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THE ARTS

VISUAL ARTS

A small but perfectly formed prize

William Packer is delighted with the standard of work submitted for a little-known but worthy award

Prizes and awards abound these days, which is no bad thing in itself, whatever shock, horror or controversy the event may produce. But that said, commercial sponsorship, however generous, has its own imperatives and justifications. And size isn't everything. The important thing is to do what is possible, and it is in no way to put down the larger brethren to point out that more modest and private efforts may be no less worthwhile, and, in a quiet way, do just as much good.

The Gilchrist-Fisher Award, which every other year or so gives £3,000 to its winner and £1,000 to the runner-up, is hardly lavish by current standards. Yet in its own way it is as remarkable and admirable as any other, and - here I must declare my interest - one with which I have been more than happy to be associated, as a member of its jury, more or less since its inception. The award was set up in 1987, by a group of young friends in memory of Alasdair Gilchrist-Fisher, who had died of cancer the year before. During his short last illness he had taken a course in painting, with a particular bent towards landscape, and so the prize in his name is one for landscape painting, and open to any artist under 30.

Not everything submitted has been hung in the show now at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery in Fitzrovia, but each artist is fairly represented, and the rest remains available to the interested visitor.

This has turned out to be rather a wild year, with four of the artists

producing romantic images of waste and wilderness, and the other two, though formally more abstracted and restrained, nonetheless looking to sea and rock, and to the wild wood. All, in their several ways - Felix Baudenbacher, with his mountain tops; Ruth Brownlee with her Shetland skies and cliffs; Sarah Longley with her bogs and meres; Deborah Nikolls and her delicate rock surfaces and strata - had decided quality and promise, but two, leaving quite aside the sheer physical presence of their huge canvases (each sent in six six-footers) were outstanding.

Katarina Ivanisin's pale grisaille paintings, with but the occasional graphic flick of sharper colour, or underlying paler blush, seem to draw us into a light-suffused but misty wood, as into a Chinese scroll or Japanese screen. They are a curious yet convincing amalgam of the Oriental and art-nouveau and art-deco, the decorative at its most sophisticated and refined. They are very beautiful things. And they could hardly be in greater contrast to Mark Thompson's rather more darkly monochromatic paintings of deep Alaskan valleys and winter lakes and rivers, all set about with black peaks and looming glaciers, to which in the event we gave first prize. No less ambitious than Ivanisin's work, it is much rawer, more edgy and direct, and takes more risks.

Another surprise is the exhibition at the Royal National Theatre of the work of Andrzej Klimowski, who is now in his early 50s. Of



Inner landscape: Mark Thompson's winning work depicts deep Alaskan valleys and winter lakes and rivers, surrounded by dark peaks

Polish extraction, he was born in London, where he studied, spent much of the 1970s in Warsaw, and is now a senior tutor at the Royal College. He is an illustrator and graphic designer who has become particularly associated with the design of book covers and posters for the theatre and the cinema, and in part the surprise is only at how familiar his work is, and how pervasive his influence. The further surprise is that it should

declare itself in its quality not so much as applied art, but as art pure and simple.

His staple is the collage, and in his practice of it he places himself firmly in the modernist tradition that comes from Dada and Surrealism on the one hand, Constructivism and the Bauhaus on the other. But here is no mere following upon a stronger influence or exercise in pastiche, but rather an entirely personal development

and movement forward. True art is always of its time, and here we have an edge and clarity to the work, and a wry and often subversive visual wit, that are all Klimowski's own. With the film and theatre posters of the late 1970s especially, made when he was in Warsaw, the underlying social and political edginess is all but palpable. Yet there is nothing to them of propaganda or polemic. For art, as it always must, keeps

its ambiguities, and its distance. More than surprising, it is impressive stuff.

'The Gilchrist-Fisher Award 2002'. Rebecca Hossack Gallery, 35 Windmill Street, London W1. Tel 020 7255 2828. www.r-h-g.co.uk. Until February 9. **'Andrzej Klimowski - a Graphic Retrospective'.** Royal National Theatre, London SE1. Tel 020 7255 2828. www.nationaltheatre.org.uk. Until February 9.

RECITALS BARBICAN

Terfel delivers seriously good fun

Having discovered its suitability as a venue for solo singers, the refurbished Barbican Hall is not wasting any time. Two more big name singers drew sold-out houses over the weekend.

It is not hard to see why Bryn Terfel has such a following. He holds the audience in the palm of his hand, wins applause for tickling them off when they cough too much ("I know a good doctor in London"), get everybody to sing along with the chorus of "Mud, glorious mud", throws in an encore from the musical *Camelot* and then clinches the evening by tossing his bouquet to a lady in the front row.

Before anybody complains that this sounds far too much like fun, let us remember that song recitals were not always intended to be earnest affairs. It was particularly in the 1950s and 1960s that the celebrity recital gave way to the instructive evening of art song, as a dynamic generation of new singers stepped forward with serious ambitions and people got to know the song repertoire better through recordings.

The marvellous thing about Terfel is that he can deliver at a serious level too. He opened Sunday's recital at the Barbican with a Schubert group that placed thunderous epics ("A Schwager Kronos") alongside barely-whispered miniatures ("Meeres Stille") ju-