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## **Aotearoa's poets of the future feature in National Schools Poetry Awards**

E Wen Wong, a Year 13 student from Burnside High School in Christchurch, has won the 2020 International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML) National Schools Poetry Award.

Her poem titled 'The house that Saturn built,' was described by judge Airini Beautrais, as "powerful and beautiful", "full of surprising language and with a strong sense of place and the interaction between the human built environment and the natural environment".

E Wen Wong receives a prize of \$500 and her school library receives a book grant of \$500.

She also receives a package of literary prizes provided by Read NZ Te Pou Muramura, Victoria University Press, *Sport*, *Landfall* and the New Zealand Society of Authors. As part of the prize, Wong will attend an online poetry masterclass with Airini Beautrais, along with nine other poets shortlisted for their entries.

Director of the IIML at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington Professor Damien Wilkins, says, "Over the years this competition has featured many writers who have gone on to publish widely and have careers in the arts. We view it as one way of encouraging young writers and their teachers to see imaginative writing as legitimate, valued, and important."

E Wen Wong says, "Receiving this award was unexpected, yet exciting and uplifting. 'The house that Saturn built' gave me a platform to channel my passion for the environment in a way that was distinctly positioned in Aotearoa. It allowed me to comment on climate change from a new perspective—to communicate what science cannot."

There were more than 250 entries this year from senior high school students, with a wide range of styles and subjects represented, including personal events, politics, history, humour, and current events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms Beautrais notes, "I'm impressed at anyone being able to write a poem (or anything at all) during the months of



lockdown and accompanying stress. There are poems that give vent to big and terrifying feelings, and poems that take a comical slant.”

Nine students were finalists: Campbell Wilson, Abraham Hix, and Marijke Hinton (all from St Andrew’s College, Christchurch); Arwyn Cranston (Wakatipu High School, Queenstown), Isabella Lane (Rangitoto College, Auckland), Xavia Hayward (Marist College, Auckland), Allegra Wilson (Diocesan School for Girls, Auckland), Robin Kunwar (Burnside High, Christchurch), and Victoria Sun (Epsom Girls’ Grammar, Auckland). Each will receive prizes from Read NZ Te Pou Muramura and *Sport*, as well as \$100 cash.

This was also the first year the Award was able to receive entries in te reo Māori. While there were fewer such entries than the IIML had hoped, Māori language judge Anahera Gildea (Ngāti Tokorehe) was excited about the potential of te reo Māori poetry.

The 2020 National Schools Poetry Award is organised by the IIML with the support of Creative New Zealand and advertising agency Ogilvy (formerly Ogilvy & Mather), with sponsorship and promotional support from Wonderlab.

The winning poem, the complete judges’ report and all the shortlisted poems are available on the National Schools Poetry Award [website](#).

**For more information contact Professor Damien Wilkins, Director, International Institute of Modern Letters on 04-463 6905 or [Damien.Wilkins@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Damien.Wilkins@vuw.ac.nz)**

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