

Batchelor, Emma, *Winners announced: The 2024 National Photographic Portrait Prize and the Darling Portrait Prize for Painting*, **Riotact**, 21 June 2024



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21 June 2024 | Emma Batchelor

Presented alongside the National Photographic Portrait Prize for the first time is the Darling Portrait Prize, a biennial national prize for Australian portrait painting.

Honouring the legacy of Mr L Gordon Darling AC CMG, this prize supports the evolving notion of Australian identity while celebrating emerging and established portrait painters.

Twenty four finalists have been selected for this prize, from almost 1000 entries, with local artist Surya Bajracharya among the group.

The Darling Portrait Prize, judged by National Portrait Gallery Director Bree Pickering, Art Gallery of NSW Curator First Nations Art Erin Vink, and Art Historian and Critic Tara Heffernan has been won by **Noel McKenna** for *William Nuttall with horses in field*.



Noel McKenna with his Darling Prize winning work, William Nuttall with horses in field, 2023. Photo: Mark Mohell.

"This is an energetic and unexpected portrait," the judges said of McKenna's work. "The subject shares the work with animals and the landscape. It is joyous in its execution and demonstrates the skill of an established Australian artist whose practice is assured in every way."

McKenna, who lives and works on Gadigal Country in Sydney, is a highly recognised and established artist. The winner of the Sulman Prize in 1994 and a five-time winner of the Art Gallery of NSW Trustee's prize for watercolour, McKenna's paintings often explore everyday scenarios and highlight the relationship between humans and animals.

His winning portrait is of his long-time art dealer and friend.

"Prizes are a leap of faith for any institution, you never quite know what you are going to get," National Portrait Gallery's Curatorial and Collection Director Isobel Parker Phillip said.

"What a prize will showcase is not an intentional narrative, but a litmus test of what feels urgent and important in the contemporary moment."

And what that looks and feels like in 2024 may come as no surprise; the artists selected as finalists are interested in identity, both how it is expressed and how it relates and interacts with the world around us.

What may come as more of a surprise is the emotional scale these explorations take.

"What has emerged as the recurring beat in both of the prizes this year," Parker Phillip explains, "is a sense of the intimate and the introspective."

Of all of the finalists, Parker Phillip describes "a pensiveness in many of the works on show".

"They are tender and thoughtful in who they depict, many of them mentors for the creatives, as well close family members and the self, but also how they depict."