

Embargoed until 2am on Friday 16 August 2013 (National Poetry Day)

Blue sky thinking wins poetry award

A Year 13 student from Pakuranga College in Auckland has won the National Schools Poetry Award for 2013.

Emma Shi won the award for her poem *inadequately blue* (printed below), inspired by an early morning when she was captured by the beauty of the sky as it went from darkness to light.

“I was sleepy, but the sky was so pretty and it was slowly getting brighter. And that’s what inspired the first line—‘the sky folds open every morning like origami’,” says Emma.

“The situation struck me with a sense of inadequacy about being human—*inadequately blue* is about how small we are, with all our limits, along with the things we could, and wish we could do—if only we were, perhaps, as great as the sky.”

Emma was one of 10 finalists in the poetry competition for Year 12 and 13 secondary school students, organised by New Zealand’s most prestigious creative writing programme, Victoria University’s International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML).

The competition judge, poet and Victoria University lecturer Anna Jackson, says *inadequately blue* is a very assured poem, from its arresting opening image, through its three poised and shapely stanzas.

“This is a poem about an origami feeling, with the image of the origami cranes at once suggesting the care, the attention, the patience it takes to ‘fold and fold and fold’ and at the same time the lack of pretension, the artlessness, the simplicity of writing all in the lower-case about nothing more than a feeling.”

Entries for the Award came from senior secondary students all over New Zealand. Ms Jackson says she read a tremendous range of work, all of it showing some promise, some energy or some element of successful resolution.

Emma will receive \$500 cash, as well as a \$500 book grant for her school library—and her poem will be displayed on posters throughout New Zealand. In addition, Emma and the nine other finalists will attend a poetry masterclass at the International Institute of Modern Letters, with accommodation courtesy of the Bolton Hotel. The New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English has provided support for the masterclass.

All 10 finalists receive a package of literary prizes and subscriptions from the New Zealand Book Council, New Zealand Society of Authors, Victoria University Press, New Zealand literary journals *Sport* and *Landfall*, and Booksellers New Zealand.

The other finalists are Ruby Solly, Western Heights High School; Didi Hughes, The Correspondence School, Tokomaru Bay; Isabelle McNeur, Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti; Madeleine Ballard, Diocesan School for Girls; Philippa McMenamin, Villa Maria College; Abigail Mossman, The Correspondence School, Fielding; Holly Brendling, Baradene College; Bryony Campbell, Wellington East Girls’ College; and Timothy Fraser, Hutt International Boys’ School.

The National Schools Poetry Award has been providing a forum for young writers since 2003.

inadequately blue.

the sky folds open every morning like origami
and i fold out with it, like butterflies,
like pretty birds, lifting away,
only to be caught in the creases of the ocean.

they say that if you make one thousand
paper cranes, you get a wish.
if my fingers did not ache, i would fold and fold and fold
until i got not one wish, but a million,
and i would scatter them across the sea
and kiss the feathers that wash up on the shore each year.

my lipstick stains are stuck on the softest things in the world
like clouds and the boy who didn't say goodbye.
he dipped his finger into sunsets
and painted my eyes red, orange, fire,
and i would spread that burn out across the ocean
but my fingers shake
and nothing comes out of my mouth but air.

—Emma Shi

Shortlisted poems and the judge's report are attached to this email, or can be read at <http://schoolspoetryaward.co.nz/> available Friday morning.

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