

National Drawing Award

It all starts with drawing.

In the spirit of community and collaboration, Artspace and The Physics Room joined together in 2004 to present the inaugural *National Drawing Award*, an initiative aimed at supporting and promoting the range of artistic practice in this country. In a virtual flinging open of the gallery doors, the award had overwhelming popular appeal, evidenced by the 546 entries received. The open (and FREE) entry aimed to counter the hierarchy and expense typically associated with such events in favour of giving back to the artists out there. The total prize pool of over \$5000 cash went some way in achieving this. Every submission gained a place on the wall, attracting a range of artists, "amateur" and "professional" alike. The democratisation of the two gallery spaces brought to the fore a warm fuzzy feeling about the respective galleries' commitment to nurturing contemporary art across the field.

Selecting a winner was bound to be tough. The Award was judged in two parts, firstly by a panel comprising Tobias Berger, Artspace Director; Emma Bugden, City Gallery Wellington Curator; and Danae Mossman, The Physics Room Director. Battling it out over a trestle table at Artspace, the judges concluded the overall winner was Auckland artist Andrew McLeod. McLeod's drawing, *Art School Dream*, was described by Berger as:

unique, yet skillfully drawn, referencing theory as well as personal experience. Funny and conceptual, quoting and satirising so fantastically a montage of theories – French drawing, Photographic, Sculptural, Intermedia and 'jokes for assholes' – standard art school fare. Not only does this drawing use the medium of drawing with skill and distinction, it also talks about the business of art making.

As part of McLeod's prize package he received funds to produce an artist book (the result is *Largess*, a chunky publication that plumbs the depth of McLeod's practice), as well as a cash prize, a Telecom mobile phone and other goodies.

The challenge of selecting a single award winner from the range of entries spawned a new category – the Merit Award. Recipients of this award were Richard Lewer with his graphite sketch *Gymnastic Championship Wanganui*, Monique Jansen for her deconstruction of the drawing in *Untitled*, and Ruth Cleland's classical rendering of a banal street scene, *A Sunny Day in Mosgiel*.

The second part of the judging, the People's Choice Award, took place at the end of the exhibition and aimed to hand the reins over to the public. The winner was decided in Christchurch after a ceremonial affair that saw Tobias Berger, endowed with game-show style hype, working through the tie in votes with an animated physical voting session that involved members of the audience having to become a 'vote' and move to one side of the room. The winner was Jacquelyn Greenbank with her stitched rendition of the Queen Mother. Greenbank received a cash prize, a Telecom mobile phone, an artist page in *Staple* magazine, and other treats.

The exhibition of the entries was equally as democratic; the works were hung in alphabetical order, and shown in two parts at each gallery, first artists A-L then M-Z. A novel, and entirely un-curated approach to presentation, the exhibition as a whole was an engaging and insightful representation of drawing practice in all its guises. From digital prints and pencil sketches to collage and stitch-work, the show was a montage of ideas and approaches. An often underrated medium in contemporary art, drawing's status as the poor cousin was thrown out the door.

Danae Mossman

