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The Australian Book Industry Awards (ABIAs) acknowledge the talent behind the books Australia loves – the best authors, the best publishers and our best book retailers. INCITE reports.

This year over 350 members of the book industry got together at the Art Gallery of New South Wales to celebrate the 16th year of these prestigious industry awards.

The judging panel consisted of a respected and diverse list of publishers, booksellers and industry figures.

ABIA presenters included Australian writers Richard Flanagan, Tim Winton and Thomas Keneally, and visiting overseas writers Jonathan Franzen, Gloria Steinem and Jeanette Winterson.

'Our goal is to make the ABIAs the most important event in the Australian literary calendar,' said Justin Ratcliffe, ABIA spokesperson and Joint Managing Director of Hachette Australia. 'We certainly went a long way towards achieving that this year. It was an evening filled with passion as the industry united to celebrate and recognise the outstanding creativity, vision and innovation displayed by everyone involved in bookmaking – authors, publishers, retailers and industry professionals.'

'The Australian Book Industry Awards grow in stature and strength every year.'

In an unprecedented honour for a first-time author, actress and comedian Magda Szubanski won the gold ABIA for Book of the Year after winning Biography of the

Year for *Reckoning: A Memoir* (Text Publishing).

A veteran comedy writer and performer, Szubanski reveals her extraordinary story of self-discovery, from a suburban childhood haunted by the demons of her father's espionage activities in wartime Poland, to the realisation of her sexuality along with the complex dramas of adulthood and the desire to uncover the truth about herself and her family.

In another first, Tim Winton's debut non-fiction work, *Island Home: A landscape memoir* (Penguin Random House), won the ABIA for Non-fiction Book of the Year. Winton explores the way an Australian landscape has determined his ideas, his writing and his life.

Andy Griffiths once again won Book of the Year for Younger Children with *The 65-Storey Treehouse* (Pan Macmillan), illustrated by Terry Denton.

Romance publisher Harlequin won its first ABIA with Rachael Johns' *The Patterson Girls*, which won General Fiction Book of the Year for her contemporary romance mystery novel about four sisters. Johns, an English teacher in WA, focuses on rural romance and has been a finalist in several Australian romance writing awards.

One of the evening's favourite awards, The Pixie O'Harris Award, which acknowledges distinguished and dedicated service to the development and reputation of Australian children's books, was awarded to children's writer and former laureate Jackie French.

Nominated by Sue McKerracher, CEO of ALIA, Jackie French is one of Australia's best known authors and advocates for children's literature. Her books have given many hours of pleasure to thousands of families.

Jackie, who recorded a video to accept her award, said: 'As a child, I knew where paradise lived. It was in Barker's Bookshop – Brisbane's only bookshop – where I found my lifelong friend, *The Magic Pudding*, and where I discovered who I was, and what my country may be.

'Since then, over my 25 years of writing, I have seen our industry evolve and grow and I'm pleased to be part of this event tonight, celebrating the achievements of the Australian publishing industry. We are the people of the books.'

Sydney writer Stephanie Bishop has cemented her status as a rising literary talent, by taking out Literary Fiction Book of the Year for *The Other Side of the World* (Hachette Australia).

The Matt Richell Award for New Writer was won by Lucy Treloar for her first novel, *Salt Creek* (Pan Macmillan), a book about a colonial family struggle.



Emma Rusher, Managing Director of House of Rusher, and author Richard Flanagan.



James Kellow, HarperCollins CEO, who accepted the Pixie O'Harris Award on behalf of author Jackie French, and Sue McKerracher, ALIA CEO, who presented the award.

Fresh from winning London Book Fair's International Bookstore of the Year award, Melbourne's Readings won Australia's Best Independent Book Retailer of the Year.

The prize for National Book Retailer of the Year was shared between Dymocks and Booktopia.

Leading independent Allen & Unwin won Publisher of the Year, and NewSouth Books won the award for Small Publisher of the Year.

Justin Ratcliffe added: 'At a time when proposed changes to copyright threaten to undermine the very foundations that our industry is built on, it was inspiring to witness the powerful solidarity on display and the impassioned defence of creators.'

As Jeanette Winterson so memorably declared, 'What we're really protecting is the life of the mind; the creative core of what we are. This is more than an industry. This is the heart of humanity.' 🌟

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