

Judging Wellcome Image Awards 2011

Judges Catherine Draycott, Fergus Walsh, John Durant, Adam Ruhterford and Robin Lovell-Badge, talk about the Wellcome Image Awards, the entrants and the process of judging them.

CD: The Image Awards are a way of recognising the best of the images that we've acquired since we last held the Awards, so it's a retrospective thing. We then create a shortlist of between 100 and 150 images and those are the images that are shown to the judges on the day.

FW: The process was very interesting, we had a lot of incredible images to choose from and in the end you have to be quite ruthless.

JD: It was amazing, I've not done this before and seeing so many images and having a group of us just brainstorming our way through them to try and find which we thought were deserving to go into the exhibition next year, an amazing process.

AR: We managed to get down from about 200 down to about 40 quite quickly and then you get really stuck into it.

RL-B: And I think it's a combination of seeing things, seeing images which are dramatic and really have an impact on you. And I mean for me obviously, as a scientist in the group, I was keen to make sure that things that we were seeing had a scientific story to tell if possible.

AR: Another criterion was if there was a very apparent technique, a new technique that was shown in the images that was something that we can really use and learn from in terms of extracting scientific data from it.

JD: For some of them it was all about 'how on Earth did they do that?' Some were – you just couldn't begin to guess what the image was unless you looked at the caption and then you suddenly realise. One was of the little hooks on the end of a caterpillar's leg which enable it to climb up apparently smooth surfaces so expertly, a sort of Velcro-like adaptation. And as soon as you saw it and realised, suddenly the penny drops and it makes sense. But in a different kind of stimulus was from one of the entries that we've singled out for special attention, which was actually a photograph taken in a surgical theatre. And for me that photograph is incredibly evocative.

FW: Looking at the images at the end I think there's a fantastic cross-section both of the intriguing and things that reveal objects that we all know.

RL-B: I think anything that brings some level of understanding of the beauty, the fascination of science to the general public is a good thing.

AR: The image is one of the best ways of conveying scientific data in journals and to a wider press and that's why things like this competition, Wellcome Images, is very important, because you're not only getting really important scientific data out but you're doing it in a way that means

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that people can look at it in a gallery and say 'that's an amazing thing to look at', but then they can read about that actually it's a really important technique and it has come from scientists doing research. And that's why these type of award ceremonies are so important.

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