

## **Mandorla Art Award Launch 2017**

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It is my pleasure and privilege to announce the theme for the Mandorla Art Award 2018 and to offer a brief commentary. The theme is to be found in the first two verses of chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Rev 21:1-2*

### **Reflection**

Change the earth, change the sky!  
Bombs are falling; children die;  
Crops have failed; the earth is dry.  
Who will hear the people's cry?

Some poets, artists, and prophets voiced the distressing belief that the creation of the heavens and the earth, as reported in Genesis, was a failed experiment. In a context of poverty and suffering, they gave voice to the voiceless, some so malnourished that any form of protest on their own part could not reach expression or even be thought. Defiant dreams and visions and fantasies of hope moved the creativity of those among them still with sufficient sustenance to think and act, who voiced their pain. They dared to dream of a new heaven and a new earth, a new city, a new community, a new creation.

The 2018 theme for the prestigious Mandorla Art Award is a fantasy of hope for people facing hopelessness. It is itself a work of art, reflecting a school of verbal art, reaching back at least four centuries and persisting for centuries to follow. The school is commonly identified as apocalyptic. It sounds a little like "eucalypt" and is related. "Eu" means "well" and "calypt" means covered. Eucalypts have well covered seeds. In the word "apocalyptic" "apo" means "un-" and together with "calypt", "covered", it means "uncovered", "revealed". In the school of apocalyptic writing what is uncovered may portray the science of their day, such as how stars shape human endeavour, or explain how evil came into the world, or tell how history will end. The Apocalypse or Revelation of John written in the latter decades of the first Christian century focuses on the latter.

It stands in a tradition of hope. Hope expressed through Israel's prophets for divine intervention to change the course of history took a more dramatic turn when people's sense of distress escalated. Their corresponding hope for change moved beyond the limits of change within history to fantasies of totally new beginnings. Thus defiant hope embraced the poetry of imagination, lions lying down

with lambs, valleys being lifted up and mountains and hills made low, deserts blooming, a phenomenon not unreal for us Australians. A common pattern of such imaginary works was to write in the name of some ancient hero like Daniel, Elijah, Moses, Enoch and even Adam, reporting the course of history to follow their time. Animals symbolised empires, a lion, a bear, a leopard, a goat, to cite the images used in Daniel, representing the Babylonians, Medes, Persians and Greeks (7:1-7). At another point Daniel depicts the Medes and Persians as two horns on a ram and the Greeks as a goat. Daniel represents Alexander the Great as “a male goat” which “appeared from the west, coming across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground” and then coming to a sudden end (8:5). Daniel’s author, writing mid second century BCE, then has the sixth century BCE Daniel represent events up to the author’s own time, including the Maccabean revolt. So much is history in pictures. The author must then imagine what might happen next. His fantasy, like most conjectures of such writers, failed to materialise. Despite that, the visions they articulated excited and inspired the imagination and so it is also with the author of the Apocalypse of John.

It, too, reports history to its time, which now included Rome’s empire. John’s communities in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, faced a provincial administration bent on forcing all to hail the emperor as god or be banned from all commerce with disastrous consequences and at worst face persecution and death. Rome, represented as a prostitute sitting on seven hills, would soon fall. That was the hope. It was not realised, but the open-ended fantasies of hope, which followed and include the text of our theme, inspired generations to come. Its visions, recycling traditions of the apocalyptic school, imagined new beginnings, starting again.

The first creation was a failed experiment because of human folly. There will be a new heaven, a new earth. Jerusalem, sacked by the Romans in 70 CE and its temple destroyed, will be reinvented. It will come down from the sky like a bride on the wedding day. For people in survival mode wedding feasts were a highlight, a rare occasion for good wine, good meat, an ideal image of hope, one loved by Jesus, which helped inspire the Christian eucharist. A new Jerusalem: community restored! And no more sea? The landlocked people’s image which John employed expressed the horror of the deep, the abyss whence came the demons, like personified viruses to plague humanity, the monsters and dragons. That sea shall be no more!

Dare to hope! Dare to dream! Dare to imagine! Dare to depict and portray!

Change the earth, change the sky!

Bombs are falling; children die;

Crops have failed; the earth is dry.

Who will hear the people’s cry?

And so the theme for 2018:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Rev 21:1-2*