

## Robert Malherbe: discovery leads artist to parliamentary victory



*Lithgow Wetlands* by Robert Malherbe.

EMILY RITCHIE THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM October 13, 2016

Robert Malherbe was rejected from art school when he was 16 but he never let that stop him from pursuing the craft. His impulse to paint was stronger than his desire to acquire formal training, so he taught himself.

“Painting is just something I’ve always done and I try not to be too self-aware,” says Malherbe, 51.

“After high school I got myself a job in animation and I worked for Disney and Hanna-Barbera, which was a great way to learn to draw and make money at the same time.”

Malherbe, based in the Blue Mountains, is the recipient of this year’s \$20,000 NSW Parliament Plein Air Painting Prize, chosen from 41 finalists, for his painting *Lithgow Wetlands*.

Malherbe decided to paint Lithgow in the NSW central tablelands because it’s a place he has grown to love in recent years.

“It’s a city that’s really coming along,” he says. “It’s steeped in history and it reminds me a lot of (inner-city) Newtown in the 80s before the boom, it has a lot of that same character.”

One day Malherbe stumbled on Lithgow’s man-made wetlands by accident

and was moved by the natural yet industrial beauty of the place. He has always loved painting outdoors and believes that immersing himself in the locale of the work enhances the end result.

“Painting a landscape is inconceivable to me unless I’m in the middle of it, putting down my sensations directly from the motif,” Malherbe says. “I try, with the use of paint, to miraculously converge with my locale, and this has always been my practice.”

Malherbe has entered the NSW plein air award every year since it began in 2008 and has been a finalist six times. This is the first time he has won.

“I hope this will throw more light on my work,” he says. “And the money will mean I can go out and buy a lot more paint and canvas without feeling guilty.”

In recent years Malherbe’s work has been met with critical acclaim, having been chosen as a finalist in the Wynne Prize, Mosman Art Prize and the Archibald Prize. He also was awarded the Art Gallery of NSW residency at Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris.

With the latest prizemoney, Malherbe hopes to once again travel overseas and visit art galleries “to keep the input going”.

Following this year’s exhibition, which runs until October 28, *Lithgow Wetlands* will become part of the permanent collection of the NSW Parliament, joining work by previous winners including Guy Maestri, Isabel Gomez and Rodney Pople.