

Melbourne gets miniaturised in People Make Places

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Since 2009, identical twins and visual artists Leanne and Naomi Shedlezki have been building tiny cities out of cardboard and perspex. The duo may usually reside in Bondi but since taking on their most expansive installation to date, they haven't had much time to hang around in the sunny suburb. *People Make Places* is their synchronised brainchild, a convoluted yet carefully curated participatory medium that exists whenever the twins are together in the same city.

The project began in Melbourne in 2009 during a separate art project called '*Match Box Gallery*'. With an excess of materials, the duo began handing out matchboxes on trams and on the street, asking people to use their creativity to illustrate inside the box what their city means to them, planting the seeds for this latest concept. "From our time in Melbourne, we have then gradually developed the project where wherever we're going about our daily life together, we invite people to contribute... that's where it started," says Leanne.

The premise is relatively simple. Wherever the twins are, they are bound to be seen with an average-sized, clear perspex suitcase. It's something that seems to be barely there yet its the lack of detail or regularity that makes it such an intriguing object. It's what motivated me to approach the twins in Collingwood, nearly five years after the project had begun.

“After commencing in Melbourne, we have gone on to New York, Venice, Shanghai, Deniliquin, London and Dubai. We've come back here [Melbourne] because we're delivering some artwork here but as we're doing this project whenever we are together, we're inviting people to join in our journey.” Leanne explains.

Naomi shows me one of their suitcases from Dubai. This one represents a completed leg of their open-ended journey, it's transparent body filled with a mosaic of completed matchboxes containing sentiments in Arabic, tiny hand drawn dioramas, royal invitations and glimmering trinkets from market stalls. When I meet back up with them to return my completed matchbox, the Melbourne suitcase is nearly four rows deep with completed works. There are lovers of coffee, music and football all working to express their passions within the tiny dimensions. Some are from Melbourne-born residents, others depict tiny urban naticities of people's first impressions upon coming to the city; intricate paintings of immediately recognisable city landmarks.

My friend Julia was born and raised in Byron Bay. Her matchbox Melbourne is just an emery board and a painted row of vibrant buildings but any Melburnian who looked at it could tell you it's the tarmac of Princes Bridge stretching perpendicular to our city skyline. The suitcases are filled with the memories and ideas of strangers, but looking at them, there is something universally understandable in each matchbox.

“The reason why we do it is everyone all over the world is connected... each box someone makes is a building brick of the city. How it keeps going is we're inspired by people creating something about their own city and each time we receive a matchbox, it keeps us wanting to give out more and more and more.” Leanne says. With 2000 boxes already collected by the collaborative art duo, there is no end for their project in sight. They plan to create a mobile gallery to display the finished works but say they're receptive to having the suitcases displayed in museums or galleries around the world.

The Melbourne genesis of Leanne and Naomi Shedlezki's *People Make Places* can be [viewed on their website](#) but there are many more to be seen when their project finally culminates in a global exhibit. Naomi and Leanne are in Melbourne until Thursday so if you see a pair of women holding an unusual suitcase or a fistful of matchboxes, make sure you go say hello and take up the opportunity to express what Melbourne means to you.



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