

# Acquisitions Collection

2001–2021



## Acquisitions Collection

The Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize (WSSP) was launched in 2001 by Woollahra Council to support, promote and celebrate artistic excellence, and to encourage the local community to access the then newly-renovated Woollahra Council Chambers. It was written at the time that the Council Chambers were transformed, “from a place of public administration to a place for community reflection and introspection.”

On the occasion of the Prize’s 20th anniversary, the exhibition was held to inaugurate Council’s new purpose-built gallery space, Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf, the new venue reflecting Council’s continued commitment to developing the artistic and cultural life of the local community.

Over the past 20 years, more than 800 works have been exhibited, with the winner of each year’s main Award added to Council’s collection of cutting-edge contemporary sculpture, on public display year-round. The Prize has long been a focal point for community discussion and engagement, each year attracting thousands of visitors, and hundreds of attendees at talks and workshops.

From the first years of the Prize, the exhibition has featured a range of materials, from the traditional (ceramic, metal and glass) to the contemporary (sequins, polystyrene, and pot scourers), with works addressing political, social, personal and playful themes. In 2003 the Prize began to attract interest from artists entering from overseas, and in 2014 was won by an international artist for the first time. Its international reputation continues to grow.

Reflecting the increasing significance of the WSSP, prize money has more than doubled since 2001, and the main acquisitive award has been joined by newer prize categories including a Special Commendation, Viewer’s Choice and Mayor’s Prize. In 2020 a record 844 entries were received for the Prize’s 20th iteration.



#### **20th Anniversary**

##### **Exhibition Winner (top left)**

Rhonda Sharpe, *Desert Woman with Mustache, Coolamen and Pretty Clothes*

##### **Highly Commended (top right)**

Michael Harrell, *Politics?*

##### **Mayor's Award (middle right)**

Kate Coyne, *Weight of the world on my shoulders*

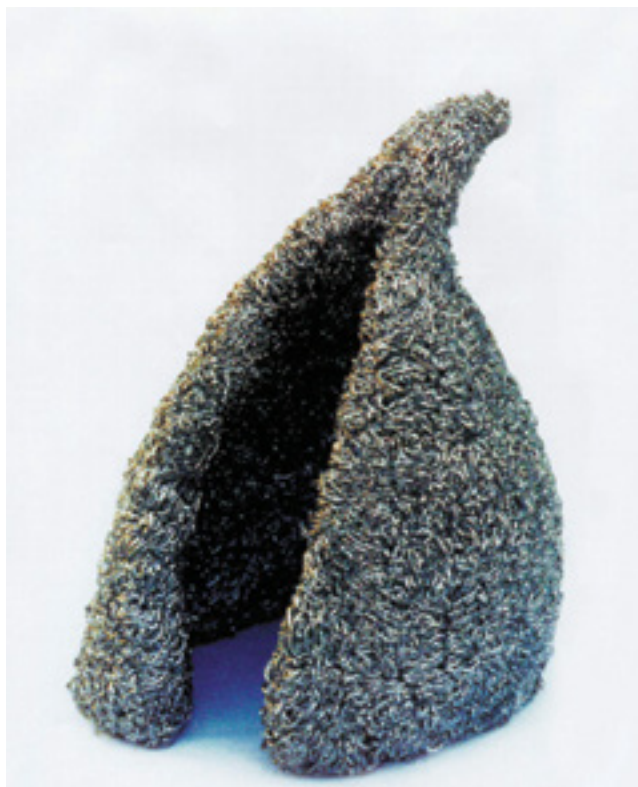
##### **Special Commendation (bottom left)**

Mechelle Bounpraseth, *My parents come from Laos, the land of condiments. Every bottle, every jar reminds me of them*

# Sebastian Di Mauro

Snare – Shimmer Suite

2001



55 x 45 x 45 cm

stainless steel pot scourers,  
aluminium, nylon thread

In 2001, Sebastian Di Mauro's work *Snare* was selected by judges Deborah Edwards and Ben Genocchio as the inaugural winner of the Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize. One of 28 finalists, Di Mauro was attracted to entering this new prize dedicated to the medium of sculpture, on a small scale. The artist saw it a great chance to present a small sculpture that he had been working on without knowing when he would have the opportunity to exhibit it.

"I was working with a material that I hadn't worked with before," he recalls. "It was lots of fun to get it to work. The size is challenging but at the same time you can experiment, you can try different things that you couldn't perhaps trial on a big scale because it's so expensive to do."

The artist, at the time living in his home state of Queensland and now based in the United States, recalls his excitement to be a finalist, and was “completely shocked” at his win, the first of his career. At the time of being awarded the inaugural Prize, Di Mauro was approached by commercial galleries interested in showing his work, and the prize money enabled the artist to be more ambitious in relation to future work. “That’s where the money comes in handy – to buy other materials, because materials can be quite expensive, certainly with sculpture.”

The material experimentation which can be seen in *Snare* subsequently developed into a larger work called *Loll*, an organic, chaise lounge-like form covered in stainless steel pot scourers, which was exhibited at the Brisbane City Gallery. The WSSP “was really a good kick-start for me, I’m still working with sculpture, I’m still exhibiting.” Di Mauro was again a WSSP finalist in 2007.

A survey of Di Mauro’s works was held at QUT Art Museum, Brisbane in 2009, he undertook an Australia Council residency in Spain and Italy, and recent solo exhibitions have been held in Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

“It’s fantastic that the Prize is still going, it’s a real credit to the Council, and it’s also great for artists,” Di Mauro says, noting that as a sculptor the opportunity to have work acquired by private collections is limited, and while opportunities exist for sculptors to make public art, these are few and far between. “What’s so fabulous about the Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize is you’ve got this great collection of work that has been purchased... It’s become a collection in its own right, which is fantastic.”

Judged by

**Deborah Edwards**

Curator of Australian Art,  
Art Gallery of New South Wales

**Ben Genocchio**

Art Critic, *The Australian*

“*Snare* is from a larger body of work called *Shimmer Suite*. Materiality plays a significant role in the conceptual underpinnings of my artwork. In my works

I have eschewed traditionally weighty materials such as steel or bronze in favour of materials that are either industrial or those found in the home. In *Shimmer Suite*

I have used a common domestic object used to scrub pots to create art.

My collective practice explores an interest in the transformation of ordinary objects into something poetic and metaphoric.”

– Sebastian Di Mauro  
artist statement, 2001

# Jan King

Leda

2002



71 x 60 x 32 cm

painted steel

Sculptor Jan King was a finalist in the inaugural Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize in 2001 with her work *Asavari*, before being awarded the Prize the following year for her sculpture *Leda*. The Sydney-based artist recalls that, "in 2001 [the Prize] was just starting off and I thought it was a really good idea, a small sculpture prize for smaller works... It's nice to have something that you can have in your home and live with."

King's winning sculpture was part of a broader body of work from the early 2000s, entitled *Mythological meanderings*. "I was working on a series at the time [based] on women in Greek myths," King explains. "I had been thinking about the various women in myths and there's such a wonderful range. I was fossicking around amongst all my stuff and came across a ripply bit of steel that somehow reminded me a bit of a wing, and so the thought of *Leda* came to the fore with the swan."

“Jan King’s recent work is preoccupied with abstract interpretation of physical gesture, and in the case of Leda, the way this gesture expresses emotion.”

– Jan King  
artist statement, 2002

Recalling the process of creating *Leda*, King remembers, “working with what I was seeing in the more abstract shapes and putting them together in such a way that I was telling myself the story of Leda and the approach of the swan. I don’t think she was a very willing participant, so the taller pieces of steel have a definite turn away from the advance of the wing.”

At the time, King was making sculptures intended to sit on tables, as well as some tall pieces. “And I still continue to work on all scales. I’ve made works of three-by-two metres, as well as six-inch pieces, and everything in between.”

She notes that the small-scale focus of the WSSP encourages audiences to consider collecting sculpture for their own domestic environment. “Maybe that is what happens, they see your work there...and think, I really like that work and I’d like to have something that scale in my house.”

King was an established artist at the time of her win, having been exhibiting regularly since the mid-1970s, so while the WSSP did not serve as a career launchpad as it has for other winners, “It’s very nice to win a prize, [and] always nice to be acknowledged.”

The artist has high praise for the Prize on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. “I think it’s great that it’s endured for that long... I think Woollahra Council is actually very proactive for sculpture, I take my hat off to them... I’m glad that they’ve maintained this and kept it going, it’s terrific.”

Judged by

**Keith Cottier**  
Architect

**May Barry**  
Sculptor

# Mikala Dwyer

## Empty Sculpture

2003



80 x 80 x 60 cm

plastic

A framing of space like a line might wrap around the surface of blank paper in a drawing. Sculpture is traditionally about gravity, weight, volume, form, and the three dimensions.

Here, the sculpture is all volume; weightless and transparent so that you see through to the surrounding environment. The act of looking at and through the surface is more akin to how one might view a painting or even a building.

A “looking-through” space. The space or void inside the sculpture becomes almost visible through its framing. ‘Nothing’ is given aura by encasing it. ‘Nothing’ becomes matter, even content.

Judged by:

**Rachel Kent**

Curator of Contemporary Art,  
MCA

**Roslyn Oxley**

Roslyn Oxley9, Paddington

# Bruce Slatter

Smashing

2004



The sculpture explores the expectation and potential of everyday objects and structures from the urban environment. Ideas of endeavour, anxiety, apprehension and empathy are prevalent in the works through the carefully constructed miniatures sited within possible scenarios.

By diminishing the scale, the work attempts to intensify focus, to distil the essence and meaning of an object, while still retaining its original form.

The diorama casts the viewer as participant, reminding them of familiar and shared experiences and as witness by providing an all-seeing perspective and understanding.

Judged by:

**Wayne Tunncliffe**

Curator of Contemporary  
Australian Art, AGNSW

**Ken Unsworth**

Eminent Sculptor

30 x 50 x 60 cm

wood, metal, paint

# Jessie Cacchillo & Craig Waddell

Ruby Rabbit

2005



This work is part of a collaborative series that explores how humans interact with the natural world. The sculpture, a rabbit, is made by moulding left-over oil paint from previous work.

By recycling a traditionally two-dimensional material and transforming it into a three-dimensional material, the artists – both painters – connect with and extend their painting practice into their sculptural work, and vice versa.

Judged by:

**John Stringer**

Curator of the Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth

**William Wright AM**

Sherman Foundation Fellow in Contemporary Art, University of Sydney

30 x 31 x 21 cm

wood, plaster, oil paint,  
resin, canvas, feather

# Louis Pratt

## The Ambassador's Skull 3.1

2006



16 x 22 x 38 cm  
bronze, stainless steel

The starting point for this work and a famous historical example for me is Hans Holbein's painting *"The Ambassadors"* (1533).

In the foreground of this painting is an anamorphically distorted skull; this distortion is corrected if the painting is viewed from the far right. From this I created *The Ambassador's Skull 3.1*.

The profile work is also derived from this but is a work based upon a laser scan of my head.

Judged by:

**Anthony Bond**

Director Curatorial and  
Head Curator International,  
Art Gallery of NSW

**Felicity Fenner**

Curator, Ivan Doherty Gallery,  
NSW College of Fine Arts

**Professor Anne Graham**

Chair of Fine Art,  
School of Fine Art,  
Drama and Music,  
University of Newcastle

# Yvonne Kendall

## Passengers

2007

42 x 38 x 75 cm

curtain material, string, glue



Yvonne Kendall is looking for a new house, but unlike her family of turtles she cannot load her loved ones and possessions on her back and simply relocate. We all have so much baggage. Home, hearth and family continue to be the inspiration for Kendall's new work, but with very personal significance.

Judged by:

**Laura Back**  
Curator of Art,  
Australian War Memorial

**John McPhee**  
Art Consultant

# Adam Cullen

## Pegasus Flying over Sydney

2008

40 x 50 x 28 cm

shells, bullets, wood, metal, blue tongue skin, chrome



Pegasus flying over the CBD of Sydney is a metaphysical model of Sydney... a city that will never be 'finished'... growing yet falling apart due to bad management, disposable architecture and an undercurrent of violence and crime.... one of the most urbanised cities in the world, it is in constant ruin; a place where gods fly over.

Judged by:

**Edmund Capon AM OBE**  
Director, Art Gallery of NSW

**Deborah Edwards**  
Senior Curator of Australian Art  
Art Gallery of NSW

# Alex Seton

I...U

2009



8 x 78 x 80 cm

Bianca marble

Before winning the WSSP in 2009 with his work *I...U*, Seton was awarded the Viewer's Choice Award in 2005 for *A Young Man's Dream*, and in 2008 received a Special Commendation for the sculpture *Attractive Terms*. All three sculptures demonstrate the artist's mastery of detailed marble carving technique. *I...U* was the first in a series of sculptures featuring hoodies, works that arose out of post-9/11 politics and the associated discussion around identity cards. "The hoodie is an egalitarian garment but it's also a very useful one to avoid cameras in public spaces," the artist says.

For the Sydney-based sculptor, the appeal of entering the WSSP was not about nabbing the prize. "I think... a lot of times to artists, the actual win is such a long shot anyway, [that] it's a bonus. The real reason they're entering is to be considered amongst a high-quality calibre and... to have that chance to be eyes-on in front of particular individuals who are of high standing in the art world, to get them familiar with your work, and your name."

He recalls that the early days of the WSSP provided a counterpoint to what was at the time a relatively gatekept commercial gallery scene. "It was much harder to get your foot in the door [to gallery representation]. Being able to say, 'I won this prize,' was a great way of being noticed by commercial gallery directors and curators." In Seton's case the WSSP provided a long-term career impact, with the recognition of the Prize helping the artist to secure commercial gallery representation in his home city. While Seton's national and international recognition now includes a major work commissioned for the grounds of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and being awarded the 2020 Sovereign Art Prize in Hong Kong, "I still get people saying, 'Oh, you did the hoodie down at Woollahra' – there's a high recognition factor, because it was in the Council Chambers' foyer for a very long time."

The connections fostered by the WSSP go beyond the professional. Seton fondly recalls meeting the late Adam Cullen at the WSSP opening night in 2008, where Cullen was awarded the WSSP and Seton a Special Commendation. The awards were presented by the late Edmund Capon, Director of the Art Gallery of NSW at the time and one of that year's judges. The friendship struck between Seton and Capon that evening endured through the following years.

Seton notes that the WSSP had outlasted a brief proliferation of sculpture prizes in the early 2000s and is a firm believer in such awards. "Sculpture-exclusive prizes and shows are important. [Looking at] work in three dimensions requires a different kind of concentration," he notes.

"There is a sniffiness around sculpture sometimes as being entirely more practical, but done well it can really sing, so anything that gives a spotlight for it, is front and centre for me. It's what I live for."

Judged by

**Geoffrey Cassidy**  
Director of Artbank

**Neil and Diane Balnaves**  
The Balnaves Foundation

"I...U considers notions of self-presentation and communication. A 'hoodie' jersey lies crumpled on the ground, as if casually discarded by the wearer. Obscured lettering can be read on the crumpled chest of the jersey, 'I...E...U'. The ambiguous missing centre word ending in E could be love, hate or something else? The partial message in SMS text shorthand within the carved folds implies the transience, and inbuilt melancholy of frustrated and abbreviated expression. The design nods at 'I love NY' and 'team' jerseys."

– Alex Seton  
artist statement, 2009

# Archie Moore

Humpy Goona

2010



Archie Moore uses a wide variety of different media, depending on the subject of his works. With his carefully crafted paper sculptures, Moore communicates an experience for Aboriginal people of colonisation and the introduction and perpetuation of Christianity.

Moore comments on the interventions into peoples' lives by church and state through a replica church emerging from an open bible (miniature version).

This is a variation on earlier works involving paper sculptures from bibles, usually opened to the book of Deuteronomy – a very imperialistic and bloody book.

Judged by:

**John Kaldor AM**  
Principal of Kaldor  
Public Art Projects

**Monica McMahon**  
Curator,  
University of Western Sydney

**Glenn Barkley**  
Curator,  
Museum of Contemporary Art

7 x 6 x 4 cm

paper



**Woollahra  
Gallery**  
at Redleaf



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# Margaret Seymour

Pas de deux

2011



Perspex, screen, video, steel, castors

50 x 40 x 25 cm

The Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize had been established for a decade when Sydney-based artist Margaret Seymour was awarded it in 2011. "The WSSP has a unique place in the Sydney art world – a well-respected prize dedicated to Sculpture with a smallish footprint," Seymour observes. "My larger site-specific works didn't fit the bill. But then suddenly I had a work that did. Without intending to 'scale down' I realised my way of working had shifted."

Seymour concedes that the work she entered, *Pas de deux*, is an unusual artwork to enter in the prize, and remains the only interactive work in the collection. "My aim with *Pas de deux* was to engage the viewer in a virtual dance by inviting them to physically move the object which is on wheels. The horizontal screen shows a video of feet walking a few steps forward and then back again... I also imagine the thoughts of the viewer as another kind of dance that happens between themselves and the artwork."

*Pas de deux* came at a critical point in Seymour's thinking about art. "I became interested in sculptural objects that invite viewers to participate if they so choose," she recalls. "Winning the prize encouraged me to keep going and I used the prize money to create new works." Seymour has continued to exhibit her work in solo and group exhibitions in the decade since, and in 2015 undertook the BAiR International Residency at The Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada.

The experience of being part of the WSP was valuable in other ways too. "I particularly enjoyed the artist talks in the week following the opening. There were some great questions from the audience. Clearly the prize means a lot to the community as well."

Judged by

**Dr Gene Sherman AM**  
Executive Director, Sherman  
Contemporary Art Foundation

**Professor Ted Snell AM**  
Chair of the Visual Arts Board,  
Australia Council

"In this work I have re-interpreted the traditional ballet '*pas de deux*' - a movement sequence choreographed for two dancers. A horizontal screen is mounted on industrial castors. Positioned at ankle height, the screen displays a video of two feet walking. In my '*pas de deux*' the video represents one dancer and the viewer is the other. The viewer is invited to manoeuvre the object around the exhibition space, thereby becoming a performer. My work references the cautious approach and retreat, or give and take 'dance' involved in negotiating difficult social and personal interactions."

– Margaret Seymour artist  
statement, 2011

# Thor Beowulf

## The Carbon Credit Machine

2012

67 x 46 x 52 cm

mixed media – bonsai,  
gauges, metal tubing  
& other instruments

Organic, Environmentally-Sustainable, Regenerating, Solar-Powered, Water-Fuelled, Earth-Enriched, Oxygen-Producing, Carbon Sequestration and Co2 Conversion Machine or *The Carbon Credit Machine*.

With the growing awareness and concerns about environmental despoliation, climate change and the fragile interdependence between humans and their natural environment, this living bonsai sculpture highlights the problematic relationship between humans, technology and the natural world.

The artist symbolically deconstructs the natural processes of carbon-based plant growth, photosynthesis and transpiration by representing these natural functions with an array of recycled instruments and mechanical devices of metal, glass and plastic. The centrepiece is the living organism itself, an Australian native Ficus bonsai tree, which here represents all trees as nature's own efficiently functioning carbon storage and carbon dioxide conversion machines. With this work the artist seeks to raise awareness of the incomparable beauty and sublime functionality of trees and living organisms.

Judged by:

**Guido Belgiorno-Nettis AM**

Trustee of the Art Gallery of NSW and Director of the Transfield Foundation

**Natalie Wilson**

Assistant Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of NSW

**Professor Janice Reid AM**

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney and Trustee of the Art Gallery of NSW



# Julia Deville

Sorrow

2013

56 x 35 x 15 cm

stillborn deer, glass,  
antique platter, rubies 0.35ct,  
enamel paint

Julia Deville is fascinated with the aesthetic used to communicate mortality in the Memento Mori period of the 15th to 18th centuries, as well as the methods the Victorians used to sentimentalise death with adornment.

She works in traditional gold and silver smithing techniques, combined with materials that were once living such as jet, human hair and most importantly, taxidermy.

Deville uses these materials as a Memento Mori, or reminder of our mortality and incorporates the symbols of death throughout her work.

Deville believes it is important to identify with the concept that we are mortal creatures.

"I believe if we can accept our own mortality, we can in turn appreciate the significance of life. As a strict vegetarian, I consider my taxidermy to be a celebration of life, a preservation of something beautiful. I feel strongly about the fair and just treatment of animals and to accentuate this point I use only animals that have died of natural causes."

Judged by:

**Nick Mitzevich**

Director of the Art Gallery of SA

**Professor Ian Howard**

College of Fine Arts,  
University of New South Wales



# Natalie Guy

## Form for modern living #2

2014



48 x 8 x 7.5 cm

bronze, steel

“The objects or objets d’art of the modernist mid-century interior are loaded with design memories and assumptions, especially around style and taste. These objects are now very collectable and are often utilised to contextualise contemporary aesthetics and art in both the private interior and gallery showroom.

This scenario has been the catalyst for a series of works that began in 2012, on what could be termed ‘pseudo-modernism’, focussed on the domestic interior and utilising the familiarity of everyday objects. These objects are reworked and reconfigured with the intention of creating an ambiguity - recognition with a twist. The new objects become neither prop nor décor, they could possibly be found in a modernist collector’s apartment or an institutionalised museum collection.

Recent works have drawn on Barbara Hepworth's series of Forms with a shift to domestic scale. *Form for modern living* is a bronze cast of what was originally a reworked plywood school chair imitating a modernist sculpture, lending permanence to a once humble object. Now with new formal characteristics and aesthetic qualities in place, this pseudo-modernist piece can question the meaning of artworks as they are made, collected, replicated and exhibited in both the private and public sphere."

– Natalie Guy  
artist statement, 2014

Natalie Guy is a finalist in the 20th anniversary iteration of the Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize. It is full circle for the New Zealand-based artist who was awarded the Prize in 2014, the first non-Australian artist to receive the honour. "It seemed to have people from around the world as participants which I thought was really interesting, there was certainly nothing like that in New Zealand [at the time]."

Guy completed her Master of Fine Arts at the Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland the year before winning the WSSP. "At that point I'd never sold a bronze work, then I won a prize with one," she recalls. "So that awareness was really nice [and] people looked at those works differently. I'd made a lot of wooden versions of [*Form for modern living* #2]," she notes. "Suddenly everyone... looked at them in a slightly different way."

The Prize money was welcomed by the recent graduate, for whom making her first bronze artwork had been a major financial commitment. "I started a rolling bank account where if I sold something the money went back into that, and I could have money for more materials, and it gave me quite a good kick-start. I was able to go on and keep on making a lot of artwork and luckily that bank account is still ticking over... it's also meant that I've been able to get into larger works... including some public artworks." These include a large bronze piece for Westfield, and a public sculpture for Christchurch City Council as part of the city's post-earthquake regeneration.

"I do think winning the award did give me quite a big push, and a bit more motivation and self-belief that I could do such large works." A small sculpture leading to big things.

Judged by

**Lisa Havilah**

Director of Carriageworks;  
Justin Miller, International Art  
Advisor and former Chairman  
of Sotheby's Australia

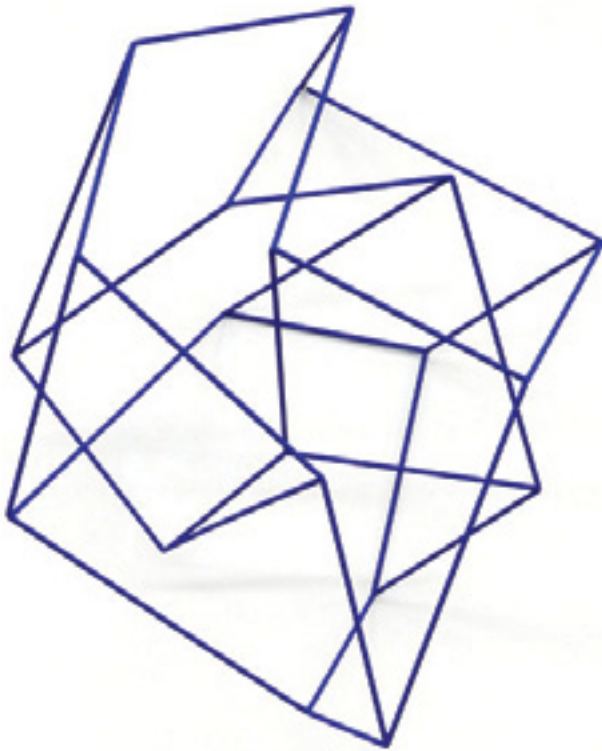
**Gretel Packer**

Arts Patron and Trustee of the  
Art Gallery of NSW

# Robert Owen

Symmetria #37

2015



This work is from a continuing series of sculptural forms that theoretically engage the conditional and possibility of failure. They investigate the gap, the moment that a projected plan splits from the unfolding of a different system. There is the character of unbounded life, yet in a certain limited form – a drawing of space, and in space.

Judged by:

**Dr Michael Brand**

Director of the Art Gallery of NSW

**Penelope Seidler AM**

Arts Patron and Director of Harry Seidler & Associates

**Barbara Flynn**

International Curatorial Advisor

62.5 x 72.5 x 65.5 cm

painted stainless steel

# Todd Robinson

## Psychic Staircase

2016

55 x 21 x 28 cm

balloon: cast hydrocal,  
SLS print, automotive lacquer

base: MDF, steel,  
plywood veneer

*Psychic Staircase* is a sculptural work originating from an ongoing series of balloon-inspired sculptures featured in *Oooh* and *Experiments in Natural Philosophy*.

These feature balloons that droop and slump as the force of gravity appears to bear down upon them. The series explores sculptural presence, materiality and conditions of audience reception.

"In conceiving this particular work, I am interested the physical sensation of vulnerability that one experiences through the feeling of vertigo, as well as the psychology surrounding particular architectural features such as stairs and landings" Robinson says.

The work is cast directly from a latex balloon and finished with automotive lacquer. The balloon is balanced precariously on top of a model staircase. Notably the stairs are not realistically proportioned but rather distorted, with very narrow treads, emphasising the sense of isolation.

Judged by:

**Wendy Whiteley OAM**

Ambassador for the visual arts

**Rhonda Davis**

Senior Curator at Macquarie  
University Art Gallery

**Barry Keldoulis**

CEO and Group Fairs Director  
of Art Fairs Australia)



# Sanné Mestrom

## Self Portrait (Sleeping Muse)

2017



30 x 20 x 20cm

bronze

"A major conceptual thread running throughout my art practice is the critique of 'value' in the ecology of the art world: the way that value is gained and lost in the most elusive ways in art ecologies," Sanné Mestrom says. "My version of Brancusi's '*Sleeping Muse*' is very much de-monumentalised; the original sculpture of my face and head had been kicked around the back- yard like a football by my cheeky dog Charlie, who also chewed its nose and ears off".

"I love that as the piece became increasingly battered, it simultaneously became increasingly 'muse'-like, in the Brancusian sense – the edges had been affected by the chaos of daily life: softened and rounded out by the sheer force of living. Needless to say, I chose to cast it just as I found it."

Judged by

**Djon Mundine OAM**

Curator, Writer, Artist and Activist

**Roslyn Oxley OAM**

Gallerist and Arts Benefactor

**Alexie Glass-Kantor**

Executive Director of  
Artspace Sydney and Curator  
of 'Encounters' at Art Basel,  
Hong Kong

# Tim Silver

## Untitled (When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd 02)

2018

34 x 44 x 20cm

Porcelain, enamel, acrylic

Working with materials that change over time, Silver's work forms a poetic of decomposition, an entanglement with rupture and destruction as processes of making, where decomposition is figured not as the antithesis of composition but as an aesthetics of (dis)organisation.

Time is present as a dialogue with history – in *Untitled (When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd)*, Silver produces a series of porcelain busts of himself reproducing Bruce Nauman's iconic *Self Portrait as a Fountain* (1966-67). Silver's reference to Nauman, which is in turn a reference to Duchamp's iconic *Fountain* sculpture (1917), extends a conversation on the history of contemporary art between artists across different time periods, locations and contexts.

The busts have then been tagged and graffitied by different groups of 'youth', a moment of collaboration that indexes the modern public bathroom as a site of anonymous mark making and a playful meditation on the history of conceptual art and the status of the readymade.

– Excerpt from Catalogue Essay by Andrew Brooks, 2016

Judged by

**Amanda Love**  
Director Loveart,  
Independent Art Advisory

**Michael Lynch AO CBE**  
Australian Arts administrator,  
former Director of Sydney  
Opera House and former  
CEO of West Kowloon  
Cultural District Authority,  
Hong Kong



# Merran Esson

Autumn On The Monaro

2019



30 x 70 x 70 cm

fired ceramics

Sydney ceramic artist Merran Esson was a finalist twice before her 2019 win, in 2014 with her Highly Commended work *Euriowie Cliff* and in 2017 with the work *Fragment*. These prior experiences helped inform her 2019 application. "I knew I wanted to [exhibit it] on the mantlepiece because I really felt that my work was shelf work. [When] I was accepted as a finalist I also got the mantlepiece so I was very happy with that solution."

This strong vision for *Autumn on the Monaro* arose not just out of Esson's past inclusion as a finalist but as a close follower of the prize for some years. "I think people who just jump into prizes in the hope that their work will shine on the day is always a worry... I think you have to know that if you're going to be in the running, who are the people you're likely to be up against, and you need to check out their work and how they're presenting their work and what is the competition," she observes.

One of Esson's highlights of being awarded the WSSP in 2019 was a talk with judge Louise Herron. "I really liked my conversation with her, she picked up immediately what the work was about: growth and repair, and that was for me a very interesting conversation.

I love the way that women figure out quite quickly what other women are talking about." Even for an established artist like Esson whose practice stretches back over four decades, with works held in major museum collections around Australia and internationally, experiences like these around the Award can be a confidence boost.

Esson's winning sculpture is part of a significant ongoing series of work, which arose unexpectedly but has gone on to receive multiple accolades, including the 2019 Muswellbrook Art Prize in Ceramics as well as the WSSP. "The trees of the Monaro were a complete surprise," Esson recalls. "I wasn't expecting them to appear. I opened the kiln one day and said 'oh my god, these are the trees of the Monaro!' I'm very excited about that body of work."

Judged by

**Professor Ross Harley**

Dean of the Faculty of Art & Design and UNSW Chair of Arts and Culture

**Louise Herron AM**

Chief Executive Officer,  
Sydney Opera House

**Tim Ross**

Design and Architecture  
Advocate, Broadcaster,  
Author and Comedian

"Autumn is a sign of change on the land, a signal that summer is ending. The colours of autumn are best seen in the European trees planted in groups throughout the Monaro area of NSW, or in the rolling hills of Tumbarumba, and all journeys in between.

In the landscape the purpose of these trees is to create shade from the hot summer sun and protection from the winter winds. They are the passing images that become familiar, revealing themselves in the creative processes that inform this art. They realise an abstract simplification that triggers one's own sensations."

– Merran Esson  
artist statement, 2019

# Rhonda Sharpe

Desert Woman with Mustache, Cooloman and Pretty Clothes

## Winner of the 20th Anniversary Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize



Above: Rhonda Sharpe's winning entry  
Desert Woman with Mustache, Cooloman  
and Pretty Clothes

80 x 40 x 17 cm

Bush dyed woollen blanket embellished  
with wool and cotton

"We always go looking for goanna and bush foods together, this makes us feel really happy," artist Rhonda Sharpe says. "Sometimes a woman might get a mustache, but that doesn't matter. We all family. I always used to wear pretty clothes like this when I was a young girl. I don't have photos of me so I do sewing instead. I feel proud when I see my work, it makes me happy, and it's good if it makes other people happy too or maybe they might think about some things about how Aboriginal people are really good at doing things. Like hunting and knowing culture, and making art and looking after each other and not laughing when someone is looking different and always sharing everything."

Judged by

**Dr Lara Strongman**  
Director Curatorial and  
Digital, Museum of  
Contemporary  
Art Australia

**Joanna Capon OAM**  
Art Historian/Curator and  
Industrial Archaeologist

**Jenny Kee AO**  
Artist and Fashion Designer



Artist Rhonda Sharpe



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