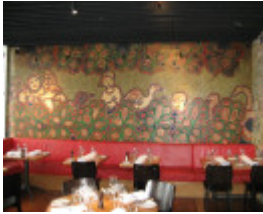


# TOLARNO HOTEL



Mirka at Tolarno\_St Kilda  
\_restaurant mural\_KJ\_13 Oct  
o8



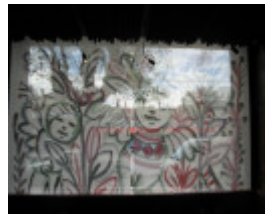
Mirka at Tolarno\_St Kilda -  
restaurant mural\_KJ\_13 Oct  
o8



Mirka at Tolarno\_St Kilda  
\_restaurant mural\_KJ\_13 Oct  
o8



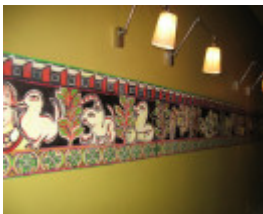
Mirka at Tolarno\_St Kilda  
\_restaurant murals\_KJ\_13  
Oct o8



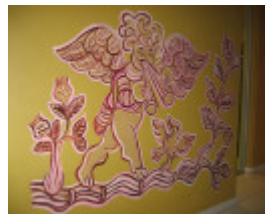
Mirka at Tolarno\_St  
Kilda\_new blinds in  
restaurant\_KJ\_13 Oct o8



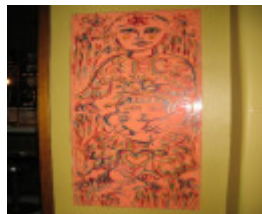
Mirka at Tolarno\_St Kildabar  
relief mural\_KJ\_13 Oct o8



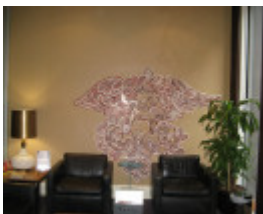
Mirka at Tolarno\_St  
Kilda\_hall mural\_KJ\_13 Oct  
o8



Mirka at Tolarno\_St  
Kilda\_hall mural\_KJ\_13 Oct  
o8



Mirka at Tolarno\_St  
Kilda\_light diffuser\_KJ\_13  
Oct o8



Mirka at Tolarno St  
Kilda\_mural in foyer\_KJ\_13  
Oct o8



Mirka at Tolarno\_St  
Kilda\_exterior\_KJ\_13 Oct o8



PROV H2207 tolarno plan

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### **Location**

42 FITZROY STREET ST KILDA, PORT PHILLIP CITY

### **Municipality**

PORT PHILLIP CITY

### **Level of significance**

Registered

### **Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H2207

### **Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO126

### **VHR Registration**

May 14, 2009

### **Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Register

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### **Statement of Significance**

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Tolarno Hotel was purchased in 1965 by Georges Mora (1913-1992) and his wife Mirka Mora (1928- ), who had migrated from France in 1951 and had an important influence on the changes which occurred in Melbourne's cultural life in the post-war period. The restaurant was the third the couple had owned since migrating from France in 1951, following the Mirka Cafe in Exhibition Street, Melbourne (now demolished) from 1954, and the Balzac in East Melbourne from 1958, which marked the beginnings of Melbourne's cafe society. Georges Mora bought the hotel as a restaurant, art gallery, studio and home. It had originally been a mansion, was converted to a boarding house in the late nineteenth century, and then to a hotel, with the present restaurant and bar added to the front, by the 1960s. The Moras were prominent members of Melbourne's artistic and bohemian set. They were associated with the revival of the Contemporary Art Society from 1953, and their restaurants were used to display the work of local artists, many of whom have now become world famous, including Charles Blackman, Sidney Nolan, John Perceval and Howard Arkley. At the Tolarno Hotel Georges opened the Tolarno Gallery, where a remarkable series of art exhibitions were held in the 1960s. As well as displaying the work of local artists, including exhibitions of Sydney Nolan's Ned Kelly paintings and of Mirka's paintings, it was also used for exhibitions of the work of modern French masters, which made Georges a valuable emissary of French art in Australia. Between 1965 and 1978 Mirka painted a series of murals over the walls and windows of the restaurant, bistro, hallway and toilets. The restaurant has changed hands several times since 1970, though Georges continued to run the gallery until 1979. Substantial alterations were made in 2006-7, under the supervision of the architect Peter Elliot. As part of these works Mirka Mora was commissioned to restore the original murals and to paint new ones. The original painted windows at the front were replaced. The restaurant was renamed Mirka at Tolarno Hotel.

The Tolarno Hotel is a modern hotel and restaurant resulting from c1930 and c1960 additions to a nineteenth century mansion. At the front are a restaurant and a bar area, with a hallway between leading to the former gallery and hotel reception behind. The colourful murals and artworks of Mirka Mora are an integral part of the character of the place. They include the painted murals around the walls of the restaurant, a painted plaster relief (originally coloured, now painted white) on one wall of the bar, and painted murals in the entrance foyer, hallway, women's toilets and on the south wall of the hotel foyer. There are also in the restaurant three blinds with printed reproductions of Mirka's artwork created specifically for the restaurant. Eight painted light diffusers, originally hanging from the restaurant ceiling, are now mounted and hang on the walls of the hall and restaurant. The subject matter of the artworks is strongly autobiographical, their symbolism deriving from Mirka's Romanian heritage, her interest in literature and history, and later from the lives of her three children.

How is it significant?

The Tolarno Hotel is of historical and aesthetic significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Tolarno Hotel is of historical significance for its association with the great changes which occurred in the cultural and intellectual life of Melbourne in the post-war period, and with the role played in these changes by cultured European immigrants. It is historically significant for its association with Georges Mora, a prominent restaurateur and art gallery owner, and his wife Mirka, one of Victoria's best-known and loved artists, both of whom had an important influence on Melbourne's cultural and culinary life in the post-war period, and introduced to Victoria a more European way of life that has since become normal.

The Tolarno Hotel is aesthetically significant for its murals and other art works by Mirka Mora, one of Victoria's best-loved artists, which have become her most well-known public works.

## **Permit Exemptions**

### **General Exemptions:**

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage

Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### **Specific Exemptions:**

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. 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. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria 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. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. 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. 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 may 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.

Construction dates	1928, 1960, 1965, 2006,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Other Names	Mirka at Tolarno Hotel, MIRKA MORA MURALS,
Hermes Number	14435
Property Number	

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## **History**

George Mora (1913-1992) was born in Leipzig in 1913, and became a Legionnaire, a Resistance supporter and later head of an orphan organisation. Mirka was born in Paris in 1928 and studied mime and drama at the Barrault School of Theatre. The two married in 1947 and migrated to Melbourne with their first son in 1951. After a brief stay in suburban McKinnon they moved to 9 Collins Street, the former studios of the artists Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, John Longstaff, Jane Sutherland and Ola Cohn, where they lived for fifteen years. Their studio became a centre of cultural life in Melbourne. Mirka painted from the time they arrived there, but made extra money dressmaking, and a dress commissioned by Sunday Reed led to long friendship with her and her husband John Reed, whose house Heidi at Bulleen was the focus for an extraordinary circle of artists in post-war Melbourne. The Reeds and Moras built adjoining beach houses at Aspendale.

In 1954 George and Mirka opened the Mirka Cafe at 183 Exhibition Street, on the corner of Little Bourke Street. It hosted provocative exhibitions, as well as innumerable parties. It was probably the first French cafe in Melbourne and was also the first cafe to put chairs and tables for patrons on the footpath. It was a salon for Melbourne's avant-garde and a focus for international visitors. It was decked out in modernist style, with murals, furniture and sculpture designed by Ian Sime, Julius Kane and Clifford Last respectively, and meals served on crockery made by John Perceval. Adorning the walls were changing displays of paintings by Sime, Hope, Sidney Nolan and Bert Tucker, Joy Hester and Danila Vasileff, as well as significant works from the private collection of John and Sunday Reed. As Dawn Sime recalled (quoted in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p 35), unlike some other artists' meeting places, women here were not marginalised.

From 1953 George and Mirka both joined in the revival of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), with George Mora as President and John Reed as Director. The Moras' apartment on Collins Street was the meeting place and gallery for the CAS in the early years. It began organising art exhibitions for the Royal Visit of Queen Elizabeth II, opposed to the official one in the Melbourne Town Hall. In 1956 the CAS Gallery of Contemporary Art opened in an old warehouse in Tavistock Place, with early shows in the lead-up to and during the Olympic Games by Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, John Brack, Laurence Daws, Robert Dickerson, Joy Hester, Roger Kemp, John Percival, Clifton Pugh and Edwin Tanner.

The success of the Exhibition Street cafe led to the need for larger premises, and Balzac, for which George commissioned a mural from the Annandale Imitation Realists, opened in 1958 at 62 Wellington Parade, East Melbourne. Charles Blackman and George Mora cooked. It was the first restaurant in Victoria to get a 10pm licence. It is now operating under a different name and has been extensively altered.

In 1965 Balzac was sold and George bought the Tolarno Hotel at St Kilda, and then announced the news to Mirka. It was to be a hotel, restaurant, gallery and restaurant, as well as a studio for Mirka. The site had been occupied from 1884 by a Boom style mansion called Tolarno (the same name as a pastoral property on the Darling River, South of Menindee, in New South Wales, though there is no known link between the two). In 1886 the hotel was converted to a guest house, complete with a croquet lawn in the front garden. In 1928 (or 1933) a Moderne style rear wing of twenty-nine bedrooms a dining room and kitchen was added. It was designed by G G Cronin, for the owner S C Cronin. The Modernist six bedroom wing and the present restaurant were built on the site of the former front garden, probably in the 1960s, just before George bought it. The building of commercial premises in the front gardens of former mansions has been common in St Kilda.

Tolarno French Restaurant and Bistro opened later in 1965, and rapidly became the most fashionable French bistro in Melbourne. The family lived in rooms on the first floor and the restaurant was on the left of the lobby as it still is. Mirka Mora used the hotel's bridal suite as her studio. The Moras built a new kitchen and toilets at the rear of the restaurant. Mirka painted the murals on the walls, and with the young artist Martin Sharp from Sydney (later of Oz magazine) painted climbing roses on the windows and doors of the restaurant (now removed).

George began a transition from restaurateur to art dealer. The rear dining room was converted into the Tolarno Gallery, which opened in 1967 and became one of the best known galleries in Melbourne in the 1960s. Many of the exhibitions held there were of top international standard, particularly the work of modern French masters, including drawings and prints of Renoir, Toulouse Lautrec, Picasso, Chagall, Vuillard and Bonnard. George Mora travelled to Paris every year, and returned with shows for art-conscious Melburnians, and the exhibitions made Mora a valuable emissary of French art in Australia. The Sidney Nolan Ned Kelly series was also shown there.

At Tolarno in 1967 Mirka exhibited a series of large, mural-scale paintings, alongside tempera pastels, bas reliefs and drawings. The exhibition attracted widespread reviews and signalled Mirka's arrival as a serious artist. Mural commissions from private collectors followed as a result of the exhibition. Mirka also began an ambitious series of murals painted throughout the restaurant, 'which have since become the artist's most celebrated and enduring

public works' (Philippe Mora, *Where Angels fear to Tread*, p 43). Philippe (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p 51) describes the Tolarno murals thus:

The series of wall murals at Tolarno Bistro, St Kilda . can be seen as one of her most significant offerings to the wider world. Produced between 1965 and 1978, the Tolarno murals represent a creative commitment unlike anything else in the city. Today patrons keep company with a tableau of figures who literally leap out of the walls, in what Mora describes as a 'flurry of plaster'. In the restaurant, colourful birds and cherubs eavesdrop on diners, and warm to the sounds of chatter and laughter. There is no crevice or protrusion in which Mora's fantasy world does not extend: windows bear archways of florid overgrowth, a horned she-devil guards the front counter; even the air-conditioner is consumed in the frieze-like narrative. Mora's characters are derived from an interest in Greek mythology and in the Jungian analysis of dreams and archetypes, but at Tolarno the spirits act primarily as agents of watchful protection, warding off evil and ensuring the safety of diners.

Eventually the management of the hotel became too onerous for the Moras and that part of the business was sold. The Mora bedrooms and studio moved to the basement, and a second gallery was opened at the rear, next to the kitchen.

In 1970 the Moras separated, and Mirka moved out. From 1974 the restaurant was run by Leon and Vivienne Massoni, leaving George to run the gallery, from 1975 with his son William, but in 1979 George built a new gallery in South Yarra with William Mora as partner. William opened his own gallery in 1985.

Leon Massoni sold the Tolarno restaurant business in 1988, and from 1991 until 2006 it was run by Iain Hewitson and Ruth Allen. The building was bought in 1996 by James Fagan and Bernard Corser. Following the departure of Hewitson, the restaurant was leased in 2006 by Guy Grossi, from Grossi Florentino (VHR H493), a Melbourne culinary institution. His father Pietro had been a chef at Massoni's restaurant, and Guy Grossi had begun his career there.

Substantial alterations were undertaken in 2006-7, under the supervision of the architect Peter Elliot and with the involvement of Mirka Mora. The restaurant, and the murals, had become rather faded and worn. The interiors were altered, producing a more open plan, with the addition of a white marble floor in the entrance hall, a marble bar in the bar area, and leather banquettes in the restaurant. Some openings were altered and the toilets rebuilt. Mirka Mora was commissioned to 'refresh' the original murals and to paint new ones. The original painted windows were removed and larger ones installed, shaded by screens painted by her. The old windows had been damaged and disfigured by air conditioners, and had also been repainted by others without her permission. The restaurant has been renamed Mirka at Tolarno, and her colourful murals remain an integral part of the character of the place.

Mirka Mora is one of Melbourne's best known and loved artists. Her public commissions include a tram, and mosaic murals at Flinders Street Station and St Kilda pier (now destroyed). She has worked in a variety of materials and techniques, pigments, pastels,tempera, oils, watercolours, tapestries and mosaics, and her voluminous output includes soft sculptures (dolls). All her work is strongly autobiographical, its symbolism deriving from her Russian heritage, her interest in literature and history, and later from her own three children and her love affairs. Mirka has conducted many highly popular workshops around Australian schools and CAE classes, and has held many solo exhibitions since 1956, first at Tolarno and since 1987 in her son William Mora's Gallery. A book on her work was published in 1980 by Macmillan, and she was represented in the touring exhibition, *The face of Australia*, in 1988. A retrospective exhibition, *Mirka Mora: Where Angels Fear to Tread*, was held at Heidi and toured to the Ararat Regional Gallery 1999-2000, and in 2001 her work was included in the exhibition *Joy Hester and Friends* at the NGV. In 2000 her autobiography *Wicked by Virtuous* was published. Her commissions include a Federation Tapestry design for the Victorian Tapestry workshop 2001, and Christmas stamp designs for Australia Post 2003. She was made an *Officier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Government in 2002.

## REFERENCES

Richard Peterson, 'Tolarno Boutique Hotel, Bar & Bistro 42 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda', in *A Place of Sensuous Resort: Buildings of St Kilda and Their People*, St Kilda 2005.

Alan McCulloch et al, *the New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, Carlton 2006, (entries for George and Mirka Mora, pp 699- 700).

Max Delaney & Murray White, *Mirka Mora. Where Angels Fear to Tread. 50 years of Art 1948-1998*, Heidi Bulleen 1999.

Alan McCulloch et al, *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, Carlton 2006 (pp 699-700).

Mirka Mora, *Wicked but Virtuous*, Ringwood 2000.

## **Assessment Against Criteria**

a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

Mirka at Tolarno Hotel is important for its association with the great changes which occurred in the cultural and intellectual life of Melbourne in the post-war period, and with the role played in these changes by cultured European immigrants.

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

Mirka at Tolarno Hotel is aesthetically significant for its murals and other art works by Mirka Mora, one of Victoria's best-loved artists, which have become her most well-known public works.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

Mirka at Tolarno Hotel is historically significant for its association with George Mora, a prominent restaurateur and art gallery owner, and his wife Mirka, one of Victoria's best-known and loved artists, both of whom had an important influence on Melbourne's cultural and culinary life in the post-war period, and introduced to Victoria a more European way of life that has since become normal.

## **Plaque Citation**

This was owned in the 1960s and 1970s by the restaurant and gallery owner Georges Mora and his wife Mirka, post-war European immigrants who greatly enhanced Melbourne's cultural life. It is decorated with Mirka's unique art works.

## **Extent of Registration**

1. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2207 held by the Executive Director being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 6332 Folio 354.

2. All of the building marked B1 on Diagram 2207 held by the Executive Director.

3. All the murals and other works by Mirka Mora in the restaurant, bar, entrance, hallway, toilet and hotel foyer are included in the registration.

F1 Murals on walls of restaurant

F2 Mural on east wall of bar

F3 Mural in entrance foyer

F4 Murals in hallway

F5 Mural on south wall of hotel foyer

F6 Murals on walls of ladies' toilet

O1-8 Former light diffusers from the restaurant, one now hanging in the restaurant and seven in the hallway

O9 Pair of wing doors from the original bar, now mounted on the hall wall adjacent to front entrance on the right hand side of the bar entry

O10-12 Three blinds in restaurant with printed reproductions of Mirka Mora's artwork

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*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/>*