



For artist Peter Atkins, our complete familiarity with the visual language of highway signage is used to introduce other meanings to their representation – with a complete absence of typography. The *Hume Highway Project* (2010) is a series of bold colour blocks framed with the familiar rounded edges of ‘highway language’, as Atkins terms it.

*I have photographed hundreds of signs along the highway in both directions from Melbourne to Sydney and back again. It was only later, after I had begun this documentation process, that I could look beyond these signs, past their words and see them differently from their intended purpose. I had begun to see these signs as simply beautiful abstract forms.<sup>1</sup>*

Designed for distance reading, the role of colour in highway signage is central to their legibility. Each colour combination communicates different content: green with white type indicates directions, distances and places; brown with white type is used for cultural destinations; blue signs are for petrol, food and rest areas; while red with white type carries the immediacy of safety information and warnings.

But it is the absence of typography, and all the site-specific information this would bring, that makes these works resonate in a purely symbolic sense. Although Atkins’ *Hume Highway Project* focuses on a rural experience, his sharp observations highlight the capacity for signage (even without text) to operate both as markers for geographic sites, as well as a framework for our own individual mapping of space.