


rietveld



review-ed



gerrit rietveld academie
graduation show 2023

art and design

Rietveld Review(ed) is part of the Graduation Show's public programme. An independent external committee, consisting of Audrey Large, Federico Martelli, Ghita Skali and Megan Hoetger, was asked to reflect on the Graduation Show as a whole and to signal current tendencies and themes within the exhibition. The committee members were also asked to reflect on the department presentations and to highlight some graduate projects that support their observations. In the committee meetings, a broad range of topics was discussed, and a selection of these thoughts and observations have been included in this report.

Moving through the exhibition in roughly 16 hours, trying to pay attention to works by 164 students from 14 departments, questions were raised about what it means to open up your work to an audience, and how to successfully shape conditions for an audience to engage with a work. When the doors of the academy open and the world walks in, umbrella and beers in hand, with memories and histories, with high expectations or none at all — are the works able to speak?

While text can play a crucial role in opening up the work, it became apparent that striking the right balance between too much and too little context is a delicate task. Sometimes, instead of serving as an invitation, the large amount of accompanying text made it difficult to enter the graduates' worlds, despite their evident thoughtfulness.

The TXT department's presentation stood out as an elegant composition that demonstrated a harmonious and consistent approach across all aspects — from the individual works, to the use of space, the display of technical skill, and the well-written texts. It served as a remarkable example of providing an adequate level of context, allowing viewers to explore and engage, while also leaving room for personal associations.

In other departments — some more than others — committee members found it difficult to grasp the essence of the presentations, partly due to the absence of context. This gave the impression that students in some departments were more supported in the process than others, which had a noticeable impact on the potential of the space as a whole and the individual merits of the graduates.

Sometimes, the physical presence of the artist is needed to activate the work and make it land, something that comes with its own set of risks and opportunities. How do you deal with an unpredictable audience, how do you prepare your interactions and

answers? Performativity was effectively explored in Layla Gijzen's lock-picking workshop (designLAB), and the committee was enchanted by Nanna Due's nail salon (Architectural Design), which provided a captivating stage for intimate encounters.

On the third floor of the Rietveld building, the Fine Arts department showcased the students' ability to utilize a space and its architectural elements in subtle yet powerful ways. These ranged from bold interventions to delicate gestures, with the latter prevailing in numbers. The engagement with spatial dynamics turned into a proper conversation on Wednesday morning, when the building decided to talk back as Storm Poly forcefully blew open its windows and let rainwater invade the rooms. Spatial awareness was seen in the work of Huub Kooijman, which seemed to be engaged in a conversation with that of Cemre Eraslan — more about works entering into a dialogue later in this report. Albert Rask (VAV — moving image) played with architectural elements of the Benthem Crouwel building by making the roof shake, and Carla F. van den Berg (Fine Arts) brought fragments of dismantled structures into the academy, pushing the limits of how far this building can carry the remains of another. Carla's work, along with that of several others in the academy, also prominently featured the theme of the archive. Graduates entered these archives through personal stories and explored their power as spaces that transcend time and place, as seen in the work of Ada Jochimsen (Jewellery — Linking Bodies), Nikola Woudstra (TXT) and Jana Sofie Liebe (Graphic Design, with a shout-out from the committee for most precious business card). Great care and sensitivity was felt in the work of Özgür Deniz Koldaş (Graphic Design) who gave space to intergenerational queer dialogue through his exploration of archival material.

Across all the departments, the committee noticed a tendency to utilize materials in a surprisingly sincere way. There seemed to be a genuine appreciation for the inherent qualities of each material; wood remains wood, cardboard remains cardboard, and a nail is a nail. Imperfections and rawness are not concealed or embellished, and unnecessary frills are kept to a minimum. The graduates demonstrate both the courage and expertise to successfully execute this approach, which the committee highly values. Material sensitivity was seen in the works of Jordi de Vetten (Photography), the constructivist sculptures of Jette Kelholt (Fine Arts), and Gabriel Stoll's many flavours of cardboard box (Fine Arts). Stella Sterk's (VAV — moving image) installation encourages the audience to appreciate material flaws and worn-out objects that are often overlooked.

When pushing the literalness in their use of material to the point of absurdity, irony and humour come into play. This clever approach provides a counterbalance to the weightiness of some of the underlying themes and concepts addressed, with a lightness of touch that was (almost) never corny. This was seen in the work of Edgar Fulton (Ceramics), in Yi Wang's endless wait for the wind to come (VAV – moving image), and in Luca Mosbech Fedele's subtle and strange interventions all over the upper floors of the Rietveld building, which include a burnt pizza, mouse droppings and juice cartons turned inside out (Fine Arts).

Most of the graduates had their first year split in half by the global pandemic, spending part of their education at a distance from others. The committee wondered if this situation led to the remarkable interconnectedness they observed in some departments. Notably in Fine Arts, the committee felt it straight away: certain spaces stood out due to the impressive dialogue between the artworks – for example in the works and collaboration of Pien Overing and Bert McLean. The committee felt that this generation of graduates seems to be practicing a different form of collectivity than we've seen before. It's not just about making a group show – they actively engage in genuine exchange and collaboration, displaying remarkable generosity.

This strong sense of connection and solidarity was also felt in the Graphic Design department, where Ran-Re Reimann hijacked the notion of individuality and created tailor-made exhibition structures for every classmate using wood found around the academy, Alexander Joshua Kinzig played sensitively with data about his fellow students, and Uma Naddermier organized the department's public programme.

Lastly, the committee appreciated the ways in which graduates touched on urgent topics through embodiment and personal stories, entering the political through another realm which resulted in sharp and moving works with an indirect political message – something they would like to state with the greatest nuance, since making explicitly political work doesn't rule out sharpness nor the ability to be deeply moving. Both the works of Lente Oosterhuis (Jewellery – Linking Bodies) and Orlaith Mayet (Fine Arts) were able to transmit the story of their personal, urgent search for a place to simply exist, and the committee was captivated by the donkeys in Lian Bi's work (TXT), in which she addresses topics such as intergenerational expectations and productivity through painting and video.

Thesis

A separate committee, consisting of Brenda Tempelaar and Sébastien Tien, chaired by Paula Albuquerque, reviewed the graduates' theses.

This year's theses consisted of diverse and thought-provoking approaches to what writing can be when practiced at the Rietveld Academie, where intersectional social justice and climate activism are central, together with a conscious sense of political positioning and being-in-the-world-with-care. Writing approaches ranged from speculative fiction to autotheory, and also included formal exercises in circular and meandering stylistic methods which challenge notions of what constitutes a narrative and its discursions. When it comes to the theoretical backgrounds proposed by the theses, the referencing emerged partly from traditional art historical and (continental) philosophical sources, but mainly focused across the board on low-theory, intersectional, ecological, gender-fluid and decolonial writings extending beyond academic formats and conventions. Most theses manifested an urgent desire for wondering and wandering; were both disenchanting and reenchancing; and oriented towards making and queering multispecies worlds where rocks and stones pulsate.

The three highlighted theses include 'And You'll Pass It On, Won't You?' by Ada Jochimsen (Jewellery-Linking Bodies) which focuses on notions of inheritance with the embodied voice providing a sense of agency. From the loss of a stone belonging to a family heirloom, to the removal of Lenin's statue in post-Cold War Berlin, it explores the entanglements of personal and collective histories. Anachronistic in kind, it questions the legitimacy of engaging with hand-me-downs and the particular responsibility bestowed upon the individual inheriting historical events embodied by jewels, statues and monuments. It does so by relying on a conscious choice of the form of content, such as hypertext and overlapping graphics and imageries, alongside an economy of referencing strictly relevant to the line of thought at hand.

'All forgotten things (and the sound of a quintillion tiny shivering leaves)' by Rebekka Bank (designLAB) is a sharp analysis of ecosystems from the perspective of present trends in thinking about care for the environment, yet it achieves a particular lightness as it takes the reader by the hand to show and tell how being-in-the-multispecies-world is structured when felt up-close. This is reflected in the sentence "[i]t takes on average 15 seconds for a

tortoise to complete one breath,” making us suddenly aware how long it takes to complete a vital task, or how the weight of the rock on the cover of the thesis materializes sound as we read.

‘It Fell from the Stars – Alternative Cosmogonies from the Second World’ by Dorin Budusan (DOGtime Unstable Media) is a ‘fragmentological’ approach to making sense of displacement, while switching positions with the subject by no longer accepting being considered as an object. Beginning with the fall of a meteorite, it connects personal observations with a critical analysis of the Eurocentric ontologies of orientalism and exoticism, thereby devising an assemblage of conceptualizations for urgent geopolitical awareness.

Finally, a honourable mention highlights a fourth thesis, entitled ‘(WITH MY EARS) TO MY FEET’S HEELS’, by Dennis Buckland (Fine Arts) linking rock art to privilege in former European colonies.

art and design committee members

Audrey Large researches digital cinema and image theory and uses her findings to design material objects. She plays with the boundaries between the digital and the physical.

Federico Martelli is part of Cookies, a spatial design office based in Rotterdam and Paris. He specializes in museography and exhibition design, and he recently launched OtherNetwork, a digital platform that connects independent art spaces globally.

Ghita Skali is an Amsterdam-based artist. She uses odd news, rumours and propaganda to disrupt institutional power structures such as the western contemporary art world, state oppression and government politics.

Megan Hoetger is a performance and media historian and curator. Since 2019 she has been programme curator of the arts organization If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution.

thesis committee members

Brenda Tempelaar is an artist and writer, founder and editor of The Long Tail of Art. She publishes on contemporary art and forms a collective together with Rob Leijdekkers and Hedwig Houben.

Sébastien Tien is an artist, writer and founder and director of the bookstore project Page Not Found, a space for publishing as artistic research in The Hague.

Paula Albuquerque (Chair) is an artist, scholar working on Surveillance and Specters of Colonialism and Senior Researcher and teacher at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie.

colophon

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