



Melbourne's paintings on wheels

When the decorated trams take to the tracks more than a few heads will turn



ABOVE: Artist Andrew Southall's tram is decorated with vivid "everyday" situations. LEFT: Mirka Mora at work on a big scale. BELOW: Mirka's tram is a magical mystery tour of myths and legends incorporated with illustrations of verses by Edward Lear. Pics: Don McPhedran.



Painted trams — covered with everything from pink clouds to Greek mythical serpents to bikini-clad girls — may be traffic stoppers but they'll also be conversation starters, according to Victoria's Ministry for the Arts.

"We're not saying people have to like them," a spokesman pointed out, "but we hope they'll provoke some discussion."

Art is literally being transported to the public, under a scheme that is costing the Ministry \$14,000. And six well-known painters have each been commissioned to restyle one of Melbourne's

familiar green pea soupers.

The idea to paint trams was supported by Victoria's Premier, Melbourne's Lord Mayor and the Tramways Board as well as the Minister for the Arts.

"Taking art to the public in an imaginative way is just as important as showing it in galleries," said the ministry spokesman Michael Nation, who is co-ordinating the scheme. "People may be daunted by museums but they see trams and say 'Oh, I must go and have another look at them!'"

The artists, Mirka Mora, Andrew Southall, Mike Brown, Clifton Pugh, Les Kossatz and Sandra

Leveson, have the scheme well in hand. Mirka and Andrew have already completed their trams, the remaining four should be ready by the end of the year.

Then, in all their glory, the colourful six will be rotated in service round Melbourne.

Mirka's tram is a fantasy world, covered with images from Greek myths — Cyclops, cherubs, angels and serpents — combined with the koala and the kangaroo.

She has even turned the air vents on the roof into the heads of geese and written Edward Lear poetry inside.

Andrew ("I haven't been on a tram for 12 years") spread everyday situations

all over his tram. Multi coloured tables and chairs, blue trees and green and blue bikini-clad girls scream out from under pink clouds.

He said the major difficulties were working in enamels not oils — for better wear. "And sometimes I'd step back to get an overall look and forget I was standing on scaffolding."

The painting on wheels should prove an added tourist attraction for Melbourne. So if you see a vivid bowl of fruit or a half butterfly/half woman creature bearing down on you, don't blink — it could just be your tram.

— CAROL VEITCH