

Jury report 13th ABN AMRO Art Award



The jury of the thirteenth edition of the ABN AMRO Art Award is honoured to grant this year's award to Ivna Esajas. Working at the intersection of drawing and painting, Esajas creates, in the jury's words, an intriguing universe in which everything seems to flow into each other while carrying equal weight, and in which nothing seems to be able to exist without each other. The interplay of foreground and background and interaction of bodies, narratives and time symbolise the search at the core of her work for a state of balance between solidarity and the friction of interdependence. To this end, Esajas draws from (art) history as well as from traditions and narratives rooted in Black communities and culture.

The jury is enthusiastic about the richness and originality of Esajas' visual language, which is as delicate and subtle as it is bold and compelling. With clear, elegant lines and transparent matte fields of pigment, she constructs deceptively simple scenes that capture one's gaze with their configurations of interlocking figures within a constantly shifting perspective. Esajas draws inspiration from myths and personal stories, Black feminist traditions, science fiction, literature, and everyday life. From this rich array of sources, she builds a poetic universe that is constantly in motion but always in balance. The jury applauds Esajas for the manner in which she spotlights the beauty and necessity—as well as the complexity—of togetherness.

Esajas studied at the Utrecht School for the Arts before graduating from the Sandberg institute's Blacker Blackness master's degree course. Her recent exhibition at Metro54, *Sister Mine: Between Holding on and Letting Go*, demonstrates her commitment to following her own path, regardless of prevailing trends, unreflected conventions, and the zeitgeist. By way of example, Esajas frequently works on the reverse side of stretched canvases, thereby making the raw slats of the stretcher frames—including

the unhemmed edges of the canvas—the actual frames of her paintings. At times the stretcher may disappear entirely behind bands of colourfully stitched textile; other works forego conventional canvases altogether, executed on the inside of wooden cabinet drawers. Specific choices arise according to what, for the artist, the work itself seems to dictate within the process of its making. This intuitive method, something like a carefully considered spontaneity, is palpable throughout her practice. Esajas typically embarks on each piece without preconceived ideas about what she wants to create. She simply starts, allowing connections to emerge from the dots and lines she makes on the canvas until something promising begins to take shape. She develops this in an exploratory manner, fleshing out the emerging idea in pencil, charcoal, paint, and embroidery. The choice of exhibition title, "Between holding on and letting go," is apt: this quote from a poem by James Baldwin—an important source of inspiration for Esajas—hints at the tension between maintaining control and trusting in chance discoveries, a working process yielding images that allow for surprise, even to Esajas herself. The jury particularly commends Esajas for the multiple layers of meaning she manages to embed in the resulting work: without conveying anything explicitly, she succeeds in raising pertinent questions about how we, as human beings in an increasingly individualistic society, relate to one another and to history.

The ABN AMRO Art Award supports the development of promising female artists in the Netherlands and is bestowed primarily on the basis of artistic merit and originality. The jury notes that Ivna Esajas' tendency to work independently of institutions, keeping herself out of the public eye, and thus artworld's systems of valuation and expectation, displays her conviction that the work should speak for itself; the reception of her recent work and exhibitions demonstrates the extent to which she achieves this objective. Nevertheless, the jury believes that Esajas' work deserves more

attention in the Netherlands and deems this an excellent moment to help facilitate and support her endeavours. The jury is thus delighted to honour Esajas as the thirteenth recipient of the ABN AMRO Art Award.

Jury of the thirteenth edition of the ABN AMRO Art Award

Danila Cahen, Curator of the ABN AMRO Art Collection

Natasja Kensmil, visual artist

Erica Kostelijk, Director of ABN AMRO Transaction Banking

Emily Pethick, Director of the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam

Rein Wolfs, Director of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Text of the jury's report

Esther Darley on behalf of the jury