

# State Preparation

Paintings by Amanda Davies





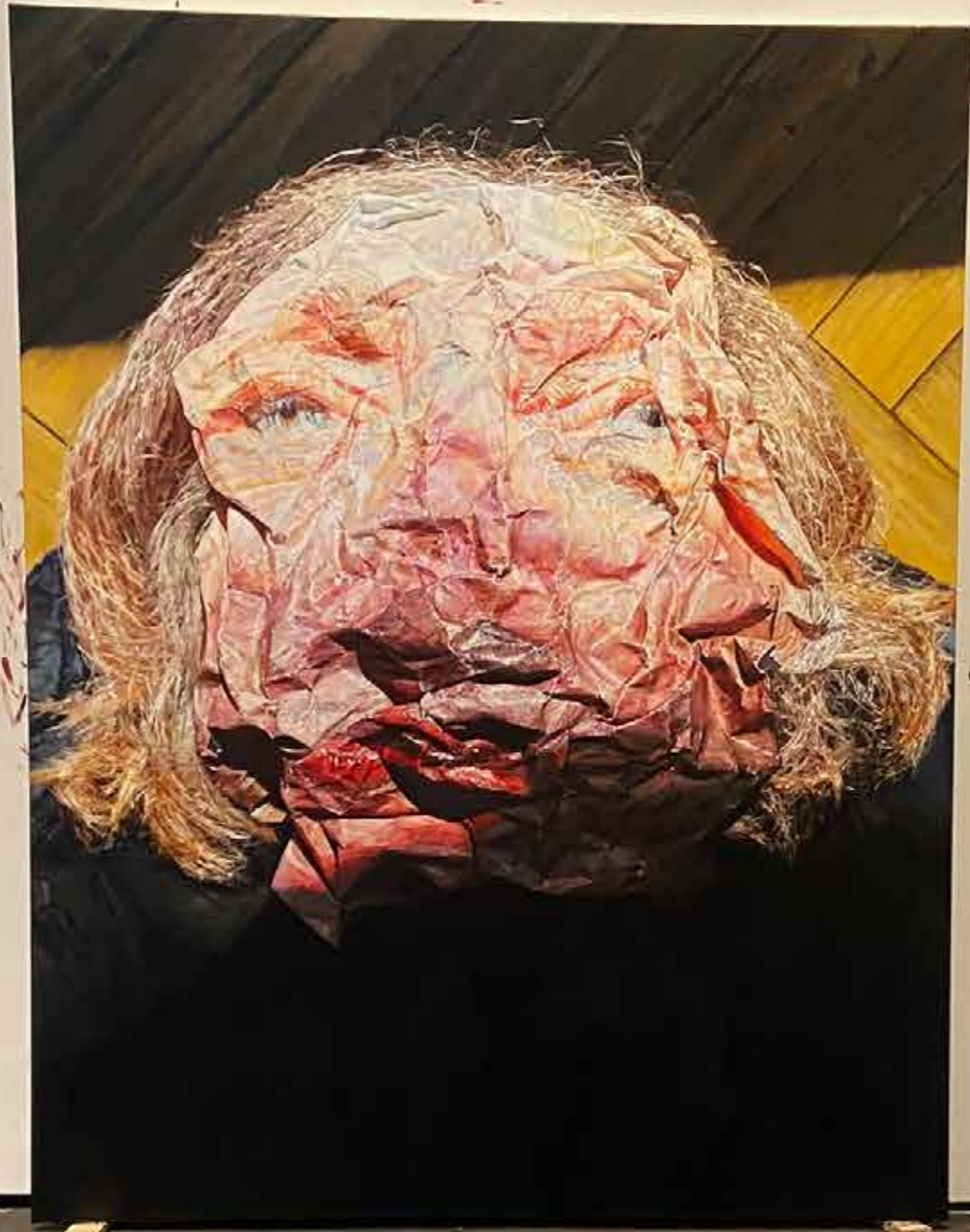
In 2020, a large-scale portrait of Penny Clive was completed in the artist's studio at Premaydena, Tasmania. Its completion initiated an extended conversation that led to a Detached Cultural Organisation Artist Residency, held from November 2020 to February 2023. Titled *More Beautiful Than They Think*, the residency has culminated in a sustained body of work focused on the portraiture of a single sitter: Penny Clive AO — Tasmanian philanthropist, environmentalist, and patron of the arts and sciences. A catalogue created following the residency includes essays by Craig Judd, Eliza Burke and Keely Jobe, documentation by Rémi Chauvin and designed by Cath Robinson.

*State Preparation* brings together more than forty paintings produced during and following the residency, presented together for the first time. Drawing on a term from quantum physics, the exhibition title refers to the process of conditioning a system so that meaningful observation can occur. In this context, the phrase operates as a metaphor for portraiture as a practice of readiness, attention, and duration.

Rather than seeking a definitive likeness, the works approach portraiture as an evolving relationship. Each painting records a particular moment — a shift in expression, mood, or presence — shaped by time, trust, and sustained engagement between artist and sitter. Individually, the works function as discrete encounters; collectively, they form an accumulation of states rather than a single resolved image.

Seen as a whole, *State Preparation* resists the conventions of the singular portrait. Meaning emerges through repetition and return, revealing portraiture not as an act of capture, but as an ongoing process of becoming.

*Penny Clive*, 2022, oil on linen, 40 x 30 x 3.5cm



## Brave Faces

*State Preparation* exhibits a cycle of paintings made over two years, the results of a Detached Cultural Organisation Artist Residency *More Beautiful Than They Think*. This exhibition continues Davies rigorous examination of the processes of representational illusionism, that is the creation of recognisable human and natural observed spaces and forms on a flat surface using techniques and materials employed by artists since the 1420's. *State Preparation's* key focus is the portraiture, but here the torpor of history and tradition that clings to this genre is audaciously discombobulated.

Portraiture is where one person closely observes another "to capture a likeness". The very best of such likenesses are said to contain the truth or spirit the essence of the observed subject. In western European art reverence given to the portrait can be traced back to Ancient Rome when in their prime (around 30–40 years old) members of the elite would have wax impressions made of their faces. Carefully stored until their death these impressions were then copied and worn by members of the family and paid actors in the funeral procession so the general public could see again the deceased subject in their best light.

It is significant that the portrait genre emerges and takes flight against the backdrop of the traumas of the Black Death (bubonic plague) 1347 - literally memento-mori's artists were commissioned to paint recently deceased or dead relatives. Artists gave life and comfort to those that remained alive. Portraits made at this time were small in scale, able to be held and contemplated in the hands some even worn close to the body. The subject is presented in the best possible light. These are bodies composed as glittering fiction - upright, contained, skin taut and unblemished. Aided by craft-based discoveries

and development of oil painting techniques which allowed more subtle or "real" luminous effects, the best are said to have their own magic where the eye is teased cajoled overwhelmed by a wow-factor of beautifully wrought details such as individual hairs or shimmering silks, velvets. Artists were expected to make their subject look more glamorous, more alive with tricks of lighting, setting and accoutrements. Living subjects were eventually deemed appropriate subjects for portraits the great and the good generally did not want images of themselves and family members to display the failure of genetics the results of poor diet or unhealthy lifestyle choices. Wealth, political power, significant occupations, high or low social status are didactic tools in portraits up to the mid 18th century. Even with the rise of more modern aesthetic frameworks such as realism, expressionism and abstraction and in spite of photography and the digital notions of quality in portraiture still rely on the fiction of the body held in stasis cheating times passage as the artist captures their prey in that perfect instant of empathic observation and re-presentation of a "real person". Amanda Davies *State Preparation* resists such conventions.

Employing typical conceptual rigour over two years Davies observed and depicted in countless studies one person, a woman. Her body her face her physicality her psycho-geography has been meticulously examined and mapped - every indexical relation of the subject at hand, every contour delineated refined every tonal variation duly noted - and rejected. Here it is the entropic haptic glitches in process, mark making, colour composition etc that have been retrieved from the corner or garbage bin. Subjecting these rejects her bad art to close scrutiny and review Davies has then chosen sketches that are then worked up refined presented for our delectation.

*State Preparation* is not about "the good likeness", these paintings are at first glance horrific frightening

abject visages. This is an exhibition that celebrates the brave face. It reveals what lies just beneath the surface of the skin, of the psyche of the self, Davies bravura technique lovingly delineates these comparatively new terrains. Such artisanal skills and keen art historical research (see Claude Cahun, Theodore Gericault, Vesalius photographers, Jo Spence, Katy Grannan and John Coplans et al) not only sweeten the often-confronting content but also make that content even more compelling.

Extending the post conceptual tropes of the body as landscape/landscape as body *State Preparation* presents contexts subtexts substratum of humanity not yet recognised or surveyed. These paintings counter the notion that once the outer layers of the body are removed the veil of personality and individuality disappear.

Apart from the portrait genre Davies other key examination in *State Preparation* is skin. Skin is about the vulnerable self. It is the largest organ of the human body - the average humans skin weighs 3.6 kilos and covers about 2 square meters. Like a landscape it is constantly damaged and attacked always changing regenerating, always becoming. Without skin there is no touch, no sense perception. Primates reassure each other by touching. *Skin hunger*, the lack of physical contact is a real issue for the aged. Touch facilitates infant and indeed all development. Touch speeds healing because it reduces stress hormones that cause anxiety and depress the immune system.

Riffing now, with Roland Barthes he remarks language is a skin:

I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire. The emotion derives from a double contact: on the one hand, a whole activity of discourse discreetly, indirectly focuses upon

a single signified, which is "I desire you," and releases, nourishes, ramifies it to the point of explosion (language experiences orgasm upon touching itself); on the other hand, I enwrap the other in my words, I caress, brush against, talk up this contact, I extend myself to make the commentary to which I submit the relation endure.

*A Lovers Discourse Fragments* 1978

*State Preparation* is a difficult exhibition - one that shows the artist tackling the profoundly beautiful treacherous and dangerous aspects of our humanity. Amanda Davies compels us to look further at and into ourselves than we have done before. These are very real very brave faces.

**Craig Judd, February 2026**



Left: *Head of P.C.* 2022, oil on linen, 41 x 31 x 3.5cm

Above: *Head of P.C.* 2022, oil on linen, 41 x 31 x 3.5cm



Left: *Head of P.C.* 2022, oil on linen, 41 x 31 x 3.5cm

Above: *Head of P.C.* 2021 — 2022, oil on linen, 246 x 194 x 3.5cm

**State Preparation: Reflections on crushing and time in Amanda Davies' portraits of Penny Clive AO**

In 2019, Amanda Davies painted her first crushed portrait (Fig. 1) – a large, close-up self-portrait in bruised pinks and fleshy reds<sup>1</sup>. Belonging to a series of works aptly titled 'Crushing', the portrait was the beginning of Davies' technique of using crushed paper masks to explore the face as a fluid element of portraiture and extend the emotional, conceptual and material parameters of her work. Disrupting portraiture's conservative interest in likeness and appearance, the crushed mask gave Davies a formal vocabulary for painting interior states of the self and the fleeting nature of moods and feelings, perceptions, fears and desires. In *State Preparation* Davies continues to use the crushed paper mask to refine these interests, exploring in depth the relationships between artist and sitter and the vitalistic territories of painting itself.

Between 2020-2023, Davies was supported by arts patron and philanthropist Penny Clive AO to undertake a unique three-year artist residency at Detached Cultural Organisation. Clive is renowned for her support of the arts in Tasmania, particularly through Detached and her enduring commitment to long-term projects and patronage. The residency was a collaboration between Clive and Davies on a series of crushed portraits of Clive, a process involving generosity, curiosity and courage in equal measure from both women. Over four sittings in three years the residency evolved through a period of change in the Australian arts landscape where Covid-19 had created funding turmoil, limitations on arts practices and restrictions on physical activities. The fertile ground of the Clive/Davies collaboration was unusual and welcome at the time, a testament to Clive's persistence of vision and trust in the arts as a vital space for cultural expression, and a consolidation of the importance of mutually supportive relationships between artists and patrons.



Fig. 1. *Crushing* 2019, oil on linen, 250 x 183 x 3.5cm

What emerged over the course of the project is a tense, unnerving and mysterious series of portraits, foregrounding the enigma of Clive as a subject and the intensities of an exclusive single-sitter project as it evolved. Through a staggered process of four sittings, Davies painted thirty-five crushed 'masks' by photographing, printing and crushing a paper facsimile of Clive's face worn by Clive during each sitting. The result was thirty-five individual portraits<sup>2</sup> that are tight in framing and focus, magnifying Clive's face as a site of tension where the image of the subject slips awkwardly between the familiar and unfamiliar, the beautiful and grotesque. The variability of the portraits suggests a dynamic process of capturing the subject in flux, as Davies' dismantles portraiture's claims to representing fixed, knowable identities in singular, defining images.

These works suggest states of process, preparation and change reflecting the dynamic relationship between artist and sitter, and the endless variations of the embodied subject as it evolves in time.

Although the works share an interest in the theatricality of portraiture explored by other artists such as Cindy Sherman, Claude Cahun or Gillian Wearing, Davies' moves away from critiques of deception or disguise, towards a space where messy and unpredictable forces are at play. The works are closer in effect to Jean Dubuffet's 1946-47 portrait series 'More Beautiful Than They Think'<sup>3</sup> (the title of Davies' residency) that portrayed members of the Paris elite in raw, gritty portraits in Dubuffet's attempt to align his subjects with the authenticity of everyday life and materials. Davies' works do not entail Dubuffet's strategies of caricature or social critique, but they share an interest in defamiliarizing the ordinary and finding beauty in the 'brutal' energies of life<sup>4</sup> in ways that as Eleanor Nairne comments on Dubuffet's work 'acknowledge...our fundamental precariousness'<sup>5</sup>.

Davies' focus on such energy is supported by her sculptural processes of crushing and flattening, folding and unfolding the paper masks, as she assembles a new image each time like a sculptor might work clay. The series evokes partial resemblances of Clive, referencing ideas about inaccessible parts of the self and disturbing our expectations about what a face looks like or who a portrait represents. Davies offers no easy consumption of a familiar image, just as she does not undertake any easy construction of the portrait. Clive's faces impart both an emotional unfamiliarity and a sense that parts of the self are trapped or caught in the folds, perhaps suppressed or restrained. Sometimes they evoke an animalistic or abstracted otherness, at other times they suggest various human characteristics of strength, vulnerability, determination, grit, pensiveness or fearfulness. The emotions are raw, untethered,



Fig. 2. *Penny Clive* 2023, oil on linen, 40 x 30 x 3cm

appearing to float in space, recalling Francis Bacon's commentary on the uncertainties of appearance, particularly when painting over an extended period of time:

'The longer you work, the more the mystery deepens of what appearance is, or how can what is called appearance be made in another medium. And it needs a sort of moment of magic to coagulate colour and form so that it gets the equivalent of appearance, the appearance that you see at any moment, because so-called appearance is only riveted for one moment as that appearance. In a second you may blink your eyes or turn your head slightly, and you look again and the appearance has changed. I mean, appearance is like a continuously floating thing'<sup>6</sup>.

The uncertainty of appearance in Davies' portraits amplifies their sense of estrangement. Despite their intimacy, one feels far from knowing Clive as a subject, repelled by the force of the image and a sense of the unknown. In some portraits, this is intensified to the point of suggesting a subject devoid of interiority,<sup>7</sup> which like a death mask evokes the horror of evacuation and ghostliness. Such dramatic tensions are Davies' speciality, as she draws on visceral effects and symbolic suggestiveness to create the push-pull effects of horror and seduction so we cannot look away.

Davies' work is often described in a vocabulary of subtleties, slippages and unsettling ambiguities that trouble our attempt to find a language to describe its effects. The Clive portraits are no exception to this as they resist definitions and confound boundaries inviting us to examine at close range how our perception of portraiture might be dismantled and expanded. In the process of crushing, Davies finds a language for the forces that mediate the relationship between artist and subject, inviting us to see Clive not just as a subject in a constant state of becoming, but in a state of becoming art.

It makes sense to envision Clive as such a subject, as arts patron whose work is committed to such becomings in the broader cultural field, embedded in the making of new spaces and relationships. And it makes sense that Davies refuses to present Clive as a heroic illusion, *la belle peinture*, when the process of making the series was itself subjected to diverse external forces and the fluctuations of long-term collaboration. In this sense, the series poses much broader questions than the problems of appearance and likeness that have long been the subject of anti-portraiture's critique. It reminds us that the portrait, like its subject, changes as life is lived and, like all painting, remains vulnerable to the passing of time.

Eliza Burke, February 2026

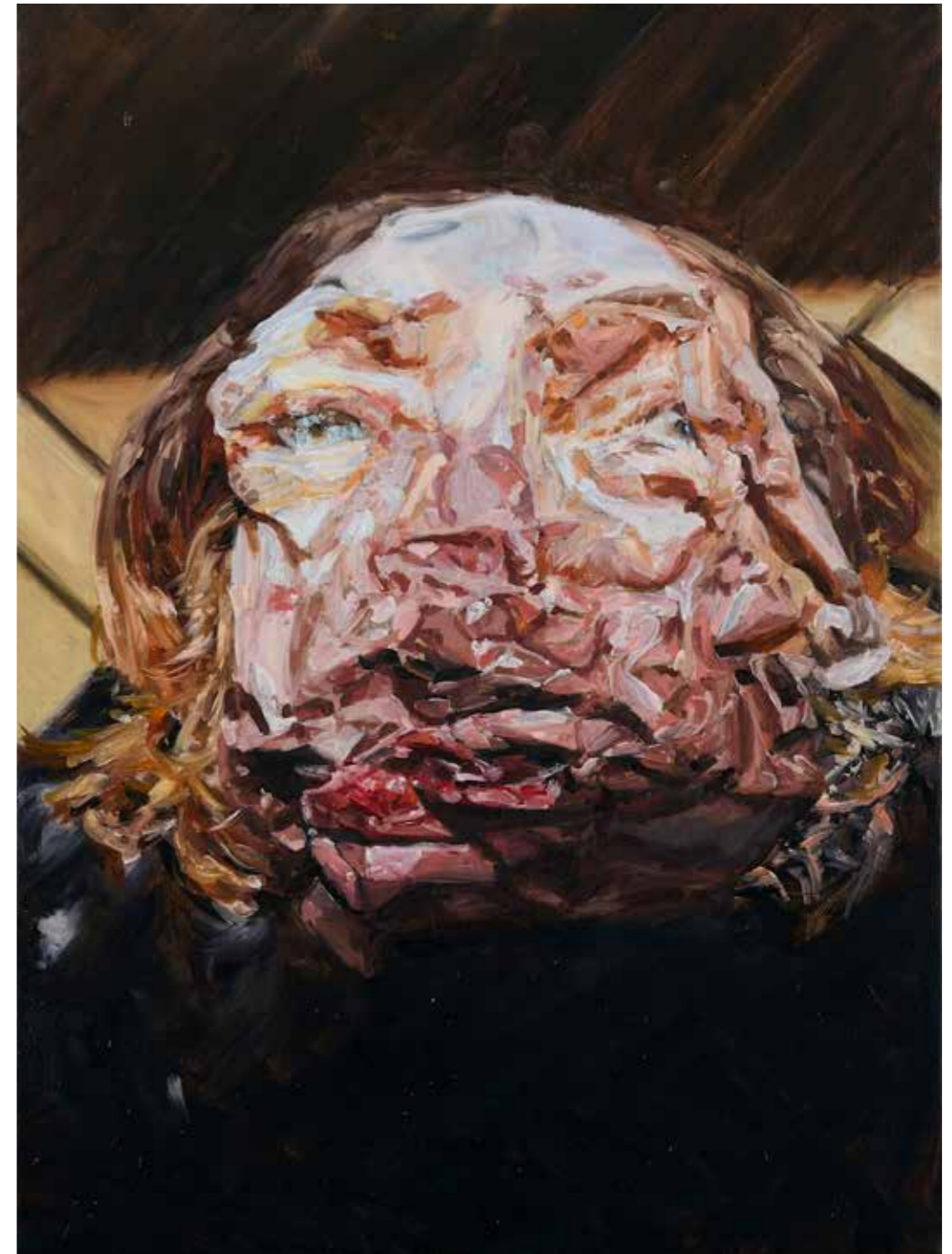
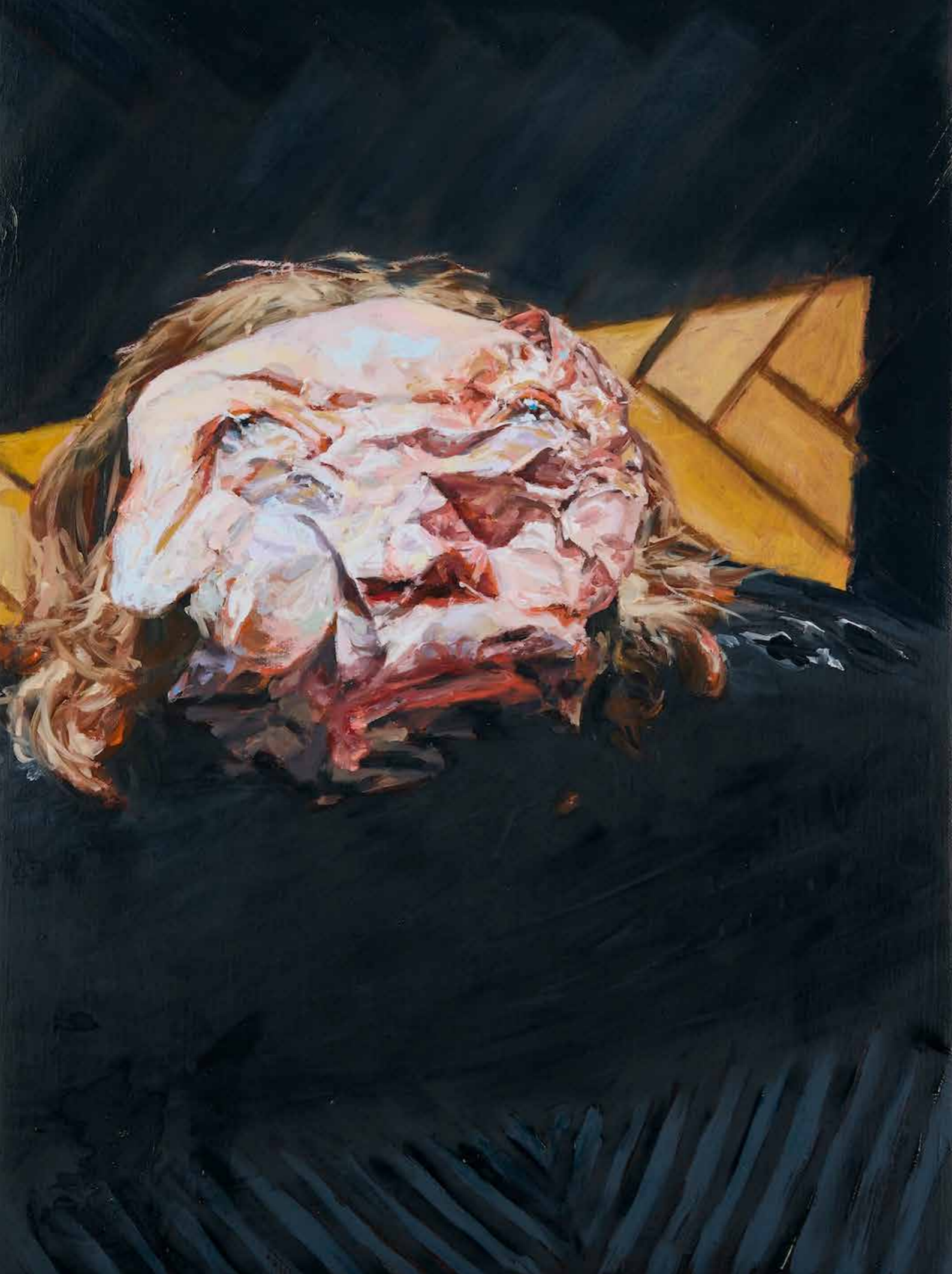


Fig. 3. *Head of P. C* 2023, oil on linen, 40 x 30 x 3cm



Fig. 4. *Penny Clive in the Mike Parr bronze heads room* 2023, oil on linen, 40 x 30 x 3cm

1. Davies, A *Crushing* The School House Gallery, Rosny Farm and School House Gallery, Hobart, 1 - 30 June 2019.
2. Additional portraits were conceived and painted following the residency between 2023-2026.
3. Jean Dubuffet's series of portraits *Plus beaux qu'ils croient* (trns. 'More Beautiful Than They Think') are well known for their use of caricature to represent members of Paris's elite arts circle with whom Dubuffet was acquainted. Dubuffet's portraits were exhibited at the Galerie René Drouin between August and October in 1947. See Chadwick, S. (2022). *Jean Dubuffet, Bricoleur: Portraits, Pastiche, Performativity*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
4. A selection of Dubuffet's 1947 portraits from *Plus beaux qu'ils croient* appeared in the exhibition 'Jean Dubuffet: Brutal Beauty' at the Barbican Art Gallery in London, 17 May - 22 August, 2021.
5. Nairne, E 'Brutal Beauty: the outsider art of Jean Dubuffet', May 17, 2021.
6. Accessed at: <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/brutal-beauty-the-outsider-art-of-jean-dubuffet> Date Accessed: January 31st, 2022.
7. Bacon, F in 'Francis Bacon, Interview with David Sylvester, September 1974' cited in Kuspit, D 'Francis Bacon: The Authority of the Flesh' *Artforum* Summer 1975, Vol 13, No. 10.
8. Newman, M 'Decapitations: The portrait, the anti-portrait...and what comes after?' in Johnstone, F., & Imber, K (Eds.) (2020). *Anti-portraiture: Challenging the Limits of the Portrait*. Bloomsbury Publishing pp. 25-68



Left: *Head of P.C.* 2022, oil on linen, 41 x 31 x 3.5cm

Above: *Head of P.C.* 2022, oil on linen, 41 x 31 x 3.5cm

### Amanda Davies on Penny Clive

If an artist knew that they were about to embark on a futile project, would they ever begin the task? In the case of Amanda Davies, I think they might. Davies' most recent body of work, a series of portraits depicting the Tasmanian art collector and patron Penny Clive, has taken three years to complete and demonstrates, in the artist's own words, a project of ultimate futility. This admission is proffered with no small amount of pleasure; if the aim of a conventional patron's portrait is to reveal something definitive about the sitter or project a favourable image to a future viewer, if it is to shore up the subject's position, to galvanise their status, then Davies has failed and appears ambivalent to have done so.

Breaking from tradition might be the most fitting approach for a study of Penny Clive because her patronage has never been particularly traditional. Her support for the arts is politically, socially and environmentally informed, at once generous and steady, but also subdued, never showy, tending to occur largely in the wings. This may be why so few people actually know who Penny Clive is or even what she looks like. What makes her so enigmatic is that her altruism has no ulterior motive – she wants the arts to flourish and artists to have agency, nothing more.

Capturing a shadowy figure is bound to come with its challenges, and there is a sense with this series that Davies is searching down every avenue to find her subject. It is a search that at times feels more archaeological than artistic, a practice thick with contradictions. The process involves the repeated accumulation and stripping back of paint, as if the artist is generating layers purely to dig down and discover what's beneath them. Some images are grotesque and carnal, with grimacing displays of teeth or mouths that look malignant like wounds that won't heal. These elements suggest a hidden

structure, an abject system beneath the skin. If there is a base internal world we daily and wilfully overlook, it rises to the surface in Davies' work. As if acknowledging the revelatory and representational limits of traditional portraiture, Davies masks the sitter's face with sheets of scrunched paper before painting her, leaving only a sliver of skin on the forehead and a shock of silver hair to hint at the person beneath. By adding a physical layer between the viewer and the viewed, Davies is also inviting an opportunity for accident and chance to occur. The paper, rendered with an alternative face, is unwieldy, less malleable than one might assume, and it's in this lack of control that an agential volatility emerges. The artist has no real say in what the face will do. The eyes might slip to the side or the nose mash flat. Nothing will line up the way it's supposed to. There is a liveliness introduced to the image via this method – a wilfulness, a defiance – and it has a remarkable pulling effect on the audience. An enigma is being offered and we want to resolve it.

But representation demands complexity, and identity is not an isolated or stagnant entity, it moves and changes with every passing moment, with every changing condition. It's worth noting that this series was developed not in a vacuum but at a time of great social and political upheaval. The use of light in Davies' paintings, which seems to seep in slantways as if through a window, suggests an outside world in close proximity. There are always extenuating circumstances, something occurring beyond the frame. The subject in Davies' images watches on as a deadly pandemic spreads across the globe, as political movements and economies collapse in shambles, as environments and elegant ecologies are battered with accelerating, anthropogenically-induced challenges. These are strange times, and anyone who knows Penny Clive, knows that these factors, especially the latter, affect her at a deeply personal level. It is appropriate then that Davies offers a series of studies and not a single, classifying

image. It is appropriate that she sees this as a project with no end point. It is appropriate that she takes layering seriously as a means of female representation because the individual should not be an enigma that the viewer ultimately resolves. Are we viewing something beautiful or grotesque? Are we witnessing vulnerability, horror, frustration, surrender, or an earnest kind of hope? Or does the slipperiness of subjectivity ask us to see all these things at once?

It's easy to forget when viewing these portraits that the ice-blue eyes are not the subject's own, the leering teeth are not her own. It's easy to forget this because a level of complexity is brought to bear in those eyes until it feels as if the subject is staring back, and when you suddenly remember that the eyes are a mask, one is still left with a sense that Penny Clive is observing the viewer without necessarily being observed. The subject may be prostrate throughout the studies, but she is far from passive, and it seems that if this arts patron is to be remembered in a particular way, then it's as mysterious, conflicted, unknowable, and manifestly attentive.

This is perhaps where the work most successfully exemplifies the subject. While the artist might have been grappling with a fraught sense of agency, the subject, at least, appears to have retained hers. In Davies' paintings we see Penny Clive's ability to both observe and wriggle out of view. As far as representation goes, this might be the closest anyone ever gets to capturing Penny Clive.

### Keely Jobe, February 2023

Image: Studio documentation, 2023



**PARTIAL LIST OF WORKS**



1. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
246 x 194 x 3.5cm  
Box Tas Oak Frame  
2021 – 2022



2. *The Patron*  
oil on linen  
246 x 194 x 3.5cm  
Box Tas Oak Frame  
2022 – 2023



3. *Portrait of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
246 x 194 x 3.5cm  
Box Tas Oak Frame  
2019 – 2020



4. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
43 x 33.5 x 3.5cm  
Box Tas Oak Frame  
2021



5. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
43 x 33.5 x 3.5cm  
Box Tas Oak Frame  
2021



6. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
43 x 33.5 x 3.5cm  
Box Tas Oak Frame  
2021



7. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



8. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



9. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



10. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



11. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



12. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



13. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



14. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



15. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



16. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



17. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



18. *Penny Clive*  
oil on linen  
40 x 30 x 3.5cm  
2022



19. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



20. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



21. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2022



22. *Penny Clive in the Mike Parr bronze heads room*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



23. *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**24.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**30.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**36.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**42.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**25.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**31.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**37.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**26.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**32.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**38.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**27.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
54 x 45 x 6cm  
Box Tas Oak Frame  
2023



**33.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**39.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**28.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**34.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**40.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**29.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**35.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023



**41.** *Head of P.C.*  
oil on linen  
41 x 31 x 3.5cm  
2023

## State Preparation Paintings by Amanda Davies

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# DETACHED

*Head of P.C.* 2022, oil on linen, 246 x 194 x 3.5cm

