

Artist finds a rich seam in outback mining town

TIM DOUGLAS The Australian May 09, 2013 12:00AM



Guy Maestri with his prize-winning painting *Hill End (Scibbo's Lane)* yesterday. Picture: John Feder. Source: The Australian

HILL End, the former goldmining town in central NSW, has long been a spiritual home for Australian artists. Some of the country's finest practitioners -- Donald Friend, Russell Drysdale, John Olsen, Margaret Olley and Brett Whiteley -- have been inspired by the region's arid beauty.

Last night, Guy Maestri added his name to the Hill End honour role when he was announced winner of the NSW Parliament Plein Air Painting Prize.

The Sydney-based artist was awarded the \$20,000 acquisitive prize for Hill End (Scibbo's Lane), a work inspired by and painted in the tiny Central Tabelelands town. Maestri said the significance of Hill End on Australian art history -- kept alive by a booming local arts scene and a residency program begun by the Art Gallery of NSW in 1995 -- was not lost on him.

"We know those artists have been there and it's a nice idea to feel like you're part of some sort of artistic lineage," said Maestri, who in 2009 won the Archibald Prize for his portrayal of Geoffrey Garrumul Yunupingu. "Subconsciously, Hill End is a place that attracts artists, draws us in. So it's very nice to win for this work."

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Maestri's work is painted from the backyard of his friend, Hill End artist Luke Sibberas's home, which he visits up to five times a year.

"It's a pretty rugged, bony, almost arid forgotten sort of place," the 38-year-old artist said. "It's just basically a ghost town. Artists are joined to it because of those elements. Hill End is almost a lawless place. You can go there and be and do what you want and there are plenty of likeminded people doing the same thing."

Maestri's 50cm x 60cm work beat 40 other selected works. He said the town -- a historical site managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and which boasts one pub and one shop -- had probably changed very little from when Friend painted his famous work *The Cricketers* there in 1948.

"I imagine it would have been a very similar feel about the place, although the paintings from that time are certainly drier," said Maestri, who will return to Hill End today to create more work "and celebrate a bit".