



Judge's Report

Felicity Fenner

**Senior Lecturer and Chief Curator (National Institute of Experimental Arts)
at UNSW Galleries, COFA**

The Mosman Art Prize is one of Australia's oldest and most esteemed art awards. Every artist worth their salt has had a go at one time or another; 67 have won it and many others have been awarded associated prizes that come under its umbrella. It's a much-loved institution in the Australian art world, which is why I was honoured to be invited to select the works for this year's exhibition and prizes.

My hat goes off to all the artists who entered this year. Australia has more art awards than other countries. In this current economic climate, artists are increasingly entering award exhibitions, hoping to offset the effects of a slow art market by winning some prize-money, or to boost their profile by at least being selected for the exhibition. The award exhibitions are, in turn, becoming increasingly competitive and high-profile.

The process of selection for the Mosman Art Prize echoes that of the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes at the Art Gallery of NSW: each and every work is held up by art handlers for examination by the judge, for as long as is needed. After the preliminary selection, the process starts again with the first selection of works, and repeats again and again until the selection is fine-tuned to a size that will make for a full and diverse exhibition that's comfortably accommodated in this building.

We ended up with 99 works this year, but there wasn't a single other work that screamed for inclusion – more like another 20 of equal quality, so the decision was taken to stop just short of the magic 100 number of artworks.

(It is interesting to note that ten of the artists here are also in the current the Archibald, Wynne, Sulman, including Michael Muir's work in the Wynne and Paul Ryan and Anh Do's in the Archibald.)

First prize was awarded to Michael Muir's *Past the stacks*. It's a striking, deceptively simple painting that stood out from others in its ability to convey a sense of place and the contemporary psyche. It's a generic, modern place that he's rendered, but one that's invested with the kind of ambivalent narrative that often characterises everyday experiences in everyday places. We're not quite sure what's happening here, either with the landscape or between the two figures. The painting evokes film noir, embodying a dark presence that lurks just behind the sunny façade.

The Henry Bucks of Mosman Commendation Prize went to Paul Ryan's *Blue boy and dog*, a compelling double portrait that invokes European and British portraiture of the 18th century, but with

its dramatically spare background, strips the image of its cultural context. The success of Ryan's portrait challenges the advice given to photographers' and filmmakers' to never work with children or animals.

The Allan Gamble Memorial Art Prize (for a work about the built environment) was awarded to Becky Gibson's *Back of Croydon*. This work will strike a chord, as it did with me, with any viewers who've lived in and around Sydney and looked out over corrugated iron rooftops – a million miles away from living room views here in Mosman, but cherished nevertheless by us inner-westies.

The Fourth Village Young Emerging Artist Award went to Eric Davidson Gluyas for his intriguing *Burning stacks with dog*. Stacks and dogs are themes amongst this year's winners. This modest little painting jumped out very early in the judging process: the dog and the campfire is a familiar scene for country Australians, yet rendered here with a theatrical and seductive visual intensity that makes us look again, trying to decipher a storyline.

I'd like to add a prize category for the 95 finalists who haven't won a monetary award this year: Highly Commended. And I'd extend that commendation to the 702 artists who entered the Award. They are to be commended for bravely sending in their paintings for consideration. Without their support the Prize could not continue. For those who were not selected this year: please continue to share your work with the Gallery, its curators and guest adjudicator by submitting paintings each year. It might feel like it's fallen into a black hole, but that's not the case: even if it's not selected, it is seen, mulled over and handled with great care and respect here at the Mosman Art Gallery.

Thank you to the Mosman Art Gallery for contributing, in all its programs though especially with this annual event, to Australia's cultural legacy with such professionalism and dedication – particular thanks to Gallery Director John Cheeseman, Senior Curator Katrina Cashman and Exhibitions Coordinator Julie Petersen. The art handlers, most of them artists in their own right, also seemed to enjoy as much as I did the time we spent exploring, examining and being excited by the many and various entries.

Congratulations to all.

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