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Canberra-based portrait wins national prize

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FORMER Canberran Lee Grant has won the National Photographic Portrait Prize with her piece “Charlie”, which depicts a young resident, who lives in a social housing complex for vulnerable people in Ainslie.



Lee Grant wins the National Photographic Portrait Prize with her piece “Charlie”.

Ms Grant’s piece was followed by Filomena Rizzo’s portrait, “My Olivia”, which was named Highly Commended and features Olivia, a young girl who experiences strong feelings and urges but with patience and the maturing of chemicals in her brain outgrew these impulses.

Senior curator at the Portrait Gallery and co-judge of this year’s prize, Dr Christopher Chapman says it was the power of humanness that shone through in the two award-winning portraits.

“It’s a big deal to make it through to the final exhibition selection and with my fellow judges Petrina Hicks and Robert Cook, I was looking closely at how the portraits spoke to me, how they conveyed their story uniquely,” Dr Chapman says.

“As the possible winners came into view from within a very strong field, it felt like we were distilling something of the essence of portraiture, and the winning portraits possessed that essence for us.”

Co-judge and photographer Petrina Hicks says it felt as though the distilling process was to extract truth - and that they narrowed down the images that felt true.

The other co-judge, Robert Cook, who is also the Art Gallery of Western Australia curator appreciates that both works depict a young individual making their own way in their lives and into the wider world.



"My Olivia", by Melbourne's Filomena Rizzo was named highly commended

"It's like both subjects are facing futures that are uncertain," he says. "And they're doing so bravely. It's the bravery that you have when you're afraid, when you yourself might crumble and you figure there's only a fifty-fifty shot at making it through."

"What the artists have done here is present this dilemma, one we all get on some level, with compassion, without artifice and without false heroics," Mr Cook says.

Winner Lee Grant says she is both thrilled and honoured at the news of her win and can't quite put into words how grateful she is.

"I have been a Canberra girl for most of my life, so there is an extra personal significance in being able to share this work in my old hometown in one of the country's most esteemed and respected institutions," Ms Grant says.

"An acknowledgement like this is massive and will encourage me to keep going and to keep sharing stories that are important to me and that I believe deserve to be in the national conversation."

Ms Grant will receive \$30,000 cash from the Portrait Gallery, lighting equipment from Profoto to the value of \$15,000 and paper supplies from Ilford to the value of \$5000.

As for the Highly Commended to Victorian photographer Filomena Rizzo, she says she didn't see the real significance of her image until some weeks later.

"The portrait of Olivia was taken in the Redwood Forest, a very magical place," she says.

"The image shows vulnerability and sadness, but mostly I see strength and a bond only we two share. My girls are by far my greatest teachers.

"The portrait has come from a very personal space and time. When you put so much into an image and share it, it is wonderful that others see it. I am truly humbled and grateful to have won Highly Commended."

Ms Rizzo will receive an EIZO monitor valued up to \$4000.

People's Choice voting opens from today, March 23, allowing the public to vote for their favourite image online or in person.

The National Photographic Portrait Prize opens to the public on Saturday, March 24 and is on display until Sunday, June 17, before it tours around Australia. For venues and ticketing information visit nppp.portrait.gov.au.

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