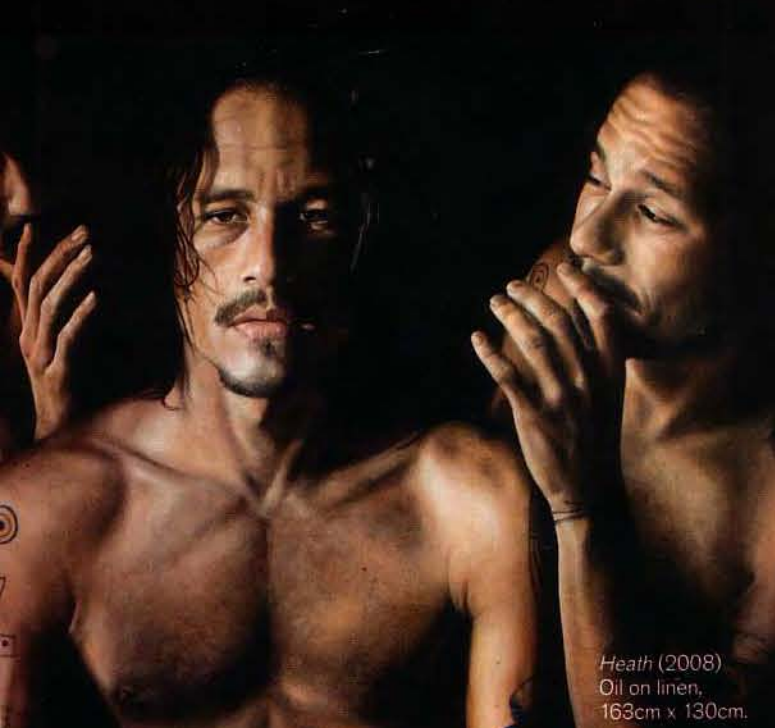
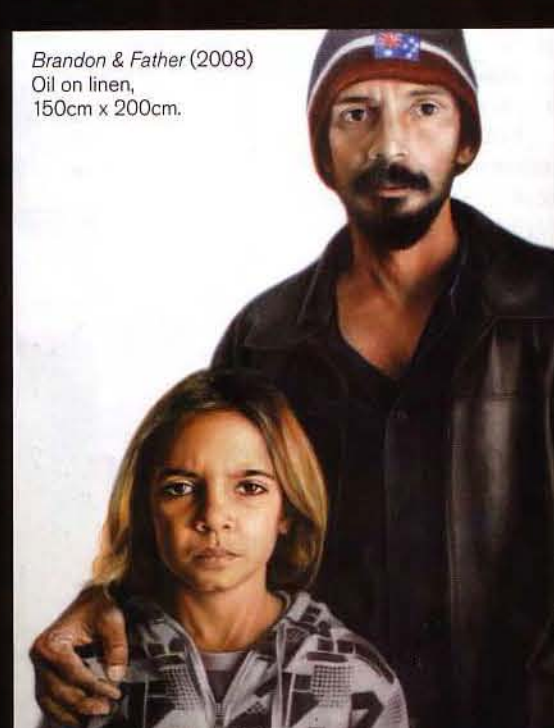




Brandon (2008)  
Oil on linen,  
200cm x 150cm.



Heath (2008)  
Oil on linen,  
163cm x 130cm.



Brandon & Father (2008)  
Oil on linen,  
150cm x 200cm.

# SUBJECTS OF DESIRE

*Vincent Fantauzzo's portraits are both a product of and a response to popular culture's fascination with its idols.*

Words by **Nicola Harvey**

**T**he Melbourne-based artist who gained national acclaim when he was acknowledged as the 2008 Archibald Prize People's Choice winner for his evocative photorealist portrait of the late actor Heath Ledger is fascinated with the effects of pop culture on subjects of desire.

Since graduating in 2005 with a Master of Fine Arts in painting from RMIT University, Melbourne, Vincent Fantauzzo has dedicated his art practice to exploring the intricacies of portraiture in an effort to capture a moment, if not the essence, of his subject's life. He likes to "investigate people, to try to discover a little of what they're about".

A self-confessed film addict (the result of a childhood shadowed by dyslexia, which limited his learning through reading), Fantauzzo considers his portraits to be a piece in the narrative of the subject's life – like a film still, with scenes and dialogue preceding and following. During a recent residency in Hong Kong with one of his dealer galleries, 10 Chancery Lane, Fantauzzo pushed the idea of narrative further by producing 30 self-portraits in 30 days – an example of his non-static approach to portraiture.

Fantauzzo's photorealist style of painting, which relies heavily on *chiaroscuro* (the technique

## EXHIBITIONS

"I am specifically interested in the artists of the Italian Renaissance and the vanishing art of figurative painting," says Vincent Fantauzzo, who is exhibiting solo shows at both of his Australian dealer galleries this year.

March 5–28  
Boutwell Draper  
Gallery, Sydney  
[boutwelldrapergallery.com.au](http://boutwelldrapergallery.com.au)

May–June  
Dianne Tanzer  
Gallery, Melbourne  
[diannetanzergallery.net.au](http://diannetanzergallery.net.au)

of juxtaposing light and dark to suggest form and volume) to give his portraits a brooding, slightly gothic impression, is indebted to the great masters of the Renaissance.

There are socio-historic similarities, too. During the golden era of the Renaissance, before the existence of the art market as we know it, painters were beholden to their patrons (wealthy merchants, aristocrats and the church), producing portraits to impress upon history the importance and virtue of their employers. Though the contemporary art market is quite different, there remains the demanding patron: a hungry pop culture producing imagery that mythologises and immortalises the importance of the subjects *du jour*.

Fantauzzo's portrait of Ledger, titled *Heath*, which is now in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, is a perfect example. Initiated as a respectful collaboration between two friends and fellow artists, the portrait is no longer a retort to the pop phenomenon, as it was conceived.

*"...it is important to continue discussing the portrait and the man so the narrative of the portrait continues to develop, even if the earthly life it portrays cannot."*

Since the death of the enigmatic actor and the awarding of a posthumous Golden Globe in January for his role in *The Dark Knight* (2008), the portrait is becoming absorbed into the myth of the brooding actor.

Fantauzzo is not deterred. Despite his usual reticence about his work (he prefers "anyone to be able to read the painting in the way they see it"), he believes it is important to continue discussing the portrait and the man so the narrative of the portrait continues to develop, even if the earthly life it portrays cannot.

Fantauzzo recently painted young actor Brandon Walters, the unexpected star of Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* (2008). In a manner similar to his collaboration with Ledger, Fantauzzo developed a friendship with his subject before embarking on the project. He captured Walters posing with his father and he remembers Walters "almost protecting his father", a role reversal for the young boy who shot to international fame with the release of the film. "His involvement [in the film] was a great source of pride for his [Aboriginal] community...many of the young guys now think they too can do something similar," Fantauzzo says. Other portraits of Walters capture a stoic young man who is resilient in the face of the Hollywood onslaught. 