

## JURY REPORT

Tracy Metz winner of the Maaskant Prize 2016

### PERSISTENT WONDERMENT

“My basic attitude is journalistic: how is it that things are the way they are? Curious and open-minded.”

Journalist, author and presenter Tracy Metz is the 18<sup>th</sup> winner of the Maaskant Prize. The fact that she has been awarded the prize stems directly from the great appreciation and the need for recognition of the position Metz occupies in the professional field. Metz has a strong and remarkably diverse profile. Her kaleidoscopic contribution to the discussion about and the quality of the spatial development of the Netherlands over the past three decades has been important and influential, in part thanks to the positive and enthusiastic tone that characterizes much of her work. In a country where debates quickly go sour and harden into rigid positions that stem from our long tradition of Calvinist preachers, Metz' constructive and interested attitude is the exception rather than the rule.

Tracy Metz distinguishes herself not as a designer, but as a critical follower of new developments, an interested and curious publicist, as a persistent and apparently open-minded interrogator, but also as a sparring partner for many professional designers, policy makers and anyone interested in spatial planning, urban issues, design and the quality of our illustrious and artificial lowlands.

That aura had grown and developed during her professional life over the past thirty years. After beginning at the newspaper *Het Parool*, she worked for 26 years for *NRC Handelsblad*, the newspaper that was once regarded as indispensable for readers looking for nuance. In her career as a writer she created an impressive body of work with growing authority on a broad range of subjects varying from Dutch interiors photographed by Theo Baart (1992), the rise and influence of the historic urban idyll of New Urbanism in America (1996) to Next Nature, about the possible new virtual dimensions of nature influenced by mankind (2005). In her articles in newspapers, but often also in (professional) magazines such as *Architectural Record*, her tone is critical, independent, strong-minded as she writes with both authority and humor about architecture, urbanism, nature and landscape.

Metz reflects on and informs us with palpable enthusiasm about our relationship to our built and natural environment. At the same time she consistently manages to generate attention and interest for the issue at hand, the design and the designer. And all of that without losing the sincere wonderment about developments in the Netherlands which her American background imbued in her in an almost offhand manner. The search for a balance between the two worlds which she holds equally dear brought her the prestigious Loeb Fellowship at Harvard's Graduate School of Design – an affiliation which was prolonged with

her appointment as a visiting fellow. Since 2012 Metz is an independent journalist and author.

It should come as no surprise that this persistent wonderment has led to the publication of a number of memorable books. With her book *FUN! Leisure and landscape* Tracy Metz was one of the first to chronicle the spatial and architectural impact of the leisure industry that was taking the Netherlands by storm. And before that, in the book *Snelweg > Highways in the Netherlands* together with the photographers Theo Baart and Cary Markerink (1996), she had shown the rapid transformation of the Dutch landscape as a consequence of the increase in mobility and the infrastructure it requires. Her vision on where we stand in relationship to our natural environment led to her being awarded the Groeneveld Prize in 2012.

Her most recent book, *Sweet&Salt: Water and the Dutch* was yet another bullseye. In it she convincingly describes and illustrates the new ways the Dutch protect themselves from the threat of water. An urgent and typically Dutch subject which Metz, with her signature enthusiastic persistence, elevates to a higher level but above all, to that of a broader public. Her role as a member of the Delta Commission, a state commission that produced the report in 2008 that led to the Delta program, enabled her to be a well-informed and engaged author.

In addition to her writing, Tracy Metz has increasingly developed into an organizer and moderator of debates, discussions and presentations. With many years of experience under her belt as a popular moderator, she started the live talkshow and digital magazine 'Stadsleven' about life in cities, which has generated a lot of response in both the professional and general media. The themes she chooses show not only the breadth of her interests, but above all her spot-on sense for important and urgent issues with regards to the current wave of urbanization and the excessive popularity of many cities. Her initiative in starting a modern-day 'salon' for cultural gatherings under the name 'StadsSalon' at her home, and her regular television appearances, in among others the political program Buitenhof and the popular daily talkshow 'De wereld draait door', have further confirmed her stature as a critical and knowledgeable thinker about new developments. Her role since 2013 as the director of the John Adams Institute, as the successor to Russell Shorto, is the latest step in this trajectory.

With her texts, books and activities, then, Tracy Metz has an impressive track record in repeatedly bringing relevant and urgent developments in society and in the professional field to the attention of both a professional and a general audience. Her belief in the added value of design and designers is unflagging. At the same time, the professional world stands to benefit from good analyses and visibility of the value and strength of designers and their way of thinking.

Metz looks for, and often finds, overlap between disciplines and subjects. In a time when cultural policies are disintegrating, the base for designers' practices is

eroding and ambitious commissions for spatial design are scarcer than ever, the importance of this achievement cannot be emphasized enough. Metz' role in this debate is that of the enthusiastic and critical presenter and connector, but also promoter of the added value and necessity of culture in its many manifestations. The fact that her work is accessible for a broader public makes her efforts all the more valuable. In times like these of searching and doubt, arrogance and complacency are the last thing that either producers or consumers of culture need. It is this special quality of Metz as a messenger and interpreter of culture on many levels and on many stages that have a strong appeal for the jury.

The jury has expressed the hope that Tracy Metz will continue to manifest and even expand her initiative and enterprising qualities on various (international) fronts for many years to come. Happily, this hope was confirmed at the award ceremony of the Maaskant Prize. With the launch of the website [www.tracyinnederland.nl](http://www.tracyinnederland.nl) which she developed in collaboration with multimedia agency Submarine, artist Jan Rothuizen and podcastmakers De Kostgangers, she has added a new epistle to her long relationship to the Netherlands and had yet again shown her eternal sense of wonderment.

Jury Rotterdam-Maaskant Prize 2016

The jury of the Rotterdam-Maaskant Prize 2016 consisted of the following members: JAAPJAN BERG (moderator and publicist | Bergplaats, secretary), FRITS VAN DONGEN (architect/partner at van Dongen Koschuch), JANNEMARIE DE JONGE (partner at Wing), KARIN LAGLAS (chair board of directors Ymere), LEEN VERBEEK (King's Commissioner of the Province of Flevoland, chairman).