

Doug Moran prize 2022: Graeme Drendel wins \$150,000 for portrait of fellow finalist who painted him

## **The Victorian artist wins for his small painting of artist and friend Lewis Miller, who was also nominated for his own portrait of Drendel**



Doug Moran national portrait prize 2022 winner Graeme Drendel (right) with fellow artist and subject of his portrait, Lewis Miller (left). Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

Graeme Drendel has won Australia's richest portrait prize for his painting of one of his fellow finalists, the artist Lewis Miller, who was himself nominated for a portrait he had painted of Drendel.

Drendel, a Victorian artist known for his figurative work, was announced as the winner of the \$150,000 Doug Moran national portrait prize at a ceremony in Sydney on Wednesday. Drendel and Miller, who are good friends, were both present for the announcement.

"We've known each other for a long time," Drendel said after the announcement. "We've never painted each other before. Lewis is a very regular portrait painter, and he's done a lot of self-portraits so people know his face."



Graeme Drendel's winning portrait of Lewis Miller. Photograph: Supplied by Doug Moran national portrait prize

“I suggested to him that I’ll do his portrait and he said, ‘Well, I’ll do one of you.’ I had three sessions with him – I usually get a portrait done in a couple of hours but for some reason Lewis was trickier. But it was really good fun – a lot of gossip, good music and a glass of beer.

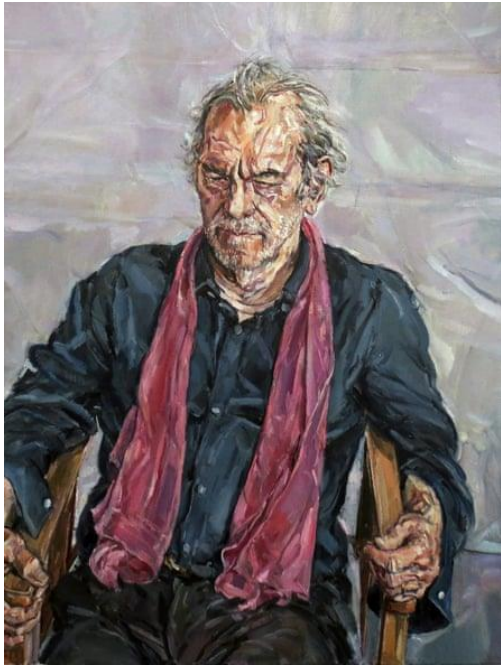
“I expected his painting of me to win, it is a ripper. It is a beautiful tough painting. That’s why I feel so grateful to have won.”

Prize judge and art historian Gerard Vaughan called it “an intriguing coincidence” that Miller’s “excellent” portrait was also a finalist, but said that Drendel’s painting “stood out right from the start of the judging process, within a very strong field”.

“Drendel’s painterly technique is superb, skilled and subtle with faultless lighting and tonality ... it is a quietly powerful portrayal of a familiar face, a character study both reflective and demanding attention on account of its emotional strength and credibility,” he added.

Drendel’s painting of Miller is just 30cm tall. Vaughan said that while some viewers might find its small size “surprising”, it was a strength.

“One characteristic of contemporary portraiture is large size, presenting images of faces that are full-on, ranging from big to gargantuan. In this case, the converse applies ... a smaller scale can provide opportunities for the artist to represent a clearer sense of reality, intimacy and authenticity, a



Lewis Miller's portrait of Graeme Drendel. Photograph: Supplied by Doug Moran national portrait prize

Drendel called his win “an incredible surprise – I have never won a prize before, and to win with a tiny little painting is a huge shock.”

“I’ve barely thought about the monetary aspect of it,” he said. “That’ll come. Really, it’s the recognition, after all these years of working, it is worth so much more.”

Drendel has been nominated for the Doug Moran national portrait prize twice before, in 2021 and 2017. He has exhibited since 1990 and his work features in many collections across the country, including the National Gallery of Australia.

Vaughan’s fellow judges were artist Lucy Culliton, and Peter Moran, whose parents Doug and Greta Moran established the Moran Arts Foundation in 1988.

Culliton said Drendel’s win was a unanimous decision. “Interestingly when we viewed the paintings in real life, although I knew the painting was small, I was surprised at how small the portrait was. I am very happy with our winner. A beautifully painted painting,” she said.

The Doug Moran national portrait prize invites original works from Australian artists “capturing Australians from all walks of life, whether a public figure or someone from the artist’s circle of experience”. All entries must be at least painted partly from life and the sitter must be known to the artist.

Last year, the prize money was doubled so three artists could win \$100,000 each, because the judges couldn't agree on just one – a first for the prize.

There will be no physical exhibition for the Doug Moran finalists this year, due to building works at Juniper Hall, the heritage-listed building in Paddington, Sydney, where the works are usually shown.

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