

Mosman Art Prize

20 August 2026

Thank you Blake. Thank you Uncle Allan for welcoming us onto Country. I offer my respect and gratitude for being here to the elders of the Country we are on this evening. And thank you Deputy Mayor for your kind introduction.

It is a privilege not only to be here this evening but to have had the opportunity to judge this year's Mosman Art Prize and to briefly work with such a fabulous team at the gallery – thank you to everyone here at the gallery, Blake, Kelly, Althea and the team.

Prizes occupy a great deal of space in the arts' ecology. There is something about the element of competition – the uncertainty, the sense of judgement, the occasion – that we can become drawn to. They often bring attention and public focus, however momentarily – upon an area of practice – in this case painting. They can be affirming for some participants, less so for others.

I run a public art museum that has its own biennial national art prize. So whilst I find the notion of an art project or event being centred on competition unsettling at times, despite the centuries-long traditions of art prizes in the west, I also see how prizes can be harnessed, well, let's say harnessed for good. They can not only benefit some artists financially, but others in terms of new exposure to audiences primed to take part in their own forms of assessment and conversations about the relative merits and qualities of works. They serve as the focal point for occasions such as this – for coming together in the name and in the presence of art.

The importance of such communal, social gatherings – of coming together in public and as the public – of coming together in support of cultural work and life has never been more important.

Prizes function to build the backbone of public collections, as is the case with the Mosman Art Prize. And such collections provide their own unique pathways through the histories of art; here of painting in Australia. Prize exhibitions bring artists together, make introductions, build community. And these prize exhibitions present clusters and groups of works that would be unlikely to appear in other exhibition forms, offering up particular conjunctions and connections, little prompts to considering about what occupies the thinking of artists today; their experiments with form; their proposals whether modest or bold, for both reflection and actions that might help make a little sense of the world around us.

As a judge the prize is this opportunity to spend concentrated time looking at such an array of work - such a privilege, and a responsibility. A painting prize with such a long and storied history brings with it further responsibilities, an awareness that there's a minor participation here in the building of a collection and a narrative through time regarding painting in Australia, the histories that it bears with it and its possible future directions.

This is probably the moment when I'm supposed to say something about the importance – the state – of painting today. But I'm going to shy away from that. It's unnecessary. You'll draw your own conclusions regarding its robust health as you move around this exhibition.

As we've heard, there were over 1500 entries to this year's prize. To be one of the 73 artists with represented here tonight is an achievement in itself. Some of these works are by artists working almost exclusively in painting, others by artists for whom painting is one set of material processes and forms amongst many they utilize to create and communicate with. That distinction drops away in the context of the exhibition.

The exhibition itself – let alone the whole pool of entries – cumulatively represents an extraordinary commitment of time, intelligence, learning, and emotional energy. I ask that you bear that in mind as you move through the exhibition. And in saying this I want to acknowledge, congratulate and thank all the artists exhibited here tonight, all those who entered the prize and the many other artists who I imagine are here this evening. You have chosen a hard path. But one that is incredibly important to all of us here and the culture of this place more broadly. It is only the work that you all do that makes the work that I and my colleagues do possible and hopefully purposeful.

It was a real delight to come into the gallery yesterday and see the exhibition on the walls. There is a dazzling array of work and even after having viewed the entries closely in photographed form initially, there were a number of wonderful surprises. Which is one of the great things about painting – you really do have to be with it, in the same space, through a period of time to begin to apprehend its qualities. To build relationships.

I enjoy this act of looking at and being with paintings in all their forms, from highly refined or precisely geometric abstraction through to paintings as tactile pictures of or presences within recognizable worlds.

I'm always interested in paintings that whilst not overtly about the act of painting itself, carry some conscious traces of the histories of painting. I look to paintings that seem of or with the world around them, whether that be visual relationships to the material realities of our world – Country, landscape, people, environments, objects, scenes – or in an absorption of the psychological, emotional, intellectual conditions of this time.

I look to paintings where the material form – paint itself but not just paint – demands to be looked at not through, nor glanced over. And to paintings that make me wonder even how they came into existence – that particular accordance of artists intention, experimentation and technical capacity - and both how and why they are generating a sort of gravitational pull upon me.

None of that will go far to explain my choices for the various prize categories this year. But hopefully it gives you all a few thoughts to bring to your experiences of the works in this year's finalist exhibition.

Again, my congratulations to all the artists exhibiting in this year's Mosman Art Prize, and indeed to all those exhibiting elsewhere across the gallery who are also being celebrated tonight.

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I will say just a few words about this year's winning painting. It's a painting I struggled with in ways throughout the judging process. It doesn't give itself over easily, certainly not on a first viewing. But it distills and radiates an urgency that brought me back to it again and again. It's a painting that I feel I need even more time with. It feels vital, unsettling, hard to work out pictorially. On every viewing a new detail, a new representational problem reveals itself – the weighting of paint, the speed of its movement, where a body struggles with the dark hues threatening to engulf it. You sense both historical time – historical lineage – and the great rush of the present in this painting. You sense – well, I sense – historical reference and intense personal experience. A picturing of self perhaps – I'm projecting here – a picturing of the self, straining to hold together whilst simultaneously, defiantly standing ground. This is not a polished, perfectly resolved object of adoration but a field of pictorial, gestural energy that encapsulates so much of what remains contemporary and important in painting.

The Mosman Art Prize of \$70,000 is awarded to **Georgia Spain**.