

School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

Painting Souvenirs of Italianicity

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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award for any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date: December 2020

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ABSTRACT

This practice led research investigates the complexities of souvenirs within the domestic every day, and the potential of still life painting to engage with and to reflect on felt experiences surrounding these objects. The souvenirs that I investigate within my research are miniature figures; reproductions of iconic sculptures from the old masters of Italy. These souvenirs reside within homes not to pay tribute to the original artists nor the stories depicted, but as objects embedded with familial significance. I coin these sentimental objects as ‘Souvenirs of Italianicity’. I look at souvenirs particularly in relation to their place in the everyday and their ability to deepen connections with personal cultural histories in the light of critical theory. I identify these miniature replicas within the domestic home as potent symbols of Italian identity while reflecting on my own personal experiences as a descendant of Italian immigrants.

The objects I investigate are part of the everyday and their potential as cultural objects is overlooked. Through a painting practice I critically engage with the still life genre and reflect on contemporary lived experiences of the domestic interior by emphasising what might normally fade into the blur of the everyday. Contrary to the negative connotations surrounding souvenirs in academia, I argue that their nostalgic and sentimental value points to a deep connection to memory and familial history, making them deserving of greater academic attention. To examine the significance of these souvenirs, the painted works in this research engage with theories surrounding affect and the felt experience. This practice led research aims to identify, celebrate and elaborate on the complexities of objects within contemporary domestic spaces and their relationship with concepts surrounding identity, the passing of time, and the affective relationship objects have with the space they exist within and the people that surround with them.

INTRODUCTION

How can still life painting explore the role of souvenirs as valuable objects capable of forming connections to heritage within the domestic sphere?

When thinking about ‘souvenirs’, one might think about mass-produced knickknacks, the kitsch, the tacky, the cheap, a piece of evidence from a holiday far away. Objects reminiscent of once being somewhere far away are on display, as little mementos that become part of everyday activities. Magnets on the fridge and figures on the mantle effortlessly personify domestic environments. These mementos are hidden out of sight and tucked away in nooks, like tea towels in the kitchen, and shirts in the drawers. They find their way into pockets and purses as keyrings and trinkets. Things easy to live without, but often things that are hard to let go. Almost anything can become a souvenir, but the items that typically come to mind are the mass-produced objects sold in shops and stands at busy and touristy sites. In academic literature souvenirs have generally been treated as such, as the very epitome of tourism’s cultural kitsch (Haldrup 2017, 52). However, if I were to look around my family home, certain objects that would typically fall into the category of being a ‘souvenir’ have superseded this role. For instance, the miniature reproductions of famous sculptural artworks. These objects are spread throughout the living areas of my family home, on the dining table, a bookshelf in the corner and by the couch on the floor are some of the places they can be seen. When I look at these souvenirs thoughts of a faraway country come to mind, but I don’t think of a specific holiday or a fond memory of travelling overseas. Instead these souvenirs embody a cultural connection to my personal heritage, a reminder of my family’s history.

Australia is a particularly diverse nation, and people from many backgrounds call themselves Australian. I, like many other people in Australia, have a mixed heritage background. My mother is a second-generation immigrant whose parents emigrated from Italy in 1955 after World War Two. My father is a first-generation immigrant from England who came over in 1978 with his mother and two brothers on the tail end of the ‘Ten Pound Pom’ scheme that brought in over one and a half million people from the UK (Saunders 2006, 164). In my research, my connection to my English heritage is not a focal point because Australia is an English-speaking nation that has adopted much of the lifestyle and traditions of England. It is the non-English speaking ethnic groups that emigrated to Australia and their descendants that this project primarily refers to.

On the street I grew up on, my neighbours encompassed a variety of different cultural heritages. Different cultures fuse together as the building blocks that embody a new Australian identity. When I was young, I had a neighbour my age, who I would visit regularly for play dates. She was Filipino and Croatian, but she was ultimately Australian. The objects displayed in her home paid tribute to the beliefs and customs from her parents' countries of origin. The interior of their home gave me insight to what felt like another world. There were miniature religious figures draped with rosary beads and framed biblical imagery including a large print of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* looking over the kitchen and dining area. Before I'd enter their home, I would take my shoes off in the front entryway and be offered a pair of inside slippers. Stepping through another home, adorned with different culturally embedded objects, I began to understand domestic objects as a connection to heritage and culture.

The souvenirs that are the primary focus of my investigation, like *The Last Supper*, are also reproductions of famous works of art but for different purposes. *The Last Supper* displayed in my neighbour's house reflected their religious beliefs and practices which coincide with the artists intentions and beliefs. This is unlike the replicated sculptures within my family's home, where the understanding of the work has been personalised and no longer corresponds to the artist's intent. These objects found in my family home are what I have coined 'Souvenirs of Italianicity'. That is objects, souvenirs in particular, that are kept in the home as a connection to Italianicity. This term doesn't refer to objects with Italian origin that are kept in the home for purposes other than their Italianicity. This is also different to an Italian souvenir which refers to Italy as a country; a destination. Souvenirs of Italianicity refers to a memento of nostalgic significance that doesn't bring memories of a holiday but is instead embedded with familial ties to Italy.

Souvenirs of Italianicity are elusive and specific, they are personal and vastly known, they are not tied to forms, and can take almost any shape. Their existence reflects individual perspectives that are in a constant state of flux which makes them elusive in nature, and therefore difficult to catch. To explore the complexities of Souvenirs of Italianicity I reflect on my personal experiences with them as objects and the affective encounters experienced from these objects, through my experience as a third-generation Italian immigrant. Having never lived overseas, I've always known Australia as home and grew up speaking English at school and home like many of my peers. Objects have been meaningful in helping me understand my connection to Italy. I can sympathise with the nostalgic feelings that Italian migrants and my family may have experienced. This response is generated from my engagement with these objects that bring forth felt affects in response to objects representing a country I have never lived in but feel a cultural connection with. The felt affects the objects produce prompt me to reflect and think, but most importantly to act. This research is driven by the 'act', by means of creative led research. My methodology involves a reflexive photography practice which informs my paintings and studio experimentation. The

project aims to utilise painting to draw connections between past and present, and between myself as an individual and my greater cultural identity.

Painting provides a perspective which is essential in interpreting the allusivity and specificity of the objects explored in this project. This is because the artist remains present within a painting regardless of if they are physically there or not. I am present through my choices made during the production of my paintings, the objects and figures I have sourced and selected to paint, and in the painting process itself through my sense of touch. Art critic and author Isabelle Graw's understanding of painting's ability to connect has influenced my understanding painting's potential to hold the trace of the producing person; to embody the 'ghost of a presence' (Graw 2012, 50). Graw argues that, through mark making, paintings "suggest a strong bond between the product and the (absent) person of its maker" (ibid). It is this 'ghost of a presence' that makes a painting practice effective in interpreting the elusive and specific nature of Souvenirs of Italianicity. The intent of the artist is present through the artistic process in whatever form it takes (Graw 2012, 51). Mark making is an essential element in my paintings; precise and deliberate marks are made using a variety of experimental methods creating an intentional connection with my presence as the artist to the objects that I depict. Through painting Souvenirs of Italianicity, the 'ghost of a presence' bridges the gap between the subject and viewer: the painter being the mediator between the two.

The application of paint draws a direct connection to me as the artist through touch, and more importantly, through my choices. Every aspect of my paintings, from the preparation of the surface to the application of paint, are evidence of my presence through touch. The carefully prepared surfaces that I work on provide a sense of touch reflecting the time spent carefully sanding and priming, the smooth surfaces are then able to pick up the most sensitive details of my gestural mark making. The smoothed texture of the wooden board and rough texture of the toothy canvas change the results of my application of paint. Whether I paint with a brush, wipe with a rag, or make the choice to leave the surface smooth and bright untouched by oily pigments, my connection to the painting as the artist is present. The selections I make of where and when to apply paint reveal fragments of my narrative. Using painting as both a means of expression, and as a means of communication to a wider audience, the fleeting nature of the Souvenirs of Italianicity becomes tangible. In *'Thinking through painting – reflexivity and agency beyond the canvas'* arts theorist Peter Geimer refers to a painting's ability to become suddenly and strangely poeticised, suggesting the poetry of the painted image has the ability to make elusive subjects understandable (Geimer 2012, 29). Painting has the potential to make what is difficult to catch, and in a sense untouchable, attainable. An elusive subject matter that surrounds notions of nostalgia, personal feelings, and memory is grounded when a connection to an individual person, such as the artist, is provided, giving context to the viewer.

My paintings build on a still life painting practice, critiquing and extending on notions surrounding the genre, rather than strictly being within the genre. Still life is a principal genre of Western art, a genre where the subject is made up of mostly other than living, or ‘dead’, things. Author Martin Wood, describes the genre in his 1913 journal article “Still-Life Painting” suggesting:

“Still-life” painting seems to express a world from which the inhabitants have withdrawn, but a world which owes all its charm to the reflection it retains of those who but a moment ago were moving in it. (Wood 1913, 22)

Still life painting is a genre which reflects the lived experiences and felt affects of those who own the objects represented by the still life painting. One might think of depictions of everyday objects, of fruit and flowers, a celebration of material pleasures. Often memento mori is in close association to still life painting, a visual reminder of the inevitability of death through a collection of symbolic objects. In the seventeenth century the French Academy ranked still life at the bottom of the hierarchy of genres – fifth after history painting, portraiture, genre painting, and landscape. The lack of human subject matter meant it was considered lowly and to this day, still life is comparatively undiscussed (Bryson 2017, 136). My paintings reject certain static ways still life painting is understood. Still life painting is ever evolving and reflects the ever-changing nature of the everyday and the overlooked. It acknowledges the past in a humble way, and acts as a witness to the small pleasures in life. Through recurring forms, Bryson suggests homewares and domestic objects “point backwards to a long evolution in the culture which produces them” (Bryson 2017, 137). Valuable insight into personal and sensual experiences are provided through still life painting as it can give a physical presence to fleeting moments. In an alignment with the way that still life painting has been overlooked, souvenirs too have been overlooked as valuable objects within academia. Painting Souvenirs of Italianicity builds cultural memory and takes the fleeting affects embodied by overlooked objects in everyday life and freezes them in time.

I begin chapter one by considering ways in which heritage is celebrated and commemorated in the everyday, before elaborating on the objects that draw a connection from the past to the present, particularly in relation to cultural heritage. I reflect on my own Italian – English heritage and how it is presented within domestic environments. I build an understanding of the importance of material culture drawing from cultural anthropologists Susan Pearce and Daniel Miller. I draw from Pearce’s understanding of the value in everyday objects, considering the complexities of the souvenir and its impact. Building on Miller’s understanding of material culture’s ability to strengthen relationships between people, I suggest people’s connections to material culture can strengthen their ties to their cultural heritage. I use the term “nostalgic object” to define the objects that are valuable not simply as objects but are valuable by the nostalgic value they embody. These objects do not have a specific form, nor are they

bound to specific places, people or initial value. In this chapter I introduce my initial creative research methods, including selecting the motifs central to this project. I looked broadly what is considered a nostalgic object within my family home, including looking at similar items in the homes of my extended family and friends who have Italian heritage before centring my focus on souvenirs as nostalgic objects. Certain objects that carry many meanings and act as symbols become reoccurring motifs which in turn raise new questions, opening new pathways for discussion and delving into the complexity of these objects.

In chapter two I build on my understanding of material culture and the nostalgic value imbedded in the objects I paint. I investigate the souvenirs' place in academia and the role they have in domestic environments. My thesis is informed by theories from Susan Stewart, referring to her 1984 book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* in relation to souvenirs, and later, miniatures. My thesis builds on Stewart's understanding of souvenirs, referring to the concepts in Michael Haldrup's "Souvenirs: Magical objects in everyday life", examining the so called "magical" potential of souvenirs for building identity and a sense of personal cultural heritage. Looking beyond the common understanding of souvenirs in relation to the tourist, I refer to the souvenir's potential as a 'cultural vessel'. In doing this I question the seemingly unbreakable bond between souvenirs and kitsch. As a response to their inescapable association with kitsch, I begin painting experiments that both reject and acknowledge these origins. I do this through my use of technique, application, and colour where I restrict my palette before reintroducing a controlled colour palette to draw connections between notions of tacky and tasteful. My experimentation with mark making draws a crucial connection with the domestic environment, and my use of colour reflects notions of memory, the passing of time, and notions of kitsch. Following this experimentation, I then reflect on the studio discoveries that occurred in the making and showing of the body of work, exhibited as a series at the 2018 *Curtin Art Degree Show*.

Chapter three examines my felt experience of the space and builds on discoveries made through my initial research and the first body of work and extends my method of painting with new uses of colour and mark making. In May 2019 I collaborated with artists Callum Hope, and Greg Molloy in a group show titled *Traces of Understanding* at Zig Zag Gallery, Kalamunda. In this show works from our individual practices are connected by process driven techniques. I elaborate on the illusive and specific nature of these objects, and how through a painting method affects can be slowed and captured to produce affects that reflect the intention of the painter. My understanding of affect theory is informed by *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) by Melissa Gregg, Gregory Siegworth and Sara Ahmed. This text guided my understanding of affect in relation to objects as I locate the "shimmer" through a painting practice that utilises direction and motion in mark making. In reflecting on the complex nuances of the Souvenirs of Italianicity that are

central to my project, I look at the intention of the original artist that the souvenirs reflect, their influences, and how these intentions are temporary despite remaining present. I experiment on collaborative painted works with Greg Molloy using his motor driven machine, which once dry, I work back into adding and removing paint to create a composition. Guided by my understanding of affect, I locate the “shimmer” through emphasising elements of my painting practice.

Chapter four more closely looks at underlying themes of domesticity and gendered space specifically in regard to my body of work exhibited in the Quarter Gallery at Curtin University in Bentley in November 2019 titled *Souvenirs Contained*, and later in my solo show titled *Souvenirs of Italianicity* in January 2020 at Pig Melon in Perth. My paintings in this final body of work have distinctly shifted to engage with notions of space in both the exhibition space and in the represented space in my paintings. I begin by acknowledging the transformative aspect of domestic home, as a space that has many roles while remaining inviting and comfortable. My experience in the home, a private space, is compared with the gallery, a public space. I also consider the studio’s role as a hybrid public and private space, that bridges the gap between the location of the still lives that I depict in a homely environment to the stark conception of the gallery space. In what ways does the space reflect and inform the content of the works within it? The same painting in a different space create new affects completely different to those experienced in the home and studio. I discuss the relevance of my paintings with the history of still life as an underappreciate and overlooked genre of painting. But I do not limit myself to stick diligently within any one category. In this final body of work, I push my painting practice towards the portraiture genre which allows notions of identity to have a larger presence within my final show.

When I think about my Italian heritage and how it is present in my life, I think about family, food, language, and traditions passed down through generations, but I also think about the physical presence of Italian culture that is part of my everyday life. In my family home I encounter objects that hold significance, not through their domestic utility, but through their connection to Italian culture - a nostalgic tie to ethnicity. The affective ability of these objects has drawn me in, as they draw connections between the past and the present. In their tangible state they mimic and attempt to replicate famous Italian figures portraying historical stories, but in another way their acknowledgement of a personal connection to a motherland far away is also present. I argue the gathering of such objects within a home play a crucial role in depicting heritage inside the home. Through my painting practice I examine these collected objects in a personal and visually orientated manner, deepening my understanding of what makes them meaningful and complex so as to shed light on their nuanced cultural potency.

1.1 OBJECTS AND THE SELF.

From the moment I wake up, until I go to sleep, I am constantly surrounded by objects, some which I seek out and engage with, but for the most part I move through my day without the slightest acknowledgement of the objects around me. They are integrated into every facet of life; material objects are an essential part of the day to day. Cultural theorist and author Susan M. Pearce lays down the fundamentals on which my basic understanding of material culture is built on. Pearce wrote in the introductory chapter of *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (1994)

... Material objects are as much a part of the weave of our lives as our bodies are; indeed these two aspects of our lives have the fundamental characteristic of physicality not possessed by more other facets of our existence (Pearce 1994, 1).

Pearce emphasises the role of objects as an extension of the self, and as having an important role in defining and contributing to a sense of identity as either an individual or a group. Pearce posits that within material cultural theory the study of objects is an important element within the broader pattern of cultural studies (Pearce 1994, 2). Certain objects are worth more than others across different measures of value, such as functional value, monetary value, social value, psychological value, and cultural value. Regarding what makes certain objects valuable Pearce writes:

Notions of what creates value are very complex and so are the related processes of social change and the relationship of the material world to these movements. Our relationship to the accumulation of objects is as profound and as significant as our relationships to each other, to language, and to time and space, and as complex. (Pearce 1994, 4)

Pearce acknowledges the deeply complex nature of objects, likening the relationships people have with objects to being as impactful as relationships with other people. This understanding further informs my process, as I investigate the complexities of my own experience with specific objects through a reflexive painting practice.

Objects are important in shaping perceptions of the world and by recognising their potential a deeper understanding of relationships can be grasped. Cultural theorist and author of *Material Culture: Why Some Things Matter* (2008), Daniel Miller argues that although the ever-growing acquisition of material objects might imply people are more superficial and materialistic, the opposite in many ways is true; possessions remain profound and a closeness with objects, and a closeness with other people run parallel. Receiving and exchanging gifts gives a physical memento of a personal relationship with a friend, by displaying the object in your home through sight and touch, memories and thoughts of that friend resurface. In this way objects can strengthen bonds between people, in a way that doesn't require both people to be actively involved. Gift giving is a gesture that keeps on giving. I not only agree with this notion, but I believe an affinity between having a closeness with objects and a closeness with heritage also exists. In the same way a personal bond between two people can be passively strengthened, objects displayed within the home that are reminiscent of cultural heritage contribute to the relationship one has with their cultural and personal identity. This is particularly true for people removed from their cultural heritage through immigration, and descendants of migrants whose connection to their cultural heritage is further removed by the generational gap from their original homeland. Listening to the affects of objects opens a dialogue with an authentic other voice (Miller 2008, 2). This 'other voice' is found within the physicality of the object where connections to other spaces and experiences are held. The 'other voice' extends its embodied space through its history as an object. In the domestic environment, this 'other voice' also builds on the history and sense of identity of the people that live around it.

1.2 THE THREE GRAZIE ON THE DINING TABLE.

Antonio Canova's grand marble statue of *The Three Graces* sits, domesticated on the centre of the dining table, becoming part of the everyday through its placement in a space that people come together in. Simply referred to as 'The Three Grazie' by my mother, a hybrid English and Italian nickname for the



Figure 1. Isabella Speed, miniature reproduction of *The Three Graces* on a doily (1), 2018, digital image.



Figure 2. Isabella Speed, miniature reproduction of *The Three Graces* on a doily (2), 2018, digital image.

statue combining the English reading with the Italian ‘Grazie’ meaning ‘Graces’: a poetic reminder of my family’s relationship to Italy, one experienced through the lens of Australian culture. ‘The Three Grazie’ have become part of my home life activities, including dining, cleaning and relaxing. It usually rests in the background but, if needed, it can be easily lifted and moved, and sometimes becoming the catalyst for discussion. Compared to its original counterpart that resides protected in a museum, this miniature version is treated more like part of the home environment rather than a piece of art shielded from dust and fingers. This Souvenir of Italianicity is distanced from its high art origin and mythological inspirations. This miniature replica in particular was bought by my mother in Italy without a thought of the myth of Zeus’s three daughters. At that moment, through a labour of selection, this souvenir was chosen for the value it holds as an object of Italianicity. It is small enough to sit somewhat unnoticed on a doily – an object also embedded with familiarity and nostalgia - and can be effortlessly and routinely moved to clear a space when needed. The table is a versatile and familial location and in the absence of people dining, the three figures inhabit the space in a gentle embrace. It has become part of the environment like the doily, like the table. These souvenirs may have been simply bought as mementos of a holiday to Italy, but I argue they are more than that, they embody sentimental value that contributes to the representation of familial and cultural histories within the home. The objects that I have carefully selected as the focal point of my paintings are vessels of memories and affects. Through a painting practice I am able to contextualise the histories that the objects embody and draw a connection to notions of identity in contemporary domestic spaces.

The miniature reproductions of famous Italian sculptures were especially interesting because unlike some of the other objects, both the artist and the story behind the figures were not relevant to their selection and placement in the home. Aside from the miniature replica of *The Three Graces*, the second souvenir of Italianicity that has consistently remained a focal point throughout my investigation is a miniature replica of the statue of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* originally by Flemish artist Giambologna. When I first brought up with my mum the fact that one of the statues that lived in the lounge room was a replica of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* she was not thrilled. The violent story behind the sculpture didn’t really have a place inside the house. Its value lies in its obvious Italianicity, and its connection to personal cultural histories. Despite Giambologna not being an Italian artist, he was based in Italy and depicted a Roman myth in this work. In discerning what makes an object a ‘Souvenir of Italianicity’ I consider their role in the home and how their physicality connects to an idea of Italianicity. The nationality of the artist, and the nature of the myth or story being depicted is superseded with a connection to place. *The Three Graces*, although by an Italian artist, depicts Greek mythology, unlike *The Rape of the Sabine Women* where a non-Italian artist depicts an Italian myth. Later in my project I include another miniature replica of a famous statue hidden in plain sight on a corner shelf in the living area, this time it is Alexandros of Antioch’s *Venus De Milo*. While the artist or the mythological background is not Italian but Greek, I would still

categorise this object as a Souvenir of Italianicity due to its given role in the home, when in proximity to the other statues such as replicas of Italian buildings and other Italian paraphernalia. The sculptures that have become central to my investigation are important because of the nostalgic value imbedded within them by the owner of the object and those who share the owner's views on the object, as opposed to the original purposes of the artist.

1.3 'LABOUR OF SELECTION'.

The process by which objects are carefully chosen for display can be understood as what Miller terms 'labour of selection', in which connections to heritage are acknowledged through a selective process. Through the labour of selection of displayed objects meaningful connections are made. A connection to a distanced heritage can be strengthened, one that grows more distanced with each generation. This is the case in relation to the selection of the objects inside my family home, in both choosing to buy them, and to then choose where to display them if they are displayed at all. My project centres around 'objet d'art'¹ that are somewhat small, placed on doilies and in corners existing as part of the everyday for those that reside beside them. The objects were selected and purchased by members of my family, chosen because of their connection to cultural heritage. They are miniature replicas of famous Italian sculptures in varying sizes selected because of their connection to Italian culture.

Miller's notion of 'labour of selection' is not just present in the initial purchase of the objects, there was also a labour of selection in selecting which objects I decided to photograph to then paint. After identifying different kinds of objects accumulated as representations of Italy displayed within the home, I decided the focal point for this project was miniature replicas of famous Italian sculptures, particularly looking at a miniature replica of *The Three Graces* (Figure 1 and 2). Other objects that spoke of Italianicity included novelty items relating to specific Italian stories, such as a ~60cm tall Pinocchio made of glass, a vessel shaped like a fat Italian priest and a tall ceramic bottle shaped like the bell tower of the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower in Florence (Figure 3 to 6). I initially photographed these objects in their natural untouched place on a long entertainment unit where they sat among other objects, family photos, gifts, and souvenirs. This is the same place my mother's collection of nativity scenes seasonally comes out, a place in the living area where one might gaze when having a cup of tea on the sofa. The miniature

¹ Meaning literally an 'art object' in French, but in practice refers to a small decorative or artistic article typically regarded as a collectable item (Dictionary.com 2018, accessed October 18, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/objet-d-art>)



Figure 3. Isabella Speed, Italian object (1), 2018, digital image.



Figure 4. Isabella Speed, Italian object (2), 2018, digital image.



Figure 5. Isabella Speed, Italian object (3), 2018, digital image.



Figure 6. Isabella Speed, Italian object (4), 2018, digital image.

reproductions of these statues are distanced from their original source of inspiration, the myths and stories that are depicted by the figures, have been substituted for more personalised meanings.

There is a labour of selection in many facets of my project, from the collecting and displaying of the objects that make up the focal point of my project, to my artistic method of conceptualising, researching, and executing a painting. In my practice, my labour of selection as an artist begins by photographing objects with which I then determine the direction of individual paintings and their place in my project as whole. Through photography I experiment with both candid and staged methods of capturing a variety of objects in my family home. In selecting what object to photograph, I consider their connection to Italianicity, whether that be through their physicality, or origin of production and design.

After photographing a variety of objects within the home of my immediate family, I reached out to my less immediate family and friends with Italian heritage. I initiated discussions about how Italian heritage is present within their home, particularly in regard to what objects are on display. Attaining photographs of their objects of Italianicity helped to inform my selection for what objects became the focal point of my research. Interestingly there were different replicas of the same statues that appear in different domestic environments. Both Canova's *The Three Graces* and Giambologna's *The Rape of the Sabine Women* made a second appearance as representations of Italian heritage in two other family homes (Figure 8 and 9). One home belonging to my zia (aunt) on my mother's side, and the other home belonged to a long time friend who also shares a somewhat distanced relationship to her Italian heritage which can be comparable to my own relationship with Italy.

What makes these objects relevant is their visual sense of Italianicity, and the nostalgic value that comes with that. Nostalgia is an evolving concept, initially the name of a medical condition in the 17th century, it defined a type of wasting disease originating from the sad mood that came from the desire to return to one's native land. The word is a literal combination of the Greek Nostos meaning 'return to the native land', with Algos, which means 'suffering or grief' (Atia and Davies 2010, 182) (Hofer 1934[1688], 381). It wasn't until the 19th century that the term nostalgia was softened to that of a normative aspect of human memory and a cultural mode (Atia and Davies 2010). Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies's journal article "Nostalgia and the shapes of history" (2010) suggests "nostalgia's pleasures are probably familiar to everyone, and especially treasured by travellers, immigrants, exiles and refugees: by displaced peoples of all kinds (Atia and Davies 2010, 181)." Australia is a multicultural country where many people reflect on their homeland and heritage through nostalgic objects. I myself am not displaced as an immigrant would be, but the objects of Italianicity acknowledge the displacement of my grandparents and allow me to build a deeper connection with my heritage through my everyday experiences.



Figure 7. Isabella Speed, miniature reproduction of *The Three Graces*, 2018, digital image.



Figure 8. Emma-Jay Deuter, miniature reproduction of *The Rape of the Sabine Women (1)*, 2018, digital image.



Figure 9. Emma-Jay Deuter, miniature reproduction of *The Rape of the Sabine Women (2)*, 2018, digital image.

1.4 THROUGH A LENS.

The choices I made in my photography practice continue to be present through out my painting practice. There were two main pathways in my photography as I mentioned previously, staged scenes where I move and set up the objects to be read in a certain way, and candid photographs, where I have come across a scene and have made little to no changes to what is already in front of me. In order to not disturb the connections formed by the placement of different objects, I used point of view, composition, and lighting to draw attention to the object. I took photos at many hours of the day and night, with both natural lighting and staged lighting. In my candid photos, I hoped to engage in how they exist in the everyday. In my candid photograph in the living area (Figure 10) the statue stands in the middle of the composition surrounded by elements of a home. In the photo, surrounding the sculpture, a towering pile of books sits on a dramatic piece of wooden furniture. A floral sofa mirrors from the other side building a narrative together with the stack of books. The miniature reproduction is further cornered into this space by a sewing kit in stasis between being used and being returned to its place in a cupboard. This space is often hidden from many angles in this room. But crouched in front of the sofa I was able to frame the sculpture in its everyday place.

My candid photographs spoke of the domestic environment that the objects existed within, through my staged photographs I was about to experiment with a dramatic approach that reflect the history that led to their creation. By changing the placement, composition and lighting I create a sense of drama reminiscent of the old masters. I considered the environment deciding how much to keep. In my photograph (Figure 11) I lit the figures with a single source of light in a darkened room with a spotlight, which in turn shrouds the surroundings in darkness. The doily remains present, as well as a teapot in the background. The statue became the star of its own show, set on the centre of the dining room table. With a stage in mind, I positioned the various different figures from around my house in different positions before photographing them (Figure 12 and 13). Their smooth texture and unsaturated colour unified them against the floorboards in my family living room. The furniture watched from the background like a silent audience. In my photographs the figures are the stars of the stage, everything else, the doily, couches, chairs and other various pieces of furniture are the props and scenery that inform how the Souvenirs of Italianicity are interpreted.



Figure 10. Isabella Speed, painting reference - candid, 2019, digital image.



Figure 11. Isabella Speed, painting reference – dramatic lighting, 2019, digital image.

Experimenting with photography has provided my project with an initial labour of selection that enabled me to capture the physicality of my surroundings quickly and accurately. My painting practice depends on the photographs as my primary source of information, meaning photographing the sculpture, environments and other elements that are included in my paintings were an ongoing part of this project that had an important role in the outcome. I often work from multiple photographs for a single painting, which allows me to make changes to the composition and add or remove elements. My paintings may replicate the composition of the photograph especially if I had staged the photograph or choose to draw attention to the candid environment. However, in comparing photographs with their counterpart paintings, it is evident that many liberties are taken during the painting process. Colour, mark making, and perhaps most importantly texture – and the evidence of the artists touch build on the visual composition that is provided by the photograph. Using photography as my initial labour of selection allowed me to consider and reflect on the content of the image before reconstructing the imagery through paint.



Figure 12. Isabella Speed, staged painting reference on floor (1), 2019, digital image.



Figure 13. Isabella Speed, staged painting reference on floor (2), 2019, digital image.

Any ordinary object has the potential to become a nostalgic object when the owner imbues the physicality of the object with their nostalgia. Souvenirs that become nostalgic objects move beyond the predetermined notions of the tourist souvenir, and instead reflect the identity of the owner. This chapter explores the souvenir as a nostalgic object, and how a painting practice can shed light on their genuine cultural value despite an origin as a touristic and kitsch item. There is an affinity between the tourist souvenir and cultural kitsch that exists in academic literature (Haldrup 2016, 52). I investigate the Italian souvenirs that are miniature replicas of famous statues found within the home of my family, not as kitsch objects, but as nostalgic cultural objects embodied with sentimental value. In Hugh Wilkins' study "Souvenirs: What and Why We Buy", it is acknowledged that there has been little investigation into souvenirs, whilst also noting that souvenirs are not bound to one role or use. Due to the diverse roles that souvenirs have and the large forms they can take there are many opportunities for further research (Wilkins 2011, 246). Contrary to previous notions surrounding souvenirs I look at souvenirs that I consider as elevated and complex objects with genuine value.

2.1 SOUVENIRS AS CULTURAL VESSELS.

The value inherent within the souvenirs of this project is tied to their role as conduits for sentimental feelings and memories. Guy Fletcher argues that sentimental value is a genuine kind of value despite resistance within academia. It is important to acknowledge that the term sentimentality can be thought of as synonymous with "cloying," "mawkish," or "schmaltzy" which implies that to be sentimental is to be cheap and excessively emotional (Fletcher 2009, 55). When Fletcher talks about sentimentality it is not referring to this term in such a way, but as in "sentimental value" to convey "a connection with sentiment or emotion-involving relationships of experiences" (Fletcher 2009, 55). Within my project I refer to the latter reading of sentimentality, as a genuine and somewhat discreet emotional connection to another time or place. I build on Fletcher's understanding of sentimental value, arguing that it can be significant in establishing a connection to an estranged cultural heritage. Fletcher suggests the state of affairs surrounding an object alone do not ascribe sentimental value, but the object itself is a bearer of genuine value (Fletcher 2009, 60-61). There are many versions of full scale 'souvenirs' replicating famous sculptures which can be found in art and museum collections around the world. On an institutional level these museological souvenirs embody the same affects of the original, which are also imitated by the miniature souvenirs on a domestic level. Within my project, Souvenirs of Italianicity hold their value

partly because of their aesthetic and objecthood in a similar way to their museological souvenir counterpart, and partly because of the sentimental value that has been granted to them.

The complex nature of souvenirs has been acknowledged by poet and author Susan Stewart who provides a critical analysis of nostalgia and objecthood in her 1984 book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Stewart looks with a metaphorical eye at everyday objects, and the narratives people attach to them to build an understanding of self, and the greater surrounding world. Stewart draws from semiotics and from psychoanalytic, feminist, and Marxist theories, and has been influential over a variety of subjects, which extends into my understanding of painting still life. I build on Stewart's understanding of souvenirs as objects that mediate time and space despite Stewart primarily referring to the tourist souvenir. More recently, topics surrounding nostalgia in relation to material culture has been acknowledged as potentially more active and self-aware than Stewart and other theorists have allowed for (Atia and Davies 2010, 183-184). I instead look at the souvenir as a cultural souvenir, as a vessel that holds cultural significance to individuals that are somewhat estranged from their cultural heritage.

In her chapter "The Miniature" Stewart writes that a souvenir's fascination lies in its ability to affect us, affording us particular moods, sentiments and imagination (Haldrup 2015, 57). The souvenir is tied to a personal story, carrying memories of its particular context of origin which she refers to as a sampled souvenir. It also acts as a representational object, re-presenting certain places and times outside the domestic home (Haldrup 2015, 58). Souvenirs operate on two different levels, "as traces that interconnect the lived experience of what was... and as [a] token that refers directly to the material setting of its origin (Haldrup 2015, 58)". There are intertwining layers (or folds, which I later refer to in chapter three) present within the souvenirs I am looking at that, in a sense, bend time to draw a connection between two different times and places. The souvenirs refer to Italy through their overall appearance, which is one of the main reasons they might be bought as mementos and tourist souvenirs. The grand sculptures that these miniature reproductions are imitating, the artists that initially created these works, and the ancient story being depicted each remain as part of the sculpture in the layers of complexities. The "lived experience of what was" that Haldrup refers to is the holiday or time spend travelling which allowed the buyer to come in contact with the souvenir. In 2005 I travelled to Tuscany, Italy on a trip with my family, to not only visit relatives living in Italy, but also to experience Italy's tourist sites. On this trip, when my family and I saw the life size reproduction of Giambologna's *The Rape of The Sabine Women* at the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence it was a pleasant surprise. Not because of the story or artist, but because of the connection between the grand, looming statue that stood over four meters tall with our home in Australia where the Souvenir of Italianicity sat, depicting the same scene in our living room, thousands of kilometres away.

Click to view image online.

Figure 14. Dr. Shannon Pritchard, *Giambologna Abduction of a Sabine Woman*, in Smarthistory, 2016, <https://smarthistory.org/giambologna-abduction-of-a-sabine-woman/> (accessed 20 February 2020).

2.2 THE MAGICAL NATURE OF SOUVENIRS.

Anthropologist Michael Haldrup builds on Stewart's analysis of the souvenir, arguing they have a magical role in the home (Haldrup 2015, 53). Haldrup draws a connection between the mediation offered by the souvenir and magical capabilities. In Haldrup's article "Souvenirs: Magical Objects in Everyday Life", he writes:

...the souvenir relates to the lived experience 'beyond' the everyday spaces of home but offers endless new inscriptions as it passes in and out of its roles. It is this slippery, ephemeral, and elusive quality, that makes it so hard to get a firm analytical grip on the role of the souvenir. (Haldrup 2015, 56)

Haldrup identifies the souvenir as an object with many complexities, continuously changing in its meaning and role. Everyday objects enchant the lives of people living beside them, bringing forth affects and emotions, embodying memory of place, people, and I would also add a reminder of heritage. Feelings of nostalgia and sentimentality are some of the feelings these objects might be associated with, it is the

combination of the object and the physical domestic space they reside in that allow this to occur. The objects of Italianicity are depicting their own stories, that of being a souvenir, but also a narrative of the original artist of the statue and the story that the statue represents. The story might be mythical or historical, such as in *The Three Graces*, where Zeus's daughters embody the divine qualities of femininity, or in *The Rape of the Sabine Women* as a depiction of historical events. The souvenir goes beyond tourism when it finds a place within the home, Haldrup argues, becoming part of the home where it has a sense of belonging and adding to the identity of the people living beside it (Haldrup 2015, 55). The Souvenirs of Italianicity in my project are domiciled, living quietly on the dining table or by a couch, speaking of Italian heritage through the connections formed between their physicality and the nostalgia of their owners.

2.3 ORIGINS AT EGREGIA

I thought about the evolution of the motifs that I painted, and how three nude women depicting an ancient story became an icon representing Italian heritage in a domestic Australian home. Also known as the Charites, the story behind *The Three Graces* is derived from Greek mythology and have a long history of representation in Grecian art. They are three sisters, the daughters of Zeus, and are the goddesses of feminine qualities, a paradigm of beauty and fertility. *The Three Graces* are the most consistent motif seen throughout my practice and are “among the most consistently rendered motifs of the Roman world” (Jane 2002, 180). In their Roman depiction there were many visual consistencies in their depiction regardless of the medium by which they were created by (Francis 2002, 197). It came to my attention the miniature souvenir of *The Three Graces* that I reference throughout my paintings has a signature on the back reading “A. Giannelli”. This was the signature of Italian born Artist Arnaldo Giannelli who founded the company Egregia, that produces a huge variety of miniature collections. In this thesis I referred to souvenirs as ‘mass produced’, however, these pieces are not technically considered mass produced, but are still made in large numbers for the decorator market (Egregia 2020). The company is owned and run in Italy, but it was clear after looking at the catalogue that they do not limit themselves to Italian iconography, they produce objects that represent other cultures, historical time periods, and hobbies. Alongside the reproductions of great Italian masterpieces are historical busts, figures of animals, religious paraphernalia, and ancient Egyptian icons to name a few (Figure 15). The original models of the sculptures were skilfully made by Giannelli. This means that the miniature of *The Three Graces* is both not ‘mass-produced’ and has a name behind its design. Despite these findings, due to their lifecycle I still consider them souvenirs. While there is no limit to what could potentially be considered a souvenir, this project reveals a process, or journey in which souvenirs typically relegated to the realm of ‘cultural-kitsch’ are revealed to harbour potent ties to a cultural identity

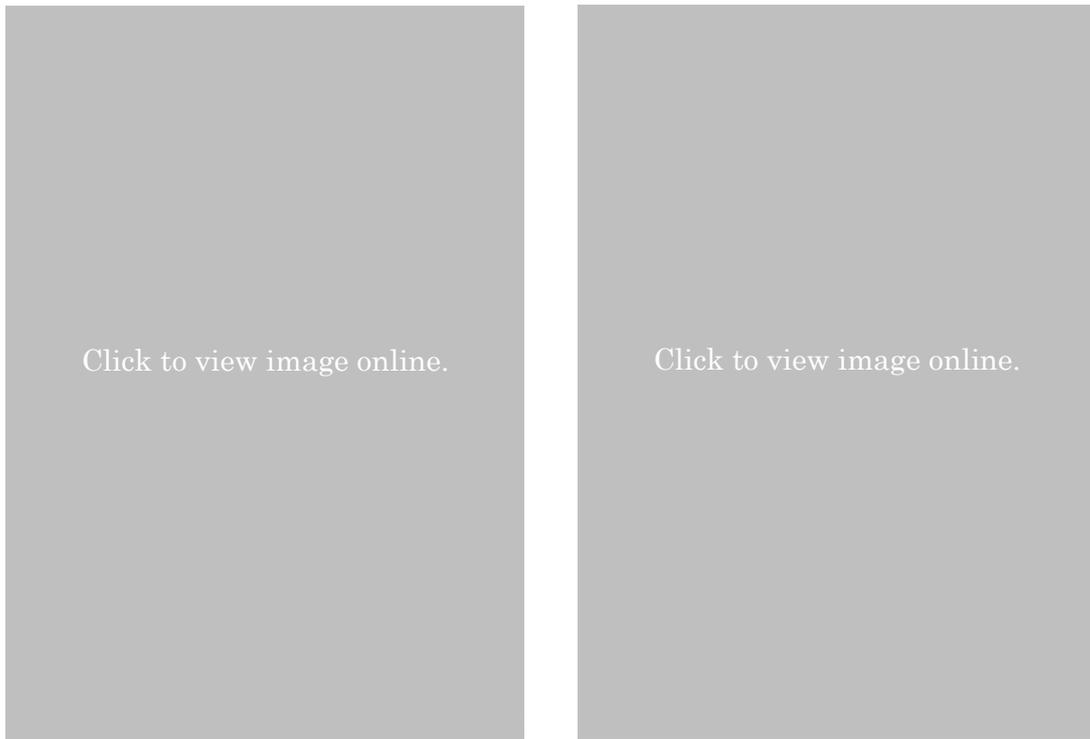


Figure 15. Egregia, catalogue screenshots of pages 29 & 70, 2019, retrieved from <http://www.egregia.it/catalogo/egregia.pdf> (accessed 28 November 2019).

The souvenir mediates time and space as they reflect the cultural globalisation of the current times, and the diffusion of cultures that happen with migration. The wide range of cultural icons produced by Egregia's souvenirs are not confined to representations of Italianicity. The location where the souvenirs are manufactured does not carry the same impact as the physicality of the objects. In this same way, the Greek narrative behind *The Three Graces* is also irrelevant when the iconography speaks strongly of Italy. The souvenirs I look at represent the national iconography of Italy through their physicality. I acknowledge the origins of the imagery, by looking through the scope of still life painting using techniques that refer to the traditional techniques of the old masters. The souvenir is misunderstood and misrepresented. By reproducing their imagery in the form of oil paintings, which is a practice that often requires intense scrutiny and time commitment, I draw attention to the object. Painting's associations with time and memory juxtapose with with ideas surrounding the 'tourist souvenir' and 'cultural kitsch'.

2.4 TIME AND MEMORY THROUGH PAINT.

Initially in my material investigation I began simply depicting the forms of the souvenirs mimicking techniques from the old masters. Considering the nature of the souvenirs and their connection to another

historical time I used a monochromatic palette consisting of earthy hues of raw umber and burnt sienna to communicate notions of memory, of the past; of an age gone (Figure 16 and 17). This direction of colour didn't acknowledge the kitsch-iness that is usually associated with the souvenir. But it instead references the underpainting process, "en brunail": a French term that describes paintings done entirely in shades of brown. In pieces such as *Reach* (2018) and *Hold* (2018) (Figure 18 and 19) I experiment with colour to acknowledge the souvenir's potential as a kitsch object. In this painting I introduced pinks and purples to pull my painting out from the past, and into the present. It was my intention to reference great historical works through my techniques, much in the same way the Souvenirs of Italianicity are referencing something greater. The techniques used in these early paintings led to some key discoveries that informed the direction paintings later in this project took, especially regarding the emphasis of the underpainting to allure to notions of time and memory.

From the paintings created early on in my project, a connection to Italy is present through the motif, which could be identified to replicate well known and commonly reproduced statues. However, it was unclear whether my source material came from. I was not painting from images of the original statue, but a reproduction in the form of a miniature souvenir. These early paintings did not acknowledge the object as a replica, nor as an object that holds a connection to a domestic environment, which led me to a state of experimentation in the studio. I continued to involve the repetitive process of applying and removing paint with the use of brushes, pallet knives and rags, moving further from a recognisable image. This layering of paint took a new form as in *Silhouette of a souvenir* (2018) (Figure 20) where I used paint more generously and less precisely in gesturing the nuances of the miniature features present on the statue. With facial expressions absent, and details such as their fingernails non-existent, the silhouette became the focus, and the paint a gesture of gravity. The process of distancing the figure from its origin, resembles a distancing from my cultural background that has taken place over generations. My Nonna and Nonno² shared a strong connection to Italy as their homeland, and my mother came from a family rich in Italian culture and language, but I grew up in an English-speaking household with a combined heritage from both Italy and England. In exploring the ambiguous potential of my medium, I was able to understand that the details and representation of the figures were less important when the focus was redirected to other elements of my paintings. The specificity of the figure itself was not of great importance to my family as a cultural object. Removing the fine details allowed a distancing between what the object depicts and allowed for a more open reading from a wider audience.

² Nonna and Nonno are the Italian words for Grandmother and Grandfather.



Figure 16. Isabella Speed, progress shot of *Reach*, 2018, oil on board, 20.5 x 25.5cm.



Figure 17. Isabella Speed, progress shot of *Hold*, 2018, oil on board, 20.5 x 25.5cm.



Figure 18. Isabella Speed, *Reach*, 2018, oil on board, 20.5 x 25.5cm.



Figure 19. Isabella Speed, *Hold*, 2018, oil on board, 20.5 x 25.5cm.

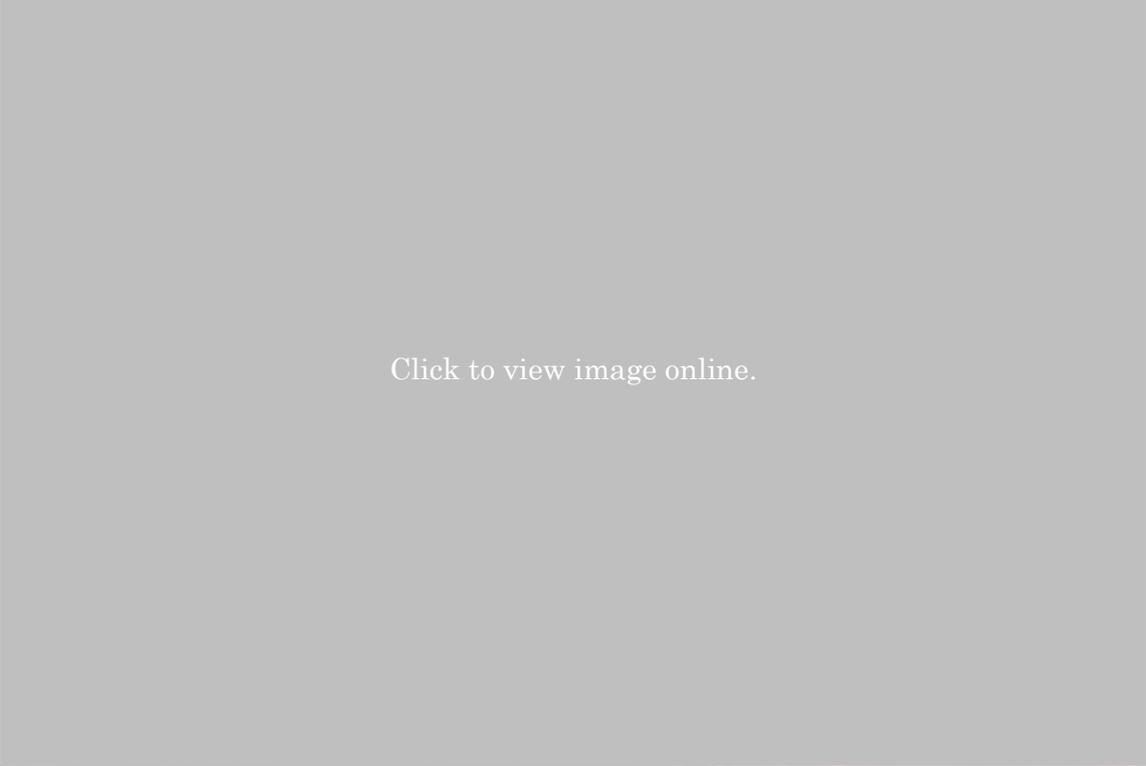


Figure 20. Isabella Speed, *Silhouette of a Souvenir*, 2018, oil on canvas, 30.6 x 40.8cm.

2.5 AMBIGUITY IN PAINTING.

In my early paintings, I intended to use paint in such a way that would evoke ideas of memory and ambiguity through my application of paint. One painter who has influenced my production and methods is Polish contemporary artist Wilhelm Sasnal (b. 1972). Sasnal's paintings have an ambiguous air about them, combining realist representation and gestural mark making. Sasnal's practice is not uniform in its style or content, but there is often a seemingly intuitive approach to the application of paint. A sense of gesture, with clear brush strokes and purposeful mark making are present in his paintings. Within the simplified forms and bright colours of his paintings a consistent ambiguity exists throughout his work. This ambiguity is communicated through their use of the blank negative spaces, often filled with a flat application of paint which remains flat even with the presence of brush strokes. In a 2005 interview, Sasnal addresses the somewhat vacant areas within his paintings and the reasoning behind them, stating "If they are vague, it is because I want to give people many different ways to read it (Sasnal 2005, 90)".

This level of openness, and lack of information is a visual tool used by other artists before Sasnal, such as Gerhard Richter and Luc Tuymans. Referring to Gerhard Richter's ambiguity, Wilhelm Sasnal praises the mystery present within his paintings, as it's his belief that paintings work better within an area of ambiguity (Sasnal 2014, 85). Although Sasnal is not alone in utilising negative space in order to create a sense of ambiguity that allows for viewers to fill in the blanks, it is the way in which he fills these spaces that draw me to his paintings. In Sasnal's painting *Portrait* (Figure 21) the brush strokes that fill the background create a gestural wiping motion. The paint is diluted with a medium, thinning the consistency, and applied leaving clear directional brush marks. The direction and movement have a sense of intuition to it, and an awareness of the edge of the support. This is one way Sasnal remains present within his work, his sense of touch and signs of movement. The paint acts as not only a depiction of an image but as a memory of the artist through their touch. In my practice, the traceable marks acknowledge not only my presence as an artist but associations with the form of the gesture and the mark it leaves. The mark is reminiscent of the domestic sphere in which my motifs exist.



Click to view image online.

Figure 21. Wilhelm Sasnal, *Portrait*, 2001, oil on canvas, 50 x 73cm.

In order to solve some of the key challenges I was facing in the studio, I added a second reoccurring motif to go with the souvenir of Italianicity. This was the addition of a person, through the imagery of a hand, or in some cases multiple hands. In my painting practice, issues such as lack of context both of the object's role, and its implied scale were solved by the juxtaposition of the hands with the Souvenir of Italianicity. The addition of hands in my painting practice also acknowledged the connection between Italian people, and hand gestures. It is widely claimed that Italian culture is rich in hand gestures, and by gesture I refer to a movement expressive of thought or feelings, particularly involving hands (Iverson et al. 2008, 165; Kendon 1997, 109). I built on the widely acknowledged connection between Italians and hand gestures, by juxtaposing hands with the Souvenirs of Italianicity. This involved bringing together an ambiguous painting approach with a gestural wiping motion combined with two motifs; the hands, and the souvenir to provide context to the object.

In viewing these early paintings as a cohesive body of work the two distinct techniques employed within my paintings come together creating a wistful and melancholic mood. That of the gestural wiping motion and removal of the paint with either a rag, brush or cotton tip. The second way in which I apply painting remains highly gestural but incorporates the layering of paint thinned with medium or solvent. In this method, I employed a palette knife to apply and scrape away paint. In both there is a to and fro where

paint is applied and later removed, either with a rag or palette knife. I repeated this process until the object had enough detail that the gaze would be drawn to the motif as a focal point, and that the motif would be recognisable whilst also appearing somewhat incomplete. The gentle application of paint in the alla prima paintings including *Hold on* (2018) and *Pass on* (2018) (Figure 22 and 23) contrast with the scratching and scraping of a pallet knife in paintings such as *Clasp* (2018) (Figure 24). Some works sit between these two technical choices, connecting the paintings as a series. The two techniques unite in paintings such as *Gesture* (2018) (Figure 25) creating a link and unifying my body of work as a whole. This physical push and pull involved in the application of paint was also present as a push and pull between two contrasting techniques. The to and fro consistently present within my work gesture towards notions of an incompleteness in regard to my own cultural identity, between my current lifestyle as an Australian and my distant Italian roots. Utilising a painterly ambiguity, the Souvenirs of Italianicity fade into the background, yet remain present enough that they are not lost to the medium.

Through my paintings I attempt to draw together notions of the past and present, high art and low, kitschy and tasteful. In bringing together the different works I deepened my understanding of what individual works provide, and how they come together making my project as a whole clearer. In the *Curtin Art Degree Show* I hung the majority of my works salon style, closely gathered together, to allow paintings to inform one another (Figure 26 and 27). This method of hanging, when not done from ceiling to floor but clustered in the centre of a wall, alludes to the method of hanging family photos together in a home, in a series, displaying members of the family on their own, and grouped together, which all come together as one family once the different photos are hung closely together: fragmented but whole. The colours I used are the thread that links the paintings as a family. Magenta, purple and fleshy tones that communicate with the kitsch contemporary contrast with earthy umbers and siennas. Centred was *Clasp* (2018) (Figure 24), a self-portrait beside the hollowed-out silhouette of Souvenir of Italianicity, which situates myself in the middle and refers to my personal experience as a central aspect of this project. The miniature replica of *The Three Graces* appears several times painted with different methods. Sometimes painted completely and descriptive of what it actually looks like, other times as a cropped detail finely painting in a series of layers or gesturally and ghost like. The details of the souvenir that are not present in the self-portrait are informed by smaller paintings surrounded allowing the reoccurring motifs to communicate with each other.



Figure 22. Isabella Speed, *Hold on*, 2018, oil on board, 34 x 39cm.



Figure 23. Isabella Speed, *Pass on*, oil on board, 21.2 x 22.8cm.

The discoveries made during the creation of this series of paintings provided the foundation for all the paintings that came after this. These early stages of my project provided essential groundwork that my practice led research continues to build on in regard to both my understanding of the souvenir and in my technical painting choices. I refer to Guy Fletcher and Susan Pearce in order to look beyond the tourist souvenir, and instead recognise their potential as a cultural vessel with magical qualities that draw a connection to a different time and space. I chose painting techniques that draw a connection to other times and spaces. Gestural wiping motions imitates the wiping movement that takes place within the domestic sphere, and the earth colours are reminiscent of a time deep within the past. The series of paintings that follow this body of work emphasises colour in a primarily monochromatic series and continue to include the additional motifs that were introduced during the making of this series. Hands continue to be a factor within each of the series of paintings throughout this project. I kept the identity of the hands unclear as they provide a bodily presence. The inclusion of hands establishes the context in relation to the souvenir's size, place and role. The *Curtin Art Degree Show* provided my project with its first public encounter, allowing people to ascribe their own personal meanings to the work, the same way I have found meaning through the Souvenirs of Italianicity. In the next chapter, I focus on my use of technical elements to delve further into the notion of ambiguity to capture and represent the 'shimmer' emitted from Souvenirs of Italianicity.



Figure 24. Isabella Speed, *Clasp*, 2018, oil on board, 40.7 x 50.8cm.

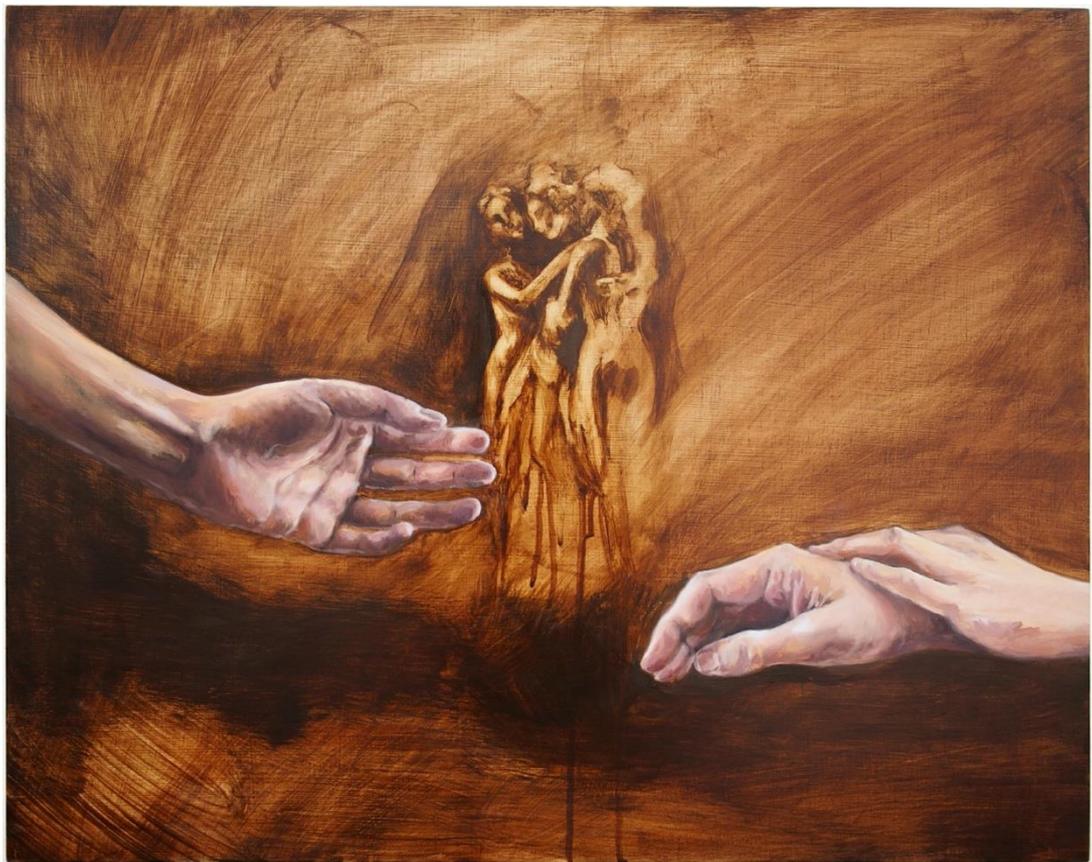


Figure 25. Isabella Speed, *Gesture*, 2018, oil on board, 40.7 x 50.8cm.



Figure 26. Isabella Speed, installation view from the *Curtin Degree Show*, 2018, photograph by Bo Wong.

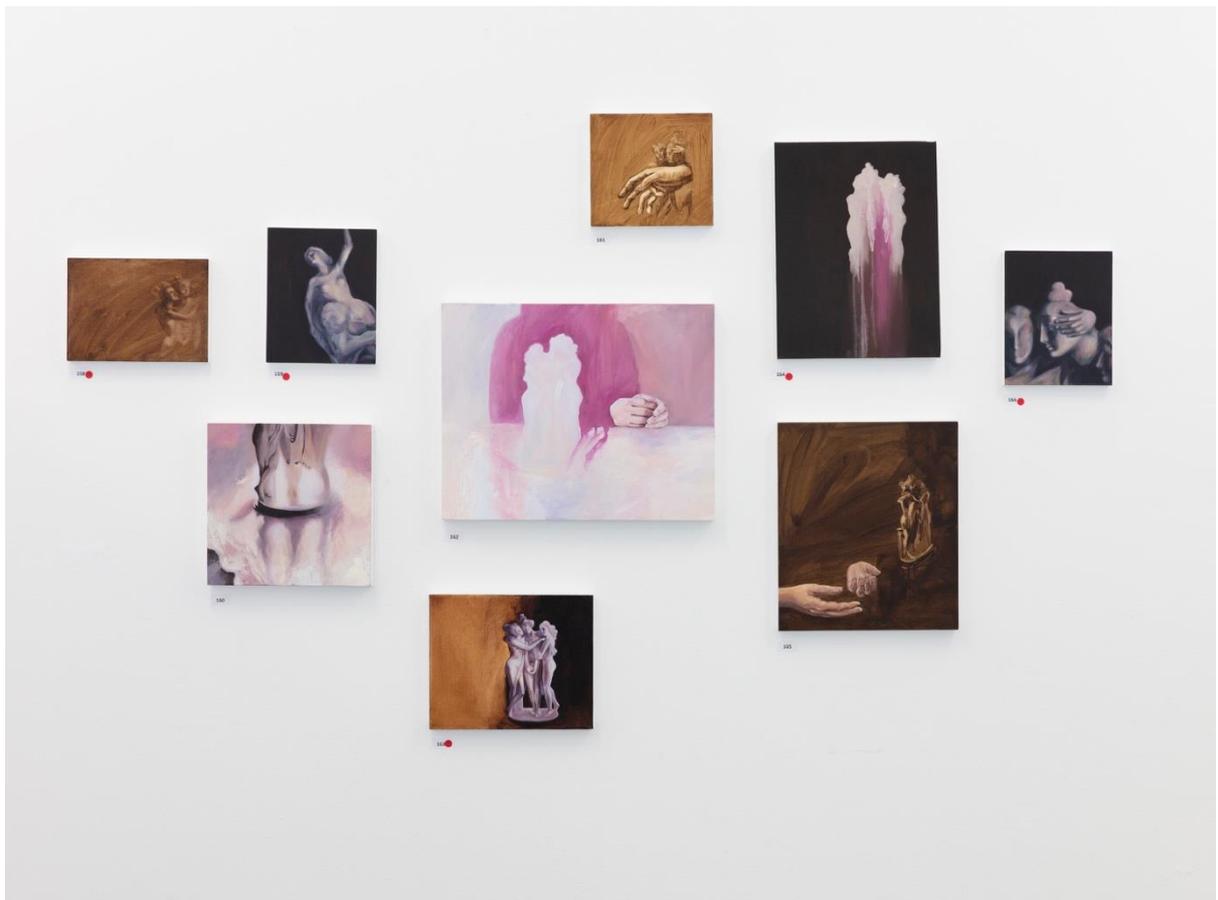


Figure 27. Isabella Speed, installation view from the *Curtin Degree Show*, 2018, photograph by Bo Wong.

This project is an encounter with specificity where objects are relating, reacting, and forming connections within the home, as well as in my painting practice. This chapter looks at the specific nature of Souvenirs of Italianicity, and how a painting practice draws connections between people, time and space. A personal perspective is essential to understanding certain relationships between people and objects. A painting practice is deeply connected to the perspective of the artist and can provide my research with a means to fuse a personalised viewpoint into my research, to then communicate to a wider audience. Through my practice I will consider the affects that surround and pass through objects which then impact the people in their presence. Like these objects, paintings have an affective nature that influence the atmosphere of any given space. They can embody the affect given from an object while also emphasising the affects and atmosphere through painting elements and principles. This is further explored in my body of work through the presentation of a series of paintings as a single body, clustered together close enough that their connection to each other is undeniable. In putting together my body of work in the *Curtin Art Degree Show* I selectively used colour, size and composition to tie together a series of paintings interpreting one topic. After reflecting on my body of work displayed at the *Curtin Art Degree Show*, I create a more unified body of work as part of a three-person group show that engages with two other artist’s practices through collaboration and curation. I then reflect on the way my paintings come together with other artists work, noting similarities to the way in which object in the home interact with and reflect one another.

3.1 DEFINING AFFECT.

If this study was about the same object but from the perspective of someone else, the results would be distinctly different. If this project looked at the souvenirs in my family home from the perspective of my mother, a guest, or a total stranger the object would be interpreted differently by each person. Despite the specificity of this project I believe certain elements are universal to the experience of others in regard to their relationship with objects, particularly utilising objects to strengthen their relationships with heritage. This very personal nature of my research can be articulated through insights of affect theory and through the reflexive act of painting as a mode of research and communication to a larger audience. In this chapter I will identify where my project is situated in relation to affect theory, referring to *The Affect Theory Reader* by Melissa Gregg and Gregory Siegworth to understand how affect theory could provide a way to read my paintings and their representation of a cross-generational domestic space. I understand a cross-generational domestic space not as a place that simply houses multiple generations, but a space allowing

previous generations and a cultural history to continue to exist in the present through contemporary objects including miniature souvenirs of statues.

Affect provides insight into both the complexities of the Souvenir of Italianicity and painting's potential as a mode that produces affects. Painting is able to draw these bodies together through a visual means, whilst highlighting the importance of the viewpoint of the artist. Theories of affect are diverse to the point of being infinite as are the "highly particular encounters with bodies, affects and worlds (Gregg, Seigworth and Ahmed 2010, 4)". Through painting I aim to draw connections between highly particular encounters, to compose and capture them and to share with a larger audience. The introduction of *The Affect Theory Reader* is titled "An Inventory of Shimmers". A definition of affect is articulated while being clear that understandings of affect are not and never will be complete, and theories on affects are infinite and diverse (Gregg, Seigworth and Ahmed 2010, 4). Early in the introduction Gregg and Seigworth articulates that:

Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (Gregg, Seigworth and Ahmed 2010, 1)

This in-between-ness, beside-ness and ongoing-ness makes affects diverse among different fields and research methods. Like liquid it fills the gaps in a large variety of fields. Through a creative practice, affects can be visually communicated through manipulated compositions using painterly techniques. Colour, mark making, and composition are elements of a painting practice that contribute to manipulating affect, shaping the body (painting) to body (viewer) intensities. Affect goes beyond thinking or reflecting and beyond emotion: affect acts (Gregg, Seigworth and Ahmed 2010, 2). Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed in the chapter "Happy Objects" defines affect as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed 2010, 30). Affect theory provides my project with a way of articulating the very specific experience of an individual's relationship with certain objects within a certain environment.

3.2 PAINTING THE 'SHIMMER'

By painting *Souvenirs of Italianicity*, I create a link to the past by embodying my own memory and lived experience through the forms I paint. In my interpretation I made the physicality of the souvenirs my own. Cultural theorist Andrea Witcomb writes in "Remembering the dead by affecting the living: the case of a miniature model of Treblinka." (2013) about the affective power of objects, specifically referring to the case of a particular miniature model displayed in a museum and its affective ability to create an intense experience in the setting of a museum. Witcomb refers to the object's impact on those who engage with it, and its potential to provide an opportunity of identification and to build personal concepts of identity (Witcomb 2013, 44). Witcomb highlights the importance of a personalised individual perspective that initially gave the object a material form that embodies memories through its creation (Witcomb 2013, 45). The objects themselves that I paint could potentially be referred to as a memory aid, but when I reimagine these objects through my paintings, they become the memories themselves. According to Witcomb, the affective power of the object is influenced by the knowledge of a personal connection, therefore the affective power of my paintings is strengthened due to the unbreakable personal connection I have with both the painting and the objects depicted (Witcomb 2013, 45). My paintings are an attempt to capture the affective intensities inside my family home, while offering a glimpse into my personal perspective connecting the past and present.

Souvenirs of Italianicity draw a connection between the past and present through replicating the physicality of historical art objects, such as famous sculptures. In *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* Stewart writes on models that are reproductions:

It is important to remember that the mechanical reproduction of art objects, the movement away from authenticity of the original that in fact might be seen as creating the authenticity of the original, results in the susceptibility of art itself to this mode of exaggeration. As recent psychoanalytic work has told us, repetition, in fact, creates a reproduction which initiates the very aura of the real. (Stewart 1993, 91)

In replicating famous sculptural works of art, traces of the real affects given off by the original remain present. Stewart sees models as freezing a moment in time, and therefore an erasure of history and marking it off from the present and instead framing it in nostalgia (Stewart 1993, 48). She draws a correlation between miniature models and childhood. The size of the miniature model allows and encourages the viewer to come a bit closer, to look at the detail and to re-enter the past (Stewart 1993, 48). However, collapsing many moments into a single frozen scene does not allow for an accurate representation (Stewart 1993, 48). This lack of accuracy offers a space to insert personal concepts and

connections into the narrative of the object. The people that engage with the souvenir build on the authenticity of the original with their own authentic understanding of the original object.

The souvenir connects and communicates to surrounding objects and people that are in the presence of the object. Cultural geographer Nigel Thrift proposes that “every surface communicates” which, in the process, works to produce “new kinds of cultural nerve, if you like, which build extra facets of ‘you’” (Thrift 2004, cited in Gregg et al. 2010, 214). It is this concept of communication between surfaces that suggests what the term ‘shimmer’ refers to. All surfaces seen and experienced contribute to the felt affects within a particular space. The surfaces are physical and tangible therefore, they can be reproduced. This leads me to draw a connection to paintings not only as surfaces themselves which communicate with the space they are in, but also as depictions of communicating surfaces. My paintings capture communicating surfaces as a ‘shimmer’ of the contemporary domestic. Although the objects that are the focal point within my paintings are miniature replicas of famous Italian statues, I am not concerned with all miniature replicas, or a particular replica by any known artist, or of any particular story. The ‘shimmer’ is a combination of the context and narrative of the people that live in the same environment with the object.

3.3 ‘FOLDING’ NEW MEANING INTO ESTABLISHED ARCHETYPES.

The miniature replica of the famous neoclassic sculpture of *The Three Graces* that sits in the centre of the dining table is the object that appears most throughout my paintings. It was the one that first caught my eye when I began questioning the ways by which Italian culture is present within my family home. A statue of three women nude and embracing in the centre of a dining room: different people may interpret this scene in a variety of ways. *The Three Graces* has been a reoccurring trope for artists across fields, countries and times. Great painters have brought their own view in representing the Greek mythological goddesses reflecting on what they know of, and where they existed. Botticelli, Raphael, Rubens, the list goes on of the artists centuries apart that are drawn to bring the three daughters of Zeus to life. Their representations have been influential for contemporary artists where the mythological side has faded in light of the artists own perspective. Antonio Canova’s statue among other famous statues is the focal point within the painting practice of contemporary German artist Vivian Greven (Figure 28 and 29). Like my own practice, her paintings go beyond simply representing the mythological daughters of Zeus as what Canova intended, but she builds on her personal interpretation. Greven’s portrayal of *The Three Graces* refers to notions of beauty, the artificial creation of bodies, intimacy and a closeness between people (Leiman, 2019). I find it fascinating that despite being on the other side of the world, from

completely different backgrounds, even without looking at the same version of the statue, Canova's sculpture speaks of a closeness to people and remains influential to both our painting practices.

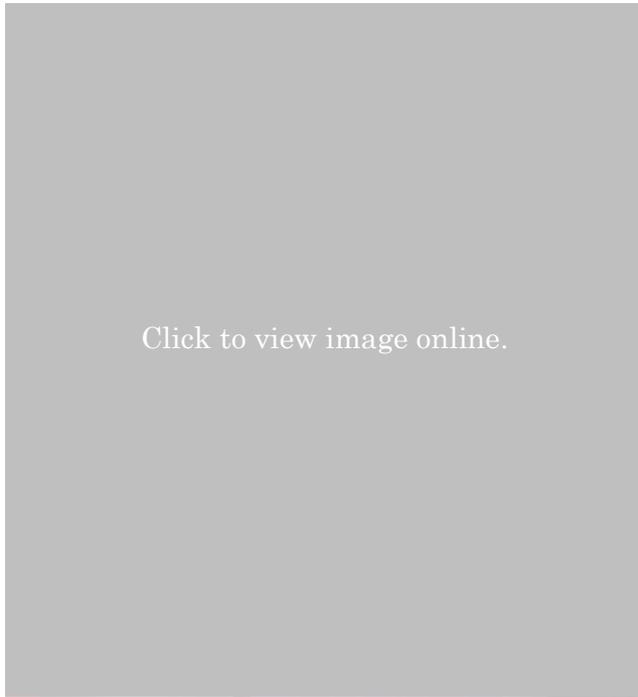


Figure 28. Vivian Greven, *Leea I*, 2017, oil on canvas, 120 x 110cm.

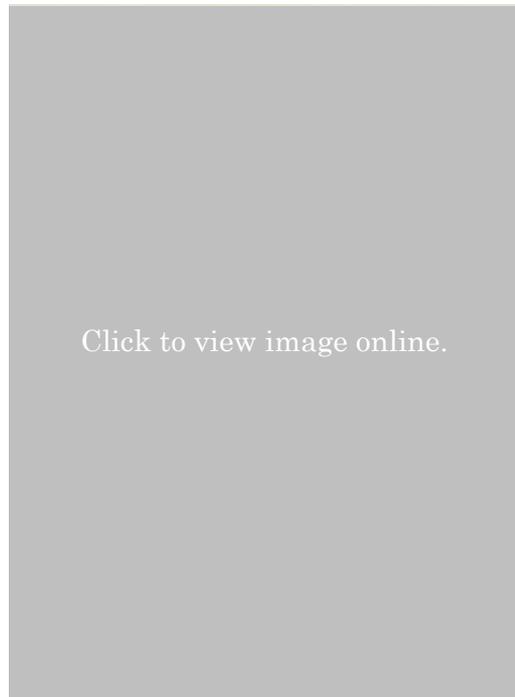


Figure 29. Vivian Greven, *Leea II*, 2019, oil and acrylic on canvas, 150 x 110cm.

Objects with different circumstances, histories, and spaces which they now inhabit, have complexities in regard to their relationship with time, history, and people. Kevin Hetherington in his article “Museum Topology and the Will to Connect” (1997) looks at the relationship between material culture and spatiality through the example of the ceramics collection at the Museum and Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, England (Hetherington 1997, 199). In the case of both the museum and domestic interiors, a space can provide agency to create a narrative. The space is not neutral but defined by a narrative which is made up of subplots that are subject to being unravelled by those who come in contact with the object (Hetherington 1997, 203). Connections intertwine between the narrative of the space with the narrative of the object: “Time and narrative become folded into the materiality of the space” (Hetherington 1997, 207). In a museum, the narrative of the ceramic object is put into perspective within a bigger picture; a historical timeline. In a domestic space, the narrative of the objects within are shaped by their relationship to the people who live around and engage with them. Their personal histories are reflected by the object which in turn may inform their sense of identity.

Kevin Hetherington uses the term ‘folds’ in referring to the multiple overlaying narratives that are embodied by objects and influences by the people and places they engage with. The term folds takes on

multiple meanings in my project, it not only refers to the folding of time and space that the narrative of the objects engage with, but with a technical approach to folds through painting techniques. The object can create a fold in the specific space, and also a fold in time (Hetherington 1997, 209). Other objects communicating with the 'souvenirs' within my painting can create these folds, agency, and affects. The use of a gestural wiping motion in the paintings *Heavy* (2018) and *Embrace* (2018) (Figure 30 and 31) communicates these folds in a quite literal sense. Through mark making done with a rag I use a side to side motion that gently folds over itself as opposed to using a brush or pallet knives to paint and create forms. These folds have the power to disrupt the representation of the 'souvenir'. An ulterior sense of time and place is revealed, and the existing forces of the object and space are disrupted. Hetherington writes "The fold weakens the fabric of the space allowing new, yet unfixed and more partial, perspectives to come into view (Hetherington 1997, 214)." The folds draw together separate bodies, affects, and worlds creating meaningful connections. Through a painting practice, these connections are frozen in time and space allowing complexities of the object to be revealed through the scope of a new perspective.

3.4 ATMOSPHERES

Still until moved, the souvenirs continue to buzz with a sense of place and time. They draw an invisible line across the planet between two places as an affective conjunction of past and present. Michael Haldrup pushes the boundaries of how objects have previously been conceptualised, writing:

By scrutizing (sic) the affectual and sensuous dimensions of material objects, we may be able to conceive of objects not only as dead things, but rather in terms of other-than-human agencies animating and enchanting the life worlds we both inhabit. Putting things and people on equal footing does not necessarily 'kill' the vitality of human social and material life but also provide potentials for producing more vivid accounts of the role everyday objects have in animating, enchanting and energizing mundane lives as well as capturing the ambiguities, interruptions and transformations of both people and things. (Haldrup 2015, 59).

Nostalgic objects have an especially strong affectual and sensual presence through their ability to provide a catalyst for memories to resurface and connections to other times and places to be made. These 'other-than-human agencies' push the boundaries of what an object's role can be. Nostalgic objects are not bound by their function but serve other purposes that can enchant and influence the lives of people. The original works that the Souvenirs of Italianicity imitate are considered highly valuable, both culturally and monetarily. They are protected and kept in prestigious museums and galleries around the world where they can enchant the lives of those who seek them out with their other-than-human presence. The reproductions of the statues are inaccurate in capturing the exactness of the features, proportions, and



Figure 30. Isabella Speed, *Heavy*, 2018, oil on board, 60.5 x 45.7cm.

details of the originals. However, they are near enough to be recognised, and their obvious Italianicity remains despite any discrepancies. Through my paintings, they are again further distanced from the original source, however, they bring attention to the objects ability to enchant everyday experiences and places within the domestic sphere.

Atmosphere according to Gernot Böhme is “The relation between environmental qualities and human states” (Böhme 1993, 114) (Olesen 2010, 25). He argues that things remain present through their ability to affect the environment and that the energy of the object “radiates as it were into the environment, takes away the homogeneity of the surrounding space and fills it with tensions and suggestions of movement” (Böhme 1993: 121). The locality of the object, its physical appeal, the folds that pass-through time and space draw connections to everything else that shares the same atmosphere (Olesen 2010, 32). Objects gently inform each other to build a complex narrative, a reflection of the lives of the people that build the atmosphere. Bodil Birkebaek Olesen draws on Böhme’s understanding of atmosphere in her article “Ethnic Objects in Domestic Interiors: Space, Atmosphere and the Making of Home” on the appeal of ethnic objects as decorations that bring with them a desirable atmosphere specific to domestic spaces. In this study, the people decorating their homes with ethnic objects do not have a connection to the object through their own ethnicity, but the ethnic objects appeal to them because of their material and visual qualities and of the atmosphere they provide to a domestic space (Olesen 2010, 29). My family home living room that the Souvenirs of Italianicity are located in is not the sole ethnicity represented in the room. They are mixed in with souvenirs from travels, Aboriginal Australian ethnic objects, gifts and inherited objects. They make up a part of a broader selection of ethnic objects that are both part of my ethnicity, and part of my lived experiences. However, it is the objects that reference personal cultural connections that affect the cultural identity of the people that live around them.

Atmosphere and affect have a lot of similarities; however, this does not make them one and the same. They both engage with the ungraspable, the vague, the specific encounters with the in-between. Encounters with atmospheres set the tone of a space, it can be thick and overwhelmingly present, however it can also remain subtly present as it is most of the time, it is the cross-over of the material world and fleeting immaterial sensations (Bille, Bjerregaard and Flohr Sorensen 2015, 32). Geographer Ben Anderson argues when thinking about the concept of atmosphere is “good to think with because it holds a series of opposites – presence and absence, materiality and ideality, definite and indefinite, singularity and generality – in a relation of tension” (Anderson, 2009, 80). Mikkel Bille builds on Anderson’s description of the complex relations that make atmosphere difficult to capture by ‘linking people, places and things together in often unpredictable ways (Bille, Bjerregaard and Flohr Sorensen 2015, 33). Atmospheres may seem illusive and ungraspable, but atmospheres can be staged, and often are



Figure 31. Isabella Speed, *Embrace*, 2018, oil on board, 60.5 x 45.7cm.

in many parts of everyday life. Whether that be in a professional context such as architectural or design related jobs, or the efforts of home making in the domestic. In my paintings I stage specific atmospheres based on the felt experience of being within a certain space. Often when I paint, I consider elements of my painting as a series of opposites that react to each other to create new meaning and to replicate an existing atmosphere carried by the objects I depict.

In my paintings *Heavy* (2018) and *Embrace* (2018) (Figure 30 and 31) I use painting techniques in an attempt to draw a link, to make connections between the souvenir, Italy, and my personal perspective as someone with Italian heritage. In my compositions I acknowledge notions of memory with the absence of paint, alongside my use of colour to create a sense of atmosphere. I leave certain details and defining shapes present and pull areas into an abstract gestural wiping motion. This emphasises what remains, and part of what remains is the atmosphere. In *Heavy* (2018) I bring back the human figure, giving perspective and acknowledging the link between people and the souvenir. In the same way the bodies in the first painting appear to be recognisable as opposed to being shifted into abstraction, the hand hangs on to the souvenir with just two fingers. The gesture displayed by the hand builds on the atmosphere created by the use of colour and mark making, suggesting a sense of loss and longing. People shape the atmosphere they reside in 'through organizing objects, bodies and spaces' (Bille, Bjerregaard and Flohr Sorensen 2015, 33). In a painting, it is up to the artist to stage the atmosphere in much the same way, by organising the objects, bodies and spaces within the composition of the painting. The atmosphere changes throughout the painting process, evolving and shaping into the final product which the artist 'rearranges' and 'organises' the elements of the painting.

My painting practice acts as a platform to interpret and stage the atmospheres of my felt experiences. I take photographs and sketched out various compositions, and then when I am ready to paint, I start with a blank, smooth, white board. This acts as a completely clear stage free of most texture where I set the atmosphere with gentle and gestural movements. The boards are small and light enough to be moved by one person, and the surrounding atmosphere the workshop and studio are temporarily. The space that my paintings reside within is temporary whether it be my studio, the gallery or the domestic interior of the buyer. Typical elements that may shape the atmosphere are the 'architecture, colour, lighting, humidity, sound, odour, the texture of things and their mutual juxtaposition' (Bille, Bjerregaard and Flohr Sorensen 2015, 36). In my paintings that were part of the group show 'Traces of Understanding' I primarily focused on the use colour, light and gesture to translate a heightened sense of atmosphere. The use of monochromatic palette draws attention to my mark making and use of dramatic lighting.



Figure 32. Isabella Speed, *Over the dining table*, 2019, oil on board, 35.6 x 28cm.

3.5 GROUP SHOW: TRACES OF UNDERSTANDING

In May 2019 I exhibited works as part of a group show titled 'Traces of Understanding' at Zig Zag Gallery, Kalamunda. This show included works from myself and artists Greg Molloy and Callum Hope. In this group show, we reflected on how to capture *traces* of our engagement with the mundane and the everyday, and how, through methods that produce physical traces of the process in their production, these can deepen our understanding of our surrounding environments. We brought together recent works from our individual practices and created collaborative pieces using Molloy's drawing machine. I created two experimental collaborative pieces with Greg Molloy by using his drawing machine titled *Hand / Machine Collaboration* (2019) and *Face / Machine Collaboration* (2019) (Figure 33 and 34) alongside five paintings that strip back my techniques to their bare minimum. These paintings emphasise ambiguity through the use of vacant spaces which are sometimes left blank or filled with gestural wiping motions that appear to fold over themselves. Peter Geimer suggests that "The stronger removal of meaning is visually evident, the more empathetic the search for profundity becomes" (Geimer 2012, 39). I previously explored ambiguity executed in a controlled and deliberate way. Through working with another artist, engaging with their unpredictable and autonomous drawing machine I created experimental works that created ambiguity in a less controlled environment which informed later developments in my painting practice.

The collaborations opened up new avenues regarding both process and interpretation of the themes that are central to this project. The collaborative process was done on wood supports which I primed and sanded until smooth to create a surface consistent with the rest of my works that pick up even the gentlest gestural movements of a brush or rag. Molloy's machine stands tall and angular, a pyramid frame made of metal with a waterfall of gathered metal wires. The metal wires act as the hand and use a rotating motor which twists and twirls unpredictably and somewhat aggressively onto the support digging into the gesso and spreading the paint. I used an oil-based wash in a raw umber/burnt sienna mix which was primarily controlled by the machine, however, the machine had wheels allowing Molloy and myself to give loose direction to the wire applicator. Initially, I liberally applied an earthy wash with a brush to the machine and board, but later opted for soaked rags attached to the rotating applicator. In having the machine use rags to apply the paint, a connection to my previous works was made. In many ways this machine acts as an opposite to the small and feminine object that is present in my paintings, and of the gentle and precise application that



Figure 33. Isabella Speed and Greg Molloy, *Face / machine collaboration*, 2019, oil on board, 28.5 x 29cm.



Figure 34. Isabella Speed and Greg Molloy, *Hand / machine composition*, 2019, oil on board, 28.5 x 29cm.

goes into the production of my paintings. The rotating applicator made both scratches and circular motions, less precise than my wiping motions, but more like that of a coffee cup stain; a mark that can be found over a dining room table or in any lived-in environment. The unpredictability and fluke-like nature of the machine has added a new layer to my project, opening up avenues surrounding unintentional mark making from domestic activities.

The process and outcome of collaborating with Molloy provided me with a new perspective on perspective (point of view) in my paintings. In the process of applying the paint to the support with the machine a physical distance allowed me to look down over the support from a distance. In making the work with Molloy we looked down onto the board to navigate the machine over the surface, from a bird's eye perspective. The wooden support was on the floor while we, the creators, the people with the machine, stood tall above looking down onto the surface. From this perspective I could draw a connection between looking down over a table and looking down at my painting. Previously I had worked closer to eye level, both in the studio and through the perspective in my composition. Looking at the objects from their level or slightly above reflected the perspective of the artist or viewer, looking down at the support the mark making from the machine with wires and a rag appeared like the surface of a table, complete with imperfections. After allowing the wash to dry I worked back into the pieces, adding in two motifs that have been present within my project and within the other exhibited works; the hand and the miniature souvenir. The change of perspective influenced my next body of work, when I reintroduce other objects that inhabit the dining table space together with the Souvenirs of Italianicity that had been previously removed, such as a tablecloth and doilies.

For the collaborative pieces I painted in my motifs small and only partially rendered, as objects that exist intertwined with what the activities that take place over the dining table. The abstract marks are reminiscent of spillages, mug stains, cleaning procedures, and general use. *Hand / Machine Collaboration* (2019) shows an out reached hand grasping towards something unseen which contrasts against circular wiping marks and jagged scratches that move across the support. *Face / Machine Collaboration* (2019) has faces from the miniature reproduction of *The Three Graces*, coming in and out of the abstract collaborative wash. Within these works, a sense of movement is present, movement of an object over the surface much like a mug of tea picked up and set down until it has been emptied. Or the movement of the domestic souvenir being picked up and placed back down to make room for cleaning, dining or other activities that take place over the dining table. Previously in my paintings the reoccurring wiping motion was done with great care and much control. The uncontrolled marks made in collaboration with Molloy's machine has given my work a new layer that informs my understanding of the table as a facilitator of particular affects.

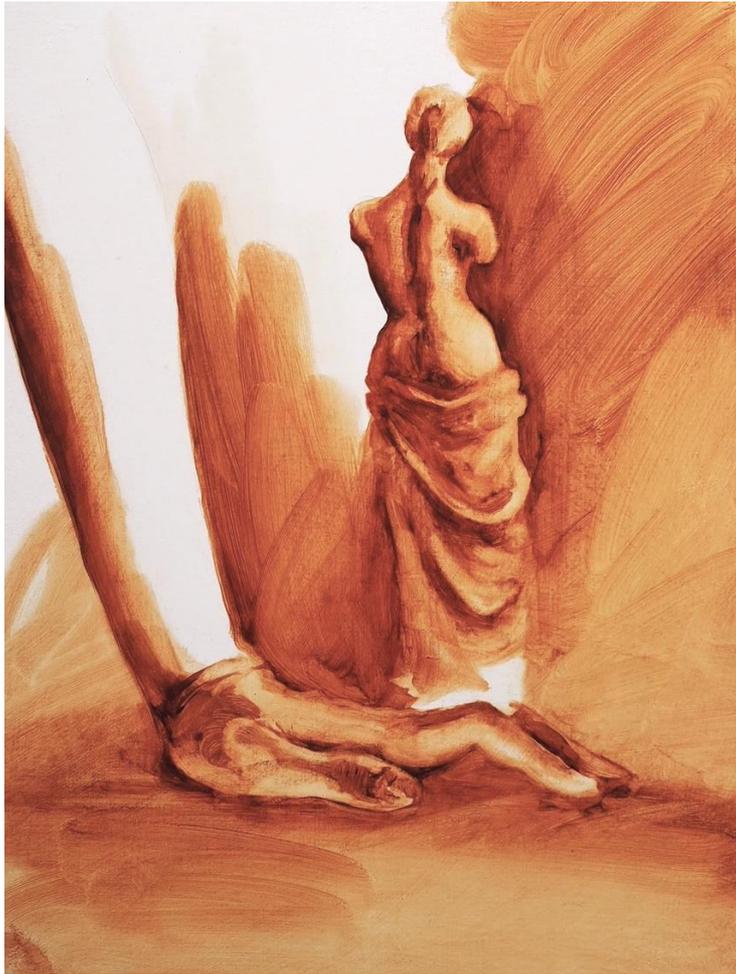


Figure 35. Isabella Speed, *Between gestures*, 2019, oil on board, 44 x 36cm.

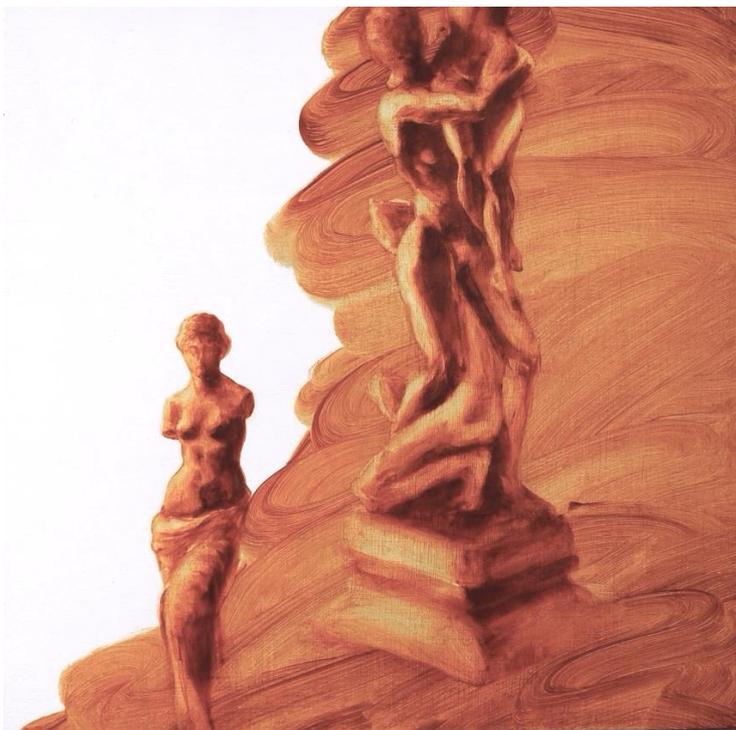


Figure 36. Isabella Speed, *Lounge room souvenirs*, 2019, oil on board, 30.5 x 30.5cm.

The two collaborative pieces communicate with each other, with my other paintings through the colours and motifs present, with Molloy's machine and Hope's paintings, but also with the viewer and the space they both inhabit. I attempted to take a simplified approach to emphasise particular elements in my paintings which is not to say my works are simple or deal with a simple topic. Hetherington believes "Complexity is about connection and contingency; it impels us to make connections. It is also about materiality and representation" (Hetherington 1997, 216). The place that *Souvenirs of Italianicity* inhabit extends beyond the boundaries of the domestic space, into the spaces of neoclassical art, Greek mythology, nudity, the tourist industry, and Italy among others. The traceable steps of the object extend the boundaries of the place, and the physicality of the object opens up new connections. The object "...also inhabits, [making] visible the invisible space (affect) of intervening time..." a time that is travelled through as if it were not there (Hetherington 1997, 216). My paintings further extend the space inhabited by the objects through painterly techniques I have adopted, and motifs I have included throughout my works.

A small painting titled *Emerge* (2019) (Figure 37) shifts from the monochromatic colour palette that the rest of my works abide to in this group show. I experimented with atmosphere, particularly through the composition, the juxtaposition of objects, the colour and lighting. The lighting is dramatic where the shadows engulf anything not lit in beige and green. The atmosphere is heavy, with a somewhat chilling ominous energy. Like my other paintings that were part of the group show, the background provides atmosphere. Instead of a single wiping motion *Emerge* (2019) uses multiple layers to create the depth which an outstretched hand emerges from. The series of paintings that were part of the group show *Traces of Understanding* primarily focus on the object, and sometimes a gestural hand. Backgrounds are instead made up of mark making, dense layering of paint and in some cases completely blank. I attempted to focus on the atmosphere and felt affects produced by the objects. In doing this the background provided little to no context in terms of place, and instead provided a connection to the passing of time and a lack of 'place'. Participating in a group show and creating collaborative works has been influential in how I consider perspective within the context of this research.

This experience provided my project with a new theoretical direction borne of my painting experimentation as part of the collaborative exhibition. I looked to Melissa Gregg and Gergory Siegworth for a theoretical understanding of affect theory, which I considered during the production of my paintings. My paintings attempt to capture the affective 'shimmer' of the in-betweenness, beside-ness and ongoing-ness that buzzes and surrounds objects. I consider Kevin Hetherington's concept of 'folds' in positioning the souvenirs as part of something larger where everything surrounding an object, including the space it is in, its history and future, impacts the perception of the object. In an exhibition the space,

and other artworks displayed become part of the folds that objects and paintings live within. This group show provided a space which my works could be displayed and curated among the works of artists also referencing notions of domesticity and self-reflection. I created a sense of atmosphere by emphasising my use of colour and mark making to create a unified series, and later through layering. *Emerge* (2019) is particularly successful in demonstrating a dense atmosphere, and despite its darkness, informed the next series of paintings. I worked with Greg Molloy on collaborative paintings made with the use of his drawing machine. The outcome of the collaborative process gave me a new perspective on my work, particularly in relation to the occurrences that happen directly above the dining table, and how that space is perceived. I refocus on what surrounds the souvenir 'above the table' as though I am looking from a top down perspective, the same perspective I had in the during our collaborative painting. In my next and final series of paintings, I look at the souvenir while considering its role within the home and its position as a dining table ornament. The gendering of public and private spaces is discussed in relation to the domestic, drawing on the term 'folding' to describe an object's spatial and contextual position in time.



Figure 37. Isabella Speed, *Emerge*, 2019, oil on board, 19.5 x 26.2cm.

My paintings all take place inside the domestic sphere: a space that is familiar, everchanging, and privately hidden away from the public eye. Souvenirs of Italianicity are located throughout the shared living areas of the domestic space that facilitate gathering, dining, cooking, entertaining and everyday routines. By painting objects from this private and homely space, I reproduce their imagery and physicality to be viewed within the public sphere of the gallery. The spaces and objects depicted in my paintings offer glimpses of my private life which, upon being exhibited publicly, may be framed and viewed differently. In my final chapter I discuss where my body of work stands in relation to the public and the domestic, considering gender and the feminine, building on my personal perspective within the private sphere. I will refer to my work exhibited at two different stages, the first being in The Quarter Gallery space at Curtin University, and later as a solo exhibition at Pig Melon in Perth. These different spaces change the way my paintings were perceived, which led me to consider the role of different public gallery spaces to explore private concepts. The Quarter Gallery provided a space within the heart of Curtin University that is purpose built to show art, following the model of a white cube space. This is vastly different to Pig Melon's exhibition space, which has a familiar home-like qualities mixed in with gallery essentials. I will discuss the shift that was present between these two exhibitions, and how they informed my understanding how my paintings engage with place, particularly in relation to the public, the domestic and gender.

The home is a key part of the private sphere where the day begins, and the night comes to an end. It is the first reference point for what a day might become. Home is often expressed as a place of comfort and routine, a place which where someone can always return to without need for an invitation. Author and human geographer Tim Edensor understands home as an essential space for forming notions of identity and emphasises the connection between routine experience of a space and its familiarity and homeliness (Edensor 2002, 54). Edensor argues that "... the most common spatial experience is that in everyday life, where familiar space forms an unquestioned backdrop to daily tasks, pleasures and routine movement." (Edensor 2002, 54). The home is where people, patterns, routines, and the objects inform and influence notions of self and identity for those that inhabit the space. Edensor draws a link between the home as a space to construct notions of identity with its role as a space that provides an environment to relax and 'slow down' in:

The centrality of home to constructions of identity partly testifies to the desire to achieve fixity amidst ceaseless flow, and metaphorically is used to proffer a unified, identifiable culture within a specified space, being 'drenched in the longing for wholeness, unity, integrity' (Edensor 2002, 57)

The home is exempt from this ceaseless flow and is ever changing to suit the needs of those who dwell there. However, home is often highly constructed to reflect the life and beliefs of those who live within it, making it slower paced than a public space may feel. Unlike a public space, the private home can be decorated and kept in a way that provides a sense of ‘wholeness’ or ‘unity’ that falls in line with the beliefs and cultural history of the homemaker. In my paintings, the Souvenirs of Italianicity are part of the ‘backdrop’ within the home which plays a role in shaping my sense of identity. Still life painting is a genre that slows a scene down to a halt, allowing the scene to be taken in completely. In a still life painting, the objects, whether living or dead, are frozen at a point of their lifecycle, framing them in a specific time and space. When the surrounding environment is included as part of the painting, it is also suspended in time, giving the viewer the opportunity to pay attention and rediscover the often overlooked ‘backdrop’.

4.1 THE DOMESTIC AND THE ASYMMETRY OF THE SEXES

The original narrative depicted by souvenirs, i.e. the artist’s intended meaning, is often overlooked when they become part of domestic ‘backdrop’, and a new narrative becomes present. Objects and artefacts are the products of cultural and historical pressure. They, like any other kind of cultural activity are “[n]ot an unchanging background: the culture of the table is as responsive to history as anything else” (Bryson 2017, 13). The culture surrounding the table is often represented in still life paintings. There is a correlation between still life, the everyday and the domestic, through their connection to the ‘overlooked’. They all exist within the ‘private’ sphere which is subsequently a ‘feminine’ space, as opposed to the ‘public’ ‘masculine’ sphere. In Bryson’s chapter “Still Life and the Feminine Space” he scrutinises the division between still life and other painting categories. Still life painting depicts a ‘feminine space’ of the routine and domesticity present around the dining table and home interior, as opposed to other painting genres such as history painting and portraiture, which demonstrate the greatness, heroism and achievement of man through the depiction of the unique and great individual. Bryson writes: “To understand still life of the table one needs to take into account the asymmetry of the sexes with regard to the domestic space of which the table is centre” (Bryson 2017, 160). Heretic, grand statues that have been miniaturised and placed onto a domestic table are rebranded as household souvenirs. I bring attention to the feminised space, emphasising its ability to transform objects, and shape identity in paintings such as *Over the dining table* (2020) (Figure 25). In this painting the Souvenir of Italianicity is framed within a domestic space beside a vase of flowers, on a floral tablecloth. The Souvenir of Italianicity is an object that has transformed and continues to do so over time to reflect the space the inhabits, and every facet within this common space. The still life genre and the domestic are not alone in their ‘feminine’ characterisation, souvenirs have also fallen into this category of the undervalued and underestimated of

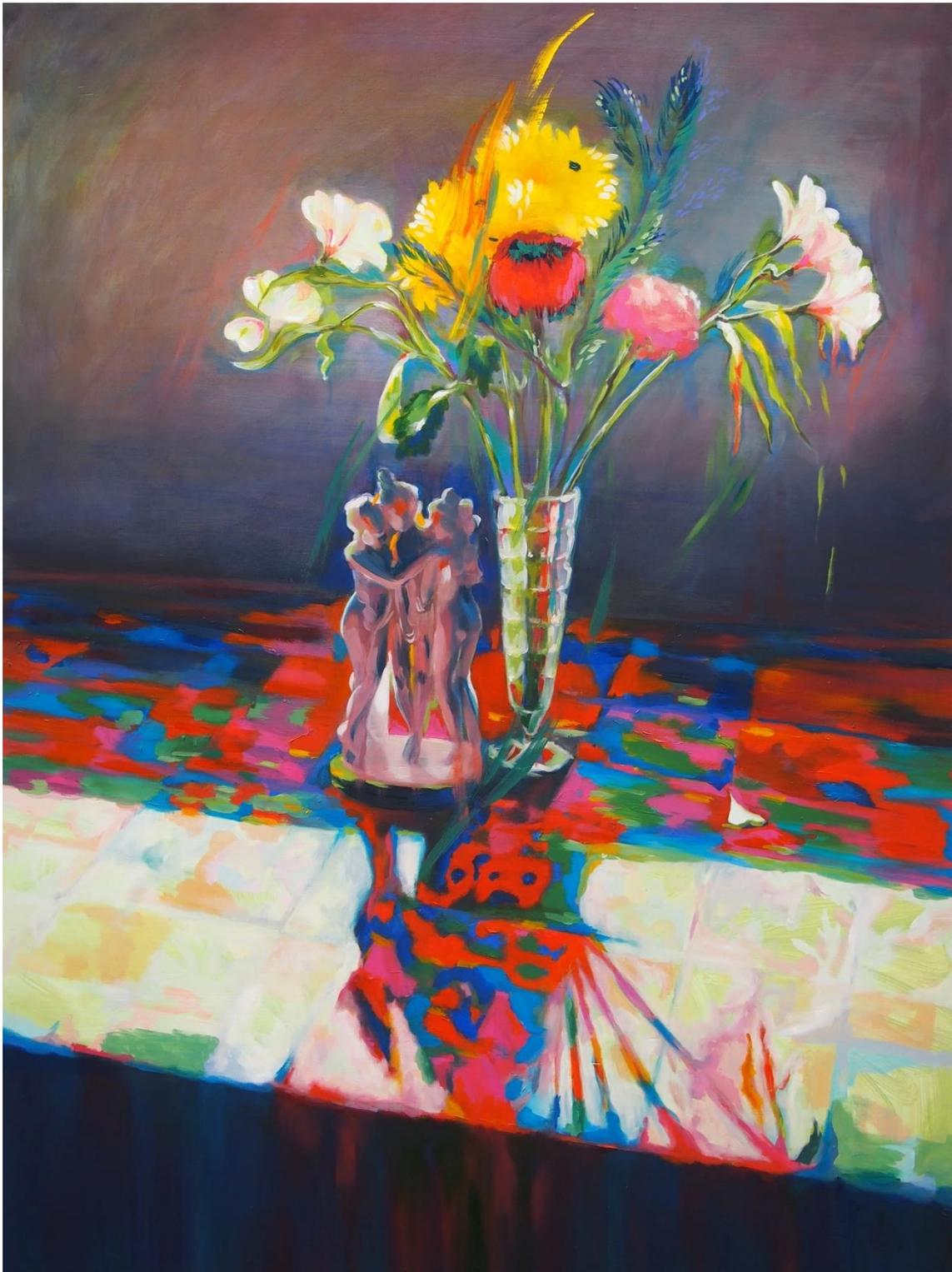


Figure 38. Isabella Speed, *Over the dining table*, 2020, oil on board, 74.4cm x 99.7cm.

the feminine domain. I paint these feminised private counterparts of the grand public statues reclaiming their imagery and re-establishing their role.

Throughout the making and analysing of my works I have referred to my paintings as part of the still life genre, even if they lie at the outskirts of this category. When I use the term 'genre' I draw on Bryson's understanding, where he refers to a "variety of family resemblances" in the form of a series, particularly the coherence produced by "the level of material culture to which those objects belong" (Bryson 2017, 12). My paintings share many similarities with other paintings within the still life genre focusing on the complexities surrounding objecthood, despite the inclusion of hands. Norman Bryson deems still life as the furthest removed from narrative, and therefore the hardest for critical discourse to reach. This has made still life under-interpreted, with room for more research and critical analysis (Bryson 2017, 9-10). In this sense, the still life genre is underappreciated, much like the objects and spaces depicted. The domesticated souvenirs that I paint, like the still life genre, is considered 'lowly'. Despite this, I argue that a narrative is very much present: that of personal cultural histories, of migration, and of identity. Objects carry their own independent histories, which change and shift to reflect the cultural and historical pressures of the time (Bryson 2017, 13). My paintings embody both the independent histories of the object, and the personal histories of the individual, therefore presenting a narrative that reflects the cultural and historical context of a person living during this time.

The static carved bodies of the souvenirs carry a sense of familiarity within my family home in the same way as the forms of a jug may feel familiar. These objects are products of cultural and historical pressures and point backwards to a long evolution in culture that has led to their production (Bryson 2017, 137). Regarding familiar objects, Bryson writes "As human time flows around the forms, smoothing them and tending them through countless acts of attention across countless centuries, time secretes a priceless product: familiarity." (Bryson 2017, 138). Finding familiarity with certain objects creates connection between a person and the space, and subsequently a sense of belonging. My familiarity with the Souvenirs of Italianicity is intensified by the painting process, where many hours are spent analysing, reproducing, and familiarising myself with the likeness of the statues. In my paintings *There* (2019) and *Armrrest* (2019) (Figure 26 and 27) I painted forms and patterns I regularly experienced as part of my every day. The souvenir, the flowers, and the pattern on the couch have all been smoothed over by familiarity, becoming symbols of a certain place in time. The forms of still life provide a significant role concerning cultural memory of everyday objects that can be clouded by familiarity, smoothed over by time, and forgotten. In the same way that 17th Century Dutch still life reflected the 'everyday' of that time period and the objects present within people's lives, my paintings of Souvenirs of Italianicity represent the material culture that reflects the life of my 21st century family, reflecting on eating and drinking in and around domestic life.



Figure 39. Isabella Speed, *There*, 2019, oil on board, 26.5cm x 35cm.



Figure 40. Isabella Speed, *Armrest*, 2019, oil on board, 26.5cm x 35cm.

4.2 INTERIORS AND EXTERIORS.

My paintings are an exploration of the interior ‘backdrops’ that influence my understanding of heritage and familial ties. This ‘backdrop’ is made up of everything within the home, the objects, furnishings, and walls and floors themselves. The backdrop extends past the physical boundaries of the interior but also include the affective and sensual aspects of this environment. The interior is not only place that shape and reflect identity through display objects such as souvenirs. Both the interior and the exterior of a home is shaped by the people that inhabit the space, which in turn shapes future understandings of identity for those who dwell within these spaces. Connections to heritage can be made not only through the home interior but also through the constructed exterior that speaks of an Italian presence. When walking through the suburbs surrounding my family home, certain homes stood out to me that spoke strongly of an Italian nostalgia. They reminded me of the house my Nonna and Nonno lived in, and of the homes some of my extended Italian family and friends live in. These houses were brick with facades and architectural details reminiscent of the countries they had left behind in search of new opportunities. Decorative flairs such as neoclassical columns, border fencing, gateway stairs, and productive well-tended gardens were some of the key examples of these post-war migrant houses. Around Australia, the impact from the influx of Southern European migrants that came to Australia in the post war period from the late 1940s to the 1980s is present through both the exterior and interior of suburban homes, which has become part of the ‘backdrop’, silently shaping notions of identity, especially for those of us with European roots.

Although I made this connection between the exterior of these homes with having a Southern European background, when I look at the exterior of the home I grew up in, it did not have any of these fundamental Southern European architectural charms. Dr Lozanovska’s book *Migrant Housing: Architecture, Dwelling, Migration* (2019) takes a look “at the architectural legacies of Australia’s post-war Southern European migrants.” (Lozanovska 2019). The migrant experience and subsequently the migrant house have a large amount of research surrounding the impact on suburban architecture. Artists such as photographer Warren Kirk capture iconic Australian Migrant homes in their everyday pride. Kirk’s photos are primarily shot in Melbourne, however, the kinds of homes he captures are not only found in Victoria, but throughout Australia including the suburb and surrounding areas where my family home was. Houses I would pass by regularly in my day to day embody many of the characteristic of the homes captured in Kirk’s *Westography: Images of a Vanishing Suburbia* (2016) (Figure 41). Through photography Kirk preserves suburban homes by documenting their exteriors and interiors that will no doubt continue to change and shift in appearance to suit the times.

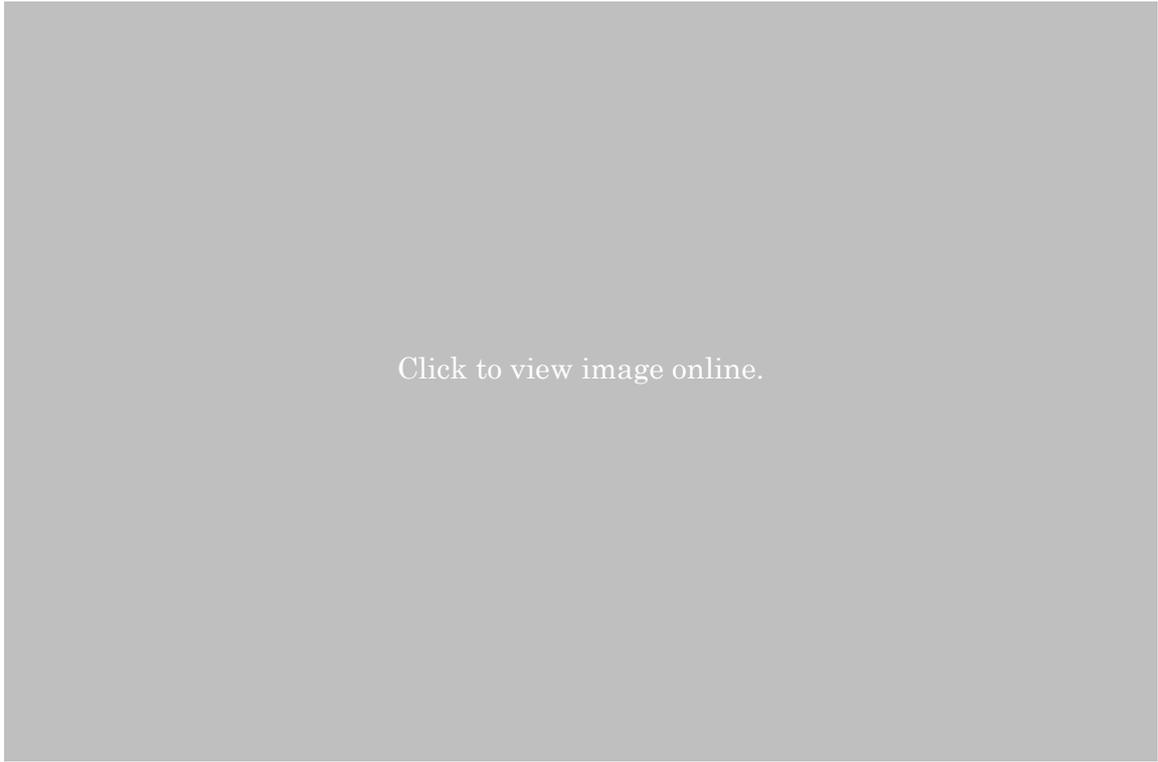


Figure 41. Warren Kirk, *West Footscray*, 2012, digital image.

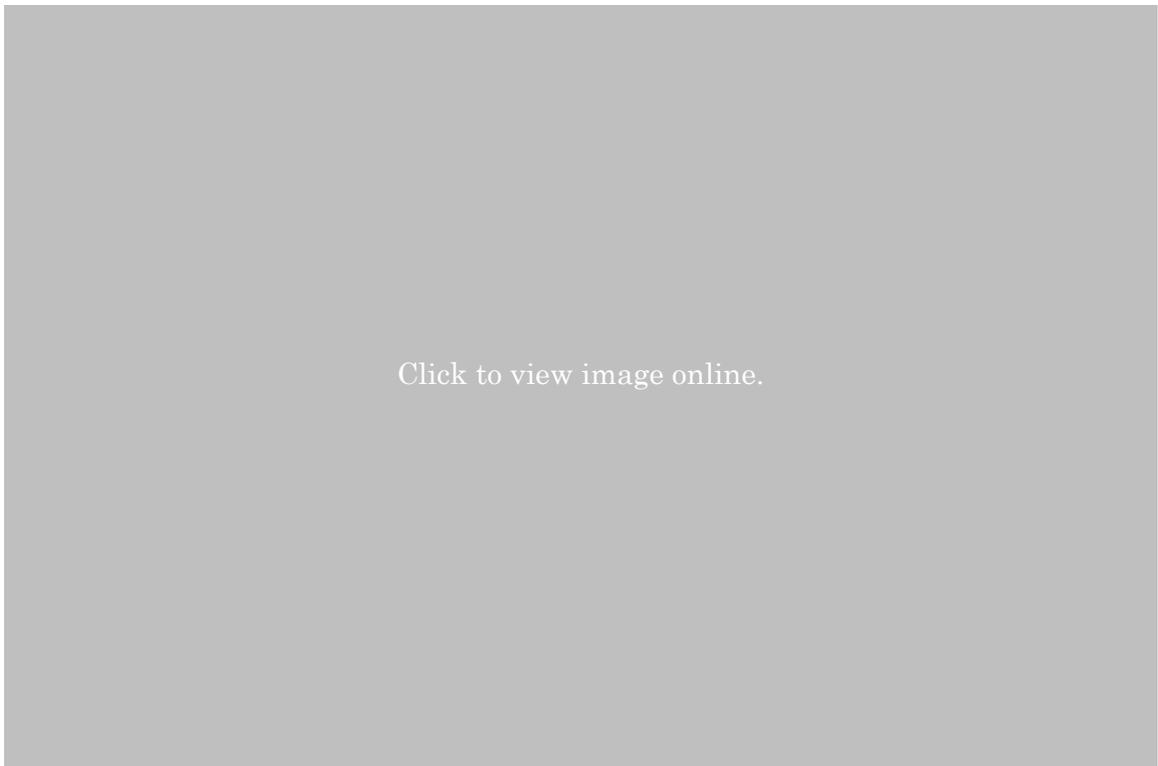


Figure 42. Warren Kirk, *Yarraville*, 2016, digital image.

While there is a lot of resources looking at the migrant experience in regard to their home and architecture in Australia, the generations that followed may have moved away from these homes but have found new ways to identify with their migrant heritage. Through still life painting I capture objects and home interiors of the descendants of Italian migrants. In paintings such as *Locale* (2020) (Figure 43) the Souvenir of Italianicity stands tall in the centre of the composition surrounded by the interior of the home. The interior is not representative of the migrant home, but instead represents the transforming identities of migrant descendants. Some parallels can be drawn between the furnishings of some of these migrant homes, with my family home. In the photograph *Yarraville* (2016) (Figure 42), among photographs and other objects a souvenir depicting a reproduction of Michelangelo's David, a Souvenir of Italianicity as an ode to the testimony of Italian culture. Warren Kirk recognises the charm and historical potential of the overlooked aesthetics that might even be considered banal. There is significance in the archiving that Kirk provides, in the same vein that there is significance in representing and researching the ways which Italianicity and ethnicity is visually represented within descendants of the first-generation migrants. Through photographing these homes Warren Kirk provides insight into many aspects of the lives of migrants living in Australian suburbia, however, photograph lacks the sense of touch that painting can provide. The homes photographed by Kirk are not his own, but those of strangers. In depicting objects and environments through a painting practice, my sense of touch is ever present, and intertwined with the narrative of the objects, providing insight into experiences of personalised affects.

4.3 THE QUARTER GALLERY EXPERIMENT.

My paintings are snapshots of the private realm, looking into the domestic, the everyday, and the overlooked. The objects that are central to this project inform notions of self, they are nostalgic and personal, and everchanging in wherever form they may take. In early November 2019 I put together a small show at Curtin University in The Quarter Gallery titled *Souvenirs Contained*. This space situates my work in a public space drawing attention to the private and personal nature of my research. This space is situated in a renovated shipping container between buildings, grassy seating areas, and pathways on the Curtin University campus. During the installation process, while hanging works and preparing the small space, it became apparent this is very much part of the public sphere. With windows from floor to ceiling on two of the walls, I felt very much on display in the same way my painting and various object were on display as an extension of my sense of identity. Strangers walked by, only meters away from where I was setting up, going about their day, perhaps glancing in, perhaps not. The gallery space was diorama-like in nature, as people could not enter the space, they could only observe it from a distance. This is also similar to viewing objects within a still life painting, where they have been arranged and composed within the



Figure 43. Isabella Speed, *Locale*, 2020, oil on board, 30.5cm x 40.5cm.

limits of a rectangular frame. I considered *Souvenirs Contained* an experimental exhibit to bring together elements from the home and studio environments within a public backdrop. Together with the paintings, drawings, and photographs, are nostalgic objects collected from my family's home that emphasise the publicness of The Quarter Gallery through their connection to the private realm. I further this investigation into gendered spaces by considering the gallery as a public space to house private themes.

My painting methods have previously drawn attention to notions of time and nostalgia through underpainting techniques, and gestural light mark making. This display includes a mix of complete and uncomplete works that continue to refer to notions of time through their painting techniques and also through the inclusion of objects and photographs. I brought items from my family home that are often present in my paintings, alongside other resources that are part of my painting process. Bringing ordinary objects into a gallery space sets them apart from the domestic background they normally blend in with as part of the everyday. The physicality of objects allows for another level of engagement. E. Edwards points out that alongside being encoded with visual information, certain nostalgic objects “demand a physical engagement’ in that they are ‘handled, touched, caressed’ as sensual objects.” (1999, 227) (Edensor 2002, 117). Memory is not only visual, but physical, sensual and embodied. On a table centred in the space is a glass vase belonging to my mother with pink carnations and native Australian eucalyptus silver gum leaves, doilies and the miniature reproduction of *The Three Graces*, over a white crocheted tablecloth. These objects are symbolic of the dining table space that they all inhabit, they are symbolic of the feminine, the domestic, and the passing of time. Folded on one end of the table a folded doily is neatly stacked in a pile reminiscent of the hidden stack of doilies hidden in a living room drawer that seasonally make appearances. In their natural environment encounters with these objects are encounters with their physicality; their weight, texture, scent. However, behind the glass windows they are without their original context. The photos pinned to the gallery space wall, fabric and floral decorative paper in small ornate frames, and self-portrait, and the paintings instead provide context for the objects. These objects, photographs, drawings and paintings, despite their differences, are all part of the same narrative: they are fragments of a larger picture. They engage with the passing of time and memory, as they represent different stages of this project. Through the collecting and displaying of a variety of objects, materials and works, I highlight a connection to the passing of time and memory not only through the painterly techniques I use, but through the juxtaposition and curation of space.

I've juxtaposed raw elements of my family home with works reflecting my personal experience with and around these items, they are paintings and drawings in varying stages of completion, and visual aids from my studio space such as photographs and sketches. My collection of works and items in The Quarter Gallery unifies two of my personal spaces in a public space. Floor to ceiling windows hide nothing, but

locked doors seal everything inside, all within a repurposed shipping container. It brings forth memories of the port town Fremantle, where I grew up, local to my family home, shipping containers were part of my everyday going through the town to and from school. The shipping container exterior is also reminiscent of the migrant experience of my Nonna and Nonno many years ago when they travelled by sea from Italy to Australia. The glass front elevates the function of durable metal container, to that of a display case found in a museum or in a home holding precious collected goods. In *Ways of Curating* (2014) Hans Ulrich Obrist writes on collecting:

To make a collection is to find, acquire, organize and store items, whether in a room, a house, a library, a museum or a warehouse. It is also, inevitably, a way of thinking about the world – the connections and principles that produce a collection contain assumptions, juxtapositions, findings, experimental possibilities and associations. Collection-making, you could say, is a method of producing knowledge. (Obrist 2014, 39)

This collection of works and items is in a way ‘evidence’ of my connection to Italy. Items with different origins were juxtaposed with objects, lace fabric, photographs, gilded frames, floral craft paper and samples of composition and colour. Some of the items although not personally collected by me reflect my identity and draw connections between the studio, the private home, and the public gallery. Exhibiting my works in The Quarter Gallery space allowed me to investigate the relationship between my paintings as a reflection of the private, and the gallery as a public space where objects could be viewed under new light. In collecting and displaying my paintings alongside objects, I was able to build a narrative and create connections between my works. The discoveries made during the duration of The Quarter Gallery space informed the ways in which I build a sense narrative and place in my Solo Show – *Souvenirs of Italianicity*.



Figure 44. Installation view of *Souvenirs Contained*, 2019, The Quarter Gallery, photograph by Isabella Speed.



Figure 45. Installation view from *Souvenirs Contained* with works from *Traces of Understanding*, 2019, The Quarter Gallery, photograph by Isabella Speed.



Figure 46. Installation view from *Souvenirs Contained* with works in progress, 2019, The Quarter Gallery, photograph by Isabella Speed.



Figure 47. Installation view from *Souvenirs Contained*, 2019, The Quarter Gallery, photograph by Isabella Speed.



Figure 48. Installation view from *Souvenirs Contained* with work in progress, 2019, The Quarter Gallery, photograph by Isabella Speed.

4.4 SOLO SHOW: SOUVENIRS OF ITALIANICITY

The body of work exhibited in my solo exhibition *Souvenirs of Italianicity* is built on the findings made from my previous show and works to bring together the final iteration of this project. The Quarter Gallery space provided my project with an environment fixed firmly in the public realm. In my final body of work, I instead selected a space that feels closer to a home in its presentation and atmosphere. The space I chose communicates with the domesticity depicted in my paintings, with nooks and crannies, and homely details, yet still a remaining public gallery. My solo show was held January 2020 at Pig Melon, an independently run project space in Perth. The space is a repurposed shopfront made up of two rooms intimate in size, with warm wooden accents on the floorboards, and a staircase that draws a connection to a home. The building has high ceilings and a single stained-glass panel as part of the shop front window, a connection to Australia's colonial history is present through the architecture and finishing of the building. It is not the space that defines the exhibition, but the connections and associations that can be made, as Hans Ulrich Obrist writes:

The very idea of an exhibition is that we live in a world with each other, in which it is possible to make arrangements, associations, connections, and wordless gestures, and, through this *mise en scène*, to speak (Ulrich Obrist 2014, 32).

This comparison to the French 'mise en scène' is a comparison to the arrangement that takes place on the stage of a theatre production in order to tell a story. In the Quarter Gallery space, the exhibition was clearly visible from the outside, but inaccessible, restricted like a stage kept vacantly waiting for the performers. Pig Melon instead invites the viewer on to the stage, to be among the objects, and to become part of the arrangement. The history and character embodied by the Pig Melon space connects with the arrangements that have taken place within my paintings allowing for an exhibition that engages more directly with the environment it depicts.

The space my paintings inhabit wordlessly gesture towards the space depicted within my paintings, and the affects produced by the objects and surrounding environments. The Pig Melon space has a sense of warmth and history, contrary to the Quarter Gallery which has cool cement flooring, flat white walls, completely free of hidden nooks and crannies. The presence of floorboards in my paintings draw a connection to the floorboards under the feet of the viewer. The viewer navigates the space, over well-worn floorboards, and doorways to engage with the exhibition. The front room is inviting and brightly lit with gentle spotlights, and a large shopfront window which faces a stairwell that winds out of sight. A modest doorway leads to the second room that separates the space into two. I used this to naturally divide my works into two sections that convey different parts of the same story. Hans Ulrich Obrist

writes that "...the task of curating is to make junctions, to allow different elements to touch" (Ulrich Obrist 2014, 1). The division of rooms allowed for me to divide my works thematically. The first room, as an entry point, included my works that depicted the home, hands, floral arrangements and decorating. All things that are seen within the dining area of my family home, specifically around the dining table. The second room is smaller in size and more intimate in terms of lighting. In a corner there is a mock fireplace and mantle which together with the wooden floorboards remind me more of an unfurnished home rather than a gallery. This room houses paintings of the souvenirs, alongside three self-portraits that loosely imitate the statues. The parallels between my paintings and the Pig Melon space informed my curatorial process and decision making in displaying works where they make a connection with the other paintings, but also with the space itself.

The first room housed paintings of three different miniature statues: *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, *The Three Graces* and *Venus De Milo*. These statues are not consistent in their connection to Italy as they cross the line into Greek art and history. However, through the process of homemaking, these objects are unified to communicate an affective environment that identity is built from. Despite their fractured relationship to Italy, they are tied into the narrative of my family. In domestic homes, tourist souvenirs are thought of as signifiers of strangeness and otherness but are "domesticated by their inclusion in a normative system of arrangement" (Edensor 2002, 114). Objects are assembled in relation to spaces bound by routine, where they can be easily seen without obstruction. Edensor refers to the TV to typically be the central piece of furniture which other objects will be put around. I have seen this to be true in many cases, but in the case of my family home, there is no TV present, and instead the dining table is the central pieces of furniture which objects find themselves situated in terms of. That may not necessarily mean on the table, but also around it, in a place that can be seen while seated at the table. In the seven paintings from the first room, alongside the souvenirs, was renditions of gesturing hands, flower arrangements in a vase, and floral soft furnishings such as the sofa and the tablecloth. They are all objects and things seen and engaged with are the dining table. The intimate size of the room, alongside its homely features, allowed me to utilise the exhibition room as a space reminiscent of the living area of my family home, to contextualise the souvenirs. The second room is more personal, and is deeper within the building, depicting more intimately my relationship with the objects.



Figure 49. First room installation view from *Souvenirs of Italianicity*, 2020, Pig Melon, Perth, photograph by Isabella Speed.

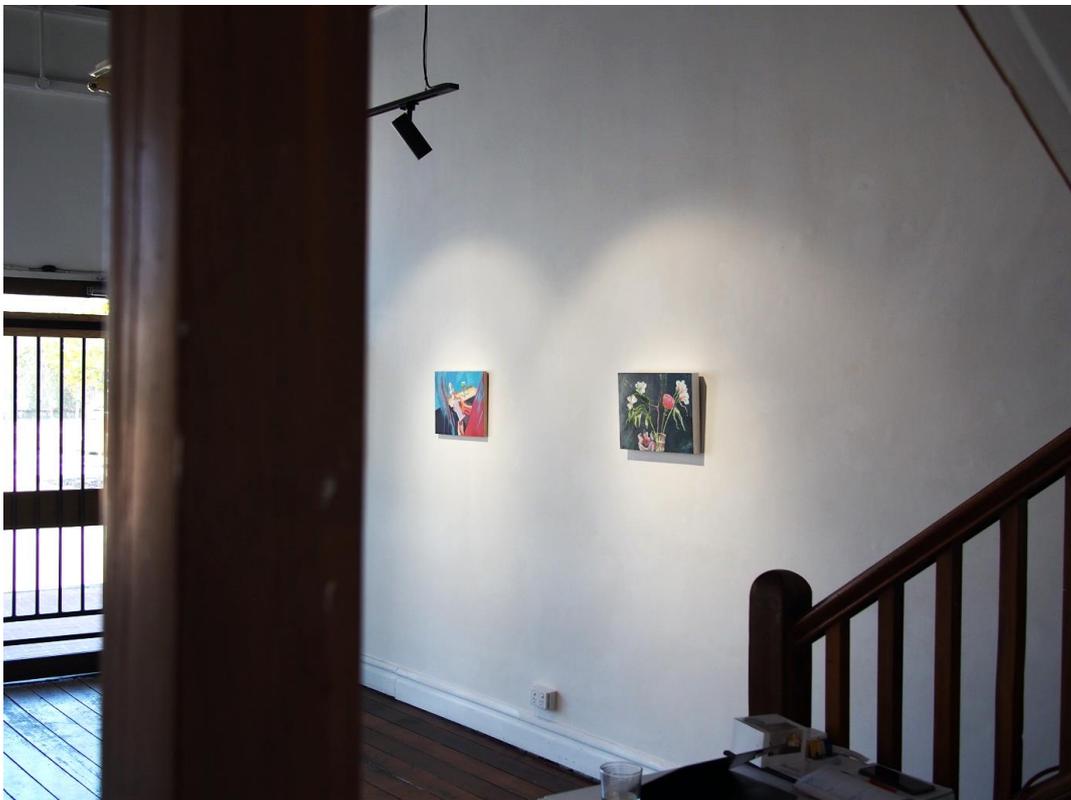


Figure 50. First room installation view from *Souvenirs of Italianicity*, left to right: *Belonging* (2020) and *Stem* (2020), 2020, Pig Melon, Perth, photograph by Isabella Speed.



Figure 51. First room installation view from *Souvenirs of Italianicity*, 2020, Pig Melon, Perth, photograph by Isabella Speed.

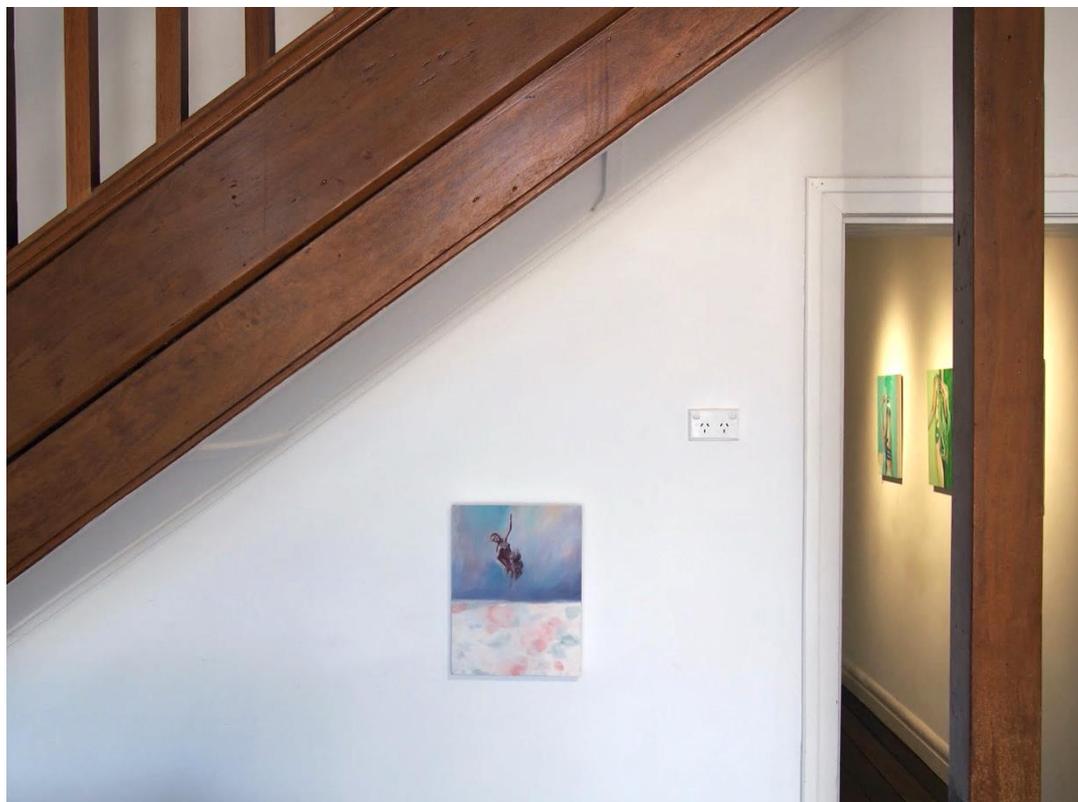


Figure 52. First room installation view from *Souvenirs of Italianicity* of *Behind the sofa* (2020), 2020, Pig Melon, Perth, photograph by Isabella Speed.

In the making of this final series of paintings the subject matter shifts to include feminine soft furnishings that are adorned with floral prints as a reoccurring feature. In the first room I emphasised the inclusion of flowers by including floral arrangements and soft furnishings adorned with floral patterns in each of the paintings in this room. The presence of flowers is an ode to my mother and the heritage she has passed onto me while also acknowledging the gendered nature of the domestic space. My paintings may not speak of a typical Australian home, but the floral prints and imported flowers act as souvenirs, in the same way as the statues, that speak of a migration of culture while simultaneously drawing a connection to my mother as a female role model, homemaker, and her connection to Italy. Upon entering the gallery space, the largest painting in the room draws in the eye with bright colours and gestural mark making. In the painting *Over the dining table* (2020) a Souvenir of Italianicity stands domesticated as a table centre piece contrasting with a bright somewhat garish floral tablecloth and a slowly decaying floral arrangement in a glass vase. These objects all exist within one area of my family home, around the dining table, and regularly change locations situationally. The nature of this encountered space is changed when it is instead experienced as a still life composition. Still life paintings provide a platform for objects to be looked at in a way which the attention is placed on certain objects in deliberate and intentional manner.

In painting certain objects together in a still life painting, their relationships with each other and myself as the painter can be scrutinized to reveal a narrative. Often objects have a symbolic value outside of their intended uses when viewed in a still life painting. Objects that are otherwise overlooked or considered lowly can be arranged in certain ways to draw attention to them and the lives that they reflect and impact. In *Still Life: A User's Manual* (2002) Author Peter Schwenger writes on narrative and objects:

Accumulating associations and experiences as they pass through various hands, objects become the custodians of narratives to correspond, which emanate from them like an aura. (Schwenger 2002, 147)

Although not all objects are framed by narrative, associations and experiences that are attached to the object are present through their affective aura which I hoped to capture through my paintings. Attached to objects are not only personal associations, but also general known associations that build on the history of the still life genre. The gently wilting flowers in *Over the dining table* is symbolic of the passing of time and mortality of life but are also a reflection of my personal experiences and relationships. The miniature statue acts as a custodian of cultural and familial narratives that exists within the everyday. By including soft furnishings and other objects such as flower arrangements this narrative is extended, considering the relationship between the feminine and the domestic.



Figure 53. Second room installation view from *Souvenirs of Italianicity*, left to right: *Huddle* (2020) and *Gather* (2019), 2020, Pig Melon, Perth, photograph by Isabella Speed.

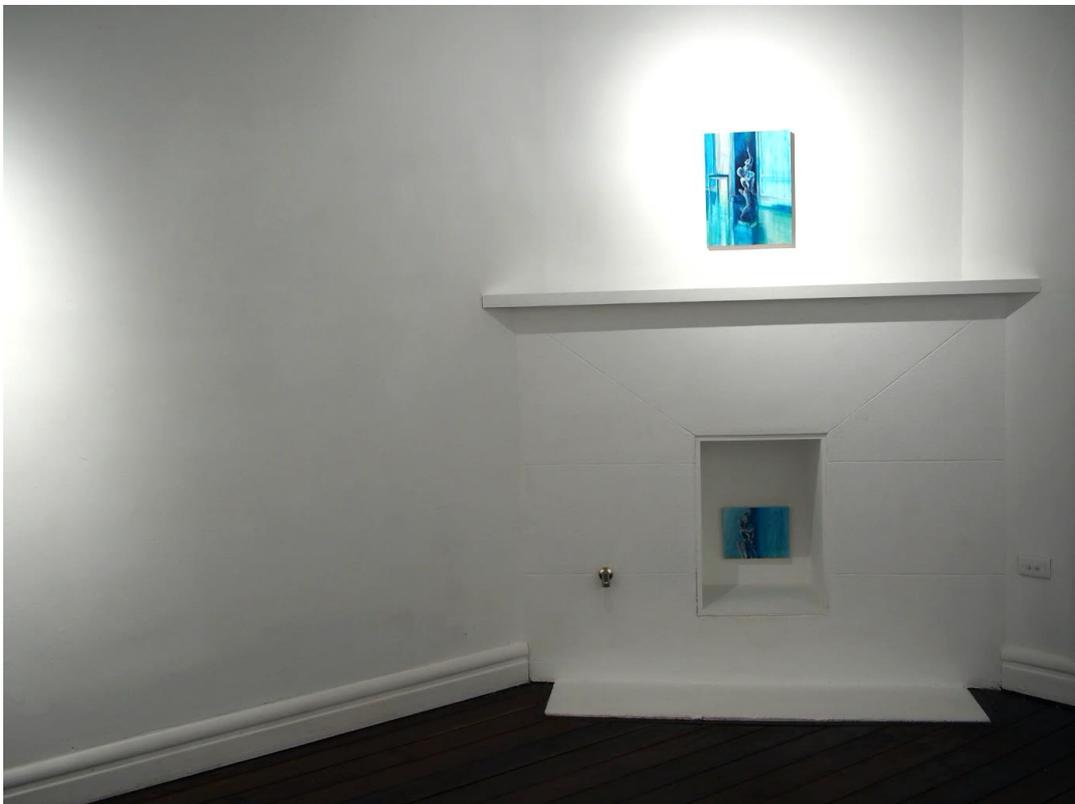


Figure 54. Second room installation view from *Souvenirs of Italianicity*, top down: *Locale* (2020) and *Le* (2020), 2020, Pig Melon, Perth, photograph by Isabella Speed.

In my paintings I engage primarily with the still life genre but, through my selection of motifs, I also reference other historical genres of paintings. Bryson believes that painting is divided between two sectors, the 'low-plane reality' of the "routines of daily living, the domestic round, and the absence of personal uniqueness and distinction" and the 'high-plane reality' dealing with the "exceptional act and the unique individual, with the narrative and the drama of 'greatness' (Bryson 2017, 15). My research generally resides within this 'low-plane reality' since it deals with the everyday routine of my daily life. However, in saying this, through my inclusion of souvenirs that depict famous sculptures of greatness, and the exceptional acts of unique individuals, these two worlds merge. The scenes depicted by the souvenirs represent the 'high-plane reality', and by painting these objects through the lens of the 'low-plane' still life painting genre these two worlds are fused together in one still image. Through a still life painting practice I reclaim the biased 'high-plane' imagery, the by-product of the souvenir kept as an Italian object, by juxtaposing the souvenirs with floral imagery. As a result of this, I challenge previous notions of what is considered 'high-plane' and 'low-plane'. Although considered 'low-plane', domestic spaces are nuanced and complex, where individuals build their understanding of the world and their self.

During the curation and install of the Pig Melon show, I considered the previous shows in which I installed my paintings. In the Quarter Gallery exhibit I combined works at different stages with objects, drawings and photos, which allowed me to examine the private and public spaces of the home, studio and gallery. Installing the *Curtin Art Degree Show* paintings allowed me to consider the paintings as fractured pieces of a larger narrative. When dividing this body of work between Pig Melon's two rooms I considered how the paintings relate to the space, and how they relate to the other paintings in the same room. In doing so, I shaped the narrative the works convey by controlling which works communicate with each other in each room, how close together they are, and where each painting is positioned relative to the surroundings and the other paintings. A fireplace in the second room of the Pig Melon space adds a touch of home, and provides me with a fixture to divide my paintings. *Locale* and *Le* (2020) (Figure 54) are paintings of the reproduction of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* framed by the fire place setting. In photographing the statue for these paintings I moved the statue from its usual place and arranged the statue on the living room floor before taking photos with staged and natural lighting. *Locale* depicts the souvenir of Italianicity as the centre of attention surrounded by the wooden living interior. The painting is over the fireplace, in a place where a valued painting may be displayed in a home. In contrast, *Le* is inside the fireplace, and depicts the same statue off centre on a surrounded by lines reminiscent of the grain of wooden floorboards. The painting is tucked away, but not out of sight, much like its counterpart in the living room. The space that paintings are viewed in further contextualise and inform the paintings they house, making the 'homely' Pig Melon space especially appropriate for this series of paintings.

In the second room there is no flowers and no vases, there is no floral patterns on the sofa or the tablecloth. In this room I incorporate the 'self' through juxtaposing paintings of the Souvenirs of Italianicity with a set of self-portraits. The three self portraits are simply titled *One*, *Two* and *Three* (2020) (Figure 55) are named after *The Three Graces*. Painting my physical form emphasises the importance of personal perspective. The three portraits do not include my face, but instead reference the bodies of *The Three Graces* through the styling of the hair, loosely draped fabric, and relaxed posture that imitates the gestures held by the souvenir figures.



Figure 55. Installation view from *Souvenirs of Italianicity*, left to right: *One* (2020), *Two* (2020), *Three* (2020), 2020, Pig Melon, Perth, photograph by Isabella Speed.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CONCLUSION

In coming to my conclusion, I reflect on the journey and development this project has undergone, which has unfolded as a series of paintings and shows alongside this exegesis. This topic initially came to my attention after attending an annual Christmas gathering with my family. Every year we come together to enjoy homemade ravioli in each other's company. Sitting across the table from me was Lucca, an Italian handyman, who was not related to my family by blood or marriage but had been present at these gatherings for the past couple years. I realised that my family's connection to him was simply the fact that he was Italian. This led me to think about what it means to have Italian heritage in Australia. With this in mind, I began paying attention to how Italian identity is expressed in Australia. This led me to investigate how Italianity is expressed within the domestic sphere, ultimately leading me to pay extra attention to the Souvenirs of Italianity that reside within my family home. The objects which I have coined as Souvenirs of Italianity are nostalgic objects that are valuable through their affectual ability and the connections they draw to Italy, and to the Italian heritage of those that live by these objects. I refer to souvenirs as both commercial products that may be sold at tourist sites, and as nostalgic objects for descendants of immigrants. These nostalgic objects connect into a familial culture that becomes further distanced with every generation.

The findings of this project have been guided by my creative practice, and in reflecting on each series of paintings my understanding of the souvenir and its complexities in relation to expressing heritage within the domestic sphere has developed. Similar to Wilhelm Sasnal, I position my work within a space of ambiguity. Gestural mark making motions reference domestic daily tasks, partially veiled imagery that weaves in and out of the background is suggestive of incompleteness whilst also inviting the curious eye to search for something more. As the artist, my perspective is central in understanding the point of view this research is derived from. Through the painting process, I remain present through my sense of touch in the textures and marks I leave behind. My body of work acts as a personal encounter with objects of Italianity, and through my paintings I represent the objects embodied with my own presence. The photographs I take are scrutinized and deciphered in the painting process wherein I paint snippets of quiet moments that exist between objects and people, considering notions of identity, place, and time. Painting slows down a scene to a stop, giving the mind a moment to take in each object through the eye of the artist. This slowing down of time allows for absorption and reflection. Paintings compress time, and, in a similar sense, souvenirs compress time and space.

When I discuss compressing time and space, I am not talking about time travel in the science fiction sense where one is physically transported across time and space. I am instead referring to objects that compress time and space through their ability to affect and initiate memories and thoughts. Memories and thoughts evoked through interactions with Souvenirs of Italianicity are specific to individual experiences. My lived experience as an Australian with mixed English and Italian heritage shaped my perception of the Souvenirs of Italianicity, just as Lucca's lived experience as an Italian living and working in Australia would shape his. In painting the souvenirs, and therefore imbuing the imagery of the objects with my sense of touch, and my personal perspective is highlighted as a significant aspect of this research. Still life painting has provided a reflexive method for analysing and exploring objects, their role, and their representation. The narrative of objects is a reflection of their context. Susan Stewart questions the relationship between the narrative of the object and possessor writing "What is the narrative of the object; it is the narrative of the possessor (Stewart, 2007, 136)." In this way a strong human presence remains despite the lack of a human figure. Although still life painting has been considered as the bottom of the painting hierarchy due to its lack of human figures, traces of human presence are embodied by objects which shed light on their complexities and their role in shaping notions of identity.

My understanding of material culture and its importance in shaping relationships, perceptions of self, and how we understand the world around us builds on the works of Daniel Miller and Susan M. Pearce. In selecting a nostalgic object that communicates Italianicity I looked to the objects I have frequently seen in the homes of my extended family, friends with Italian heritage, and in public representation. Souvenirs replicating grand sculptural works stood out due to their popularity and undeniable visual connection to Italy. I didn't initially consider the potency souvenirs carry as undervalued objects that are associated with the kitsch, tacky and cheap. By focusing on the souvenir as the object of investigation led me to question the discourse surrounding souvenirs regarding authenticity, referring to Guy Fletcher's research on sentimentality as a genuine kind of value, Susan Stewart on the complexity of objects, and Michael Haldrup on the magical nature of souvenirs. The significance in using miniature replica souvenirs to research objects that depict heritage within the domestic sphere is through their multi-layered connections. The Souvenirs of Italianicity in this project draw a connection to the undervalued, while simultaneously referencing the elevated sculptural works from another time in Italy. Souvenirs often bring to mind a different place and time, such as a holiday or trip, but for people with a distanced familial connection to Italy, Souvenirs of Italianicity are reminiscent of not only personal experiences, but familial experiences of previous generations with a close connection to Italy as a homeland.

My first series of paintings established a line of inquiry into the complexities of the souvenir, particularly looking at their connection to narrative. The paintings from this first series explore the role of ambiguity

and fragmentation through painting techniques used and by the way they are arranged and displayed. In doing so they communicate my narrative as someone with fragmented cultural and familial ties to Italy. Works such as *Silhouette of a Souvenir* (2018) communicate notions of time through the speed of the painting process and the materiality of the paint. Like the dripping paint traditions and stories change shape over time and through generations. Paintings such as *Hold on* (2018) and *Pass on* (2018) demonstrate quick and gestural wiping motions contrasted with a slower application of paint focusing on detail and representation, whilst *Gesture* (2018) and *Clasp* (2018) demonstrate the timely layering capabilities of the paint which reviews and changes previous layers with each additional layer. The painterly application builds details and changes the perception of what is being portrayed. Each painting is a fraction of a larger narrative. In bringing together and hanging my first series of paintings exhibited at the *Curtin Art Degree Show*, the fractured narrative reflects the relationship that descendants of immigrants may have with their family's country of origin.

My next series of paintings that came together as part of the *Traces of Understanding* group show responds to my first series of paintings particularly looking at the traceable mark as a shimmer of affect. This series included collaborative works *Face / Machine Collaboration* (2019) and *Hand / Machine Collaboration* (2019) that influenced my next body of work and invited a new artistic perspective. This body of work responds to theories of affect, particularly referring to *The Affect Theory Reader* to build an understanding of how affects can be reproduced within paintings. Using popular and symbolic imagery such as that of *The Three Graces*, I align myself alongside other artists such as Vivian Greevan through our use of a shared motif. In acknowledging the potential of objects interpretability, the role of the environment became increasingly more important in situating the reproduction of *The Three Graces* as a souvenir of Italianicity. My paintings bring together the imagery of *The Three Graces* with a sensual and considerate application of paint and gestural movement in an attempt to capture the affectual shimmer.

Affectual and sensual experiences are important in processing concepts of national identity. Notions of national identity are processed as much through felt experiences, as through cognitive processes of finding meaning (Edensor 2002, 140). My understanding of identity goes beyond what I see and engage with physically, as it is also shaped by my affectual experiences with cultural and nostalgic objects. Paintings are carriers of the touch of the artist as a reflection of their experiences. They invite inquisition and reflection through the deliberate actions of the artist. Objects and paintings engage with people through a realm invisible to the eye, that of affect as sensual and tactile experiences. Painting the affectual shimmer of objects is reflective of the object's position in time and space, as well as my personal relationship with the object.

My final series of paintings was exhibited at two stages of its development in two different spaces. Firstly, in November 2019 in the Quarter Gallery and later, more complete, at Pig Melon. This series of paintings addressed themes of affect and identity, while considering the public and private. The exhibition space is an important aspect of these shows and each space informs this project differently. The Quarter Gallery provided my project with a space to investigate the public and private nuances of the private domestic space I investigate, the studio that treads the line between public and private, and the white cube gallery space situated clearly in the public sphere. This influenced my choice for my solo show, which I opted for a gallery space more in turn with the domestic space that my paintings reflect. Like photographer Kirk Warren, I capture and interpret my surroundings, to better understand the world I live in, but also my personal sense of identity. This final body of work builds on the findings from my previous exhibited series of paintings. The first series of paintings examine how paintings can relate and inform each other to express a larger narrative and prompted me to move beyond painting the physical. My second body of work incorporated an emphasis on tactile mark making which provides a way for affects to be observed. A stronger sense of place in my paintings comes together in this final body of work where I bring together informed elements in a single shared space.

My research offers a personalised look into the value of souvenirs as nostalgic objects, and their potent influence on those that live within their affectual reach. Although this project is specific to my situation, people from different cultures and backgrounds may have souvenirs or other objects and keepsakes that strengthen their connection to their familial and cultural heritage. With increasing globalisation and migration, future generations may find themselves with an increasingly distant relationship to a country that was once home to their family. Each series of paintings contributes to the understanding of objects and their relationship to place, time, and memory through a personal lens. This project considers time in relation to place and connects these concepts with the familial and cultural heritage. My Nonna and Nonno's origin in Italy is acknowledged through the humble yet previously undervalued souvenirs in my family home, as well as many other facets of my life, including the family gatherings with enough Italianicity for any Italian, like Lucca, to feel at home. Through the still life medium I freeze a moment in time and space as well as the affects and complexities embodied by the object I depict. Still life painting has given me a method with which to examine and discuss objects from private domestic spaces in relation to myself. While the results are personal and specific, the method and framework for understanding I describe in this thesis are in many ways universal. This framework considers the affectual reach of souvenirs, and objects more generally, and the profound meaning making dormant in the stereotypically mundane, regular, domestic: the home.

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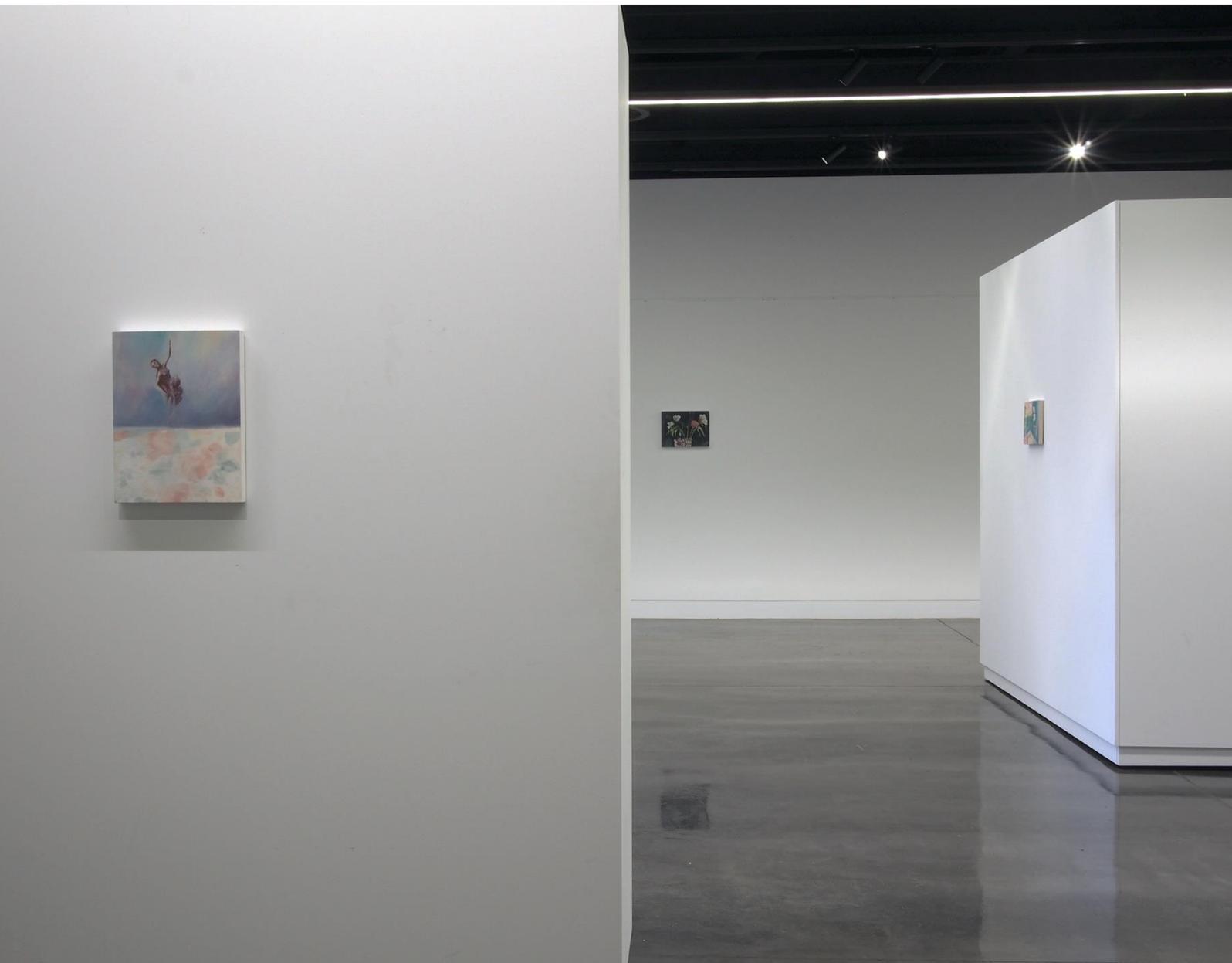
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DIGITAL EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE

This section contains documentation of my digital examination.

SOUVENIRS OF ITALIANICITY: CATALOGUE



ISABELLA SPEED

This catalogue documents the series of paintings that were originally exhibited at Pig Melon, Perth in January 2020 set up for examination purposes as part of a Master of Research (Fine Arts) in the project space (202:165) at Curtin University in June 2020.

This document includes a 3D walkthrough link, photographic documentation of the paintings within the project space, images of the paintings, as well as a copy of the room sheet which can also be accessed through the walkthrough.

All paintings and photographs by Isabella Speed.

Walkthrough link: [HERE](#)

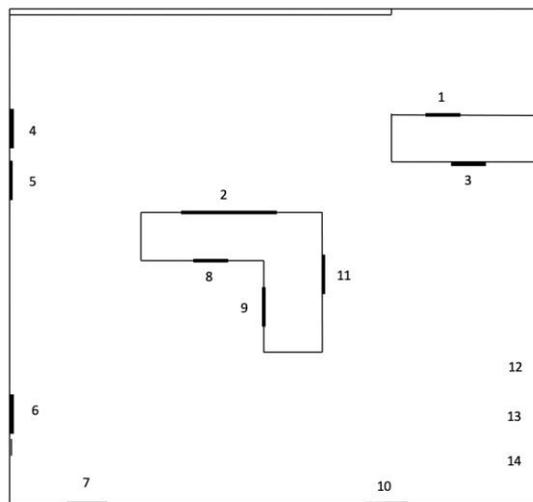
Souvenirs of Italianicity

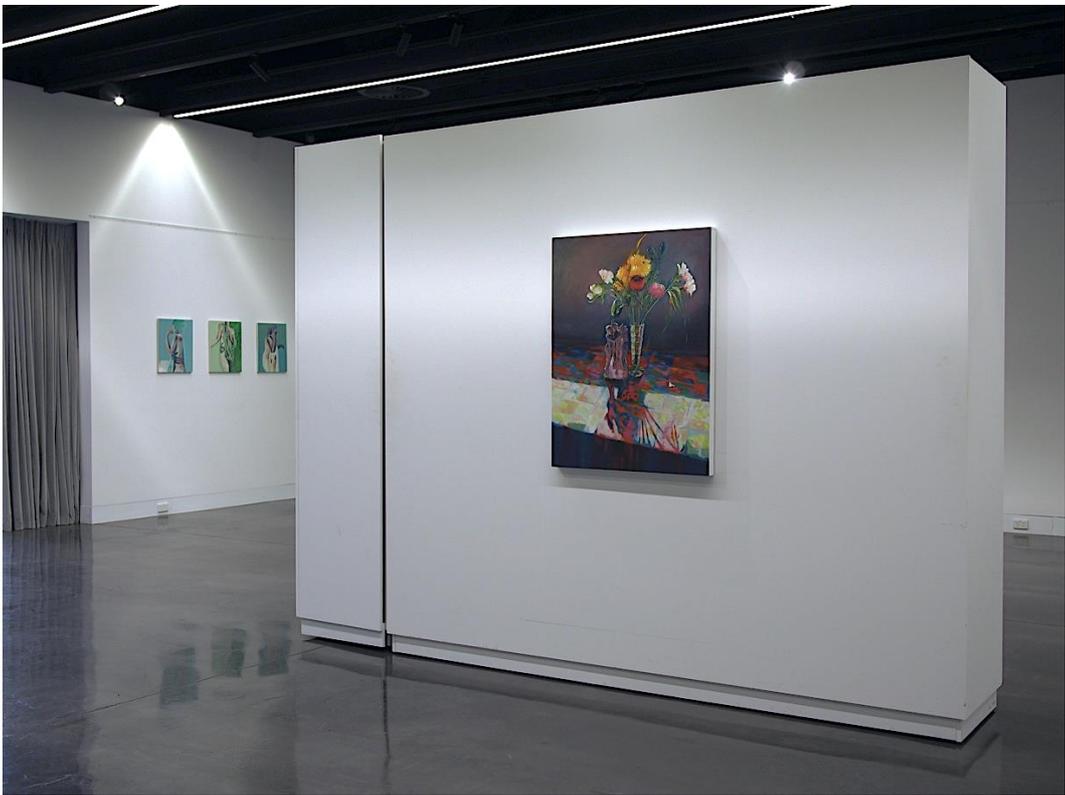
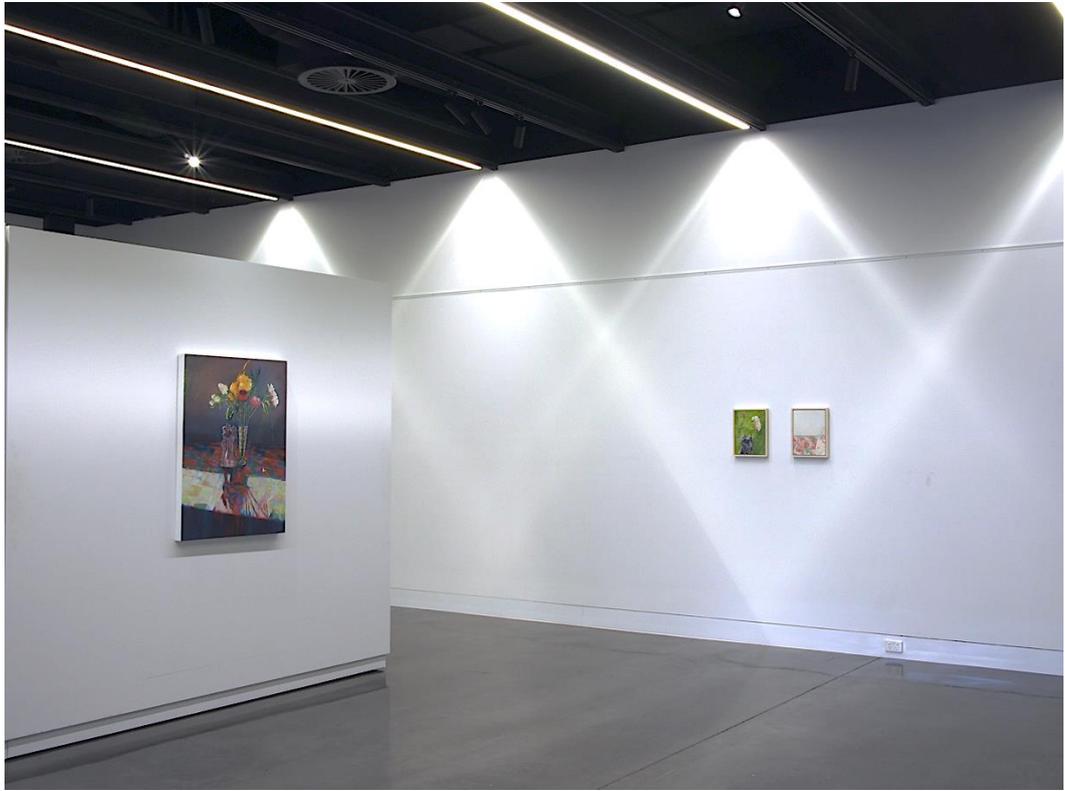
Isabella Maria Louise Speed

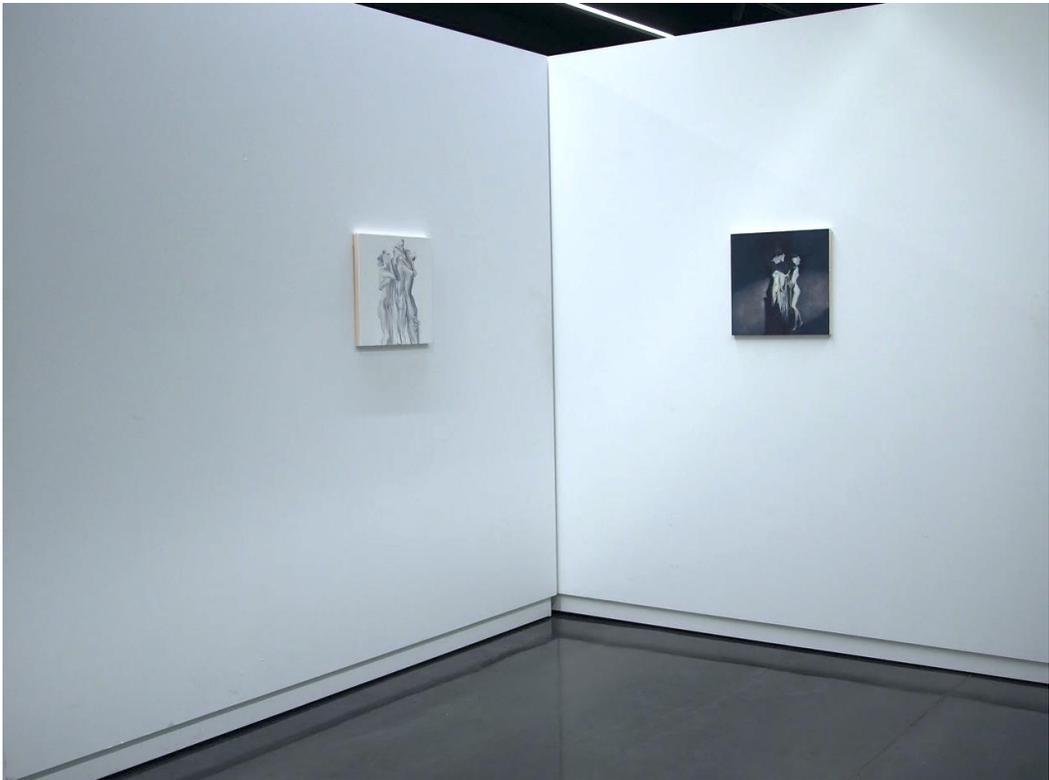
‘Souvenirs of Italianicity’ looks at reproductions of iconic sculptures from the old masters that quietly reside within the home of my family, not to pay tribute to the artists, but as objects embedded with hereditary significance. These works draw from my nostalgic and distant connection to the homeland of my Nonno and Nonna, Italy. As an Italian descendant that does not speak the language, through other ways, such as engaging with objects reminiscent of my Italian cultural heritage, I draw a personal connection to my roots.

When thinking about ‘souvenirs’, one might think about mass-produced knickknacks, the kitsch, the tacky, the cheap, the very epitome of tourism’s cultural kitsch. Things easy to live without, but often things that are hard to let go. Almost anything can become a souvenir, but the items that typically come to mind are the things sold in shops and stands at busy and touristy sites. If I were to look around my family home, there are certain objects that would typically fall into the category of being a ‘souvenir’ but have superseded this role. When I look at these souvenirs thoughts of a faraway country come to mind, but I don’t think of a specific holiday or a fond memory of travelling overseas. Instead, these souvenirs embody a cultural connection to my personal heritage, a reminder of my family’s history.

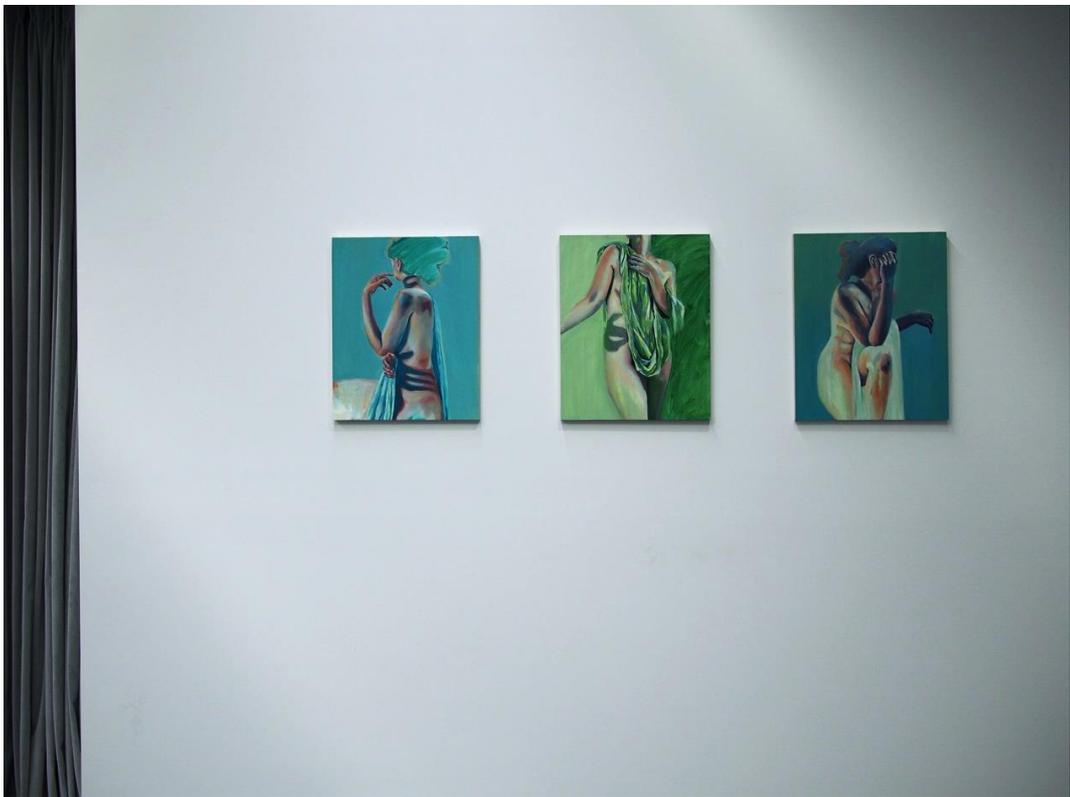
1. *Behind the sofa*, 2020, oil on board, 30.5cm x 40.5cm
2. *Over the dining table*, 2020, oil on board, 74.4cm x 99.7cm
3. *Belonging*, 2020, oil on board, 40.7cm x 30.5cm
4. *Armrest*, 2019, oil on board, 26.5cm x 35cm
5. *There*, 2019, oil on board, 26.5cm x 35cm
6. *Locale*, 2020, oil on board, 30.5cm x 40.5cm
7. *Le*, 2020, oil on board, 25.5cm x 20.4cm
8. *Gather*, 2019, oil on board, 40.8cm x 40.8cm
9. *Huddle*, 2020, oil on board, 40.8cm x 40.8cm
10. *Together*, 2019, oil on board, 40.7cm x 30.5cm
11. *Stem*, 2020, oil on board, 30.5cm x 22.8cm
12. *One*, 2020, oil on board, 50.8cm x 40.8cm
13. *Two*, 2020, oil on board, 50.8cm x 40.8cm
14. *Three*, 2020, oil on board, 50.8cm x 40.8cm

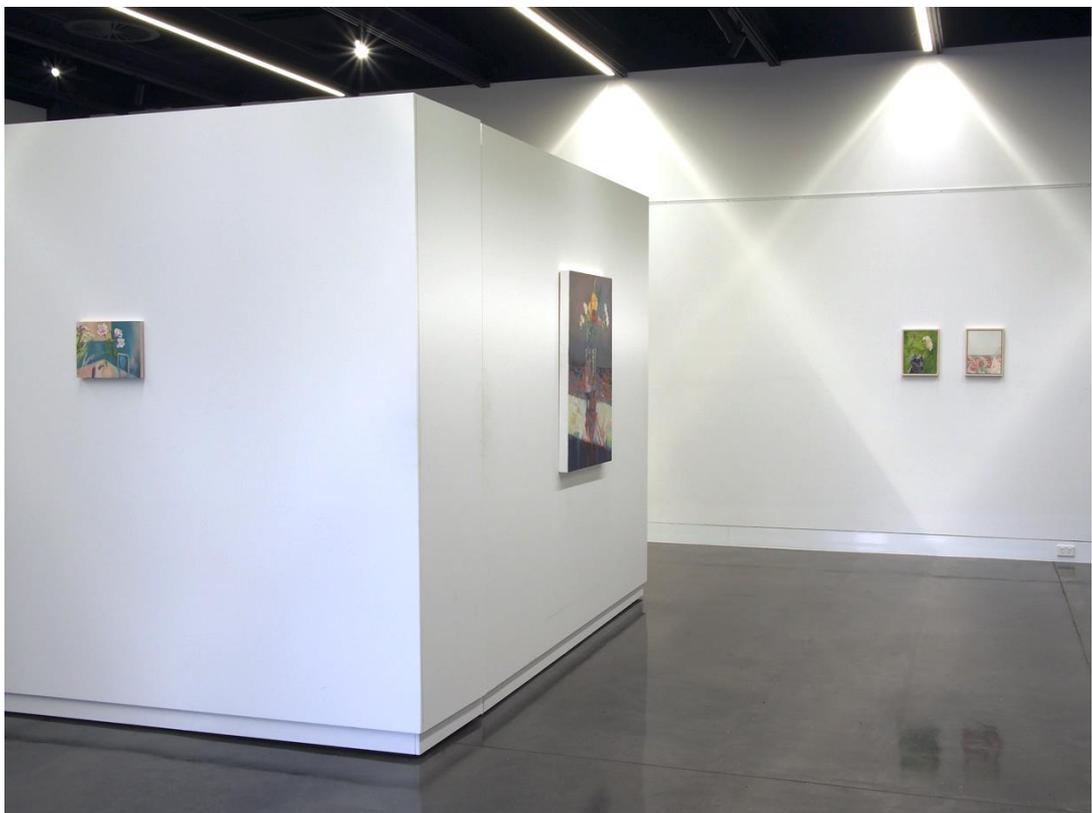


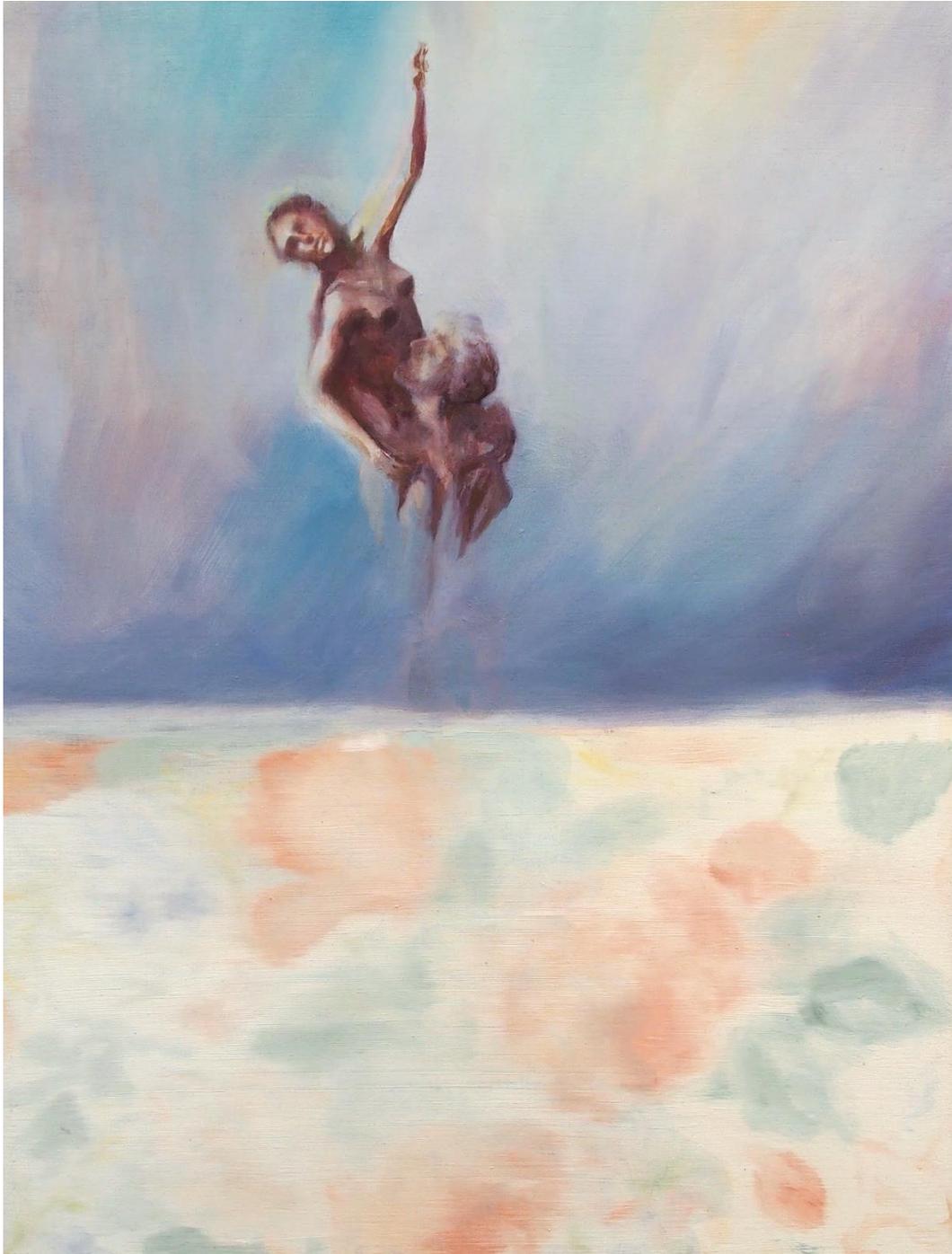












Behind the sofa
2020
oil on board
30.5cm x 40.5cm



Over the dining table
2020
oil on board
74.4cm x 99.7cm



Belonging
2020
oil on board
40.7cm x 30.5cm



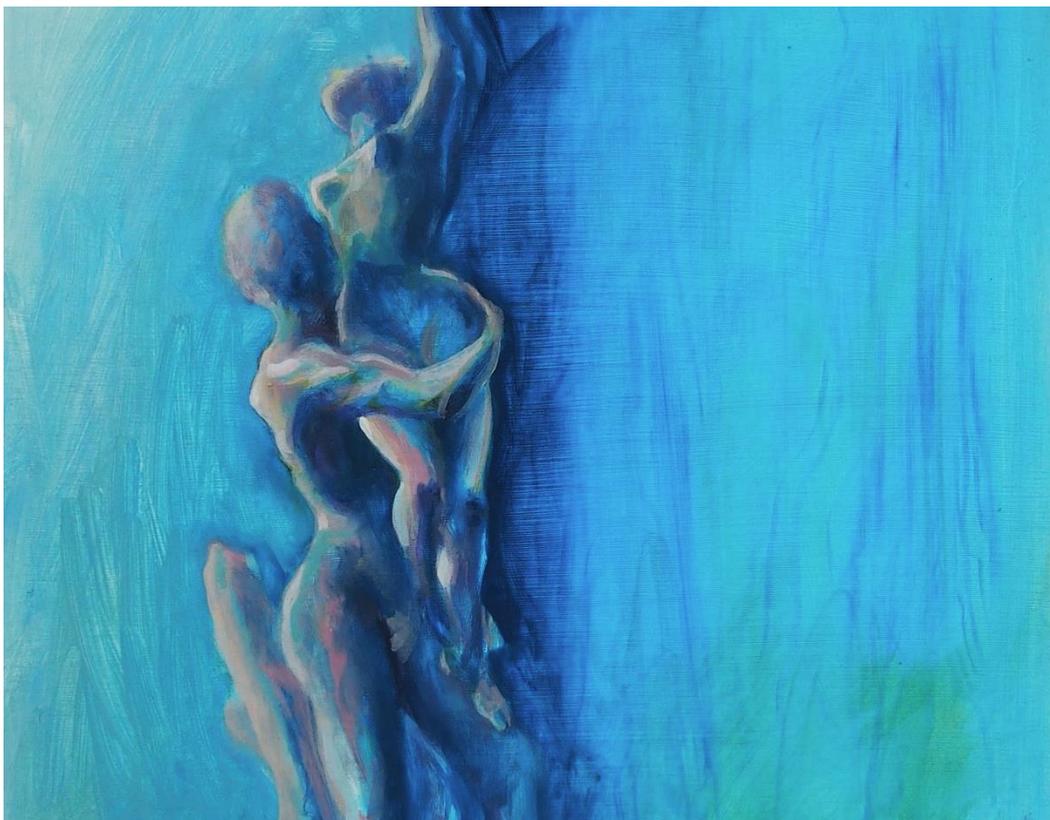
Armrest
2019
oil on board
26.5cm x 35cm



There
2019
oil on board
26.5cm x 35cm



Locale
2020
oil on board
30.5cm x 40.5cm



Le
2020
oil on board
25.5cm x 20.4cm



Gather
2019
oil on board
40.8cm x 40.8cm



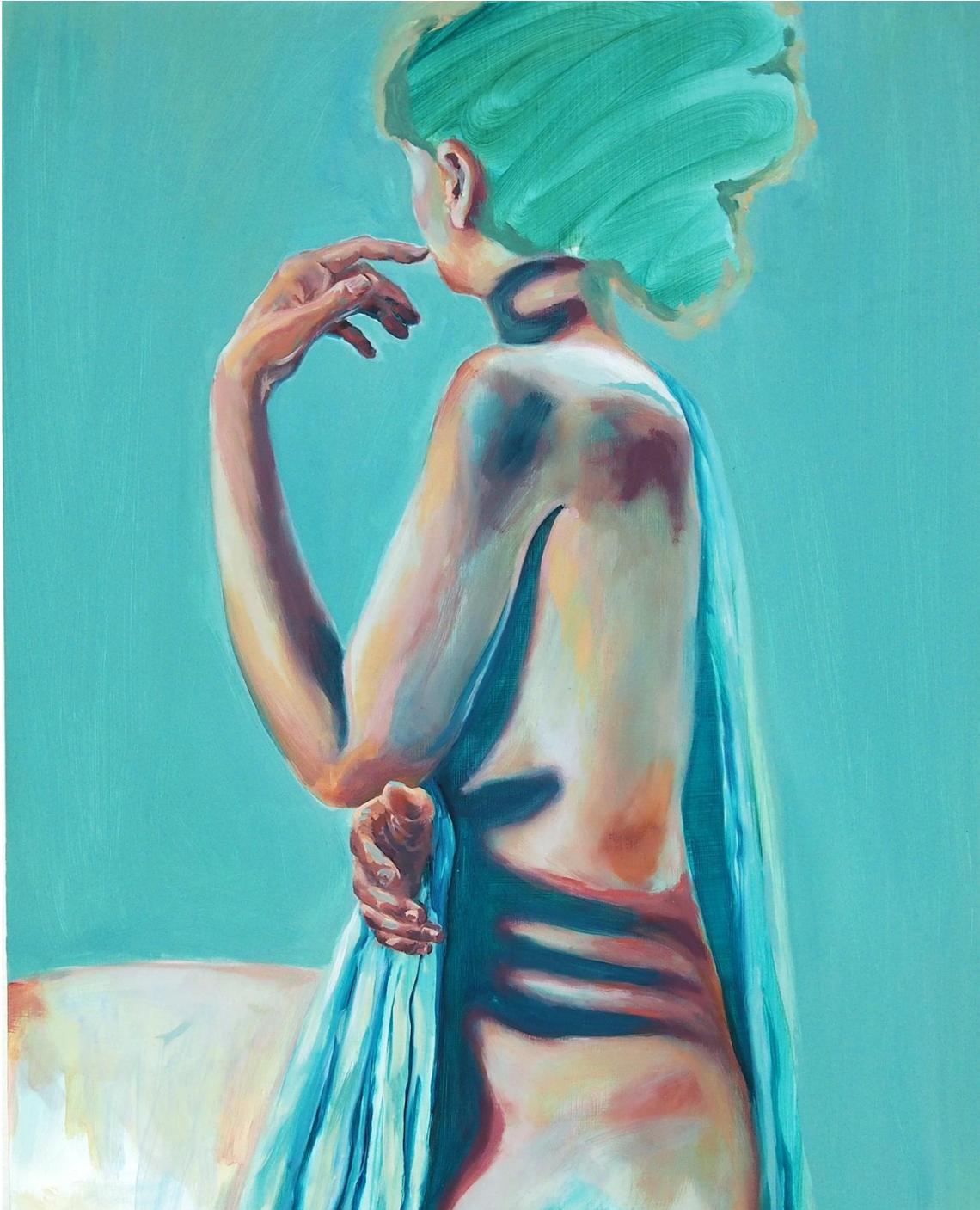
Huddle
2020
oil on board
40.8cm x 40.8cm



Together
2019
oil on board
40.7cm x 30.5cm



Stem
oil on board
2020
30.5cm x 22.8cm



One
2020
oil on board
50.8cm x 40.8cm



Two
2020
oil on board
50.8cm x 40.8cm



Three
2020
oil on board
50.8cm x 40.8cm

APPENDIX

This section contains documentation of exhibited works and exhibition catalogues that were discussed in relation to this thesis, as well as works not discussed in this thesis, but are related to this research.

Please join us for the exhibition opening of

Traces of Understanding

6pm Wednesday 8 May 2019

Artist Talk
Thursday 9 May
4pm - 5pm

Recent work from emerging artists Callum Hope,
Greg Molloy and Isabella Speed

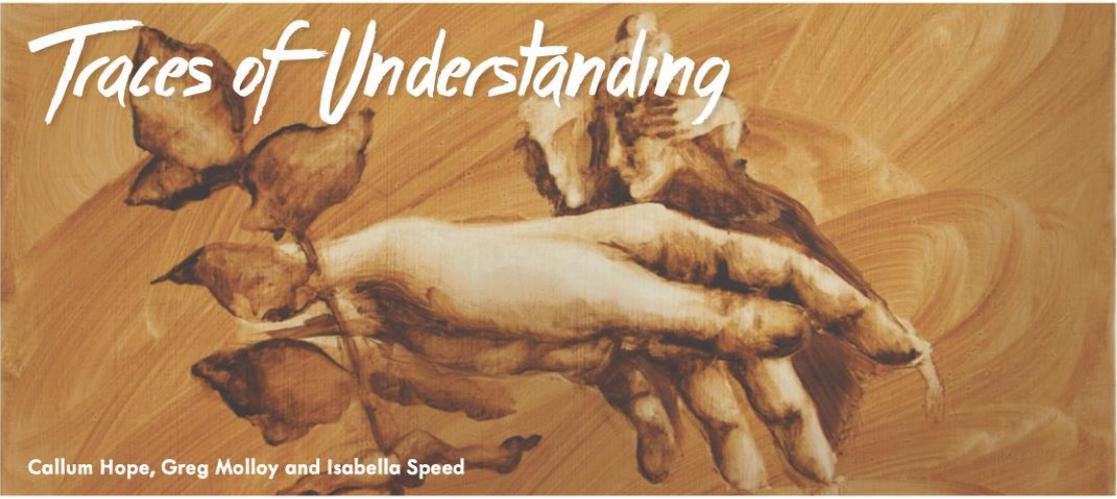
EXHIBITION OPEN 8 - 13 MAY 2019



Mon-Fri: 9am-4pm, Sat-Sun: 10am-4pm
50 Railway Road, Kalamunda (08) 9257 9998
zzgallery@kalamunda.wa.gov.au www.zzcc.com.au



Traces of Understanding group exhibition flyer, Zig Zag Gallery, Kalamunda, 2019.



Traces of Understanding

Callum Hope, Greg Molloy and Isabella Speed

Please join us for the exhibition opening of

Traces of Understanding

Recent work from emerging artists Callum Hope, Greg Molloy and Isabella Speed

6pm Wednesday 8 May 2019

Alongside a selection of works from their individual practices, Hope, Molloy and Speed feature works stemming from an experimental and multipart collaborative process where machine and human combine on one support engaging in the psychological challenge of interpretation of compositional boundaries.




Mon–Fri: 9am–4pm, Sat–Sun: 10am–4pm
50 Railway Road, Kalamunda (08) 9257 9998
 zzgALLERY@kalamunda.wa.gov.au www.zzcc.com.au



Traces of Understanding group exhibition invitation, Zig Zag Gallery, Kalamunda, 2019.



Traces of Understanding exhibition opening night, Zig Zag Gallery, Kalamunda, 2019. Photographs by Isabella Speed.

ISABELLA SPEED

Graces and Sabine are part of a body of work titled Painting Souvenirs of Italianicity. In this project I look at reproductions of iconic works from the old masters that quietly reside within the home of my family, not to pay tribute to the artists, but as objects embedded with hereditary significance. Miniature replicas of famous works are the souvenirs of my personal heritage that I celebrate through this body of work.

Price guide: \$240 each (framed)

 @isabellaspeed



Sabine

Oil on board
30 x 30 cm (unframed)



Graces

Oil on board
30 x 30 cm (unframed)

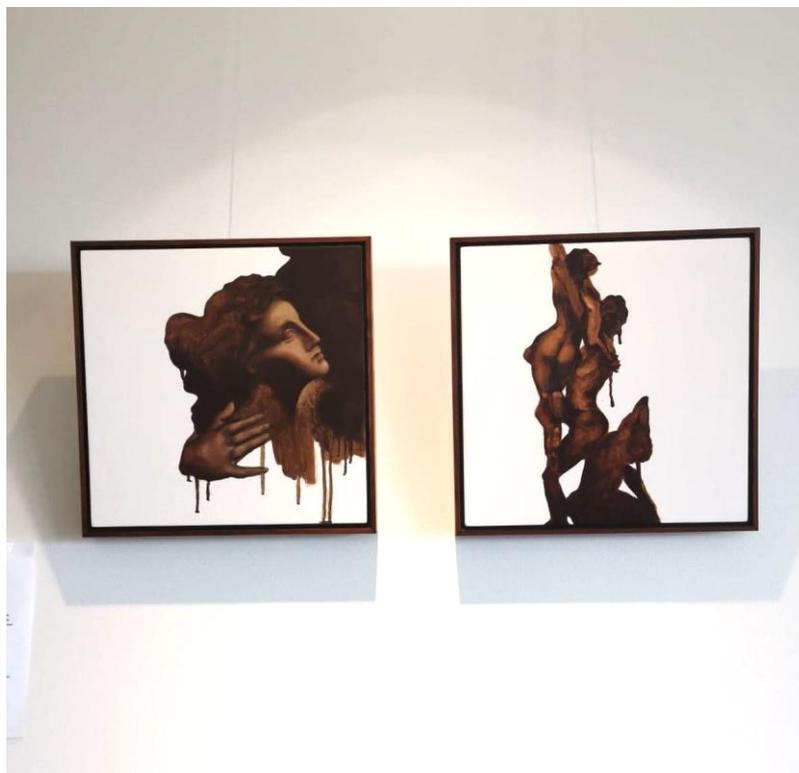
55

Clyde and Co Art Award exhibition catalogue, page 55, 2019.

(Winner of the 2019 *Clyde and Co Art Award*, Perth)



Installation shot of the *Clyde and Co Art Award*, Perth, 2019, photograph by Isabella Speed.



Graces (2019) and *Sabine* (2019) at the Clyde & Co Office, Perth, 2019, photograph by Isabella Speed.

Isabella Speed

Souvenirs of Italianicity

'Souvenirs of Italianicity' looks at reproductions of iconic sculptures from the old masters that quietly reside within the home of my family, not to pay tribute to the artists, but as objects embedded with hereditary significance. These works draw from my nostalgic and distant connection to the homeland of my Nonno and Nonna, Italy. As an Italian descendant that does not speak the language, through other ways, such as engaging with objects reminiscent of my Italian cultural heritage, I draw a personal connection to my roots.

When thinking about 'souvenirs', one might think about mass-produced knickknacks, the kitsch, the tacky, the cheap, the very epitome of tourism's cultural kitsch. Things easy to live without, but often things that are hard to let go. Almost anything can become a souvenir, but the items that typically come to mind are the things sold in shops and stands at busy and touristy sites. If I were to look around my family home, there are certain objects that would typically fall into the category of being a 'souvenir' but have superseded this role. When I look at these souvenirs thoughts of a faraway country come to mind, but I don't think of a specific holiday or a fond memory of travelling overseas. Instead these souvenirs embody a cultural connection to my personal heritage, a reminder of my family's history.

Isabella Speed is an emerging artist from Perth, Western Australia primarily working in painting and drawing. She looks at topics surrounding the everyday, reflecting on aspects of her own life including identity and the overlooked. After completing a Bachelor of Art at Curtin University in 2016, she went on to complete honours in 2018. Continuing her honours practice led research, Isabella is currently undergoing a Master of Research (Fine Arts) at Curtin University. Isabella has participated in group exhibitions and art awards, recently winning the Clyde & Co Art Award for 2019.

Souvenirs of Italianicity room sheet 1/2, Pig Melon, Perth, 2020.

Room 1 : From Left to right

Belonging

Oil on board
40.7cm x 30.5cm
2020
\$240

Together

Oil on board
40.7cm x 30.5cm
2019
\$250

Behind the sofa

Oil on board
30.5cm x 40.5cm
2020
\$240

Armrest

Oil on board
26.5cm x 35cm
2019
\$250

There

Oil on board
26.5cm x 35cm
2019
\$280

Over the dining table

Oil on board
77.4cm x 99.7cm
2020
\$650

Stem

Oil on board
30.5cm x 22.8cm
2020
\$200

Room 2 : From Left to right

Huddle

Oil on board
40.8cm x 40.8cm
2020
\$300

Gather

Oil on board
40.8cm x 40.8cm
2019
\$300

Locale

Oil on board
30.5cm x 40.5cm
2020
\$450

Le

Oil on board
25.5cm x 20.4cm
2020
\$200

One

Oil on board
50.8cm x 40.8cm
2020
\$350

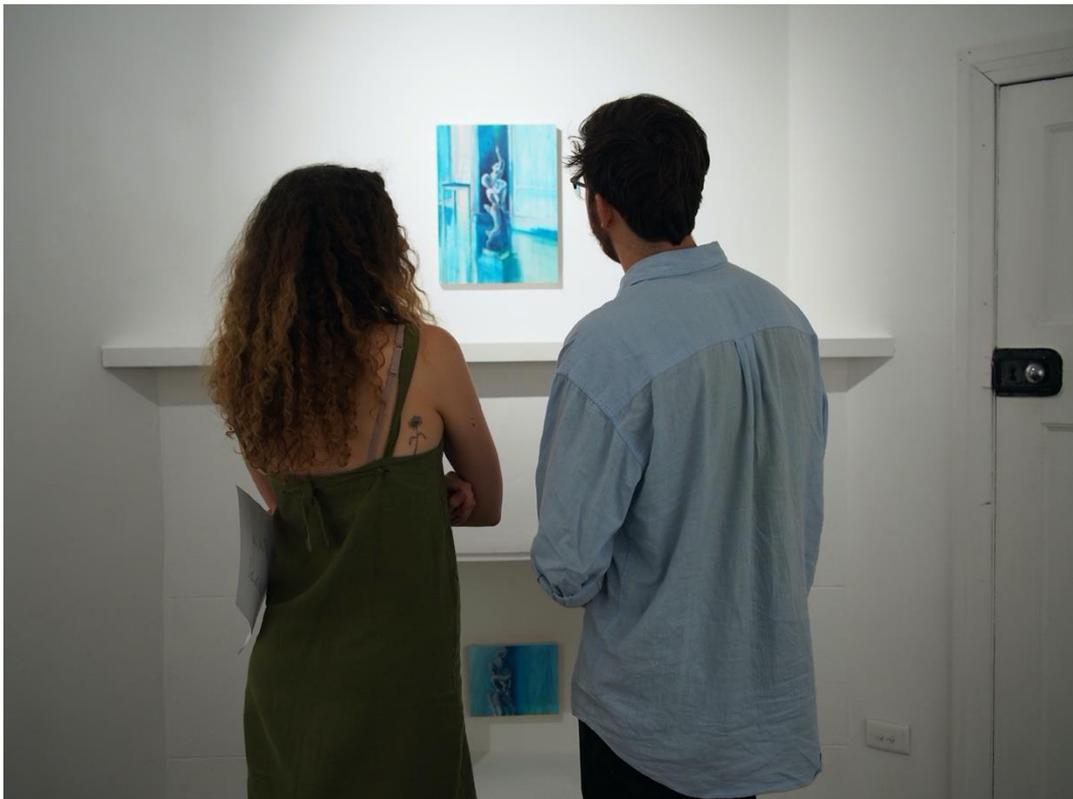
Two

Oil on board
50.8cm x 40.8cm
2020
\$350

Three

Oil on board
50.8cm x 40.8cm
2020
\$350

Souvenirs of Italianicity room sheet 2/2, Pig Melon, Perth, 2020.



Souvenirs of Italianicity exhibition opening night, Pig Melon, Perth, 2020, photographs by Isabella Speed.