

Judge's Report

Alexie Glass-Kantor

The Mosman Art Prize was established in 1947 at a moment of profound cultural, social and political change in Australia following the Second World War and the rise of Modernism. Here we are 73 years later living in a similar time of immense change as we reflect upon how our experience of the world and the way in which we inhabit it has been dramatically altered.

Entries for the 2020 Prize, for which there were over 580, demonstrated a remarkable spectrum of approaches in considering how we relate to the coordinates of the world at this time and the trajectory of contemporary painting. Our understanding of what it means to move, to shape shift, to make contact with others and to cross thresholds, has completely changed in 2020 as we face one of the most significant transformations of the modern age with the arrival of COVID-19. It is a privilege to encounter artists who are embracing ambitious ideas and offering artworks that can invite new and unique ways of seeing the world. It is notable that with the Mosman Art Prize there is not one winner and that every artist who submitted a work, and those subsequently included in the exhibition, have contributed paintings that are significant and timely.

It was both a challenge and a heartfelt responsibility to select the finalists in this year's Mosman Art Prize. My focus and intent was to collaborate with the team at Mosman Art Gallery to ensure that the exhibition represented a broad approach to cultural and linguistic diversity, First Nations, gender and gender non-binary representation, and included artists at the earliest stages of the career through to the most senior and established: I wanted to ensure that legacy of this esteemed prize is anchored to honouring and celebrating the relevance and breadth of Australian painting.

Mosman Art Prize: *Mangroves, 2020* by Salote Tawale

The winner of this year's major prize is Fijian-Australian artist Salote Tawale. Working in the expanded field of painting, this extraordinary textured and collaged portrait touches on themes of ancestral history, memory, transmission, migration, displacement, language and culture. The painting is an eloquent and considered homage to the idea of who Salote is and the contemporary world she inhabits, as well as the history and traditions that she has inherited through generations of women and community. It is important to recognise that Salote is an artist achieving at the highest level of artistic production through installation, film and painting. An emerging leader in Australian contemporary art she is a conceptually rigorous artist working at the forefront of experimental painting. I am delighted that an artist of Salote's inimitable talent and ambition is the recipient of this year's Mosman Art Prize.

Margaret Olley Commendation Award: *Lido, 2019* by Stieg Persson

Melbourne-based artist Stieg Persson draws from the lineage of history painting with a deep understanding of over a thousand years of artistic traditions drawing from the Renaissance through to pop cultural and more subversive modes of representation. When making his paintings Stieg often draws inspiration when walking the streets of his hometown in St Kilda, lifting ideas from everyday matter such as wall markings and architectural details, and from the remains of both natural and unnatural elements, bringing them together to speak in an uncanny synthesis and sequence of juxtapositions. This painting depicts not one idea of how we understand space but the many ways in which we encounter different processes, responses and instinctive ways of mapping and creating a relationship to our place, to our homes and to the movement of ideas through time.

Allan Gamble Award: *Landscape Composition 1, 2020* by Phil James

With tongue planted firmly in cheek and a very deep infinity for the wry, Phil James is an artistic provocateur who often works with found painting and objects, introducing elements which invite an opportunity for the surreal and the unexpected to emerge. In this darkly humorous painting, he takes a found object and imbues the house with a nihilistic sense of what is happening at this moment in time: on the back of climate change protests; in the midst of a global pandemic; and in a moment of profound political shifts—he's burning down the house. The built environment in this work is the history of vernacular architecture but it has been stubbed out, overshadowed, erased and redefined. Phil is not proposing a preservation of this type of architecture, or even upholding the romantic appeal of history paintings, but instead asks how we can instrumentalise satire to update outmoded representations of authority, structure, power and place.

Guy Warren Emerging Artists' Award: *Ascension, with Hog and Alter Ego, 2020* by Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran

Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran is a Sri Lankan born, Sydney based artist whose ceramic, painting and installation-based practice explores the politics of sex, gender and religion. His work is often raw and charged with sexual motifs, drawing on the history and potency of both subcultural and political strategies for rethinking subjectivity and identity. There is a very driven and defiant urge in Ramesh's work to play with rich and fluid forms of painting in the expanded field, he combines saccharine colours, layered palettes and a strong eye for the deeply subversive when making a painting as deliciously layered as this particular triptych.

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Judge, 2020 Mosman Art Prize

Executive Director, Artspace

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