

RIETVELD REVIEW(ED)

This year was the fourth edition of Rietveld Review(ed), in which the academy invites external experts from the world of art and design to visit and reflect on the Graduation Show. What are the tendencies and themes that stand out this year? For 2024, the academy invited Ahmet Ögüt, Yana Foque, Lisa Konno and Clementine Edwards to share their thoughts. This report on their reflections offers visitors an opportunity to deepen their visit to the exhibition.

“I’m reluctant to tell you what the words are saying,” one graduate tells the committee when asked about an unfinished sentence in their work. If you want to know how it ends, go back and put the puzzle together. It is only the first of many works that the external committee will have to decipher in order to understand them, tempting them to look for clues as to how to enter or engage. In a way, this fits their task: to examine the work of all 156 students in this year’s Graduation Show in the space of about 16 hours, searching for themes, tendencies and common threads in their work, and highlighting specific works that exemplify these observations.

The committee encounters several works that demand a great deal of attention, as they are often fragmented across different spaces and consist of incredibly subtle interventions, such as the work of Nanna Egelund (Fine Arts) who is fascinated by behavioural catalysts. The installation by pàn qi (Fine Arts), which touches on the archiving of memory, is experienced as slowly unwrapping a gift. Noticing these pieces requires the viewer’s concentration and keen observation. In addition, many of the works demand a great deal of attention and care from their makers. This is most evident in pieces that require the actual presence of the artist for ongoing maintenance – without this upkeep, these transient works might not hold their shape, or even survive the show. This element of dealing with temporality can be seen in the work of Adriane Bastiaens (Fine Arts), which features a kind of stained-glass window made of caramel that – as the sugar melts – needs to be daily replaced with a new window. When the graduate is needed on site, performative elements come into play, although their interaction with their works is by no means theatrical. Sometimes, the presence of the artist is needed to give permission to touch the work, to reassure the viewer that the work wants to be played with, to provide – again – clues to help the work to be experienced as intended. This is the case with Lawil Karama’s work (DOGtime Unstable Media), which invites participation on many different levels but certainly reveals its power in the presence of the artist. As you play the game, the different layers of the story gradually reveal themselves with increasing intensity.

The committee often wonders how these works could exist in a different setting, where the artist might not be present all the time. But that is a question for the future. In the here and now, the work thrives, and the committee is touched by the many gestures of care. Right here and now is also a moment when the friction between the students and the institute is clearly present, as this Graduation Show is taking place simultaneously with an encampment for Palestine. The committee admires the grace with which the community navigates this tension, and the generosity with which signs of protest are given space to exist. Students have built, experimented and intervened with the building and its surroundings. A notable example of how protest can have creative potential is the 30-metre-long Palestinian keffiyeh hanging from the Benthem Crouwel building (makers unknown). In general, there are many subtle ways in which the graduates engage with the buildings, resulting in an almost collaborative dynamic between the students and the structure; the building is not just a container, but acts as the connective tissue between the students and the institute.

The committee notices that most of this year's work stays at a distance from anything too loud, too political, or too painful. Perhaps because the world outside already is these things. Perhaps if everyday life were more stable, there would be a greater urge to go wild with realism, but right now, the opposite seems to be happening: graduates are internalising the world, imagining, creating cocoons, building new and different worlds. The work of Fatima Agoula (VAV-moving image) is an unusual mix of surrealism, stylised domestic horror and religious references. It is full of both traditional and futuristic elements that could easily fall into incoherence, but instead come together seamlessly. Sometimes, it's pure joy that invites the viewer into these new worlds, as in the ecstatically bright and colourful installation of Nanna-Lucie Bregendahl-Axilgård (TXT). Eleri Wonkyeol Lee (designLAB) hands her anxiety a microphone to sing its cruel yet cheerful song, and if you lay your head to rest on her round wooden table, there is magic to be found in the work of Anna Reymond (Graphic Design). Nicolas Dagieu's project (DOGtime Unstable Media) was appreciated for its calming, poetic power and its reference to fairy tales, while at the same time feeling very contemporary. These new worlds are not entirely secluded however: the pain of the real world still seeps through, and the committee encounters many personal stories of loss and grief, as well as heartfelt dedications to family and heritage. The work of Katya Marchenko (VAV-moving image), which sensitively addresses the subject of dementia, is beautifully executed, and the committee appreciates how it offers different ways to engage with it.

Overall, the committee was surprised by how analogue and craft-oriented the work of this year's graduates was. Technology-based projects, and students exploring VR and AI, were surprisingly absent across all departments. It's an open door, perhaps, but they can't help but suspect that this may stem from a desire to reconnect with the physical and a longing to immerse themselves in the real world after the pandemic. Confined to their bedrooms, students may have yearned to feel and shape things with their hands, or to "sink their teeth into the world", as one committee member put it. Several works are technically well executed, demonstrating a deep commitment to learning and mastering techniques across a range of disciplines. Impressive examples of this emphasis on craftsmanship can be found in the work of Martina Bucci (the name of her department, Jewellery – Linking Bodies, couldn't be more fitting), the strong and poetic explorations of clocks and time by Cathy Hu (Graphic Design), and the room where graduates Tereza Kalousova and Rosa Shepherd (Architectural Design) present their work. Other examples include the chairs of Yorick Arend Bakker (designLAB) – a strong, seemingly simple idea, perfectly executed – and Alina Setjowikarto (The Large Glass), who has clearly put everything she has into thoroughly understanding and mastering her material.

Speaking of The Large Glass, the committee was struck by the contemporaneity of the works from this department and the coherence in the aesthetic worlds of the individual graduates. These works were unmistakably of the present — not of the future or the past. The graduates steered clear of the commonly explored theme of fragility: instead, the works were bold and confident, demonstrating a strong belief in the expressive power of this material. This is evident, for instance, in Björg Dyg Nielsen's mature and mesmerising installation, and Ida Cecilie Meldgaard Fisker's intricate, jewel-like objects, which serve as a commentary on the materialisation of the spiritual in our digital age.

Finally, an honourable mention goes to the Ceramics presentation, which showcased many strong individual works and as a whole exuded the raw, distinctive energy of the department.

Committee members

Ahmet Ögüt

Ahmet Ögüt is a conceptual artist working in a wide range of media including video, photography, installation, drawing and printed media. He is the founder of The Silent University, an educational programme for and with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Clementine Edwards

Clementine Edwards is an artist working between sculpture and writing. Clementine's practice engages with craft, climate crisis, gender and how lived experience, including trauma, narrates meaning-making.

Yana Foque

Yana Foque is a Belgian curator with a background in (graphic) design, whose main interest lies in exploring the notion of co-authorship, the relationship between artists and their assistants/partners and the social/political/historical structures that shape these collaborations. She holds the position of Executive Director and Chief Curator of Kunstverein (Amsterdam), its affiliated publishing house and its franchise.

Lisa Konno

Lisa Konno is an artist and (fashion) designer. Her work travels freely between different fields, from documentary, fashion and ceramics, to performance and more. Recurring themes in her work are cultural identity, sustainability and activism.

Colophon

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