

Jury Report 1st Prize International Photo Festival Leiden 2017

The jury members unanimously decided on 17 June that the first prize of the International Photo Festival Leiden 2017 goes to:

Saskia Aukema with her photo series 'Veiled'.

Muslim women publicly wearing a niqab, a face veil that leaves only the eyes visible, is a sensitive issue in Western society, touching upon many controversies. In some countries, wearing this type of clothes is prohibited in certain circumstances (for instance when performing public functions, travelling with public transport, etc.). There is also a political discussion in the Netherlands about whether the niqab may be allowed or must be banned.

Driven by her independent journalistic curiosity, Saskia Aukema has spent almost three years in the search for women who literally hide behind a face veil. The photographer has established contact with more than thirty women from the Netherlands, and some from England, who wear a niqab in their daily life, winning their trust, asking them questions about the how and the why, and eventually, in close cooperation with the women themselves, giving form to her photo reportage. Since its completion, the project has resulted in a number of exhibitions and a magnificent book that was published last month by Lecturis.

The jury was impressed by Aukema's conscientious journalistic approach, which we might consider as a fine example of the category 'slow journalism'. This approach has resulted in a consistent series of portraits that reflect on both the sensitive subject and its social connotations, and distinguishes itself through its positive creativity and visual power. Always in close consultation with the women, Aukema has 'styled', and in a sense 'abstracted', her portraits to iconic images that in their meaning extend far beyond the topic of 'Muslim women and their niqab'. Aukema's series is as well about identity, about the public and the private, about being a woman, and not least about clothing and fashion. The relativization and humour that speak of her photo series have a liberating effect.

The jury is of the opinion that to bring the niqab discussion to a higher and more nuanced level, as Saskia Aukema has demonstrated, has become possible thanks to her outstanding talent and skills in the field of photography.

Her close advertence to concept, styling, composition, colour, shape and texture has made her series extraordinarily strong and communicative. To

honour her photography with the first prize is therefore more than adequate.
Congratulations!

Saskia Aukema (1975) has studied Dutch language and literature in Leiden and graduated from the Fotovakschool Amsterdam in 2013.

Wim van Sinderen, jury chairman International Photo Festival Leiden 2017