

Media Release

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Shannon Te Ao wins Walters Prize 2016



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Shannon Te Ao, *Two shoots that stretch far out* (video still) 2013–14, HD video, single-channel, 13:22min, colour, stereo sound, courtesy of the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington.

Shannon Te Ao has been announced tonight as the winner of the Walters Prize 2016, New Zealand's most prestigious contemporary art award.

The announcement was made by Doryun Chong, the Walters Prize 2016 international judge, at a dinner at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Te Ao wins \$50,000 for the honour.

Te Ao was selected for his presentation of *Two shoots that stretch far out* 2013–14, a single-channel, HD video work and *Okea ururoatia (never say die)* 2016, living plants, furniture and lights.

Chong, Deputy Director of Hong Kong's M+ museum, says he was intrigued, touched, and moved by Te Ao's art.

'As I left the space of his art, I felt as if I had not only been teleported but also had been transformed. I imagined him citing those lines [of an historic Māori song] to the end of time, with the rabbits, ducks and chickens, wallaby, swan and donkey by his side, while the plants wither and die, and come back to life again, and then again.'

'I would like to thank Shannon for helping me remember that a powerful work of art is sometimes created by an elegant formula of a simple gesture and repetitions. It is my distinct pleasure and privilege to announce that the winner of the Walters Prize 2016 is Shannon Te Ao,' says Chong.

Chong says the artworks being shown for the Walters Prize 2016 gave him the impression that he was traveling to unfamiliar places.

'The pleasure of finding yourself in an unfamiliar place comes from encountering images and ideas that override the framework for understanding the world. This occurs when perceptions are challenged, even if the traveller believes he has seen and experienced much,' he says.

Chong is the latest of a prestigious line of key international figures who have judged the Walters Prize historically and created connections and engaged with the contemporary art community in New Zealand. These judges include Charles Esche (2014), Mami Kataoka (2012), Vicente Todolí (2010), Catherine David (2008), Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (2006), Robert Storr (2004) and Harald Szeemann (2002).

Auckland Art Gallery Director Rhana Devenport says, 'something mysterious and wholly unexpected has occurred in the coalescence of works in the Walters Prize 2016'.

'The vital force of camera- and time-based art in this country is unmissable in this year's Walters Prize as the works trace across primordial time, imagined spaces and generational memory, to become meditations on mortality and life, while asking unanswerable questions about love, yearning, empathy and time,' she says.

Te Ao joins a celebrated list of former Walters Prize winners: contemporary New Zealand artists Luke Willis Thompson (2014), Kate Newby (2012), Dan Arps (2010), Peter Robinson (2008), Francis Upritchard (2006), et al. (2004) and Yvonne Todd (2002).

The Walters Prize is awarded for an outstanding work of contemporary New Zealand art produced and exhibited in the past two years, and 2016 marks the eighth iteration of the biennial award at Auckland Art Gallery.

The Prize was initiated to help create a greater understanding of contemporary art in New Zealand and to make contemporary art a more widely recognised, debated and prominent feature of the country's cultural life.

The winner of the Walters Prize 2016:

Shannon Te Ao, *Two shoots that stretch far out* (video still) 2013–14, HD video, single-channel, 13:22min, colour, stereo sound and *Okea ururoatia (never say die)*, 2016, collection of plants, display furniture, ultra violet lights. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington.

Te Ao was born 1978, Sydney (Ngāti Tūwharetoa). Lives and works in Wellington, New Zealand.

(ends)

Exhibition details:

The *Walters Prize* 2016

When: Open until Sunday 30 October 2016
10am to 5pm daily

Where: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Corner Kitchener and Wellesley Streets
Auckland, New Zealand

Entry: Free

For more information, high res images and interview requests contact:

Olivia Boswell, Communications Officer, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
M +64 21 952 759

E olivia.boswell@aucklandartgallery.com

W www.aucklandartgallery.com

History

The Walters Prize was established in 2002 by founding benefactors and principal donors Erika and Robin Congreve and Dame Jenny Gibbs, together with Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. From 2004 Dayle, Lady Mace became a major donor, providing an award to each of the finalist artists. Founding sponsors were EY, who dedicated their support until 2010 and Saatchi & Saatchi, whose relationship with the Prize continued until the end of 2014. Auckland Contemporary Arts Trust provided support as a principal donor and Elevation Capital joined as a major sponsor of the 2014 Walters Prize. More recently, Christopher and Charlotte Swasbrook have supported the prize as major donors.

Previous winners

2014: Luke Willis Thompson for *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, 2012

2012: Kate Newby for *Crawl out your window*, 2010

2010: Dan Arps for *Explaining Things*, 2008

2008: Peter Robinson for *Ack*, 2006

2006: Francis Upritchard for *Doomed, Doomed, All Doomed*, 2005

2004: et al. for *restricted access from abnormal mass delusions?*, 2003

2002: Yvonne Todd for *Asthma & Eczema*, 2001