

*The new 'clusters' series by Rachel Coad*

# pack

Australians in London

May 25 – June 6, 2009

Gallery 27  
27 Cork Street  
Mayfair, London

### SUBJECTS

ADAM, ADELAIDE, SA  
MELISSA, BRISBANE, QLD  
LUCY, PERTH, WA  
STUART, SYDNEY, NSW  
REBECCA , PERTH, WA  
JOE, SYDNEY, NSW  
DARRYL, SYDNEY, NSW

‘Pack’ is a collection of new oil portraits  
by Rachel Coad.

The exhibition is part of Coad’s trademark  
‘Clusters’ series, in which she creates soulful  
paintings of ordinary people. In ‘Pack’, it’s seven  
young Australians who have made the well worn  
pilgrimage from Australia to live and  
work in London.

‘Clusters’ also refers to the multiple panels with  
which Coad works. Up to nine canvases  
make up each finished piece.

Rachel Coad lives in Fremantle, Western Australia.

## ESSAY BY DAVID BROMFIELD

Rachel Coad makes some faces so large you might wander across them for days. This may indeed be part of her purpose, for the face can be and often is a landscape, a map, an involuntary record of incidents and events. In any case it is appropriate. These are faces of seven young Australians living overseas that she met during a six week sojourn in London. They are no longer expatriates. In these deterritorialised, globalised times Kangaroo Valley is no more. These travellers are at home everywhere or nowhere. Even so in practice mateship and other virtues survive.

It was once believed that one's face was always, literally, one's fortune, that physiognomy was destiny. This almost

became a science but dwindled in the nineteenth century to the frequent observation that a murderer had always had the face of a hanged man or, more recently, that, in his last few performances, Jimi Hendrix had the face of the dead. The portrait of Dorian Gray could live his entire life out for him.

Coad may be working with a similar conceit. There are no hanged men here, but there is the face of Darryl an accountant, a 'lovely man', who was having bad luck wherever he went as Coad discovered during her sittings with him. He was . . . robbed in Spain, again in Italy and a third time in the UK ... but he has wonderful stories of fellow Aussies lending him money, their couch and a helping hand when he needed it. He

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also proudly announced himself a 'real Australian' which he followed with an extraordinary story of his great grandmother who was Aboriginal and who fell pregnant to a station owner in NSW and was then abandoned.

Coad records her conversations with her subjects during their sittings. As she photographs and sketches them, the creative history of the portrait, the ensemble of choices, movement, marks and materials which make it up, merges with their stories in a remarkable rediscovery of the rhetoric of portraiture, of the presence of the subject as one of many narratives within culture.

She proceeds through sketches and photographs, tightly detailed prelimi-

nary studies, towards the large, looser, finished paintings to the point at which the two stories become one. As one's eye travels across Coad's faces, it encounters all the decisive moments of the work mapped out in marks. Nine separate panels make up Coad's large images, the artist occasionally swaps them in or out of the work as seems appropriate. The partial grid so formed further encourages the viewer to see them as a map rather than a form.

This is indeed portraiture, the full presence of a person in an unending flow of dialogue. One thinks of Warhol chatting amiably to Ethel Scull as he dropped nickels endlessly into the photo-mat machine that was making

her portrait, almost certainly the very last one before the catastrophe of photo-realism.

Coad began this ambitious project in part to investigate the practical changes in the various myths of Australian identity brought about by globalisation. It is easy to accuse her of a naive expressionism, of over privileging the personal. There is another story. Deleuze and Guattari believed that the face was always a horror story, the place where the psycho-dynamics and narrative of identity come face to face with the ultimate crack up. Perhaps the face is always and ever a cultural construction, the final fragile frontier against self-knowledge. If life still imitates art, Coad is on to a winner.

ADAM  
25  
INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER  
ADELAIDE, SA  
MET AT THE CHURCH NIGHT CLUB

It's pretty hard, you know, to break up with your girlfriend and go travelling for who knows how long. My parents were pretty supportive. My Dad was a little more hesitant. He said I should think about what I want to do for the rest of my life. But now every time I speak to him he's like, 'Yeah, you've never wasted any time, good on you.'

I wasn't much of a fan of the place really. I just thought it was going to be too similar to home, without the beach culture, so I wasn't really that keen to spend much time here. But I'm going travelling to Portugal and Spain for some surfing and stuff, and I'm a bit sad to leave actually. Yeah, it's grown on me a bit.

“...When I arrived I slept on a friend's floor for two months. Then she left to do some more travelling, and I took over her room.”

I did design at Uni but it's pretty competitive over here, and so expensive, so I just started doing some labouring.

“...And I've had a mate, a Perth guy, sleeping on my floor for 2 months. He's taking over my room so it's all worked out sweet”

From: adam  
Subject: Re: art project Adam  
Date: 14 September 2008 12:31:41 AM  
To: rachelc@aapt.net.au

Hey Rachel,  
I've been travelling around Portugal for the last two months in my van, The WOMB. It's been sweet. Good weather, surf and fun times.  
Cheers  
Adz

3 December 2008

Hey there,  
I just arrived back to Adelaide last night. First time I had seen my folks in 2 years. Scared the shit out of them - they weren't expecting me for another 2 weeks!  
Speak soon,  
Adz



THE CHURCH (Adam)  
300cm x 210cm  
MIXED MEDIA  
2008

MELISSA

25

PR MARKETING CONSULTANT

BRISBANE, QLD

MET AT THE RUGBY

My first couple of weeks was a kind of mix. There were some really hostile ‘get out of my way’ type of people, but then someone helped me with my bags.

There’s a mixture of reasons why I came to London. I grew up on a cane farm in Mackay in Queensland. Pretty much my whole life was there. But my Mum’s family is from Malta and my Dad’s side is German, so I thought I may as well go and see the world a bit.

London is a good base to see the rest of Europe, and I had a bunch of friends who had already come over.

It is quite expensive. You know, you’ve got no income for a while. You want to enjoy London but you kind of need money to do that, so it’s a bit of a Catch 22.

“They call us FOBs – Fresh off the Boat. You do feel like a fish out of water when you first get here.”

“At the airport, Dad had tears in his eyes – but he didn’t actually cry.

When it was time to say goodbye to Mum and she was just bawling her eyes out – all mothers do I guess”

I left my fish behind for them too. Hopefully it doesn’t die. It’s one of those Siamese Fighter Fish. I’d be really sad if he died, but he’s a bit of a trouper.



RUGBY (Melissa)  
102cm x 182cm  
OIL ON LINEN  
2008

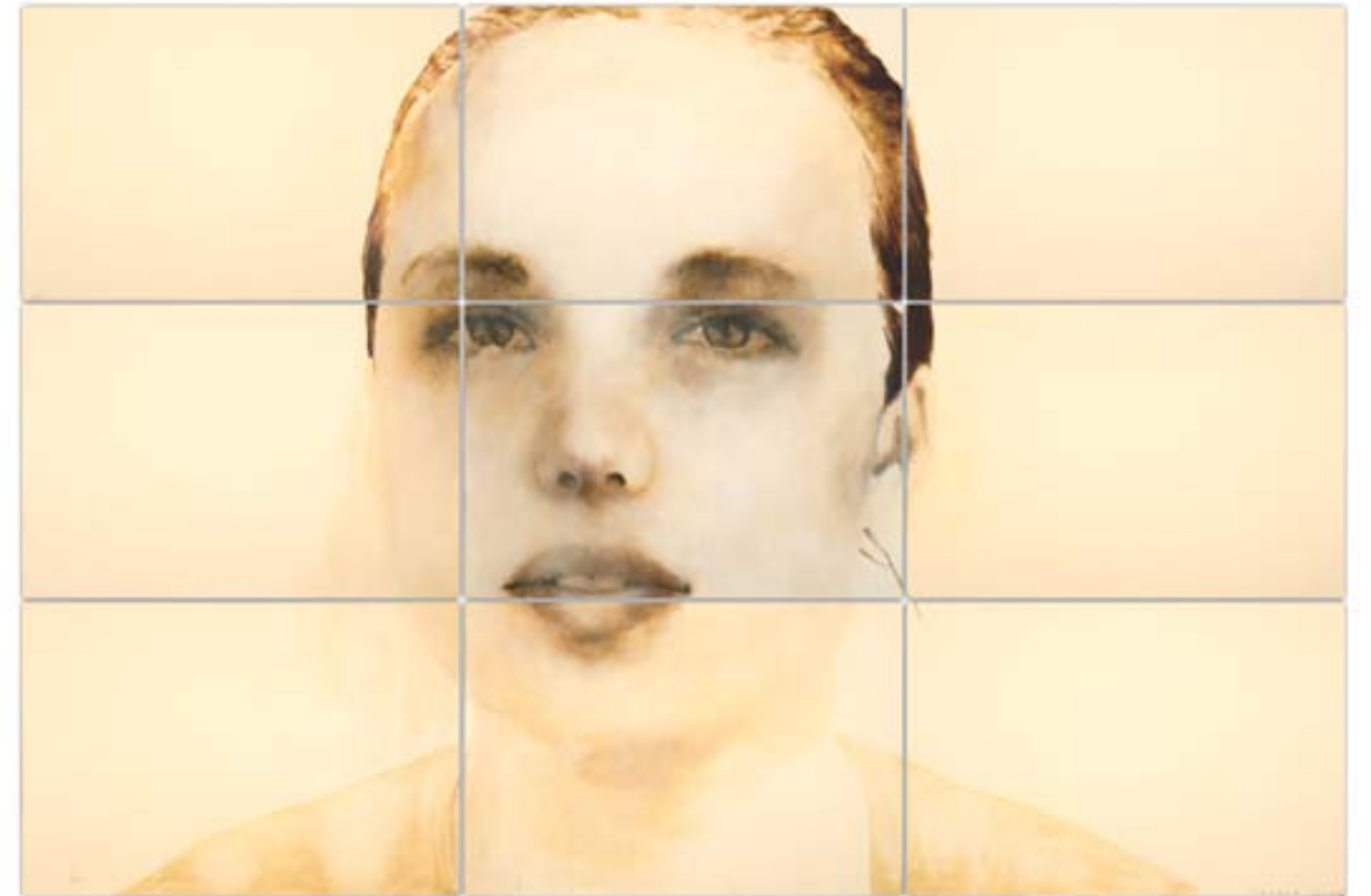
LUCY  
22  
SOUND ENGINEER  
PERTH, WA  
LIVES WITH REBECCA

Bec came over two weeks before me. I found that a bit difficult because originally it was just me who was going, and I said to Bec, 'You should come, it will get us away from Perth.'

Then she started the journey without me. I was kind of sad, but that's the way things turned out. Once I got over here, for about four months we were inseparable. I got her a job in the pub I was working at, and we were sharing a room together. It was just me and Becky, we did everything together. But after that we kind of just went our separate ways. It was weird.

Mum knew I was never going to stay in Perth. Whether I went to Sydney or London, she knew it was going to happen.

I remember the day of the liquid bomb scare at Heathrow. They were at on like High Terror alert. I wasn't allowed my i-pod or my cigarettes, I was only allowed my passport, my ticket and my money. You had to take your shoes off and there were dudes with massive machine guns. The lines for Departure went all the way around Heathrow. It was crazy.



NOTTING HILL  
CARNIVAL (Lucy)  
195cm x 285cm  
MIXED MEDIA  
2008

STUART

32

MANAGER OF THE PRINCE OF TEK, EARLS COURT

SYDNEY, NSW

LIVES ABOVE THE PUB

I went to Belfast for a year because I didn't want to come to London. In Coogee, where I'm from in Sydney, there's Brits everywhere. I was a bit anti-British when I left. I went to Greece for a job which didn't work out, but my sister was here so I sort of came here by default and absolutely loved it. I can't see myself leaving in the near future.

I will go back to Oz, but if that takes another year or another 8 or 9 years I couldn't tell you.

Since the London bombings there's a general feeling that people are more politically aware, and they're taking precautions.

I remember that day. It was my girlfriend's 21st birthday. I used to go from Kentish Town to Kings Cross to Edgware Road. There were bombs on both those routes. It was a real shock. It was similar to when the World Trade Centre got hit. Everyone was just walking around dazed for days afterwards. It was just really freaked.



THE PUBLICAN (Stuart)  
130cm x 190cm  
MIXED MEDIA  
2008

REBECCA  
22  
MASSEUSE  
PERTH, WA  
LIVES WITH LUCY

I didn't really know anyone at all when I got here. I stayed in central London in a pub. Then I started working in a pub with Lucy. That was heaps of fun. We just partied and worked and partied.

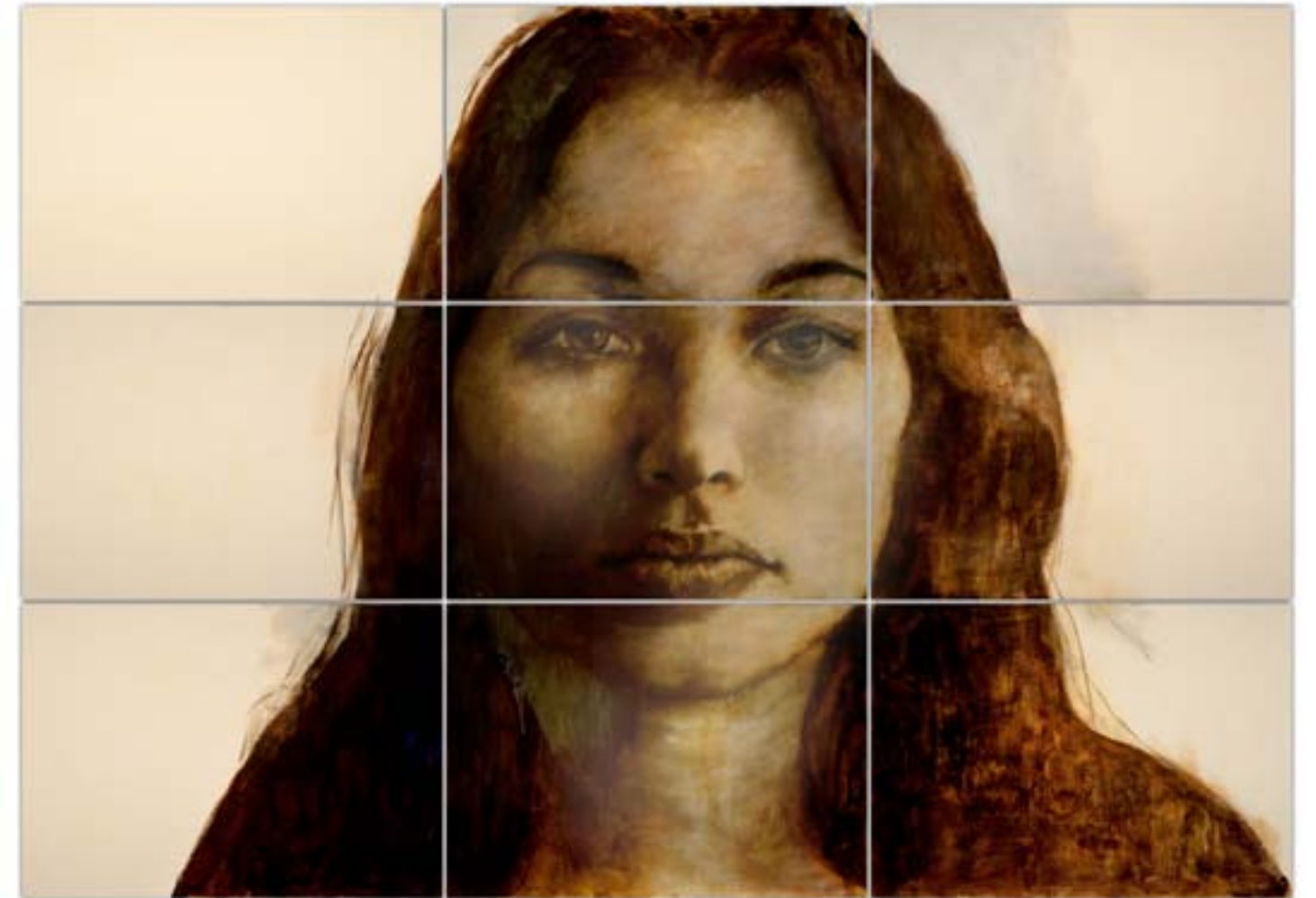
We were going out mainly in Brixton, which is renowned for being dodgy and violent. The advice we got was 'Just keep your head down and don't make eye contact with anyone. Make sure you look like you know where you're going. If you look like you're lost, forget it.'

I personally would never bring up children in London. Never. Some of the kids in this place are scary... they have no respect at all.

**It's like the Heathrow Injection.. You get to Heathrow, they take your tan and give you 5 kilograms!**

When I first came over I was like a Size 8. I went up to a Size 14.  
I've lost a bit but I'm still bigger than I was.

**You can't go to the beach either. Sometimes I sunbake outside, reading my book in my bikini, pretending. It gets really hot and I just want to jump in the water, but I have to come in and have a cold shower instead.**



BRIXTON (Rebecca)  
300cm x 210cm  
MIXED MEDIA  
2009

JOE  
25  
WAITER, SKATER  
BONDI, NSW  
MARRIED TO JULIE

We had to leave Australia and do things off shore to get my wife (from New Caledonia) back into the country, and we got kind of stuck in London. It's more expensive than I expected, and a bit colder. I'm missing home a bit, but my wife would like to charge off to the US after this. She wants to go see Hollywood. I'd prefer New York.

Dad thinks London's a dirty hole but says I have to experience it for myself.

We got here and had 2 days of hell trying to find some place to stay. I tried all the backpackers. Dragging 20 kilograms of luggage around central London, that was fun.

The one on the neck? I got that done in New Zealand, just after we got married there. The rest of my tats I got in Sydney.



JULIE (JOE)  
130cm x 190cm  
MIXED MEDIA  
2008

DARRYL  
27  
ACCOUNTANT  
SYDNEY, NSW  
FRIEND OF MELISSA

I can't tan to save my life... but I'm a 'real' Australian. Everyone jokes about me... I'm as white as can be.

My great, great grandma was an Aboriginal maid who had an affair with the man of the house. She got pregnant but he already had several kids to several wives and he disowned the child. It's such a tragic story but there's so many like that.

I spent \$1200 on excess luggage to get from Sydney to London. Then on the train in Rome I got pick pocketed.

**.. even the day I got robbed I was still telling everyone what a great time I was having..**

I met this woman and she's like 'you lost your passport but I've got money, so how about I buy you a beer'. She sort of saved me for a couple of hours. Then I ran into another friend from Sydney who looked after me. I got introduced to her friend and she just kept throwing money at me, giving me 50 euro or whatever, telling me I could pay her back later.

**When I finally got my first pay cheque after 5 months, I booked to go to Pamplona. On the morning of the opening ceremony I got pick pocketed again.**

I got evicted from my house, and two days later my work gave me a week's notice that I'd no longer be needed. Before that I had my expensive watch taken from my wrist. This week I'm looking for place to live and a job. I love London!



I LOVE LONDON (Darryl)  
300cm x 210cm  
MIXED MEDIA  
2008

**SPECIAL THANKS**

JOHN AND GLORIA Mc MAHON  
JANE AND GEOFFREY GESTETNER  
LORRAINE COAD  
MEGAN ANDERSON  
CHRIS RYDER



[www.rachelcoad.com.au](http://www.rachelcoad.com.au)

“...an extraordinary gift combined with a level of maturity that captures the personality and character of her subjects. There is nothing tentative or timid about her work. The results are emotive and thought provoking.”

*– Norah Ohrt, Perth Galleries, Sotheby's representative, Western Australia*