

Diverse is not automatically inclusive

Report on the public discussion Enriching jewellery education, an intercultural dialogue, on 31 August 2022 in Rotterdam

by Liesbeth den Besten

The art academy is a white environment, and the few jewellery schools in the Netherlands and Belgium are no exception. The threshold of the academy is high, revealing a huge gap. Where are the black students, those with a migration background, and other minority groups? Do they struggle to be admitted, how many of the "diverse" students reach the finish line, what problems do they encounter while studying at an art academy? And what can we do, how can we reach young people from minority groups and motivate them to study art or jewellery?

These and other questions were discussed on 31 August 2022 during the round table discussion 'Enriching jewellery education - an intercultural dialogue' at TENT in Rotterdam. This necessary initiative was organized by Karin van Paassen in the context of [Jewel.Rotterdam](#). The round table participants broadly agreed that there is still much to be done before the art school is a safe environment for every student. This exchange of views was a useful beginning from which lessons can be learned.

In her opening talk, Miriam Bestebreurtje, education manager at the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA), where she is primarily concerned with inclusion, stated that an organization can be diverse but that does not mean it is automatically inclusive. Inclusiveness means creating a safe environment where everyone feels heard, seen, and recognized, in terms of ethnicity and gender. Bestebreurtje: "If you find out that as an educational institution you are exclusionary instead of inclusive, then you have to do something about it. As an educational institution we contribute to the culture. So, if you only give a specific group of people the opportunity to express themselves you are not contributing to the vitality of the arts." WdKA has been working intensively on diversity and inclusion for about 10 years, for instance through a Cultural Diversity lectureship, working groups, research by Master students (such as Marleen van Arendonk), and currently two PhD researchers. Bestebreurtje believes that in everything an institution undertakes and communicates, it is very important to be sincere about it: "Students feel everything, they feel whether something is sincere."

Moderated by Esther Doornbush, founder of the free online encyclopedia [contemporarysesieraden.nl](#), and coordinator of the Rijksmuseum's acquisition process, the panelists first talk about why and how the topic of diversity and inclusion concerns them. Chequita Nahar addresses the lack of role models. She experienced in the 1990s as a jewellery student at the Maastricht Academy and the Sandberg Institute how difficult it is to study in a non-inclusive environment. It leads to a very one-sided education. There was no one to whom she could relate, and her themes were not recognized - in short, a lot was untouched. Nahar therefore wants to approach the theme from the idea of talent development: "because then you start thinking differently about the field of work and about diversity and inclusion."

Janice Deul, activist, and publicist has been advocating for an inclusive climate in fashion, art, culture and media for over a decade. She outlines why inclusion and diversity should be an important issue precisely within this field: "Although many people find fashion (and

jewellery) superficial, these are things that everyone comes into contact with and therefore you can use them well as a tool to implement change. Precisely because they are so accessible and relatively accessible. Because of the way systems work now and the way education is organized now, we are missing out on a lot of talent. We need to help marginalized groups to come in and see them as an enrichment."

Kalkidan Hoex, jewellery designer, artist, teacher at the Breitner Academy and MASieraad, active in community work, and founder of brand [The New Tribe](#), tells a personal story about her experiences and struggles with the Dutch educational system. Where you end up in education is determined by what you look like, and where you grow up. Because she has white parents committed to her ambition to continue studying, she managed to get into the academy in Maastricht despite starting from MBO. Hoex: "The Dutch education system is just not right. You are judged on skin color, but as soon as teachers knew that I have white parents, the image they had of me changed. The system should be completely unraveled". As an adopted Ethiopian child in a small Limburg village, she became aware as early as kindergarten that she had a different position. But, Hoex says, "I experienced the advantage of white privileged parents, which is a huge difference from many of my black friends." Gary Symor, designer, and teacher, has different experiences because he came as a 28-year-old from Suriname to the Netherlands for his education: "I was older, could resist better. The expectations were always too low, but I could deal with that." He experienced that people have blinders on and decided to do things differently. As a teacher at MBO Rijnland, trained as a fashion designer at HKU, he has become a role model. Symor: "I give my students what I missed out on myself. I see them as new citizens who are important to society. I enter the classroom with an approach to learning, not teaching." This attitude of learning from each other and not just from teacher to student is a form of inclusive education. But he sees his exemplary function in a broader sense, says Symor: "I really want to be a role model for the students, looking cool, well groomed, a positive attitude, open to students."

The Hungarian Irma Földényi, designer, former teacher at WdKA, (guest)teacher at Gerrit Rietveld Academy, and researcher at Sint Lucas Antwerpen in collaboration with Saskia Van der Gucht ('Jewellery, Matter, Time - Hard Data, Soft Stories'), has been living in the Netherlands for about 10 years. Coming from an Eastern European culture into the Western European one, she has very often been the 'guest': the person who can and must learn. Földényi: "I could make mistakes, do things in a different way than the Dutch." To her, the Netherlands with all its different cultures seemed like a place where everyone can freely reinvent themselves. But that turned out not to be obvious: during the years as a teacher, she learned how important it is to create a safe environment for students with different backgrounds and to build trust in it.

Saskia Van der Gucht, visual artist, trained as a jewellery designer, and teacher and researcher at Sint Lucas Antwerpen, deals with the subject in a task force on diversity and inclusion at Sint Lucas. Van der Gucht: "I try to be aware of my privileges in different areas. In my work I notice that we must work on different layers. For example, there is also a lack of diverse teachers. We need examples, everyone wants to be a good person and be on the right side but when we talk about diversity and inclusion we also have to talk about structural racism and economic inequality. And what are good practices? I hope today can also be about concrete actions."

Aside, colourblindness:

White Dutch people are largely unaware of the systematic underestimation of black children and children from immigrant backgrounds. Unintentionally hurtful comments, ignorance and prejudice often make black and other minority students feel excluded. It is precisely the non-malicious little remarks that confirm that you are different.

*In her article *The Entrance Gap*, sociologist Teana Boston-Mammah, connected to the Willem de Kooning Academy, points out that white people can say that color does not matter to them but that this is different for black people. She writes, "...this ideology of colour blindness is a form of invisible European racialization." (Boston-Mammah, *WdKA Makes a Difference Reader*, 2017, p.12) So we could argue that the ease with which white people can make statements about colour blindness is proportional to the discomfort that black people feel in doing so. So, it is important to talk about this in public.*

Several problems are discussed:

The educational system: Kalkidan Hoex argues that the idea of individualism, highly valued at art schools, is typically western. In other parts of the world, the idea of community, and doing something with each other and for each other, and caring for each other is much more important. In this connection, we can also refer to this year's Documenta fifteen, organized by a collective from Indonesia, where big names were missing, and collectives called the shots with art that has a strong social connotation. For that matter, according to Hoex, the Addis Ababa School of Art does have its own signature in arts, crafts, religious art and free art. Gary Symor, who teaches at a vocational school, where students come from diverse backgrounds much more often than at art schools, sees that students often talk about making money. He characterizes his teaching style as "disruptive." "I ask the student what you want to learn and how can we help you get there. Everyone learns from that. We must turn things around, otherwise nothing happens. But it's difficult, especially when you talk to managers who have been working there for ages. It's disruptive in their eyes." Symor points out, that because you're black and look different you can get the idea that you're worth less or that people think that. This makes it difficult for students from minority backgrounds to speak up for their opinions. Symor: "There is a fear of putting yourself on the front, so I ask them what they want, and how they want to express themselves. Because that's the greatest treasure we have." He wants to change the system from the bottom up. Although, his discussion partners respond negatively to his question of whether he might be too positive, Chequita Nahar does make a comment. She has chosen a different approach: from teaching, through a coordinator position, to a management position because she thinks that is the only way she can get something done.

She has a rather pessimistic view of the well-being of art students from diverse backgrounds, which was confirmed by the interviews she had with them. Deul: "If they want to showcase themselves and their own culture it is discouraged, it is seen as not valuable enough. Students are allowed to draw inspiration from it, but it should not be your work. It only has value when there is intervention from a white authority." Some students drop out, others are kicked out of the academy.

Aside, unsafety:

In 2021, Amfi, Amsterdam Fashion Institute, was in the news because of the unsafe climate at school. Stories of racism, bullying by teachers, the use of the n-word, rejection of work because it would be "too ethnic," and failure to act appropriately on student complaints,

ignoring students after complaints, lead to serious emotional damage among students. Resulting in burnouts, study delays, and dropping out. For years dozens of students faced this. On timetotellamfi.nl (former) students can share their stories. After an external investigation, and the announcement by the Ministry of Education of an investigation into all art, design and fashion programs in the Netherlands, Amfi has taken the first steps towards a culture change at school. Workshops and trainings for teachers and bringing confidants more clearly to the attention of students, are a first step, but much more needs to be done.

Inequality: studying at an art school is very expensive, often too expensive for people from migration backgrounds. Kalkidan Hoex points out that it is even more complicated because of economic, cultural, and social differences. According to her, students with African or Asian roots have different interests than the individualism that is central to art school. With them it's about the community, that's what they've inherited. Therefore, it's not surprising that they want to study something that will earn them money, support their families, and make them proud. Hoex: "Different norms and values play a role. If you don't have parents who will pay anything for you, education is a huge struggle." She refers to [Patta](#) - a Dutch success story as a streetwear brand. These days, Patta also educates young people through their own [Academy](#). How can you teach young people from minority groups that they can have ambitions and achieve something in this society? According to Hoex, this can only be done through the scene they are in. "You have to know it; you have to go to it."

Chequita Nahar talks about the scholarships that the Maastricht Academy has been able to provide for some time thanks to the Province of Limburg. The idea for scholarships that can provide more equality came about because of a discussion meeting on diversity with all the academies in Eindhoven. Nahar: "We now go to places where young people skate, hip-hop, dance, etc. to explain to them that they can also earn money by doing this." It is not clear though whether other academies also provide grants.

But at the end of the day, you're not there yet if you have the students in. Then the first bump of diversity is taken and then it only begins. Then the system will have to show how inclusive it is. A more diverse teaching team is very important in this regard because, as Kalkidan Hoex rightly pointed out, the only black teacher on a team, you can't solve all the problems and you can't eliminate every misunderstanding.

Information: Most young people today get their information from social media and don't go to open days. The students who do go there are often young (and white) and are accompanied by their parents. Open days, a form of "that's just the way we do it," may not work anymore today. Other strategies will need to be devised, which are more cumbersome but ultimately more rewarding. For example, Chequita Nahar and Kalkidan Hoex argue that it works better to actively seek out potential students by going to places where young people congregate. The Maastricht Academy is also active in this area and in this way tries to inform young people that you can actually earn money if you have studied art. Maastricht is now also actively recruiting students in Curacao.

After the break, there is room for discussion with the audience after first doing a round table on what each panel member understands by diversity and inclusiveness:

Chequita Nahar: "a diversity of people, sharing knowledge and especially learning from each other, I think is a form of inclusiveness". Gary Symon thinks inclusiveness is "looking at your surroundings without blinkers, free from prejudice". Saskia Van der Gucht thinks that diversity could be about "intersectional thinking, different axes of inequality and visions

thereof that are not mutually exclusive, take these into account and act on them." Janice Deul argues that an inclusive society is one "where everyone participates and counts, where everyone's story is told, and where everyone has the opportunity to flourish and grow." To Irma Földenyi, inclusiveness is "being aware of your prejudices and daring to question them." Kalkidan Hoex takes a different position. She argues that there is still a lot of cultural healing to be done before we can say "and now we are really sharing". Feelings of inferiority and dependence have been passed on from generation to generation, and there is still little recognition of this psychological component. There needs to be room for that as well.

Questions and comments from the audience:

Designer-artist Jing He (China) has been in the Netherlands since she was 25 where she studied at the Rietveld Academy, Department of Goldsmithing and did her Masters at the Design Academy Eindhoven. She has taught at DAE and is currently a lecturer at the Jewellery - Linking Bodies department of the Rietveld Academy. Jing He: "Schools can easily say they want to be diverse but there are many problems to dissolve. I am always the only Asian teacher in a team. The main thing is to give space for common ground between teacher and student from the beginning." She expects teachers to become more aware of their own cultural backgrounds and the Euro-centric art education. Jing He: "It is important to understand students with a different cultural background and listen what the student wants to say. The Dutch educational system is very different and Asian students often don't know how to communicate with the teachers. Dutch people are very direct, for Asian students this is very uncommon. But this is not only my job. Maybe we should organize a workshop for art teachers about 'intercultural competence'."

Chequita: "Intercultural competences are indeed an important part of education. And communicating with students from outside can be very complicated. "Then teachers say: the student is lazy, or the student doesn't listen. Again, this is about being inclusive, being aware and acting accordingly."

Italo-Australian student Laila Marie Costa from Naarm/Melbourne first acknowledges the Wurundjeri people from the Kulin nation because they are the custodians of the country where she lives. In her view diversity is about a lot broader definition: "To me it also includes neurodiversity, gender, the queer, the elderly, persons with disabilities, we can just go on. I am neurodiverse myself and working in Belgium as a MASieraad Hasselt-Amsterdam student now for 10 months. I think the student support services are very different from those in Australia. In Australia teachers are trained in (diversity) awareness about neuro diversity, gender, ethnicity etc."

Marleen van Arendonk, senior Teaching Training WdKA, studycoach Arts & Crafts (including jewelry), states that "teaching the teacher" also exists in the Netherlands. For years she was a secondary school teacher of art education in 'het Oude Westen' (a neighborhood in Rotterdam), a school with about 55 nationalities. She was trained annually in her knowledge of ethnicity, and also taught this subject herself. Van Arendonk: "but this education that was very important stopped because of lack of money." Or, as Kalkidan Hoex rightly points out, "lack of priority!"

Chequita Nahar: "A lot of research has been done but it is not being implemented in the institutions. I just get judged for not enough students or that they don't graduate on time while I try to get students to study according to who they are." As long as the government's priority is quantity, the quality of education will not improve.

As part of her Master's in Education in Arts, Van Arendonk conducted research on diversity at WdKA. Her comprehensive report with recommendations was published in January 2016 under the title "I always thought an art academy was for white people" (a quote from a Surinamese-Hindu WdKA student). Her research addressed the question of what strategies can be applied to increase interest among Rotterdam students in art and art teacher education. One of the findings of literature review and interviews with students was that teachers in secondary education are hardly a source of inspiration. Another finding is that students automatically translate art into "autonomous art" and a poor future prospect in the economic field. The relationship with the applied arts, fashion, styling, and design is hardly made and the idea that a good living can be earned in these areas is unknown. By focusing more on design instead of traditional (western) liberal arts, the interest of students from ethnic backgrounds could be stimulated. In other words, it is important to find out what information young people need to choose a direction or profession they have little or no knowledge of.

Aside:

Marleen van Arendonk: "Our society is an ever-changing melting pot of different cultures. Soon there will be no such thing as a majority or minority from a certain culture. That's why it's not only important that a teacher understands his students, but that students are or become aware of their own background and that they understand or start to understand the background of their fellow human beings. Cultural education can play an emancipatory role in this process. Taking part in social and cultural life often leads to an improvement of the social mobility of groups with a migrant background. However, cultural education still consists of a largely Western canon. Therefore, it hardly connects with the perception of young students. Remarkably, even present-day themes are hardly taken into account in cultural education." (Marleen van Arendonk, "I always thought an art academy was for white people", A research into the growth of diversity among students of Willem de Kooning Academy's Fine Art & Design Teacher Training course, Rotterdam Piet Zwart Institute, 2016, P.4)

Renate Vollenberg of Artez Arnhem misses students of children of migrants, "why don't they come and why are they gone within half a year? They find the Artez system too heavy they say, too many hours. That is why we often refer them to the HKU where they have fewer hours." According to Kalkidan Hoex, however, it is not only about the amount of hours. There are also problems with the ethnic background and not getting enough space for it in their work. Teachers struggle with that. Students take these experiences with them, even when they drop out of school, and the story is spreading in their communities. Chequita Nahar has experienced that gender is sometimes also a problem for teachers. This can lead to a student who is in transition but is being structurally ignored and addressed by the wrong name. Nahar: "While it's about personal development, I want to educate individuals, address what they bring. They should be able to develop from the person they are and want to be."

Marleen van Arendonk interviewed 152 students and discovered that the mistakes start as early as elementary and secondary school. Van Arendonk: "Art education is about western art, conceptual art and not about narrative art. The children do not recognize themselves in the art they are shown at school. The students we would like to bring in don't come to the open days. They know the academy but see it as a stronghold. Everything they see outside and around the academy is white. You don't just step in there. Websites are fun and hip but give far too little information about what students actually learn at an art school."

Janice Deul wonders if anything has been done with the recommendations from her research. That is partly the case, according to Van Arendonk, new positions in schools are no longer automatically filled from the school's own network. And partnerships have been developed with secondary students inviting them to the academy for workshops. These workshops give them a better idea of what they can learn at an art school. This worked well until corona kicked in. Beforehand, only 3% of the participants considered going to an art school, afterward it was 11%. A small but positive change.

Finally, Chequita Nahar argues for a revision of values. By recognizing the values of students' different perspectives, we make our culture richer. Janice Deul brings up the decolonization of art. She argues that art should be seen irrespective of traditional, Eurocentric Western values about what art is and what success in art is. It is precisely there in that decentralized vision that great opportunities lie for design, styling, fashion, and jewelry. It is precisely in this decentralized vision that there are great opportunities for design, styling, fashion, and jewellery.

In conclusion, the table notes that we don't have much time anymore, that we need to stay in dialogue and respond. And as Saskia Van der Gucht introduces "also the planet doesn't have that much time anymore", with which she touches a sensitive chord with Gary Symor: "I've been busy with sustainability for so long, and also with the question of how other cultures deal with nature. I think, that too is diversity."

Recommendations and insights:

Aside, art labs:

One of the most important recommendations from Marleen van Arendonk, based on her research: "In addition, it could be worthwhile to set up workshops with an educational curriculum. In these workshops, technique and means are of no/little importance. However, experiencing what a profession in art can mean is what counts. The survey revealed that most of the pupils have an idea of what they want to become. Yet, many of them don't exactly know what a certain profession involves; they have a vague idea. An Artlab 'Interspace' of workshops that last for an afternoon over a longer period of time, offer a better solution for the examined problems. Setting up such a 'community of practice', a place in which professional dilemmas are analysed, is one of my main recommendations." (Marleen van Arendonk, "I always thought an art academy was for white people", A research into the growth of diversity among students of Willem de Kooning Academy's Fine Art & Design Teacher Training course, Rotterdam Piet Zwart Institute, 2016, P.45)

Diversity is not the same as inclusiveness: Inclusiveness means security, for example by having the space to put your own identity or desired identity, and your own ethnic background at the center of your work.

Prioritizing: Of the many studies already done, academies do not seem to care much. There is a lack of prioritization. That a mixed student population leads to new insights and discussions and is thus an enrichment of art education, is an insight that has not yet reached most of the management tables of art academies. Students will come anyway, and ultimately academies are judged by numbers of students and not by what they give their students. The Academy in Maastricht is a good exception where work is being done on diversity and inclusiveness. See here the added value of a director (Chequita Nahar) of

Surinamese origin. She sees the urgency and is in a place where changes can be initiated. More people like Nahar are needed in crucial policy spots in art education.

From below and from above: Symor, Deul, and Hoex are clear about their ambition to change the system from the inside and from the bottom up. Nahar opts for the managerial route. Both are needed.

Image: To change the image of the academy as a stronghold where individual white artists are trained, academies will have to address marginalized groups more explicitly in recruitment campaigns. The link art academy > liberal art > poor economic prospects can be broken by using fashion, design, and styling more actively. It is precisely in these sectors that there is a real economic perspective.

Looking outside the existing networks: The fact that we must look for new diverse students outside the existing channels is an important insight. The recruitment policy will have to become more active, by going from the academy to places where you would like to find your future students.

That it is also crucial to hire people from outside existing networks, to organize open applications and to hire teachers and administrators from mixed and diverse backgrounds seems obvious but is not commonplace. It is slow going but there is movement.

Continuing dialogue: It became clear on August 31 that there is a need action and for more dialogue. Diversity and inclusion are topics we need to work on together. There are enough good ideas, we can learn from each other and inspire each other.

Two important groups were missing in Rotterdam, art students on the one hand and administrators of art academies on the other. They should also participate in the next round table. Perhaps this may be an interesting task for Eva Olde Monnikhof, director of DIVA (the Diamond and Silver Museum in Antwerpen) and her staff, who suggested continuing the exchange of ideas in her museum: a continuing story in a colonially charged place.

Aside, jewellery:

As an older, white, privileged, cisgendered woman, I wondered if I was the right person to write a report on a discussion about diversity and inclusion in jewellery education. But I saw and see it as a good opportunity to delve seriously into the subject and be able to make some comments. By delving into the matter, reading articles, and having my eyes opened, I became aware of how deeply rooted the problem of missing diversity and inclusion in jewellery education is. It is alarming to read that bullying, misunderstanding, and discrimination are so prevalent, while many (including me) are not sufficiently aware of sensitivities in word choice and interaction. One of my former students from an immigrant background, who completed the academy with a master's degree, told me, "It's not ill-intentioned, it's ignorance. But you become very sensitive to little comments or facial expressions that people are not even aware of." She also pointed out that the entire academy is white: "The teachers are white, the students are white. Because you look different you are constantly affirmed in that. You don't know anyone who looks the same and does well. It's very exhausting to live in discomfort like that for five years." In addition, she struggled with being pushed into a certain role, with teachers expecting her to do something with her roots, or superstitions.

The discussion in Rotterdam was not specifically about jewellery education. This is understandable because jewellery departments are a marginal part of art education; most art

academies do not even have a jewellery course. I would like to elaborate a little on that. 'Contemporary jewellery' has developed into an entity in (large parts of) Europe, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand over a period of over 50 years, and more recently in parts of Asia, such as China, Korea, Japan, and Thailand. A global infrastructure of training, galleries, fairs, museums, jewellery weeks, symposiums and collectors exist. Beneath it lies a set of unwritten rules and assumptions: this is how we do and see it; this is contemporary jewellery. Things like style, aesthetics or a way of working play a role in it. But in a changing society, the idea of "contemporary jewellery" as a 20th-century Eurocentric phenomenon needs revision and renewal. Change and renewal will come from outside. I write 'contemporary jewellery' in quotation marks to indicate that, in my opinion, what is generally understood by this is not fixed. It is precisely contemporary jewellery that, through its freedom of subject matter, choice of materials, and techniques, from pure craft to new technologies, offers opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations, market expansion, and new intercultural approaches. In the latter regard, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia are forerunners.

As a teacher of jewellery history (trained with Eurocentric blinders but critical of the assumptions of art history whose foundations were laid in the 19th century by men with a colonial, misogynistic vision) I taught at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and Sint Lucas in Antwerp, among others. Since 2021 I have been affiliated with MASieraad Hasselt-Amsterdam as one of the founders and head teachers. The student population in jewellery departments has always amazed me, and especially that so little has changed since the mid-1980s (when I taught my first classes). The students are predominantly white, female and/or gay, and from Western countries. Occasionally a student from Latin America, Suriname or with a migrant origin trickled in - so infrequently, however, that they were exceptions and no doubt felt like outsiders. Asian students were also a minority, representing different countries and cultures. Education (including me) was unable to really take them into account, there were too few of them, and we knew too well what 'contemporary jewellery' meant. We assumed they would have a good time without asking questions. It is good that those questions are finally being discussed.

(Translated with DeepL)