

Speech Notes – Ross Hemera
2008 Molly Morpeth Canaday Art Award Judge

I am delighted to be here with you today and I am honoured to be invited to judge the Molly Morpeth Canaday Art Award for painting and drawing. I am absolutely convinced that art events such as this, reflect the health, wellbeing and spirit of our smaller provincial centres; so as I stand here today I feel proud as a Kiwi and a New Zealander.

I am well aware that events such as this require the dedication and commitment of the community and especially the organising committee and all the other helpers involved. I would like to acknowledge that much of the time and energy put into making such an event is voluntary. Credit is due to the organising team, helpers and supporters. Such events allow us to express our identity, our values and aspirations. It is at the very heart of our way of life; our New Zealand culture.

It was in this context that I made my selections. Our communities are diverse and full of variety. The overriding theme of the entries reflected a really strong sense of New Zealand as a place and the things that are important to us as New Zealanders; the bach; the beach; our cultural patterns; our personalities and our material culture.

So again, it was in this context I selected the winning entries. I was looking for this diversity and this variety. Before I talk about the winning entries, I would just like to acknowledge the quality and the artistic merit in each and every work. I am delighted by the number of local artists who chose to express local themes, but also I acknowledge the artistic investigations into New Zealand-wide issues and identity.

The winner of the **Local Artist Award** epitomizes the essence of provincial town New Zealand. *On holiday here in the Bay I drove past this very bookshop. I was compelled to get out of the car and go rummaging around the cases of books. This painting has the same effect on me.*

The **Portrait** winner is actually quite provocative because of the ambiguity of the possible trans-gender implications. I think this suggestion is well interpreted through the anatomical distortion and style. While this person is anonymous, we also know this person well.

The **Abstract** category winner presents a formal pattern-play reflective of Pacific cultural paradigms. There is a rather compelling incongruity between the flower motif and its sculptural depiction. The fragility of flowers has become timeless.

The winner of the **Mixed Media** category uses mixed idioms in collage-like constructions. Graphic symbols are painted over the top of patterned wall paper. I get the sense of a redecoration project, perhaps similar to the redecoration craze of the innercity villa houses in Wellington.

The winner of the **Drawing** category is a delightful and charming rendition of an interior scene. The charm that is the second-hand/antique shop that now abounds throughout New Zealand is captured here. As we now begin to identify yesterday's paraphernalia we continue to define who we are. Our propensity for collecting is now a tradition well upheld.

For me, photographic realism has a way of inviting you into the painting. The winning **Landscape** entry seems to do this and serves as a resting place. We are invited to – *come sit by the creek and rest awhile*. I grew up in the South Island high country. I have paddled in this creek, sat on its banks . . . and rested a while.

The **Highly Commended** winner provides an insight into a particular personality. Depicted is a story of layers - in a painting with different layers of meaning. If this is a story about personality, with an eye for detail, then correspondingly the painting style incorporates that detail. The depiction of those feet would mean nothing without the depiction of the material things attached to them. We can learn so much about personality through objects.

The **Open Winner** touches on issues. For me, it touches on some real issues as a Maori, as a New Zealander and as a parent. The work suggests that, through the mokoed face, our Maori culture is important to us; through the use of kowhaiwhai based pattern our visual culture is important to us. And through the symbolic depiction of baby-child objects (safety pins, pacifiers etc) our children, our babies are also important to us.

Considering this combination of imagery, I can't help thinking about a very real and disturbing issue – child abuse as a dark and ugly aspect of our society. I think this work addresses this phenomenon in a meaningful and positive way. It suggests that we treasure our children and babies in the same way we treasure our identity and culture.

Again, I am delighted and honoured to be here, congratulations on a successful art event. Congratulations to the organising team. Congratulations to all those whose work was selected for the exhibition and special congratulations to all the winners. However, also, to all entrants, your contribution and participation is acknowledged.