DIGGER PORTRAIT HIGH ON GALLERY’S WISH LIST

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A PORTRAIT of a proud but traumatised Australian soldier by one of the nation’s top artists will be Queensland’s next major art acquisition.

The powerful painting, Sergeant P, after Afghanistan, by Ben Quilty is the focus of the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art foundation’s 2014 appeal.

QAGOMA director Chris Saines says the gallery needs about $120,000 to buy the painting, which will be the first Quilty in the collection.

“We want a Quilty and we’re committed to acquiring this one,” Saines says.

“To help us do that, we need the support of our foundation members and the public.”

“Ben is one of those artists whose career trajectory has been steeply rising, particularly since he won the 2011 Archibald Prize.

“There is already a strong uptake and we hope this will be the first of many Quilts in the collection.”

Saines says Sergeant P, after Afghanistan, a dark but ruggedly beautiful oil painting, is a moving work that resulted from Quilty’s stint as an Australian official war artist in 2011 – a commission from the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

He noted it would be a timely acquisition, with the centenary anniversary of the Anzac landings at Gallipoli looming.

Quilty, who lives in the southern highlands of NSW, is considered one of Australia’s hottest artists and he has been chosen to exhibit at the prestigious Saatchi Gallery in London.

He has been showing his work at Jan Murphy Gallery in Brisbane for more than a decade and says he sometimes feels like he hails from Queensland.

He says his stint as a war artist was one of his proudest achievements.

Quilty painted Australian soldiers in Afghanistan and continued friendships with them back home.

He says many still suffer the effects of war and Sergeant P, an SAS soldier who can’t be named for security reasons, was nearly killed in a helicopter crash while serving in Afghanistan.

“His legs were broken, his back was broken, both lungs were punctured, he was in bad shape,” Quilty says.

“Now he’s back home at a desk job and still in a lot of pain. But he insisted on standing when I was painting him. I told him it could take a few hours but he insisted.”

The portrait shows a proud and somewhat battered bloke, and Quilty says it honours the subject and all those who serve in our military forces.

Funds are building for the acquisition.

Quilty says he is looking forward to having a work in the QAGOMA collection and hopes it is just the start.

The Australian War Memorial’s exhibition of his Afghanistan paintings is continuing its national tour after a recent stint in Brisbane.

More info:
qagoma.qld.gov.au/2014appeal
POWERFUL PIECE: War artist Ben Quilty with his painting of an Australian soldier who served in Afghanistan. QAGOMA needs $120,000 to buy the artwork. Picture: Adam Smith