

Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture

RSTCA No: R084

Name of Place: National Gallery of Australia

Other/Former Names: Australian National Gallery

Address/Location: Parkes Place PARKES 2600

Block B1.5 Section 29 of Parkes

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| Listing Status: | Registered | Other Heritage Listings: | |
| Date of Listing: | June 1993 | Level of Significance: | National |
| Citation Revision No: | | Category: | Educational |
| Citation Revision Date: | February 1993 | Style: | Late Twentieth Century Brutalist |

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|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|---|
| Date of Design: | 1968-1972 | Designer: | Colin Madigan of Edwards, Madigan, Torzillo & Briggs |
| Construction Period: | 1973-1982 | Client/Owner/Lessee: | Commonwealth of Australia |
| Date of Additions: | | Builder: | |

Statement of Significance

The National Gallery of Australia is one of the most forthright examples of Australian civic architecture of the 1970's. It is an important and prominent Australian example of Brutalist Architecture, and is the most decisive statement of the Brutalist philosophy as realised by Colin Madigan. It is a finely executed building reflecting great care and attention at all levels of detail throughout. His craft-based attitude to concrete construction is demonstrated in the quality finishes of the building. Madigan, working together with the landscape architect Harry Howard, has provided an outstanding landscape in which the building is sited with the sculpture garden on the lake side of the Gallery continuing the varied, spatial progression established within the building.

It is difficult to describe the significance of the National Gallery and not mention the adjacent High Court building designed by the same firm in a similar style. The off form concrete masses, linking pedestrian bridge and strong, vertical elements at the entry of both the Gallery and High Court visually connect the two buildings. The buildings hold positions of prominence in the important landscape of the Parliamentary Triangle.

Description

The National Gallery of Australia was designed for the lake front site at the eastern end of the Parliamentary Triangle, between the High Court and King's Avenue. It demonstrates an imposing use of in situ reinforced concrete, with large blank walls adjacent to the linear patterns of mullions stabilising glass walls. It is a complicated building of varied levels and spaces arranged on four floors of approximately 23,000 square metres. The character and proportion of the galleries vary. They are arranged on three levels and are related in such a way to provide rest points and sudden release points. At ground level are several galleries, a raised entry level for introductory galleries and exhibitions with a monumental scale and the top level for Australian collections. In addition the building houses a restaurant, bookshop, theatre and a series of private areas for offices, storage and a range of services related to the collection.

The triagrid ceiling-floor system is used to create a complex structural and spatial order departing from orthogonal planning, and the route through the galleries is unexpected and complex. Internal galleries offer unexpected and exciting views of the central areas of Canberra.

There are a series of external spaces and structures associated with the National Gallery building. These include a Sculpture Garden, water features, a small restaurant, landscaped recreational areas and public facilities. The Sculpture Garden is planned around a viewing path of varying character and includes works by Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, Maillot, Flugelmann, studies for "The Burghers of Calais" by Rodin, and Nakaya's Fog sculpture.

The National Gallery of Australia and High Court of Australia are connected by a pedestrian bridge linking Gallery entry level and the forecourt of the High Court.

Condition and Integrity

The building has been recently altered in a number of ways including: re-roofing with a metal deck; some galleries have been subdivided to create new galleries; some wall surfaces have been changed/re-clad; and the bookshop extended.

Background/History

Analysis against the Criteria specified in Schedule 2 of the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991

(i) a place which demonstrates a high degree of technical and/or creative achievement, by showing qualities of innovation or departure or representing a new achievement of its time

(ii) a place which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group

(iii) a place which demonstrates a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function which is no longer practised, is in danger or being lost, or is of exceptional interest

(iv) a place which is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations

(v) a place which is the only known or only comparatively intact example of its type

(vi) a place which is a notable example of a class of natural or cultural places or landscapes and which demonstrates the principal characteristics of that class

(vii) a place which has strong or special associations with person, group, event, development or cultural phase which played a significant part in local or national history

(xi) a place which demonstrates a likelihood of providing information which will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history, by virtue of its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality or benchmark site

References

Other Information Sources