

Five things we learned at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition

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The annual open-submission behemoth returns to the RA, this year overseen by academician Eileen Cooper. Over 1,200 artworks will go on the walls of Burlington House – as ever, by big names and recent graduates alike. Here are five things we learned from the show.

1. It's exhausting

There are well over a thousand works of art hung across the Royal Academy's walls, by artists young and old, rich and poor, famous and really seriously not famous at all. They have been whittled down from the 12,000 pieces submitted, and then organised into individual rooms by a hanging committee made up of Royal Academicians like Fiona Rae and Yinka Shonibare. It's room after room, painting after painting, and it's totally rammed full of people. Knackering, but a lot of fun.

2. People have terrible taste

Almost every time I saw a piece and thought: 'Please Lord, rip my eyes from my head, for they have witnessed ugliness so profound that I no longer wish to see', there'd be a little sticker on the frame. That sticker means that it's been sold (almost everything you see is for sale). Basically, if something's really crap, someone's probably bought it. The only conclusion to take from that is that people have terrible, awful, horrendous taste and will buy any old tat while totally ignoring everything that's good. Or maybe it's me who's the problem... No, I'm Time Out's Art editor, so that can't be it. The point is, there's a lot of shit art here, and you're going to have to wade through it all before you get to the good stuff.

3. Rooms IV and VI are where it's at

Some of the rooms in the Summer Exhibition are all chaos and busy-ness, but a couple stand out as really well curated. The room of Richard Long, Phyllida Barlow and Eva Rothschild works is quiet and restrained, and Yinka Shonibare's room is fun, garish, colourful and the most enjoyable of the lot. It's full of art by Gonçalo Mabunda, Tomoaki Suzuki and Abdoulaye Konaté – eclectic, international, real good.



Hassan Hajaj, courtesy the artist

4. There are some big art names

It's not all amateur watercolourists and garden shed sculptors, there are some seriously big artists on show here. There's a great Georg Baselitz drawing, a handful of paintings by Phyllida Barlow, a huge Anselm Kiefer and a massive, nightmarish Anish Kapoor sculpture that looks like a wax monster from a horror film about the menstrual cycle. Fun for all the family.

5. But some of the less well known names are amazing too

That's the real pleasure of the Summer Exhibition – stumbling upon artists you might never have heard of before and falling totally in love with them. Look out for people like James Irwin, Rhys Coren, Carla Busuttil, Cristina BanBan. Plough through the crowds, push on past all the naff art and you'll be rewarded with some absolute gold.

The Summer Exhibition is at the Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, W1J 0BD. June 13 - August 20. To purchase tickets, click here (<http://ticketing.timeout.com/tickets/summer-exhibition-2017>).

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