

Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam

Report of the jury of the Drempelprijs Social Practices 2017 (GV, 170630)

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 Willem de Kooning Academy on the threshold of their careers as 'creating pioneers'. Over the past few years, there are three such awards, one for each of WdKA's graduating practices: Autonomous Practices, Commercial Practices, and Social Practices.

WdKA: Social Practices

WdKA defines her Social Practices as "artistic practices focused on enhancing the quality of life of individuals or groups within society, by raising their awareness, educating them, or contributing to their sense of identity. In other words: helping people to improve themselves in their relationship with their surroundings. Here, the social engagement of the artist, teacher or designer takes precedence over his/her personal expression. Through engagement with image and design, individuals or groups are shown new ways of perceiving their own world, and of finding their own place within this world."¹

In addition, Mrs. Iris Schutte (coordinator of WdKA's Social Practices) places the focus of Social Practices "[...] on art and design that aim to impact complex social issues by (re-)designing processes and relationships. Our world, our society, now seems to be changing more rapidly, more broadly and also more intensely than ever before, confronting us with systemic changes occurring simultaneously in different fields and disciplines and on different levels of scale. Social practitioners explicitly choose to personally experience these systemic changes, to examine and question them, to invent or help devise means of expressing them. They do all this, not from the perspective of the maker or the market, but of the context. This is where they conduct their embedded research and experiments, and also where they present their work to the public."²

The jury

This year's jury consists of:

- Mrs. Yu-Lan van Alphen, Programme Manager Culture & Social Design at 'DOEN' Foundation that aims to connect arts and society, encouraging artists and designers to reframe relevant social issues; founding partner of biennial 'New Material Award' (chairwoman of the jury)
- Mrs. Sabrina Lindemann, 'urban catalyzer' at OpTrek, the Hague where she works as game changer in the redevelopment of the former Binckhorst industrial area, aiming to interactively include citizens into the planning process by urban planners and commercial developers;
- Mrs. Anne van der Zwaag, owner-director of design fair 'OBJECT' and of 'BIG ART'; author of 'Looks good, feels good, is good' (2014); also serves on jury of HKU-Award, Utrecht;
- Mr. Guus Vreeburg, art historian at WdKA (secretary without right of vote).

Criteria and procedure

The jury met on Thursday June 29, 2017 at WdKA that was in full swing to finish the final details of its Graduation Show at its Blaak 10 and Wijnhaven 61 buildings. In advance, WdKA's teaching staff (department coordinators and the coordinator of the Social Practices) had selected twelve candidates for the longlist, according to the following criteria:

- the issue/theme of the student's graduation project has been elaborated in an innovative way;
- the student's graduation project is a fine example of what WdKA intends with its Social Practices;
- through her/his project, the student has created professional chances and opportunities after having graduated; in essence the project has fine potentials of being continued in the long run;
- the project has overall excellent qualities (theoretical framework, research, relevance, visual aspects, final execution and finish).

In addition to this, the jury explicitly decided to place emphasis to the degree in which projects are just informative of urgent contemporary issues, or have the potential to clearly contribute to systemic changes.

The jury saw and heard presentations by a total of twelve nominees, nine of them female. In alphabetical order: Kaoutar Gadir (Advertising), Charlotte Jansen (Fashion Design), Funs Janssen (Illustration), Jamie de Jonge (Animation Design), Folkert Koelewijn (Photography), Joran Koster (Fine Art and Teacher Training), Elise Marcus (Lifestyle Design), Astrid Martirosian (Animation Design), Lianne Meester (Product Design), Lisa Reith (Lifestyle Design), Mijke Star (Fine Art and

¹ from: <https://1417.mywdka.nl/profielen/social-practice/>

² from: <http://beyond-social.org/wiki/>; more info at <https://www.wdka.nl/practices/social-practices/>

Teacher Training) and Charlotte Stijns (Fine Art and Teacher Training). The jury wants to congratulate all of you with your nominations!

General impressions

The members of the jury were impressed by all projects shown. Presentations were well prepared – both materially and textually: well formulated, enthusiastic, self-convinced and convincing. The projects' subject matter is always urgent and relevant to contemporary and future social issues. They show a broad range of themes: from cultural identity and social inclusion and exclusion, critical analysis of present day communication structures, personal and group emancipation, cultural diversity, gender issues, durability and the environment, all the way to innovative approaches to education and learning. Profound research has provided a thorough basis to the projects. Candidates show an eagerness to experiment with and adopt novel techniques and materials. These often go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and lead to interdisciplinary collaborations, often including relevant external social partners. We saw some projects that have been executed beautifully and originally – ready for exhibition! In many cases, candidates express clear and relevant ideas on how to carry their projects and/or themselves into the future, clearly defining limitations as well as potentials. Thus, the jury met with a whole range of designers of impressive quality. We felt inspired in meeting these new fellow creating pioneers. In the end, our discussions focussed on three candidates.

Joran Koster (Fine Art and Teacher Training) – “Vertelkunst voor de Internationale Schakelklas”.

After having completed a BA Graphic Design and having established himself as a designer both locally as well as internationally, Joran took WdKA's part time Art&Design Teacher Training. For his graduation here he developed a tool kit to be used in educating migrants and refugees the principles of Dutch culture and society as well as its language. The method makes use of 'telling stories', defining it as an art form that is familiar to many newcomers. A relevant approach to an urgent issue: it may free newcomers from their isolated position here. Joran designed a manual that contains various educational scenarios that combine a variety of educational and situational settings, each indicated by appropriate pictograms. The manual, after having been extensively tested in collaboration with several Rotterdam schools and the *Verhalenhuis Belvédère*, has now been published under a Creative Commons license, so that anyone may use and possibly modify it. Joran wants the method now to be opened up, instead of it being its inventor's monopoly. The project seems very mature and well advanced: may be even well beyond the *threshold...* www.jorankoster.com/

The next two projects we want to discuss are by candidates of Lifestyle Design. Over the past few years, this course is taking a new direction, into *lifestyles transformation design*; and even though the two nominees have still studied under the old regime, this new game changing ambition is clearly visible in their projects:

Lisa Reith (Lifestyle Design) – ‘Authoritative by Design’

Lisa researched the ways by which the ones 'behind the scenes' are manipulating information on the Internet – it's not at all neutral! – and how users perceive the authority or trustworthiness of these platforms under the influence of how these are designed. A very urgent issue indeed, in these times of fake data and fake news... Over the past period, Lisa has coherently and consequently focussed all her student activities (electives, internship, etcetera) to this issue, thus providing her project with a profundity that is rarely seen. It is obvious that Lisa has made huge steps at WdKA, arriving here from vocational training. She published her research and her findings on a website (www.authoritativebydesign.com), presenting them to us in very precisely formulated wordings that are proof of a thorough theoretical framework and very articulate, yet enthusiastic and self-confident. Thus, she makes us – and definitely other audiences as well – aware of the intricacies of her subject matter. Lisa plans to continue studying: Sociology at Goldsmith's in London, "because it combines humanities and art school". However, from her visual material, nor from her presentation, we could clearly deduct who exactly the research project and its findings are aimed at: is it about informing and creating awareness with website consumers, or might these findings on the other hand wind up in the hands of e-commerce entrepreneurs? Whose game are you changing?"

Elise Marcus (Lifestyle Design) – ‘Mother Earth Network’

Elise surprised us with a 3D-installation that demonstrates her 'Mother Earth Network' in which she invites citizens to upload all sorts of data sets on all aspects of nature and planet earth at large into a digital network. This radical project – it might deserve a more radical title ... – aims at generating understanding of and empathy with the planet, as well as having people thereby change to more sustainable lifestyles. For her project, Elise herself has already collected many existing data, collaborating with professional organisations in the Netherlands and abroad. She discussed with psychologists and philosophers. To visualize her findings and make them available to global audiences, she familiarized herself with programming that is not common at WdKA. Thus she makes existing data more readily available, and she enables her users to more easily upload new information. The project breathes a radical imagination that gives it great potential to contribute to actual systemic changes. www.elisemarcus.com

Conclusion

That's why, after thorough and constructive debate, the jury was unanimous in her decision to grant the Drempelprijs Social Practices 2017 to...: Elise Marcus.