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This summer, **Noel McKenna** has returned to his hometown for a solo exhibition of his large-scale maps at Brisbane's QAGOMA. McKenna has exhibited regularly across Australia, and increasingly internationally, for several decades, but as QAGOMA curator **Peter McKay** notes, usually in commercial settings and presenting the latest work. *Noel McKenna: Landscape – Mapped* was, he says, an opportunity to consider a “deeper timeframe, publish new scholarship and present a side of the artist that even his loyal audiences might be less familiar with”.

McKenna is best known for his paintings depicting everyday, domestic scenes and animals. The works in *Landscape – Mapped* display the same perceptive interest in the world, but are much larger (some are 180 centimetres wide) to accommodate the expanded frame of reference and use of text. Most of the 19 works in the exhibition are maps of Australia, others hone in on more specific cartographic targets.

“He has only produced a few maps each year and they have never been brought together before,” McKay explains. “McKenna’s investigative interest in his world, or country rather, shines much brighter when the series is seen together in full.”



1. Noel McKenna, *Centennial Park*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 160 x 160cm.
2. Noel McKenna, *Shark and ray species of Australia*, 2006. Oil and enamel on canvas, 152 x 183cm.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND NIAGARA GALLERIES, MELBOURNE.

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Big Things, Australia, which was in the Wynne Prize in 2004, records the country’s oversized landmarks, our national strategy for getting on the map. Another, of his life in Brisbane before he left for Sydney, charts a complex web of memory and history. We all carry maps like these in our heads (or, at the very least, a version of his map of Sydney’s public toilets). McKenna revalues this knowledge, placing it into a system that talks explicitly about what Australia is made of: the parts that make up the whole.

There’s a kind of nostalgic appeal to these maps. They recall a time before Google Earth, when you could sit with an atlas or a First Book of Facts and feel like you were actually getting some way towards understanding the world. But of course these maps don’t pretend to possess the same objectivity. They are fiercely subjective. As McKay puts it: “His balance between his personal subjective experiences and the surrounds we all share...affirms the value of the individual while affirming that we are all part of something much bigger and greater than ourselves.”

Jane O’Sullivan