

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

"Poetry surrounds us everywhere, but putting it on paper is, alas, not so easy as looking at it." – Vincent van Gogh

Therefore I would like to thank everyone who put 'pen to paper' and entered this year's Patron's Prize for Poets Competition. I would also like to congratulate everyone who has been short listed for an award today. By entering this competition, poets are provided with an opportunity to present their work to a highly qualified and respected poet and author. Dr Liana Joy Christensen, whose short stories, essays and poems have been widely published both in Australian and international journals, has produced an excellent Judge's report which contains an immense amount of valuable feedback.

JUDGE'S REPORT – LIANA JOY CHRISTENSEN

Writing poems appears to be an intrinsic part of human nature – and a natural response to the things that move us to tears or laughter; rage or compassion. Certain themes are perennial in poetry – and the submissions reflected this range: poems about war and ageing; poems about love and nature; poems of political and cultural satire.

I celebrate the fact that people are inspired to write poems and share them with others in simple, heartfelt human communication. I consider it a privilege to have been able to read and respond to this outpouring of poetry. Long may it continue!

The role of a judge, though, must of necessity involve sifting and sorting. Poems are assessed against both aesthetic and technical criteria that are an essential part of the craft. Such criteria include:

- the choice of form and its successful interplay with theme and subject
- the freshness or originality of the poetic voice in response to the theme and subject
- the skill of the poetic diction and deft handling of poetic devices such as metaphor, metre, image
- the absence of clichés and poeticisms (old fashioned words and phrasing that are no longer considered a legitimate part of poetry).

These are relatively objective, teachable (and therefore learnable) techniques. Each of the poems chosen for an award measured up very well against these criteria. However, it must be stated that a number of others that did not make the shortlist were also competent in this regard.

If I were choosing a selection for a small anthology, for instance, there were other poems I admired and would like to include. How, then, does a judge move from a long list of thirty or so very good poems to a final selection of winners? It's not an easy process. Each poem is read and re-read several times. Having ascertained that the first, objective, technical criteria are met, the judge must then rely on their subjective aesthetic response to the work. This aesthetic response is informed by considerable reading in the field. It is subjective but not arbitrary. Yet, at this point of the process, there is always an X-factor. That is the reason why a poem that may not even be shortlisted in one completion can win a prize in a competition with a different judge.

Before concluding these general remarks, I would just like to add that I very much enjoyed the range and creative exuberance of the pen names chosen. In this regard, I would make special mention of "Daffyd Mallard" whose coded pseudonym made me laugh out loud.

Judge's Encouragement Award for Youth

Winner: Tuesday Mornings by Emily Siggs, Aged 17 (WA)

There is a poignant, 'through-the- looking-glass' quality to this poem. It demonstrates a gentle respect for those who live outside the margins of society ("You don't do as we say/You don't do as we do/There must be something /Wrong with you").

Novice Poet Award

Winner: Root and Branch by Judy Winchester (TAS)

In the wrong hands, the multiple layering of images in this poem could be disastrous. Instead, it is compelling and beautiful. The poem works its charm through precision and specificity. We are taught to see, image by image, the wondrous burgeoning of life within a forest.

Commended Entries (in alphabetical order by author)

Gabirol's Golem by Shane McCauley (WA)

A strikingly original subject, if somewhat disturbing. It certainly disrupts any complacency that may be engendered by “Malaga’s bluest sky”.

A Geranium Grows in the Wall by Shey Marque (WA)

Moves with an assured voice through a series of deliciously evoked denials (“I’m not a decipherer of auditory things”) to a subtle and lovely conclusion.

Chasing Cello Joe by Shey Marque (WA)

This poem is deft in its use of typography and metre to reflect the improvised and sometimes discordant jazz/romance theme.

The Saturday Afternoon Football Call by Damen O’Brien (QLD)

Very funny poem that made me nod in recognition. Its irony is lightly and skilfully deployed.

Highly Commended Entries (in alphabetical order by author)

Fences by Dave Drayton (NSW)

A very specific and un clichéd sketch of suburban boundaries and tensions – a fairly rare topic. I particularly appreciated reading a poem from outside mainstream “vanilla middleclass” themes.

Humanless Places by Ross Jackson (WA)

This gothic evocation of ‘humanless places’ was both immediately familiar (oh, yes, I’ve had those responses!) and also refreshingly decentred.

The Road to Damascus by Christopher Ringrose (VIC)

An excellent example of how to seize a received cultural cliché (the road to Damascus) and demand the reader see with fresh eyes “the flat faced whining army trucks/crunch over glass and rocks/to the City of Jasmine”.

The Same by Rita Tognini (WA)

The arresting immediacy of the opening line (“And Unle Ez”) draws the reader instantly into a series of pointed observations about war, centred around the precise (and in this context chilling) word “uguale/the same”

3rd Place

Winner: Four Reflections in Plate Glass off King Street by Ross Jackson (WA)

There are no wasted words in this poem. Each of the four stanzas depicts an aspect of urban life. Each image is like a small grenade that explodes with both individual and collective meaning. The poem is typographically sophisticated and I am utterly enchanted with the evocative originality of the lines “big hair/like grass trees/carried/on/long stalked necks”.

2nd Place

Winner: Paddle a Glass Lake by Marjorie Lewis-Jones (NSW)

Each one of this series of haiku is deceptively simple – a sure sign of quality. In fact, the work is remarkably even and controlled, which demonstrates a high level of technical artistry. I found it deeply refreshing and cleansing to the poetic palate to read and re-read the work as a whole.

1st Place

Winner: In the Suburbs by Madeleine Tingey (WA)

In this short, 26 line poem we are offered an experience that is both deeply personal and at the same time transpersonal. What could be more familiar than a deli, a schoolboy, a grandmother, a suburban car park? Everything and nothing, it seems. The exquisite ‘bleeding’ of one reality into another very delicately “sutures” (to use the poet’s own word) together many things:

- Youth and age “He makes her tea/the way she likes, sweet/folds fragile fingers around the cup/leans close”.
- Different cultures “After school he eats a meat pie from the deli that smells of Asia”
- The ordinary with the immanent divine “He watches with awe/as a glittering temple/topaz-gold, sways above the water/in the spot/where cars are usually parked.”

This is a highly accomplished and very powerful poem, one that will stay with me a long time. It is also a beautiful commentary on the hidden richness of multiculturalism.

I am honoured to be able to award it first prize.