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## New sculpture award the Nasher Prize is putting Dallas on the global art map

The new \$100,000 Nasher Prize is the only annual award dedicated to sculpture, says Fiona Hughes, and it will put Dallas on the global art map

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FIONA HUGHES Thursday 3 September 2015 11:27 BST



Flying the flag: Phyllida

Barlow's 100 Banners is currently on show at the Nasher Sculpture Center

**Architecture has the Pritzker and Stirling prizes. Photography has the Prix Pictet. There's the Turner, the Tonys, the Oscars, the Baftas, the Man Booker ... but there has never been an annual prize dedicated to sculpture. That was part of the thinking at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, which introduces a new international award this year.**

A generous \$100,000 for the winner puts the Nasher Sculpture Prize among the biggest art awards in the world. It is open to artists across the globe with a substantial body of work. Apart from stipulating that the winning artist will have made a significant impact on our understanding of sculpture, the criteria are deliberately vague since the aim is to foster debate towards new definitions of the art form. The Nasher wants to pose the question: what is sculpture in the 21st century?

Sculpture has changed radically since the Sixties, growing beyond chiselling or casting to encompass everything from installation to performance to land art. The boundaries keep on shifting. Yet the cultural significance of sculpture remains vital — who can forget the toppling statue of Saddam Hussein? Who is not depressed by the devastation at Palmyra?

This is a job for a heavyweight jury. The inaugural seven decision-makers include Tate director Nicholas Serota and British artist Phyllida Barlow. Also part of the international line-up is this year's Venice Biennale curator, Okwui Enwezor. They have already met and chosen their first winner, to be announced on September 30.

There will be a launch event and a public debate in London next month for Frieze Week, followed next spring by more public events and a celebration gala in Dallas, where the award will be presented.

Although the handing over of the statuette (designed by Shard architect Renzo Piano, more about him later) is to take place on Texan soil, the transforming concept of the Nasher Prize is that it is international. In accordance with the wishes of Nasher Sculpture Center founder Raymond Nasher, the smallish but beautifully formed museum should pursue and promote the discussion and development of sculpture beyond its city boundaries.

The Center's current director, Jeremy Strick, who took up the post in 2009, presides over an important collection of some 300 works of 20th-century sculpture. The list of artists reads like a who's who — Brancusi, Calder, Gauguin, de Kooning, di Suvero, Hepworth, Kelly, Oldenburg, Picasso, Rodin and Serra — and there are mini-collections of up to 10 works by Matisse, Picasso, David Smith, Moore, Miro and Giacometti.

Although this dynamic institution continues to make acquisitions (a new fund for art by women has just been announced) it's this extraordinary original collection, left by Raymond Nasher after his death in 2007, and his wife Patsy, who had died nearly 20 years earlier, that makes it a jewel in Dallas's crown.



A Barbara Hepworth in the Nasher Sculpture Centre's garden

The Nashers began buying art in the Fifties but it was in the Sixties when Patsy, the one with an eye for art and the nerve for risk, really started to shape the collection. One of her daughters, Nancy — a businesswoman and benefactor with an art habit of her own — shared some of her childhood memories with me. Her stories include recalling the piercing blue eyes of Henry Moore, a regular visitor to their house; rejecting a commissioned Andy Warhol portrait because her hair looked wrong; opening her bedroom window and seeing Jeff Koons’s Louis XIV bust glistening in the sunlight. The family lived around the works of art her parents bought for their home, including large-scale outdoor works they placed on open land in front of the house for the neighbourhood to enjoy.

Raymond was, among other things, a property developer and in 1965 he opened one of the early shopping centres in the US, NorthPark in Dallas. The crisply designed and now carefully expanded retail heaven is so well-kept and managed that, Nancy tells me with glee, it is today referred to as a “museum mall”, while still being a top- 20 ranked “billion-dollar mall”.

What distinguishes NorthPark from those other fiercely air-conditioned cathedrals to commerce are the huge works of sculpture (which Nancy continues to collect, with her husband) that the Nashers decided to display there so everyone could experience them. Highlights of NorthPark’s 30-odd works on show at any one time might include the two Anthony Caros, a Henry Moore, or an Antony Gormley.

The ideal of bringing art to its broadest audience is what inspired Raymond to plan the Nasher Sculpture Center and garden, which opened in 2003. He commissioned Renzo Piano to design a building in Dallas’s up-and- coming Arts District. The resulting museum is flooded with natural light and has a view from the street right through to the garden where outdoor works dot the landscape.



Art on display in the Nasher Sculpture Center

Big-name architects are de rigueur in this part of the world. In the Arts District alone you’ll see I M Pei’s home for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, across the road from Norman Foster’s Winspear Opera House,

which is part of the AT & T Performing Arts complex that includes a theatre co-designed by Rem Koolhaas.

The Arts District came into being in the Eighties with the arrival of the Dallas Museum of Art, and has been supported by the city's forward-thinking mayor, Mike Rawlings, who ran on an electoral platform to develop Dallas as a cultural destination. That's an enticing ticket for any arts lover, although, it has to be said, the Arts District is in need of some animation.

If you dare venture beyond an air-con environment at this time of year, exposing yourself to near 40C temperatures and scorching sun, you're likely to find only mad dogs and Englishmen as company. Even the district's Booker T Washington School for Performing and Visual Arts (which produced Norah Jones and Erykah Badu) can't fill the streets with chattering youth in that heat. Jeremy Strick is convinced, all the same, that with so much in development, the street life of the area will feel considerably different in five years.

Dallas does have the feel of a outward-looking city of the verge of something. Richard Patterson, one of the Young British Artists in the Nineties who became known for his hyper-real paintings, has made it his home and sits on a committee of advisers at the Nasher. Despite a healthy cynicism about the contemporary art world, he is enthusiastic about the international reach of Dallas, which is also, he believes, particularly Anglophile.

The Nasher's current Phyllida Barlow show — so intentionally, joyously, intrusive it feels more like a gallery takeover — possibly supports Patterson's theory. The museum maintains a varied programme by both rotating its collection and inviting artists in. Thomas Heatherwick, Rachel Whiteread, Eva Rothschild and Martin Creed are other visitors from London to have exhibited in recent times.

Patterson also directed me downtown to the Goss-Michael Foundation, a private space and grand collection of YBA and more contemporary work, set up by George Michael and his then partner Kenny Goss. Opening night parties there are the coolest in town.

Then there is the relatively new Warehouse, an industrial-style gallery largely devoted to exhibitions from an treasure trove of privately owned, international contemporary art. Smaller galleries flourish too and a busy art calendar peaks in April with the Dallas Art Fair when the entire art world descends on Texas.

Dallas has set its sights on becoming a centre for culture. Bit by bit that appears to be happening, and if the creation of the Nasher Sculpture Center was an essential step in that direction the Nasher Prize is another one, announcing the city's intentions to the world.