

ARTS & CULTURE

weekender.

PRIZES UP FOR GRABS

BY JO COOPER

FINALISTS in the acquisitive annual prize of the Muswellbrook Regional Art Centre, which has grown in recent years to be one of the richest for painting in regional Australia, were announced yesterday.

This year's awards are being adjudicated by the director of Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, Suzanne Cotter.

Among those vying for the \$50,000 painting prize is Sally Anderson, from the Northern Rivers region, who in the past two years has been a finalist in both the S.H. Ervin Gallery's Portia Geach Memorial Award for portraiture and the Art Gallery of NSW's Sulman Prize.

Peter Berner, well-established as a comedian and ABC TV host, is also a contender for the painting award. He has been a finalist in the Archibald Prize. Also a finalist in Muswellbrook's highly competitive painting category is Tony Costa, winner of the Archibald Prize in 2019 for his portrait of contemporary artist Lindy Lee.

Costa had previously been a finalist in the Archibald Prize three times, and has been a finalist in the Wynne Prize twice, the Dobell Prize for Drawing four times, and has also been a finalist in the Sulman Prize.

Newcastle-based Matthew Tome, formerly the head teacher of fine arts at the Newcastle Art School, is also in the running for the painting prize, along with Irish-born artist Michael Cusack, who trained in Newcastle and is the co-founder of the Byron School of Art, at Byron Bay.

Sally Stokes, who won the Muswellbrook Art Prize in 2021, is again a finalist. Her first

solo show, held at Annandale Galleries in 2017, was praised by Pulitzer Prize-winning art critic Sebastian Smee.

Raphe Coombes, formerly of the Hunter Valley and now living in northern NSW, has become a finalist with his painting based on the small town of Wyaliba, which started as a commune in the 1970s and was decimated by the bushfires of 2019.

Local artist Michelle Brodie's painting of her fourth-great-grandmother has also been listed as a finalist. Another local on the finalist list is Amanda Galbraith.

Twice previously a finalist in the Muswellbrook Art Prize, Lise Temple of rural South Australia is again included. Other painting prize finalists include Hunter-based Christopher Dewar, Newcastle-born artist Julia Flanagan, emerging artist Jo Langley of the Blue Mountains, Melbourne musician and painter Lucy Roleff, and contemporary Indigenous artist Sarrita King, of Darwin.

Scone's Teresa Byrne, Newcastle photographer James Rhodes, Newcastle artist Benjamin Gallagher and locally-based painter Jo Shand are among those in the running for the \$10,000 prize for works on paper. Shand previously lived and worked in Sydney's inner-west, and has recently been travelling the west of NSW. Her work is titled *Murrurundi afternoon*. Shand is also a finalist in the prize's ceramics category.

Two works on paper by Melbourne multi-disciplinary artist Chelle Destefano, who won the Lake Art Prize at Lake Macquarie's MAC yapping gallery in 2020, have been selected in the pool of finalists. Destefano, who is deaf, explores deaf culture in her work and the history of oppression experienced by deaf people. One of her finalist works is



Michelle Brodie painting 'Francisium Tiernan 1840'.



Ebony Russell ceramic 'Indecorum - In Confidence Vase & Pedestal Set'.



Finalist Raphe Coombes painting 'Wyaliba'.

titled *A Deaf Lady's Letter to the World*.

Alison Mackay, winner of the Gallipoli Art Prize three years ago, is also contending for the works on paper prize. She has been a finalist in the Portia Geach portrait prize seven times, and been hung in the Archibald and Sulman prizes.

Finalists in the \$10,000 ceramics prize include locals Kara Wood, Nicola Bolton and Sharon Taylor. Sydney-based ceramicist Ebony Russell is also a finalist, with her work inspired by cake decoration. Winners of the prize will be announced on February 25 at the opening of the exhibition.

The Muswellbrook Art Prize began in 1958. One of its first winners was Fred Williams, who became one of Australia's most successful landscape artists, and was the first Australian to have a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Elissa Emerson, of the Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre, says the winning works will become part of the Muswellbrook Shire Art Collection. She says that the prize, which has been sponsored for almost three decades by Bengalla Mining Company, "has yielded an excellent collection of modern and contemporary" Australian art.

Newcastle gallery still in the picture

BY JIM KELLAR

THE Newcastle Art Gallery may have its doors closed, but there is still action going on.

The gallery launched a six-part podcast, *Conversations from the Collection*, in January featuring gallery audience lead Zana Kobayashi in conversation with six artists.

Each episode dives into a different collection area of the Newcastle Art Gallery to uncover hidden stories and connect with artists who have contributed to the significance of collection.

The first series includes conversations



Virginia Cuppaidge features in *Conversations from the Collection*.

Invitation for outdoor art

Gallery as the project takes the next step towards construction.

Newcastle Art Gallery will commission four new works of art to be displayed on the hoarding (temporary fencing) erected around the site for the duration of the construction work, which is on track to begin mid-year.

An expression of interest for artists was launched by Newcastle Art Gallery, coinciding with City of Newcastle opening a tender for the four contractors shortlisted to complete the main construction works.

"It's wonderful to kick off the new year with two important milestones for this much-anticipated project continuing on time towards the planned completion of

Nelmes said in a press release.

"Given the site's prominent location in the heart of our city, the construction hoarding project offers a unique opportunity for established or emerging artists to reach new audiences while also improving the external view of the work zone.

"I can't wait to see the calibre of concepts proposed by artists during this expression of interest period, and also look forward to the successful construction company and timelines being confirmed at a future council meeting following the tender process."

Local and national artists and collectives working in all mediums are invited to apply for this project, with the chosen works of art to be digitally reproduced for display on