

JURY REPORT  
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ARNON  
GRUNBERG

JOHANNES  
VERMEER  
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# Arnon Grunberg Laureate Johannes Vermeer Award 2022 Jury Report

The Johannes Vermeer Award, the state prize for the arts, has been presented annually since 2009 to an artist living and/or working in the Netherlands. With the award, the Dutch government seeks to draw attention to and honour special artistically talented minds. The laureates of this award display exceptional artistry and are of great importance to their field and society. The award can be presented to artists from all disciplines: from dance to design, from fashion to music, and from the art of painting to literature.

The State Secretary for Culture and Media Gunay Uslu is advised by a jury in her choice. The jury members are experts in their field and look beyond the boundaries of disciplines. They actively explore the artistic climate in the Netherlands, bearing in mind a proportional representation of the various art disciplines. This year's jury consisted of Andrée van Es (chairman), Pierre Audi, Romana Vrede, Hicham Khalidi and Sjeng Scheijen.

In its selection, the jury is on the lookout for an artist who has built up a leading and consistent oeuvre. The artist must have a proven relevance to the field and to the artistic climate in the Netherlands and beyond. This year, the jury focused on an artist who transcends the domain of his oeuvre. An author who questions urgencies and themes in the social debate in his own way, showing an unbiased interest in the intentions of others. Someone who steps past so-called boxes or political trends and plays an inspiring role of significance for young artists in the Dutch art field. This year's laureate represents all of this and more. The jury unanimously chose Arnon Grunberg as the winner of the Johannes Vermeer Award 2022.

It is the first time that the award has been presented to a laureate from the literary world. This choice of the jury emphasises the position of literature and the word in a broad sense in the Dutch art field. Writer Arnon Grunberg receives the award due to his exceptional contribution to Dutch arts. His literary input unmistakably influences his generation.

"You can't ask people to love you, it's too much to ask. You can only ask that from your mother." (Mothermarks, 2016)



Writer, essayist and columnist Arnon Yasha Yves Grunberg was born in Amsterdam in 1971, to Hannelore Grünberg-Klein and Hermann Grünberg. At the age of 23, he made his debut with Nijgh & Van Ditmar with *Blue Mondays*, a strongly autobiographical novel in which his parents' war experiences are unfolded. Since then, he has written as many as 16 novels. His columns, essays, short stories and reports have been published in newspapers and journals like *de Volkskrant*, *De Standaard*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Parool*, *Vrij Nederland*, *Hollands Maandblad* and *De Groene Amsterdammer*. He also regularly attends public debates beyond the Dutch borders. Grunberg often leaves his desk for new experiences. For example, he allowed himself to be 'embedded' in a psychiatric clinic, with soldiers in Afghanistan, as a substitute father with a Dutch family, with chambermaids and with the staff of the Swiss railway catering service. Together with brain scientists, he launched research into neurobiology in relation to the creation and perception of art. Since his debut *Blue Mondays*, his literary work has been translated into 30 languages and his novels have been awarded major literature prizes both nationally and internationally.

The jury praises the power of Grunberg's voice and the recognisability of his writing. He knows how to give all the genres he practices his own completely recognisable, frequently imitated but inimitable voice. After three sentences you know it's him speaking, which is a rare quality. The jury is also impressed by the unparalleled production and breadth of his oeuvre and his passion for language. Grunberg has redesigned and manipulated language. The importance of that cannot and should not be underestimated. With his pen as a weapon, he can defend this country.

"A person falls in love with a defect. It is the lack that moves, seeing the wound through the mask makes it soft." (*The Asylum Seeker*, 2003)

Grunberg investigates in word and deed what jeopardises humanity. The jury sees how he fearlessly identifies the weakness with his novels, short columns, journalistic reports, philosophical essays, in a 4 May lecture, or recently through dance. Grunberg watches, asks and describes. With his unbridled sense of curiosity, he investigates the other's truth. He recognises the value of discomfort, the misstep, the disappointment, the shortcoming, the suffering, the shame and fear. With his work he makes way for confusion, longing, forgiveness, love and endearment. Grunberg's universe creates space for seriousness and emotion, but also for wonder and uncontrollable laughter. Arnon Grunberg is a strong thinker and a courageous writer. He is undoubtedly one of today's most important, versatile and influential artists.

"To me, man is an escape artist. Why do you escape, how do you escape and where do you escape, the answers to those questions shape our identity. [...] The artist and the writer practice a paradoxical form of escape art. They seek truth, whatever it may be, try to show it and at the same time move heaven and earth to escape it." (NRC, 1st May 2018)

With great admiration for his oeuvre and convinced that his work will continue to nourish and amaze us in the future, the Johannes Vermeer Award 2022 could not find a better destination than Arnon Grunberg, according to the jury.