



LITERARY }

NIL LUMBİK

ANTHOLOGY
of WRITING 2017

FOREWORD }

Nillumbik prides itself on years of artistic contribution to Australia's vibrant literary community.

The Literary Nillumbik Awards showcase how the power of words play an intricate role in our solitary and shared lives. The winners of the Alan Marshall Short Story Award and the Nillumbik Ekphrasis Poetry Award share this anthology. Their voices will echo beyond our community.

The Nillumbik Council has a new association with the Australian Society of Authors and Writers Victoria. We are proud of this partnership and its strengthening of the Literary Nillumbik program. We thank judges, Bruce Pascoe, Helen Lucas, Steve Smart, and Karen Throssell for their expertise in selecting this year's winners.

Congratulations to all the winning writers and poets and to all who entered the 2017 Literary Nillumbik Awards.

Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.

– William Wordsworth



P. Clarke

Mayor, Councillor Peter Clarke

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The Alan Marshall Short Story Award was created in 1985 to celebrate excellence in the art of short story writing. The Award honours the life and work of Australian literary icon and former Eltham resident, Alan Marshall.

Each year Australian authors are invited to submit stories up to 2,500 words in length. The Award is presented by Nillumbik Shire Council in partnership with the Yarra Plenty Regional Library.

In 2017 the Award is also proud to be associated with Australian Society of Authors and Writers Victoria.

JUDGE'S REPORT

by Bruce Pascoe

The range of theme and style was impressive. Most writers were conscious of style and plot variations. The prize winning stories handled all of these points in original ways but also distinguished themselves with deft and understated plot resolution.

It was notable that writers were careful to try and avoid cliché and stale plot lines.

The winning Open Prize story established a gradual dread supported by subtle character development and a beautiful use of language.

The winning Local Prize story used a similar method to establish a dark and sombre mood which was allowed to draw the reader toward the understanding of the main character's motivation.

HIGHLY COMMENDED OPEN STORY

Mallee Dirt Bleeds Red by Chris Scriven

HIGHLY COMMENDED LOCAL STORY

Breaking-in by Anne Connor

OPEN PRIZE



ALAN MARSHALL
SHORT STORY
AWARD 2017

IN THE DARK

by Sarah Day

The loaves were arranged in two pious rows behind the counter on a sloping shelf. Baked in square tins, they rose even-sided to their square tops. They *were pale*. Their crusts would be thin and their dough light. They would *turn to pap in the mouth* – his father, German, and a connoisseur of bread would be dismissive. Time ticked on the starburst clock behind the counter. His father, waiting in the car, would be impatient. A blowfly crawled out of a gap between the two middle loaves. Thick legged, eager, it marked out an even rectangle on the field of the loaf's flat surface. The boy wondered if a fly's brain could accommodate right angles. Apparently. The shopkeeper wore a navy beret with a tight leather band that had left a red wheal around his forehead as he pushed it further back on his brow. He had seen the fly too. With a brief glance that met the boy's eyes squarely, he selected the fly-trodden bread from the row of perhaps a dozen. The boy noticed the man's fingernails were unclean as he slipped the loaf into a brown paper bag. He was not the sort of boy to speak out, unused to complaint especially to an adult man and anyway, what did it matter? He said nothing and paid for the bread, waiting with his hand limp on the counter for the change, and feeling a heaviness in his chest without knowing why it was there. The coloured fly-strips behind him rustled.

Coins in hand he turned and jumped to see his father standing in the doorway. The weight where his heart was grew colder and heavier and harder when he saw the expression on his father's face. It was like the blade of a spade. He knew that his father would dig with it.

The car door on the driver's side slammed. Without turning round from the front seat the boy spoke quickly to his younger brother in the back seat:

Did you pack the fuel for –

His father cut him short:

What did you do that for?

Their father drove leaning over the steering wheel, slouched in the seat, too tall for the vehicle. Changed gears as he turned out of the Derwent Bridge service station back on to the gravel highway. The boy could hear the anger in the consonants. It occurred to him at that moment that his father never spoke German when he was angry. Nor English, for that matter, in those rare moments when he softened towards his sons. The boy slipped his hands, palms down, under his thighs and stared straight ahead. Dense forest grew to each side of the road that swung around bends as it wound steeply upwards. He noticed the brilliant red on the tips of the gums, new growth that looked as if the trees were in bright bloom. He saw the first conical Christmas tree form of a celery top pine that told him they were getting higher and entering the border of the rainforest. He smelt the garlic in the bratwurst at the back of the car in the tin box with the ice. He was not hungry.

His brother in the back seat, ever the diplomat and peacekeeper, cleared his throat. The older boy felt sorry for him, he hadn't a clue what was going on. He knew something was up though.

We should be in Zeehan by four-ish if we don't stop again.

This observation drew no response from his father or brother in the front seat. They drove a little further in silence, and then:

You saw the bloody fly, why did you accept the bloody bread?

The older boy was ready.

What do you mean?

The branches of the passing trees were close enough to reach if he stretched out his arm.

Why did you take the bloody bread that had been crawled all over by a fly? You and the bloody shopkeeper, you both stood there watching it.

The consonants again, especially those Vs acting as Ws. He only noticed the accent when his father was angry. The voice was hardening:

Why didn't you speak up and say: "I don't want the bloody bread that's had a filthy fly walking all over it?"

As the boy gazed through the window at the passing trees his tongue and lips played with the *sp* sound in the word speak, first echoing his father's *shp*, then, the way he was used to saying it: *sp*; *shp*; *sp*. To his brother in the back seat, it looked as if he were whispering to his own reflection.

I didn't notice it had a fly.

The car was accelerating. It swung into the next bend and revved harder out of it. He wound the window down. The pressure in his chest needed air. There were more rainforest trees now: sassafras that old-timers used to make tea out of; there was one bloke who'd crush the leaves and rub them on his chest when he was crook like the first people around those parts used to. Now the occasional tall myrtle and now the horizontal scrub with its uniform limbs and camouflage speckles, a bugger to walk through. You needed a machete. The smell of forest dampness, earthy, menthol, rich as fruitcake, eased the pressure a little. He had grown up on the West Coast in a Hydro village. The saw-millers had known their trees. He'd learnt the names from them.

Now there was just the chugging of the motor labouring as the old Vauxhall climbed. The sound reverberated against the steep embankment. The blade in the chest of the boy in the front seat dug deeper; the freezing air calmed him. He breathed in slowly. How long had his father been standing there at the service station door watching?

The front had come in by the time they reached the coast. The campsite was empty. The headlands obscured by low cloud. Great waves rose out of the fog crashing brutally on the rocks. It was hard to say what was louder, the wind or the waves. The boys made the tent canvas taut, hammered pegs into the rocky ground with fingers that had no feeling, and fastened guy ropes to trees.

Their father had no need to check whether they'd done the job well. He only gave instructions once. He had taught them to put up tents years ago; there was no need to check. He would sleep in the back of the station wagon on an old kapoc mattress. He could sleep anywhere without a mattress. He'd learnt this early. He'd been on the run as a boy in the war.

The tent made fast, the boys began to construct a lean-to shelter out of a sheet of oilskin tarpaulin. They cut four makeshift poles of driftwood that was stacked waist high along the high waterline. Two ropes to tie down each. The younger boy worried about the kerosene stove, he doubted it would light in the wind. It would rain soon. They were damp in the fog already. Their father was getting into his wet-weather gear. He had hardly spoken a word since they pulled in for bread. The younger boy puzzled over what might have happened but he knew better than to scratch an inflamed sore. He could see that his brother was staying carefully out of range of their father, making sure that at all times the car or the tent were between them. Neither gave a sign that he was aware of these tactical moves. The sky had darkened, the wind in the invisible forest at their backs now deadened the noise of the waves.

When the rain began, the wind eased a little. Now the sea roared the louder. The elder brother was oblivious to the din of the ocean. There was a hush in his thoughts. In his mind's eye he watched again with fascination and a mild exultation as the fly sauntered across the crust of the pale bread, each jointed leg seeming to move independently of the rest. The blowfly had been the daring one, unflinching, unafraid, sauntering casually beneath the dark eye and grubby hand of the shopkeeper. With an effort of will he drew himself back to the campsite, conscious of his younger brother's solitude. For the moment the blue kerosene flame was alight, the black kettle balanced above.

They stood beneath the flapping awning moving aside now and then as the wind's gusts emptied quantities of water that pooled above them. Their father, in his heavy rubber waders and oilskin stepped on to the beach without a backward glance, steering the craypot into the wind. He looked like the captain of an invisible ship, a dark, diminishing figure on the grey shingle. Ahead of him the fog thinned a little so that the great rocks at the southern end of the inlet

became silhouetted. On the sea side, it hovered just off-shore, the breakers materialised as if out of the white air.

The figure in the distance had reached the furthest rocks. He stooped over the pot. With a free hand he raised the collar of the coat against the storm. The tide was coming in. A wave surged high upon the shore. The boys could hear the hollow knocking as it drew through deep pebbles back to the sea. The younger boy stamped his feet up and down. It was getting colder.

What did he bring for bait? he asked.

Chicken necks and backs.

The water inside the kettle was prickling.

It'll do.

Tea leaves floated to the surface.

Should've waited a few minutes longer.

Not to worry.

They banged the sides of the kettle with a stick, some of the tea settled. Stirred honey into their cups. They sipped, looking to the south, watched as their father pulled himself and the craypot with its length of rope attached, up the diagonal, shiny black face of granite. Waves broke in a spray of white foam across its surface every now and then. They were cold to the bone. The enamel cups scalded their hands. They watched the insect-like figure in the distance that was their father. His movements foreign, arrhythmic, and ungainly.

The waders. They've got steel toes.

The bottom lip of the older boy rested on the rim of his cup. His words blew across the surface of the tea. And then, as if he needed to explain:

They're heavy.

The tremendous waves ranked in rows one behind the other on their way in to shore. The sun, an opaque smudge, was getting low towards the ocean.

The mist had lifted over the bay. They could see the height of the cliffs now that flanked their inlet on either side. At the same time they also saw something else...the wobble on the horizon as a great wave began to lift its mass out behind the breakers. The older and the younger brother watched it lifting and shifting and moving closer. It seemed to move more slowly than the rest. The previous wave pulled back into its reach. And then like a clap of thunder it broke all along the shore. Deep water surged across the face of the rock on which seconds ago their father had stood. They watched it cascade, the foam seemed to hold mid-air. The older boy thought of the rubber waders with their steel toes. Watched the terrible water pounding and sucking. And then, at last, heard it receding, knocking as it drew back through the shingle. Neither boy moved. The elder still held his cup to his lips. His brother spoke first:

Would you go and rescue him?

Nope.

The word magnified a little in the empty tea cup which had grown icy cold. He flicked the dregs on to the gravel. The rain had eased completely.

Would you?

Na.

They could not take their eyes off the empty rock. The wind had dropped.

It was nearly dark. Their eyes were trained through the fading twilight. They no longer noticed the waves drawing in, receding. As they watched, they saw there was movement. A head lifting and then the drenched stick figure pulling itself slowly upwards and onto the rock's treacherous surface. Laboriously it clambered down and paused a moment teetering on the uneven shingle. In the near-dark they could see that he was holding one end of a rope. The pot was set.

LOCAL PRIZE }



ALAN MARSHALL
SHORT STORY
AWARD 2017

MIRIAM AND MILDRED

by Karen Andrews

Miriam hitched her skirt and kneeled beside the cow. The animal made a mournful noise and in reply, from the nearby holding yard, came the bleat of her calf. Miriam could picture its pretty brown and white face against the palings, tendrils of spit dripping from its mouth. Rather than milk, she had the urge to place her hand over her ears and block all entreaties. Not that it mattered – those sounds were already committed to her soul. Miriam shifted her weight, placed her hands on the rubbery udders and got her elbow ready just in case the cow had a tantrum. Empathy was one thing, a broken foot another. They would just have to pass this time together in their mutual poor mood. Miriam's insides felt like they were curdling. This last cow – Mildred, she'd secretly named her – and she would be done.

There came the pearled stream, a metallic ping. Again and again she squeezed, feeling sicker each time.

You still here?

Her father's voice, a cacophony of accusation under the tin roof.

I started late.

May I ask why?

One of Mildred's ears flicked at his mock politeness.

I don't feel well.

Miriam heard him mutter to himself as he surveyed the dairy, stopping to inspect if each empty stall had been left to his satisfaction. As he approached, her uterus seized again. Oh, no. Miriam clenched every muscle she could between her legs. If anything, it made the pain worse. And it didn't make a difference. The bleeding began, taking to liberty with gusto. She looked down. Blouse, thin skirts. It was warm. *Good yield today?* she asked loudly, looking for a distraction. God, it hurt. May the Lord forgive her for taking his name in vain, but it did. Was this how it struck all women? She had to stay seated until he left, and then get back to the house unnoticed to get her rags and change. But first problem first: act normal.

Nearly done? he asked, leaning against the railing. Mildred turned at the sound of her father's voice, recognising her master. Yes, Joseph Fisher was the question-asker – not her, her brothers, not even her mother.

A band of muscles went into spasm across her stomach. Yes, she said, struggling to keep an even tone.

Samuel is expected for dinner.

Miriam bit the inside of her cheek. *I know.*

I expect you to be more civil to him on this visit.

Miriam suspected she had been as civil as any fifteen-year-old girl could be to a seventeen-year-old boy with a doughy, pale face, who made long eye-contact over the dinner table and had the disturbing talent of arranging to be momentarily alone in the same room. Her brothers couldn't even stand Samuel – they teased her when they were in the field, ghosting her from behind, standing so close she could feel their breath upon her neck. Turning to strike, they'd dance backwards and laugh, saying they were merely emulating her betrothed. It was a lie, of course. Their mimicry was born from the same mistrust of Samuel's unsettling energy.

We are not betrothed, she'd snap.

No, but she wasn't stupid. Samuel's family was influential in the community; not that they weren't, but Joseph had always felt that his had been overlooked. His belligerence, his scheming, was a source of suspicion. He was a man of the new century, he claimed, surrounded by people of the old. That required heeding to custom.

Like matchmaking.

I'll do my best, she said to her father, continuing to milk, hoping that her attentiveness to her job would be enough to assuage her father's problem with its lateness of completion.

She'd had a lot of experience in masking one reality with the semblance of another. Like hiding her monthly bleed for almost two years from everyone except her older cousin Rebecca, a stalwart ally who Miriam loved more than anyone else in the world. Rebecca had been subtly shunned by the town since she left to marry a man from the city more than five years ago. On a rare return in those early days, she handed over a package to Miriam containing everything she'd need to keep her womanhood a secret. Miriam's mother had done the same with dignified solemnity, but those rags remained unstained in her drawers, but not untouched. Her mother checked, she was certain.

Miriam just wanted time, that's all. Was that so much to ask? If her father knew she was bleeding now, he would be satisfied she was in good health. Another stage completed towards destiny. She rested her forehead against Mildred's belly and took a deep breath of animal mustiness. Theirs was a similar relationship and duty: of procreation and secretion.

Mildred's tail twitched in irritation – a fly, perhaps. Miriam sat back just in time to save the bucket being turned over as the cow stepped forward in the stall to adjust her position.

Drat! She raised her hand to swat Mildred as an exasperated anger suddenly filled her head, stopping at the last second to instead curl it into a fit and bring it back to her side. The keening of the calf outside began again.

That's enough, said her father. *Let her out. Go see if your mother needs any help.*

Miriam's toes curled with indecision. What to do? She looked to the cow and an idea struck.

Can you please go up and release the door to the yard? I'll walk her out.

A strange request, but it was the best she could do. Her success laid in the balance.

Temperamental beast, said Joseph, ticking Mildred's ears as he walked past.

She has her days.

I was talking about you. Joseph pushed the bolt. It was rusted, making it sticky and he turned his back to concentrate on forcing it open.

Miriam seized her chance. She stood up and glanced at the stool, rubbing the blood smear off the surface with the hem of her skirt. She ducked behind the rump of the cow. Out of sight, she twisted her skirt around to inspect the spreading red starburst, not as large as she'd expected. She picked up the bucket and held it low over her stomach. It worked, covering the stain. But she would still need to be careful.

Joseph freed the latch and the door fell open. Mildred trudged forward, her emptied udders swayed back-and-forth out into the sunshine. Miriam gripped her bucket and followed the cow into the yard.

Where are you going now?

I just want to check something. I won't be long.

She heard her father grunt as she pushed the door back to be re-latched. She breathed a sigh of relief as the bolt was secured, marvelling at her good fortune. Mildred trotted across the yard to her calf. Miriam turned away before seeing what she knew would come next: nose pressed to nose the animals would stand together, communicating hunger and desire.

Miriam rolled back her shoulders. One day she might feel the same way.

A day long off in the future, she hoped.



THE NILLUMBIK ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ POETRY AWARD 2017

Ekphrasis (pronounced Ek-fra-sis) – the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the ‘action’ of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.

The Nillumbik Ekphrasis Poetry Award invites Australian poets to respond with 12-line poems to artworks from the Nillumbik Visual Art Collection or exhibition program. In 2017, six public artworks located across the Shire were selected.

JUDGE’S REPORT

by Helen Lucas

2017 Judging Panel: Helen Lucas, Steve Smart and Karen Throssell

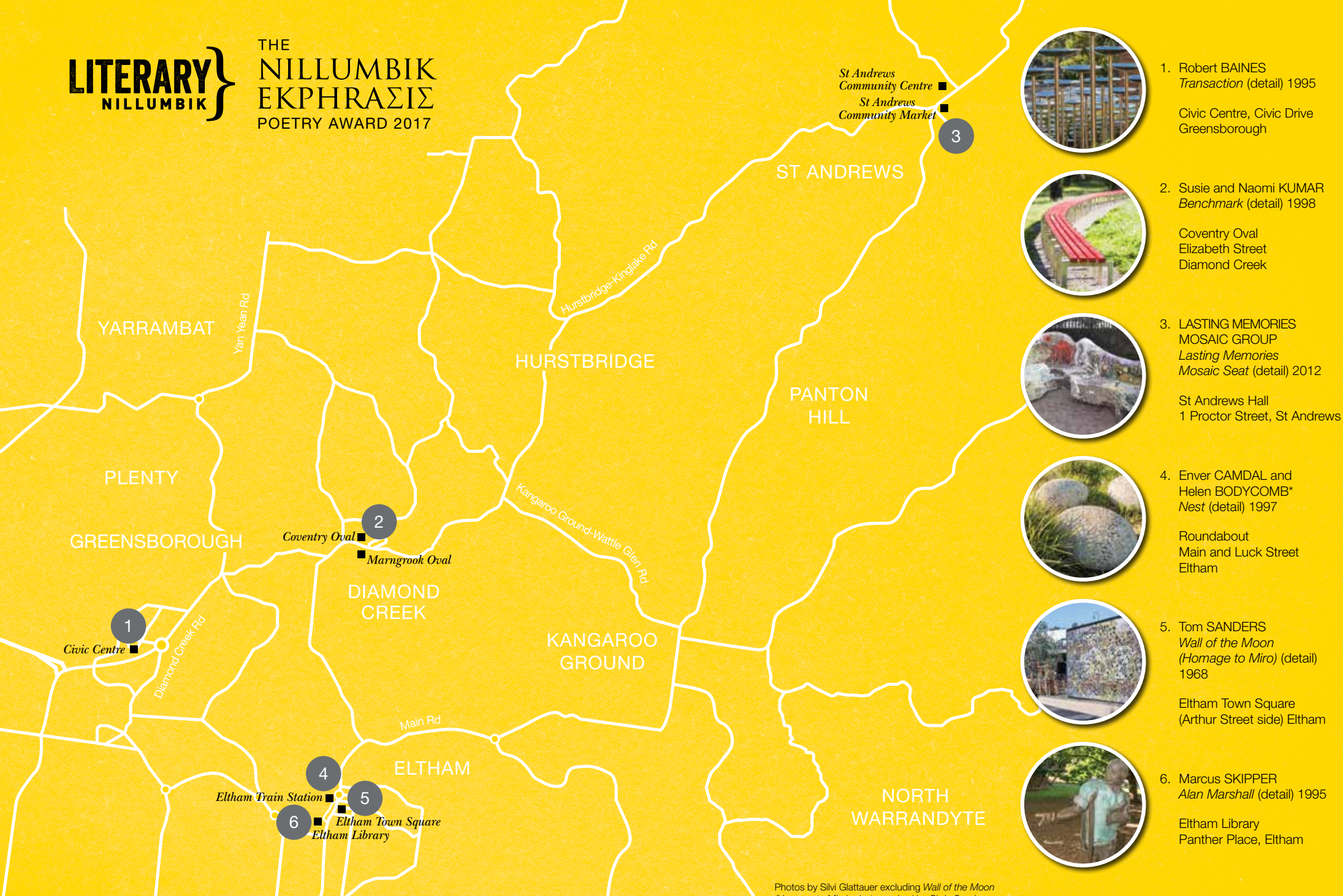
This choice of public artworks this year added both a challenge and an opportunity for poets. The winning and shortlisted poets used the ‘in situ’ element of the pieces to provide a contextual element which added a greater depth and interest to their poems. We had a strong sense in many of the poems, especially the Local Prize section, of an existing relationship between poet and artwork, a history with the works that inspired personal and emotional responses.

The Open Prize winning poem, *Trigger Warning* in response to *Transaction*, is a clever, bold and well-crafted poem, almost wistful, that captures the disappointment of the lack of water in *Transaction*, but also the promise of it. ‘I long for rain... erase you as a reminder of lonely separations.’

Transaction was also the inspiration for the Local Prize winner with *Weeping Forest*. This well-considered poem, like *Trigger Warning*, expresses a yearning for water to transform the ‘forest of silver steel flowers.’ Both poets use metaphor deftly and have a clear intention in its expression.

The Youth Prize winner responds to the sculpture, *Alan Marshall*, in a descriptive poem which examines the detail of the piece with curiosity and imagination: ‘Down the road’, the finger curled and the puckered mouth.’

The winning poems were winners from the start.



1. Robert BAINES
Transaction (detail) 1995

Civic Centre, Civic Drive
Greensborough

2. Susie and Naomi KUMAR
Benchmark (detail) 1998

Coventry Oval
Elizabeth Street
Diamond Creek

3. LASTING MEMORIES
MOSAIC GROUP
Lasting Memories
Mosaic Seat (detail) 2012

St Andrews Hall
1 Proctor Street, St Andrews

4. Enver CAMDAL and
Helen BODYCOMB*
Nest (detail) 1997

Roundabout
Main and Luck Street
Eltham

5. Tom SANDERS
Wall of the Moon
(Homage to Miro) (detail)
1968

Eltham Town Square
(Arthur Street side) Eltham

6. Marcus SKIPPER
Alan Marshall (detail) 1995

Eltham Library
Panther Place, Eltham

Photos by Silvi Glattauer excluding *Wall of the Moon*
(*Homage to Miro*), photographed by Chris Sanders.
*Bodycomb/Licensed by Viscopy, 2017.



THE
NILLUMBIK
ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ
POETRY AWARD 2017

Robert BAINES
Transaction (detail) 1994
stainless steel
30cm-320cm x 175cm x 500cm (irregular)
Public Art Collection: Nillumbik Shire Council

OPEN PRIZE

TRIGGER WARNING

by Rachel Hennessy

If water ran from one bowl to the next, you might call it a transaction
touching, a necklace of droplets
the silver scoop of each separate vessel threaded together
a child's invention of flow and flood

Only you sit dry
cleaned when the budget is adjusted
dry leaves settling around the edges in-between monetary allowances
weeds creeping in, as weeds always will
the possibility of rust

I long for rain, enough rain to fill you up
join you together
erase you as reminder of lonely separations



THE
NILLUMBIK
ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ
POETRY AWARD 2017

Robert BAINES
Transaction (detail) 1994
stainless steel
30cm-320cm x 175cm x 500cm (irregular)
Public Art Collection: Nillumbik Shire Council

LOCAL PRIZE

THE WEEPING FOREST

by Michael Olsen

a forest without birds,
flowers without leaves
filled with a song no-one hears

a forest under video surveillance
but there is no trespass
only the promise of wind & sun

a forest oasis amid the pampas,
defiant yet alone, uncoloured
by the elements of time

a forest of silver steel flowers
lillies open to the sky
begging for rain they cannot hold



THE
NILLUMBIK
ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ
POETRY AWARD 2017

Marcus SKIPPER
Alan Marshall (detail) 1995
bronze
160cm x 110cm x 70cm (irregular)
Public Art Collection: Nillumbik Shire Council

YOUTH PRIZE

UNTITLED

by Jennifer Nguyen

Wax melted and puddled underfoot

Both palms open and holding things substantial and insubstantial

Vaulted and crooked nose, south-headed eyes

Reverent at the murky sight grasped and lingered in between fingers

Clutched wearily underarm, a crude makeshift crutch

Pants' leg rolled up and tucked into the waistband

Mud-deep skin wrapped tightly over strained muscles and bones

Clasped open book and puddled pants' leg

'Down the road,' the finger curled and the puckered mouth

Sultry and melancholic, chewed the words crudely

As the melted wax under the worn boot

Trudged on the fallen dry leaves to somewhere indefinite



THE
NILLUMBIK
ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ
POETRY AWARD 2017

Naomi KUMAR & Susie KUMAR
Benchmark (detail) 1998
stainless steel, timber, enamel paint and Lilydale topping
60-40cm x 50cm 600cm (irregular)
Public Art Collection: Nillumbik Shire Council

OPEN HIGHLY COMMENDED

CARNAL PARK

by Jenny Pollak

It might be a cool slide down
the slick artery
on the ride of your life
into the heart of the corporate

grass – or a lascivious tongue
in the throat

of the big smoke
that wants you so much

to sit on the seat of its muscle
and devour you
from the bottom
up



THE
NILLUMBIK
ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ
POETRY AWARD 2017

Marcus SKIPPER
Alan Marshall (detail) 1995
bronze
160cm x 110cm x 70cm (irregular)
Public Art Collection: Nillumbik Shire Council

LOCAL HIGHLY COMMENDED

A WRITER'S STRENGTH

by Karen Andrews

There is an expectation of roughness, an egoism of form
as your hand slides over his upturned, beckoning fingers.
Instead there is comfort; a writer's strength.
Children see this first, they trust
they take hold and swing underneath his arm.
My palm cradles his head instead,
a crenulated mystery. Book clutched to breast
lips mid-story.



THE
NILLUMBIK
ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ
POETRY AWARD 2017

Robert BAINES
Transaction (detail) 1994
stainless steel
30cm-320cm x 175cm x 500cm (irregular)
Public Art Collection: Nillumbik Shire Council

YOUTH HIGHLY COMMENDED

I AM AN INDIVIDUAL

by Sophia Laidlaw

As we stand proudly in our rows,
One begins to think
Are we like soldiers standing in straight lines,
Scared to even blink?

Or do we each express a story,
As different individuals do
Could one of us, be based upon,
The important life of you?

Everything is different,
Nothing is ever the same
Look beyond the similarities,
The scratched one is calling your name.

NOTES

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THE
NILLUMBIK
ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ
POETRY AWARD 2017

asa
AUSTRALIAN
SOCIETY OF
AUTHORS

WRITERS
VICTORIA
All about writers



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