

David Cotterrell: telegraph.co.uk : Trendier than the Turner

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Do you know that brand of bread lubricant that sells itself as I Can't Believe It's Not Butter? A casual glance at the current Beck's Futures 3 exhibition (at the ICA until May 12) brings an art world version of the same thought to mind: I can't believe it's not the Turner Prize.

Consider the similarities. This too is a prize for new, young, up-and-coming art. (It advertises itself as the most valuable, with 65,000 of winnings to be awarded.) The winner will be selected by a jury chaired by an art world heavyweight (the Serota role in this case being taken by Mark Francis, sometime director of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh). The winners will be presented with their cheques by a recording star, in this case Bjork; the Turner Prize cast Madonna in that role last year.

So what, if any, are the differences? Beck's Futures has more artists on its shortlist: 10 against the Tate ration of four. Also, on the whole, the Beck's crowd are [sic] less well-known. The Turner Prize shortlist, although it generally includes at least one figure whom [sic] nobody has ever heard of, is made up mainly of the already quite famous. Out of 10 on the Beck's shortlist, only two are represented by a commercial gallery, and most are in their twenties.

Oh, and, if anything, Beck's Futures are [sic] aiming to be even more trendy. Not only is a rock star giving the prize, another rather senior one, Marianne Faithfull, is on the jury. The beer firm that sponsors the event has gone for a contemporary art association. At art events, bottles sometimes appear with specially designed labels by such avant-gardniks as Tracey Emin and Jeff Koons. (A collection of four was recently auctioned for more than 3,000.)

But what of the actual art? Well, there are no real tabloid shockers of the kind that the Turner Prize intermittently comes up with, Martin Creed's empty room with flashing light being the most recent example. But there is a slight art world shock, namely that, out of the 10 artists on the shortlist, half are painters or at least use painting in conjunction with other media. That is a bit surprising.

In addition there is a photographer, a video artist, a film-making duo, and an installation maker. But painting dominates this event in a way that it never has the Turner Prize. In part, that is because - another unprecedented spectacle in such an art prize - there is something approaching a shared style among several of these young painters.

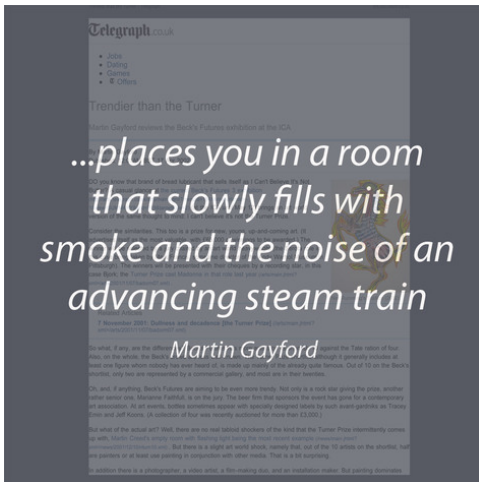
A number make their pictures by putting together wildly diverse kinds of mark and imagery. This approach is used most startlingly by Paul Hosking, a sculptor who places 3D models of deer on the wall, roped like climbers on to a background that resembles an early modernist collage. The deer are covered in a sort of wallpaper pattern of brightly colored hamburgers and monkey skulls. Now, that is unquestionably wacky. But some of the painters are not far behind in their congruity stakes.

Neil Ruming represents dissected animals in a variety of graphic techniques from hyper-real to diagrammatic, with an effect suggesting a Damien Hirst taxidermy piece depicted by Gilbert & George. Dan Perfect combines color-field stripes with cartoony doodles, and graffiti-like squiggles. On a slightly different track, Toby Paterson is interested in the neat geometry of modernist architecture and architectural models, a collection of which has spilled chaotically on to the floor in one piece.

Are the judges, who include the notable artist Julian Opie, on to something here? Is there a new

movement afoot in British painting? It's hard to say. I was quite taken by some of the work described above, but also by the installation of David Cotterrell, who places you in a room that slowly fills with smoke and the noise of an advancing steam train. At any rate, Beck's Futures turns out to be interestingly different from the dear old Turner after all.

Martin Gayford



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