



Romancing the Streetscape

TOWN HALL GALLERY

WED 18 JAN – SAT 15 APR 2023

Featuring: Rick Amor, William Breen, Andrew Browne,
Mark Chu, Robert Clinch, Cathy Drummond and Dani McKenzie.



FINDING THE SUBLIME IN THE CITY

ESSAY BY

Essay by Town Hall Gallery Curator
Elle Hale

Take a stroll through the streets of Melbourne and experience our city through the eyes of seven artists. The portrait of Melbourne they have created is both endearing and surprising, encouraging us to value the urban environment we live in. From nature finding ways to reassert itself to the warm glow of a restaurant spilling onto the street, 'Romancing the Streetscape' portrays the city with a romanticism often associated with traditional landscape painting.

Currently, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas, and by 2050 this is expected to increase to about 70%.¹ With the experience of city-living so familiar to many people, it is unsurprising that artists have turned their attention from picturesque landscapes to urban streetscapes and architecture.

For the artists featured in this exhibition, Melbourne is an urban sprawl of modern industry and a melting pot of culture, where small businesses jut up against American fast-food vendors. The streets are marked by heritage facades and lively graffiti, and there is a certain beauty in the way one building casts its shadow onto another.

William Breen's paintings in this exhibition are inspired by the architectural history and eclectic contemporary street art of Melbourne's inner suburbs. They are meticulously crafted works that seduce the viewer with their classical composition, soft focus, and atmospheric light. He says, 'The images echo a state of suspended animation when everything slows down to a point where one can appreciate the contemplative nature of a world in balance, a world where everything is in its right place: an ideal vision.'²

A dreamy palette and soft focus are also features of Dani McKenzie's quasi-photographic works. McKenzie paints moody, atmospheric night views and restaurant scenes where the banality of the everyday is infused with mystery. McKenzie likes to walk a lot, particularly around where she lives and works, always keeping her eyes open for scenes to paint. 'Undoubtedly, it'll be something small that makes the difference, or lucky timing really – a bin on the sidewalk, a cat in the window, or a moment where the sun comes out and someone walks past,'³ she shares. We know these modest daily observances well, they are part of the shared experience of living in a city.

Cathy Drummond also has a keen eye for the everyday moments and joys they can bring. For more than twenty years Drummond has painted the buildings, shops and streets of Melbourne, attracted by their colour and shapes, cultural significance and particular character. Over time Drummond has come to document a bygone era, where many of the buildings and shops she has recorded in paint have disappeared, victims of development and gentrification in a rapidly changing city.

Mark Chu's works highlight the artist's duty as an observer of human life, focusing on human subjects using colour, form, and texture to enhance psychological complexity. 'Through research I learned that red and blue are measurably emotive colours. It seems intuitive, but red is linked to passionate emotions; I want public life to be more impassioned, more compassionate,'⁴ he explains. For this exhibition Chu painted areas around Glenferrie Station in Hawthorn. He was drawn to the many functions and eras



of the area, from retail to corporate, local to multinational – the traffic, advertising, shops, workers, and utilities old and new.

Andrew Browne's skilfully rendered paintings depict urban textures of Melbourne through specifically cropped, macro compositions. Immortalising abstracted footpath repairs and tenacious weeds growing from cracks, manmade and natural worlds collide in paintings that are both hyper realistic and abstracted. Browne's works appear realist at first glance but are in fact collaged from multiple sources.

Robert Clinch also employs this technique of collaging multiple locations into a seemingly realistic but imagined world. For Clinch, the accuracy is in the detail and the heightened realism of the works gives them a fairy tale quality. His paintings feature a notably warm palette, due to the dominating presence of iconic Hawthorn bricks that give so many of Melbourne's historic inner suburbs their distinct character. Clinch's interests lie in the human condition, and while his works depict a playful perspective of city life, they also act as a commentary on the pressures and problems of modern living.

The isolation that can come with living in a city is evident in Rick Amor's vaguely ominous streetscapes, featuring lone figures dwarfed by their urban surrounds. His unrivalled understanding of tonality and masterful manipulation of light are applied to paintings that are much more than a documentation of an area – they speak of the human condition and represent the modern world with experiential wisdom and none of the hype.⁵

Despite the hustle and bustle usually associated with the city, there is a noticeable lack of people in 'Romancing the Streetscape'. As a result, these works transcend the banal, hectic truth of the world and offer viewers a refreshing perspective. Imagination and a touch of mystery have transformed Melbourne into a sublime landscape.

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- 1 "Some facts on urbanisation," United Nations, accessed 1 December 2022, www.un.org/en/ecosoc/integration/pdf/fact_sheet.pdf
 - 2 William Breen, email correspondence, December 2022
 - 3 Dani McKenzie, email correspondence, December 2022
 - 4 Rain Fuller, "INTERVIEW w/ Mark Chu," No Vacancy, accessed 24 November 2022, www.no-vacancy.com.au/new-blog/2021/2/5/interview-with-artist-mark-chu
 - 5 Steve Lopes, "Rick Amor," Artist Profile, accessed 24 November 2022, artistprofile.com.au/rick-amor

EXHIBITION OPENING

SAT 21 JAN, 2–4PM

Join us for the official opening of 'Romancing the Streetscape'.

Free, bookings essential.

EXHIBITION TOURS

SAT 21 JAN, 1–2PM

WED 5 APR, 12–1PM

Join this curator-led tour of 'Romancing the Streetscape'. Hear directly from the artists and gain a deeper understanding of the artworks on display.

Free, bookings essential.

CINEMA SESSION

WED 1 MAR, 6–8.30PM

Join us for a screening of 'The Lost City of Melbourne', introduced by a guest speaker.

\$10, bookings essential.

**ONLINE DESCRIBED
EXHIBITION TOUR**

TUE 14 MAR, 3–4.30PM

Art lovers who are blind or have low vision are invited to join us for an online described exhibition tour.

Free, bookings essential.

READING NOOK

DURING OPENING HOURS

Town Hall Gallery and the Boroondara Library Service have teamed up to provide a curated collection of books relating to the exhibition.



FAMILY ACTIVITIES

DURING OPENING HOURS

Curious kids and their families are invited to enjoy two free art activities. Spot the different shapes, colours and images of the exhibition in a self-guided I Spy activity, and participate in an interactive installation created by local artist Angharad Neal-Williams, where visitors are invited to represent themselves in a mural of the Boroondara landscape in our Explore and Create area.

Free, all materials provided.

For more information and to make a booking, visit www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/arts or call 03 9278 4770.



COVER

William Breen, 'Wet Paint', 2020, gouache on paper, 47 x 70cm, image courtesy of the artist and Flinders Lane Gallery.

ABOVE

Dani McKenzie, 'That Little Italian Place on the Corner', 2022, oil and acrylic on linen, 107 x 152cm, image courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery. Private collection.

BACK COVER

Andrew Browne, 'A weed is a plant in the wrong place', 2021, oil and alkyd on linen, 92 x 64cm, image courtesy of the artist. Private collection.

CENTRE SPREAD

Mark Chu, detail from 'McDonald's Hawthorn', 2022, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 76cm, image courtesy of the artist.

INSIDE COVER

Robert Clinch, 'Fanfare for the Common Man', 2003, egg tempera on panel, 107 x 105cm, image courtesy of the artist and Lauraine Diggins Fine Art. Private collection.

OPENING HOURS

Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm
Sat, 12–4pm
Closed public holidays

HAWTHORN ARTS CENTRE

360 Burwood Road,
Hawthorn, Victoria
03 9278 4770

Town Hall Gallery is a member of the Public Galleries Association of Victoria and participates in the Cultural Gifts Program.