

Judging the Cork Street Open... and it's pistols at 10 paces

BY [MARTIN NEWMAN](#) ON AUG 5, 11 03:11 PM IN [ART](#)

Until August 12

Well the Cork Street Open HAS opened.. and what an experience that was.

I was flattered when asked to help judge the entries this year, but had no idea what a bunfight it would turn into.

Having whittled down about 2,000 entries to a little under 300 I arrived at 28 Cork Street on Monday for the lock-in.

With a glass of Pinot Grigio in hand and a plate of quiche I set about analysing the entries – stacked against the wall – with fellow jurors Louis Singh, Laura Noble and Stuart Semple. The object being to grade the works from top to bottom and pick category winners and best in show.

The organiser Kathryn Roberts had warned me about the clashes of ego she'd experienced in previous opens when the judges got together, but that was only part of the problem.

With Noble leading from the fore at every opportunity with one scathing deconstruction of a 'wannabe work' after another and Semple generally concurring, I soon found myself in a shaky alliance with art gallery owner Singh.

Trying to defend certain works against the onslaught of Noble, a gallery owner herself, we seemed to be vaguely sympatico.

But by the end of the night even this had unravelled and I found myself more often than not the odd man out in an X Factor style three-strikes or ticks adjudication.

Works I liked a lot, such as Sally Fuerst's Hannah in Profile, *top*, were getting a luke warm reception from the others, while I felt no connection with some of their favourite pieces.





I watched with great sympathy as Kathryn and her husband Rodney sat listening despairingly to our brutal assessment of some of the works. Particularly the abstracts. Their own, very valued work, having been to lovingly bring all these pieces together.

The charitable event, which requires a hell of a lot of time and work by Kathryn, was this year raising money for POPYRUS, an organisation dedicated to preventing youth suicide.

In the meantime, however, the four of us argued and sniped, sulked and huffed, at what each of us surmised was worthy of inclusion.

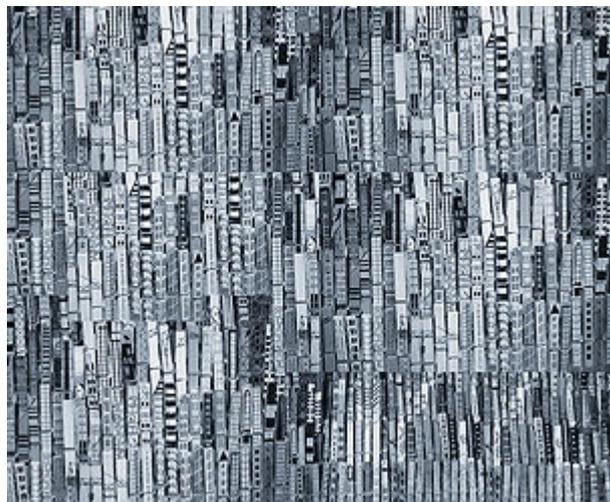
And the hardest part in any of it was picking a winner. Half a dozen paintings and sculptures were pulled out and put at the side, but after about three hours there was still a lot of shaking of heads and appeals of: 'How do we do this?'

In the end there was a rough consensus, pushed on by the increasing lateness of the hour. It was far from perfect however, and I suspect each of us would have individually selected entirely different works.

But at close of play Simon Shepherd's *Divide and Conker*, *above*, a highly realistic ceramic sculpture of a basketball inside a conker shell had won best in show. It had been expertly realised, was eye-catching and unusual, but lacked that inherent commentary that you want art to have. Instead it was a very good piece of design. And a chat with the artist confirmed it had evolved as a piece, because it looked right.

Runner-up was another sculptural work Eliza Bennett's creepy *Pleading Affluenza* – a pair of leather gloves, made like Chesterfield chairs in a glass case. For me the opposite was true of this one and there was too much of an attempt at creating a clever meaning.

The photographic prize deservedly went to Jo Metson and Nicola Yeoman's *Formations* and the young artist award to eight-year-old Maximillian Ghose's lovely *Galaxies*.



The framing award was given to Tony Feld, who produced some of the most beautifully painted works, albeit of a somewhat random arrangement subject-wise.

The drawing prize, quite radically, we gave to Hanna ten Doorkat's Metropolis, *above*, a work that at once took in mixed-media, sculpture and drawing – hundreds of pegs arranged like a cityscape and each illustrated in pen with doors and windows.

There were many others that came close. Ann Winder Boyle's wax painting Education for the Masses, *below*, was in my reckoning. Alex Moore's F/OOD series photographs were huge and confronting, as was Paul Mumford's photo Burning.



Susan Munson's landscape First Visit to Yorkshire was sublimely beautiful, as was Ryan Rodgers Hedge in Winter: Tregannick Farm. And there was much, much more.

But getting the balance of the exhibition right and each of the jurors balancing their own strong views was a battle.

What this exhibition shows is just how diverse art is and how diverse ideas and tastes in art are.

It means that a huge range of styles and subject matters can legitimately and energetically compete for attention in the marketplace and in the public's affections.

I think, therefore, this has been a triumph for struggling artists (and the other kind) everywhere – a chance to shine. Not so much for the judges.

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