



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

THE 2009 AUSTRALIAN CENTRE LITERARY AWARDS

ASHER LITERARY AWARD

Award for women writers offering an anti-war theme. Presented in association with the Australia Council for the Arts. Award value, \$10,000.

The judges were impressed with the strength and breadth of the field, with the award shared between two outstanding entries.

Sara Knox's novel offers a twist on the experiences of the Second World War, with a tale of transvestism and identity-exchange amidst the highly-charged world of the air ace. Shirley Walker's evocative and heartfelt memoir is a polished and beautifully written account of the impact of successive wars across the generations of a single family. In exploring the past, both prize winning books show how the aftermath of war can be even more poignant than the experience of combat itself.

WINNER

\$5,000 Sara Knox, for her novel, *The Orphan Gunner* (Giramondo)

WINNER

\$5,000 Shirley Walker, for her memoir, *The Ghost at the Wedding: A True Story* (Penguin)

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Kate Mulvaney, for her play, *The Seed* (Currency Press)

COMMENDED

Marina Larsson, for her history, *Shattered Anzacs: Living with the Scars of War* (University of New South Wales Press)

JUDGES

Deirdre Coleman, Kate Darian-Smith, Lucy Sussex

THE PETER BLAZEY FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship for a work in progress in the non-fiction fields of biography, autobiography and life-writing. Award value, \$15,000 plus a residency at the Australian Centre.

In a highly competitive field of applications, the judges were struck by Lily Chan's work, a memoir of her grandmother that spans three countries – World War II Japan, post-war China and regional Australia. Beautifully written, evocative and memorable, this is a piece of writing by a young writer with a fresh voice that holds out the promise of a career in which great things may be achieved.

The judges also commended highly Sam Everingham for his fascinating account of an iconic Australian character. Well-written and thoroughly researched, this compelling biography of Gretel Pinnenger leaves the reader wanting more.

WINNER

Lily Chan

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Sam Everingham

JUDGES

Crusader Hillis, Jennifer Kloester, Graham Willett, Michael Williams

VINCENT BUCKLEY POETRY PRIZE

Award for Australian poets to support a trip to Ireland, in memory of Vincent Buckley. Award value, \$10,000.

The quality of applications for the Vincent Buckley Prize was variously strong. It was not easy to arrive at a decision but the judges finally agreed that Elizabeth Campbell's poetry and her intended program overseas were exceptional.

The judges should also like to commend highly Sarah Holland-Batt and John Jenkins, both distinctive voices, both playing their part in Australia's vibrant poetry scene.

WINNER

Elizabeth Campbell

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Sarah Holland-Batt

HIGHLY COMMENDED

John Jenkins

JUDGES

Kevin Brophy, L.K. Holt, Chris Wallace-Crabbe



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D.J. 'DINNY' O'HEARN MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP

Award for emergent writers of fiction, poetry and drama, in memory of Dinny O'Hearn. Award value, \$5,000 plus a residency at the Australian Centre.

The judging panel was impressed by the quality of the applications this year, almost equally split between fiction and poetry, and ranging over many different styles and themes. The stand-outs were those entries that best conveyed a sense of the project to be undertaken and supplied a polished writing sample.

It was a very competitive field and so narrowing down a winner was hard, but in the end Gretchen Shirm's work emerged a clear favourite. The judges were convinced by her proposal for a well-conceived short-story cycle, and admired her closely observed and poignant stories that reveal ordinary lives in all their complexity. We would also like to highly commend Ann Shenfield for her poetry and Jenny Sinclair for her novel in progress.

WINNER

Gretchen Shirm

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Ann Shenfield

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Jenny Sinclair

JUDGES

Meg Mundell, John Murphy, David Ryding, Aviva Tuffield

KATE CHALLIS RAKA AWARD

Prize for indigenous creative artists. The 2009 Award is for scriptwriting. Award value, \$25,000.

From a diverse field of entries including short films and docudramas, the judges have chosen to recognise Warwick Thornton's script for *Samson and Delilah*. The judges noted Thornton's brilliant use of cyclical time to create a highly original and compelling narrative that provides a 'voice' to children at the centre of ongoing struggles in the Northern Territory. Great dramatic tension between the two main characters and an innovative mix of dialogue and other forms of communication create a powerful intimacy punctuated by moments of violence and conflict. The judges felt that this was one of the most important scripts to be produced in Australian film history.

The judges also highly commended Beck Cole's *Plains Empty*. They remarked on its original use of the ghost story to provide a format for considering colonial violence against Aboriginal women. The judges felt that *Plains Empty* marks an important Indigenisation and feminisation of the gothic/horror tradition in Australian cinema.

WINNER

Warwick Thornton, for *Samson and Delilah*

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Beck Cole, for *Plains Empty*

JUDGES

Therese Davis, Gary Foley, Kim Kruger, Emily Smith, Sara Wills

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Australian Centre would like to thank the donors of all of its Awards. In particular we would like to thank Clive and Penny Blazey and Tim Herbert for donating funds for the Peter Blazey Fellowship, and Professor Emeritus Bernard Smith and his family for donating funds for the Kate Challis RAKA Award. We would like to thank the Australia Council for the Arts for its support for the Asher Literary Award.

The Centre thanks Peter Rose for presenting the awards, and the Melbourne Writers Festival for hosting the event.

The Centre would also like to acknowledge the significant ongoing support of the Hugh Williamson Foundation.

The Centre is pleased to be presenting the awards as part of the School of Historical Studies.