

A sparkling show in the newly refurbished Mall Galleries

The 2007 ING Discerning Eye Exhibition, opened by selector Charles Saumarez Smith at a private view on 13 November, looked better than ever in the re-designed and enlarged space at its annual venue in The Mall.

All of the 2007 selectors (Artists Sarah Armstrong-Jones and Jennifer McRae, Critics Charles Saumarez Smith and Drusilla Beyfus and Collectors Dame Stephanie Shirley and Davina McCall)



*The refurbished gallery looked better than ever*



*Traffic through the gallery*

obviously enjoyed the task – described as “unexpectedly testing” by Charles Saumarez Smith – of putting together their selection of works. All were indebted to the 83 artists they had invited to take part and were unanimous in their appreciation of works entered through the open submission process.

This year not only saw a record number of entries to the open submission, but also saw a record percentage of total exhibited work come from that source. Although selectors are guided to choose at least 25% of their section from the open submissions, the 2007 selectors found plenty which appealed. Just over 50% of the 530 works on display were from the open submission, critic Drusilla Beyfus commenting “I found a lot of work that I had no difficulty in choosing at all. I felt very satisfied at the end of the selection days”. This gave almost 250 artists the opportunity to show alongside established names and, as the exhibition’s strap line goes, connected “new artists with new audiences”.

*The large crowd listens to Charles Saumarez Smith's opening words*





The ING Discerning Eye exhibition has been described as “an art buyer’s dream” and the domestic scale of the works (20 inches in any dimension) certainly makes many of them highly affordable. Total sales were up an encouraging 13% at just over £95,000. Some 70% of the artists whose work was purchased during the exhibition’s run came via the open submission, accounting for 67% of all works sold, while over a third of the invited artists made sales.

The refurbished gallery enabled the six individual sections of the exhibition, displaying the choices of the six individual selectors, to be shown in the best possible light (both literally and figuratively speaking). It is interesting how each selector becomes rather proprietorial about “their” works and sections, but all were in agreement that the exhibition looked wonderful, Sarah Armstrong-Jones also commenting that “You just see what people’s characters are through the work they choose ... it looks good”.

The availability of the additional area in the North Gallery allowed the exhibition to spread a little wider than in previous years and collector Dame Stephanie Shirley took full advantage of the space, revelling in the “creative” element of making her selections and delighting in her section of the show, which she described as “very much my collection, my choice, my way of hanging and my joy!”.

At the sponsor’s Private View, TV presenter and collector Davina McCall found herself “patrolling up and down ... I was so chuffed if anyone found the stuff that I liked interesting”. She was “really pleased” that a lot of people liked her selection – borne out by the fact that almost 36% of works chosen by her were bought, accounting for a quarter of all works sold in November.



*The new North Gallery delighted Dame Stephanie Shirley*



*Davina McCall's section*



*Davina McCall enjoys one of her selections with a visitor*

Another marvellous year for the ING Discerning Eye exhibition, summed up by Drusilla Beyfus – “A number of people have said what a good occasion the whole thing is, in that you see so many different kinds of works; all different tastes. And it’s a really democratic way of seeing what’s going on in paintings, sculpture and photography today”.