

Jury's Report

“What would we like the world to know about Dutch photography in 2015?” That’s the question the jury’s chairman, Arjan Benning, asks of the jury members. They meet for a ‘jury day’ at Pakhuis de Zwijger in Amsterdam to select the best submissions for SO2015. Photographers have submitted work that they produced in the past year, which should present their unique view on 2015. In addition, the photographer’s ‘creative identity’ should be apparent in the series. Benning phrases it as follows: “Is the photographer interchangeable with another, or could the series have been made only by this person?”

Prior to the jury day, the members had each, independently of one another, selected submissions that have ‘stopping power’. A series had to get at least one vote to make it to jury day. Peter van den Doel, director of DuPho, starts this day by introducing the jury members to each other, five professionals working in the photo industry. They then continue the selection process together. They do so by looking at big screens on which the series are displayed one by one, image after image. Now that the series with stopping power have been pre-selected, the jury is allowed to ask for the artist’s statement accompanying the series, and discuss, if desired. The jury is quite positive in their judgements: even if a submission hasn’t been edited well, and therefore won’t make it to the next round, the jury points out which photos touch them.

Editing turns out, as in previous years, to be the main pitfall for the participating photographers. “I feel like we’re leaving out many great talents just because of their sloppy editing”, one jury member remarks. Making a good edit is not just a matter of leaving out weaker photos, it’s thinking about the series as a whole: what makes it more coherent, more meaningful and more exciting? The jury is itching to edit out some specific photos in otherwise good series, but this is not allowed. It’s the photographer’s task to show his or her creative identity, not the jury’s to make one for them. Nevertheless, the jury hopes that photographers will spend more time on their editing process and ask others to look and think along with them before submitting.

This year it is remarkable that very few portrait series were submitted, and that amongst the students’ submissions, many interior corners were photographed. A jury member thinks that a teacher must have given that as an assignment. Another funny realisation is that many photographers this year photographed light bulbs and other light sources, because in many a series there is one photo of a lamp or a light hanging from the ceiling.

The contest is not divided by genre, and that causes discussion in a few instances. The odds are that, in a selection of Dutch photography, all genres would be somewhat equally represented. Yet, some genres are underrepresented in the submissions. To select a series in order to have a good ratio between the genres is not the intention of this contest. Instead the jury members judge a series on its own qualities irrespective of its genre. Only when the jury doesn’t agree on the quality of a series, do they compare other works in a similar genre, in order to discuss their merits.

A submission needs at least four votes in order to be nominated. Whenever the discussion becomes tough, the jury asks questions between themselves, such as:

- Would you commission the photographer?*
- Could the work be picked up by galleries?*
- Would you like to hang the work on your own wall at home?*
- Would it grab you when you open up a magazine?*
- Does it explore the boundaries of photography?*

These questions help the jury look at the various series from different angles, and to maintain a fresh critical perspective.

Towards the end of the day, the jury comes to a decision on which series deserve to be nominated. From 208 submissions, 35 series are chosen to form the Selection Of 2015. These prints are spread out on several tables. The jury concludes that they are proud of what is in front of them. This, indeed, is what they want the world to know of Dutch photography in 2015. The next task is choosing the winners. The jury, to their own surprise, agrees easily.

SO2015 Student Prize

The students' submissions turned out to be so good, that more have been nominated than originally planned. "Many of the students simply do as well as professional photographers," one jury member points out. The students' work is very indicative of 2015, from Polaroid style to fashion, to abstract and documentary. The jury is unanimous in its decision to award the SO2015 Student Award to Kiki Groot. Her series on a boy with autism convinces the entire jury. They find it an innovative series shown in a powerful edit, with no superfluous photos.

The Winners of SO2015

Bronze goes to Martijn van de Griendt for his fresh reportage on teenagers presented in nice full frames. Silver is for Eddo Hartmann who has a unique view on North Korea in a consistently grey series.

Finally, deciding who deserves Gold hardly needs discussion. Everyone agrees that Linelle Deunk's black and white series clearly stands out. It has a beautiful use of light, and the combination of portraits and landscapes is very well done. Since there's a trend of black and white photography, the series is 'very 2015', and the jury hopes that Deunk's work will set the standard.

By: Nora Uiterlinden