

Kanturk Arts Festival 2013 Schools' Art Competition Adjudicator's Report

I am happy to record that the fifth year of this competition sees continuation of the upward trend in the quality of works submitted. I commented last year on the obvious signs of commitment, not just by the students themselves, but their teachers. It is so important, given the recent and seemingly ongoing cutbacks on public services, that the population at large are made aware of the huge contribution that teachers, everywhere, make. During debates in the news media, the teachers' class contact hours are always dragged up, but the preparation time, the evaluation time and the vast amount of voluntary work somehow don't merit the same scrutiny. This Schools' Art Competition is one tangible manifestation of the nurturing process, the *educatio* (Latin: to lead out) that is at the centre of complete education. There is no doubt in my mind that the talents of the students could wither on the vine were it not for the encouragement and the opportunities offered by their teachers.

The submissions for this year's competition demonstrate the broadening of the base of good solid work. It most certainly is not a case of one or two good works shining above a miasma of mediocrity. I'm delighted to say that it makes my job a lot harder. It opens the way for genuine dispute as to the merit of one work over another. How to compare apples with cherries? In the case of one of the two strongest (in both quality and quantity), categories, I found that I could not separate the top two. It wasn't until later, when I was selecting the overall competition winner from the five category winners, (including these two tied entries), that I unconsciously chose one of the tied but not the other. Whew!

Numbers this year were slightly down on last year, but not to any worrying extent. I think that the overall quality of the entries more than made up for any loss in numbers.

Yet again I was delighted to see a variety of media being employed. It is refreshing to see this, especially as it wasn't just variety for its own sake. The students made great use of the possibilities of various paints, pencils, pastels, etc.

I was also impressed by the different approaches to the competition themes that were on offer. "The Gathering", for example, became a vehicle for exploration of the local, so various things were chosen: events, airport arrivals, etc., but there were also reinterpretations of older themes, such as "The supper at Emmaus" which indicated that students were using the opportunity to think deeply about their choice, (probably encouraged by their teachers). Yet again I was struck by the maturity with which students approached what would be considered "Difficult" subjects for adults to contemplate.

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I made the point in a previous year that it is important for students doing state exams to keep up their art work, as far from being detrimental to their studies, the two are very much symbiotic and go hand-in-hand with one another. I was therefore disappointed that the entries for category D, were thinner, both in numbers and in execution. Hopefully this is just a temporary 'Blip'.

I am impressed, yet again, that this competition continues to surprise and delight me. All the freshness of previous years is still in evidence. There are subtle developments with regard, for example, to the use of paint, the possibilities of colour, the observed world, as opposed to, or in conjunction with the world of the imagination, the use of graphics or lettering to make an image, the list goes on and on.

In other years, I noted that because of the level of work in this competition, I could feel confident that the future of the world of visual expression was in good hands. I am glad that I can truthfully say the same again this year. I thank the students, teachers and the organisers for the privilege of seeing all this wonderful work. I would like to encourage all of the students whose work did not win a prize that their work contributed hugely to the success of the competition. Please keep working, do not be discouraged if you didn't win a prize this year. Continue to make the judging process a difficult one! As usual I look forward to seeing the work displayed around the business windows of the town. I know that the people of Kanturk take this exhibition to their hearts and take justifiable pride in the wonderful work of the students.

*John Philip Murray, Lissardagh, Co. Cork.
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Overall winner 2013

Winner Category B

Aisling O’Sullivan – “Hope for the Future of Mankind”

This painting works on several important levels. It is a work of the imagination, but it employs recognisable images of the tangible world. It shows the contrast between the small, soft, vulnerable child holding the teddy bear, staring out, not into the void, but a distance populated by a variety of close planets and distant pinpricks of stars. We do not see the expression, but we can assume that it is one of wonder at the vastness of space. While the space is unimaginably huge, the manner of displaying it adds a slight human warmth, the milky blues, the warm earthy ochres of the planets, and so on. In choosing to paint the area around the planets in a paler blue, the deep blue area outside this has the effect of framing our attention on child and planets. Choice of colours, use of gentle tonal gradations, good control of shape, all work together to make this a very satisfying piece for the viewer to study. This is a very cleverly constructed composition, very well realised and a worthy winner.

**Category A - Winner:
Hayley Buckley – “My Pet Giraffe”**

This picture displays so many of the elements of great pictorial composition that it mounted a good challenge for the overall competition. There is a great composition; a strong diagonal rises sinuously from the lower left culminating in a beautifully rendered head. The strong blue sky reverberates against the orange and brown giving a lucid colour contrast. A clear yellow sun warms an already warm image. The simplicity of the design directs us exactly to where our attention should be focussed; we are presented with no distractions. While this work shone out, this was a strong category and those highly commended could have been winners on another occasion.

Highly Commended:

Roskana Jamrůz-“Hope”

Josh Murphy-“The Gathering”

Jack Dwyer-“Rage”

David Heffernan-“Shot-Stopper”

Jessica Buckley-“Trip to the Zoo”

Colin Linehan-“Rage”

**Category B – Winner (also Overall Winner):
Aisling O’Sullivan – “Hope for the Future of Mankind”**

This category was very strong and produced the overall winner. The Highly commended pieces included various good approaches; graphic lettering, abstracted human shapes, dramatic, tension-filled situations with interesting planes of perspective, and humorous takes on the natural world. As with category A any of these works could have provided the winner.

Highly Commended:

David Moore-“Hopes of Winning”

Rebecca O’Flynn-“The Global Gathering”

Stephen Kealy-“Rage”

Eve McAuliffe-“Hope”

Paul Leahy-“Hopes”

Zara Murphy-“Hope.....is a bright shining light”

Jesse McAuliffe-“Rage”

Atene Acdukerčūite-“Hopes”

Daniel O’Connell-“The Gathering”

Aoife Higgins-“Sick Rage”

**Category C - Winner:
Emma Morrissey – “Hope”**

This was another very strong category. In the end, the drama of the light spilling from the open door proved to be the most compelling image. There is no clutter, no ambiguity of purpose. Colour is used cleverly and to a minimum. The contrasting dark tone of the outer edges allows the bright tone of the light to explode outwards. This is a very satisfying piece.

I feel that I should also single out Ellen Sheehan’s picture of an arrival in the airport lounge. On many different levels this piece works so well. It is a narrative, beautifully described; each individual figure brings their own story for our perusal. On a technical level, we are shown just enough of the passageway from which our arrivals have appeared, then we have a huge glass window giving onto another room whose window gives onto the runway with our plane on the apron, very cleverly conceived!

All of the other works commended had their strong merits, from The Supper at Emmaus, symbolic hands and candle, a nightmarish horse, a rendition of the Olympic gold-medal winner, a more local winner displayed in a cut-out star, a meticulously rendered Manhattan skyline, a dramatic path junction with shades of Thoreau’ choice and a quirky innocent-looking dismembering with a scissors!

Highly Commended:

Ellen Sheehan-“The Gathering”

Cliona McRory-“The Gathering”

Katie Lynch-“Hope Can Be Found”

Amy Leahy-“Dark Nightmare”

Rebecca Eustace-“Express Yourself”

Chloe Cotterell-“My Dream to Play for Cork

Emma Newman-“My Dream Vacation”

Evan O’Sullivan-“Hope Road”

Caoimhe Murphy-“Destroying Everything in its Path”

**Category D - Winner:
Anke Ludwig – “Hope”**

The winner of this category showed a gentle butterfly breaking through a brick wall to reach out into the freedom of the countryside. This was a nice, quirky idea, rendered in gentle colours.

This category showed the smallest number of works submitted and also contrasted with the strength of all the others in quality. I hope that the students in this category will take on board my comments regarding the complementary relationship between study of the other subjects and the pursuit of artistic development. Commitment to one should not exclude the other.

Commended:

Emer O’Donoghue-“The Gathering

Helena Egan-“Hope”

Kate Singleton-“Rage”

Lorraine Crowley-“Hope”

**Category E - Winner:
Clare Murphy – “Hope”**

This work displayed a very strong vision, while at the same time employing soft edges on everything. This gave an impression of vibrant energy, looking as though it was completed with haste and urgency. Clever framing of the centre by the dark mountains allowed a brightness to emerge that would have been unobtainable without that contrast. The light behind the sun, or is it the moon, is almost blinding. As with some other works in this competition that dealt with the theme of hope, there is a strong aspirational force, a reaching-out, that is easy to understand, but very difficult to document.

While there were very few entrants in this category, they were all extremely strong. Dara Meehan’s disturbing creature, straitjacketed, imprisoned, bloodstained, solitary in the confinement of a graffiti wall is beautifully rendered in soft gradations of tone. The backstory would, no doubt, disturb still further! Probably not for a calm domestic setting! Orla Kelleher “Kanturk Gathering” mixes the real and the imagined in an engaging way; you can almost hear the music echoing off the castle walls.

Highly Commended:

Dara Meehan-“Rage”

Orla Kelleher-“The Kanturk Gathering”
