



Press Release
JOKE SCHAUVLIEGE
FLEMISH MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT, NATURE AND CULTURE
Saturday, 2 March 2013

Els Beerten wins the Flemish Culture Award for Youth Literature

Today, Flemish Minister of Culture Joke Schauvliege presented writer Els Beerten with the 2011-2012 Flemish Community Award for Youth Literature. The jury honoured the youth author because she broke through the cocoon of youth literature with her novel *Allemaal willen we de hemel*. The ceremony, held at the Kopergieterij children and youth theatre in Ghent, was paired with the start of the 2013 Week of the Youth Book, an organisation of the Stichting Lezen (Belgian Reading Foundation).

Allemaal willen we de hemel is a gripping and richly gradated story of destiny about love, friendship, loyalty and betrayal in the lives of Jef, his sister Renée and their little brother Remi, who all look up to their friend Ward. Three adolescents and one child, surrounded by parents, teachers, friends and neighbours. They are regular people in an irregular situation: the Second World War. In each chapter, author Els Beerten writes from the perspective and realm of thoughts of one of the children. In this way, she lets us see how the war forces everyone to make choices. These choices have far-reaching and sometimes tragic results. In one way or the other, the children are partly responsible for the evil that makes up a part of the world.

Els Beerten (1959) grew up in Koersel. She has taught Dutch, English and creative writing in Aarschot since 1985. *Allemaal willen we de hemel* was published in 2008 and became an instant classic in Flanders and the Netherlands. In 2009, the book won, among others, the Boekenleeuw award, the Gouden Uil award for the Young Reader and the Gouden Lijst award. The German translation was nominated twice for the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis (German Youth Literature award). Finally, the book also won the Nienke Van Hichtum award in 2010 and the Lodlavki award in 2012.

The jury feels the praise is justified. "*Allemaal willen we de hemel* is much more than just an exciting war novel. It is also a coming-of-age story about growing up and taking responsibility for what you do in your life. Els Beerten also makes an indirect plea for the power of art: music is a leitmotiv in the story and binds the characters to one another. The multi-vocality also compels the reader to reflect on good and evil, truth and lies. The composition is well thought-out and developed with care, but this doesn't stand in the way of the exciting ending."

Flemish Minister for Culture Joke Schauvliege continues: "*Allemaal willen we de hemel* shows how very fragile or artificial the border can sometimes be between a novel for adolescents and adults. This story,

about war and the far-reaching effects thereof, seizes readers of all ages by the throat and deserves to be, especially during the present Year of Reading Aloud, 'read aloud' and shared."

2013 Week of the Youth Book

This awards ceremony marks the start of the 2013 Week of the Youth Book, the largest children's book festival in the country. A report on the opening ceremony can be followed live on www.jeugdboekenweek.be. This year's Week of the Youth Book will run until 17 March and focuses on the theme of "time". For two weeks, schools, libraries, bookshops and culture centres will be organising all kinds of activities to highlight the best books for children. More information: www.jeugdboekenweek.be

2011-2012 Flanders Culture Awards

A jury of experts honours a person or organisation that has made a remarkable contribution to the Flemish cultural landscape during the past season. The Culture Awards create public awareness of the laureate at a major event in the sector, which generates attention and appreciation for both the sector and the winner.

A cash prize of €12,500 is connected to the award. The Flemish Community set aside €20,000 for the Award for General Cultural Achievement. Each laureate receives the bronze statuette La ultima isla by Philip Aguirre.

More information: www.cultuurprijzen.be and www.vlaanderen.be/cultuurprijzen

Information for the press:

- Patrick Verstuyft, spokesman for Flemish Minister for Culture Joke Schauvliege, mobile +32 (0) 0475 51 56 05, persdienst.schauvliege@vlaanderen.be
- Gert Van Tittelboom, spokesman for the Government of Flanders Department of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media, mobile +32 (0)478 395 704, gert.vantittelboom@cism.vlaanderen.be
- A portrait of the laureate is available at www.cobra.be and www.knack.be/cultuur.
- Webserver with brochure for the Flemish Culture Award for Youth Literature and a high resolution photo of Els Beerten (credits: Mirjam Devriendt): www.cism.vlaanderen.be/cultuur/cultuurprijzen/pers/