

THE NATION

ART PRIZE



Taking risks ... Nicole Kelly, left, with Wendy Whiteley at the studio with two of the winning paintings *Figure in landscape*, left, and *Woman with green thigh*. Photo: Ben Rushton

Colourful identity emerges from shadowy figures

Adam Fulton

SOMEWHERE in Nicole Kelly's paintings, which won her \$25,000 yesterday as part of the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship, are people. Not that they can necessarily be spotted in her abstract, vibrantly colourful canvases. And that's fine with her.

"I don't mind," the 22-year-old from Engadine says. "I like my [paintings'] titles being figures so they know there's a figure in there and it is about

something, it is really grounded in a subject. But often I have to point out the figure to people – that's quite nice – or sometimes they see different figures, and that's quite nice, too."

Seeing the person wasn't the point, anyway. It was about conveying "the feeling of the figure".

Kelly, a National Art School student who has been painting for just four years but made the finals of last year's Whiteley scholarship, was "just stunned" that her 10-painting body of work had won. The prize also

gives her a three-month residency at the Cite Internationales des Arts in Paris.

Eleven finalists were chosen out of 124 entries from 20- to 30-year-olds across Australia. For the first time in the prize's 11 years, an exhibition of finalists' work will not be held at the Brett Whiteley Studio in Surry Hills, where the award was given, but will instead be shown online at the studio's website (www.brettwhiteley.org). Only paintings by Kelly and the two highly commended artists –

25-year-old Becky Gibson, of Redfern, and East Sydney's Jessica Mais Wright, 28 – will be shown at the studio until November 29.

The Art Gallery of NSW director, Edmund Capon, one of the prize's three judges, said the move to an online exhibition was "an experiment" and open to debate. It was "a pity not to be able to see the actual works" in the studio, but "we've got to carry on and make all these evolutions". The studio's "limited space" and resources were among the reasons.

The Brett Whiteley Foundation's director, Brian Ladd, said more people looked at the Whiteley studio online than visited it, "so this gives us a chance to give a much broader coverage to the finalists".

Capon said Kelly's winning works had "ambition and resolve and real, purposeful expression" and took risks.

The person on the right in Kelly's *Figure in landscape* was her boyfriend, she revealed, and it was made after she sketched him in the bush at Sussex Inlet.