



MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIA'S RICHEST PORTRAIT PRIZE TOURS TO MANJIMUP IN 2026

The Lester Prize 2025 Finalists Exhibition
Manjimup Art Gallery
11 April – 16 May 2026

WA's home-grown national art prize, and Australia's richest portraiture competition, The Lester Prize, is set to tour to Manjimup Art Gallery from 11 April to 16 May 2026, bringing 40 of the nation's most compelling contemporary portraits to the South West.

Following its major exhibition at WA Museum Boola Bardip in Perth, the 2025 Lester Prize Finalists Exhibition will travel to Manjimup thanks to generous regional touring support from Talison Lithium. This regional tour extends the reach of this acclaimed showcase, staying true to the Prize's enduring ethos of making "art accessible for all."

More than 1,025 entries were received in 2025, the highest in the Prize's history since its establishment in 2007, highlighting the continuing growth of portraiture as a powerful form of visual storytelling across Australia.

An independent judging panel selected works from both established and emerging artists, with finalists representing the diversity of the national arts community including 17 returning artists, 13 from Victoria and 12 from Western Australia.

Among the returning finalists is Lori Pensini, an award-winning artist and grazier based near Boyup Brook, whose emotionally resonant work *Bare earth #2* explores the lived impact of prolonged drought in the WA South West.

Created in direct response to her experiences on the land during two years of drought, Pensini's portrait within the exhibition forms part of her ongoing examination of rural resilience and the uncertainties of a changing climate.

While in Manjimup, Pensini will also host a community Artist Workshop, offering participants a unique opportunity to learn directly from one of Australia's leading regional artists while engaging with the themes of place, environment and personal narrative.

Lester Prize Executive Director, Shannon Yujnovich, says the strength of this year's exhibition lies in its artist-first approach:

"The Lester Prize is proud to place artists and community at the heart of what we do — rather than focusing solely on those sitting for portraits. Each year we continue to see exciting new voices joining artists who return to the Prize, creating an incredibly rich snapshot of contemporary Australian portraiture."

Recent additions to the Main Awards prize pool mean The Lester Prize now offers more than \$135,000 in total prize money, further reinforcing its position as one of Australia's most prestigious and most lucrative art prizes.

“The opportunity to host an exhibition of this calibre is truly a gift to regional communities. It not only enriches our cultural landscape but also ensures that world-class art is accessible to everyone, no matter where they live,” said Shire President, Donelle Buegge.

The Lester Prize Finalists will be on display from 11 April until 16 May 2026.

Enter The Lester Prize

Entries are now open for the 2026 Youth Award, welcoming students from Years 7–12, with submissions closing 5 March 2026.

The call for entries for the 2026 Main Awards (Adults 18+) will open from mid-January to mid-June.

There are seven major awards including the Richard Lester Prize for Portraiture, the Tony Fini Foundation Artist Prize, the Minderoo Foundation Spirit Prize and the Ashurst Emerging Artist Prize.

Full entry details: www.lesterprize.com

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ABOUT THE LESTER PRIZE FOR PORTRAITURE

The Lester Prize is one of Australia’s most prestigious awards for portraiture, celebrating artists who push the boundaries of contemporary portrait painting. Now in its 18th year (2025), the Prize showcases diverse, insightful and powerful representations of the human condition, connecting audiences with the stories and subjects that shape our communities.

Based in Western Australia, offers significant opportunities for both established and emerging artists through its main portraiture awards, youth competition, public programs and regional touring.

With a prize pool of \$135,000 in 2025, The Lester Prize continues to grow its reach, partnerships and impact, championing portraiture as a vital and accessible art form.

Supported by generous donors, community partners and The Lester Collective, The Lester Prize is committed to fostering artistic excellence, supporting creative careers, and engaging the wider public in the power and relevance of portraiture.

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