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The Collection has several works by major figures in the development of contemporary Aboriginal painting. Amongst them is a work in the series concerning the Tingari Cycle (1996) by Ronnie Tjampitjinpa (c.1943–), who is from the west of the Kintore Range in Western Australia. As with other artists in the Collection, the primary images in Tjampitjinpa’s work are based on a song cycle, the Tingari Cycle, which is a secret song cycle sacred to initiated men. His work follows the Pintupi style, often associated with Papunya, of strong circles joined together by connecting lines relating to his people, country and the Dreamtime. It first appeared in Papunya Tula exhibitions during the 1970s.

As with a number of other significant works in the Collection, the bare bones of the composition, the schematic landscapes, have much in common. The treatment, however, varies enormously, as can be seen if one compares the animated quadrilaterals in this work with rough squares demarked by Rover Thomas in Rock Country on Texas Downs. Tjampitjinpa does not use dots for boundaries and is sensitive to the precise interaction of the edges of every one of the concentric boundaries round each area of ochre in the work.

Soakage Water at Kirrimalunya (2004), a painting by George Ward Tjungurrayi (b.1945), is also related to the Tingari cycle. It too appears as an elaboration of separate roughly quadrilateral areas. In his case, however, the concentric boundary lines have been multiplied to the extent that there is no open canvas left at their centre. The huge water soakage at Kirrimalunya was accessed by the generations of Tingari men including the artist’s father. The change in style or manner may be a result of stylistic evolution or a direct response to the patterns to be found on the surface of a pool of water. In any event it is a very beautiful image.

Wangkardu (2001), by Helicopter Tjungurrayi (b.1947), is also a painting
of a soak well at his home, Wangkardu, south-west of Balgo, in the Great Sandy Desert, Western Australia. Helicopter Tjungurrayi was born in this country and travelled and hunted as a young man with his family. The greater part of this painting represents the *tali*, or sand dunes which dominate the landscape of the area. There are a couple of roads and in the centre is the *inta*, or living water, at Wangkardu. This is a very different way to treat the subject of a soakage. Helicopter Tjungurrayi has made a number of works of a similar nature.
The two-panel painting *Sugarloo Billabong* (nd), by Alan Griffiths (b. 1933), shows a different approach to painting water. The billabong is part of his traditional country near the Victoria Downs station in the Northern territory. In the left panel Sugarloo Billabong and Sugarloo Knob are indicated at the bottom centre of the painting. Sugarloo Creek (Ngalgarung) flows across the centre. Wiligbayi joins it from the upper right; Yalibayi joins Wiligbayi from the upper centre. Wirroodoorb joins Sugarloo from the upper left. Mosquito Dreaming are the two small hills in the lower left. Genboo (Station Hill) is the small rectangular hill in the lower right and also the name of the small creek that flows into Sugarloo Billabong and then into Sugarloo Creek. Griffiths has a made number of map-like paintings similar to this. He varies the colours and aspects of his style in each one. This is a particularly colourful example.

Jinny Bent (1940–2002), who also used bright colours, spent her early years as a hunter and gatherer in the Great Sandy Desert. In middle age she learned to paint. In her later years she spent much of her time on her family’s outstation on the edge of the desert, and made many journeys back to her country. Her *Wayli, Mungunbarnu and Darbu* (2000) uses a number of shapes and a complex range of marks to map out part of it.

Often women painters appear to be the more innovative within the possibilities of their country, dreamings, signs and symbols. Marlee Napurrula (b. 1938) is from Haast’s Bluff. Her people are closely related to the people of Papunya, the Aboriginal community near Alice Springs. She began painting in 1983. She developed a distinctively individual painting style, experimenting with rich decorative colours, portraying bush flowers and nulla nullas, combining dots with solid areas of colour and line. Gradually she simplified and refined her work, which continued to represent her country but remained unlike the work of any of her

Marlee Napurrula, Kalinyapatinypa, (Honey Grevillea), nulla nullas and walu (rockholes) at Kungkayunti (Browns Bore; 1998)
peers. In her painting Kalinypalinypa (Honey Grevillea), nulla nullas and walu (rockholes) at Kungkayunti (Browns Bore; 1998), which was purchased from a commercial exhibition in that year, she uses a dense network of large coloured dots and solid robust brushstrokes to make an image that is at once a map-like account of her country and a catalogue of symbols for local flora.

Kathleen Petyarre (b.1940) and Gloria Petyarre (b.1945) were both involved in the early developments at Utopia with Emily Kngwarreye. They were among those who had made jokes about her batik work.

Kathleen Petyarre’s first works on canvas appeared in 1988 in the collaborative Utopia exhibition, A Summer Project. Her oeuvre has always been identified by a deft minimalism. Her most celebrated paintings, based on her Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming, depict the whole of her ancestral country, which covers some 200 square kilometers of the eastern desert of central Australia. A fine example from this part of her work, Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming (1997), was purchased for the Collection in that year. It is both a unique dreaming and an aerial view of part of her country. Gloria’s Bush Medicine Dreaming (1998), purchased in 1998, is a field of red-brown and ochre marks in a wave-like pattern related to the wind-driven movement of bush medicine plants.

Queenie McKenzie (Nakarra; 1925–1998) had been Rover Thomas’ first wife but she later made a career for herself as an artist and a highly appreciated cultural advocate. She began painting in late 1980. She was born on the Old Texas Station, on the banks of the Ord River in East Kimberley. She spent most of her early adult life as stock camp cook on new Texas Downs. She moved to Warmun in the mid 1970s. In 1990 she began painting for Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra, where her work was first exhibited. She mined the ochre for her
paintings herself. Her painted board *Ninteramangy (Leaning in all Directions; 1995)* shows a massive black outline of the boab tree used to shelter ceremonial materials spreading branches in all directions. The simple style of her early boards is related to that of Rover Thomas but they are more figurative and often make use of a black background.\(^{(14)}\)

The Collection contains seven paintings, collectively titled *Warmun Memories 1960–1995*, made by Warmun artists in memory of their time there, including Queenie McKenzie’s *Warmun Community (1995)*, which is a plan of the Warmun community. The horizontal yellow line is the Warrmarn River with a smaller creek which runs past the airport joining from the lower right and the road leading to the community to the left of that. At the top is the open square, the horseyard. The black oblong is where the races were held. Queenie’s old camp across the river is the black square at upper left. When Jimmy Klein retired from managing Texas Downs Station, he lived in the camp across the small creek (lower right). The administration buildings and the new community hall are to the right of the entrance road, while the school and the clinic are to the left.\(^{(15)}\)

Taken as a whole the *Warmun Memories* sequence is a unique record of the evolution and attitudes of the work of this important community of innovative artists. The *Warmun Memories* paintings are complemented by a series of prints by young Warmun artists. They are a reminder that far from being a rigidly fixed echo of an ancient culture, contemporary Aboriginal art is constantly in flux, prompted by continuous innovation. It has undoubtedly played a major role in the evolution of Australian contemporary art as a whole.
The spectacular success of Indigenous art from the 1990s onward, was only partially reflected in the careers of the emerging generations of white urban artists. Despite the efforts of Julie Dowling, Trevor Nickolls and others, there is far less artistic interaction to be found between them than one might expect. Although it has been a common experience to see Aboriginal and European artists' work side by side in commercial galleries such as Artplace for many years, there is almost no creative dialogue between them. No doubt this is due in part to Aboriginal artists' well-founded fear of appropriation, yet the overall concerns of many European artists, especially the painters, are sometimes far closer to those of Indigenous art than is ever acknowledged. Certainly, however, the renewed interest in urban experience amongst European artists was not shared by Indigenous artists.

In the mid-1980s, just as the unified WACAE collection was emerging under the guidance of David Hough, an extraordinary boom in contemporary and historical Western Australian art began. A new generation of artists appeared, many of whom lived and worked in inner city Perth. Exhibition spaces also proliferated. New commercial galleries, such as Artplace, Goddard de Fiddes and Gallery East, began to represent the best of them while PICA, The Verge Incorporated, the Beach Gallery and other co-operative spaces provided inexpensive opportunities to exhibit for those not willing or able to work in a commercial context.

The art of the new generation was predominantly urban and realist. It had little interest in the traditional concerns of Western Australian art, in particular landscape conventions or the elaboration of a local variant of current international mannerisms. Young artists who, at art school, had been educated as epic painters found themselves painting over the work from their graduate show so that they could use the supports to make realistic views of urban life. This led many of them to a renewed interest in representational techniques in drawing and painting. It is this interest alone that connects them to the history of art in Western Australia. Apart from that they were the first generation of artists in the state to understand that self-reliance in terms of their creative aims and assumptions would be central to their creative future. This promoted a profound change in the expectations of the art audience and of collectors.

The emerging Collection took a little while to respond to these developments. Nonetheless it now holds a number of significant works from that period. The centre of Perth itself was undergoing major changes. The sky over the CBD was never free of construction cranes. Developers allowed several large building sites to remain as bare earth for years after the previous aging brick buildings were demolished. Artists witnessed this turmoil from their cheap apartments in the Oddfellows building on St George's Terrace or from their new co-operative studios, such as Gotham on William Street, where Thomas Hoareau (b. 1961) had his studio.

From the mid-1980s, Hoareau began to chronicle the changes in the city, beginning with the destruction of Forrest Place as a historical communal centre. He developed an abbreviated but sophisticated technique which depended on a careful separation of colours and tones. The Collection holds three of his paintings of the inner city environment which illustrate the various facets of his attitudes to it.

At first, he reacted to the destruction of the old inner city community with its comfortable habits and familiar locations in a series of bleak works in which absence and devastation are the principle themes. His fundamental concern was the slow ebb of human presence and animating memories from the city. The Chrysalid (1990), is typical of the large scale works in which he used a series of his photographs of high rise construction underway to model his compositions. This worked well in the upper-half of the work, leaving Hoareau free to employ the flexibility of pastels to cast the half-finished structures and the irresistible rhetoric of the cranes in a romantic or even sentimental light. The figure covered by a cloth in the foreground was intended to suggest that eventually the dormant presence of humanity would return to the devastated city. Indeed the work has been compared to a cinema poster. Unfortunately, Hoareau’s dramatic
intention was never fully realised despite his excellent observation. The artist had to fend off suggestions that the body was the victim of an accident. He came to believe that direct observation might provide a better sense of urban presence. In 1998 he recalled:

Someone once wrote about my work that it had the Homicide Effect. I thought ‘What’s this? I haven’t killed anyone, there’s no murder in my paintings’. There was once a cop show called Homicide—you don’t remember?

Homicide was the first Australian cop show. They saw their own streets on television and thought, hey this is Melbourne, this is Fitzroy. The critic was trying to say that I make pictures of very familiar scenes that people recognise, which was a very unusual thing to do when we had such an international feeling here.

Hoareau was also attracted to the sentimental poetics of urban life in a manner reminiscent of the Surrealists’ engagement with Paris. His West Perth Morning (1993) was one of a number of attempts to evoke those poetics using multiple images. He also attempted to free himself from direct dependence on the photograph. Hoareau wanted to evade “the technology trap.”

It is possible to make an art of despair about this whole situation [but]—

I find this path personally enervating and artistically repetitive. This why I have abandoned lately my use of appropriation and photographs, opting for what might on the surface appear to be a retrograde activity, depicting my environment with the same simplicity and clarity as banging two pieces of wood together.

West Perth Morning is one of several experiments Hoareau made to
intensify the sense of human presence in the city. It contains four panels. Two show an image of the back of his partner surrounded by shadows reflected in a tilted oval mirror as she prepares for work. Each painted mirror shows a separate moment in the morning’s routine so that apparent repetition dissolves into two unique events. This is a reflection in paint, not photography.

That’s really morning because it’s Jo getting up very early to go to work at a media monitoring place where you read the newspapers so that the government departments and private companies get to know what’s happening and who’s saying nasty things about who.¹⁸

The other two panels show two similar depictions of a fence surrounding a construction site, covered with posters. Above it is a view across town over the roof of Perth Institute of Contemporary Art to the Telstra building in the distance. One can see the entire microwave dish on the roof of the right-hand image but only a part of it in the central panel. This cues the viewer to search for other differences, in the position of shadows for instance, or the shifting legibility of the torn posters. These collages of type and fugitive images are painted with much delightful care and attention to the surface effects that they produce.

The use of two slightly dissonant images to evoke the human presence in relation to the work had been a familiar strategy in American and European art since 1950s, when Robert Rauschenberg made an ‘exact’ copy of one of his gestural expressive brushstrokes. At the time of Hoareau’s work there was considerable debate about the use of double or dual images as a means to amplify the viewer’s sense of the work. His aim was to use this effect to sidestep the numbing effect of photography as a key to ‘reality’.

Thomas Hoareau, Northbridge Gothic (1998)
During the 1990s Hoareau took more interest in the people around his Northbridge studio. He painted them in a number of homages to well-known paintings. One, *Northbridge Gothic* (1998), features a young couple fashionably dressed in black in the manner of ‘goths’ which could then be found around the city. They are posed against a view of the Brass Monkey Hotel as it could be seen from his first-floor studio window across the road. The man is carrying a staff whose tapering head contains a small pastiche of Grant Wood’s iconic painting *American Gothic* (1930), which shows a mid-western American farm couple with the man grasping a pitchfork. Hoareau was well aware of the ironic effect of such a source but his intention had more to do with the need to reinvigorate his art without changing his central concerns or having them overwhelmed by the latest thing.

Patrizia Tonello (b.1963) was one of a number of other artists to express concern for the consequences of urban development in her early works. They were all painted on secondhand window blinds which allowed her to achieve a particularly impressive graphic detail. Several featured empty, abandoned brick-walled buildings stranded in acres of churned up dirt, inspired in part by cleared sites to be seen around Perth. In the Collection’s *Lie of the Land* (1993), she developed this idea into much broader comment on the relation between building and agriculture. It shows three parallel sheds in tight perspective, their brick and mortar walls picked out in extraordinary detail. Around them is a field full of stubble, with the tracks of a single vehicle running over the rising hill in the foreground and alongside the sheds to the right. This is a mysterious, intense image. The empty sheds have no obvious use. They appear to be a deserted remnant of some long abandoned urban project.

Tonello’s later work relied increasingly on magic and emblematic qualities of her imagery rather than on
her ability to work with a direct realism. *Trinity* (1995) shows a large, beautifully observed blanket or cover with a red stripe across its centre hanging in front of a wall made of grey corrugated tin and timbers. Once more it has no obvious interpretation. It appears to be an exercise in formal composition and rhetoric with its roots in art history, notably the draped interiors in the work of Poussin. The Collection also owns *Nothing Sacred* (1998) in which a spiral of golden balls floats in the blue water of a magic twilight landscape in which a range of ancient rocks stretches between sky and water. The balls echo a number of forms to be found in recent art history, notably Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*. For Tonello, however, *Nothing Sacred* refers obliquely to the process of changing the natural environment simply to extract minerals “to decorate the wrist or throat of a privileged individual. The floating baubles symbolise the ‘lightweight’ nature of this manufactured beauty as compared to the true beauty of nature in its unaltered state.”

While Tonello and others moved away from immediate engagement with an urban context, artists continued to engage with the everyday experiences of the city and their ethical implications. *The Smell of Freedom* (1999), by Gina Moore (b. 1969), was purchased in 2000. It shows a woman filling up a four-wheel-drive vehicle on the forecourt of a garage across the road from a block of flats in Fremantle. Moore has constructed the complex volume of the forecourt by careful use of bright sunlight picked up on various warm white elements: the balconies of the flats, the petrol pumps, a white car moving to the left. The figure of the woman herself, perhaps the artist, is built from broad tonal strokes so that her gesture becomes almost monumental. This approach is very similar to that of the American painter Edward Hopper, who was interested in similar informal moments in urban life.
Moore’s title however, makes clear that, unlike Hopper, she is aware of the ironies ever present in the urban reality, as she made clear in 2001.

*The Smell of Freedom* is about that feeling of liberty that comes with a full tank of petrol. I once saw a sheep escape the flock as they were being herded from a big creaky, smelly truck to a live sheep export boat at the Fremantle Port. It had escaped! It was free! It bolted along the wharf, erratically; one eye on the scene of horror it had left behind. It had the skip of freedom—could smell it in the air. I was vicariously filled with elation. Then I thought, where could it go? It could jump into the water and drown, go back to the truck or onto the boat. This is the real story behind *The Smell of Freedom*, that elusive odour! As you can tell by the way I’ve carried on, this painting feels very pertinent to me. It’s about a particular set of sensations that I find hard to put into words—I feel like I can smell them though!\(^9\)

Joanna Lamb (b.1972), also undertook an examination of the delusions of freedom promoted by the car in *Framed View 2* (1998). It was one of several works which used a wide, almost ribbon-like format, almost two-and-a-half metres wide but only a third of a metre high, to suggest the visual experience of being in a moving vehicle. The vehicles immediately in front loom huge while the buildings of the Perth CBD seem almost infinitely far away, yet they will very soon be on top of the viewer. As Lamb commented:
Authority over space and time is at the centre of human desire. These works look at the fragments, the moments of stillness in between the past and the future. Protected by the aerodynamic shell of the automobile we are outside time, heading away from our past and heading toward the future. Faster we go, in order to arrive in the future and leave the present behind.

The interest of the 1980s generation in urban subjects also led them to interiors, often with their friends posing or going about their daily lives, often in shady rented houses with second-hand furniture. Kevin Robertson (b. 1964), was an enthusiastic painter of city views but he is represented in the Collection by an unusual interior and two portraits. *Rebecca and Chris* (1992), is a painting of two of his friends in their bathroom in Sydney. Robertson spent some months painting the room observing the various reflections of light.

The light green tiles must have been a tremendous challenge but Robertson has handled them very well. The end wall and a number of shadows are worked in mid-blue shade with a variety of brushstrokes. The reflections of the woman’s dressing gown lend a pink and purple glow to other parts of the image. Robertson has a remarkable gift for the way in which form can be made to appear within a network of carefully observed patches of light and shade.

For instance the hands, head and shoulders of the young man in the bath carry tremendous conviction. They exist partly in luminous cast shadows, but also in and through a system of coloured surfaces that sometimes coincide with a shadow, that almost but do not quite overtake the coherence of the man’s face. Robertson is working in the manner of the great painters of interiors, the French Intimistes, Vuillard and more especially Bonnard, who worked for many years on images of bathing.
As with many of his generation, Robertson was highly conscious of the quality of his paint surfaces. He often used this technique to suggest the softening of edges, the relaxed absorption of human presence within an interior, the rediscovery of urban leisure that was so much a part of that time. He may also have been affected by the work of Lucian Freud, in his detached treatment of faces and of expressive props such as the household plant on the right. The volume created by the turning stairs seen through the open bathroom door is a traditional device that is familiar in the work of seventeenth century artists from Velasquez to Vermeer. Robertson has adapted it so as to suggest a different, far more mysterious inner space, the psychic space of a new urban imagination.

The Collection holds two of his portraits Megan Salmon in the Studio (1991) and Fontini Epanomitis (1995). Megan Salmon was a Perth painter who later became a fashion designer. Robertson shows her reading in a loose patterned gown before a multi-coloured shaded background very much in the manner of Vuillard. The portrait of the writer Epanomitis was made after she won the Vogel literary award with her novel The Mule’s Fool. He had hoped to exhibit it in the Archibald prize but was unsuccessful. Robertson used a vertical view of his subject on a sofa to suggest a domestic introspection.

Salmon took up portrait painting with a vengeance. She produced exhibitions of female portraits, sitting and standing in exotic decorative environments, One, the elegant Portrait of Linda Orsulich (1991), is in the Collection. In 2001 Salmon recalled this work and the sources on which she based it.

I had Linda sit for me about three times during which I painted her face, arms and dress. The dress was the inspiration for this painting. I remember creating the scene
around it and therefore chose the recline to show it as a major shape in the composition. I was looking at works by Hugh Ramsay, Whistler, Klimt as well as Expressionists like Beckmann and Post-Impressionists like Bonnard. My intention was to create a decorative work but with very expressive quality of the marks giving it a personal strength.\(^{21}\)

Indeed the loose treatment of the blue and green patches of the dress are remarkably evocative of the texture and the quality of light reflected from fine material. As Salmon's sources show, this was a generation deeply committed to cultivating the sensitivity of their touch in way not seen before in Western Australia. It has been argued that this commitment was old-fashioned nostalgia, even perverse, but taken together with their interest in urban experience these artists did make a remarkable contribution to local art.

Unfortunately there was no local patronage capable of supporting their interests for the long haul. By the late 1990s most them were fading from sight. It is fortunate that the Collection has first rate examples of their work. The one exception was Tom Alberts (b. 1962), a superb draftsman who emerged with a remarkable first exhibition at the Beach Gallery featuring drawings of himself and friends and surreal views of Perth. Soon, however, overwhelming interest in getting things right technically merged with his interest in a cold classicism, sinister but sensual, in which he attempted to allow a particular psychic interiority, a moment of doubt or desire to emerge through tremendous magical calculation. By 1990, it was clear to him that this future lay elsewhere. He soon relocated to Melbourne, from where he has built a national and international reputation that he could never have achieved in Western Australia.
The Collection owns a fine charcoal drawing by him, *Own* (1990), which shows a naked male figure in a pose reminiscent of a renaissance figure painting by Masaccio. The gesture of the arms and hands, however, has far more to do with an existential doubt about the body, a doubt which is reinforced by the clothed figures half-turned away from the viewer. Alberts has deliberately left them slightly unresolved so that their apparel appears more like a second skin, continuous with the flesh. A similar effect can be found in the work of the Belgian surrealist Magritte, though Alberts emphasises the slightly threatening detached gravitas of the background figures in a way that Magritte never would.

Alberts soon became fascinated by the rhetoric of classicism in European painting, by its harsh mythic ambience, the mechanics of the inevitable that is caught so well in the work of Poussin or more especially, J. L. David. His *Exit* (1993) depicts a man in a loose fitting white towelling dressing gown in front of a table carrying a coffin draped in a white sheet on which he rests one hand. The man is reading a note held in the other hand, a suicide note perhaps, or a death warrant, his blond head tilted slightly forward. The cold grey light in a cold grey space strongly suggests that this is a classical image though the source would be hard to find. Even the modern dressing gown suggests a toga and a classical herm-like figure lurks in deep dark shadow to the right. Unfortunately there is an illuminated ‘exit’ sign over the door to the left, probably an allusion to the silence sign in Andy Warhol’s *Electric Chair* paintings, which feature screen prints of the execution chamber and the chair. The rickety ladder in the corner is also inappropriate in an image of classical times. It may even be a quotation from the work of Picasso; a ladder appears in many of the works associated with Guernica.

*Exit* is obviously an experimental, formative work in which Alberts is
working with a theme—the idea of death and a number of images that have been associated with it, but without the need to make a logically coherent image. The mere cultural association of the elements of this composition with the idea of death is sufficient; it suits Alberts’ sense of humour. If this prop cupboard of clichés is indeed the anteroom to eternity then there is very little to anticipate.

Mythic and legendary subject matter has always fascinated local artists but they have always seen it, from the outside, as it were, as if they could never own these legends in the way that Europeans can. Too often the result is an uncontrolled sloppy symbol or allusion with no place in the experience of the viewer.

At first the work of John Paul (b. 1953), with its classical titles and elaborately overfilled late mannerist mises en scène seems to be just such an ungainly, insecure pastiche, but on further examination, it has a unique presence not too far away from the work of Tom Alberts. Paul worked by building up his images in paint, with no clear idea as to the subject or how its form might evolve.

The Collection holds three of his works from the early 1990s. The fascinating diamond-shaped Saving the Furniture Cairo 1915 (1992), a strange double perspective view of narrow Arab street in deep shadow with one apparently panic-stricken figure in a grey and white striped costume in the foreground. It appears that he may be tumbling through the air from the blue sky above. The massacre of Armenians and others in Cairo and elsewhere by the Turks took place in 1915: the much debated genocide. There are indeed a number of descriptions of attempts to save furniture and other domestic goods from the mob roaming the streets of Cairo. It is likely that this is what suggested this subject to the artist, though his dreamlike image suggests a contemporary, personal relationship to the subject.
This is also true of Leda and the Swan (1993). Leda was ravished (or raped) by Jupiter in the guise of a swan. Paul, however, has reworked the scene as a slightly seedy erotic encounter, half-fantasy, half-legend. Leda’s face is deep in shadow. She appears to be rubbing her hair with an orange towel above her pinkish-grey, sagging body. She wears torn black stockings with one large visible ladder. The swan appears to have crashed through her bedroom window. Its head hangs beneath the crook of her knee for all the world like poultry in a butcher’s shop. Despite all this a strong erotic charge pervades the work as if the artist began with a sensual urge and worked slowly back until this version of the myth emerged on his canvas.

In 2001, Paul was explicit about his methods in his Perseus — Medusa (1994).

I had developed a technique which allowed me to work straight from the imagination. One of the by-products of working like this is the analysis of what emerges. As the painting developed so did the revelations on a personal level. The painting is about my grandmother and great-grandmother, one submissive, the other dominant, both functioning powerfully in me, which is where my connection to the myth comes in.22

There is much more to see in this strange interpretation of the story of the snake-headed monster whose face turned whoever looked on it to stone. Perseus beheads Medusa with a sickle, not a sword, a deceptive treacherous action that suggests Freud’s association of the action with castration. The goddess appears to be infested with a variety of loathsome animals, but there is little sign of serpents. This is some grisly execution in which victim and executioner are equally nasty, not a heroic triumph.

Ivan Bray (b.1967) was also fascinated by the dissonance between his own vision and classical myth and the tradition of painters who worked with it. His Diana (1992), in the Collection, was inspired by the treatment of the subject by Titian, in particular by The Death of Actaeon in the National Gallery, London. In 2001, Bray commented:

My Diana stretches her back and arms across the canvas, pointing her bow and arrow out to sea, an unexpected, unexplained memorial to passion.23

In the London Titian, the stocky Roman huntress Diana stands in the left foreground pointing her lethal arrow to the small confused figure of the transformed Actaeon, his head adorned with horns. Bray has transformed her monumental pose, so that a now naked Diana, one foot planted atop a descending wall, points her arrow to the silver clouded heavens. In the right-hand corner of the canvas, two male figures lurk in darkness below the wall. Like much of Bray’s work, this event seems soaked in moonlight.
Myth and symbol were specially important to many women painters in the 1980s. This was partly because much popular feminism had been based on the reconstruction of myth. It was, however, the apparent freedom to assert new relationships, invent new iconographies within the context of local painting, that had the most powerful appeal.

Yvette Watt (b. 1963) has been a consistent maker of paintings with a compelling imagery whose relationship to mythic processes is both familiar and radically surprising. She is particularly concerned with her private system of myths in relation to animals, which she regards with an almost totemic familiarity and power. Her Offering No 2 (1993), was purchased shortly after it was exhibited at Artplace in 1994. Its upper half shows a tightly designed almost heraldic black bird with a small golden yellow object glinting in its open beak. In the lower half, a large, slightly grubby, masculine hand is raised to the sky against a dark oceanic background. In 2001, Watt recalled her surprise when she encountered a myth that matched her intentions.

This was the second of two works on the theme of a person reaching up/protecting themselves, as a black bird hovers above them. The bird appears to have a yellow disc in its beak, or perhaps the beak is open and the sun can be seen behind/through the bird's beak. Shortly after I sent this work up to Perth I was watching Northern Exposure on TV (a serial set in Alaska). The episode featured the creation beliefs of the Inuit people, who apparently believe that the world began when a raven brought the sun down to the earth in its beak. I was delighted and a little astonished at the coincidence of this native American myth and the imagery of my painting—which was not based on any particular myth I know of, but was sourced from my own 'mythic' language I had developed over many years of working with animal imagery.