

# I Think I Can – Background Information

I Think I Can (ITIC) is an interactive installation created in collaboration with model railway hobbyists – Hills Model Railway Society in Sydney, and Australian Model Railway Association (AMRA) in Melbourne. This Live Art work places scale model railway layouts in public places, railways stations and arts centres, inviting the public to engage and play by becoming temporary residents via an avatar – a tiny puppet.

*“I Think I Can takes its title from the famous line of the children’s tale The Little Engine That Could, about a small train attempting pull a large load up a steep hill, which was used to teach children the value of optimism and hard work. I want to play with the optimism of that title and story, but subverting the value placed upon hard work. We’ll invite commuters to engage with an alternative, miniature version of themselves.” – Sam Routledge*

Participants are invited to take a “personality test” on an iPad. The test calculates their personality and ideal profession but provides them with a choice of residents in careers that are in exact opposition, encouraging the participant to imagine another reality for themselves. They receive an intricately detailed 1:87 scale human figure, and are invited to find a location and context to place the figure.

The participant is introduced to the model railway layout and its imaginary community; viewing the blog on a laptop and the on-going narratives already in place in the miniature town. The Host works with them to create a story about the chosen resident and its relationship to the town and other residents. The Director/Puppeteer animates the figure onto the layout, propelling it into an imagined context and narrative, interacting with the miniature environment and with other residents. The action is filmed by the Media Artist, for display on a large screen above the layout, and potentially for live web streaming or display in other venues, if in a multi-venue event context.

The participant receives a passport for their resident, allowing them to return to the layout, and direct their resident’s progress, proposing new moves and responding to other residents’ actions. The Blogger documents the story, for immediate publication in an online newspaper, the journal of the imaginary town (see URL of draft blog from Federation Square trial), and in a twitterfeed and even a “breaking news” style text crawler across the videoimage. Participants can track the journey of their figure online, and continue to direct its progress, proposing new moves and other actions through the blog function of the online newspaper.

This work is a collaboration between a community group and a group of artists, who have overlapping but distinct goals. AMRA’s aim to accurately mirror the real, on a smaller scale is similar to the ambitions of puppetry in mimicking the movements of a subject using a model that represents it. Model railway enthusiasts, mainly men who don’t otherwise engage in “the arts”, would rarely describe their hobby as an artform or a creative activity, yet it involves complex work in conceptualising, designing and creating miniature worlds. However, puppetry has a different engagement with the projection of the imagination and fantasy onto the model, giving it the capability to be extraordinary, to step outside the real, and to critique it. ITIC will harness these aims in engaging participants in an optimistic task of collective storytelling that deals with dynamic notions of residency and responsibility.

Director: Sam Routledge

Media Artist & Dramaturg: Martyn Coutts

Software & Interaction Design: Oliver Marriot & Matt Gingold

Design: Jonathon Oxlade

Consultant: Ian Pidd

Producer: Harley Stumm – Intimate Spectacle