Sunny Art Prize '19 | Art & the Costs of Human Progress | Press Release

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Media:








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We live in a world that is increasingly divided on issues surrounding the recent costs of human achievement. Can art provide society with the tools to understand the nature of these many contemporary issues that people face across the world? This is the question that the Sunny Art Prize 2019 exhibition has explored with the artists selected to participate in a programme of travelling exhibitions. This programme of shows begins with the current exhibition **in London at the Sunny Art Centre** (on view until **31 October 2019**, before the show travels to China).

As with every edition of the Sunny Art Prize, 30 shortlisted artists from around the world see their work gathered together in an attempt to engage with themes such as colonialism, the current climate emergency and sharp extinction rates in the natural world, war and conflict, housing crises, mental health, identity and consumerism. They do this through a variety of mediums ranging from painting, sculpture and ceramics to video art, 3D work and installations. The London exhibition of the Sunny Art Prize 2019 will provide audiences with a chance to think about how societies and individual lifestyles contribute to the solution, or exacerbation, of some of the most pressing issues of human life.

The top three winners of the 2019 edition of the Sunny Art Prize were announced during the opening of the exhibition in London. Christopher Cook won the first prize, which also included a cash prize of £3000. Emma Elliott won the second prize, which also included a £2000 cash prize. Eunmi Kim won third place with £1000. The first three winners will also get the chance to participate in an art residency in China. The residency will provide them with the opportunity to explore how different cultures relate to the issues that currently form the focus of their work.

What are the themes and issues explored by the three finalists in their artworks?

Christopher Cook – Breaking the Boundaries of History: Linking Tradition with Contemporary Capitalism, Materialism and Oppression

British painter Christopher Cook has become known for his monochrome artworks in graphite powder, oil and resin. The shortlisted artworks The Thief, Skirmish, Shadowy and DMZ Still Life show detailed compositions that are purposefully reminiscent of the seventeenth-century Dutch still life genre. A clear intention of the Dutch genre is to display wealth and power, colonialist expansionism, and beauty. Also, the more the artist looked, the more this contradiction came to reflect a 'coming of age' of capitalism and materialism. This recognition prompted him to consider contemporary implications of the genre by disrupting the beauty of the various tableaux. He did this through the addition of anachronistic elements in his artworks that suggested modern-day exploitation, conflict and protectionism.

His artworks shortlisted for the Sunny Art Prize represent a range of these themes, from the subtle mischief-maker lemur among the precious objects of The Thief, to the more overt threats of conflict in Skirmish and Shadowy. DMZ Still Life was created during a residency in Nicosia, Cyprus, and is a painting in which the displays of wealth and well-being become trapped and trivialised within a no-go zone. The viewer is invited to look closely and find the little anachronistic elements that subvert the narrative of what seems to appear as innocuous compositions.

Emma Elliott – Biodiversity: Wry?No!

Emma Elliott is a British sculptor whose central concerns are the incongruous and hypocritical aspects of humanity as well as the impermanence and fragility of the natural world. The shortlisted artwork Wry?No! is a sculpture that was hand-carved in Carrara marble and functions as a commentary on the ills of machismo trophy hunting and the illegal horn trade. This human endeavour is responsible for decimating the world's rhino population by more than 90 per cent over the last 40 years.

With ground rhino horn being worth more than gold on the illegal rhino horn market and considered to be a cure for many common ailments in traditional medicine, this work highlights the fallacy that it can heal. The marble artwork also stands as a wake-up call following the recent WWF Living Planet Report 2018 on biodiversity. The report highlighted how human activity alone caused a 60 per cent decline in overall biodiversity just in the last 40 years. These rates have only been seen with mass extinction events in

geological history. Unlike with previous extinctions, however, it appears that one species alone is fully responsible: Homo sapiens.

Eunmi Kim – Exploring the Sensory Overload in Contemporary Society

Eunmi Kim was born and raised in South Korea. She is mainly interested in sensory perception and its corresponding communication. Her works tend to be self-reflective and research-driven while also being related to her scientific and medical interests, reflecting on cognition, neural activity, sensory deprivation, and sensorial and therapeutic experience.

As a person with hyperthyroidism, Kim is a solitary being who can easily be pushed into sensory overload. To confront her vulnerability, her multimedia project Me-Time (4.0): Mindfulness-Introspection-Void aims to realign the mind and body by reducing sensory stimuli while experiencing and expanding an awareness of the self. Her video installation comprises a series of self-experiments. They are conceptually-led performances shot at various locations that use introspective, meditative and eccentric methods of restricted environmental stimulation therapy (REST). As a coping mechanism, Kim chooses off-grid places that reduce sensory stimuli. These allow for subjective experiences of self-isolation and avoidance so she can ultimately enjoy a personal space, time and experience.

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