

Mosman Art Prize
2007

60th Anniversary

Judge's Report by Deborah Edwards
Senior Curator of Australian Art, Art Gallery of NSW.

It has been a real pleasure to judge the 2007 Mosman Art Prize. One of the benefits for a curator in a state art institution in judging this Prize exhibition is to gain a renewed sense of the extraordinary levels of creative activity at work in the community. People of all ages, walks of life and professions are clearly engaged in creative endeavours which run in perhaps wider channels than those a curator might experience in the normal course of the working week.

It was fascinating to see the clusters of interests currently manifested across the diverse ranges of works examined. Under the framework of painting, which is an increasingly and productively open category, the work of still life painters, portraitists, and abstract and landscape painters indicate that hyper-realism, gestural and geometric abstraction, academic figuration, naïve art, even luminetics for example, all remain important sources for such contemporary practice. So too in evidence, is a strong interest in the fusions or blurring of boundaries between painting, assemblage, collage, printing and drawing.

This year's 60th anniversary exhibition – offering a larger Prize of \$20,000 - saw over 800 entries, which not only resulted in a long and pleasurable judging experience, but indicates the very substantial level of support for the institution which is the 'Mosman Art Prize' from both local and non-local artists.

My award of the 2007 Mosman Art Prize to **James Powditch** for his work, '*Butterfly effects*' brings to the permanent Mosman collection a standout contemporary artwork by a consistently substantial and versatile artist, and also holds to the Mosman Council and Gallery's desire, with this prize, to support significant artists in the development of their careers. Powditch is well known for inventive, witty and sometimes provocative works forged under a contemporary pop-aesthetic and incorporating painting, assemblage, collage, and screen-printing. In *Butterfly effects* he has produced a beautiful, tightly structured aesthetic rumination on the transformative effects of small occurrences (the flutter of a butterfly's wings) into larger and frequently unpredictable events. A delicate painted tracery of a butterfly provides the visual anchor for a stylish orchestration of photographs of Australian suburbia, pages from a Pelican soft-cover ('A History of Modern China') and Chinese packing crates - through which Powditch engages with the growing concern over climate change and the relationships which may exist between the Australian dream and contemporary Chinese realities.

Powditch's strong sense of design and firm craftsmanship are evident in a work where success ultimately lies in the understated yet astute relationships which are established between materials, the material thing, and the conceptual density of his art.

The commendation prize was won by South coast artist **Paul Ryan** with his energised painting, *'The Headlands, looking East'*. I have enjoyed the painterly qualities of Paul Ryan's previous Chardin-influenced still lifes of the late 1990s, and equally enjoy his more recent Thirroul landscapes. The artist, who I believe has publicly spoken about his growing affinity with the light, atmosphere and forms of the south coast environment, has produced in this thickly impastoed and atmospheric painting, an excellent example of his current concerns.

The Allan Gamble Memorial Art Prize for the theme of the built environment was awarded to **Peter O'Doherty** for his painting *'Maroubra beach flats'*. This ordinary scene, reduced to a fragment of sight and presented in its essentials only, reveals itself as both a slice of suburban life and a distilled geometric abstraction – arranged in softened planes of light, shade, line and colour. In this sense, the painting exists – as do many of O'Doherty's journeys through suburban landscapes – within the productive and enigmatic spaces opened out between formal exploration and depictions of the real.

The work of a number of younger artists in the Mosman Art Prize was particularly strong, with several serious contenders for the House of Phillips Fine Art Young Emerging artist's award. The award went to **Laura Jones** for her painting, *'Nikki'*, a quirky portrait in vibrant colours and acid green background which reveals Jones technical prowess as a painter, her sophistication as a colourist, and her capacity to engender mood and character in the portrait form.

I congratulate all entrants in the 2007 Mosman Art Prize.

Deborah Edwards
July 2007