

STATE OF THE ART



Figure 1 *The Gods Had No Mouths* by Myangah Pirate



Figure 2 *Bone Bowls* by Patrice Cooke

Art Competitions

Most artists all look at art competitions and are tempted to enter, but how many enter full of optimism and low on the checking of the details? How much is it really costing when you take into account the entry fee, which you have to pay even if your work is not selected, the freight and / or petrol, administration time and costing, including analysing the selection criteria and who is doing the judging. If you get selected and even manage to sell your work how much commission do the organisers take and if you do not sell, there is the freight home. If it is acquisitive and you do win does the prize meet or better your price. What is a win or even being included in the exhibition, worth on your CV?

In some art competitions the hang is so numerous that paintings can be three or four high and cover all available space and it must be asked how is it possible for any judge to meaningfully select the best painting out of what is really a jumble of visual competitiveness. What criteria do the judge or judges use? Some artist judges select the entry that best conforms to their style of art, others try to select a work they estimate will please the local audience. In some cases, particularly a certain judge drawn from the “Halls of Academia”, you can only assume that the winner was selected via a version of spin the bottle.

A number of artists are firmly against entering competitions, and suggest that artists would all be better off if all the money involved was paid into a central account and used to support art and artists –a utopian vision indeed.

As a friend, who by the way offers an art prize through his own gallery, has said “Artists should go and buy themselves the entry fee equivalent in lottery tickets and they would have a better chance of winning.”

Though all in all, artists will still enter art competitions, they are human, they like to get their work out of the studio and on display and to have the chance to compare their offering to their peers’.

Sculpture in the Valley 2013 was held as a part of the Arts in the Valley festival held in May. The prizes are in two parts, \$10,000 first prize for an outdoor work and \$3,000 for an indoor work. The outdoor works were displayed in the spectacular garden at Wombat Hill, Bellawongarah, a very steep site with lots of water features and advanced plantings. It is at once both ideal for outdoor sculpture and offers competition to any sculpture. The entries this

year were the usual mix, and despite the size of the garden it is still difficult to place so many sculptures and give each the space they require to look their best. The winning work by Julie Love, *Boat People*, on the ground alongside a pond would have benefited from some elevation. The sculpture I thought best fitted into the garden, almost as if it had grown there, was *Bone Bowls* by Patrice Cooke, three superb organic pieces nestled in a garden under the canopy. Randall Sinnamon's tribute to the late south coast sculptor Ian Gentle, *Shopping Trolley Creek*, a much more subtle piece than his sculpture which had won a previous Valley sculpture competition, worked really well in the finer detail than it did from a distance. The indoor sculpture prize was taken out by Myangah Pirate with *The Gods Had No Mouths*, two pieces finely rendered in leather, moulded plastic, deer fur and echidna quills. Lesley Prosser's *Interiors II* was a solid but finely balanced work in painted steel, while Maria So Jung Kim's entry was a delicate steel drawing in space.

Paths to Fulfilment : Shoalhaven Mental Health Fellowship Open Annual Art Competition 2013 was held at the Shoalhaven City Arts Centre in June. While this competition is "open to all artists", in reality it is a community event and open to anyone who wants to enter, there are no particular categories and the organisers endeavour to hang every entry. And this is evident in the very crowded hang, if that term can be used when one large entry is left on the floor leaning against the wall. We were also informed that a large number of entries were left out for lack of space. It would probably be better if the event was moved across the street to the historic and very handsome Nowra School of Arts building. All entries could be hung and displayed to advantage. The competition would also benefit if a few entry and hanging categories were introduced; something like 'artists', 'community' and 'children' would be a good start. While the current competition can be looked at as a fun community event it does nothing to encourage a high standard of art and quality entries by artists are few and far between and those few good works are lost amongst the rest. The judging did at least pick out Vlad Barac's *Shedding Layers* as the winning entry as well as acknowledging one of the children's entries, Joshua Carrig's excellent *Self Portrait* (Figure 3) which had qualities reminiscent of Joy Hester's portraits. There was also a well made assemblage / art work, not hung to the best advantage, entered by Jillian Naidu whose solo exhibition of her excellent art was in the Foyer Gallery of the Arts Centre during the same period.



Figure 3 *Self Portrait*
by Joshua Carrig

The **Ulladulla EscapeARTfest** will soon be upon us, 21 September through to 6 October, along with their round of prizes and awards including the Shoalhaven Open Art Prize, Youth Art Prize, RIPE Sculpture at Cupitt's Winery and various poetry, literature, music and photography competitions. Entry details can be checked on their website

<http://escapeartfest.info/art-prizes.html>

Keep a watch out for the exhibition of finalists in the **Jervis Bay & Basin Arts 2013 Contemporary Art Exhibition and Shoalhaven Contemporary Art Prize**, which is scheduled to be held in the Main Gallery, Shoalhaven City Arts Centre from 6 September to 2 October 2013.

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