MGA Foundation is thrilled to announce that Melbourne-based, Iranian-born artist Hoda Afshar is the winner of the $30,000 William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize for her photograph ‘Portrait of Behrouz Boochani, Manus Island’ (2018).

The judging panel – Dr Michael Brand, Director of the Art Gallery of NSW; Melbourne-based artist Dr David Rosetzky; and Anouska Phizacklea, MGA Director – made the winning selection from 50 finalists whose work reflect the diversity and depth of photographic practice in Australia.

The judges were unanimous in their decision to award Afshar the coveted prize, agreeing that the portrait, with its immense visual, political and emotional presence, is worthy of attention and reward. An exhibition of all finalists is now on display at MGA until 18 November 2018. Gallery visitors are encouraged to vote for their own favourite in the Sotheby’s Australia People’s Choice Award.
‘Afshar’s portrait of Behrouz Boochani is compelling and powerful. It is a haunting portrait that speaks to the history of photography. Boochani’s gaze, the fire that burns behind him, the way his body is positioned – it has an intensity and power that is undeniable. Embedded within Afshar’s practice is a deep understanding of photography, its history and how powerful photography can be.’ – Anouska Phizacklea, Director MGA

‘The judges were very happy to recognise this photograph as a most worthy winner of the prize. It’s a great work of art—a photograph that doesn’t just preserve the dignity of the subject, but shows the viewer what has happened to this person, how this person has gone from being a writer and film maker to becoming a refugee, and what that has done to him as an individual. We think it’s wonderful that this one photograph could show this, and hopefully connect with a very broad audience in Australia.’ – Dr Michael Brand, Director Art Gallery of NSW.

‘Hoda Afshar’s haunting and confronting portrait of Behrouz Boochami has a sense of urgency and purpose to it. Through its performative and collaborative process, it questions ideas of authorship and truth in documentary photography, it blurs distinctions between photographic genres and also, importantly – presents a human face to the horrific situation endured by the men detained on Manus Island as a result of Australia’s refugee policy. It is a visually striking and sophisticated photograph that addresses a series of complex questions at the forefront of current debates in art, culture and politics today.’ – Dr David Rosetzky, artist

‘Winning the Bowness Photography Prize with this portrait of Behrouz Boochani is not only a glorious moment in my career as an artist, but also a confirmation of the trust that I have always placed in the power of art to change the world through changing the way we see it. The Bowness Prize is a record of our current times, as seen through the lens of a group of unique visionaries. The selection of works on display every year shows us what is at stake, and receiving this award is for me a testament to the fact that what is at stake today is our humanity. I hope that winning this prize will contribute, in some way, to redrawing the lines that divide us and those who have been placed outside the safe borders of our human community.’ – Hoda Afshar, 2018 Bowness Photogrpahy Prize recipient

**Artist statement:** Behrouz is a Kurdish-Iranian journalist, writer and filmmaker. He fled Iran in 2013 seeking asylum, and arrived on the shores of Australia on his thirtieth birthday – four days after the Rudd Government announced its offshore detention plan.

I sent this portrait to Behrouz after I returned from Manus in April 2018, and called him. I said, this is you, Behrouz, with your passion, your fire, and your writer’s hands. It symbolises your resistance. He heard this, and paused. You are right, he said. But I do not see myself in this picture. I only see a refugee. Someone whose identity has been taken from him. A bare life, standing there beyond the borders of Australia, waiting and staring. He fell silent, then said … This image scares me.

**Artist biography:** Hoda Afshar (b. 1983) is a Melbourne-based artist from Tehran, Iran. She has a Bachelor degree in Fine Art–Photography from Tehran and is currently completing a PhD in Creative Arts at Curtin University, Perth. She contributes regularly to academic and art journals, and lectures at Photography Studies College, Melbourne.

In 2006, World Press Photo selected Afshar as one of the top ten young documentary photographers in Iran. Since moving to Australia in 2007 her work has been exhibited widely both locally and internationally and published online and in print.
In 2015 she won Australia’s National Photographic Portrait Prize at the National Portrait Gallery. Afshar has been shortlisted for many prestigious prizes and was a finalist in last year’s Bowness Photography prize for a work from her internationally recognised series, *Behold*. She has most recently joined Eleven, a new collective of contemporary Muslim-Australian artists and thinkers whose aim is to disrupt current politics of representation and hegemonic discourses around Islam and Islamic identities.

Hoda Afshar’s photographic practice sits knowingly between conceptual, staged and documentary photography, and often reflects on questions of representation, displacement, gender and identity politics.

**Colour Factory Honourable Mentions**: Shelley Horan, Darren Sylvester and Cyrus Tang are the 2018 recipients of the Colour Factory Honourable Mentions.

Colour Factory support three Honourable Mentions with printing vouchers. Based in Melbourne, Colour Factory offer premium photography, fine art and digital printing services as well as museum grade solutions for mounting and framing.

**Images (left-right)**: Shelley HORAN *Melody Ramsey* 2018 from the series *Honcho Disko* gelatin silver print 37.0 x 37.0 cm courtesy of the artist; Darren SYLVESTER *IKEA sunrise* 2018 chromogenic prints 120 x 160 cm (each) courtesy of the artist, Neon Parc (Melbourne) and Sullivan+Strumpf (Sydney); Cyrus TANG *A simple life (118 minutes)* from the series *Golden hour – long exposure* 2018 pigment ink-jet print 65.0 x 65.0 cm courtesy of the artist and Arc One Gallery (Melbourne)

**About the Bowness Photography Prize**: In 2005 the MGA Foundation was established with the aim of supporting MGA and its significant collection. The MGA Foundation recognised the importance of providing a platform for contemporary Australian photographers to showcase their work, which would simultaneously raise the profile of MGA and its unique commitment to photographic art. The following year the MGA Foundation launched the inaugural William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize to promote excellence in photography across all photographic media and stylistic genres by both established and emerging artists with work produced within the last year.

The prize has become an important survey of contemporary photographic practice and one of the most prestigious prizes in the country, providing Australian photographers with the opportunity to exhibit at one of Australia’s leading public galleries. In 2017, the prize became acquisitive and the cash prize awarded to the winner was increased to $30,000 to ensure that the prize continues to provide a significant boost to a photographer’s career. This year the prize continues to adapt and grow to better reflect photographic practice. Size restrictions have been removed and a broader range of photographic practices are accepted.

**Sotheby’s Australia**, the premier auctioneer of art, decorative arts and jewels within Australia, have joined MGA this year as the sponsor of the People’s Choice Award. With Sotheby’s Australia support
the prize awarded to the recipient of the 2018 Sotheby's Australia People's Choice Award has increased to $2,500 which will provide significant encouragement and support to the selected artist.

2018 Finalists:

Hoda Afshar
Robert Ashton
Sofi Basseghi
Alison Bennett
Devika Bilimoria
Tom Blachford
Aaron Bradbrook
Danica Chappell
Rowan Conroy
Michael Cook
Tamara Dean
Marian Drew
Amos Gebhardt
John Gollings
Linsey Gosper
Lee Grant
Janina Green
Ponch Hawkes
Hego
Petrina Hicks
Shelley Horan
Leah King-Smith
Katrin Koenning
Sandra Lamonaca
Mathew Lynn
Kirsten Lyttle
Isobel Markus-Dunworth
Ben McGee
Joseph McGlennon
Rod McNicol
Jacqueline Mitelman
Nasim Nasr
Polixeni Papapetrou
Matthew Portch
Clare Rae
Julie Rrap
Melissa Spiccia
Nathan Stolz
Natalya Stone
Ian Strange
Darren Sylvester
Samuel Szwarzbold
Cyrus Tang
Di Tang
Natalie Tirant
Justine Varga
James Verdon
Martin Walch
Amanda Williams
Anne Zahalka

High-resolution images of finalists and interviews are available upon request
All finalist’s images can be viewed on MGA’s website:  https://www.mga.org.au/bowness-prize

Exhibition dates | 29 September – 18 November 2018

Artist talks | Saturday 27 October, 2pm
Join finalists Kirsten Lyttle, Darren Sylvester and Cyrus Tang and discover some of the stories behind the works on display in the William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize.

Artist talks | Saturday 10 November, 2pm
Join finalists Aaron Bradbrook, Devika Bilimoria and Amos Gebhardt and discover some of the stories behind the works on display in the William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize.

MGA partners City of Monash | Creative Victoria
Exhibition partners MGA Foundation | Sotheby’s Australia | Colour Factory | Thames & Hudson
Program partners Chain of Ponds Wines | Gomersal Wines | Bright Brewery | Haymes Paint
Design partner Pidgeon Ward
Community awareness partner Cristine Jones – Ray White
Public program sponsor Novotel Melbourne Glen Waverley
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