

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Golden touch: Richard Wright's work at Tate Britain took three weeks to paint but will eventually be destroyed

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Decorative painter wins Turner

By Peter Aspden,
Arts Correspondent

Richard Wright, the Glasgow-based artist who paints abstract designs on to site-specific surfaces only for them to be destroyed at the end of their display, is the winner of this year's Turner prize.

Mr Wright, who at 49 only just qualified for this year's prize for the work of a British artist under the age of 50, was nominated for exhibitions of his painting at Pittsburgh and Edinburgh.

The judges praised the "profound originality and beauty" of his work. "[He] uses elaborate and labour-intensive methods to create transient works that respond directly to the architecture and context of

a space," they said. "Rooted in fine art tradition yet radically conceptual in impact, his works come alive as they are experienced by the viewer."

Mr Wright was presented with the £25,000 prize at Tate Britain last night by Carol Ann Duffy, the Poet Laureate. The other finalists, Lucy Skaer, Enrico David and Roger Hiorns, received £5,000 each.

The choice to reward an essentially decorative painter will delight traditionalists, although the way in which Mr Wright works, painting on awkward or delicate surfaces that do not last, is decidedly contemporary. Mr Wright's installation at Tate Britain's current Turner prize show is a

huge, untitled gold-leaf work which took three weeks to paint on one of the gallery's walls. It will be destroyed at the end of the exhibition.

Mr Wright graduated from Glasgow School of Art and spent 12 years painting on canvas before giving up on his art in the 1980s. When he started again, he decided to display his work on unorthodox surfaces. "I wanted to get at the idea without the object getting in the way," he said.

Influences on his highly labour-intensive, decorative work include medieval painting, gothic iconography and typography. In 2004, as part of a group show, he put up prints of his designs over torn posters

and the graffiti-filled walls of Mexico City. "I wanted to make work that is part of everything else," he said.

Mr Wright's victory defied the bookies, who had strongly favoured Roger Hiorns. His installation "Seizure", in which he pumped 75,000 litres of copper sulphate solution into a south London council flat to create a crystalline structure, has attracted thousands of visitors.

The Turner prize has lost some of its controversial edge in recent years. But Stephen Deuchar, the outgoing director of Tate Britain, said the annual exhibition of shortlisted artists' work was as popular as ever, with last year's show attracting more than 90,000 visitors.