

The real deal

Three artists make the mundane memorable

You don't often think that the Riverside Expressway is beautiful. You just don't. Particularly in traffic. But take away the cars, give it a good hose down and paint it on a sunny day and it doesn't look half bad.

In the art of J Valenzuela Didi (the J stands for Jason) it is aesthetically pleasing.

Jason is one of three artists showing at Lethbridge Gallery in Paddington and his realist paintings of freeways and urban scenes are colourful and stylish. The Malaysian-born Brisbane painter offers an alternative view of the commonplace in his show *Unfinished Pilgrimage*.

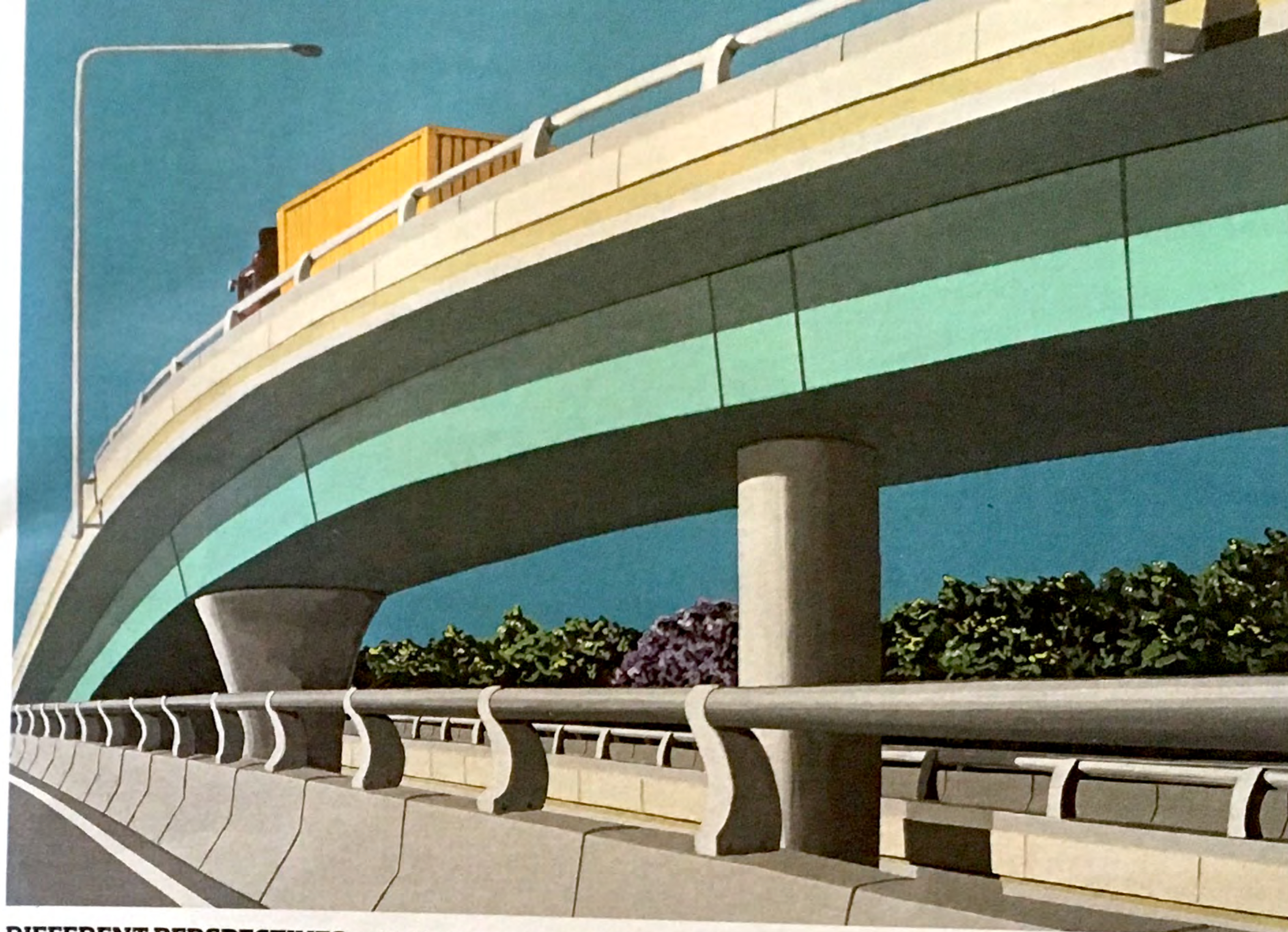
Of course, when you look at works such as *Progress: Breakdown* (it shows a truck stalled on the Riverside Expressway) or *Progress: Feed* (the expressway as we'd all like it to be – empty) you can't ignore the elephant in the room. I'm talking about Jeffrey Smart, the master of urban scenery.

One of the most iconic Australian paintings of the late 20th century was his *Cahill Expressway*, painted in 1962. Being mentioned in the same breath as Smart is fine by Jason. "I am influenced by a few artists and Smart is certainly one of them," he says.

He says his paintings are "unfinished conversations, fragments of a life in transit" and his work is about "the beauty of the journey we are on".

"And the sadness and the sorrow that goes with it," he says. "Sometimes I get captured in this beauty. My mind remains in a place. A moment that has long since passed." He says he paints "everyday places ... that resonate on life's journey".

His works are mostly unpopulated but figures do appear including a mysterious woman in *Your Memory is Here* and *Rose of Jericho*.



DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ... Lix North's *Insurgent* (left); J Valenzuela Didi's *Progress: Breakdown* (above); and Jonathan Bentley's *Inked 1* (right) bring the commonplace into sharp focus at Lethbridge Gallery this month.

"It's my wife Bernadette, actually," Jason says. "She's not always happy about posing."

Another of the artists exhibiting is our own Jonathan Bentley, an award-winning artist and illustrator who works for News Queensland and whose work can be seen in this magazine.

His exotic series *Inked* features nudes with their backs to the viewer. They are tattooed, in the paintings at least.

"My *Inked* series represents a beginning point for me, a new chapter in painting," Jonathan says.

"I have learned to make new marks by scratching and scraping the surface of my paintings using a variety of new tools and mediums and that has led me to consider the way so many of us have chosen to mark our own skin in a similar way through the use of ink and needles."

Lix North is also exhibiting, although it takes her a long time to produce her gorgeous self-portraits

and she has only managed to come up with one for this show. But what a beauty it is. *Insurgent* shows the artist wearing rather steampunk-style glasses with a canary perched on the end of them.

"I'm thinking of the canary in the mine shaft,"

Lix says. "I have chemical sensitivities and the work relates to that and the canary is a symbol."

Lix, who runs her own design business, is in demand as a portrait painter and is often commissioned to paint people's dogs. She happens to be a dog lover, so that's fine by her.

Her one painting here is wonderfully strange and, frankly, it's enough.

His paintings are "unfinished conversations, fragments of a life in transit"

LIX NORTH'S INSURGENT, J Valenzuela Didi's *Unfinished Pilgrimage*; and Jonathan Bentley's *Inked* until Sep 28, Lethbridge Gallery, 136 Latrobe Tce, Paddington, open Thu-Sat 10am-5pm; Sun 10am-3pm or by appointment; ph: 3369 4790. lethbridgegallery.com