Award for author of Inside Madness

A prestigious journalism fellowship has been awarded to author Melissa Sweet, in recognition of her recently released book, Inside Madness.

Ms Sweet has been awarded the 2006 Dart Centre Ochberg Fellowship, which aims to support journalists to improve their coverage of violence and traumatic events.

The fellowship will bring journalists from around the world together in Los Angeles in November for a seminar examining the media’s role in covering violence and trauma.

Ms Cait McMahon, the director of the Australasian Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, said: "Melissa wrote with significant skill and sensitivity about the tragic murder of South Australian mental health service director, Dr Margaret Tobin in her book Inside Madness.

“His book, along with Melissa's other presented work - 'Rising from the Ashes' about survivors of the New Years Day bush fires in Junee, south-western New South Wales - indicated her talent in combining some significantly important skills when writing about traumatic incidents.

"The ability to sensitively bring together issues of human suffering, respect for the humanity of victims, survivors and perpetrators of tragedy combined with fine journalistic investigation and craft is not always well achieved.

"Melissa's ability to do this whilst continuing to enthrall her audience throughout, placed her at the fore of a very competitive group of applicants for this year's fellowship."

Inside Madness tells the story of murdered psychiatrist Dr Margaret Tobin and the impact of her death. It is also a history of mental health reform in Australia, and an examination of the difficulties of achieving change in complex, conservative health systems.

Ms Sweet hopes the Fellowship will help her to examine some of the ethical dilemmas which arise when writing about the victims of violence.

"Researching and writing this book was an extremely traumatic process, both for myself and for some of Margaret Tobin's friends and family members," she says.

"By telling Margaret's story, I was also telling the stories of those close to her. When you write a book like this, you have to accept the uncomfortable reality that you may be adding to the grief and trauma of those who have already suffered huge losses."

Ms Sweet is a freelance journalist who specialises in writing about health and medicine.

* The Dart Centre Ochberg Fellowship has been established by the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies and the Dart Centre in order to build a cohort of journalists better prepared for the challenge of reporting on violence and trauma. Australasia’s Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma provides one fellowship each year to a mid-career journalist.

* Ms McMahon and Ms Sweet are available for interview.

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