Michele Kirsch wins the £10,000 RSL Christopher Bland Prize for *Clean* (Short Books)

The 2020 judges are Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (Chair), Sara Collins and Andrew Lycett.

‘I am delighted and honored to win this year’s RSL Christopher Bland Prize. The fact that this award is specifically for first books by authors over 50, is proof that those of us who get algorithm pop-up adverts for potions that diminish the physical signs of decrepitude, still have something to say. *Clean* could not have been written had I not lived through the experience. When you are older you are more comfortable with your own writing voice, and for me, that meant feeling OK about tackling a very serious and sometimes tragic subject matter with some levity.’ — Michele Kirsch

‘Reading books by authors over 50 was a hugely exciting adventure. The range of subjects and writing styles truly impressed the judges. The winning book is beautifully crafted and written, filled with darkness and light, compelling. We go with the writer Michele Kirsch, as she fights addiction with honesty and humour. And, like her, come away changed forever.’ — Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

‘I adored Michele Kirsch’s memoir, I marveled at the form as well as the content of her remarkable life, and her honest, unflinching self-reflection.’ — Sara Collins

‘This is a sharply observed memoir which is hilarious, totally compelling and impossible to put down. It bubbles with energy, wry observation and telling social comment from both sides of the Atlantic.’ — Andrew Lycett

The RSL Christopher Bland Prize is an annual award of £10,000 to a debut novelist or non-fiction writer aged 50 or over.
Michele Kirsch is a 59-year-old writer and cook living in East London. She has worked as a teacher, a press officer, a journalist, a glass washer, a house cleaner and a cook – in that order. Her first book, Clean, was Book of the Week in the Daily Mail and The Lady, and Book of The Month in Psychologies.

All publicity enquiries for Michele Kirsch should be directed to Helena Sutcliffe
helena@shortbooks.co.uk

The other books shortlisted in 2020

Anne Griffin – When All is Said (Sceptre)
Five toasts. Five people. One lifetime.

‘Full of warmth, humour, emotional truth.’ – Andrew Lycett

Publicist: Maria Garbutt-Lucero
Maria.Garbutt-Lucero@hodder.co.uk

Stephen Morris – Black Tea (Claret Press)
A reflection on the changing face of Russia over 30 years.

‘Personal, historical, geographical and political elements are beautifully woven together.’ – Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

Publicist: Katie Isbester contact@claretpress.com

David Nott – War Doctor: Surgery on the Front Line (Picador)
An NHS surgeon volunteering in the world’s most dangerous war zones.

‘A remarkably clear sighted and forensic account of personal and professional courage.’ – Sara Collins

Publicist: Gabby Quattromini gaby.quattromini@macmillan.com
Celia Paul – Self-Portrait (Jonathan Cape)

About her journey to becoming an artist, with all the sacrifices and complications that entails.

‘A deceptively restrained autobiographical account by a gifted female artist.’ – Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

Publicist: Joe Pickering  JPickering@penguinrandomhouse.co.uk

‘I started the creative life at the age of 76, so it’s never too late.’
- Christopher Bland

This is the second year of the RSL Christopher Bland Prize. £10,000 is awarded annually to a debut novelist or non-fiction writer whose first work is published when they are aged 50 or over. The 2020 Prize was open to authors writing in English from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, whose novel or popular non-fiction book had been published within the calendar year 2019. The winner will also be offered the choice of a two-week writing retreat in either the South West of France or County Sligo, Ireland. This Prize is made possible through the generosity of the Bland family and their friends.

Raynor Winn won the inaugural Prize in 2019 with her memoir The Salt Path.

The 2020 winner was announced on Thursday 2 July 2020.

Christopher Bland (1938-2017) was born in Japan and grew up in Northern Ireland. He studied History at Queen’s College, Oxford (1958-61), and fenced for Ireland at the 1960 Rome Olympics. After university, Sir Christopher worked in the City, holding many prominent positions in big business. At the same time, he became a leading light in the arts and media worlds, cultivating a series of prominent positions in important institutions. These included London Weekend Television (LWT), the BBC and the Royal Shakespeare Company. As well as his novels Ashes in the Wind (2014) and Cathar (2016), Sir Christopher wrote the play The Easter Rising and Thereafter which was staged by the Jermyn Street Theatre – 100 years to the day after the uprising in Dublin.

Founded in 1820, the Royal Society of Literature is the UK’s charity for the advancement of literature. Other awards and Prizes are: the RSL Ondaatje Prize for writing that best evokes the spirit of a place, the Encore Award for best second novel of the year, the V. S. Pritchett Short Story Prize, RSL Literature Matters Awards and the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction.

For further information about the RSL Christopher Bland Prize, please contact annette.brook@rsliterature.org |@RSLiterature | rsliterature.org