

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Hoyle, Ben. "I'd like him to do my living room.' Wall artist wins the Turner Prize", The Times,, 08.12.09, p6-7

# 'I'd like him to do my living room.' Wall artist wins the Turner Prize

Ben Hoyle Arts Correspondent

People who dislike contemporary art often complain that it will not endure like the masterpieces of bygone eras. In the case of last night's 2009 Turner Prize winner they have a point, though not quite the one that the sceptics who picket the ceremony every year might make.

Richard Wright, 49, beat the most acclaimed field in years to the £25,000 prize with a body of work whose existence is necessarily fleeting.

Almost everything the artist has made since rejecting painting on canvas in the late 1980s has since been destroyed. Why? "My paintings were rubbish." Instead he now paints exquisite, often highly elaborate

designs directly on to the walls and ceilings of a room, with the understanding that they will soon be erased.

"The most important thing is that the paintings are painted over," he says. "This work is not for the future. It's for now. If something is really important enough it will survive."

"You can speak about the death of the work but part of the object is to

heighten the life of it. That's what life is like. People die and they are remembered by their friends."

The jury, which was chaired by Stephen Douchart, the director of Tate Britain, praised the "profound originality and beauty" of Wright's work.

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

Wright is the oldest man to win the prize since the under-50 age limit was imposed in 1991. His victory means that Britain's most notorious art prize, the showcase that caused outrage with Tracey Emin's unsanitary bed entry, is now in the hands of a thoughtful student of art history, whose delicate creations are applied using techniques familiar to the great Renaissance fresco artists.

He received his prize from Carol Ann Duffy, the Poet Laureate, at a ceremony at Tate Britain. The runners-up were the strongly fancied Roger Hiorns, Lucy Skaer and Enrico David.

Shortlisted artists each curate a miniature exhibition of their own work for a group show in the lead up to the prizegiving. The other artists' rooms included the remains of an atomised passenger jet engine (Hiorns), a whale skull (Skaer) and a tableau including

children's toys, gay sex and builders' bottoms (David).

Wright's contributions were an enormous abstract mural in gold leaf on one gallery wall and a smaller pair of red designs painted above the doorway opposite it.

To judge by the responses posted by the public on boards outside the show,

A gold leaf painting that spans a wall of Tate Britain won this year's Turner Prize for Richard Wright, below. Almost everything he has created in recent years has been destroyed. "This work is not for the future," he says. "It is for now"

his approach resonated with the public just as much as with the judges.

Yesterday afternoon there were roughly as many notes backing Wright as there were for the other three shortlisted artists put together.

"Richard Wright," one said. "Thank you for bringing back some skills to the Turner Prize." Another summed up its appeal and contained a job offer. "Richard Wright should win — refreshing attitude to marketability and mortality. I'd quite like him to do my living room too."

Founded in 1984, the Turner Prize is awarded to a British artist or an artist working in Britain for an exhibition of their work in the 12 months before the shortlist is compiled.

Not by a long stretch does every-

## All that glitters is not sold in this glimmering world

Rachel Campbell-Johnston



A graffiti artist has taken this year's Turner Prize. It's the sort of announcement that would normally be expected to unleash a torrent of "call that art!" rants. But surely not this time?

Richard Wright's shimmering wall painting, a luminous expanse of intricately patterned gold-leaf that seems, as you enter the exhibition's second gallery, almost to float upon its far wall, is the type of artwork that even a traditionalist can admire.

Wright, who at 49 is nudging the upper age limit for entrants, pays homage to the cartooning techniques of the great Renaissance artists who, tracing their pictures on to paper, then pricked holes in the surface and puffed chalk dust through them, thereby transferring their images on to the wall.

His delicately applied patterns are fundamentally abstract, but they play with figurative possibilities. You might see leaping figures, discover mathematical geometries, find peering faces or apocalyptic landscapes. But even as the mind seeks out and fixes upon a single image, it evaporates away into the background turbulence. And

perhaps, more than anyone, one is reminded of the work of Turner himself — of his huge atmospheric late canvases and the depthless maelstroms of his diaphanous fogs.

Wright's work is all about atmosphere. "Space," he informs the viewers of a video that is shown at the Tate, "is a work already begun... if you walk into an empty room you can't see the air but you can sense the atmosphere."

This subtlety, in the context of the story of the Turner, is significant. The prize has progressed a long way in the 25 years since its inauguration when a small but dedicated gaggle of devotees gathered to hear that Malcolm Morley had been appointed the first winner. Then, contemporary art

was regarded as a potentially embarrassing outpost of high culture. But before long the Turner would be appointing household names — Gilbert and George and Damien Hirst most prominent among them. Fame and money are bedfellows and soon

contemporary art had become much like any commodity. It didn't matter what you made as long as it was money. This year's shortlist reflects today's calmer mood. It is less about superficial appearance and more about the processes of looking. Wright suggests that we question the power of capitalist markets, perhaps. His murals cannot be owned. They will be painted over at the end of the exhibition. All that glitters is not sold in Wright's glimmering world.

