



'Art must include women's voices'

By Aoife Moynihan

The Ravenswood Australian Women's Art Prize has become an important part of the national scene

The Ravenswood Australian Women's Art Prize was established in 2017 to 'give thousands of female artists an opportunity to be seen,' says Ravenswood School for Girls principal Anne Johnstone.

"An estimated 63% of art school graduates in Australia are women," she tells *North Shore Living*. "But despite being in the majority, research shows that women continue to be underrepresented and undervalued in museums, galleries, and auction houses around the world.

"Art shares our history, our stories, our diverse perspectives, dreams and reflections. And these must include women's voices," Ms Johnstone says.

That first prize in 2017 attracted 789 entries, which ballooned to 1,616 in 2024 - more than double the Archibald Prize. It is now the highest-value professional artist prize for women in Australia with, over \$58,000 in prize money.

It's a popular event, with more than 2,000 people viewing the finalists' exhibition last May.

Artists draw inspiration from what's happening in the world around them and from their own personal stories, and Ms Johnstone says it's 'awe-inspiring how artists capture the essence of time.'

"Art can make a real difference in how we experience and interpret the world," she says. "It has the power to bring people together, inspire creativity, provide comfort and offer hope."

For example, the 2020 prize saw more environmentally focused entries in the wake of the 2019/20 summer bushfires. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many entries portrayed the significance of family life and domesticity with themes of adversity and hope. Celebrations of joy featured highly in 2024.

The \$35,000 Professional Artist Prize was awarded to Gaypalani Wanambi in 2024 for her artwork *Dawurr*. Gaypalani is based in Northeast Arnhem Land, about 700 kilometres east of Darwin. She uses discarded industrial materials in her art, such as the abandoned road sign used in *Dawurr*, which means honeybee - Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land have a long connection with native bees.

Dawurr is etched onto the reclaimed road sign. Judge Jade Oakley praised the fine engravings for having 'a jewellery-like quality,' and the shimmering details seem to change as the viewer moves.

Michael Reid Gallery's Toby Meagher collected Gaypalani's award on her behalf. However, she did send a video message of thanks to Ravenswood.

"I'd like to thank Ravenswood. I'm very proud to win this award, thank you," she says.

Sisters Nancy Long Nungarrayi and Rene Long Nungarrayi won the \$5,000 Indigenous Emerging Artist Prize in 2024 for *Pereltye*. The sisters are based in the Kintore area, Northwest of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory and remember their

Ravenswood



Sensing Lost Memories by Zara Collins won the People's Choice Award

mother gathering *Pereltye* (bush lollies) from the leaves of the River Red Gum trees.

The judges were impressed with the energy and sense of movement in the artwork, which conveyed 'a night resplendent with stars.'

Sydney-based artist Chris Gleisner (originally from the USA) won the \$5,000 Emerging Artist Prize in 2024 for *Sculpted Triangles*, comprised of paper, oil pastels, pencil and thread. "Most artists never expect to get in, let alone win," Chris tells *NL*. "I feel like I've won the Lotto, like the stars were aligned."

Through her drawing, Chris connects with materials and experiments with how shapes and patterns combine. In *Sculpted Triangles*, she played with how a drawing sits in a space, but not in a conventional two-dimensional way. Chris experimented with drawing a sculpture, rubbing oil pastels onto thick paper, which stained the paper, creating a vibrant look with the light glow of the paper coming through the oil pastel. She used thread to hold the sculpture together.

Chris says the Ravenswood Prize is recognising the gender imbalance in the art world.

"The number of incredible female artists is mind-boggling," she says. "But when it comes to who is making money, who is getting the real recognition at the top levels, statistically, it's men," she says.

Zara Collins, who is from Adelaide but moved to Sydney at 19, won the \$2,000 People's Choice Award in 2024 for *Sensing Lost Memories*, a porcelain teddy bear sitting on a porcelain blanket. She was honoured to be chosen as a finalist, let alone win.

"When I won the People's Choice, I was over the moon because it felt like a vote of confidence in my work," Zara tells *NL*.

Using paper and porcelain as her main mediums, Zara's work is all about evoking memory. She's pretty sentimental, particularly since turning 50 last year, looking back to a time when she says life seemed simpler.

"I think it stems from my grandparents, who were refugees when they came to Australia from Lithuania and Latvia. They



Sculpted Triangles by Chris Gleisner,
Emerging Artist Prize winner



Pereltye won the Indigenous Emerging Artist prize

came with nothing. So, things they accrued over time became very special," says Zara.

Zara's 'Nan' used to make blankets and the teddy bear in her winning art was inspired by a teddy she cherished as a child.

"It was a corduroy pig," recalls Zara. "It was my favourite toy and went everywhere with me. It was starting to fall apart, so Mum had to restitch the leg and the ear. I loved it so much."

Fragile objects don't last forever, and Zara wanted to give them a sense of permanency, so porcelain worked for her.

"Sometimes a medium is the right medium for an idea, and trapping memories within porcelain just felt right," explains Zara, who says that her artwork evoked memories for others, too. "It was universal and not just personal."

Zara agrees that women are underrepresented in the art world. Still, she says she is seeing a shift, with more women's art shows being held here in Australia.

"There's something beautiful about being in a women's art award. It's a really nice energy and it feels supportive, whatever

stage you're at in your career," says Zara.

"I feel like women are doing it for themselves."

Entries to the prize closed 5 March, and finalists will be announced 8 May. Members of the public can view the works at the exhibition of finalists, with opening night Friday 20 June. **N**

Ravenswood Australian Women's Art Prize 2025

ravenswoodartprize.com.au/exhibition

Exhibition of finalists 21 June to 7 July

Free entry Thursdays to Sundays

Ravenswood School for Girls: 10 Henry Street, Gordon

Professional Artist Prize \$35,000

Emerging Artist Prize \$7,500

Indigenous Emerging Artist Prize \$7,500

People's Choice Award \$2,000 plus Derivan art pack

Six Highly Commended Awards \$1,000 each (new in 2025)

All artwork is for sale (excluding winners' works)