

McCaughan, Sophia, 'Unwilling participant' helps secure major arts prize, **City Lismore News**, 21 June 2024



'Unwilling participant' helps secure major arts prize

By [Sophia McCaughan](#)

A moonlit photo of an award-winning author and a simple painting of a man with his horses have taken out prestigious portrait prizes.

Amos Gebhardt's Alexis with moon has won the 17th National Photographic Portrait Prize.

Gebhardt's work captures Stella Prize winner Alexis Wright peering towards the night sky.

The artist took inspiration from Wright's writing.

"She invites her readers to think really deeply about how we might survive this contemporary moment," Gebhardt told AAP.

To me, she is a luminary.

Gebhardt lives in regional South Australia and has a background in cinematography, working as a director before turning to photography.

"It was really nice to dust off my light meter and get back to actually work on film," they said.

There was something in the air the night Wright was photographed.

"It's an amazing thing under the moonlight and in the night, there's something very powerful that happens when you're in silence," Gebhardt said.

"There was a really beautiful connection that was happening between me, the moon, the camera and Alexis."

The Darling Portrait Prize is a biannual award, established in the memory of National Portrait Gallery founding patron, L Gordon Darling.

Noel McKenna's winning work is a portrait of his long-time art dealer Bill Nuttall.

Inspiration struck after sifting through photos of Nuttall hanging out in a paddock with his horses.

"I took a lot of photographs that day and then a few months later, I was just looking at it, and I thought it'd make a nice painting," McKenna told AAP.

Nuttall didn't know he was in the painting until McKenna showed him the finished work.

"I could almost say he was an unwilling participant," McKenna said.

"I sent him a photo of it and he quite liked it."

The two prizes offered artists a unique opportunity, National Portrait Gallery curator Isobel Parker Philip said.

"It's an invitation for artists to reflect on the moment and paint or photograph someone of their choosing," she told AAP.

"We want to emphatically embrace and showcase to people that there are so many different ways of making portraits."

Gebhardt will get \$30,000 and camera equipment valued at \$20,000, while McKenna will receive a cash prize of \$75,000.

The works are on exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra from Saturday until October 13.

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