



**Heineken
Prizes** 50 YEARS



KNAW

Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History 2014, awarded to Aleida Assmann

Ladies and gentlemen,

Each of us has countless memories of the past. Sooner or later, many of those memories will fade, while others are kept alive in stories, photographs or documents. Which memories remain affects how we approach the world today.

What is true for us individually is true for human societies as well. Families, peoples or nations reinforce some parts of their common history in a 'collective memory'. Other parts fade away over time.

Aleida Assmann has been a pioneer in what has become a distinct discipline that studies a particular kind of collective memory, which she has named our 'Cultural Memory'.

How do expressions of a society's culture affect how it handles its history? Which events keep being retold in the news media, and which ones are mostly ignored? How does literature deal with the past? Which parts of history are celebrated in architecture and monuments, in film and the other visual arts? And will the Internet change how we as a society remember and forget?

Together with Jan Assmann, her husband, Aleida Assmann established what has been called 'an anthropology of remembrance'. Her work connects literary studies with historical science, anthropology, psychology, theology, and neuroscience. Today, 'Cultural Memory Studies' have been accepted and adopted worldwide.

In Germany, she watched a society come to grips with its guilt about the Holocaust. It brought about a culture of Remembrance in which literature and art were dominated by guilt long after the war. At the same time, in other countries, art and culture had more room for positive historical reflections.

Aleida Assmann does not limit her work to research. She has often engaged in public debate. She advises countries on how to deal with the dark pages of their histories. How do you avoid burying your misdeeds? How do you avoid getting stuck in anger or guilt?

Germany, she has said, should use Holocaust Remembrance Day not just to commemorate how Auschwitz was liberated but also to strengthen the country's commitment to human rights today.

In a similar vein, she has joined a campaign to turn the 8th of May into a Europe-wide remembrance day for World War II and the Holocaust. The point is not just to get Europeans to remember their common history, but to have them celebrate a common future as well.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please join the jury in honouring Aleida Assmann, winner of the 2014 Heineken Prize for History.