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Some of the Queensland Regional Arts Awards 2023 winners and highly commended, including L-R: Anna Guthrie, Jo Lankester, Clare Jaque Vasquez, Lincoln Austin, Colina Wymarra, Judge Dr Fiona Foley, Naomi Hobson, Warwick Gow. Image credit: Masimba Sasa.

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Funding and opportunities with Regional Arts Awards

The prestigious Queensland Regional Arts Awards are now open for submissions. For the winners, the award creates a massive impact.

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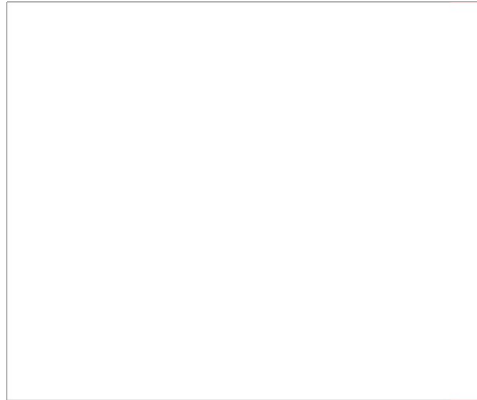
David Burton

One of the country's most prestigious and generous arts awards opens for entries this week. The highly anticipated **Queensland Regional Art Awards** (QRAAs) invite submissions from established and emerging artists living in regional Queensland.

The prize offers Australia's largest regional arts awards prize pool of over \$140,000. Past winners describe the award as 'life-changing'. The QRAAs showcase winners in Brisbane and are announced at a gala

reception. There are multiple categories, including Emerging Artist, the Mervyn Moriarty Landscape Award, First Nations Artist, Art for Life, Environmental Art and Remote Artist Award.

'I heavily underestimated the impact of the award,' **Clare Jaque Vasquez** tells *ArtsHub*. Vasquez won the First Nations Artist award in 2023 and is an emerging Gomerioi/Kamilaroi artist. It's been less than a year since Vasquez won the prize, but her professional networks have exploded in that time.



'When I entered, I was unrepresented,' Vasquez says, 'but now I'm signed with Vivien Anderson in Melbourne.' The confidence boost from the QRAs encouraged Vasquez to submit for other awards and opportunities.

Fellow winner in the Emerging Artist category **Naomi McKenzie** agrees. 'The award led to my first commercial exhibition,' McKenzie tells *ArtsHub*. 'That was a huge learning curve for me. I sold three pieces, which was amazing.' Since then, McKenzie has gone on to showcase her work nationally and she has just applied for funding to expand her work further.



Guests at the 2023 Queensland Regional Arts Award Gala exhibition. Image: Masimba Sasa.

Regional Arts Awards creates massive career opportunities

'Winning the award was extraordinary,' McKenzie says. 'I stepped away from my coffee shop business, and the award meant my practice was supported. It's created tremendous momentum in my professional network.'

'It's meant a growth in my confidence,' Vasquez agrees. 'I've connected with a whole new generation of contemporary artists like myself who are innovating art in Queensland.'

The QRAAs winners are diverse, crossing mediums, ages and levels of professional practice. Submissions share a common theme: 'Resolution' in 2024.

'Artists and society as a whole grapple and confront multiple viewpoints and concepts requiring resolution,' **Flying Arts states.** 'Through the creative process, artists take this voyage through differing personal and social lenses to reach meaningful resolution in their work. This reflects and is relevant to the broader journey of society.'

The artists' interpretation of the given theme is typically broad, mainly because the award welcomes submissions from all mediums.

McKenzie works in analogue film, building on her previous career experience in the photographic and newsprint industry. Her work focuses on photographs of the natural and domestic world, weaving interpersonal and the Australian landscape together.

Vasquez uses acrylic paints in a unique method she describes as 'weaving', focusing on the power of texture and layers to create homages to country and landscape. 'I try to avoid using as many Western art tools as I can,' she says.

The result has proven immensely successful for Vasquez. Since winning the QRAA, she has gone on to win the Hinchinbrook Art Award (Indigenous artist award), become a finalist in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA) with Telstra and has been part of several group exhibitions.

Regional Arts Awards creates powerful emotional legacy

For artists like Vasquez, the award means one thing for her own professional practice, but quite another for her family. 'I underestimated how my family would react,' Vasquez tells *ArtsHub*. 'They were over the moon. So excited. I shared the news with my uncle, and he's getting on now. He was on the same mission as my family. And he felt this sense of pride and recognition, but there was also an element of release and healing.'

Vasquez's matriarchal lines are central to her work and identity. 'I grew up on country with my mum and grandmother for almost half my childhood. My grandmother had this gift of innovating. She was an artist, but her work never made it to gallery walls. So, it's amazing to have industry recognition. My grandmother wasn't able to do this. It would've meant the world for my grandmother.'

Flying Arts' mission statement for the QRAs includes creating opportunities for artists who would otherwise go unrecognised. The association has been devoted to providing services for regional artists for over 50 years, assisting artists in overcoming the impact of regional isolation and remote living.

Flying Arts continues to have a relationship with its winners. McKenzie was recently able to attend a workshop hosted by Flying Arts that assisted in her finding pathways for funding.

Artists from around Queensland outside the Brisbane City Council area are invited to apply, which has created a diverse list of winners. McKenzie hails from Toogoolawah. Others have come from Ipswich, Townsville, Cape York and remote Queensland.

Advice for submissions to Regional Art Award

Both Vasquez and McKenzie hesitated before submitting their work to the award, but are very glad they did. When asked to provide advice to other considering the award, their responses are passionate.

'Definitely enter,' Vasquez says. 'I severely underestimated the value of the award. It's been a strong pivot point.'

'Don't let imposter syndrome get you down!' says McKenzie. 'I questioned my legitimacy for so long. As a regional artist, you constantly question your place in the world. But when an opportunity comes, I reckon take it and run! The award's been huge. I feel armed for the rest of my career.'

Entries for the 2024 QRAs award are now open and close on 7 October. Finalists are announced at the end of October and will be exhibited at the Judith Wright Arts Centre in Brisbane in December, where winners are announced at a gala reception.



David Burton

David Burton is a writer from Meanjin, Brisbane. David also works as a playwright, director and author. He is the playwright of over 30 professionally produced plays. He holds a Doctorate in the Creative Industries.

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