



# JACK RODGERS

## Gabba Dogs

## **Q&A with Llewellyn Millhouse & Jack Rodgers**

*LM: Watching and betting on greyhound racing is not a common pursuit amongst contemporary artists, the "doggies" are often associated with backwardness or cultural cringe. What is it about greyhound racing that drew you to capture these characters?*

JR: When researching a new project, I'm most interested in inherited nostalgia, not nostalgia for my own lived experiences. In the past I have mostly dug up easy things like concerts that people have fond memories of, etc. The difference with *Gabba Dogs* is that I was interested in the nostalgia for something that is no longer acceptable or worse, not cool! It was the cultural cringe that drew me to the Woolloongabba dog track because it does seem very dated and backwards.

Although they aren't my memories, I do describe my paintings as "events I wish I'd seen". At times that has been very literal and specific like Woodstock or the Apollo 11 launch. *Gabba Dogs* feels different in that it is looking at the more morally ambiguous effects of nostalgia on our identity. The mid-70s was a corrupt and seedy time in Queensland and I thought digging into the characters from the Woolloongabba dog track was a good place to start researching this period of our history.

*LM: Often your characters appear indifferent to the gaze of the viewer. How do you see your relationship to these people, do you identify with them?*

JR: I am using a face to show the viewer not what it looked like to experience a time or place but what it felt like and how it affected this person. I'm not sure if the viewer responds to it in the same way I do when I'm making it, but the clues are there.

I kept coming back to Nolan's portraits of coal miners while I was putting this show together, I feel like I can smell the dirt and ciggies in those paintings. You start off looking at the surface of a painting but eventually you're transported to the back of a truck in Kalgoorlie.

I do build an intimate connection with each face while painting them even though the line drawing aspect of the painting process happens very quickly. While I am working, I am looking for a way to see something reflected in the eyes of the witness. I'm trying to tell you the story by showing you the person who saw it, not by showing you a literal representation of the event.

*LM: Your work captures fleeting emotional states and behaviours with a clarity that evokes a narrative universe, rather than depicting any particular narrative unfolding through time. Can you speak to your attraction to 'the softer edges of an anecdote', as opposed to more didactic or concrete narrative painting?*

JR: Narrative universe is a good way of describing it – I think all these characters belong within a narrative but I'm not going to lay the story out. That's for the viewer.

'Narrative universe' reminds me of an essay about Adam Cullen that described all the characters in his paintings as living in one mythical place called Loserville. I think *Gabba Dogs* has a similar quality to it. I'm not interested in drawing one

specific, didactic narrative out for people, but all the ingredients are there for some good stories.

That's what I mean by the softer edges of an anecdote, I don't feel responsible to tie the paintings to specific historical research as I have in the past.

*LM: Place seems important to this body of work, do you feel like these paintings could be made from photographs of anywhere in Australia, or is there a particular Brisbane-ness or even Woolloongabba-ness to these works?*

JR: The thing I find enjoyable about a topic like this is specificity. In digging into the specifics of a story it actually becomes more relatable. In the case of *Gabba Dogs*, the viewer may have no interest in greyhound racing, to the location of Woolloongabba or even to the era I am talking about. What the viewer might be able to do is draw a line between this body of work and other outdated aspects of their culture that they are nostalgic for because of connections to family, place etc. The uniquely Queensland details are what make this body of work interesting to me. It's the Queensland context of the police corruption and folklore about fixed races and dodgy bookies that shapes this location and its story.

*LM: Since around 2010, many Queensland Millennials have embraced a nostalgic and ironic Australiana as a way to articulate a complex national identity. How do you see your practice fitting into this larger cultural shift?*

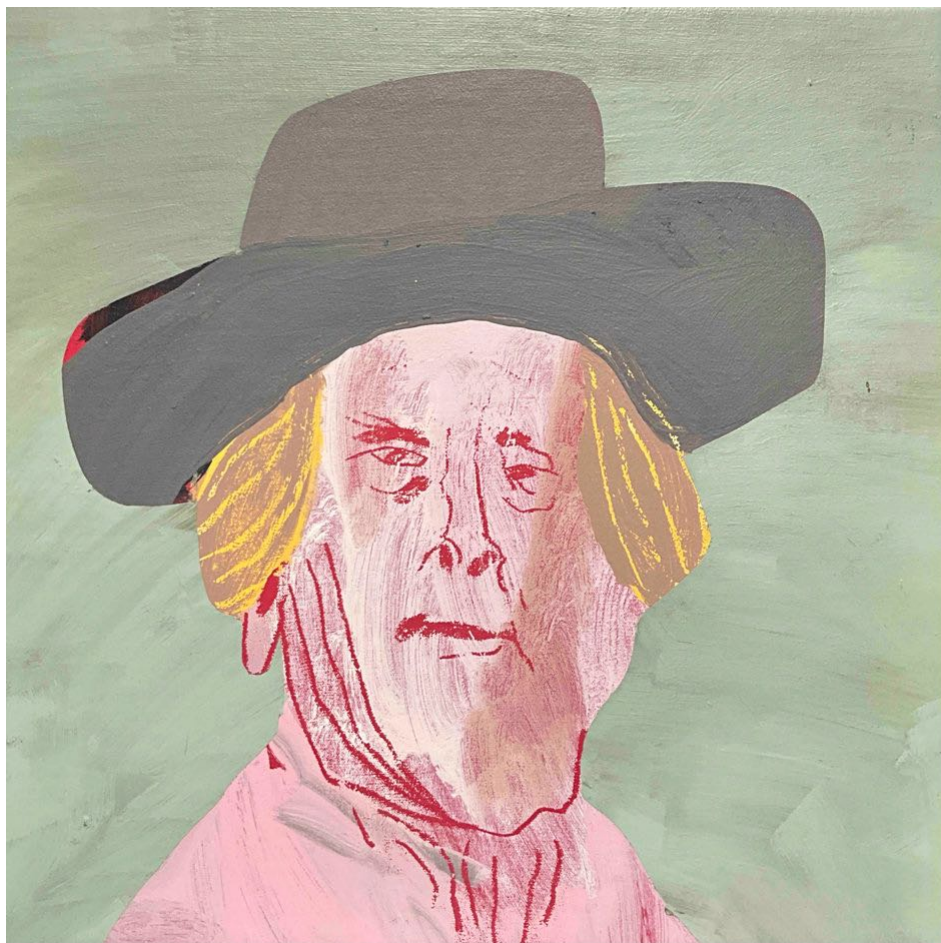
JR: It's natural to be nostalgic about things within your lived experience, particularly your youth, but nostalgia for a time you haven't experienced is a big part of Australian culture. The attraction to kitsch and irony is that it helps to disarm Australia's distaste for straight faced nationalism and open us up for broader conversations about our identity and who we want to be when we grow up.

It's easier to fantasise about a time before your own because there is no burden of context. You're being passed down that oral history and you're inheriting the rose-tinted glasses, even the bad bits were good. To find out that those times weren't good for everyone involved is part of what's happening culturally at the moment in Australia, we're having a hard look at ourselves, and it can be a bit unsettling.

*LM: The period documented in Gabba Dogs roughly coincides with our parent's lives before having children, and also with the Joh years, can you talk about your relationship to this period of Queensland history?*

JR: Our political history from the Joh days is a big influence on my practice because it's a great example of what I call inherited nostalgia.

I'm attracted to that time frame because it's just out of reach for us, but we have access to those who were there and their war stories. People who experienced that era describe it as a conservative and boring time to be a young person and the fact that it was also so violent and corrupt gave them something to rally against. My practice boils down to getting excited and nostalgic for a time I didn't even experience.



*Farm Strong* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 61 cm



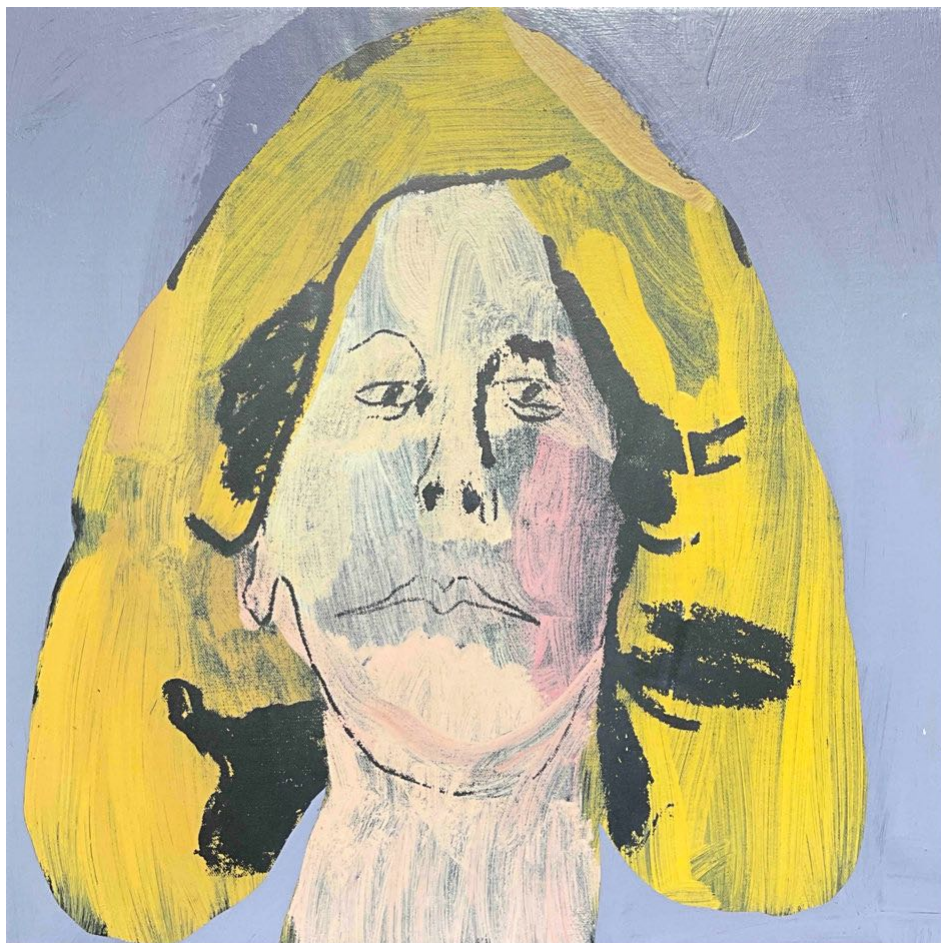


*Late Scratching* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 61 cm



*Carbine Stout* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 61 cm



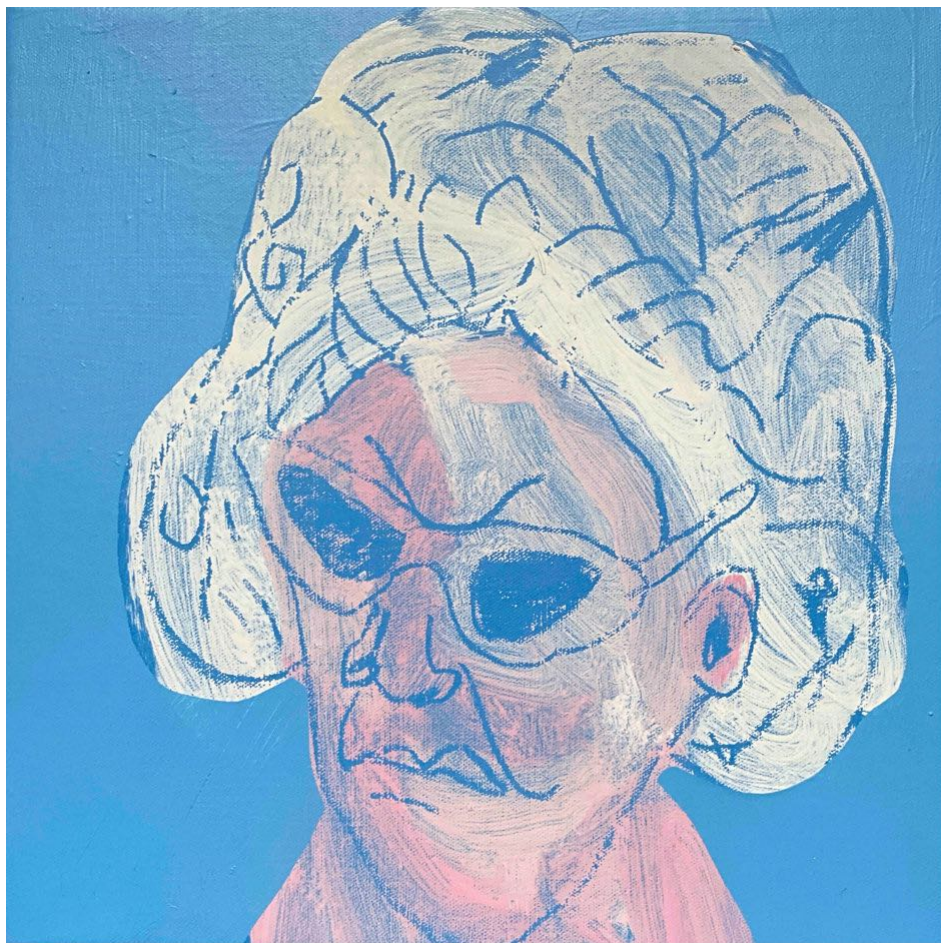


*Ten To One 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 61 cm*



*Dish Licker* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 61 cm





*The Bookies Wife* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 40 cm



*Odds-On 2024*, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 40 cm





*Blue Rinse* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 40 cm





*Outpaced* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 40 cm



*Disputed Lead 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 50 × 50 cm*



*The Favourite* 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 40 cm





*Money Wont Bring Happiness 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 40 × 40 cm*



*Railed On The Run Up 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 92 × 92 cm*

Exhibition dates  
**4 June - 29 June 2024**



**Woolloongabba Art Gallery**

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