

2019 Judge's awards speech

Kia ora, thank you Maree (Maddock). And Kia ora John (Maihi) for your karakia.

I'd like acknowledge the iwi of Whanganui, a special place that is home to a special river, as well as all of the peoples who have come to call this place home over the years, from near and far. Especially the gallery staff and colleagues who've looked after me so well over the last few days, Greg, Greg, and the rest of the team. Your worship, the mayor. And the award sponsors.

It would be easy to assume that regional review exhibitions can be relatively similar affairs. Like the Portage Ceramic Awards, which we host every year at Te Uru, an open call for works can result in an eye-watering mix of submissions, essentially unhindered by interference from the curators, critics and art historians, who usually control what gets into a gallery. The result is a great diversity of unfiltered artworks that were never intended to co-exist, and that can be a daunting prospect to try to make sense of.

But this egalitarian approach, where Jamie from school may end up sharing a wall with well-established masters, is a big part of the appeal of these events. As are the surprise gems that surface from artists that nobody else knew about – joining the usual suspects from the national circuit are makers that are busy working in back sheds and on kitchen tables just down the road. Art is not just a spectator sport, and it's important to come together with events like this one, to celebrate the full breadth of people actively engaged in creative activities.

For some years now, I've been hearing a buzz about the good things happening here in Whanganui. It's a city with a deep history and an exciting future. So I was delighted when Sarjeant Gallery curator, Greg Donson, contacted me to see if I could judge the 2019 pattillo Whanganui Arts Review. This could be an interesting gig, I thought, and it's overdue that I got down there to check out the action. So thank you for having me – I hope I'm still welcome after tonight's announcements.

Before I get into the presentation of awards, I must note that I was spoilt for choice from the works submitted so narrowing it down to 11 awards, which sounds like a generous number, was no easy task. I started by reducing my selection to what I thought were just a few favourites until I realised I still had more than 30 to choose from. I eventually got it a little closer to the quantity required but there were still a few I was struggling to let go. So I would like to quickly make a special mention of five artists that stood out and hung in there to the very end – Brit Bunkley, Emma Camden, Andrea Gardner, Jack Burrows and Lily Claypole. Especially Jack and Lily who were candidates for the youth award but were genuine contenders alongside everybody else.

And so onto the Merit Awards... if each winner could please come up to the stage by the stairs on your right, pause for your photo, and then exit on the left, not forgetting to grab your award on the way through... and please look out for details in your winners' packs of a special sponsor's morning tea tomorrow...

So here we go, seven merit awards in no particular order...

For a finely crafted chain of pruned, sawn, sanded and drilled tree branches, the Friends of the Sarjeant Gallery Merit Award goes to Frances Stachl for *If Not Now, Then When?*

For a deceptively well-controlled construction of oozing ceramic textures, the Recaffeinate Merit Award goes to Andrea du Chatenier for *Signal*.

For a striking and well-executed update of a famous Gainsborough painting, the Renata's Art & Framing Merit Award goes to Catherine Sleyer for *The Blue Boy*.

This next work mixes personal anecdote and social commentary through a distinctive use of photographic technologies. The Rivercity Picture Framers Ltd Merit Award goes to Rita Dibert for *Mousewheel: Contemporary Life*.

The winner of the Wanganui Garden Services Ltd Merit Award is awarded for an absolutely charming painting that makes efficient use of line and colour for a captivating botanical study. It's Emily Wrigglesworth for *Kowhai Yellow*.

Our next award winner has produced a layered and striking political and cultural commentary with a well-integrated mix of media and sources. The Whanganui River Markets Trust Merit Award goes to Thompson Kiwikiwi for *Kupapa or Kaupapa?*

The last award in this section is for the exquisite detailing and crafting of an enigmatic pair of objects that look like functional precision tools but I couldn't tell you what they're for and, if they were mine, I'd be happy just holding and admiring them. The WH Milbank Gallery Merit Award goes to Kieran Donnelly for *Objects for a Modern World*.

There is one more merit award, which is the WDC Youth Committee Youth Recognition Award, and I would like to invite a representative of the committee to help with this presentation.

Engaging youth in cultural activities makes a really significant contribution to the future wellbeing of any city, so having a special category in the Whanganui Arts Review to encourage participation is a terrific initiative. We didn't look at these separately and what I've seen submitted for this section is work that is as good as anything else in the competition. I was impressed by the strong representation of artists vying for this award. That's a good sign of a healthy, creative community. As I've already said, several came very close to winning an award, irrespective of being in a special category.

The winner for this award is a distinctive and quirky portrait that is also well balanced in colour and composition. Like many others, it caught my eye for its originality well before I realised it was a youth entrant. The winner of the WDC Youth Committee Youth Recognition Award is Rose Hird for *Rohi*.

Innovation and originality also characterise our top three awards tonight. First up, the Dalgleish Architects Excellence Award. I believe Craig Dalgleish is here to make the presentation.

This artist's work is immediately identifiable, consistently working within specific parameters. But they also manage to retain an element of invention and surprise mixed with a dash of humour for good measure. Often defying our expectations of form and function, we can't help but wonder how it works and how it's made.

The winner of the Dagleish Architects Excellence Award is Rick Rudd for Teapot.

Many of the sentiments associated with the previous work also ring true for the winner of the Central City Pharmacy Excellence Award, and I'd like to welcome Louise Barnicoat to make this presentation.

Form and function wrestle with our understanding of materials in relation to seemingly familiar objects. With a virtuosic approach to technique, there is a sleight of hand that makes us question our assumptions of the everyday items that surround us.

The Central City Pharmacy Excellence Award goes to Glen Hayward for his Fountain Solomon Guggenheim New York 2017.

And so we now come to the pivotal moment in the evening when we announce the 2019 pattillo Whanganui Arts Review Open Award. Maree Maddock from pattillo is here to present the award.

Like my usual base of Titirangi, on the outskirts of Auckland, Whanganui has long been renowned as a mecca for craft artists, and our final award tonight caps off an impressive list of artists who demonstrate that a diversity of craft practices and experimentation are flourishing in this region.

This is another artist with an established practice who continues to push into new territory, and to explore new approaches. This work uses digital technology, not to finesse something into an unnatural perfection, but to look at the qualities of being digital. The resulting artefacts, glitches and gridded frameworks allow the object to break down in interesting ways that play with scale and materiality to question the kind of scaffolding we use to construct images and objects.

The winner of the 2019 pattillo Whanganui Arts Review Open Award is Kathryn Wightman for *Austin*

Andrew Clifford

Director of Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery