

Exhibition by Ray Coffey

14th - 18th November 2017

Woolloongabba Art Gallery

UPSTAIRS



613 Stanley Street Woolloongabba QLD 4102

Ray Coffey's Surreal Talent

Born in Liverpool during the post-Beatlemania counterculture of the 60s, Ray Coffey realised he might have a talent for drawing when, aged eight, a schoolmate accused him of getting his dad to do his artwork for him. Entirely self-taught, he became a commercial artist at 17, and took his early love of European comic drawings to the world of computer game design. Twenty-five years later, after emigrating to Australia, he decided to change direction and follow a long held dream to be a fine artist. A slew of awards and finalist berths later, including the National Works on Paper, the Black Swan Prize and the Sunshine Coast Art Prize, you'd have to say the risk paid off.

Today, portraiture is Coffey's preferred genre, though his easy fluctuation between hyperrealism and surrealism has led him to a subgenre of entirely his own making. Freakishly talented, he differs from most hyper-realist artists in that he free draws all of his portraits rather than utilising projections and tracings. Attracted to character over beauty, he has no interest in perfect faces, opting instead to draw subjects others might overlook, or not dare to consider. The result is a signature portrait style that elevates the downtrodden and afflicted to positions of respect and self-possession, quietly communicating to his audience that everyone is worthy in his eyes.

His *Homeless Series*, several of which are included in this showcase, is indicative of the work Coffey seeks to create. An exploration of the situations that might lead to a life on the street, each portrait depicts a resident of Brisbane's *139 Club* (a refuge and drop in centre for the city's homeless) which, along with the accompanying story, humanizes and dignifies a much maligned group within society.

Coffey's role in documenting each sitter's story is important, but it is when he looks beyond their current situation to imagine them as stars in impossible worlds – surreal and mythological – that his work really comes to life. It is the sort of work that couldn't possibly be created without deep reflection on determinism and twists of fate, how causation rules destiny, and the sort of genuine empathy for fellow humans that allows alternative endings to be imagined.

His mammoth work *Samuel the Addict*, recently named a finalist in the 2016 National Works on Paper, is one such portrait. Samuel, a thief who broke into many houses including Coffey's, is portrayed floating through space, a golden sphere representing the addiction he is chasing down. But it could just as easily be the Man in the Moon, or a wise old spirit chasing the sun, such is the pathos with which it's drawn.

Now, having completed his most recent work, an immense self-portrait titled *Propaganda*, he appears to have turned this intense exploration inward. The title suggests he's examining his own rhetoric and egotism, though propaganda is the last thing you think of when you meet him. When it comes to Ray Coffey, I don't mind saying that I reckon this guy is the real deal.

Carrie McCarthy

culturalflanerie.com



Steve the drunk 122cm x 61cm

Oil on panel



Propaganda

: ideas or statements that are often false or exaggerated and that are spread in order to help a cause, a political leader, a government, an artist.

166cm x 98cm Charcoal and acrylic on paper



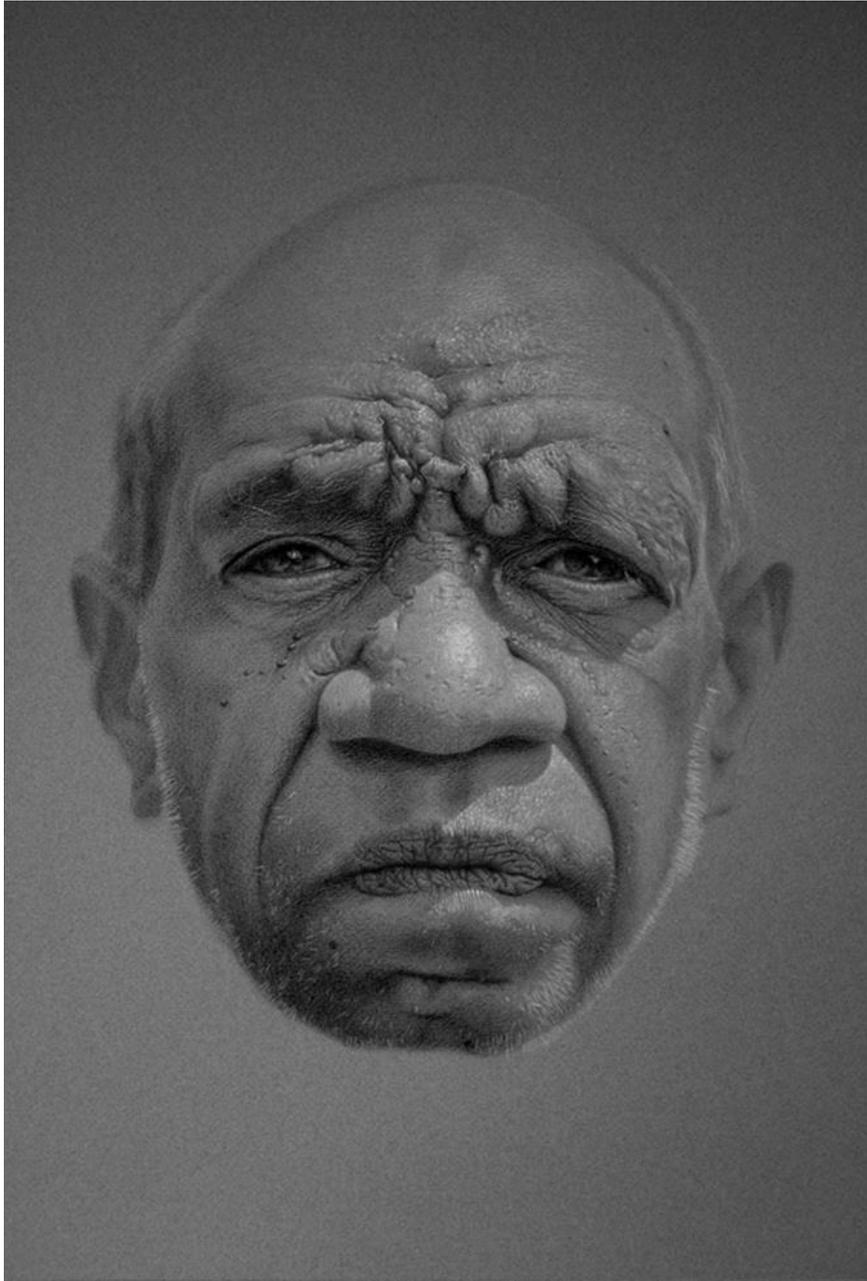
Samuel the Addict

Samuel is an addict. Samuel broke into our house and stole lots of valuable things. Samuel broke into nine other houses and stole lots of valuable things. Samuel was caught by the police who told us he will do anything to get drugs. Samuel was caught then released and reoffended, caught and released and reoffended, caught and released and reoffended, caught and released. Samuel is an addict and it will kill him soon but Samuel's addiction doesn't care.

Charcoal on paper

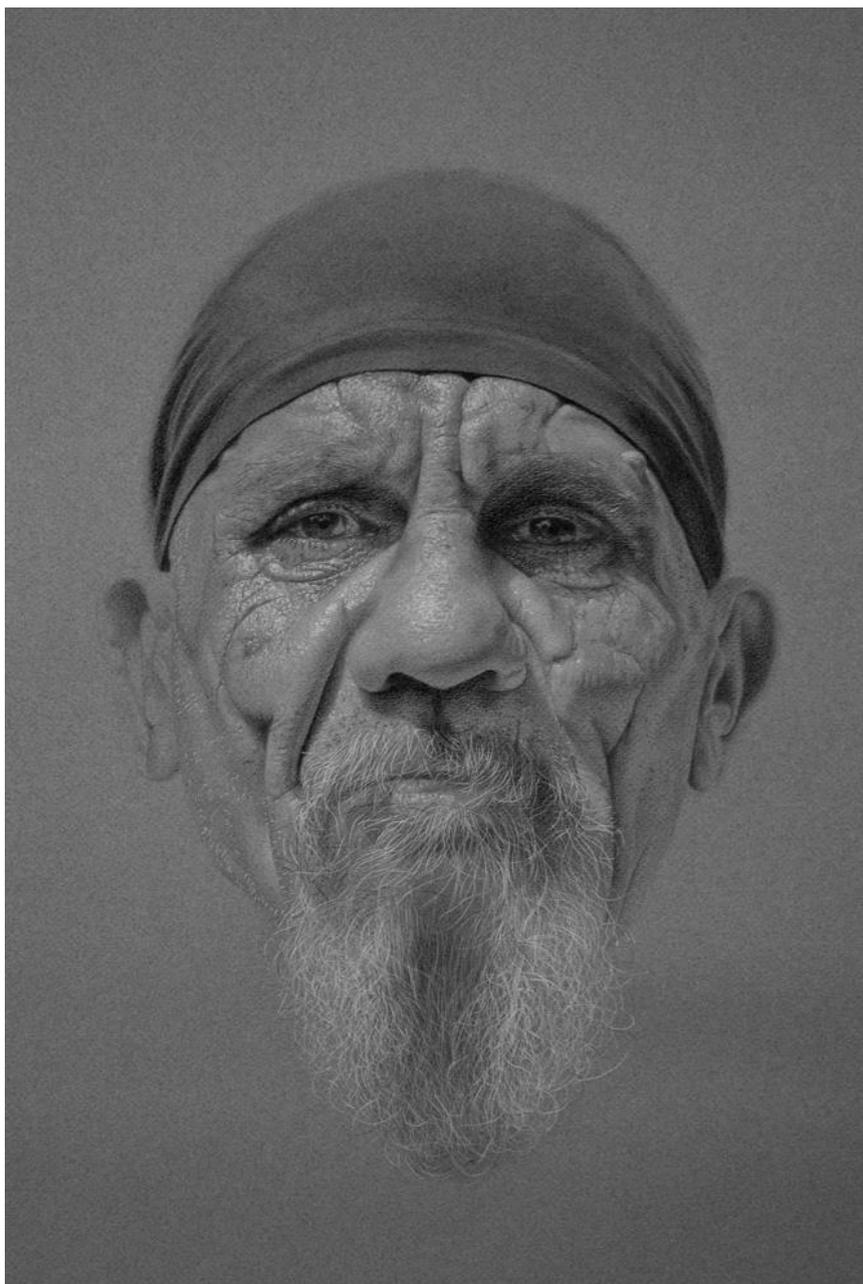
160cm x 98cm





KEVIN: "I was fostered out to a nice family and went to an opportunity school in a small town with one main street. Always waving at the same people. All my mates are married with kids and stuff. I can't stand the four walls. The people who were influential to me, they've all passed away. My heart is mucking up on me. What's the point in whinging. I have everything I need. Bath, shower, feed. I like the way I live."

75cm x 55cm - Charcoal - \$2000



DANIEL: "I was in with a bad crowd. Motor bikes were my thing. We used to go down to Bathurst races but in the end there were too many riots. I was an armed **robber but I haven't been in trouble for over 15 years. I just like spending time** with my daughters now. I was adopted. I had 10 adopted brothers and sisters. I never found my real mum and dad. Everybody else did."

75cm x 55cm - Charcoal - \$2000



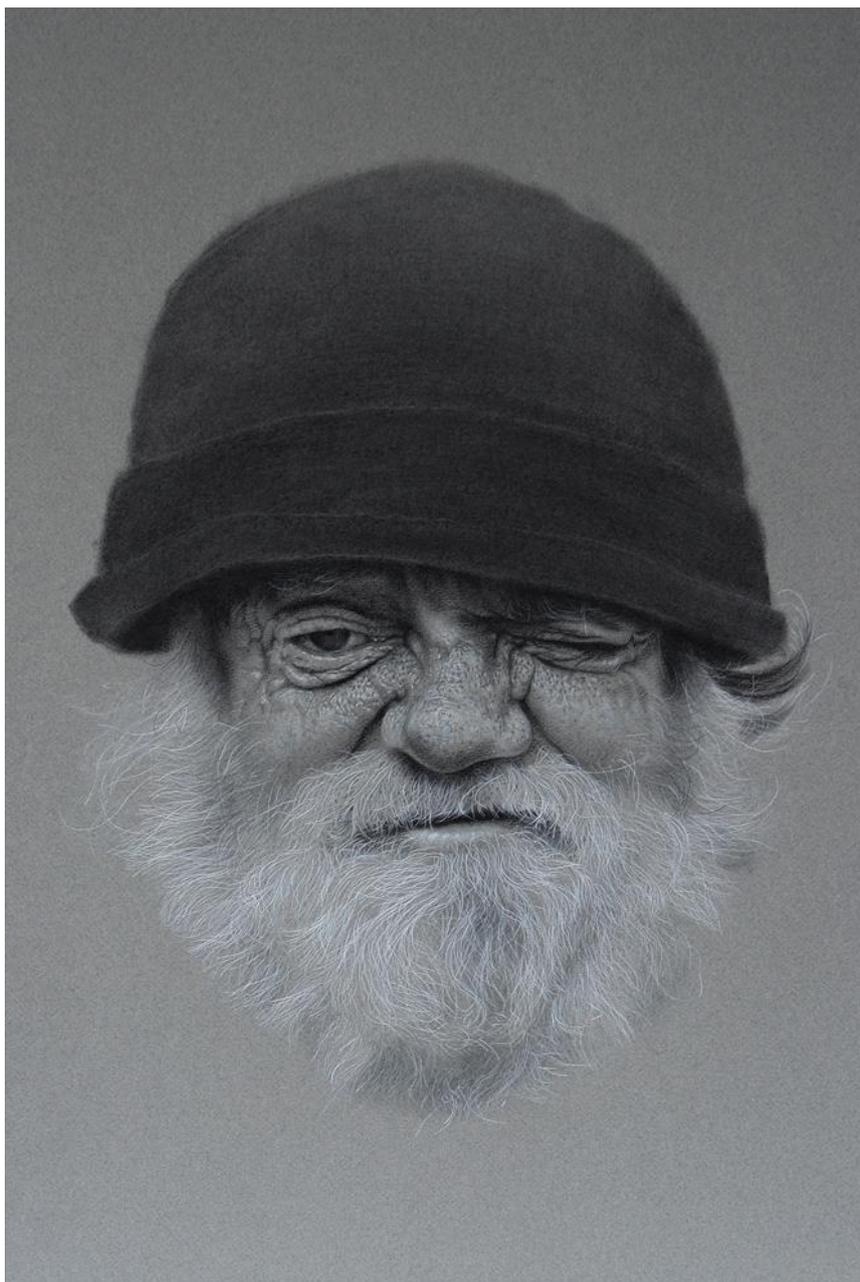
KIM: "They were using Heroin with needles. They said "do you want a shot Kim, you have used before haven't you". I was only 23 and had never used. Just to be in with the crowd I said I had. That was the stupidest thing I'd done in my life. That night was the beginning of the most horrific tortuous life anyone could ask for. You don't think you are going to get addicted."

75cm x 55cm - Charcoal - \$2000



JOANNE: "My husband was mentally abusing me. I just couldn't take it anymore. I wanted to be independent. He kept putting me down. I just wanted out. My family hasn't supported me much. When I had my son they didn't give me much support then either. I was in a boarding house for 18 months. I asked for a transfer as some bloke there wouldn't leave me alone, calling me all the names under the sun. I'm in community housing now for 7 years. I'm on a disability pension as I suffer with anxiety. I'm not too bad now. I'm grateful for all I've got. I'd rather sleep on the streets than go back to a boarding house"

75cm x 55cm - Charcoal - \$2000

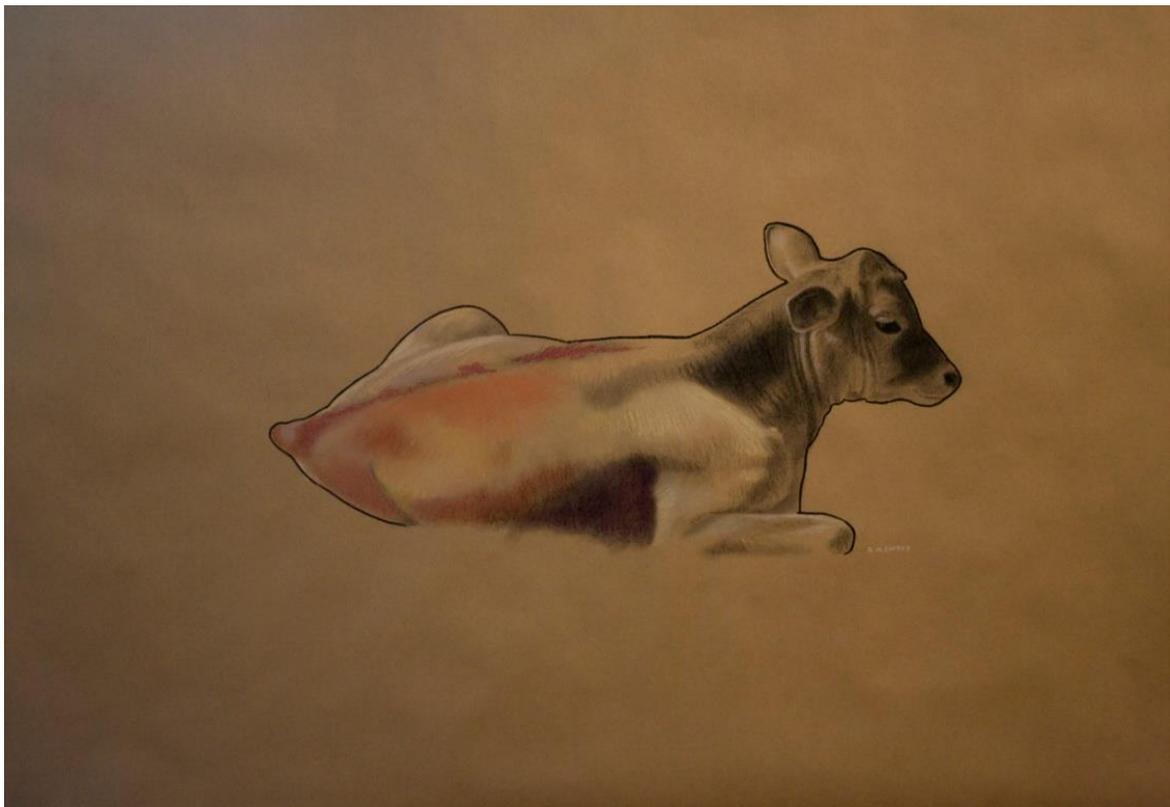


ERNIE: "I went to look for him twice with the picture in the back of the car. I really wanted him to see it. All I found was a bag of neatly folded newspapers, an empty **coke bottle and a few clothes. I don't know if he sleeps there but he sits there** sometimes. The river is nearby. I wonder why he chooses here, a car park under a railway bridge near a factory that smells of sour milk. I went down to the river. I **thought I'd ask the men down there if they'd seen him. But they've all gone too. No trace of blankets and boxes. Maybe that's why he likes the car park.**" Ray Coffey

75cm x 55cm - Charcoal - \$2000



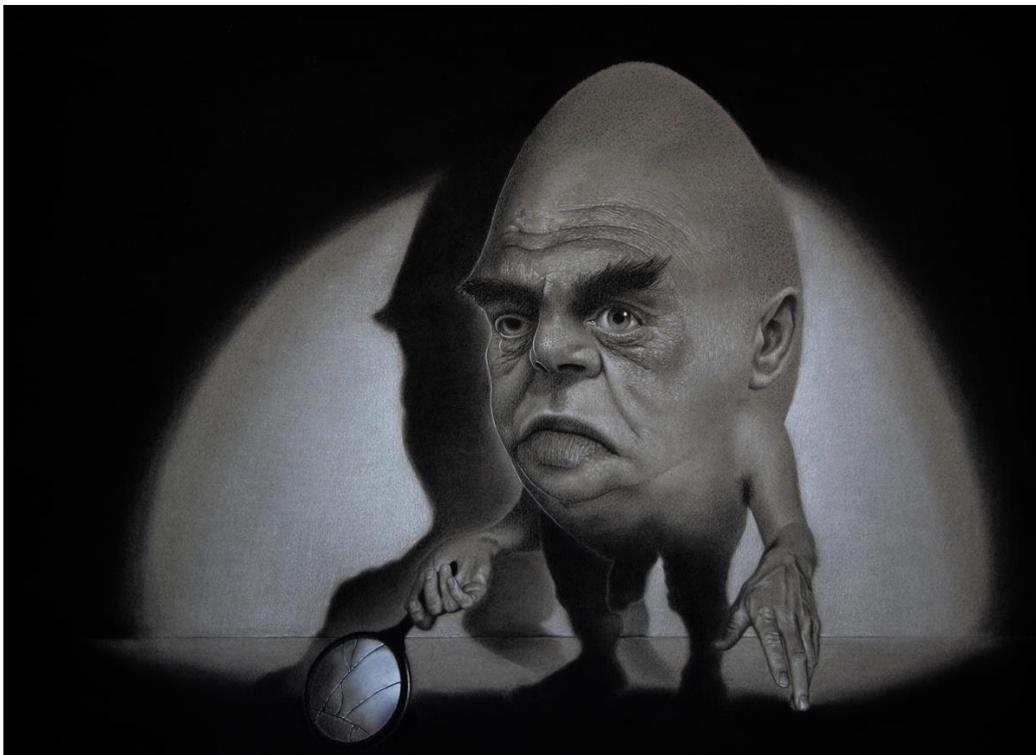
Sheep - Pastel - 60cm x 86cm \$250



Calf - Pastel - 60cm x 86cm \$250



Green Fly - Oil on panel - 26cm 21cm
\$500



The Premonition - charcoal - 52cm x 65cm
\$900



oh Ray, that is me to a "T"The eyes are amazing and the rest is agony.

I have had a severe depressive illness for most of my adult life and in particular in 2012.

The colours and the strokes scream the anguish I have suffered.

Dominatrix - 75cm x 55cm - Charcoal - \$650



Boy Beneath - Charcoal - \$200



Girl from Zambia - charcoal and pastel - \$500



Cloud Study 1 - pastel - \$100



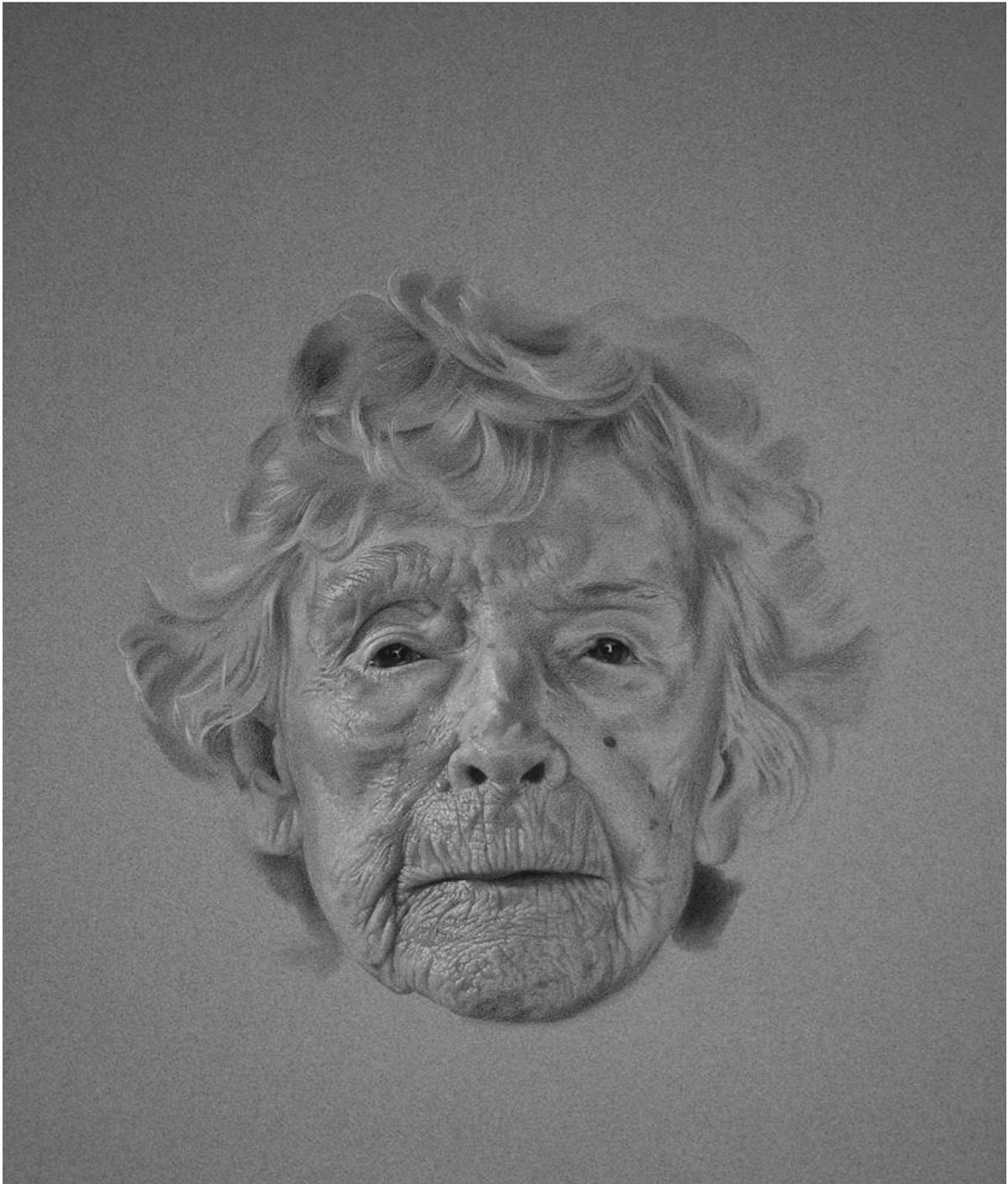
Cloud Study 2 - pastel - \$100



Cloud Study 3 - pastel - \$100



Hand Study - chalk - \$150



People's 'peaceful lives were shattered' by Russia's invasion: "People disappeared. They took thousands to Siberia ... We were married the last day before the Russians closed all the churches". We 'bade farewell to family ... on 26 October 1940, the start of a long journey via the Trans-Siberian Railway' ... "I was very sad to leave. I was going further and further away, and I didn't know if I'll ever see it again. I was thinking I hope the Russians won't stay long, and maybe by some miracle Lithuania will be free again". In Australia, "I never saw such beautiful flowering trees before".

(Extract from Eve Puodziunaite Wicks, 2015, unpublished manuscript).

Karla - 75cm x 55cm - Charcoal - \$900