

Academy of Art and Design Zwolle

Profile: Human Matters

The ArtEZ Academy of Art and Design Zwolle is an art academy. It is an institute where (applied) artists are trained and where research is done into the nature of art and the role of art in society. The academy trains bachelor art educators, illustrators, animators, graphic designers, cartoonists, interior architects and associate degree interior designers.

Art academies in the Netherlands are part of higher professional education. While other higher professional education prepares students for a concrete occupation, students at an art academy must have the ability to link their own history and identity to the necessary professional expertise. Only through that link can they become a professional (applied) artist. This is reflected in the first and most important competence from the professional profile for visual arts and design: creative skills.

The ArtEZ Academy of Art and Design Zwolle teaches students to create work that links up with their own way of thinking and living, the uniqueness and history of the profession, and the social context in which they practise the profession. Moreover, our academy sees it as its task to equip students with the skills to become active and critical citizens with an artistic mission.

The domain for which our academy trains is art. The value of art rests first and foremost in itself: the insights, the beauty, the wonder and hope that art gives. This gives art an intrinsic value that is not derived from the economic or utility value that has come to be associated with it since the middle of the nineteenth century. From this intrinsic value, art can contribute to the humanisation of society. Art is, then, not merely an extension of or driving force behind the neoliberal economy.

Human Matters

For us, Human Matters is an ideal, an attempt to amalgamate the ideas behind this mission. This ideal embodies on the one hand the humanity, the human measure, the physicality, the sensory perception and the human sociality that we always bring with us. On the other, it comprises matter: the materiality and form of art. In summary, Human Matters says that humanity matters and is worth fighting for in today's world - a world with ever greater economic differences, a world with ever greater dangers for democracy and liveability.

Human Matters is a criticism of the ideology of the social system we live in. It counterbalances hyperspecialisation in science and the emphasis on performance and profit in the neoliberal meritocracy. In the arts there tends to be a proclivity to regard humans as sensory, thinking and feeling beings that live in communities.

Humanisation of society

The view underlying the contribution that the arts and artists make to an ongoing humanisation of society motivates the Zwolle academy. We focus on the encounter with what is unknown, uncertain and foreign. We regard this

as part of a step towards a better world. We are convinced that the arts and artists can play an important role in this.

This view of what an art academy should do is rooted in part in the history of the Zwolle location. A few mergers ago the Christian academy from Kampen joined ArtEZ. The old, compartmentalised idea of an emancipatory professional training course for talents 'from their own community' and the more modern relationship to the arts driven by Protestant Christian ideology had already largely disappeared by then. In the ArtEZ context, however, there remained the inspiration to use art education to link art explicitly to philosophical and ideological inspiration.

This view of our mission is idealistic. It is, however, not easy, conflict-free or comfortable. As a matter of fact: it requires constant adjustment, regroupment and discussion. It calls for curiosity and self-reflection, from students and lecturers alike. That is why our education, in every degree programme and in all years, pays relatively much attention to art-theoretical, philosophical and ideological contexts -

all for the purpose of sending art educators, interior designers, graphic designers and cartoonists who have learned to reflect introspectively and to consult others out into the world. Artists who can work in interdisciplinary, foreign and perhaps suspicious environments and circumstances; who seek to tap into the power that the arts have to shape difficult, painful and confusing human issues and hopeful and cheerful problems.

In our opinion, the greatest social value of the arts is to be found in artists who are able to pursue their vocation on the basis of this meaningful dialogue. There is a vital democratic element in this link between the artist's role and citizenship. Everyone needs the others, the strangers and the interaction with the unknown in order to get to know themselves. That is our compass.

Educational practice

An important question is how the ideas underlying the ideal of Human Matters are reflected in the programme, organisation and everyday educational practice of the ArtEZ Academy of Art and Design Zwolle.

The educational vision that the degree programmes in Zwolle have in common is based on the theoretical and empirical encounter with and adaptation of what is foreign and different: by looking, reading and writing. And by creating, working together and making discoveries. This is, by definition, not a flawless and comfortable process. In order to help students develop their artistic identity and find their voice in it, education is primarily a way of organising their discomfort. It is aimed at getting the educational community to ask themselves and one another the hard questions and to depict them.

Art education gives students room to develop their own narrative, to enrich themselves and to learn to express themselves. At the same time, ArtEZ Zwolle does not offer purely demand-driven education. Education at our academy trains artists who are looking for the value of their artistic practice in the communities where they are going to work. Or students who, as skilled, inspired and committed professionals, continue their studies with a solid compass in master's courses.

The academy's housing is also inspired by the Human Matters ideal. At the same time, it is precisely this housing that can help us much better to fulfil our responsibility for sustainability, ecology, peace and quiet. The

same applies to themes such as lifelong learning and the meaningful integration of education and meetings with alumni.

Educational examples of Human Matters in the academy

The theoretical and reflective classes

Most of the education at the academy consists of helping students to develop their own narrative and the - analog and digital - skills needed for the purpose. A relatively large part of the remaining teaching time is devoted to expanding knowledge and broadening cultural and intellectual horizons. This takes place in so-called observation classes and classes or projects in which students acquire theoretical, philosophical, art didactic and art historical knowledge. The content of this teaching time fits in with the students' interests, addressing themes such as spirituality, ethics and ecology. Ultimately, these theoretical and reflective classes should help students to develop a broader view, enabling them to discover the relativity of their own experience and cultural context and to hone their outlook.

Interdisciplinarity

A few times a year, all students from different disciplines and different academic years take part in projects based on social themes. These topics are proposed by partners and extramural institutions. The process of discussing, designing and working is an experience in unknown territory for the students. They do this with people and ways of thinking that are outside their own comfort zone. Examples of these interdisciplinary projects are Winter Lab, Summer Lab and 24Hours.

Liberal Arts Minor

Since 2015 our academy has offered a programme of six months (30 EC) to external students or amateurs. This Liberal Arts minor focuses on professionals who want to use art practice to reconsider their education. Be it a nurse who would like to learn something about graphic design, a trainee surgeon who wants to take up animation or a lawyer who is interested in interior architecture. This programme activates them very practically and propagates the art academy's mission. The minor organises discomfort among the professionals of the future. The self-reflection, the linking of arts to human issues and the development of an ability to transfer are recognisable elements from a Human Matters perspective.

Internationalisation

We use international cooperation as a means of meeting and confrontation. In line with the ArtEZ Institutional Strategic Plan, we want each degree programme to run its own educational projects with foreign academies and institutions. Illustration Design with Barcelona, Graphic Design with Milan, et cetera. This means that the academy does not focus on recruiting foreign students or that English is the regular language of instruction. But it does mean that students are prepared for an artistic practice that can learn from and compete with the whole world.