

2016 Libris Awards Artspace Mackay

The contemporary artists book is characterised by boundless freedom – it has absorbed many conceptual frameworks, many art mediums and technologies and goes across the spectrum of the senses – in the exhibition, sight, sound, smell and touch.

The enlightened policies of the Mackay Regional Council made Mackay a national centre for Australian Artists Books in 1995; with the opening of Artspace Mackay in 2003, the Council received the Tate Adams' gift of several hundred artists books and works on paper and, since 2006, the Libris Awards have kept this gift alive. In 2016, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Libris Awards, we are having the fifth Libris Awards and what a great celebration this has become. Out of a much larger number of entries, 70 finalists have been selected by the curatorial staff of Artspace Mackay – and to be a finalist is already to be a winner and a member of an elite group. So congratulations to all of the finalists!

My task has been a thrilling honour – going through all of selected finalists and selecting the recipients for the three major prizes:

1) **Artspace Mackay Foundation Youth and Student Artists Book Award.**

This \$2000 acquisitive prize is targeted at people under 26 or still studying in an undergraduate visual arts course. This is an award that is about taking risks, a punt and choosing the unexpected, the promising and the challenging. It is literally a once in a lifetime opportunity for an emerging artist to gain national recognition plus a handy fistful of dollars. I selected the work by the 25-year-old Brisbane-based artist, Brooke Ferguson and her *The Small Garden (for M.S.)* The MS stands for the wonderful veteran artist, Madonna Staunton, where young Brooke Ferguson was inspired by a poem by Staunton and with gouache, pen and ink and pencil has created a fragile concertina – a beautiful sensibility from a promising young artist.

2) **Mackay Regional Council Regional Artists Book Award**

This prize is designed to foster artists in this local area – Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac regions of Queensland. Here the competition was very tight – there is something in the drinking water in these regions that encourages creativity. The highly commended, or runner-up entries in this category are by Denise Vanderlugt and her *I used to wrap rainbows* – a wonderful veteran artist with a sculptural installation, and the local artist, Jo Mitchell's *For Mary* – a wacky children's tale that is quite beautiful on many levels. As much as one fought the temptation, the \$2,500 award had to go to the local artist, May-Britt Mosshamer and her effective piece *Tapping the knowledge*. In art you can say very important things with a bit of humour in your back pocket. This work is all about the flood of information and the drought in knowledge.

3) **Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal National Artists Book Award \$10,000 Acquisitive Award.**

Here the judge's job becomes impossible as any of about a dozen artists with major national reputations and brilliant work could be credibly awarded the prize. As highly commended, or runner-up entries I need to mention the Melbourne-based artists, Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison's brilliant, challenging and impossible to display *Closer to Natural*; the Sydney-based Monica Oppen's conceptually challenging *Metropolis*, the Brisbane-based Tim Moseley and his *Kange pholu wanda*, which could give you many years of joy and puzzlement and the classic Peter Lyssiotis's *Blind Spot* and his ode and lament for a tree. After much soul-searching I decided to allot the winning entry for the major prize to a collaborative and fabulous artists book by two Melbourne-based artists, George Matoulas and Angela Cavalieri, with the text by the novelist and playwright Antoni Jach, titled *Europa to Oceania*. The three linocuts are by Angela, the three collographs are by George and there are another two collaborative foldout prints. The two artists, one of Greek extraction, the other from Calabria in Italy, with wit, profundity and beauty explore the migrant experience at a time when the Australian social fabric is under stress with the question of refugees and migration.

It has been a humbling honour to be invited to judge the 2016 Libris Awards.

Sasha Grishin 27 viii 2016