

Women's art prize unveils guest judge



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[/dropcap]he new director of the Warrnambool Art Gallery **Vanessa Gerrans** will judge this year's South West International Women's Day Art Prize.

Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West, which is organising the prize for a second year, said it was delighted to secure Ms Gerrans as this year's judge for the event, following in the footsteps of renowned Portland artist **Carmel Wallace** [who judged the inaugural event in 2015.](#)

Women's Health executive officer **Emily Lee-Ack** said Ms Gerrans was a perfect fit with the aims and aspirations of the women's prize, which will be announced at The Artery on February 26 (*there is still time to enter – see end of story*).

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"We are privileged to welcome a curator to the judging role. Vanessa's broad experience and passion for women's art will be an amazing asset to this year's prize, following on from the generous contribution of inaugural judge Carmel Wallace last year," Ms Lee-Ack said.

"As an organisation that works to advance gender equality in all areas of life, we are delighted to have leading women in the arts in our region to take on this important role."

Ms Gerrans said she was similarly delighted to be involved.

"It is a privilege to part of a process that promotes Australian women artists and champions awareness and cultural diversity in the region," she said.

"I greatly admire female artists for their skill and enormous capacity for depth of expression...I expect the judging will be a very enjoyable challenge."

This year's prize offers \$2000 cash for the winner – up from \$1500 for the inaugural event – with the winning work to be acquired by Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West and also featured on the cover of its annual report for 2016-17.

A \$1000 cash prize will be awarded to the runner-up, with another \$1000 cash prize for best emerging artist.

Bluestone Magazine is also, for the first time, sponsoring the People's Choice award of \$250.

This year's theme for the prize is 'Hope' and local women artists have until January 28 to enter.

[box]The South West Women's IWD Art Prize will run at The

Artery from February 26 to March 13, 2016. For detailed information about how to enter [please visit the website here](#). [/box]



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Last Thursday a first priority for book club



Catherine Ryan, left, and Brigid Foard are among the members of The Last Thursday Book Club, in Port Fairy, that provides a place for women to enjoy stimulating conversations about books.

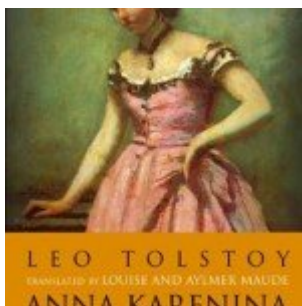
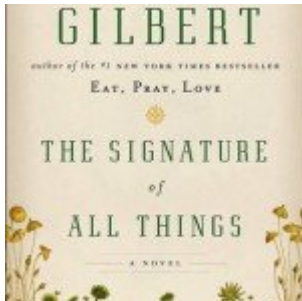
[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] While there are infinite joys about becoming a mother, the loss of stimulating conversation or intellectual discussion can prove challenging for women who enjoyed such things before becoming a parent.

Brigid Foard, who lives in Port Fairy and teaches English at Emmanuel College, Warrnambool, remembers when growing up that her mother, **Sylvia Jones**, was part of a local book club for about 20 years and how it became a “staple of her life”.

When Brigid had the first of her two daughters, she tried to find a similar club to meet other women who enjoyed reading

and talking about books, but without success.

“I remember feeling quite envious of what Mum had, because I was unable to find anything similar,” she said.



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] T
[/dropcap]hat changed around September last year when two local women, **Lucy Abbott** and **Meg Higgins**, started **The Last Thursday Book Club** in Port Fairy. The group is aimed at women with or without children who are looking for a place to indulge their love of books.

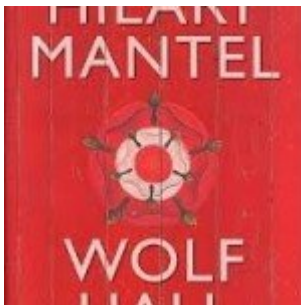
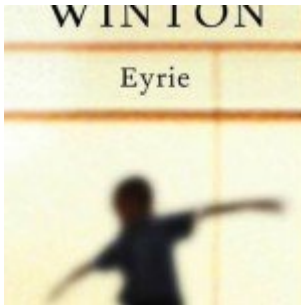
The group now has about seven members who all meet monthly at a local cafe or restaurant and, over coffee, dessert or a glass of wine, spend a couple of hours dissecting the book that has been chosen for that month.

“I had been reading all these fantastic books, but I didn’t really have anyone to communicate my thoughts or frustrations to about what I was reading, now I have met this great group of like-minded women and we share all of our ideas,” said one member, **Kelly Wynne**, who has two young children and works part-time as a heritage consultant.

“It has also really broadened the types of books and authors that I now read,” Kelly added.

Catherine Ryan, who has an infant son and also teaches English at Emmanuel College, agreed and said the group gave her an important social outlet that was not work-related, yet stimulating.

“Teaching English is working, whereas this is relaxing...it’s something I do for myself,” she said.



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] A [dropcap]s to how it works, well each member of the club gets to choose a book, which is then either bought, borrowed or shared among the members who have a month to read it.

The books chosen so far have ranged from Tim Winton’s new release, *Eyrie*, to the somewhat more hefty tome by Booker Prize winner Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall*. Tolstoy’s classic *Anna Karenina* and the Elizabeth Gilbert’s new book, *The Signature of all Things*, are also on the list.

“We trust each other’s tastes: there hasn’t been a bad choice so far,” laughed Brigid.

And all three women laughed as they described how their monthly Thursday night meetings had become “sacrosanct” and their respective partners – and children – had learned to accommodate the club.

“The regularity of it is really important to me,” said Brigid, “because once you become a mother, it is very easy to be defined only as a mother and to be trapped into talking about teething when, really, you might want to be talking about literature.”

“We are just really fortunate to have something like this in a rural area.”

[box type="bio"] Bluestone Magazine will check in each month with The Last Thursday Book Club to see what they have been reading...and what they thought of it! **[/box]**



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