

National Trust Classification Report

FILE NO: B6873

NAME: Federation Square

LOCATION: Swanston Street & Flinders Street, Melbourne, City of Melbourne

OTHER / FORMER NAMES: 'Fed Square'



1. STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

Federation Square is a public square designed by Lab Architecture Studio, led by Peter Davidson and Donald Bates, in association with Bates Smart, and was opened to the public on 26 October 2002. It occupies a site the size of a city block (3.8 hectares), bound by Flinders Street, Swanston Street, the Russell Street extension and Princes Walk which skirts the Yarra River, and is built above working rail lines that feed into Flinders Street Station. The site consists of a series of interlocking buildings, spaces and laneways, integrating public and civic spaces, commercial and retail tenancies and major cultural institutions including the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and SBS in the Alfred Deakin building on the north side, the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia to the east and the Koorie Heritage Trust in the Yarra Building to the south.

The architectural and aesthetic significance of Federation Square depends on its presentation as a unified whole. The key elements of the site are outlined below, however the relationships between each element are also intrinsic to the significance of the place.

The Deck

Federation Square is built on a deck constructed over the Jolimont railyards, supported by steel beams, concrete 'crash walls', and vibration-absorbing spring coils and rubber padding.

The Labyrinth

The Labyrinth is a maze of zig-zag surface corrugated concrete walls situated between the deck and the surface of the Square where the site slopes upward towards the Atrium. Covering an area of about 160 square metres, the Labyrinth is almost 40x40 metres and 1.4 km in length, functioning as an environmentally friendly air-conditioning system that provides cool air to the Atrium, Deakin Edge and other parts of the Square in summer and warm air in winter.

The Square

The Square is an irregularly shaped open space, sculpted to the rising ground levels required over the railway tracks below. A complex of buildings forms an irregular U-shape around the square, oriented to the west. The Square gradually rises approximately 6 metres from Swanston Street to the eastern end of the site, near the Atrium and the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.

***Nearamnew* by Paul Carter**

The surface of the Square is made up of approximately 467,000 cobblestones of variegated coloured Kimberley sandstone from Mt Jowlaenga in Western Australia, which comprise the public artwork *Nearamnew* by Paul Carter. The work was commissioned by the Federation Square Public Art program and designed by public artist and academic Paul Carter in collaboration with Lab Architecture Studio. The artwork was created specifically for the Square to commemorate Federation, referencing the global, regional and local levels found in a federally organised society. The design consists of three parts inscribed into the cobbled surface: 1) the whorl pattern which forms the envelope of the design, 2) nine ground figures and 3) nine vision text.

The Atrium

The eastern end of the square is formed by the Atrium, which runs north-south from Flinders Street to the Yarra River walk, immediately to the west of the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. It is a five-storey covered laneway or street constructed from glass and steel, and is a feature entry point into Federation Square from Flinders Street. At street level there are a collection of retail and hospitality outlets.

The Crossbar

Two-thirds of the way down the Atrium is the 'Crossbar', situated at an angle to both the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia and the Atrium, slicing through the two. The Crossbar acts as an entry point to the gallery, also facilitating the movement from the Atrium to the main Square. The western half of the Crossbar hosts restaurants at ground level and on the second-floor, as well as corporate offices in between.

Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia is situated at the eastern end of Federation Square, stretching almost the whole block from Flinders Street down to the Yarra River walk. The gallery is designed as two north-south 'filaments', which form an angular and elongated figure of eight. The main entrance to the gallery and access to the three levels of the building are positions where the two filaments meet, at the Crossbar. The floor of this area is Kimberley sandstone which also paves the Square, creating a visual link with the rest of the precinct.

Deakin Edge auditorium

At the southern end of the Atrium, with views through the glass wall to the Yarra River, is an indoor auditorium designed for music, lectures forums and presentations. It can seat up to 450 people. The interior is lined in wood veneer in geometrical patterns. The space was named BMW Edge until May 2013 until a new sponsorship deal with Deakin University led to the rebranding of the space as Deakin Edge.

The Alfred Deakin building

The Alfred Deakin building encloses the northern side of the Square, and consists of two large buildings joined by a glass central arcade. In 2018, the anchor tenants of the Alfred Deakin Building are the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and SBS. The eastern half of the building is a solid mass, containing two cinemas, a function room, retail space and café. The western half of the Alfred Deakin Building houses the administration of ACMI and the Melbourne headquarters of SBS. The arcade between the two parts of ACMI leads from Flinders Street into the Square. The Alfred Deakin building also includes a below-ground space on the Flinders Street side of the Square, which runs parallel to Flinders Street and the railway lines. This space, occupied by ACMI's Screen Gallery, is utilised for screen-based exhibitions. The Screen Gallery was built in part of the space that once contained two platforms of the former Princes Bridge railway station. The Screen Gallery is 110 metres long, 15 metres wide and 8 metres high. There is a huge steel mezzanine floor which is retractable, allowing the Screen Gallery to have varying floor configurations. The Alfred Deakin building is connected to the Atrium by a small two storey building which currently has a hospitality use.

The Yarra Building

The three-storey Yarra Building encloses the Square on its southern side, allowing people to move beside it down to the riverside walk on either side. The land around the Yarra Building slopes downhill to the river, and on both the eastern and western sides there are several flights of steps leading the pedestrian down. There are a number of cafes and restaurants at deck level, facing the river, and on the western side of the building. In 2018, the anchor tenant is the Koorie Heritage Trust, which relocated there in 2005.

Transport Hotel building

The Transport building is located at the south-western corner of Federation Square, adjoining Flinders Street and opposite the railway station and Princes Bridge, thus enclosing the Square on that side. A stage has been built on the side of the building facing the Square which, when in use, turns the space into an amphitheatre. On the eastern side of the building is an LED screen, which is a central element of the Square. The Screen showcases major events within the Square itself and from places elsewhere in Melbourne, across Australian and around the world, at various times of day and night.

St Paul's Court

St Paul's Court is a roughly triangular area of Federation Square directly opposite the twin steeples at the southern end of St Paul's Cathedral. The corner of Federation Square opposite St Paul's Cathedral at Swanston and Flinders Streets is the major gateway for pedestrians into Federation Square. Unlike the main Square, St Paul's Court is not paved in sandstone cobbles; instead it is covered by bluestone and concrete pavers. The court's surface rises from the street corner until it leads the visitor into the cobbled area and up a flight of steps into the Square. To the east there are commercial and retail outlets.

The Western Shard

The Swanston/Flinders Street corner of the site is occupied by the Western Shard, a glass-walled pavilion which provides access to the underground Melbourne Visitor Centre. The

entrance features interactive news tickers in colour LEDs and small screens promoting current activities.

The Eastern Shard

The Eastern Shard is a zinc-clad building with a jagged and asymmetric outline. Slits of irregular shape act as windows and as a sculpture in the surface of the building. The distinctive slashed façade also flashes messages and electronic information about the Square and other news and events. The Eastern Shard is also the western buffer to the Flinders Street Amphitheatre. The Eastern Shard is the exit for the Melbourne Visitor Centre. A retail tenancy is housed in St Paul's Court in the Eastern Shard.

Landscaping features

There are a small number of landscaped sections in the Square which are planted with Eucalyptus trees. There is also row of established Plane trees between the Yarra Building and Princes Walk. Three main spaces branch off the Square, including the Flinders Street Amphitheatre, St Paul's Court, and the Swanston Street Forecourt. Each of these spaces focuses outwards, with a sloping gradient and seating, and feature a level change separating them from the Square.

How is it significant?

Federation Square is of historic, aesthetic, architectural and social significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criteria for inclusion in the Heritage Register of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria):

Criterion A: Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics

Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

Criterion 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.

Why is it significant?

Federation Square is significant to the State of Victoria for the following reasons:

Federation Square is significant as Victoria's premier civic and cultural space, bound by a Civic and Cultural Charter developed in 1997. Federation Square represents the culmination of a century-long search for a public square within the State's capital city, Melbourne. Its unique design incorporates landscape, public open space, buildings, exhibition halls, office space, cinemas, interior public spaces and retail and hospitality venues all within the one cohesive complex, representing an innovative approach to the provision of civic and cultural space.
[Criterion A]

Federation Square is aesthetically and architecturally significant as a monumental example of architecture dating to the turn of the twenty-first century, which has been both critically and popularly acclaimed, and which is largely intact to its constructed form. The aesthetic and architectural significance of Federation Square relies on its presentation as a unified whole.

Federation Square is a prominent example in Victoria of a monumental civic and cultural space resulting from an international design competition. [Criterion E]

Federation Square is aesthetically and architecturally significant as the finest example of turn-of-the-century architecture embracing geometry as the primary generator of form, using the slightly angled 'cranked' line in both plan and elevation, and one of the only buildings in Australia that uses pinwheel triangular tiling for the façade, which utilises fractal geometry. The angular geometries in both plan and elevation and rendered in three dimensions in a variety of materials creates a completely unique aesthetic of unsettled, non-orthogonal surfaces and spaces, expressed in an unexpected, almost painterly manner. [Criterion E]

The paving of the square, known as *Nearamnew* by artist and academic Paul Carter, is significant as a unique and ground-breaking public artwork, commissioned for the site and integrated within the design of the place. *Nearamnew* commemorates Federation, while deliberately eschewing the more traditional forms and language of commemorative statues and memorials in the State's public open spaces. [Criterion E]

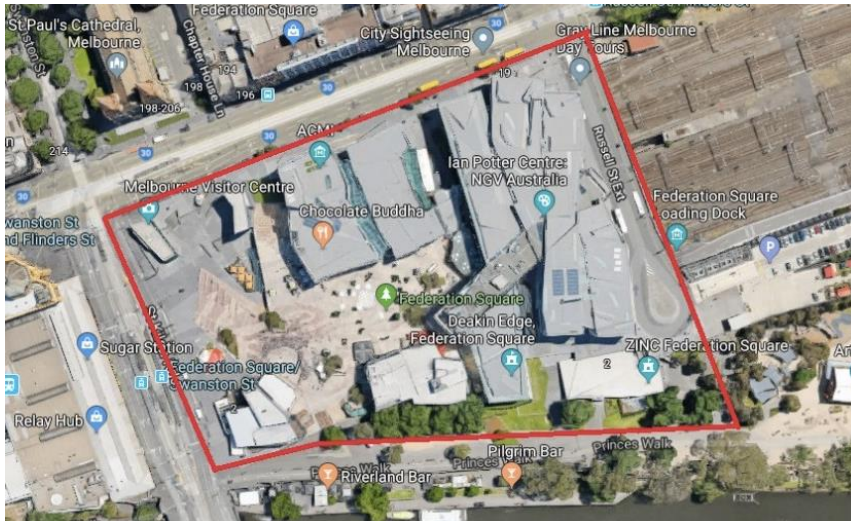
Federation Square is significant for the high degree of technical achievement demonstrated in its construction. The construction of the deck over the railway lines, the first large scale and still the largest expanse of railway decking built in Victoria is notable. The Labyrinth and its related passive air-conditioning system also demonstrates a high degree of technical achievement. The Labyrinth is the largest such system in Victoria and the most extensive of any public project. This achievement was recognised with a Planning Institute of Australia (Victoria) Award for Planning Excellence–Ecologically Sustainable Development in 2003. [Criterion F]

Federation Square demonstrates a high degree of technical achievement through the use of non-orthogonal geometries in plan and elevation and especially in the three dimensional structure of the Atrium, which was achieved through what was at the time the most extensive use of sophisticated computer modelling, now commonly used to create complex façade patterns and built form. [Criterion F]

Federation Square is socially and culturally significant to the State of Victoria as a place of celebration, entertainment and protest since 2002, which has engendered a sense of ownership by all sections of Victorian society. It is significant as Victoria's premier live site for the broadcast of significant national events including the 2006 Commonwealth Games, the location of significant twenty-first-century protest events, as well as the state's premier location for cultural events. In less than two decades, Federation Square has come to be highly valued by the community as part of its history, cultural life and identity. It is one of Victoria's best known and most heavily used public spaces. [Criterion G]

2. EXTENT OF NOMINATION

All of the land, buildings and outdoor spaces/areas/laneways, including the public artwork *Nearamnew* and furniture, features and trees/plantings (as originally designed and constructed 1996-2002), included within the extent of nomination below [Fig. 1]:



3. CATEGORY

Public Square.

4. HISTORY

4.1 Summary

Federation Square is located on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation.

The site of Federation Square at early colonial settlement was an open swampy area of public land reserved between Flinders Street, the Yarra River, and the extension of Swanston Street to the main river crossing point. Government buildings were supplanted by the first rail line and station from 1859, a use which gradually expanded through the nineteenth century until the whole area was railway lines and railyards, with Princes Bridge Station serving lines to the north east on Flinders Street. Batman Avenue, which curved along parallel to the river up to Swanston Street, was developed in 1890 along with the construction of the final Princes Bridge.

A number of proposals for roofing the rail yards were made through the twentieth century, first in the 1920s, then revived in the 1950s and 60s as part of wider efforts to develop public buildings, purpose-built public institutions, and public plazas to remedy the paucity of public open space within the city grid. Ultimately only the few railway lines adjacent to Flinders Street were built over, with a pair of sixteen storey office blocks named Princes Gate Plaza (also known as the Gas and Fuel Buildings) with Princes Bridge Station below, and a raised plaza on the corner of Swanston Street, completed in 1967.

A much longed for civic square for Melbourne was instead developed on the corner of Swanston and Collins from 1966. A new design replaced the initial square in 1980. Built to a competition-winning permanent design by Denton Corker Marshall, Melbourne City Square opened in May 1980. By 2000, DCM's Melbourne City Square was replaced with a much simpler square design. This was in turn demolished in 2017 for the Melbourne Metro tunnel construction.

In 1994 the Victorian State Government, led by Premier Jeff Kennett, announced that the Gas and Fuel Buildings would be replaced by a development celebrating the Centenary of Federation on 1 January 2001. In 1996 demolition of the Gas & Fuel buildings began and an

international design competition was held to develop a 'unique 21st century civic and cultural facility' that was to include a plaza, a Cinemedia centre, a performance space, a small gallery, a wintergarden and shops and cafes. From 177 entries a short list of 5 were chosen, and on 28th July 1997, the winner was announced: London-based Lab Architecture Studio, led by Australian Peter Davidson and US-born Donald Bates, in association with the Melbourne architects Bates Smart.

When the winning design was announced, the first of what would become many changes to the original brief was also made; that the proposed 'civic and cultural facility' should also house the Australian art collection of the National Gallery of Victoria in an enlarged gallery on the site. The final design was announced in July 1998. It was substantially different in detail but retained the general layout of the winning scheme, and employed the same architectural language of 'cranked' angular geometries, scattered vertical 'shards', and folded abstract patterned facades. Construction began a month later with the challenge of decking the railway lines.

In 1997 a *Civic and Cultural Charter* was developed and agreed to by the State Government of Victoria and City of Melbourne to guide the future operations of the Square, balancing the civic and public uses and the commercial tenancies. It was assumed that the commercial activities would underpin the operational costs of managing the Square as a whole. In 1999 the Victorian Government established Fed Square Pty Ltd to operate the Square on its behalf as the sole shareholder, and to oversee construction.

The design of Federation Square provided impetus for public interest in the project and its design and debate. The western 'shard', a free standing four storey element proposed for the corner of Flinders and Swanston Street, was particularly controversial. A key concern, raised soon after the winner was announced, was that this element of the design would block views to St Pauls Cathedral from Princes Bridge. Following an inquiry, then Premier Steve Bracks announced on 17 February 2000 that the western 'shard' would be reduced in height to no more than 8m. The decision drew protests from the architectural community.

Construction was fast-tracked in the hopes of completing by early 2001, which meant detailed design occurred just before construction and problems resolved through 'on the spot' decisions. The tight timelines and the complexity of bringing to fruition the design of 'cranked' angles in three dimensions, a process that required sophisticated computer modelling, meant the final cost was four times the original budget. Finally, nearly two years after the centenary of Federation, the Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Steve Bracks officially opened Federation Square to the public on Saturday 26 October 2002. The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia and ACMI were fully completed later that year, and other tenancies opened over the next 12 months. The Square and its various occupants were immediately popular, drawing millions of visitors in the first year.

The larger amphitheatre-like space of the Square has since become the focus for numerous major public events. The first was New Year's Eve 2002, followed in January 2003 by crowds gathering to watch the Australian Open on the screen. In September 2003 the AFL Grand Final was streamed live, as were the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games. It has been used as a site of protest, from an Iraq war demonstration in 2002, a Work Choices rally in 2005, and on 13 February 2008 people gathered to watch Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issue the formal apology to the Stolen Generations. It has been used for numerous events, from Indigenous ceremonies, to festivals, markets, fashion shows, public lectures, films and concerts. The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia has hosted Australian art shows, from the permanent collection to curated shows, and ACMI has become a focus for screen culture, with film festivals, special

events, accessing the State Film collection, and drawing thousands to the many screen and movie culture based shows in the basement Screen Gallery. The Melbourne Visitors Centre in the basement accessed via the truncated corner shard is a starting point for many visitors and tourists into the site.

There have been few alterations to the buildings and spaces since construction. In 2009, the entry to ACMI was reconfigured to allow entry only from the Square rather than also from Flinders Street, a permanent, interactive exhibition *Screen Worlds: The Story of Film, Television and Digital Culture* was installed, and the Mediateque was developed, where the public can access much of the film and video collection. Since September 2015 the upper floors of the Yarra building have been home to the Koorie Heritage Trust. A weather protection canopy designed by Melbourne-based architect Peter Maddison, of Maddison Architects, was added to the eastern extremity of the main Square in 2014.

4.2 Post-colonial History of the Site

In his book *Federation Square* [2003], urban historian Andrew May traces the history of the site where Federation Square now sits, outlining the displacement of the Traditional Owners following the settlement of Melbourne in the 1830s, followed by the use of the site for a city morgue and coroner's office, a fish market, corporate offices and a railway.¹

4.3 Search for a Square

The Hoddle Grid was designed without a central public square, long seen as the missing element of the city. When constructed, Federation Square was seen to represent the culmination of Melbourne's 'search for a square', with urban historian Professor Graeme Davison highlighting the following historic events and actions as shaping this process:²

- Robert Hoddle proposed a public square on the site near the present State Library in the 1830s but this never eventuated.
- In the 1920s city councillors debated a scheme to create a square on the site of the Eastern Market in Bourke Street. In 1929 a Metropolitan Planning Commission recommended a 'spacious city square' adjacent to a 'new' City Hall at the top of Bourke Street opposite Parliament House.
- After the war, a renewed mood of civic idealism reignited interest in a civic square. Plans for squares at the top of Bourke Street, in Swanston Street and over the Flinders Street railway yards were unveiled, energetically debated, yet ultimately abandoned.
- By the 1960s, as shoppers migrated to suburban malls, retailers joined the cause, arguing that a city square would enliven the city centre and keep the threat of a 'doughnut city' – a dead centre surrounded by lively suburbs – at bay.
- Only in the 1980s did Melbourne finally get its own city square, a cramped little rectangle opposite Town Hall, which ultimately failed.³

In Melbourne's search for a square, various designs for the site where Federation Square is now located were developed but never realised. These designs included early-modernist schemes in the 1920s, late-modernist schemes in the 1950s, and post-modernist schemes in

¹ Andrew May and Norman Day, *Federation Square* (Hardie Grant Publishing, 2003), 7-20.

² Graeme Davison, "For what shall it profit a city if it loses its civic soul", *The Conversation*, February 2, 2018.

³ Graeme Davison, "For what shall it profit a city if it loses its civic soul", *The Conversation*, February 2, 2018.

the 1990s. Schemes to roof the railyards had been proposed from at least the 1920s with successive proposals ranging from car parks and terraces to office blocks and civic plazas.⁴

In 1963 Victorian Premier Henry Bolte announced a \$5m project to roof part of the Princes Bridge Railway yards and construct two 16-storey buildings [Fig. 3].⁵ The two towers were completed in 1967, with the east tower housing the Victorian Employees Federation and the west tower housing the Gas and Fuel Corporation. Princes Gate Arcade, at the base of the towers, included a concourse of 14 shops including a supermarket, clothes shops and a branch of the ANZ Bank.

The 'Jolimont Rail Yard rationalisation project' commenced in the mid-1990s to reduce the railway lines running parallel to the Yarra River from a total of 53 lines to 12, an initiative made possible by improved railway technologies and the relocation of space-consuming shunting operations to more outlying locations in Melbourne.⁶ Part way through this project, the State Government, in association with the Melbourne City Council, commenced looking at the concept of developing a square over the rail lines. A prerequisite was the removal of the Gas and Fuel towers [Fig. 4 & Fig. 5].⁷

4.4 Design Competition

In 1996 the Government of Victoria, the Commonwealth Government and City of Melbourne announced their intention to jointly develop a 'unique 21st century civic and cultural facility on a 3.2 hectare site on Swanston Street between Flinders and the Yarra River'. The project's implementation was to be overseen by a Steering Committee chaired by the Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet and included representatives from the City of Melbourne, the Department of Treasury and Finance, and the Department of Infrastructure. The State Government's Office of Major Projects, on behalf of the Steering Committee, was made responsible for the delivery of the project.

A preliminary Federation Square design brief in 1996 offered competition entrants the opportunity to redesign the site highlighting its importance as a place of civic celebration and public interaction [Fig. 6]. The document set out the parameters of the project, the size of the site and its location, as well as the intended uses of various buildings and spaces.⁸ The competition brief included a public plaza, a performing arts space, a gallery space, a large new institution known as a Cinemedia centre with auditoriums, exhibition spaces and offices, a wintergarden and ancillary bars cafes and retail.⁹

Seven key objectives for the project were included in the design brief, including the need for the site to have a social objective and be 'people friendly'; to look ahead culturally and technologically; to meet an identified need for Melbourne to have a new civic and cultural space; to celebrate the city's Indigenous and multicultural heritage and history; to be architecturally bold, while providing a physical link between the Yarra River and the CBD, and to be operationally and financially sustainable.¹⁰ The architectural competition was held to

⁴ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 22.

⁵ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 20.

⁶ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 39.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Seamus O'Hanlon, *Federation Square: the First Ten Years* (Monash University Press, 2012), 17.

⁹ Norman Day, *Federation Square*, Hardie Grant, 2003

¹⁰ O'Hanlon, *Federation Square*, 17

attract the widest possible architectural input. A total of 177 entries were received in the competition with most entries coming from Victoria (96) and NSW (30). Forty-one entries were received from overseas including 18 from the UK and 6 from the United States.¹¹

Five architects were selected to proceed to the second stage. They were:

- Lab Architectural Studio (the ultimate winner)
- Ashton Raggatt McDougall (Melbourne)
- Denton Corker Marshall (Melbourne)
- Chris Elliott (Sydney)
- Jennifer Lowe and Adrian Hawker (London)

The seven member Judging Panel consisted of:

- Professor Neville Quarry (Chair), Dean of Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney
- Daniel Libeskind, internally renowned architect working in Germany and California
- Dick Roennfeldt, Director of the Office of Major Projects
- Dr Catherin Bull, nationally acclaimed landscape architect
- Rob Adams, architect and Director of City Projects, City of Melbourne
- Peter Clemenger, Chair of BBDO Advertising and trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria
- Brett Randall, Chief Executive of the Victorian Arts Centre

The judging panel analysed and assessed the five short-listed entries before unanimously reaching a final decision. Lab Architecture Studio (London), architects Peter Davidson and Donald Bates, in association with Bates Smart (Melbourne), were announced as the winners of the competition in June 1997.

4.5 The winning design

A proposed site plan was released to the public when the winners of the design competition were announced in May 1997. The site plan identified the future potential uses of the buildings, including a performance venue, exhibition galleries, an atrium, Cinemedia Gallery and Offices, and the Desert and Rainforest Greenhouses [Fig. 7].

After their winning design was announced, Lab architects Peter Davidson and Don Bates articulated how their design responded to the inspiration of Australia's Federation:

*'People used to criticize us for not representing Federation, but we do it by building in the qualities of Federation into the design. So the facades, for example, are federated – which is to say, different things coming together to create something different which is meant to be evolving.'*¹²

¹¹ Victorian State Government and City of Melbourne, *Winners Announced*, National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Archival Document, 1997

¹² May and Day, *Federation Square*, 35

*'Federation Square is the creation of a new center of cultural activity for Melbourne – the long-awaited large, open public civic destination. In the true spirit of Federation, the design brings together distinct elements and activities.'*¹³

Professor Neville Quarry, Chair of the judging panel, similarly articulated how the design took inspiration from its immediate context:

*'The winning scheme draws its inspiration from the unique urban characteristics of Melbourne arcades and lanes and transforms these elements into a new form of organisation, celebrating the city. The proposal will invite pedestrians to explore a complex of vibrant linkages of open and closed spaces, a set of different identities brought together in the architectural equivalent of a federation.'*¹⁴

The judge's report discussed the proposed design in further detail, articulating how the buildings would be perceived as 'simple rectangular shapes enlivened by cranked and inclined walls with highly figured facades in unusual arrangements of zinc, sandstone and glass panels and by deep entrance recesses.'¹⁵

4.6 Construction

On the same day the winning design was announced, the first major change to the brief was also announced by Premier Jeff Kennett, that the Square would host a 'Museum of Australian Art', being the Australian collection of the National Gallery of Victoria.¹⁶ The announcement required the architects and engineers to restructure their plans for the site significantly.

What was to become the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia took the place of the Cinemedia centre along the eastern end of the site, the performance space was dropped from the Flinders Street frontage to make room for the relocated Cinemedia centre (which was to become ACMI), the 'desert' and 'forest' greenhouses facing the Yarra were replaced by the Yarra building, intended to house more commercial functions, with a lecture theatre, later Deakin Edge, placed in the south end of the 'wintergarden', later known as the Atrium. The whole site was redesigned, while still retaining the essential aesthetic and overall arrangement, though the built forms became more solid, and the 'shards' which had provided vertical accents across the design became less prominent.

At the conclusion of the design competition, there was great haste to proceed with the project. The Government set ambitious timelines, keen to have the development completed in time for early-2001, marking one hundred years of Australian nationhood and the official centenary of Federation.¹⁷ The pressure to fast-track construction meant that the structural deck over the Jolimont railyards began before the plans were completed. As a result, the designs became by necessity a 'design of emergence' to allow for the change and evolution of the site. This proved difficult for the designers, engineers and builders as they had very little time to plan anything in advance of actual construction.¹⁸

¹³ Victorian State Government and City of Melbourne, *Winners Announced*, National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Archival Document, 1997

¹⁴ Victorian State Government and City of Melbourne, *Winners Announced*, National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Archival Document, 1997

¹⁵ Victorian State Government and City of Melbourne, *Winners Announced*, National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Archival Document, 1997

¹⁶ "Square To Transform City Centre", *The Age*, 28 July 1997

¹⁷ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 76

¹⁸ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 42-44

The construction of the deck over the railway lines was the first major challenge. While challenging technically, the construction also had increased difficulty as the railway lines were to remain operational, limiting much of the work to the hours between 1 and 5am when the trains were not running. The next challenge was to separate the sensitive functions of an art gallery and cinema space from the noise and vibrations of the trains, employing 4500 springs and rubber pads under the deck.

In September 1999, the Kennett Liberal Government was succeeded by a Labor Government led by Steve Bracks. In Opposition Labor had been critical of the project but resolved early to support the project and see it through to completion.¹⁹

The Victorian Government established Fed Square Management Pty Ltd in 1999 to operate the Square on its behalf. Fed Square Management appointed CEO Peter Seamer in early 2000 to undertake the operational and commercial activities of the Square, assume responsibilities as client for the project, and improve its poor media and public image.²⁰ At the request of the State Government in late 2000, Fed Square Management submitted a report on the progress of construction, which led to the Government requesting that Fed Square Management take over the construction responsibilities of the project from the Office of Major Projects.²¹

Documents released under the Freedom of Information Act show that the project had been accelerated, at an exorbitant cost. Sources confirm that the State Government pushed hard for the Square to be opened before the state election year to stand proof that 'Labor could get a major project up.'²² In the weeks leading up to the completion of the project, hundreds of extra workers were employed to ensure the project was ready by the proposed October Launch date. The Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Steve Bracks, MP, officially opened Federation Square to the public on Saturday 26 October 2002.

The final cost of the project was approximately \$467 million, four over times over the original estimate. The budget had blown out significantly due to the initial cost being seriously underestimated, the expense of covering the railyards, changes to the brief throughout the project, the need to resolve construction methods for the angular design, and long delays.²³ Federation Square was an enormous undertaking not just because of the scale and budget of the project, but also the complexity and diversity of the design, its topical and politicised nature, as well as the logistics of managing such a large scale project in such a central location.²⁴

4.7 Shard Controversy

Following the announcement of the winning design in 1997, public controversy raged over the height and siting of the shards on the north-west corner of the site. The National Trust and members of the Melbourne City Council were concerned the shard would block views of St Paul's Cathedral from Princes Bridge.²⁵

¹⁹ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 42-44

²⁰ May and Day, *Federation Square* (Monash University Publishing, 2005)[eBook], 80

²¹ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 42-44

²² Unknown, "The battles behind the Square", *The Age*, June 7, 2003

²³ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 44

²⁴ May and Day, *Federation Square* [eBook], 80

²⁵ Andrew May, *Federation Square, a place in history* (Federation Square Management Pty Ltd, 2001)

At the request of Premier Steve Bracks, an independent review by architect and former Planning Minister Evan Walker was completed in 2000, recommending the removal of the western shard to minimise obstruction to the view of St Paul's Cathedral from the south. Following the results of the review, Premier Steve Bracks announced on 17 February 2000 that the western shard would be removed from the project plans. The project architects argued that such an intervention would compromise the integrity of their overall design package. In October 2000 the State Government announced that the controversial western shard would be replaced by a lower structure, no higher than eight metres.²⁶

4.8 Completion to the Present

Federation Square was officially opened on 26 October 2002, with the public able to access the Square, the Atrium, parts of ACMI and the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, though significant elements were not yet complete.²⁷ While there was much praise for providing Melbourne with a longed-for central gathering space, the architecture was divisive, with many observers labelling it ugly.

ACMI and the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia were not fully operational until late November. Restaurants, bars and function centres were progressively opened throughout 2003.²⁸ The Transport Bar and Taxi restaurant in the southwest corner, on which construction did not start until early 2001,²⁹ opened in early 2004.³⁰

The need to ensure the financial stability of the newly opened site, while maintaining the community and civic function, became the key management focus from the outset. Devised in 1996-7, the *Civic and Cultural Charter* was implemented to guide and enforce this balance, outlining the various functions of the Square and providing guidelines to achieve them.³¹ The Charter provided principles to guide commercial activities, while ensuring they remained subsidiary to the guiding principle of Federation Square as a democratic public space. Federation Square's first major event was New Year's Eve 2002 when it took over from Southbank (and before that City Square) as the site of Melbourne's New Year's fireworks display [Fig. 8]. Thousands of people gathered to witness the New Year's fireworks display live in the Square and to watch others from around Australia and the globe do the same on the Big Screen.³² In its first year, about 6 million people visited Federation Square, including two million visitors to the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia and one million visited ACMI.³³

Sport became increasingly important to Federation Square's public role over the next few years. In January 2003, crowds gathered around the Big Screen during the Australian Open to watch matches, in September 2003 the AFL Grand Final was streamed live, and in 2006 a live stream of the Commonwealth Games was a major attraction.³⁴

Less than six months after its opening, the Square saw its first major political rally as more than 100,000 people marched to it from the State Library in protest against the looming prospect of

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The new heart of Melbourne, *The Age*, 25 October 2002

²⁸ O'Hanlon, *Federation Square*, 26

²⁹ Federation Pub Designed For The Future, Media Release, Minister for Major Projects, 6 April 2001

³⁰ "The man behind the bar", *The Age*, 10 January 2004

³¹ O'Hanlon, *Federation Square*, 27

³² Pg. 47, O'Hanlon, *Federation Square*, 47

³³ Federation Square captures the heart of a city, *The Age*, 11 October 2003

³⁴ Ibid.

conflict with Iraq.³⁵ Almost three years later, in November 2005, Federation Square was the starting point for another large demonstration, this time against the Howard Government's proposed industrial relation laws, known as Work Choices [Fig. 9]. In driving rain, more than 150,000 people gathered in and around Federation Square to march to a rally in the Carlton Gardens.³⁶

On 13 February 2008 people gathered to watch and listen to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issue the formal Apology to the Stolen Generations [Fig. 10]. The Age reported that 'about 8000 people, including high school students and toddlers, filled Federation Square to witness the historic event' live on the Big Screen. Later that afternoon, a free concert featuring Indigenous performers Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter was held on the main stage and broadcast live over the internet.³⁷

The Square also became a popular venue as a site of culture, leisure and celebration, with festivals, markets, fashion shows, public lectures, films and concerts all adapted to the flexible space. Major government-sponsored and endorsed events held since the Square opened include the Film Festival, the Writers Festival, the Arts Festival, the Comedy Festival, the Food and Wine Festival and the Fashion Festival.³⁸ The auditorium, named after financial sponsors, at first known as BMW Edge, and since 2013 as Deakin Edge, has been in constant use for lectures and events as part of a festivals, one off events, and as a conference venue.

5. DESCRIPTION

Federation Square is a public square which occupies the size of a city block (3.8 hectares), bound by Flinders Street, Swanston Street, the Russell Street extension and Princes Walk which skirts the Yarra River. It is located on the most prominent intersection in Melbourne: bound by Flinders Street Station, St Paul's Cathedral and Young & Jackson pub. It also has an interface with Princes Bridge and the Forum Theatre. The site consists of a series of interlocking buildings, spaces and laneways, integrating public and civic spaces, commercial and retail tenancies, major cultural institutions including ACMI, the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, and the Koorie Heritage Trust, and tourist and civic facilities. The key element of the site, the irregularly spaced 'Square', is sculpted to the rising ground levels required over the railway tracks below, opening at various points into the city.³⁹ A series of buildings are located around the perimeter of the Square. Each building is slightly different in form as a variety of clients had to be taken into consideration during the design and construction phase.

The key buildings located on the site have been designed in the post-modern style with modern minimalist shapes interspersed with geometry and angular slots. The complex geometrical design features a mix of zinc, perforated zinc, glass and sandstone over a metal 'exoskeleton' frame in a complex geometrical pattern.

Federation Square is the most awarded project in the history of the Royal Australian Institution of Architects (RAIA) Victoria, receiving 5 major awards in 2003; the Victorian Architectural Medal, the Melbourne Prize, the Joseph Reed Award for Urban Design, a Marion Mahoney Award for Interior Architecture, and an Institutional Architecture Award. It also

³⁵ Ibid., 48

³⁶ Ibid., 49

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 50

³⁹ May and Day, *Federation Square*

won a Planning Institute of Australia (Victoria) Award for Planning Excellence –Ecologically Sustainable Development in 2003.

5.1 The Deck

In order to develop the project, an enormous deck had to be constructed over the Jolimont railyards, understood to be the largest expanse of railway decking ever built in Australia.⁴⁰ This was a particularly ambitious undertaking that took over twelve months to complete. Because normal train operations were to continue, structural work was only permitted in early hours of the morning when normal train operations had temporarily ceased. The engineers went to great lengths to ensure that rail noise and vibrations would not affect the activities above deck. The deck is supported by over 3,000 tonnes of steel beams, 1.4km of concrete ‘crash walls’ and over 4,000 vibration-absorbing spring coils and rubber padding.⁴¹ The deck was completed in 1998 to a final cost of approximately \$64 million.⁴²

5.2 The Square

Situated on top of the deck is the irregularly shaped open-air plaza, known as ‘the Square.’ The Square is the main area for gathering, and can accommodate up to 15,000 people at one time.⁴³ A complex of buildings forms an irregular U-shape around the Square, oriented to the west. The Square gradually rises approximately 6 metres from Swanston Street to the eastern end of the site, near the Atrium and the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. The Square is surfaced in approximately 467,000 cobblestones of variegated coloured Kimberley sandstone from Mt Jowlaenga in Western Australia.⁴⁴ The small number of landscaped sections in the Square are planted with Eucalyptus trees. There is also row of established plane trees between the Yarra Building and Princes Walk. Three main spaces branch off the Square, these include the Flinders Street Amphitheatre, St Paul’s Court, and the Swanston Street Forecourt. Each of these spaces focus outwards with a sloping gradient and seating, and feature a level change separating them from the Square.

5.3 The Screen

A central part of the Square design is the large and fixed public screen. Since the Square opened, the Screen has showcased major events within the Square itself and from places elsewhere in Melbourne, across Australian and around the world, at various times of day and night. It occasionally transmits curated cultural content, selected television programs, independent films and other media productions. Like major cultural events, the Screen acts as a magnet to visitors and those passing by.⁴⁵

5.4 Nearamnew (A1)

Nearamnew was commissioned by the Federation Square Public Art program and designed by public artist and academic Paul Carter in collaboration with Lab Architecture Studio. The artwork was created specifically for the Square to commemorate Federation, referencing the global, regional and local levels found in a federally organised society. The design consists of

⁴⁰ May and Day, *Federation Square* [eBook], 78

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² O’Hanlon, *Federation Square*, 23

⁴³ May and Day, *Federation Square* [eBook], 113

⁴⁴ <http://fedsquare.com/about/history-design>

⁴⁵ O’Hanlon, *Federation Square*, 41

three parts inscribed into the cobbled surface: 1) the whorl pattern which forms the envelope of the design, 2) nine ground figures and 3) nine vision text. The nine ground figures are found at different locations within the sandstone whorl and include the following: 1) The Maker's Vision, 2) The Colonist's Vision, 3) The Child's Vision, 4) Alfred Deakin's Vision, 5) The Migrant's Vision, 6) the Builder's Vision, 7) The Artist's Vision, 8) The Ferryman's Vision and 9) The Visitor's Vision.

5.5 The Atrium (B1)

The eastern end of the Square is formed by the Atrium. The Atrium runs north-south from Flinders Street to the Yarra River walk, immediately to the west of the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. It is essentially a five story covered laneway or street constructed from glass and steel, and is a feature entry point into Federation Square from Flinders Street.⁴⁶ The original starting point for the Atrium's design was the triangular pinwheel geometry of the façade, but it evolved as it was developed into a three-dimensional, folded design. It is a vast space with walls where steel girders are joined in a lace-like mix of complexity, with glazing between them.⁴⁷ At street level there are a collection of retail and hospitality outlets including the NGV shop, *In a Rush Espresso* and a bistro restaurant.

5.6 The Labyrinth

The Labyrinth is a 'maze of zig-zag surface corrugated concrete walls', situated between the deck and the surface of the Square where the site slopes upward towards the Atrium. Covering an area of about 160 square metres, the Labyrinth is almost 40x40 metres and 1.4 km in length, functioning as an environmentally friendly air-conditioning system that provides cool air to the Atrium, Deakin Edge and other parts of the Square in summer and warm air in winter. In summer, the system draws in cool air through the concrete cells at night, which helps to cool the concrete walls of the building during the day. The Labyrinth allows the air inside the Atrium and other internal areas to be up to 12 degrees Centigrade below that outside. In winter it creates a thermal air mass that can be used to supplement air-conditioning. The system uses about one-tenth of the energy by conventional air-conditioning, which 'drastically reduces carbon emissions' and is cheaper to operate.⁴⁸ This system was recognised with a Planning Institute of Australia (Victoria) Award for Planning Excellence–Ecologically Sustainable Development in 2003, the citation reading as follows:

The cooling of large public buildings and spaces is often one of the more difficult hurdles to achieving ESD. Lab Architecture Studio and Bates Smart Architects, has thought outside the square and developed an innovative model method for cooling air in large civic spaces. The storing of cool night time air in a "cool bank" for release during the day is a simple, economic method which should become an industry benchmark.

*This system is just one of the many that has been embodied into Federation Square and provides an example of the application of ESD principles that can be supported by agencies involved in planning civic facilities. It is hoped that the opportunity is taken to complete some of the other embodied ESD systems in the complex and to install public interpretation signs to explain the ESD principles found in the complex.*⁴⁹

⁴⁶ May and Day, *Federation Square* [eBook], 134

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ O'Hanlon, *Federation Square*, 37

⁴⁹ Planning News, *PIA Victoria Awards for Planning Excellence*, Planning Institute of Australia, Victoria Division, Vol 29, No. 11 December 2003, 9

5.7 Crossbar

Two-thirds of the way down the Atrium is the 'Crossbar', situated at an angle to both the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia and the Atrium, slicing through the two. The Crossbar acts as an entry point to the gallery, also facilitating the movement from the Atrium to the main Square. The western half of the Crossbar hosts restaurants at ground level and on the second-floor, as well as corporate offices (including the Square's management company) in between.⁵⁰

5.8 The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia is situated at the eastern end of Federation Square, stretching almost the whole block from Flinders Street down to the Yarra River walk. The exterior of the gallery is clad in the triangular fractal façade that is so striking a feature of Federation Square, where sandstone, zinc and glass come together in a vast abstract work of art.⁵¹ The gallery is designed as two north-south 'filaments', which form an angular and elongated figure of eight. The main entrance to the gallery and access to the three levels of the building are positions where the two filaments meet, at the Crossbar; stairs, escalators and lifts are all accessed here. The floor of this area is the Kimberley sandstone that paves the square, creating a visual link with the rest of the precinct.⁵²

The ground floor of the gallery contains a theatrette, NGV Design Studio facing on to Flinders and Russell Streets, and the NGV Design Store which specialises in Australian art and design books, as well as an inspired selection of local design products. Design products include exclusive NGV products, the latest fashion accessories, home wares, children's gifts and unique Indigenous Australian objects. The NGV Design Studio is located on the Flinders Street frontage east of the Atrium. This space was originally a restaurant attached to the gallery, but this eventually closed. It was then used as a function space, an office and gallery for the Design Institution of Australia, and is now the NGV Design Studio.

5.9 ACMI (Alfred Deakin Building) (B3)

The Alfred Deakin building, consisting of two large buildings joined by a glass central arcade, is home to ACMI and SBS. The eastern half of the Alfred Deakin Building is almost windowless - containing two cinemas, a function room, retail space and café - and is clad almost entirely in sandstone and zinc. In contrast, the façade of the western half consists of more glass. Although a whole, the two parts of the building are delineated by their differing cladding.⁵³ The arcade between the two parts of ACMI leads from Flinders Street into the Square. The glass ceiling throws light into the centre, and allows the arcade to function as a foyer for the eastern and western elements. The western half of the Alfred Deakin Building houses the administration of ACMI and the Melbourne headquarters of SBS.⁵⁴

Below ground on the Flinders Street side of the Square and running parallel to the railway lines, there is a cavernous space, ACMI's Screen Gallery, for screen-based exhibitions.⁵⁵ The Screen Gallery runs underground parallel to Flinders Street and has been built in the space

⁵⁰ May and Day, *Federation Square* [eBook], 89

⁵¹ May and Day, *Federation Square* [eBook], 86

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ May and Day, *Federation Square* [eBook], 101

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

that once contained two platforms of the former Princes Bridge railway station. The Screen Gallery is 110metres long, 15 metres wide and 8 metres high. There is a huge steel mezzanine floor which is retractable, allowing the Screen Gallery to have varying floor configurations.⁵⁶ Beer Deluxe and Beer Garden is located between the Alfred Deakin Building and the Atrium.

5.10 Deakin Edge (B5)

At the southern end of the Atrium, with views through the glass wall to the Yarra River, is Deakin Edge. This is an indoor amphitheatre designed for music and public theatre. It can seat up to 450 people. Lined in wood veneer in similar geometrical patterns to other interiors in the complex, the original fit out was made possible through the support of BMW Australia.⁵⁷ The space was named BMW Edge until May 2013 until a new sponsorship deal with Deakin University caused it to be renamed Deakin Edge. Zinc is located to the rear of Deakin Edge and is a multi-hireable function space.

5.11 Yarra Building (B6)

The three-storey Yarra Building encloses the Square on its southern side, allowing people to move beside it down to the riverside walk on either side. To keep the continuity with the coherent themes of Federation, the Yarra Building is clad in the fractal façade. However, it looks rather different to the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia and the Alfred Deakin Building with more stainless steel grillage (the steel beams and crossbeams under the cladding) being visible than in the rest of Federation Square.⁵⁸ The land around the Yarra Building slopes downhill to the river, and on both the eastern and western sides there are several flights of steps leading the pedestrian down. The whole building is designed as commercial spaces, and on both the deck level (towards the river) and the Square level there are cafes and restaurants.⁵⁹ The Koorie Heritage Trust is currently housed in the Yarra Building, having relocated there in 2005.

5.12 Transport

The Transport building is located at the south-western corner of Federation Square, adjoining Flinders Street and opposite the railway station and Princes Bridge – thus enclosing the Square on that side.⁶⁰ Transport is situated at the lower end of the Square, and is the focus of many of the sightlines generated by visitors. To capitalise on this, a stage has been built on the Square side of the building, which when in use turns the Square into an amphitheatre. There is also a large video screen above the stage, used for major events, sports ‘live sites, promotional and artistic installations.⁶¹ To the south and west of the zinc shard are wide terraces at the second and third level and these are surrounded by a black aluminium, perforated screen. During the day shadows play across the metal screen and persons inside will be protected both from wind and ultra-violet rays by its shading, but at night light will pour out from the pub through the holes. The design of the neo-pub is intended to be inherently flexible, so that internal spaces can be opened up for ventilation or closed off as required.⁶²

5.13 St Paul’s Court and the Melbourne Visitor Centre

⁵⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁸ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 100

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 101

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

St Paul's Court is the roughly triangular area of Federation Square directly opposite the twin steeples at the southern end of St Paul's Cathedral. The corner of Federation Square opposite St Paul's Cathedral at Swanston and Flinders streets, is also the most heavily used intersection around the precinct, and therefore is the major gateway for pedestrians into Federation Square. Unlike the main Square, St Paul's Cathedral is not paved in sandstone cobbles; instead it is covered by bluestone and concrete pavers. The court's surface rises from the street corner until it leads the visitor into the cobbled area and up a flight of steps into the Square. Because of the slope of St Paul's Court, the Square itself is not visible until one is almost upon it, and it remains a secret space from the Flinders and Swanston streets intersection.⁶³ To the east there are commercial and retail outlets, including Time Café and bar, which was refurbished in December 2014.

5.13.1 Western Shard (B10)

The Swanston/Flinders Street corner of the site is occupied by the Western Shard, a glass walled pavilion which provides access to the underground Melbourne Visitor Centre. The entrance features interactive news tickers in colour LEDs and small screens promoting current activities.

5.13.2 Eastern Shard (B11)

The eastern 'shard' is a zinc-clad building with a jagged and asymmetric outline. It contrasts with the fractal façade of the adjacent Alfred Deakin Building. As is consistent with the rest of Federation Square, there are no traditional windows in the zinc, rather, there are slits of irregular shape that both act as windows and as a sculpture in the surface of the building.⁶⁴ The distinctive slashed façade also flashes messages and electronic information about the Square and other news and events. The Eastern Shard is also the western wall to the Flinders Street Amphitheatre. The Eastern Shard is the exit for the Melbourne Visitor Centre. A 7-Eleven is currently housed in St Paul's Court in the Eastern Shard.

6. INTEGRITY/INTACTNESS

Excluding some minor alterations (detailed below), and some ephemeral installations that have appeared and disappeared, Federation Square remains largely intact since competition in 2002. In 2009 the entry to ACMI was reconfigured to open only from the Square and not from Flinders Street. The major stair up from Flinders Street was removed and the box office was relocated to the Square level. At Flinders Street level a permanent Australian Film and TV exhibition and an operating studio opened, and at Square level the Mediateque was created, where the public can access much of the film and video collection.⁶⁵ In 2014 a honeycomb shade structure called Cloud Canopy, designed by Melbourne-based Maddison Architects, was added to the east end of The Square [Fig. 15].⁶⁶ The intention was to create "a strong concept" that "wasn't competing with the existing architectural language." In 2018 works commenced on the Screen to reconfigure it as a high-definition digital wall panels, covering a larger area,

⁶³ May and Day, *Federation Square*, 95

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ ACMI Our Story, ACMI website accessed 5 May 2018 <https://2015.acmi.net.au/about-us/our-story/>

⁶⁶ "Cloud Canopy Shades Melbourne's Federation Square", *The Age*, 17 July 2014

with plans to dramatically improve the free on-site Wi-Fi “to enable real-time, user-generated content and interaction with the screens.”⁶⁷

7. COMPARISON

7.1 Public Gathering Spaces: Victoria

In Melbourne, the grassed forecourt in front of the State Library of Victoria has become a central public gathering space, but this was not its original intention. Created in the 1860s along with the first stage of the library, museum and art gallery buildings, it was fenced and grassed with a single wide flight of steps to the library entrance. The fence was removed in the 1930s, and diagonal paths added, but it was not until the 1990s that it began to be used as a gathering space for rallies and demonstrations [Fig. 16].

Melbourne City Square was created as public space across the road from the Town Hall, but not with any other facilities associated with it. The first stage, a grassed and paved corner open space, opened in 1967 and was soon used for Vietnam War protests. The space was gradually enlarged, to the competition winning design for City Square by DCM architects, with water features, a large area of bluestone paving, the yellow abstract sculpture Vault by Ron Robertson-Swann, and a rear shopping arcade, opened in 1980 [Fig. 17].

Melbourne City Square was considered something of a failure, the shops soon closing, not generating much civic activity, and the architecture not widely admired. In the late 1990s it was demolished, half the site leased for the construction of a 15 storey hotel and the new smaller square simply paved in granitic sand, with cafes along the east edge, and at the south end, with a car park underneath. This was completed in 2000, and any civic functions it might have generated were soon taken over by Federation Square when it opened in 2002, with the exception of the City of Melbourne’s Christmas tree and some festivals. In 2016 it was announced that this Square too would be demolished as part of the Melbourne Metro underground train tunnel, to allow for the construction of an underground station, to be called Town Hall. The Square was closed and demolished in 2017.

The Arts Centre, constructed in stages between 1965 and 1984, includes Melbourne’s premier arts institutions, but the buildings are generally designed to address St Kilda Road, rather than a large public space. The State Theatre forecourt often hosts facilities that operate in tandem with the venues, such as a *Speigeltent* during festivals, but is not generally a gathering place itself.

There are almost no historic plazas or paved squares in Victoria. Some nineteenth-century town halls have an open space in front or behind them, for instance South Melbourne Town Hall has a curved grassed space, Brighton Town Hall has parkland behind it, and Maryborough Town Hall a small grassed and planted space in front, but public gatherings normally took place in parks or on sporting ovals, or in the town halls themselves. Some country towns have a central formal park, for instance Memorial Park in Colac, but these are much more like parks than plazas. In the later twentieth century, the creation of malls by pedestrianising retail streets has created some plaza-like spaces, where people can linger, but these are not primarily for gathering of large groups.

⁶⁷ Fed Square's New Digital Experience Initiative, Fed Square website, accessed 6 May 2018
<http://fedsquare.com/fed-squares-new-digital-experience-initiative>

Recent years have seen the construction of one similar project in the suburbs of Melbourne, Harmony Square in Dandenong, which has many similarities with Federation Square, but was built twelve years later [Fig. 18]. Opened in 2014, the complex consists of the large City of Greater Dandenong City Offices along the south side, with the Dandenong Library forming an L, and facing the main partly retail strip, partly enclosing the landscaped plaza called Harmony Square, designed by Lyons Architecture with Rush Wright Associates Landscape Architects. This project also shares some similarities with Federation Square, with dynamic angular geometries, cafes, and a paved event space facing a stage and video screen above, but large grassed areas and trees as well. The paving pattern was designed by Paul Carter, who also did the artwork for the Federation Square paving.⁶⁸

Another recent civic plaza, built in 2012, is Northcote Civic Plaza, created on vacant land on High Street between the grand nineteenth-century Northcote Town Hall and the early twentieth-century former Library. Without any cafes or buildings addressing it, and set mainly at a higher level, its function as civic space is limited to organised events.

7.2 Public Gathering Spaces: Australia

There are a few public spaces built in association with public buildings from before WW2 in other capital cities, such as the 1920s Brisbane Town Hall facing King George Square, and the 1920s Perth Post Office and Forrest Place, but these were originally streets acting as forecourts rather than the pedestrianized plazas they later became. The same can be said for Martin Place in Sydney, the first section created as a street for the 1880s GPO to face. Other public squares in Australian cities are generally more like parks with formal paths and monuments or fountains, such as the 1930 Anzac Square in Brisbane, or Victoria Square in Adelaide, part of the original plan of 1837, completely re-landscaped in 2014.

Darling Harbour in Sydney, built in time for the bicentennial in 1988, is the most comparable. The southern part of the development is built around Tumbalong Park, a green space with a stage on one side that could be used events, re-landscaped into a smaller area with tiered seating behind in 2015 by Hassell architects [Fig. 19].⁶⁹ This space has been used for events, including Australia Day, but is not the central gathering space in Sydney. The buildings and spaces around it are partly for public use, partly commercial, including part of the Convention Centre (demolished and rebuilt 2014-16) and the earlier 1983 Sydney Entertainment Centre, since also replaced by the Darling Quarter development of commercial buildings, but including a theatre.

7.3 Architectural style

Federation Square has been described as 'Deconstructivist' in style, although it does not appear to have been a label used at the time it was designed. Deconstructivism is not strictly defined as a style, but was established as a subsection of Postmodernism by Phillip Johnson with his 1988 New York Museum of Modern Art show *Deconstructivist Architecture*. This featured the work of seven architects, or rather designs, since few had completed projects: Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Coop Himmelb(l)au, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, and Bernard Tschumi. Many have gone on to become what are now termed 'starchitects'. The name of the show was partly to imply that 1920s radical 'Russian Constructivist' architecture (itself often unbuilt) provided inspiration for these architects, but also that there was a common thread of defying the norms of construction, through the use of

⁶⁸ Open House Melbourne Program 2017, "Harmony Plaza"

⁶⁹ Hassell Architects website

multiple angles and/or curves, sharp geometry and dynamic compositions. This was quite different from the then typical postmodern architecture, drawn from historical sources or local traditions, usually abstracted or used ironically. The architects themselves did not use the style name 'Deconstructivist', but were interested in testing new ways of generating form.

While the angled geometries and patterns pioneered by some of these early 'Deconstructivist' are now common place in architecture worldwide, they have rarely been the single most important aspect of the design. Federation Square uses the slightly angled, 'cranked' line as the generator or form in both plan and elevation, while the fractal geometry which characterises the façade patterns are created from pinwheel triangular tiling (devised by mathematicians Radin and Conway).⁷⁰ There are few buildings in Victoria or Australia whose architecture can be described as Deconstructivist or that use angular geometry as the primary generator of form. There are no other building in Australia, and possibly the world, that use pinwheel tiling for the façade.

7.4 Late Twentieth/early Twenty-First Century Architecture

There are a number of buildings from the 1990s onwards where angled forms dominate, or use mathematically-calculated fractal geometry.

The 1996 refurbishment and addition to Storey Hall at RMIT by Ashton Raggatt MacDougall (ARM Architecture) is the earliest example of the use of angular geometries as a principle generator of form but mainly pattern, though there are many other influences in this work [Fig. 20]. The geometries are generated by the use of the tiling pattern developed by mathematician Sir Roger Penrose in the 1970s. His 'kite and dart' pattern consists of only two shapes, but can cover any surface, in 'an infinite area without ever repeating the pattern exactly'.⁷¹ The cast bronze panels of the exterior, the angular cave-like entry inset into the façade, and particularly the patterned walls and ceiling of the original nineteenth-century auditorium all employ this pattern, but the colours and other elements, such as the impression of keys and suspender belts in the exterior bronze panels, refer the historical use of the hall by the Irish community who built it and later the suffragettes who occupied it. It is also reportedly an early use of computer aided design (autoCAD) to design and fabricate the elements.

The works of Victorian architects Wood Marsh provides an interesting comparison, especially their ACCA gallery, completed in 2002, the same year as Federation Square. From their beginnings in the 1980s as Postmodernists, when they employed striking forms and patterned surfaces, their architecture since the 1990s has increasingly employed massive simple geometric forms, with texture provided by the materials themselves rather than applied pattern. Their work from around the turn of the twentieth century includes some projects which can be described as 'Deconstructivist' in appearance. Sofo House completed 1999 employs a variety of angles in plan, elevation and even for window openings, creating an angular copper sheathed sculptural composition [Fig 21]. A much smaller scale and without façade patterning, it is nevertheless an interesting comparison.

The new home for the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) in the Southbank Arts precinct is the most comparable to Federation Square in use, form and period [Fig. 22]. The building houses an art gallery as well as rehearsal spaces for a dance company and a theatre company, and wraps around a small courtyard / amphitheatre, which is the main entryway to

⁷⁰ Pinwheel tiling, Wikipedia

⁷¹ Storey Hall, Projects, ARM architecture website

<http://armarchitecture.com.au/projects/rmit-storey-hall-and-green-brain/>



Fig. 2: Looking west along Flinders Street, with Princes Bridge Station (since demolished) on the eastern side of street, photograph by Albert Arnell, 1922-1929, State Library of Victoria



Fig. 3: Princes Gate and City skyline, photograph by Murfett Publishers, 1960-1980, State Library of Victoria



Fig. 4: Gas and Fuel Corporation Buildings, 'these buildings are ON THE MOVE', photograph by Ian Harrison Hill, 1996, State Library of Victoria



Fig. 5: Gas and Fuel Corporation of Victoria during demolition, photograph by Ian Harrison Hill, 1996, State Library of Victoria



Fig. 6: Map showing the proposed 'Federation Square site', included in the Preliminary Design Brief, 1996.



Fig. 7: Proposed site plan released to the public when the winners of the design competition were announced in May 1997.



Fig. 8: New Year's celebrations at Federation Square, photograph by John Gollings



Fig. 9: Work Choices Rally, 2005



Fig. 10: National Apology to the Stolen Generations, 2000, photograph by Federation Square Management Pty Ltd.



Fig. 11: Close-up detail of *Nearmnew*, photograph by Karres & Brands



Fig. 12: Whorl pattern as seen from above

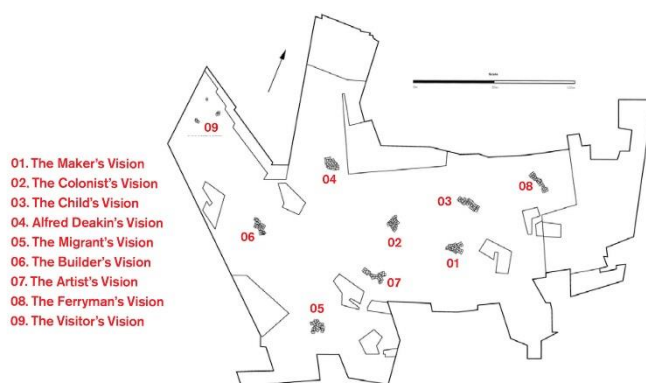


Fig. 13: 'Plaza showing location of *Nearmnew* ground figures', <http://architecture.rmit.edu.au/projects/nearamnewspeak/>



Fig. 14: The Atrium. Photograph by Rodrick Bond, April 2008, *Panedia*



Fig. 15: Cloud Canopy structure at Federation Square



Fig. 16: Iraq Invasion protest rally, State Library of Victoria forecourt, 2003. The protest march commenced at Federation Square.



Fig. 17: City Square opening in 1980.



Fig. 18: City Library, Council Offices and Harmony Square, Dandenong, 2014



Fig. 19: Tumbalong Park surrounded by exhibition and commercial buildings, and after the recent rearrangement of landscaping in use for a festival.



Fig. 20: RMIT Storey Hall interior, ARM architecture, 1996



Fig. 21: Woods March, Sofo House, 1999



Fig. 22: ACCA complex
Southbank, Wood Marsh, 2002