



Jury Report Prix de Rome Architecture 2018

In selecting the shortlist for the Prix de Rome Architecture 2018, the jury evaluated the plans submitted by 66 candidates for the Low Pressure assignment in East Groningen. Criteria that weighed heavily in that evaluation process included an innovative approach, the spatial quality of the intervention, a radical, unexpected or surprising design, and the further potential of the development. The jury was also looking for candidates who had made a serious study of the area and suggested spatial solutions that chimed with the analyses and ideas they had formulated. Other criteria were the plans' relevance for the area and whether they might act as a catalyst. Had the candidates used their imagination? Or did they proffer new conceptual models? After careful deliberation, the jury selected four candidates who possess these qualities and made the jury curious to see what they would come up with for the High Pressure area chosen for the final round: the Sixhaven area in Amsterdam.

After studying the plans submitted by the shortlist nominees – Alessandra Covini, Bram van Kaathoven, Katarzyna Nowak and the duo Rademacher de Vries – the jury feels fully justified in its choice of these candidates. All four responded in a thought-provoking way to the jury's fictional commission to devise a proposal for an area as yet untouched by urban development. Each of their plans is persuasive in its own way. It is obvious that the candidates have spent the past months working enthusiastically and intensively on their projects. As well as fulfilling the aforementioned criteria, all four have seized the opportunity to experiment and to think outside the box. That independent spirit, which is wholly in the tradition of the Prix de Rome, is warmly welcomed by the jury. Moreover, they all succeeded in underpinning their design with a strong narrative. The degree to which these narratives played a role in the eventual design varies. Below, in no particular order, the jury's findings.

David Rademacher and Christopher de Vries took a hypothetical future as the starting point for their project, *Foundations*. They developed a fictional narrative around a vision of the future in which a new stock market crash halts not just economic growth in general, but also the construction of a mega tower planned for Sixhaven. The bare foundations of this imagined Sixtower are leased to a wide range of groups all of whom lay claim to their own space. The design arising from this scenario reminds the jury of a film set. The jury regards it as an interesting thought experiment to develop a plan based on a dystopian vision of the future and in so doing to ponder the question of what kind of future actually awaits the city of Amsterdam. Also interesting is their plea to retain the *erfpacht* system and to apply it even more rigorously in urban development. By the same token, the jury feels that their plan would have been even stronger if they had extended their narrative thread into the actual design process and started by designing the imaginary Sixtower before immersing themselves in the foundations. Nevertheless, the jury appreciates the radical quality of the narrative that underpins their equally radical design.

Empty spaces also play a key role in Katarzyna Nowak's *Vrijhaven* plan, resulting in a conceptual proposal in which the development of public space takes precedence over the urban development of the area. Nowak is less concerned by how the empty space is subsequently filled in, so long as that free space is guaranteed. The jury is very impressed by the five empty spaces Nowak conceived for the Sixhaven area. The forms she proposes are splendid and demonstrate that Nowak has the ability to create strong, three-dimensional spaces based on models. The jury can easily imagine the vaulted form Nowak placed beside the IJ becoming a favourite spot in Amsterdam. The jury is also charmed by Nowak's intuitive and experimental approach, which is readily apparent in her models, a work practice that is in the tradition of previous Prix de Rome candidates. The jury has no doubt that Nowak will find her way in the architectural world and looks forward to following her progress.

Bram van Kaathoven surprised the jury with a hefty tome containing the theoretically underpinnings of his *New Atlantis* plan, which proposes encircling the empty space of the Sixhaven area with a single

continuous building. His analyses are exceptionally precise and so compelling as to be irresistible; every objection that arises while reading has already been anticipated and addressed by Van Kaathoven. In his Sixhaven proposal, as in his first-round entry, he reacts critically to the assumptions formulated by the jury in its assignment. Beguiled by this self-assertiveness, the jury sees Van Kaathoven as an architectural provocateur who, before he starts designing, asks himself whether building is in fact the solution. The jury is impressed by his intelligent analyses and the highly consistent way in which he develops his plan and succeeds in raising it to a high level. An outstanding achievement, especially in view of his young age. Accordingly, the jury is pleased to award Bram van Kaathoven an honourable mention and looks forward to the moment when his designs achieve the same richness as his analyses.

Alessandra Covini's plan, *Amsterdam Allegories*, is a proposal that turns Sixhaven into a walled harbour in which twenty-one islands provide space for passing visitors. In addition, Covini sketches scenarios in which the islands drift around the city. Each island refers to specific characteristics and typologies of the city and harbour of Amsterdam. By enclosing the islands, Covini adds a new typology. The result is a refreshing plan that proposes new forms of public space that sparkle with pleasure, positive energy and humour. Covini has a captivating way of depicting what the end result will look like, whereby the models play a key role. The jury thinks that the islands are liable to prove so attractive that the question is whether they can provide enough space to accommodate that success. Covini can be forgiven for the rather too literal ideas behind some of the islands because they nonetheless suit the atmosphere and identity of Amsterdam. The jury is also very impressed by the way Covini works directly in the third dimension and manages to transform materiality into architecture. Moreover, this proposal, in which she transposes her ideas into a larger scale, represents an interesting step in her development. It is this development, in combination with the refreshing energy of her proposal, that led the jury to unanimously declare Alessandra Covini the winner of the Prix de Rome Architecture 2018.

The jury of the Prix de Rome 2018 consists of:

Mels Crouwel (architect/founding partner Benthem Crouwel Architects)

Frank Havermans (founder/artist/designer Studio Frank Havermans)

Afaina de Jong (architect/founder AFARAI)

Oana Rades (owner/architect Shift architecture urbanism)

Ronald Rietveld (architect/founder RAAAF, winner Prix de Rome 2006)

Peter Cachola Schmal (director Deutsches Architekturmuseum)

Chair of the first round was Birgit Donker (director Mondriaan Fund), chair of the second round was Mels Crouwel

Written by Mirjam Beerman (coordinator Prix de Rome)