

John Copes Watercolour Prize 2013



Why the John Copes prize?

My father always had a keen interest in drawing and watercolour. Some of my earliest memories are of the folios of sketches and materials that he acquired as a result of his attendance at the Julian Ashton School after his return from the army at the end of the war. I guess having a young family interrupted his pursuit of this interest until he was able to take it up again whilst working with the UN in the West Indies. He continued to develop this interest on his retirement and return to Australia, when he joined the Ku-ring-Gai Art Society where he served as president for several years. One of his first acts when he and Hope moved to Bowral in 1995 was to join the BDAS where he became an active member and regularly submitted works to appropriate competitions.

It was after failing several attempts to have any of his paintings hung in a competition, whilst seeing mainly abstract works being favoured, that he suggested to me that my company might consider sponsoring a prize specifically for representational art. My initial offer of a prize for representational art did not find favour with the committee but in 1997 a competition was held under title of the Kenilworth Prize for representational art. Shortly after holding the second Kenilworth Prize Dad passed away and the family thought it would be a fitting memorial to continue the prize in his memory. At the same time the prize money was doubled to \$4000.

The notion of a prize for traditional or representational art created difficulties of interpretation for the committee and competitors alike. Many meetings were held and views exchanged, whilst almost every year correspondence was received from competitors expressing varying degrees of dissatisfaction with either the entries or the judging. Although there were always a handful of excellent works, I was often disappointed in the overall quality of the entries and sometimes unhappy with the choice of winners. Notwithstanding these difficulties and my own reservations as to whether the prize was achieving its purpose, it did continue to grow in recognition and stature and the overall quality of entry improved through the years.



In 2006 it was suggested that there was room in the competition calendar for a specific prize for watercolour and the family eagerly accepted the invitation to rebadge the Copes Prize for Representational Art as the John Copes prize for Watercolour. A watercolour prize really made more sense as an avenue for our support and as a memorial to my father. It was the medium in which he almost exclusively worked and it was one which the whole family enjoyed and admired. We felt that it also would provide encouragement and an avenue for display for this sometimes under recognised, segment of our art community.

The first watercolour prize was exceptionally well received by competitors and members alike and we received much favourable comment and several letters of appreciation after the competition.

Having agreed to sponsor an annual watercolour prize, when funding for the portrait prize came to an end, the committee suggested that we might alternate the watercolour prize with a prize for portraiture as the latter had proved very popular and provided a different and specific artistic style for members to pursue.

The result has been an outstanding success. The watercolour prize attracts a full gallery of entries all of high quality and gives those practicing that medium the opportunity to compete and display on a level playing field, whilst the Portrait Prize offers the opportunity to appeal to a wider group of artists and for the Society to benefit from the promotional opportunities offered by the high degree of public interest in the discipline.

We are grateful to successive committees of the BDAS for their guidance in the evolution and management of the competitions. We are very happy and comfortable with the status of both competitions, with the support for them, and the outcomes in recent years, and we look forward to continuing our support of the BDAS in this way for many years to come.

Tim Copes

