



Auckland Art Gallery MEDIA RELEASE For Immediate Use: 14 April 2008

The finalists for New Zealand's richest and most prestigious contemporary art award have been decided.

The \$50,000 Walters Prize, similar to the Tate's Turner Prize, is awarded for an outstanding contribution to contemporary art in New Zealand in the past two years. Previous winners were Francis Upritchard in 2006 for *Doomed, Doomed, All Doomed*, et al. in 2004 for *restricted access* and Yvonne Todd in 2002 for *Asthma and Eczema*.

Named in honour of artist Gordon Walters, the prize was established in 2002 by founding benefactors and principal donors Erika and Robin Congreve and Jenny Gibbs to make contemporary art a more widely recognised and debated feature of New Zealand cultural life.

2008 FINALISTS

Edith Amituanai nominated for *Déjeuner 2007*, shown at Anna Miles Gallery, Auckland.

Lisa Reihana for *Digital Marae 2007*, shown at Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth.

John Reynolds for *Cloud 2006*, shown at the Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Peter Robinson for *ACK 2006*, shown at Artspace, Auckland.

Each finalist will receive \$5,000 thanks to major donor Dayle Mace. They were selected by a jury of four experts appointed by the Auckland Art Gallery.

Auckland Art Gallery Director Chris Saines says "The Walters Prize set out to focus on the contemporary work but it unconditionally celebrates the contemporary artist. Eight years and four prize exhibitions on, the artists who have participated in the prize are, without exception, continuing to push out and to re-shape contemporary New Zealand art. It has proven an incredibly reliable core sampler of our best new work."

JURY

Jon Bywater - Programme Leader for Critical Studies at Elam School of Fine Art, The University of Auckland.

Elizabeth Caldwell - Senior Art Curator at Te Papa Tongarewa.

Andrew Clifford - curator at Gus Fisher Gallery, The University of Auckland, freelance writer and broadcaster.

Rhana Devenport - director of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

INTERNATIONAL JUDGE

The international judge for the 2008 prize will be named later this year. They will select the winner, announced at a gala dinner in late October. The winner will receive \$50,000 and an all expenses paid trip to New York, including the opportunity to exhibit their work at Saatchi & Saatchi's world headquarters.

The 2006 Walters Prize judge, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, is currently chief curator at the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art in Turin and is curating the 2008 Sydney Biennale.

JURY STATEMENT

"In looking at artwork made since the last Walters Prize, we sought to identify those exhibitions that have done the most to focus and to steer the concerns of art and the way it is discussed in Aotearoa New Zealand. The four finalists have done this by making refined presentations reflecting art making strategies that have particular resonance now. For the first time, two artists previously selected have made the final four. Their new bodies of work represent significant developments in practices already noted by previous jurors for their prominence in the national art conversation. A long short list was finally reduced to a swarm of single-word paintings, sculpture that punches its way through a wall, photographs that show us pro rugby players working in Europe, and an installation that depicts the demi-god Maui riding a surf board"

EDITH AMITUANAI

Born 1980 Auckland

Lives in Auckland

Graduated in 2005 with a Bachelor of Design, majoring in photography from Unitec

2007 Inaugural recipient of Marti Friedlander Photography Award

Nominated for *Déjeuner* (2007)

Jury comment: "**Edith Amituanai's** modest and generous photographs, part formal portrait, part casual snapshot, reflect her engagement with communal and personal rituals, family intimacies and the subtle way traditions mutate. *Déjeuner* is a layered, insightful commentary on transpositions of a 'third culture' that investigates new global labour and economic exchange systems, enmeshed with the legacy of generations of displacement and migration. Her subjects are New Zealand Samoans who today play professional rugby in Europe. These images - taken 'at home' and 'on the field' in Montpellier, France and in Parma, Italy - offer a powerful insight into the lives newly forged by these elite sportsmen, lives that encompass performance expectations, distant memories of family and a shifting connection to the conception of 'home'."

LISA REIHANA

Born 1964 Auckland

Lives in Auckland

Graduated in 1987 with a Bachelor of Fine Art (BFA) from Elam School of Fine Arts, The University of Auckland.

Represented New Zealand in the 2000 Biennale of Sydney

Nominated for *Digital Marae* (2001-2007)

Jury comment: "**Lisa Reihana's** *Digital Marae* is conceived as a project that will evolve over a further two decades. Already, though, its combination of originality and surety make it a globally significant landmark in the articulation of indigenous narratives through new media. Large photographs represent Maori ancestral figures as pouwhenua, the carvings or sometimes paintings in a Maori marae. *Digital Marae's* most recent form incorporated a new suite of male and takatapui (cross-gendered) figures, giving the house they erect within the gallery the gender balance traditional in marae construction. The bold but intricate depictions negotiate the contemporary space of their creation and their ancient subject matter with a cinematic immediacy and allure."

JOHN REYNOLDS

Born 1956 Auckland

Lives in Auckland

Graduated in 1978 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Elam School of Fine Arts, The University of Auckland

2006 New Zealand Arts Foundation Laureate award

Nominated for *Cloud* (2006)

Jury comment: "For **John Reynolds**, playing with scale means working big without becoming weighty. With his 2006 Sydney Biennale work *Cloud*, he clearly had mastered this game, assembling a silvery field of more than 7000 canvases that are both monumental and ephemeral in the way they occupy space, causing viewers to navigate the work as if floating through it rather than being intimidated by it. As subject matter goes, it doesn't get much more ambitious than tackling the identity politics of language by representing an entire lexicon, deriving his text from Harry Orsman's *The Oxford Dictionary of New Zealand English* 1997. For Reynolds, language is a lot like precipitation, floating around us in a constant state of flux, dispersing and condensing in new ways that can characterise a culture. This continues his ongoing negotiation of the way metaphysical constructs such as language (or mark-making) can manifest in or occupy a landscape, as demonstrated by the signposts of his 2002 Walters Prize finalist work *Harry Human Heights*.

PETER ROBINSON

Born 1966 Ashburton

Lives in Auckland

Graduated 1989 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Ilam School of Fine Arts, Canterbury University, Christchurch

Represented New Zealand in 49th Venice Biennale in 2001

Nominated for *Ack* (2006)

Jury comment: "**Peter Robinson's** *Ack* confidently and assertively investigates and animates space, material and form — its exuberant presence engages the viewer in a confrontation verging on physical. Robinson's practice regularly critically examines the structures of cultural politics. *Ack*, however, adopts a more ambiguous position, offering forms that are at once playful, powerfully raw and seductive. The enigmatic title makes comic reference to the call of a duck and has a fictional German quality that conjures meanings relating to the land and to colloquial expressions. In 2006 *Ack* occupied Artspace at the same time Robinson's *The Humours* was shown in the last Walters Prize exhibition. *Ack* announced itself immediately as a work equally worthy of this award."

Exhibition opens: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki New Gallery, 13 September to 23 November 2008

Images of artists and their works are available. Artist CVs also available.

For more information:

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