

Amsterdam, June 28 2018



Jury report for the eighth ABN AMRO Art Award

With its choice of Helen Verhoeven, the jury of the eighth ABN AMRO Art Award has opted for an artist who links restrained emotion and contemporary social dilemmas with classical, historical and art-historical iconography.

Nothing in Verhoeven's work is what it appears to be. With her seemingly naive yet meticulous painterly style, she abandons the rules of place, time and space, harking back to a medieval idiom in which a number of potentially disparate elements exist alongside each other in one image. Her paintings seduce the viewer via their reassuringly familiar compositions, but upon further consideration, they prove to be full of conflicting messages: scenes in which perpetrator is simultaneously victim, in which violence and intimacy closely interrelate, and where status and pose mask deeply rooted isolation.

Furthermore, the jury is struck by a visual language that is entirely Verhoeven's own. She flirts with art-historical traditions and clashing styles, painting with masterly verve – at times deliberately coarse and awkward, yet then very precise – switching back and forth between perspectival views, close-ups, and fragmentation, without losing sight of the whole. This grants her paintings a cinematic quality, as they often resemble compilations of moments in time that suggest an unpredictable but inevitable future.

Verhoeven's work stems from extensive investigations into a range of diverse sources, including images taken from medical studies, interviews, scientific archives and the Internet. For instance, her monumental group portrait for the Supreme Court of the Netherlands derived from extensive research focused in part on the history of Dutch law. A commanding group of figures are depicted within the painting: the row of judges, who face a crowd of people, are set in a long row against a background teeming with references to biblical, classical and historical figures. While not attempting to ignore a sad reality where justice does not always prevail, she moreover subtly comments on the white, and predominantly male, make-up of the institution. The jury is impressed with the way in which Verhoeven tackles such topics at the center of contemporary society, fusing these current themes with traditional manners of representation — here newly empowered as commentary on man's shortcomings.

Verhoeven continues to offer her subjective take on a diverse array of conflicting ideas and views in her series as well, as evidenced in a particular group of paintings on motherhood. On one hand referring to feminine beauty and the loss of control over the body as it changes, these paintings are also about love and the tensions that can exist within human relationships, such as that between a mother and child.

In her most recent work, the installation *Church I*, Verhoeven merges techniques like stained-glass, mosaic, painting and sculpture with humanistic ideas into a rich and comprehensive gesamtkunstwerk. Having discovered a new way in which to draw us into her fascinating and kaleidoscopic view of the world, Verhoeven here impresses upon us her versatility and incredible craftsmanship.

The ABN AMRO Art Award is intended as a stimulus for talent in the Netherlands. The quality and singularity of the work are principal criteria for selection. While making her mark with significant exhibitions within the country and abroad, Helen Verhoeven remains relatively unknown to a wider Dutch audience. Her intriguing and idiosyncratic body of work is rich and full of surprises, continually displaying new and unexpected developments. The jury considers Verhoeven a remarkably talented artist, deftly combining a thoughtful consideration of tradition, an acute topicality, and a visual language that is unique among those of her generation. It is the jury's pleasure to grant the 2018 ABN AMRO Art Award to Helen Verhoeven.

The jury of the eighth ABN AMRO Art Award is comprised of the following members: Maria Barnas (poet and visual artist), Danila Cahen (curator ABN AMRO art collection), Stijn Huijts (artistic director Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht), Xander Karskens (artistic director Cobra Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Amstelveen) and Silvia Zonneveld (Managing Director ABN AMRO MeesPierson / Private Wealth Management).

