

# Jury report tenth ABN AMRO Art Award

The jury of the ABN AMRO Art Award is honored to grant this tenth edition of the prize to Neo Matloga. With the choice of Matloga (South Africa, 1993), the jury shows its esteem for an artist who, within an appealing and idiosyncratic signature style, subtly links household scenes from his home country with the difficult socio-political background against which they take place.

Neo Matloga, who grew up in South Africa during the post-apartheid era, came to Amsterdam in 2016 as a resident artist at De Ateliers. There, he swiftly developed a style employing a combination of painting and collage that the jury finds impressive – a truly new voice that, at the same time, has a certain familiarity. With ink, charcoal, and photographs, Matloga creates ‘collage-paintings’ that provide a glimpse of the day-to-day household cosiness of his youth: friends at the kitchen table, conversations on the sofa, dancing in the living room; upbeat stories full of affection and a sense of security, inhabited only by people of color. With these, following the lead of artists like Kerry James Marshall, he created a world in which he felt at home – and one that he did not find represented in art. At the same time, due to the freedom and inventiveness with which Matloga constructs his figures – from fragments of photographs showing family, friends and famous South Africans – he grants them many facets and perspectives, both literally and figuratively. Eyes and ears go in all directions, and limbs are contorted; the figures seem both endearing and disturbing. In that respect, his work brings to mind the Cubist portraits of Picasso and Braque from the early twentieth century as well as the 1960s collages of American artists such as Romare Bearden. The jury commends, in particular, the new point of view that Matloga provides beyond these art historical figures.

Furthermore, the jury is impressed by the way in which Matloga taps into deeper social and political levels while

avoiding easy clear-cut messages and placing a strong emphasis on relationships among people. As such, his work can be regarded as an invitation to look at a Black community, while our gaze is cast back by eyes that seem to miss nothing. Who is looking at whom here? One could imagine these at times unsettling figures as spirit-like entities that remind us of what we don’t see: the problems that South Africa continues to face. With titles written in his native language Sepedi (Northern Sotho), Matloga underscores his cultural identity but also stresses the abundance of languages in South Africa. Among the gleeful scenes, we also sense questions being raised about apartheid, racism and Black identity. Giving rise to such associations, the work remains lively and urgent in the jury’s view.

The ABN AMRO Art Award is intended as a stimulus for talent in the Netherlands. The quality and singularity of the work are principal criteria for selection. Neo Matloga is recognized by the jury for his compositional acuity and his vibrant, powerful and spirited work. It is both monumental and intimate and in a singular manner deals with the dilemmas of our age. The jury is eager to follow the development of work that it finds so promising and finds this a perfect moment to support Neo Matloga in his next steps. For that reason the jury is pleased to grant him the tenth ABN AMRO Art Award.

Jury of the tenth ABN AMRO Art Award:  
Danila Cahen, curator ABN AMRO Art Collection  
Stijn Huijts, artistic director Bonnefanten, Maastricht  
Xander Karskens, director De Ateliers  
Natasja Kensmil, visual artist  
Marianne Verhaar-Strijbos, director Private Wealth Management ABN AMRO MeesPierson

on behalf of the jury, Danila Cahen