



MEDIA RELEASE

Next generation of portrait artists revealed: 30 Student finalists announced for The Lester Prize Youth Awards 2026

Thirty exceptional young artists from Years 7–12 have been selected as finalists in The Lester Prize Youth Awards, to be presented at the historic Old Gaol within WA Museum Boola Bardip.

Supported by the City of Perth and key partners, this year's Youth Awards attracted a diverse and inspiring range of portrait artist submissions from secondary students across Australia. The selected artworks showcase remarkable talent across a variety of mediums, styles and personal stories.

Finalists have been selected across three categories: Years 7–8, 9–10 and 11–12, with 10 artworks chosen in each group.

The pre-selection panel included First Nations artist Amanda Bell, Lester Prize Finalist Melissa Clements, and WA Museum Events Producer and artist Cedar Rankin Cheek.

Final judging will be undertaken by Lester Prize Finalists Sarah McBride and Ross Potter, alongside artist and former Lester Prize Exhibition Manager Casey Temby. Winners will be announced at the Youth Awards Opening Night on Thursday 23 April, hosted by the ever-popular Famous Sharron.

Finalist artworks will be exhibited in a free public exhibition from Friday 24 April to Sunday 19 July 2026 in the Old Gaol building at WA Museum Boola Bardip.

Throughout the exhibition period, school workshops will be delivered in the Museum's Learning Studios by Lester Prize Finalists Anne McCaughey and Jessica Logan, offering students a unique opportunity to engage directly with practicing artists.

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.”

Entries are still open for the Main Awards - the Lester Prize for Portraiture - with a total prize pool of over \$140K. Submissions close 17 June for artists aged 18 and over, with the exhibition taking place later this year (10 October – 29 November 2026). For more information, visit: <https://www.lesterprize.com>

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

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The Lester Prize

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.

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