

# 46th Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award

Fremantle Arts Centre



SAM BEARD



The Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award is among the most well-known prizes for printmaking and certainly one of the longest running in Australia. Since 1976, successive exhibitions have included some of Australia's finest contemporary printmakers (Mike Parr and Jörg Schmeisser are two that spring to mind). As an exhibition it has embraced experimentation – a testament to the vast possibilities of printmaking. Over the years, this variety and 'pushing of the boundaries' of printmaking has often motivated the raising of an eyebrow or two – not mine, I might add! The breadth of techniques is among the aspects of the Print Award I find most appealing, and thus the exhibition is a meditation on the vast possibilities of one particular kind of image-making. A good student of printmaking is alert to the

♦ Jacky Cheng, winner of the 46th Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award with her winning work, *Yue Lao - God of Match-making and Marriage*, 2021, created with Chinese calendar papers .

increasing variety of techniques. Ultimately, what really matters most is not the technique that yields the image, but the image itself. However, this year, for the first time, my eyebrows raised – not because of anything unusual, but because of the usual. Wandering through the galleries, a consistency emerges. Lovers of abstracted and textural forms inspired by environmental subject matter will relish in the numerable gritty prints by the likes of Monique Bosshard Curby, Bina Butcher, Seong Cho, Jo Darvall, Eleanor Davis, Erica Elgin, Bron Ives, Karen Prakhoff Rickman, Gary Shinfield and Bridie Weaver. Well executed, these prints appear familiar in the handling of form and subject. They represent a continuation of styles popular for some time. This is not so much a judgement of the work, but rather a noteworthy trait of the show. Perhaps what surprises me about this is that so much else about the Print Award is new: this is the first year, proper, that the Print Award has been held as a biennial event (after the impromptu skipping of 2020 due to the pandemic); it is the first in 15 years without Jim Cathcart at the helm of the Fremantle Arts Centre; and it includes the inaugural awarding of a First Nations Prize – deservedly awarded to Kieren Karritpul's



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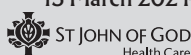
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◆ *Tradition of Hope*, 2022 (detail), laser engraving on paper, by Guy Louden.

*Traditional Fish Basket*. I gravitated immediately to Karritpul's collagraph print. It is a richly textured image, confidently laid out on the page.

Among the more familiar images are both standouts and eyebrow-raisers. Jacky Cheng's *Yue Lao – God of Matchmaking and Marriage* received this year's First Prize. The work is perhaps more aptly described as an exercise in weaving and macrame than traditional printmaking. So, where is the print? On the paper of course! Applying a Duchampian logic, Cheng's work uses the 'readymade' prints of Chinese calendars, which she has painstakingly reimaged in a decorative design. Depicting Yue Lao, a mythical cupid-like figure, Cheng's work is an impressive undertaking. Among the works that caught my attention is Matthew Brown's *double\_dragon\_diagram*. This lucid illustration is printed using carbon transfer paper on board. Brown's clever use of materials produces an unexpectedly appealing variety of fuzzy linework – surprisingly rich in density and quality. Familiar images of pop culture dragons swirl around in a vortex of blue fuzzy lines. While online imagery is the subject, there is nothing digital about the image; Brown's hand is explicitly present in the lines and forms.

Guy Louden's elegant print *Tradition of Hope* is a quiet, elegant and modestly composed image. A laser engraving on paper, the lines are consistent in value, creating a subtle pattern that criss-crosses the surface. Louden draws upon his familial connection to WA's communist history as a source of inspiration. As he notes, the ornate patterns and designs of William Morris, as well as his political ideals, are a rich influence on this print. Reading Louden's remarks about his work, a distance emerges between rationale and image – to me, how the two relate is ambiguous. Perhaps the hand that lingers toward the centre of the image is reaching out to something lost. Has something slipped from its grip? Perhaps this gesture implies a 'searching for' or 'loss of something, and it is this longing that connects Louden's inspiration and image. Or perhaps the distance between the image and the idea suggests there is a wealth of work yet to be explored. Regardless of which, I look forward to seeing how these themes are further explored by Louden.

◆ *River Serpent*, 2022, paperclay by Jenni Vacca.



Of the many appealing abstract prints, it is Andy Quilty's simple monotypes that are of most interest to me. Quilty has been exploring the 'mark-making' of burnouts for some time now. These particular images include an alluring variety of intensities in line and form. Fluctuations in density leave some sections tight and tangled and others lucid and luscious. Close scrutiny reveals particular regions of the compositions that perhaps border on the undefined. This tension between appealing and discordant elements makes sense with the subject – the skid marks of burnouts from a stolen Maserati. As a whole, the work is a fresh and lively inclusion.

During a final meander through the galleries, Jenni Vacca's paper clay print, *River Serpent*, catches my eye again. It was only after a subsequent viewing that its singularity became apparent to me. In some ways Vacca's clay relief prints are in tune with the enviro-abstract mentioned earlier. Yet Vacca's use of materials and thoughtful arrangement result in a work appealing to the senses. It is hard to resist the urge to touch, stroke and hold these 'images.' *River Serpent* blurs the line between image, object, and subject – which is it? I wonder. The sensorial and the speculative are joys in her work.

This year's Print Award has many appealing sights to behold. While the continuity in themes and techniques is perhaps somewhat unusual for the Award, this is by no means a negative. Rather, it appears to benefit particular works that stand out in their idiosyncrasies, demanding further inquiry. Be not afraid of the boundary-pushers!

The 46th Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award continues at Fremantle Arts Centre until 22 October.

