## Archibald Prize 2018 celebrity podcast transcript: Rachel Perkins tour

- Speaker 1: Welcome to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ.
- Julian Morrow: Welcome to this podcast tour for the 2018 Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The Archibald is for many Australians, the most prestigious, most popular, and most controversial art prize. It's an open competition and the prize is awarded to 'a portrait painted from life with a subject known to the artist having at least one live sitting with the artist'. Subjects of the Archibald tend to be individuals who, as the will of JF Archibald, himself, put it, are distinguished in arts, letters, science or politics. And in this podcast, some distinguished Australians will tell you what they think about the portraits, which have been chosen for the 2018 Archibald exhibition. Russell Crowe talked with artist and Archibald judge, Ben Quilty. And Rove McManus, Yumi Stynes and Rachel Perkins will talk with me, Julian Morrow, as we walk through the Art Gallery of New South Wales for the 2018 Archibald Prize.

As we move through each room, we'll announce each artwork and its exhibition number, which you can see on the gallery wall high above the painting. When we're about to move on to next artwork, you'll hear this sound [bell rings]. If you'd like to spend more time with any work, just pause the podcast. We'll move through each room from left to right. And in this episode, I talk to director Rachel Perkins about the 2018 Archibald exhibition.



Image: Yvonne East The Honourable Chief Justice Susan Kiefel AC

- Speaker 1: The tour will start in room one. We will begin at painting number 15.
- Julian Morrow: Painting number 15 is a painting of the Honourable Chief Justice Susan Kiefel AC, by Yvonne East. A very powerful pose, Rachel. What do you make of this portrait?
- Rachel Perkins: Well, I love this portrait. And, again, another powerful woman lawyer. I like it because she's seemingly very relaxed in her pose. And I think the thing about a painting is that you've got one image. You know I'm a filmmaker and obviously I can draw from thousands of images to create a story, but a visual artist who's doing a painting has one image and here I think the artist is portraying her power, but it's a very relaxed power. It's almost like she's a she-lion. It's like she's really relaxed, but she could just pounce at you.
- Julian Morrow: I believe that's on her business card, actually...
- Rachel Perkins: Really? She-lion?
- Julian Morrow: Chief Justice slash she-lion.
- Rachel Perkins: Don't mess with me... but, I think that's the thing, she's very comfortable. She's at the top of her game, I think. The books behind her signifying all that knowledge and history. I think it's about comfort and achievement and relaxed, but I think it's about power. The image is really a statement about power.



Image: Salvatore Zofrea Sally Dowling SC

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 57.

- Julian Morrow: We're in room number 1 of the Archibald 2018 and this is painting number 57. It's a portrait of Sally Dowling SC, by Salvatore Zofrea. Rachel, what do you make of this portrait?
- Rachel Perkins: Well, I really love this because I think it stands out. It sort of looks like some sort of vintage work, I think, because the floral arrangement, which I think is like a Japanese screen that she's sitting against. It's almost like a Margaret Preston sort of print. And she actually comes out of the work. Like, if you look at the outline around her body, she's sort of... It is almost like a Margaret Preston lino print. So I really love that about it. The composition of it is sort of vintage, sort of antique feel of it. The soft fabric... It's a very classical work, I think, and I love the vibrancy of it.
- Julian Morrow: And, of course, senior counsel means she's a very senior lawyer. Much more colourful than most of the lawyers that I've come across. What do you think?
- Rachel Perkins: Maybe you're moving in the wrong circles.
- Julian Morrow: That's right. Absolutely. I want to brief...
- Rachel Perkins: I know a lot of interesting lawyers.
- Julian Morrow: ....Sally, straightaway. Absolutely. Yeah.
- Rachel Perkins: Well, I think one thing we can say about the Archibald this year is that there's a lot of powerful women...
- Julian Morrow: Absolutely.
- Rachel Perkins: ... in this exhibition, which is really encouraging. And a lot of them are lawyers, and she is one, of course. So I really like that about the overall Archibald reflecting society in that way. And here's powerful women projected, but she seems very relaxed. It's not power she's exuding; she seems very comfortable in herself. But, yeah, I think it's a beautiful classical work.
- Julian Morrow: And, apparently, when she was sitting for it, she didn't charge her normal rate so that's a relief for the artist.
- Rachel Perkins: Yes, well, at \$500 an hour, so you'd have to be quick. Yeah.
- Speaker 1: We're now moving into Room number 2. The next artwork is painting number 34.



Image: Guy Maestri The fourth week of parenthood (self-portrait)

- Julian Morrow: As we move into room two of the Archibald Prize 2018, this is painting number 34, *The fourth week of parenthood (self-portrait)* by Guy Maestri. I feel exhausted just looking at this.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. Look, I think that is what he's communicating. Again, it's that sort of style where you can really see the painter's hand in the creation of it. But, yes, it gives you this feeling of sort of dishevelled, confused.
- Julian Morrow: I haven't slept for weeks.
- Rachel Perkins: I haven't slept and... I don't know... It just gives you that impression. I really liked it. He looked sort of shattered, I think. He looks shattered. And anyone who's had a kid understands that feeling.
- Julian Morrow: That's right. Give him three or four more Archibalds and maybe there will be a smile on his face in self-portraits.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. Yeah. But, look, I like the composition and the colour. I like what it was expressing... the confusion and shatteredness of being a first-time parent. So, yeah. I loved it.
- Julian Morrow: Hang in there, Guy.



Image: Julian Meagher Herb and Flan

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 37.

- Julian Morrow: Painting number 37 is *Herb and Flan* by Julian Meagher. Two subjects in this portrait.
- Rachel Perkins: Yes, Herb managed to sneak in there apparently during the painting of the portrait, but there's some paintings where I think you respond to the person being painted.
- Julian Morrow: And this of course is Richard Flanagan?
- Rachel Perkins: Richard Flanagan, the great Australian author, I mean he is one of the stand-out writers of our time. I'm responding to the work because of the subject in some ways, I must admit I'm a massive fan, but the pose is great too. It sort of shows his interrogative mind. That's the sort of staunch way he's looking at it. But, of course the bird softens it. It's sort of very Australian too, which Richard Flanagan is, of course. So, I think the sort of balance of the pink, just from an aesthetic point of view, the skin tones between the bird and he work really well, and the composition, which is otherwise pretty monochrome. I think it has a lovely palette and aesthetic, but yes, it's the author and his sort of interrogative stance that I really love in this work.
- Julian Morrow: Have you met Richard Flanagan?
- Rachel Perkins: I had met him very briefly coming out a door, and I was like squeezing past him and I went, 'Hello, love your work'. And then we passed... passed like ships in a day. His recent speech at the press club just before Anzac Day was really extraordinary. I think he talked about the Uluru statement from the heart. I think he just contributes so much to Australia. So he's a totally apt subject for the Archibald, because the Archibald is about representing significant Australians, and he is absolutely one of them. So, yeah I love this work because of who's in it.
- Julian Morrow: And not a man to be messed with as you can tell from the portrait.
- Rachel Perkins: No, I certainly wouldn't want to try and have an argument with him over something.



Image: Peter Berner Self-portrait with hindsight

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 4.

Julian Morrow: Okay. Painting number 4 is *Self-portrait with hindsight* by Peter Berner, known to many Australians as a television comedian. He did *Backberner*. That's what I was watching back in the day of the Howard Government. But, also, Peter is a highly trained artist, a graduate of the National Art School. And his self-portraits made it all the way to the finals of the Archibald this year.

- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. First time, isn't it, for him?
- Julian Morrow: Yeah.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. Which must be a thrill. This is actually one of my favourite works. I really love it. Again, it's a very gestural piece, so you can see the hand of the artist in here. And I think this painting... I think it's talked about with hindsight, so it's almost like he's looking back in the way that he's posed. He's looking over his shoulder behind him, so it feels to me like he's looking back at his life, which the artist talks about, and assessing what's happened. And slightly confused. Like, what is...
- Julian Morrow: Yeah. Nothing makes sense anymore.
- Rachel Perkins: Nothing makes sense. What was the plan? What happened? Where did the last 40 or whatever years go? Which I can relate to.
- Julian Morrow: Can't we all?
- Rachel Perkins: So I really love the simplicity of it. And I like the fact that it's unfinished, like it's on a board or something, and it's not completely painted. And that suggests to me that his life is not yet over. There's more to come. It's almost like a mid-life moment. Not particularly a mid-life crisis, but a midlife reflecting back on where he's come to at this point. Yeah.
- Julian Morrow: And I look forward to more hindsight from Peter Berner in future years, perhaps.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. And I just think the colours are magnificent, too.
- Julian Morrow: Striking colour.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. They're really striking, beautiful.



Image: Kirsty Neilson Anxiety still at 30

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 41.

Julian Morrow: Let's have a look now at painting number 41. This is *Anxiety still at 30* by Kirsty Neilson. Rachel what strikes you about this one?

Rachel Perkins: Well look, I think the thing about this is that it really speaks to the subject, and it really captures, like I was saying earlier, the artist has one... they're showing one frame. They need to communicate the subject of what they're going for. Yes it's a portrait but there's a deeper story there, and here, the artist is capturing anxiety, which of course is suffered by many people. I think here the use of light and dark, so obviously this light part of her life and there's this darkness. And, also the way that she's posed with her hand covering her mouth. You know, you see this beautiful girl actually, but then you also see this darkness to her. So, I think that combination of light and dark works really well, and it also suggests some sort of internal conflict. You know, suggested by the light and dark, so I think it's a really simple, evocative image that really captures the subject of what the artist is trying to portray.



Image: Melissa Grisancich Courtney Barnett and her weapon of choice

- Speaker 1: [Music] You're listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour thanks to ANZ. We're now moving into room 3. The next artwork is painting number 21.
- Julian Morrow: We're now in room 3 of the Archibald and let's have a look at painting number 21. This is *Courtney Barnett and her weapon of choice*, by Melissa Grisancich.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah, I love this painting. I mean, I love Courtney Barnett as a musician. I think she's really fresh and her lyrics and her music is very contemporary, and I think this painting really captures that. The bold background... it's sort of retro, but really modern, which is sort of Courtney. And it's just got a freshness. And I really love the title: *Weapon of choice*. And I think that's true with Courtney. She talks about the challenges of being a young person. She's gay and she uses music to talk about the things in her world and so the title and the pose of the guitar, I think, is a really great... It summarises Courtney and the sort of casualness and vibrancy really speaks to her personality and her flavour as a musician. So I think it's a really successful piece in capturing the artist.
- Julian Morrow: You mentioned that you're a fan of Courtney Barnett's music. How much do you think knowing the subject of an Archibald portrait changes the way you engage with it?
- Rachel Perkins: Look, I think it's true it does because, particularly, for musicians like Courtney Barnett or writers like Richard Flanagan or filmmakers like Warwick Thornton, who are all represented in this, because you have some respect for their work or affection for them you're drawn to the portraits that represent them. But I think it's the successful capturing of those artists, I think, that makes the difference. I mean, anyone can paint anyone, but it's about how they capture that person, or what makes that particular image. It's a moment in time that the artist captures. And can they encapsulate that artist in that very brief moment in this one image? And I think this artist, in relation to Courtney Barnett, has done a great job.



Image: Ben Smith Tony

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 48.

- Julian Morrow: Painting number 48 is a portrait of Tony by Ben Smith. Rachel, what do you make of Tony?
- Rachel Perkins: Well, of course, Tony is Tony Albert, the Aboriginal artist, who lives at my sister's house. So, again, we're sort of friends and mates, which maybe that's a conflict of interest, but, look, I'm not a judge, so there's no prizes I'm awarding. But I really love this portrait for a couple of reasons. One is that it's, sort of, size... It draws you in so naturally, have to get closer to it to look at it. It's beautifully composed, I think. And it's very subtle in its design because, of course, the yellow behind his head, to Indigenous viewers, suggests the Aboriginal flag.
- Julian Morrow: Immediately, but, then also, it kind of feels like a tradition in Western art as well...
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. Absolutely.
- Julian Morrow: ...in portraits and all that.
- Rachel Perkins: Yes. It could be like a halo or religious portrait, so it's got a bit of trickery there.
- Julian Morrow: And for someone who knows... Did you say that Tony lives with your sister? Is that right?
- Rachel Perkins: Yes.
- Julian Morrow: Yeah. Right. Would you put a halo behind his head?
- Rachel Perkins: Yes.
- Julian Morrow: Oh, really?
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. No. He's a gorgeous man. And I think you get that softness in this painting. I mean, it's not grand-standing. He's looking very directly... Yeah, I think it's a really subtle, beautiful portrait that... Yes, and the size is particularly interesting. The artist has chosen to do a small portrait. You look at the work around the walls, it's in a big scale. But this is quite different and that draws you into the artist. And it's a very deliberate choice by Ben Smith, the portrait.



Image: Jordan Richardson David Wenham and hat

- Speaker 1:[Music] You're listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour thanks to ANZ.<br/>We're now moving into room 4. The next artwork is painting number 45.
- Julian Morrow: Painting number 45 is a portrait of *David Wenham and hat* by Jordan Richardson. David is an iconic Australian actor. Here he is on the walls of the Archibald. What do you think this portrait captures of David? And what do you think of the painting?
- Rachel Perkins: Well, look, I love the painting. I love that it's sort of emerging out of the darkness, and there's this sort of light source over to the right of him, which is really sort of soft. I really love the use of light, I think. And I love the colours, the dark tones like the dark greens and the darkness that he's in. And it's not immediately obvious that he has got a hat upside down on his head.
- Julian Morrow: It looks like he needs a wardrobe assistant, doesn't he?
- Rachel Perkins: Yes. Just someone...
- Julian Morrow: To put that hat on right.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. No. Clearly it goes the other way. But I think the hat sort of shows his slightly ludicrous, funny nature. Like, if you've seen him in, *Cosi*.
- Julian Morrow: Which is the very first thing I saw David Wenham in, and he played a sort of manic, crazy man.
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. He stole the show.
- Julian Morrow: Yeah.
- Rachel Perkins: He was fantastic. He presents as this quiet, serious person, but when he's doing caricatures of sort of Australians, he's really hilarious. So I think, like the hat upside down, sort of symbolises what otherwise is a very serious portrait. So I like that. I like the contradiction that exists in the design and the choice that the artist used to portray him.
- Julian Morrow: Although, I must say, I think any portrait of David Wenham should come with some sort of trigger warning for those people who watch *Sea change* and love it. Their hearts are still broken over the romance between David and Sigrid Thornton. Is it too soon?
- Rachel Perkins: Is it too soon to show him? Yeah. I'm not sure. Maybe it should have a warning. Yeah.



Image: Robert Hannaford Robert Hannaford self-portrait

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 22.

Julian Morrow: Painting number 22 is called *Robert Hannaford self-portrait*. Surprisingly, it's painted by Robert Hannaford.

Rachel Perkins: Yes, now this artist I know. He's actually painted me before.

Julian Morrow: Oh really?

Rachel Perkins: Yeah, so I'm a little, again, a little bit...

Julian Morrow: What was that experience like?

Rachel Perkins: Well it was very nice, what he does ... he does this strange thing, he whistles. He does like these bird whistles. Or, this particular whistle as he's painting ... and again and again and again. So, you have to go back for a number of sittings and he does this sort of [whistling noise] which initially is a little bit disturbing, but then you have to quite like it. What it is, I think there's a great reversal that he's done here, because this is actually how he stands when he's painting someone. You can see him, he's sort of...

Julian Morrow: You know this pose?

Rachel Perkins: He's looking at the subject which is himself obviously, and he's looking at himself trying to paint himself. That's the pose he uses when he paints you. So in fact, by seeing this painting, it's like you've become the subject yourself. That he's looking at you, and you're being painted by him. It sort of reverses the roles, which I think is a really interesting way to portray himself. And, it is him essentially stripped back to his element as the artist. Like he's got bare feet, he's in his studio, brush in hand, he's contemplating the light or the figure, and it is the artist in his very natural element and I really like that about it. That it is very much a self-portrait because it is him doing what he does.



Image: Mathew Lynn Gladys Berejiklian

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 29.

- Julian Morrow: Painting number 29 is *Gladys Berejiklian*, a portrait by Mathew Lynn. Gladys Berejiklian is obviously the Premier of New South Wales. And much of the Cabinet's made the Archibald this year, which I think is a first. We've got the Arts Minister on another wall.
- Rachel Perkins: Yes. The beautiful, Don.
- Julian Morrow: Yes. Rachel, what do you think of this portrait of Gladys?
- Rachel Perkins: Well, again, I sound like a massive name-dropper, but I have to say...
- Julian Morrow: Don't tell that she's painted you as well?
- Rachel Perkins: No. She hasn't painted me, but Mathew Lynn has painted my sister twice for the Archibald. And it's been in the Archibald twice. And I think he's been in the Archibald like 15 times or something like a ridiculous amount of times. And I hung the portrait of my sister in my house yesterday that he had painted, as it happens.
- Rachel Perkins: So he's an artist, again, working in the academic form. It's like total precision. But I think what he is doing here is this beautiful use of colour. Like the background is almost shimmering.
- Julian Morrow: Yeah.
- Rachel Perkins: Like it actually looks like the whole painting is sort of, in a way, shimmering .. sort of suggests movement in a sort of a...
- Julian Morrow: Which is very different from the portrait of the Chief Justice that we talked about earlier, which is incredibly precise.
- Rachel Perkins: Yes.
- Julian Morrow: There's something soft and shimmering about the...
- Rachel Perkins: Yes.
- Julian Morrow: ...the background and the...
- Rachel Perkins: Yes. It's like a reflection, or it's got water on it, or something. I really love that quality about it. And she's sort of emerging out of the dark too, which sort of... glowing, sort of night ship.



Image: Anne Middleton Guy

- Julian Morrow: 38 is simply titled *Guy*. And it's a portrait of Guy Pearce, by Anne Middleton. Rachel, what do you make of this one?
- Rachel Perkins: Well, I love this painting. I mean, I don't know whether I'd have it in my house because...
- Julian Morrow: It would be quite intimidating, wouldn't it?
- Rachel Perkins: Yeah. I just think just seeing Guy Pearce like that big staring at you every morning might be a bit disturbing. But I do love it because it's just, Guy, stripped back. I mean, literally, but also it is, essentially, him. There's no pretence around him. His direct gaze to the audience. It feels very intimate. And just the detail of his skin. I mean, I think that's the amazing accomplishment in this painting. The incredible detail you're seeing, and the lines, and pigments. It just feels incredibly intimate because of that. And none of that Hollywood stuff. It's just him. The essential Guy Pearce right there in front of you.



Image: Kathrin Longhurst Self: past, present and future

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 28.
- Julian Morrow: Painting number 28 is titled *Self: past, present and future*. And it's by Julian Morrow: Painting number 28 is titled *Self: past, present and future*, and it's by Kathrin Longhurst. A painting of Kathrin's daughter that's really, tells that generational story. What do you make of it, Rachel?
- Rachel Perkins: I like it from an aesthetic point of view. I think the palette that she's used, it's almost like it's in negative. It has a very luminous feel to it, it's like there's light shining from behind it. Look aside from the digital numbers and the tank design that she's got on the right, I mean, that doesn't actually interest me, that stuff. It's more the girl, and I think it's sort of timeless, it could be from any era. I mean, take away that stuff and it's sort of beautiful, classical, sort of portrait of this young girl, and it's the luminosity that I love about this work and speaks to me. I think it's just exquisite in the tone and the artist's capacity, it's an exquisite work. If it was me, you know I'm the filmmaker, I would say, 'Okay, get rid of the tank, get rid of the digital stuff, and right, okay, done'.
- Julian Morrow: Pare it back in the edit.
- Rachel Perkins: Pare it back, you know, don't need that. Yeah, I think it's a beautiful picture.



Image: Angela Tiatia Study for a self-portrait

- Speaker 1: [Music] You're listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ. The next artwork is painting number 52.
- Julian Morrow: We're in room five at the Archibald 2018 and gazing at the very large and very, very impressive painting number 52: *Study for a self-portrait* by Angela Tiatia.
- **Rachel Perkins:** Yeah look, I really was moved by this painting because I think the sort of athleticism of the pose is really unusual. Like, we've not seen anything else in the Archibald like that. There's the confidence, like as if she might pounce, and it feels like she's chosen that pose, very unusual, for a certain reason. I think it's about strength, and I think there's also a bit of a wildness there. She's also part Samoan, and I really like that in way that she's painted her hair. It's a really big part of Samoan identity, it's that fabulous hair, and that's a really strong element to this painting. But then, you've got this very graphic floor element that sort of contrasts with the sketchy nature of this unfinished way that she's painted herself. So, I like the contrasting design elements. But yeah, I also like the reflection on her heritage and the way she's painted herself, and that hair sort of anchors the image, that dark hair. So, I really like the composition but I like the strength and the wildness of her pose and the way that she's chosen to present herself.



Image: Fiona McMonagle Sangeeta Sandrasegar

- Julian Morrow: This is painting number 33, a portrait of Sangeeta Sandrasegar, by Fiona McMonagle. And quite a contrast to the painting we were just looking at. What do you make of this portrait, Rachel?
- Rachel Perkins: I feel like this is a really evocative painting. It feels... it doesn't feel fixed. It really feels like it just captured a moment in time, like this girl could have just been looking at you, talking... You were talking to her, and it just sort of captures... It's very informal. It has a sort of strength in her because it's direct, but it feels very intimate.



Image: Vincent Namatjira Studio self-portrait

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 40.
- Julian Morrow: Painting number 40 is titled *Studio self-portrait* and it's by Vincent Namatjira. Obviously, the Namatjira name, iconic in Australian art. Vincent Namatjira is the grandson of the famous Australian artist Albert Namatjira. Rachel, what do you think of this one?
- Rachel Perkins: Well, I love this painting. I think it's a standout because I think a couple of things are going on here. Obviously, there's the... his grandfather in the iconic ute. Albert Namatjira used to have this ute he used to drive around in, and you see lots of photos of him. And so his grandfather's in the background, but then Vincent's here in the studio in his KISS t-shirt on.
- Julian Morrow: Yeah.
- Rachel Perkins: He paints out of Indulkana, a remote Aboriginal community, and you can sort of see this casualness in the way that he paints, so it sort of talks about the legacy of his grandfather and the art movement that he was part of, but also very contemporary. It's also very unusual for artists, mostly, to do, from that region, from the desert region, to do self-portraits. Mostly, they're working in the style that we could call sandpaintings or dot paintings. And so it's a very unusual form for an artist from that area. And he sort of gazing off. It's very contemplative, I think, as well. But, then, also the figures almost... they have quite a flattened perspective. It's sort of like Sidney Nolan, in some ways.
- Julian Morrow: When I first looked at it, I didn't... I immediately took a second look to notice that Albert's on another canvas. Another work of art, looking down.
- Rachel Perkins: Yes. That's right.
- Julian Morrow: Two for the price of one.
- Rachel Perkins: Yes. Painting in a painting. And you can see that it was highly commended this work. And it would have been interesting... I mean, highly commended sort of means it was up there.
- Julian Morrow: It was the only one that was highly commended other than the winner.
- Rachel Perkins: That's right. It would have been interesting, I think, because the Sulman and the Wynne Prize, the two other major art prizes in Australia, both have been awarded to Indigenous artists. So if Vincent took this out, we would have had a trifecta.

Julian Morrow: A trifecta?

Rachel Perkins: Yes. But, anyway... so he's highly commended, which is terrific for him. He's a really exciting artist. And this is a standout work.

- Julian Morrow: Thanks for listening to the 2018 Archibald Prize podcast, recorded at the Art Gallery of NSW. And, remember, you can download and listen to more episodes featuring our other guests.
- Speaker 1: You've been listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ.