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Winner of £40,000 student art competition announced

Ramona Zoladek, who graduated from Anglia Ruskin in July, was handed the UK's largest student art accolade at an award ceremony at Northumbria's Gallery North this evening.

The combined £40,000 competition prize, sponsored by Northumbria law graduate and philanthropist Mr Wee Teng Woon, equals in value Britain's biggest art award, the Turner Prize.



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

Mr Woon was guest of honour at the award ceremony and presented the first prize to the winner. Holly Hendry, winner of the inaugural Woon Art Prize in 2013, was also in attendance to pass on her crown.

Ramona, 27, said: “I can’t believe it! I feel very lucky to be chosen. I never expected to be shortlisted, let alone win! It’s the most amazing thing that could happen to me. I can now fully dedicate my time to working in the studio and not worrying about funding for materials. This is a dream for any artist.

“It will be a great start to my artistic career. Hopefully I will develop my practice and build a professional portfolio and profile. The overall experience will give me confidence. I want to focus more than ever on my practice, keep developing, and get the most out of this opportunity. I hope to exhibit as much as I can.”

Originally from Poland, Romana moved to England seven years ago. Her work revolves around ideas of growth, ruin and the history exposed by these objects and architectural units as they interact with nature.

The winning piece is composed of concrete and plaster planks that have living roots and seedlings embedded into them, growing out of the crevices and flaws in the structures.

“The tension between solid building materials and organic matter is obvious

and naïve but, at the same time, exciting,” she said. “I pay particular attention to those prominent features of the landscape which are supposed to be familiar but are not easily recognisable. Once constructed for the purpose of habitation, they are now abandoned places, overgrown by nature; crumbling, decaying, becoming part of the landscape.”

Ramona beat competition from nine other shortlisted artists to take the top prize, the Woon Tai Jee Fellowship. The shortlisted artists came from art schools and universities across the country and their art work encompasses a wide range of themes and mediums, including sculpture, photography, collage and animation.

The Woon Tai Jee Fellowship is named after Mr Woon’s late father and earns the recipient a £20,000 bursary, use of the Woon Tai Jee studio space in the BxNU Institute of Contemporary Art at BALTIC 39 and mentoring from BALTIC Professor and Turner Prize-nominated artist Christine Borland.

Ramona is looking forward to moving into the North East’s artistic community. She said: “I have heard it is an incredibly vibrant place for the arts. I cannot wait to explore the North galleries. Just from looking at the mix of architecture in Newcastle I have a feeling the arts may be more individual than anywhere else.

“I’d like to thank Northumbria University, BALTIC 39, and of course Mr Woon for this amazing opportunity. I am overwhelmed and cannot wait to start working in the studio.”

The second prize, worth £9,000, named after Mr Woon’s late mother Lim Ai Fang, was awarded to Emilie Atkinson, Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. The £6,000 Cheong Kam Hee Art Prize, named after Mr Woon’s father’s late second wife was presented to Sam Baker, Kingston University. The competition judges split an additional consolation prize of £5,000 between two artists: Catherine Ross, Gray’s School of Art, Robert Gordon University, and Eleni Odysseos, University of Leeds.

The Woon Foundation Painting and Sculpture Art Prize was established to provide opportunities for students to develop their fine art practice, offering direct links with the cultural sector through Northumbria’s partnership with BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead.

BALTIC Professor Christine Borland said: “Mr Woon and his family’s investment in artists at the very beginning of their careers is a unique gesture of support for, and belief in, the future of contemporary sculpture and painting. We have seen, through previous Woon fellow Holly Hendry’s example, how the confidence which this opportunity nurtures can benefit the whole artistic community here in the North East. We very much look forward to welcoming Ramona to BALTIC 39.”

Mr Woon added: “I am delighted to offer this career-changing opportunity to such a gifted young artist. Ramona’s residence in BALTIC 39 will allow her to actively engage with the rich North East art community.

“The work of all of the shortlisted artists was of very high quality and the awards presented this evening recognise these emerging talents, showcasing their work to a wider audience.”

Holly Hendry, last year’s winner, completed her Woon fellowship this summer but she credits the prize for providing her with a unique opportunity and platform to develop her practice. Since winning the prestigious award and studio space in BALTIC 39, the 24-year-old has exhibited work in Northumbria’s Gallery North. Her work has also been displayed at The Royal Standard in Liverpool, The Bank Gallery in Whitechapel, London, and by the Sharjah Art Foundation in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

Members of the public will be able to see the pieces she has produced during her residency at her solo show, *Hollow Bodies*, in Gallery North, which opens on the 24th of September and runs until the 15th October.

All of the winning and shortlisted artworks are currently on display at Gallery North, Northumbria University, Sandyford Road, 10am-4pm weekdays, until September 19th.

Entries for the 2015 Woon Foundation Painting and Sculpture Art Prize are now open. For more information, visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/woonartprize.

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