



KANTURK ARTS FESTIVAL 2010

SCHOOLS'S ART COMPETITION

JUDGE'S REPORT

As with last year's event, it was a great honour and privilege to select award winners for this competition. The same pleasure and sadness at having to make choices from a large entry of vibrant, lively works was evident for me. But choices, as in many walks of life, have to be made. In an ideal world, it would be good to have each young person with me when I am making my decisions, so that they could see the reasons why I would end up choosing one work over another. Certain decisions in the selection process are made quickly. It is apparent which are the strongest 25% in the category. Sometimes this figure is much higher, sometimes much lower. Among that number there will be variations in several ways. For instance:

- Some works will be painted and will cover the whole page, incidentally, these tend to be the boldest compositions, where the young person tends not to get too bogged down in fussy details.
- Some will be drawn in pencil, usually making a good graphic impact and displaying the young person's ability using the limited means of black and white.
- Some will have outlines drawn in pencil and coloured in with coloured pencil, this can pose a very daunting prospect if there is a large area to be filled. As a consequence, I would tend to discourage this method as a way of approaching a large white sheet.
- Some young people are able to draw more accurately, others have a natural ability to organise the composition, still others may have an innate feel for colour, or pattern. All of these are important attributes, but choosing one over another is like comparing the taste of an apple to an olive. Both are wonderful, but satisfy different senses.
- Some young people include lettering in their works. I feel that it is important to stress here that this is an *Art* competition the aim of which is to give expression to a *Visual* interpretation of the young person's world; this is not a poster or advertising competition. The inclusion of lettering can be the result of two main causes; 1) either the young person feels a lack of confidence that the viewer will not understand what they have drawn or painted, or 2) that they have taken the easy option of using a word instead of working out a way to express the idea of that word using their own visual imagery.

Let the young person take heart about point 1); in a general sense, pictures that leave a little to the imagination of the viewer tend to be the ones that we keep going back to view. We want to know more. We like a little mystery. So if you feel the viewer has to work a little before they 'get it', then so much the better. The viewer will be improved by a little work!

If the young person needs any more reassurance on this point, consider the works by great masters of the past, even back into prehistoric cave paintings. Art experts make careers of studying these works in order to extract meaning from them. In many cases, things which would have been common knowledge in another age have become obscure to the modern viewer. Yet we can still appreciate the beauty and order of these things that we do not fully understand.

I must, however, also make one small note of personal disappointment and that is that the enthusiasm of the primary school children seems to fade at the post-primary level. For some of the categories for the older students we had very few entries. Hopefully that will change as the current crop start to come through the ranks. I would encourage older students, even in exam years, to appreciate that time spent making a work for an event like this, far from being a time wasting exercise, helps to develop 'problem-solving' skills that are useful in all other subjects. Those seeking to improve their points for Leaving or Junior Certificate will note that the highest achievers frequently are the ones who have a broad field of interests, including art and music. The inclusion of the Art Class in the school curriculum acknowledges its rightful place in the fully-rounded education that all young people deserve.

This selection, it must be stressed, is the view of one individual. A different day or a different judge could produce a very different set of results. Like all aspects of 'real life' we try to inform our conscience, but our decision afterwards is our own.

The Judging Process involved the selection of possible 'Commended' and 'Highly Commended' works which exhibited special qualities. From these, I then chose a category winner, finally when all the choices had been made, I took the seven category winners aside to make the choice of 'Overall Winner'. In some ways this is the most invidious judgement, where the spread of ages and media is at its most marked. But I feel that we have a worthy winner.

This competition is a means to instilling confidence in a young person to make a personal picture of the world - and the competition element is designed only to add a little exciting spice to the process. All of the entrants are winners for taking part and I encourage all to enjoy the work of the other participants. I am wholly responsible for the choices that I made in judging this competition.

I would now like to make a few comments, with reference to particular works and why I chose them. I hope that this will give a little insight into the judging process and allow young people to go with confidence into a further event, safe in the knowledge that their entry will be judged fairly and sympathetically.

**Overall Winner
And winner of Category B: 1st & 2nd Class**

Conan Crowley

Title: 'Down Town'



When I was first laying out the entries from this category this picture really jumped out at me. First of all, the image of the car is very big and strong, without glorifying the vehicle. It portrays a whimsical even humorous car with no driver, stopped at traffic lights. Again, this is very boldly and confidently portrayed. There is a plain blue sky as a backdrop. We have nothing else to distract us. On further, closer inspection we can see that there are some very subtle devices at work here: the use of black, traditionally discouraged by academics, unites the picture, black wheels join black road which connects to the black traffic light apparatus. This same black, in the rectangle at the top of the pole, separates the three lamps from the surrounding blue, to allow them to shine brightly, with perfect contrast and no competition from any other colours. – A master stroke!

This is a beautifully composed picture and it transcends his age category. One can only hope that he can keep working with the same clarity as he matures.

Winner Category A: Junior and Senior Infants

Kevin Riordan

Title: 'The Power Ranger'



Similar to the overall winner, this is a bold image against a plain blue backdrop. The controlled use of paint is exciting and full of drama yet he shows that he can control the image – a difficult trick, beautifully executed.

Winner Category C: 3rd & 4th Class

Shauna O'Connor

Title: 'Slán'



More bold size and exciting use of paint. The drama of the scale of the figures in front of the great orange ball of sun is remarkable.

Winner Category D: 5th & 6th Class

Orna Guerin

Title: 'Kanturk in the Present'



This is another example of clear thinking and beautiful execution. Each individual image would make a beautiful picture in its own right. It is a snapshot of Kanturk that relies only on visual imagery to get its point across.

Winner Category E: 1st & 2nd Year

Michael Cottrell

Title: 'Modern Cars'



Again, there is no doubt about what we are supposed to be viewing. The car is in centre-frame, the road and the landscape are mere settings. A sense of drama is enhanced by the diagonal nature of the composition.

Winner Category F: 3rd and Transition Year

Clare Murphy

Title: 'Granny Bought a Laptop'

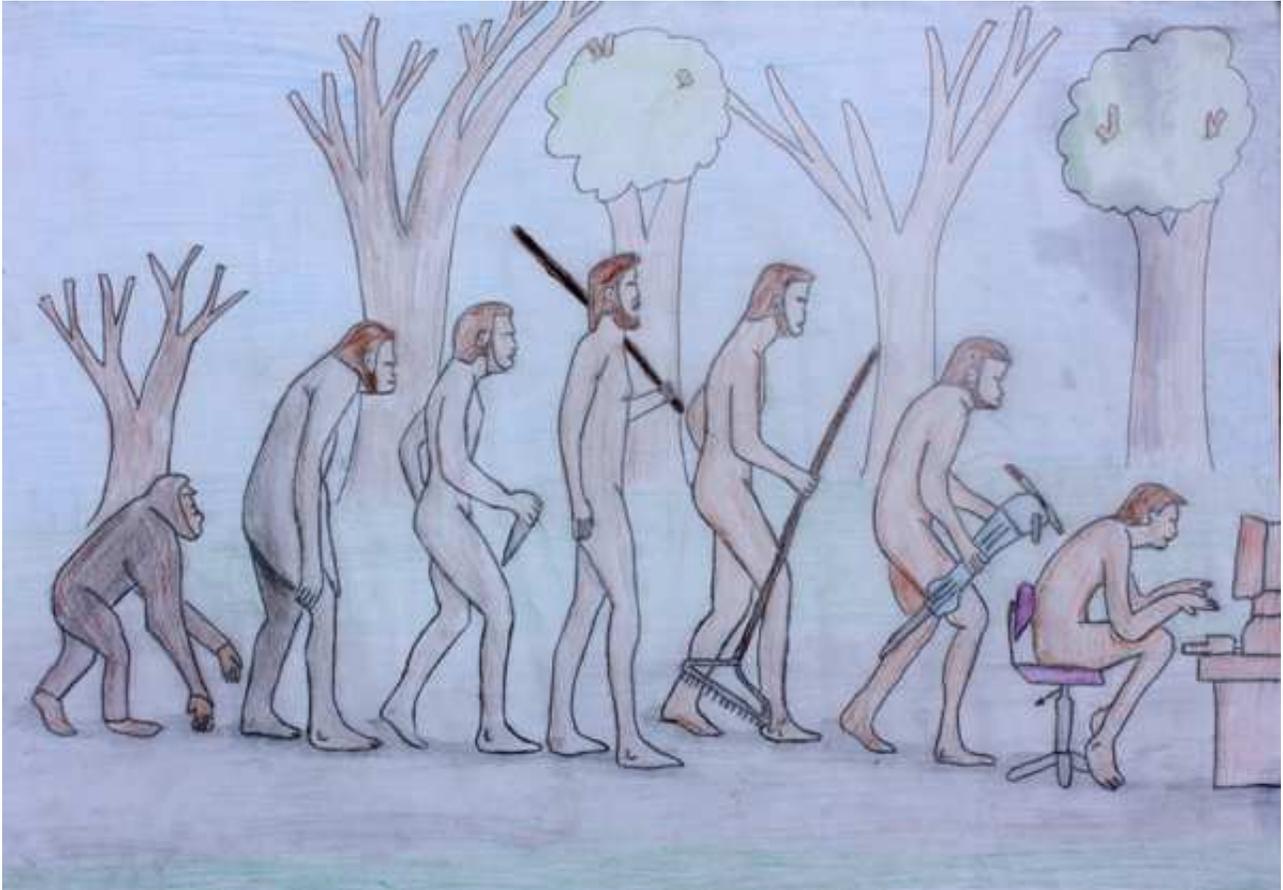


This is a deceptively straightforward-looking picture. A cottage interior has been beautifully rendered with all of the expected accoutrements: fire with crane and kettle, rocking chair, blanket chest and so on. The whitewashed surfaces of the walls are treated with the irregular textures that define indigenous buildings. Then on the table we see a laptop computer. It is at the same time unobtrusive and incongruous. This picture is brimming with little touches, the picture on the wall, the mat, and the beautiful flowers on the mantel, wonderfully described – with the addition of a generous, gentle humour.

Winner Category G: Leaving Certificate Cycle

Una Twohig

Title: 'Evolution'



This is a very clever picture. It is subversive. We think we know it from other drawings of the manner in which humans have evolved from their cousins. But there is a nice twist, the hunched ape evolves into an equally hunched human having been through many stages of development. The structure of the picture is uncluttered, the background setting of the trees and the onward march of mans progress is clearly drawn. We are interested and our reward is our little joke. (I'm writing this hunched in front ofguess what!)

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