

PRESENTATION FRANÇOISE VAN DEN BOSCH PRIZE 2000 TO RUUDT PETERS  
Theatre Institute, Amsterdam 1 November 2001

Speech by Liesbeth den Besten:

Ladies and gentlemen, relatives and friends of Ruudt Peters and also of course the central figures in tonight's event, Ruudt Peters and his partner Leo Versteijlen, as the chairwoman of the executive committee of the Françoise van den Bosch Foundation, I would very much like to welcome you all to the eleventh presentation of the Françoise van den Bosch prize, a prize which is awarded every two years.

This year things will be a bit different. Due to circumstances, the prize-giving ceremony is taking place rather late. It is the Year 2000 award I will be presenting here this evening, with the year 2001 drawing to an end and the jury for the 2002 award getting ready! They will meet exactly a month from now, so if all goes well, you can attend another ceremony within a year. That is, if we do not lose our battle against time again. In addition, as you might have noticed, many more people than we had expected wanted to attend the ceremony. This has resulted in unpleasant decisions and make-shift solutions, but I am convinced that they will not cast a cloud over this evening's celebrations. One of the implications is that the ceremony has to be performed twice. I've heard that some people think it's a farce, but I can assure them that the prize I'm about to give to Ruudt is just as fake - the money was transferred to his bank account some time ago. So I suggest that we do not speak in terms of fake or real this evening. The Françoise van den Bosch Prize is real, as real as the recognition for the prizewinner's work. The ceremony is the 'act' that goes with it and we're going to perform this act twice - don't forget the Theatre Institute is our location for the evening! It was the best solution we could think of.

Since the summer of 2000 I have been chairing the executive committee of the Françoise van den Bosch Foundation, when after 9 years of chairmanship my predecessor, Paul Derrez, decided to stop. In these nine years as a chairman he did very well and I would like to take this opportunity to show my public appreciation for what he did. Paul Derrez was not only a Foundation chairman, he was also the first winner of the Françoise van den Bosch prize. It was 1980 and the jewelry world was still fresh and green. I more or less followed what happened in this world, paid the occasional visit to Paul's gallery RA and read an interesting article about the laureate in the newspaper. As a young student of art history I realised that a whole field was waiting to be explored here. One thing led to another, for instance a thesis about Dutch jewelry design. The fact that I am about to present the eleventh Françoise van den Bosch prize to Ruudt Peters, twice even and for the price of one, is partly caused by this very first prize awarded twenty-one years ago to Paul Derrez. As you can see, this prize has made people act from the very start.

No doubt there will be many people in tonight's audience who do not know who Françoise van den Bosch was, and that's why I will take you on a short trip to a recent past, to an era which has been closed. Françoise van den Bosch was one of the rebellious jewelry designers, who - in the sixties and seventies - broke with all kinds of jewelry design conventions and traditions, and wanted her profession to have an independent arts discipline status. Françoise had been born in 1944 and had studied at the Jewelry Design Department of the Arnhem Academy of Arts. In 1977, while preparing a retrospective of her work, she suddenly died in her studio.

In her short life Françoise van den Bosch had built up an impressive oeuvre and impressed many people. Her work reveals an inquisitive mind and a consistent approach, and I think that this is the reason why her work can still be an example to young jewelry designers. Françoise had no ready-made answers, she searched and found, sometimes - not always. The silent witnesses of her approach are the many experiments in the inheritance she left us. With a minimum of intervention in simple materials, such as copper, brass and aluminium, she made sober but very ingenious pieces of jewelry. Soon she started to make independent objects. The tube material which she used for these objects was carved with a saw and pinched together, a method of working resulting in objects which often consisted of several, interlocking elements - the cushion brooches.

Françoise not only locked herself up in her studio - although she must have been a passionate workhorse - she also had a mission. As one of the five founders of the BOE - the Union of Rebellious Jewelry Designers (year of founding 1973) - she had been an active advocate of her colleagues' interests and a strong supporter of giving information to the public. And Ruudt, you too will probably have met her in this period, for you are mentioned in the minutes of a BOEgroup meeting as the contact

for the province of Friesland. Friesland, Ruudt? What on earth was a man, studying at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, doing in Friesland?

But to get back to Françoise: her work and her élan were highly appreciated, in the Netherlands and abroad. That is why after Françoise's departure some of her friends decided to capture this élan in a Foundation. They wanted to keep the interest in the design of jewelry and objects alive and thus stimulate the profession. With donations by Françoise's father, Count van den Bosch, a fund was established, which has enabled the Foundation to finance its activities to this very day.

Much has changed since the first prize was awarded twenty-one years ago. Where in 1980 museums were waiting in line to curate an exhibition of a jewelry designer's work, it's much more difficult nowadays. There is a lot of negotiating to be done, sometimes with no result (despite all the efforts made). You might say that 'the modern piece of jewelry' (pardon me for the ugly generalisation) has matured. The jewelry profession has settled down, has become established and accepted, but at the same time it has lost some of its glamour. I call it 'mature', someone else might call it 'boring'. Museums no longer need pieces of jewelry to create a profile. Pieces of jewelry have become integrated in our daily lives and have lost their special attraction. They flourish, however, in the many galleries and on the many fairs. There are buyers, collectors and wearers and what can be more beautiful than to see your jewelry function? To see that it is worn by people who really care; that it makes them feel well?

For Ruudt Peters this has always been an important issue. Over the years, with what seems to be an increasing obstinacy, he has expressed his hatred of showcase exhibitions. He thinks that they create too much distance between the objects on show and the people that want to see them. Jewelry is made to be felt, to be touched and weighed in your hand. This, however, makes it difficult to organise an exhibition of his work in a museum. It is possible in a gallery with its permanent supervision and clear lay-out, but in a museum the very thought will make people extremely nervous. Since, in the short term, it was not possible to hold a museum exhibition of Ruudt Peters' work and I still liked the idea of seeing a lot of his jewelry in one place, I have asked everyone attending this prize-giving ceremony to wear one of Ruudt's pieces of jewelry - provided of course that they had one. I do not know how many people responded to my call, but I hope that we will be able to enjoy a walking exhibition here, twice. These will also be the two shortest walking exhibitions ever.

And yet Ruudt Peters deserves a museum presentation of his work. After all he has been active in the profession for 25 years, a period in which his approach to the jewelry phenomenon, his ideas about its presentation and his many years of teaching at the Rietveld Academy have been such major influences in jewelry design. That is why it is so nice to have a prize like the Françoise van den Bosch prize. It is true: the money may be a fraction of the large art prizes, but it is not only the money that matters. For the Françoise van den Bosch Foundation the prize has always been an act of stimulation and the winner has always been encouraged to hold a similar view. There are numerous examples from the Foundation's past, of winners who felt encouraged by the prize to organise an exhibition of their own work. One of these examples is Ruudt Peters who felt encouraged by the presentation of this prize to establish a working group to prepare a travelling exhibition. The young architect Gianni Cito has made a plan for a flexible structure which can be used in different kinds of exhibition rooms. In this glass-free but safe structure people can take a close look at and even touch the objects on show.

Much still needs to be done, but the ball has started rolling. The latest news is that the exhibition will start in the dome room of the Museum of Modern Art in Arnhem in September 2002 and from there it will travel to the vault of the Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam. The Schmuckmuseum in Pforzheim will certainly open its doors to this travelling exhibition and the Museum voor Sierkunst in Ghent and other museums have shown their interest as well. Besides, negotiations are underway with a German publisher about a book, which will be designed by Henrik Barends.

Despite the fact that contemporary jewelry, as I have said before, has lost the rebellious spirit of Françoise's days, and has found its own public of lovers and connoisseurs, the Françoise van den Bosch Foundation still serves a very useful purpose. Our strength is our independence - we have no commercial or other interests, no hidden agendas. The Foundation's list of priorities includes the awarding of the prize, but we also set great store by giving information to a broader public. That is why we recently started a website with much information about the Foundation, the prize winners and the collection, which is supervised by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

I would like to end with a few words about the prize: every two years a new jury is formed, and each time one of the seats is taken by a (different) member of the Foundation's executive committee. The members of the jury must make sure they are well-informed. They can defend their own candidates but must come to an agreement in a discussion with their fellow jury members. This may take some hours, but fortunately they always reach an agreement, and the year 2000 is no exception to this rule. I am glad they have chosen Ruudt Peters, who really deserves the prize, which came at a very special moment - in the year in which he turned fifty and took leave as the co-ordinator of the Rietveld Academy's Jewelry Design Department.

The jury consisted of Paul Mertz, who chaired the jury on behalf of the Foundation's committee, Bernhard Schobinger, the Swiss winner of the 1998 prize, Marjan Boot, applied arts curator of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and Marcel Wanders, designer, whom I would all like to thank very much for all the work they have done.