

NN Group Art Award 2019

Jury report



7-10 FEBRUARY
ART
ROTTERDAM
2019

A total of 32 gallery owners have nominated artists and submitted documentation material for the third edition of the NN Group Art Award at Art Rotterdam. As in previous years, the entries were all of very high quality.

The foremost assessment criteria are:

- A completed art education at a Dutch academy
- High-quality work (an interesting artistic position and an adequate technical execution)
- Authenticity and innovation (a unique visual style with new perspectives)

All art techniques are eligible for the NN Group Art award.

Jury

Every year, the jury consists of a museum curator, an art journalist, an artist or collector and the curator of the NN Group art collection. This year, the jury comprised:

- **Eelco van der Lingen**
(conservator Fries Museum and incoming director Mondriaan Fund)
- **Liesbeth Willems**
(curator KRC art collection)
- **Lieneke Hulshof**
(editor in chief Mister Motley magazine)
- **Marcel van Eeden**
(visual artist)
- **Els Drummen**
(curator NN Group art collection).

The jury reviewed all 32 submissions from the gallery owners. The entries include extensive resumes, images, videos and background information. The nominated artists are, for the most part, distinctive within the Dutch art milieu. The jury greatly appreciates the gallery owners who dare to take a strong stand for artists who make a radical and innovative contribution to this milieu.

Nominees

The four nominees for the NN Group Art Award 2019 are:

- **Matea Bakula** - Lumen Travo Gallery
- **Harm van den Dorpel** - Upstream Gallery
- **Katja Mater** - Galerie Martin van Zomeren
- **Femmy Otten** - Galerie Fons Welters

The four artists have followed various art courses and/or postdocs in the Netherlands. The stage of each artist's career ranges from young talent to mid-career.

The nominees also have things in common. They each create their own original experiences, in which little attention is paid to prevailing, popular, outside opinions. No matter what the circumstances, they continue to build that world through a strong focus on material research and daring experimentation with techniques.

The artists respond to, among other things, our online society, the freedom of movement of material, mythology from various cultures, and concepts such as time and space. In addition, they each work with various media: from videos, photography and paintings to sculptures and multimedia installations.

Matea Bakula

(1990, Sarajevo), lives and works in Utrecht
HKU Utrecht (grad. 2013)
Lumen Travo Gallery (stand 76)

Matea Bakula is the youngest nominated artist. She makes sculptures from synthetic PU Foam, plaster and natural materials like beeswax. There is an exciting juxtaposition in her work between the polished surface and the interior of a sculpture. Like a true alchemist, Bakula examines the various layers of the material and makes them visible. In this way, she exposes the multiple faces of the material and questions the expectations for their use. According to the jury, an exciting and strong element. What is about to happen? Is what we see heavy or light, static or flexible? Viewers feel compelled to reach out and touch the sculptures.

Bakula fled with her family in 1994 from Bosnia-Herzegovina. She still returns regularly. Last year, she visited her hometown of Sarajevo and was fascinated by the contradictions between the destroyed post-war buildings and completely new houses. This fascination seems to be visible in Bakula's material process.

In addition, the jury sees in her work a connection with typical Dutch sculpture tradition. We see constructivist tight forms, as we know from the sculptor Carel Visser. Bakula, however, peels the skin of her material even further, and seeks out sculptural boundaries to arrive at what she calls the 'intermediate stage'. The moment between 'something is about to happen' and 'something already happened'. Her sculptures thus provide a moment when time stands still. The stillness between standing up tall and collapsing under the pressure, between gluing and tearing. The tension between staying together or breaking apart.

Lumen Travo Gallery represents Matea Bakula's work at Art Rotterdam.



Harm van den Dorpel

(1981, Zaandam), lives and works in Berlin
Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (grad. 2006), VU Amsterdam,
Artificial Intelligence (grad. 2002), Upstream Gallery (stand 27)

Harm van den Dorpel's artistic practice consists of sculptures, installations, works on paper and computer-controlled graphics and software. The origin of his work lies in online idiomatic language. He investigates the role of technology in our contemporary society. Especially how we create and use hardware technology, but at the same time are also limited by it. With his use of form and colour, he refers to the current digital culture, but also, for example, reverts back to Mondrian's compositions.

The jury finds it interesting that the work is contemporary, but at the same time is nostalgic. The idiomatic language dates the pieces. In addition, the works continuously transform (from 2D to 3D to multimedia) and remain innovative and explorative.

The transparent Plexiglas works are layered, both literally and figuratively. They refer to the latest blockchain technologies, which record people's confidential data, and link to fingerprints, for example. Van den Dorpel questions the essence of this technology.

In addition, there are drawings of the artist that have been executed automatically by a computer. Van den Dorpel creates the software himself, determines the algorithm and chooses the material. According to the jury, this artist has created a convincing and innovative unique handwriting, and shows us that aesthetics in computer art is still very much in development.



Upstream Gallery represents Harm van den Dorpel's work at Art Rotterdam.

Katja Mater

(1979, Hoorn), lives and works in Amsterdam and Brussels
De Ateliers (grad. 2005)
Galerie Martin van Zomeren (stand 31)

The jury is impressed by Katja Mater's intelligent and multi-faceted work, which always results in the unpredictable. Photography is the basis of this exploratory work, in which space and time are central focus points. Mater translates space into a flat surface and in various media. Her photography is cut out in planes, rearranged, and effortlessly merged into video art.

In addition, this artist designs her own projection techniques, such as the use of two projectors that together show one roll of film. The jury praises this technical expertise. Everything has been thought through. What we see is not identical to what happens before our eyes. As viewers, we are pulled into another dimension, because depth and movement are portrayed in a surprising way.

In addition, it is interesting that Mater's work is full of dualities. The hand-made work looks mobile and light, but at the same time it is very precisely formulated and brought into composition. Her oeuvre is therefore playful and strict at the same time, improvisational and well considered; it is precisely the right relationship between these extremes that is the result of years of persistent research.



Winner NN Group Art Award 2019

The jury appreciates the recent progress in Mater's work. She seems to have discovered a new freedom. At the same time, the work remains consistent in its quality and investigative attitude. The work shows us an adult artist who has not forgotten how to play.

The jury admires how Mater has succeeded in adding a new chapter to an oeuvre that increasingly shows a strong identity within the Dutch art scene.

Femmy Otten

(1981, Amsterdam), lives and works in The Hague
Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (grad. 2012)
Galerie Fons Welters (stand 26)

Femmy Otten is a painter and sculptor. But according to the jury, she is above all an artist who has had her own, authentic visual language for years. Fully independent of trends in the art world, her works often revert to mythological figures. In addition, we see androgynous figures that evoke free, inviting associations with regard to concepts of gender among viewers. Influences of other cultures, myths, stories and forgotten histories are directly felt in her convincing, sensitive work. Otten's work thus achieves a universal value, because the performances she shows transcend geographical and temporal boundaries.

In her latest work, she uses the sea as a metaphor for the volatile political climate in Europe. The sea represents the fluid water that is elusive and ever changing. The jury thinks that Otten's work is evidence of a craftsmanship that continues to innovate through the constant investigation of new materials, such as plaster reliefs and tree resin objects. Within her 2D works, the expressiveness that is characteristic of her drawing stands out.

The jury sees added value in the dialogue that the drawings and sculptures enter into together. Otten's work transcends the medium and creates a new experience. A cross-border, poetic, total experience.



NN Group

NN Group is an international financial services company, active in 18 countries, with a strong presence in a number of European countries and Japan. With all its employees, the Group provides retirement services, pensions, insurance, investment and banking to approximately 17 million customers. NN Group's includes Nationale-Nederlanden, NN, Delta Lloyd, NN Investment Partners, ABN AMRO Insurance, Movir, AZL, BeFrank and OHRA.

Sponsoring cultural events

NN Group wants to make a positive contribution to society by helping people to secure their financial futures and by being socially engaged. We have a long history of sponsoring cultural events, with the aim of making art and culture accessible to a wider audience. For example, NN Group invests in cultural partnerships with Dutch museums and artists, as reflected in our support for a wide range of exhibitions and the artwork we purchase for our corporate collection. We consider the role of art and culture to be extremely valuable in society, because art inspires and connects people. We want to help make art accessible to everyone. We focus specifically on regions in the Netherlands in which our offices are located: Rotterdam and The Hague. For example, NN Group is a corporate partner of the Dutch Photo Museum in Rotterdam and of the Mauritshuis in The Hague.

In 2017, NN Group launched a partnership with Art Rotterdam. As part of our social engagement, we specifically chose to present the NN Group Art Award to incentivise talented artists.

