

Jury report of the Françoise van den Bosch Prize 2002

Jury members Claartje Keur, Ruudt Peters, Cornelia Holzach and Ingeborg de Roode were quick to agree on one thing: Western European designers have received much attention in recent times. Why not, therefore, try to find a designer from elsewhere? It would also be worth the effort, because beyond Europe's borders much is made that deserves to be seen.

Having decided on this, reaching further agreement immediately proved somewhat difficult. Most jury members had listed a number of candidates, mostly made up of designers who, having been active for a good while, are in a position to serve as models for the upcoming generation. So far so good. However, not a single designer was proposed by more than one jury member. One conclusion might be that right now there are no designers who stand head and shoulders above the rest. Viewed positively, there are so many good, interesting designers around that many of them qualify for the prize.

After a preliminary round of voting five candidates remained, just one of whom was non-European. However, the jury members did not really feel a unanimous decision on any of them was possible. Further discussions revealed a growing desire to seize the opportunity presented by the award to turn the attention of the Dutch design world, and perhaps even of that in surrounding countries, on a non-European designer who, still perhaps relatively unknown, undoubtedly deserves a share of the limelight. This opened up the possibility of taking a generally broader view, which was seen as a welcome development.

In the session that followed one name emerged unanimously for the conferment of the Françoise van den Bosch Prize 2002: Warwick Freeman, born in 1953 in Nelson, New Zealand and, remarkably, self-taught. Freeman's jewellery deals with the emotional content of the material. He draws on the qualities of a wide range of substances, nearly all of them naturally occurring, which he connects with forms and subjects from his surroundings. Motifs alluding to the sea are common. He focuses on the essence of the form, simplifying it to the point that a more vigorous and powerful image emerges. His work is rooted in traditions of the South Pacific: the materials and techniques he chooses, as well as the tales that inspire him, are those of the original inhabitants of New Zealand and Oceania. Freeman is deeply interested in their cultural influence. His work is nevertheless indisputably contemporary, positioning itself at the crossroads of two cultures. Every piece of jewellery is charged with the power of a symbol. The way in which he fashions and combines substances such as mother-of-pearl, bone, gold, silver, minerals, acrylic, shell and wood is refined and testifies to a great love of his craft. The jury acclaim the consistency of his working methods, which are free of any intellectual premises. In the fast-paced culture of the western world, the serenity of Warwick Freeman's designs may serve as an example of a different approach.

Amsterdam, July/December 2002, final version