

STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 18 MAY 3:00 PM

CASULA POWERHOUSE ANNOUNCES THE WINNERS OF THE 68TH BLAKE PRIZE FOR ART AND POETRY

Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre (CPAC) congratulates the extraordinary artists and poet whom the judges have selected, from among 600 entries and 57 finalists, as the winners of the three art prizes and one poetry prize that together constitute the 68th Blake Prize. The winners will be publicly announced on May 18, at 3 PM at the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.

The Blake Prize is one of Australia's longest standing and most prestigious art prizes for local and international contemporary artists who explore spirituality and religion. The 68th Blake Prize exhibition is on display at Casula Powerhouse until July 7, 2024.

- **The winner of the 68th Blake Art Prize, with its \$35,000 cash prize, is Shireen Taweel.**

Taweel is a Sydney based multidisciplinary artist whose practice draws on speculative futurisms and alternative histories and involves artisan techniques applied in conceptual ways. Taweel's works have been widely exhibited in notable institutions, most notably In the Inner Bark of Trees at SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin (2023). For more detailed information on the winners, their works, and judges' comments please see the attachment.

Taweel's winning installation, titled *Shoe Bathers*, conjures up the sensory relationship between body, mind, and religion in a hammam. A hammam is a place of public bathing associated with the Islamic world, which are known to serve both civic and religious functions.

The installation includes two timber packing crates stacked with aromatic olive oil soaps. These hand-made soaps draw the mind to the softened marble walls of the hammam and invite audiences to consider how the walls and stones of the hammam have been shaped by centuries of water passing across contours of bather's bodies.

Resting upon the soaps are two pairs of copper sculptures which mimic bathing shoes. The shoes are pierced and engraved with heritage motifs and illustrations of bathing practices. The fragrant ambience of this installation draws attention to the transformation which often takes place during the sensory act of bathing rituals.

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- **The winner of the Blake Emerging Artist Prize, with its \$6,000 cash prize: Tina Stefanou**

Tina Stefanou is a Greek-Australian artist, performer, and researcher living on unceded Wurundjeri country in Wattle Glen, Victoria. She draws on her background as a vocalist to work with and across a diverse range of mediums.

Stefanou's single-channel video work, with sound, *Backbreeding*, 2023. It intertwines vocal workshops, community rituals, and farm practices to delve into the significance of grain and wool within a Wheatbelt community in rural Western Australia.

- **The winner of the Blake Established Artist Residency and Exhibition is Yhonnie Scarce. As part of her prize, the artist receives a residency and solo exhibition at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre.**

Yhonnie Scarce, a Kokatha and Nukunu artist based in Fitzroy (VIC). Her interdisciplinary practice explores the political and aesthetic nature of glass and photography, often referencing the ongoing effects of colonisation and removal on Aboriginal people. Scarce's work is seen in the collections of many of the world's most prestigious museums, including the Tate Gallery London, National Gallery of Victoria, and Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, among others.

Scarce's installation work, *Koonibba, South Australia*, includes 40 hand-blown glass bush yams presented in front of an image screen-printed on calico and reflects on the introduction of the Christian Missions in South Australia.

- **The winner of the Blake Poetry Prize, with its \$5,000 cash prize is Coco X. Huang.**

Coco X. Huang is a Chinese-Australian writer, musician, and scientist. She creates interdisciplinary works that challenge and extend conventional forms. Huang has performed at the National Young Writers' Festival (2023) and Sydney Festival (2021), was shortlisted for the Woollahra Digital Literary Award (2020) and received a Faber Writing Academy scholarship (2020).

Her winning poem is titled 'Three Lessons.' It is written in three parts this poem mixes both the written and visual forms to invite the reader to consider the ways in which ancestries, spiritualities, and cultures are woven together across time and space.

The Blake Poetry Prize is administered by WestWords. WestWords is dedicated to the creating, sharing, and reading of stories in Western Sydney.

About the Blake Prize

The Blake Prize dates back almost three-quarters of a century to 1951, making it one of Australia's longest standing and most prestigious prizes in either art or poetry. The Blake Prize's namesake is

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William Blake, a poet, artist, and visionary. William Blake worked to create change in the social order and in the mind in an 18th-Century Europe that embraced racism, sexism, and slavery, and wrote that “all men are alike (tho' infinitely various).” The Poetry Foundation considers him one of the greatest visionaries among English poets.

Liverpool Mayor Ned Mannoun said, “The ratepayers of Liverpool are proud that the Blake Prize has been at home at our own Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre since 2016. Our community contains over 150 different nationalities, speaks more than 140 languages, and has an equally diverse range of faith backgrounds. That makes it the ideal location for a major arts prize.

“On behalf of Liverpool, I express heartfelt thanks to the team at CPAC, the judges and artists participating in the Blake Prize, to WestWords, and to all the visitors who will see the exhibition while it remains on display until 7 July.”

The panels of judges for the 68th Blake Prize are renowned for their contribution to the discourse of contemporary art, poetry and spirituality in Australia. The art prize judges are interdisciplinary artists and Worimi man Dean Cross, Director of UNSW Galleries and Curator of the 2024 Adelaide Biennial José Da Silva, and Professor in Religion within the School of Humanities at the University of Sydney Professor Jay Johnston FAHA.

The poetry prize judges are 2022 Blake Poetry Prize winner Simone King, successful writer of Mununjali and Dutch heritage Ellen van Neerven, and the widely published and award-winning poet and academic Peter Ramm.

The 68th Blake Prize exhibition will remain on display at Casula Powerhouse until 7 July 2024. Casula Powerhouse is a cultural facility of Liverpool City Council. For more information, visit: <https://www.casulapowerhouse.com/>.

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**68th Blake Prize Winning Artists –
Expanded Information on the Winning Artists**

The Blake Art Prize

Winner: Shireen Taweel

Artwork Title:

Shoe Bathers, 2022

Installation, engraved and pierced copper, olive oil soap, timber, and sound (25 minutes)

Artist statement:

Initiating sensations of transition and transformation which often take place during the sensory act of a bathing ritual, the fragrant ambience of Shoe Bathers, conjures a ritualised phenomenon of spirit, community and family communion. A plurality of bodies, minds and religions, creating intimate histories of unity within the walls of a hammam.

An archive of profound experiences is imprinted in assemblages of handmade olive oil soap, the clusters of intersecting sensations speak to the softened marble walls of the hammam, the memory of the stone shaped by centuries of water passing across contours of the human body.

Resting upon the scented soap, two pairs of embellished bathing shoes, pierced and engraved with heritage motifs and illustrations of the bathing practice, draw attention to a powerful arousing of the senses in an ethereal record of the living and non-living object: stone, metal, water and flesh manifesting virtue.

The ceremonial objects are arranged on packing crates in preparation for a migration of cultural and ritual practices, a continuum of the creation of unities.

Artist Bio:

Shireen Taweel is a Sydney based multidisciplinary artist working on Gadigal Land. Taweel's practice draws on speculative futurisms and alternative histories as a means to decolonise future cultural, political, and ethical dimensions of Space migration. Taweel focuses on the construction of future transcendental architecture and movement ecology informed by the Arab Sciences contribution of astronomy and celestial navigation instruments to the past and future of migration and pilgrimage. Taweel's development and research is often site-specific working in collaboration with local communities, architecture and environment experimenting with the materiality of site. Conceptual applications of artisan techniques and speculative narrative drives cross-cultural discourse and dialogues of shared histories and fluid community identities.

Taweel's works have been widely exhibited in notable institutions throughout Australia, Lebanon and Germany. Recent group shows include In the Inner Bark of Trees at SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin (2023), this language that is every stone, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Asad Raza, and Warraba Weatherall at Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2022), Making Worlds, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2022). Taweel had a solo exhibition Holding Patterns at the 4A Centre of Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney in 2020. Her works are held in the collections of the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Australia. In 2023, Shireen was selected to participate in the artist-in-residence programme at Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France.

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The Blake Established Artist Residency and Exhibition

Winner: Yhonnie Scarce

Artwork Title:

Koonibba, South Australia, 2023

Screen-print on calico with iron ore pigment, 40 hand-blown glass bush yams, ammunition boxes.

Acknowledgements: Courtesy the Artist, and THIS IS NO FANTASY Melbourne

Artist statement:

Printed with iron-oxide pigment, signifying dried blood and the surrounding landscape rich in iron-ore, 'Koonibba, South Australia' (2023) reflects on the introduction of Christian Missions in South Australia. Situated approximately 40km west of Ceduna and 800km northwest of Adelaide, the Koonibba Mission is the birthplace of my Grandfather Barwell Coleman. For many years I have returned to the Koonibba and Point Pearce Mission sites. Through these visits, I have become obsessed with the structures that endure in these communities. I find myself studying the bricks, crucifixes, and bells that sit outside each building. This compulsion stems from the knowledge of the detrimental effect they had on my extended family – enduring loss of language and culture, illness, and slave labour.

Artist Bio:

Yhonnie Scarce was born in Woomera, South Australia, and belongs to the Kokatha and Nukunu peoples.

Scarce's interdisciplinary practice explores the political nature and aesthetic qualities of glass and photography.

Her work often references the ongoing effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people; in particular, her research has explored the impact of the removal and relocation of Aboriginal people from their homelands and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Family history is central to Scarce's work, drawing on the strength of her ancestors, she offers herself as a conduit, sharing their significant stories from the past.

Scarce's work is seen in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria, Tate Gallery London and Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, Art Gallery of South Australia, National Gallery Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Flinders University Art Museum, Australian War Memorial, The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Shepparton Art Museum, and the University of South Australia, among others.

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The Blake Emerging Artist Prize (\$6,000, Acquisitive)

Winner: Tina Stefanou

Artwork Title:

Backbreeding, 2023,
Single-channel video, with sound, 11:01 mins.

Artist statement:

Intertwining vocal workshops, community rituals, and farm practices, Tina Stefanou's work delves into the significance of grain and wool within a Wheatbelt community in rural Western Australia. Stefanou reimagines activities rooted in a romanticised and Judeo-Christian religious perception of regional life. This exploration taps into the nostalgic force commonly found in rural communities, emphasising the religious undertones associated with depictions of grain, wool, rural farmland, and the nurturing of children as sacred practices.

Stefanou works with these agrarian materials to voice an alter-ritual that celebrates the strange without relying on a religious centre. This exploration focuses on labour across species as a sacred union, transcending traditional Abrahamic mythologies and their connections to the nation-state.

The term "back-breeding" refers to the practice of breeding livestock to revive disappearing traits, even those of extinct species. This attempt to resurrect the past contrasts with current realities shaped by climate crises, neoliberal techno-feudalism, and socio-economic circumstances. Stefanou's conceptualisation views these scientific and agribusiness processes as a form of faith, attempts to re-animate bodies, akin to spiritual or ritualistic practices.

Artist Bio:

Tina Stefanou is a Greek-Australian artist, performer, and researcher living on unceded Wurundjeri country in Wattle Glen, Victoria. With a background as a vocalist, she works undisciplined, with and across a diverse range of mediums, practices, approaches and labours: an embodied practice that she calls voice in the expanded field. As a means to seek more inclusive ways of making and to frame tangled relationships, she engages in multispecies performance with a family of local others, friends not-yet-made, and poet(h)ic meetings of matter. Informed by diasporic and working-class experiences, Stefanou engages in sound and research as social practice, exploring with and beyond all-too-human and more-than-human vocalities. She works with multiple communities over long periods of time and locations through para-ethnographic field work, vocal workshops, performance making, and filmic traces.

Stefanou has performed, presented, published and exhibited locally and internationally including: Salt Museum (Istanbul); Kadist Gallery (Paris); Le Pavé d'Orsay (Paris); the University of Music and Performing Arts (Graz); Residency Corazon Gallery (La Plata); The Yellow House (Sydney); The Sydney Opera House; Stacks Projects (Sydney); Festaal (Berlin); Carriageworks (Sydney); Gertrude Contemporary (Melbourne); The Ian Potter Museum (Melbourne); Blindside Gallery (Melbourne); Perth Institute of Contemporary Art; McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park (Langwarrin); Hamer Hall (Melbourne); Phoenix Central Park (SYD); University of Western Australia (Perth); Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (Melbourne); National Gallery of Victoria; Museum of Old and New Art (Tasmania); American Anthropology Association (NY); Rosi Braidotti Posthuman Artist Labs (Utrecht University); 3ecologies Project (Canada); Buxton Contemporary (Melbourne); The Substation (Melbourne); Sarah Scout Presents (Melbourne); Composite Gallery (Melbourne); Collingwood Yards Arts Precinct (Melbourne); Disclaimer Journal; Journal of Sonic Studies; and Cordite Poetry Review. She has worked with organisations such as: Liquid Architecture; Art + Australia online; Women's Art Register; Alpha60; Erth Visual & Physical Inc; Chiara Guidi; SPACED; Young Voices Melbourne; West Australian Opera; DADAA Gallery; The North Midlands Project; Art Gallery of Western Australia; The Australian Art Orchestra; Centre of Visual Art; Speak Percussion; Cementa; RMIT's non/fictionLab; ADSR Zine; Semi Permanent; Centre for Projection Art; Project Anywhere; and Chamber Made.

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The Blake Poetry Prize

Winner: Coco X. Huang

Artwork Title: Three Lessons

Video: Coco X. Huang performs the poem at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjslXVuvOqY&t=39s>

Artist Bio:

Coco X. Huang is a Chinese-Australian writer, musician, and scientist. She creates interdisciplinary works that challenge and extend conventional forms. Huang has performed at the National Young Writers' Festival (2023) and Sydney Festival (2021), was shortlisted for the Woollahra Digital Literary Award (2020) and received a Faber Writing Academy scholarship (2020). Her works have recently appeared in Jacaranda Journal, Baby Teeth Journal, Cordite, Voiceworks and the Australian Poetry Journal, among others.

Judges' Comments:

"This poem, dedicated to 'voice and guzheng', is a strong achievement of form, style and theme. The poem is tender in its telling of ceremony, learning and family. It stood out for its unique presentation and expansive exploration of sound."

"Written in three parts this poem mixes both the written and visual forms to invite the reader to consider the ways in which ancestries, spiritualities, and cultures are woven together across time and space. The visual medium serves to underscore the aural inflections of the poem that echo through its lines, 'Across the seas and centuries, we play the voices of the dead to life; invite their legacies.' The poem's tender attention to the 'voiceless artefacts' of family, the bowls, cups, golden paper squares, the 'coffee table crammed in the garage' are a precise meditation on the vessels that carry memory and heritage. In this, the poet imbues them with the histories of diaspora, the conflict with satisfying the 'old ghosts sighs' with the knowledge that 'Songs of blood are hard to sing.' Throughout the poem, striking imagery carries the poet's connection to the past, 'stiffened my thumbs—a hardening my ancestors knew as the grind of a shovel, the back-heat of working fields' and 'a red song for breakfast; twirling with friends in the square.' Ultimately, the poet suggests spiritual and familial connections are hard won, against the metaphor, 'present tides are strong and ever-changing seafloor form' they remind of us of the power of music to reverberate through time and place, bridging the past and present, but that those bridges, like songs, take a lifetime to master."

"Three Lessons moves between evocations of songs and image to convey how family, ritual, art and ancestral lineages shape the inner life. This poem has an original and innovative form, offering an audio-visual experience that is in conversation with and further enriches its strong poetic lines. The poet's images are sensual and specific – golden paper squares curled to ingots, jasmine smoke unfurling and plastic-wrapped hot roast chicken which can't be transformed to baahk chit gai. While "[s]ongs of blood are hard to sing", this poem's beautiful music and reflective and wise voice reveal a poet in dialogue with a rich lineage of poetry, creativity and loss."

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