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Kingwood artist Robyn O'Neil wins \$50,000 Hunting Art Prize - May 03, 2009

Kingwood artist Robyn O'Neil was awarded the 2009 Hunting Art Prize on Saturday night during a ceremony at the Decorative Art Center.

Sponsored by international oil-services company Hunting PLC, the \$50,000 award is the most generous art prize presented annually in North America. The company launched it in 1981 to recognize an artist from the United Kingdom before moving the prize to Houston in 2006.

More than 1,500 artists submitted digital files in the fall for the first round of judging. Each artist was allowed to enter one two-dimensional painting or drawing measuring no more than 72 inches on any side. The contest was open to established, emerging and amateur artists from across Texas.

O'Neil was chosen from 129 finalists in the second round of judging for her graphite drawing *A death, a fall, a march: toward a better world*.



Robyn O'Neil, *A death, a fall, a march: toward a better world*, graphite on paper; courtesy of the artist

Her works have been shown at museums and galleries around the world, including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; ArtPace, San Antonio; the Dallas Museum of Art; V1 Gallery, Copenhagen; Gallery Praz-Delavallade, Paris; and Hof & Huyser, Amsterdam.

In 2003, O'Neil received the Artadia Grant from Artadia -- The Fund for Art and Dialogue, New York, and was international artist-in-residence at ArtPace. In 2004, she was included in the Whitney Biennial.

Jurors Chiyo Ishikawa of the Seattle Art Museum, independent curator Kate Green and Suzanne Folds McCullagh of the Art Institute of Chicago tapped O'Neil as the winner.

Past Texas winners include Houston artist Francesca Fuchs, who won from a pool of nine finalists in 2006, when the competition was open to Houston artists nominated by the local art community. A three-panel jury chose Fuchs after conducting studio visits with the finalists.

In subsequent years the prize was opened to artists across Texas, who were allowed to present a single artwork for consideration under the current rules. Michael Tole of Irving won in 2007, and Wendy Wagner of Houston won in 2008.

In a statement released by Hunting PLC, O'Neil said she was "especially appreciative" of the award "given that it comes during a time when we are seeing more and more cutbacks in sponsorship of the arts."