

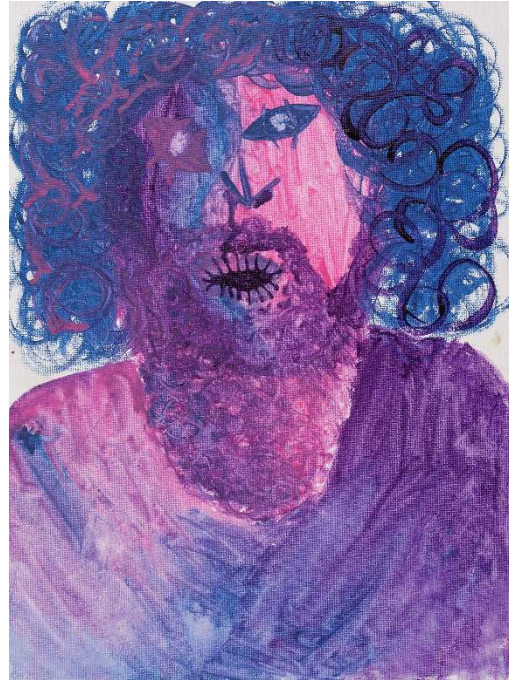


**Interview with Mitchil  
Harding (Taungurung)**  
Recipient of the G4S Australian  
& New Zealand Encouragement  
Award (1 of 2) for *Me 2020*,  
acrylic paint on canvas.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Koorie Art Show (4  
December 2021 – 20 February  
2022)

**By Andrew Stephens**

Mitchil Harding says the beard he sports so proudly will never go – he’s too attached to it. But the shock of unruly curls crowning his head, shown in his self-portrait *Me*, have been lopped off in the time since he painted the work last year.



Mitchil made the work in the middle of university studies, and in amid the COVID lockdowns when everything went digital. Studying visual arts at the Gippsland campus of Federation University in Churchill, he found that online learning for an activity he’d much rather do person wasn’t suitable – so he put the course on hold and started working for his parents. “I got really frustrated with the way unis try to do art online. It just doesn’t work.”

His first version of the painting while at university was done in pencil, but he later decided to re-work the image as a painting – and the results are highly expressive, full of rich colour and intensity. He made the painting during a period when lockdown rules meant he couldn’t attend his workplace. “It is similar to the piece I did for uni in pencil, but I decided to get inspiration from abstract art. I thought, okay, no rules, I am just going to paint this and see what it is like.

“I love colour and I especially love purples, pinks and blues. I hate it when people say pink is a girl’s colour, or purple even. It’s just a colour! And if you like it, you like it.”



Mitchil's father Mick Harding is also an artist, a proud Taungurung man whose business Ngarga Warendj (Dancing Wombat) produces artworks. Working with him, Mitchil has found that he enjoys all forms of art-making, from wood work and shaping artefacts and ornamental objects, to laser-cutting, embossing and graphic design work. Working with his parents has been encouraging in this domain, he says.

Doing a self-portrait was in many respects drawn directly from investigating some things we all do. "It is pretty much a simple thing," he says. "You look at yourself every day in the mirror when you get up, and that's pretty much what I did, I didn't use a photo or mirror. I just thought of what I think I look like, but in a bit of an abstract way...the crazy beard and the curly hair, and that's what I did look like at that point. I've since had a haircut, a real good short one. I've still got the beard of course. I'm 28 and if I shave this off, I'll look like I'm 12 or something...!"

Mitchil's approach to art-making is to come into the present moment as much as possible, to just be in the here and now. "We do art in the moment a lot of the time, and when you do that, you don't think, you just *do*. I have done that with a lot of the things I've painted. I just draw and paint and see what happens and you end liking it or not liking it."

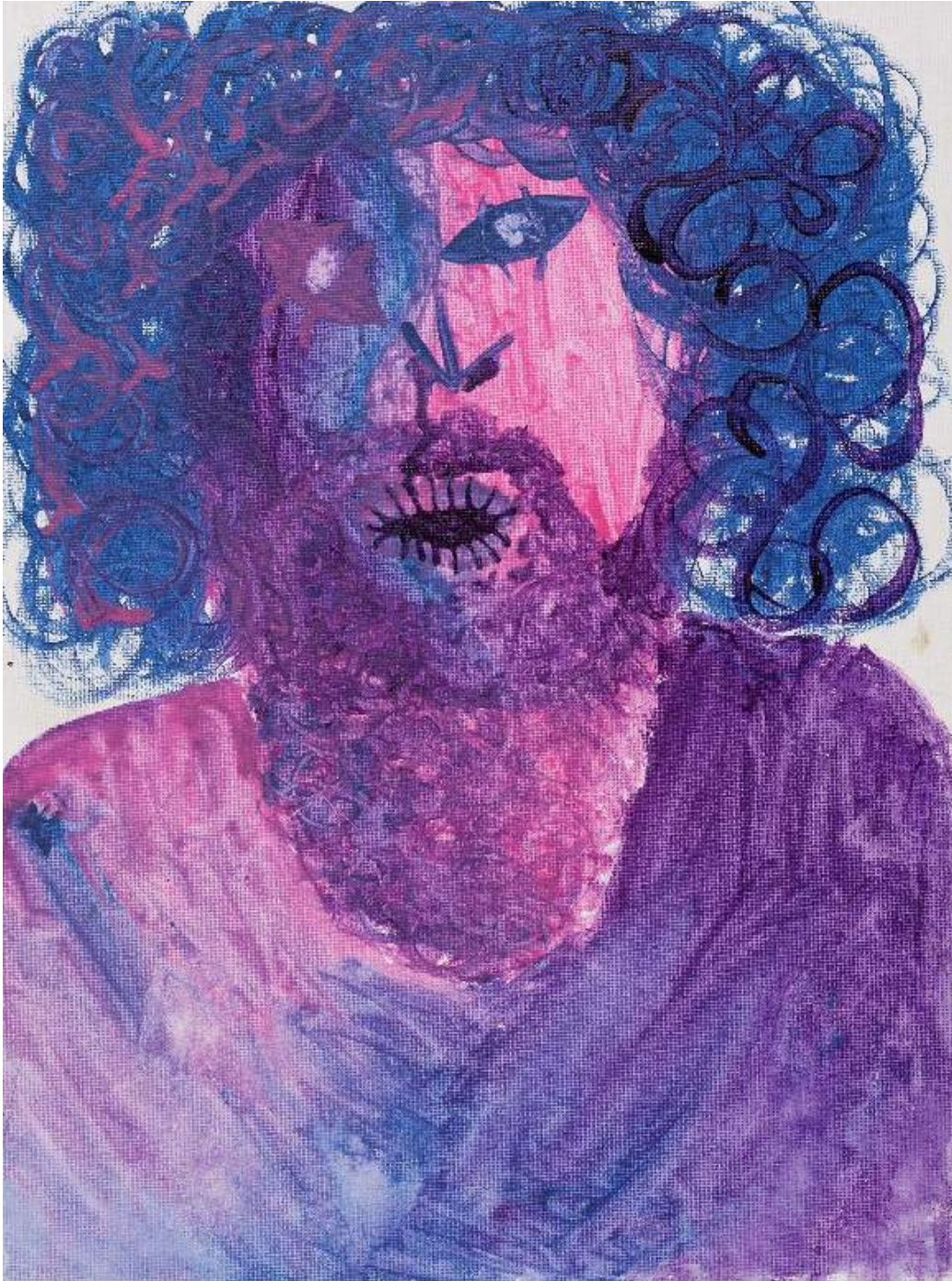
As a Taungurung man, he has had a lot of cultural connection through his father, uncles and aunties. "I have had a very lucky time because I have had a lot to do with our culture since I was five or six, maybe even younger," he says. "We used to go up to Healesville to Aunty Judy Monk's or other places and do different cultural things, learning about ochres and carving. I have had as much as I can to do with it since then and through different jobs."

Mitchil also used to be a Cultural Heritage officer at the Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation, which also helped with his cultural connection. "It helped my knowledge of how my ancestors lived in the landscape and with my identity as a Taungurung person – seeing the sheer size of some secret/sacred sites stretching kilometres."

As for his future in art, Mitchil says he will definitely continue to push himself to create new things and learn to use more mediums. "Anything is art if you're brave enough."



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**Mithcil HARDING (Taungurung),** *We* 2021, acrylic paint on canvas.

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