

Promoting visual arts in Guyana



Michael Griffith with his winning piece "Through the Canvas"

The Government of Guyana, through the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, launched the Guyana Visual Arts Competition and Exhibition last year, with the objectives of establishing and recognizing the creative work of Guyanese and providing a source of inspiration for Guyanese artists, thereby stimulating the development of the finest expressions of the visual imagination among Guyanese.



First place photography winner, Nikhil Ramkarran

This visual arts competition was started in 1994 and resuscitated last year August. Submissions were welcomed in six categories: painting, sculpture, drawing, ceramics, textile and photography. Any artist was allowed to enter a maximum of three pieces in any category, or in a combination of categories.

Artists' works produced within the last five years (November 2007 to November 2012) were accepted. However, this is just because no such initiative has been staged in Guyana since 1994.

The competition would be held biennially, with work produced within the last two-

year span. For the next competition, which will be staged sometime in 2014, only work produced after 2012 would be accepted.

The competition is opened to those 16 years and older. The first prize winner would receive \$500,000 and a gold medal; second prize winner \$300,000 and a silver medal, while the third place winner gets \$200,000 and a bronze medal. A special 'Promise Award' of \$200,000 and a bronze medal would be given to an emerging artist whose work shows exceptional promise.

2012 Visual Arts competition

On December 14, winners of the competition were awarded in categories of painting, drawing, sculpture, textiles, ceramics and photography. In the category of painting George Simon won first place for his entry "Homage to Wilson Harris"; in sculpture Gary Thomas for his piece "Lifeline Integration"; drawing, Michael Griffith for "Through the Canvas", and photography Nikhil Ramkarran.

Aneza Coelho won the Promise Award, and Akima McPherson earned the judges' 'Special Award' for her piece "Walk with Me". McPherson walked away with \$200,000.

The 'Lifetime Achievement Award (Posthumous)', the first ever in Guyanese art, went to sculptor of the 1763 Monument "Cuffy" the late Philip Moore A.A. and the citation handed over to his daughter Corine Munroe.

Guyana Times Sunday Magazine interviewed a few winners, who related their motivation for entering the competition and described their award-winning pieces.

Nikhil Ramkarran, first prize winner in the category of photography, stated that he entered the competition for its historic nature; being

the first in so long, and his view that it is the first time photography has been considered part of the visual arts in Guyana.

Additionally, it is his belief that to continue to improve, every aspiring artist must be prepared to subject themselves to a critical audience, one that is going to scrutinize their work and give the kind of feedback, positive or negative, which leads to improvement if they are prepared to listen, and the competition provides that ultimate forum.

"I also entered because of the singular honour of having my work judged by such an illustrious panel of judges. That they would consider my entry good enough is a kind of validation which is remarkably rewarding. My winning entry in the competition is an old wooden fishing vessel (I believe) which stood abandoned at the Kingston foreshore for many years. It is now gone, but at the time was, for me, a reminder of the inevitable dissolution of all things, no matter how important or useful," expressed the visual artist.

Michael Griffith, first prize winner in the drawing

while vending on the pave on Water Street close to Stabroek Market," the artist revealed.

Another notable artist Akima McPherson, awarded the judges' 'Special Award' for her piece "Walk with Me", mentioned that that her initial motivation came from stories she read of women and girls who had experienced sexual violence in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and who had walked great distances to seek medical help when they were no longer of "use" to their captors.

"As I continued the work, I reflected on women closer to home who had found the courage to walk away from abusive situations and seek help. So within the work women walk alone, but they walk. In the uppermost tier of the work there are seven figures arranged in a procession, walking together. They grow in size and emerge more and more from the wax material; this in itself references that journey of reclaim of one's life. The seven figures also reference the support women offer each other. And finally, the mirror seeks to multiply the num-



Akima's 'Walk with Me'

bers to remind of the scale of the problems referenced by the work. Wax was used as it is simultaneously a strong yet vulnerable material," she outlined.

McPherson disclosed that the sculpture, while initially responsive to the situation in Eastern DRC, deliberately is ambiguous about location and specifics, but seeks to stimulate questions and responses that hopefully will lead to a discussion about sexual violence against women and girls, its pervasiveness and actions to address same.

Pro photographer Michael Lam, winner of bronze in the photography category, noted that there was a previous competition in Guyana which in his mind did not take the issue of photography and the rights of the photographers seriously.

"At least it did not from the wording of their rules for the competition. For photography to be included as an art form in a prestigious competition such as the revived Guyana Visual Arts Competition and Exhibition



Visual artist Akima McPherson

was, to me, an affirmation of what photographers like Nikhil Ramkarran and I have been aspiring to. Thanks to our exhibition at the National Art Gallery in February 2012, we believe that our own 'art' is now being taken more seriously. There was a strong showing from photographers at the exhibition, and it will only get better as time passes," Lam divulged.

The artist said he chose three pieces to enter, not knowing what exactly the judges would be looking for. Of the three, "Final Entrance Opening" was awarded the bronze medal.

The Guyana Visual Arts Exhibition has been extended to January 12, 2013. The exhibition may be viewed at Castellani House (painting, drawing and photography) on weekdays from 10:00hrs to 17:00hrs and on Saturdays from 14:00hrs to 18:00hrs. The sculpture, ceramics and textiles winning entries may be viewed at the Guyana National Museum on weekdays from 9:00hrs to 16:30hrs and on Saturdays from 9:30hrs to 14:30hrs. Admission to both exhibitions is free.



Michael Lam's award-winning piece 'Final Entrance Opening'

category, disclosed that his wife encouraged him to enter the competition; to which he submitted three pieces. "My winning piece, 'Through the Canvas', I tried to capture a new perspective of the process of creating a drawing. It is an illusion of seeing the artist through the canvas. The background was chosen to represent my humble beginnings as I first started drawing in earnest



Lam collecting his prize from President Donald Ramotar