



MEDIA RELEASE – EMARGOED until Friday 24 April 2026

Winners Announced for The Lester Prize for Portraiture - Youth Awards 2026

Australia's next generation of artistic talent has been recognised, with the winners of **The Lester Prize for Portraiture Youth Awards 2026** announced at a vibrant ceremony at WA Museum Boola Bardip, hosted by Famous Sharron. Bringing together students, families, teachers and supporters from across Australia, the event celebrated the creativity, technical skill and emotional depth of young portrait artists in Years 7 to 12.

Taking out the top honour in the **Year 11–12 category**, **Natali Jaros** (Presbyterian Ladies' College, WA) impressed judges with her pencil-on-paper self-portrait *Embrace*, featuring her sister. Judges Sarah McBride, Casey Temby and Ross Potter praised the work as "a very brave and bold creative execution that pushes the boundaries of traditional portraiture."

Billy Ferguson (Brisbane State High School, QLD) received **Highly Commended** in the same category for *Chasing Bees*, a reflective painting capturing a moment from his childhood.

In the **Year 9–10 category**, **Kayla Braimbridge** (Carine Senior High School, WA) was awarded first prize for *Already at the Party*, a nostalgic and technically accomplished work inspired by Chiaroscuro. Judges commended its strong composition, depth of field and striking use of light. **Lacey Pohle** (Kawana Waters State College, QLD) received **Highly Commended** for her introspective, dream-like painting *Into the Light*.

The **Year 7–8 category** was won by **Laura Niu** (Rossmoyne Senior High School, WA) for *Yesterday's Face*, described by judges as "an artwork beyond its years in maturity, skill and choice of subject matter." **Miriam Sekendy** (John XXIII College, WA) was **Highly Commended** for her technically accomplished pencil drawing *Interrupted Thoughts*.

The inaugural **Montauk Lighting Co. Installers Prize** was awarded to **Idelia Cao** (St Andrew's Cathedral School, NSW) for her contemplative self-portrait *A Moment of Stillness*, recognised for its quiet restraint and sensitivity.

The **Schools' Award** was jointly presented to **Perth Modern School** for **Raadin Ebadi's** powerful charcoal portrait *Determination*, and **CBC Fremantle** for **Bailey Riemann's** dynamic self-portrait *Highlights of the Hustle*. Both schools will receive artist-led workshops delivered by a Lester Prize finalist.

Now in its 19th year, the Youth Awards attracted approximately 300 entries from across the country. Students were invited to submit portraits of Australians they admire or self-portraits, with a total prize pool of over \$6,500 awarded across three age categories.

Executive Director, Shannon Yujnovich said the Youth Awards highlight the depth of emerging artistic talent across the country: "These young artists are telling powerful and deeply personal stories through portraiture. The calibre of work we've seen this year is exceptional, and it's incredibly exciting to support and celebrate the next generation of Australian artists at such an important stage in their creative journey."

Supported by Montauk Lighting Co., Oxlades Art Supplies, The Lester Group, City of Perth, Stan Perron Charitable Foundation and the WA Museum, award winners received a combination of cash prizes and art materials to further their creative practice. Participating schools were also eligible for professional development workshops valued at up to \$1,000.

Finalists' artworks will be exhibited in a free public exhibition from **Friday 24 April to Sunday 19 July 2026** in the Old Gaol at WA Museum Boola Bardip. Now hailed as Australia's richest portrait prize with a total prize pool exceeding \$140,000, entries are still open for **The Lester Prize's Main Awards**. Submissions close **17 June 2026**, with the exhibition to be held from **10 October to 29 November 2026**. For more information, visit: www.lesterprize.com

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LESTER PRIZE YOUTH AWARDS WINNERS		
Yrs 11-12 Winner	Natali Jaros, <i>Embrace</i>	Presbyterian Ladies' College, WA
Yrs 11-12 Highly Commended	Billy Ferguson, <i>Chasing bees</i>	Brisbane State High School, QLD
Yrs 9-10 Winner	Kayla Braimbridge, <i>Already at the party</i>	Carine Senior High School, WA
Yrs 9-10 Highly Commended	Lacey Pohle, <i>Into the light</i>	Kawana Waters State College, QLD
Yrs 7-8 Winner	Laura Niu, <i>Yesterday's face</i>	Rossmoyne Senior High School, WA
Yrs 7-8 Highly Commended	Miriam Sekendy, <i>Interrupted thoughts</i>	John XXIII College, WA
The Montauk Lighting Co. Installers Prize	Idelia Cao, <i>A moment of stillness</i>	St Andrew's Cathedral School, NSW
SCHOOL CATEGORY		
Joint Prize	Raadin Ebadi, <i>Determination</i>	Perth Modern, WA
Joint Prize	Bailey Riemann, <i>Highlights of the hustle,</i>	CBC Fremantle, WA

ABOUT THE LESTER PRIZE FOR PORTRAITURE

The Lester Prize for Portraiture is one of Australia's most prestigious and highly regarded fine art awards, celebrating the creativity, skill, and storytelling of portraiture. Based in Western Australia, the Prize supports artists at all stages of their careers—from emerging and youth artists to established professionals—while engaging the broader community in the power of portraiture to inspire, challenge, and connect.

With a total prize pool exceeding \$140,000, including a main award of \$50,000, The Lester Prize is Australia's richest portrait prize by prize money. Each year, it attracts over 1,000 entries nationwide and draws audiences of more than 25,000 visitors to its exhibition at WA Museum Boola Bardip.

Founded in 2007 as the Black Swan Prize for Portraiture by artist Tina Wilson, the award was rebranded in 2019 as The Lester Prize in honour of Richard Lester, its founding sponsor and long-time supporter. The Prize continues to champion artistic excellence, inclusivity, and community engagement, giving portraiture a national platform that celebrates identity, emotion, and the human experience.

The Lester Prize – Youth Awards nurture the next generation of Australian portrait artists, encouraging high school students nationwide to explore creative expression.

Divided into three age categories—Years 7–8, 9–10, and 11–12—the Awards offer cash, art materials, framing prizes, and school workshops valued at over \$6,500.

Recognised as one of Australia’s leading youth art initiatives, the program helps young artists build confidence, develop technique, and experience exhibiting their work in a professional setting.

The Youth Awards are proudly supported by the City of Perth, Lester Group, Montauk Lighting Co., Oxlades Art Supplies, with additional support from the WA Museum Boola Bardip installation team.