



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Street artists put their mark on the wall', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 15/12/07.
Tags: Czech Republic, music, countryside, travel
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The photographer had contrived to park the orange Škoda in front of a brown lake with a perfect medieval village in the distance. At the time the photograph was taken, the car was only a week out of the factory in Mlada Boleslav, a small industrial town north of Prague. Its first owner kept it in immaculate condition for the next twenty years, and when he decided to move to Australia he couldn't bear to leave his car behind. It carried for him too many memories: of driving holidays to bright caravan parks in Moravia with his daughter and now ex-wife, their tent and luggage strapped to the roof, playing games of alphabet as they drove; and of whole Saturdays spent tinkering with it in the carpark of their panelak. It was an extension of himself, nothing less.

He organised, against the advice of friends who told him he was sentimental, and to each other, a fool, to have it shipped. He died two weeks after arriving in Sydney, and the car was allotted for auction soon after. It was picked up for eighty-five dollars by a car dealer and weekend taxi driver who called himself Jim but whose real name was Dimitrios, and who once ran an earnest campaign as an Independent candidate for the NSW Lower House. He drove the orange car back to the nameless bare earth lot that he rented on the Princes Highway, backed it into a raised position where it could best be viewed by traffic, and leaned a painted sign on the window that said *Beaut Buy \$950*. He smoked a couple of cigarettes at his empty desk in the small booth that held nothing else, then caught the bus to the taxi depot.

The next morning he arrived home to washed out skies brocaded by roof tops from his balcony. Snarled in his books and records and decades of paper and dust, he listened instead to his beloved recordings of Italian opera. He fitted LP after LP onto the record box, patiently unwinding the last twelve hours he'd spent turning black wheels around Sydney. He conducted the air of his living room like he was playing strings, then as if he was playing table soccer, seeing visions of red rusted roofs breaking into frothy ocean, and a huge luminous jellyfish plunging.

The next day she walked that way. She always saw faces in fingernails and cars. Their headlights were eyes, the radiator a nose, the license plate a pinched mouth. They

could convey a variety of emotions, the fronts of cars, more varied and strange for their abstraction than real faces. The orange Škoda had a friendly face, not perky and prim like so many of the new models, and its colour, like a bright pill that might cure cancer, was an antidote to the ubiquitous navy and white bubbles that covered the highways, pretending to be invisible. It had a Teutonic exactness in its sharp mouth that she mentally applauded. She came back later that day and bought it from Jim, with dole money she had managed to save through a combination of extreme frugality and shoplifting.

The windows of the Škoda became her lens and she drove around for a week with an old video camera resting on the dashboard, recording, with AM radio at full volume. A year later it took her to Port Pirie, where she spent a happy autumn living with a sculptor and picking olives. She broke his heart and continued on towards Western Australia. She stopped at a rest stop scene where giant concrete silos were painted with bright murals and announcements of love and premiership-winning football teams, somewhere near Iron Knob. When she got back in after a sandwich the car wouldn't start. The first person she flagged down diagnosed a blown head gasket and offered her a lift as far as Ceduna. She pushed the car into the scrub, opening the windows so it could more quickly become part of the environment. She wrote a sentimental note and left it in the glovebox, asking any person who found it to treat it with care, for it had come a long way. She hitched the rest of the way to Perth, a city which terrified her and brought on a series of panic attacks for which she was hospitalised for a week.

That night an emu leaned in to assess the Škoda, but decided it was best left alone and ran off at full speed. Two years passed, then a duo of sound artists camping at the rest stop used it for a recording, planting contact mikes on it to tape the subtle emanations of wind it conducted, and drumming it with metal poles. By then the orange paint had sheared off to a scratchy, plum-coloured rust. On windy nights, it howled.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tim Wright.