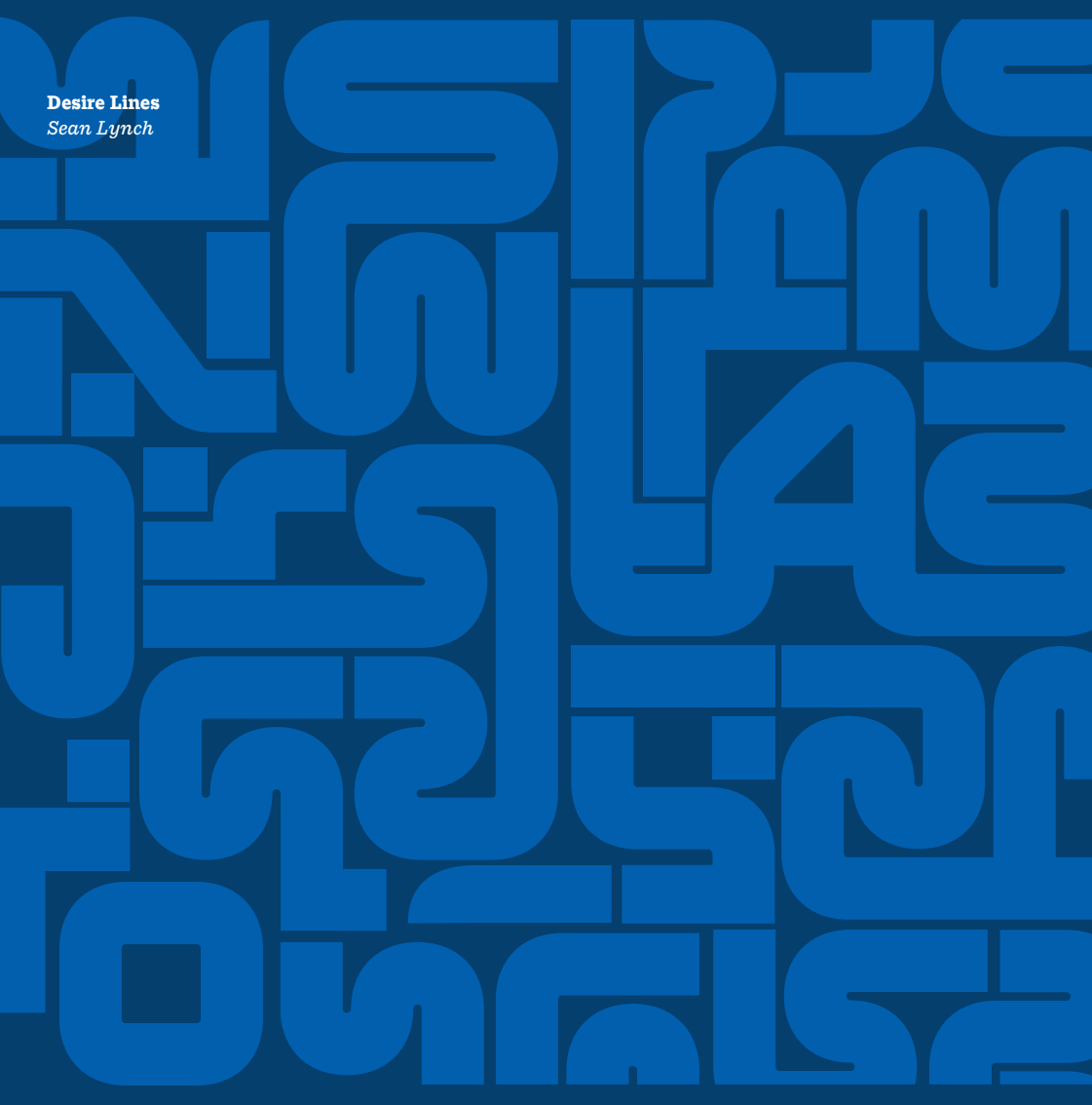


Desire Lines
Sean Lynch





DESIRE LIVES

Curated by Sean Lynch

Desire Lines is an exhibition that explores emotive and sentient relationships of city life. Titled after a term used in landscape architecture describing an improvised route or path made in defiance of an official roadway or designated direction, *Desire Lines* suggests a covert journey through the City of Melbourne's collection of 12,000 objects and artworks.

The lived city is far from rational; it is a place of curious encounters and beguiling coincidences, from a forgotten handprint in Melbourne's walk of fame and signage removed from an unknown city building to an apparently damaged architectural model and the history of public art and environmental campaigns.

The exhibition also presents the work of artists including Hossein Valamanesh, Laresa Kosloff, Sonia Kretschmar and Miles Howard-Wilks, artworks dedicated to finding new ways of seeing and understanding the complex motifs and layers of urban existence.

Melbourne is not a fixed and coherent entity, no matter how much it might try to shout about its monumentality. City life can be far from a voluntary and docile submission to structures of capitalist domination, the promised land that universal planning might try to persuade us to follow; it can also appear as an arrangement of tracks and interconnections, each drawn towards another in space, time and circumstance, caught in a flash encounter or sudden instance. Our collective joy, if we wish to harvest its full potential, is not to 'suffer' that shock or confusion, but to absorb it as an inevitable condition of existence and authentic dwelling.

A survey of all the kinds of feelings ever experienced in Melbourne and the stimuli that caused them is well beyond the comprehension of this exhibition, or indeed an accomplished psychologist or neuroscientist. Yet, an experimental argument might be developed on the basis of commentary and documentation, and in this the City of Melbourne's collection offers an optimistic perspective. 'I think, therefore I am' is in this sense annulled. Instead, 'I feel, therefore I am' is a guiding motto, a playful mechanism to emphasise the need of an individual looking to express themselves against the passivity of collective behaviour and the indiscriminately blasé attitudes of urban dwelling, something best described by German sociologist Georg Simmel at the start of the 20th century.

Attuned to this guiding light, a motif for *Desire Lines* is evident in the presentation of brass lettering, recently discovered in a plastic box at the collection's former storage depot on Little Bourke Street. These letters, some rendered in Helvetica font, once spelt 'CITY OF MELBOURNE' on a building, although exactly where or when no-one seems to know. For *Desire Lines*, the letters have been salvaged to free associate and form anagrams of new words and phrases – a hidden poem in the city's midst. In the chaos that ensues, we might find new versions of Melbourne, versions previously unbeknownst to us. A collection of images, contextual information and commentary on objects in the exhibition are accordingly featured in these pages to accompany the exhibition at City Gallery, Melbourne Town Hall.

Overleaf
Letters for signage
Maker and date unknown
brass
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection



BEEN MULTICOLOUR CYNIC
UNMOUNT BICYCLE COILER
BICYCLE CONTINUUM LORE
UNCURL BICYCLE EMOTION
UNTIMELY RUIN
OCCULTLY BIENNIUM CORE
BLIMEY UNCOOL CINCTURE
BLIMEY COUNCIL RECOUNT
BLIMEY COUNCIL TROUNCE
BUCOLIC COUNTRYMEN
TIMELY COUNCIL BOUNCER
BOUNCY CICERONI MULLET
INCLINE CLUBROOM CUTIE
CLUBROOM LICENCE UNITY
BE COUNCILMEN COURTLY
BUCOLIC CENTURY OILMEN
UNLIT BUCOLIC CEREMONY
BUY NUMERIC COLLECTION
COUNTRY MICE
TURBO OCULI INCLEMENCY
BE CLERIC MUTINY UNCOOL
UNTIMELY CLUB COERCION
BLOOMY UNICENTRIC CLUE
CYCLE CONTINUUM
COLONY CUBICLE MINUTER
CRUMBLY CINE ELOCUTION
NICE CRUMBLY ELOCUTION
CROON UNTIMELY CUBICLE
UNECONOMIC RELIC
MOTLEY CUBICLE UNICORN
OUTNUMBER CYCLONIC LIE
COMELY COUNCIL TRIBUNE
COMELY COUNCIL TURBINE



Laresa Kosloff's *Stock Exchange* was the artist's first foray into Super 8 filmmaking, in 1998. Here, she takes up the story:

I took an old camera into the Melbourne Stock Exchange building. I prepared the camera in the toilets and jumped in the glass elevator to film the internal facade of the building. The bottom level of the building is publicly accessible; however, beyond this is the domain of corporate workers. I wasn't meant to be in the lift. I wanted to make a beautiful film despite the impersonal corporate architecture. Security guards tried to pursue me at the time, so I swapped from one lift to another to avoid them. You can see this in the film as the vantage point shifts. It was like a game of cat and mouse.¹

St Kilda Rd was filmed 12 years later, capturing a group of Parkour practitioners warming up in the vicinity of Inge King's monumental 1974 sculpture *Forward Surge*, at Southbank. Parkour is an athletic discipline in which participants attempt to get from point A to point B in the fastest and most efficient manner possible, often performing gymnastic manoeuvres along the way. Running, climbing, swinging, vaulting, jumping or rolling might all occur in navigating an urban space, moving around, across, over and under its features. Parkour provides a novel way of interacting with the urban environment, challenging the embodiment and meaning of metropolitan life. Instructor Andi Kalteis reveals in his 2006 'how-to' DVD that 'Parkour also influences one's thought processes by enhancing self-confidence and critical thinking skills that allow one to overcome everyday physical and mental obstacles.'²

The joy of such flamboyant urban flâneurism is a distant concept in Sonia Kretschmar's 1992 poster, part of a series commissioned by the City of Melbourne that explores environmental themes. Kretschmar took noise pollution as a topic, and, with a tight deadline, set about composing an image of a woman behind a window, peering out as aggressive mechanical and machine sounds swirl around her. An enormous lawnmower and a powered-up speedboat are prominent, and claustrophobic text encircles the scene: 'where are you going? what are you doing? around + around + this buzzing noise inside

Opposite top

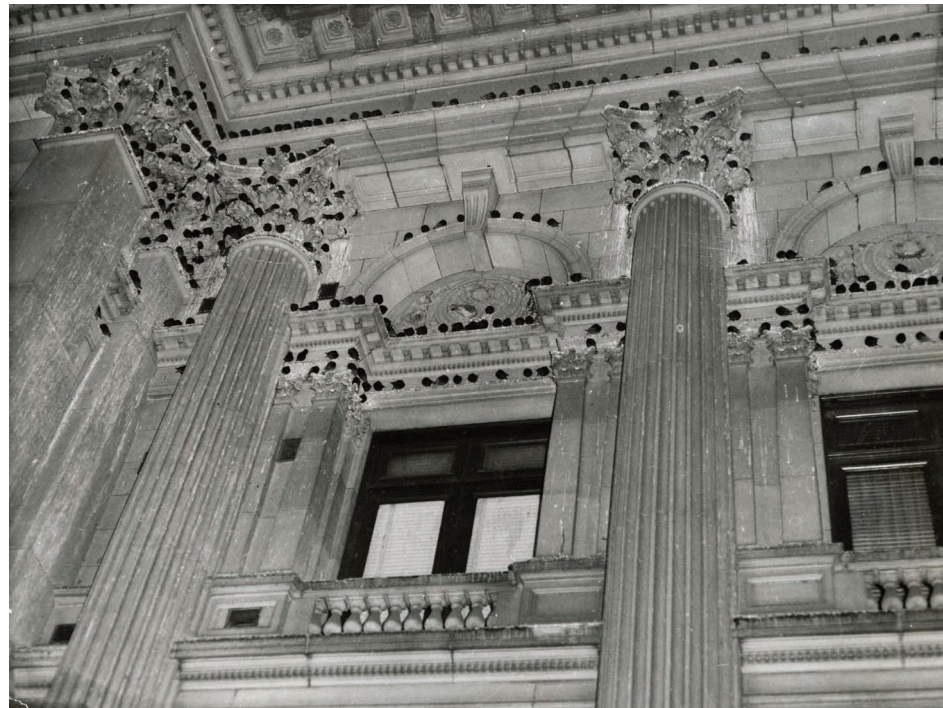
Laresa Kosloff
St Kilda Rd (still), 2010
digitised Super 8 (silent), 1/3
1:56 mins
purchased 2016
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection
© the artist and Sutton
Gallery

Opposite bottom

Laresa Kosloff
Stock Exchange (still), 1998
digitised Super 8 (silent), 2/3
2:22 mins
purchased 2016
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection
© the artist and Sutton
Gallery

¹ Laresa Kosloff, email to author, 28 October 2022.

² Andreas Kalteis, *Parkour Journeys - Training with Andi* (DVD), 2006.



Above and opposite
 Unknown photographer
 Images of birds roosting
 on the Town Hall, c. 1960
 photographs
 City of Melbourne
 Art and Heritage

Opposite

Unknown artist
Untitled drawing
ink on paper
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

4

Stephen Burke, in Sean Lynch, *A Blow by Blow Account of Stonecarving in Oxford*, Modern Art Oxford, 2014, p. 77.

basket by her nurse, taken and placed at her monument. So that they might remain longer, as they were exposed to the weather, the nurse covered the basket with a tile. As it happened the basket was placed upon the root of an acanthus. At springtime the acanthus, pressed down by the weight of the nurse's offering, put forth leaves and shoots. They grew up the sides of the basket and, being pressed down at the angles by the force of the weight of the tile, were compelled to form the curves of volutes at the extreme parts. Just then sculptor Callimachus, known for the refinement and delicacy of his artistic work, passed by the tomb and observed the basket with the tender young leaves growing round it. Delighted with the novel style and form, he carved some capitals after that pattern for the Corinthians.⁴

A surreal sketch illustrates antagonism towards co-habitation with other life forms we cannot control. It shows what appear to be two European wasps, a now dominant non-native species in Australia, inside a rubbish bin playing cards. No records or accession information can be found about the drawing, or when and why it was made. The image might have been part of a council waste-management campaign, reminding people to put the lid on their garbage, preventing wasps getting in.

European wasps arrived in Australia when hibernating queens were unintentionally stowed in ships and produce from North Africa, Asia or Europe. They were first seen around Melbourne in 1977. Over the next five years they established themselves throughout the greater urban area and spread to much of Victoria. They are more aggressive than their Australian counterparts and keen to be around humans, who supply plentiful food and drink, particularly meat and things of a sweet variety. Some people can suffer life-threatening symptoms from a sting, such as anaphylactic shock. Considered a scavenger and pest, the European wasp is physically like many of Australia's native species, making it difficult to discern its population growth.

In the sketch, it appears as if the wasps are playing some variety of the card game Rummy. While initially appearing humorous, the association of the wasps



with human activities such as card playing brings uncomfortable illusions to the derogatory expression and toxic deployment of the word 'swarm' in reference to human migration, the refugee system and the bio-politics of Australia's visa system. Perhaps such allusions, whether intentional or not, might have caused the removal of the concept from the campaign.

The City of Melbourne holds a collection of more than 40 concrete casts, which once made up Melbourne's Celebrity Wall. Modestly akin to Hollywood's Walk of Fame, the wall was established at McEwan's Hardware in the city centre in 1972, and for more than two decades it saw impressions of actors, racing-car drivers, TV personalities and professional athletes well known in Australia enshrined in concrete for posterity. Criteria for admittance onto the wall seemed to vary over the years: NASA astronaut Gordon Cooper joined the club in 1975, while former premier of Victoria Dick Hamer got in on the act in 1990.

The wall's presence on Bourke Street no doubt suggested Melbourne as a cosmopolitan city full of famous personalities and popular high-achievers. Crowds and photojournalists would typically gather at the store, waiting for the latest incumbent to arrive and plunge two hands into the wet concrete, the impression of which was later hung upright on the wall, accompanied by a plaque. Some chosen for the honour decided to adopt an alternative format to more accurately reflect their public persona or path in life. Variety entertainer Barry Crocker placed his foot rather than hand in the concrete, with the accompany plaque coyly noting that he 'PUT HIS FOOT IN IT FRIDAY 6TH OCTOBER 1972'. Piping Lane, 1972's Melbourne Cup winner, featured with an actual horseshoe set into wet concrete. Champion boxer Lionel Rose punched in his clenched left fist into the concrete rather than adopting the more typical open palm approach.

Judging by the casts' differing consistencies of concrete mix, a wide range of mixtures, brands and products were used over the two decades of the venture, presenting various finishes. One presumes these materials, along with the necessary timber formwork, trowels and wall fixings, were all sourced directly in store, providing a history of the kinds of products available at McEwan's Bourke



Street premises before it was bought out by retail giant and DIY superstore Bunnings in 1993.

One cast in the collection has no identity attached. Appearing in a pale concrete mix, the handprint sits below a spherical indentation. It could have been a trial run by a shop assistant before someone famous arrived, or it could compare to the anonymous markings oft seen in a newly poured concrete footpath on the street. As the perennial underachiever, it more than deserves a place in *Desire Lines*, a moment seemingly close to societal greatness now forgotten.

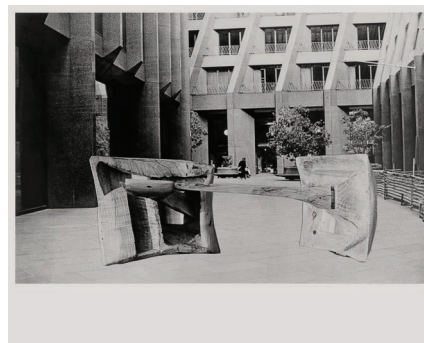
Above
Handprint
(subject unknown)
c. 1972-92
cast concrete
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection



A late 1990s architectural model of City Square, a site near City Gallery, home of *Desire Lines*, shows the plans for the Westin hotel and redesign of the plaza space beside it. A miniscule representation of the 1865 monument to Irishman Robert O'Hara Burke and English-born William John Wills features the infamous leaders of the doomed survey expedition to figure out the geographic puzzle of Australia's interior. Unsuccessfully looking for an inland sea, they died in the wilderness in one of the most recited episodes of the country's history. Their representation in the monument – since sited in various locations throughout Melbourne – has often faced criticism for its lack of sculptural nuance, with strangely elongated necks seen on both men. This is not evident in the City Square model, with both men decapitated from the shoulders up. It is unknown if this was a deliberate act or an accident that might have occurred during transport and storage. Yet, these headless renditions are a bizarrely appropriate metaphor for the confusion and the misdirected journey that led to the deaths of Burke and Wills, and their martyrdom by the state. Today, the actual monument remains in storage, out of public view following its removal in 2017 to facilitate building a new train station on the site.

Left and inset
 City Square model, c. 1997
 Architectural Models Pty Ltd
 (Alan W. Chandler)
 mixed media
 City of Melbourne
 Art and Heritage Collection





5
Ken Scarlett, *Sculpture for Melbourne*, press release, Gryphon Gallery, Melbourne, 1986.

Found last summer in a folder labelled 'Lost Works', a collection of photographs shows a series of sculptures, each seemingly placed around Melbourne city centre. With no information featured in the collection database, curatorial research by Cressida Goddard and Amelia Dowling ensued; they identified the images as part of a series of exhibitions collectively entitled *Sculpture for Melbourne*, held at the now defunct Gryphon Gallery in the summer of 1986. Contributing artists included Chris Beecroft, Geoffrey Bartlett, David Jensz, Gary Cumming, Wendy Teakel and Dan Wollmering, who share an expressionistic approach to large-scale assemblage work in metal, stone and wood. Their artworks are apparently sited in corporate plazas, on a helicopter landing pontoon on the Yarra and in the ubiquitous office boardrooms and foyers of the CBD. Yet, close examination of the photographs reveals the sculptures' placement has been made through expert darkroom composition, using documentation of the artists' maquettes printed on top of location photographs taken around the city.

From today's vantage point, it is hard to imagine any of the works being realised: many of the pieces appear dangerous to encounter, with sharp edges, spikey points, loose stones and cavernous nooks and crannies prominent, presenting a generally destabilised aesthetic that would find little favour in contemporary

public art and its health and safety guidelines. In many ways, curator Ken Scarlett pre-empted this clash of artistic forms and beliefs in the exhibition press release, noting:

The centre of Melbourne is laid out in a very logical grid of straight roads at right angles – convenient, but visually boring! We need some major pieces of sculpture to act as focal points, as areas of visual surprise in an otherwise predictable city.⁵

Shaking off the mantle of 19th-century art and 'bronze figures of explorers long since dead', Scarlett considered the show as promoting avant-garde and progressive art of the time: 'I feel certain that the people of Melbourne can be brought to the point where they accept the fact that they are living in the 20th century'. Such sculptural optimism should today be commended, especially in light of how much public art of recent decades has offended and frightened the public it purports to serve (many will place Ron Robertson-Swann's 1980 *Vault* in this context, a piece today seen outside the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, in Southbank). Could this be a characteristic worth accentuating in commissioning contemporary public art, pushing thrills and unpredictable encounters instead of bland conformity?

Opposite

Left

Geoffrey Bartlett
Left Turn Number 2
1986

City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

Right

David Jensz
Title unknown, c. 1986
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

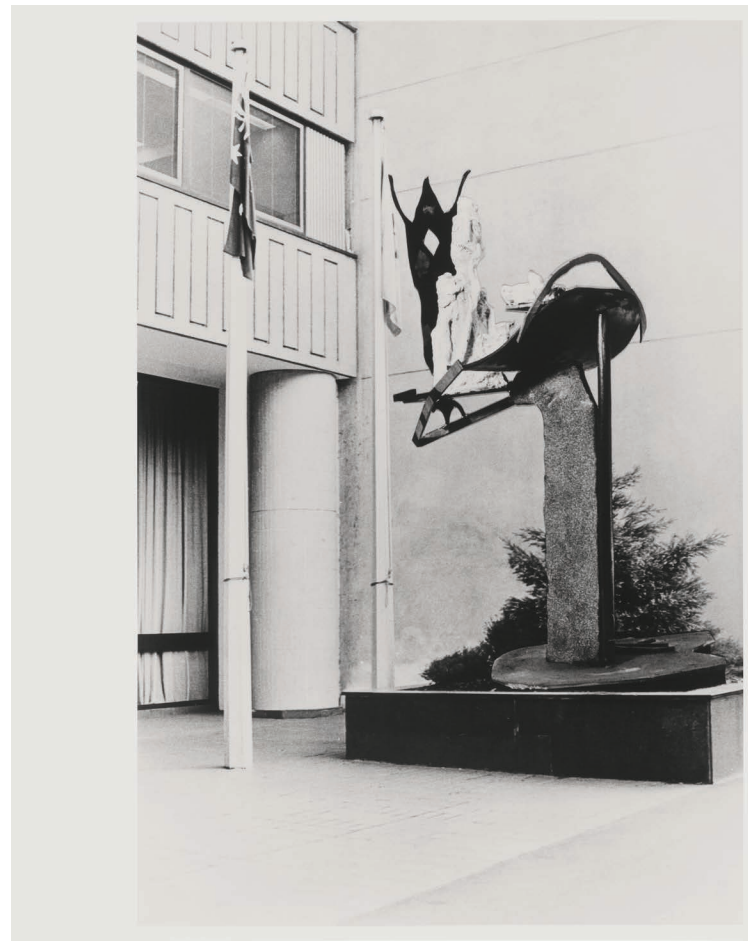
Above

Left

Artist and title unknown
c. 1986
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

Right

Artist and title unknown
c. 1986
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection



Opposite
Geoffrey Bartlett
Title unknown, c. 1986
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

Left
Artist and title unknown
c. 1986
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection



The history of Hossein Valamanesh's large-scale artwork *Faultline* is a prominent part of *Desire Lines*, and over the last few years it has been an important part of my own introduction to Melbourne's public art. Originally located at Southbank in 1996, *Faultline* featured a structure resembling a dilapidated jetty leading to a site onshore where a ruined sandstone building, sparse vegetation, a boat overflowing with water and two bronze casts of the artist could be encountered. This scene is sketched out in an architectural maquette presented in *Desire Lines*. The complex arrangement points to Valamanesh's interests in migration, memory and displacement, key themes seen in many of his (and Angela Valamanesh's) artworks following his arrival in Australia from Iran in the 1970s.

Critic Paul Carter considered the work as both a rebuttal to the rapid urban redevelopment seen throughout Melbourne and a subtle challenge to the process of commissioning art in public space, noting that *Faultline* has:

no redemptive message, one that asserts the importance of an institutional practice or place, a social heritage, or an historic event, which it is in the interests of the commissioning party to strengthen ... [I]t would have been possible to design a more engaging public artwork for this passage way. An act of carnivalesque recuperation could have been attempted. A cheerful attempt to bridge the dreary space between the twin phantasmagorias of Southbank shops and restaurants and the casino that animated the site might have been made. *Faultline's* lack of clamour, its generic allusion to the migrant's arrival, and to the perennial cleavage between dreams and realities, expected profits and losses, becomes, in this context, a conscious strategy of disillusionment. One comes across the work as something left over from another history, as the debris of a different collective imagining, as the slow fuse of another possibility still burning on the water's lip.⁶

While many key elements of the sculpture were removed in the 2000s and placed in storage, several have reappeared in consultation with Valamanesh as part of *Distant Things Appear Suddenly Near*, a public artwork I made

Opposite

Hossein Valamanesh
Faultline maquette, 1993
mixed media
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

6

Paul Carter, in *Hossein Valamanesh: A Survey*,
Art Gallery of South
Australia, Adelaide
2001, p. 40.

Opposite

City of Melbourne
Engineering Branch
Photo File 2, c. 1958–64
bound paper and
photographs
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

7

Roland Barthes,
*The Eiffel Tower and
Other Mythologies*,
Hill and Wang, New York,
1979, p. 14.

for University Square, Carlton, in 2021. This new artwork was, in turn, greatly influenced by *Faultline's* composition, themes and history, acknowledging that art in public places is not only a shared experience for those who encounter it when completed but also as a way of finding artistic kinship and generational understandings of the places and spaces we creatively inhabit.

A selection of photographs associatively explores ways of being in and with the cityscape. In a pragmatic manner, safety shoes, presumably to be worn by City of Melbourne employees, are tested by placing weights on them to consider the possibilities of work injuries and tripping – nobody wants to fall from grace. One could jovially speculate that such fear of the act of walking might have influenced the infamous late 1950s ‘windscreen survey’, during which two city officials, Shaw and Davey, marked areas of Carlton and Fitzroy for clearance without getting out of their car. John McHutchison’s late 1970s photograph of men staring through windows in building-site hoardings to watch construction at Flagstaff Station is described in the collection database as a scene ‘reminiscent of a public pissoir or a peep show’. The men are both seeing and being seen, somehow recalling French critic Roland Barthes’s opinion about being on top of the Eiffel Tower. Once there, Barthes observed it as ‘the only place in Paris where I don’t have to see it ... [O]ne can feel oneself cut off from the world and yet the owner of a world’.⁷ In another photograph, a young boy sells periscopes on the street to help get a view over the crowd during the Queen of England’s visit in 1954. In their entirety, this assemblage of photographs points to a desire to escape the city’s power structures that restrain one’s actions and to find time aplenty for distraction and looking.

Such freedoms are also seen in two artworks made with gouache and ink on paper by Miles Howard-Wilks in 2015. Trains have appeared as a central theme in many of his paintings and ceramic works since the 1990s, from his interest in heritage trains to contemporary tunnel-boring machines for creating the Metro Tunnel. Howard-Wilks never works with reference material when making these works in his studio; everything is drawn from his memories and observations of the city. Accordingly, Melbourne’s new underground system

INDUSTRIAL SAFETY SHOES

8



Safety shoes as used at
Engineering Work shops,
Dymon Road.

Showing demonstration of
weights on industrial safety
shoes.





Opposite
John McHutchison
Men at Hoarding Windows,
Flagstaff Station, c. 1980
photograph
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

Above
Mark Strizic
Rule Britannia, 1954
photograph
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection



Above
Miles Howard-Wilks
Untitled, 2011
gouache and ink on paper
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection

Opposite
Miles Howard-Wilks
Flinders Street, 2015
gouache and ink on paper
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage Collection



appears as a complex compositional space, bringing past and future together; figures that might have once featured in a 19th-century promenade or on a leisurely stroll around the city on a late-20th-century weekend are swiftly transposed to a future 21st century. These characters are accompanied by, or adopt dress codes inspired by, magpies, another motif seen in many of Howard-Wilks's paintings. As the figures look on, trains meander below the city in lucid, dreamlike landscapes of a layered subterranean world. Despite the relentless progress, those depicted appear nonplussed by the simultaneousness of urban transformation and its accelerated tempo. Their eyes are turned inwards, not looking to the future and its eternal promise of progress but to the pleasure and hope in imagining a city that's more than the sum of its parts.

