

The Turner Prize – not for the faint-hearted!



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Nothing causes as much uproar in the UK art world as the Turner Prize, even Prince Charles has waded into the debate. You can see this year's (un-/controversial) short-listed artists from October 23.

Named after the well-loved British artist William Turner, 'the painter of light', the Turner Prize has been awarded every year since 1984 and has become the United Kingdom's most publicised art award. It was established in order to celebrate new developments in contemporary art, the prize being given to 'a British artist under fifty for an outstanding exhibition or other presentation of their work in the twelve months preceding'. However, 'British person' means an artist working in Britain, allowing two Germans to have won the prize: Wolfgang Tillmans in 2000 and Tomma Abts in 2006.

But what makes this prize so controversial? It's partly because the prize is generally awarded to conceptual artists, something the general public find rather challenging. In 2001 the award was given to Martin Creed for his work, *The Lights Going On and Off*, which was an empty room with the lights going on and off. In 1999 one of the short-listed artists, Tracey Emin, caused some attention with her exhibit *My Bed*, which was a double bed in a dishevelled state with stained sheets, surrounded by detritus such as soiled underwear, condoms, slippers and empty drink bottles. In 2010 the award went for the first time to an aural work, *Lowlands*. Susan Philipsz had recorded herself under three bridges in Glasgow singing a Scottish lament, 'Lowlands Away', and these recordings were played through loudspeakers installed along the walls of a gallery room.

The Turner Prize hasn't always been controversial though – the work of first prize winner in 1984, Malcolm Morley, was more traditional. His paintings were inspired by a visit to Greece in 1982 and brought together his interest in Greek mythology and contemporary life.

Other noteworthy prizewinners have been Rachel Whiteread who won the prize in 1993 for *House*, a concrete cast of the interior of a complete Victorian house which was later demolished by the local council; Damien Hirst in 1995, for his notorious sculptor *Mother and Child, Divided*, a cow and a calf cut into sections and exhibited in formaldehyde in a series of separate glass cases and Gillian Wearing in 1997 for *60 minute silence*, which showed an hour-long video of actors dressed in police uniforms posing for a photograph. You can understand why some people think it is contentious.

In 2002 even Prince Charles was drawn into the debate about the art on display. Kim Howells, a junior minister in Tony Blair's government commented that the exhibits were, 'conceptual bullshit'. Prince Charles wrote to him: 'It's good to hear your

refreshing common sense about the dreaded Turner Prize. It has contaminated the art establishment for so long.'

In spring each year an announcement is made of the four short-listed artists who are in competition for the £25,000 first prize. In 2013 they are Laure Prouvost, Tino Sehgal, David Shrigley and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and their work will be shown in an exhibition at Ebrington in Derry-Londonderry opening on 23 October. The winner will be announced on 2 December 2013.

If you would like to know more about the Turner Prize 2013, then click here <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/turner-prize-2013-shortlist-announced> and for general information about the Turner Prize go to <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibitionseries/turner-prize>.

If you would like to use the Turner Prize as a topic in your classroom from A1.1 upwards, we have provided you with a discussion activity.

You'll find it in the following **Teacher's notes**.

Teacher's notes

- Write these names of some famous artists on the board:
Picasso, van Gogh, Monet, Michelangelo
(You could ask students to add some other artist names.)
- Ask students which of these artists they like / don't like.
- Tell them that they are going to talk about contemporary art and the British *Turner Prize*.
- Give students some background info:
Explain that the *Turner Prize* is awarded to celebrate new developments in modern art and that it is often won by a piece of conceptual art, such as photography, sculpture or an installation. The prize money for the winner is £25,000 and the three runners-up receive £5,000. It is given to a British artist under 50 years old (although anyone working in the UK is eligible). It was first awarded in 1984. There have been some interesting winners.
- Write the following words on the board:
bed, cow house, light bulbs, police officers, shed
Check students know the meaning of all of these words.
- Tell them that six winners of the Turner Prize have used one of these 'items'.
- Divide the class into groups of three. Ask students how they think an artist has created a piece of art using one of these 'items'. *How do you think the artist has used a cow?* Help with vocabulary and encourage any ideas that students may have. They need to be creative! They could draw some of their ideas. Students may use German in their discussions. Do allow it, but encourage them to share their ideas in English.

- Ask the groups to share their ideas with the rest of the class.
- At the end, explain what the artists really did (see **Key** below).

Follow-up activity:

See if there is anything in the classroom students could use for *their* piece of art. Ask them whether they have other ideas of unusual items that could be included in a piece of art and how they would use them.

Key:

Bed: ***My Bed*** is a double bed in a dishevelled state with stained sheets, surrounded by detritus such as soiled underwear, condoms, slippers and empty drink bottles. (Tracey Emin, runner-up in 1999)

Cow: ***Mother and Child, Divided*** is a bisected cow and a bisected calf preserved in formaldehyde and displayed in glass cases. (Damien Hirst, 1995)

House: ***House*** is a concrete cast of the inside of a house. (Rachel Whiteread, 1993)

Light bulbs: ***The Lights Going On and Off*** - an empty room with the lights going on and off. (Martin Creed, 2001)

Police officers: ***60 minute silence*** is a 60-minute video of a group of actors dressed in police uniforms. They had to stand still for an hour as if they were posing for a photograph. (Gillian Wearing, 1996)

Shed: ***Shedboatshed*** is a shed that had been converted into a boat, sailed down the River Rhine and turned back into a shed again. (Simon Starling, 2005)

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