

2019 Patrick White Literary Award awarded to Jordie Albiston

18 November 2019

Continuing a legacy of more than 45 years, Perpetual today announced Melbourne-based poet Jordie Albiston as the winner of the 2019 Patrick White Literary Award.

The award recognises Jordie Albiston's accomplishments and numerous collections of work as a poet. Doctor Albiston has published twelve poetry collections, and a handbook on poetic form. Two of her collections have been adapted for music-theatre, both of which enjoyed seasons at the Sydney Opera House. Albiston's work has been recognised by prizes, including the Mary Gilmore Award, the Wesley Michel Wright Prize and the NSW Premier's Prize.

Reflecting on the achievement, Doctor Albiston said: "It is one of the pleasures of my life to receive the Patrick White Literary Award. I am a full-time poet and my days are solitary. To be honoured like this in the public realm is an unexpected thrill, which will affect my work and myself for years to come."

Doctor Albiston will receive \$20,000 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to Australian literature.

The Patrick White Literary Award was established by Nobel Prize winning author Patrick White to advance Australian literature "by encouraging the writing of novels, short stories, poetry and plays for publication or performance". For the past 45 years it has been awarded to an author who has made an ongoing contribution to Australian literature, but may not have received adequate recognition.

The award is managed by Perpetual as trustee of the philanthropic trust behind it, and many authors of different status and experience may qualify for consideration.

Perpetual General Manager of Community & Social Investment, Caitriona Fay said: "More than 45 years ago Patrick White used the proceeds from his 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature to establish this Award. White's passion to support Australian authors has created a lasting legacy. Through this philanthropic act, he has positively impacted the lives of countless authors who have made a contribution to Australian literature."

Jordie Albiston was officially honoured for her contribution to Australian literature at the Patrick White Literary Award celebration at the Readings Store within the State Library of Victoria, on Saturday 16 November 2019.

The 2019 judging panel included Dr Felicity Plunkett (Chair), Dr Bernadette Brennan (Former Chair), Dr Julieanne Lamond and Ms Michelle de Kretser.

– Ends –

Note to editors

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About the Patrick White Literary Award

The Patrick White Literary Award was established by the author with the proceeds of his 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, and it is managed by Perpetual as trustee of the philanthropic trust behind it. The Award has been given annually to an author who has 'already made a contribution to Australian Literature' but who may not 'have received due recognition for that contribution'.

The broad terms of the Award mean that authors of different status and experience may qualify for consideration. Many winners have been older writers, but some have been younger, and all have been encouraged by it to continue writing. Poets, novelists, playwrights and short story writers have been among the now 45 recipients who have so far benefited from Patrick White's generosity and vision. Past winners include Christina Stead, Fay Zwicky, Amanda Lohrey, Tony Birch and Samuel Wagan Watson.

The judging committee's current members are Dr Felicity Plunkett (Chair), Dr Julieanne Lamond and Ms Michelle de Kretser.

About Jordie Albiston and her work: The Judging Committee's citation

Jordie Albiston is a Melbourne-based poet. She has published eleven collections and a twelfth will be published by Puncher & Wattmann this month. Albiston studied flute at the Victorian College of the Arts, before publishing her first collection of poetry in 1995. She holds a PhD in Literature.

Nervous Arcs, her first collection, was published by Spinifex Press. It won the Association for the Study of Australian Literature's Mary Gilmore Award for a first book, was runner-up for the Anne Elder Award and was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry in the NSW Premier's Awards. Janette Turner Hospital writes of the collection that 'Jordie Albiston writes with sharp intelligence, lyrical grace and moral passion.' Its themes – including memory, the body, desire, myth – established a brace of concerns to which her work has returned. In its experimentation, especially with the sonnet form, it initiates the inventive and expansive formal range which characterises Albiston's poetry.

Two of her books (*Botany Bay Document* - retitled *Dreaming Transportation* - and *The Hanging of Jean Lee*) based on non-fictional documents and testimony have been adapted for music-theatre by Sydney composer Andrée Greenwell. Both productions have had seasons at the Sydney Opera House. *Botany Bay Document* (Black Pepper, 1996) draws on legal records, maps, letters, ship documents, intimate diaries and letters to re-examine the white invasion/settlement of Botany Bay from the perspective of convict women and the wives of their guards. *The Hanging of Jean Lee* (Black Pepper, 1998) explores and documents the conviction of thirty-one-year-old Jean Lee, the last woman to be hanged in Australia, in 1951.

Albiston's fourth collection, *The Fall* (White Crane Press, 2003), again responds to documentary evidence, this time a 1950s photograph of a young woman after her suicide, which won *Time Magazine's* Photo of the Year. *The Fall* was shortlisted for Premier's Prizes in Victoria, NSW and Queensland. In *Cordite*, Matt Hetherington writes that 'Jordie Albiston shows us both the pain of forgetting the mystery, and the dark art of bringing the pain to light.'

Her 2007 collection, *Vertigo: a cantata* (John Leonard Press), employs musical notation rather than conventional grammar, accumulating bars rather than stanzas and lines. Its arias, recitatives and choruses narrate the process of grieving for a lost love, situating this in the context of the sea. Lyn McCredden writes that '*Vertigo* can be read at one sitting, and needs to be - a formal, dignified, trenchant year's experience of lost love articulated in a musicality of language which embodies but also transforms the pain and grief threatening to annihilate.'

the sonnet according to 'm' (John Leonard Press, 2009), composed entirely of variations on the sonnet form, interlaces strands from the lives of the poet, her maternal grandmother and her paternal great-great-grandmother. It won the Kenneth Slessor Prize in the NSW Premier's Awards in 2010. *The Book of Ethel* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2013) is a collection of poems about Albiston's great-grandmother. Mark O'Flynn calls it 'a rigorous exploration of a self-imposed limitation that strives to seek out its own flexibility, the freedom of shackles.' Dan Disney writes: 'Jordie Albiston's dance with form is a sophisticated yet radical gambol: these poems move decisively, sensuous and surefooted... *The Book of Ethel* is, as with Albiston's other recent books, an astonishing confluence of formal constraint and authentic music.'

Jack & Mollie (& Her) (UQP, 2016) is a book-length poem comprising decasyllabic cinquains, evoking the life of a woman through the eyes of her two dogs. *Warlines* (Hybrid Press, 2018) works from letters sent by soldiers in the First World War, archived in the State Library Victoria. It is, David McCooney writes, 'a masterwork of documentary poetry that is both profoundly moving and intensely crafted'. He continues: 'It is impossible to describe the intensity of this as a reading experience. Each discovery is profoundly moving. If this book is almost "too much", it does its job in helping us imagine the inconceivable "too much" that was the mass slaughter of World War I.'

Albiston's new collection, published by Puncher & Wattmann this month, is titled *element: the atomic weight & radius of love*. The work uses chemistry as an indexing trope to explore the human experience of love, extending Albiston's longstanding conversation with mathematics and poetry into the realm of science.

Albiston has also written two collections of poetry for children. She is co-editor, with Kevin Brophy, of *Prayers of a Secular World* (Inkerman & Blunt, 2015), collecting poems broadly addressing ideas of the sacred, and *The Weekly Poem: 52 exercises in closed & open forms* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2014), in which she explores fifty-two examples of poetic form.

In her exhilarating formal inventiveness, her originality, and her close, ethical work in the terrain of non-fictional poetics, Albiston's work is extraordinary, moving and provocative. Her attentiveness to remaking form and her empathic portrayals of lives, especially the lost and silenced lives of women, are some of the qualities that make her work outstanding.

The judges congratulate Jordie Albiston on being chosen as winner of the Patrick White Award for 2019. We look forward to her future publications.

About Perpetual Philanthropic Services

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