MEDIA RELEASE: 8pm, 19 October 2017

William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize
$30,000 winner: Polixeni Papapetrou

"This year's Bowness Photography Prize exhibition is a big jewellery box full of treasure. And the winning photograph is an absolute gem!" said judge Susan Fereday.

One of Australia’s most established photographers Polixeni Papapetrou has won Australia’s most prestigious photography prize, the $30 000 William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize with her work ‘Delphi’ (2016) from the series Eden.

This year’s judging panel, artist and educator Susan Fereday, architect and collector Corbett Lyon, and MGA Senior Curator Stephen Zagala selected Papapetrou’s work from a record 897 entries – the largest number received in the history of the prize.

Polixeni Papapetrou, one of Australia’s most celebrated artists, says "I am so delighted to receive the Bowness Photography Prize and to enter the circle of artists who have won in the past. Thank you to MGA, to the MGA Foundation and to the brilliant judges who selected such a distinguished group of images! For me, the crowning thrill comes with knowing that the Bowness Photography Prize is now an acquisitive prize, which means that my work ‘Delphi’ now belongs to the MGA Collection. For my works to belong to this historically crucial institution is a great honour that fills me with pride and gratitude."
Stephen Zagala says, “Papapetrou’s portrait of Delphi captures the complex vitality of late adolescence. Emerging from a tableau of blooms, which metaphorically evoke the cycle of life and death, this young woman seems to be both brimming with potential and delicately embedded in her environment. This is a moving meditation on existence itself, while also affirming women as strong and beautiful forces of life.”

Papapetrou’s work is from the series Eden that show young women wearing floral dresses standing in front of floral backgrounds, each holding or wearing an arrangement of fresh flowers. The images merge figure and ground so that the models disappear into their surroundings. This merging of formal elements also allows Papapetrou to forge a unity between the young women and the flowers, between culture and nature.

Papapetrou states, “In Eden I photographed girls adorned with floral arrangements to reflect on their metamorphosis from child to adolescent and adolescent to adult, and a oneness with the world, fertility and the cycles of life. By reflecting on the changing body of young people as they shed one skin for another, we are embedded in the cycles of life.”

The series reflects on the young women’s transformation as they move away from their childhood to emerge as part of the adult world.

Papapetrou continues, “The seasons of growth, blossoming and wilting are visibly illustrated in the life cycle of the flower which also highlights our mortality. In this world of flowers and girls, budding, blossoming, eventually consigned to wilting, culture folds itself upon nature in a floral embrace that cancels the gloom of inevitable mortality in this miraculous thing we call life.”

Gallery Director Anouska Phizacklea says “We are delighted and thrilled that Polixeni Papapetrou has taken out this year’s Bowness Photography Prize. Polixeni is one of Australia’s most widely acclaimed and exhibited artists with a distinguished career and this work is a beautiful and deeply personal photograph that delicately balances the vulnerability, strength and dignity of the young woman.”

Established in 2006 by the MGA Foundation to foster excellence in Australian photography, the Bowness Photography Prize has become an important survey of contemporary photographic practice and one of the most prestigious prizes in the country, providing Australian artists with the opportunity to exhibit at one of Australia’s leading public galleries. This year the prize became acquisitive and the cash awarded increased to $30 000 to ensure it continues to provide a significant boost to an artist’s career.

Polixeni Papapetrou (b. Australia 1960) attained Bachelor Degrees in Arts and Law at the University of Melbourne in 1984 and practised law for 15 years. While working as a lawyer she developed an amateur interest in photography and produced a number of photographic series documenting drag queens, body builders and Elvis fans. The end of Papapetrou’s career in law coincided with the birth of her first child, and her artistic career subsequently focused on projects that use her children (Olympia and Solomon) as models. Papapetrou has a Master of Arts from RMIT (1997) and a PhD in Fine Arts from Monash University (2002). She has exhibited her work widely since 1996.

Image: Polixeni PAPAPETROU Delphi 2016 from the series Eden pigment ink-jet print 127.5 x 85.0 cm courtesy the artist, Michael Reid Gallery (Sydney) and Jarvis Dooney Galerie (Berlin)
COLOUR FACTORY HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Del Kathryn Barton
soft cake in the wind  2017
pigment ink-jet print with acrylic paint
180.0 x 140.0 cm
courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery (Sydney)

Danica Chappell
Fermata #14  2016
from the series Fermata
tintypes
111.0 x 78.1 cm
courtesy of the artist

Jenny Pollak
Alberto 2  2015–17
from the series Last call
pigment ink-jet print
82.0 x 70.0 cm
courtesy of the artist

PREVIOUS WINNERS OF THE WILLIAM AND WINIFRED BOWNESS PHOTOGRAPHY PRIZE
2016 Valerie Sparks
2015 Joseph McGlennon
2014 Petrina Hicks
2013 Pat Brassington
2012 Jesse Marlow
2011 Jacky Redgate
2010 Lee Grant
2009 Paul Knight
2008 Nat Thomas & Concertina Inserra
2007 Ray Cook
2006 Kathy Mackey

MGA FOUNDATION
The MGA Foundation was established in 2005 to support MGA, the Australian home of photography, and its nationally significant collection of Australian photographs. Its establishment of an endowment provides a secure and stable financial base for MGA. Its philanthropic and fundraising program provide much needed support to MGA, including activities that build organisational capacity and growth, including curatorial and professional development scholarships and acquisition funding.

The shortlist of 59 works, including Papapetrou’s winning photograph will be exhibited at MGA (Monash Gallery of Art) until 26 November 2017. For more information, visit www.mga.org.au

High resolution images and interviews available on request.
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