

Subject: Against the motion that ‘the Art Fund is the right sponsor for the former Gulbenkian prize for museums and galleries’

Source: *Museums Journal*, vol. 107, no. 7, 2007, p. 17

Note: This is the pre-print version prior to being edited by the journal

“What’s in a name?” Well, quite a lot actually. And for this reason it is not a good idea for The Art Fund to sponsor what has until now been known as The Gulbenkian Prize. Its new title – The Art Fund Prize for Museums and Galleries – is a bit of a mouthful and will surely be shortened to just The Art Fund Prize. It will therefore stand accused of favouring art galleries over museums or heritage sites. Imagine if The Art Fund had presided over this year’s prize awarded to Pallant House Gallery. Some would surely have shaken their heads, smiled wryly and whispered, “The Art Fund chose ‘one of the UK’s finest collections of modern British art’ – now that *is* a surprise!”

Indeed, perhaps if The Art Fund *had* sponsored the 2007 award the result might have been different? In a desperate attempt to avoid any accusation of bias they might have opted for a less explicitly art-focused institution. This could have serious repercussions for future decisions if the jurors are forced to think twice before ever awarding the prize to an art gallery. Few people are likely to accuse The Art Fund of discriminating in this way – but perception is a large part of reality. So, when Romeo’s Juliet stood on her balcony and asked “What’s in a name?”, she might have come to a slightly different conclusion if she’d be told that the new sponsor of The Gulbenkian Prize is The Art Fund.

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