

Artist Amanda Penrose Hart finds peace where so many Anzacs died



Gallipoli Art Prize winner Amanda Penrose Hart with her winning painting *The Sphinx, Perpetual Peace*. Picture: John Fotiadis

ASHLEIGH WILSON THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM April 20, 2017

The first time Amanda Penrose Hart visited Gallipoli, she stood on the beach and looked with awe at the imposing outcrop known as the Sphinx. It was 2013, and she was there with a group of artists from Australia, each trying to capture a sense of the majesty all around.

Until that moment, the Anzac legend had been something of a remote concept. “We all celebrate Anzac Day,” she said, “we all get a public holiday, and we learn about Anzac Day when you’re a kid, but I didn’t know anything about Anzac Day and what they went through until I went there. It was amazing.”

Penrose Hart spent two weeks in Gallipoli making several studies in the open air before returning nine months later to work some more. Back in her studio in Sofala, near Bathurst in western NSW, she worked on a painting based on what she had seen.

That work, *The Sphinx, Perpetual Peace*, was yesterday named the winner of this year’s \$20,000 Gallipoli Art Prize. It’s a large painting, 153cm by 214cm, and took about a year to do.

“It just powers over you, it’s amazing,” she said of the Sphinx, a spiky ridge to the north of Anzac Cove where so many Australians lost their lives. “It’s so enormously tall and steep. So I did a big painting of it to try to capture the feel of the place.”

Penrose Hart was not in Sydney yesterday to receive the award. She left this month on another creative pilgrimage through war, this time to the Western Front. She is making her way through France with other established local artists including Wendy Sharpe, Euan Macleod and Luke Sciberras.

Like her two previous Gallipoli trips, this excursion has as much to do with artistic pilgrimage as a desire to experience such hallowed landscapes first-hand. Penrose Hart is consciously walking in the footsteps of Arthur Streeton and George Lambert, both of whom worked in these regions during World War I, as well as Sidney Nolan in later years.

Her travel plans meant Gallipoli prize organisers decided to inform her of her win before she left, before yesterday’s announcement. “The timing couldn’t be better. It’s wonderful, I’m very happy that my name will be on the list with all the people who have won in the past,” she said.

Despite the title, and this year’s winning selection, artists entering the Gallipoli prize do not necessarily need to focus on the Gallipoli conflict or even warfare. The prize is open to painters from Australia, New Zealand and Turkey, reflecting on themes of loyalty, respect, love of country, courage and comradeship.

All 39 finalists’ entries will be displayed at Gallipoli Memorial Club, Sydney, from April 20 to 28.

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