



9 day swing  
**Richard Lewer**

# in the swing

Ric Spencer

Since emigrating to the west (moving to Perth from Melbourne) Richard Lewer has integrated into his new surroundings by utilizing the survival mechanisms of an artist - that is by applying his processes of art making towards understanding his adopted environment. For Lewer this represents more than a natural reaction but the reinforcement of a working methodology, because for some time social observation and the dissection of community networks has been a cornerstone of his art practice. Whether it be listening to police radio, joining a boxing gym or learning to chop wood; the impetus in Lewer's practice toward integration leads to an informed point of view.

Art though is never fully integrated, it necessitates a considered existentialism to survive its own production. I think in many ways *9 day swing* is the perfect storm - it brings together Lewer's art process of social observation, an implanted externalised view which aims to comprehend a cultural phenomenon and a studio painting process that not only understands materialism but is based on its vivid translation into energized figuration. *9 day swing* observes, somewhat boldly, an industry and a lifestyle equally inclined to similar characteristics... a world with an implanted externalised view built on an old land on the somewhat transitional premise of energizing a resource - in this case from its location into a market place with a vivacious hunger for raw materials.

For *9 day swing* Lewer spent time in the north west of WA in the Karratha/Dampier/ Roebourne area - extending the considered appreciation of this environment he has landed in, Lewer has painted a non-linear series of floating images which, in spite of their intangible nature, grasp at specific events and occurrences. Through the blood sweat

and tears of trying to get oil paint to stick to metal, this by constant rubbing and the building of the finest of grabbing surfaces, the imagery layers contemporary history over its ever present past to create a world where events are re-enacted and re-lived and re-surface almost as a reaction to the holes in the ground. Truly, if you dig you will find and the dark political nature, the bare bones of a hard past, are there for the taking in the Australian outback. Lewer's works conjure a misplaced sense of community, a unity under the Southern Cross (which becomes a grotesque face in his *Advance Australia Fair*) built on subjugation, tattoos and swing shifts - a nationalism which is somehow derived from digging up everyone's resources and selling them overseas for the profit of a few. In Lewer's forlorn portraits of place, history is always and the flouro ghost in *5 Signs of Depression* occupies the same soiled landscape as the tragedy of the Flying Foam Massacre and the death in custody of John Pat - in the face of this any symbolic effort at nation building seems almost inconsolable.

In one of his map haikus Lewer borrows from Dire Straits and "so far away from me" becomes a manifestation of more than the isolation felt by FIFO workers, more than geographical isolation of mine sites and more than the inert psychological loneliness all Australian's are born knowing. Rather the words seem to echo inward, inside the emotional immaturity of a nation that has done it tough but has little room left (beyond a laconic racism) or more then a lethargic desire to look at itself, to critique itself and to grow closer to itself.

*Dr Ric Spencer is an artist and writer and currently Curator at Fremantle Arts Centre.*

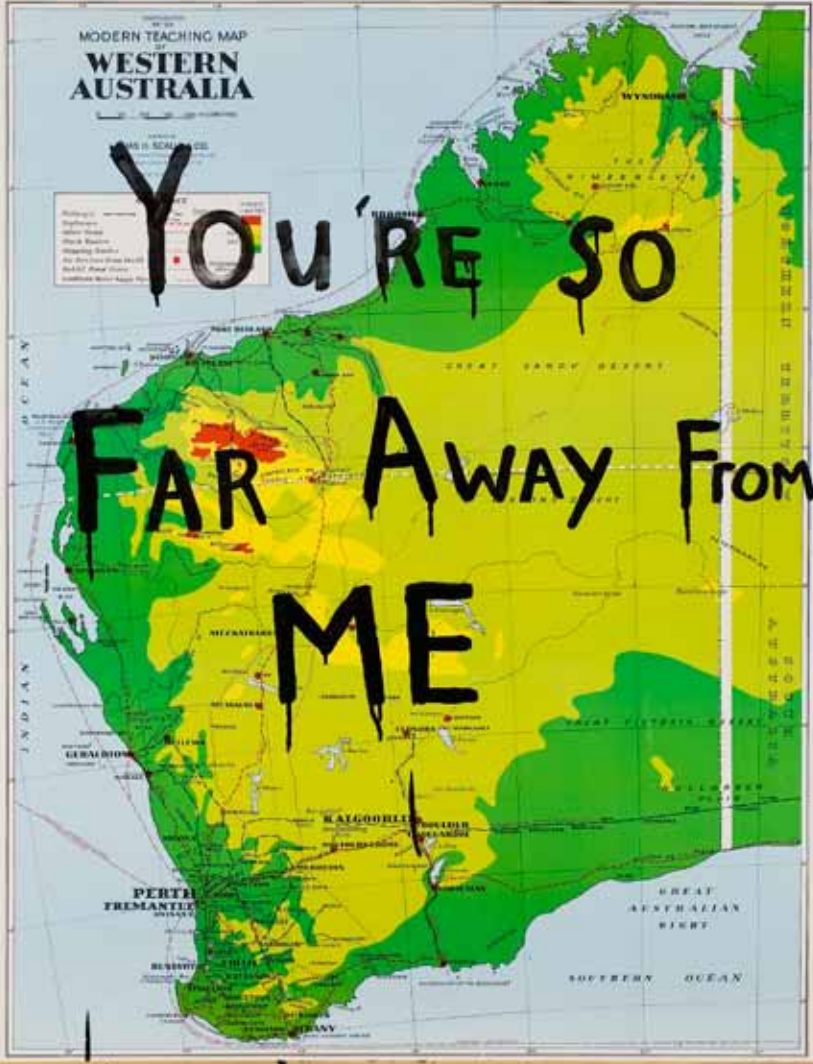


MODERN TEACHING MAP  
OF  
**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Scale: 1:1,000,000

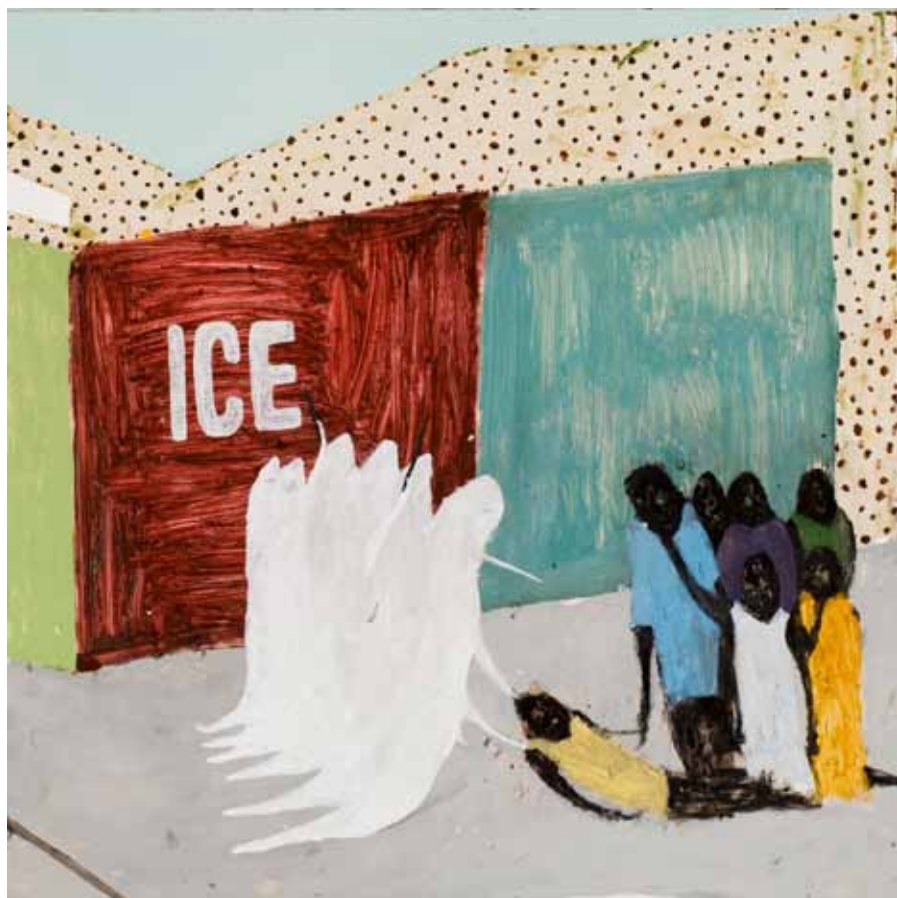
Relief	0 to 1000 feet
Highways	1 to 4 inches
Water	Blue
Rock	Red
Wetland	Green
Population	1000 to 100,000
Major Cities	Red dots
State Capitals	Red squares

**YOU'RE SO  
FAR AWAY FROM  
ME**

















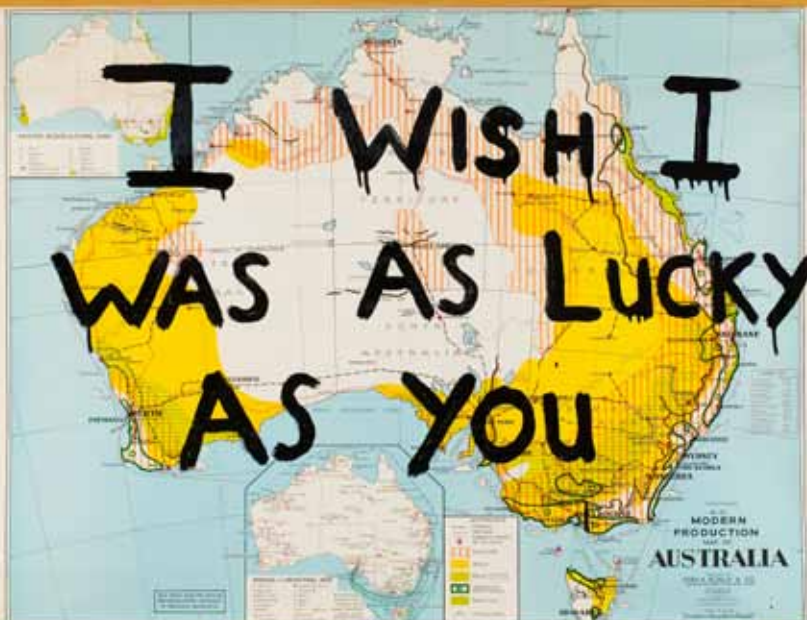


Image Titles



*Cyclone season*  
750mm x 750mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2013



*Advance Australia Fair*  
1000mm x 1000mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2013



*The workers Pilbara pastoral workers strike 1946*  
750mm x 750mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2013



*5 signs of depression*  
1000mm x 1000mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2013



*We need a community not another camp*  
750mm x 750mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2013



*You're so far away from me*  
110cm x 80cm,  
enamel on found school map, 2013



*Fit in or fuck off*  
90cm x 80cm  
enamel on found school map, 2013



*New Boss*  
1000mm x 1000mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2012



*I wish I was as lucky as you*  
110cm x 90cm  
enamel on found school map, 2013



*Remembering John Pat*  
1000mm x 1000mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2013



*Flying Foam*  
1000mm x 1000mm  
Oil on epoxy coated steel, 2012

Richard Lewer wishes to thank

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FEHILY CONTEMPORARY  
Ph: 03 9017 0860  
3a Glasshouse Rd, Collingwood Vic 3066  
[ask@fehilycontemporary.com.au](mailto:ask@fehilycontemporary.com.au)

Open: 11:00am – 5:30pm  
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