

## Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki announces Dr Jacky Bowring as the inaugural winner of the Michèle Whitecliffe Art Writing Prize

# MICHÈLE WHITECLIFFE

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## ART WRITING PRIZE

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki is delighted to announce Dr Jacky Bowring as the inaugural winner of the Michèle Whitecliffe Art Writing Prize, for her entry 'Art Therapy'.

As the 2021 winner, Dr Bowring receives \$2500 and sees the winning entry published in Auckland Art Gallery's magazine, *Art Toi*. The two runners up, Alena Kavka and Robyn Maree Pickins, will have their entries published on the Gallery's website as online articles.

Auckland Art Gallery Director Kirsten Lacy says part of the Gallery's responsibility is to nurture art writing and critical engagement.

'The Gallery has an important role in publishing on art and ideas, developing new ways of understanding and talking about the visual arts in New Zealand. We also actively set out to nurture critical and creative thought about the visual arts and to support new writing and writers,' says Lacy.

'The Michele Whitecliffe Art Writing Prize was created with the intent of invigorating discussions about New Zealand art and culture. It is pleasing to see a controversial and provocative exploration on public sculpture as the inaugural essay, 'Art Therapy', by Dr Bowring.'

The Prize aims to draw out critical voices and to refresh and strengthen discussions about art and culture. Writers were asked to respond to the theme of 'well-being' in their essays and an independent judge, Charles Darwent, selected the winner from a strong group of entries.

Art critic for *Independent on Sunday* from 1996 to 2013, Charles Darwent is a regular contributor to *The Guardian*, *The Art Newspaper* and *ArtReview*. He is also the author of *Mondrian in London* (2013) and *Josef Albers: Life and Work* (2018).

'Art Therapy' opens with a challenge to accepted wisdom: What if art is actually not therapeutic but harmful? It is easy enough to catch the eye with a snappy first line, far harder to sustain interest having done so. What impressed me about 'Art Therapy' was its consistent and intelligent sacrificing of sacred cows. There was no falling back on easy assumptions, no reaching for critical jargon. The essay's authority comes from the originality of its thinking. It needed no dressing-up,' says Darwent.

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A professor at Lincoln University, Dr Bowring is a landscape architecture academic specialising in memories and memorials.

'Hearing about the competition was the perfect catalyst for me to write about a lot of the things I have been reflecting on in relation to statues and public art', says Dr Bowring.

'As a landscape architect I'm really interested in public spaces and how they are a mirror of culture in many ways, including how statues are so potent in their weighty symbolism. I wasn't sure if that was what was meant by "art writing", so it was amazing to hear my work had been recognised by a judge with such mana in the field.'

Darwent adds, 'The piece is also not afraid to entertain. It talks about a lived experience – of civic sculpture, wonderfully (and usefully) redefined as "compulsory art" – in a language that is both lively and lived-in. There is an undertone of absurdity that animates the piece, its ideas, like the statues it engages with, moving around as on a chessboard. I hugely enjoyed reading this essay and came away thinking differently because of it.'

The Michèle Whitecliffe Art Writing Prize was founded in 2020 to foster vital debate about Aotearoa New Zealand's visual arts. Supported by Michèle Whitecliffe, the Prize is established in memory of her late husband, Greg Whitecliffe, who was passionate about writing and seeing the arts celebrated in print.

'In many respects, it is the perfect year for this inaugural art writing prize, as we have a little more time to reflect and appreciate what is being written. I feel very strongly about the arts, and it was something that my late husband Greg was extremely proficient in. He contributed regularly to arts magazines and papers, presented papers to arts conferences around the world and was just getting into writing and painting about his Māori heritage and his ancestors when his life was cut short. This award has been set up in his memory to acknowledge everything he has done for the arts in New Zealand,' says Michèle Whitecliffe.

'Setting up Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design was a courageous action and one that has benefitted thousands of students in the arts. Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design has become a household name, but still we need more support in the written arts and this is why I am thrilled to be working in conjunction with Auckland Art Gallery. I wish to congratulate Dr Jacky Bowring on her work and look forward to seeing many more articles being written on and about the arts in New Zealand.'

## About the winner

Jacky Bowring is Professor of Landscape Architecture at Lincoln University, and a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects. Jacky explores the landscape through research, critique and design, and is the author of *Landscape Architecture Criticism* (2020), *Melancholy and the Landscape: Locating Sadness, Memory and Reflection in the Landscape* (2016), and *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (2008). Her design work includes ongoing development of the memorial landscape for Pike River Mine, and 'Island of Lost Objects' which was a winner in LA+ Journal's international competition to design an island (2017).

## About the Prize

Greg Whitecliffe (Ngāti Pikiao) (1954–2001) was an artist, educator and co-founder of Whitecliffe Art School (now Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design) in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, an accredited degree-granting private college. He pursued an active career which varied from professional development in higher education management at Harvard University to stone lithographic workshops in Switzerland. He qualified with a Bachelor of Arts, two Masters degrees, a post-graduate course at Harvard and was working towards a PhD up until he died in 2001.

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In the last years of his life, Greg had commentaries on New Zealand contemporary art and art history published internationally. He was a member of International Council of Fine Arts Deans (ICFAD) and was working towards establishing a purpose-built campus for Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design.

Michèle continued to run Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design until late 2018 when she sold the college to a new enterprise.

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**For more information, high-res images  
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