

Jury's report

Public art commission in honour of the 50th anniversary of the
Fentener van Vlissingen Fund

The occasion

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Fentener van Vlissingen Fund, the fund's board is commissioning the design of a public work of art. The work of art is a present to residents and visitors of the city of Utrecht. The work of art's envisaged location is the bridge close to the SHV head office.

Steenkolen Handels-Vereeniging (SHV), a family company with a workforce of over 50,000 employees and activities around the world, has been located in Utrecht since 1913 and has close ties with the city. The Fentener van Vlissingen Fund was founded in 1961 by SHV and is financed by the company. The fund supports and promotes artistic and cultural projects in the city and province of Utrecht. In line with SHV, the fund sets great store by looking for the unusual, and has made this a part of its objective. SHV supports people in the development of fresh ideas, thereby forging an independent path for the future.

The location

Utrecht is a dynamic city. A city seeking a modern way to connect its growing periphery of post-war urban housing developments and suburbs with its historic city centre. On one side of the divide is high-rise shopping mall Hoog Catharijne. Forbidding, monolithic, once thought of as visionary, it towers over the immense railway complex in the heart of Utrecht, where all the country's railway lines meet. On the other side, the city's look and feel is determined by the network of cobbled streets and alleyways surrounding the medieval Dom tower and Oude Gracht, built on the city's Roman foundations.

The renovation that the station and its surroundings are now undergoing will join the two sides of the city together again. This immense project includes the return of water to the former canal Catharijnesingel where it is bordered by Moreelsepark and Rijnkade. In the 1970s, this canal had been filled to make space for a multi-lane road through the city. The city centre and the station area are currently connected by a flyover but this will soon be replaced by a proper bridge.

It is this future bridge that is the focus of the work of art that the Fentener van Vlissingen Fund wishes to realise: a public work of art with a unique, powerful and recognisable appeal that clearly connects with its surroundings. It is a location with a long history and an ambitious future; a layered and hybrid place and an extremely busy place, now, and even more so in the years ahead.

The jury

To assess the proposals, the fund's board has appointed a jury consisting of the following members:

Tom van Gestel, (former) project leader at the Foundation Art and Public Space (SKOR)
Simon Roozen, project manager for the railway station area Utrecht
Erik van Tuijn, art historian and co-ordinator digital media at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague and a board member of the Fentener van Vlissingen Fund
Ida van Zijl, head of the design and applied art department at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht and a board member of the Fentener van Vlissingen Fund

Chairman of the jury is the mayor of Utrecht, Aleid Wolfsen

The jury's report

Given the complexity of the location, the jury was in agreement from day one that it wanted three excellent but widely different artistic proposals. The members decided to invite three parties to submit a proposal: artist Sheila Hicks, social design lab Studio Roosegaarde and architect duo Gijs Van Vaerenbergh.

In this report, the jury shares its assessment of the proposals submitted by the three parties.

Proposal: Amarres by Sheila Hicks

About Sheila Hicks

Sheila Hicks can look back on a long and successful international career. She was born in Hastings, Nebraska in 1934 and studied at Yale University. In 1957 she moved to Chili to work as a painter. It was there that she became fascinated with weaving techniques and fibres. She travelled around the world in search of new techniques and materials, and played an important role in the emancipation of weaving as a visual arts discipline in its own right. Like no other artist, Sheila Hicks interweaves art, craft and architecture in her works. She makes paintings without paint, textile graffiti and autonomous installations. Her work, sometimes small, sometimes large, but always colourful, is included in many international art collections. This year the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam ran an exhibition called 'Cent Minimes' of a hundred small woven textile works made by Hicks over the past 50 years.

About *Amarres*

Hicks proposes a colourful sculpture with the title *Amarres*, reaching for the sky "like a geyser" from the water surface of the Catharijnesingel. The work consists of a bundle of modern shipping cables of various types, colours and textures. These ultra-durable and flexible materials form a sculpture that is meant to serve as an anchor for the inhabitants of Utrecht. A meeting place that "contributes to our well-being" and will weave its way into the lives of all Utrechters. The braided column with a height of 8.5 to 13 metres will light up its surroundings at night.

The jury about *Amarres*

The jury is impressed by the creativity with which Hicks has woven together her impressions after visiting the location into a lucid and energetic proposal. By making a meeting place of her work, Hicks has given expression to the SHV value "invest in people". The jury does wonder, however, whether a meeting place on one of the city centre's busiest arteries is a realistic concept. The choice of a nautical theme is considered very Dutch, but not typical for Utrecht.

Proposal: Clouds by Studio Roosegaarde

About Studio Roosegaarde

The work of Daan Roosegaarde (Nieuwkoop, 1979) moves across the boundaries of art, spatial design and technological innovation as it explores the changing relationship between man and technology. To aid him in this ambition, he established his own studio, Studio Roosegaarde, with ateliers in Waddinxveen and Shanghai.

By applying and developing new technologies, he has constructed dune landscapes that undulate and light up, walls that open like tulips, and much more. Always, the work of art responds to the presence of people. Roosegaarde calls this techno-poetry: a connection established between artistic ideology and technology. His work has been on exhibit at the Tate Modern in London, the Tokyo National Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and in public spaces from Rotterdam to Hong Kong.

About *Clouds*

Studio Roosegaarde has proposed a work of art that is enigmatic and monumental. The bridge over the Catharijnesingel is to be flanked by two columns formed by rings of smoke rising from the water. The rings of smoke have been placed in a grid which makes them take a variety of shapes.

The jury about *Clouds*

The work's near lack of physical presence and its reminiscence of passing clouds, with their strong imaginative appeal, are the aspects that the jury finds particularly attractive. The work is more like an event than an object. The jury can well imagine that a sudden encounter with this ephemeral work on a bridge with busy pedestrian traffic in an urban environment can be quite a sensation. It is a seemingly simple intervention that unlocks the imagination of passers-by: an unusual surprise in an everyday commuter existence. The question is, however, whether it is really possible to produce a column of smoke rings capable of rising at least 15 metres before dissipating or being blown away by the wind. Moreover, the jury doubts whether the ephemeral work will be clearly visible in built-up surroundings.

Proposal: Mariaplaatspoort by Gijs Van Vaerenbergh

About Gijs Van Vaerenbergh

Gijs Van Vaerenbergh is a collaboration between Pieterjan Gijs (Leuven, 1983) and Arnout Van Vaerenbergh (Leuven, 1983), established in 2007. Their work centres on site-specific projects: experiments in the form of installations and constructions that interact with their surroundings and balance on the fine line between architecture and visual art. Besides these experimental projects, Gijs Van Vaerenbergh are also involved in architectural projects and commissions in which they apply the results of their experimental work. As a consequence, their work develops in two directions: from experiment to architecture and vice versa. Gijs Van Vaerenbergh sometimes seek inspiration in existing architecture, as we see in their church-like sculpture *Reading between the lines* in Borgloon (BE), but sometimes also in the visual arts, as shown by *Framework* in Gent, where the artists were inspired by Sol LeWitt. The materials used vary from weathering steel to building equipment such as cranes and tower waggons. Their projects sometimes resemble buildings, sometimes performances.

About *Mariaplaatspoort*

During their preliminary study, Gijs Van Vaerenbergh discovered that Utrecht once had four historic city gates, none of which is still standing in modern-day Utrecht. Because the work of art will be located where the station area and Utrecht's city centre meet, they propose erecting a fifth city gate, a new one, over the bridge: Mariaplaatspoort. The gate will consist of a twisted steel arch, untreated on the outside, reflecting on the inside. Due to the twist of the arch, the view of the gate will change with every step one takes. Sometimes, it will even partially disappear from sight.

The jury about *Mariaplaatspoort*

In the jury's opinion, the design is simple but makes a forceful and monumental visual impression. The tension created by the work is subtle and originates in the twist of the arch and the surprise effect of the reflecting inner surface. In their proposal, Gijs Van Vaerenbergh provide a clear idea of the construction method, even suggesting that the placement be treated as an event. The design by Gijs Van Vaerenbergh has a "classic" look, in the sense that the chosen material (weathering steel) and form (a geometrical arch) have been widely used in 20th century sculpture and installation art. The jury is impressed by the clarity and subtle power of the work and its symbolic quality, which is deeply anchored in the location. Moreover, on the basis of the proposal submitted, the jury is confident that the work will fit into its complex surroundings without the need to make any significant concessions.

The jury's decision

The location chosen by the Fentener van Vlissingen Fund is a bridge connecting the ultramodern station area with the medieval city centre. In a few years' time, every day tens of thousands of pedestrians and cyclists will cross this bridge and pass the head office of SHV. The location is the anchor of the work of art. The jury intentionally invited very different artists to submit a proposal, hoping to find a work that does justice to the many-layered complexity of the location. This proved to be a successful strategy. At the same time, as could be expected, it has made the decision all the more difficult as we have the choice of three impressive, original proposals. If we could, we would love to commission all three of them. Finally, after much deliberation, we chose the proposal that creates a new image of an age-old symbol connecting the city to the world and the citizens to the city.

Our choice is the sculpture that takes on its true form only when it is used by those citizens:

Mariaplaatspoort by Gijs Van Vaerenbergh.

Utrecht, November 16, 2012

On behalf of the jury

Aleid Wolfsen
Chairman