

The Griffin Art Prize: Supporting Graduates



The Griffin Art Prize, based at Griffin Gallery, London, is designed "to have a meaningful impact" on the career of one recent art school graduate. The enviable goodie bag of prizes on offer for the winner would, indeed, fast-forward the ambitions of any emerging painter, but not without some real talent; fortunately this is something which is not in short supply among several of the exhibiting artists. Such is the case that, as ever with "competitions" from the bottom to the top of the art world, it seems a shame – and rather arbitrary – that one must be chosen at the expense of the others. Nonetheless, that one winner was the excellent Ana Milenkovic, for her work *Face to Face II*.

This winning painting, an intelligent and chaotic deconstruction of the moon through collage, stands as part of a series of similar pieces exhibited by the Serbian artist, a recent Fine Art graduate from Wimbledon art school. The depth of reference and aesthetic appeal of these paintings is made all the more impressive when one learns that she is also a winner of the prestigious Clifford Chance Sculpture Prize – this win is just another feather in her cap, and painting another string to her bow. Milenkovic said: "I'm hugely honoured to have won this prize. This was a huge surprise for me, the best part of this process was working alongside five other exceptionally talented artists. This is a huge boost of confidence for me to keep working on my practice and develop as an artist. I'm really looking forward to starting the residency."

Though a thoroughly deserving recipient of the prize, she is right to mention the other artists; from the beguiling cross-platform work of Pallas Citroen to the intricate line drawings of Olivia Kemp, the rest of the shortlist provides some gems. Citroen's work in particular is striking and in some ways unsettling, and includes the arresting headless deer sculpture, *Bambi*, as well as a warthog friend whose head has been replaced by a real skull. She thus continues the theme of deconstruction and, in her desire to "make them back into some semblance of wholeness," reconstitution.

Olivia Kemp's series of line drawings, on the other hand, stand in stark contrast to the more conspicuous work of her contemporaries here. She focuses on "the idea of nature slowly taking back its own" through painstakingly intricate black and white lines. Her entry is an untitled image of this occurring in a cabin in the woods, and the gradual creeping back of the wilderness provides an eerie and almost witch-like quality to the scene. One can imagine the ancient Greek Furies or Macbeth's weird sisters joining in the natural reclamation; it hard to put your finger on why there is such a profound atmosphere to the piece, but this is no standard pen-and-ink scene.

The Prize has previously been reported on for its all-female shortlist, and this is worth a shout out in the male-dominated world of contemporary art. However, the power of some of the work is the real point in hand, and it is perhaps disproportionate to the relatively modest exhibition space – definitely a plus. Ana Milenkovic will hope to follow in the footsteps of last year's victor, Zsófia Schweger, who has since been selected for the Bloomberg New Contemporaries exhibition (currently showing at ICA) and exhibited at the RA's summer show. The exhibition evidences the fact that not only she but several other others are destined for success, and this is its greatest strength.

Alex Daniel

The Griffin Art Prize runs until 23 December. Find out more: www.griffingallery.co.uk

Credits:
1. Installation view, Griffin Art Prize 2016. Courtesy of Oliver Holms and Griffin Art Gallery.

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