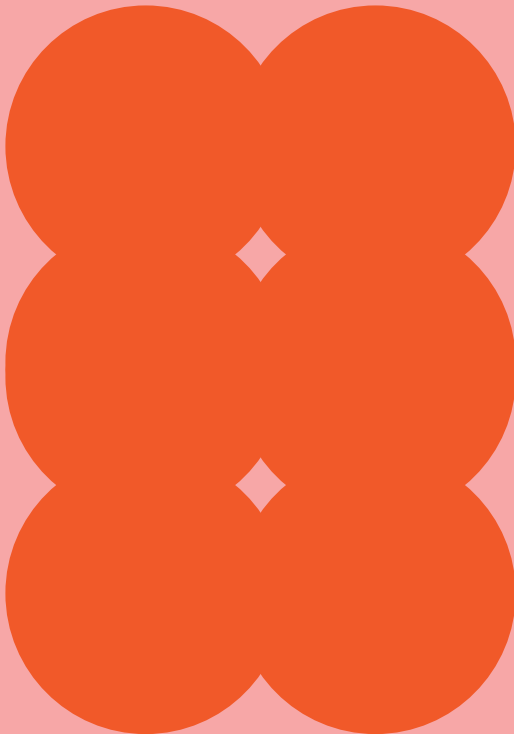




**Artbank
Prize**

2026 Catalogue



Artbank acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We recognise First Peoples art and cultural practice has been thriving for millennia and we pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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Artbank is pleased to present the inaugural Artbank Prize. A new pathway to a national collection. The prize has been established to recognise and support outstanding contemporary art practices, and to promote access for all Australian artists to present their work for consideration for the Artbank collection. It aims to champion new voices and help grow the breadth of contemporary Australian art represented across the country.

Artbank Prize
2026 Finalists

Elyas Alavi ^{VIC}

Dave Carswell ^{TAS}

Cathy Franz ^{ACT}

Annette Galstaun ^{NSW}

Sam Harrison ^{QLD}

Angelina Karadada Boona ^{WA}

Damien Shen ^{SA}

Wanapati Yunupingu ^{NT}

Why an Artbank Prize?

The idea of an Artbank Prize is not new. In the 1980s, Artbank explored establishing a prize program but encountered the practical constraints governing how public funds could be used, with cash awards falling outside the scope of the program. Four decades later, we found ourselves confronting the same challenge and asking a different question: if not a cash prize, what form of recognition would best reflect Artbank's purpose and create meaningful opportunity for artists?

The result is the Artbank Prize, an initiative that places acquisition at its centre. Rather than offering a monetary award, the prize commits to acquiring the winning work into the Artbank collection, creating a lasting legacy for both the artist and the collection. It is a model that aligns with Artbank's mission to support Australian contemporary artists while building a national collection that reflects the breadth and vitality of artistic practice across the country.

The response to the inaugural Artbank Prize exceeded our expectations. We received over 740 applications from artists and their representatives across Australia, resulting in a shortlist of 68 artists and, ultimately, eight outstanding finalists. While the quality of the finalists' works speaks for itself, the process also introduced Artbank to many remarkable artists whose practices we will continue to follow and consider for future acquisition.

The prize has highlighted the strength, diversity and dynamism of contemporary artmaking in Australia. Across a range of media and approaches, artists engaged with questions of identity, place, environment,

history and innovation. Particularly notable was the depth and diversity of First Nations artistic practice represented, with four of the eight finalists identifying as First Nations artists. Their works demonstrate the continued power of art to carry cultural knowledge, tell stories and push creative boundaries.

I would like to thank our distinguished judging panel, Tony Albert, Ellie Buttrose and Elizabeth Fortescue, whose expertise, insight and generosity shaped a thoughtful and rigorous selection process. I also acknowledge the Artbank team for their commitment to delivering this new initiative and the many artists, galleries and art centres who participated.

The success of the inaugural Artbank Prize demonstrates the value of creating an open pathway into the Artbank collection. It has strengthened our engagement with Australia's visual arts community, broadened our understanding of the practices emerging across the country, and reinforced Artbank's role in supporting artists and bringing contemporary Australian art to wider audiences.

We are proud to present this catalogue, and to celebrate the artists whose work has made the inaugural Artbank Prize such a compelling and rewarding undertaking.

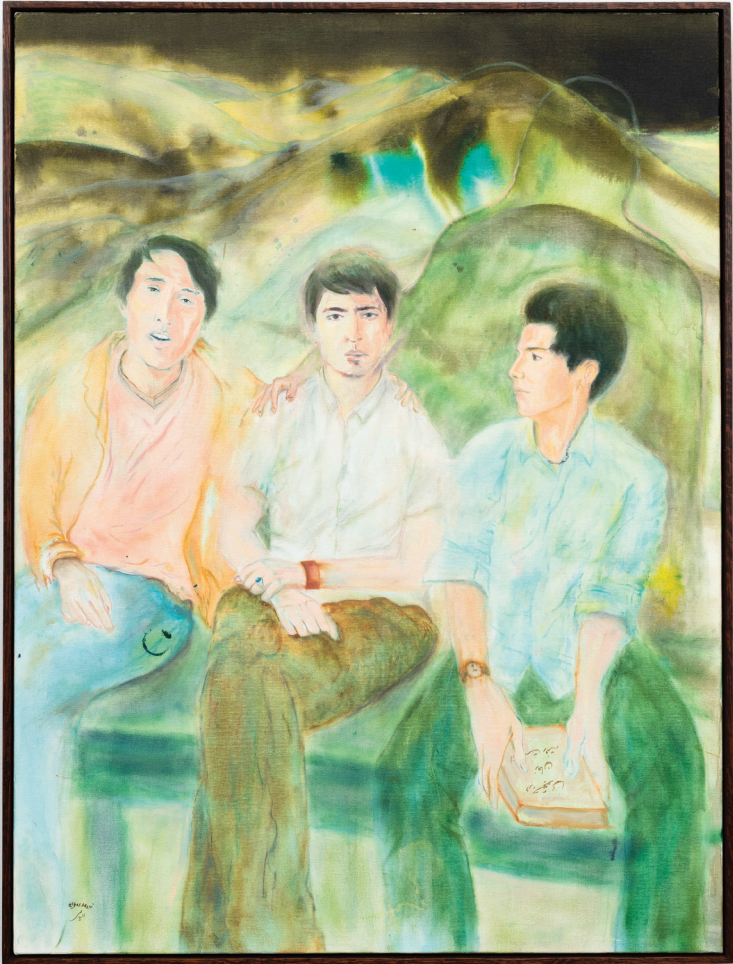
Zoë Rodriguez
Director, Artbank

“For me, the acquisition from Artbank early in my career was really seminal in the projection of where I am. And it’s just not the acquisition alone. It’s the visibility in the aftermath, the way in which the Artbank collection is shared through so many diverse audiences, in public places outside of a traditional museum – Artbank art reaches everybody.”

Tony Albert

Finalists

Elyas Alavi



Elyas Alavi is an Afghanistan-born Australian artist and poet whose multidisciplinary practice spans painting, drawing, installation, performance, moving image and poetry. Drawing on collective histories of migration, exile and belonging, his work engages with memory, language, ritual and the cultural legacies of the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region. His recent paintings and drawings trace subtle queer histories shaped by displacement, intimacy and remembrance, while his sculptural, photographic and installation projects have explored the legacies of South Asian cameleers in Australia.

Alavi's work has been presented at the 24th Biennale of Sydney (2024), Lahore Biennale 03 (2024), 3rd Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (2026), TarraWarra Biennial, Healesville (2023) and solo exhibitions *ALAM* at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney (2024) and *Another Kind* at Gertrude Contemporary Glasshouse, Melbourne (2023). He holds a Master of Visual Arts from the University of South Australia and a Master of Fine Arts from Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London. Alavi is represented by FUTURES Gallery in Naarm/Melbourne.

Inspired by one of the artist's memories, this painting shows three queer friends sitting side by side before the mountains of Daikundi, Afghanistan where Alavi was born. The image moves between memory and imagination, shaped by migration, distance, and longing across Afghanistan, Iran, and Australia. The figures sit close, barely touching, yet their shirts blend into one another. Colour passes softly from one body to the next, blurring the edges between them and creating a sense of intimacy and belonging. One figure holds a copy of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, a reference to memory as emotional, incomplete, and non-linear. Rather than describing the past literally, Alavi lets it return through mood, colour, and gesture. Behind them, a ghost-like figure appears almost unnoticed, with one hand resting on a shoulder. Seeming to rise from the mountain itself, it suggests memory, absence, and queer lives that remain partly hidden.



Face to Face, 2025
Oil on canvas
104.5 × 78.5 × 5.5 cm

Elyas Alavi photo by Machiko Abe

Dave Carswell



Dave Carswell is a photographer currently based in Lutruwita/Tasmania. His photographic practice is rooted in documentary image making with his interests motivated by the intersection between nature, humanity and the built environment. Carswell's work is concerned with the manner of anthropological intervention on the built landscape with a recent focus towards public space and the way economic, social and ecological influences shape contested spaces.

His work has been shown in solo and group shows internationally and nationally as well as in festivals and print. In 2024 Carswell won the Devonport Regional Gallery's acquisitive award, the *tidal.24: City of Devonport Tasmanian Art Award* with the artwork *Flocculation #15*. Work from this series was also awarded the Judges Commendation at the 2024 Contemporary Landscapes in Photography Award hosted by the Perth Centre for Photography as well as being shortlisted for the Bowness Photography Prize (2025), Mullins Conceptual Photography Prize (2023) and the Canberra Contemporary Photographic Prize (2024). Carswell has also been shortlisted for art prizes including the 2022 Australian Photobook Awards, Olive Cotton Award (2019), 2022 Wyndham Art Prize, 2020 Heysen Prize (Landscape), Perth Centre for Photography's IRIS Award for portraiture (2018) as well as the Moran Prize (2018).

"This work continues my interest in the contestation of space along the kanamaluka/Tamar estuary. The impetus is a campaign urging the public and authorities to 'Fix the mud'. Despite using the language of environmentalism, research reveals the campaign is being led primarily by entities with vested interest in the waterways. This conflict raises the idea of a socialised notion of 'nature' and encourages a critical understanding of what political, economic and social interests dominate the discourse around the estuary's current and future use. The methodology involves producing landscape photographs and sitting the film at the tide line for a week before returning to the work and developing the sheets in my home studio. The end results are markings, etchings, sedimentary influence, light leaks and algae burning onto the film and engaging the flows of the waterways to impact over the final image."

Flocculation #24, 2026
Pigment ink-jet print
88 × 73 × 4 cm



Dave Carswell photo courtesy of the artist

Cathy Franzi



Cathy Franzi is a ceramic artist engaged with ideas of nature and the environment. She uses the ceramic medium and its possibilities for form, surface imagery and installation to explore ways to express cultural and scientific values attributed to Australian plants. She holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Sydney (1985), a Master of Visual Arts, School of Art & Design from the Australian National University (2010) and in 2015 she was awarded a PhD from the Australian National University School of Art & Design, the culmination of four years of intense research into the intersection of ceramic studio practice, botanical science and printmaking.

With a 30-year professional practice, Franzi has held over 17 solo exhibitions, received numerous awards and grants, and her work is held in national and international collections, including Grassi Museum of Applied Arts in Leipzig, Germany and Taoxichuan Art Museum in Jingdezhen, China. She is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics and is represented by Sabbia Gallery, Redfern.

"My interdisciplinary art practice explores Australian flora and environments and how they might be expressed through ceramic form and surface. *River Bottlebrush* draws on my research with botanists from the National Seed Bank, fieldwork on location and my scientific background. Endemic to eastern Australia, *Callistemon sieberi* grows in dry, rocky riverbeds and in flood channels, with prolific flowering attracting nectar feeding birds. I use the wheel as a tool for forming, making vessels within the language of ceramics, but altered to create a unique undulating form. I adapt aspects of printmaking methods and composition to the ceramic medium using my own materials and tools. Imagery is created through sgraffito, by carving through the black surface to reveal white porcelain below, to evoke a relief lino print. The textural surface reveals every mark of the hand, aligning with the textural nature of the plants I represent, adapted to a harsh environment."



Cathy Franzi | photo by Andrew Sikorski, Art Atelier

River Bottlebrush, 2026
Porcelain
41 × 19 × 17 cm

Annette Galstaun



Annette Galstaun paints scenes that are both familiar and otherworldly, like a nostalgic memory or a lingering dream. Her world is a place where mermaids, birdlife, dinosaurs and movie characters happily coexist in pattern and colour. Galstaun works out of Studio A, an organisation in Sydney that supports and creates professional pathways for artists with intellectual disability. Galstaun often abstracts her characters, creating ethereal beings with elaborate costumes and embellished surroundings. She likes to express her spirituality, often depicting angelic and mystical subject matter, while also drawing inspiration from classic fairy tales, Disney films and popular culture. Galstaun works with gouache, acrylic, watercolour and pencil, and soft sculptures.

Galstaun unveiled *Magical Putt Putt*, a commissioned interactive installation at Cement Fondu, Sydney in 2022, which was also included in *Tower, Dog, Red Rattler*, curated by Studio A artist Thom Roberts at Artbank, Sydney (2025). Galstaun has exhibited in numerous Studio A exhibitions and contributed to major public mural projects at the University of Technology Sydney and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. She was a finalist in the Mosman Art Prize (2024 and 2025), and the Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award (2025).

As an artist, Galstaun is known for creating gentle whimsical works, populated with mermaids, fairies and the guardian angels she communes with nightly. *Tyrannosaurus Rex* marks an exciting departure, inspired by a recent screening of the 1990s blockbuster *Jurassic Park*. In awe of the fearsome creatures she witnessed, Galstaun became driven to render them in her world, gilded in gold leaf and glitter, glowing with the same sparkle of her favourite Disney fairytales. Galstaun is adamant that this T. Rex is a female; fearsome and feminine, in her desert landscape.



Annette Galstaun photo by Scott Heldorf

Tyrannosaurus Rex - She emerges from the jungle, 2025
Watercolour, gouache, ink,
coffee, gold leaf on paper
119 × 96 × 4.5 cm

Sam Harrison
Kamilaroi/Wiradjuri



Sam Harrison is a Meanjin/Brisbane-based artist and curator with cultural connections to the Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri peoples of Central New South Wales. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, in 2018. Working across a range of creative roles as an artist, curator, artist assistant and arts educator for young adults with autism, Harrison has developed a strong interest in the role of art as shaping inclusive, healthy and engaging urban environments.

His practice explores Australian identity through three interconnected themes: reinterpreting the national story through historical and contemporary perspectives, fostering dialogue around Australia's diverse cultural identity, and imagining the nation's future within an increasingly connected and globalised world.

Recent career highlights include solo exhibitions *Letters Home* at Onespace, Brisbane (2025) and *Fair Dinkies* at Outer Space, Brisbane (2025), an artist residency with Aboriginal artist collective proppaNOW, and receiving a Highly Commended award in the Sunshine Coast National Art Prize (2025) for his work *Born Here, From There*. Harrison is represented by Onespace, Brisbane.

"*Letters Home* explores the loss of language that is necessary to communicate something that is internally and intimately understood. The patterns in this work are used to demarcate use of land (scar trees) and ultimately function as a written language, questioning if colonial languages hold within them the capacity to express experiences so far removed from colonial belief systems. It reflects on how the structure of language embodies the moral and philosophical beliefs of the culture it comes from. How do the words we chose to make, reflect who we are? The abstracted text overlaying the charcoal drawings holds within it a desire to write home, to send updates of life to grandparents, to ask for updates on trivially important politics and if the siblings are stepping up in their new jobs. It is an imagined nostalgia for a mundane life steeped in the lived experience of our cultural values."



Letters Home - Continued (1), 2026
Charcoal drawing on canvas with
glass epoxy
105 × 80.5 × 5.5 cm

Angelina Karadada Boona Wunambal/Worrora



Angelina Karadada Boona is a Wunambal Gaambera/Worrora woman born in Kalumburu, Western Australia. Daughter of artist Lily Karadada – who painted on bark, bush baskets, and Numarrga (bush cradles) – and Jack Karadada, a medicine man and artefact maker, she learned two languages from her parents and remains dedicated to supporting children to learn their languages.

In her *Wandjina Emerging* series, she explores traditional mediums of white ochre and natural resin from the white gum tree. She considers collecting these raw materials essential for connecting to her ancestors as she creates extraordinary Wandjina paintings of luminous pale pink and chalky white with earthy texture. Karadada Boona works in partnership with Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, and continues to challenge herself creatively and push her practice forward as she prepares for her upcoming inclusion in the fourth NGV Triennial at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2026).

“In the Dreamtime our ancestors didn’t believe in God. One day a big storm came across our land. Our ancestors went to the cave to get away from the rain and the flood. They all settled in their new home in the cave. They looked out and saw a figure in the clouds; they thought it was a ghost, but it was Wandjina emerging from behind the biggest storm that was building up. The water rose but our people, our ancestors, were all safe from the rain and the flood. Today we still have the monsoon rain and the flood still comes up, but we will never get flooded out because we believe he is still watching over us.”

Wandjina Emerging, 2025
Found natural ochre on paper
153 × 99 cm



Angelina Karadada Boona photo by Michael Jalaru Torres, courtesy of Waringarri Arts

Damien Shen
Ngarrindjeri/Kaurna



Damien Shen is a Ngarrindjeri/Kaurna/Chinese artist, born in Tarntanya/ Adelaide. His multidisciplinary practice spans drawing, painting, analogue photography and moving image. Grounded in family, cultural memory and archival research, Shen largely examines how Aboriginal people have been represented, classified and remembered, and the possibilities for reclaiming these images through contemporary acts of authorship, agency and care.

He approaches the archive as living material rather than fixed historical evidence, bringing colonial images into conversation with portraiture and visual influences drawn from his Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna and Chinese heritage. Recent projects extend into film and performance, card magic and artist-designed objects, using humour, wonder and shared experience to hold difficult histories alongside Aboriginal excellence, optimism and joy.

Shen has exhibited nationally and internationally and is represented by MARS Gallery, Melbourne. His work is held in major public and private collections across Australia and internationally, including several major Australian cultural institutions.

My Cuzzy Nate and the 654 Club explores storytelling, magic, and Aboriginal excellence and optimism. The narrative-based, multi-part card trick, *Sam the Bellhop*, was created in Chicago in the 1930s and made famous by the legendary magician Bill Malone. In this moving image work, the trick is adapted and performed by Shen, in the guise of a professional magician, for an audience of Aboriginal spectators. The intricate, expertly timed script of the trick is updated to become a story of Aboriginal joy and celebration, using culturally authentic slang and prompting genuine, unrehearsed reactions. Stemming from Shen's childhood fascination with stage magic and 12 months of practice and development, this work provides important cultural diversity to the predominantly white history of stage magic. Shen has deliberately sought to instil his recent work with a sense of joy and wonder, frequently returning to imagery and experiences of childhood.



Damien Shen photo courtesy of the artist

My Cuzzy Nate and the 654 Club (still), 2025
Moving image (video), sound
5 minutes, 32 seconds
Production still: Piri Eddy

Wanapati Yunupingu Yolngu



Wanapati Yunupinju is a Yolŋu artist from the remote Gumatj homeland of Biranybirany in Northeast Arnhem Land. The son of the late artist and spiritual leader Miniyawany Yunupinju, he was trained in Yolŋu Law, ceremony and artistic practice from an early age. Following his father's passing, he began painting on bark, yidaki and larrakitj before developing a distinctive practice of etching sacred Gumatj clan designs into discarded street signs and found objects using a rotary tool. Inspired by fellow artist Gunybi Ganambarr, Wanapati is a leading figure in the contemporary Found movement in Northeast Arnhem Land.

His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including the landmark exhibition *Murrjiny: a story of metal from the east* at Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin (2021), a solo presentation at Melbourne Art Fair (2024) with Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne, and inclusion in the major exhibition *Yolŋu Power: The Art of Yirrkala* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2025). He is represented by Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne and works in partnership with Buku Larrŋgay Mulka Centre.

"The bāru (crocodile) the carrier of the gurtha (fire) is very special and powerful story belonging to the Gumatj people. In ancestral times, the leaders of Yirritja moiety clans used fire for the first time during a ceremony at Ŋalarrwuy in Gumatj country. This came about as fire brought to the Madarrpa clan country by Bāru the ancestral crocodile, spread north and swept through the ceremonial ground. Various ancestral animals were affected and reacted in different ways. These animals became sacred totems of the Gumatj people and the areas associated with these events became important sites. The Gumatj clan design associated with these events, a diamond design, represents fire; the red flames, the white smoke and ash, the black charcoal and the yellow dust. Also the black skin, yellow fat, white bone and red blood of Gumatj people."



Wanapati Yunupinju photo courtesy of Buku Larrŋgay Mulka

Ancestral Fire, 2025
Etched aluminium
90 × 74 × 16 cm

Artbank extends its gratitude to the esteemed judging panel for the inaugural Artbank Prize 2026: artist Tony Albert, curator Ellie Buttrose and arts journalist Elizabeth Fortescue.



Tony Albert photo courtesy National Gallery of Australia

Tony Albert is one of Australia's foremost contemporary artists with a longstanding interest in the cultural misrepresentation of Aboriginal people. Drawing on both personal and collective histories, his multidisciplinary practice considers the ways in which optimism might be utilised to overcome adversity. He courageously engages in difficult conversations to shed light on problematic histories and current injustices faced by First Nations people.

Albert is highly regarded as an ambassador for Indigenous culture and community. In 2025, he was awarded the insignia of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the Republic of France in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the arts and culture. He was the Artistic Director of the 5th National Indigenous Art Triennial, *After the Rain*, at the National Gallery of Australia, as well as the inaugural First Nations Curatorial Fellow at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Indigenous Trustee of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and recipient of an Honorary Doctorate from Griffith University (2023).

“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.”

Elizabeth Fortescue



Ellie Buttrose photo by M Bowden courtesy of QAGOMA

Ellie Buttrose is a Curator at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), where she oversees collection development for Contemporary Australian Art, realises ambitious commissions and delivers thought-provoking exhibitions and collection displays.

Buttrose was the curator of the *2026 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Yield Strength*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Samstag Museum of Art and Adelaide Botanic Gardens featuring 24 artists that push their media to build visual complexity, or contort it to convey the limits of existence. Alongside artist Archie Moore and commissioner Creative Australia, Buttrose won the Golden Lion for Best National Participation for the 2024 Australia Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.



Elizabeth Fortescue photo by John Fotiadis

Elizabeth Fortescue is a Sydney-based journalist who writes about the visual arts. She reports weekly on the art auction market for *The Australian Financial Review*, as well as contributing other articles to that newspaper. Fortescue is a long-term Australian correspondent for *The Art Newspaper*, an international journal which is published in London. In 2024 her book, *Wendy Sharpe: Many Lives*, was published by Wakefield Press. She is now working on a book about another Australian artist.

Thank you to the artists, gallerists and arts centres for supporting this exhibition.

Thank you to all the artists who applied for the inaugural Artbank Prize. This process has been incredibly inspiring for the Artbank team, offering a unique opportunity to view the work of over 740 artists and experience the depth, diversity and creativity of emerging artistic practice across Australia. The Artbank Prize has highlighted an extraordinary breadth of talent and provided a powerful insight into the voices, perspectives and ideas shaping the future of Australian contemporary art. Artbank is looking forward to continuing the Artbank Prize in the future.

Thank you to the extensive network of contractors, artwork transport technicians and suppliers who support the Artbank program and a special thanks to Jennifer Leahy of Silversalt photography and Garbett Design for the Artbank Prize branding and design.

Thank you to Artbank's clients whose ongoing support has allowed for the Artbank program to continue to thrive for over 45 years, supporting Australian contemporary artists at all stages of their career while simultaneously bringing art into the public domain.

Thank you to the entire Artbank team for the dedication, collaboration, and commitment that make the program such a success. The Artbank Prize has been made possible by the collective effort, expertise, and passion that each team member brings to their role.

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.

Visit our website to find out how you can lease Artbank artworks for your home or office.

artbank.gov.au

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