

Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam

Report of the jury of the Drempelprijs Social Practices 2019

The 'Drempelprijs' is the 'award on the threshold' that since 1962 is being granted on behalf of the City of Rotterdam to the most promising graduates of the Willem de Kooning Academy. This award encourages these young talents to start their official careers as 'creating pioneers'. Over the past few years, there are three such awards, one for each of WdKA's graduation practices: Autonomous Practices, Commercial Practices, and Social Practices.

WdKA: Social Practices

The Willem de Kooning Academy defines Social Practices as artistic practices that impacts wicked societal or environmental issues. They are not only concerned with the aesthetics, the functionality and the conceptual meaning of their work, but also aim to (re-) design the encompassing social, economic or ecological systems and interactions in relation to political powers in a radical way.

The projects of WdKA Social Practices become direct interventions into society and politics that go beyond art as a means for conventional pedagogy and social work. They do not only visualize, aestheticize or serve social struggles in a subservient and docile way, but aim to innovate them in the true, radical sense of the word by redesigning underlying processes of design, production and interaction.

The Jury

This year's jury consists of:

- Alexandre Furtado Melville, self-taught art director, photographer, writer, designer, curator at Gemaal op Zuid and consultant at Studio Narrative. (chairman of the jury);
- Emiliano Gandolfi, cofounder of Cohabitation Strategies and Director of the Curry Stone Design Prize
- Tabo Goudswaard, artist, researcher and social designer. He manages Social Design Studio Goudswaard, which designs new ways of looking at social problems. Tabo was intendant of The Art of Impact
- Boo van der Vlist, Artistic researcher (RASL & independent practice) and lecturer at WdKA and Erasmus University Rotterdam (secretary without right of vote).

Criteria and procedure

The jury met on Thursday July 11 at the Blaak building of the Willem de Kooning Academy. The hallway and classrooms that are normally filled with students working or having coffee were transformed to a festive graduation exposition that would be opened and celebrated later that evening. Except for some final finishing touches that were made, all students looked ready to celebrate their final days at the Academy. In an atmosphere of healthy nerves and excitement, the jury saw and talked to all the candidates selected for the Drempelprijs. This selection was made in advance, by WdKA's teaching staff (department coordinators) according to the following criteria:

- The student has approached and resolved a specific problem statement in an innovative way.
- The student's graduation project serves as an inspiring example of the WdKA's vision for that particular practice.
- The student's graduation project has created opportunities for the student's further career. The project has the potential for further long-term development.
- The graduation project meets high standards of quality, on a theoretical level (research) as well as in terms of relevance, design and implementation of the project.
- The graduation project must have been evaluated by the education programme with a mark of at least 8.
- The student must have completed or must be completing his/her study in June or July of the given year.

This year the jury paid special attention to the potential of the students work for a future career and defined the term "innovative" further by focusing on the urgency of the issues addressed and the ability of a student to translate a critical position towards the issue and their own position within it to a valuable project. The jury saw and heard the presentations by a total of twelve nominees, in random order:

Sanne de Wit (Product Design), Alona van Rosmalen (Fine Art), Jodie Joossen (Spatial Design), Carlijn Bijlsma (Advertising), Nelleke van Lomwel (Advertising), Friso Jonker (Spatial Design), Esmee van der Horst (Fine Art & Design Teacher Training), Isa Gaastra (Illustration), Esther van Asselt (Graphic Design), Ambre Millies-Lacroix (Lifestyle Transformation Design) Jesler Muntendam (Lifestyle Transformation Design), Josine Slemmer & Lisanne Janssen (Fine Art & Design Teacher Training).

General impressions:

The jury was impressed by the high-quality projects of the nominees and the broad variety of disciplines on display. Most projects showed to have done thorough research as a foundation for their projects, in literature or more embedded strategies like interviews and workshops. The presentations were well-articulated and the overall future potential of this year's nominees was considered to be very high. The jury noticed that a lot of projects originated from personal stories and relationships, which was considered to be a strong quality. With obviously present intrinsic motivation or a personal relation to the issue addressed, the projects showed sincere curiosity and involvement. This is an important quality in social projects. The jury noticed that some graduates however were so heavily involved in the project itself, that they sometimes lost sight of the bigger social issue at hand. Their advice is to be even more in love with the social problem, instead of one's own role within it. This can help some projects to grow further.

The jury did not have an easy job to compare the high-quality projects that were very different from each other in both nature and issues addressed. The variation ranged from nominees doing material research to find more sustainable options for products like jewelry and street tiles to students that based their work on embodied or personal experiences and found ways to create awareness and behavioral change in written word, video or design. The jury saw great potential in the projects shown and was impressed by the detailed plans for further steps, future implementation and collaborations with external stakeholders. This is a strong quality in most projects, which makes the jury confident that these projects will continue to grow and will be the starting point of long-lasting creative careers with a positive impact in society.

The jury wants to thank all candidates for sharing their stories and projects that inspired and touched the jury deeply. In the end, our discussions focused on three candidates: Sanne de Wit, Nelleke van Lomwel and Alona van Rosmalen.

Sanne de Wit (Product Design)

Sanne de Wit grew up in an environment where obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) played a major role. From her own misunderstanding and curiosity about what this disorder means for the person itself, she started a research into the experiences of people that struggle with OCD. She did several in depth interviews with different people that constantly have compulsive thoughts. By capturing their stories in a tangible visual and audio installation, the viewer gets familiar with the deepest thoughts and obsessions in a beautiful open way without judgement.

The jury was impressed by the visual storytelling qualities that Sanne showed in a very detailed and capturing installation that was self-explanatory. The strength of Sanne is how she is able to translate something that is difficult to grasp and enrich our perception with a appealing visual language. Sanne shows to be very well capable to dive into the skin of someone else by truly listening and taking a co-creation approach. These are very important skills in a social practice.

The online platform that accompanied Sanne's analogue installation gives perspective for the continuation of her work within the field of OCD and through a medium with a bigger range. The jury however also sees her qualities to be used on other diseases as well and would like to encourage Sanne to explore these routes.

Nelleke van Lomwel (Advertising)

In her work *Under The Influence*, Nelleke van Lomwel tries to dismantle the underlying power structures of our country's favorite addiction: alcohol. Nelleke grew up with an alcoholic father and knows from experience that alcoholism can take many forms that can be easily hidden in our society. Alcoholism often doesn't appear in the stereotypical image we have of it. After her father passed away, Nelleke was left wondering how it is possible that within our Dutch culture drinking alcohol is the norm. In her project

Nelleke questions this norm and tries to dismantle how it is possible that this norm is being transferred over generations.

By building a wooden bar for children which she uses as an interview tool to engage with people on the street, she visualizes how the alcohol industry infantilizes the consumer. She wants to show how society is kept in ignorance about the scope of the problem. Nelleke plays an important role in her own project, since the conversations she has at her wooden bar often start as jolly chit chat. By being open about her own past with her father the conversation shifts and reveals an honest and inconvenient truth. The gimmicky looking wooden bar gets an entire new meaning in which the re-appropriation of the Heineken image is smartly done.

The issue Nelleke is addressing is very urgent and is one that maybe often is not, but *should* be, on our minds. It will be a big issue for the coming years and by grabbing this topic with a personal urgency and activist attitude she could be agenda-setting with her project. The jury is confident that with her advertising background Nelleke can set up a bigger campaign, which she plans to do in the form of a documentary.

Alona van Rosmalen (Fine Arts)

Alona van Rosmalen cannot be missed at the Graduation Show of 2019. The pink flowery altar-like sculpture that says "Miss Holy Mestiza" and has a big reclining body without a head in front of it, intrigues. The work cannot be fully read without the embodied presence of Alona there. Dressed with a similar lace of the sculpture and with flowers in her hair, Alona presents herself as a hostess. She hosts you through her embodied experience at the art academy, which has not always been the easiest road. In a modest body posture, Alona has a powerful presence and convincing story that shows strength and convinces the jury. In some ways with a pleasant and urgent discomfort.

Complaint 'Body of knowledge' is a research project about context awareness in the Art Academy, in which Alona -a student of colour- creates, views and puts her work in place. Alona's work is grounded on a solid theoretical research and puts her body of knowledge on the forefront to understand and expose the inequalities of our society. Through her work Alona is searching ways in which the learning environment can become a safe space for expression for all students. She is addressing an oppression that is undermining our society and exposing a "white innocence" that is rarely addressed in our academic institutions and in our institutions at large.

Alona hopes that by using herself as a case study she can *"give new insights into how we can take the double consciousness into consideration when dealing with students of color, or any other student who are part of a minority group within the Willem de Kooning Academy. This problem is bigger than me and I hope that my research can be used as a learning tool for us all."*

The jury is convinced that Complaint "Body of Knowledge" is the beginning of a bigger body of knowledge that should continue to grow on this topic. Alona envisions this in the form of a publishing house. Her work is an inspiring example for the WdKA and in general for academic institutions on how to deal with and integrate different cultural backgrounds and different opinions. In order to become a more loyal representation of society and of the possibility of building a more just society.

Conclusion

That is why, after thorough and constructive debate, the jury was unanimous in her decision to grant the Drepelprijs Social Practices 2019 to Alona van Rosmalen.