

Media Release

Strictly embargoed until 18:30 Wednesday 3 November 2021

## Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf opens and winner of the 20th Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize is announced



*Sydney's historical 122-year-old St Brigid's building has been transformed into a contemporary public art gallery opening tomorrow with the 20th anniversary exhibition of the Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize.*

*Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize has today announced Luritja woman and Yarrenyty Arltere artist Rhonda Sharpe as the 2021 Prize winner.*

Sydney's newest public art gallery, **Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf** opens its doors to the public for the first time on **Thursday 4 November 2021**. The historical **122-year-old** building, owned by Woollahra Council, is one of the few surviving **mid-19th century** harbour foreshore grand mansions and has been transformed into a new Gallery, showcasing a year-round program of contemporary art led by Gallery Coordinator **Sebastian Goldspink**. Overlooking Sydney Harbour in Double Bay and spanning two levels, the Gallery will act as a community hub at the heart of a new cultural precinct, including the 1863 Council Chambers, the picturesque Blackburn Gardens, Murray Rose Pool and Redleaf Beach.

The **Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf** launches its artistic program with the **Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize's 20th anniversary exhibition**. To mark the unveiling, **Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize** has today announced **Rhonda Sharpe** and her work *Desert Woman with Mustache, Cooloman and Pretty Clothes* as the winner of the main acquisitive award, increased this year to \$25,000. Sydney-artist **Mechelle Bounpraseuth** was awarded the Special Commendation, the 2021 Mayor's Award has been awarded to **Kate Coyne** and second time finalist **Michael Harrell** has been Highly Commended.



**Woollahra  
Gallery**  
at Redleaf

**Winning artist Rhonda Sharpe** commented on the award: “When I found out I won this award I was so happy, but I couldn’t believe it was true. Everyone works together in the Yarrenyty Artere art room in Alice Springs, and we all love our sewing. We encourage each other every day to get better at art. So, I thought, why did I win, but I really love making soft sculptures, I always get ideas of things to make! I’m really proud to win this award because sewing makes me happy. Thank you.”

**Mayor of Woollahra, Councillor Susan Wynne** said of the Mayor’s Award Winner: “Kate Coyne’s work, *Weight of the World on My Shoulders*, captivated me from the moment I set eyes on it – this stunning hanging sculpture drew me in with its strong and gentle folds of lead. All the finalists’ works are amazing and I can’t wait for the community to see them and the new gallery.”

The winners were chosen from a finalist group of **52 works**, selected from a record **844 entries**, by the judging panel, Director Curatorial and Digital, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia **Dr Lara Strongman**, Art Historian, Curator and Industrial Archaeologist **Joanna Capon OAM** and celebrated artist and fashion designer **Jenny Kee AO**. Artists from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have created works - each measuring up to **80cm** in any dimension - responding to themes ranging from today’s politics, the COVID-19 pandemic, our relationship with the natural world to identity. The unique 20th anniversary exhibition will feature all **52 finalist works** alongside the Council’s collection of **19** previous winning works from the Prize.

**On the 2021 Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize, judge Dr Lara Strongman** said: “Shortlisting from such a large and diverse field of creative entries, was quite difficult. But selecting the winner was comparatively easy, and a unanimous decision. We three judges determined that originality and presence in the gallery were the qualities that we were looking for. We found that they came together wonderfully in Rhonda Sharpe’s work. It’s utterly distinctive, unlike anything else, and represents a fearless personal view of the world which we admired very much. I’d love to see more work by this very talented artist.”

**Joanna Capon OAM** commented: “What attracted me to Rhonda Sharpe’s *Dessert Woman with Mustache, Cooloman and Pretty Clothes* was its vibrancy and originality. It held my eye and made me laugh, something we are much in need of at the moment.”

**Jenny Kee AO** added: “This is the work of a storyteller and is different from the preconceived idea of what a sculpture should be. It takes sculpture to another dimension in its vibrancy, its originality, its humour and naive beauty.”

Originally designed by English architect **Frederick Moore Simpson** and built in **1897**, the historical building began as the family home for Captain Arthur Lassetter and has since been the headquarters for the Royal Commission on Espionage, Woollahra Arts Centre and most recently the treasured Double Bay Library. The building has been restored and reinvented by **Tanner Kibble Denton Architects** to create four high calibre exhibition spaces, while keeping all of the original details including crown moulding, arched windows and original wooden flooring.

The exhibition program for **Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf** will be led by respected curator and proud descendant of the Burramattagal people of Western Sydney **Sebastian Goldspink**. Sebastian is also the curator of the 2022 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art and was a co-founder of ALASKA Projects in Kings Cross.

**Sebastian Goldspink, Coordinator, Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf**, said: “Having grown up in Double Bay and spent my childhood visiting the building in its earlier life as Double Bay library, it brings me great joy to see it restored and



reinvented into Sydney's latest public art gallery. We are looking forward to offering everyone a warm welcome to the new Gallery and showcasing the work of emerging and established artists in this unique building."

Upcoming exhibitions opening on **8 December** include iconic landscape works by multiple Wynne and Archibald prize finalist **Belynda Henry**; a solo exhibition of Sydney-based visual artist **Fraser Pollock** showcasing the artist's love of line and colour; *Remains of the Day*, a series of work by artist **Nicholas Samartis**; and *Hold Tight*, photographic and video works by **Emily Portman**, exploring the performative actions and needs of physical contact, through the backdrop of a socially-distant world.

A cultural hub situated on the lower ground floor of the gallery will become the new home for the established *Woollahra Artist in Residence Program*. The program provides rent-free, non-residential unfurnished studios for artists to work in. The first round of artist residencies will feature artists **Susan Baird**, **Rox De Luca**, **Wendy Yu** and **Sharon Billinge**. The first Artist in Residence **Penelope Cain** will present a giant *Houseplant Takeover*, inviting visitors to bring their houseplants to partake in a temporary 'takeover', celebrating human-plant relationships in a community space.

Woollahra is recognised as the home of many of Australia's most acclaimed artists, authors and filmmakers, including poet Banjo Patterson, Nobel Prize-winning author Patrick White, iconic opera singer Dame Joan Sutherland as well as internationally recognised visual artists Charles Blackman, Russell Drysdale, Fairlie Kingston, Margaret Olley, Lloyd Rees and Martin Sharp. The area also has one of the highest concentrations of commercial galleries in any local government area in Australia. *Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf* will support many non-commercially represented artists.

The Woollahra Gallery will adhere to strict COVID-Safe guidelines in line with the NSW Government's Public Health Order and ensure the safety of visitors and staff. All staff, and visitors to the Gallery aged over 16, will be required to provide proof of COVID-19 double vaccination, wear a mask indoors and check-in using the QR code provided.

The Gallery opening hours are: Wednesday – Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday – Sunday 10am-5pm Admission is free. Finalists' works can be purchased online. For more information visit [Woollahragallery.com.au](http://Woollahragallery.com.au), @woollahragallery

Ends

**MEDIA CONTACT:** To request interviews, imagery and information in relation to the Prize and Gallery, please contact Articulate: Sasha Haughan, [sasha@articulatepr.com.au](mailto:sasha@articulatepr.com.au), 0405 006 035 or Kym Elphinstone, [kym@articulatepr.com.au](mailto:kym@articulatepr.com.au), 0421 106 139.

**IMAGERY FOR MEDIA USE:** <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mb9upjrlmhptgb8/AABYSGXdibbcIW8VLe4Wd0sVa?dl=0>

Image captions (left to right): Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf, credit David Varga; Rhonda Sharpe, Desert Woman with Mustache, Cooloman and Pretty Clothes. Courtesy of Rhonda Sharpe and Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize; Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize exhibition at Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf, credit David Varga.

#### **ABOUT WOOLLAHRA GALLERY AT REDLEAF**

Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf, located at 548 New South Head Road, Double Bay will be a cultural hub in the community, a destination where all are welcome. Over its lifetime, this significant heritage building has had a rich and diverse history. It has been home to many important local families, the headquarters for the Royal Commission on Espionage, and a community gathering place as the Woollahra Arts Centre. It was most recently the treasured Double Bay Library before its relocation to Kiaora Place. The vision of the Gallery is to be the cultural heart of Woollahra and support creative talent to flourish. It will be a collaborative space for all to connect with and be enriched by the arts. The Gallery will focus on contemporary art through the yearly exhibition calendar of a range of diverse shows by different artists.

#### **ABOUT SEBASTIAN GOLDSPINK**



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A proud descendent of the Burramattagal people of Western Sydney, Sebastian Goldspink is an independent curator and Founder of ALASKA projects. In 2011, Sebastian opened the ground breaking space ALASKA projects as a platform to exhibit contemporary visual art in unused or disused spaces – showcasing over 500 artists across 150 exhibitions. Sebastian has curated exhibitions nationally in Australia and internationally in London, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Christchurch. He has collaborated with institutions including Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Old and New Art, National Art School, Performance Space, Art Month Sydney, Sydney Symphony and Kaldor Public Art Projects. In 2020, Sebastian was named as the curator for the 2022 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art for the Art Gallery of South Australia.

#### **ABOUT THE WOOLLAHRA SMALL SCULPTURE PRIZE**

Established in 2001, the Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize is Australia's pre-eminent award for small sculpture presented by Woollahra Council. In 2021, an increased prize pool of \$29,000 will be offered to mark its 20th anniversary. The Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize attracts strong support from artists, collectors and critics and is the first national acquisitive prize for an original sculpture of up to 80cm in any dimension. Each year the winning work is acquired by Council and forms part of the permanent public collection which is on display all year round for the community to enjoy for free. Visitors can discover some of the world's most exciting contemporary sculptures and often be introduced to the most innovative artists working in the medium. The Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize will be the opening exhibition for Woollahra Gallery at Redleaf.