

## Whanganui take on crucifixion story wins Graham Hall top printmaking award

Noam Lazarus

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Graham Hall in his studio next to his winning piece, The 14th Station. Photo / Noam Mānuka Lazarus

The final piece to Graham Hall's series of self-crucifixion artworks has paid off for the printmaker.

The Whanganui artist and former arts teacher took out the main award at this year's New Zealand Painting and Printmaking Awards, held last month at Artspost Galleries in Hamilton.

Hall received the \$12,000 award in the printmaking category, alongside Brett a'Court in painting.

"I started this series in 2017. And this is the last piece, which is quite neat for the last one to be the winner," Hall said.

The piece, The 14th Station, sits within a series of 14 artworks referencing the stations and monuments along the Via Dolorosa, Jerusalem, inspired by Jesus Christ's processional walk.

Although many artists have replicated the dramatic narrative, Hall sought to reimagine it in reputable Whanganui spots, with himself as the unfortunate protagonist.

Hall, who had previously submitted five pieces of his 14-work series to the competition, said he did not expect to win.

"There's no real great print history in New Zealand, so the print and paint awards is an important vehicle for artists", Hall said.

“It’s the pinnacle show for contemporary painters and for printmakers.”

The awards, an initiative of the Waikato Society of Arts, have celebrated artists since 2000.

“It used to be one prize. So either a printer or painter and very, very few printmakers were awarded,” Hall said.

“Then [printmaker] Carole Shepherd became a judge and pushed for equal prizes for both fields.”

Hall’s take on the stations of the cross begins at the top of Cooks Gardens, travelling through the Farmers carpark and finishes inside the Sarjeant Gallery. His character is ultimately crucified outside the gallery, before facing a deposition inside the building.

The winning piece, which he finished late last year, depicts what Hall describes as the character’s ascension.

Several Whanganui people, including musicians and Hall’s family and friends, appear as characters throughout the series.

Dealing mostly with narrative-heavy black-and-white artworks, Hall draws from the symbolism of Hogarth, the illustrations of Doré, Rembrandt, local artist Marty Vreede and others.

To produce his works, Hall uses a printing press he constructed while studying at Whanganui Polytech, with Vreede as his tutor.

“That was part of your third year, you built your own press. It’s enabled me to be self-sufficient”, he said.

A multi-block printmaking process was adopted for this series, consisting of five wooden blocks with different engravings and etchings that collate to make a single image.

Hall has exhibited overseas in places such as Taiwan and Bulgaria, with his most recent showing in Armenia, where he was invited to a conference in 2023.

“That was an eye-opener. It was the first Christian country in the world, declared Christianity [in] 300AD.”

His next project will take the same approach, looking at Dante’s Divine Comedy on the streets of Whanganui.

“Purgatory. Hell, Paradiso. I wanted to look at that idea and create a Whanganui narrative for that storyline.

“That’ll be a big body of work. That’ll be about 25 prints. That’ll finish me off.”

Noam Mānuka Lazarus is a multimedia journalist based in Whanganui.