



Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2019

Over the weekend of Saturday and Sunday 27 and 28 April 2019, the Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize exhibition was held in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall, Uffington. The exhibition formed the centre piece of the Ridgeway Friends Day. This is the third year that the arts prize has been held, celebrating the artistic inspiration of the Ridgeway; the Committee have announced that the arts prize and exhibition will be an annual event.



The exhibition was set up on Thursday and Friday with judging carried out Friday afternoon. Saturday and Sunday the exhibition was open to the public who not only to saw the arts works but enjoyed the goodies from the café in the hall. Sunday was the Ridgeway Friends Day and Friends of the Ridgeway AGM.

Entries to the competition were more than previously but with fewer written entries and photographs than last year offset by a significant increase in sculpture entries. Several competitors have commented that as an annual competition it is and will continue to gain momentum. There was a considerable variety of works entered, including some wonderful textile pictures. Whilst entries came predominantly from the Wiltshire and Oxfordshire ridgeway corridor, some were received from further afield with one potential entrant resident in New York.

All works entered were exhibited making a wonderful and varied exhibition of art works inspired by the Ridgeway. The ambiance of the exhibition was enhanced by the Café provided by the local caterer. A large thank you is due to all entrants for submitting works; there was a wonderful entry enabling a comprehensive exhibition to be mounted including a large variety of works not only between categories but within the individual categories. The judges once again commented on the quality and variety of the entries. The overall winner was a piece of sculpture.



The Judges



Esther Lafferty with prize winners



'Me and my Son'

The results of the competition were announced and prizes awarded at the Prize Giving after the Friends of the Ridgeway AGM. The Judges were:

- (a) Esther Lafferty, Chair of Judges, is the Festival Director of Oxfordshire Artweeks, a visual arts festival involving around 1,000 artists and 450 venues each year. She has a Masters Degree in Human Sciences from the University of Oxford and worked as a medical publisher before turning her hand to writing and event organisation, reviewing children's literature.
- (b) Amanda Hislop, painting judge. She works as an artist combining drawn and painted marks with the tactile qualities of thread, paper and fabric. The essence of the landscape and natural forms inspire her work. In addition, she is a teacher and lecturer and runs one and two day workshops and longer summer schools designed to stretch creative imagination with a strong emphasis on intuitive exploration and pushing beyond boundaries. She also is a prize winner for her art.
- (c) Clover Stroud, written work judge. She is a local author of the Ridgeway memoir *'The Wild Other'*; she writes for the Daily Mail, Sunday Times, Daily Telegraph and Conde Nast Traveller amongst others. She lives in Oxfordshire with her husband and five children.
- (d) Paul Wilkinson, photographic judge, is one of the UK's most sought-after photographers. With a life-long love of photography and a passion for creating beautiful, timeless images, he has established himself at the top of his profession as a people photographer. Paul has won an array of awards for his work and is now an International Judge.
- (e) Jo Boseley, the sculpture judge, is an Oxfordshire based sculptor, known for her quirky and unusual hand built stoneware ceramics for the home and garden inspired by the natural world. She exhibits, including in Oxfordshire Artweeks, and is a teacher.

After much debate amongst the judges (and subsequently amongst visitors to the exhibition), the piece that best expressed the 'Spirit of Ridgeway' was a sculpture by Michele Greene. The winners were:

- Overall winner and Sculpture: Michele Greene 'Me and my Son'
- Written: Peter Wild, The Spirit of the Ridgeway
- Photography: Sean Dunlop 'Ridgeway view of our ancestors'
- Painting: Katherine Foxhall 'Into the Manger'.

Esther Lafferty in summing up the entries commented on the range and excellence of the exhibited works. In the painting category, she highlighted a delicate textile piece of 'painting with fabric' by Barbara Shaw, showing the view from Coombe Hill, at the very other end of the Ridgeway and a beautiful mosaic by Wendy Bobennie of an owl on a way marker pointing out the route between the two! It's broken crockery marked the passing of time in a wonderfully rich and colourful way. As a panel the judges commended a stylised contemporary print of Avebury by Brian Button, accessible and representative of a very special place.

The painting runner up is 'Racing in the Rain' by Jill Smith – which Amanda noted particular technical merit as well as the sense of space it gives. You can also read the shape of history in the landscape with its suggestions of age-old undulations. The light coming through thundery clouds could be something spiritual or just the weather which as we all know can change in an instant up on the ridgeway from sunny to stormy.

The painting category winner is a small delicate etching by Katherine Foxhall 'Into the Manger'. This was felt to have been skilfully done and unlike any of the other pieces on show, encapsulating a big spirit in a very small space. In the colour of the land itself, there's an understated charm and a timeless calm, a drifting shadow and wispy detail in the foreground, and it was the picture that pulled her back time and time again.

The winner in the photography category was judged Sean Dunlop's 'Ridgeway view of our ancestors'. This is a technically difficult blended image from 15 separate photographs showing the milky way over the Ridgeway adding spirituality to the ridgeway view that to people in Faringdon and the Vale is instantly recognisable. The runner up, by Alec French, is a photo of the red coated hunt on the ridgeway. There's great perspective, lighting timing and composition, although the panel did debate the subject matter for some time. The photo is of the now, with modern day vehicles, and yet of the past too, a pastime that was once popular and is now frowned upon in the main, and so there's a photo documentary quality to it. It's of historical merit marking the moment, and a commentary for the future perhaps too.

Spirit of the Ridgeway

The view I see is remarkable
it is one of space and time...
I remember an age when
this chap said
"lets draw some lines," and I said, "of course"
but I did not imagine
that he would draw - a horse
and that this then would define,
keep me trapped
but also set me free
like a tattoo - you know,
a unique feature - letting me be me.

Many lines connect our lives
and so one day
much much later
I was visited by a family of three generations
peering at the sky
looking at my horse
so white
but more intent on wind speed
as they'd come to fly their kite
their line in the sky
a fine line linking hillside,
family, timeI cry

because It came to my attention recently
that one of the three was no more
the other two now older
no longer fly kites
but may one day
if a new line comes their way
the old line now fragile
links to other times
through spoken words, and pictures of those days
and driving by en route
they pause and cast a glance
their kite still in the boot

And as I recall them laughing and playing
I shed my tears for times gone by
immortal as I seem
I can sometimes get weary
being a part of life - yet not
(the horse ensures I will not be forgot)
the view has changed
you can see me but not as I see you?
As my slopes still
provide a backdrop for the living
I'm glad he drew those lines
it serves to keep my spirit giving

Peter Wild



Across Roof Into the Manger (Painted 2/2019)



The sculpture category included a number of wildlife pieces – and hares in particular from one crouching in tactile stone by Sharon Rich, another mantel-piece-sized character light-heartedly licking its ceramic ear, and a giant depiction of the landmarks of the Ridgeway painted around a six foot hare by Jo Marshall.

The winning sculpture, and the winner over all, was by Michele Greene. It shows two metal people set into a stone hill and there are timeless as they stand there on top of the world evoking exactly the feeling you get if you stand above Uffington's White Horse and look out with the wind whipping past you. It's elemental, age-old and has that spiritual quality the judges were looking for. Jo Boseley, Sculpture Judge, said "For me, the piece that best answered the theme 'spirit of the Ridgeway' was 'Me and my son' by Michelle Greene. The shape of the stone on which the figures stood reflected the gentle contours of the hills, while the two figures emphasized the majesty of the downland landscape. Looking at the two stick figures one could almost feel the wind blowing and recall the exhilaration of being 'on top of the world' , the downs giving way to fields and villages below as far as the eye can see".

The runner up in the sculpture category was carved by John Nicholls, a buzzard on a stone backdrop with a hole that could be the sun or the moon and leaves you wondering, just as the mysteries of the Ridgeway do – and it's an abstract representation of the ridgeway, giving this depiction go the Ridgeway a freedom and a flavour of adventure.

In the written category, the poem, by Peter Wild, was a unanimous choice. Clover Stroud the written work judge, described it "as the most original. It had rich emotional resonance, with the horse described in a way that rang true, and the poem giving the feel of the ridgeway as a space that is used, the wind providing the lift for kites, as a space where you're aware of the passing of time and generation visit, pass and visit again".

Esther Lafferty presented the prizes to the winners. After the prize giving there was a cream tea for all at the exhibition. We were all delighted with the success of the Art Prize over the week-end. For this the Friends of the Ridgeway owe a real debt of gratitude for all the hard work and organisation, to the volunteers involved. A very big thank you to all who helped.