



**rijksuniversiteit  
 groningen**

## **Alumnus of the Year 2020: jury report**

The University of Groningen is proud of its alumni. They are our ambassadors and our links to society. Every year, we award one of our alumni the title Alumnus of the Year, as an expression of appreciation and encouragement. The title is awarded to a UG alumnus who, in our eyes, has made an extraordinary contribution to society, academia or culture, is a source of inspiration for others and shows promise for the future.

### **The Alumnus of the Year 2020 is: Laurien Meuter**

Laurien Meuter founded the Tiny Miracles Foundation in 2010, to give women and their families in the poorest slums of Mumbai, located in the Red Light District, a chance of a better future. The foundation works on the basis of equality, paying attention to all the aspects that may help to break the vicious circle of poverty, which is often passed on from one generation to the next. The women who participate in the projects are therefore not only provided with a job and a proper income, but they are also given access to healthcare and information about a wide range of topics, varying from handling money to sexual abuse. Activities are organized to help the women gain awareness and self-confidence, and education is provided for their children. Tiny Miracles thus focuses not only on individuals but on the entire community.

‘We offer opportunities and possibilities to change how people think – people who have more faith in themselves will more easily believe that they can determine their own future’, is how Meuter explains her foundation’s way of working.

To enable all this, she works together with a number of international companies, museums and institutions that sell the products that the women make, such as designer vases and bags, throughout the world.

Laurien Meuter represents several characteristics and values that the University of Groningen holds dear. She is a social entrepreneur who is committed to creating a sustainable society by using a multidisciplinary approach and vision, she takes international as well as local perspectives into account, is able to connect different worlds with each other and bases all her actions on inclusiveness and equality.

This makes her a source of inspiration, not just for everyone who would also like to contribute to a better world, but also for us as a university. Her work makes a concrete contribution to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals drawn up by the United Nations, which the UG would also like to focus more on. For example, we are establishing interdisciplinary schools to confront students with major societal themes and familiarize them with social entrepreneurship, and thus teach them how to work towards a sustainable society, just like Laurien is doing.

### **About Laurien Meuter**

Laurien Meuter (1976) grew up in Amsterdam and 't Gooi, studied Economics in Groningen (1996-2001) and subsequently spent many years working for a bank in the Zuidas, Amsterdam's financial district. A serious accident, however, inspired her to change course. She spent a year working in Mumbai and was touched by the extreme poverty and degrading circumstances that street children were living in. Since 2010, when she established the Tiny Miracles Foundation,

she has been dividing her time between Amsterdam and Mumbai to help women and their families in slum areas in India to improve their living conditions. Her aim is to permanently lift one million people out of poverty. In 2020, Tiny Miracles was awarded 'Certified B Corporation' status, an international certification for companies around the globe who successfully combine commercial interests with contributing to a better world.

### **The jury**

This year, the jury for the Alumnus of the Year award comprised:

Cisca Wijmenga, Rector Magnificus, chair

Sander de Hosson, pulmonary specialist, Alumnus of the Year 2019

Thony Visser, Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Remco Kouwenhoven, Director of Alumni Relations & Fundraising/Ubbo Emmius Fund

### **Previous winners**

2019 - **Sander de Hosson** (1977), pulmonary specialist and pioneer of good palliative care; *Medicine*

2018 - **Christiaan Triebert** (1991), visual investigative journalist for the New York Times/Bellingcat; *IRIO*

2017 - **Carolien de Bruin** (1977), founder of C-Change, which helps international companies and organizations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; *Business and Finance*

2016 - **Merel Rumping** (1984), founder of Carewithinreach, making orthopaedic care accessible to all; *IRIO*

2015 - **Luuk van Middelaar** (1973), writer, professor and expert on Europe; *History/Philosophy*

2014 - **Monica Arac de Nyeko** (1979), Ugandan writer and humanitarian specialist for UNICEF, one of the writers on the Africa39 list and winner of the 2007 Caine Prize for a short story about two lesbian teenagers that served as the inspiration for the film Rafiki; *Humanitarian Assistance*

2013 - **Wim Pijbes** (1961), former Director of the Rijksmuseum; *Art History*

2012 - **Matthijs Bierman** (1964), Director of Triodos Bank; *Business Administration and Law*

2011 - **Stine Jensen** (1972), philosopher, writer, programme maker; *Philosophy*

2010 - **Jelle Brandt Corstius** (1978), writer, programme maker; *History*