



2026 CAKE! NETWORK AWARDS GUIDE

The 2026 ACDN Awards celebrate the skill, creativity, professionalism and community spirit that make Australia's cake-decorating sector so extraordinary. This manual is the source of truth for each award, setting out what is being recognised, who is eligible, how nominations and judging work, and the standards used to determine finalists and winners. The awards have been structured to reflect the many different ways people contribute to our sector — as artists, educators, small businesses, retailers, suppliers and innovators — with clear, consistent processes designed to recognise excellence fairly and meaningfully.

For 2026, the ACDN Awards have been restructured to make the program easier to understand, more consistent across categories and clearer about what each award recognises. Award categories have been refined, eligibility requirements made more explicit, and judging processes aligned so that nominees, voters and judges can see how decisions are made. Different award groups now use processes suited to what they are actually recognising — whether that is technical artistry, customer experience, business excellence, product innovation or contribution to the sector.

These changes reflect the continued evolution of ACDN and the diversity of the cake-decorating community. The aim is to create an awards program that is transparent, accessible and meaningful, while preserving the strong community involvement that has always been central to the awards. By publishing clearer criteria, consistent scoring guides and defined judging pathways, we want every participant to understand what they are being considered for and how excellence will be recognised.

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ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

These awards recognise individual artistic and technical achievement. Entrants do not need to operate a cake business and commercial success is not considered. The focus is the quality of the artist's work within their nominated discipline.

Awards in this Category are:

COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

---ROYAL ICING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

---FONDANT COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work is primarily focused on decorated cookies as the finished artistic medium. Entries may include royal icing, painting, airbrushing, modelling, dimensional elements, wafer paper or other edible decorative techniques. Due to popular demand, this award has been split into two awards for 2026. Nominees will be placed in the correct category by the Awards committee.

CUPCAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work is primarily focused on cupcakes as the finished artistic medium. Entries may include piped, sculpted, painted, modelled or mixed decorative techniques, but the cupcake itself must remain the principal format being judged

3D/NOVELTY CAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists specialising in sculpted, shaped or dimensional cakes where construction, carving and form are central to the finished piece. This category is for work that goes beyond a traditionally shaped cake and relies on technical structure, proportion and three-dimensional design

SUGAR & WAFER FLOWER ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose work is primarily focused on realistic or stylised floral work created from sugar-based mediums or wafer paper. The flowers should be the dominant feature being judged, rather than a minor decorative element within a broader cake design

BUTTERCREAM ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work demonstrates buttercream as the principal decorative medium. This may include piping, palette-knife work, buttercream flowers, textured finishes, painted effects and other buttercream-led techniques. Work where fondant, modelling or other mediums are dominant should be entered in the more appropriate category

SUGAR MODELLING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists specialising in hand-modelled figures, characters, animals, objects or decorative elements created primarily from modelling mediums such as modelling paste, fondant, gum paste or modelling chocolate. The modelled elements should be the main focus of the work being judged.

EDIBLE DECORATIONS ARTIST OF THE YEAR

For artists whose submitted work is primarily focused on edible decorative work that is not fully represented by another Artistic Achievement Award. This may include mixed-media edible work, wafer paper decoration other than flowers, edible fabrics and textiles, rice paper, sails, structural decorative elements and combinations of edible techniques and materials

CHOOSING THE RIGHT CATEGORY

Artists may enter more than one category where judges can view evidence of cakes/work that match the chosen category. Where a piece uses several techniques or materials, the category should reflect the element that is most central to the technical achievement of the work.

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS KEY DATES

Process	Description	Date
Public Nominations	Artists are nominated or may self nominate for each award category. Artists may be nominated in several categories.	11 August – 30 August
Accept Nominations	All nominates will be contacted via email and asked to accept their nomination. Nominees will be asked to provide a logo, head shot and other images of their work as required to allow TCN to promote and run the awards processes.	11 August – 3 rd September
Judging panel	Round 1 for this awards is judging by an expert panel of judges. They will assess the artists skill against published criteria to determine the artists who will be announced as finalists and move onto the next round to compete for the national trophy. The Awards panel will meet with the judges and provide moderation of the results to determine the final rankings of the finalists. 4-6 Artists will be announced as the finalists.	3 rd September – 20 th September
Finalists Announced	The Finalists will be announced.	23 rd – 26 th September
Cake Decorators Voting	Due to the technical nature of these awards, voting for the national award will be restricted to current ACDN members – artists themselves who have a wide variety of skill and understanding in the techniques demonstrated. The Awards Committee will tally the votes, weigh the results and moderate the final rankings to determine the final results.	27 th September – 12 th October
Awards Presented	During the ACDN Community Night, the top ranked artist will be announced as the award winner and the second ranked artist will receive the Highly Commended award.	20 th November, 7pm Hijinx Hotel QV Melbourne.

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible for any Artistic Achievement Award, the nominee must:

- the individual artist or decorator, not nominated as a business;
- be based in Australia;
- have created their represented work (submitted portfolio, social media or online photos) themselves;
- demonstrate unique or personal interpretation of cake decorating styles, avoiding direct imitation or work completed as part of a class or workshop where the design was guided step by step by another artist or teacher;
- provide any additional information reasonably required to confirm authorship, technique or category eligibility;
- respect the intellectual property of other artists, businesses and brands;
- not present another person's work, images, designs or teaching material as their own;
- agree to the published judging process, including expert shortlisting and ACDN member voting; and
- comply with the Awards' conflict-of-interest and conduct requirements.

ACDN membership is not required to enter or be nominated for these awards.

AUTHORSHIP OF WORK

The award recognises the technical and artistic achievement of the individual nominee.

The nominee must have personally completed the work. Assistance with non-decorative tasks may be permitted where it does not materially contribute to the artistic or technical execution being assessed.

Where collaborative work is submitted, the nominee must clearly identify which elements they personally created. Work will only be considered where the judges can reasonably assess the nominee's individual contribution.

The Awards may reassign a nominee to a more appropriate category where necessary.

MULTIPLE CATEGORIES

An artist may be considered in more than one Artistic Achievement category where they can demonstrate distinct bodies of work that genuinely meet the eligibility requirements of each category.

The same piece should not ordinarily be entered across multiple categories.

COMMERCIAL STATUS

Artists do not need to operate a registered cake business, sell their work commercially or earn income from cake decorating. These awards recognise technical and artistic achievement

regardless of whether the nominee is a professional, semi-professional, hobbyist or emerging artist.

INELIGIBLE ENTRIES

An entry may be excluded where:

- the submitted work was not created by the nominee;
- the work does not substantially fit the nominated category;
- images or information provided are materially misleading;
- there is substantiated evidence of plagiarism or misrepresentation;
- the work falls outside the stated eligibility period; or
- the nominee does not agree to participate in the required judging process.
- the artist attempts to sway the outcome or dissuade members from voting using persuasion, rewards or other methods not in line with ACDC community values as determined by the ACDN Awards Committee
- the artists body of work is determined to be offensive in matter, tone, presentation or likely to offend as determined by the ACDN awards Committee

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS & ACCOLADES

The following awards and accolades will be presented:

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH TROPHIES

3D/NOVELTY CAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

BUTTERCREAM ARTIST OF THE YEAR

ROYAL ICING COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

FONDANT COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

CUPCAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

EDIBLE DECORATIONS ARTIST OF THE YEAR

SUGAR MODELLING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

SUGAR & WAFER PAPER FLOWERS OF THE YEAR

CAKE DECORATOR OF THE YEAR

ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS RECOGNISED WITH CERTIFICATES

HIGHLY COMMENDED 3D/NOVELTY CAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED BUTTERCREAM ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED ROYAL ICING COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED FONDANT COOKIE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED CUPCAKE ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED EDIBLE DECORATIONS ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED SUGAR MODELLING ARTIST OF THE YEAR

HIGHLY COMMENDED SUGAR & WAFER PAPER FLOWERS OF THE YEAR

JUDGING RUBRIC: ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS						
Judging Criterion	Weight	1 - Limited	2 - Developing	3 - Good	4 - Very Strong	5 - Outstanding
Technical skill and control	30%	Limited control of the nominated medium or technique. Significant technical issues are evident and execution is inconsistent	Some competent technique is demonstrated, but control is uneven or there are noticeable technical weaknesses.	The artist demonstrates sound control of the relevant medium and techniques, with competent and generally consistent execution.	The artist demonstrates a high level of technical control, precision and confidence across their body of work.	The artist demonstrates exceptional mastery of the medium, with highly refined, precise and consistently controlled technical execution that clearly distinguishes the work at a national level.
Finish and Quality of Execution	25%	The work appears unfinished, poorly resolved or significantly affected by visible flaws.	The work is generally complete but contains noticeable issues with finish, refinement, proportion or consistency.	The work is well finished to a solid professional standard, with only minor flaws that do not materially detract from the overall result.	The work is highly refined, polished and consistently well executed, with strong attention to detail.	The work demonstrates exceptional refinement and finish, with meticulous attention to detail and virtually no visible technical weaknesses.
Complexity and Degree of Difficulty	15%	The work demonstrates limited technical challenge or ambition within the nominated discipline	Some challenge or complexity is present, but the techniques or construction remain relatively straightforward	The work demonstrates an appropriate level of technical difficulty and successfully manages several challenging elements.	The work demonstrates substantial technical complexity, intricacy or difficulty, handled with confidence and control.	The work demonstrates exceptional technical ambition and difficulty, successfully resolving highly complex, intricate or demanding techniques.
Artistic Design and Interpretation	20%	The designs lack cohesion, balance or a clear artistic direction. Creative decisions do not effectively support the finished work	Some thoughtful design choices are evident, but composition, colour, proportion or interpretation may be inconsistent.	The work demonstrates a clear and cohesive artistic approach, with effective composition, colour, proportion and interpretation.	The work is visually distinctive and thoughtfully resolved, showing strong artistic judgement, cohesion and individual interpretation.	The work demonstrates exceptional artistic vision. Design, composition, colour, proportion and interpretation work together seamlessly to create a highly distinctive and memorable result.
Consistency and Body of Work	10%	Body of work is inconsistent or provides insufficient evidence of sustained skill within the nominated category	Some strong examples are present, but quality or technical achievement varies noticeably across their body of work.	The body of work demonstrates a generally consistent standard and clear competence within the nominated discipline.	The artist demonstrates a consistently high standard across multiple pieces, with clear breadth and confidence within the discipline.	The artists body of work demonstrates exceptional consistency, depth and sustained technical achievement across all examples presented.