

Emotional connection lands \$100k art prize

Creativity

Theo Chapman

Adelaide-based Ida Sophia has won this year's \$100,000 Ramsay Art Prize, Australia's richest award for artists under 40.

The performance artist's 12-minute video, *Witness*, was inspired by a childhood experience of watching her father's baptism.

Witness was shot in a single take at The Pool of Siloam in Beachport, South Australia.

"In the Bible, Jesus restores a blind man's sight at the Pool of Siloam. This location choice was site specific, reflecting my attempt to 'see' Jesus like my father did," Sophia said.

"I also spent my childhood swimming here."

Sophia said watching her father being baptised was a profound

moment because "I perceived that he loved Jesus more than me".

Aaron Seeto, director of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Nusantara in Jakarta, one of the three judges, said: "Sophia's winning work, impressed us with its sophisticated concept, personal symbolism, and emotional connection to the site of performance."

"We were particularly struck by the integration of durational performance and its translation into video, which created a visceral experience for the viewer."

Sophia beat 26 other finalists to the prize.

All works can be seen at the Art Gallery of South Australia until August 27.

Right: Ida Sophia with her winning video, *Witness*, at AGSA in Adelaide.
PHOTO: AAP



ATO accused of 'sitting on' HECS repayments

Student debts

Hannah Wootton

University graduates are copping indexation increases to portions of their study debts that they have already repaid because the Australian Taxation Office is sitting on money until tax returns are filed.

It means this year's large indexation rate of 7.1 per cent will be applied to a portion of HELP (Higher Education Loans Program, better known as HECS) debt even though repayments were taken from graduates' salaries in real time.

BDO partner James Trainor, a specialist in employment tax, said the situation was "unfair" and "a bit of a disconnect" with the concept of indexation.

When employers take HECS-HELP repayments from pay packages, it gets lumped with income tax as a "tax withholding payment" and sent to the ATO. But the ATO holds these funds as a credit until individuals file their tax returns, rather than reducing their debts in real time.

There is no interest charged on HECS-HELP debts. However, indexation is added on June 1 each year to maintain its real value by adjusting it in line with changes in the cost of living.

As June 1 is before the end of the financial year and well before any returns are processed, this means portions of debt that workers have technically repaid are subject to the indexation increase.

Because inflation has jumped, this year's indexation number will sting. Former students are brace for a 7.1 per cent indexation rate – a near 12-fold increase on 2021's rate and up from 3.6 per cent last financial year – to come into force next Thursday.

One expert has estimated that the rise would add about six months to an average student's repayment time, and many are considering whether they would be better off paying down their debt voluntarily to minimise the size of the indexation hit.

"It seems a little unfair that the government applies indexation but doesn't give any credit [to payees] for the fact they sit on it for a long time," Mr Trainor said.

"If you're applying indexation to reflect the fact the individual hasn't repaid their loan... it's a bit of a disconnect not to reflect the fact they have been paying all along."

This both subjects a larger portion of workers' debt to indexation and means the government "effectively has got use of those funds and not the individual" in the period of time between receiving them and paying down the debt, he said.

The government has got use of those funds and not the individual.

James Trainor, BDO partner

"It's unfair to the individual because if you didn't have to have that compulsory withholding you could put it in a bank account, earn a bit of interest, or [invest it] and have a little bit more to then pay back your HECS."

Rapid increases in CPI in the past 18 months has prompted calls to freeze indexation or assist former students to lessen debts.

Mr Trainor said reducing debts in real time was a "not overly complicated" way for the government to do this.

"Reduce the balance in real time, then you get to the indexation point on June 1 and you've got a lower balance," he said. "Or move the indexation date to October 1 which is when most people have done their tax returns, so those payments can be taken into account before applying indexation."

But the ATO indicated it did not have plans to change the indexation process.

"For the process to change, there would need to be significant change to the legislative framework under which PAYG is operated," it said.



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

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Contact officer

Name - Beaumont & Beaumont
Phone - 02 6126 4500
Email - info@beaumontandbeaumont.com.au

Closing date - 11pm Sunday 11 June 2023

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