

Archibald prize 2022: Blak Douglas wins \$100,000 for portrait of Lismore artist Karla Dickens

The unanimous decision was announced on Friday at the Art Gallery of NSW, where all finalists will be exhibited from 14 May



Moby Dickens: Blak Douglas' 2022 Archibald prize-winning portrait of Karla Dickens.

Kelly Burke *and* Steph Harmon
Fri 13 May 2022

Acclaimed Dhungatti artist Blak Douglas – born Adam Douglas Hill – has won the 2022 Archibald prize, for his portrait of Wiradjuri artist Karla Dickens, titled *Moby Dickens*.

Douglas collected the \$100,000 prize on Friday, at the Art Gallery of NSW. It's the second time an Indigenous Australian has won the prize in 101 years, after Vincent Namatjira in 2020.

Dickens, who is based on Bundjalung country in Lismore, is painted holding drenched and leaking buckets while standing ankle-deep in flood water.

“Karla is my favourite female First Nations artist, we are dear friends, we are birds of a feather when it comes to our sentiment in art, and I really admire the way she pieces together her work,” Douglas said in a statement.

“I was there in Lismore immediately after the first deluge ... and saw the shock and horror on people’s faces. Karla had just reached a pivotal point in her career and almost immediately the flood catastrophe happened. So, when she should have ordinarily been excited about where her career was going, she was harbouring three families in Lismore as part of her own rescue mission.”

The murky waters he painted represent more than the devastating floods that claimed more than 3,600 homes in the northern rivers region earlier this year.

“I see them as a metaphor for the art world,” Douglas told press at the announcement.

“You have to take a swim across a murky estuary to find your goal ... and the leaking buckets is a metaphor for the 50% commission that somebody has set in the landscape of art, which can make it very hard when you’re an emerging artist and you’re climbing a ladder to get to the next tier.”

Dickens’ expression, which appears to be something of a cross between anger, fear and determination, “encaptures how Lismore is feeling about the incredibly lacklustre efforts of the current government in dealing out crisis relief,” he said.

The 14 flat-bottomed clouds behind her represent the numbers of days and nights that the first flood lasted in Lismore. At 3m by 2m, it’s the largest painting on show at the Archibald exhibition.

Douglas has been an Archibald finalist five times and a Wynne finalist twice. “As Ben Quilty told me, just keep entering and eventually you’ll win,” the artist joked.

Taking aim at the Archibald’s long history of hanging portraits painted by white men depicting white men, until very recently, he described his win as a “double whammy”.

Jude Rae was highly commended for her portrait of inventor and engineer Dr Saul Griffith.

Nicholas Harding won the \$50,000 Wynne prize for landscape painting of Australian scenery or figurative sculpture, with his oil on linen work Eora. Harding has been a Wynne finalist nine times – and is a 19-time finalist of the Archibald prize. Juz Kitson and Lucy Culliton were both highly commended for the Wynne.

The \$40,000 Sulman prize for best subject painting, genre painting or mural project in oil, acrylic, watercolour or mixed media, was won by Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro for Raikō and Shuten-dōji, a rendering of the fight between the warrior Raikō and the demon Shuten-dōji, painted on the fuselage of a Vietnam War-era helicopter.



Blak Douglas stands with his Archibald prize-winning portrait, Moby Dickens.

On 5 May Sydney-based artist Claus Stangl won the Archibald's packing room prize – judged by those who unpack and hang the portraits – for his 3D-style portrait of New Zealand film director, writer and actor Taika Waititi.

It was the final pick from head packer Brett Cuthbertson, who is retiring after 41 years with the gallery.



Eora by Nicholas Harding won the 2022 Wynne prize.

The Waititi portrait is among 52 hung in this year's exhibition, including paintings of Helen Garner, Benjamin Law, Peter Garrett and Courtney Act; they were chosen from a selection of more than 800 entries, in a prize judged by the art gallery's trustees.

Twenty Indigenous artists entered the Archibald – a record for the prize – and there were 27 Indigenous finalists among the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes.

This year's Archibald finalist exhibition also includes five vibrant works from Studio A: a Sydney collective of artists with intellectual disability who have had their most successful year to date.

The finalists in all three prizes will be exhibited at the Art Gallery of NSW from 14 May to 28 August 2022.