

# RAY COFFEY

Hooligan Series



THERE'S NO JUSTICE

FUCK THE TO

## Hooligan Series

From my upbringing as a child to my journey into young adulthood, I came of age within the confines of council estates in Bootle, an area marked by some of the highest deprivation in the United Kingdom. It was a place where unemployment and crime rates soared. Violence, sadly, is well woven into the fabric of British culture. Young men, statistically more likely to be the victims of assault. We navigated our daily lives with an undercurrent of fear. Whenever I was walking down an unfamiliar street, the approach of others signalled a potential threat. Demonstrating fear was dangerous, yet it lingered beneath the surface. Crossing the street or avoiding eye contact risked revealing vulnerability. Relief and bravado the reward if you escaped a confrontation. Within the working-class male psyche those who exhibited prowess in football or other athletic endeavours were met with respect and admiration. Intellectual acumen was also esteemed, albeit to a lesser extent. However, the pinnacle of admiration was reserved for individuals with a proficiency in physical combat and could attain reputations akin to champions or saints.

Violence triggers excitement. Football hooliganism was a pathway for such excitement, a thrill away from the hum drum 9 to 5 empty life. This further underscored the significance of physical prowess within some communities. The chance to prove your mettle before your peers fighting for your town. Exhilaration like a drug (one that I wished to have no part of). It became a subculture (casual culture). Expensive brand-named clothes like a uniform. Bonding over speed, alcohol and fighting. The English disease. Football hooliganism in the 1980s was such a concern that Margaret Thatcher's government set up a "war cabinet" to tackle it.

Violence, paradoxically, commands both fear and reverence within society. The reverence for violence manifests itself in various cultural forms, from the pages of comic books depicting graphic scenes of war to the screen showcasing superhero epics. I remember the excitement as a 12-year-old as British troops prepared to leave English ports sent by Margaret Thatcher to recapture the Falkland Islands. The brass band playing "Don't cry for me Argentina" as young men sailed off to their fates. The daily news footage of fighter planes, ships exploding, not really understanding through all the excitement the cost. Its was the same with the first gulf war. I watched the enthusiasm of TV presenters excited about what types of ordnance were being dropped on Baghdad in the Shock and Awe stage of the war. Again not truly appreciating that beneath those impressive explosions were people.

Violence sells. Violence advertises. Give us a war, any war, and the media will line up behind it, at least until it starts to go bad. "I guess I was part of the groupthink," Bob Woodward lamented several years into the Iraq war.

As a society, our attitude toward sending men (and increasingly women) off to war is complex and multifaceted. Historically, cultural ideals of duty, honour, and patriotism have played significant roles. Wars are often framed as necessary for defending freedom, protecting national interests, or promoting stability, which can garner public support. Moreover, social pressures, like the glorification of military service in media and education, can shape attitudes. Furthermore, the experiences of veterans, including physical and psychological wounds, highlight the profound costs of armed conflict. In more than 20 years of fighting in Afghanistan, 46 Australians died as a result of service. Over a similar period, between 1997 and 2020, at least 1,600 serving and ex-serving ADF members died by suicide.

This raises a poignant question: As a society do we fully understand the hypocrisy in what we ask?

*Ray Coffey 2024*



Above image: *Dave #1* 2024, Gypsum mounted on wood, 11 × 11 cm  
Cover image: *Working Class* 2023, Oil on canvas, 30.5 × 22.5 cm  
Back image: *Skinhead* 2024, Oil on board, 46 × 61 cm





Untitled 2024, Oil on canvas, 101 × 152 cm





*Let's Go Fucking Mental!*, Limited edition signed Giclée print, 59.4 × 42 cm



*England Away* 2023, Oil, acrylic and graphite on paper, 84.1 × 59.4 cm

A selection of works from Ray Coffey's exhibition, 'Hooligan Series'

7 May – 1 June 2024



Woolloongabba Art Gallery

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