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BritArt's new yawn

NICK HACKWORTH

COME back the transvestites, all is forgiven. A rerun of last year's prize, which benefited from Grayson Perry's unorthodox glamour and the Chapman Brothers' malicious sense of humour, would be infinitely preferable to the contest being served up by the Turner Prize judges for 2004. By logic the shortlist should be either entertaining or good, thereby either serving the Tate's need for publicity or the cause of quality art in this country. This list is neither. Though some art purists will laud the list for being "serious", it is, in fact, merely dull. Indeed its poverty highlights two problems in British art: that few exciting young talents have emerged in the wake of the Young British Artist generation, and that - since the cultural decision-makers continue to ignore figurative and other less sexy forms of contemporary art - they are left with a shrinking pool of artists to select for prizes and major shows. The only newcomer, richly undeserving of his place on the list, is Kutlug Ataman - a Turkish-born, London-based artist. In a spate of major shows last year, including one at the Serpentine, he valiantly upheld video art's tradition of presenting badly made home movies as sociologically fascinating works of art. The other three - though not household names - have all been on the scene for a while. Yinka Shonibare's politicallycorrect textile sculptures are mildly amusing but "lite" and repetitive skits on the politics of racial identity. Jeremy Deller, meanwhile, is a conceptual-cum-performance artist who puts together events and exhibitions that explore a political topic or aspect of popular culture, as in his trainspotterish Unconvention, an exhibition he organised about the Manic Street Preachers. The final nominees - and by far the most worthy - are cerebral art duo Langlands and Bell, who have been collaborating since 1978. Their elegant work - in a range of forms, from sculpture and architecture to computer simulations - quietly and intelligently questions the power structures of this world. They will, therefore, seem somewhat out of place when the Tate Britain's exhibition of shortlisted work opens in the autumn.