

**Press Release: Thursday 18 September 2025**

## **Aesthetica Announces Winners of the 2025 Art Prize Alongside Landmark Future Tense Exhibition at York Art Gallery**

Aesthetica is proud to announce the winners of the **2025 Aesthetica Art Prize**, celebrating outstanding contemporary artists from around the world. The **Main Prize** winner is Tobi Onabolu for *Danse Macabre*, while the **Emerging Prize** goes to Sam Metz for *Porosity*.

**Tobi Onabolu** is an artist-filmmaker and writer from London, now based in Grand Popo, Benin Republic. **Danse Macabre** explores spirituality, mental health, and the human psyche. It combines poetry, music, archival audio, and movement to represent the conscious and unconscious mind. Dancers, singers, and unseen voices animate this portrait of healing and expanded awareness. Yoruba Egúngún masquerades symbolise ancestral memory and energy. The work synthesises elements from Yoruba traditions, European cinema, and experimental music, creating a performance that draws from multiple geographies and timelines.

**Porosity** reflects **Sam Metz**'s sensory experience of the Humber Estuary, North East England. Bright yellow structures echo how they see the water's reflection through ocular albinism (a genetic condition that affects the eyes and often can cause visual differences such as light sensitivity, reduced depth perception and involuntary eye movements). Metz, a neurodivergent artist, uses sculpture to communicate non-verbally. Porosity challenges conventional ideas of sculpture by integrating disability and chronic pain into its core form, embracing difference as both method and message.

Both winners are featured in the **Aesthetica Art Prize 2025** exhibition at **York Art Gallery**, running from **Friday 19 September 2025 – 25 January 2026**. The exhibition showcases 25 shortlisted artists whose work spans a diverse range of mediums, addressing urgent global themes including migration, cultural identity, ecological fragility, and the intersection of technology and the human experience.

Alongside the Prize, York Art Gallery presents **Future Tense: Art in the Age of Transformation**, a major exhibition featuring large-scale immersive installations by internationally acclaimed artists Liz West and Squidsoup — both alumni of the Prize. Squidsoup's *Submergence* immerses audiences in an ocean of 8,000 responsive LEDs, blurring the line between digital and physical space, while Liz West's *Our Spectral Vision* surrounds visitors with a radiant spectrum of colour, offering a truly unforgettable sensory encounter. Together, these exhibitions transform the gallery into a hub of contemporary art innovation.

Since its inception in 2007, the Aesthetica Art Prize has become a springboard for some of the most dynamic and groundbreaking artists working today. Thousands of practitioners have been recognised through the Prize, and alumni include internationally acclaimed artists such as Larry Achiampong, Jenn Nkiru, Julia Fullerton-Batten, Liz West, and Squidsoup. Aesthetica's magazine, in circulation for over 20 years

and **with a readership of 550,000 across more than 20 countries**, has been instrumental in shaping conversations around contemporary culture, championing innovation and amplifying diverse voices globally.

**Cherie Federico, Director of Aesthetica and Curator of Future Tense, says:**

*"The Aesthetica Art Prize has always been about recognising and celebrating exceptional artistic talent. This year's winners, Tobi Onabolu and Sam Metz, exemplify the innovation, creativity, and relevance that the Prize seeks to champion. Seeing their work alongside the broader exhibition, and in the context of alumni like Liz West and Squidsoup, highlights how the Prize continues to nurture artists whose practices make a lasting impact on contemporary art both in the UK and internationally."*

**The Aesthetica Art Prize 2025 and Future Tense: Art in the Age of Transformation** run from **19 September 2025 – 25 January 2026** at York Art Gallery. Both exhibitions are included in general admission, available to book in advance via the Gallery's website.

**Ends**

For images:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1PB62n0oNqdiflcPPqFtErHvnoqDPwpcS?usp=sharing>

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