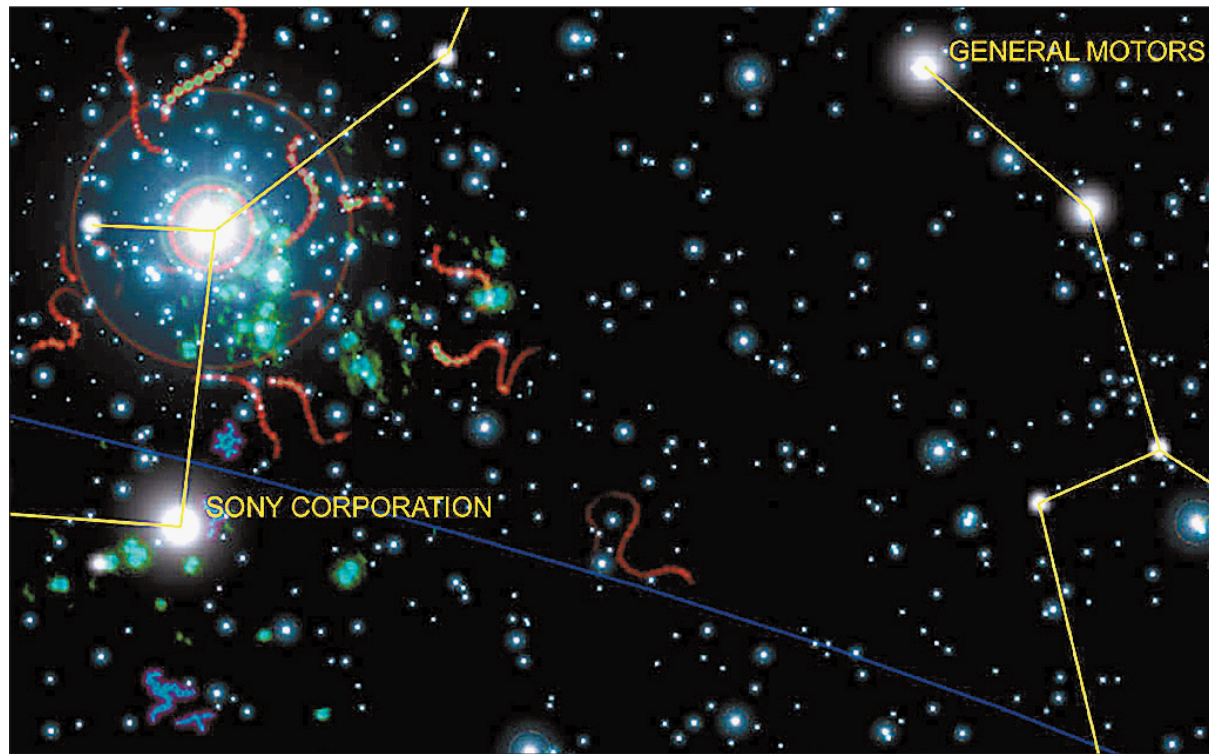


The Arts

Why aren't these up for



A computer-generated sketch for Black Shoals, a technologically innovative work by Lisa Autogena and Joshua Portway

Women of Jerusalem, Station no 6, by Gigi Sudbury (detail)

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by Nick Hackworth

THE announcement of the winner of the 2002 Turner Prize, broadcast live on Channel 4 this Sunday, will be an anticlimax rather than a thrill. Critics usually vocal in their support have instead damned the quality of this year's line-up, and the mediocrity of the work has roused none of the entertaining controversy stirred up in the past by Damien Hirst's bisected cows and Tracey Emin's soiled bed.

If this Turner has failed to live up to the few virtues it once possessed, it has at least succeeded in sustaining its traditional vices. Yet again the prize is revealed to be both absurdly limited in its understanding of what constitutes contemporary art and also to be a closed shop, open only to a small clique of artists represented by powerful galleries.

In truth it has become the very opposite of what its supporters believe it to be, being narrow-minded and orthodox in its excessive promotion of neo-conceptual work, and reactionary in its hostility to the diversity of contemporary art and visual culture. It is surely time, for its own sake, that the Turner changed.

An indication of how it might be transformed was provided by an experimental event that took place last Sunday, The Alternative Turner Prize, which I helped organise. It was, of course, in comparison with the real thing, a humble affair.

I managed to negotiate a room for us to use, in which to display work by seven artists short-listed by a jury that included myself; Ned Denny, an art critic for The New Statesman magazine; Thelma Holt, the theatre producer who was also a long-serving and senior member of the Arts Council under Lord Gowrie; and Brian Sewell.

An invited audience — a mixed, art and non-art crowd of some 250 people — was asked to study the work, listen to the judges and then vote for a winner. In contrast to the Turner Prize our short list was highly catholic, reflecting much of the great range of creative work being produced today: figurative painting and sculpture, graffiti art, extreme performance art

Whoever wins the Turner Prize this Sunday, it will be the wrong artist, says our contemporary art critic. So he set up a new jury to select its own winner

and work that employed the latest information technology. That the short list was so eclectic was due to the fact that the nominations made by each judge were not subject to the approval of fellow judges, and that the judges, of course, have different tastes.

A COMMITMENT to pluralism and liberalism was thus built into the Alternative Prize, whereas the Turner, by comparison, is awarded by a jury of art-world insiders compliant with the narrow orthodoxies promoted by the contemporary art establishment, invited by Nicholas Serota, Tate director and the Turner Prize jury's chairman.

Our event did not have the strong institutional support provided by the Tate, nor, as it was conceived as a response to the quality of this year's short list, did the judges have the full year that the Turner jury has to select nominees. We did succeed in highlighting the need for the Turner

'Turner judges have been guilty of seriously misreading the current stage of art history'