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The future looks bright for these emerging art stars

From fascinating hybrid sculptures that blur the boundaries between natural and man-made forms, to a series of hanging prints of photos depicting life in the former Yugoslavia, the 2024 Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition offers plenty to explore.

Written by Jane Llewellyn



'Driftlife', by Lauren Downton, is on show in the 2024 Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition. Photo: James Field / supplied



Jane Llewellyn



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2024 Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition SASA Gallery

In 2024 the Helpmann Academy celebrates 30 years of empowering emerging creatives to enhance their practices and build a sustainable profession. One of its initiatives, The Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition, plays a major role in giving students a launching pad for their visual arts careers. This year graduates are exhibiting their work during Adelaide's festival season and had the opportunity to secure one of the 17 awards up for grabs valued at more \$82,000.

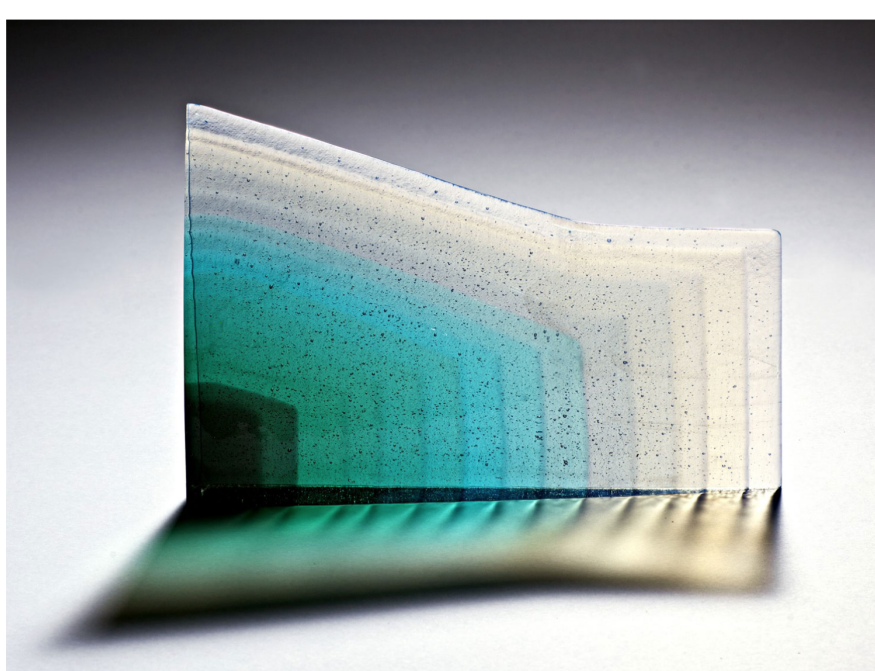
Featuring graduates from the University of South Australia and Flinders University, the 2024 exhibition features a range of disciplines, including ceramics, glass, video work, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, fashion, costume design and textiles. The artists present works that explore materiality and themes such as identity, gender, mortality and our relationship to the natural world.

The ceramics offering this year is impressive, with Lauren Downton's work being particularly noteworthy. Downton is an emerging ceramic artist who works primarily in clay. She presents hybrid sculptures that combine casts of branches, leaves, antlers, animal organs, plastics, waste and human debris. These objects blur the boundaries between natural and man-made forms, reflecting the artist's exploration into human excess and its impact on the environment. Downton's efforts were recognised with two awards: The Fetzer Award for Excellence, valued at \$7500, and the City Rural Insurance Development Award, valued at \$5000.



A guest at the 2024 Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition Vernissage alongside Lauren Downton's sculptures. Photo: Sam Roberts

Glass is another popular medium among the 2024 cohorts, and Katherine Shierlaw is a standout. The recipient of the Lang Family Foundation / McKee Award, valued at \$5000, Shierlaw has created glass works inspired by her background in geography and town planning. The exhibition includes forms from the series *Surrounds* which explore the intangible connections that exist between humans and the spaces we occupy.



One of Katherine Shierlaw's glass works. Photo: Michael Klunenek

One of the more unique presentations is Katey Smoker's house-paint sculptures from the series *The Delicate Balance Between Intention and Intuition*. Based on post-minimalist principles, Smoker's practice expands the traditional notions of painting and sculpture. She produces gridded forms that embrace the beauty of imperfection. Smoker uses house paint, an everyday material, as her medium because of its simplicity. She takes the paint from the wall and places it on the floor to emphasise the materiality and spatial presence of both the grid and the paint.

Smoker's fascinating sculptures have been well received, with the artist awarded the Helpmann Major Exhibition Award supported by IAS Fine Art Logistics and Linden New Art, valued at \$10,000. She was also the recipient of the Helpmann Academy / ACE Studio Program Award valued at \$15,000 which includes a 12-month studio residency plus extensive professional development.



The Delicate Balance Between Intention and Intuition, by Katey Smoker. Photo: Bente Andermahr

Maria Tomasic's prints on cotton muslin, which are suspended from the ceiling, are another highlight. Tomasic draws on her personal story of migrating as a refugee from Yugoslavia (now Croatia) when she was a young child. Using an archive of old black-and-white photographs, the artist explores notions of displacement and fragmented memories. Audiences can walk through and between the hanging works and experience the feeling of being in between worlds.



Obscured images; displacement and remembering, by Maria Tomasic. Photo: supplied

The City of Adelaide Award, which offers a \$5000 cash prize and acquisition by the City of Adelaide's art collection, was presented to Thao Le for *Echoes of Solitude*. The series of photographs is influenced by Le growing up in Saigon, Vietnam, and explores ideas around isolation, loneliness and abandonment. Her photographs encapsulate the busy city but at the same time present a feeling of calm. The photographs portray the tension of the hustle and bustle of the busy city frozen in a moment.

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These are just a few of the fascinating artworks featured in this year's Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition, with many more captivating displays to explore. Each year the exhibition allows audiences to explore the art stars of the future and this year is no exception, with many talented artists on the cusp of a bright future in the visual arts.

The 2024 Helpmann Academy Graduate Exhibition is on at SASA Gallery, UniSA Kaurua Building, City West, until March 22. It is open from Wednesday to Saturday, 10am–4pm.

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