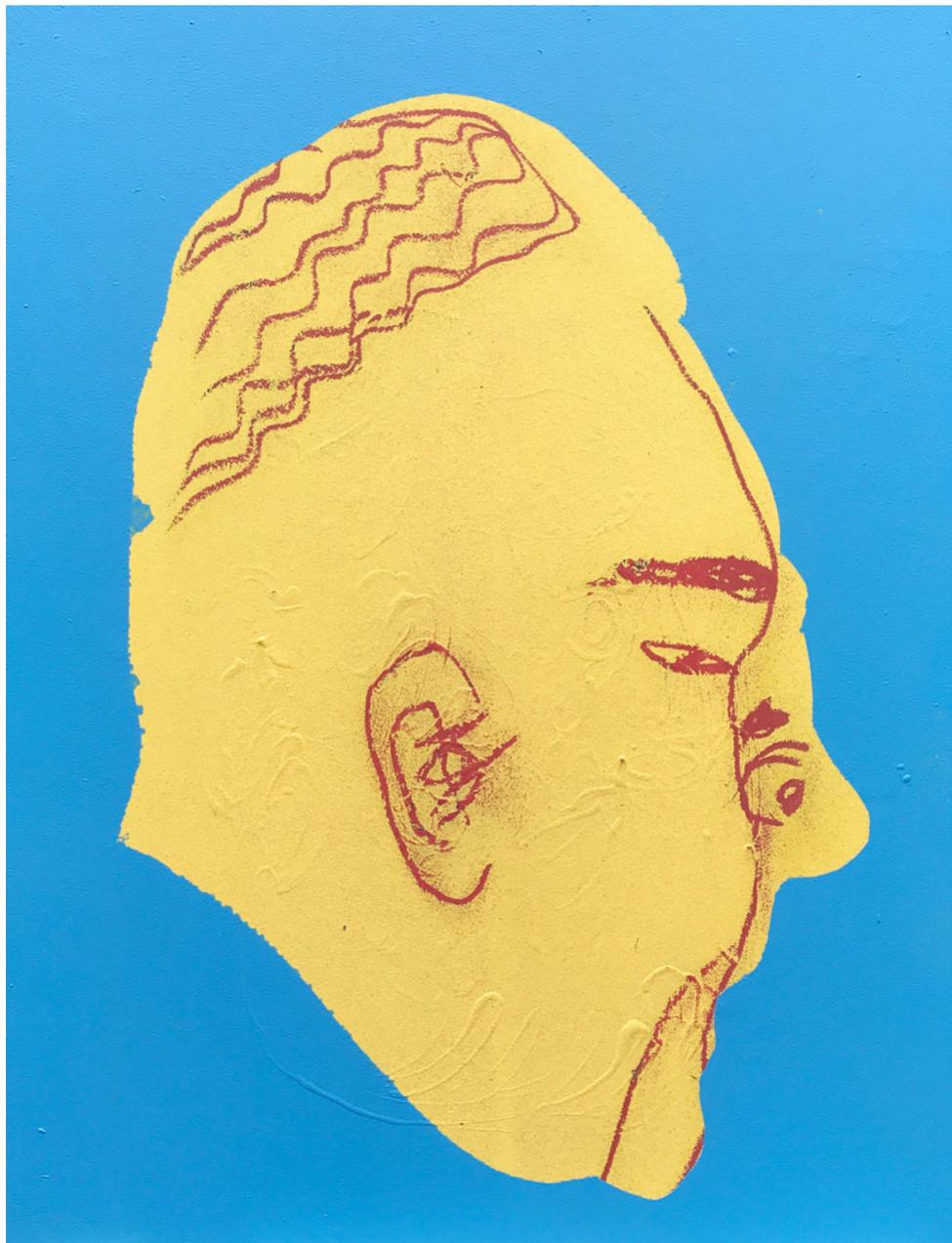


CHEAPSEATS

JACK RODGERS





*"Diamond Blush
(Man in front bar at Boundary Hotel)"*

CHEAP SEATS

From the horned protestor at the US Capitol riots in 2021 to Watermelon Boy at a Big Bash cricket game in 2016, documentation and photojournalism in a world of hashtags and memes create larger than life characters presented to us as cultural touchstones. Using selected and only subtly distinct characterisations of members of the public in historical imagery, *CHEAP SEATS* shows us that any face in the crowd might be the same.

As the latest development in a practice that has included frenetic Texta drawings, salon hangs of visual puns on board, and its fair share of caricature in political or social commentary, this body of work is some of the the most straightforward and figurative portraiture of Rodgers' career. Looking through rose coloured glasses, Rodgers represents faces in the crowd drawn from archival photography, imagining a link between the subject and the cultural identity they exemplify in the context of the event. As viewers, we are naturally quick to assume that there is a connection, to see patterns stemming from our own recollection, nostalgia, or hearsay. But, though Rodgers' formally accurate artwork titles denote real moments in Brisbane's history, his conception of these moments has been broadly sourced: apocryphal stories from the barber's chair, down at the pub, or in the line at Bunnings.

Rather than a documentarian, then, Rodgers sees himself as somewhat of an appropriation artist of real life, using the context of a concert or sporting event to examine his own romanticized attitude towards local cultural history. This has influenced his process as well, whereby he uses oil pastels to strip away surface paint to create an almost printed aesthetic that harkens back to old-fashioned journalistic sensibilities from dot matrix newspaper prints to flat grainy photography. The overwhelming colour palette of art deco pastel house paints equally evokes an Expo '88 patron crunching a sun-bleached Bubble O'Bill packet underfoot. Neither Rodgers nor I were alive then, nor is there any source for my fancy, but the idea arouses a sense of *sehnsucht*, or nostalgia for something you've never actually experienced, couched in the cultural history of the city in which we both grew up.

More formally, Rodgers continues to explore the tension between highbrow and lowbrow art, seeking as ever to make art that everyone can understand, but neither with the pointed antiestablishmentism of Warhol nor the internet culture illustration practice of @struthless69, though both are an influence. Not that Rodgers is apolitical, but here in *CHEAP SEATS* he is subtle and optimistic in his deconstruction of identity, perhaps more similarly to Richard Lewer's often faceless portraiture that relies on the audience's preconception of culture to create meaning. What differentiates *CHEAP SEATS* from much of portraiture, however, is that the real people depicted are recognized by the artist and viewer alike as emblematic and ubiquitous, rather than for their personal identity. I have struggled with whether the consent to be documented at a public event, either implied or formal, is even relevant to an exhibition like this, when meaning-making has been intentionally divorced from personhood or an accurate likeness. The quirk that no portrait subjects are likely to attend the exhibition almost ensures their anonymity, and really, it's not about them.

It might seem trite to suggest that producing paintings of other people's faces from photographs is personal, but for Rodgers it is. By exhibiting the results of his research into his own nostalgia and *sehnsucht* for a cultural history of Brisbane, he invites you into a metadiscourse of documentary history that is successful in two ways. First, it is self-reflexive. It is justified by the fact that his adaptation of the truth of documentary history cannot be disconnected from the influence that that documentary history has already had on him. Second, it is something everyone can understand. Anyone can engage with culture and nostalgia, whether or not they feel connected to the local history represented, because the mechanisms, not just artefacts, of culture and nostalgia are on display. This is achieved by drawing attention to the documentary nature of the source material in the artwork titles, and the visual techniques of caricature and disembodiment.

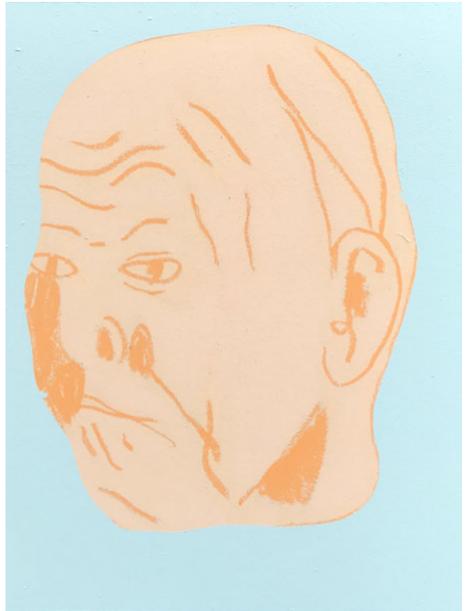
As a result, the metadiscourse asks "Who says it's real? Any of it, the cultural history, the artist's feelings about it, our responses to it?" Rodgers retorts that at the end of the day, you shouldn't let the truth get in the way of a good story.

Alexander Kucharski 2022

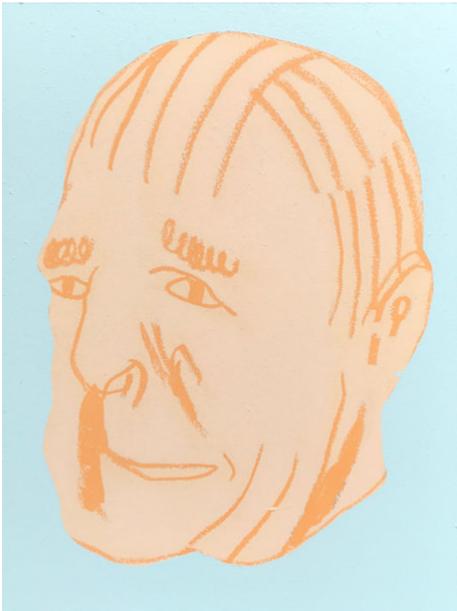
(Group stuck at the Regatta Hotel during 1974 floods)



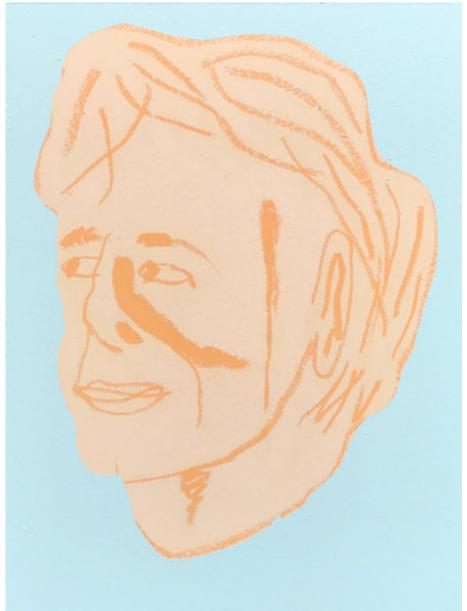
"Dark and Stormy"



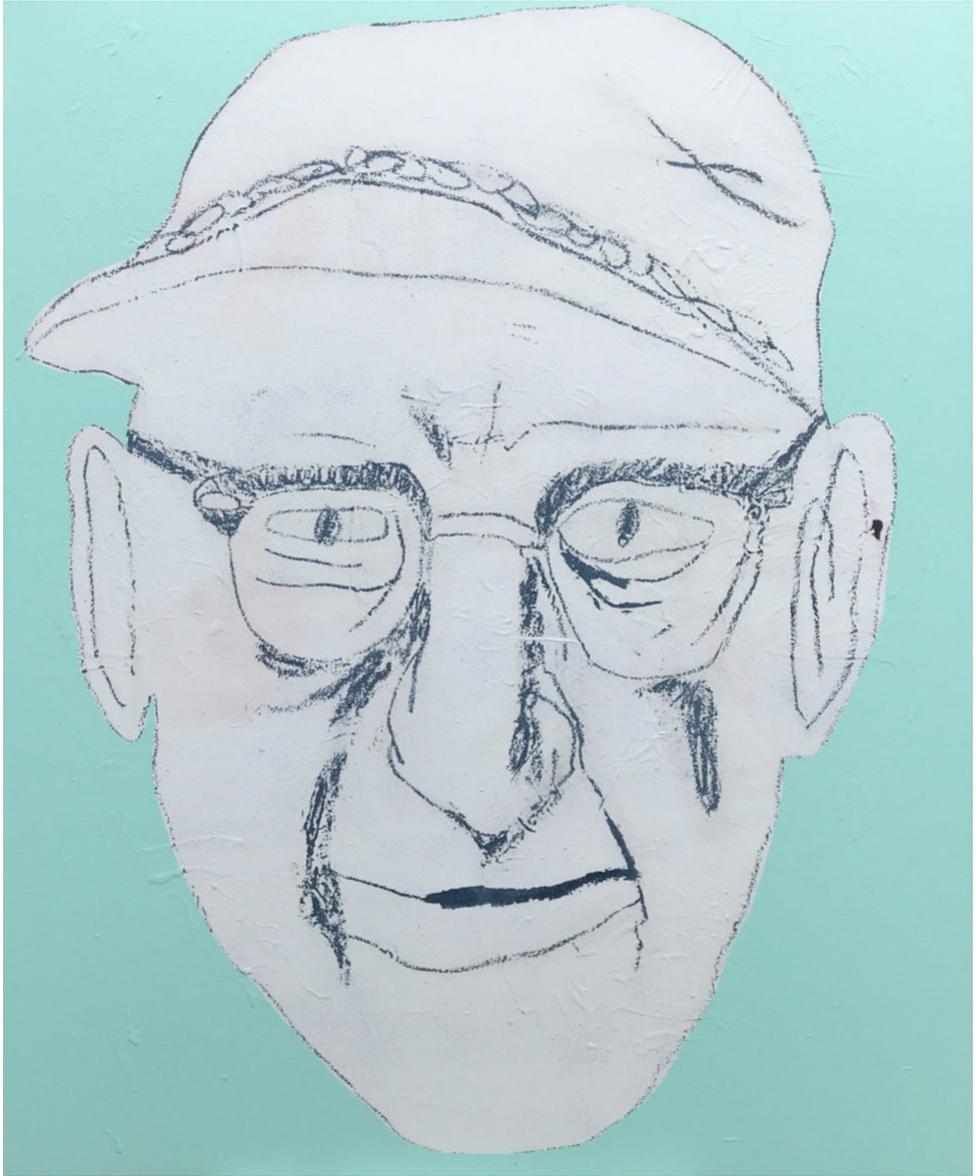
"Shandy"



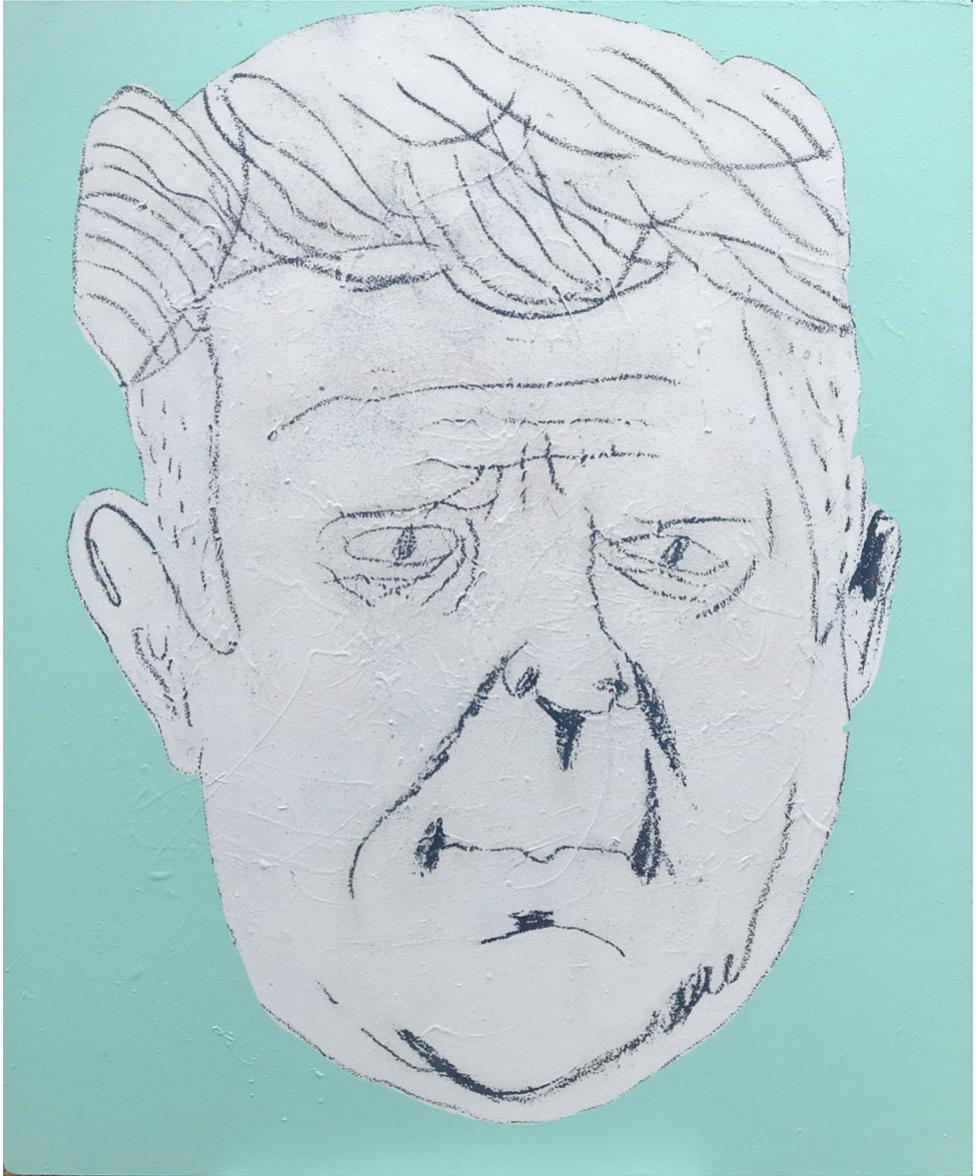
"Blue Nun"



"Cold Duck"



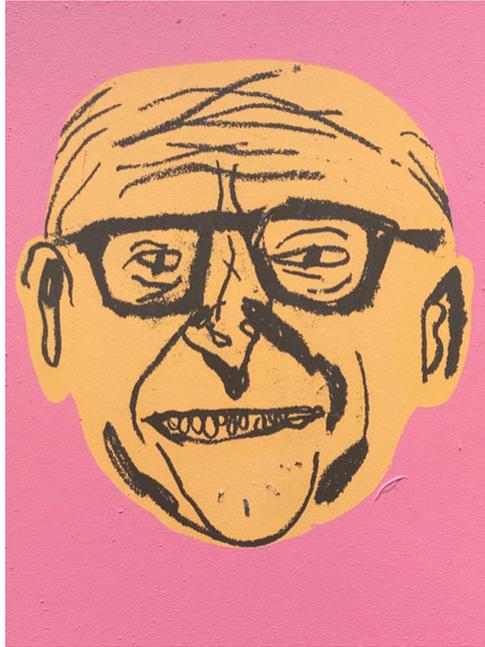
*"Tinnie Chucker 1
(Men watching State of Origin at Lang Park 1988)"*



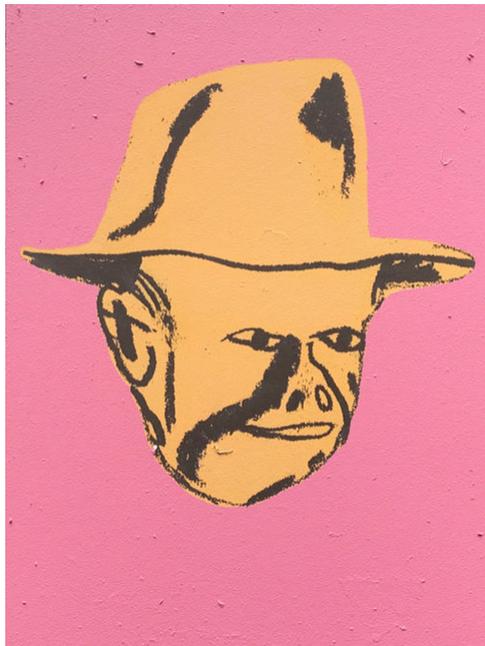
*"Tinnie Chucker 2
(Men watching State of Origin at Lang Park 1988)"*



*"To Be Alone With You
(Press meet Bob Dylan at airport 1966)"*

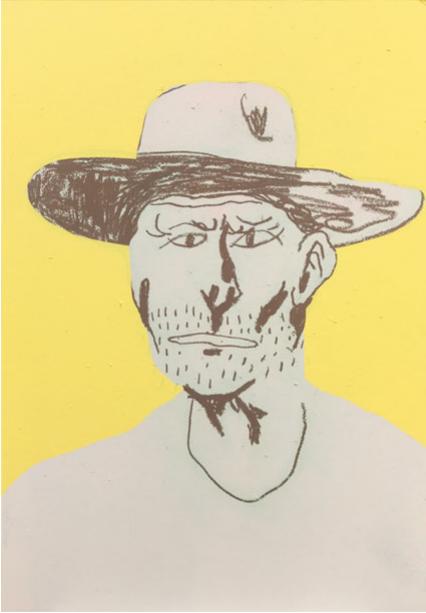


*"Dagwood Dog
(Man in crowd at Ekka 1950)"*

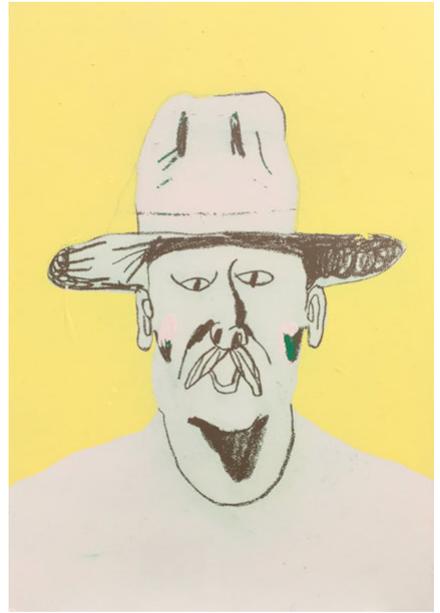


*"Strawberry Sundae
(Man in crowd at Ekka 1950)"*

(Queensland Health rat dogs and their handlers, 1900)



"The Lilt of the Tune"



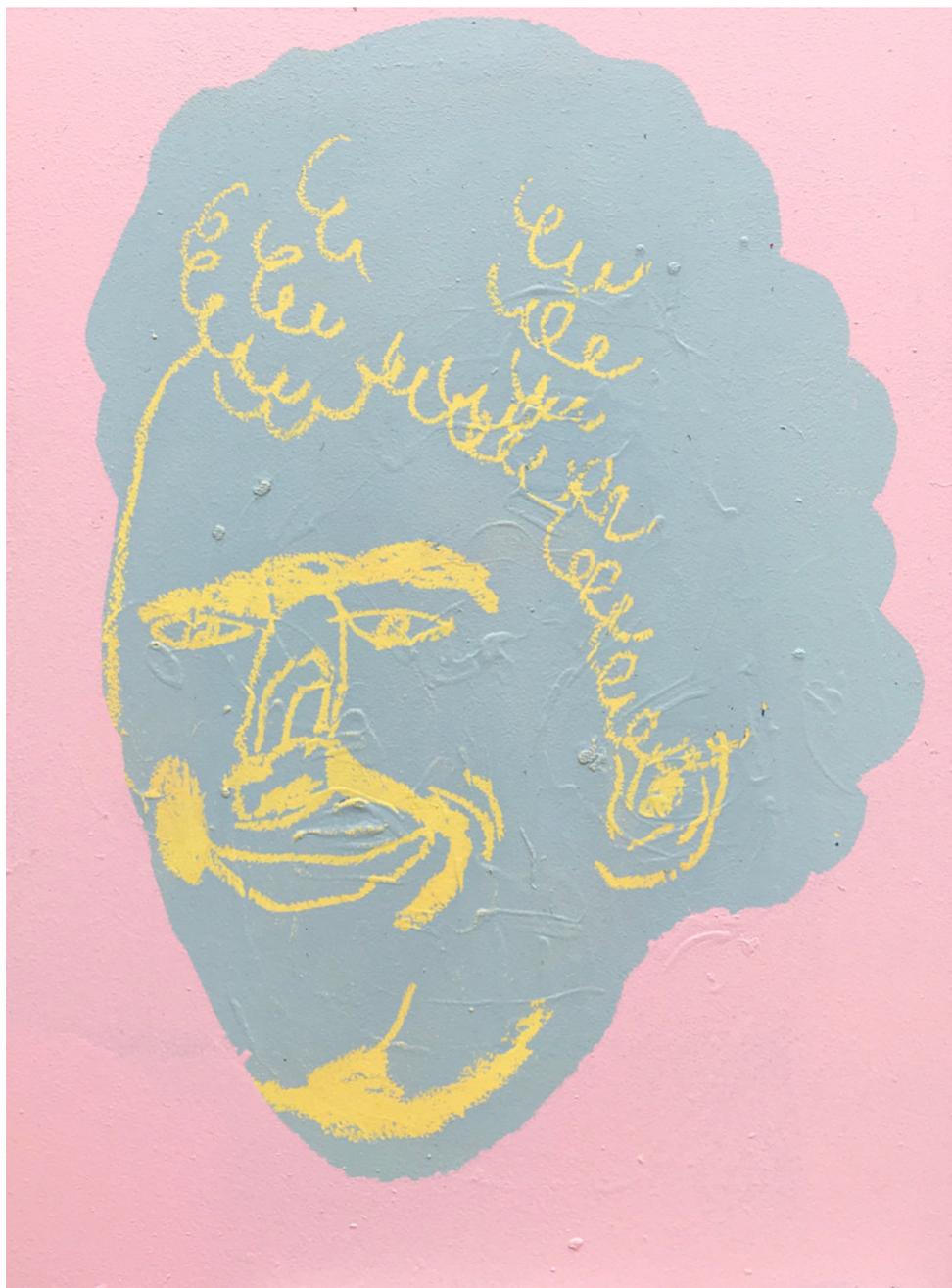
"Oh! Wonderful Night"



"'Twas the Means of His Undoing"



"A Sport Beyond Belief"



*"That's Why I Cry
(Crowd at Warana Festival, 1965)"*



*"Shake it up, Baby (Man in Crowd at Brisbane Airport as The Beatles Touch Down, 1964)"
2022, Acrylic House Paint on Hollow Body Guitar*

front images

*top: "Girls Like That Don't Go For Guys Like Us
(Crowd watching Custard at Livid festival, 1998)"*

*bottom: "Cattle & Cane
(Crowd watching The Go-Betweens at The Zoo, 1995)"*

A selection of artworks from Jack Rodgers's exhibition, "Cheap Seats".

Exhibition dates
5 March – 2 April 2022

Woolloongabba Art Gallery

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