

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated 10/08/20



## VICTORIAN ARTISTS SOCIETY



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2008



1 victorian artists society albert street  
east melbourne front view sep1981



victorian artists society albert street east  
melbourne detail of balcony aug1993



victorian artists society albert street east  
melbourne detail of front entrance  
aug1993

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### Location

428-430 ALBERT STREET EAST MELBOURNE, Melbourne City

### Municipality

MELBOURNE CITY

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0634

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO122

## VHR Registration

July 30, 1986

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - January 19, 2000

What is significant?

William Massey built the Victorian Artists Society at 430 Albert Street in 1892 to the design of architect Richard Speight. The building, constructed of brick with a tile roof, is in the American Romanesque style. The American Romanesque style combined bold massing in the Norman style with intricate decoration. It is expressed in this building by the bold Richardsonian arch, the loggia and squat columns. Speight's design, in response to a competition, is the second building on the site and sits in front of a bluestone basement gallery constructed in 1874. The 1892 two storey facade is symmetrically composed of two pavilion wings flanking a central entrance. The entrance is through a wide nested archway set on squat half columns with carved stone capitals. The spandrels to the archway contain small round windows surrounded by floral decoration in moulded cement bas-relief. Above the entrance is a loggia of four arches set upon slender columns with a decorative cement bas-relief panel and mock machicolations. The flanking pavilions on the ground floor each contain two windows set between columns with carved capitals. On the second storey are large blank panels designed to receive decorative panels that were not completed. Above the panels are three small windows set between squat columns. The gable ends above the flanking bays contain decorative cement arches and small round windows.

How is it significant?

The Victorian Artists Society is of architectural and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Victorian Artists Society is architecturally significant as an early expression of the American Romanesque style in Victoria. The style in Australia was strongly influenced by prominent American architects, notably Sullivan and Richardson. This new style represented a shift from the traditional European architectural influences of the Classical and Gothic styles, and was a conscious identification to the New World. It was significant as one approach in the search for a national style of architecture appropriate to Australia. The Victorian Artists Society has a skilfully executed decorative scheme with decorative mouldings, half columns and foliated panels. It is one of the few surviving works of architect Richard Speight.

The Victorian Artists Society is socially significant as an academy for painters and sculptors. Many of Victoria's prominent artists have been associated with the Society and the building over a continuous period of more than 120 years. Prominent members included Chevalier, von Guerard, Buvelot, Streeton, Roberts and Conder.

Construction dates	1874,
Architect/Designer	Speight, Richard,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	351

## History

### Contextual History:

The Victorian Academy of the Arts was inaugurated on 10 January 1870. The first exhibitions were held in public libraries. On 24 January 1873 a land grant was obtained by the Academy at 430 Albert Street and a bluestone gallery was erected paid for by members. The gallery was opened by Sir George Bowen on 30 July 1874. It was known by its nick-name as 'the morgue'.

In the mid 1880s a division arose between professional and amateur members and in 1886 the professionals set up their own Australian Artists' Association led by Streeton, Roberts and Conder. The two bodies were soon reunited in 1888 as the Victorian Artists' Society with J A Panton as the first president. By 1891 there were 406 members.

The architect of the new building, Richard Speight, was trained in England. His father was Richard Speight (snr.), Chairman of the Board of Victorian Railway Commissioners. Speight jnr. established a practice in Collins Street in 1887 and enjoyed seven productive years in partnership with H W Tompkins. The design for the Artists Society has overt references to the work of Richardson in America, and Speight was probably aware of Richardso's Trinity Church Rectory in Boston. Speight moved to Western Australia with his family shortly after his father was made scapegoat for overspending on the Victorian Railways.

(Article by Bridget Cassidy in 1992 Centenary Catalogue)

Associated People: Harry (Henry William) Tompkins was a partner of Richard Speight and was a co-designer of the competition winning entry for this building.

Artists; Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, Charles Conder, Percival Ball

## Extent of Registration

### AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic Building No. 634, Victorian Artists' Society, 430 Albert Street, East Melbourne (to the extent of the building and land, title Vol. 2093 Folio 484).

[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. 65 30 July 1986 p. 2977]

*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 data owner.*

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