

HER CANBERRA

HER CITY *Her Life* SINCE 2011

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Art on the line

• CATHERINE CARTER •

PUBLIC ART: WHETHER A SOURCE OF DELIGHT OR DERISION, IT IS UNDENIABLY DEMOCRATIC.

Beyond the gilded living rooms of the wealthy or the whitewashed walls of the gallery, public art reaches out to everyone.

Looming large in our cities, public art creates Instagrammable images that can transform a desolate square into a much-loved meeting place. Public art can become an iconic symbol of a city – think New York's Statue of Liberty, Rio's Christ the Redeemer or even Brussels' Manneken Pis – that foster civic pride and bring the community together. Temporary artworks can make people slow down, stop and think.

In Canberra, former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope championed a public art push that has delivered eye-catching and eyebrow-raising pieces across our city. Canberrans can encounter 117 artworks valued at \$18 million in their travels across the Territory – all helpfully catalogued on the [ACT Government's online database](#).

Like so many Canberrans, I've stood beneath our earliest piece of public art, Ethos, outside the Legislative Assembly and wondered about the winged woman holding aloft a bursting sun. My children have clambered over the stainless steel Cushion and have fallen into the fountain in Civic. I've contributed to the cacophony of horns lighting up Illumicube at night (although not for a long time, it must be said). And I've shaken my head as I've passed the Rhizome sculpture along Gungahlin Drive.

And now the construction of Canberra's light rail brings new opportunities to meld the cultural and the practical through public art.

Canberra artist Hannah Quinlivan has been commissioned to create an artwork that can be seen in the glazed screens along the first 13 stops of the Canberra Metro between Gungahlin and the City. This commission is connected to Hannah's general practice and to her PhD, which examines site-specific spaces and how people occupy them.

A graduate of the ANU School of Art, Hannah has held solo exhibitions in Berlin, New York, Hong Kong, Cambridge, Singapore, Melbourne and Sydney – but this project for the Capital Metro is her first permanent site-specific work. Having lived in many parts of the city since age nine, Hannah has deep connections to our landscape and the "mountain ranges cradling Canberra."



Hannah Quinlivan

"I've grown up with a feeling for the spaces in Canberra. I understand how these spaces have changed over time and how they might be in the future," Hannah tells me.

"I want to capture the experience of travelling from Gungahlin to the city" – both in the passenger's sense of movement and in the landscape itself as the sun moves across the sky.

Hannah's art practice reflects on the work of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, and his observation of rhythms. "Nothing is inert in the world," Lefebvre says. There are only "very diverse rhythms, slow or living". Hannah says the same can be said for places and spaces.

Lefebvre says the first task of the "rhythm analyst" is to listen – whether that's to a house or a human body – the way an audience listens to a symphony. Hannah hopes her work will encourage Canberra's commuters to listen to our city and to ourselves.



Hannah likens the concept for her luminous glass panels as “looking at the landscape through brittle gum branches”. The artworks have been designed to capture sunlight and shadows. “The sun pierces through the glass and the shadows cast dramatic abstracted lines on street furniture and people’s faces,” she explains.

While the artworks vary from station to station, they speak to each other as a series. “Each of the drawings are site-specific and anchored to each location but also connected. When you begin your journey in Gungahlin, each drawing builds and responds to each other, creating a visual and emotional journey through the landscape,” she explains.

Abstract work encourages “multiple interpretations depending on your own history and experience”.

“When you live around an artwork you start to look at it differently. And over the days and years people make it their own, as it becomes part of their landscape and experience.” And therein lies the beauty in public art.