



## MEDIA RELEASE

6 November 2019

**EMBARGOED UNTIL FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2019 8PM AWST**

### **SYDNEY ACTOR AND ARTIST ANNOUNCED AS WINNER OF WA PORTRAIT PRIZE**

Sydney-based actor and artist Liam Nunan with his portrait of fellow actor Jonny Hawkins is The Richard Lester Prize for Portraiture 2019 Winner of WA's premier portrait prize – The Lester Prize. Liam wins \$50,000 cash donated by founding sponsor The Lester Group, plus two economy class return tickets to any Singapore Airlines destination valued at \$7,320. The winner was announced tonight at the Opening Awards night at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA), where the 40 finalists' works are now on public display until 9 December 2019 in the Centenary Galleries.

The \$10,000 Tony Fini Foundation Artist Prize (selected by artists' peers) was awarded to Lori Pensini from Boyup Brook WA for her portrait *Banksia grandis—love begets love*.

Other winners announced on the evening included Tasmanian artist, Nicole O'Loughlin with her self-portrait titled *The artist Mother is present*, and WA artist, Jeff Bryant from Lockridge with his self-portrait titled *Lazarus* who both received Highly Commended awards comprising one economy class return ticket to any Singapore Airlines destination valued at \$3,660, \$1,000 cash, and a \$250 from Oxlades Art Supplies each.

Formally known as The Black Swan Prize for Portraiture, this award is now in its thirteenth year. It was renamed in 2019 in honour of the award's leading patron, Richard Lester AM. The Lester Prize total prize pool available to emerging and professional artists is now over \$77,000, making it one of Australia's most prestigious art competitions. More than 450 artists entered the competition from across Australia.

This is the first time that Liam has entered an art competition, choosing to focus on his acting career after graduating from NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Arts). In an interesting twist, he was the subject of another 2019 finalist and 2018 The Lester Prize winner, Antoinette Barbouttis from NSW—they met at NIDA. Liam's oil on canvas work features WAAPA graduate and award-winning actor and writer, Jonny Hawkins. He said 'like so many LGBTQIs, Johnny has sacrificed to live his life as freely and authentically as he does. In our sittings, I hoped to convey a moment of reflection. A sense of fortitude and a reconciling of self.'

The Lester Prize Judges in 2019 were Jaklyn Babington, Melissa Harpley and Professor Ted Snell and commented about Liam's work: "Like all good portrait's Liam Nunan's sensitive portrayal of his friend Jonny Hawkins reveals just enough to encourage us to search for more. And there is more! Jonny's introspective, downcast gaze, the somber palette the brooding expressions are tantalising lures that draw us closer to this man. We want to know more about his relationship with Liam and how this document of their friendship materialised. The artist's statement is another intriguing hook. How do we reconcile this 'moment of reflective contemplation' with Jonny's 'infectious grin' and 'love of disco'? Although new to painting, Liam is attuned to the humanity of his subject, and that makes him a worthy winner of this important prize."

# The Lester Prize

Dunja Rmandić, AGWA's Associate Curator 21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts, who also curated the exhibition and was part of the Pre-Selection Panel, said "the works in this year's exhibition surprise with unusual reflection between the artist and the sitter, creating moments of quietude and intimacy. While a lot of the works are self-portraits, other subjects are cultural shifters, creative types and special people rather than celebrities. This subtle portrayal of the 'human' over the 'hero' draws the viewer into their personal stories of relationships, self-reflection—of personal plight and of life."

John Langoulant, Chair of The Lester Inc Board said "congratulations to all the 2019 winners. These announcements are met with much anticipation every year—the prizes and accolades make a real difference to these artists and their artistic practice. This year's collection reveals a truly broad diversity in style and perspective from artists from all over the country. We are also looking forward to the announcement of the winner of The Lester Prize Youth Awards—30 young and aspiring finalists from high schools across the country are currently on display at Brookfield Place's Tower 2 Lobby.'

The Youth winners will be announced on Wednesday 13 November 2019 at an evening awards ceremony at Brookfield Place.

Thirty Semi-Finalist works are also on display on outdoor exhibition boxes at Brookfield Place plus on the big screen at various locations around Perth CBD as part of The Lester Prize's Salon de Refusés.

Still to be announced is the winner of the \$7,500 Baldock Family People's Choice Award, which is selected by the general public. Voting is available at The Lester Prize exhibition in AGWA's Centenary Galleries from 9 November to 9 December or online at [www.lesterprize.com](http://www.lesterprize.com). The winning artist and voter will be announced on 11 December 2019.

The month-long Exhibition Season has something for everyone from budding artists to professional artists—and includes portraiture workshops, artist floor talks and live portraiture demonstrations with The Lester Prize Finalists; AGWA guided tours, big screen displays and outdoor art pop ups featuring celebrity sitters around the city. For more details about these fun, free and ticketed events, please visit the website.

[www.lesterprize.com](http://www.lesterprize.com)

ENDS

## **CONTACTS**

Naomi Quinlivan  
Publicist | The Lester Prize  
Email | [naomi@candystripepr.com.au](mailto:naomi@candystripepr.com.au)  
Mobile | 0408 598 977

Yvette Canét-Gibson  
Marketing, Communications & Media Manager | The Lester Prize  
Email | [marketing@lesterprize.com](mailto:marketing@lesterprize.com)  
Mobile | 0428 883 002