

# An Ambivalent Guide to Perth

Danni McGrath

WALLPAPER  
Danni McGrath  
*Reconstructed Transperth Trains Moquette* 2015  
Watercolour on paper, 13 x 19 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*The Chaser's War on Everything* sent Craig Reucassel to Perth and to blend in he dressed in a blue wife beater, King Gee shorts, work boots, and slung a shovel over his shoulder. As he exited the airport he passed a man dressed in standard issue high vis and I laughed and laughed. Reucassel would never have passed worksite OH&S standards in that get up.

When I worked in a nightclub I often caught the train home at five or six in the morning. I'd be greeted on the platform by trains filled with high vis, heading for the city construction sites. I felt like I was taking part of some kind of night and day guard-changing ritual.

I didn't see the exhibition *Yellow Vest Syndrome* at the Fremantle Arts Centre in 2009. I know it was about much more than this, but I've created a memory of it being about all the things you could get away with while wearing a high vis vest.

The Hamersley Iron train is a sight to behold. When I was little we were on a trip up near Tom Price and were stopped for about half an hour waiting for it to pass so we could cross the tracks. Actually, Hamersley Iron is called Pilbara Iron and is owned by Rio Tinto now.

Rio Tinto's Perth headquarters are in Central Park, the tallest building in Perth, and was completed the year I was born. I thought that it was going to be overtaken by the Brookfield Place building, which houses BHP Billiton and which was completed twenty years later, in 2012. But I remember hearing something like they ran out of money, so a couple of floors were jettisoned.

The Mining Boom, in whatever phase it may be, is ever-present in Perth. Not in your face, but always in the corner of your eye. The Perth Theatre Company had to cancel the second half of its 2015 season because no one expected the value of iron ore to drop so drastically. The cranes dotting the CBD are the same yellow as the train fixtures are the same yellow as dust-tempered high vis.



## CALIBRATION



Danni McGrath, *Welcome to Perth Airport* 2015, watercolour on paper, 13 x 19 cm  
All images courtesy of the artist

## GEOGRAPHY

The Swan River (Derbarl Yerrigan in the local Noongar language) defines Perth's geography. The suburbs South of the River are generally considered to be rougher than those North of the River; this is a badge of honour for Southerners. I'm a Southerner. The Western Suburbs are more frequently referred to as The Golden Triangle, while The Eastern Suburbs don't really exist—everything is either north or south until you hit the Swan Valley. Mandurah, the southernmost suburb, used to be considered a separate town until the train was connected ten years ago. I used to go on holidays to Mandurah, now people who live there commute to Perth for work. Proximity-wise, Fremantle is basically a suburb, but the port town is vehemently its own place.

## CURRENCY

Under ten dollars for a drink is pretty reasonable. Over five dollars for a standard coffee is pushing it.

## WEATHER

Anglo-Saxons: pack sunscreen. Heed the words of my mother: if you go to Fremantle at night you will need a jumper.

## TRANSPORT

Transperth is the local public transport service, which operates a network of buses, five train lines and one lonely ferry. The buses are mostly tedious, the trains are fine, the ferry is hilarious.

## PUBLIC ART

With sponsorship from BHP Billiton and other private companies, FORM, an arts organisation that focuses on community development through the arts, has commissioned over seventy public murals over two years as part of its PUBLIC festival. The project has been met with mixed responses; some praising the project for brightening the cityscape and engaging a wide range of people, others criticising much of the artwork for a lack of sensitivity to site, and the project overall as a band-aid fix for broader problems of city design. In other news, my favourite mural in Perth is this bad boy:



Horrie Long *Reserve Dog Mural* 2015, watercolour on paper, 13 x 19 cm



## PERTH CULTURAL CENTRE

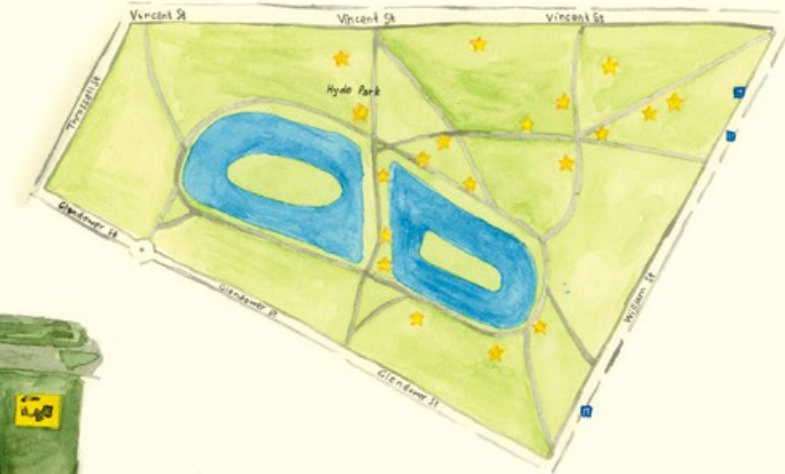
I feel awkward saying “Perth Cultural Centre”. Must all of Perth’s culture be contained within this centre? What if it escapes? Despite its clunky name, the Cultural Centre is actually pretty great, housing two galleries, two theatre spaces, a museum and a library. In addition to these important cultural institutions, the Perth Cultural Centre houses two particularly significant social icons: the best and worst public toilet hand dryers in Perth. With the wooden spoon is the PICA Bar female toilet hand dryer which is great for warming your hands just a little before you wipe them on your jeans. In first place is the State Library foyer female toilet hand dryer which, based on anecdotal evidence, was the first Dyson Air Blade installed in Perth. The original and the best.



*Worst/Best* 2015, watercolour on paper, 13 x 19 cm

## HYDE PARK

So if you’re after a good afternoon in Perth, what you wanna do is take yourself up to Mount Lawley, get yourself some fancy cheese, olives and bread from Fresh Provisions, pick up some nice beverages at Grand Cru, and head back down the hill to enjoy it all in Hyde Park. If, during your afternoon picnic, you feel the need to charge some electronics, set up some mood lighting, or power a PA for a picnic party, you can do just that. Simply locate yourself near one of eighteen orange power boxes spread throughout the park, plug and go. Please invite me.



*Hyde Park Orange* 2015, watercolour on paper, 13 x 19 cm

## IN JOKES

I used to think of Perth as the Channel Seven of Australian capital cities: the hyperactive, try-hard younger brother. But I realise now that it’s more like Channel 31, a local community station wedged between SBS and ABC that I always skipped when channel surfing as a kid. Perth definitely has a collective inferiority complex. Teamed with self awareness, this complex becomes productive. Self deprecation as state sport. Mining Tax are an electro-pop duo that sing about the Budget Emergency and sample Gina Rinehart’s poetry. David Attwood’s minimalist *YoGo Caps* (2015), adhered to the gallery wall with residual YoGo. Perella and Osborn’s viral video *This is Perth* (2009).





*Various Perth Stickers* 2015, watercolour on paper, 13 x 19 cm

## DIASPORA

Perth exists in terms of its lack of proximity to other places. At least four hours to get anywhere, four days if you're an Express Post package. Everyone is leaving, no one is coming. Those who stay or indeed, return, have an ambivalent loyalty in common: frustration at the mining boom's lack of impact on the wider economy, but unsure of accepting money from mining companies. Disheartened by small audiences but relieved to have space to experiment with few consequences. This tension keeps us on our toes and prevents complacency. And I don't want to live anywhere without Giant Sandwiches.

OPPOSITE. *Lucky Country* 2015, watercolour on paper, 13 x 19 cm

