

PRESS RELEASE: October 2009

Winner of the £25,000 Threadneedle Prize quits her day job.

Artist Sheila Wallis, 37, who won this year's £25,000 Threadneedle Prize, for her self-portrait, has given up her job working for the NHS in order to concentrate on painting.

Sheila has been a support worker for adults with learning disabilities for nearly 12 years, but since winning the Prize she has decided, **"it's time to take my art more seriously."**

The first thing is to get a studio and she is moving to Guildford to rent one. In fact she is moving house and quitting her job on same day.

"I don't do things by halves," she says. **"Winning The Threadneedle Prize has given me the financial opportunity to get a studio and a website."**

She is about to have an exhibition in Basingstoke and has spent October doing workshops for the Big Draw at Watts Gallery in Compton, where she is Artist in Residence.

"I'm excited for the future."

Sheila was born in Derry, Northern Ireland. Born at the height of the troubles, her work is partly inspired by themes of internal and external conflicts and the vulnerability and exposure of the existential human condition. She has chosen to express these themes by painting the naked body.

She wants her paintings to:

"convey the vulnerability of exposure without being exploitative or cruel... [the subject] is aware of the scrutiny, but is not subjugated, objectified, nor dismissive of it. Essentially alone, all objects and paraphernalia other than

*the body and the surface it rests upon are removed,
presenting a small, naked creature, not the classic 'nude'."*

The Threadneedle Prize, awarded on 14 September 2009 by Lauren Laverne (host of BBC 2's *The Culture Show*), followed a public vote held online and at the Mall Galleries.

It is the largest art prize in the UK awarded by a public vote. Over the last two weeks, thousands of visitors to the Mall Galleries took this opportunity to vote for their choice of one of seven artists shortlisted by the selectors.

The Prize is exclusively open to artists living or working in the UK, and has proved a massive hit with artists attracted by the £25,000 – which makes it the most valuable competition for a single work of art in the UK.

The Threadneedle Prize for Painting and Sculpture

Mall Galleries

The Mall (near Trafalgar Square)

London SW1

Nearest Tube: Charing Cross

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www.threadneedleprize.com

www.mallgalleries.org.uk

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Notes

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Source: Threadneedle as at 30.06.2009.