

# A Letter To Sydney

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Opening Talk

Sydney – We Need to Talk

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The Cross Art Projects

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We Sydney-siders to do something about the fate of our city. To talk to one another across our differences and find the common ground that might help us stand up to rampant development of our land and commercialisation of our everyday lives that puts profit before people.

Dear Sydney,

We Need to Talk.

I'm not sure I know who you are any more.

I've spent most of my life with you. But in the past few years, it seems to me like you're becoming harder and harder to live with. And it's not just me who's noticed. You're more and more sterile, more hostile, more expensive. You're meaner and hotter and more divided.

Don't get me wrong, there's still plenty of things that remind me why I loved you in the first place, and why I've stayed with you for so long. Your jacarandas in spring. A stroll and some shopping on Beamish street on a busy Saturday. Our local public school and its awesome school community. A sunny winter's weekday at any of your beaches. The crispy hot broad-bean felafel at Cairo Takeaway. Tuesday night funk throw-downs at 505. The surprise appearance of fresh graffiti on your trains and posters on your walls. The energy and shared purpose of a big Sydney Alliance assembly.

But for all that great stuff, I'm not sure I love who you're becoming.

Maybe you're getting less loveable because of the company you're keeping. You've spent a lot of time lately long hanging out with some dodgy characters.

Your buddies Barry, Mike and Gladys are cases in point.

Like Gladys. She said when she hooked up with you that making you less expensive was her #1 priority. But she's been selling off your public housing, and refusing to introduce rules making it a requirement for her developer mates to provide cheap housing in the new towers and suburban estates that are making them rich. She won't even introduce rules to stop tenants getting kicked out of their homes through no fault of their own.

Just last week she said that your public spaces were big priority and that she'll appoint a new minister for public space. Meanwhile, her and her friends have privatised publicly-owned

assets worth over \$9 billion in the last ten years. They supported private advertising on the sails of the Opera House. They put sniffer dogs instead of doctors at our festivals (not to mention on train stations in the west). They put our ovals and schools behind spear-topped fences.

She said her pals in Canberra should be doing more to stop you burning up, by doing something about climate change. But she's spending billions of dollars on a mega-freeway project that will choke you up with cars for years to come.

Not to mention the fact that she wants to spend \$2 billion knocking down a couple of your stadiums to help out her mates.

And even when she tries to do the right thing by you, she seems to have a knack for fucking it up. Just ask the trees on Anzac Parade that had to die unnecessarily for the light rail, or the people in places like Ryde and Canterbury where things have gone from ugly to uglier.

I could go on. If I'm honest, there are times I really want to leave you.

And I'm pretty sure my friend Wendy is thinking about ditching you too. But then, maybe despite herself, she seems to keep caring for you.

She's seen what you're turning into, and she's trying to snap you out of it – to use her art to show you what you're becoming, but also to remind you of your best side, to show you how much better you could be.

And when me and a bunch of my friends at Sydney Uni started getting together every week to talk about you, to try to make sense of what was going on with you, one of her posters on your walls inspired us to write you a big open letter.

So, we got together in little groups, and we wrote some stuff: about displacement, and dispossession, and decommmodification, and democracy, and a bunch of other d-words!

And then she took our words, and spent hours in your streets, and patiently drew a series of beautiful images that both responded to, and challenged, the words we wrote.

And then, she lovingly packaged the words and the images in a beautiful book, with a cover hand-printed using an ancient press and with pages hand-stitched, all wrapped up in one of her beautiful posters. Maybe she was hoping that you might actually notice us and how much we care about you, because of the care we took in making the letter that we wrote for you.

So, I'm inspired by Wendy, and I'm not ready to break up yet. Instead, me and my friends are taking a leaf out of Wendy's book. We're going to spend some quality time with you, hanging out in your streets and talking to other people who love you and wish you could turn things around. We're not going to go quiet and tolerate your bad side, but we're not going to give up on you either.

Sydney, we want, we need, to talk.