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Craig Ruddy's portrait of Warwick Thornton wins People's Choice Award for the Archibald Prize

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PEOPLE'S Choice ... Australian director Warrick Thornton stands with Sydney artist Craig Ruddy after being announced winner of the Archibald People's Choice Prize at the Art Gallery Of NSW on May 20, 2010 in Sydney, Australia. Getty Images

Source: Getty Images

A LARGER than life portrait of writer and film director Warwick Thornton by Sydney artist Craig Ruddy is a reminder that people should not be afraid of the dark, the subject says.

The Prince of Darkness - Warwick Thornton was nominated by more than 23,000 people who have attended this year's Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales to take out the 2010 People's Choice award.

Mr Ruddy was awarded \$2500 in prize money on Thursday.

"The greatest thing for an artist is to evoke feeling and thought and emotion in the viewer," he said. Mr Thornton won a Camera D'Or prize for best feature at the 2009 Cannes Film festival for his film *Samson and Delilah*.

He said he didn't mind being the subject, rather than a person behind the scenes, when he sat for Mr Ruddy.

"There's no pressure," he told journalists.

"It's kind of a nice thing to just sit there.

"You'd hear this beautiful sweeping. And these really sporadic, chaotic scratches and that.

"It was amazing to listen to someone paint."

Reds, yellows and dark textures are used for Mr Ruddy's prize-winning portrait.

Mr Thornton said he was pleased with the "Prince of Darkness" title.

"I don't have a problem with saying that there is a darker side to Australia. I'd really like to talk about it and I try to make films which are about the darker side," he said.

"We've been taught for too long to be afraid of the dark and to be afraid of black people and anything to do with the darkness.

"And that is so wrong.

"Let's embrace darkness.

"Let's embrace black people."

It is the second time Mr Ruddy had won an Archibald prize.

In 2004 he took out both the main Archibald and the People's Choice prizes in Sydney and Melbourne for his popular but contentious portrait of actor David Gulpili.

Since 1988, visitors to the Archibald prize have been given the opportunity to vote for their favourite painting.

Only twice have people decided the judges decision was correct.

This year's Archibald prize went to Sam Leach for his portrait of singer-songwriter Tim Minchin.

The Archibald finalists and winners will remain on view at the Art Gallery of NSW until Sunday May 30.