

## 'I thought it was a work in progress': What it's like to sit for the Archibald



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Benjamin Law with his portrait "Benjamin Law: happy sad" by Keith Burt which was a 2019 finalist. JENNI CARTER, AGNSW

### Benjamin Law

#### Keith Burt - Benjamin Law: happy sad (2019)

Keith approached me out of the blue. We have a lot of mutual friends and I said yes because he's a Brissie boy and I'm a Queenslander and because it's a pretty tight knit arts and creative community there. I sat for him about two or three times. He has a studio underneath his beautiful Queenslander and on the day I sat for him, for what would result as the painting that was entered in the Archibald, I'd come to Brisbane for a funeral. So he caught me in a less typical kind of mood. And he captured something of that, where my headspace was. When he was finished, Keith emailed me an image and I was totally gobsmacked.

I imagine that's a confronting moment for both the artist and sitter: "Is this person going to like what I painted?" or "Has this person completely mangled my face?" But there was something about how he captured me and it's not because it's photorealistic, there's something in the mood. I got my whole family to make a pilgrimage to the Archibalds, to the shrine that was my painting, which is a slightly sociopathic thing to do. They all thought it nailed who I was, not in a super flattering way and not in a super hideous way, there was just something that felt right.

My mum liked it so much I ended up buying it for her for a combined Mother's Day and birthday present. Which, again, is maybe a slightly sociopathic thing to do. She hasn't decided where she's going to hang it yet. For all I know, it could be the image she sees every time she sits on the toilet.