

Archibald Prize 2018 celebrity podcast transcript: Russell Crowe tour

Speaker 1: Welcome to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ.

Julian Morrow: Welcome to this podcast tour for the 2018 Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The Archibald is for many Australians, the most prestigious, most popular, and most controversial art prize. It's an open competition and the prize is awarded to 'a portrait painted from life with a subject known to the artist having at least one live sitting with the artist'. Subjects of the Archibald tend to be individuals who, as the will of JF Archibald, himself, put it, are distinguished in arts, letters, science or politics. And in this podcast, some distinguished Australians will tell you what they think about the portraits, which have been chosen for the 2018 Archibald exhibition. Russell Crowe talked with artist and Archibald judge, Ben Quilty. And Rove McManus, Yumi Stynes and Rachel Perkins will talk with me, Julian Morrow, as we walk through the Art Gallery of New South Wales for the 2018 Archibald Prize.

As we move through each room, we'll announce each artwork and its exhibition number, which you can see on the gallery wall high above the painting. When we're about to move on to next artwork, you'll hear this sound [bell rings]. If you'd like to spend more time with any work, just pause the podcast. We'll move through each room from left to right. And this conversation is between Russell Crowe and Ben Quilty, artist and Archibald judge. The conversation was recorded before the judge and winner were announced.



Image: Yvonne East *The Honourable Chief Justice Susan Kiefel AC*

Speaker 1: The tour will start in room one. We will begin at painting number 15.

Ben Quilty: Room one. There's always this urban myth that the curator puts certain paintings in certain rooms. And we're in room one and I always have my own...

Russell Crowe: What's the myth?

Ben Quilty: I'm not even gonna tell you what I think the myth might be about room one, except that there's...

Russell Crowe: Oh. That's interesting for the listeners. There you go. That's called an unfulfilled promise. Hopefully, we can change that.

Ben Quilty: I'd like to take you over here to number 15 in Yvonne East, *The Honourable Chief Justice Susan Kiefel AC*. So there is a story behind this. A number of women in positions of power within the law got together and wanted to enter work and actually commissioned this painting to be made of Chief Justice Kiefel to sort of, I guess, get behind the notion that there are women in these positions. So, for the trustees, to then have done a bit of research and found out about that story was kind of moving.

Russell Crowe: The eyes are beautiful, and I really like just the texture in the top, you know, in the top of the garment. It's quite, I don't know, got a little Raphael in it or something. What's going on here, to me, the lack of detail in the books, distracts me from the figure for some reason.

Ben Quilty: You're a man of words.

Russell Crowe: Yeah, yeah. This is very simple and quiet painting.



Image: Salvatore Zofrea *Sally Dowling SC*

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 57.

Ben Quilty: This thing or so jumped out. Salvatore Zofrea's *Sally Dowling*.

Russell Crowe: In the style of... who am I thinking of?

Ben Quilty: I think this references so many things. I mean, it could almost talk about Bonnard and the impressionists. Do you like it? Beautiful bits of paints. That hand, that left hand, both hands. Salvatore's an older, very established painter, often painting big, beautiful, luminous landscape paintings. This was one sort of out of the box, out of the bag.

Russell Crowe: Right. I'd definitely like to have a look at his landscapes.



Image: Joanna Braithwaite *Hall of fame – portrait of Pat Corrigan*

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number six.

Russell Crowe: This is interesting, isn't it? Number six.

Ben Quilty: Joanna Braithwaite's painting of collector and philanthropist Pat Corrigan. These are all the paintings that have been accepted into the Archibald of Corrigan over the years.

Russell Crowe: Oh, that's fantastic. That's a very clever idea.

Ben Quilty: I feel like it needs a frame on it, though.

Russell Crowe: Something grand?

Ben Quilty: Gold.

Russell Crowe: Yeah.

Ben Quilty: Big.

Russell Crowe: Yeah, ornate.

Ben Quilty: I didn't see it, Pat.



Image: Dee Smart *Lunch in the outback*

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 47.

Russell Crowe: Now this is Dee Smart. Number 47. *Lunch in the outback*. There's something very... I mean it's not something that I would have in my face, it's a little over the top, I suppose? It's like really popping out, but it is a great painting. No doubt about that.

Ben Quilty: It's a very, very, very pink outback.

Russell Crowe: Really good fly, based somewhat on Louie.

Ben Quilty: Hang on, that is Louie.

Russell Crowe: It is Louie, and it's a Vegemite sandwich, but it's got some nail polish in it or something.

Ben Quilty: Or blood.

Russell Crowe: Blood? Hmm.

Ben Quilty: No.

Russell Crowe: It's lipstick. Okay, I'll give you that one, I don't know why the lipstick would go round to the back cross but...



Image: Nicholas Harding *Treatment, day 49 (sorbolene soak)*

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 24.

Ben Quilty: Number 24, Nicholas Harding.

Russell Crowe: Who I admired last year. I admired his painting of Olsen last year ... very much-

Ben Quilty: *Treatment, day 49 (sorbolene soak)*, and Nicholas, and you wouldn't know this, he's been very unwell with throat cancer.

Russell Crowe: Oh that's a self-portrait?

Ben Quilty: I begged him to put a painting in. I said, 'Nicholas come on.' He said, 'No, I've been too unwell and the painting will be wet if I do it.' And a few days before he just knocked this out in a mirror. That's him...

Russell Crowe: He's just one of a very small group who has such incredible control of what he does. It's really impressive.

Ben Quilty: And a long practice of looking. Really, which is...

Russell Crowe: He's so efficient though, isn't he you know? Given the style that he works in, that is still extremely efficient to get that likeness.

Ben Quilty: It's probably still wet as well, mate. You want to test?

Russell Crowe: No... I can't help touching paintings. That's why I like buying paintings, because then I can touch them

Ben Quilty: So if you're listening to Russell Crowe now about touching paintings, just ignore him.

Russell Crowe: Yeah, don't do that in the Gallery.

Ben Quilty: Guards! Guards!

Russell Crowe: These are all for sale, folks, you know.

Speaker 1: We're now moving into room number two.

Ben Quilty: When you walk into the Archibald, I mean, it's seen in the art world as a fraught thing. A lot of artists do...

Russell Crowe: A what thing?

Ben Quilty: Fraught.

Russell Crowe: Fraught.

Ben Quilty: A lot of artists pull their hairs out over it.

Russell Crowe: To get something in, right.

Ben Quilty: 'Oh my god, why didn't I get in? Ben Quilty must hate me.' But it's so important for this museum, and I see it as one of the defining things about visual arts in Australia, that we actually get a big audience that comes and sees it. How do you see this show?

Russell Crowe: Oh, I think it's fantastic. And the thing about something like this is the significance of the Archibald, it only gets larger, year by year by year, you know? Because it's no longer what kind of may have begun as something for the clique of artists, you know? To, I don't know, measure themselves against each other; see themselves next to each other in exhibition. But it now belongs your man and woman on the street. You know? And there are people that I know like myself, I try to come every year. I'm fascinated by it, I'm drawn to it, and year in, year out there's always gonna be a situation where there's two or three things in this exhibition which I need to have in my life. You know what I mean? And you can't always get them. People don't want to sell and things like that. I think it's a very, very significant tick to any artist, young or old, to have their work hung in the Archibald.

Ben Quilty: It has been a criticism that there's not paintings of enough sports people or politicians or things like that.

Russell Crowe: No.

Ben Quilty: Thank you.

Russell Crowe: Really?

Ben Quilty: Yeah. I mean, from my perspective...

Russell Crowe: If that's the best criticism they can mount, whoever's mounting that should just be quiet.

Ben Quilty: If you think back in the '30s and '40s a man named William Dargie won this exhibition nine times. They were all of men, and they were mostly heads of banks and business. Things have changed. Our heroes have changed, I guess.

Russell Crowe: Which is great. And the fact that there's still actors in here, there's still musicians in here; but there's a wide range of people from all types of society, from benefactors to lawyers. It's just fabulous the way it's grown.



Image: Guy Maestri *The fourth week of parenthood* (self-portrait)

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 34.
- Russell Crowe: Now. So, is this commonly known as room two?
- Ben Quilty: Always known as room two in the Archibald Prize.
- Russell Crowe: Okay. 34, Guy Maestri.
- Ben Quilty: Straight on the left, Guy Maestri's *The fourth week of parenthood (self-portrait)*. Now, Guido's a very good mate of mine, who I'm sure you've met, and he's just going through that first insane period. I think little Auggie's now two months old.
- Russell Crowe: Right.
- Ben Quilty: Was dubious as to whether he'd even get anything in. And a few of us said to him, 'Guido, this is a period in your life when you'll feel like you've never felt before, you haven't slept for four weeks.'
- Russell Crowe: He's kind of pushing himself into the masterly period, isn't he? I mean, it's pretty special, this fella. Yeah. Just coming in and having a look at how he's actually created that. I wouldn't know the first thing about how to get to that.
- Ben Quilty: Wouldn't take you long with a palette knife.
- Russell Crowe: Not with a palette knife, no. He's obviously a reserve champion of some level. That's pretty spectacular. Number 34.
- Ben Quilty: And he sits in front of a mirror, very quietly cutting and pasting and over-painting...
- Russell Crowe: I like his... in the past, I've really liked his kind of semi-industrial work-scapes kind of thing, you know? But that's fabulous. I don't think I've actually seen a figure of his before.
- Ben Quilty: He has entered self-portraits before. He won the Archibald with a painting of Gurrumul.
- Russell Crowe: Right, I mean he's...
- Ben Quilty: Black and white number, probably two thousand and... ooh, you've got me now, 2009?
- Russell Crowe: Right.



Image: Benjamin Aitken *Natasha*

Speaker 1: The next artwork is painting number one.

Russell Crowe: Benjamin Aitken, number one, *Natasha*. I would hang this in my house for sure. This is a beautiful painting. I mean, it's strange and uncommon.

Ben Quilty: So Benjamin is an artist from Melbourne, a younger artist from Melbourne, and he's made a painting of Natasha Bieniek, who won the Wynne Prize a few years ago. Natasha's a miniaturist. Tiny little paintings of exquisite gardens. You've seen the paintings, I'm sure.

Russell Crowe: Okay.

Ben Quilty: And so, his simple rendering of her in big strokes just sort of captures exactly who she is as well.

Russell Crowe: I don't even know why, but that little blue underneath her face just really brings me into her face. And then you have that sort of strange inference of detail around the mouth. It's great. It's a really wonderful painting. Inspired painting, this one.



Image: Mirra Whale *Don*

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 54.

Russell Crowe: Number 54, Mirra Whale. I know, and I don't mean this in any negative at all, I know she's gonna come up with some really fabulous stuff. This is kind of like... I'm seeing, it's like a door opening or something.

Ben Quilty: Yeah, it's, again, a live sitting with Don. Don Harwin is the Minister for the Arts in New South Wales. He actually did three sittings, and the fourth he encouraged her, he said, 'Look, I don't want you to feel that you shouldn't ask me to come and sit for you,' which is a very laborious and boring thing to do. But four sittings and that's the end result, which is pretty interesting.

Russell Crowe: He probably claimed some transport, though.

Ben Quilty: No comment.



Image: Kirsty Neilson *Anxiety still at 30*

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 41.
- Russell Crowe: Now this is, for this room, this thing really got me. This thing really, really got me.
- Ben Quilty: So we're talking about number 41, Kirsty Neilson's *Anxiety still at 30*.
- Russell Crowe: It's just... step back from that and there's so much of the title in that.
- Ben Quilty: So Kirsty entered a big photo-realist painting of Garry McDonald some years ago, but she's now gone to the mirror, and very much...
- Russell Crowe: Is this a self-portrait?
- Ben Quilty: ...about live sittings and it's a self-portrait of her at 30, dealing with the side effects of anxiety.
- Russell Crowe: The way she's left part of the canvas completely there is fantastic. This is sort of like the implication that she's fully aware that she is letting you inside her tissue.
- Ben Quilty: Yes. Up along her neck and the nape, and I agree with you, the blank part makes you wonder.



Image: Natasha Walsh *Numb to touch* (self-portrait)



Image: Amanda Davies *Self-portrait*

Speaker 1: You're listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ. We're now moving into room three. The next artwork is painting number 53.

Ben Quilty: This one here is worth looking at. This tiny little thing by Natasha Walsh, very young artist, number 53, *Numb to touch (self-portrait)*. Two or three years ago, she entered, it's painted on copper I think, yes. She painted this tiny little self-portrait of her face and, very clearly, hard to explain why but I had a sense that she had done it using a mirror. That there's that idea of intimacy with yourself, that you're looking at yourself in the mirror, rather than taking a photo and copying your photograph. This is her third entry and three years in a row has been hung, and there's something about this painting that really grows on you. There's something very soft, kind of an openness about allowing people to see you, yourself.

Russell Crowe: These work, really nicely together don't they?

Ben Quilty: Yeah, the number 12 right next to the Amanda Davies self-portrait, I agree, I think that's an intriguing little portrait.

Russell Crowe: Yeah... What is on that lady's mind?

Ben Quilty: Yes, that's a really good question.

Russell Crowe: Quite a lot.



Image: Ben Smith *Tony*

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 48.
- Russell Crowe: Number 48, Ben Smith's portrait-
- Ben Quilty: Of Tony Albert. Fabulous artist.
- Russell Crowe: Who we hung out with in eastern northern West Australia.
- Ben Quilty: That's right. Just about there. So, Tony is such a well-loved artist in the art scene in this country. Urban Indigenous man, and always coming up with extraordinary ways to talk about ideas around reconciliation between Indigenous Australia and remote Australia and all the rest of us. Fabulous guy.
- Russell Crowe: Oh, I see. Because it's kind of... I just took it literally as the Aboriginal flag, but he's actually going for that Renaissance, kind of...
- Ben Quilty: It's like an icon and he's the Jesus, the black Jesus, but also, of course, possibly the Indigenous flag. And it's funny you said that, because I hadn't even thought of the Indigenous flag, but of course he's playing with that. I think it's a great little...
- Russell Crowe: I think it's great. Well done, Ben Smith.



Image: Jamie Preisz *Jimmy (title fight)*

- Speaker 1: [Music] You're listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ. We're now moving into room four. The next artwork is painting number 44.
- Russell Crowe: You know, I love this one here, that won the Packer's Prize. Number 44, Jamie... how do you say Jamie's...
- Ben Quilty: Jamie Preisz.
- Russell Crowe: Jaime Preisz. *Jimmy (title fight)*. You know. I really like that. It captures, sort of, the pugnacious side of Jimmy, but as anybody who knows him knows that he's wistful and gleeful and all these other things as well.
- Ben Quilty: In Jaime's acceptance speech, he talked about picking Jimmy because he's known Jimmy a long, long time, but also because his little sister committed suicide earlier this year. And he felt that Jimmy and his little sister had ... that there was a shared sense of trauma, I guess. And that he suddenly realised ... and I think Jimmy would be a very beautiful person to be around if you're going through something like that, as far as someone who'd support you and look after you.
- Russell Crowe: Wise man, yep.



Image: Mathew Lynn *Gladys Berejikian*

Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 29.

Russell Crowe: There's a lot of excellence happening in room four, folks, so this is probably the room you're gonna spend the most time in, I would say. Now this thing, here, the Mathew Lynn, *Gladys Berejikian*...

Ben Quilty: Number 29.

Russell Crowe: Yeah. It's, you know, I think he's just gotta keep going. You know? It's just really leading me to think that this person isn't peaking at all yet, right? It's just at the very beginning of what he can potentially do. Which is grand, it's quite gorgeous... I love the blue. I'm a sucker for a blue like that. Yeah. I'm not talking down to it at all. I just know there's gonna be something else comes from this fellow in the next few years that just probably will just blow us away.

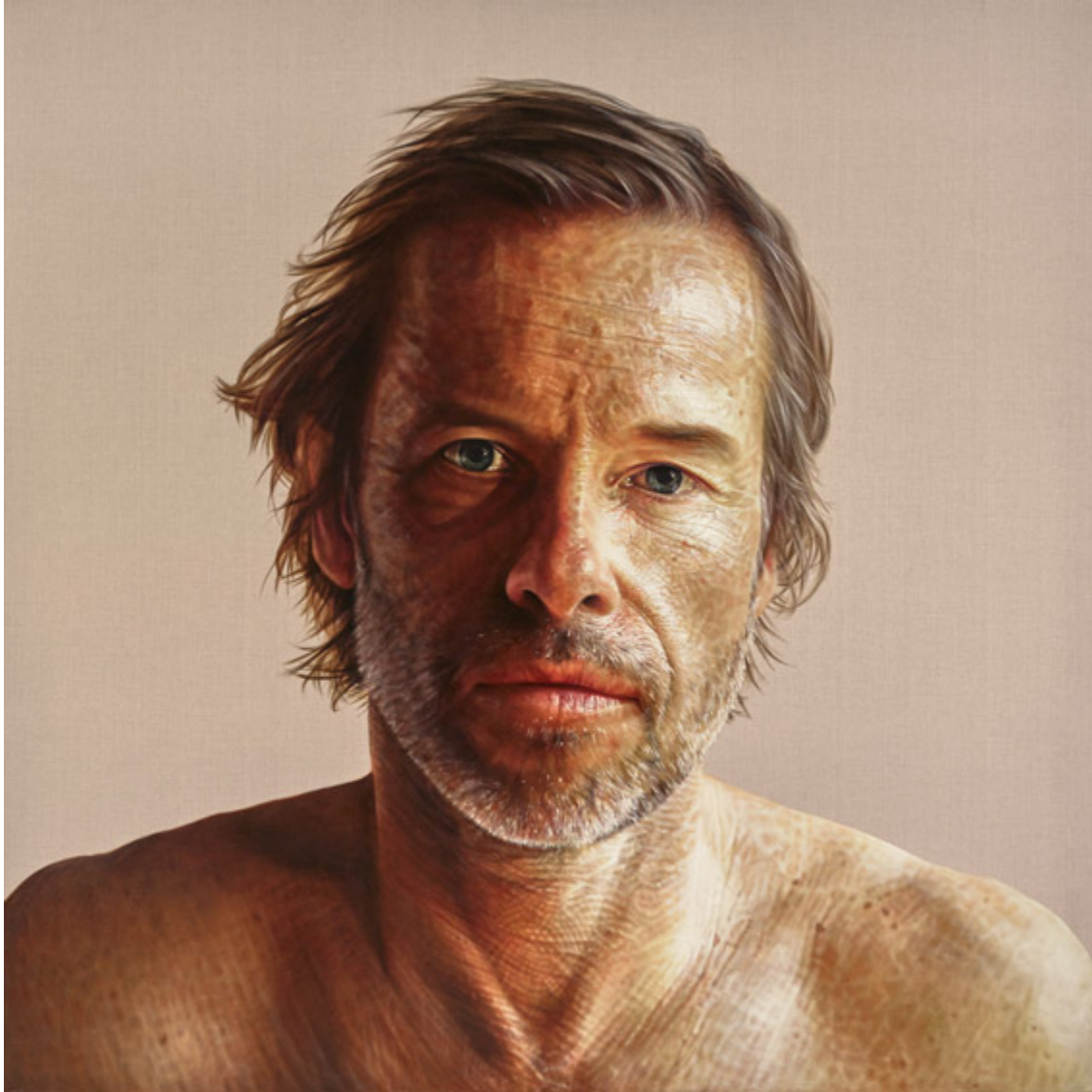


Image: Anne Middleton *Guy*

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 38.
- Russell Crowe: Number 38, Anne Middleton, to me this is...
- Ben Quilty: Can you tell who it is?
- Russell Crowe: Of course, I know who it is.
- Ben Quilty: It's a joke.
- Russell Crowe: Yeah. He is a very special person, but this is an incredible painting. It's incredible. It's funny, because I've got that portrait that was in the Archibald a few years ago of Jack Thompson. Maybe what I bought that for is to eventually have a collection of Australian actors' portraits. That might be a cool idea. I would definitely hang this in a home. You know? Not because it's necessarily Guy Pierce, because it is an incredible painting.
- Ben Quilty: Very arresting. Something that struck me after having looked at it a few times is that the back is raw linen. There's nothing on the background. The painting is just sitting on top, almost like a photo collage. Which I think's a clever thing about this painting, because the dark neck on the left against the white linen really throws that forward.
- Russell Crowe: You've gotta be really a deep believer in your own abilities to do that. No room to make it, you know, that's fabulous.
- Ben Quilty: Just to stretch the linen, and then start the first mark...
- Russell Crowe: Yeah, I just think that's incredible. Really, really stands it a step above for me.



Image: Tsering Hannaford *Self-portrait*

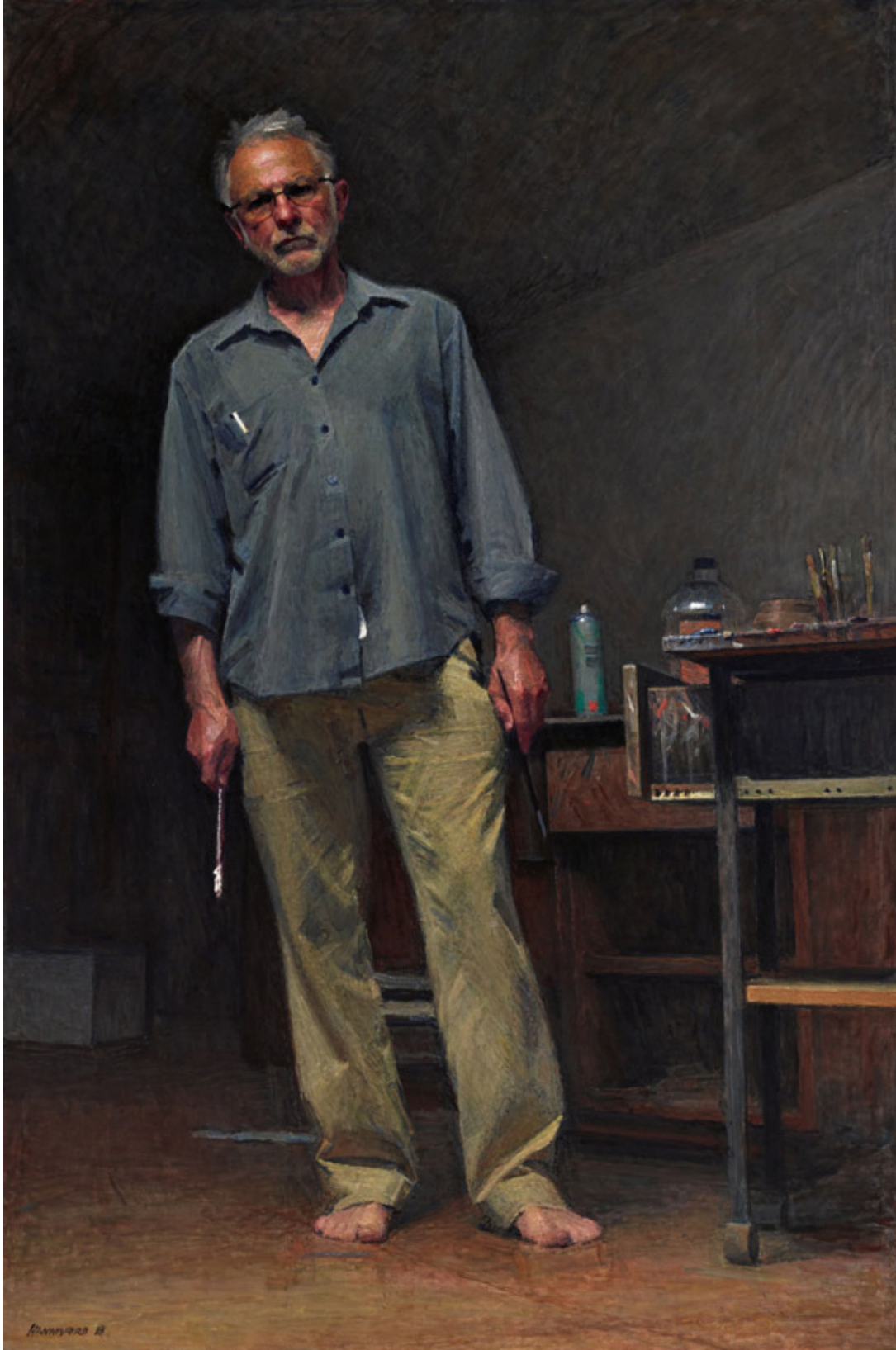


Image: Robert Hannaford *Robert Hannaford self-portrait*

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 23.
- Russell Crowe: Tsering Hannaford, *Self-portrait*, number 23, yeah. There's something really cool in that.
- Ben Quilty: Tsering's a young artist from Adelaide and a real gun, really sticking to the traditions of what painting's about. The basis of drawing and then always looking in a mirror or drawing from life, and I think it shows that sense of being there with her. Not with her, because it's a mirror. And that's her father over there, Russell. On the opposite wall behind you.
- Russell Crowe: The painting of dad or dad's painting?
- Ben Quilty: Painting by her father, number 22, Robert Hannaford, *Self-portrait*.
- Russell Crowe: Ah. I mean, look, that's an incredible painting.
- Ben Quilty: And the only other place in this museum at the moment where you'll see father and daughter together is through in the Wynne, with big Ray Ken and his daughters, who are the big guns of the Wynne Prize this year.



Image: Marcus Wills *Lotte*

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 55.
- Russell Crowe: This is a nice room, I like this room. Room four. If there's prizes for the rooms, this one's ahead so far. Number 55, Marcus Wills, *Lotte*, that's gorgeous.
- Ben Quilty: Yeah, you picked one of my favourite paintings out of Melbourne. Marcus Wills has made huge paintings...
- Russell Crowe: Oh, last year. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Ben Quilty: ...of a naked choreographer man in the main part two years ago, wearing white underpants.
- Russell Crowe: He was... he's a fabulous painting.
- Ben Quilty: So then for Marcus to turn the show on its head, and put in a tiny little thing? It almost went through. People noticed, and a few of us, the judges walked up and looked closely and thought, 'My goodness, that's an exquisite little painting.'
- Russell Crowe: It is. Marcus Wills. A name to remember.



Image: Prudence Flint *Double*



Image: Amber Boardman *Self-care exhaustion*

Speaker 1: [Music] You're listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ. The next artwork is painting number 18.

Ben Quilty: This Prudence Flint, mate, number 18, what do you think of this wild thing?

Russell Crowe: Yeah, it's got a little, sort of, what is it, is it a Jeffrey Smart, or...

Ben Quilty: It is definitely, definitely a haunting reminder of Jeffrey Smart, but with this quirky lady, which I always think is her. I always get a sense that she's putting her, sort of, alter-ego...

Russell Crowe: We're talking about number 18, Prudence Flint, *Double*.

Ben Quilty: Even though there's three of them.

Russell Crowe: Which is funny.

Ben Quilty: Yeah.

Russell Crowe: Maybe she's talking about the fruit.

Ben Quilty: I think she's really got the most unique visual language. There's really nothing else like her in the world at the moment. You could almost say in room three, that Amber Boardman has... there's reflections of Amber Boardman in room three with this number 18, Prudence Flint. It's a good room. I like this room.



Image: Vincent Namatjira *Studio self-portrait*

- Speaker 1: [Bell rings] The next artwork is painting number 40.
- Russell Crowe: It's funny because room five always, we're talking about the mythologies of the Archibald, room five has always got a gut punch, there's always one gut punch. And for me, last year, it wasn't the John Olsen, it was Anh Do... which was right there...
- Ben Quilty: Anh Do was right where the Fiona McMonagal, number 33...
- Russell Crowe: I mean, it was crazy. It's crazy how much I fell in love with that painting. And for me, this year, that gut punch is Vincent Namatjira. *Studio self-portrait*, that's number 40.
- Ben Quilty: So, Vincent is Albert Namatjira's great grandson, and he's one of the young kings of the desert, prince of the desert at the moment, making paintings of himself sitting with the Queen. He'll probably have...
- Russell Crowe: Yes, I've seen that stuff.
- Ben Quilty: ...as much chance of meeting the Queen as me, but he's decided he'd put himself in those paintings and it's something very powerful, you're right, punchy, about him putting himself into that history.
- Russell Crowe: I think that's him and Chuck Berry, isn't it? Isn't that Chuck Berry doing a duck walk?
- Ben Quilty: Yeah, I bet it is. That'll be, that would be...Yeah, so whimsical and poetic, and naive, but just a lot to say, and very little training, just all from the gut which I think makes the best paintings.
- Ben Quilty: Thanks for coming in, Russ, it's great to have you in, mate.
- Russell Crowe: My pleasure.
- Ben Quilty: You wanna go and have a beer?
- Russell Crowe: Well, it's a little early in the afternoon for a beer. Let's have a tequila cocktail instead.
- Ben Quilty: See you there.
- Julian Morrow: Thanks for listening to the 2018 Archibald Prize podcast, recorded at the Art Gallery of NSW. And, remember, you can download and listen to more episodes featuring our other guests.
- Speaker 1: You've been listening to the 2018 Archibald podcast tour, thanks to ANZ.