

The Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for Art 2006

The work of Job Koelewijn presented by Professor Carel H. Blotkamp, Chairperson of the Jury of the Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for Art

Prize citation: for 'his richly variegated, poetic oeuvre'

Dear Job,

It is a tradition to address our laureates in their own language in their laudation. I hope that our guests from abroad will forgive me for continuing in Dutch.

The jury has awarded Job Koelewijn the Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for Art for 2006. In doing so, it honours a unique artist with a richly variegated, poetic oeuvre. Koelewijn first came to public attention in 1992, when he was still a student at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. For his final project, he had his mother and aunts dress in the splendid traditional folk costume of Spakenburg, his birthplace, and ritually clean the Academy's glass exhibition pavilion. His work since then has brought him international fame and encompasses a wide range of materials and themes: photographs and film, architectural structures, books and other small objects in series, large installations, permanent works, and works that last no longer than the length of an exhibition.

Koelewijn's art is an art of ideas. He follows in the footsteps of Duchamp and, more particularly, the conceptual art of the 1960s, which has recently experienced a revival. Besides his conceptual leanings, however, his work is also highly sensual. Remarkably, he appeals not only to the sense of sight, but also to the senses of hearing and smell. For example, he covered the floor of a medieval hall in Middelburg with spaghetti, which crunched as it was pulverised under the feet of visitors. He applied perfumed baby powder to a wall of a large hall at the Biennale in Venice. His work is one of tremendous fragility and purity.

Another striking feature of Koelewijn's work is his use of written or spoken language in the visual arts. Sometimes he uses texts by his own hand, for example the moving photographic work *Kids Walk Away With My Thoughts*, in which we see a parade of small children in a schoolyard wearing hats made of paper bearing the artist's notes. More often, however, Koelewijn uses texts by others, including poets and writers that he admires such as Dante and Beckett, Marsman and Lucebert. He uses their words in unique ways. In Rotterdam city centre, for example, he used a quote by Beckett that bubbles up to the surface of the water every few minutes.

Koelewijn does not drag us along into a fantasy world; for him, everyday reality is special enough. He does not tell us stories or record spectacular events. He intervenes in subtle ways, in an attempt to intensify our experience of a particular place or moment in time. Sometimes he does this outside the museum or gallery. For example, he has taken a travelling movie theatre to various rural or urban environments. It consists of a darkened room furnished with cinema seats in which the audience looks upon the world outside through an opening the size of a film screen. Film music accompanies the moving image of a Dutch river with boats drifting past and a lone cyclist on a dike, or a stairway at a museum in Britain peopled by visitors going up and down, unaware that they are, temporarily, part of a work of art. In 1996, Koelewijn created an installation at Galerie Fons Welters in Amsterdam in which he removed a

large section of the gallery's back wall to give visitors a panoramic view of an adjoining garden. Early this year he returned to this idea. This time he installed a white plaster panel in the same gallery wall, which had been closed up again; in the panel, which rotated slowly, he placed a small, square window that looked out on the same garden.

Koelewijn intervenes, isolates, frames and immobilises in order to generate a meditative experience of space and time. It is as if he is saying that art can make everyday reality into a miracle, into a revelation.