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Paul Emmanuel scored top honours in Sasol's inaugural Wax Art Competition. Kathryn Smith reports

Sasolburg is a bleak industrial town not too far from Johannesburg where fuels and chemical products are manufactured and refined. While this may seem an unlikely place for a burgeoning cultural hub, the Sasolburg WAM! (Wax, Arts and Music) festival proved that culture and industry can sit quite comfortably side by side, fuelled (pardon the pun) by the ever-increasing arts sponsorship portfolio of chemical giant Sasol.

The festival's highlight was the inaugural Sasol Wax Art Competition, with R 130 000 in prizes and categories for professional artists, amateurs (students) and schools. Artists could enter work that employed wax as a medium (sculpture, encaustic, Plasticine, crayons) or that used wax as part of a process, including bronze casting and etching.

Johannesburg based artist Paul Emmanuel, who works from a studio in the Bag Factory, scored top honours and R 40 000 in the Wax as a Medium category with *Air on the Skin*, a labour-intensive and exquisitely rendered triptych depicting the Gariiep Dam in the Great Karoo. Emmanuel, who is well-known for minutely detailed etchings and artist's books, worked in shoe polish and acrylic on paper, scraping areas away to create the atmospheric images.

Diane Victor took the R 30 000 prize for *Trinity Fetish*, an embossed etching. In the student category, Russel Lavis won R 20 000 for a wax sculpture designed to challenge negative perceptions of the Great White shark. University of Pretoria student Sarah Noche took R 20 000 for her bronze panties, titled *Under Where*.

The exhibition attracted more than 2 000 visitors over one weekend (August 30 to September 1), and the sponsors were so impressed they bought up an entire collection of work under the guidance of curator Lesley Cohn. According to Cohn, there is talk of a purpose-built gallery to house the works, as well as future additions to the collection.