

Redland Art Awards 2006
Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland
Opening 27 October 2006
Exhibition 29 October to 27 November 2006

After a long history as an important local competition under the auspices of the Redland Yurara Art Society, *Redland Art Awards* made a significant adjustment to open with a smaller, tighter, and nationally-representative exhibition at Redland Art Gallery in Cleveland on Friday 27 October 2006. With open competition and a significant prize pool it has seen increasing professionalism since the first awards were held by Yurara Art Society in 1964, and this first exhibition under a new, restructured model effectively presented the strength and variety of Australian contemporary art.

Work ranged from paintings by Aboriginal artists to folksy story-telling; realism to abstraction, conceptually-based works, to personal, social and family narratives. There was the odd vignette of local interest, including two paintings of sinks – perhaps the desperate national water shortage is finding expression visually.

The four winning entries illustrate the Awards embrace of the national scene. Loongkoonan's *Bush Tucker in Nyikina Country*, a dot painting in resonant colours, took out the first prize of \$10,000. This "very lively" 90-year-old Aboriginal Australian from Western Australia utilizes a pointillist technique to create a dynamic picture plane and gives the picture a presence that belies its modest size. There were seven Aboriginal artworks included in the final exhibition, reflecting the strength of this genre in providing an authentic cultural experience exotic to urban Australians.

Globalisation and international influences on artistic life, its desire and illusion (and allusion), were cleverly evoked by Abbey McCulloch's *Los Feliz* portrait, a scribbly, raffish double image of a girl from Los Angeles who grins boldly at the viewer on the left yet retreats soulfully on the right. This image won the second prize of \$2,500. The intense interest in Asian art (so well demonstrated with the Queensland Art Gallery's Asia-Pacific Triennial which opens this month) was also visible in the Awards, with Hiromi Ozaki's minimal *Essence of Rose-White* evoking in modernist form the precision and tranquillity of traditional Japanese painting. Taking out the Meredith Foxton Award of \$500, its restraint speaks of the translation of one medium (a colour or flower) to another (in paint).

Lynden Stone's *Family Portrait with Dog*, won third prize (\$1,000) with its folksy, mural-like style placing the family pet, a fox terrier named Jasper, in the foreground – a neat reversal of the traditional Gainsborough-style family portrait where animals were treated as accessories to people.

Other works spoke of the uncertainty of modern life. Adrienne Fleming's *How to Get to My Place on Really Cheap Canvases* described an individual's place and position in society and the world with humour and flair. The fractured nature of thought and its random trajectories are traced in Sam Creyton's 'S', an abstract on cardboard. Anita West's *Leaf Cascade* shows meticulously painted leaves in dialogue down the picture plane, a meditative moment of examination and wonder, also evoking, for those aware of them, Eugene Carchesio's poetic visual essays on Japanese leaves.

The history of the prize lies in the thriving local art scene and its interest in nature, and this was visible in some of the works included. Kathryn Blumke's watercolour *Mangrove, Womangroves* took local landscape as inspiration in identifying parallels between mangrove botany and human anatomy. The constancy of art activity in people's lives was described in Louise Brackenridge's *Sunday Afternoon at the Art Gallery*, and the intimacy, constancy and angst of domesticity were evoked variously in Erika Gofton's *Know*, Nicola Chatham's *Woman's Despair* and Leigh Camilleri's *Woman in Grey Kimono*.

Art and literature, both local and historic, were the inspiration for V.R. Morrison's *The Weeping Medusa* and Robert Malherbe's *The Girl From up North (After Picasso)*, which attempted a new take on Picasso's *La Belle Hollandaise* from the Queensland Art Gallery's collection.

Redland Art Awards 2006 saw 410 entries reduced down to 51. These new-look awards were designed partly to address the shortage of art competitions in Queensland (compared with other states), but also to see them recognised as a significant art prize and major event in the national calendar. Its genesis, this year, as a slick and succinct exhibition of contemporary Australian art represents the strongest possible start toward this ambition.

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