

The Canberran dancer in an Archibald portrait

Michelle Potter

CURRENTLY hanging in the Art Gallery of New South Wales as one of the finalists in the 2020 Archibald Prize is a portrait with the title *Requiem (JR)*.

Painted by Marcus Wills, who has recorded that he wanted this portrait to seem "sombre and melancholic, like parts of Mozart's requiem mass", it shows a male figure with a strongly defined, muscular upper body. The clue to the identity of the figure is in the bracketed "JR" of the title, and his occupation is revealed by the musculature we see in the painting.

The sitter is Jack Riley, a dancer and choreographer and an alumnus of Canberra's youth dance organisation QL2.

Following his early training in the capital, which began in 2009, and his subsequent graduation from the Victorian College of the Arts, Riley has been freelancing as a dancer and choreographer. He has shown his choreography and performance skills in Canberra on a number of occasions. He has, for example, presented his thought-provoking, even confrontational work, *Alone*, in the Courtyard Theatre, and has worked as a dancer in *Seamless*, an award-winning work created by Alison Plevey and her Australian Dance Party for the Floriade Fringe.

He has also returned to his training ground to choreograph for QL2 projects and, like most of that organisation's alumni, continues to reflect on the influence of QL2.

"QL2 advocates for creativity and youth, which helped me to initiate my own voice as an artist," he says.

"I am very lucky to have been a part of their programs and would encourage anyone wanting to pursue dance as a career that this is where to begin."

At the time of writing, Riley is in lockdown in Melbourne. But it has not diminished his drive and determination.

"COVID-19 has thrown a number of things upside down and inside out," he says.

"It has made it difficult for all of us to pursue any creative activity or arts practice. With all of these restrictions and new models of working I still hold hope for the future of dance and the arts. We are resilient people and I believe that even an economic crisis cannot diminish our drive and passions to reflect, create and perform."

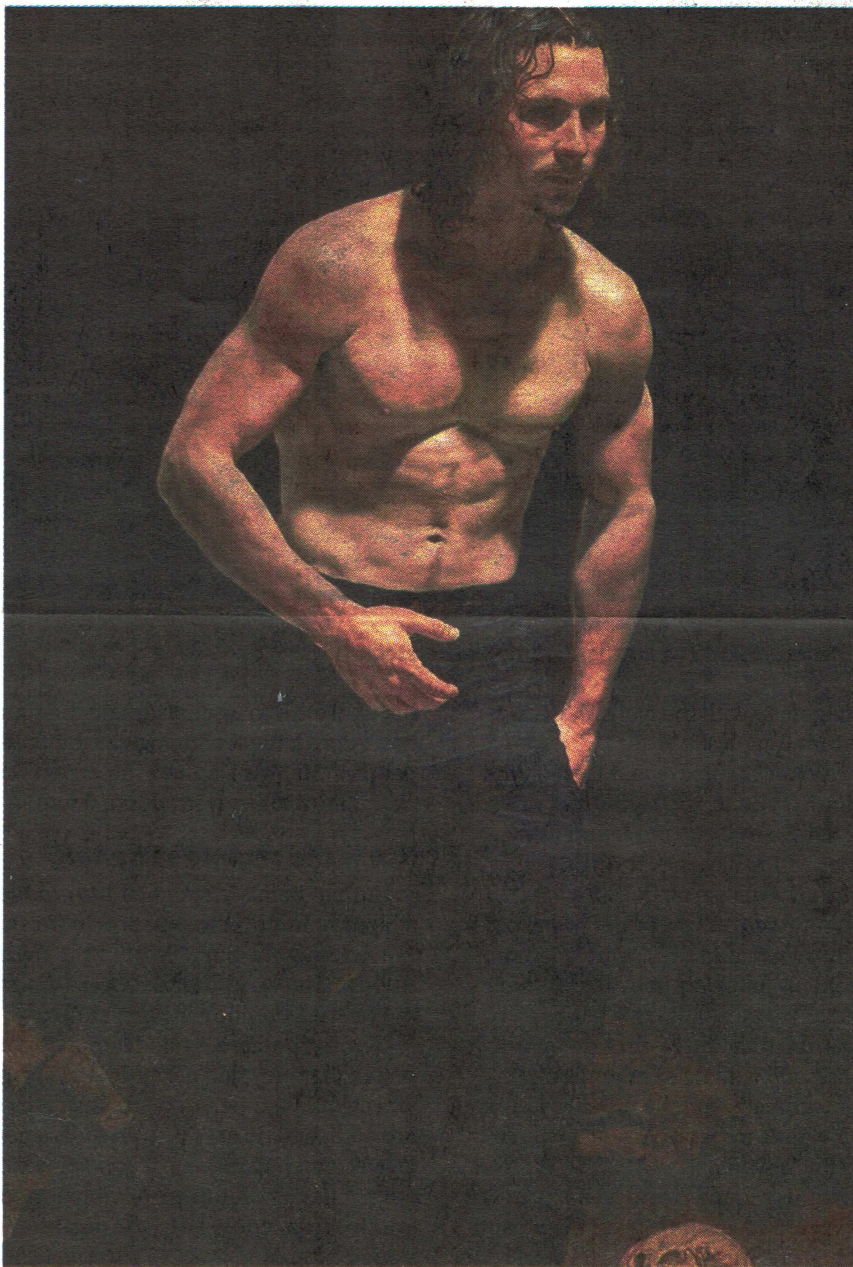
Riley has had to find alternative ways of

earning money. He has undertaken a training course to become a store manager for a well-known liquor retailer and views the experience, with its emphasis on financial operations, administrative tasks, and people management, as yet another way ultimately to develop his dance practice.

"One of the greatest things about the arts is that you carry it with you in all aspects of your life. It is the way you view and reflect the world you inhabit," he says.

"The more you can experience the world in all its facets, cultures and economies the more material you will have to make the tapestry of creation."

He certainly doesn't see the current restrictive situation as a requiem for dance, or the arts in general. As for that painting, Riley says, "I think the true valiant effort was from Marcus in bringing his portrait to life. I am very glad he made it and feel very lucky to have been part of it."



Requiem (JR) by Marcus Wills, a finalist in the 2020 Archibalds. Picture: Supplied