

A bird hunt, and top spots to admire

There are surprises all around us if you know where to look, writes Julie Power

Sitting on the stoop of a colonial building on Sydney's Bridge Street, a man enjoying the sun looks up. He hadn't realised that one of British artist Tracey Emin's handmade bronze birds she calls "angels of this earth" was looking down on him.

"Oh, that's lovely," he said. If he'd looked in the other direction, he would've found another of Emin's loneliness-busting birds that perch in secret locations across Sydney's Bridge Street and Grosvenor Street.

Emin's work, *The Distance of Your Heart*, is one of dozens of major new permanent works installed in the city – often as part of major building projects – in the past decade. All up, the city has more than 250 public artworks, including fountains and sculptures, plus dozens of temporary works.

Despite various bird hunts, nobody has found all of Emin's 68 handmade and life-size birds that she cast in bronze. The location of each is a secret, a surprising gift to anyone who finds one on an awning or street light.

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore says public art adds depth and texture to the city, engaging and stimulating the public, sometimes challenging preconceptions.

The public wanted more art in the city but it hadn't always been easy, said Moore, alluding to the controversy over public artworks like *Cloud Arch* at Town Hall that was benched indefinitely. "For a long time whenever we announced public art projects a conga line of shock jocks and tabloid commentators would decry the investment as a misuse of public money," said Moore.

Barbara Flynn, the curatorial adviser to the City of Sydney from 2013 to 2020, wrote individual letters to 800 leading Australian and international artists, including Emin, asking them to be part of the transformation of Sydney ahead of the implementation of light rail in George Street. So many responded that it crashed the council's portal.

Flynn says Moore's 18-year tenure has resulted in a legacy of permanent public art unique to Sydney, partly due to the requirement by council that a percentage of the budget of large



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projects is dedicated to public art.

Described by insiders as the go-to person for art on a grand scale, Flynn has also worked with architects, developers and builders behind some of Sydney's biggest projects, including Barangaroo Delivery Authority and Lendlease, and AMP Capital on Quay Quarter's redevelopment.

Flynn often gives private and public tours of Sydney's best public art, including with Museums of History NSW (formerly Sydney Living Museum). "None of these completed works are superficial, none of them is

decorative," she says of the artworks that are accessible to the public day and night. "These are real works of art, inserted into the city with great effort."

Here's Flynn's guide for a do-it-yourself tour with the stories behind some of Sydney's newest public art.

1. I STAY (NGAYANGALAWA)
BY JENNY HOLZER
8 Chifley Square

Tourists often mistake Holzer's giant work *I STAY* (Ngayangalawa) on a

Public arts consultant Barbara Flynn, with the work by artist Barkandji Elder Uncle Badger Bates at Yirranma Place, Darlinghurst. Photos: Janie Barrett, Mark Pokorny, Adam Mork, Brett Boardman, Katherine Griffiths



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Forgotten Songs, featuring 186 birdcages suspended above Angel Place. Originally temporary, the work is now permanent.

19-metre four-side column on the side of 8 Chifley Square as a news ticker.

Like news, it streams night and day. But it features extracts of songs, poems and writing by dozens of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. These include Bennelong's 1796 letter to Governor Phillips to works by Indigenous playwright Jack Davis and author Tara June Winch.

Holzer said, "The first-person voice in much of the writing makes the artwork alive and immediate, accessible to many".

The writing by Indigenous authors illustrated that what happened to individuals and groups, happened to society. The themes, such as love and survival, were universal.

Flynn says, "[Public art] actually can change your life. And I think that's really fascinating."

As a teenager in Buffalo, New York, Flynn recalled being moved by the 12-metre-high sculpture by American artist Mark di Suvero called *Are Years What?* (for Marianne Moore).

"It was a big and red, and standing in front of a classical building. It was such a disconnect. It was so clearly work done by an artist by who was alive."

Holzer may be an American conceptual artist, but *I stay* could only be in Sydney. "These are Aboriginal essays, authors, poets," says Flynn. "You can't take the work and separate it from its site without it completely losing its meaning."

Developing artworks like Holzer's can cost millions and take three to eight years from the artist being selected to the work being installed. They also involve detailed maintenance plans.

Sydney's public art in architecture



6 SPARKLING POND, BOLD-COLOURED GROOVE & TENDER FIRE



ROOF FOR STRAY THOUGHTS 4



Other sites

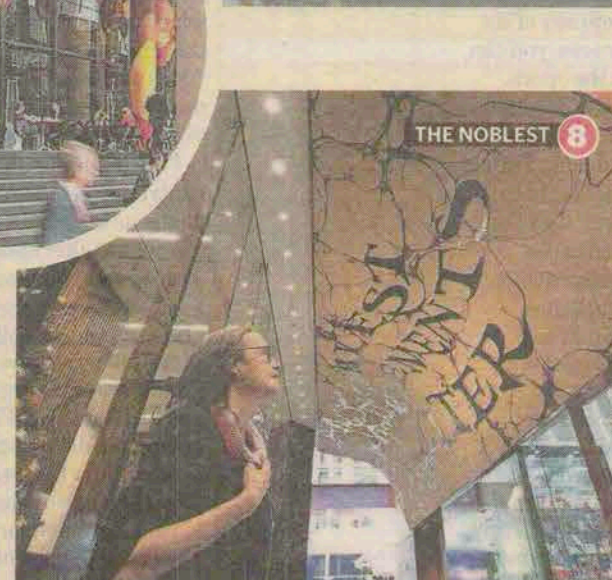
7. Big Nest in Sydney by Tadashi Kawamata, facade of The Mark (27-storey residential tower at the south-eastern corner of Central Park, facing the intersection of Carlton Street, Kensington Street and Outram Street)

8. The Noblest by Agatha Gothe-Snape, Greenland Centre (Greenland Australia/BVN)

9. Day In Day Out by James Angus, One Bligh Street (DEXUS Property Group, DEXUS Wholesale Property and Cbus Property Group/Ingenhoven and Architectus)



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THE NOBLEST 8

2. DISTANCE OF YOUR HEART
BY TRACEY EMIN
Macquarie Place Park, Bridge Street

British artist Emin's work about migration, loneliness, love and longing starts with a single bird sitting on the rim of a bird bath she made for Macquarie Place Park.

It is steps away from Sydney's oldest surviving monument, Francis Greenway's 1818 *Obelisk of Distances*.

Emin said: "Just as the obelisk measured the distances of colonial roads and landmarks, my artwork will measure the distance of my heart."

Flynn said seeing the birds changes people's perception of the city.

"Art doesn't have to be monumental," said Flynn, while sitting on a bench with one of the bronze birds near her feet.

Birds loom large, too, for the lord mayor. One of Moore's favourite art works in the city was *Forgotten Songs*, featuring 186 birdcages suspended above Angel Place that play the forgotten songs of those birds that once lived around the Tank Stream. Originally temporary, the work is now permanent, hanging in the lanes near the City Recital Hall.

3. YIRRANMA PLACE GATES
BY BADGER BATES
262 Liverpool Street, Darlinghurst

Barkandji man William Brian "Badger" Bates is better known for his works on lino hanging in the Art Gallery of NSW and other collections around Australia.

He'd never tried blacksmithing before making the new gates for the Yirranma Place, a former Church of Christ, under the lights of the installation.

Scientist – now the headquarters of the Ramsay Foundation.

Flynn likes to encourage artists who usually work in one medium to try another because the result can be unexpected, exciting and new for the public and the artist.

Bates worked with industrial blacksmith Matt Mewborn at Eveleigh Railway Yards to turn his art into steelwork.

Three large gates, each three metres high, tell the story of the Seven Sisters and the rainbow serpent. He has also covered the ceiling inside with a mural showing an Indigenous constellation, the Emu.

4. ROOF FOR STRAY THOUGHTS
BY OLAFUR ELIASSON
Quay Quarter Tower

One of the city's newest permanent works, Danish artist Olafur Eliasson's massive yellow sculpture is located in the public plaza of the new award-winning AMP Capital building by Danish architects 3XN and Sydney-based BVN.

Eliasson says its underlying structure is composed of arcs that reflect the scale of the architecture and of the human body – the largest arc could encircle the full height of the tower; the smallest, the height of a visitor.

5. REMEMBERING ARABANOO
BY JONATHAN JONES
Quay Quarter Lanes

The Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones' five-part work was installed at Quay Quarter Lanes where the first Government House once stood. Arabanoo succumbed to smallpox as a result of first contact with European settlers and, when he died, he was buried on the site.

Jones said that in a "misguided and arguably cruel practice, Arabanoo was captured and cajoled to speak Eora language words as a means for the early settlers of Sydney Cove to learn about Aboriginal culture."

Flynn said she is always impressed by the generosity of artists who often deliver more than they promised. Instead of delivering one work, Jones delivered five. These include *guara* (flags) with Eora words that Arabanoo taught early settlers; *betunjigo* (oysters), made from bronze and embedded in the high tide point of an old building on site; and *bengadee* (ornament), a British handcraft with feathers representing his imprisonment. For the fourth, *magora* (fish) lined in bronze were placed in bluestone pavers to represent the fish that once swam there and sustained the local Indigenous population.

6. SPARKLING POND, BOLD-COLOURED GROOVE & TENDER FIRE
BY PILOTTI RIST
Park Lane, Central Park residential development, Chippendale

Located in the undercroft space of the Park Lane building, Rist's work switches on at sunset and plays until 11pm. During the day, coloured panels nearby add interest.

Rist wanted to use the space to bring people together. "Under the lights people can meet, dance and speak."

One of Flynn's best memories was watching a group of young people dancing like children in "utter delight" under the lights of the installation.

Public works: all the world's a gallery

COMMENT
Clover Moore
Lord Mayor
of Sydney



Art plays an enormous part in the life of any great city. At a time in which cities risk becoming homogenised, public art can enrich and reflect identity while creating opportunities to navigate and engage with public space in unexpected ways.

In Sydney, the community has long called for more public art, and we have developed a track record of delivering iconic and engaging works. But it's not always been easy.

For a long time, whenever we announced public art projects shock jocks and tabloid commentators

would line up to decry the investment. Now developers include public art in their projects as a matter of course given the clear benefit to our built environment. That's partly due to council's requirement that developers deliver public artworks as a condition of consent on projects greater than \$10 million.

Public art can also divide opinion. Council recently recommitted to the vision of a major civic plaza at Town Hall and while it won't happen overnight – city-building takes time – we're resolved to deliver it in the long term and I'm hopeful that a suitably iconic artwork, such as Junya Ishigami's *Cloud Arch*, can be incorporated in that setting.

The city's public art program provides opportunities for artists

to present ideas that enliven our streets and help workers, residents and visitors see their city in a new light. Walk down George Street and notice *Youngsters*, by Caroline Rothwell, which subverts the monumental traditions of bronze statuary and challenges stereotypes of civic art by reminding us that cities are places for children. Or look up in Angel Place to see *Forgotten Songs*, by Michael Thomas Hill, 180 cages playing birdsong from species that lived here prior to the arrival of Europeans, layering history in the heart of our urban environment.

An important part of this work is our Eora Journey program, which celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, culture and heritage through public art projects.

Guided by curator Hetti Perkins, we are seeking to re-balance successive Australian governments' focus, at all levels, on memorialising colonial history while largely ignoring First Nations history.

We negotiate with developers to deliver this public benefit wherever possible. Late last year we unveiled a stunning artwork designed by Aboriginal artist Daniel Boyd and acclaimed architect Sir David Adjaye that was a key component of the planning agreement between the City and Lendlease for development at 180 George Street.

Part of our commitment to a city with a beating creative heart is to give as many people as possible greater access to culture and public art is one of the most accessible and visible types of expression there is.