



The Boston Globe

Jamaica Plain artist gets Foster Prize

By Sebastian Smeed, Globe Staff | January 22, 2009

The Institute of Contemporary Art's 2008 James and Audrey Foster Prize - one of the most prestigious awards for contemporary art in Greater Boston - has been given to Andrew Witkin, a 31-year-old artist who lives in Jamaica Plain.

Witkin, who learned he had won the \$25,000 prize on Tuesday, was one of four finalists whose work went on show at the ICA in November (the exhibition ends March 1). He said he was "blown away" by the news.

"It's amazing! The money is of course extraordinary. For a young artist to get that amount of money is truly extraordinary," he said. "But the money's just money. It's also tremendous to be honored by a jury of such incredible curators."

The jury was made up of five curators from institutions such as the ICA and the Yale University Art Gallery, as well as one artist, Ambreen Butt, who won the prize in 1999. The three other finalists were Catherine D'Ignazio, Rania Matar, and Joe Zane.

Witkin's work at the ICA, an uncanny installation of fastidiously arranged personal effects and impersonal furniture that he calls "Untitled, 1990 -," blurs the separation between art and life.

The arrangement reflects aspects of the artist's own life, which is both fervently social (he works at the Barbara Krakow Gallery on Newbury Street and has a wide circle of friends) and highly controlled. The overall effect is strangely haunting, at once crowded with memory and desire and devastatingly empty.

The ICA's director, Jill Medvedow, said in a statement that Witkin's "quiet installation . . . simultaneously evok[ed] a sense of isolation and a longing for connection."

Witkin, who has another installation on show at LaMontagne Gallery in South Boston (through Feb. 14), said he had received a huge range of responses to his winning work.

"I feel every response is 'getting it' to some degree," he said. "The thing is, it's really just amazing for a young artist to have so many people see your work. It's like a living, breathing workshop."

Witkin saluted the sponsors of the prize, James and Audrey Foster, who established it with an endowment of \$1 million: "Their dedication to the contemporary-art community is mind-blowing," he said.

"I'm uncomfortable with prizes in general," he added, "and especially after getting to know the other finalists, whom I have the greatest respect for. But this is a huge vote of confidence."



Andrew Witkin (top) received the Foster Prize for his work, "Untitled, 1990-," currently on display at the ICA