

The Jerwood Drawing Prize 2006

The Jerwood Drawing Prize has been one of the major instruments in raising the profile of drawing in the UK over the past decade and in its influential wake drawing is now an acknowledged and significant presence in all areas of visual art practice, theory and debate. Given the high profile that drawing now commands, it's a particular privilege to be asked to join the selection panel this year.

Running The Drawing Gallery, which opened in 2004 as the only private and commercial gallery wholly focussed upon exhibiting and selling contemporary drawing, means that daily I'm thinking about drawing - talking to collectors, artists, students and visitors about it, making decisions about what should be part of the gallery's portfolio, and planning for future exhibitions. This immersion made me no less apprehensive about the task of helping to select an exhibition of about 50 works from a submission of over 2200, all in two short days, without the contextual benefit of judging an artists work from many examples of their practice, with open mindedness, fairness and an eye upon how such choices will present a viewpoint about the position of contemporary drawing in 2006. To be selected, a drawing would need to assert itself in some thoughtful way, stand out in competition with its neighbours, and survive the bias and individual tastes of each member of the panel as well as the triangular dynamics of the how the three of us might work together.

During the selection we deliberated upon the purpose, value and relevance of drawing and the shifting position it occupies as we selected, honed and eventually arrived at a collective choice. The majority of works submitted were well within the broad definition of what might constitute drawing, and we were in general agreement on this point. As a team we also placed some value upon how a work was presented and at times titles had some influence on us. Throughout the process we maintained a flexible mixture of tolerance and firmness coupled with persuasive argument and some rethinking, to arrive collectively at an exceptional exhibition of diversity, strength and a few real surprises. We also recognised that several other potential exhibitions remained within the works not selected on this occasion.

It had to have been the hottest and most humid two days in the history of The Jerwood Drawing Prize. Throughout, the director, the organizers, and the student team gave the selection panel unflagging support so that the whole event ran with impressive smoothness. My heartfelt thanks to all involved for such a memorable, hospitable and enjoyable event. I now look forward to seeing how our choices stand together at the Jerwood Space and the subsequent tour.

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