



WINNER PEOPLE'S CHOICE ARCHIBALD.PRIZE.08

Vincent Fantauzzo for his portrait of Heath Ledger

This year more than 32,000 people voted in the People's Choice for the Archibald Prize and their favourite portrait by far was Vincent Fantauzzo for his portrait of Heath Ledger called *Heath*.

To date 130,000 people have visited the 2008 Archibald Prize, which is a record attendance for the gallery since Archibald began in 1921.

The Ledger family, in particular Sally, Heath Ledger's mother and Vincent Fantauzzo have jointly decided to donate this painting to the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

In the 20 years since the People's Choice was first awarded, the prize has only twice coincided with the judges' decision.

Vincent Fantauzzo painted his portrait of Australian actor Heath Ledger in December just weeks before Ledger died in New York in January. Fantauzzo and Ledger were friends for around five years. "We had been planning to do a portrait for the last three years," says the artist, "but the time was never right. Then late last year he gave me a call and said he was ready to do it and was really excited."

They met at Ledger's mother's home in Perth and discussed ideas for the painting. "I wanted it to be dealing with self, your own consciousness and your thoughts," says Fantauzzo. "An artist is their own biggest critic. I had seen his eyes wander off or stare into the camera while doing interviews and wondered what he may have been thinking. I felt that being a celebrity, you are always under constant scrutiny with so many demands made of you that you have to hold part of yourself back and not give too much away."

The artist and Ledger had a couple of lengthy sittings. Ledger was relaxed and happy and they talked about his career. "After the sittings I felt so inspired," says Fantauzzo, "I worked on the painting in Melbourne for 10 or 12 hours a day. I've never worked so obsessively. I was consumed by it."

Born in England in 1977, Fantauzzo came to Australia as a child and has a Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) and a Master of Fine Art from RMIT University, Melbourne. He has had solo exhibitions and has won many art prizes.

Vincent will receive \$2,500 and a \$1,000 Myer gift card for winning the People's Choice.

Each year a voter for the Archibald painting which receives the most votes is selected to win \$2,500 and a \$1,000 Myer gift card. The lucky winner is Margot McKillop from Sydney who voted for Vincent Fantauzzo's painting of Heath Ledger.

Archibald, Wynne & Sulman Prizes are on view until Sunday 18 May 2008.