

AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI

Media release: 26 September 2014



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Winner of the Walters Prize 2014 announced

At the Walters Prize dinner held at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki tonight, Luke Willis Thompson was announced the winner of New Zealand's 'toughest', most prestigious contemporary art award.

Thompson wins \$50,000 and an all-expenses paid trip to New York with the opportunity to exhibit at Saatchi & Saatchi's world headquarters.

'All four works on display have great presence, even in their relative absence,' says international judge, Charles Esche, head curator of this year's São Paulo Biennale and director of Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. 'Here, in Auckland ... I found artists committed to understanding the world we all live in differently; to using the platform of contemporary art to try to imagine things otherwise – often shyly, speculatively, gently.'

Esche announced Thompson's *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* as the winning work this evening. In experiencing the work, visitors walk down a long corridor of gallery space and enter into an exchange with a gallery assistant who ushers them through a goods lift to an awaiting taxi. The taxi takes visitors on to an unknown destination where, on arrival at a suburban house, they are invited to enter. After the visit, they are returned to the gallery space to complete the experience.

Esche says, 'Luke Willis Thompson and his quite extraordinary intrusion of art into daily life cuts through the protocols of the exhibition system like a knife. The journey begins in the first act of accessing the museum's back stage and suspends itself for the whole length of the journey there and back.'

'Anticipation, uncertainty, uneasiness and privilege all play their emotional part in charging a sense of personal displacement. Questions multiply in the process. Is this being done for me? Do I deserve it, or even want it? How do I need to react? And these questions linger because of the way the work is constructed, its formal qualities to speak in art critical terms, require a commitment in time and thought. Once you agree to take part, you cannot but engage and be implicated into its aesthetics.'

'Much more could and will be said about this work and, I am confident, also about the artist in the future. It is enough to say that this is, for me, an exceptional artistic experience, one that will stay with me long after I leave Auckland and one to which I am delighted to be able to award the 2014 Walters Prize.'

Thompson joins a celebrated list of former Walters Prize winners and contemporary New Zealand artists: Yvonne Todd, et al., Francis Upritchard, Peter Robinson, Dan Arps and Kate Newby.

The Walters Prize is awarded for an outstanding work of contemporary New Zealand art produced and exhibited during the past two years.

Held biannually, the Walters Prize aims to make contemporary art a more widely recognised and debated feature of cultural life. Named in honour of the late New Zealand artist Gordon Walters, the Prize was established in 2002 by Founding Benefactors and Principal Donors Erika and Robin Congreve and Dame Jenny Gibbs, working together with Auckland Art Gallery.

The winning work for the WALTERS PRIZE 2014

Luke Willis Thompson: *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, at Hopkinson Mossman (formerly Hopkinson Cundy) and off-site (14 - 31 March 2012)

The *Walters Prize 2014* exhibition opened on 12 July and continues **until 12 October**.

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