

'Wynne, Sulman winners take the spotlight'

By Elizabeth Fortesque

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Every year, the Wynne and Sulman Prizes are shouldered aside by their brash, demanding sibling, the Archibald. This Year was no different, with Nigel Milsom's winning Archibald portrait of barrister Charles Waterstreet generating even more than the usual hoopla.

The Wynne and Sulman can hardly compete with the star wattage of the \$100,000 Archibald. But they are generous prizes (\$50,000 and \$40,000 respectively) and make for a fabulous and varied exhibition that visitors to the Art Gallery of NSW should set aside enough time to see when they go to the Archie. One ticket takes in all three prizes.

The Wynne Prize is for landscape painting or figurative sculpture. First awarded in 1897, it is a quarter-century older than the Archibald. This year, Natasha Bieniek took out the Wynne with a contemporary landscape painting in which astonishing painterly skills mimic the digitisation of our world. Bieniek's tiny painting - about the size of your hand - depicts a corner of St Kilda Botanical Gardens in full sunlight and perfect detail. The image looks backlit, as though it were on a mobile phone or tablet. Even the silvery frame resembles a app icon.

The painting is titled Biophilia, meaning "love of life". Bieniek's painted it on a coated aluminium product called Dibond, which is usually used for display and signage. "ATMs are made out of it. I wanted to create a man-made presence in my work," Bieniek says. And, no, it's not easy to paint on that miniscule scale. "I find it very challenging to do," Bieniek says. "I think that's what keeps me going."

Bieniek is from Melbourne, while this year's Sulman Prize winner is from Sydney. Jason Phu titled his work: I was at Yum Cha when in rolled the three severed heads of Buddha: Fear, Malice and Death. Australian Born Phu says neither of his parents is religious. But he grew up with Chinese and Vietnamese book and folk tales, and these influences crept into his art. The story in the painting, however, is "completely made up".

Phu has been an Archibald finalist with a portrait of Sydney gallery owners Ray and Owen Hughes who represent the artist. This year he is again an Archibald finalist with a quirky double portrait of arts couple Lisa Havilah and Glenn Barkley. Havilah is director of Carriageworks, while Barkely is a curator. "Glenn is I guess what you would call a mentor", Phu says. His painting is titled: Lisa has a much more pleasant face than Glenn. She also doesn't sing horribly while playing a guitar or try to put a cat up a tree while I'm painting her. The cat's name was Brian he says, and it didn't really want to go up the tree.

Phu will be leaving for China in September where he will be studying at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing.