

THE ENLIGHTENING JOURNEY OF

Mr Hugo Ball

Andrew Finnie





Synopsis

February, 1916, Zurich, Switzerland: Mr Hugo Ball announces the beginning of the Dada Anti-Art movement by reciting a nonsensical poem entitled "Karawane" to a bewildered public.

The poem begins with the lines:

jolifanto bambla o falli bambla
großiga m'pfa habla horem
egiga goramen
higo bloiko russula huju

A photograph of Hugo shows him dressed in his 'sorcerer's outfit' – a cardboard cylinder, a cardboard hat and trousers, wings and oversized lobster claw gloves.

February, 2018, Maitland, Australia – 102 years later: Hugo himself, dressed in the same attire, features in a series of digital paintings that pay homage to many of the world's best known artists – among them Fra Angelico, Vermeer, Mondrian, Degas and Caravaggio.

In these works the Anti-Art movement threatens to come full circle – ironically with Hugo as the fulcrum.



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The catalyst for the exhibition

For quite a few years I'd been perplexed by an old photograph of a man dressed in what looked like cardboard trousers, jacket and cape.

The man was Hugo Ball, and he was dressed in, what he called, his 'wizard's outfit'. On his hands he wore lobster gloves, on his head, an odd looking chef's hat. I knew he had something to do with Dada poetry and all I knew about Dada poetry was that you made it by pulling random words out of a hat - or so I thought.

My interest piqued, I discovered that Hugo Ball was not just one of the catalysts for the Dada movement, in fact he was its annunciator. The photo commemorated a night at the Cabaret Voltaire (Zurich) in 1916, the night he declared Dada's presence to the world with a sound poem made of meaningless words entitled *Karawane*.

The more I read about Mr. Ball and Dada's premise of rejecting the essence of traditional art (but replacing it with nothing else), the more they seemed faintly ridiculous. The idea that discounting all that had gone before as 'irrelevant' seemed irrelevant in itself. In fact a little study showed that, as Dada became more accepted, it eventually became anti-Dada.

With this in mind, I postulated that, if Mr. Ball were still alive, he might benefit from more of an art 'education'. I would take this fellow dressed in his stiff cardboard outfit and place him in paraphrases of works by other artists.

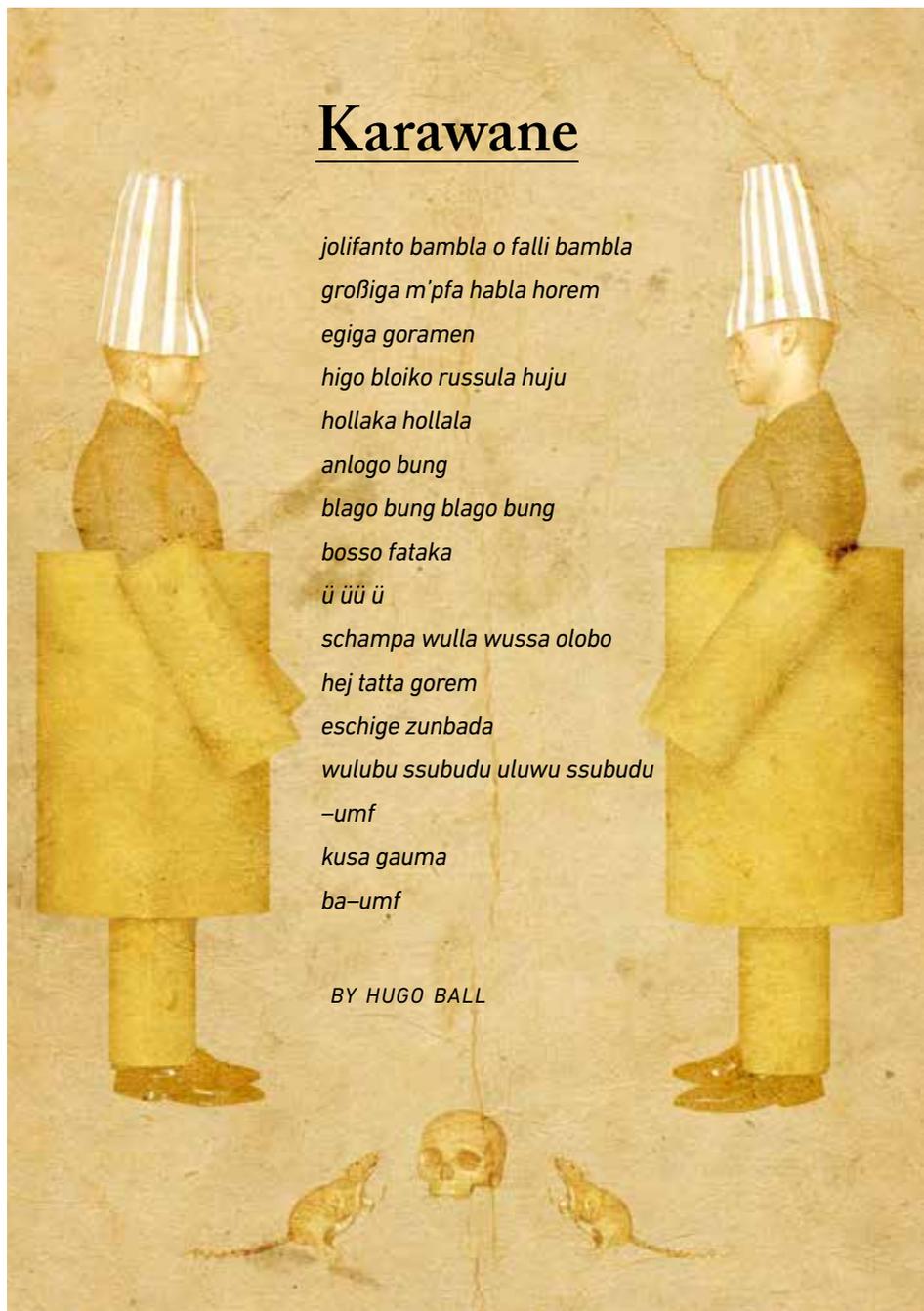
Of course the idea is as equally nonsensical as the Dada movement itself - so I felt the two would make good bedfellows.

ANDREW FINNIE, AUGUST 2017

Karawane

jolifanto bambla o falli bambla
großiga m'pfa habla horem
egiga goramen
higo bloiko russula huju
hollaka hollala
anlogo bung
blago bung blago bung
bosso fataka
ü üü ü
schampa wulla wussa olobo
hej tatta gorem
eschige zunbada
wulubu ssubudu uluwu ssubudu
-umf
kusa gauma
ba-umf

BY HUGO BALL



Hugo Ball

Hugo Ball (German, 1886 – 1927) was one of the leading Dada artists. He was a performer and writer. As a poet he pioneered the development of sound poetry.

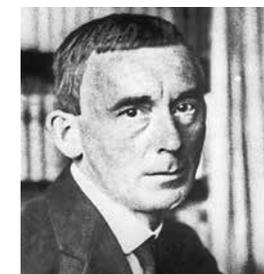
An avant-garde movement, Dada was anti-establishment and anti-art. Framed by the carnage of The Great War, Dada mocked the current materialistic and nationalistic attitudes.

In 1916 Hugo Ball created his version of the Dada manifesto. In that same year, dressed in his cardboard 'wizard's' costume, Ball performed his sound poem 'Karawane' to a bewildered audience. The poem was meaningless, reflecting the 'meaning' of Dada itself. Other members of the Dada group were artists such as Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara and, later, Marcel Duchamp.

After two years of Dadaist works, Ball left the group. He worked as a journalist, then turned to Gnostic Catholicism, living a frugal and quiet life. He died in 1927 from stomach cancer.

In recent years his work has influenced modern songwriters and composers - perhaps most well known are the *Talking Heads* who adapted his poem *Gadji beri bimba* in the song *I Zimbra* for their 1979 *Fear of Music* album.

As the first conceptual art movement, Dada had an important influence on many later artistic movements.



The premise



The precursors to these digital images were made in 2016, starting firstly with *Mondrianopolos*, then with *Hugo at The Cabaret Voltaire*. The majority of the works were made in June and August 2017.

The premise for the show initially was to take Hugo Ball on a journey through art history. He would be the common denominator in all the images. This context considered references from the Lascaux Caves rock paintings, through Giotto, Fra Angelico, Cranach The Elder, all the way to the 20th Century - with the likes of Norman Lindsay and Jeffrey Smart holding up the Australian end.

Yet having finished a convincing rendition of Cranach's *Adam and Eve*, replacing Adam with Hugo Ball, and the animals with Australian animals, I realized that, apart from showing what could be done in a digital homage, I wasn't bringing anything 'new to the table'.

'Everyone' had heard of Adam and Eve, and many people would have been exposed to Cranach's image or similar. I felt like I was acting out Marcel Duchamp's ready made *Mona Lisa* - without the moustache. It was possibly humorous but without substance.

One of the other premises for the exhibition was to achieve 'more public exposure for 'little' known but significant artists.' So the next step was to look at artists who had once been famous but had fallen from grace in recent times.

William-Adolphe Bouguereau for example, was very popular in his lifetime. He was a traditional academic Salon painter, one of the painters 'reviled' by the Impressionists. After his death he quickly fell out of favour, not being rediscovered till the 1980's.

James Ensor is another case in point. Rightly famous in his own country, and a significant influence on painters such as Klee, Nolde, Grosz and other expressionists and surrealists, he is little seen outside of Belgium.



In this exhibition, Bouguereau's referenced work *Dante and Virgil* emphasizes an uncomfortable subject set in Hell - two brutal, naked, desperate men fighting to the death.

Bouguereau set the theme for many of these works. Realizing that confronting images had more impact than traditional Romantic works, I started working with a third premise - that (some) 'good art should be disturbing'

As Banksy reportedly said: "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable." Of course this is a narrow viewpoint. But so is the assumption that art is about aesthetics and higher feelings. In reality, the worst kind of art is the piece that you walk past without a second glance.

Bouguereau led to Goya. Many of Goya's images are purposely disturbing, yet more importantly, they reflect on human behavior. Goya himself led off in all directions - Ensor, Bellmer, Balthus, Paula Rego amongst them.

All in all I have chosen more than 20 artists.

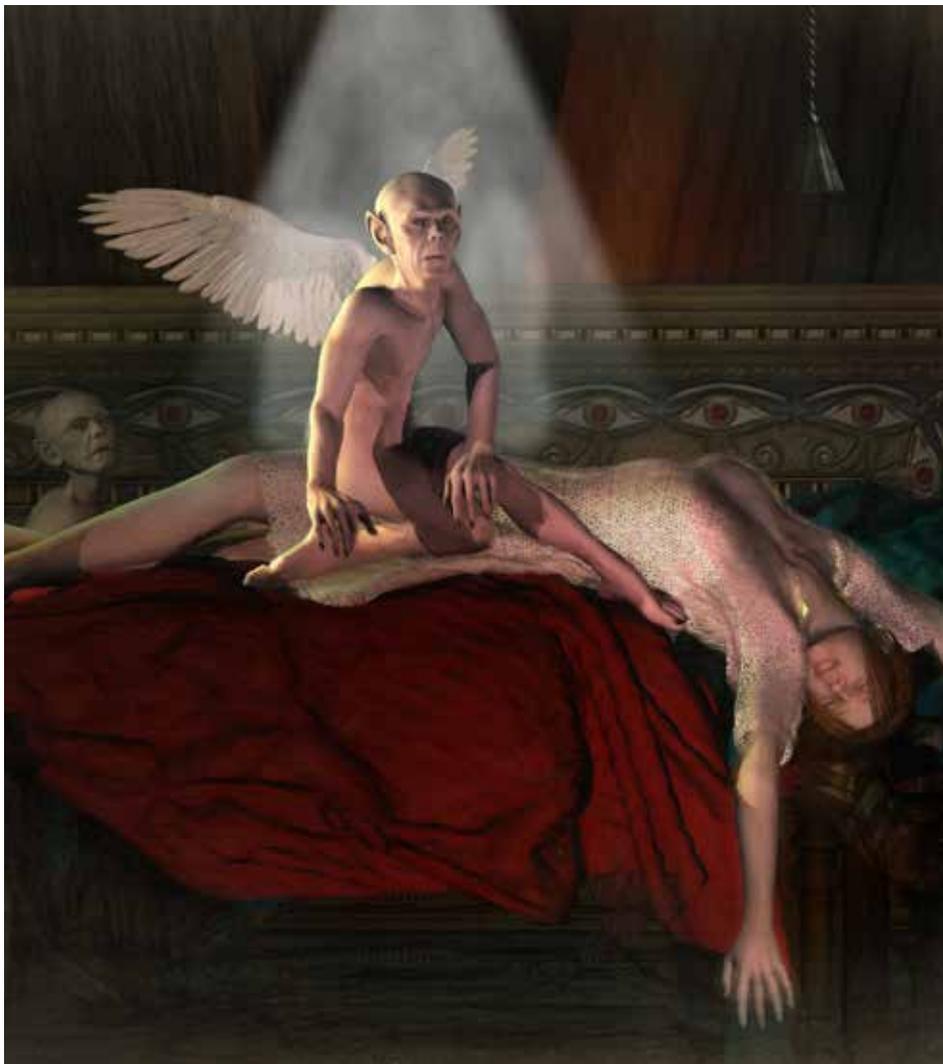
Some of the works paraphrase more than one artist - a reference to Norman Lindsay's *Enigma* lies within *Ball in Mr. Bellmer's Mannequin Studio*. *Death Leading the Blindmen* references both a Holbein woodcut and Breughel's *The Blind Leading the Blind*.

Self referentially, in the homage to Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, the paintings on the back wall are replaced by others from this exhibition.



(right) *Mr. Ball in Bellmer's Mannequin Studio* (detail).
Opposite: *Ball Impersonates Diego Velázquez* (detail).

Paraphrasing, referencing and homaging



In 1996 Steve Jobs famously misquoted Picasso as having habitually said: 'Good Artists Copy; Great Artists Steal'.

In fact, whether he knew it or not, Jobs was actually paraphrasing T.S. Eliot who, in 1920, wrote:

*Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different.**

Whatever Job's intentions were, in those few words he ably demonstrated that the moral intentions of borrowing another's work are not always obvious. It's no accident that we have a multitude of words that suggest different degrees of 'copying'. Art works can be described as; *referencing, inspired by, assimilating, paraphrasing, appropriating, misappropriating, reinterpreting, homaging, copying* and even *stealing*.

The act of appropriation itself has become a strong symbol of Post Modernism, yet the Cambridge Dictionary defines 'appropriation' as 'the act of taking something for your own use, usually without permission'.

All this suggests certain questions.

Does adding the word 'homage' to the title make everything legitimate? Does a famous artist stealing another's work make that theft acceptable because they are famous?

Is it acceptable to appropriate ideas and images just because artists have been appropriating for time immemorial? After all, no artist works in a vacuum. Progress in art, music, and architecture has been made possible by incorporating what has gone before.



Right: Fuseli's 'The Nightmare' (detail).
Opposite: 'The Incubus' - Paraphrasing Henry Fuseli (detail).

* T. S. Eliot, "The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism", 1920



Unsurprisingly, a brief foray into art history shows that many famous works heavily 'reference' other works. Examples are in abundance.

Compositionally, Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* was based on a section of an engraving of Raphael's *The Judgment of Paris*. Picasso and Goya copied or referenced Velázquez' *Las Meninas*. Van Gogh's beautiful rendition of Hiroshige's *Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi bridge and Atake* is, apart from the technique, almost a direct copy.

Bacon's series of *Screaming Popes* is initially based on Velázquez' *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. Holbein's' woodcut *Death and the Blindman* has been copied by many. Cindy Sherman's *Sex* series of photographs alludes directly to Hans Bellmer's puppets. Rego's uncomfortable compositional sexuality references Balthus. Andy Warhol appropriated publicity stills and newspaper photographs for his silk screens.

I approached this exhibition with these moral connotations in mind.

In these works I have attempted to paraphrase an artist's work by building on ideas that they

have generated. There are compositional references. There are references to certain elements (style, objects, atmosphere, chromatic palette) of an artist's work. In some cases there is cross fertilisation where I have taken references to two artists and combined them in one work (for example *Death Leading The Blindmen* references both Holbein and Breughel).

The closest compositional paraphrases were those I felt most closely associated with the beauty of the original work. For example, Diego Velázquez's handsomely composed *Las Meninas*, or the raw vigour of Bouguereau's *Dante and Virgil* - where two naked men are locked in a death struggle, or Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, where the ugly incubus is contrasted with the delicate beauty of the sleeping woman.

For other works I took the feel of the work as a jumping off point - Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* being a good example. Lastly, two other works have been left out of the show because I felt they too closely resembled the initial works: Norman Lindsay's *Enigma* and Norman Rockwell's *New Kids in the Neighbourhood*.



The method



To produce these images I work in 3 dimensional digital media. The images I produce start off as millions of digital points (vertices) joined by lines (edges) that are filled in with polygons - literally many sided planes. These polygons are arranged in a digital space which has length and breadth and depth.

Each multi-polygon surface is textured by painting it in 3-D, or by 'skinning' the polygon surfaces, laying them flat, then bringing them into a painting software. If we think of how we might cut out a map of the world from a flat atlas, then wrap that map around a metal sphere to make a world globe, then it's easier to understand the skinning process.

Textures on the polygon surfaces are many layered. Each texture can have many different parameters - such as transparency, translucency, bump texture, reflection and refraction. In this way we can simulate different surfaces. We can simulate the appearance of water, a translucent ballet dress, the subsurface scattering of light as it shines through the flesh of the human ear, the rough texture of a tattered canvas shirt.

Once the objects are constructed and textured we pose them and arrange them in a tableau, much like a stage play. At that point we might introduce a cloth simulator - a mathematically intense (and erratic) simulator that drapes the

clothes on our figures or sheets on a bed to give more natural folds.

From there we introduce digital lighting and find our 'camera' angles.

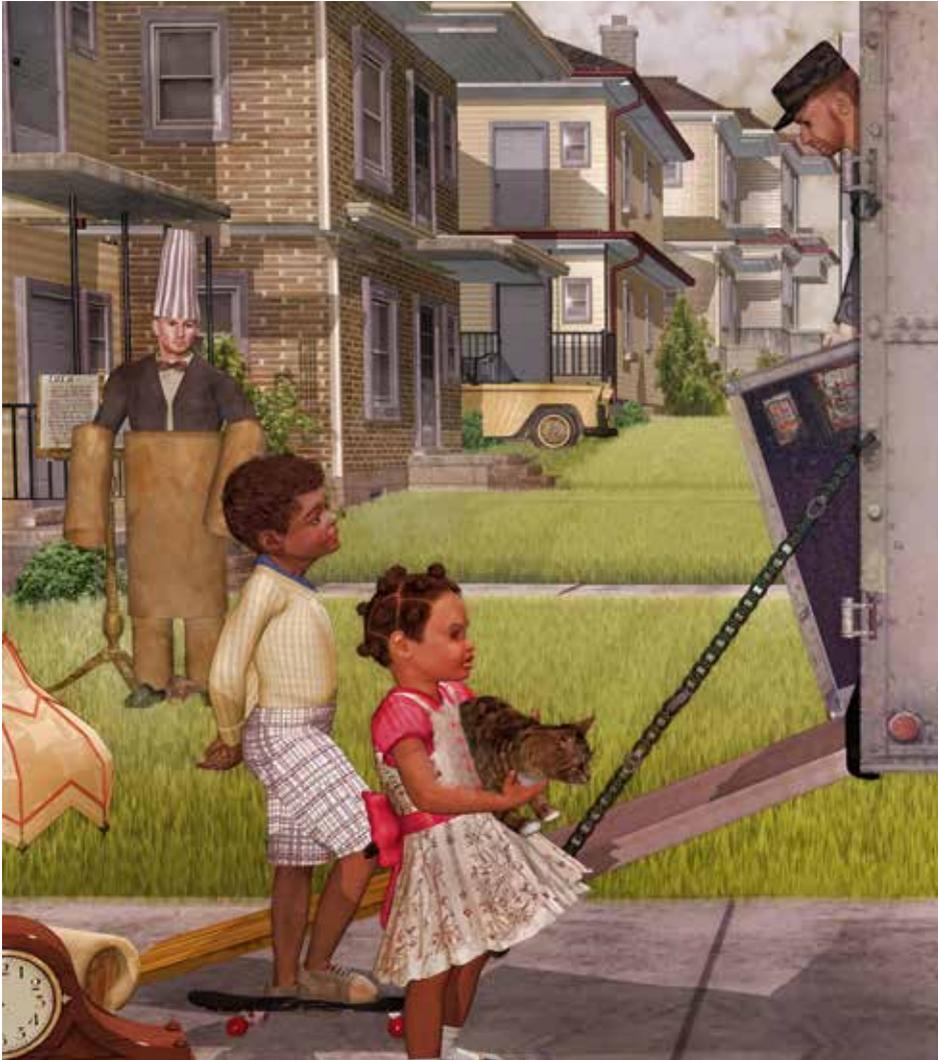
Lighting gives us many choices - we can have soft light, hard light, fill light, rim light, distant collimated light, spotlights, ordinary light bulbs, surface planes that emit light. Each light can have various shadows, gels and be any colour we choose.

The camera represents our viewpoint and we have access to parameters such as depth of field, focal length and distortion. Because we are working in three dimensional space we can move through our scene much like a street photographer looking for the best angle and composition.

Once the scene is 'set up' we start the process known as rendering. Rendering produces the images that we take into a program like Photoshop to hand work on. Typically this postwork takes many hours as once again we have many layers that we can combine - shadows, textures, highlights, reflection, ambient lighting amongst them.

Eventually we have an image.

A selection of referenced works



Gustave Doré
(1832 – 1883, France)

As a printmaker, Doré was one of the most successful book illustrators of the 19th century.

Doré employed more than 40 woodcutters to produce over 90 illustrated books, including editions of the *Oeuvres de Rabelais*, works by Balzac, and Dante's *Inferno*.

The work *Pantagruel* - after Gustave Doré references Doré's *Gargantua At The Table* (1873), (above, detail) an engraving illustrating the 16th Century book *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, by Francois Rabelais.



Balthasar Klossowski
de Rola, (Balthus)
(1908-2001, French)

Balthus used conservative technique to paint surreal and provocative imagery. Often featuring young girls, he shocked both critics and the public. Balthus himself claimed there was nothing erotic about them. Balthus' provocative images often hide the elegance of his compositions.

In the Balthus Salon paraphrases Balthus' *Salon* (1942) (above, detail). Showing two young girls in provocative poses, this is a reasonably tame work for Balthus. I have changed the shape of the sofa and replaced his fruit with flowers to see how it effects the repetitive and referential nature of the curves in the original.

Hugo Ball has been added as a substitute for a voyeuristic audience. He seems embarrassed – as well he might be.



James Ensor
(1860-1949, Belgium)

Ensor was an important influence on both expressionism and surrealism, yet he is little known outside his native country.

In Ensor's mature style he favoured bizarre subject matter, often featuring masks. His political overtones influenced a range of artists such as Derain, Munch and Picasso. His expressionistic colour affected the works of Matisse, Bonnard, and the German Expressionists. His mask influence can be seen in the works of artists such as Paula Rego.

The Feast at the Hanged Man's House indirectly references two of Ensor's works – *Skeletons Fighting Over a Hanged Man* (1891) and *The Intrigue* (1890) (above, detail).

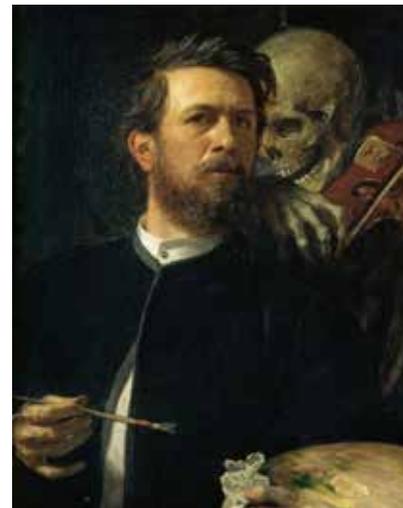


Hieronymus Bosch
(c1450-1560, Netherlands)

Another homage to a work by Bosch, *Ship Of Fools*, uses Bosch's general composition and ideas as a jumping off point.

Bosch's *The Ship of Fools* (c.1490) (above, detail), was painted on one wing of an altarpiece. The surviving painting is a fragment of a triptych that was cut into several parts.

The original work is full of allegories that are open to wide interpretation.



Arnold Böcklin
(1827 –1901, Swiss)

In the Vanitas genre of art often we see images of the artist accompanied by a representation of death. In these works the artist encourages the viewer to ponder life's brevity and the inevitability of death.

Ball Vanitas - Arnold Bocklin on Violin references Bocklin's *Self-portrait*, (1872) (above), in which Böcklin paints himself with a violin playing Death looking over his shoulder.

In my homage Böcklin, replaced by Hugo Ball, has become death himself.

Ironically of course, both artists are now dead - as soon we will be ourselves.



Hieronymus Bosch
(c1450-1560, Netherlands)

During medieval times, many people believed a "stone of madness" existed inside the skulls of the mentally deranged. Bosch's painting *The Extraction of the Stone of Madness* (c.1494) refers to a hypothetical procedure involving trepanation and extraction of that stone.

In Bosch's painting a 'quack' cuts the stone from the head of Lubbert Das, a familiar Dutch fool figure (the name translates as 'castrated daschund'). The irony is that the 'Doctor' is more insane than the patient.

I chose this work for its sense of playfulness and satire.



William-Adolphe Bouguereau
(1825-1905, France)

Very popular in his lifetime, Bouguereau was a traditional Salon painter, who specialised in modern interpretations of classical subjects. As such, he was reportedly reviled by the Impressionists.

With the advent of 'modern' art, Bouguereau has all but been forgotten.

Ball as Virgil, (p.12) draws heavily on the Bouguereau's painting *Dante and Virgil* (1850).

Dante and Virgil shows two damned souls coiled together in combat. The two combatants show almost superhuman strength. The emphasis is on brutality, exaggerated musculature, and desperation.

Fra Angelico
(c. 1395– 1455, Italian)

A Dominican monk, Fra Angelico painted religious works, often about the life of Christ.

His most famous paintings can be found on the monk's cell walls in the monastery of Saint Marco, Florence. According to Britannica, Fra Angelico was 'one of the greatest of the 15th Century painters'.

The Crucifixion paraphrases Angelico's *Crucifixion* of 1420.

I was interested in the foreshortened perspective and the lack of shadows, the way the elements are arranged like flat cut-outs. I mimicked this digitally by collaging individual elements as layers, rather than constructing it as an organic whole.



Vincent Van Gogh
(1853-1890, Dutch)

The Post Impressionist painter Van Gogh did three versions of *Bedroom in Arles* (1888), his room in the famous Yellow House.

Though the room appears to have been distorted by Van Gogh, in reality it was not rectangular but a trapezoid.

In *In Van Gogh's Yellow House*, (pp.24) Hugo Ball can be seen gazing out through the window which overlooked the Place Lamartine and its public gardens.

The blue door on the right leads to the staircase. The door on the left leads to the room that Van Gogh had prepared for Gauguin.

Michele Angelo Amerighi da Caravaggio (1571-1610, Italian)

Caravaggio employed dramatic chiaroscuro in a style that became known as tenebrism - a technique that added drama to an image through a spotlight effect.

Caravaggio, though famous while he lived, was forgotten almost immediately after his death. Only in the 20th century was he rediscovered. Ironically, many of his paintings had previously been attributed to other artists.

Rock Star Jesus references Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (c.1601), where Christ demonstrates the wound from his Crucifixion. I have placed Christ in his disciples in a modern context.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder
(1530 – 1569, Dutch)

Considered by many to be the greatest Flemish painter of the 16th century, Bruegel's work ranged from biblical scenes, to parables of Christ to narratives and mythical portrayals - such as *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. He also worked up religious allegories in the style of Hieronymus Bosch.

The Blind Leading the Blind (1568) (above, detail), is a parable – a story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. It shows Breughel's mastery of detail, each of the men being afflicted by a different form of blindness.

The work was a 'jumping off' point for *Death Leading The Blindmen*.

Hans Holbein the Younger
(1497-1593, German)

In my homage to Bruegel's work I have also included a reference to another work – Holbein the Younger's *The Blind Man*, from his *Dance of Death* series of wood engravings (1526).

Holbein's engravings have been copied many times over the centuries.

He is equally well known as a painter who painted in the English King Henry VIII's court, painting such luminaries as Henry himself, Thomas Cromwell and Sir Thomas More.



Edgar Degas
(1834-1917, French)

The Dance Lesson room is loosely based on the one in Degas' *The Foyer of the Opera at Rue Le Peletier* (1872) (above, detail).

Hugo Ball has taken the place of the famous white-clad Louis François Mérante, instructor at the opera house.

The watering can in *The Dance Lesson* was a standard fixture in ballet rehearsal rooms; sprinkled water kept dust from rising when ballerinas danced. Degas often used the can as a compositional lead in, and arguably, to lend a masculine sense to his work.

In studying Degas' many images of ballerinas works, I was struck by how young *les petits rats* (the ballerinas) in his paintings really were.

Henry Fuseli
(1741 – 1825, Swiss)

Fuseli worked during the height of the Enlightenment. Believing a certain amount of exaggeration necessary to get his message across, he influenced many artists of his time - including William Blake.

Fuseli's best known work, *The Nightmare* (1781) (above, detail), caused a scandal when first shown. Like many of his works, the painting not only deals with supernatural subject-matter, but disturbed its audience because it suggest sexuality and violence together.

In Fuseli's work the creature is an Incubus, a spirit that has intercourse with sleeping women. The scene is a stage, the horse's head pokes through the curtains like a metaphor for the sexual act and gives us a play on words - *The Night Mare*.

Largely neglected after his death, Fuseli was rediscovered by the Expressionist painters. They admired his romantic approach, symbolism and surrealism (see pp.8-9 for *The Incubus*)

Francisco Goya (1746-1828, Spain)

Goya's sense of darkness is particularly discomfoting. To choose from his many etchings is both enjoyable and difficult.

A well known work - *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (c.1797) strongly influenced the homage *Ball's Goyaesque Nightmare* (contents page).

The Sleep of Reason shows Goya asleep amongst his tools. Owls represent folly, the bats ignorance, the cat witchcraft. There is a sense of bedlam as well as nightmare.

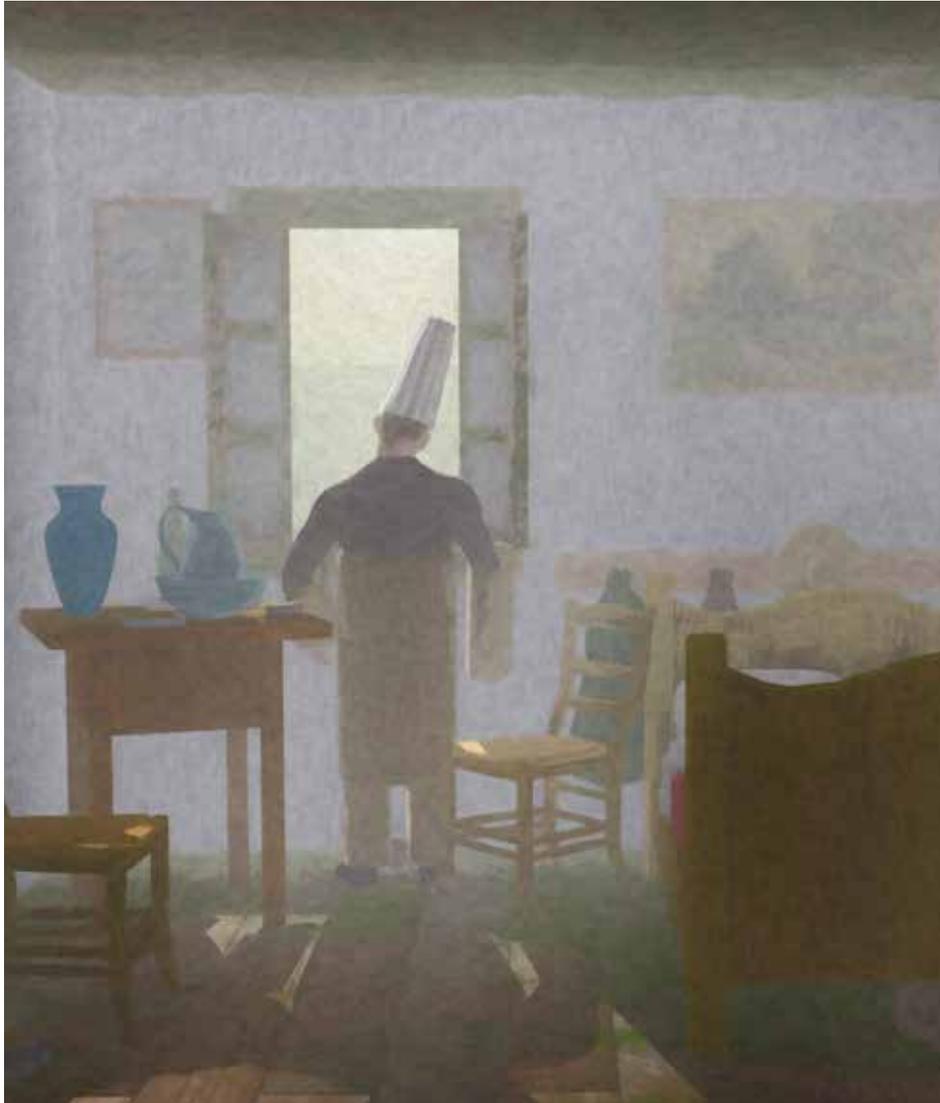
The work is part of the suite *Los Caprichos* in which Goya criticizes the foolishness of Spanish society, showing off its superstitions, its cruelty and its ignorance.



Opposite: *The Hoop Boy*- after Smart (detail)



About the artist



Andrew Finnie (Australian, 1957-) trained in fine art at Newcastle Art School (TAFE).

A founding member of the well known 'The Seven Painters' group, he is a veteran of more than 50 group exhibitions. His work can be found in a number of private and public collections including The Chris and Helen Ford Collection, The Lock-Up Collection, the Newcastle Grammar School Collection and the Collection of the Uniting Church.

In 2014 he was invited by Newcastle Now, the city's business improvement association, to create their Christmas Advent Calendar. In association with this event his work decorated Christmas banners in Newcastle City's main mall in both 2014 and 2015.

In 2015 he was invited, as a digital artist, to participate in Terrigal's prestigious '5 Lands En Plein Air' event - the first digital artist to do so. He was invited again in 2016.

Later that year (2015) he was proud to show his large digital painting '*The Body of Christ, The Tree of Life*' at Adamstown Uniting Church - a work which is now in the collection of the Uniting Church.

More recently he was invited to work in Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery's grounds as an artist in residence.

In both 2016 and 2017 he was short listed for the Newcastle Club Foundation Painting prize.

As well as working with traditional media, he is a digital artist, an animator, an illustrator and writer. He is represented by Anna Olswanger, Senior Literary Agent at Olswanger Literary, N.Y.

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*An Exhibition of 21 Digital Paintings
Concerning the Annunciator
of the Dada Movement.*

Maitland Regional Art Gallery
3 February – 29 April 2018



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