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## **Media release**

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# **‘Mona Lisa’ smiling portrait wins IHC Art Awards**

Lower Hutt artist Stacey Hughes has won the 2011 IHC Art Awards and \$5000 for a powerful portrait with a ‘Mona Lisa’ smile.

Awards judges children’s author Margaret Mahy and Dunedin printmaker Olav Nielsen both commented on the mysterious half-smile.

“I think it is quite a powerful painting – and haunting too,” Margaret says. “It is a great painting.”

Olav says he likes the way the figure is looking at something out of the corner of their eye that we can’t see “a bit like the Mona Lisa”.

“I found it quite an arresting work. It definitely caught my eye. I think it’s got that lovely sense of mystery. Olav says it has been painted very simply but ‘it’s captured a very real human expression.”

Stacey, 41, is the first Wellington winner of the national competition, which started in 2004 to showcase the talents of people with intellectual disabilities. Stacey says her winning portrait was inspired by a photograph in a magazine. She can’t remember who was in the photograph, but it may have been a rock star.

The chalk pastel on paper portrait is a departure from her usual subjects, which have favoured animals and landscapes. But facial expressions and colour are the focus of a lot of her recent work.

She has been attending art workshops for only the past five years – at the Hutt Valley Disabled Resources Trust and Take 5 Te Whare Marama in Lower Hutt – but spends as much time as she can drawing and painting, says her mother Eileen Hughes.

Second place went to Paul Sedgwick from Hamilton for *Auckland Phonebook Goes to Milford* – a series of notes on a board. Paul is fascinated with maps, street names, TV guides and emergency services. The notes are a collection of words that he has used over the past 18 months, grouped to satisfy his sense of order. “They’re a whole line-up of memo tags that make you wonder about the stories behind each tag,” says Olav. Paul, who works from the Sandz Gallery in Hamilton, has won \$2000.

Third-equal prizes of \$1000 were awarded to Denise Dennehy (Wellington) with a 3D work *Blue and White Pills Going Up the Right Way*, inspired by a Lotto spinning wheel, and Jamie McCullough (Katikati) for a paper and cardboard sculpture *Ace*, inspired by video games.

The winners were picked from the top 30 entries submitted to regional competitions by Margaret Mahy, Auckland sculptor Brett Graham and Olav Nielsen and prizes were presented at a gala night at the St James Theatre in Wellington tonight (Tuesday 16 August).

The awards are open to all New Zealanders with an intellectual disability. This year 362 artists entered. The artists receive 100 percent of the sale price for their works.

The art works can be viewed on [www.ihcartawards.co.nz/gallery](http://www.ihcartawards.co.nz/gallery)

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