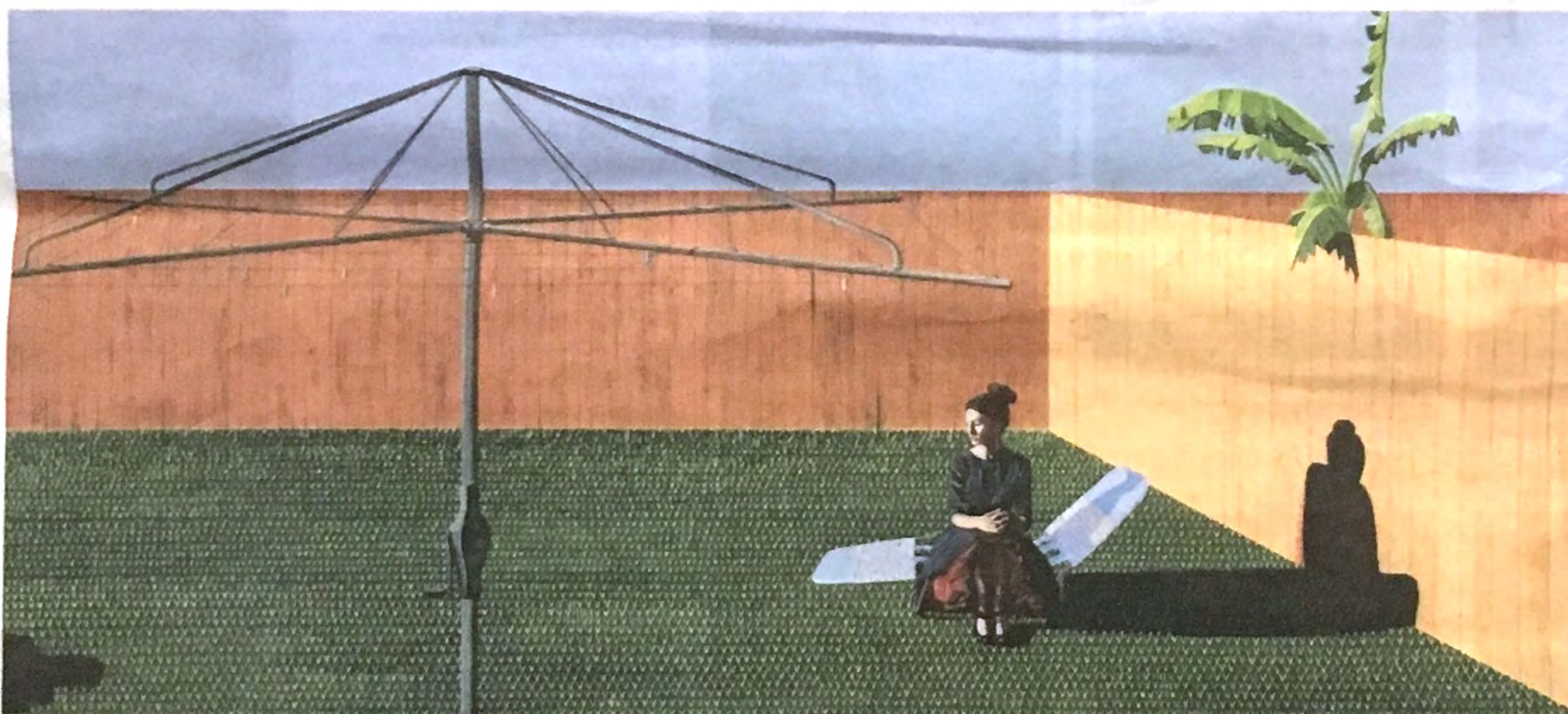




Street-wise: (Clockwise from main) Jason Valenzuela Didi's *Remade Horizon*; Ross Tamlin's *On the River*; and Valenzuela Didi's *All Tomorrow's Parties* are part of the *City Views* exhibition.



URBAN INSIGHTS

Self-taught artist Jason Valenzuela Didi credits his wife for inspiring him to pick up a paintbrush ... now he's addicted

FIONA PURDON

Local artist Jason Valenzuela Didi has always had artistic flair, but he never thought about picking up a paintbrush until his wife needed artwork to display in their living room.

The moment Valenzuela Didi started painting he knew he had found his passion. And for his subject matter he only had to look out the window on the bus to and from work.

"For nine years, I took the bus journey from Springwood (on Brisbane's southside) to Fortitude Valley," he says. "When you see the same thing every day, you don't really look at it. You take for granted everyday scenes – painting has allowed me to make sense and pay attention to what I'm seeing."

Valenzuela Didi, who will show four new works focusing on railway crossings and suburban back yards, is one of four artists contributing to group exhibition *City Views*, which celebrates the urban environment, at Lethbridge Gallery this month.

As well as Valenzuela Didi, the 2015 Rotary Art Spectacular winner, the exhibition features 2014 Sunshine Coast Art Prize winner Matthew de Moiser, Ross Tamlin and KD De Silva, winner of the 2015 Lethbridge 10,000 skill prize.

Gallery owner Brett Lethbridge says: "These artists' works are of something you see every day

when you are driving around, but sometimes you miss the beauty.

"Jason is an engineer by training and you can see the influences of line and detail in his urban work and paying attention to infrastructure."

About five years ago, Valenzuela Didi's wife Bernadette asked him to create a painting.

"I'd always done drawing and I'd always made sketches and doodles," he says. "From the first moment I started painting, I got addicted. If my wife hadn't wanted that painting, I'd still be doodling away. Even though I've always had an interest in art, I never thought to pick up a paintbrush."

Valenzuela Didi has been highly successful since he started entering art prizes two years ago. As well as winning the Rotary prize, he was recently named runner-up in the Border Art Prize, and was runner-up last year in the Publisher's Cup Cricket Art Prize. "It's been a good year," he says.

While the self-taught artist immersed himself in newly gained knowledge from how-to-paint books borrowed from the library and art textbooks, he soon identified with British contemporary master David Hockney, whose work focuses on urban architecture, patterns and primary colours.

"David Hockney looks at man-made shapes and patterns and makes the elements almost abstract," Valenzuela Didi says.

The Malaysian-born artist, of Malaysian/Chinese heritage, has always felt like an outsider growing up in Brisbane, so he likes to plant people in his meticulous acrylic paintings who do not seem to belong to the scene, such as in *Remade Horizon*, where a woman – his wife was the model – sits on a kerb in an industrial-like landscape.

In *All Tomorrow's Parties*, the woman looks forlornly into an empty back yard.

"I like to put people into my scene to give my paintings a human connection ... sometimes you feel everything around you almost looks alien. I've always been an outsider – even now I'm an artist in the engineering world and an engineer in the art world," he says.

Valenzuela Didi, who works for the Brisbane City Council, uses insight from his engineering background to focus on shapes, geometry, balance and blocks of colour while he likes to play with perspective to create a smooth and flat appearance.

**City Views, Lethbridge Gallery,
136 Latrobe Tce, Paddington, until Thursday.**