



## Jury Report Prix de Rome 2019

In April 2019, the jury selected one artist duo and three artists for the shortlist of the Prix de Rome 2019: Sander Breure & Witte van Hulzen, Esiri Erheriene-Essi, Femke Herregraven, and Rory Pilgrim. The jury was impressed by the high quality of work from the participating artists. Emphasizing the Prix de Rome's mission to act as a springboard for artists, the jury selected artists who are not yet fully established in their careers, but whose practices were seen as focused and well-defined. All finalists are contributing to the current and relevant discourse in contemporary art. In addition, the jury was looking for a range of artistic approaches and themes in their selection. Each in their own way with regard to method, style and narrative, the finalists were offering a poetic form of social engagement. The jury was very much looking forward to the projects they would be developing during their working period.

In October 2019, the jury looked at the new works in the exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and had additional conversations with all artists. The members of the jury would like to express their praise and appreciation for all presentations.

For *Accidents Waiting to Happen*, Sander Breure & Witte van Hulzen created a total installation which shows that hospitals and museums have more in common than one might expect. Using simple interventions, the museum gallery has been transformed into a clinical space; striking features are the operation cameras protruding from the walls and penetrating the room as if it were a body. Initially, after entering the space, the visitors are confused about the nature of the environment they find themselves in, and gradually even all sense of time starts to disappear. The combination of sculptures, performance, cameras, television screens and visitors creates unexpected interactions. Also exciting are the contradictions between the sterile detachment of the space and the tactile quality of the sculptures that are obviously made by human hands, and may even have been repaired. The actions carried out by the performers were inspired by moments and memories originating from the artists' research and their personal experiences. The choreographies of both the performers and visitors are given an added dimension by the screens on which they are making alternating live and recorded appearances. The result is a layered work, not only offering different perspectives on the choreography in both medical and art institutes, but also a poetic reflection on our own bodies. This all takes place in a setting where visitors are able to simultaneously take on the role of performer, agent, physician, and patient. A stage where the interaction between animate (viewer) and inanimate (sculpture) refers to the history of the body in art.

The jury is impressed by the new series of paintings entitled *The Inheritance (or Familiar Strangers)* that Esiri Erheriene-Essi has realized over the past months. They are energetically painted canvasses portraying the everyday lives of black people. The scenes are based on archival photographs of family outings, birthdays and other 'ordinary' events in the 1960s and 70s. The Kodak films that were commonly used at that time were tailored to the skin tones of white people, and as a result photographs of black people lacked definition. With her paintings, Erheriene-Essi is able to restore the life and depth that is missing in the photographs. By showing the 'ordinary stories', she emphasizes the necessity to humanize the history of black people, and to stop focusing on the negative elements alone. The main characters are combined with archival material referring to political and social events in the history and struggle of the people from the African diaspora. In this way, the painter is able to provide a context for the situation the portrayed people were in at the time, and the lives they led. The jury notes that as a result of the combination of the printed archival material in the background and the colourful scenes in the foreground, the characters seem to be coming out of the paintings. Also striking is that almost all paintings feature a figure who is looking straight at the visitor. With these techniques, Erheriene-Essi is stressing the contemporary urgency of images that appear to be historical. Furthermore, the jury appreciates the freedom with which she incorporates different styles of painting and patterns in her work. This gives them a collage-like quality that matches the artistic reconstruction of a forgotten history.

For *Diving Reflex (Because We Learned Not To Drown, We Can Sing)*, Femke Herregraven has combined complex subjects in a layered installation that fits in with the diversity of her artistic practice. The new work has originated from her thorough research into catastrophe bonds, or cat bonds, that are issued by insurance companies. The way in which the artist has managed to visualize these data in a calendar is an impressive feat in itself. In this presentation, she is connecting the concept of the catastrophe with the diving reflex, which not only protects human beings against drowning, but has also given them the ability to sing. She uses this connection to point out that a catastrophe can also be a positive tipping point. In the installation, this optimistic point of view is represented by introducing the writer Elaine Morgan as a poetic counterpart to the Last Man who is living in fear of the end of time. The result is a surreal and topical scenario that (literally) resonates in the exhibition space. The jury greatly appreciates Herregraven's versatile working method that combines and rearranges different types of research. For this work she conducted meticulous data research, but also low-tech sound experiments that logically flow from her well-considered choices for materials and aesthetics. In the installation, the various components have been brought together in an intelligent way, offering a rich experience. The jury is convinced that this project contains many more leads for future work.

Rory Pilgrim made the fifty-minute film *The Undercurrent* in which he transports the visitors to the world of a group of young people in the American city of Boise (Idaho). The film features beautiful cinematography, wonderful music, and is meticulously edited. Furthermore, the artist raises a number of topical issues in the film. Initially, climate change appears to be its most important theme, but gradually it becomes clear that the young people have other problems too. Some are fighting against gender inequality, others against their parents' lack of understanding, and still others have become homeless. Central to this film is a house that appears to function as a sanctuary for the main characters. The concept of the sanctuary is also used for the protection of nature. In this way, the film is hinting at a subtle connection between the earth that needs attention and protection, and the young people who need a home for intimacy, security and their future. Pilgrim also created a home like that during the creative process for the film by intensively involving actors and locals. The result is a disarming portrait of the insecurities, hopes and expectations of a generation, and what's more a film that gives the young people an opportunity to address themselves directly to the viewer. The jury greatly appreciates how the artist has engaged with this group and also values his intention to continue the collaboration in other ways. This characterizes the integrity of the project and makes the jury curious about a follow-up. Not only has Rory Pilgrim shown himself as a master in making films that combine cinematography, music, content, form and topicality, but it is also obvious that he has a great and genuine sense of commitment.

The jury was unanimous in its decision to award the Prix de Rome Visual Arts 2019 to Rory Pilgrim.

The jury of the Prix de Rome 2019 consists of:

Lonnie van Brummelen (visual artist, winner Prix de Rome 2005)

Amira Gad (artistic director Lehmann Maupin, London)

Peter Gorschlüter (director Museum Folkwang, Essen)

Yasmijn Jarram (curator GEM, The Hague)

Frank Koolen (visual artist)

Chair without right to vote is Valentijn Byvanck (director Marres, House of Contemporary Culture, Maastricht)