



Jury Report Prix de Rome Visual Arts 2017

The jury knew from the moment in April when they selected Melanie Bonajo, Rana Hamadeh, Saskia Noor van Imhoff and Katarina Zdjelar as the four nominees for the Prix de Rome Visual Arts 2017 that, given the strength of the candidates, it was going to be a difficult choice. The artists, to their credit, fulfilled that expectation. They are all greatly ambitious and the quality of the work they made for the Prix de Rome is very high. The jury is impressed by what they have achieved during the work period and by the way they have taken their art out of the studio environment and created it in different work forms and collaborations.

All finalists distinguish themselves by their use of a personal visual language and medium; all of them have been able to develop these further. The artists are so evenly matched that, to a visitor unfamiliar with its realization, the exhibition may even come across as a carefully composed group exhibition with four complementary presentations. One of the jurors feels this also has something to do with the fact that these artists represent a generation that grew up in to 1990s. They have witnessed the collapse of political systems and the emergence of global problems including climate change, international migration and other consequences of colonial history. To a greater or lesser extent, the core of their work appears to be fuelled by this knowledge. Together, the finalists open four different doors to four different artistic practices and four different worlds. They all create their own conditions for making their work.

Melanie Bonajo's art stands out because of the catching way it communicates. The jury appreciates the openness of her work and how she shares her perspective of the world and the threats it poses to vulnerable groups. The disarming storytelling that is part of her work is irresistible. Bonajo is an artist that speaks the language of the audience and relates to spectators in an open manner. She does so agilely. In an attractive presentation, she addresses important topics in a casual tone. Despite this casualness the jury is fully convinced of the sincerity of Bonajo's argument about the future of the earth and our distorted relationship with nature. Interestingly, she tells her story through the eyes of the youngest generation and her film develops through interviews with children into a directed climax in which children take over power. The feature film she made for the Prix de Rome will not only appeal to a museum audience, but to other platforms as well.

Rana Hamadeh left the jury with the impression they had witnessed an important moment in her artistic practice. Whereas she previously operated as a scientist, historian or activist who reported on her research in lectures and performances, in her new opera project she adamantly chooses the position of visual artist. And by targeting her audience in this – even poetic – way, she creates a poignant presentation in which the visitor is overwhelmed by sound, technology and text in a theatrical setting that is in keeping with the subjects she addresses. The jury is impressed by her far-reaching ambitions and commitment. Her interpretation of the past and the intelligence with which she deconstructs and rearranges it is topical and important.

Of the four nominees, Saskia Noor van Imhoff has best challenged the exhibition space and responded to its architectural conditions. This is of course part of her work, but it shows flexibility as well. She is also the only one to study the autonomy of art and address the

supposed rules and the structures of the art institute. She does so intelligently. She controls the architecture, the gallery lights and the walls; they become part of her work. Objects are sometimes recognizable, sometimes unapproachable and unreadable. How is the work created and how is the game played? Her art is layered and the intuitive way in which Van Imhoff presents the objects challenges the audience to think about where they are. Interestingly, Van Imhoff used the Prix de Rome as an opportunity to take a next step in her work and further develop herself. The jury cannot wait to see how she will continue to strike out upon this new path.

Katarina Zdjelar also breaks new ground with the work she made for the Prix de Rome. For the first time she added spatial interventions by applying woodcuts in the floor. Her arrangement of projection screens forces the visitors to move through space as if in a choreography. The jury sees the fact that this situation does not include a position from which there is an overview as a metaphor for the hectic times in which we live and for the lack of overview of the reality in which we find ourselves. The jury appreciates the intimacy and concentration that Zdjelar's film installation evokes, for example by zooming in on the hands of her performers. The artistic encounters between her characters have been reduced to poetic close-ups that call attention to that which is absent. All the elements in her work radiate love for the artists she has gathered for this project as well as for artists from the past to whom she feels connected.

The jury believes that all of the finalists are in search of an answer to the same question: How to act in a meaningful and socially engaged manner? They all do so in their own way: poetic, confrontational, intuitive and autonomous. The jury unanimously selected an artist who creates her own language and dissects and re-arranges history and gives it a voice. The theme that lies at the basis of this work is urgent: the need to become aware of the missing voice in testimonies and the ways in which the elimination of voices determines the view of our past. In an overwhelming, cacophonous installation she sweeps the audience into a penetrating epic full of intense experiences.

The winner of the Prix de Rome 2017 is Rana Hamadeh!

The jury of the Prix de Rome 2017 consists of:
Ferran Barenblit (director MACBA)
Mariette Dölle (director Museum Kranenburgh)
Folkert de Jong (visual artist)
Petra Noordkamp (visual artist)
Francesco Stocchi (curator Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen)
Birgit Donker, chair (director Mondriaan Fund)

Written by Mirjam Beerman (coordinator Prix de Rome)