



## Jury Report Prix de Rome 2023

From a total of 321 entries, the jury of the Prix de Rome Visual Arts 2023 selected a shortlist of four artists: Josefin Arnell, Jonas Staal, Ghita Skali, and Michael Tedja.

The jury discerns four artists who are all reacting to societal issues, but each from their own individual perspective and choosing a form of expression that is uniquely their own.

Josefin Arnell joined a small local community centre and reached out to its members for realizing a film punctuated with social observations on gentrification and urban development. Ghita Skali took a historical artefact as the point of departure for questioning the underlying power structures of the artworld itself, while Jonas Staal took up the position of a researcher of the propaganda methods employed by world powers within the scope of a documentary construct. The jury noticed how Michael Tedja claimed an autonomous position for himself while still reacting to societal issues by means of his own unique visual language, albeit from the sidelines and in an explicitly poetic, reflective way.

Although the jury greatly appreciates the high level of commitment shown by the nominees over a short period of time, it nevertheless occasionally hoped the artists would have come up with more substantial statements, taken steps in new directions, or made more radical gestures. The nominees often stayed neatly within the boundaries of their own oeuvre – perhaps somewhat intimidated by institutes like the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam or the Prix de Rome itself.

### **Josefin Arnell**

In Josefin Arnell's practice, the jury recognizes a high level of dedication to both her own expertise and the people she is collaborating with. She demonstrates a lot of bravery by placing herself in unpredictable situations while still remaining loyal to her own artistic vision and unique artistic vocabulary. Throughout this process, she has a keen eye for the challenges that arise while working with different communities.

Arnell's film *Buurthuis 2* manages to combine the aesthetics and tropes of horror and slasher films with the everyday setting of a community centre. The result is a socially critical work with a lot of character. *Buurthuis 2* contains wonderful scenes and, according to the jury, introduces a good dose of humour and lightness to this edition of the Prix de Rome. In future projects, the jury would like to see Arnell further deepening her collaborations with various communities while also exploring her own position in these.

### **Jonas Staal**

The installation *Empire's Island* by Jonas Staal not only tells the story of Ascension Island, but also explores the consequences of the capitalist sovereign power described as 'Empire'. The work challenges the visitors to constantly question what they are actually looking at. This makes us aware of how easy our own gaze can be misled.

*Empire's Island* is a documentary presentation with recognizable elements like a voice-over and illustrative graphical elements supporting the narrative about Ascension Island. At the



same time it is also a conceptual work that expresses criticism on the documentary form. Apart from the linear narrative, the work also contains a multitude of ideas and many specific references. These references are sometimes easy to find, but may also concern clues and jokes that are hidden, like easter eggs. But even without grasping these specific references, in the opinion of the jury the work is able to firmly hold its own. This is because Staal's work can be interpreted in many different ways. Depending on the spectator's knowledge of the specific subject matter and Staal's practice, the work can be accessed via various levels. The jury furthermore praises Staal's uncompromising working method and the way in which he constantly scrutinizes his own position.

### **Ghita Skali**

Ghita Skali presents a statement that cannot be ignored. Her work *Relentless Putridity* shows an open door with a brick wall directly behind it. Through a small hatch at the bottom of the door, pamphlets are dispensed to the visitors. The door itself originates from the archives of the Rijksakademie and is part of the Prix de Rome's history. By transferring this historical object to the museum, Skali brings the past into the present and puts her finger on the sore spot, i.e. the institute's far from perfect history. While the focus of Skali's institutional criticism lies on art awards, the artist's pamphlet – infused with the smell of bleach – also establishes a direct link with discriminatory practices within the artworld in general.

The jury appreciates how *Relentless Putridity* fits into Skali's long term practice of probing art awards in general. At the same time it is eager to find out how this umbrella project will materialize and exactly which place Skali's work for the Prix de Rome will have in it. In relation to the artist's own position within the artworld, the jury is also curious about how she will be giving shape to her criticism in the future.

### **Michael Tedja**

In *Vertical Reality* and *How to Study the Sea Poetically*, Michael Tedja impressively merges poetry and painting. The works consist of many separate elements – paintings, books, tables, sculptures, digital copies, texts – brought together by means of a grand gesture. According to the jury, the occasional high level of conceptual abstraction does not prevent the artist from making visually convincing statements. He immaculately defines his own voice and practice without taking up an antagonistic position.

The jurors notice the strong autonomous approach of Tedja's practice – averse to trends, resulting in a very consistent body of work. The jurors appreciate this consistency and also value the space the artist leaves for experimentation, which has led to elements like the monitor attached to the work *Vertical Reality*, showing digital copies of the works from the Holarium, which are deliberately hidden from view. The jury considers this to be an exciting development.

### **Winner**

The jury has decided to award the Prix de Rome Visual Arts 2023 to Jonas Staal because of his uncompromising and layered approach as well as the solid quality of his work. The jury has great admiration for the way in which Staal has stepped out of his comfort zone with



*Empire's Island*. The artist is not new to making works in uncontrollable situations and under complicated circumstances, however, the jury views *Empire's Island* as a new step in the artist's practice. A step that makes him increasingly question his own medium in an artistic way.

---

The jury of the Prix de Rome 2023 consists of: Ann Demeester (director Kunsthaus Zürich), Ahmet Polat (photographer and filmmaker, founder and director of Studio Polat Foundation), Robbert Roos (director Kunsthall KAdE, Amersfoort), Femke Herregraven (visual artist and 2019 nominee Visual Arts), Christina Li (freelance curator and author), and Eelco van der Lingen (director Mondriaan Fund) as chair, without vote.