

**STUDENT  
ART PRIZE  
2023/24  
PARADISE**

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This exhibition guide showcases the shortlisted entries to Durham University's fifth annual Student Art Prize. The annual prize was launched in October 2019 to expand opportunities around the visual arts, supporting the development and promotion of the visual arts across our student community.

The prize focuses on a different theme each year to allow a wide range of exploration and conceptualisation. The theme for 2023/24 is Paradise. The work represented has been shortlisted by an independent panel of judges made up of Durham University Alumni, practicing contemporary artists and professional curators. This year, as with each previous year, the judges have been particularly taken with how students have responded to the theme, creating often highly personal artworks and narratives that they feel are important and want to communicate.

Uniquely, the prize offers student artists a platform on which to develop their practice, exhibit their artwork and have the opportunity for their work to be accessioned into the university art collection, where it will be used for research, teaching and display.

To accompany our Student Art Prize this year, we curated an 'Art Prize Art School', offering opportunities for student artists to engage with the theme of sanctuary, expand their practice and support their development as artists. As part of the Art School, we commissioned and collaborated with regional artists, practitioners and arts educators to contribute to an engagement programme of freely accessible talks, workshops, downloadable resources for both students and the wider public to engage with.

The Student Art Prize 2024/25 will be launched in October 2024.

**ALIX COLLINGWOOD-SWINBURN, CURATOR  
(CONTEMPORARY ART)**



*Content Warning:*

*Some of the artworks on display in this exhibition contain language and imagery that some may find challenging. This is an exhibition of Durham University student artwork. Each student has responded to the Student Art Prize theme and created artworks and narratives they feel important and want to communicate. All artworks and captions are the creation of each individual student artist and represent their own voices and opinions. They do not represent the views of the wider University. The images, artworks, films and materials are the property of the artist and are subject to copyright.*

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## BETH WEEKS-GREENER

'I first created this piece to push my artistic experimentalism during lockdown; a time when I fully embraced nature. Reflecting on how nature was thriving during isolation, I wanted to offer a commentary (through the public form of street art) on our environmental destruction, whilst presenting the Eden like paradise that can be achieved when nature is appreciated.

I applied the female body as a representation for nature, scaling up my drawings of models from life drawings sessions. The model on the left board depicts a mature woman in an open, confident pose, epitomising her as the figure of Mother Nature. She is enshrouded with vibrant, digitally drawn flowers to celebrate abundance, and paradise, where women feel confident, and nature can flourish.

By contrast, the second model's closed pose evokes a vulnerability, reflecting the climate crisis, specifically highlighting the issue of littering. Her face is covered by a plastic bag which depicts her both as a suffocating sea creature and as a reflection of humanity's blind eye to natural destruction.'



**PARADISE SUBVERTED, 2020-24**  
**DIGITAL AND MIXED MEDIA ON BOARD**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## BECKY MORGAN

'For me, the theme of paradise immediately stirs up thoughts of nature; the beauty it holds and the sense of serenity I feel when I am immersed within it. However, as an ecologist, these thoughts are usually followed by anxiety surrounding the current destruction of the natural world I love. I think climate anxiety and concerns about the environment are something that weighs heavily on a lot of my generation. The knowledge that we are losing the world around us is something that plays on my conscience regularly. It often feels like no matter what acts I do myself, or we do as a community, our efforts to protect the environment are useless.

In response, we often try to surround ourselves with edited and filtered images, images that show us what we want to see and not how things are. It is easier to simply look away and ignore the truth.

My aim with this piece was to stop this possibility. When you first look at the piece it is a picturesque underwater scene but look more closely and you see things how they really are. There is no chance to look away from what you don't want to see.'



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**LEAVE NO TRACE, 2024**  
**ACRYLIC ON FIBREBOARD**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## HONGYI CHEN

'This artwork 'Blooming Flower Weaves a Spectacular' depicts a grand scene; an immortal dressed in a red robe is surrounded by a sea of clouds and mountains, with a red Chinese dragon behind him. The colourful clouds and towering mountains make the entire scene look as if it is in paradise.

I drew this picture for the Year of the Chinese Dragon Lunar New Year in 2024. I decided to use the Chinese dragon and Shengtang, one of my original characters, as the main subjects. I spent some time on the composition and chose to use a triangular composition to express my concept and highlight the main characters. However, it didn't depict my idea clearly, so I instead decided to use clouds, mountains and waterfalls in my picture.

I am proud of this illustration. The triangular composition emphasizes my characters, the mountains and clouds. The use of waterfalls enhances the vertical direction within it. The sun and the reflection prevent the right side from being too empty and show a corresponding relationship to the left side. Hopefully, this artwork 'Blooming Flower Weaves a Spectacular' conveys my thoughts.'

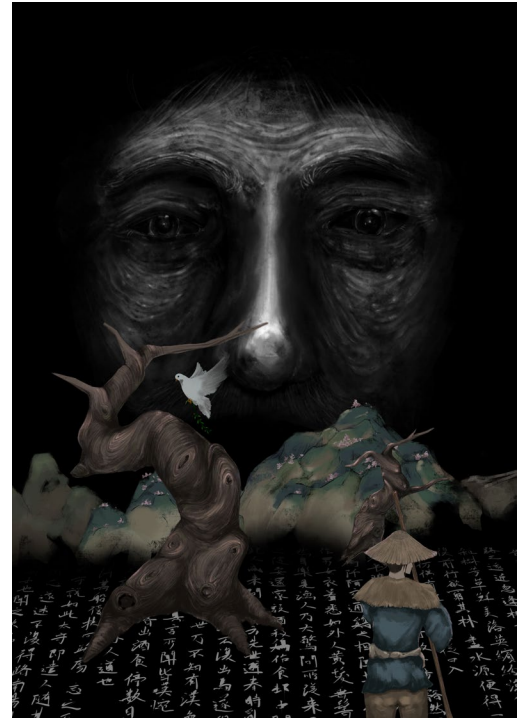


**BLOOMING FLOWER WEAVES  
A SPECTACULAR, 2024  
DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION  
STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## CHELGER CHIEW

'The piece is inspired by a Chinese historical fable called Peach Blossom Spring. The story portrays a fisherman finding a village surrounded by blossom trees, he described as a paradise. The village had managed to escape war, its residents living a stable and happy life. However, he could never find the village again.

My artwork reimagines this setting. However, from a slightly dystopian perspective. Every aspect in the piece is either monotone or slightly discoloured. The old face represents the fisherman, spending his life looking for paradise but never finding it again. This paradise is slowly fading in his memory, thus, the discolouration. This relates to a key message; never stop to reminisce the paradise that once existed or is out of reach. Instead, focus on the present and look for signs of paradise in every moment.'



**THE FOREVER LOST PARADISE OF PEACH  
BLOSSOM SPRING, 2024**  
DIGITAL PAINTING  
STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST

# HANNAH RUTH ANDREWS

'This self-portrait is meant as an exploration of the reality, versus the expectations, I had about being a university student. The painting is a reflection on the isolation and exhaustion I felt in my first term. Within the artwork I have included details (such as the paintings and notes in the background) to indicate how isolating being a student can feel.

The book 'I' am reading is Paradise Lost. I used this specific poem to depict what I experienced as a 'fall from grace' as a student, the realisation many have once they get to this level of education. That they were never great or gifted, that they are like everyone else or maybe even worse. In spite of the negative emotions that inspired the painting, sitting down each day and working on it became a respite for me and, in some ways, the time I spent on the painting became a paradise in which I could forget my academic work and focus on a different passion, one not attached to my degree.

The work, though originally intended to show the loss of a conceptual paradise, has become something that I now view in a very positive light.'



**'ART' FIRST PLACE WINNER**  
**SELF-PORTRAIT OF A BURNOUT, 2023**  
**ACRYLIC ON CANVAS**



## PENELOPE GATHERCOLE

'This print, presents a skate-boarder daring to leap over a set of stairs. To me, it represents a sense of freedom that defies our natural instincts to crawl back to safety, resulting in a feeling of elation that can only be described as paradise. I created this piece because it contrasts with dominant depictions of paradise which often insinuate relaxation and idyllic, unrealistic comfort zones. I find these representations problematic as I often spend so much time relaxing that it becomes almost uncomfortable and my body longs for the paradise found in the unexpected and adrenaline-filled outdoors.

I admire skate-boarding as it finds and creates paradise within our every-day surroundings. Therefore, I believe that this piece forces the viewer to look at new ways of moving through our built environments, whether this be skipping, flipping, dancing, or skating, in order to seize the moment and bring paradise with us wherever we go.'



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**SEIZE THE MOMENT, 2024**  
**INK ON PAPER**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2022/23 SHORTLIST**

## MARY DEMIROVA

'For as long as I can remember my favourite thing to do was to read. Ever since I was little I was always captivated into being swept away into fantastical worlds through various stories and tales. My favourite of which being 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', which is the thematic inspiration behind this piece.

Escapism through reading has and always will be my personal paradise, which is why I chose this approach for this piece. It depicts a surrealistic setting of Wonderland with two key focal points; the negative hands sharing a cup of tea, and Alice chasing the White Rabbit.

Throughout the piece there are numerous elements alluding to characters within the story, and I truly hope I have captured the essence of childhood nostalgia through the bright colours and bring to life Lewis Carroll's' magical realism. I chose to do this painting on a violin as opposed to traditional canvas to further add an absurdist element to the piece, with the back being the main painting and the remainder of the violin having sparse elements alluding to the tale. I believe that this piece truly represents my childhood paradise and the sense of paradise which comes with the freedom to escape into new and imaginary worlds.'



**DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE, 2022**  
**ACRYLIC ON WOOD**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## GEORGIA MACKENZIE SMITH

'This painting represents paradise as the many summer holidays that my family spend in our caravan. It depicts my late dog; Daisy and I surrounded by the flowers of her namesake. Daisies represent joy and purity in many cultures. When I see these flowers, I am reminded of better and happier times that were spent with my dog. The background of this painting shows dying grass and smoke billowing up over the horizon.

This has been added to the painting as a representation of loss and destruction of childhood waiting up ahead whilst sitting and basking in paradise. Due to climate change, there has been an increase of flooding causing campsites to be destroyed and uninhabitable.

Other campsites are no longer accessible to families that used to stay in them, largely due to increases in price and Commercialism, making them inaccessible. The smoke that lingers in the sky represents loss as something slow and painful. Something that must be watched from afar. I made this painting to honour and say goodbye to my childhood and to Daisy.'

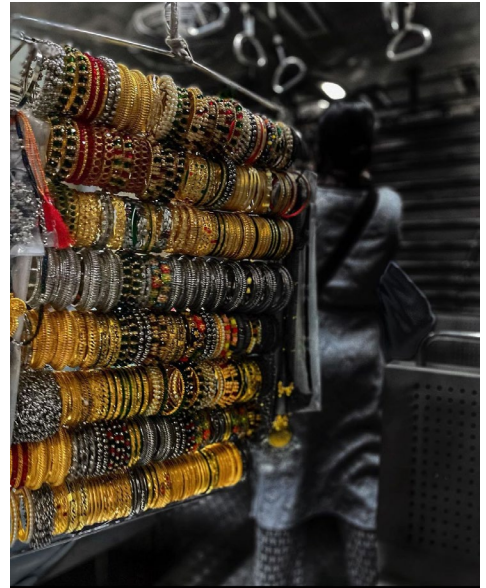


**JOURNEY TO THE DAISIES, 2024**  
**ACRYLIC ON CANVAS**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## ANANYA NAIR

'My idea of paradise is returning to the simplicity of my city. The local trains bustling with students journeying from one end to the other for school, aunties selling breakfast, and fisherwomen seated on the floor with their empty wicker baskets, exchanging stories with women in business suits about the day ahead.

Mumbai locals serve as my portal to dreams and hope, in the pulsating heart of a city of contradictions that never sleeps. I may struggle to define the concept of home, but when I find myself seated on those metallic benches, eyes closed, surrounded by the clanging of metallic strap handles, with vendors nearby selling beautiful ornaments and flowers, I am at peace, I am once again a child, and I once again have the world to dream of.'



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**MUMBAI LOCAL, 2023**  
**PHOTOGRAPH ON PAPER**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## SERENA MIAMBANZILA

'Paul Gauguin was a French painter known for his depictions of Tahitian life during colonisation. He depicts Tahiti in bold, dissonant colours. Young women are painted in a voyeuristic way - mostly undressed, with vague expressions.

Nonetheless, his paintings made me think more broadly about exoticist depictions of colonies in art. These lands are portrayed as paradise: untouched, unaffected by colonialism and waiting to be consumed. I wished to show a modern rebuttal to this stereotyped and romanticised view by drawing a critique of the tourism industry in French former colonies.

I decided to imitate the aesthetics of French colonial stamps in order to emphasise the power imbalance between the islands and their visitors. I used saturated colours to depict an idyllic scenery, which hopefully contrasts with the presence of trash on the beach.

I wanted to add some irony, as colonial stamps usually portrayed alluring aspects of the country, not environmental degradation. I also wanted it to have an anachronistic effect, as the vintage quality of the stamp clashes with the very modern attire of the clean-up worker.'



**'ART' JOINT THIRD PLACE WINNER**  
**THE MYTH OF THE PARADISE, 2024**  
**DIGITAL PRINT ON PAPER**

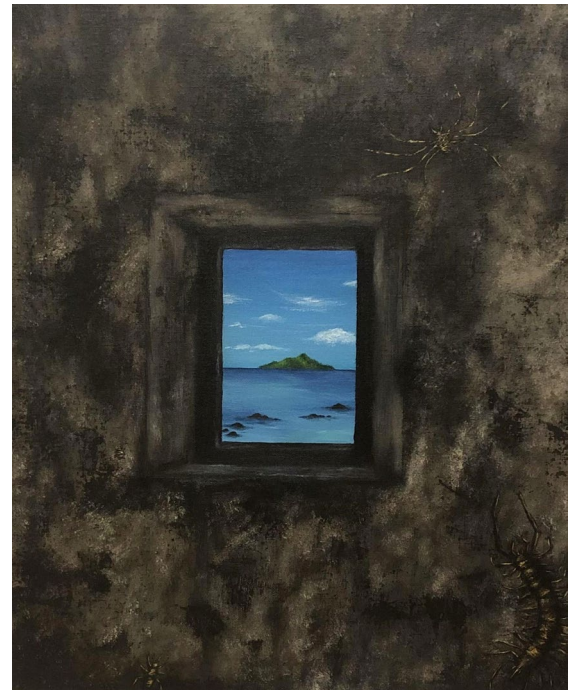


## DANIEL DICKENS

'My artwork depicts a window looking out upon a faraway island. When we imagine paradise, many people may imagine something very similar to the view from the window; an island covered in lush green trees, surrounded by clear blue water that almost melts into the horizon. However, the viewer is far removed from the paradisiacal nature scene, separated by a vast empty ocean and the walls of a dank building.

To me, this is how paradise presents itself; beautiful, yet always out of reach. As the observer, your gaze is immediately drawn to the vivid colours of the island, but if you look closer in the murky darkness of the room you'll find several bugs, illuminated by a golden light. While some parts of nature are praised for their beauty, bugs are often seen as creepy or disgusting, despite their vital role in the ecosystem. I wanted to question our notions of what 'paradise' means.

Instead of looking outward and chasing the fantasy of a perfect life, I urge you to turn your gaze inwards and appreciate the beauty of the present, even if you only find this in the smallest of things.'



**WINDOW TO PARADISE, 2024**  
**ACRYLIC ON CANVAS**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## GEORGE DAVIES

'This painting depicts sunrise at Burton Mere Wetlands, Cheshire, a very important place to me. I've been going for many years and have some great memories of wildlife sightings and walks with family. The mountain in the background is Moel Famau, just over the border in North Wales, which is also a place I love to visit. These aspects make this just as much a personal paradise as one for the animals.'

Animals have always been synonymous with paradise, but in the modern world, that relationship is changing. Animals today are forced to co-exist with us, and Burton Mere is a great example of this as the reserve is sandwiched between a paper mill, a railway track and an army shooting range. But to the animals residing there, this is paradise, and many birds return year after year, like the Canada geese shown flying through the composition. I painted the scene at dawn capturing the golden, hazy light illuminating the birds and the building, casting feelings of warmth, calmness and tranquillity, all key aspects of paradise. Birds in general symbolise paradisaical feelings of hope, freedom, peace, and happiness, so the painting reflects paradise in its look, feel, and meaning.'



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**'ART' JOINT THIRD PLACE WINNER**  
**DAWN IN PARADISE, 2024**  
**OIL ON LINEN**

## HEENA CARAHAA

'This is a painting of my grandfather, whom I never had the chance to meet. He passed away in a work accident long before I was born. He was a manual bricklayer in rural Punjab, India. Constantly working to support his family out of poverty, but rarely enjoying the fruits of his labour. He never saw how life got better. But I find solace in believing he is now in paradise.

My grandfather is in the middle, between two village men. They are laughing despite the hardships of poorly paid manual labour and caste-based discrimination from wider society. Life was tough, yet work was part of their vision for a better future, a glimpse into paradise. I found the irony in using brown, red and brick tones to contrast the brighter colours associated with paradise.

This painting is an ode to him. I can experience paradise on earth because of my grandfather's hard work.

To me, paradise is freedom. As a female British-Indian, I have had the freedom to attend school. Paradise on earth is working towards a better life. It is not tangible, nor can it be gained, or earned. I have the freedom to experience paradise.'



**GRANDFATHER'S PARADISE, 2024**  
**ACRYLIC ON CANVAS**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**



## EMMA ALLISON

'It's simple. A child's imagination is their paradise and My Space portrays just that. In the security of his bedroom, his bed provides the foundation for his journey to space - his space. In the heights of his imagination, he escapes from reality. His toys come to life, and he immerses himself in the infinite universe of outer space where his options are limitless. He is mesmerised as he enters a state of pure bliss, where he dares to dream of paradise.

Manipulating colour in photography allows the images to tell the story, here emphasising the energising and captivating nature of a child's imagination. Colour is a powerful tool for communicating emotions; blue and green symbolise calmness and safety, red energy and passion, and purple creativity. I purposefully edited the images to be warm to convey the comfort found in these fantasies, but also dramatic to portray the pure strength of the imagination.

These photographs give us an insight into his world, provoking feelings of nostalgia for the days you and I were once encapsulated in this land of exhilarating playfulness as a child. With an imagination this colourful, who would want to ever leave paradise?'



**MY SPACE, 2024**  
**DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## JULITA GAJEWSKA

'Paradise reveals itself in my grandmother's embrace, a sanctuary where time seems to stand still, and worries dissipate like morning mist.

As an immigrant separated from my grandparents, this painting becomes a reflection of the paradise I yearn for; a moment where distance fades in the warmth of an embrace and the desperate longing disappears temporarily.

Within the canvas, the scene becomes a conduit for my emotions, embodying the ache of separation and the longing for belonging. In this moment frozen in time, it represents a picture of fading memories and time. It's in the warmth of my grandmother's arms, the comfort of her touch, that paradise finds its truest form. Here, I find solace, transcending the boundaries of distance and embracing me with unconditional love.'



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**EMBRACE, 2024**  
**OIL ON CANVAS**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## MOLLY PARKER

'A form of paradise can be found in childhood. When I was younger my mum used to say, "Don't wish this time away", but this didn't mean much to me at the time. I wanted the freedom that's not possible in childhood, impatiently waiting to get older. However, I've found this freedom comes with responsibilities and worries that often weigh us down. It is interesting and a bit unfair how sometimes this realisation requires distance, and as the paradise of childhood is fleeting, once we have this distance it's too late to go back.

My painting depicts my favourite childhood teddy, Dopey. The use of oil paint has allowed me to show the depth of weathering in his face and hands, and how the softness has been worn in places. These stains act as markers of past happiness and the temporary haven he provided. Oil paint is also a timeless medium that juxtaposes the ephemerality of childhood that Dopey and the pale-yellow background embody.

As an adult, I now understand what my mum was telling me, take a moment and breathe it in, you don't always know you're in the best of times when you're in them.'



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**DON'T WISH THIS TIME AWAY, 2024**  
**OIL ON HARDBACK BOOK**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## ELENA STEAD DI QUINZIO

'I feel most content in a feeling. One in which I am sitting in my grandparent's kitchen. The coffee machine buzzes in the background and there's the scent of garlic and tomato sauce sizzling at the stove as my grandmother prepares lunch. On the table in front of me lies the wild asparagus that my grandfather, brother, and I have just brought back from our walk among the vineyards. When the room goes quiet, just for a second, I can hear the cicada's song filtering through the shutters that cast a shadow over the room. For me, paradise is not a place, it's a moment and the people that create it. It's a flame I need to protect, a moment from my childhood that I can never forget.

My paradise doesn't need an exquisite background, in fact, it doesn't need one at all.'



**A FEELING, 2024**  
**OIL ON CANVAS**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## EVA LUDLOW

'When considering the traditional 'garden' of paradise I was struck by the idea that paradise is something that has to be created, grown, tended to. I wanted my piece to reflect this process of creation, in the growth and twisting of the vines and in the choice of my method of cross-stitch. Just as a garden can only be created from what came before, embroidery carries the weight of a long and rich artistic tradition, passed down through generations of women. In my piece, vintage patterns are gradually transformed into something unique, paying tribute to what came before, while creating an interpretation of paradise individual to me.

The title is taken from the novel 'The Waves' by Virginia Woolf, in which a character reflects on the connection between domestic crafts and women's personal lives. "I have heard threads broken and knots tied and the quiet stitching of cambric going on and on on the knees of a woman." (The Waves, 1931)

My paradise represented here is personal, created, and connected. Each centimetre is monument to time spent with friends and to my mother and grandmother, the women who first taught me that paradise can be grown on the knees of a woman.'



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**THE RICHARD ROBERTS PRIZE**  
**ON THE KNEES OF A WOMAN, 2024**  
**EMBROIDERY THREAD ON COTTON AIDA**



## STEPHEN SPENCER

'During Trans Pride in London during the summer of 2023, amidst a kaleidoscope of queer love, joy and anger, we joined the march, our voices and flags raised for the rights of ourselves, our loved ones, and even those strangers whose struggles mirrored our own. The urgency of the crisis facing trans individuals drew us together, uniting us in solidarity.

For me and those dear to me, paradise is intertwined with liberation and equality. As we moved beneath the stately ivory-white facades of Edwardian buildings occupied by government, buildings which are relics of a colonial past whose echoes shape our society, I felt the pulse of history mingling with our hopes for a better future. Surrounded by both familiar faces and strangers bound by shared experiences, we revelled in the sanctuary of total acceptance, understanding and love. But this paradise is transient, we march to a destination. Eventually we must return to the harsh realities of a world that too often denies humanity. We retreat to our homes, places of work and study, clinging to the hope that our pleas will be heard, only to confront once more the hostile environments that so many endure simply to exist.'



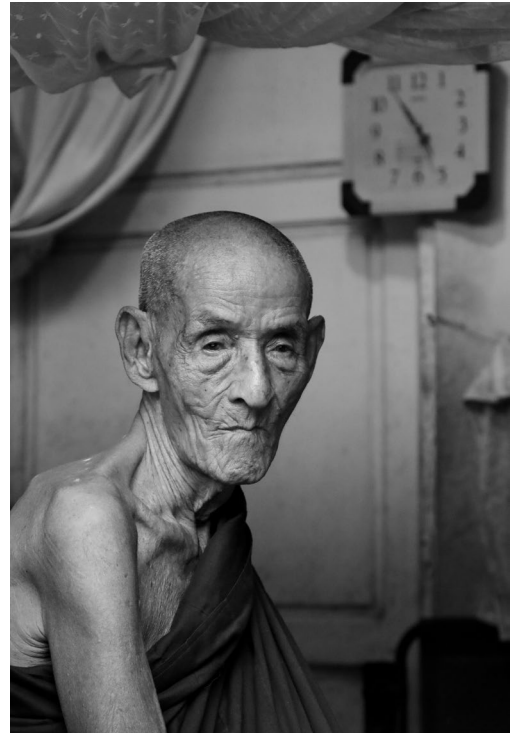
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**'PHOTOGRAPHY' SECOND PLACE WINNER**  
**ECHOS OF WHAT'S YET TO COME, 2023**  
**PHOTOGRAPH ON PAPER**

## ALEKSANDRINA EVNEVICH

'Maung Chi is a 98-year-old monk from Yangon. We met by chance. I was just passing by the window of his cell where he sat, contemplating. I stopped, observing the old man. My gaze fell on the clock behind him. For a moment, I felt a sense of eternity.

He was so old, wise, calm, this monk. I thought if paradise existed, he would be the one to reach it. I took a picture to capture the moment. Then, I approached him and asked his name and age. And for some reason, I asked if he believed in paradise. He hesitated to answer and then replied that in his long life, he had come to understand that paradise is created on earth by people. No need to believe in it; each person needs to create it every day around themselves: with good deeds, attention to others, help for those in need. He said that every day was given to us to become a little better than we were yesterday and when people would understand this, they wouldn't have to dream of paradise because paradise would be around them, on Earth.'



**SECRETS OF PARADISE, 2023**  
**PHOTOGRAPH ON PAPER**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## MAISY EKINS-MALCOLM

'Paradise, heavily discussed in religious teachings, is defined as a place of exceptional happiness and delight. In Christianity, paradise was lost on Earth due to Adam and Eve's greed and gluttony. Here my Dad's Christening spoon, a symbol of a Christian ceremony, has chocolate smeared on it providing a connection to religion in the piece. Freewill has been implemented enabling Indulgence, but causing withdrawal from paradise.

Desserts are often described as 'heavenly', due to indulgent tastes which are evocative of paradise and perfection. This decadent, half-eaten, cake depicts an ending drawing nearer, gradually disappearing, however the end has not quite been reached.

Additionally, ice cream melting on the plate also portrays the passing of time as the dessert is consumed, forming liquid puddles on the plate. This is symbolic of the transition away from paradise due to the indulgence and greed of the consumer. As the dessert disappears pleasure diminishes, and a temporary sensation of paradise is lost; similar to humanity falling when Adam and Eve ate Eden's apple.'



**HEAVENLY, 2023**  
**OIL ON CANVAS**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**



## CLEMMIE GERMAN

'Serene summer days, soaking up the heat outside, when the sun feels too hot and all that you crave is a swim to cool down. This painting shows the first refreshing step into cold water. The rush of a chill up your body, the shot of adrenaline, a perfect moment, where the world which was just so overwhelmingly hot once again feels like paradise. The peacefulness, every thought drifts away as you submerge into the water.

Paradise is often depicted as a tropical beach with crystal clear water, I have made my own interpretation of this. The angle of the painting is taken from beneath the water, watching the ripples fade out as your foot steps in. I think it is a paradise that everyone can relate to and think back to a time on a warm summers day where the thought of going for a swim makes everything seem better and the world feels so perfect, like anything and everything is possible.'



**A SUMMERS DIP  
OIL ON BOARD  
STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## SOPHIE DRAPER

'If paradise is found in the eyes of the beholder, these amber ones certainly agree. For my little cat, the cost of a simple cardboard box is arbitrary, its value instead derives from something more important; something more integral to what paradise truly represents. In her world, these softened, peeling sides form a place of safety, comfort and, above all, love — a reminder that, with a change of perspective, paradise need not be a dream or abstract concept and, may in fact, lie closer than we think.

I created this realistic coloured pencil piece to be a celebration of the overlooked, an acknowledgement that the biggest gifts tend to come in small packages.'



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**'ART' SECOND PLACE WINNER**  
**A LITTLE CAT IN A LITTLE BOX, 2024**  
**COLOURED PENCIL AND GRAPHIC MARKER**  
**ON PAPER**

## JIAXI WANG

'In my artwork 極楽浄土 or Gokurakujoudo I explore a paradoxical view of Paradise, depicting the turbulent consequences of distorted desires. Rooted in the religious concept of Gokurakujoudo, the piece aims to provoke contemplation on the delicate balance of equivalent exchange, exposing the fragility in the pursuit of paradise. By portraying the interplay between hope and despair, it challenges traditional notions of an ideal haven, inviting viewers to reflect on the complexities of seeking personal utopias and unbridled yearning.

Enveloped in swirling mist, the artwork unveils a surreal realm where whimsy and intoxication converge, crafting a mysterious tapestry of euphoria. Defying conventional paradises, it encourages exploration of unpredictable mental landscapes where the boundary between reality and illusion blurs. Stemming from contemplation on the toll exacted by the relentless pursuit of mental highs and the distorted allure of surreal euphoria, my narrative challenges paradisiacal ideals, drawing parallels context of safeguarding and restraint.'



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極楽浄土 (GOKURAKUJOUDO), 2023  
DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION  
STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST

## SIENNA FRASER

'I decided to search the definition of paradise to help prompt my creative ideas. One listed definition was 'an ideal... idyllic place or state'. I interpreted 'ideal state', as meaning an ideal state of mind. Then upon exiting the page, I was led to MSN. The headlines presented often purposefully aim to scaremonger, by appearing frightening and perhaps fake, causing the thought of them to linger unwantedly, regardless.

I imagine that many of us are prone to overthinking, and for me having OCD and other mental illnesses, this is certainly the case. I thought about how tiring it is to frequently feel held back by my own mind and worries, and decided to reflect this in my artwork by progressing from greyscale to colour as the subject covers their eye with their hand, as if finally being able to escape the anxiety constantly directed at us from everyday life. Because of my OCD, art can be challenging. So I aimed for a more untidy finish in homage to how much more vibrant everything would be if we could let go of these thoughts. Paradise for me would be escapism from the fatigue that is overthinking and unnecessary worries.'



**IGNORANCE IS PARADISE, 2024**  
**DIGITAL PAINTING AND COLLAGE**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2023/24 SHORTLIST**

## KORINA MASSICOTT

'Living with depression and anxiety, I often found it difficult to find moments of joy in my life, leading me to develop a bleak perspective on life. However, therapy has guided me towards a daily practice of mindful meditation during breakfast. As I eat, I immerse myself in the present moment, attuning to my surroundings: the soothing pour of tea, the creamy texture of yogurt, the aroma of toasted bread, the gentle sunlight cascading on my plate.

In these tranquil moments, my intrusive thoughts easily pass through my mind, and I truly feel at peace. I take this time to be grateful for what I have and what I've accomplished. I have taken up journaling to right down affirmations, my daily goals, and lingering thoughts. Now, I eagerly anticipate each morning, knowing that amidst life's uncertainties, my little moment of paradise awaits.'



**'PHOTOGRAPHY' THIRD PLACE WINNER**  
**A CUP OF MINDFULNESS, 2024**  
**PHOTOGRAPH ON PAPER**

## LUCY SKRINE

'My photograph depicts the Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital psychiatric ward in Hong Kong, double exposed with another picture I took in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. The man in the foreground is holding oranges, which he gave us for free.

I was admitted to the ward for seven nights in October 2023. The ward subconsciously became a fantasized paradise for me, a place where I could temporarily put worries and feelings of worthlessness to rest. Psychiatric wards were previously called asylums, a word initially denoting retreat, sanctuary, perhaps even paradise.

After I emerged from hospital, I experienced my new version of paradise while travelling around China. The double exposure highlights the duality of my conception of "paradise"; the paradise of remaining safely within my comfort zone, versus stepping out of it and embracing life. The man's fruit offering is emblematic of my restored hope in humanity, and continued pursuit of mental healing. His act of kindness reminds me that Fundamentally, mankind is good and pure.'



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**'PHOTOGRAPHY' FIRST PLACE WINNER**  
**A FRUIT OFFERING, 2023**  
**PHOTOGRAPH ON PAPER**



## STEPHANIE ROARTY

'Nirvana delves into the concept of paradise through the blend of colours and textures, envisioning a piece that evokes a sense of being enveloped in an idyllic state of happiness and tranquillity. The concept of paradise may vary in form from person to person, but the universal feelings of happiness, joy, and peace are shared by all.

In each of our own individual paradises we are wholly in an idyllic state. Nirvana invites viewers to immerse themselves in a world of blissful contentment and joy, the interplay of colours and textures mirror the multifaceted nature of paradise itself, from excitement and wonder to peace and harmony. It does not depict Paradise, but rather the emotions it evokes. The predominant shades of red and orange bring warmth and comfort, while complimented by ornaments of blue and streaks of green, introducing a sense of calm and nature into the composition. The depth of the artwork is enhanced using texture paste and modelling gesso which create intricate details and tactile dimensions, but also add a sense of complexity and richness of the experience.'



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**NIRVANA, 2024**  
**ACRYLIC ON CANVAS**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2022/23 SHORTLIST**

## JADDEN TSENG

'Green is inspired by Věra Chytilová's 1970 film, Fruit of Paradise, and presents a new take on the multiplicity of love, death, innocence and sin.

It is a fairytale set in a timeless, culturally non-specific space, between the living and the dead. An impossible place as paradise is an existence of nonexistence; an imaginary place of hope and comfort that is the dream of subverting reality. Paradise is where, despite circumstances making love impossible, love proves itself real, living, and unkillable.'



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**GREEN, 2023**  
**DIGITAL FILM, 10 MINUTES**  
**STUDENT ART PRIZE 2022/23 SHORTLIST**



## ARTISTS

Beth Weeks-Greener

Becky Morgan

Hongyi Chen

Chelger Chiew

Hannah Ruth Andrews

Penelope Gathercole

Mary Demirova

Georgia Mackenzie Smith

Ananya Nair

Serena Miambanzila

Daniel Dickens

George Davies

Heena Carahaa

Emma Allison

Julita Gajewska

Molly Parker

Elena Stead Di Quinzio

Eva Ludlow

Stephen Spencer

Aleksandrina Evnevich

Maisy Ekins-Malcolm

Clemmie German

Sophie Draper

Jiaxi Wang

Sienna Fraser

Korina Massicott

Lucy Skrine

Stephanie Roarty

Jadden Tseng

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to all students who entered this year, the standard was incredibly high, and huge congratulations to all of our prize winners.

We would also like to pass on our gratitude to our independent judges for their incredibly generous support in selecting the shortlisted entries and each winner.

Additional thanks go to Seasons for framing the artworks to such a high standard, and to all University Library & Collections team members involved in the realisation of the prize.

The Student Art Prize 2024/25 launches in October 2024.

**[durham.ac.uk/student-art-prize](https://durham.ac.uk/student-art-prize)**



**STUDENT  
ART PRIZE  
2023/24**  
PARADISE

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**STUDENT  
ART PRIZE  
2023/24  
PARADISE**

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