

Artist's ailing mum's portrait wins big at Brisbane Portrait Prize

Brown, Phil

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FULL TEXT

The winners across a number of categories were announced Wednesday at Brisbane Powerhouse where the finalists exhibition is now showing and where you can see the works in the flesh before voting in The Courier-Mail's People's Choice Award which closes October 15.

McDonald has won \$50,000 in The Lord Mayor's Prize, the top gong in the annual, highly contested prize that is now looking more and more like a viable alternative to the Archibald Prize.

His portrait *Like A Bridge* is a tender portrayal of his mum Violet, who lives in aged care in Burpengary. It shows a floating figure, dressed in yellow playing a banjo.

McDonald is known for painting people and animals, always with a quick application of paint, and an immediate, fluid and non fussy, freshness with clean lines, and a solid linen background. The work relies as much on what is not there as what is included.

"Roughly two years ago I took Mum to Brisbane to live due to her poor health after being in an accident," the artist explains.

"It was a hard time on our family. Mum is a loving person, with a love of music and the arts ... a true bohemian. I bought her the banjo to play. The title came from the song *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, that mum and I love."

McDonald has been painting for more than 25 years and his work is represented in the National Portrait Gallery, the National Gallery of Australia and Monash University. He has been a finalist in many prizes.

Brisbane Portrait Prize director Anna Reynolds says McDonald's win was "a win for art and a win for humanity".

"It's a highly personal and loving portrayal of a mother by her son, a well respected artist who's not afraid to push the boundaries."

The judge for the prize this year is Lisa Slade, assistant director of the Art Gallery of South Australia. She's in Brisbane for the prize presentations.

She says the prize has attracted works of "a really high standard" and described McDonald's work as being "resonant of the time".

"We have been through the reaffirmation of the importance of elders and the care of elders and care workers," she says. "I think people will immediately connect with this story of a man putting his mum into care."

Slade acknowledged that prizes are usually controversial and that may be exacerbated by the fact that most of the 60 finalists were on hand to hear if they had won ... or not. And with more than \$80,000 in prize money that matters.

"I'll keep a fast car waiting outside for me," Slade jokes.

She says art prizes were often viewed through the prism of sport with winners and losers and said that as with sport the umpire or referee's decision had to be final.

Last year's Lord Mayor's Prize winner Leonard Brown was highly commended for his work *The Cypriot / Chris Gaynor*, while the Digital Award was won by acclaimed Indigenous artist Bianca Beeton for her self portrait *Maid, Monsters of Men*, a biting satirical look at colonialism.

Acclaimed artist and academic Pat Hoffie won The Sylvia Jones Award for Women Artists for her painting *Jennifer Herd - Warrior Woman #1*.

The Packer's Prize was won by Liam Nunan for his portrait *Remy*; theNext Gen award went to Ting Jiang for *Tongue*

Tied; emerging awards went to Brianna Dittos for Self Portrait (I Stare at the Sun) and to Tara Bursic for I Created the Storm (self-portrait).

The Performing Arts and Music Industries Award went to serving Queensland policeman Stephen Tiernan for a portrait of his son, Taking the Lead. Anna Reynolds says the winning works "are a reflection of the times".

"They speak of the anxieties and preoccupations of our lives over the last few years and serve as a visual recording of the ups and downs, and the complexities, of the world we live in."

The Brisbane Portrait Prize finalists exhibition is on at Brisbane Powerhouse until October 30 and voting closes for The Courier-Mail People's Choice Award closes on October 15.

brisbaneporraitprize.org

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DETAILS

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