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This exhibition has been assisted by ART ON MOVE through the Exhibition Touring Program.

The State of Western Australia has made an investment through Department of Culture and the Arts in association with Lotteries Commission in ART ON THE MOVE.

ART ON THE MOVE is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. ART ON THE MOVE is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

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Thomas Hoareau would like to thank Daniel Brown, Sally Quin, Clare McFarlane, the AOTM staff and Jo Hoareau for their significant contributions to bringing A Case of Déjà Vu to life. Special acknowledgement is given to the willing lenders to Déjà Vu, their generosity and trust is very much appreciated.

ISBN

Catalogue design by Clare McFarlane.

Thomas
Hoareau

A Case of
Déjà Vu

A Case of Déjà Vu

Seven
Paintings
and a
suitcase
that Relive
Art History
in the
Everyday

Seven Paintings and a suitcase
that Relive Art History in the Everyday

Thomas Hoareau



ART ON THE MOVE



Government of Western Australia
Department of Culture and the Arts



Australian Government
Visions of Australia



‘One morning I was painting from my Northbridge studio window the Leabridge Newsagent on the opposite side of the road. As I was observing and painting the scene, I noticed the girl working at the newsagent had the habit of resting both hands on the counter in between serving customers. I immediately perceived a case of déjà vu and realised I was recalling Manet’s 1882 painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* that I had been looking at in reproduction earlier in the week. Initially I was just simply amused by having made this observation . . .’

Notes for the Paintings in A Case of Déjà Vu,
Thomas Hoareau 2010.

Background: Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies Bergère*, 1881-2, oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London
Inset : Thomas Hoareau, *The Girl at the Counter of Leabridge Newsagent*, 1997, oil on linen, 88 x 112 cm

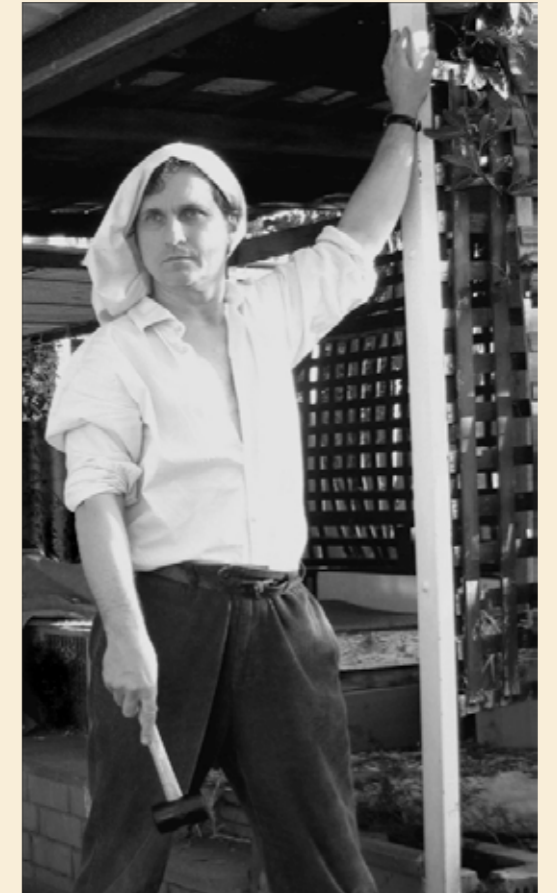


Photo study of the artist after Théodore Géricault's painting *The Farrier's Signboard* 1814.

Thomas Hoareau

was born in 1961 in McLaren Vale, South Australia.

QUALIFICATIONS

2011 Master in Fine Arts (Research) U.W.A.
1981 Bachelor in Fine Arts (Distinction) W.A.I.T. (now Curtin University).

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2011 A Case of Déjà Vu, ART ON THE MOVE travelling exhibition
2010 Lavage - Géricault, Delacroix and Courbet Revisited, H.A.C. Gallery, East Perth.
2002 My 6PR Painting, F.A.C. W.A.
1999 Washing One's Dirty Linen in Public, Verge gallery, Northbridge.
1998 Street Works and Homages, Galerie Dusseldorf, W.A.
1997 Greetings from Ahmedabad, F.A.C. W.A.
1995 Forrest Place During the Time of the Fly Plague, Galerie Dusseldorf, W.A.
1993 The New York Series, P.I.C.A.
1991 Through the Window, A.G.W.A.
1990 Four Large Drawings, P.I.C.A.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2006 Configured, Lawrence ART ON THE MOVE travelling exhibition
2002 Connection Visual II: Shanghai & Hangzhou, China
1999 A View from the Sea, Manila, Philippines & Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, U.W.A.
1996 Oddfellows, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, U. W.A.
1990 Local Talent-Urban Living, Undercroft Gallery, UWA.
1987 Among the Souvenirs, Western Australian Art in the Eighties, A.G.W.A.

SELECTED AWARDS

2006 Town of Vincent art Award
2000 City of Stirling Art Award
1999 Town of Vincent Art Award
1997 Kimberley Art Prize
1996 Town of Vincent Art Award
1991 Australia Council Overseas Studio, Greene St, New York
1987 Fremantle Drawing Prize
1981 TVW Channel 7 Young Artist's Award

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Australia National Gallery, Canberra
The Art Gallery of Western Australia
University of Western Australia
Curtin University of Technology
Edith Cowan University

List of Works

A Case of Déjà Vu consists of fourteen elements: one archival replica digital print, one painted suitcase, two monochrome painting studies, seven paintings and three display cases each containing twenty digital photo studies.

1. Tropicana Rider, 1983
archival replica print of the original
acrylic work on paper
44 x 57cm
Collection: unknown
2. The Girl at the Counter
of Leabridge Newsagent, 1997
oil on linen
88 x 112cm
Collection: Maree Rorrison
3. Study for the Girl at the Counter
of Leabridge Newsagent, 1996
acrylic on paper
57 x 67 cm
Collection: Richie Kuhaupt
4. Study for Northbridge Gothic, 1998
acrylic on canvas
51 x 41 cm
Edith Cowan University Art Collection
5. Northbridge Gothic, 1998
oil on linen
76 x 61 cm
Edith Cowan University Art Collection
6. After the Luncheon, 1998
oil on linen
71 x 92 cm
Collection: Julie and Bill Hawthorn
7. My History Painting, 2003
oil on linen
two panels, each 168 x 115 cm
Collection: ART ON THE MOVE
8. Lavage –The Raft of the Medusa in Midland, 2010
acrylic on canvas,
183 x 214 cm
Collection: artist
9. Viveash on the Verge of Suburban Development, 2010
acrylic on canvas
183 x 123 cm
Collection: artist
10. The Midland Junction Stonebreakers, 2010
acrylic on canvas
155.5 x 244 cm
Collection: artist
11. Monet's Suitcase, 2001
acrylic on canvas lined leather suitcase
34 x 60 x 18 cm
Collection: artist
12. Lavage Photo Studies, 2010
20 digital prints in display case
various sizes numbered 1 to 20 on back
Collection: artist
13. Viveash Photo Studies, 2010
20 digital prints in display case
various sizes numbered 1 to 20 on back
Collection: artist
14. Junction Stonebreakers Photo Studies, 2010
20 digital prints in display case
various sizes numbered 1 to 20 on back
Collection: artist

Preface

My way into Thomas's work was through his early paintings of collaged objects, things that he found and then posed and juxtaposed and painted. These included figurines from op-shops, images from 1950s book dust-jackets, bill posters and other urban fragments -- objects that he would arrange and draw together with an intuitive logic, generating teasing lyrical tensions between them. The objects themselves are painted with urgent and obvious brush strokes, sometimes with the pop dynamism of primary colours, sometimes with a shadowy film *noir* palette. One of the figures that featured prominently in the strange magic toyshop of these paintings from the 1980s was an old sculpture of an indigenous man that used to stand on top of the Padbury Buildings in the city, on the corner of Forrest Place and Wellington street, opposite the Railway station, a remnant from the 1950s or 1960s, when there must have been some sort of tourist shop there. 'The Aborigine on top of the Padbury Buildings' emerged as the prince of the found objects, the figure-head for an odd accidented and accretive world of reverie, of architectural and indeed archeological layering, a forgotten city of 'Oddfellows' -- a Perth that had not yet surrendered itself completely to waves of wholesale re-development. The painted plaster or concrete figure of the Aborigine looking down on the shoppers and commuters of central Perth (like the statue of Christ over Rio de Janeiro) was soon to be martyred in the late 1980s to make way for the Forrest Chase shopping mall, an iconic development that was accompanied by the Bond Tower, which forced its way up through the old Palace Hotel like the science-fiction monster that bursts from the hero's chest in the 1979 film *Alien*. As Charles Baudelaire observes in his poem 'The Swan,' his requiem for pre-Haussman Paris, 'a city, alas, / Changes more quickly than man's heart may change.'

In some paintings from this transitional period groups of Thomas' figurines, 'a few kindred spirits' (as they are called in the title of a painting from this time), stubbornly occupy building sites, while another series of paintings that follows from them, and continues through to the late 1990s, face up to the newly redeveloped city, which is represented sharply defined in sunlight. All the shadows are gone in this starkly assertive business centre, which tolerates no ambiguity, few private associations and memories, little reverie. In several of these paintings vulnerable, often naked, figures of the artist and his partner are juxtaposed defiantly against the new city. In another, a displaced local character, the walking man, is similarly pictured against the Horseshoe Bridge and Perth skyline, subjected to the bold gaze of a couple of young office workers.

Other paintings from this time depict a retreat from these streets, with the artist and his partner-model apparently taking refuge in his Gotham studio. Situated in an old unrenovated building in Northbridge, at the intersection of William and James streets, the studio and its environs infused some of the paintings from this period with the film *noir* romance of earlier works. Other compositions that moved indoors during the late 1990s include pictures of friends he assembled in compositions drawn from such canonical works as Edouard Manet's paintings *Luncheon in the Studio* and *Through to the Balcony*. Such early experiments, which attempted to see whether or not local Perth life-forms and the imaginative realms of art history could inhabit one another, obviously prefigure the works we are looking at in the present exhibition, which spring from Thomas' recent academic work on Theodore's Gericault's large painting *The Raft of the Medusa*.

Gericault used some of his friends, including his fellow painter Eugène Delacroix, as models for this work, and Thomas does likewise in his 2010 painting *Lavage - The Raft of the Medusa in Midland*. *Lavage* reminds me of the figure of the man with his bag of laundry from Thomas's early 1980s compositions, and the city laundromats that appeared in paintings from this time. Once again the urban environment is seen to be able to sustain personal visions and imagination, an odd reverie that recalls the Proustian

fusion of grand culture with everyday life. The audacious analogies that these paintings draw between art images of world historical significance and quotidian and private life reminded me of Proust. So, to take one little example from *Remembrance of Things Past*, there is a social season in which the Duchess de Guermantes declined all dinner invitations;

for the one reason of which nobody in society would ever have thought; she was just starting on a cruise among the Norwegian fjords . . . People . . . were stupified, and, without any thought of following the Duchess's example, derived nevertheless from her action that sense of relief which one has in reading Kant when after the most rigorous demonstration of determinism one finds that above the world of necessity there is the world of freedom.¹

Such Proustian metaphors serve to re-distribute intellectual prestige and profundity from classical philosophy to the social and the contingent. Thomas's grand paintings in *Lavage* seem to me to be doing something similar to this.

Daniel Brown 2010

Professor of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Western Australia.



¹ Trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), Vol. 6, The Guermantes Way, Pt. II, 234.

Viveash on the Verge of Suburban Development, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 123 cm

Hoareau makes use of the pantheon of western art history to investigate themes both private and of a more universal character. His works focus on the difficulties of those most intimate to him, but through the mechanism of certain poses and attitudes from the past. In this manner the individuals in his paintings become emblematic of the continuity of human struggles. The illusory, stage-like quality of the paintings' settings are frequently combined with brutal realism. The viewer is caught between an intellectual and an emotional response to the action.

The key frameworks of Hoareau's painting, the use of the site of Perth and of art historical referencing, underline the processes of making art. They expose the artifice and at a deeper level acknowledge that all is fleeting. The paintings touch on themes of dispossession, alienation, and indifference, and the contrasting of past and present, of the banal with the tragic, reinforce these predominant concerns. *Déjà vu* can be a sensation that is elusive, momentary and evokes feelings both of betrayal and familiarity. I have been here before, but when?

And so too the works shown in *A Case of Déjà Vu* result in meanings that are often fittingly intangible and half spoken.

Sally Quin 2011

teaches in the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts at the University of Western Australia.



* Thank you to Thomas Hoareau for supplying me notes on the paintings that assisted greatly in the writing of this essay. An analysis of the artist's work until 1999 can be found in David Bromfield's, *Suitcase City: A Study of the Work of Thomas Hoareau* (East Perth: Brown, 1999).

i Notes for the Paintings in *A Case of Déjà Vu*, January, 2011.

ii Ibid.

A Case of Déjà Vu *

Standing at the edge of the Swan River and looking towards homes perched amongst trees, hanging off cliff faces, there is a persistent feeling that all may be obliterated in a millisecond, and the landscape returned to its primordial state. Like the first tents erected in the crude Swan River Colony, Perth threatens to disappear without a trace, subsumed under water or foliage.

Perhaps only locals can imagine this erasure with ease because we are witness to the rearrangement of the city as a matter of daily life. Though there are many urban centres that mimic this trend, Perth represents a rather unique confluence of circumstances. The history of the city is short, marked by a late colonisation and the dispossession of the land's traditional owners. From the late nineteenth century to the present day, it has been reshaped in response to commodity markets in endless cycles of boom and bust. Underneath the spectacle of the good life, there is an inevitable unease writ large on the landscape.

Thomas Hoareau has been investigating what it means to live in this place since the early 1980s. There are no glimpses of an earthly paradise here, no diving into the ocean or lying in the long grass. His works show the city as bricks and mortar, a solid city, and yet with the quality of a stage-set, ready to be packed up and moved on. Hoareau chronicles various moments in the life of the city and, perhaps unwittingly, has created an historical record over almost thirty years. His paintings now recall lost spaces.

Hoareau does not actively critique the permeable nature of the city. Rather, he approaches it with a certain detachment, even a degree of fatalism. This is not because the artist lacks concern but, rather, his focus is diverted, namely to how individuals negotiate the disruption, how they move through an indifferent world. In such a way, the place in which we live takes on a broader metaphorical dimension, reflecting not only the changeable nature of the exterior environment, but also the chaotic trajectories of the human lives contained within it.

The interaction between the figure, his or her emotional life, and the city is not straightforward and results in an often disorienting experience for the viewer. The people that inhabit the paintings are by and large the artist's intimate circle—his family, friends and colleagues. They take on attitudes that signify turmoil and hardship, and yet they simultaneously act out parts, as they strike poses which correlate to paintings of the past. Their inner lives are played out through the prism of art history. The viewing experience is mediated by our memory of particular historical works of art, the familiarity of our city, and the unlikely combination this presents.

The exhibition *A Case of Déjà Vu* brings together a group of nine works dating from 1983 to 2010 which take up themes of displacement and memory, referencing iconic works from western art history, ranging from the predominant theme of nineteenth-century French art to Renaissance, Pop, Surrealism and American scene painting.

Tropicana Rider (1983) signifies the beginning of Hoareau's interest in the use of the art of the past to articulate certain ideas relevant to his present consciousness. The painting references the Orientalism of nineteenth-century French art with an Arab Mamaluke wielding a sword on a white horse. In the background an outline suggestive of a Middle Eastern city and a western camping tent are visible. The work is exuberant, painted with vivid purple and yellow, and with loose and expressive brushwork, underlining the agitated movement of horse and rider.



The Midland Stonebreakers, also painted in 2010, is a reworking of a painting by Gustave Courbet entitled *The Stonebreakers* (1850-51), a work that was destroyed in the fire bombing of Dresden in 1945. Reproduced to the same dimensions as the Courbet, the painting is a meditation on loss, not only on that of the lost canvas but also the changing landscape of Midland. Now part of a shopping district, this was the original site of the old Midland rail station. Hoareau notes that the figures 'work like ghosts from the past, to break rocks and lay tracks for a train that no longer exists.'ⁱⁱ

The characters in the *Stonebreakers*, as in many of Hoareau's works, appear stoic, tolerating the slings and arrows, even when they appear under physical strain. Midland city and its surrounds work as crucial backdrops to the main game of describing the endurance of its inhabitants, an idea that is echoed in *Viveash on the Verge of Suburban Development* (2010), a reworking of *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* (1826). *Viveash* like Delacroix's *Greece*, holds out her hands in a gesture that communicates equal doses of exasperation and forbearance. Instead of the Ottoman Empire's suppression of Greek independence however, it is *Viveash's* response to the erasure of the last tracts of native bushland and rural farmland for modern suburban development.

The Midland Junction Stonebreakers, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 155.5 x 244 cm



Gustave Courbet | *The Stonebreakers* 1849 oil on canvas 165 x 257 cm
Formerly Dresden Gemäldegalerie, the painting was destroyed in the firestorm that resulted in the Allied bombing of that city in 1945.



Tropicana Rider, 1983, acrylic on paper, 44 x 57 cm

Hoareau was inspired by an advertising campaign for a Northbridge nightclub taken from a local newspaper. He was intrigued by the disjunction between the promise of an exotic Shangri-la in the city and the less than salubrious reality. The painting is not inspired by a particular artwork but borrows more generally from Orientalism, which has already been filtered through a piece of twentieth century advertising.

In this early work key conceptual elements of Hoareau's art are in place. Experimentation with sources and the freedom of association between disparate motifs and historical timeframes remains a mainstay of his painting. Perth city is not recognisable as yet, nor is the figure a portrait of an individual known to the artist. But a Pop aesthetic that allows the integration of diverse elements is established. Further, as in much of the artist's subsequent work, the painting combines a personal vision, largely elusive to the viewer, with iconography that is somehow familiar.



Study for the Girl at the Counter of Leabridge Newsagent, 1996, acrylic on paper, 57 x 67 cm



Lavage - The Raft of the Medusa in Midland, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 214 cm

Themes developed in Hoareau's works since the 1980s seem to reach a climax of sorts in the ambitious *My History Painting* (2003). The work depicts a familiar alleyway at the edge of the city and shows the artist as martyr, in the guise of Titian's Saint Sebastian. Jean Léone Gérôme's *The Slave Market* is referenced in the pose of Hoareau's partner. The figures of the martyr and the slave are iconic forms and suggest ideas relating to the commodification of art and the difficulties and vulnerabilities associated with a creative life. In the background the message behind an aeroplane reads 'impermanence' and parachutists descend towards the city streets. The centre of commerce does not nourish, or delight, and it cannot be relied upon. The major protagonists are disengaged, lost in their own worlds, displaced in their own backyard.

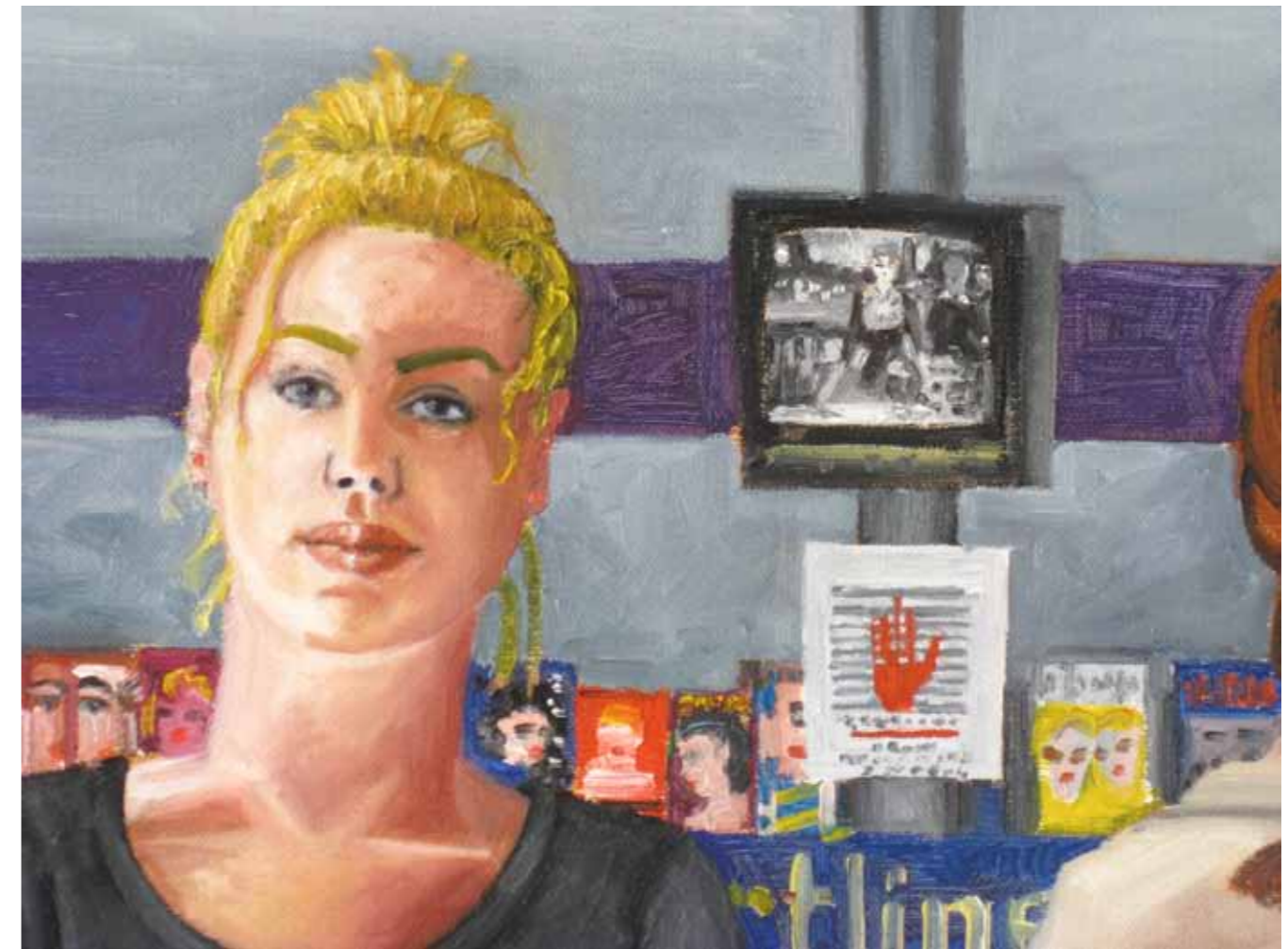
In the fifteenth-century Leon Battista Alberti defined the concept of *istoria* or history in relation to painting, noting that it was contingent for its success on the clear exposition of the narrative. Hoareau subverts this idea by presenting fragments of stories, or by joining diverse motifs to present a kind of Surrealist effect. It is a scene both dreamlike and brutal. The painting conveys a set of concepts, a personal manifesto, rather than a story. As the title suggests, it is the artist's own history painting.

In *My History Painting* the artist is represented as a wounded male. Any pretensions to the role of flaneur, the dispassionate observer with a domineering gaze, are relinquished. Rather, Hoareau is the figure scrutinised and denied agency. The motif of the vulnerable male body is continued in recent work, namely *Lavage – The Raft of the Medusa in Midland* (2010), a reworking of Théodore Géricault's *the Raft of the Medusa* (1819). Géricault's work was radical for its depiction of recent history, of a horrific story of survival following the shipwreck of a French vessel off the coast of Mauritania. It was a stark critique of the conservative elements that threatened the newly created democratic government of the day. The wreck of the *Medusa* was caused by the privileged Ultra-Royalist appointment of an inexperienced captain. In Hoareau's painting the raft is set in a self-service laundry in Midland.

Hoareau points to the self-reflexive aspects of the work where the 'very stuff that constitutes a raft: wood, canvas, rope, copper tacks and tar are the same materials that actually make-up Géricault's painting. The main mast of the raft in the painting supports a stretched sail and functions like an easel that props up a stretched canvas.'ⁱ This approach reflects the artist's fundamental interest in the craft of art, the physical and material aspects of practice, also referred to through the object of the suitcase.

As in many of his works, the painting focuses on the vulnerability of our bodies and plays out the personal on the public stage. The bodies are opened up to scrutiny, as they writhe and collapse. The brutal Perth sunshine hides nothing. Hoareau observes that the laundrette is a peculiar space in which the impersonal and the personal merge. It is the place where we literally hang out our dirty laundry. The large format of the work also underlines its public aspect.

In *Lavage* the artist sets out the methodology of his art making process. Beyond the meditation on the stuff of art (the canvas, the easel), Hoareau has enlisted his friends as models. The work is deliberately theatrical, self-conscious, quasi-melodramatic and yet it is also functions as a meditation on human suffering.



Detail of *The Girl at the Counter of Leabridge Newsagent*, 1997, oil on linen, 88 x 122cm

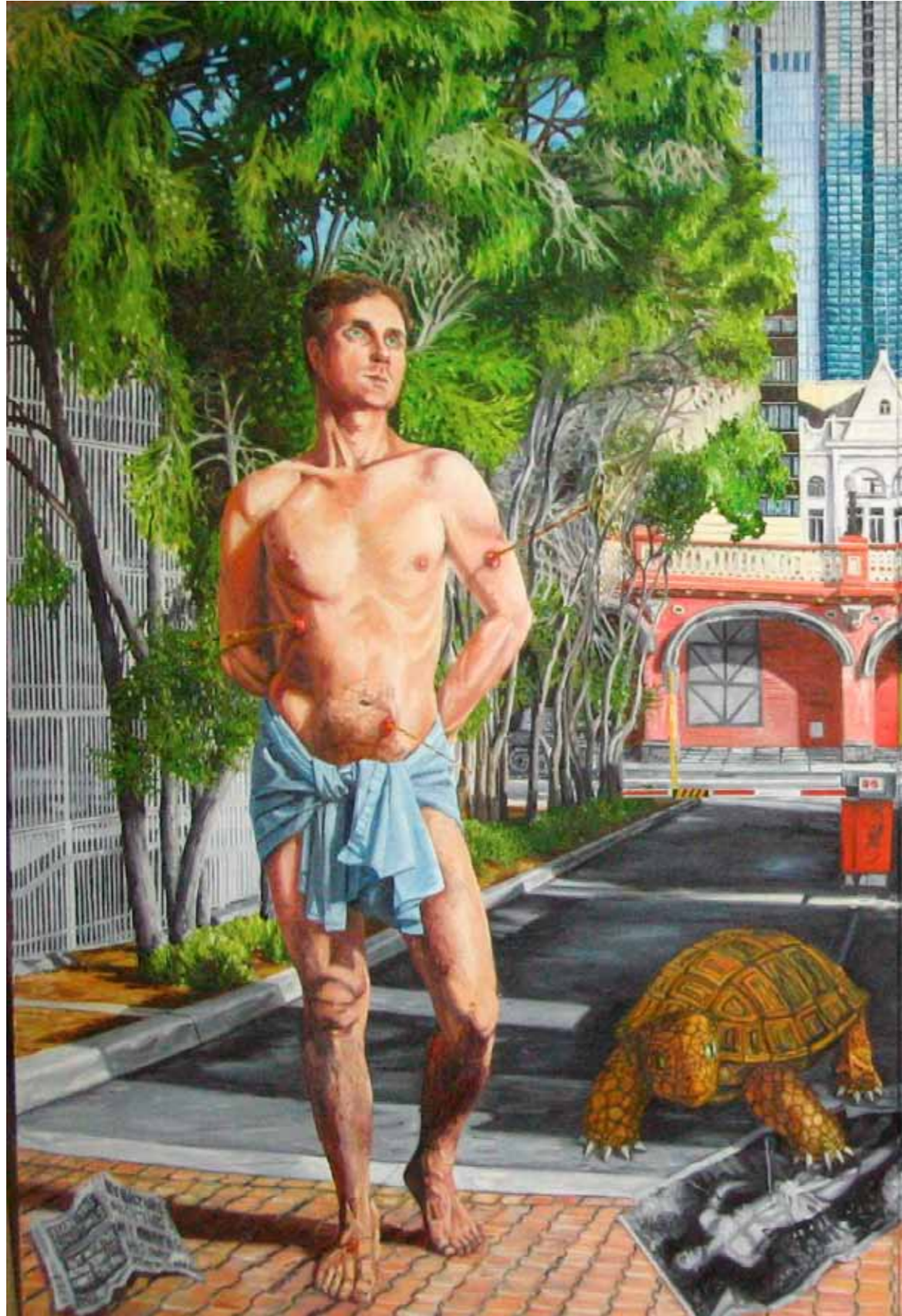
A number of works from the 1990s form a coherent grouping, inspired by the painter of modern life par excellence, Édouard Manet. *Girl at the Counter of a Northbridge Newsagent* (1997) depicts the interior of a newsagency situated opposite the artist's Gotham studio in Northbridge. The painting is a reworking of Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) and a shop worker named Simone plays the modern day Suzon.

Hoareau prizes out key elements of Manet's work and dispenses with others. The setting is a subdued, banal newsagency in harsh daylight, not a shimmering Parisian night. The vast mirror in Manet's work that reflects the hordes of male customers at the bar, as well as Suzon's back, is absent. A sense of duplication is instead supplied by the back view of another shop assistant, and Manet's original work is alluded to in the security camera footage. This is a process of dissection, an analysis of certain conventions that make up Manet's art.



After the Luncheon, 1998, oil on linen, 71 x 92 cm





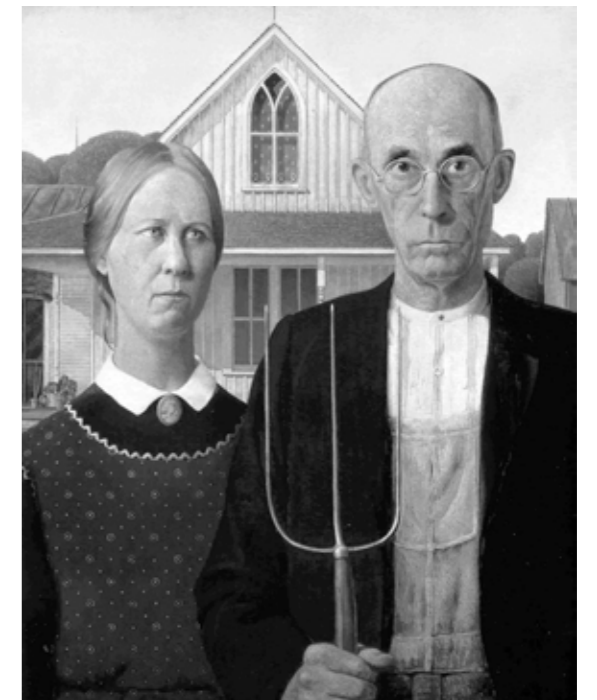
My History Painting, 2003, oil on linen, two panels each 168 x 115 cm

Such investigations inevitably create a dialogue of sorts between artists of the present and the past. Allusions to the mirror present a clear lineage in the western tradition, from Jan Van Eyck, to Velazquez, to Manet. This is not a crude identification with those artists, or an attempt to copy with exactitude their methodologies but a desire to employ central motifs in an experimental and altered context. Equally, Hoareau's paintings may convey a sentiment that resonates directly with the intent of the original artwork. For instance, though the glittering nightlife of Suzon's Paris seemed to render more potent her expression of boredom, Simone captures a very similar mood of detachment in this wildly different setting. Painted one year later, *After the Luncheon* (1998) is a reworking of Manet's *Luncheon in the Studio* (1868). The painting captures a comparable sense of dislocation between the key protagonists within the picture. And like Simone the three figures are fixed in a moment of private meditation.

Located on the opposite corner to the newsagency is the Brass Monkey Hotel, one of the few remaining nineteenth century pubs in Perth. *Northbridge Gothic* (1998) is a homage to Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930) and presents two Goths set against the hotel backdrop. While the characters in the Luncheon appear to have rummaged through the dress up box for top hats, this is the identity chosen by Hoareau's models for their everyday lives. They pointedly usurp conventional codes of dress and gender stereotypes. Such identities act as an armoury against the world and also a means of asserting the rights of individuals within it.



Study for Northbridge Gothic, 1998, acrylic on paper, 51 x 41 cm



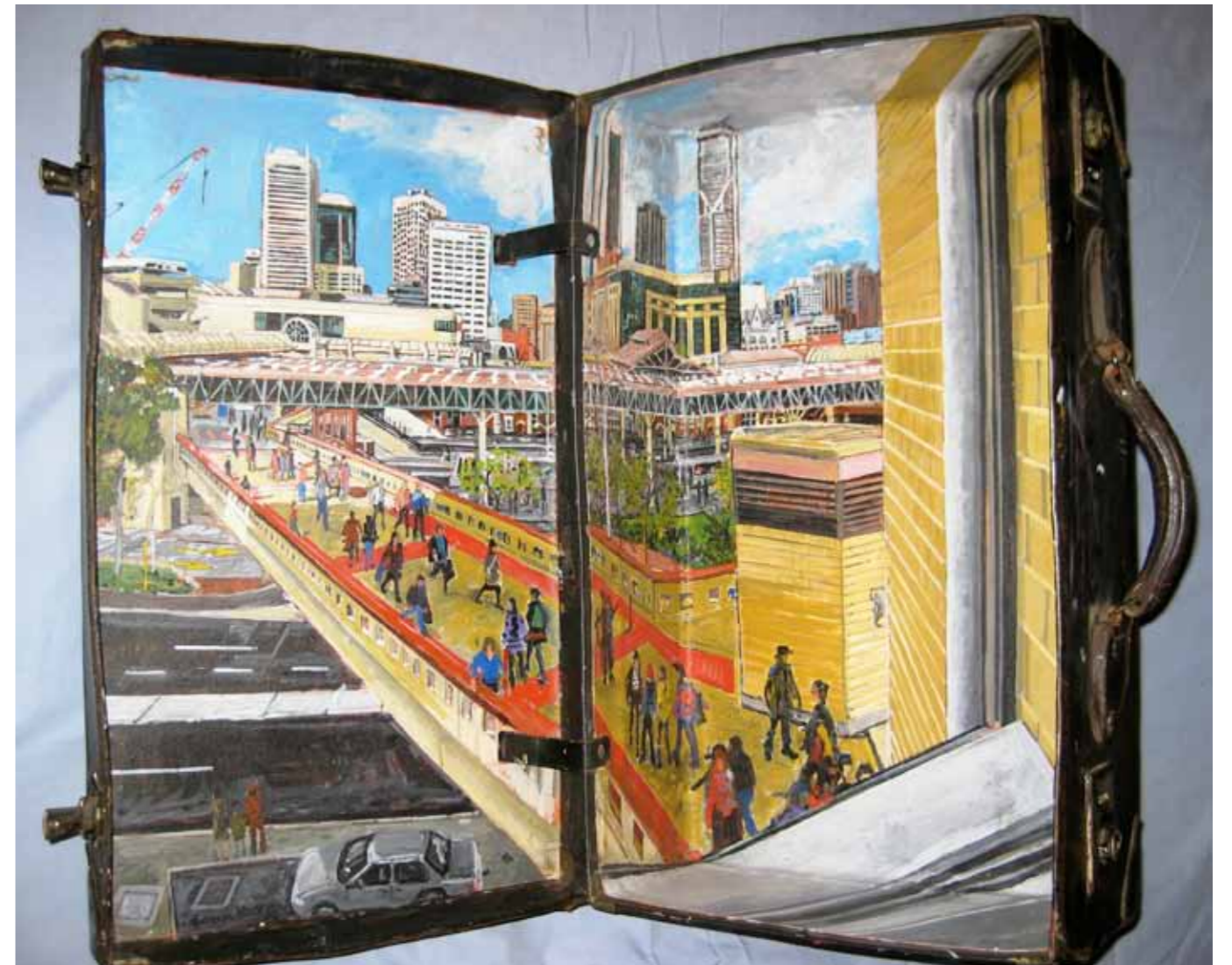
Grant Wood | *American Gothic* 1930 74.3 cm x 62.4 cm
© Figge Art Museum, successors to the Estate of Nan Wood Graham/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Claude Monet's *Boulevard des Capucines* (1873) served as the conceptual departure for Monet's *Suitcase* (2001). During a residency at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Hoareau proposed to make a painting of the city from a vantage point at the Gallery, as Monet had once done in an art gallery. This allowed viewers to look on and compare the view with that of the painting. The identification of an artistic lineage is thus extended, even in a generalised way, to the physical experience of making the artwork.

The painting represents a view of the pedestrian overpass that leads to the city train station. Suggestively, it is painted in a canvas-lined suitcase. The use of the suitcase synthesises key aspects of Hoareau's work, in its function as an object that is apt to move, adapt and be disrupted. There may also be a correlation with the portability of the painter's craft. Unless working in a very large format, the canvas and easel can be packed on the artist's back, in his or her singular journey through the city.



Northbridge Gothic, 1998, oil on linen, 76 x 61 cm



Monet's Suitcase, 2001, acrylic on canvas lined leather suitcase, 34 x 60 x 18 cm