



Face value

At this moment the clouds parted at the back of the stage, and Venus appeared. Nana, very tall and very plump for her eighteen years, in the white tunic of a goddess, and with her beautiful golden hair



Frida Kahlo *Roots* 1943. Private collection. Courtesy EPA via AAP/Richard Lewis. © 2016 Banco de Mexico Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico DF.

Del Kathryn Barton has won the Archibald twice, in 2008 and 2013. Barton and Judy Cassab are the only two women to be awarded the Archibald more than once.

Frida Kahlo *Roots* 1943

"From a young age the portrait works of Frida Kahlo, in particular her self-portraits, have had the most profound effect on me – both as a woman and on my creative practice. It's almost impossible for me to choose a work that has more impact than the others. They all send shivers through my being.

"For me they speak, they sing, from the complex longings and connectivity of the private life of this courageous and fierce lady. In this way, they are *such* generous works, erupting from her lived, felt, damaged, sincere inner-life. These painted jewels offer us insight into an internal life where the cosmos, the beloved, the architecture of the emotional life, the lived experience and the creative life collide and are organised in visual poems. I bow down!

"Quite simply they are masterworks, celebrating a complex female psyche and you *believe* them. Within these works there is no artifice, great beauty coexists with the vulnerable wounded self. She offers herself to us raw and exposed. Through honestly sharing her innermost life, Frida Kahlo helped me become a stronger and more truthful woman artist. Her world was a world that I immediately understood and recognised, a true gift. Thank you always, always!"

Jenny Sages has been an Archibald finalist 20 times.

She won the People's Choice Award in 2012 for her self-portrait *After Jack*. Egon Schiele *The scornful woman* 1910

"I used to do portraits and loved each one of them. I've stopped now. This Egon Schiele painting talks to me and says, why not again?

"I feel very strongly about this painting, it's mine, not anybody else's. I don't ask anything of it, the black is beautiful and I like the way the woman works. However, it's not like saying I'm going to do the same. There's something in the painting I can use, over and over, pushing it one way then another. I don't directly use what he paints. I just suck out what I need. I look at it in this book *Egon Schiele's Women*, each portrait in this book has its own life.

"When I turn this painting one way or another it talks to me differently. Sometimes his works remind me of my fashion drawings when I started off. And also of a portrait I painted of Heidi and Sarah Jane of Sass and Bide one year for the Archibald prize.

"I was always excited when I did portraits. Jack, my husband, used to say you need to do every one of them, each has its special meaning for you. When I look at my Helen Garner portrait [2003 Archibald finalist], I realise I've been using the same colours as Egon Schiele.

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“As I grow older, Schiele’s belief that death is not a tragedy but an inescapable fact of life rings true for me. In the self-portrait I did after Jack’s death I was responding to this idea. It began when my daughter Tanya and I were visiting the *Paths to portraiture* exhibition at Tweed Regional Gallery in South Murwillumbah in 2011. My painting of Jack was on the wall and when we came back into the gallery after lunch I heard Jack’s voice on the DVD. I started crying and Tanya circled me taking photographs. It was from these photographs that I painted my self-portrait, *After Jack* in 2012.”

Abdul Abdullah has been an Archibald finalist three times.

He was first hung in 2011.

Ben Quilty *Margaret Olley* 2011

“I have always been concerned with *people* above anything else. I figure the world’s problems are *people* problems, and as an artist I feel part of my role is to examine and question these things. Every time I visit the Art Gallery of New South Wales I visit my favourite portrait, Ramsay’s *The sisters*. But the portrait, or the experience of a portrait, that affected me more than any other at the Art Gallery is Ben Quilty’s Archibald-winning portrait of Margaret Olley.

“The year Ben won with this painting I was 25 years old, and it was my first time as a finalist with my painting of a hero of mine, Waleed Aly. It was before he was on television and I knew him as the author of a book called *People like us*. Being selected had always been an aspiration of mine, but I had used the entry as an excuse to meet him and spend some time with him. In fact, each time I’ve entered the Archibald it has mostly been an excuse to meet and spend time with people I admire.

“My big brother Abdul-Rahman Abdullah came along with me from Perth and we had a good party, star struck by the celebrity of it all. The artists’ lunch and preview the day before the announcement was the first time I saw the portrait of Margaret Olley in the flesh. No other year have I been so certain a painting was going to win.

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“The paint was bulging – practically dripping – off the surface. On closer inspection I could see Ben’s pencil lines on the bare white canvas. The broad confident strokes of thick, thick paint looked so casual and self-assured, but that only gave away a master’s hand. You would think the sparse, almost violent marks would lend themselves to a hard-edged painting, but Ben had used them to create this soft, vulnerable, and, at the same time, powerful representation of Margaret Olley.

“Not only was this my favourite painting on display, when Ben was announced as the winner he showed me how an artist can compose themselves in such circumstances. He had this casual, warm charm. He was so personable and his relationship with Margaret Olley was so sincere. In his acceptance speech, I even remember him gently teasing a reporter who had called that morning to see if he had won, and who he had had to lie to. He showed me that, even in the spotlight, being yourself, whoever that may be, is essential, and sincerity and integrity can never be compromised.”



Egon Schiele *The scornful Woman* (Gertrude Schiele) 1910. Courtesy the Wien Museum, Vienna.

Ben Quilty *Margaret Olley* Archibald prize winner 2011. Oil on linen, 170 x 150 cm. © Ben Quilty.

Giovanni Bellini *Doge Leonardo Loredan* 1501-2. Oil on poplar, 61.6 x 45.1 cm. National Gallery, London collection.



Sam Leach's portrait of **Tim Minchin** won the Archibald Prize in 2013. He is one of only three artists to win both the Archibald and Wynne prizes in the same year, along with **William Dobell** and **Brett Whiteley**.

Giovanni Bellini *Doge Leonardo Loredan* 1501-2

"There are a few things I like about this painting, which I must have seen in the '90s when I first travelled to Europe. In the National Gallery in London there are so many huge works begging to be looked at. This painting is small, about 60 x 45 cm, and there's not really much going on but it still has a way of demanding attention within the space it is in – even if you're just looking at a reproduction in a magazine or on a computer screen.

"I paid more attention to this work when I was in London in 2009 and I visited the gallery to look at portraits to prepare for my first sitting with Tim. This painting was important then, a reminder that portraits don't have to be overdone or oversized.

"I was struck by the mysterious way that Bellini's brought the personality of the sitter across. The head and upper torso look out of the

painting but not at the viewer. The simplicity is eloquent – the succinct representation gives a lot of information about the sitter. It feels like we have an idea about his role, his place in society and his character even though there is almost no pose and the face is almost emotionless. The painting seems very lifelike, though a close inspection shows even this has been achieved economically. The technique is accurate and restrained but there are sublime touches in the details of the cloth where the paint gets almost expressive.

"The blue background is intriguing. It manages to read as a void and plane simultaneously. It does not look like sky, but it doesn't exactly look like a wall either. It does make the garments leap out of the canvas though. The play of light over the robe is something I could look at for a long time."

THE ARCHIBALD, WYNNE AND SULMAN PRIZES

UNTIL OCTOBER 9

Major exhibition gallery, Lower level 1