

BABS
GONS

JOHANNES
VERMEER
PRIJS 2026



Johannes Vermeer Award 2026 goes to poet and performer Babs Gons

The Johannes Vermeer Award 2026 has been assigned to poet and performer Babs Gons. The jury, chaired by Dagmar Oudshoorn, unanimously nominated her for the award. Gons receives the award for her pioneering, multidisciplinary practice, in which she brings together poetry, spoken word, performance and social engagement to create a genre entirely her own, using language of great expressive power to enrich both the personal and public realms. The prestigious Dutch State Award for the Arts, established by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in 2008, will be presented on Monday, 23 November 2026 at the Nieuwe Kerk in The Hague by Rianne Letschert, the minister of Education, Culture and Science.

Catalyst

Babs Gons is a writer, poet, performer and host. As a poet and performer, she is considered one of the leading catalysts of spoken word poetry in the Netherlands. For more than twenty-five years, she has also unmistakably and decisively contributed to the development and professionalisation of spoken word as an initiator and artistic director. Within the Dutch poetic and literary landscape, Gons has developed a distinctive artistic and multidisciplinary genre characterised by a strong commitment to society.

She performs worldwide, and her diverse body of work, which is highly regarded both nationally and internationally, has received numerous accolades, including the De Johnny stage poetry award (2022) and the Golden Quill (2024). From 2023 to 2025, she was Dichter des Vaderlands (Poet Laureate of the Netherlands); in the final year of her tenure, the title was changed to Dichter der Nederlanden (Poet of the Netherlands).

In 2019, she compiled *Hardop (Out loud)*, an anthology featuring the work of eighteen spoken word poets. Two years later, she published her official poetry debut, *Doe het toch maar (Just do it)*. In 2022, a selection of her columns for *Het Parool* was published under the title *Alles wat je liefhebt wordt mooi (Everything you love will be beautiful)*. In 2026, her poetry collection *Wie zijn we morgen (Who will we be tomorrow)* was published.

Language

Her poetry extends far beyond the page. It comes alive in performance and in encounters with others, where it finds its full meaning through interaction with the audience. Gons' voice, rhythm and presence are an essential part of her artistry. When she recites her work, listeners are immediately moved by the intensity and expressive

power of her words. “Her language is clear, her sentences dynamic, her words accurate and her intention warm. With concise precision, she touches the heartbeat of society,” said the Johannes Vermeer Award jury.

The public realm

As a multidisciplinary artist, Gons moves with great ease between the cultural, social and political spheres. Wherever she speaks, from detention centres to international literary festivals, and from cultural events to national commemorations, she brings generations and communities together, enriching public discourse through the many voices and broad reach of her artistic practice. “With compassion and gratitude towards her audience, she captures social fault lines and human vulnerability in seemingly simple yet incisive words. Her artistic work creates a language for the issues of our time, makes them profoundly tangible and invites us towards both gentleness and strength. This is where the unmistakable significance of her oeuvre lies,” the jury said.

On view

To mark the presentation of the Johannes Vermeer Award, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is presenting an impression of the award winner’s work in the OCW display space. The exhibition space is located directly next to the entrance of the ministry on Rijnstraat 50 in The Hague and is open to the public free of charge. The exhibition will be on view as of 23 November 2026.

About the Award

The Johannes Vermeer Award is the Dutch State Award for the Arts. The winner receives €100,000, which can be spent on a special project within their own field of practice. The Dutch Government established the award in 2008 to honour and encourage exceptional artistic talent. The award is administered by the six national cultural funds, with the Mondriaan Fund acting as coordinating fund, and may be awarded to artists from all artistic disciplines who live and/or work in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Previous recipients of the award are Marco Gerris, Marit Törnqvist, Tania Kross, Arnon Grunberg, Natasja Kensmil, Rineke Dijkstra, Ivo van Hove, Janine Jansen, Iris van Herpen, Steve McQueen, Michel van der Aa, Irma Boom, Rem Koolhaas, Marlene Dumas, Erwin Olaf (†), Alex van Warmerdam and Pierre Audi (†). This year’s jury consists of Dagmar Oudshoorn (chair), Ted Brandsen, Afaina de Jong and Natasja Kensmil.

Note for the editors, not to be published:

Jury support and overall coordination of the Johannes Vermeer Award are provided by the six national cultural funds, with the Mondriaan Fund acting as coordinating fund. Production of the award ceremony is handled by LUSTR. For media enquiries, please contact The Publicity Company, Trix van Alphen at trix@publicity.nl or 020 612 7000. For more information about the Johannes Vermeer Award, kindly visit www.johannesvermeerprijs.nl