

## Juryrapport Ted Noten, Prijswinnaar 2008

Over one year ago already, a jury from across Europe convened in Amsterdam to discuss one of the most highly regarded prizes in the jewellery world, the Françoise van den Bosch prize, awarded biennially by the foundation set up in the artist's memory. By now the result of that meeting will be known to all of you, for we are here tonight to celebrate the exceptional role that Ted Noten has played as an ambassador for this art form. As one of the jurors invited to participate in the deliberations on this occasion, I would like to use this opportunity to offer a brief glimpse behind the scenes and to explain how and why we reached the decision that has led ultimately to this evening.

In the opinion of this juror, the Françoise von den Bosch Foundation has developed an exceptionally successful formula for electing their biennial prizewinner. Five jurors are invited, one from the board of the Foundation, one being the previous prize winner, and the remaining three being recognised as experts in the field of contemporary jewellery design, be that as artists, gallerist, curators or academics. On this occasion the panel consisted of Karl Fritsch; prize winner in 2006, Chiquita Nahar, Head of Jewellery & Product at the Academy of Fine Arts in Maastricht; Lous Matin, a maker and renowned gallerist; James Beighton, curator of the contemporary jewellery collection at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, and the author of this report; and the chair, Mieke Oosterman, who even now is doing a fine job of delivering this report to you. Each of the panel were asked to prepare in advance a choice of two or three artists, who they considered to have made a most substantial contribution to the field of jewellery design over the course of their career. These nominations were made independently, the first and only time that they are revealed being at the meeting itself. Such a process guarantees a lively debate, but also ensures that an intriguing selection of artists are brought forward for discussion. This is not a prize for which artists can apply, ensuring that the jury, have the freedom to select whoever they consider to be most deserving. Their choice is not restricted to artists who have nominated themselves, and need not be hindered by any artist's personal modesty.

Like other prizes therefore, there is a winner and there is a shortlist. Perhaps the one shame inherent in this anonymous process is that the shortlist will never be known; it will never appear on the artist's resumé. Nonetheless these artists were all deserving of recognition and accolade. As such, whilst we are here tonight to celebrate the achievements of Ted Noten, I would like to also offer a silent tribute to those who were so nearly here tonight.

On this occasion in 2007 the process was extraordinarily amicable. No heated arguments ensued, no tears of despair that a particular favourite had not been chosen. The first judge presented his nominations. At the mention of Ted's name a general murmur of approval was heard from the remaining judges. One by one the panel revealed their choices and argued their case. By the end, three judges, independently, had chosen to nominate Ted Noten. Another artist had received two votes, the others one each. So the winner was clear; a majority of the judges had nominated Ted. Could we all go home now, or open a bottle of our Chair's excellent wine? Not a bit of it; the job that evening was to debate the matter with due seriousness. Other artists had been nominated and argued for with consideration, authority and passion. Points had been

raised and debated about the qualities that we should be looking for in the prizewinner. Ted was admired for his conceptual rigour and innovation, but what about another nominated artist, whose handling of gold touched upon the emotions of the viewer and wearer in a deeply poetic way? A fair point it was agreed, but the same integrity in making can be seen in Ted's work: Ted is not an artist for whom intellectual curiosity comes at the expense technical expertise. His respect for and interest in traditional craft skills can be seen not only in his own work, but also in the HEROES project that he developed for Birmingham Institute of Art & Design.

It was noted that Ted had been achieving considerable acclaim at the time, and deservedly so, but what about an artist who, throughout their career had been creating excellent work with humility and commitment. Again, looking at Ted's career, that same commitment has always been apparent, perhaps most obviously in his self-organised monograph, with the highly modest title *Ted Noten*, an inspirational publication, whose influence will surely be felt beyond the world of jewellery design. It became clear that it was Ted himself who had been so proactive in developing these opportunities, and that this attitude has brought with it the acclaim that we were now witnessing. To paraphrase Shakespeare, Ted is an artist who has "achieved greatness" and not one who has had it "Thrust upon him".

So the debate continued and the drinking of wine was further postponed, but at every point the same answer came back. The winner is ... Ted Noten.

By now, some of the reasons why Ted was chosen should have become obvious. Several jurors expressed their surprise that Ted's name did not already feature on the illustrious list of past prize winners; it was felt that the prize was timely, if not overdue. Most sincerely, it was felt that in the person of Ted Noten, jewellery had an ambassador who could communicate to, and enthuse audiences that contemporary jewellery design has often found hard to reach. He has developed a visual vocabulary that can be understood outside of the circuit of collectors, galleries and jewellery museums. Projects such as *Chew Your Own Brooch* epitomise Ted's attitude, a project that has sprung from his observation and wonder at the mundane; the blobs of chewing gum, adhered to walkways, public seating and the underside of café tables; an overlooked but ever present part of our daily encounter with the urban environment. To translate this observation, through a sly take on an instantly recognisable branding device, into a opportunity for jewellery to intervene in everyday life has ensured that his project has reached an audience ranging from artists and curators, to business men and social workers through to school children.

The strategies that Ted exploits, as typified by *Chew Your Own Brooch* are those most readily found in the fine art world, and the objects that he makes will often appear to be as much at home in the white walled space of an art museum, as they do on the body of the wearer. Typically for Ted, he is not happy with either one or the other of these two possibilities, and so this project at the Stedelijk Museum 's-Hertogenbosch, causes the two environments to collide in a single event, a catwalk show within a museum. So Ted understands the language of fine art, and in this way is able to tackle the thorny issue of jewellery's status as a craft genre. He is an artist who has received a traditional training in the applied arts (albeit via a period working as a bricklayer and a nurse in a psychiatric hospital), and whose grounding in, and respect for, traditional metalsmithing techniques has already been mentioned. Make no mistake

though, Ted is an artist who can engage his mind with equal subtlety to his hand; an artist who approaches his work with humour, curiosity and astute observation. He is an artist who has fought to have jewellery design recognised as a discipline that can touch the sensibilities of the widest audience, and hold its own among the repertoire of genres promoted by fine art institutions. He has opened up new opportunities for the presentation of jewellery design from the streets to the gallery, and has embraced a range of techniques from the most traditional to the most contemporary; from the artisan's workshop to the production line robot. In the opinion of the jury, on that night in 2007, Ted Noten has done most to carry forward the spirit of innovation and enquiry for which Françoise van den Bosch herself was renowned. It was our privilege therefore to elect him as the 2008 recipient of this most esteemed prize.

James R. Beighton

Curator of Craft – mima Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art