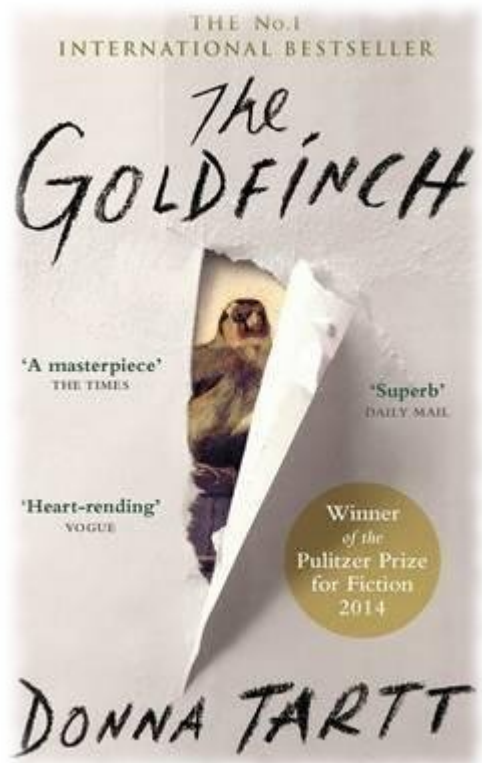


Bool Belles Review: The Goldfinch

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[box]This edition we welcome a guest reviewer from the Bool Belles book club in Warrnambool, VICTORIA DUNN. Victoria tells us what they have been reading and what they thought of it...[/box]

The Goldfinch, by Donna Tartt: winner of the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (Little, Brown)

[quote]

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] D
[/dropcap]onna Tarrt's highly anticipated new novel (her first in 11 years) is a coming-of-age odyssey that centres around a lad named Theo, who recounts the story of his life as he remembers it from the age of 13 to about 28.

Not long after the story opens, Theo is getting by on a diverse array of daily drug and alcohol concoctions. This tends to make him an unreliable witness, but it in some ways helps him manage the sometimes horrific and bizarre circumstances he becomes involved in.

The story draws on significant global events such as 9/11, and social issues such as drug use, and a brush with the criminal underworld. We are told the story completely from Theo's perspective. Characters and the contemporary American societies they inhabit are fleshed-out via Theo's immediate experience of them.



The Goldfinch,
Carel Fabritius
(1622-1654).

Image: The Frick
Collection

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] D
[/dropcap]uring a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) with his mother, Theo is separated from her and becomes a virtual orphan during a terrorist bomb attack. His mother dies, he survives.

While comforting the dying Weltie, a man he had seen earlier with a young girl about his own age, Theo is persuaded to steal the painting, *The Goldfinch*, which happens to have been a favourite painting of his mother's (the painting, by the way, [does exist](#) – see above).

The attack leaves Theo a virtual orphan and he is taken in by the family of a school friend, Andy Barbour, who live in a cavernous Fifth Avenue apartment. The dying Weltie had asked him to go to his partner, Hobie, in Greenwich Village, which Theo eventually does.

A great friendship and mentorship begins. Hobie is a craftsman; restoring American antiques is his life. Theo also sees the girl Pippa, who was with Weltie, and is now recovering at Hobie's house. Theo and Pippa recognise a resonance of emotional damage in each other.



US author Donna Tartt has drawn mixed reviews for her highly anticipated and very long novel, *The*

Goldfinch, which won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Image: www.yle.fi

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] U
[/dropcap]pheaval again occurs, however, when Theo's father turns up. His father and girlfriend Xandra take Theo to Las Vegas, where he becomes a fringe dweller.

Enter Boris: the east European rogue. Theo and Boris begin a friendship initially because they are two adolescents who feel completely out of place in their families and surrounds. They embark on a complex and addictive consumption of various drugs, alcohol and petty crime.

Theo and Boris eventually part company and Theo escape's Las Vegas to return to Hobie in the Village, where he learns everything he can about antique restoration. Unbeknown to Hobie, however, Theo's exposure to the antique world reignites his criminal tendencies.

Enter Boris again, this time with some shady underworld figures. Through his reconnection with Boris, Theo learns that it is impossible to keep a secret – even one as big as stealing *The Goldfinch* – and he attempts to take a path of redemption.

Tartt (who's debut novel was the hugely successful *The Secret History*) has attracted mixed reviews for this book, which pivots on the profound effect the tragedy of a mother's death has on one so young.

There are some rather lengthy philosophical musings on life and redemption toward the end of the book, but overall the Bool Belles' consensus is that *The Goldfinch* is a "great read" and that doesn't apply only to its length – at over 700 pages!

– **Victoria Dunn**



Next month's book: *The Bird Watcher*, William McInnes

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Tracing the trajectory of artistic talent



Portland artist Carmel Wallace with her three-dimensional work, Bloom, which is part of the *Trajectories* exhibition.

Six sensational visual artists who share much in common have combined for a new exhibition at Warrnambool's SCOPE Galleries that opened today (Sept 7).

The *Trajectories* exhibition features the work of artists **Victoria Dunn, Annette Iggulden, Marion Manifold, Liza McCosh, Noela Stratford** and **Carmel Wallace** who, between them, cover almost the full trajectory of art mediums, from painting to printmaking, drawing, photography and installations.

All six women have deep connections to regional Australia, with most living in south-west Victoria, and were among the first to complete a doctorate in visual arts at Deakin University in Warrnambool through what was then considered a bold experiment to combine artistic output (producing a gallery standard exhibition), with research and theory (a 20-000-30,000 word exegesis explaining their work).

The exhibition not only captures how far the artists have come (their “trajectory”) since their pioneering days as PhD students, but also reflects the immense value of having the opportunity to study for such a high-level qualification at a regional campus. That opportunity has since been removed, following the closure of the Visual Arts school at the Warrnambool campus.



SCOPE director and artist Dr Liza McCosh with Professor Emeritus Barbara van Ernst AM at the exhibition opening. The work of Annette Iggulden features in the background.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I[/dropcap]t was a point not lost on Melbourne philanthropist and **Professor Emeritus Barbara van Ernst AM**, who was a former head of school for visual, performing and media arts at Deakin University and who opened the exhibition.

“Their (the artists’) location within regional Victoria is important,” Professor van Ernst said.

“It is work that could stand up anywhere – there is no sense of isolation or disadvantage because of their regional location.”

Professor van Ernst also highlighted the importance of women supporting women in the arts. The exhibition not only features all women artists, but was curated by a woman (Dr Liza McCosh) in a female-owned gallery (SCOPE) and was opened by a woman. Professor van Ernst said such support was reminiscent of the Heidelberg School, and others, where male artists worked collectively to produce, exhibit and promote their work.



Artist Noela Stratford (left), Jenny Altmann and Marion Manifold. Both Noela and Marion are among the six artists included in the exhibition. Noela's charcoal work features in the background.



David Straford, Grant Wallace and James Wallace (in front of intricate works by Marion Manifold).



Retired Deakin lecturer and artist Dr Bruce Vinall, with Victoria Dunn and Annette Iggulden who's work features in the exhibition. (The artwork is a charcoal by Noela Stratford.)

Trajectories, a travelling exhibition, will be at SCOPE Galleries until October 12. SCOPE, 38 Kelp St, Warrnambool, is open noon-5pm Thurs-Sunday.

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