

Doug Moran National Portrait Prize 2022 awarded to Graeme Drendel for portrait of fellow artist Lewis Miller

[ABC Arts](#)

By [Anna Freeland](#)

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This is the first major prize artist Graeme Drendel (pictured) has received in his career spanning four decades. *(Supplied: Doug Moran National Portrait Prize/Brendan Read)*

Graeme Drendel has won the \$150,000 Doug Moran National Portrait Prize — Australia's richest painting prize — for his portrait of figurative painter and fellow finalist Lewis Miller.

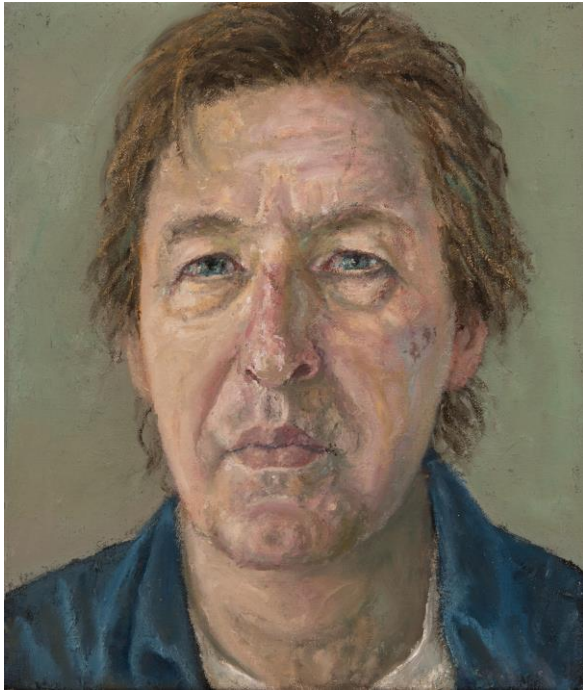
The announcement was made this morning at Juniper Hall in Sydney's Paddington.

In a poetic turn, both artists submitted portraits of each other and were selected as two of the 30 finalists for this year's prize.

The Melbourne-based artist addressed a roomful of media, fellow finalists and sitters, describing the win as a "complete surprise".

"I've entered a few portrait prizes over the years ... but I'm just gobsmacked because it is a bloody small portrait. I've always entered small portraits, never for a moment thinking they're going to win," said Drendel.

"Like most artists, I'm really just happy to have my work hung."



Solitude and introspection are recurring themes in Drendel's work. (Pictured: Portrait of Lewis Miller by Graeme Drendel.) (Supplied: Doug Moran National Portrait Prize)

The 69-year-old artist has previously [been a finalist](#) in the Art Gallery of NSW's Archibald Prize for portraiture and its Sulman painting prize, and was a finalist for the Moran in 2021 and 2017 — but this is his first major award win.

Recent winners

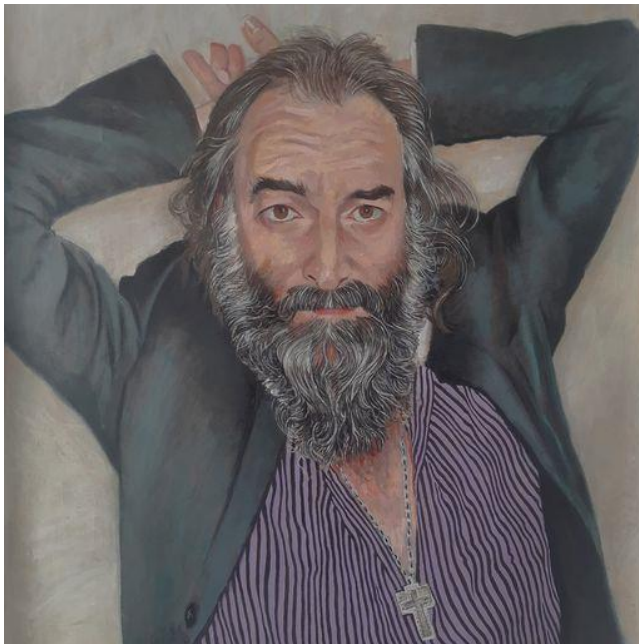
- 2012: Leslie Rice
- 2013: Nigel Milsom
- 2014: Louise Hearman
- 2015: Warren Crossett
- 2016: Megan Seres
- 2017: Tim Storrier AM
- 2018: Lynn Savery
- 2019: What
- 2021: Vincent Fantauzzo, Andrew Greensmith, Michael Vale

"Of course, it's an amazing prize to win monetarily, but more than anything it's a sense of recognition. I've been painting for 40 years and I've never won a prize before," Drendel told ABC Arts.

"It's a bit of a pat on the back I guess for all those years of painting, which I appreciate as much as anything."

The shortlist was drawn from 721 entries and features portraits of everyday Australians and recognisable personalities, including artist Reg Mombassa, musician Warren Ellis and former Australian Ballet artistic director David McAllister.

Among the 30 finalists are Tony Albert and Vincent Namatjira, with a joint self-portrait, and former Home and Away and Water Rats star Dee Smart, with a portrait of Sydney-based artist Kim Leutwyler.



Finalist Steve Lopes said in a statement he wanted to capture thoughtfulness in his portrait of Warren Ellis (pictured).*(Supplied: Doug Moran National Portrait Prize)*

The cohort was judged this year by art historian and former director of the National Gallery of Australia Gerard Vaughan, contemporary artist Lucy Culliton (a serial finalist in the Archibald Prize), and Moran Arts Foundation principal sponsor Peter Moran.

The panel deliberated over eight weeks and Culliton and Vaughan, in particular, diverged on the shortlisted entries, Culliton told ABC Arts.



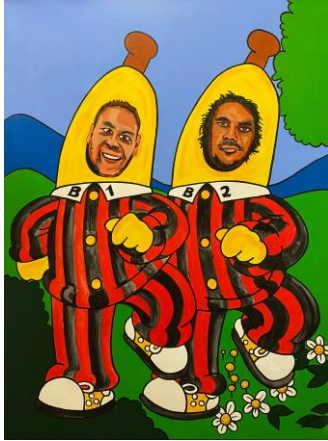
The prize accepts paintings in oil, acrylic, watercolour, ink, pastel, egg tempera or mixed media. (Pictured: Drendel in his studio.)(Supplied: *Doug Moran National Portrait Prize*)

"We basically picked our top 100; I had 109 and he [Vaughan] had 130, and then whittling down to 30 was really hard, because we had quite different tastes in our choices," she says.

"As a painter myself, I was looking for paint quality — that the artist mixed colours, not just painted out of tubes. I also like to see paintings that are painted from life. I guess that's my own personal practice.

"Whereas Gerard was looking more from his perspective as an art historian ... and looking at meaning in paintings."

Of their shortlisted entrants, Culliton and Vaughan had only two paintings in common, but there was consensus on the winner, she says.



Tony Albert and Vincent Namatjira's self-portrait (pictured) is based on a photo the pair took while in the ABC's Ultimo studios. (Supplied: Doug Moran National Portrait Prize)

"In the end, there were about 15 from [Vaughan] and 15 from me. I think that makes for a very fair judging process," says Culliton.

Last year's finalists similarly divided the judging panel, resulting in the 2021 prize being jointly awarded to three artists: Vincent Fantauzzo, for his painting of actor Asher Keddie; Michael Vale, for a self-portrait with his wife, filmmaker Donna McCrae; and Andrew Greensmith, for his portrait of Annetta Able and the late Stephanie Heller, who were then the eldest living identical twin survivors of Auschwitz.

Artists painting artists

Many of this year's finalists, including the winning portrait, feature artists or arts practitioners.

"What is particularly impressive is the number of artists' self-portraits, or their portraits of artist friends, or artists working in their studios – a sure signal of their commitment to their own practice, and how they want to communicate it to others," Vaughan said in a statement.



Miller (left) won the Hugh Ramsay Portrait Prize in 1981 and the Archibald Prize in 1998. (Supplied: Doug Moran National Portrait Prize/Brendan Read)

Just shy of two-thirds of the shortlist are portraits of visual artists — 17 in total, including nine self-portraits. Several others feature sitters working in the arts, including an actor, two musicians, a poet, and a ballet dancer.

Drendel's portrait of Miller took around six hours to complete over three sessions.

While the Mallee-born artist usually spends around two hours on a portrait, he says that painting Miller was a challenge.

"I think, subconsciously, I was intimidated by Lewis, even though I've known him for years, because he's a very recognised portrait painter," Drendel says.



On painting each other, Drendel says: "It was a fabulous process; we both really enjoyed it." (Pictured: Portrait of Graeme Drendel by Lewis Miller.)*(Supplied: Doug Moran National Portrait Prize)*

Miller, whose portrait of Drendel was among the finalists, was present at the announcement and says the mirror entries were not planned.

"It's a very unique situation. We've known each other for 25 years and we're really good friends. The prize couldn't have gone to a nicer guy."

Previous winners include Ben Quilty, Tim Storrier and Louise Hearman.

Moran prizes are acquisitive, meaning the winning portrait will be added to the Moran Prize permanent collection held at Juniper Hall, which boasts some 26 portraits. (From 1988 to 2006, the Prize was held biannually.)

But this year's finalists appear in an online exhibition. (Juniper Hall is closed for renovations.)

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Named after Moran's philanthropist father Doug Moran who, along with his wife Greta, established the prize and the Moran Arts Foundation more than 30 years ago, the coveted \$150,000 prize is Australia's most expensive prize for portraiture.

More than \$3.5 million in prize money has been awarded since it was established in 1988.

On spending the prize money, Drendel says: "I haven't really thought about it all that much. But my first thought comes to just buying materials.

"I stretch all my canvasses myself and my hands are arthritic, so it's really difficult. With this [prize money], I'll be able to go to an art supply shop and get some ready-stretched, ready-to-paint canvasses, and then, probably a bunch of brushes and paints.

"I never in my wildest dreams thought I'd win this prize. It's really taken me aback."