



PRIX DE ROME

**30 NOVEMBER 2021**  
**JURY REPORT PRIX DE ROME 2021**

*Written by Sophia Zürcher*

The pandemic, diversity, feminism, the future, technology. The four nominees for the Prix de Rome 2021, Mercedes Azpilicueta, Alexis Blake, Silvia Martes and Coralie Vogelaar, reflect upon the present time. The jury appreciates the finalists' empathy in this regard; a sensitivity to the social, political and technological matters at stake.

The many collaborations are remarkable; with dancers, singers, workshops, actors, sound designers, archivists etc. The finalists convincingly demonstrate the power of cooperative networks. These artists work in a multidisciplinary way and know how to surround themselves with the right experts and people to create meaningful works of art.

What is more, a great deal of attention is paid to craftsmanship; all the possibilities of dramaturgy, the loom, technology or story telling are fully exploited. The jury does, however, note a tendency on the part of all finalists to add (too) many layers to their work, which does not always contribute to the work's power. The artists have nonetheless put huge effort into their installations. This has led to an exhibition wonderful to wander through, as one of the jury members put it.

**Mercedes Azpilicueta**

The jury considers *Potatoes, Riots and Other Imaginaries* by **Mercedes Azpilicueta** a splendid installation. Tapestries and wall hangings are currently in vogue in contemporary art, and yet Mercedes Azpilicueta is able to give this a highly original twist. With an approach originating in a tradition of protest, she applies an almost punky collage technique to a Jacquard-woven tapestry. The jury is impressed with the intricate palette.

While the project's point of departure is quite characteristic of the city where she now lives, the ideas she presents about the position of women in society and about labour have a universal relevance. In a charming and humorous way, Azpilicueta links her departure point – the Potato Riots (1917) in Amsterdam – with global and personal histories. She carried out extensive archival research to this end, working closely with, among others, the Jordaanmuseum, which is housed in a care home. In addition to archival material concerning housekeeping, 'coffee sorters' and 'factory girls', she incorporated personal photographs of the women's protest movement #NiUnaMenos in Latin America and her own family pictures in the collage.

The tapestry is not restricted to a single story line, but offers viewers several points of entry. The jury is enthusiastic about Azpilicueta's way of showing it is all right to treat histories with a bit of audacity, a 'plastic' approach, as she herself puts it.

The tapestry is set up like a stage set, combined with white garments surrounding it like costumes, and a soundscape of nattering and the sounds of sewing machines, zips, Velcro or texting. The jury is particularly impressed by the sculptural presence of the tapestry, which is draped on one side as if history is deconstructing itself. The jury is curious to see how this project will develop further.



PRIX DE ROME

## **Alexis Blake**

Since the performance *Rock to jolt [ ] stagger to ash* by **Alexis Blake** will only be staged four times, the jury regrets it will not be possible for all visitors to the museum to experience a performance they found incredibly expressive.

Blake immersed herself in lamentation as an expression of mourning, a topical subject, for the pandemic has caused people to suffer great losses. The artist studied the lament from a feminist perspective as a means of protest. This took her all the way back to antiquity, when the lament was forbidden as a form of art. Silencing is a form of repression – of the voice, but also of the emotions.

Blake studied various periods in history, for forms and customs leading to bodily expression – because that is what a lament does; it brings out, without censorship, what is inside. How people do this is determined by gender, race, socio-economic situation, sexuality and other influences Blake is able to harmoniously bring together in classic dramaturgy, exceptionally staged.

In addition to the performance, Blake also organized an exhibition room with the smell of decay. In this room, meant to invoke reflection, visitors can pick up a tabloid with background information. The jury, however, much prefers the overwhelming emotional power of the performance in the staircase over the empty exhibition room. It is crucial that Blake's performance can be physically felt as well as intellectually understood. The performance shows how effectively Blake commands the principles of conveying of emotion. Moreover, she is able to fully exploit the resonant space of the staircase, and thus takes her place in a tradition of artists who have made this monumental staircase their own.

## **Silvia Martes**

**Silvia Martes** captures the contemporary zeitgeist par excellence. Her film *To Confirm That You Are Not a Robot, Place a Check in the Box Next to "I'm Not a Robot"* represents the most immediate response to the ethical dilemmas and problems COVID-19 confronts us with.

Her Afrofuturistic film is set a hundred years in the future, in 2121, when one of the protagonists, called Silvia, has been given eternal life by a vaccination error. She is the last person on earth. She does not have any surviving friends, but occasionally arranges to meet a non-binary robot who is burdened with feelings of guilt about the destruction technology has caused in people's lives. In this dystopia, an oracle and various archival matter about, among other things, mourning, hallucinations and waves returning, appear. She incorporates aspects intrinsically connected to research into her roots and the colonial history of the Netherlands.

Martes does everything herself; she sets the stage, and shoots and edits her films. She works with neither a production plan nor storyboard, but has an idea and develops it intuitively, resulting in a free film. The members of the jury were especially moved by the opening scenes, in which Martes directly shows her relatives. The jury is impressed with the



PRIX DE ROME

visual style of the fictive scenes Martes recorded herself, and recognizes a great scenographer in her.

The jury appreciates how Martes tries to get to the heart of this age and capture its ambiguous ethical intricacy with her polemical film.

### **Coralie Vogelaar**

In **Coralie Vogelaar's** interactive sound installation *Interpersonal Biofeedback Apparatus Encoding Cardiac Fluctuations*, three participants can take part and register their heartbeat with sensors. Contrary to the popular wearables, which omit a lot of information, the exact variations in the heartbeat become visible. It makes you aware of what usually happens inside your body without your realizing it.

Those heartbeats and intervals generate sound; a tapping or scraping on the ceramic elements of the installation, or the squeaking of polystyrene foam, for example. The ceramic sculptures, derived from the parts of a human heart, are placed in a clinical laboratory – including the bright light typical of medical practice.

Vogelaar has exceptional command of her techniques and the jury describes her installation as conceptually convincing. The jury appreciates her ability to bring together people with different expertise, from the staff of Sundaymorning@ekwc to the sensor expert.

Many interactive works are completely at the service of people; Vogelaar's installation, however, sometimes makes sounds on its own, like an independent organism with which you can literally connect by placing a sensor on your earlobe. The jury recognizes a poetic gesture in Vogelaar's technology: Vogelaar links the hearts of three museum visitors who may not know each other or talk with each other, but can see and hear each other's heartbeat, and produce sounds together.

### **Result**

The members of the jury greatly appreciate all of the presentations. The jury has decided to award the Prix de Rome 2021 to Alexis Blake because of her flawless performance in the staircase of the museum. Moreover, the jury wants to put in a plea for the wider distribution of the recording of the performance, or parts of it, so it can penetrate other spaces and minds. The jury was impressed by the performance, worked out to the smallest detail, moving and memorable.

### **Jury**

Ann Demeester

Amira Gad

Antonio Jose Guzman

Samuel Leuenberger

Viviane Sassen

Chair with no voting rights: Eelco van der Lingen