



Spotlight

people, arts & heritage

The orphan of Sunset Strip

The art of Anthony Tolhurst

Anthony Tolhurst at his Sunset Strip shack. In the background is the sculpture, 'America's Response' - a work reflecting on the absurd reaction of the US to the 9/11 attack, which was to invade Iraq, the murderous justification for which was knowingly false.
Full story inside.

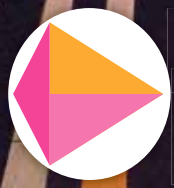
PICTURE: Dan Schulz

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Part of a large landscape work depicting a flood plain in Queensland.

PICTURES: Dan Schulz

The orphan of Sunset Strip

The art of Anthony Tolhurst



Anthony's budgie cage, a graphic sculpture he has been working on for years, reminiscent of the early modernist De Stijl architecture movement.

PICTURES: Dan Schulz

Dan Schulz

In the small village of Sunset Strip, there is a sky-blue shack on the Menindee lakefront, and a collection of rusted steel sculptures stand in the front yard, banding together like a platoon of Ned Kellys. There is a steel spiderweb, a bizarre 'stop sign' and a title revealing the name of the property, 'Ant's Nest'. This is the residence of artist Anthony Tolhurst who has lived at Sunset Strip since 2007.

Anthony is a renegade and makes no apologies for his anti-establishment stance on politics, society and art. His thoughts meander with reflections on life, analysis of history and politics, and he detests the rampant corruption of culture that has left in its wake a hubris of trash and bad ideas. This is how he begins to describe the artistic process and the way he draws lessons and anecdotes for the creation of art. "Art is supposed to tell people something, especially about mankind," he said.

"Man hasn't changed since the days of the bible. The feelings inside men have not changed. We're still the same stupid animal. We don't learn from history. We forget things. We don't see."

Anthony describes a gluttonous and imbecile world on the brink of collapse, riddled with conspiracies and moral decline, but as he retrieves his life work from among sheets of acid-free paper stored in a dusty shed, another world emerges. His work is made of anodized metal which he learned to craft from his days working in a factory. Silvers, golds, blacks, bronze, pinks and copper designs

cut by hand with extreme precision and composition, difficult to capture in any photograph because of the way light moves across the surfaces, reflecting the space around it.

"The material is interactive. You could say this is all silver but it's not. Each piece is a different colour because it came from a different piece of anodized metal. That's what I love about using this material because you have to observe the light when you cut them and lay them down."

These works tell stories of an organised and perfect world that exists beyond the chaos that surrounds his Sunset Strip shack. Anthony deploys references from his life and his thoughts on the meaning of existence; planets are held in suspended space by the mysterious force of gravity; flooded landscapes describe the force of the natural world and the arrogance of humanity to build on flood plains; televisions representing the "super-highway of information" float on a dry Menindee lake, a full moon hides behind a tree trunk and is reflected as a red orb in an abandoned TV...

"I was only nine years old when Apollo 8 took photographs of the earth," he said as he retrieved a very large work of tiled blacks and silvers, with two circular tiles revolving around one another, blue representing the earth and another a spaceship.

"This was the first time humans had seen the planet from a quarter-million miles away and that blew me away then. It was an amazing photograph and I've never forgotten it. This work is called 'The Earth Hangs On Nothing'."

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For Anthony, colour is everything. “We know the Vietnam war because of the colour shots,” he explains, “compare those to the WWII stuff, which we think of as black and white. Colour helped us to imagine being in those places. Imagine the living daylight reality of war, bloody bombs are going off, arms and legs and heads are going everywhere. F*ck that.”

Anthony studied applied graphics for ten years, working in a factory in the daytime and studying design at night school. However, Anthony was prone to moving around, suggesting this had something to do with his upbringing as the son of a military man.

“My father was in the air force and we moved every three years. That was our life. I’ve had three serious relationships, married twice and they all lasted three years so it must have had some sort of effect.”

Sunset Strip was a place where Anthony could escape the incessant noise of the world, “30 years ago after the last relationship, I thought, well, there must be something wrong with me, so I decided no more - I can’t live with anyone and I like it that way. I like living alone. I’m free to do what I want when I want and I’m not prepared to compromise.”

Some of his work is directly political such as the sculpture, ‘America’s



Anthony Tolhurst uses anodized metal to create graphical works of landscapes and scenes.

“

...Man hasn’t changed since the days of the bible. The feelings inside men have not changed. We’re still the same stupid animal. We don’t learn from history.

Response’, made of rusted steel - “rust never sleeps” - the materials for which he had collected from the Sunset Strip tip, a work reflecting on the absurd reaction of the US to the 9/11 attack, which was to invade Iraq, the murderous justification for which was knowingly false.

Anthony looks at this sculpture every morning from his armchair - a rusted stealth bomber intersecting two columns beside a human skull - a reminder, “America is no better than the Nazis... The victors write our history books.”

Opposite ‘America’s Response’, on the other side of his armchair is his budgie cage, a graphic sculpture he has been working on for years, reminiscence of the early modernist De Stijl architecture movement, which used architectural elements; frames, crossbeams, panels and materials to create layered graphical images of colour and shape. It is the sculptural equivalent of a Mondrian painting, housing his beloved budgies, an architectural wonder covered in bird shit and feathers. There are other sculptures made of car parts and gardens of ceramics in his yard. Anthony’s house looks like it has landed from a Thomas Pynchon novel, set in a Californian desert art collective with sculptures made of objects discarded by a too-rapidly transforming consumerist culture, but Anthony’s world is also kind and grounded by a deep fascination with humanity and the humour of existence. “If you can’t laugh,” he noted, “you’re in deep shit.”

When Anthony first arrived at Sunset Strip, he took down the pedestrian street signs outside the hall, which depict a mother leading a child to symbolise it is a shared road. Anthony had carefully added to the sign; a small dog and a duck.

“I took them down in broad daylight, painted them and put them back up. Not many people notice them because no



Anthony Tolhurst at his Sunset Strip shack.

PICTURES: Dan Schulz



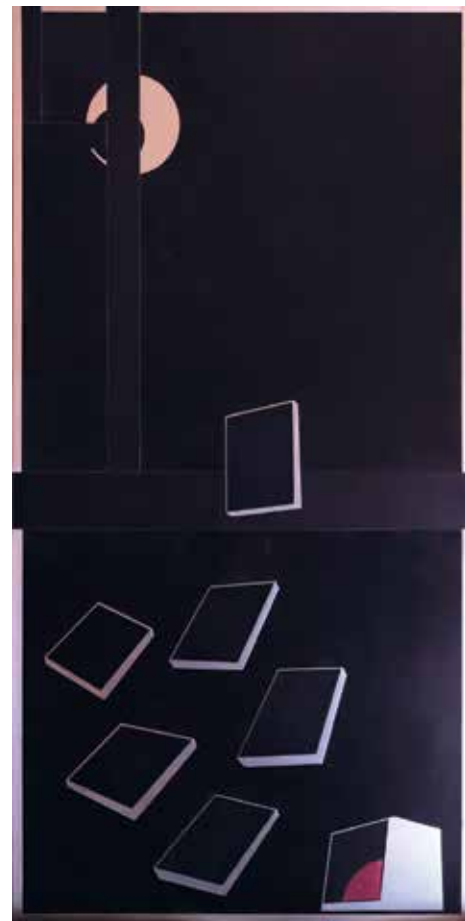
Sydney by Anthony Tolhurst.

one looks. People live by signs and they just assume it’s something they’ve seen before. People don’t see.”

The dog and duck are still there today, entirely invisible to most passersby because of the precision of his graphics. However, to the odd person who does notice, it speaks to the humour and idiosyncrasy of Sunset Strip and the people that live there, as well as a warning: don’t become complacent.

The abundance of knowledge, time and discipline in Anthony’s work is obvious and he laments the demise of skill-based crafts, “The current art world is not real art, it’s conceptual, intellectual, elitist bullshit. There’s no skill involved at all. If you take something that was painted in the Renaissance - now that’s skill - that’s art.”

In each of his works there is an “orphan,” an anomaly in the pattern or design which represents the artist himself, a signature of his outsider attitude in everything he does. This unique body of work is like no other being produced in the Far West and probably deserves to be seen and experienced, but Anthony is content with not having exhibited it and loathes the financial aspect of the art world. His practice is largely a private affair, his work kept safe from a world that compulsively destroys what is beautiful and real.



A work made of anodized metal depicting the Menindee Lake when it was dry and a series of screen representing the “superhighway of information”.