

Taylor Wessing portrait prize won by photo of boy in school uniform

Swiss-Italian photographer Claudio Rasano praised by judges for creating 'something beautiful out of the everyday'

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An apparently simple and straightforward picture of a boy in his school uniform has won the Swiss-Italian photographer Claudio Rasano a major portrait award.

Judges for the 2016 Taylor Wessing prize said Rasano's picture of 18-year-old Johannesburg student Katlehong Matsenen was powerfully direct and managed to create "something beautiful out of the everyday".

Rasano was named £15,000 winner of the photographic portrait prize at a ceremony on Tuesday evening at London's National Portrait Gallery, the competition's organisers.

The portrait was part of Rasano's series called *Similar Uniforms: We Refuse to Compare* in which he is exploring whether individuality can be preserved when school uniforms are worn.

Before the ceremony Rasano explained the issues he was interested in. "Children themselves have been known to rebel against uniforms," he said, "especially as they approach the awkward age characterised by the need to fit in and the desire to stand out, all at the same time.

"Some experts too have spoken against school uniforms on the grounds that they suppress individuality and diversity."

Basel-born Rasano has twice featured in the Taylor Wessing prize exhibition, in 2011 and 2013, but this is his first win.

Second prize went to Joni Sternbach, who uses early photographic processes to give contemporary images a Victorian feel. She had been shortlisted for a disorientating image of a modern-day Californian surfer posing by the sea with his girlfriend.

In third place was Kovi Konowiecki, a former professional footballer who is now a

photographer. He won for Shimi Beitar Illit and Tilly and Itty Beitar Illit, part of a series of inkjet prints that portray Orthodox Jews from around the world.

All three are part of an exhibition showing the best of this year's huge entry. In total 4,303 submissions were entered by 1,842 photographers.

Nicholas Cullinan, the gallery's director who also chaired the judging panel, congratulated Rasano. "The quality and diversity of both this year's shortlist and exhibition are a testament to the engaging work being produced by international photographers," he said.

"Each and every photographer who entered has contributed their part to the debate and evolution of contemporary portrait photography."

The ceremony also saw Josh Redman winning the £5,000 John Kobal new work award for his portrait of Frances, an 83-year-old woman.

The Taylor Wessing photographic portrait prize exhibition runs 17 November-26 February.

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