



MEDIA RELEASE UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 9.30am Thursday 3 September 2026

ELYAS ALAVI (VIC) NAMED WINNER OF THE INAUGURAL ARTBANK PRIZE



Elyas Alavi in his studio photo by Machiko Abe courtesy of the artist.

Sydney, 3 September 2026 – Artbank is pleased to announce Elyas Alavi (VIC) as the winner of the inaugural Artbank Prize, a new national acquisitive prize established to support outstanding contemporary Australian artists and create an open pathway into the Artbank collection.

Selected from a field of 742 applicants from across Australia, Elyas Alavi was chosen from eight state and territory finalists by an expert judging panel comprising artist Tony Albert, curator Ellie Buttrose and arts journalist Elizabeth Fortescue.

As the inaugural Artbank Prize winner, Alavi's work, *Face to Face*, will be acquired into the Artbank collection, securing its place within one of Australia's most significant contemporary art collections and enabling it to be shared with audiences nationwide.

Born in Afghanistan and now based in Melbourne, Elyas Alavi is an artist and poet whose multidisciplinary practice spans painting, drawing, installation, performance, moving image and

poetry. His work explores themes of migration, exile, memory, belonging and identity, drawing on personal and collective histories to create powerful and deeply resonant works.

The winning artwork captivated the judges through its sensitive exploration of memory, intimacy and belonging. Alavi's work feels original and distinctive within its approach. Through a nuanced visual language, Alavi reflects on the complexities of displacement and connection, creating a work that speaks to both personal experience and universal human narratives, giving voice to an important Australian story.

"Elyas Alavi's work stood apart for its originality and the subtle complexity of its storytelling. The painting felt unlike anything else we encountered during the judging process. Through a deeply personal narrative, it speaks to broader themes of identity, belonging and remembrance with remarkable sensitivity and skill." **Tony Albert.**

The judges noted that the work's distinctiveness, together with its nuanced exploration of memory, migration and queer identity, made it a compelling choice for the inaugural award.

"Elyas Alavi's painting is striking for its quiet emotional power, nuanced handling of intimacy and distinctive visual language. It demonstrates an impressive level of artistic maturity that we felt should be celebrated and more widely shared. The Artbank Prize provides a rare opportunity for an artist at a pivotal point in their career, offering both recognition and the legacy of acquisition into a national collection. Elyas's work exemplified the vision and excellence that this prize seeks to celebrate." **Ellie Buttrose.**

"The response to the inaugural Artbank Prize has been extraordinary. With 742 applications received from artists and their representatives across Australia, the Prize has demonstrated both the depth of artistic talent in this country and the enthusiasm for an accessible pathway into this treasured national collection. We congratulate Elyas Alavi on this significant achievement and look forward to sharing his work with audiences across Australia and the world through the Artbank collection." **Artbank Director Zoë Rodriguez.**

As the winning artwork, *Face to Face*, will be acquired into the Artbank collection and made available for lease through Artbank's public leasing program, enabling audiences across Australia to experience Alavi's work in workplaces, public institutions and community settings.

"Being the first winner of the Artbank Prize is something I feel very honoured by. Artbank has been supporting and collecting the work of Australian artists for more than four decades, so to know that my painting will now become part of that history is something I feel very proud of. It gives me a real sense of encouragement to keep trusting the direction my work is taking, and to keep making work that feels personal, honest and meaningful."

"What I really like about Artbank is that the work can continue to be seen and live in different places. I love the thought that this painting might be encountered by people I may not know, in places I may not visit. For me, that gives the work another life beyond the studio." **Elyas Alavi winner Artbank Prize 2026.**

The finalist's exhibition continues until 30 October 2026 at Artbank's Sydney premises.

"The Artbank Prize is a great reflection of what is happening now in Australian art. A rich cross section of artists, working in a broad spectrum of styles and mediums, each with a unique story to share. Through their work, these artists bring forward diverse voices and perspectives from across Australia, reflecting the breadth and complexity of contemporary Australian life. The eight finalists were all of an extremely high standard and, together, brought a remarkable range of artistic practices, experiences and narratives to the Prize." **Elizabeth Fortescue.**

Artbank Prize 2026 Finalist's Exhibition

3 September 2026 – 30 October 2026

Artbank Sydney, 222 Young Street, Waterloo NSW 2017

Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10 am – 4 pm or by appointment

[Artbank Prize 2026 Finalists](#)

Elyas Alavi VIC

Dave Carswell TAS

Cathy Franzi ACT

Annette Galstaun NSW

Sam Harrison QLD

Angelina Karadada Boona WA

Damien Shen SA

Wanapati Yunupingu NT

[About the Artbank Prize](#)

The Artbank Prize is an open-call, acquisitive prize for Australian artists not yet represented in the Artbank collection.

The prize has been established to recognise and support outstanding contemporary art practice, and to promote access for all Australian artists to present their work for consideration for the Artbank collection.

[About Artbank](#)

Established in 1980 as a federal artist support program, Artbank is a unique public art collection and leasing program that operates under a simple yet powerful philosophy: art is for everyone. Artbank's two core objectives are to nurture Australian creativity by acquiring works by living Australian artists,

and to promote the value of contemporary art and share it with the public through the leasing scheme.

Containing over 11,000 works by more than 3,500 Australian artists, the Artbank collection is remarkable not only for its breadth, but also for its democratic representation of the numerous voices and experiences that shape Australia.

With over half the collection on lease in the public domain at any time, Artbank successfully fulfils its mission of promoting the value of Australian contemporary art to the broader public.

Visit our website to find out more: artbank.gov.au

END

[Media Package](#)

[Catalogue](#)

Media Contact

For further information, or to request media interviews and images, please contact:

Natalie O'Connor, Artbank Marketing Manager

media@artbank.gov.au

1800 251 651 or +61 2 9697 6000

222 Young Street
Waterloo NSW 2017
Australia

