

# The 61<sup>st</sup> Blake Prize EDUCATION KIT



The Blake Society Ltd





Sign of the Cross - Greg Weight



Untitled from the series 'Film'  
- Sarah Barcan

## The Blake Conversation: Introducing the Exhibition

The Blake Prize each year makes an impact well outside the usual audiences for contemporary art. Because the subject matter of the religious and the spiritual imagination is so wide, it has the potential to either comfort or unsettle anyone's imagination. In the Blake we meet artists and poets who are addressing the mainstream issues facing our society.

No longer a stuffy art prize, the Blake has its finger on the pulse of current concerns about what it is to be human in these complex times.

This is a wider public conversation that reconsiders the social role of art and poetry and the contribution that creative people make to the content and quality of public debate. Art offers a form of imagining possible futures and in reconciling the past.

It also engages the terrain of ethics and justice and within the Blake it specifically reconsiders the nature of spirituality, not as something belonging to the private realm but to public and cultural formation. The Blake Prize prompts a widened conversation about the nature of being human, that allows for a reconsideration of the nature of what we understand by the spiritual.

This year's prize addresses the human connection to place and the environment, to issues of human justice, and to more contemplative states that sustain wonder and curiosity. In the diverse creative forms of poetry, video, painting, sculpture and so on, life returns as something like a gift that transfigures the everyday of ordinary life.

This exhibition therefore offers a deeply engaging selection of work from poets and artists who offer a creative way in shaping this important ongoing cultural conversation.

DR ROD PATTENDEN

## Introducing the Education Kit

This education kit is a resource that provides teachers and students with support material for a successful visit to the exhibition or through accessing the online material at the Blake Prize website for use in the class room (<http://www.blakeprize.com.au/>).

It is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the three chosen themes of the 61<sup>st</sup> Blake Prize, being **Spirituality and Religion**, **Nature**, and **Smoke and Threads**. **Smoke and Threads** includes information on the joint winners of the Blake Prize, Fabian Astore and Eveline Kotai. The second section provides information on those artists who were **Highly Commended** and the **5<sup>th</sup> Blake Poetry Prize**, whilst the third section looks at the process of **Choosing a Winner** and includes student activities.

The fourth part provides formal **Questions for Discussion** and **Creating and Making** activities that are split into lower secondary Years 7-9, and upper secondary Years 10-12 Visual Art Students. Students studying Theology, English and Psychology will also be interested in the themes in the exhibition. It is intended that teachers select activities that are aligned with their curriculum requirements and suited to their students' current studies.

An added feature of the kit is a **Glossary/Terms of Influence** that highlights definitions and influences on the exhibiting artists and their work. This can be used prior to, during or after your visit.

For further information about the Blake Prize it is recommended you refer to The Blake Book which is listed in the references at the end of this document or to also visit the official Blake Prize website [www.blakeprize.com.au](http://www.blakeprize.com.au). We hope you enjoy the contemplative journey that is the 61<sup>st</sup> Blake Prize and the 5<sup>th</sup> Blake Poetry Prize 2012.

*"The basic project of art is always to make the world whole and comprehensible, to restore it to us in all its glory and its occasional nastiness, not through argument but through feeling, and then to close the gap between you and everything that is not you, and in this way pass from feeling to meaning. It's not something that committees can do. It's not a task achieved by groups or by movements. It's done by individuals, each person mediating in some way between a sense of history and an experience of the world."*<sup>1</sup>

— ROBERT HUGHES, THE SHOCK OF THE NEW





# Spirituality & Religion

Spirituality and religion are obviously at the core of the 61<sup>st</sup> Blake Prize exhibition, however there are often questions surrounding the work and the individual artist's interpretation.

Has the artist explicitly linked their work to theology or have they generalised it incorporating universal themes? To represent spirituality and belief in art can be overtly apparent in some cases, and in others illustrate human experience or the search for meaning in a subtle or restrained approach. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism are some of the religions explored by the artists in this year's Blake Prize. The group of work has a "hushed", unspokenness to it. Perhaps a response to the chaotic world we live in dominated by intense movement and immediacy. It takes you on a journey of contemplation and the importance of mindfulness; a deceleration through refined techniques and quietly modest works.

The two winners of this year's prize depict Islam and the practice of Buddhism. Eveline Kotai is compelled by Buddhism and literally imbues the spiritual practice in her work **Writing on Air – Mantra Triptych**, while Fabian Astore illuminates spiritual presence in his depiction of **The Threshold** inside the magnificence of the Suliman Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. Hyun Hee-Lee's work **Homage** embodies the respect she has for two religions, initially Buddhism and then Catholicism, both of which have guided her through life.

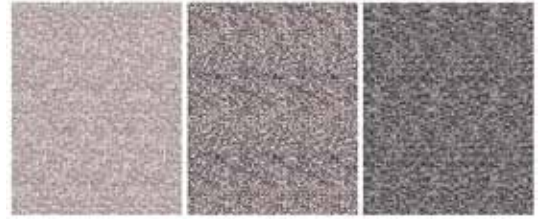
Caroline Rothwell's bronze sculpture **Attendant (After Schongauer)** references historical interpretations of the suffering of St Anthony in the wilderness sourcing a print by Martin Schongauer (1490) of the devil subjecting Anthony to numerous temptations, all of which he overcame through the power of prayer.

The spiritual themes are further represented in Sherna Teperson's **At once both heaven and earth**. Made of ciabatta bread, this religiously loaded material referred to biblically as the 'staff of life', is depicted in the form of a small beast poised between bondage and an innate calling to Lightness.

The diversity of these religions ultimately inspired each artist in the Blake Prize in their own personally driven way. Not only providing a rich layering of history, but a complex and diverse layering of the human spirit, life, death, and of those moments in between.

<http://www.shernateperson.com/>

<http://www.michaelreid.com.au/artists-view?aid=27>



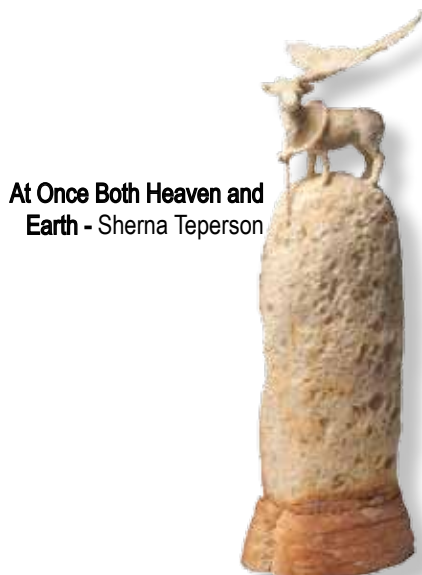
**Writing on Air – Mantra Triptych** - Eveline Kotai



**The Threshold** - Fabian Astore



**Homage** - Hyun Hee-Lee



**At Once Both Heaven and Earth** - Sherna Teperson



**Attendant (After Schongauer)**  
- Caroline Rothwell

# Nature

The power of nature and ecology can impact, alter and drive an artist to create. This is by no means a new concept, however it renders an ideal symbolic dialogue between nature and spirituality.

In discussing this influence on the artists, David-Ashley Kerr's large format photograph **Untitled 4** portrays the male nude romantically collapsed in the Australian Landscape. He says of the work *"the idea of the fallen angel has been interpreted as being cast out, estranged, this artwork grapples with ideas of environmental estrangement and belonging to place"*.

Similarly Anthony Pelchen's **Code Maroon (Stay or Go) 2** documents his experience with illness whilst living on the Wimmera River in Western Victoria. His recovery was encompassed by watching the colour of the land in drought, then finally rain to which he documents colour, ritual and nature inside a suitcase. Catherine Rogers **Between the Sea and the Sky** has captured a moment of profound space and beauty in her tonal photograph depicting the meeting of ocean and sky as an ever-changing mass. The image is reassuring and comforting, yet ephemeral and intangible.

Other artists such as Danie Mellor beautifully depicts, in his trademark blue pencil drawing, a giant skull in the landscape surrounded by shell lettering. **Bulluru Dreaming** narrates a creation story of his indigenous ancestors attacked by mythical birdmen. And Cowboy Loy Pwerl reflects a spiritual place where a boy and a goanna both belong to the land itself in country Utopia, Central Australia.

In considering **Bracken** by Troy Ruffels, it depicts a close-up into the natural world. The artist has a fascination with nature and explores this theme throughout his work. **Bracken** seems to envelope the viewer; the painterly coarseness of the fern sits against the hauntingly dark landscape. He says of his inspiration "places resonate with me, and generate particular moods, atmospheres, harmonies and silences, - I gravitate to these contemplative spaces in the landscape".

<http://www.david-ashleykerr.com/>

Anthony Pelchen: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRfBftAXYIA>

<http://www.artshub.com.au/au/news-article/profiles/arts/anthony-pelchen-184308>

<http://www.theartvault.com.au/Artists/apelchen.htm>

<http://www.catherinerogers.com.au/>

<http://daniemellor.com/portfolio/>

<http://troyruffels.com/>

<http://www.bettgallery.com.au/artists/ruffels/index.htm>



**Untitled 4** - David-Ashley Kerr



**Code Maroon (Stay or Go) 2** - Anthony Pelchen



**Between the Sea and the Sky** - Catherine Rogers



**Bracken** - Troy Ruffels



**Bulluru Dreaming** - Danie Mellor



# Smoke & Threads

**Smoke** – to burn, a cloud of tiny particles, something that obscures, something transient....

**Thread** – a fine filament, something connecting elements, human life, to intersperse

In discussing the work of the Blake Prize finalists one aspect became apparent. The work carried with it a bond, a link that was the embodiment of spirituality, yet would fundamentally distinguish it from previous years work.

The visual layering of smoke in Fabian Astore's winning new media work **The Threshold**, explores this dramatic symbolism whilst being expressive and spiritually emotive. The 'smoke' moves across the illuminated interior of the mosque, slowly darkening, encompassing, and finally defining itself as it turns red and black. The presence of the little girl freely playing, innocently leading the smoke, is juxtaposed against the background of men in prayer seated in ceremony under a magnificently-lit setting. The sound of the prayer emanates beautifully and converges to almost visually shift the layers in a powerful way which Astore describes as *"Sitting at the threshold, the presence of childhood innocence renders complex boundaries to a moment of spiritual elevation"* The work was recorded serendipitously in the Suliman Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey.

Artists such as Sally Blake's depiction in **Sol Niger** and Aaron Anderson's screen print **and the power forever** further express smoke as a theme by using the process of burning to produce dark, brooding works on paper. Blake burns small holes in the circles of the black and white sun, whilst Anderson uses milk as paint, charring it with a heat gun to produce an image of a coal burning power plant. Both have used the polarity of black and white over large areas, and both explore the notion of 'blackness' associated with smoke.

Cath Barcan's also illustrates this in her print **'Film'** which depicts a woman with a moving gush of smoke from her mouth. In her description she discusses the work *"a fine thread or filament, a dimness or abnormal opacity affecting the eye, a thin mist, a haze..."*

Eveline Kotai's winning work **Writing on Air – Mantra Triptych** embodies precision and geometry whilst harnessing the use of thread. Following what she describes as an accident, she began to re-use the pieces of canvas she had cut away and thrown on the floor as part of a new artwork. The re-used paintings are cut into thin strips and then reassembled extremely close together using a sewing machine to attach the strips to a canvas with invisible thread. The method is transcendental. She explains, *"It is a meditative ritual to generate mindfulness and compassion"*. This meditative quality is conveyed with patterns and text rhythmically moving horizontally and vertically across the canvas, restrained yet energized, perfected yet harmonic.

Similarly Faridah Cameron's **Veil** explores the delicate process of the thread-like application of paint to the canvas, whilst Cath Braid uses the

time-honoured skill of hand embroidery in the poignant work **Jumu'ah**. Cath Braid in collaboration with Rolla Khadduri and the Women of Chitral in Pakistan, almost defines the word thread. The textile work is presented as a grid with hundreds of hand embroidered buttons depicting vibrantly coloured eyes. The project was initiated by Braid involving embroiderers from nineteen centres in Chitral, untapping their potential to be part of what evolved into a women's embroidery collective of clothing design. This unconventional social enterprise gave a voice to rural Pakistani women in the national and international media and was a means to encourage their self-sufficiency and dignity. The work transcends beyond its tactile surface and appears to resonate and shift due to its portrayal of the varied movements of the women in prayer through different positions of eyes.

<http://www.craftunbound.net/theme/ordinary/pollyme-masterpieces-in-idle-chatter-from-pakistan>

[http://hsc.csu.edu.au/textiles\\_design/design/3239/caravana.htm](http://hsc.csu.edu.au/textiles_design/design/3239/caravana.htm)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lew\\_tuNjugY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lew_tuNjugY)

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/polly-me/112766648772688>

Eveline Kotai is a well-established artist and her work can be viewed at the following websites. <http://exhibitions.connydietzscholdgallery.com> and

<http://www.evelinekotai.com.au>

<http://www.fabian.astore.id.au>

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/creative-space-was-milked-for-mastery-20120628-2156q.html>

<http://aaronanderson.com>



**Sol Niger** - Sally Blake



**and the power forever** - Aaron Anderson



**'Film'** - Cath Barcan



**Veil** - Faridah Cameron



**Jumu'ah** - Cath Braid

# Highly Commended

In conjunction with the two winning works, four works were highly commended by the judges.

## Janet Laurence

*"the work is a meditation, a breath, a mantra. It is the OM as manifestation of primordial vibration from all life emerges".*

The work of acclaimed artist Janet Laurence, **Grace**, breathes life into the natural world. She describes it as "her calling for love and care of all life and the interconnection of all living things". Well known for her profound responses to the environment, science and architecture, the convergence of this work seems to embody the totality of elements that have driven her to this day. The hanging of translucent material, a veil, explores a metaphoric layering of drifting and stillness, hiding and revealing, life and death. When approaching the work there is a sense of weightlessness and space in which the viewer is almost able to take a breath of life, and as the work unfolds a feeling of experiential transformation occurs, a sense of 'oneness' with all life forms.



Further study: [www.janetlaurence.com](http://www.janetlaurence.com), [http://shermangalleries.sherman-scaf.org.au/artists/inartists/artist\\_profile.asp%3Fartist=laurencej.html](http://shermangalleries.sherman-scaf.org.au/artists/inartists/artist_profile.asp%3Fartist=laurencej.html)

## Shoufay Derz

*"a personal reflection on death and the meaning of emptiness"*

There is a darkness to Derz's work **Depart Without Return**. She is compelled by personal reflections on mortality, and the meaning of emptiness. Her use of pure indigo pigment is a constant in her work. Religiously poignant, indigo is considered one of the oldest dyes and described as the only 'true blue'. In Hindu it is named 'Nila' which translates as 'dark' and this is articulated in her work to evoke emotion and drama. She lies in a small canoe shrouded in indigo silk with live blind silk moths covering her face. Typically moths are attracted to light but there is an absence of light, this is reminiscent of the Godheads of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism depicted as blue-skinned symbolising the infinite. Harnessing the life cycle of silk moths, Derz depicts an explicit connection between the transience of life and the celebration of mystery, both elemental and alchemical. She is compelled by the concept of absence articulated through marks of presence and how the visual artist uses the known to depict the unknown "just as the writer uses words to express the ineffable" she states. She draws on the spiritual qualities found in the unexplainable between life and death, presence and absence, only to produce this evocative and beautiful piece of conceptual art.

Peril Online Magazine (Issue: October 2012)  
<http://www.peril.com.au/featured/interview-with-shoufay-derz/>, [Shoufey.blogspot.com](http://Shoufey.blogspot.com)



## Faridah Cameron

*"The sound of bells....the scent of celery (our hearts are not dead)"* extract from poem by Maria Valli 1972.

In looking at the work by Faridah Cameron, one can be tricked into thinking the work is a textile. **Veil** exposes a theme in this year's Blake Prize whereby the technique mastered by Cameron's paint application resembles thread. This tactility of markings applied to the surface is a thread connecting and metaphorically following her philosophical beliefs of religion, mythology and cultural continuity. She explores the element of repetition to which a pattern emerges evoking her very own personal calligraphy. Inspired by the work of Italian/Australian poet Maria Valli she interprets the sensory experience of joy in *'the sound of bells....the scent of celery'*, as it is those experiences that promote our spiritual awareness within a physical existence.

Further study: <http://www.faridahcameron.com>



## Sue Saxon (in collaboration with Jane Becker)

*"Hope is essential to life, to one's ability to continue."*

Artists Sue Saxon and Jane Becker collaborated to produce the work **Hope**, an installation piece depicting glowing, illuminated eggshells which spell out the word 'hope' in cursive script. Although the use of fairy lights appear playful and humorous, the spiritual understanding of the word holds deep meaning, a belief, and as Saxon explains "the 'hoper' believes they will reach a concept of heaven, salvation or an end to suffering". The use of eggshells also holds great significance, as the beginning of a life, an organic vessel of which something first develops, a creature, a being; or alternately ultimate death. At the core of Saxon's work is her heritage and she examines the experience of being a child of Holocaust survivors and Judaism. Her parents migrated to Australia in the 1950's whereby hope was fundamental to their survival and paramount to the ability to build a new life in a new country. The work is further associated with the title of the Israeli/Jewish national anthem *Hatikva* meaning 'The Hope'.

Further study: [www.suesaxon.com](http://www.suesaxon.com)

<http://twma.com.au/exhibitions/event/sue-saxon-and-jane-becker-all-that-is-solid-melts-into-air/>





## The MUA Human Justice Award

The MUA Human Justice Award was awarded to artist Saif Almurayati for his new media work **Unfolding History**. Entranced by listening to the Islamic religious chants Almurayati recaptures glimpses of early memories, from his grandmother's house to the refugee camps and his experiences in Australia. This personal, emotive work bears witness to not only his own loss of identity but to those of all refugees, the disadvantaged and the voiceless. The images show black figures on harsh orange backgrounds with obscured or erased text. The use of the eraser carries with it an explicitly 'loaded' concept. Almurayati describes "through the use of erasure, this piece is about exploring what is created when something is removed, to obscure the text is creating a spiritual relationship between what has been written and subsequently erased, it is a way of diminishing the barriers that are created by languages."

Further study: [www.saifart.com](http://www.saifart.com)



## The John Coburn Emerging Artist Award

The John Coburn Emerging Artist Award was awarded to Hyun Hee-Lee for the work **Homage**. Hee-Lee was raised in the Buddhist faith, and then converted to Christianity. It was this experience that prompted her to document her own spiritual transition. Homage embodies her respect for both religions. She was encouraged to write the first four books of the New Testament, of which she then unified the repetition of the written process with meditation whilst paying homage to the Buddhist prayer ritual. There is a silence to her work, an aura of pureness and light that emanates from the paper ties juxtaposed on grids of white canvas squares.

See further references to her work at <http://www.artereal.com.au/home/hyun-hee-lee>



# The Blake Poetry Prize

The Poetry Prize was won by writer Graham Kershaw and his work **'Alter Rock'**.

The poem addresses the mixed inheritance of white settlement in the Murchison district of Western Australia. It views the contemporary physical and social landscape in light of the aspirations and values of the first white people there, and in particular of John Hawes, an architect and priest active in the 1920's and 30's.

Hawes built Geraldton Cathedral and a series of remarkable churches in the area, employing an eclectic cocktail of Romanesque, Byzantine and Arts & Crafts elements. Altar Rock, also known as Mass Rock, was a site outside the small town of Mullewa, where Hawes would offer communion to Indigenous people reluctant to attend church. The area Kershaw documents lies on the outermost fringes of the wheatbelt, and after decades of living on the coast, this contrast began to slowly influence his poetry.

Kershaw says *"For me, it has taken on the appearance of the front at which the western project has stalled, with all its attendant enlightenment, humanist Christian and positivist values – a tragic historical event, but also a moment of silence and space, replete with possibilities."*

## Altar Rock

Graham Kershaw

### **I: Brand Highway North**

*As angles travel, haystacks refract hectares,  
bales become ziggurat temple stones,  
sandstone drums for columns never assembled.  
Here speaks the international currency of straw,  
a coopered steel dialect, whose accent sounds  
Devonian here, Australian in Essex.  
In Dongarra, Morton Bay Figs form the arches,  
tracery and trunks of a half-completed nave,  
scaffolding removed from all promise and purpose.  
North of Badgingarra, hills as dark as sodden moors  
beg chapels, a hardy leather pelt stretched tight  
over the country's bare, sharp bones; the puncture  
of one's post and it will rip and spill white sand,  
scarecrow in a storm, bleeding straw.*

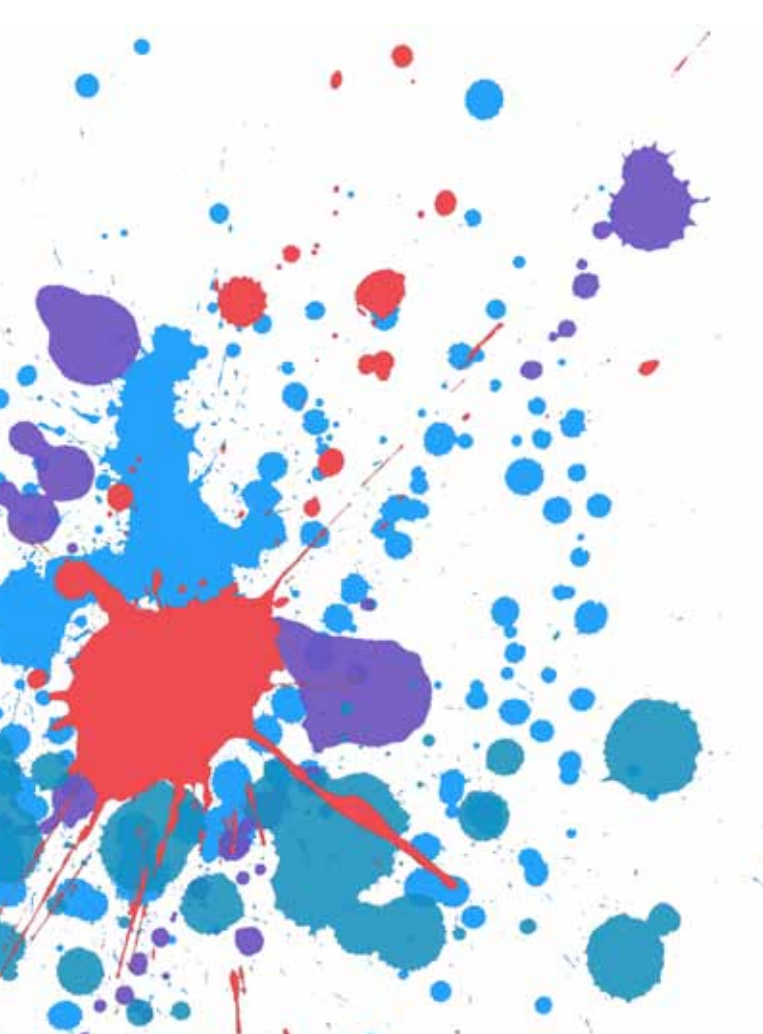
### **II: Mount Magnet Road East**

*Further north, the land is prised open, they say,  
valleys regurgitated. Mountains bleed into sea,  
flesh hung from trees charred by their own shadows  
black hands held up against the sun. It may all be true,  
for hear now, in the distance, this prophecy: the night's  
chandelier, crashing over a black marble table.  
So savour these last wheatlands, where slopes carpeted  
with golden grain's choral glow still flap and crack  
like hot sheets, outcrops burnt back to the blood-red bone,  
fired limbs of blackened stone. Here the was has been  
refined to contour lines, visitation stories of dearth  
and deliverance Jeremiah might have believed;  
here is hope, discrete, unspoken, but lightly inscribed  
on slopes by slender post and wire, faith in invisible rivers  
stripped down to watermarks etched on tablets  
between dusty trees.*

### **II: Mullewa**

*In the deli's dark and sullen sanctuary, tourists  
congregate, lured by the promise of everlasting flowers,  
buying sour communion wine, while in shuttered shops  
and shrouded rooms in every fibro cube the dry town  
keeps watch on the rock at its skirt, where Hawes  
once dreamt black and white might kneel to rub rough stone  
against their cheek, and weep. This lost moment  
still stalls the day and haunts the night, this lost chance  
to take things further still runs under this skeleton  
of a town, a stubborn silver trickle, waiting to be found.*

References: <http://www.fremantlepress.com.au/authors/348/Graham+Kershaw?PeopleGroup=3>





# Judging the Blake Prize

**What does the Blake prize reveal about spirituality in Australia, or at least how artists perceive such spirituality?**

I write as one of the judges for the 2012 prize who has studied and written on popular culture, film, literature, music and politics, all in relation to religion. I began the process of viewing the 1100 submissions with a plan to view a set number per day. But before I knew it, I was thoroughly engaged, enraptured even. I could not stop. Or rather, the only moments I did stop was when a work intrigued me, made me look longer, inquire and think further.

That arrested moment, the pause, became a criterion for selecting my initial shortlist. Why? A crucial feature of spirituality is its many-layered nature, the awareness that an unexpected moment or experience may reveal a glimpse of what can be called 'spiritual' or 'religious'. To put it slightly differently, the spiritual is always slightly beyond our ability to represent it. So the works that made it onto my shortlist were able to embody that notion of spirituality, the many-layered, unexpected and beyond-ness of the spiritual.

The works that were selected by the three judges together, both as winners and finalists, revealed a particular emphasis, with a prevailing meditative, reflective and questioning mood. I suggest this emphasis has much to do with the strong sense of a troubled world, not the usually troubled world with its war and exploitation, but the world today, which has taken an extended turn for the worse. The rolling global economic depression, the swings to the far right in politics, increase the sense of a world out of kilter – as do the decline of the US empire and the rise of China. Further, the demonization of a new 'enemy' to the 'West' – namely, Islam – continues. All these elements create a sense of the breakdown of old givens and generate fear of what will replace them.

It is this situation, with its particular shape in our time, that leads us to be more reflective and meditative, to seek spirituality as a way of dealing with such uncertainties. It is far easier to be playful when times are smooth and risk-free. Serious meditation is for troubled times, a search for deeper truths and new possibilities. To my mind, this is what the 2012 Blake Prize reveals, at least in part.

DR ROLAND BOER

## Choosing a Winner - The Debate

- Discuss and debate in class how the prize was split between 2 winners. Is this bending the rules?
- Consider why the judges of the 2012 Blake Prize selected these 2 works. Look at the works and document how the artists used their chosen medium. What processes did they use? Discuss why you think the works were selected. What was it that influenced the judges' decision?
- Conduct an appropriate social media experiment on Facebook or Twitter asking a variety of people the following questions: What does art mean to you? Have you heard of the Blake Prize? What is your impression of the artists' works? Do you have a favourite artist? Why? (Teachers to set boundaries for appropriate social media discussion). Collect and bring the results to class and discuss/compare as a group.
- Imagine yourself to be one of the judges and choose an artwork that you believe to be the winner. Construct an argument that justifies why and make a list in point form with your reasons then present in class.
- Create your own Peoples Choice award following your visit to the exhibition. Alternatively, curate your own exhibition as a class. Invite other teachers, the principal and students to visit work on display and vote for their favourite and why. Collate the results and discuss the relevance of judging. How do they affect the future of the artist? Arrange to have the work on display or published in the school newsletter or announce at assembly. Document the experience using a still camera.

**Still Life** - Justine Varga



**Attendant (after Schongauer)**  
- Caroline Rothwell



**Cath #2** - Sarah Cunningham



# Activities & Discussion

## Secondary 7-9

### Questions for Discussion

Document your first impressions as you enter the exhibition. What can you see? (Print out the Blake Prize Worksheet in Education Kit Part 2: <http://www.blakeprize.com.au/education/the-blake-education-kit>)

The exhibition explores themes of spirituality, religion, nature, smoke and threads. As you walk through the exhibition see if you can match works to these themes. Explain how the work explores the theme and the emotion it creates for you. Is there an 'energy', a spiritual experience, or an essence of understanding the environment?

Watch the work **The Threshold** by Fabian Astore. Record your impression of the work? Describe how it develops. Are you looking at what is happening in the background only or is the smoke prevalent? How has the artist achieved this effect? How do your feelings change from beginning to end? Describe your personal response to the work.

Look at the work by Eveline Kotai **Writing on Air – Mantra Triptych**. The artist is heavily influenced by Buddhist practice and describes it as a meditative ritual to generate mindfulness and compassion. Are you looking at the work as a whole or individually? Is the work moving or static? If you could touch the work what would it feel like? If it made a noise what noise would it make? Are the cut and sewn pieces coming forward? Do you see a vertical or horizontal pattern or both? Describe how/if the artist has expressed mindfulness in the work. How do you feel when you look at the work? Describe the mood of the artwork.

Choose from the works **Hope**, **Writing on Air-Mantra Triptych**, **Bulluru Storywater** or **Sol Niger**. When looking at the work try and imagine it has a sound. What music would be playing and why?

Look at the works by modern master Paul Klee and abstract painter Agnes Martin, then compare to Eveline Kotai's work. Find at least two examples of their work. To what extent have their styles influenced her work? Are there similarities/differences? Discuss the elements used in the work with specific examples. Would you define any of their works as spiritual? If so, why?

In Shoufey Derz's work **Depart Without Return** describe the significance the colour indigo has on the work. Imagine the work represented in another colour, choose one from the colour wheel. How would it change the work? What emotions would it evoke?

## Creating and Making

Following your visit to the exhibition, recall your response to the works. Write a poem that represents one of the following themes of Spirituality, Nature, Smoke, or Threads.

Eveline Kotai's work is a heavily labour-intensive process. She cuts, re-cuts and re-sews while saying a mantra. Using previous work or off-cuts, produce a work that requires this mindfulness, attention to detail and repetition. Does this experience of creating change your response to the work? What would your mantra be whilst producing your work?

Sue Saxon and Jane Becker collaborated to create the installation piece **Hope**. The word holds great significance for Saxon in relation to her beliefs and Jewish heritage. Get students into pairs either in the classroom or outside. Ask the students to discuss and document a list of ten words or feelings that have significant meaning to them and then choose one that they both feel strongly about. Using rope, string or wire create a large-scale work either on a wall or floor, inside or outside, that spells out the chosen word. On completion walk around the space as a group, discussing each word, what it means to them and its visual impact. Photograph the work and use for further discussion considering the variety of results. Did the collaboration make the process easier or more difficult? What role does collaboration play in visual art today? Debate the advantages/disadvantages of working in this way.

Using a camera take a photograph in nature that evokes a feeling of spirituality or meditation. Consider altering the image by blurring it or taking a close-up. Document the location of the photo and the time of day it was. Try taking the photo at a different time and compare how the light has affected the result. Refer to the works by Troy Ruffels, David-Ashley Kerr, Darren Davies or Catherine Rogers.





# Activities & Discussion

## Secondary 10-12

### Questions for Discussion

Upon entering the exhibition consider three works that capture your attention immediately. Record your response to the works and discuss why you chose them. (Print out the Blake Prize Worksheet in Education Kit Part 2: <http://www.blakeprize.com.au/education/the-blake-education-kit>)

Document and discuss the formal elements in Eveline Kotai's **Writing on Air – Mantra Triptych** or Hyun-Hee Lee's **Homage** e.g. colour, line, shape, tone, form, texture, scale. How have they interpreted these elements? Discuss the processes they have used and how they have included these elements.

Research the art practice of Janet Laurence. Find at least three examples of her work (refer to reference list at the bottom of this document). In the classroom show students the images and document their initial responses. Laurence challenges the relationship between art, the landscape and the interconnection of all living things. To what extent has her work responded to the environment?

In pairs or in a group discuss one of the following works **Attendant (After Schongauer)**, **Unfolding History, At once both heaven and earth**, or **Cath #2**. How has the work explored spirituality and belief? Then choose another work that challenges or opposes that work. Do a comparative study exploring the similarities/differences you find. Describe your thoughts on the work?

Consider the term 'thread' and its significance in the exhibition. Identify works that reference this theme and discuss how the artist has incorporated it. What process did the artists use? How does texture change the meaning of the work? What do you think the concept of thread expresses?

Shoufey Derz's work **Depart Without Return** explores the notion of absences, death and the meaning of emptiness. Compare and contrast the work with other examples of this. Think about the term absence and death in for example: Sue Saxon and Jane Becker's **Hope**, Aaron Anderson's **And the power forever**, Greg Weight's **Sign of the Cross**, Faridah Cameron's **Veil**, or Justine Varga's **Still Life**. Discuss your feelings on absence and death. Identify how you would interpret this theme in an artwork.

## Creating and Making

Find a passage that appeals to you in one of the historical sources that have influenced an artist's work in the Blake Prize, or use a quote from Blake Poetry Prize (e.g. Graham Kershaw's **Alter Rock**, New Testament, Buddhism, Islam, Maria Valli (poet), St Anthony, Hinduism). Create an artwork or visual text in response to the passage that gives the viewer an insight into how words and images can merge together.

Following your visit to the exhibition recall your responses to the works, referring to your notes. Choose at least three works and write a review using the following process: Describe, Analyse, Interpret and Judgement. Be clever with your responses. Imagine it will be printed in a newspaper or an online publication.

Fabian Astore recorded his work **The Threshold** serendipitously. He initially only started to record because he was overcome by the beauty of the sound of prayer until he realised a way to visualise the layering of 'spiritual presence' with smoke. Using this as your intent, find a place that holds special meaning to you, a place of peace and calm, then record its movements either with a still camera, sound recording or video. Bring your results to class. Is there an element of the work that you captured serendipitously? An unforeseen moment that was fortuitously depicted? Discuss how you could incorporate a 'layer' to the work or a change to the appearance. List the possibility of materials that could be used and how the viewer could be taken on their very own spiritual journey.

Research the work of the following artists: Eveline Kotai, Faridah Cameron, Cath Braid, Janet Laurence, Louise Rippert or Shoufey Derz. Thinking about your own practice and what inspires you, create a body of work based on one of the artists you feel strongly about. Experiment working with one of the materials the artist has used. It may be the use of textiles as in the work of Kotai, Braid or Laurence, or experimenting with the fine application of paint as in the work of Faridah Cameron, the use of collage represented in the work by Rippert or experimenting with new media as represented in the work by Shoufey Derz. Record your experiments in your VAPD documenting your processes. How has the artist influenced your own style? What was your experience?

Danie Mellor limits his colour palette to mainly blue and uses the motif of a huge skull set against the landscape in his large-scale work **Bulluru Storywater**. What do you think the skull means to Mellor? Consider what Mellor's intentions were when he added the text made of shells. Using blue drawing material only, create your own work and incorporate a textural element from nature that surrounds your work. Photograph the work and consider reducing and enlarging the work. How does this impact on the work? Discuss the importance of scale and the affects of a limited colour palette.

Look at the work in this year's Blake Prize and then ask the question what does silence and noise mean to you? Describe what it might look like. Consider the winning artists' works and the Highly Commended and their interpretations of spirituality and the environment. How have they visually interpreted silence and noise? Document where you find a your own place of solace and place of energy or excitement. Consider how it can alter your perception of yourself, your surroundings and views on society as a whole. Create two opposing works in your choice of medium that reflect the sense of place, and the how the mind can be influenced by environmental factors. Consider your colour scheme, use of space, choice of materials, use of line, composition and texture.

# Glossary/ Terms of Influence

**Bracken** – a large coarse fern, or mass of ferns.

**Bulluru Storywater** – Bulluru meaning 'Dreaming'. The title of Danie Mellor's work refers to an Indigenous creation story from the rainforest area of North Queensland.

**Ganesha** – Hindu god of wisdom or prophecy; the god who removes obstacles. Typically has head of an elephant.

**Homage** - a public show of respect or honour towards someone or something

**Karaniya Metta Sutta** – Buddhist philosophy translated in writings describing The Discourse of Loving Kindness

**Jumu'ah** – (Arabic) describing the congregational prayer or salah that Muslims hold every Friday.

**Om** – is a mystical Sanskrit sound of Hindu origin practiced in Dharmic traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. It is used at the beginning of most Hindu texts as a sacred incantation to be intoned at the beginning and end of a reading of any prayer or mantra.

**Mandalay Hill** – is 240-metre hill in Burma, which is known for its abundance of pagodas and monasteries, and has been a major pilgrimage site for Burmese Buddhists for nearly two centuries.

**Mantra** - is a sound, syllable, word, or group of words that is considered capable of "creating transformation". Its use and type varies according to the school and philosophy associated with the mantra. Mantras originated in India becoming an essential part of the Hindu tradition and a customary practice within Buddhism.

**Maria Valli** – Italian/Australian poet who published works interpreting the first experiences of Italians living in Australia in the 1960-70's.

**Martin Schongauer (The Temptation of St Anthony) – (1445-1491)**

This 15th Century artist illustrates with a copperplate etching an episode in the life of St Anthony. This influential print depicts the devil subjecting Anthony to numerous temptations, all of which he overcame through the power of prayer. At a later stage in Saint Anthony's life in the desert, the devil waged battle again, sending phantoms to attack him. Schongauer's engraving depicts the old man's impassiveness in the face of an array of brutal and wild beasts. Frequently explored by artists, this theme allows them to depict a fantastic world populated by ghastly creatures, half man and half animal.

**Serendipitously** – to be found by accident; unexpected yet fortuitous, serendipity (noun)

**Shi'a** – (Arabic) is the second largest denomination of Islam and based on the teachings of the Quran

**Sol Niger** – meaning black sun: can refer to the first stage of the alchemical magnum opus, the nigredo (blackening).

**Spirit** – Vital animating essence of a person or animal. A rational or intelligent being without a material body.

**Threshold** - A point of entry or beginning

**Triptych** – a work of art divided into three sections

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“This is a wider public conversation that reconsiders the **social role of art and poetry** and the contribution that creative people make to the content and quality of public debate. **Art offers a form of imagining possible futures** and in **reconciling the past.**”

Dr Rod Pattenden

Introduction: Dr Rod Pattenden

Judges Statement: Dr Roland Boer

Education Resource Writer: Nadia de Ceglie