Lecture summary:

The Blake Prize was established in 1949 by a small group of people interested in revitalising religious art in Australia. They were inspired by what was happening overseas, particularly in France. The prize was named after the unconventional visionary poet and artist William Blake, signalling that it was ‘not being offered to encourage painting of any particular school, nor to limit subject matter too narrowly…Blake is timeless, and though not professing allegiance to any particular denomination, was perhaps the most God-possessed painter of all time.’

It was barely a decade, however, before the prize was challenged about its conception of what constitutes religious art, being drawn into the topical debates of the late 1950s and early 1960s about abstraction and figuration. This lecture will focus on the first 20 years in the history of the prize. It will consider whether the prize achieved its twin aims of encouraging ‘artists to paint religious themes’ and ‘the church to become a patron of art of the highest quality.’

Slide list:

1. Title slide, showing William Blake’s relief etching London from his Songs of Innocence and Experience, 1794
2. The Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes at the AGNSW
3. Peter Smeeth, The artist’s fate. Winner of the 2011 Sulman Prize
4. Henry Hanke La Gitana 1936 Oil on canvas. The first work awarded the Sulman Prize
5. Charles Meere Atlanta’s eclipse Collection of the S. H. Ervin Museum, Sydney
6. Full page spread in the Australian Women’s Weekly about the Blake Prize in 1952
7. Cartoon by Molnar of the Blake Prize and a newspaper review of the prize
8. Blamire Young The Flight into Egypt c.1913–14 Watercolour on paper, 63 x 64 cm Collection of the Mildura Arts Centre
9. Frank Hinder Flight into Egypt 1952 Tempera and oil on hardboard 96.5 x 75.5 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia and Flight into Egypt 1943 Tempera on paper, 58.4 x 48.2 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales
10. Sidney Nolan Flight into Egypt 1951 Oil and enamel paint on composition board, 91.4 x 121.9 cm. Collection of Wesfarmers, Perth
11. Donald Friend, *Flight into Egypt* 1940 Oil on board, 30.5 x 25 cm and Justin O’Brien *Flight into Egypt* c.1945 Oil on canvas on board, 67.5 x 46.5 cm
12. John Perceval *Flight into Egypt* 1947–8 Mixed media on canvas on hardboard, 95 x 100 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia
13. Ian Fairweather *Flight into Egypt* 1961 Synthetic polymer paint on hardboard Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Judy Cassab *Flight into Egypt* 1954 Oil on canvas
14. Louis Kahan *Flight into Egypt* 1975 Etching, 37 x 51 cm and Władysław Duttiewicz *Flight out of Egypt* c.1985 Oil on composition board, 122 x 137 cm
15. Colin Lanceley *Flight into Egypt* 2007 Oil and carved wood on canvas 63 x 55 x 13 cm and Priscilla Bracks *Madonna in the Wild* Digital Image on C-Type Photographic Paper, 60 x 30 cm
16. Michelangelo’s *Pietà* and detail from the Sistine Chapel ceiling; Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*; Dürer’s *Hands of an Apostle.*
17. View of the AGNSW old courts with the European Old Masters.
18. Ian Fairweather, *The Last Supper* 1958 Synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, 97 x 244 cm. and John Passmore *The Miraculous Draught of Fish* 1952 Oil on hardboard, 122 x 183 cm. Both collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales
19. John Passmore *The Baptism* c.1953 Oil on board, 121.9 x 151 cm
20. Ian Fairweather *Annunciation* 1958 Gouache on paper and hardboard, 97.8 x 73.7 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales
21. Ian Fairweather *Gethsemane* 1958 Gouache on cardboard on hardboard, 145.6 x 198.2 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, then deaccessioned in 2010.
22. Ian Fairweather *Epiphany* 1962 Synthetic polymer paint on cardboard, 139.6 x 203.3 cm and *Palm Sunday* 1951 Gouache and watercolour on paper, 54 x 81.3 cm Both collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, and *Ave Maria* 1957 Gouache on paper, 99 x 75.8 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia
23. Ian Fairweather *Marriage at Cana* 1963 Synthetic polymer paint on cardboard, 120 x 220 cm Collection of the National Gallery of Australia
24. John Coburn *Triptych of the Passion* 1960 Enamel on composition board, 106 x 182 cm Collection of the Catholic Institute of Sydney
25. Eric Smith *The Scourged Christ* 1956 Oil on hardboard, 116 x 85 cm Collection of the Penrith Regional Art Gallery and *Christ is Risen* 1959 Oil on composition board, 220 x 115 cm Collection of Canisius College, Pymble, Sydney
27. Herbert Badham *The Annunciation* 1954 Oil on board, 93.7 x 110.5 cm Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery
28. Robert Dickerson *The Resurrection* 1959 Enamel on board, 120 x 180 cm Private collection, Qld
29. Keith Looby *Those days we murdered Jesus* 1969 Oil on canvas, 210 x 210 cm and Eric Smith *The Apostle’s Creed* 1969 Oil and collage on paper
30. Stanislaus Rapotec *Meditating on Good Friday* 1960 Oil on board, 164.1 x 411.4 cm Collection of Macquarie University, Sydney
32. Michael Kitching *Last Supper-Premonition* 1964 Wood, metal and plastic 188.5 x 223 cm
33. Covers of the Blake prize catalogue for 1951 and 1952
* 34. Justin O’Brien *The Virgin Enthroned* 1951 Oil on canvas, Triptych 126 x 195.8 cm Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria
35. Justin O’Brien *Madonna* c.1959 Oil, gold leaf on canvas laid on hardboard, 110 x 86 cm and *The Baptism of Christ* 1978 Oil and gold leaf on paper laid on hardboard, 74 x 56.5 cm
36. Michael Kmit *The Evangelist John Mark* 1953 Oil on canvas, 95 x 70 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney and *Crucifixion* Oil on canvas
37. Arthur Boyd *The Kiss of Judas* 1952–3 Ceramic sculpture, 60.9cm (height) Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales and *Crucifixion and Rose* 1979–80 Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9 cm
38. Arthur Boyd *Christ Carrying the Cross* 1946/47 Oil on canvas, 86.4 x 101.6 cm Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria and *The Mockers* (1945) Oil on canvas on hardboard, 84.5 x 103 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales
40. Arthur Boyd *The Expulsion* Oil on canvas, 109.5 x 114.5 cm; *The Expulsion* 1950–1 Ceramic tile, 42.5 x 45.5 cm
41. Albert Tucker *Judas* 1955 Oil on composition board, 97 x 130 cm Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
42. Albert Tucker *Ascension* 1962 Oil and mixed media on composition board, 130 x 93.9 cm Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria and *Pilate* 1952 Oil on canvas, 73.6 x 92.7 cm
43. Joe Szabo with his painting Black Friday, which won the Blake Prize in 1972
* 44. Keith Looby *Your motel Calvary Still Life Flowers* 1973 Oil on canvas with mirrored glass, two panels, 259.1 x 289.6 cm. Collection of Griffith University, Brisbane
45. Keith Looby *Resurrection* 1964 Oil on canvas, 263.7 x 391.7 cm Collection of the National Gallery of Australian, Canberra, gift of James Fairfax and *The Last Supper (Crucifix)* 1967 Oil and gilding on five panels of board, 232 x 171 cm
46. Views of the interior and exterior of Rayner Hoff’s Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park, Sydney
47. Andre Serrano’s *Piss Christ* 1987 Photograph and showing the work after being attacked during an exhibition
48. Alonso Cano *The miraculous lactation of St Bernard* 1650 Oil on canvas Collection of the Prado Museum, Madrid
* 49. Blamire Young *The Flight into Egypt* c.1913–14 Watercolour on paper, 63 x 64 cm Collection of the Mildura Arts Centre
50. Photograph showing the Blake Prize on display at the Mark Foy’s Ballroom in 1951.
51. Sidney Nolan Temptation of St Anthony 1952 Synthetic polymer paint on board, 122 x 96.5 cm Collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia.
52. Donald Friend *Acts of St. John the Baptist* 1951 Oil on canvas, 51 x 61 cm
53. Elwyn Lynn *The Betrayal* 1957 Oil on panel, 91 x 121.4 cm Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria and Weaver Hawkins *Persecution* 1951 Oil on hardboard, 121.92 x 182.8 cm Collection of St Paul’s College, University of Sydney
54. Rose Farrell and George Parkin *The annunciation* from the series *Repentance* 1988 type C photograph, 127 x 163.5 cm Collection of Griffith University and *St Dominic in Prayer* 1988 Type C colour print

55. Lindy Lee *Untitled* 1988 Oil and wax on canvas, 214 x 159.6 cm and *Of Redemption* 1986 Oil and wax on canvas, 232.5 x 205.25 cm

56. Brett Whiteley *Fidgeting with infinity* 1966 Oil, collage, pencil, photographs and fibreglass on three panels, 244 x 382 cm (overall) Collection of the National Gallery of Australian, Canberra, gift of Philip Bacon in 2000

57. Brett Whiteley *The Giving Up* 1979 Oil on steel, 256 x 114 cm

58. Paul Newton *Our Lady of the Southern Cross* 2008 Oil on canvas Collection of St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney

59. Jiawei Shen *Mary MacKillop of Australia* Oil on canvas, 152 x 112 cm Collection of the Mary MacKillop Shrine, Sydney

60. Luke Roberts *My childhood vision of Mother Mary MacKillop galloping past the Alpha Convent bringing more joeys to central western Queensland* Oil and gold leaf on linen, 168 x 122 cm. Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery

**Bibliography:**


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