

---

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA



NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA  
SOHE 2008



1 national gallery of victoria st kilda road  
melbourne front view

---

## Location

180 ST KILDA ROAD SOUTHBANK, MELBOURNE CITY

## Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1499

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO792

## VHR Registration

August 20, 1982

## Amendment to Registration

May 23, 1998

## Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 22, 2000

### What is significant?

The National Gallery of Victoria was opened in 1968 as the first stage of the Victorian Arts Centre. Designed by noted Melbourne architect Roy Grounds, this building created great controversy both before and after construction, and caused the split in 1962 of the important and influential partnership Grounds had with Robin Boyd and Frederick Romberg.

The National Gallery was originally established in the Public Library in Swanston Street in 1861. Calls for a new and separate gallery building began after the generous Felton Bequest in 1905 enabled the acquisition of a large collection of art, however this was not fulfilled for another sixty years. In 1943 the State Government proposed that a new art gallery be constructed on crown land just south of the Yarra River on a site known as Wirth's Park, occupied at the time by a number of entertainment facilities. Proclamation of the site was delayed until 1957, after Henry Bolte was elected Premier, and construction on the site finally commenced in 1962. A competition was not held for the design and in 1959 Grounds, Romberg and Boyd were appointed architects. In awarding this commission, emphasis was placed on Grounds thirty years of experience and he subsequently became responsible for the job. He then devoted much of his time, from the 1960s to the 1980s, to this building complex. The master plan produced by Grounds, placed the Gallery at the southern end of the St Kilda Road site, with the northern end reserved for the future construction of a theatre and concert hall complex.

The Director of the Gallery at the time, Eric Westbrook, produced a brief outlining the aims of a new Gallery building and, together with Grounds, undertook a three month tour of Europe and America to view international gallery designs. Grounds had already gained a reputation in Victoria for his highly innovative work, playing a key role in the early 1930s in bringing the Modern Movement to Australia. His fascination with geometry was evident in his work from the early 1950s and can be clearly seen in his gallery design.

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.

Grant and Mary Featherston were commissioned to design the furniture and fittings for the gallery in 1966. They were required to address a wide range of issues, including security, atmospheric control and the housing of a variety of objects, and, in response to their brief, developed a system of butt jointed glass cases which provided an unencumbered view of the objects on display. These were supported on rectilinear frames of Victorian ash, consistent with the material used throughout the interior.

In response to the specific site, the original master plan included a triangular planned Art School to the west of the gallery and circular spire to the north, and in 1970 the former was opened. Associated auditoria and theatres were also planned for future development and these were completed in the early 1980s.

A major redevelopment of the National Gallery was opened in 2003. Designed by Italian architect Mario Bellini, in conjunction with Melbourne architects, Metier 3, it retained the basic design and inserted a new gallery. Many important features of the original Grounds design remain intact, including the exterior bluestone walls, Leonard French ceiling, water wall entry (although moved), and many of the original internal finishes.

### **How is it significant?**

The National Gallery of Victoria is of architectural, historical and social significance to the State of Victoria.

### **Why is it significant?**

The National Gallery of Victoria is of architectural significance as the most ambitious and most successful of the works from the post-Second World War period to 1960, in the development of a modern Australian architecture. This period of experimentation in structure and expression was influenced by the Modern Movement in Europe and America, and resulted in a specific Australian response.

The National Gallery of Victoria is of architectural significance as a major work by 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 architectural profession. Grounds' significance as an architect was confirmed when he was awarded the RAIA Gold Medal in 1968 and was knighted the same year.

The Gallery is of architectural significance as a highly detailed, integrated design. This is seen 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.

The Gallery is of historical significance as the first major public building to be constructed in Victoria in the fifty years following the First World War, and the first entirely new Art Gallery to be constructed in Australia after the Second World War. It set new standards for exhibition layout, art storage and conservation and represented a new era in the arts and public architecture. The site became the primary focus for the arts in Victoria and provided Melbourne with an important visual image.

The National Gallery is of social significance for the high level of public ownership and affection it attracts. This is particularly evident in the large amount of money raised by public appeal and the strong attachment felt with the visible images of the water wall and the Great Hall.

[Online Data Upgrade Project 2005]

## **Permit Exemptions**

<p class="c2">· <b class="c1">Installation of banners at the entry to the National Gallery of Victoria for the Dutch Masters from 5 June 2005 to 2 October 2005 after which it is to be removed.</b></p> <p class="c2">· <b class="c1">The banner is to be installed without making any permanent changes to the facade of the building as described in the attached plan prepared by ARUP , Job No 84207/3 Sketch Sk/3/1 Rev A.</b></p> <span class="c1">Installation of structures being for promotional advertising signage for Picasso Exhibition as set out in the document titled 'Picasso-External Signage Proposal Concept & Preliminary Documentation' dated 15 May 2006 and prepared by NGV Exhibition Design Department. Exemption valid until 9 October 2006 and signage must then be removed.</span> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.</span> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component.</span> <p class="c1">General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: A Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.</p> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.</span> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.</span> <span class="c1">Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor

works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.</span>

Construction dates	1962, 1997,
Architect/Designer	Grounds, Roy, Bellini, Mario, Metier 3,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	NGV,
Hermes Number	1066
Property Number	

## History

<p class="c1">The National Gallery of Victoria was opened in 1968 as the first stage of the Victorian Arts Centre. Designed by noted Melbourne architect Roy Grounds, this building created great controversy both before and after construction, and caused the split in 1962 of the important and influential partnership Grounds had with Robin Boyd and Frederick Romberg.</p> <p class="c1">The National Gallery was originally established in the Public Library in Swanston Street in 1861. Calls for a new and separate gallery building began after the generous Felton Bequest in 1905 enabled the acquisition of a large collection of art, however this was not fulfilled for another sixty years. In 1943 the State Government proposed that a new art gallery be constructed on crown land just south of the Yarra River on a site known as Wirth's Park, occupied at the time by a number of entertainment facilities. Proclamation of the site was delayed until 1957, after Henry Bolte was elected Premier, and construction on the site finally commenced in 1962. A competition was not held for the design and in 1959 Grounds, Romberg and Boyd were appointed architects. In awarding this commission, emphasis was placed on Grounds thirty years of experience and he subsequently became responsible for the job. He then devoted much of his time, from the 1960s to the 1980s, to this building complex. The master plan produced by Grounds, placed the Gallery at the southern end of the St Kilda Road site, with the northern end reserved for the future construction of a theatre and concert hall complex.</p> <p class="c1">The Director of the Gallery at the time, Eric Westbrook, produced a brief outlining the aims of a new Gallery building and, together with Grounds, undertook a three month tour of Europe and America to view international gallery designs. Grounds had already gained a reputation in Victoria for his highly innovative work, playing a key role in the early 1930s in bringing the Modern Movement to Australia. His fascination with geometry was evident in his work from the early 1950s and can be clearly seen in his gallery design.</p> <p class="c1">In response to the specific site, the original master plan included a triangular planned Art School to the west of the gallery and circular spire to the north, and in 1970 the former was opened. Associated auditoria and theatres were also planned for future development and these were completed in the early 1980s.</p> <p class="c1">A major redevelopment of the National Gallery was opened in 2003. Designed by Italian architect Mario Bellini, in conjunction with Melbourne architects, Metier 3, it retained the basic design and inserted a new gallery. Many important features of the original Grounds design remain intact, including the exterior bluestone walls, Leonard French ceiling, water wall entry (although moved), and many of the original internal finishes.</p> <p class="c1"><b>The draft statement of significance and the above history were produced as part of an Online Data Upgrade Project 2005. Sources were as follows:<br /></b>Allom Lovell and Associates. <i>National Gallery of</i> <i>Victoria</i> <i>Conservation Management Plan.</i> Volume 1. 1994<br /> Meredith Gould<i>. National Gallery of</i> <i>Victoria</i> <i>Conservation Plan</i>. 1998</p>

## Plaque Citation

This highly geometric, palazzo-like building was designed by influential modernist architect Roy Grounds in 1968 as the first stage of the Victorian Arts Centre complex. A major redevelopment, incorporating many original features, was completed in 2003.

## **Extent of Registration**

Amendment of Register of Government Buildings

South Melbourne City

National Gallery of Victoria

St Kilda Road, South Melbourne.

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. G39 12 October 1988 p.3094]

Transferred to the Victorian Heritage Register 23 May 1998 (2 years after the proclamation of the Heritage Act 1995 pursuant to the transitional provisions of the Act)

---

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*