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The advertisement features three pieces of modern furniture: a desk with a wooden top and metal legs, a modular shelving unit with white frames and wooden inserts, and a long, low cabinet with a mix of white and wood finishes. The brand name 'MONOQI' is prominently displayed in a bold, sans-serif font, with the tagline 'DEDICATED TO DESIGN' underneath. A red 'Shop now' button with a right-pointing arrow is located at the bottom right of the ad.

FIRST NIGHT REVIEW

Visual art: Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize, National Portrait Gallery, WC2

Nancy Durrant

November 16
2016, 12:01am,
The Times



Katlehong Matsenen, a Johannesburg schoolboy. He featured in a series of portraits that looked at ways of preserving individuality while wearing school uniform

CLAUDIO RASANO

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Today's sections

the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait

Times+

My account

Prize is a pleasing indulgence. At its best it is like looking through a selection of perfect keyholes, big enough to let your imagination fly, but not quite big enough to reveal actual facts and slip into news reporting.

This isn't a vintage year, but there is plenty to admire in the way of skilful portraiture.

It's no bad thing that this year's show is low on celebs. Of these there is only Simon Callow, who looks to me as if he's acting his moment of quiet reflection, and a smug Nigel Farage, shot by Charlie Clift smoking a cigar — a portrait of a man punching well above his weight and loving every minute of it.

There is the usual contingent of kids, quietly triumphant in the face of life. My favourites in this category are Laurie Griffiths and Jonty Tacon's two boys from Chernobyl, the red bike

they proudly share speaking of a long-term deprivation that can only be overcome by compromise, and Scott Thomas's image of Jet, a child living in a Welsh eco-community whose oversized, garish Iron Man costume is cheerful proof that it doesn't matter how you bring up small boys, you are powerless against the lure of a jetpack.

The winner of the competition's first prize, announced yesterday evening, was an arresting photograph of 18-year-old Katlehong Matsenen.



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By using natural light and a white background and having his subject wear the uniform of his Johannesburg school, Claudio Rasano highlights the significance of the strict uniform policy in South African schools. Stripping away social signifiers presents this

striking, solemn boy simply as a student, in tune with the anxiously enforced egalitarianism promoted in the country since the fall of apartheid.

Uniforms of all kinds loom large, whether the focus or not. Kovi Konowiecki's *Shimi, Beitar Illit*, a portrait of a violinist with a klezmer band that won third prize, focuses on his beautiful face, forcing the viewer to see the person underneath his shtreimel (the fur hat worn by many married Orthodox Jewish men). By contrast, the nun-like garb of Fabio Boni's Italian Red Cross volunteers dominates, making them look like something from *Call the Midwife*. Here too are actual midwives, shot by Anna Kari in their blue dresses in under-resourced hospitals in Zanzibar and Tanzania. They radiate a sense of order that must be a huge comfort to the women who visit these struggling facilities.

Also alarmingly short of equipment is the female anti-poaching unit photographed by Julia Gunther on patrol in the Balule nature reserve in South Africa. Dressed in full camouflage, they operate unarmed. I love their toughness, not tempered but enhanced by their femininity.

A figure that at first glance I took to be wearing a uniform (it's a khaki jumper) was the centenarian John Harrison, whose portrait by Paul Stuart is subtitled *36852 Days Old*. Its rarity struck me forcefully – when was the last time you saw a face like this that didn't belong to a Holocaust survivor, or a concentration camp guard finally being brought to justice? Life expectancy is rising, so where are the rest of them?

From November 17 to February 26; 020 7306 0055

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