

JUSTIN HINDER

HOLY GHOST

Stained glass windows keep the light out, candles pave the way.
Men wear robes and sashes, chanting in latin.
Women wear habits, married to God.
Like a relic of the past, the rituals have not changed for centuries.
Outside, the world screams for attention.
Inside is bathed in silence, ornate ceilings and marble altars.
The reverie. The theatricality.
But also, the corruption. The cult-dom. The refute of science.
The gallery is church these days.
But the Catholic guilt from childhood is embedded.

Justin Hinder's *Holy Ghost* conjures imagery from Christianity and ancient mythology to centre around the idea of Catholic guilt. This heavy burden of always doing the right thing and making the correct moral decisions, often at the cost of the self, weighs upon many individuals who have had religious upbringings.

Coming to age within a strict Catholic familial and educational environment is one thing, but doing this while also becoming aware of one's homosexuality is another. Hinder has processed this experience through the act of painting, hinting at his own story through the fictional narrative in these works.

The suite of nine paintings that make up *Holy Ghost* image the ornate beauty of the church while revealing its darker side. Centring around the narrative of a schoolgirl, biblical, ritualistic, ceremonial and sacramental stories prevail.

The series starts with a painting titled after the first words in the bible: *In The Beginning*. In this work a young girl is transported to her new life at a private Catholic girl's boarding school. The viewpoint is from behind, revealing the road ahead with a driving nun's reflection in the rear-vision mirror. A reminder that 'god is always watching'.

We follow the school girl through her choir welcome in *Hosanna*; her baptism in *Holy Water*; her receiving of the holy sacrament in *His Body and Blood*; and her confirmation in *Sprigs of Rosemary*. A sense of being watched from all angles is evoked to emulate the paranoia of the Fear of God.

As the narrative of *Holy Ghost* progresses, it grows darker. *Bury* sees the schoolgirl and a friend digging a hole in the ground, with a nun approaching in the background. Has she envisioned her own demise, or is she covering something up?

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In *The Rapture*, the schoolgirl and her peers await their reckoning from two nuns. In *Exodus* the girl's fear of judgement is symbolised through imagery borrowed from the biblical stories of Eve's apple and Judas' Kiss.

Tomb/Charon's Obol, the final painting in the suite, forms a death scene. The schoolgirl has died and her corpse lays in a candlelit viewing chamber. Her friend is led in procession by two nuns, holding the Charon's Obol: a token to transport the dead to the afterlife. Although she has died, the painting sees the girl's corpse re-animate, lifting her head to receive the token as though resurrected.

Justin Hinder is a true storyteller. His paintings are formed around narratives of dark romance, mystery, and sometimes whimsy. Hinder's earlier works have explored the story of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and evoked ethereal brides, funereal scenes and reflections of life's rituals and passages. In *Holy Ghost* we are offered a glimpse at the artist's own narrative, embedded in a dark cloud of intrigue.

Melissa Loughnan

Melissa Loughnan is the founding director of Utopian Slumps and author of *Australiana to Zeitgeist: An A to Z of Australian Contemporary Art*, published by Thames & Hudson, 2017.

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