

*THE  
UGLIEST MAN  
COMPETITION*

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*TEELAH  
GEORGE*

Printed on the occasion of  
the exhibition

*MEATWORKS MENS QRTRS*

by

*TEELAH  
GEORGE*

at

*OK GALLERY,  
Northbridge.*

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Text accompanying artworks are excerpts from *Wyndham*  
– *with a ton of salt* by Ken Mellowship, 2004, Hesperian  
Press

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*TEELAH  
GEORGE*

*with text by*

*CHRISTINA CHAU*



## Teelah George: Meatworks Mens Qrtrs

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Shortly after entering her current studio at the Fremantle Arts Centre, Teelah George handed me a photograph of four men standing in a line dressed in tuxedos and each posing with fully flared grins and a painted 'black face'. The word Jacko was scrawled on the back of the photograph in pencil; the name of George's grandfather (although it is unknown which of the men he is).

When George returned to Perth in 2012 after living in Belfast for three years, she came across a number of photographs and a memoir titled *Wyndham – with a ton of salt* by Ken Mellowship, each providing mysterious connections to Jacko's life in Wyndham. He is mentioned as one of the many men up there in their twenties working at the town's meatworks station during the early to mid 1900s. Written in 2004, the memoir is largely a revision of the diary entries written by Mellowship at the time. It is a brutal story set in a town and a time where one is a brother, caretaker, co-worker, nurse and counselor to each other. The men such as 'The Hygienic Butcher (Ted Scot)', 'Len (The Horse) Philips' and 'Jacko George' each deal with the processes of coming together with other strangers in attempt cope with severely isolating conditions. Mellowship does so through a melody of old yarns and local in-jokes to reassure the reader that we are outsiders to this coming of age story.

The meatworks station itself is also inaccessible today. In Jacko's time, the station was a self-sufficient centre for 1600-2000 workers processing meat in the station's abattoir, cannery, freezer, tallow, and tannery. However, since its demolition in 1986 nothing has been erected in its place and so the imprint of the station stands as a reminder of a past industrial centre. For George, rather than connecting readers to this space, the memoir reads more as a lamentation to the lives and memories that have since dispersed and faded. George's tactile gestures in '*Meatworks ran the town then (dry) and (wet)*', responds to this disconnection by suggesting that archives bring attention to how there are times where we are unable to connect with the past.

The sculptures, portraits and prints that George has created for *Meatworks Mens Qrtrs* gives insight to the way in which documentation can at times provide a sense of alienation, disconnection and reinterpretation. Working from archival photographs and Mellowship's text, George invites us to engage with a process of celebrating the fissures in memory that build over time and the opportunities presented to recreate and mythologise them. Through her portraiture George underlines how Mellowship obstructs a desire to represent the forms of these men by describing them in abstract clichés and alluding to unexplained pasts such as 'The Python', 'Whispering Smith or the Darwin Terror', and 'Brutal' and invites us to embrace this obstruction. The absurdity of this dialect is further highlighted by George's sculptural work *Shit on a stick, piss in a cup*, which gives form to an old family description of dinner in Wyndham. For George, fictive interpretation and abstraction become mechanisms for emphasising voids produced in memory as well as providing new avenues to connect with the memories that are still alive.



*THE HYGENIC BUTCHER (TED SCOT)*

‘Ted Scot was the Hygienic Butcher simply because he wasn’t very clean at all’



*CAPTAIN MUDBANKS, RAMPAGE (VINCE PAGE)*

‘Captain Mudbanks, Rampage (Vince Page) was a boatman true. He spent a lot of time refitting and repairing boats. He always chose a location close to the pub which was a disaster’





*THE PYTHON (BOB SILVER)*

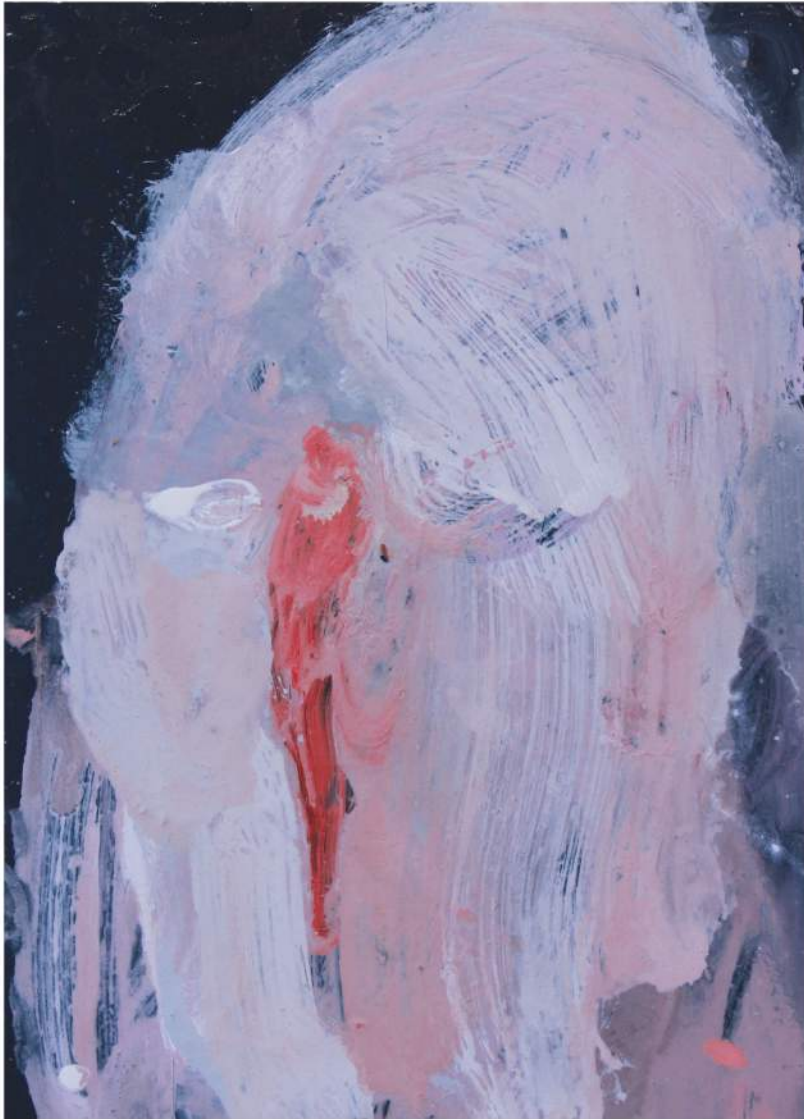
‘The Python (Bob Silver) is a tall slim bloke with a neat appearance. He reckons he drove people on tuitts buses, and bullocks as a drover in the territory and he prefers bullocks’





*MICK BONZER*

‘Mick held a builders certificate. He worked on boats for a while then into the baking business working for the baker at Halls Creek where his cigarette butts and bottle tops added a sort of Kimberly flavour to the bread.’



*FRANK THOMAS (SCRUB TURKEY)*

‘Frank Thomas (Scrub Turkey) was the best nickname I have heard to match a bloke, scrub was a dead ringer of a turkey. It was said that Bill Flinders named him the time Wyndham airport was bombed by the Japanese. Scrub came out of some bushes where he was hiding like a bloody scrub turkey.’



*WHISPERING SMITH OR THE DARWIN TERROR (RON SMITH)*

‘Whispering Smith or the Darwin Terror was a well dressed bloke, shorts and shirts neatly ironed, his neat appearance helped by well groomed hair and mo. His trade mark a bandanna around his neck. Ron Smith had a wife who was a very good worker and kept the terror looking this way’



*JACKO GEORGE (POP)*





*BILL ROWE WAS BILL THE PAINTER*

‘Bill Rowe was Bill the painter ex pommy army, Cyprus and Hong Kong police and now working overtime up here to pay off a house down south for his wife. What he didn’t know was that he had a husband-in-law when he found out Bill screamed loud and clear but to no avail, hubby in law and wife kept the property’



*JACK THE BARBER (JACK BRADSHAW)*

‘Jack the Barber (Jack Bradshaw) was an elderly chap with a fairly big pot gut. He would never attempt a hair cut without a large one freshly opened, a good supply of fags and a sweat rag. Then he would put his guts on your shoulder, light a smoke, take a swig of beer and start to cut your hair exactly how you didn’t want it.’



### *FRANK*

‘Frank was a bloke that you knew had seen better days. There was a lot of these chaps around, mostly maintenance men. Frank was a master plumber, he was broke, just out of jail and it was staring him in the face again if he didn’t get going. He was trying to get a stake by working the boats but he always seemed to cop cement. Frank had cement poisoning, he had only to walk past the hatch that contained cement and he broke out in an ugly rash.’





### *BRUTAL*

'Brutal was a typical meatworker, from and related to many Fremantle people. Among his ancestors he claims Captain Peter Hedland, Discoverer of Port Hedland. Wyndham, Broome, Abattoirs, work places for Brutal, boning out turtles from Exmouth at Freo with the old gun Norm Dixon.'



*LEN (THE HORSE) PHILLIPS*

‘Len (the horse) Phillips took the job on as undertaker, somebody had to do it.’



*COCKROACH (IAN MCLEAN)*

‘He earned his nickname because he was into everything and over the years proved those who named him right.’



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