

In the name of art

It could be said to reflect York itself – a historic relic with a focus on religion, re-appropriated and occupied by an exciting new wave of contemporary artistic talent. York's medieval church-turned-artspace York St Mary's this year plays host to the Aesthetica Art Prize Exhibition, a showcase of work by around 100 artists from across the world.

Aesthetica Art Prize director and judge Cherie Federico says: "The gallery is an outstanding venue and what's so special about it is the history that the building already inhabits. Centuries before it was a gallery, it had a different purpose and was a part of people's lives, but in a very different way. I like the fact that now, as a gallery, once again the building becomes a part of people's lives, and through the presentation of artworks we can evoke a debate and a conversation around contemporary art and ultimately the wider messages of the pieces. The context of the church gives the artworks more space to breathe and, by veering away from the traditional white cube, a very new visitor experience emerges."

Indeed, the works' wider messages are vast and varied, perhaps down to the breadth of worldwide talent on show – countries represented include the US, Chile, Germany, New Zealand and the UK.

Shortlisted in the photographic and digital art category, Chilean photographic artist and philosophy PhD student Inés Molina Navea's series of images, *541 Dias*, is striking. The hooded subjects are skilfully lit – a masterclass in the art of photography – but also address the issue of people, as the artist explains, "dissatisfied with the economic model that exploits them, with the social inequality, police abuse, with the democracy's imagery that presents a world for everyone".

From the long list of entries – to be screened alongside the eight shortlisted entries taking centre stage in the exhibition – Bristol-born photographic artist Darren Nisbett's arresting photograph *Anaesthetic* turns a discarded surgical chair into a bleak and haunting tableau.

Federico chose from more than 3,000 entries falling under the categories: photographic and digital art; three-dimensional design and sculpture; painting and drawing; and

An art exhibition with international breadth takes place against a medieval backdrop which challenges the notion of the gallery as a white cube, writes **Ali Schofield**



Work by Inés Molina Navea is shortlisted in the photography category

video, installation and performance.

"People often ask me: 'What are you looking for?' This is a really difficult question to answer, and I don't believe contemporary art can be so easily codified. It's just not as simple as that. One thing is for certain – an excellent piece of artwork stops you in your tracks and, by the time you've finished looking at it, somehow you are different. This works on many levels – perhaps you learned something or you saw a different viewpoint, one which you may never have considered before. For me, this is one of the main aims of contemporary art.

"The work that artists are producing today reflects the world in which we live. Social media, the latest device or gadget and the ever-imposing selfie have defined current times. It's the role of the artist to make sense of all of this, to examine the world and represent it back to us. The artists in the exhibition have inspired a discussion, whether that is around form, content or an overarching message about the

environment or social perceptions. All of these works are incredibly relevant – they are shouting about the world, questioning it and playing with the rules."

Accompanying the exhibition will be a book and a series of free lunchtime talks on Wednesdays throughout its run at York St Mary's, starting with a presentation by artist Deb Covell, shortlisted in the painting and drawing category, on 23 April.

Federico says: "For me, it's so important to support the next generation of artists. It's a tough old world to break into, and through the Aesthetica Art Prize we are recognising innovation and excellence.

"There are not that many platforms for emerging artists, and I hope that the Aesthetica Art Prize can further artists' careers and encourage new audiences to find out about their work."

The Aesthetica Art Prize runs until 22 June at York St Mary's, Castlegate, York YO1 9RN



ALSO SHOWING



ROBIN INCE

10 April, Lowry, Salford

Writer, stand-up and actor Robin Ince, best known for his BBC radio show *The Infinite Monkey Cage* with physicist Brian Cox, presents the latest in a series of unhinged comic lectures. After dabbling in Darwin and Feynman he now looks at the last 100 years of psychiatry and psychology to explore just how hard it is being a self-conscious being on planet earth.



BRUCE NAUMAN

Until 24 May, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston

An exhibition by influential artist Bruce Nauman is part of Artist Rooms On Tour, a collection of modern and contemporary art acquired by Tate and the National Galleries of Scotland. Representing the breadth of his work from the 1970s to the 1990s, the exhibition will include Nauman's epic *Changing Light Corridor With Rooms*, last shown in the UK in 1989.