

Turner Prize 2016 awarded to Helen Marten

By Nick Glass, CNN

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Photos: Inside the Turner Prize 2016 exhibition

"Brood and Bitter Pass" (2015) by Helen Marten - Artist Helen Marten was announced this year's Turner Prize winner. The winner receives £25,000 (\$32,500) in prize money. The other shortlisted finalists receive £5,000 (\$6,500) each.

Scroll through the gallery to see Marten's work, as well as work by other Turner Prize shortlisted artists: Michael Dean, Anthea Hamilton and Josephine Pryde.

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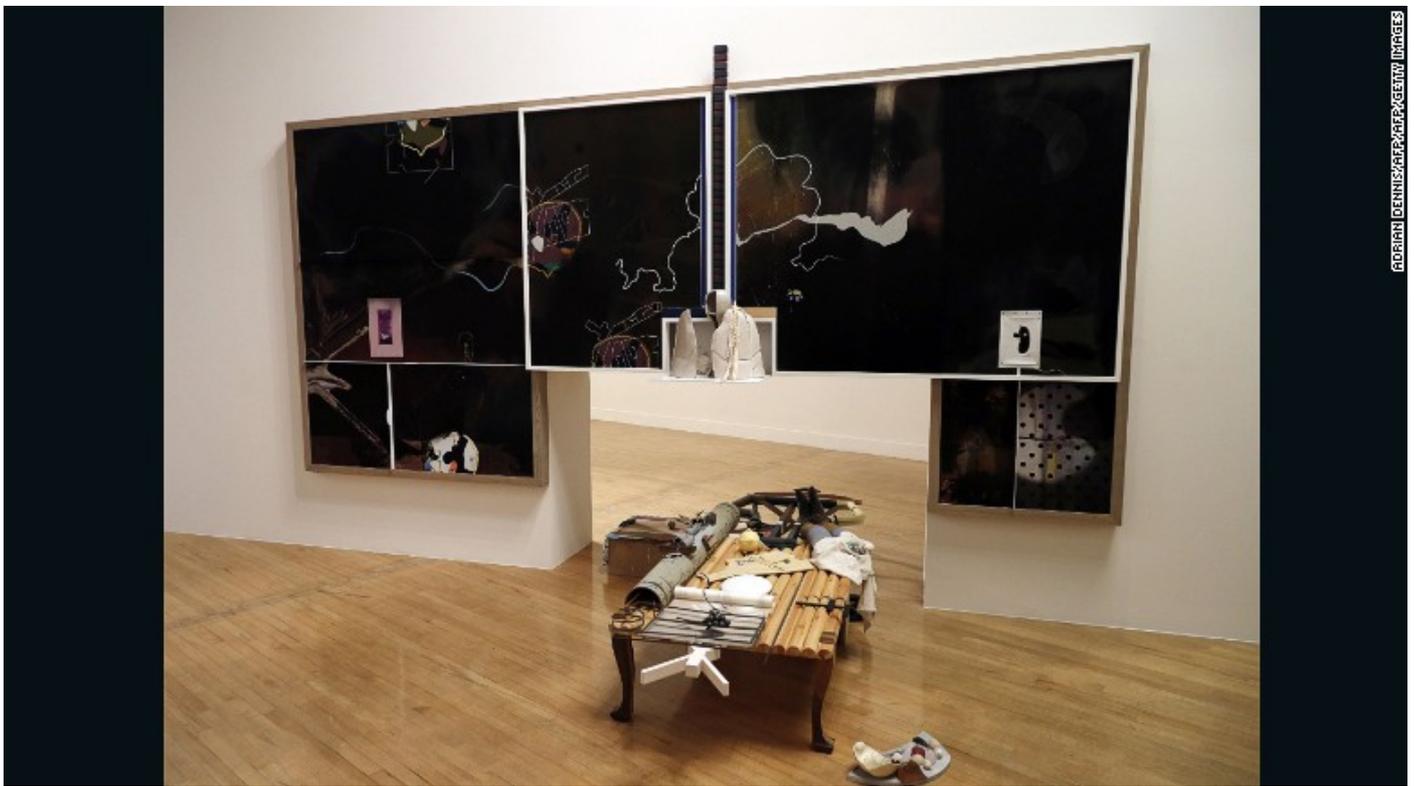
Story highlights

Helen Marten named winner of this year's Turner Prize

Michael Dean, Anthea Hamilton and Josephine Pryde were also shortlisted for the Prize

(CNN) — In retrospect, the signs were all there.

In the last few weeks, it began to seem somehow inevitable, as predictable as Damien Hirst winning in 1995 or Mark Wallinger in 2007.



ADRIAN DENNIS/REUTERS/AGENCY IMAGES

An installation by Helen Marten is pictured during a photocall for the 2016 Turner Prize, at Tate Britain in London

It appeared that [Helen Marten](#) was destined to win the [Turner Prize](#); and now at 31 and the youngest of the four shortlisted nominees, she has.

You could say an art star is born.

Marten's work, hard to describe

Describing her work is a challenge, devilishly hard, say some critics. We are meant to be intrigued and a little (if not greatly) puzzled. Ask Helen Marten what she does and she'll respond with a wry laugh and a question -- "What don't I do?"



Artist Helen Marten

The biographical essay in the Tate booklet, accompanying the [Turner Prize 2016](#) show at [Tate Britain](#), puts it like this: "An encounter with her work is akin to coming across a treasure map for an anonymous urban landscape in the not too distant future' (or perhaps a recent but already forgotten past) containing an elaborate sequence of puzzles in a language at once familiar and alien."

Her London dealer, [Sadie Coles](#) says something similar. The work, according to Coles is "akin to reading a slightly surreal pulp novel involving convoluted and unsolvable sequences of mysteries set in an unidentifiable urban realm somewhere in the almost graspable future."

In short, Marten's art is hard to encapsulate.



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Related Article: Will the Turner Prize show make you blush?

'Archaeologists of our own time'

For the Turner exhibition, Marten is showing a trio of works made for the 2015 Venice Biennale, "kind of conceived as a algorithmic installation -- algorithmic in the sense that there's a chain of logic in viewing them."

Like some archaeological storeroom, she has filled her space with multiple handmade and found objects -- an idiosyncratic detritus of fish bones, python skins, coins, a textile magic lamp, cotton buds, iron building nails, dried lemon peel -- all neatly laid out on shelves and chipboard and oddly shaped work stations.



Her work clearly invites you to look and look again more closely. Marten has said, "as an artist, there is no policing of fantasy."

The work is full of visual riddles. "We are," she says, "archaeologists of our own time." The longer you look at one object, the more of the world you see in it."

Early start

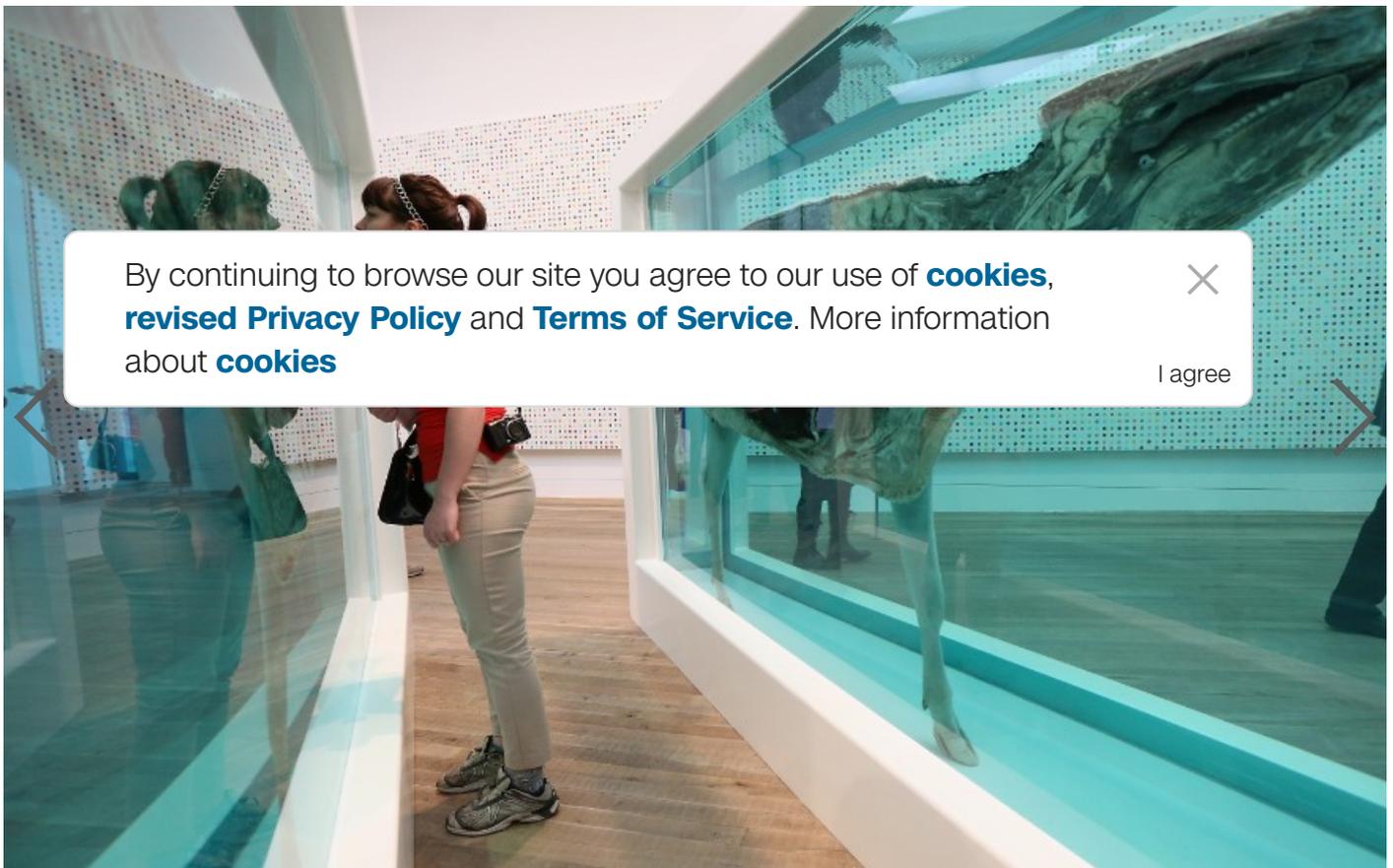
Marten works in a 'rather chaotic studio' by the canal in the East End of London. But she originally comes from Macclesfield in Cheshire, a short train ride from Central Manchester.

Both her parents are scientists (a chemist and a biologist) and she has a twin sister. "I have the linguistic brain,"

explains Marten. "She has the mathematical brain."

Growing up in Macclesfield, she felt that becoming an artist never really seemed like a viable option but that's what's she become. Just two years after leaving art college, she went to [Central Saint Martins](#) in London and then to the [Ruskin School of Art](#) in Oxford. She got her first solo show 'Wicked Patterns' in Naples, Italy in 2010. She hasn't looked back.

Even without seeing her shows, their titles tease us playfully -- 'I like my heroes marble-chested' in 2010, 'Dust and Piranhas' in 2011, 'Plank Salad' in 2012, 'Candy Mandible, Mrs' in 2014.



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Photos: 10 works of art that shocked the world

Mother and Child Divided (1993), Damien Hirst - Mother and Child (Divided) (1993), Damien Hirst

There are art prizes, and there is the [Turner Prize](#), the *enfant terrible* of contemporary art awards.

Founded in 1984, the Turner Prize was designed to promote discussion about art in Britain by celebrate most outstanding pieces made by a British artist each year. Thirty years on, it's as well known for its role as it is for sparking debate with polarizing nominations. (Damien Hirst's winning "Mother and Child Divided," a cow and a calf bisected and emerged in formaldehyde, was a tabloid sensation.)

But the controversy that surrounds certain works -- Turner-nominated or not -- says as much about the public as it does about the artists.

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Not just 'junk'

There's a wit and a humor here and a profound seriousness. Marten clearly resents the crude suggestion that she's just a collector of bric-a-brac.

Long before she's made any work of art, she reads and reads and fills notebook after notebook (she has hundreds of them).

"A lot of people look at my work and think it's an amalgam of junk, like a granny's attic," she has said.

And yet, it clearly isn't. Marten works with a team of metalworkers, fabricators, carpenters, ceramicists and seamstresses. They work from her blueprints. Everything, as she puts it, "is murderously plotted." There is

nothing random about it.

Last month, Helen Marten won the inaugural [Hepworth Prize for Sculpture](#) (although she calls herself an artist, rather than a sculptor), awarded by the [Hepworth Wakefield](#) in Yorkshire.

She announced that she would share the £30,000 (\$38,000) prize with her fellow nominees -- she felt that art prizes were flawed to some extent.

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[Simon Wallis](#), Director of the Hepworth, was one of this year's Turner Prize judges. So was [Beatrix Ruf](#), now Director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. She was instrumental in Marten getting her breakthrough show in Zurich in 2012.

Helen Marten is represented by galleries in London, New York, Berlin and Rome. And her prices have apparently doubled in the last year or so. A collector told me over dinner in October that he'd bought a Marten installation for £19,600 (\$25,000) two years ago. Now he said they are priced at around £78,500 (\$100,000). Winning the Turner Prize is only likely to inflate them further.

Her triumph tonight will introduce her to a much wider audience.

The Turner Prize 2016 exhibition opens daily until 2 January 2017 at [Tate Britain](#), Millbank, London, England.