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[Home](#) > Portrait prize faces strong interest

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TOP PERFORMER: Artrinsic executive director Tina Wilson and sponson Dick Lester gear up for the 7th Black Swan Prize. *Photo: Bohdan Warchomij*



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IT has taken just a few years for the Black Swan Prize for Portraiture to establish itself as one of Perth's most prestigious art events.

The \$45,000 first prize is a standout in a lean field, with corporate support from property investment and development firm Lester Group lifting prize money well above that of other local art competitions.

Since 2007 the Black Swan has provided an opportunity for Western Australian artists previously disadvantaged by the state's isolation.

Artrinsic executive director and prize founder Tina Wilson said the Black Swan was created with the aim of overcoming this obstacle.

"To enter any of the prestigious prizes, which are obviously all in the eastern states, it costs \$500 to \$2,000 just to ship the artwork over," Ms Wilson said.

Lester Group founder Dick Lester is also acutely aware of the importance of a competition like the Black Swan.

"A prize gives (artists) oxygen, primarily to show their work," Mr Lester said.
"(The artists) certainly appreciate the money when they win, but that is not their primary motivation."

The partnership between Lester Group and Artrinsic is a prime example of how arts and

business can join forces to achieve positive outcomes.

Mr Lester said Australia would become a poorer society if these relationships were not formed.

"The government by its nature can't be the only sponsor of art because of the way government works in a democracy, it leaves too many spaces, and therefore corporate Australia needs to move in and fill those spaces," he said.

Ms Wilson agreed it is this alignment of values that has most likely allowed for the success of their partnership.

"What I would love to see, and what I think is starting to happen more, is the government matching funds that corporate has put in," Ms Wilson said.

The prize is open to all entrants from Australia and the winner's prize of \$45,000 is an increase of \$5,000 from last year's competition.

The first Black Swan event in 2007 was an exhibition of the WA finalists in the Archibald Prize; due to the overwhelming response, the Black Swan Portraiture Prize was developed the following year.

From 2008 to 2012, the number of entrants has almost doubled, with more than 200 artists entering the last competition.

Last year, 55 per cent of the entries came from interstate.

Category: [Community & Arts](#) [2]
[Arts & Culture](#) [3]

Tags:

[Black Swan State Theatre Company](#) [4]

[Lester Group](#) [5]

[Artrinsic](#) [6]

[Tina Wilson](#) [7]

[Dick Lester](#) [8]

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Links:

[1] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/print/article/Portrait-prize-faces-strong-interest>

[2] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/Category/Community-Arts>

[3] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/Category/Arts-Culture>

[4] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/Company/Black-Swan-State-Theatre-Company>

[5] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/Company/Lester-Group>

[6] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/Company/Artrinsic>

[7] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/Person/Tina-Wilson>

[8] <http://www.businessnews.com.au/Person/Dick-Lester>