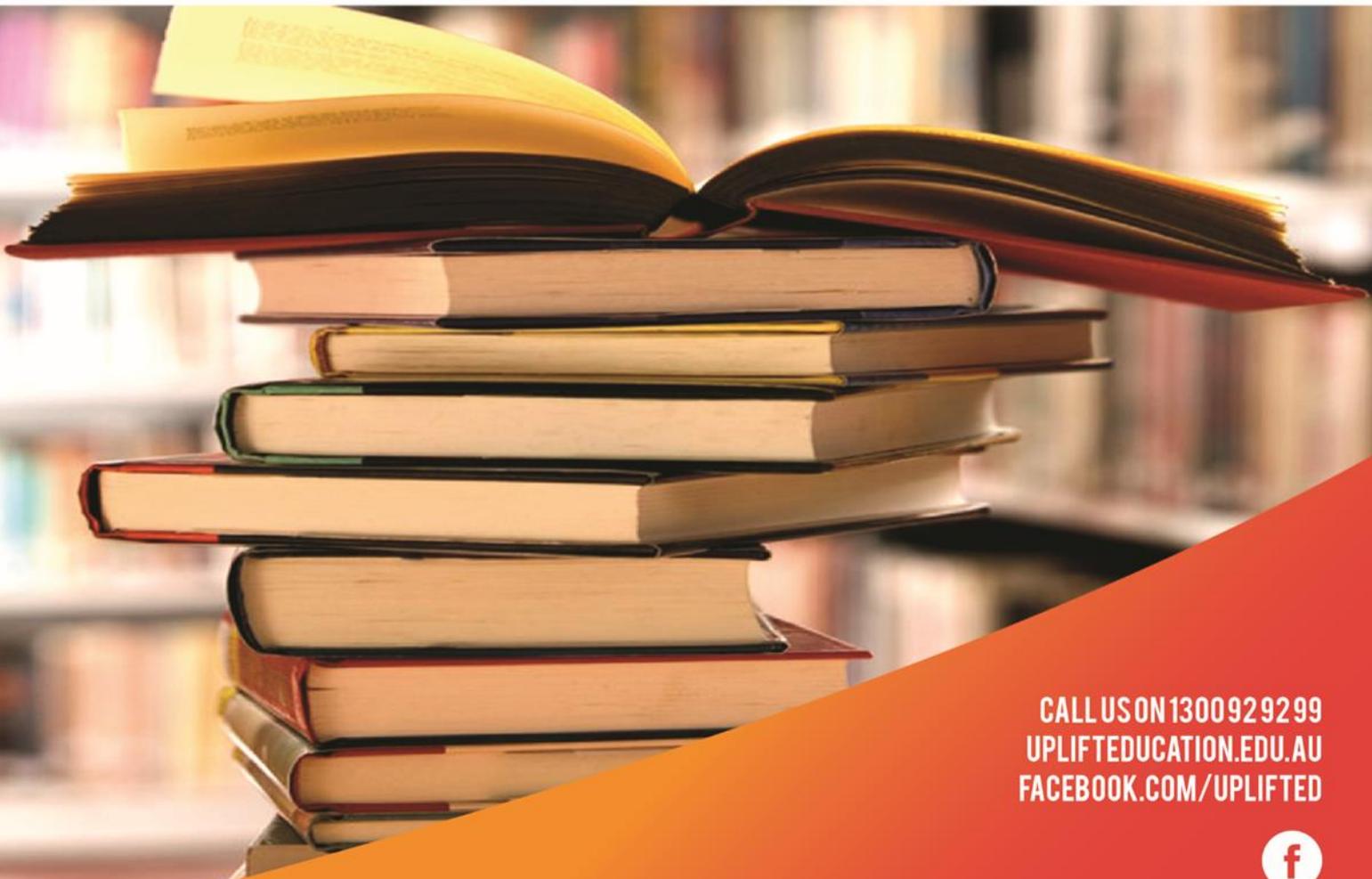




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THE HISTRIONIC WAYFARER



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The Histrionic Wayfarer (after Bosch), by Tim Storrier

The Histrionic Wayfarer ('*Wayfarer*') was the 2012 Archibald Prize winner, a \$75,000 prize awarded annually to an Australian portrait. *Wayfarer* was a controversial choice considering it was faceless, but Storrier regarded the identity (himself) was 'made clear' by the painting. Storrier included a scribble of his own head on the piece of paper flying to the Smudge's right (Smudge is the dog).

The major theme behind *Wayfarer* is of the artist searching for himself – his identity, the 'I'.

The Medium

Wayfarer is an appropriation of a 1510 painting of *The Wayfarer* by Hieronymus Bosch, but while it is based on a traditional painting evoking biblical themes it is also modern in the way it challenges the audience's ideas of what a portrait is meant to be. This fits well with the overall idea behind *Wayfarer*; looking for something that might be abstract, formless, tough to nail down. The way Storrier pushes the boundaries of what a portrait is, for example by painting a portrait of a man with no physical features of his own, parallels the wayfarer's own search. It is difficult to say what the identity is – is it our bodies? Our minds? Both? Some immortal, unbreakable soul? The wayfarer in the painting is thus caught up in a search for what the 'self' is, and the postmodern interpretation of portraiture parallels the doubt in this task.

The other aspect of medium, as mentioned, is that the text is based upon another painting. The original *Wayfarer* depicts a character in the foreground moving towards the right but looking left. To his right are cattle in an enclosure (possibly reflecting virtuous and dignified life, or home) but to his left is (presumably) a whorehouse (representing debauchery). This element of decision, choice and multiple pathways is also present in Storrier's *Wayfarer*; the wayfarer is moving towards the left but Smudge is looking right.

1. Do you think there is a particular formula for discovery, whether people follow it by design or by accident, or can discoveries happen in many different ways? Here the wayfarer is very much on

the lookout; he's prepared, his pose indicates searching and he's on some sort of journey.

Does discovery require us to be active and vigilant or can discovery be passive and thrust upon us?

2. Consider the above question about whether discoveries happen in the same way or in different ways. Does the style of the portrait, with its emphasis on challenging traditional conventions and ways of thinking about portraiture, suggest discovery is an intensely personal thing, different for everyone in their own unique way?
3. The wayfarer depicted is on a journey to discover himself and who he is. Is this what all discoveries come down to, in the end? Some may be physical, some may teach us about others and some may involve new nuggets of knowledge, but ultimately is discovery always about finding yourself and your place in the world?

The Portrait

The salient aspect of the portrait is the absence of the face, or indeed any part of a physical body.

Only his clothing and possessions are visible as part of him. This raises many philosophical questions about identity: are we just our possessions, or do our possessions tell us nothing at all about our true selves? Without them are we nothing, or do they perhaps only cover everything up? Storrier, in painting this self-portrait, suggests that he does not know. The wayfarer is thus a metaphorical – or metaphysical – exploration. It is not traversing geography but rather the mind, body and soul of the artist to find out more. The absence of any physical body strengthens this, suggesting not only an incomplete awareness of self but perhaps a total ignorance.

This ignorance is strengthened by two other major aspects of the wayfarer: his stance, which is leaning forward and looking out hoping to find something; and the background, the empty barrenness of the desert and the cloudy sky suggesting there is very little in sight, very little to find. Similarly, his gaze is looking out of frame.

But this does not dissuade our wayfarer who, if nothing else, is well prepared for the journey.

'Histrionic' means excessively theatrical or melodramatic, and this helps explain the ramshackle busyness of the wayfarer's backpack. Storrier himself calls it a 'carapace of burden', which is an interesting metaphor as a carapace is the hard exoskeleton or shell of tortoises and crustaceans. Perhaps a suggestion from Storrier that his possessions are a part of him after all, and not something you merely pick up and put down after a long day. But regardless, what's apparent is the *bricolage* of items and allusions that adorn him.

His boots, one long and one short, evoke the original image of Bosch's wayfarer as well as the backpack and sling. But keeping in line with the postmodern uncertainty discussed above, Storrier's wayfarer is 'burdened' by a whole collection of other items: sleeping gear, food, coffee cups and artist's supplies. Compared to Bosch's original it is chaotic and frenetic, but this merely reinforces some of the themes discussed above. Bosch's *Wayfarer* was a traditional work and steeped in a concrete, if difficult, moral decision. Storrier's is different. Storrier's dilemma is far more abstract and harder to grasp, and thus the mess of possessions reflects this uncertainty and doubt.

1. Why do you think Storrier chose to describe the carapace as a 'burden'? Is discovery facilitated or hindered by more knowledge, more perspectives, more things? Do these things prepare you or is minimalism better – knowing what you want, where to get and without it getting drowned out by white noise?
2. Is discovery subjective or objective? That is, do discoveries have an independent reality of their own that all discoverers would see, or can different people see the same discovery in different ways? How is your answer to this question supported or challenged by the unconventional way Storrier constructs his portrait?