



THE WAIKATO SOCIETY OF ARTS NATIONAL ART AWARD, AND I WAS JUST WONDERING IF I COULD GET YOUR OPINION, YOUR FEELING OF WHETHER THERE WAS A CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN YOU AWARDED THE PRIZE TO AN ARTIST YOU REPRESENT?

AB: Who are you?

DM: I'M JUST AN ARTIST, I CERTAINLY WASN'T IN THE SHOW. I'M JUST INTERESTED TO HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE MATTER.

Anna Bibby runs a commercial gallery in Auckland. She was the sole judge of the Waikato Society of Arts National Art Award in 2004, which has a prize of \$20,000. The prize was awarded to artist Seung Yul Oh. Anna Bibby announced the award on the 20th February 2004. Seung Yul Oh's first exhibition opened at Anna Bibby Gallery on the 24th February 2004.

ANNA BIBBY: Anna Bibby Gallery

DANE MITCHELL: HI, CAN I SPEAK TO ANNA BIBBY PLEASE?

AB: Speaking

DM: HI ANNA, MY NAME IS DANE MITCHELL. I'M JUST CALLING BECAUSE I WANTED TO ASK YOU A QUESTION.

AB: Yes

DM: I'VE BEEN TALKING TO QUITE A FEW PEOPLE ABOUT

AB: Well they asked me to select the exhibition because basically I'd been through art school, I'd worked in public institutions most of my working life rather than dealer galleries and I've worked in dealer galleries. And I've been an exhibiting artist. So I suppose in making their decision as to who selected the show, the Waikato Society of Arts wanted to draw on that broad background. So I agreed to do it because of that. There was a lot of publicity before the show, like last year and early this year letting people know who was selecting the exhibition and I suggested that perhaps my artists shouldn't actually enter. And I think that one, that exhibition, I was under the impression that it was far more a community-based one than the other one that is shown at the Waikato Museum of Art and History. And so I didn't mind selecting what appeared to be more of a community, amateur exhibition. And I knew that none of my artists were going to enter because I was judging it. That was firmed up over the Christmas period and that happened. And he (Seung Yul Oh) wanted to do it

(show at the Anna Bibby gallery) at the same time as Peter Robinson. Peter's Christchurch show was on and I felt that that was a nice relationship and so we organised things so that that could happen because I felt the two shows would complement each other. I was quite surprised when the week before Christmas the entrants were sent to me and I thought, oh my god, Seung is in here, but in selecting the work, generally, I didn't actually look at the names as I did the selection. Which is done... It's a very difficult award to actually select because people sent photographs. You're actually selecting work from photographs, so if someone takes a good photograph they are more likely to do well, than someone who sends you a manky four-by-six that is an appalling photograph. I think that it's very tough on artists to be exhibiting and to be selected in that sort of way. So I selected without. I had the list of names but I selected from the photographs without knowing whose work it was. I mean obviously certain works jumped out and I thought that must be by so-and-so. And so that's how I made my pre-selection, or the selection. When I went down to do a placement and to decide who was going to win I did, you know, the same thing and chose five that I felt were excellent, or interesting and I felt that Seung's wasn't the best work in the show in terms of being polished or refined or anything like that but it was the one that was more interesting of the works that were there, and for me, it seemed, when I looked at the works, I thought that it had lots of possibilities and it was exciting. And I think for me, when you're selecting someone to

be in your gallery or interviewing someone for a job, you're not just going just by the interview, you're looking at what you think the potential is.

DM: SURE, CERTAINLY, SO I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THAT WOULD RELATE TO THE CHOICE OF THE SHOW, BUT I'M JUST KIND OF CURIOUS ABOUT THE FACT THAT HE WON THE AWARD AND THE CONFLICT OF INTEREST THERE.

AB: Well, is it a conflict of interest?

DM: WELL, IT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS...

AB: Well, I discussed it with Tobias Berger, Robert Leonard, Jim and Mary Barr, and Simon Rees. And Simon said Greg Burke, when he selected the first of these exhibitions had rung from Sydney, you know, he was concerned that he'd, he felt, what's his name, I've forgotten his name - photographer... He felt that this guy put in the best work but at the same time he'd just purchased work of his I think, he had a project on at the Govett-Brewster, so that could be seen as a conflict of interest. Tobias of course had strongly supported Rohan (Wheallans), and that could be seen as a conflict of interest. The same with Jim and Mary Barr. They were rooting for Daniel Malone, strongly, and everyone knew it, and he won the award. I think that at the end of the day, you give the award to who you think is the best, and why would you do otherwise because your credibility is built up on your honesty. And I'm an incredibly honest dealer. I pay people the minute I get the money. I'm very straight up, I'm

a very straight shooter, and don't think I'd be known as otherwise. I say exactly what I think about things. I was concerned. I actually took an outside person down to have a look at the selection, to have a look, to see which one they felt would be the winning work and they came up with exactly the same work. Someone who is very well respected in the art world, because, I discussed it with the Waikato Society of Arts, I discussed it with a number of people because I felt, especially, if Seung was having a show at the end of the year it wouldn't have been a problem, but at the same time I felt that there would be talk about it, but I'm hardly going to, I'm not the sort of person, I'm far to honest to award someone else the prize which was a substantial amount of money just to make myself look squeaky clean. That is dishonest. To penalise someone because you feel it might anger some people or be seen in the wrong light. I chose that work because I did think it was the most interesting, vital, the work that spoke of potential - to me. And that's all I can do. I certainly went through agony over it, and I felt that it was unfortunate. No one else I represent or have an ongoing relationship with was actually in the show, which was a good thing. But in this case, when they went out, there was no relationship with Seung...

DM: THAT'S FINE, I JUST WANTED TO CALL, BECAUSE I WANTED TO HEAR WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY ABOUT IT, BECAUSE I WAS INTERESTED MORE THAN ANYTHING...

AB: At the end of the day, you just have to be

honest, and god it was agony. But if you were an artist and you discovered that you were someone's first choice but they didn't give you the prize of \$20,000 to keep themselves looking squeaky, I think that would be just frightful. You wouldn't like it, no one would like it. And that's the flipside of the coin and that's what I had to deal with.

DM: THANKS FOR BEING HONEST WITH ME AND TALKING TO ME ABOUT IT, I APPRECIATE IT. THANKS FOR THAT.

AB: Bye Dane.

DM: BYE.



The above conversation is a transcript of a recorded telephone conversation between Anna Bibby and Dane Mitchell. Anna Bibby did not know the conversation was being recorded.