

Hutchins Australian Contemporary Art Prize Awards
Speech by Mr Richard Warner
Departure Lounge Deck, Brooke Street Pier, Hobart, Friday 8 June 2018

Good evening everyone and thank you for inviting me to speak at this the fifteenth Hutchins Australian Contemporary Art Prize Awards evening.

May I acknowledge the Aboriginal community as the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and to acknowledge their leaders past present and emerging.

I would like to acknowledge among you:

- Her Excellency Kate Warner, Governor of Tasmania;
- Headmaster, Dr Rob McEwan;
- Art Curator, Dr Joy Barber-Milojevic;
- Members of the judging panel, Patricia Brassington, Dr Peter Hill and Dr Edward Colless;
- President, Hutchins Foundation, Mr Ian Johnson;
- Chair, Hutchins Foundation Art Committee, Mr Trevor Mc Kenna;
- and the entire Art Foundation Committee.

The Hutchins Australian Contemporary Art Prize is an acclaimed biennial national award dedicated to supporting excellence in contemporary art, with the inaugural prize awarded in 1997.

The central objectives of the prize are to promote contemporary art and artists to Hutchins students and strongly demonstrate that the Hutchins School values art equally alongside sporting and academic success.

This year marks the introduction of a vibrant new vision for the prize, initiated by the Hutchins Art Foundation Committee and coordinated by the school art curator, Dr Joy Barber-Milojevic. The prize has no theme, genre, substrate or subject matter preconditions.

The competition is open to Australian artists, at any career stage, and aims to celebrate and encourage the diverse range of contemporary art practice.

Another key objective of the prize is to show the finalists' work in a busy city location in order to raise awareness of the school's activities within the local community. This year there are 48 works on display here at the wonderful Brooke Street Pier, through to Wednesday 27 June.

The Hutchins Australian Contemporary Art Prize is a demonstration of The Hutchins School's recognition and commitment to broadening the education platform it provides to its students. As Sir Ken Robertson, bestselling British author, speaker and advisor on education in the arts has said, and I quote:

“The arts aren't just important because they improve math scores, they are important because they speak to parts of children's being which are otherwise untouched.”ⁱ

It might just be that my own time at Hutchins, a long time ago now, might have been more rewarding had I chosen to study art or music.

I know from observing my daughters Emily and Meg and five grandchildren trying to learn to play an instrument, sing or paint, that the arts play a significant and important part in the development of young people. The arts are not just fun for kids but help them significantly to learn and grow.

My family has learned to be creative, to practice thinking creatively, which now comes naturally to them and will hold them in good stead in the future.

Mastering an arts subject builds self-confidence and as my grandchildren demonstrate, improvement in their progress builds that self-confidence.

I also know that trying to learn to play an instrument, sing or paint can be very challenging and I'm sure many, including members of my family, have been tempted to quit and do something else. Perseverance and focus are lessons hard taught in the arts but once learned, pay off throughout all of life.

Encouraging the development of artistic ability at an early age can reap rewards in later life. Alan Bean, one of only 12 people to have walked on the moon died in May this year. He was the commander of the Apollo 12 Mission and since his retirement from NASA in 1981 he devoted his time to developing his hobby of painting into a successful career. He, unlike some others of that elite group, found a passion beyond his profession which gave him enormous satisfaction.

Which brings me to the personal stories of two former Hutchins students who have benefitted from Hutchins School encouraging engagement with the arts.

Hilton Owen was 16 and in year 9 at Hutchins when he became interested in art. Hilton was inspired by his art teacher, Marja Bratt, whose enthusiasm brought real life to art for Hilton. He subsequently graduated with a Fine Arts Degree from the University of Tasmania in 2011.

Hilton has had an impressive start to his career. He has staged 13 exhibitions around Australia with his first solo exhibition in 2008 being a sellout and his most recent solo exhibition was held in April 2018 at Gaffa Gallery in Sydney. Hilton is committed to developing his art, has a strong work ethic and maintains a constant workflow, exhibiting at least every two years.

Luke Wagner left Hutchins in 1979. He was a prefect, captain of house, a member of the rowing eight and captain of athletics and he did well academically. Following school, Luke was accepted into veterinary science at Sydney and Melbourne and also medical school in Hobart. Luke chose to stay in Hobart and study medicine but changed to Agricultural science in year one.

This did not suit him either, so Luke completed a one-year Fashion Design course. He then managed Artery an Hobart art supply business in Hobart, a move which changed his life. He met many inspiring artists who encouraged him into his own business. He started a picture framing business and developed a burning ambition to paint.

Luke has been and continues to be a very successful career artist based here in Hobart. He won the Hutchins School Old Boys Association's Ivied Tower Award in 2005 in recognition of his outstanding achievement in the arts.

As Luke says and, I quote: "n a nutshell Hutchins equipped me to chose anything in life and to follow my heart."

Well done to all of the 354 entries from all States and territories around Australia and the 48 finalists whose works are on display here. Thank you to the three erudite judges, Pat Brassington, Dr Edward Colless and Dr Peter Hill. Well done also to the Hutchins School for initiating what has become an important national prize.

Thank you.

ⁱ <https://www.artbarblog.com/words-from-ken-robinson/>, accessed 28 May 2018.