

SHE'S GOT IT COVERED

Looks matter. That's true of books too, so PhD students often put a lot of thought into the cover of their thesis. And Monica Aguayo-Mendoza's was the best of 2020.



Text Roelof Kleis

The Mexican PhD graduate won *Resource's* 12th Cover Prize with the cover of her thesis *Chew on it*, which was popular with both the jury and the public. Online, 1565 people voted for *Chew on it*, which is 27 per cent of all the 5789 votes cast. And that total was a record: never before have so many 'voters' taken part. The result was by no means a foregone conclusion, however. Right to the last, *Chew on it* was neck and neck with the Spanish Mariola Acosta's thesis on *Doing Gender*. Between them, these two covers netted more than half the votes.

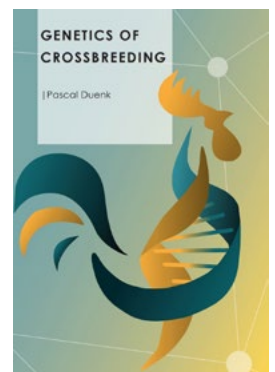
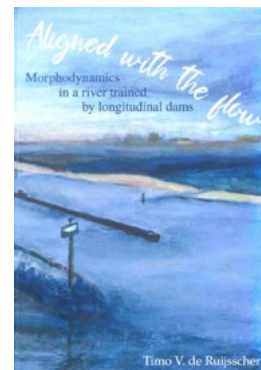
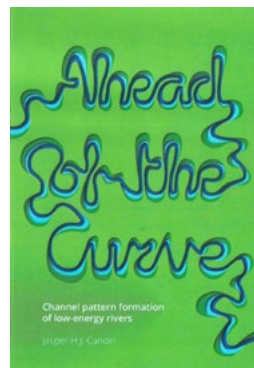
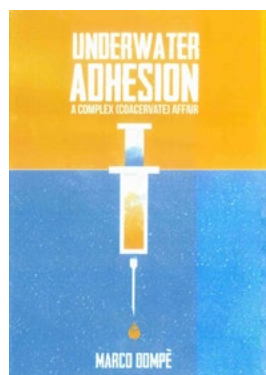
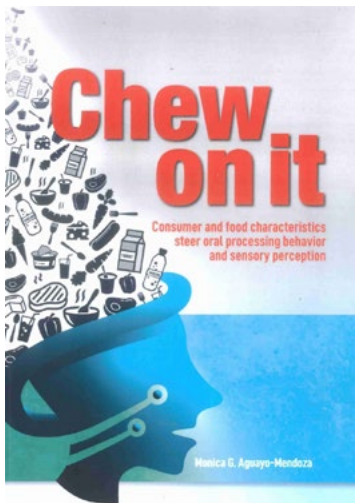
The jury (see next page for the members) ranked *Chew on it* second. 'The subject stands out beyond the level of a picture with a title,' says Special Collections curator Liesbeth Missel. 'In a specially constructed image, the subject is illustrated in detail, and the title itself is visualized.' *'Chew on it* sounds like a psychiatrist's advice

to a patient, which a tabloid newspaper got hold of,' is how Jac Niessen expresses the association the title has for him. Education Dean Arnold Bregt thought the cover 'lively with a good link to the subject of the thesis'.

Design

For the winner Aguayo-Mendoza, the Cover Prize is a nice recognition of all the work she put into the appearance of her thesis. 'A catchy design is typical of all my PhD presentations. Each chapter of my thesis starts with an infographic summary, for instance. And I carried that through to the cover, in the same colour scheme.'

The winning thesis explores the relationship between chewing and the perception it produces. This involved a lot of experiments in which test subjects had to spit out their food. 'But of course, I didn't want to put that



on the cover. Spitting is disgusting.’ What other options were there? ‘Well, it’s hard to capture perceptions of food in a picture. So I used the little icons for foods from my experiments. I had them jumping out of a head, as it were.’ She thought up the concept and the colour scheme together with her husband, and designer Wendy Schoneveld then produced the cover. And a lot of lobbying on social media through friends, family and colleagues took care of the rest.

For the jury, the cover of *Chew on it* was surpassed by that of *Underwater Adhesion* by Marco Dompé. He did research on glue that works well even in wet conditions, such as in medical applications in the body. ‘This design is beautiful in all its simplicity, and it is strong graphically, with the text supporting the image,’ explains Missel. ‘An elegant and simple depiction of the research in two colours: how do you stick the yellow drop of glue into the blue area?’ says professor Liesje Mommer. ‘For me, everything about this cover works,’ is *Resource* graphic designer Alfred Heikamp’s view. ‘The complementary colours blue and orange reflect the relationship between water and glue perfectly. In theory they are totally incompatible, but the syringe filled with glue shows that it’s possible to change that. If I saw this cover on a bookshelf, it would make me pick up the book.’

The jury

The 2020 Cover Prize was awarded by a combination of a jury and an online public vote. Both assessments produced a top five, and these were with combined to give the final result (using a points system of 20, 15, 12, 10 and 8 points). The jury was made up of Arnold Bregt (Dean of Education), Liesbeth Missel (Special Collections curator at the Forum library), Alfred Heikamp (graphic designer at *Resource*), Jac Niessen (Science information officer at WUR) and Liesje Mommer (professor of Plant Ecology and Nature Management). ■

The jury’s top five

- 1 Underwater Adhesion – Marco Dompé
- 2 Chewing – Monica Aguayo-Mendoza
- 3 Stream Whisperer – Jasper Candel
- 4 Snacking Behaviour – Femke Damen
- 5 Breeding Success – Pascal Duenk

Top five online

- 1 Chewing – Monica Aguayo-Mendoza
- 2 Doing Gender – Mariola Acosta
- 3 Long Live the Cow – Esther van der Heide
- 4 Diverse Bull – Harmen Doekes
- 5 Longitudinal Dams – Timo de Ruijscher

Colouring in

The 2020 candidate who took the most trouble over his cover may have been Harmen Doekes. He visited 133 colleagues, friends and family members with his cover drawing to colour in, as a way of thanking them for all their support. ‘You don’t complete a PhD on your own. You need the support of family, friends and colleagues. So I thought it would be fun to ask all those people to colour in a bit of the picture.’ And that fitted nicely with the subject of his study: the genetic diversity of bulls in the Netherlands as all the colours of the rainbow. Doekes found a colouring page on the internet, added a few personal elements (the double helix, the ball and the musical notes) and set off. He had the first 80 contributions quite quickly, but then came the first lockdown. ‘Then I started to visit everyone at home. Safely, yes. I had a bottle of hand gel with me and I kept a safe distance.’

He is more than satisfied with the result. ‘The creative side of the project is important to me, and it really was a joint effort by young and old together. The youngest was six and the oldest 70.’

