

National Gallery of Victoria (former)

Address 180 St Kilda Road, Southbank 3006

Practice Grounds, Roy

Designed 1959

Completed 1968

History & Description In 1959 Grounds, Romberg and Boyd were appointed architects to design a new NGV on a site in St Kilda Road. Later amid great controversy Roy Grounds became the sole architect. His master plan placed the Gallery and two other smaller buildings at the southern end of the site, with the northern end reserved for the future construction of a theatre and concert hall complex.

The large palazzo-like gallery building is rectangular in form with three internal courtyards providing light and external views to surrounding galleries. The bluestone clad, reinforced concrete building is relieved only by a large entrance archway and a bronze Victorian coat of arms by Norma Redpath on the front facade. The oriental influenced floating roof, with upturned eaves, is separated from the walls by a continuous band of high clerestory windows, and a moat surrounds the entire building. The water theme is continued at the entry where a flow of water runs down a glass screen, now known as the water wall. The brief required the inclusion of a reception hall for State functions and this is four storeys in height and features an abstract ceiling of multi-coloured glass by the artist Leonard French. Two principal double height floors, at ground and second floor levels, contain the main gallery spaces, with intermediary floors containing many of the service areas. Contrasting internal finishes include bluestone, bush-hammered concrete and Victorian ash veneer panels, baffles and gapped lining boards.

The Italian architect Mario Bellini, in conjunction with Metier 3, were responsible for its redevelopment in 2003. (VHR #H1499)

Statement of Significance The original NGV is of significance as a major work by the noted Australian architect, Roy Grounds, who, together with his former partners Robin Boyd and Frederick Romberg, was one of the most influential architects of his generation, pioneering modernist design. The gallery represents the peak of his five decades of practice. It is his best known work and a building that provoked a mixed reaction from the profession at the time for invoking medieval oriental themes and not strictly adhering to modernist principles. Grounds's importance as an architect was confirmed when he was awarded the RAIA Gold Medal in 1968. He was also knighted the same year. The original complex was important as a highly detailed, integrated design. This was demonstrated in the variety of internal finishes employed, the design of furniture and fittings, and in the integration of art work in the building, such as the ceiling by artist Leonard French and the coat of arms by Norma Redpath.

Criteria Applicable N2 - Significant heritage value in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
N3 - Significant heritage value in establishing a high degree of creative achievement
N5 - Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history.



Great Hall 2009, photo by John Dalkin [flickr]



Central Courtyard 1968, by Wolfgang Sievers [SLV]



Aerial view ca.1970, photo by Dennis Mayor [SLV Picture Collection]



Front elevation 1968, photo by Wolfgang Sievers [SLV Picture Collection]