



Buildings blocked by poor vision

VISUAL ART

The Architects Project

Various locations across Perth.
Until March 2.

FOR cities in decline or needing a boost, the signature building has become an important first step towards rejuvenation. Across the world, city administrators are eager to emulate the famous Bilbao effect. The decision to commission American architect Frank Gehry to design a new art gallery made the industrial town an instant attraction and destination for more than one million tourists a year. The shimmering building became a source of civic pride and a shining example of architecture's ability to transform and inspire.

For Perth Festival director Shelagh Magadza, this power to inspire was the catalyst for the Architects Project. She commissioned four local architectural practices and artist Callum Morton to design memorable buildings for city blocks. It was hoped their schemes would be so fabulous they would stimulate a new vision for the city that would transform Perth and erase its Dullsville epithet.

That was the plan. Unfortunately the five



Nearsighted: Callum Morton's billboard is one of the few that create excitement

modest billboards offer little excitement. The only two that do are Morton's nightmarish transformation of Edmund Blacket's wonderful St George's Cathedral and Jonathan Lake's gargantuan black folly.

Morton has turned the elegant 19th-century church into a fun park with a massive roller coaster or water slide entering and exiting the shell of the building where stained glass windows once filtered the intense West Australian sun. Lake proposes a black monolith with large holes "for nothing at all, except the collection of sunlight".

The project's aim was "to challenge our views of how we conceive of spaces in our city". But, unfortunately, there is little that is visionary or inspirational in this modest group of proposals.

Iredale Pedersen Hook have set up a mock merry-go-round with images of unrealised projects by local architects. Their rather tongue-in-cheek response suggests that even when presented with good ideas, neither the populace nor administrators have the gumption to proceed.

Simon Pandal suggests his vacant lot will constantly change and that a monstrous earthmover will swallow up anything that occupies valuable land, while Gresley Abas provide a grab-bag of good ideas for any city but no project that incorporates these into a coherent whole.

A great opportunity to set new benchmarks and expand our sense of possibilities has been wasted.

Ted Snell