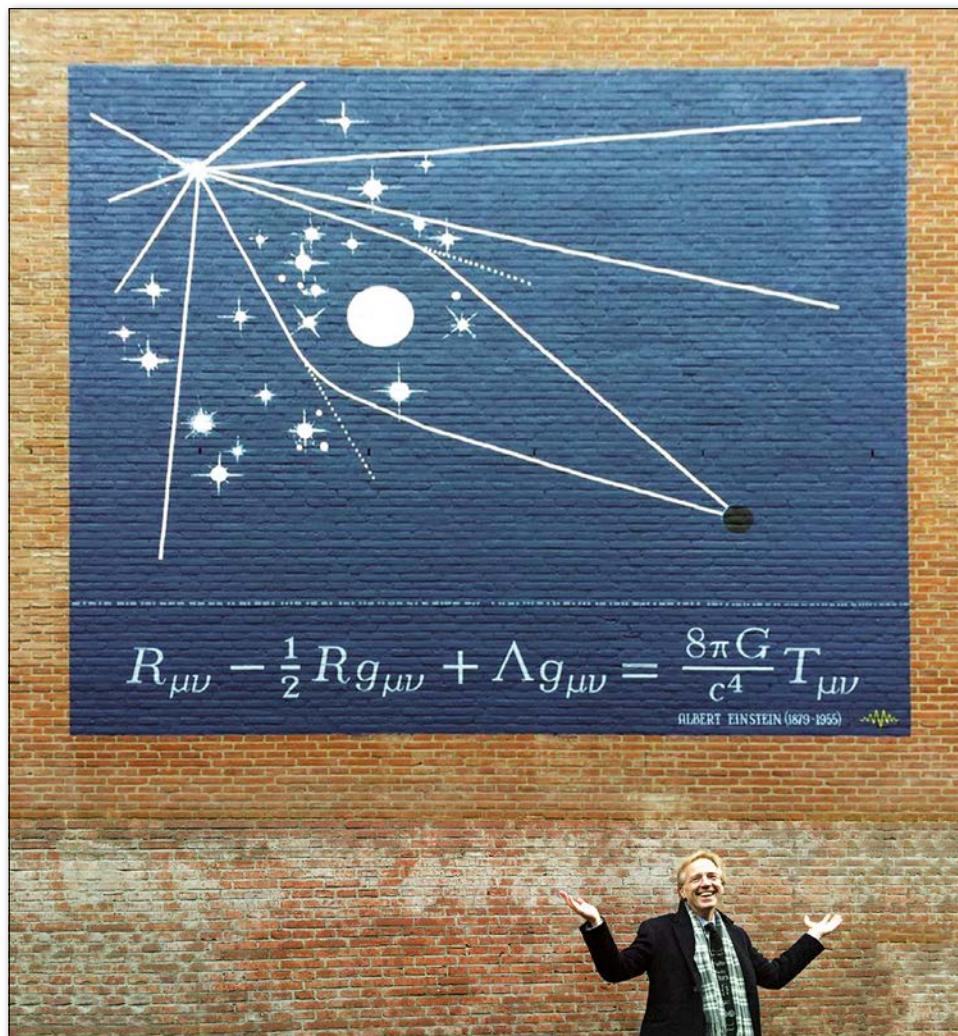
Since a couple of years visitors of the historical centre of Leiden in the Netherlands are treated to a cultural surprise. At several places in the city they can read a variety of poems in various languages, including Chinese and Russian, painted on walls.

This prompted physicists Sense Jan van der Molen and Ivo van Vulpen to propose a physics analogue. After all, Leiden is renowned for its science; think of people like Lorentz, Kamerlingh Onnes, Ehrenfest, Zeeman and Huygens, just to name a few. So why not put some key equations on the walls, and give the strollers some food for thought?

The idea was welcomed by the city and the university. The required funding was soon raised and before long the first wall formula was inaugurated on the 24th of November, 2015, by Robbert Dijkgraaf, professor at the University of Amsterdam and director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Since then two more formulas have been painted on Leiden houses, as can be seen in the pictures.

This is just a beginning. Ten more formulas are in the pipeline, all of which have some relation with Leiden physicists. Perhaps this will inspire colleagues in other countries to follow the example. Decorating your city and making a bit of publicity for physics at the same time never hurts. ■

Jo Hermans



▲ Einstein's field equation, unveiled by Robbert Dijkgraaf in 2015 on the wall of the Boerhaave Museum (courtesy Hielco Kuipers)



▲ Snell's law of refraction (courtesy Erik Arends)



▲ The Lorentz force on a charge in a magnetic and an electric field (courtesy Erik Arends)