

Over the last year or so of Emma and I talking about the concept for this show, we have discussed many shared memories - recent and not - of experiencing Perth's embracing of lit structures. Childhoods and formative years that were bathed in coloured hues of light. I think its something to do with growing up in the 90's where for a long period of time minimalist almost new wave pop clean aesthetics framed the way we thought, the things we saw and the actions we took. Set against the complete dichotomy of 90's aesthetics which were negotiating the gaps between the pursuit for futurism and nihilist grunge. It is almost as though these coloured lighting installations emerged as way to make Perth a more aesthetically tolerable site, to make it seem new and of the future.

'Excessive Lighting', let's not get it confused with light pollution. By no means are we saying that Perth is one of THOSE cities. Rather Perth is seeing a proliferation of transitioning coloured LED lights applied as a fixer-upper for Perth's most prominent cultural and architectural sites.

We remember when the lights on the Kings Park Trees were installed providing a counterpoint for the city skyline after dark. Encountering those colours from a backseat position on the Narrows Bridge, they were like grounded northern lights, illuminating the trees topping kings park.

In our minds this started off the trend. The city started to blossom outside of business hours into the new millennium, The City of Perth sought to reclaim it's long lost legacy as "The City of Light".

A favourite story about Perth that came up in our research was the instance of the residents of Perth organising to turn on all the lights in the city as a beacon for lonely American Astronaut John Glenn in 1962. This example of the building of Perth's identity draws a connection between the individual 'doing their bit' and 'the greater good' which is the basis for my work in the show. Reading up on lighting installations that took place for visits made by the Queen and the Commonwealth Games - they were humble in execution, bought together by small groups of people gathering to show off their city - their place in the world.

Now Perth's architecture is framed by rainbow expanses of light, which make manifest the distinctions between structures that are at once too massive to be felt in their entirety on a human scale and so friendly and familiar that you could almost touch them. This is a strategy to draw suburban-bound populations out of their four-by-twos to the 'great metropolis'. Kind of like moths.

The example of Council house is a centre point for this show, and particularly Emma's work. Rescued from the brink of destruction it was made new again, mysterious in its veiled LED lit exterior. This moment marked the rebirth of the coloured lighting trend in the CBD. Outwards spiralled a milieu of LED panels taking over the tops and facades of buildings in its proximity.

Eventually, as with all new technology's, LED colour phasing became cheap, affordable and it's applications smaller and more universal. A flashing open sign outside a 24/7 deli, or the bottom of a black Toyota. Emma came home from work the other day to her brother's outlaying of his plans for her to decorate the underside of his bed frame with similar LED strip lighting to that used in the frame of her work *Perth Lighting Study*, "just like one of those cars" he said.

In mid 2014, the Perth city council unveiled plans to outline the individual buildings that make up the Perth city skyline in LED strip lighting. Creating a pretty postcard image for tourists to our GREAT CITY OF LIGHT.

The plans were knocked back after consultations with local science professionals revealed the dire threat to local wildlife populations. Whole ecosystems would be disrupted by the light shed from the city's skyline and it would also drastically alter and impair the sleeping patterns of Perth's human subjects.

What I see as fascinating about this whole trend is the link between individual agency and group representation. While I find the skyline lighting strategy a little bizarre I also think of the Thornlie christmas light displays where entire suburban streets are decorated to be presented it their 'best light'. I see these big public installations in the centre as reflections of what is going on in the periphery.

With expanding technology advancements and financial freedoms present in the context of Perth as a city, I see no end to this trend of technicolour renovations and installations, be they large-scale public constructions or small scale private birthday parties.

It is everywhere we go in this city, this city we call our city of light.

Excessive Lighting

Emma Buswell & Melissa McGrath

Free Range Gallery 27 February - 8 March, 2015

List of works

Melissa McGrath, *December*, borrowed domestic lighting products

Emma Buswell, *Perth Lighting Study*, acrylic on board, LED lights

Emma Buswell, *They will say this is where it all began*, two channel video, 11min 08sec

Melissa McGrath, *Naval Cadets - Centenary Ave*, digital print on postcard, unlimited multiple

Melissa McGrath, *Milne Feeds & Billboards - Cnr Welshpool Rd & Leech Hwy*, digital print on postcard, unlimited multiple

Melissa McGrath, *Maintenance Lighting Installation - Lake Street*, digital print on postcard, unlimited multiple

Melissa McGrath, *Gradient*, procured witches hats, rope light, spotlights, power board

Emma Buswell, *Past Idols*, unfired earthenware clay, plaster, timber

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