



"Nicole Wermers: Radical Turner Prize show unveiled in Glasgow"

Written by Ian Youngs
September 30, 2015



Opera singers, an artisan DIY showroom and a pop-up research library are all part of this year's Turner Prize exhibition, which showcases the latest nominees for the prestigious art award.

The exhibition opens at the Tramway gallery in Glasgow on Thursday.

In the past, the contemporary art prize has frequently been provocative and disliked by traditionalists. Likewise, this year's visitors may struggle to find much that fits the conventional definition of visual art. The nominees include architectural collective Assemble, who are using the exhibition to launch their own range of home improvement objects - from tiles to doorknobs and fireplaces - based on designs they have created for the Liverpool regeneration project that brought them to the attention of Turner judges.

Janice Kerbel has written an avant-garde, a capella 24-minute opera, which will be performed in the gallery at regular intervals by six singers.

Bonnie Camplin has installed a supernatural study centre, including five TV sets showing interviews with people who claim to have had paranormal experiences, as well as books, leaflets and a photocopier for visitors to use.

The work of the final nominee, Nicole Wermers, comes the closest to recognisable contemporary art, presenting 10 dining chairs with fur coats on the backs.

Co-curator Paul Pieroni said the exhibition showed how diverse contemporary art had become. "It can be made out of anything with anything by anyone, anywhere, anyhow," he said. "That means you get very interesting projects and this year is exemplary."

"One would say there's only one project that's traditionally composed of the material of art, and that's Nicole Wermers' presentation. Everything else is working in a radically different way.

"This year is also an interesting year because of the number of female artists nominated, and because Assemble are nominated, which is a collective whose background isn't explicitly in contemporary art production. It feels like the prize is experimenting a little... both in terms of the medium and in terms of the nominees."

Nicole Wermers

Wermers, originally from Germany, is interested in certain behaviours that barely get noticed in the modern world.

Here, she has arranged 10 dining chairs and sewn fur coats over their backs. It's supposed to refer to that moment when you go to a meeting or a restaurant and hang your coat over the back of the chair. "To Nicole that's incredibly interesting," according to Paul Pieroni. "Obviously there's a practical dimension to it - it's the most obvious thing to do with your coat. But generally what it does is demarcate public space as temporarily private.

"She's always looking just beneath the surface of appearances and asking, why did you do that? Why is that that way?"

Assemble

This 14-strong collective are the most leftfield nominees - they were shortlisted for their innovative work renovating 10 derelict houses in Toxteth, Liverpool.

Now they have made the items they designed for those houses available to the wider world.

"We're really keen to use the platform of the Turner Prize to set up a new social enterprise, which makes products for homes," Assemble's Lewis Jones said. "So for the show we've built a showroom for these products."

He adds: "They're not art-world prices. They're priced based on how much they cost to make. They're made by hand in Liverpool. It's not going to be £10,000 for a doorknob." The ceramic cabinet handles are £15 each, while the tiles will set you back £8.

Bonnie Camplin

At the centre of Camplin's research suite are screens showing interviews with people who claim to have been to Mars or encountered aliens or experienced hypnotism or mind control.

Most people would dismiss these people out of hand. But not Camplin.

"I find that I'm perfectly open to the possibility that they are telling the truth - that they are not mad, rather the situation itself may be quite mad," she says.

She wants to challenge how society comes to a collective decision about what is rational and normal. Around the edge of her room are dozens of scientific-looking books and leaflets that, taken together, could build up a case for accepting some alternative views of reality.

Janice Kerbel

At the centre of Camplin's research suite are screens showing interviews with people who claim to have been to Mars or encountered aliens or experienced hypnotism or mind control.

Most people would dismiss these people out of hand. But not Camplin.

"I find that I'm perfectly open to the possibility that they are telling the truth - that they are not mad, rather the situation itself may be quite mad," she says.

She wants to challenge how society comes to a collective decision about what is rational and normal. Around the edge of her room are dozens of scientific-looking books and leaflets that, taken together, could build up a case for accepting some alternative views of reality.