2019 Richard Guy Wilson Prize for Excellence in the Study of Buildings, Landscapes and Places

November 15, 2019
This is the third year of the Richard Guy Wilson Prize, an opportunity that has elicited an outpouring of submissions from both undergraduate and graduate students across the University. The Prize, an annual $5000 prize, is named in honor of Richard Guy Wilson, noted architectural historian and the Commonwealth Professor in Architectural History at UVA’s School of Architecture. This year’s Prize jury featured Jane Alison (Professor of English & Director of the Creative Writing Program), Ari Blatt (Associate Professor of French), Michael Lee (Ruben M. Rainey Professor in the History of Landscape Architecture), and Ekaterina Makarova (Associate Professor of Sociology). The impact of Richard Guy Wilson’s teaching, and his ability to inspire critical and creative thought about the political, economic, technological and artistic contexts through which we study the constructed world, is reflected through the Prize and its remarkable submissions each year.

Piers Gelly has been awarded the 2019 Richard Guy Wilson Prize for his submission, Light Work, an extended excerpt of a novel that he drafted while completing the MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Virginia. Submitted and defended as his master’s thesis in Spring 2019, Light Work previously received the 2019 Henfield Prize for the best short story by an MFA candidate at UVA. Light Work follows a high school student named Simeon as he embarks on an extraordinary adventure, enrolling in an experimental liberal arts college, where students are actively engaged in the daily activities of managing and running the school — from its collective self-governance to the required immersion in daily chores, such as cleaning the facilities, or tending the gardens and livestock that contribute to the community’s sustenance.

As Gelly notes, “Though Simeon finds the school more or less by chance, he comes to know and love the place — which is to say, the modes of living made possible by the school’s unusual foundational principle: the axiom that the study of the arts, and habits of direct contact with the world, make for a life and a community that is both beautiful and good.” The Richard Guy Wilson Prize jury praised Gelly’s submission as an outstanding creative work, one that vividly brings to life, in compelling prose and an evocative narrative, the power of place to shape our experiences, both individually and collectively.

Jeffrey Renard Allen was the faculty advisor for Gelly’s submission.

The Prize jury also awarded Honorable Mention to the following entries:

Brian Cameron, “Unaffordable Injustice: Segregation, Gentrification, and Urban Policy in Charlottesville, Virginia” Program in Political and Social Thought; Andrew Kahrl, faculty advisor
In his remarkably ambitious, incisive, and cogently structured investigation, Cameron excavates the long history of race and housing in Charlottesville from the Reconstruction era to the heyday of urban renewal in the decades after WWII and the more recent history of gentrification following the adoption of single-family zoning in 1991.

Adriana Giorgis, “Villa Marittima: The Presence of Absence” School of Architecture; multiple advisors
This multi-layered project explored the typology of the Villa Marattimas, or ancient Roman seaside villas, that now stand largely as ruins along the coast of central Italy. Combining historical research, on-site documentation (drawings, photographs, drone videos, and 3D laser scanning), cultural landscape analysis, an exhibition, and a design proposal, Giorgis created a detailed catalogue of meticulously documented sites, while sensitively reframing these disparate vestiges as a cohesive cultural landscape.

Natasha Roth-Rowland, “The New Jewish Underground: Occupation, Excavation, and Neoliberalism in East Jerusalem” Department of History; James Loeffler, faculty advisor
Tracing the establishment and systematic expansion of the City of David archaeological park, Roth-Rowland reveals the converging interests of government officials, philanthropists, and private organizations in expanding Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem in a thesis notable for the depth of its research and the clarity of its prose.

Submissions for the 2020 Richard Guy Wilson Prize will be due by Friday, May 22: https://www.arch.virginia.edu/rgw-prize