

**PETER ATKINS**

*The Passengers*

Tolarno Galleries

23 March – 27 April 2019

Since his earliest exhibition with Tolarno Galleries in 1991, Peter Atkins has transformed his obsessive practice of hunting, collecting and meticulously cataloguing everyday items into paintings luminous with fields of intense colour. A master of abstraction, Atkins brings a refined cultural judgement to humble subjects, and like an alchemist he elevates them into art and design that becomes wondrous.

His passions over the years have run from buttons, buckles, baggage tags and bottle tops to maps, Monopoly and medicine boxes. A true twentieth century boy, Atkins is consumed by the impact of mass production and its inevitable result – obsolescence and cultural detritus – and the traces of profound interior lives and emotions tied to these artefacts. Atkins stokes the embers of collective memory and almost-forgotten personal resonances. It's there in paintings of the red and blue chevron of an Aerogramme, laden with the frozen longing of love letters. Childhoods are evoked in his series' of abstracted Japanese model paint charts and remnants of misspent teen years in his lovingly deconstructed record covers.

His recent preoccupation is the bold graphic and geometric designs of train tickets issued in Melbourne and country Victoria between 1920 and the late 1980s.



In 2013 for National Gallery of Victoria's *Melbourne Now* blockbuster exhibition, Atkins created *Station to Station*, a project comprising 12 flags referencing iconic railways train ticket designs for journeys in and out of Flinders Street Station. The works flew on flagpoles in Federation Square, and are now in the NGV collection.

On display until October 2019 at the former site of the City Square on Melbourne's Swanston Street is *RAILway*, Atkins' Public Commission for the Metro Tunnel Creative Program. These designs reflect suburban train tickets throughout greater Melbourne as well as country tickets issued across Victoria. Atkins has visualised local and social history on a grand scale, taking up a whole city block and in-situ for 12 months.

Now finally, Atkins' journey has arrived at *The Passengers*, a new series of 36 small-scale paintings that further elaborate on collective social history and personal stories dislodged from memory by the train ticket designs. These intimate, jewel-like paintings distill and strip away unnecessary details, focusing on the exquisite forms underneath each ticket. What is revealed is an evocative collection of abstracted forms and colours that represent a complicated and fascinating visual coded language, a railway vernacular, that is particular to inner Melbourne, outer Melbourne and greater Victoria.

"These are objects that have filtered through almost everyone's life at some point," Atkins says. "I expect that when these works are viewed, people will be provoked into a very personal response, perhaps triggering narratives or memories of journeys undertaken with family and friends between particular destinations – perhaps to various sporting events, the Melbourne Show, the daily trip to school or to work, shopping in the city or weekends away with friends."

Included in *The Passengers* are paintings that reference many specially printed tickets, for occasions including the Papal visit in 1988. There are tickets specially printed for use by Scouts and Scoutmasters, and for travel to Flemington, Sandown and Caulfield horse racing tracks, with destinations stating HILL, STAND, LAWN and PADDOCK. There are also tickets relating to VFL Park and other tickets printed for journeys to and from Calder Raceway.

"The final work in the series is based on the ticket issued for Puffing Billy. It seemed appropriate to end the series with such a quintessentially Melbourne icon. These tickets are like connectors, connecting us all through time and place, to locations, events, friends and family in and around our beautiful city of Melbourne."



*The Passengers 1 – 36*

2018/19

acrylic on board

22cm x 40cm each, 42cm x 62cm framed size

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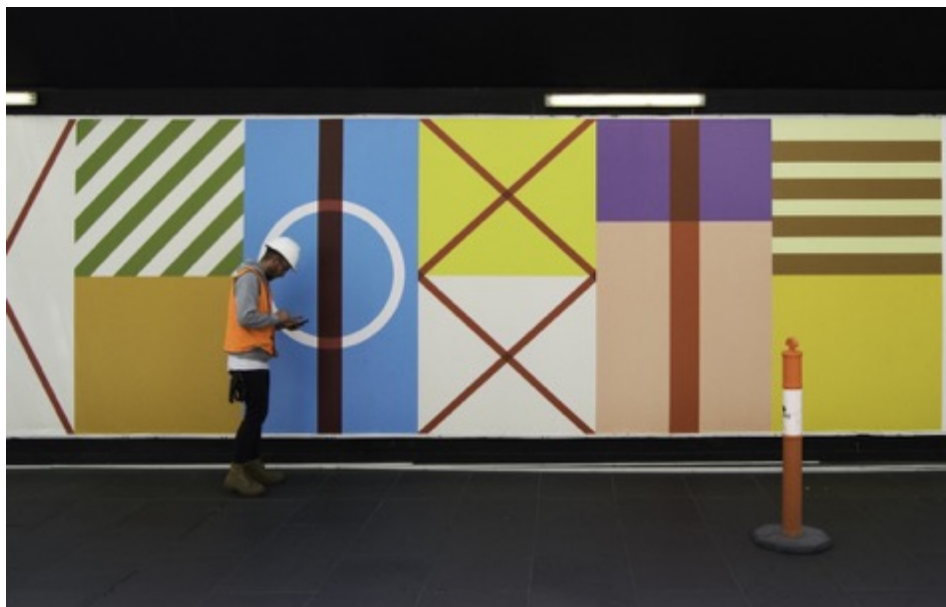
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*RAILway* – Public Commission for the Metro Tunnel Creative Program October 2018 – October 2019



*Station to Station* flags in the Great Hall at National Gallery of Victoria, and at Federation Square



Peter Atkins in the studio