

The Wait is Over

By THEA RUTHERFORD ~ Guardian National Correspondent ~ thea@nasguard.com:

With his digital collage self portrait of a fantasy world where mythical animals wear clothes and faces hang in a green constellation-lit sky, artist Lavar Munroe emerged the winner of the Central Bank's Open Category Competition "Redefining the Portrait."

Munroe's "I Know You're Wondering What Kind of Animal I Am" was declared the winner of a competition that drew a combination of emerging and established artists on Wednesday night at the Bank Gallery.

The \$7,000 award marked the largest for the annual Central Bank Art Competition, which removed the age limit from the Open Category this year.

While there were no second or third place winners, the works of well-known Bahamian abstract artist Kendal Hanna, who has painted for more than 50 years, and artist Dylan Rapillard were highlighted by competition judge Jay Koment during the awards ceremony.

Munroe's father Fredlin Munroe accepted the award on behalf of the artist who lives and works in North Carolina with his wife and infant daughter. Munroe, who has won several Central Bank Competition awards, called his father's cell phone a few minutes after his win was announced. A teacher of his had called him to relay the good news.

"Lavar, he's just cool and collected and Lavar has been that way for a very long time and I don't think anything in this world is going to change that right now," said his father. "He's very focused, he's doing very well and I thank God that he is headed in the right direction."

Koment, who judged the competition along with two other judges, called Munroe's portrait "very strong. "He has a great future," said Koment.

The roughly 4.5 x 4 ft collage features a nude, tattoo-covered Munroe aiming a gun that shoots marbles while riding a horse cloaked in bright clothing. Other clothed animals surround him as well as a few dead birds. The artist said that he had sought to convey multiple meanings through the piece.

"What I wanted to do was stir up a conversation, some sort of controversial conversation," said Munroe in a telephone interview from North Carolina on Thursday. "In that piece I basically tried to communicate some sort of child-like innocence but yet it communicated violence, it communicated life, death, it communicated astronomy, it communicated family, it communicated self reflection – looking forward or looking back at your life – it also talked about sexuality in a way, body decoration."

The print was also "a homage to myself, my family, my mother, my daughter, my wife," said the 26-year-old artist.

Munroe's works have appeared in exhibitions around the world. Two bodies of his children's book illustrations are currently on display in the Italian-based ASSOCIAZIONE CULTURALE TEATRIO Children's Book Competition. His works have been exhibited in Japan, the United States, Mexico, Ethiopia, Portugal and Finland. Munroe, a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design, also maintains a regular exhibition schedule in the U.S. in addition to showing about twice a year in The Bahamas. He is the recent recipient of the Yes We Can: A New Vision for the Arts Grant for the state of Georgia. He highlighted renowned Bahamian artist Max Taylor for his role in recommending him for the grant.

"I'm always excited to learn more," said Munroe. "I never think I'm there. I always have to progress."