

Monumental Marginalia. Borders of Space and Authority in Contemporary Melbourne

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Melbourne had every intention of being an orderly space. Only two years after the Australian city was founded, Robert Hoddle imposed a grid plan upon the shambling European settlement that had grown along the north bank of the Yarra River (Fig. 1).¹ The regular march of evenly spaced city blocks clearly demarcated the Central Business District (CBD) from the surrounding bush and farmland. Melbourne's imposition of regimented European form on the landscape was, however, soon disrupted. Land along the city's laneways was developed before the main streets, and businesses began to occupy areas that were never intended to host urban traffic in their narrower streetscapes.² As the city expanded into the inner suburbs, it was freed from the constraints of the 'Hoddle grid' and adopted the mix of wide boulevards and slender laneways typical of a Victorian era city.³ In retrospect, this often-organic development created the beguiling synthesis of idiosyncrasy and grandeur that characterises Melbourne today. At the time, however, it was far from the proud structure that the city's founders had hoped for. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, public architecture at the city's heart reawakened this conflict of space and authority.

Centrality To Controlled Liminality

Melbourne was riding high on a wave of prosperity and optimism in the 1970s. In 1971, the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works' *Planning Policies for the Melbourne Metropolitan Region Report* and the city's *Metropolitan Planning Scheme* both forecast considerable population growth and development of the city.⁴ This was accompanied by a significant real estate boom, and energy in urban architecture that favoured modern, expansive, and increasingly tall buildings.⁵ As the decade drew to a close, the Melbourne City Council turned its attention towards what their predecessors had been trying to address, and had long been lacking from this proud city – a central public space. Hoddle's failure to include a civic square in the CBD had attracted criticism in Melbourne's infancy, and continued complaints into the twentieth century forced Council to address the issue.⁶ Demolition of the Queen's Walk Arcade in 1966 had finally freed a prominent area right at the city's heart for the Civic Square (later renamed the City Square) (Fig. 2).⁷

1 Miles Lewis, Philip Goad, and Alan Mayne, *Melbourne. The City's History and Development* (Melbourne: The City of Melbourne, 1994), 25-27; and James Boyce, 1835: *The Founding of Melbourne and the Conquest of Australia* (Collingwood: Black Ink, 2012), 148.

2 Fiona Poulton, "Little Latrobe Street and the Historical Significance of Melbourne's Laneways," *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria* 10 (2011): np. See also Weston Bate, *Essential but Unplanned: the Story of Melbourne's Lanes* (Melbourne: City of Melbourne/State Library of Victoria, 1994), passim.

3 Lewis, Goad, and Mayne, *Melbourne*, 35; and Alice Giulia dal Borgo, "Signs of Italian Culture in the Urban Landscape of Carlton," *Italian Historical Society Journal*, 14 (2006): 2-3.

4 These were later revised. Lewis, Goad, and Mayne, *Melbourne*, 133.

5 Lewis, Goad, and Mayne, *Melbourne*, 128, 135-139.

6 This was first voiced in the anonymous 1850 article "Melbourne as it Is, and as it Ought to Be". Anonymous, "Melbourne as it Is, and as it Ought to Be," *Australasian* 1 (1850): 138-142. For later criticism, see no author, "Chance to Acquire a City Square," *The Age* (June 9, 1958): 2; John Hetherington, "Collins Street Calling," *The Age* (May 7, 1959): 1; K.C.B Bethell, "Wisdom of a City Square," *The Age* (June 10, 1966): 2; and Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Victorian Chapter), *Melbourne Civic Square* (Melbourne: RAlA, 1970), 1.

7 David Warmal, Queen Victoria Buildings. 1888. Stone. Melbourne: Australia.

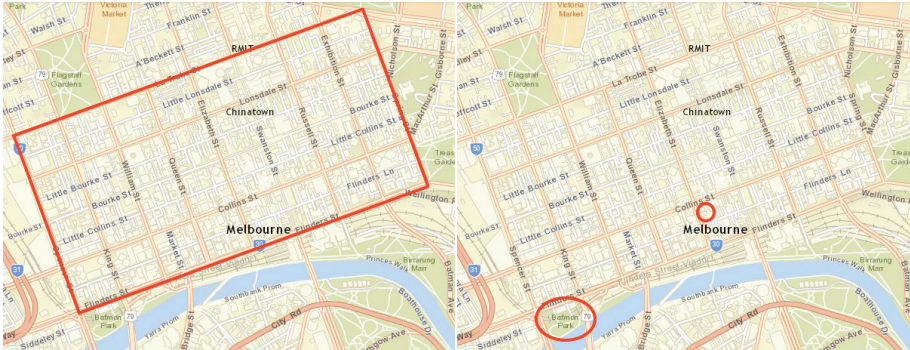


Fig. 1: Map of Melbourne showing the 'Hoddle Grid' (left).

Fig. 2: Map of Melbourne showing the City Square and subsequent Batman Park locations of the City Square sculpture (right, top to bottom).

Occupying the southeast corner of the intersection of Swanston and Collins Streets, Melbourne's main vertical axis and grandest boulevard respectively, the City Square was perfectly situated to express Melbourne's optimism as a leading Australian city. It was also in very good architectural company. The new urban space was between the grand nineteenth century Town Hall and William Butterfield's St. Paul's Cathedral; diagonally across from the modern gothic extravagance of the Manchester Unity Building; and already hosted the comfortably Victorian bronze *Burke and Wills Monument* on its corner.⁸ The space was almost destined to add a postmodern finishing touch to Melbourne's architectural heritage, and its completion was eagerly awaited.⁹

Design of the City Square, much like the plan of Melbourne itself, began sedately enough. In May 1976, local architectural firm Denton Corker Marshall (DCM) gained their first major architectural commission with a winning proposal for the Civic Square Design Competition.¹⁰ This, hoped Melbourne's leading broadsheet *The Age*, would produce "a square of grace and dignity".¹¹ Despite having been founded only four years earlier, DCM had already gained attention for "reject[ing] the patronising and dislocating revolutionariness [sic] of the modern movement" in favour of "a highly legible aesthetic..." that united architecture, place, and audience.¹² Their proposal was accordingly user-centric.¹³ DCM softened their architecture's contemporary linearity with trees, water features, and public spaces such as a 'sitting mound' and 'speaker dais'.¹⁴ Punctuating the key intersection of Swanston and Collins Streets, the architects envisioned a modern, abstract sculpture taking pride of place.¹⁵

8 Joseph Reed, Melbourne Town Hall. 1867-1890. Freestone and bluestone. Melbourne: Australia; William Butterfield, St. Paul's Cathedral. 1880-1931. Sandstone. Melbourne: Australia; Marcus Barlow, Manchester Unity Building. 1932. Terracotta faience façade over concrete-encased steel. Melbourne: Australia; and Charles Summers, *Burke and Wills Monument*. 1865. Bronze statue with granite pedestal. Melbourne: Australia. See Melbourne City Council and Denton Corker Marshall, *Melbourne Civic Square Design Development*. February 1977 (Melbourne: Melbourne City Council, 1977), 1-3.

9 Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Victorian Chapter), *Melbourne Civic Square*, 1.

10 Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper, *Australian Architects: Denton Corker Marshall* (Red Hill: Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Education Division, 1987), 6, 44; and Geoffrey J. Wallis, *Peril in the Square: The Sculpture that Challenged a City* (Briar Hill: Indra Publishing, 2004), 12.

11 Graham Perkin, "A Shop-Soiled City Square," *The Age* (October 6 1975): 5. As Melbourne's main broadsheet under its legendary editor Graham Perkin, *The Age* was "a paper of its times, riding the wave of social, political, and economic change that was reshaping suburban [and urban] Australia." Ben Hills, *Breaking News. The Golden Age of Graham Perkin* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2010), 416-418.

12 DCM was founded in Melbourne 1972 by John Denton, Bill Corker, and Barrie Marshall. Beck and Cooper, *Australian Architects*, 6, 15.

13 Melbourne City Council and Denton Corker Marshall, *Melbourne*, 6.

14 Denton Corker Marshall, *Melbourne Civic Square Design Development Plan – Lower Square Level*, 1977, in Melbourne City Council and Denton Corker Marshall, *Melbourne*, np.

15 Ibid.

Neither the architects, nor the Council that chose them, knew exactly what form the City Square sculpture would eventually take. However, DCM's winning proposal shows a generically modern abstract form in elevation, and a large footprint on the plan.¹⁶ It was clear that the "urban' sculpture...", as the architects were later to describe the envisioned object, would be a substantial and strikingly formal geometric work.¹⁷ With its design to come in a sense 'after the fact', the sculpture was planned as a coherent element of the square's overall form. As well as responding to Melbourne's growing preoccupation with recognising and creating landmarks in the city's architecture, the proposed sculpture also confronted accusations of 'Featurism' that had been levelled at Melbourne in the previous decade.¹⁸ Robin Boyd's scathing *The Australian Ugliness* had accused Australian architecture of succumbing to Featurism – "the subordination of the essential whole and the accentuation of selected separate features" – more than any other country.¹⁹ Boyd's acid wit was essentially railing against visual competition between different styles, scales, materials, and features that he felt dominated Australia's landscape.²⁰ And Melbourne, whose architecture flourished in the ostentatious wealth of a gold-rich Victorian era, was highlighted as the worst "Featurist capital".²¹ Despite being written from a highly subjective – and, some would argue, equally rigid – aesthetic viewpoint, *The Australian Ugliness* attracted considerable critical attention and recognition in Australia and internationally.²² This began even before the book was published, and assisted by frequent reprinting and revisions of the text, its profound impact upon Australian architectural practice persists today.²³ In late 1970s Melbourne, the sting of Boyd's criticism would certainly still have been felt in his home town, as would his call for architects to represent and reflect "the best and most enlightened aspects of Australian culture".²⁴ By integrating an abstract formal sculpture into the streamlined architecture of the City Square, DCM ensured that they – and by extension the Council that chose them – were living up to this expectation. Although the sculpture would be a prominent landmark in the wider cityscape, it would equally be attuned to its space and its time.

At its inception, Melbourne's City Square was anything but marginal. The architects' and Council's joint search for its final element equally began with all the clear authority of the wider project's origins. Between 1977 and 1978, DCM negotiated with the Council to independently hold and judge a sculptural competition.²⁵ The architects intended to choose between maquettes presented by pre-selected sculptors, recommended by Melbourne's *cognoscenti* and personally invited to submit responses to a detailed brief.²⁶ The elitist 'competition' attracted considerable disapproval from the artistic community.²⁷ Its message, however, was clear – architectural dominance over the space would be absolute. The competition selection criteria soon projected this theoretical ascendancy into the object's future physicality. As well as specifying height and material in line with the Square's architecture, the selection criteria/brief required that the sculpture be "open..." and "developed from concept stage in conjunction with the architects..." but also be the work of "an important artist".²⁸ In a letter personally inviting Ron Robertson-

16 Ibid.

17 Denton Corker Marshall, "City Square Sculpture Competition Selection Criteria," in Geoffrey J. Wallis, *Peril in the Square: The Sculpture that Challenged a City* (Briar Hill: Indra Publishing, 2004), 16.

18 See Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2010), passim. Matthew Aitchison, "The Boyd Ultimatum," *Architectural Association School of Architecture* 66 (2013): 62-63, 66.

19 Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, 19.

20 Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, passim.

21 Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, 46.

22 Aitchison, "The Boyd Ultimatum," 66; David Lowenthal, "The American Scene," *Geographical Review* 58, 1 (1968): 81-82.

23 No author, "Architect Predicts 'Ugliest Decade'," *Sydney Morning Herald* (28 November 1960): 5; Aitchison, "The Boyd Ultimatum," 66; and Andrew Leach, "Letters from the Gold Coast," *Architectural Association School of Architecture* 70 (2015): 26.

24 Patrick McCaughey, "Achievements of a Lifetime," *The Age* (October 18, 1971): 2.

25 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 16-17.

26 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 17-18.

27 Robert Rooney, "Square Row Revives Spirit of '39," *The Age* (January 31, 1979): 2.

28 Denton Corker Marshall, "City Square," in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 16-17.



Fig. 3: Ron Robertson-Swann, *Vault*. 1978-1980. Prefabricated steel. Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

Swann, Clive Murray-White, and David Wilson to submit, John Denton of DCM stressed that these criteria would be decisive in determining the competition outcome.²⁹ Denton added to the guidelines that the sculpture's "role..." would be that of a focal point of the Square, and that it would need to visually link its architecture to the surrounding cityscape.³⁰ The winning sculptor, Robertson-Swann, seemed to tick all of the boxes.

A decade earlier, Sydney-born Robertson-Swann had been a pupil of Anthony Caro and Philip King in London, and subsequently an assistant to Henry Moore.³¹ Since his return to Australia, the artist had "established himself as one of the most formidable talents in the country".³² More recently, and on a local scale for DCM, Melbourne critics had celebrated his formal abstract works for opening new avenues of expression and understanding in Australian art.³³ Robertson-Swann was certainly the "important artist" that the selection committee was looking for.³⁴ His winning maquette also fulfilled the brief.³⁵ Its bright yellow overlapping shapes create a complex, but also streamlined, form that is both "open..." and enclosed (Fig. 3).³⁶ Indeed Robertson-Swann designed the as-yet unnamed object with a nod to architectural form to align it more closely with the City Square and its designing firm.³⁷ Yet this conformity – or at least perception of the sculpture and its space as such – was short-lived.

²⁹ Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 19.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Simon Pierse, *Australian Art and Artists in London, 1950-1965: An Antipodean Summer* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 230.

³² Maureen Gilchrist, "Sculptor's First Show a Stunner," *The Age* (September 18, 1974): 2.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Denton Corker Marshall, "City Square," in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 17.

³⁵ Ron Robertson-Swann, *Maquette for Vault*. 1978. Synthetic polymer paint of balsa wood. Inv. 2005.243. NGV Australia: Melbourne.

³⁶ Denton Corker Marshall, "City Square," in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 16.

³⁷ Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 21.

The City Square sculpture's liminality – which would come to define both its current, and all of its subsequent, spaces – began even before the work was constructed. Architectural concepts and constraints had largely dictated the form of Robertson-Swann's work. When the public became aware of the maquette and designs, this dynamic began to shift, and the sculpture began to occupy a somewhat uneasy midpoint between created and built form. As Councillor Don Osborne publicly expressed his highly derogatory views on the work's size and function, the Australian Guild of Realist Artists Ltd. argued that its abstraction prevented it from being relevant 'art'.³⁸ The sculpture was in the unfortunate position of being "large enough to find itself caught somewhere between sculpture and architecture..."³⁹ This was openly the intent of the space, and of the artist. Nonetheless, in a city preoccupied with stating its identity through landscape, any uncertainty about its new landmark was an unwanted complication for some. As these grumblings grew to a roar of protest, the sculpture's inherent form pushed it – and its surrounding architecture – to the limits of acceptability. Less than a year after DCM selected Robertson-Swann's maquette, and only two months after Council approved their decision, Cr. Osborne led a successful Council movement to reappraise the object before construction commenced.⁴⁰ Although this was overturned the next day, the damage had been done. The Council had, however briefly, leant official support to the City Square's opponents. Work was delayed, and the space's future form hung in the balance.⁴¹ At this point, the sculpture existed only as a diminutive balsa wood maquette. Nonetheless, its (imagined) presence had destabilized Melbourne's new civic architecture.

In the short term, the professional status of both DCM and Robertson-Swann, his sculpture's unquestionable fulfilment of the brief, and (somewhat intermittent) Council support tempered the Square's increasing marginality in the public opinion. When the sculpture was installed in May 1980, the Square could be considered complete. The space was at the centre of Melbourne but, as a result of its focal object, instantly at the boundaries of the city's opinions and identities. As Cr. Osborne dubbed the sculpture 'Yellow Peril' and the Council considered removing it from the City Square, political cartoonist Michael Leunig foreshadowed the object's imminent future.⁴² In *The Age* of 8 August 1980, Leunig depicted the sculpture dislocated from its original context and abandoned by the people in a forest of anonymous skyscrapers. Less than a year later, the sculpture was moved to the city limits.⁴³ The period between the sculpture's installation and removal, and its subsequent history, magnified the margins of discipline, identity, and reality that defined its early reception. The object both witnessed, and became an agent in, an unprecedented public outcry that divided Melbourne and persisted into the twenty-first century. As the debate forced Melbourne to redefine its cultural dynamics, Robertson-Swann's art/architecture changed the city's spaces and challenged its authority.

Art/Architecture

The City Square sculpture was inextricably tied to its architectural context. The architects conceived the object with the primary function of complementing their design and the wider city, and so made the sculpture's identity dependent upon its location. This is expressed nowhere more clearly than in the name of *Vault* that Robertson-Swann eventually gave the work. This title was inspired by the uppermost interlocking elements that "give the impression that one

38 Steve Harris, "Sculpture: Second Thoughts," *The Age* (February 13, 1979): 5; and Rooney, "Square Row," 2.

39 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 39.

40 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 29.

41 Harris, "Sculpture: Second Thoughts," 5.

42 Michael Leunig, *Untitled*. Cartoon. *The Age*, August 8, 1980. Leunig's significant role in twentieth and twenty-first century social commentary is acknowledged in Noel Gough and Warren Sellers, "Re/de/signing the World: Poststructuralism, Deconstruction and 'Reality' in Outdoor/Environmental Education Research," in *Connections and Disconnections: Examining the Reality and Rhetoric. International Perspectives on Outdoor Education Theory and Practice*, ed. International Outdoor Education Research (Bendigo: La Trobe University, 2004), 3-4.

43 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 39.

has vaulted over the other..." when in the cathedral-like space at the work's heart.⁴⁴ Only three days before, Council had decided to remove the sculpture from the City Square.⁴⁵ *Vault* was to be divorced from the neighbouring St Paul's Cathedral, and from the persistent flow of people within and around its form. These informed its status as an object straddling art and architecture. Yet Robertson-Swann decided to give the work this title, at this time. Even as it faced losing its context, disciplinary marginality within *Vault*, and in DCM's wider urban architectural concept, remained integral to the object's meaning.

From the perspective of *Vault*'s supporters, the sculpture's embracing of art and architecture was fundamental to the wider success of the City Square. As part of a "compositional revolution...", *Vault* was composed of form and space.⁴⁶ In its original context, this allowed it to interact with its surrounding civic architecture, and to give "a focus, a pulse..." to DCM's design.⁴⁷ In a notable correlation of opinions, on the day that Robertson-Swann titled *Vault* for its form, the editor of *The Age* argued that the sculpture should remain in the City Square primarily because it was site-specific.⁴⁸ A symbiotic relationship between *Vault* and the Square had recently been championed in the 'Save Our Square' rally of 8 August 1980. Held in the City Square on the same day that Leunig's dislocated *Vault* appeared in *The Age*, this protest argued that the space would be destroyed if *Vault* were removed. It is important to remember, when looking back over *Vault*'s history, that it alone was under attack. The Council continued to approve of DCM's architecture, and of all other aspects of the Square. *Vault*'s supporters, however, recognised that removing a sculpture that had been intended and designed for the space would disrupt the City Square as a whole. In their minds, the Square had become informed by – and even dependent upon – *Vault*'s presence. It was this dialogue between object and space that polarised Melbourne.

A number of artists, architects, critics, and the public criticised "the vindictive old men of Melbourne..." for not recognising the crucial interplay between *Vault* and its environment.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, their colleagues claimed that the work's formal abstraction prevented it from the very same interaction.⁵⁰ As director of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial a few years earlier, Tom McCullough had encouraged work that Robertson-Swann found alienating in its avant-gardism.⁵¹ Now, as a supporter of *Vault*'s removal, McCullough closely echoed the openly conservative criticisms voiced earlier in the work's history.⁵² *Vault*'s relationship with its space – whether approved or disapproved – enacted profoundly upon the community that fostered its creation. Its cross-disciplinary form had shaken creative practice at its core and, in redefining opinion, had divided and realigned its practitioners. By late 1980 a new coalition of influential creatives and a few – but influential – Council members, united by their disapproval of *Vault* in the CBD, held the majority.⁵³ With *Vault*'s removal, they put the work back in its place.

44 Robertson-Swann, quoted in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 90.

45 Ibid.

46 Clive Murray-White, "Hard Edge Abstract Sculpture 1960s-70s....deja vu @ NGV," Clive Murray-White. *Musings and Mutterings from the Back Deck*, February 16 2016. In promotion of the 2016 exhibition *Hard Edge Abstract Sculpture 1960s-70s*, curated by Rebecca Edwards and Beckett Rozentals, at the National Gallery of Victoria (Australia), the gallery echoes the 1978 competition by highlighting Robertson-Swann as amongst "key Australian sculptors of the period... [1960s-1970s]". Similarly, the exhibition labels for the maquette focus upon the City Square controversy. National Gallery of Victoria, *What's On: May-Jun 2016* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2016), 20; Rebecca Edwards and Beckett Rozentals, "Ron Robertson-Swann. *Maquette for Vault* Exhibition Label," *Hard Edge Abstract Sculpture 1960s-70s* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria Australia, 2016); Rebecca Edwards and Beckett Rozentals, "Hard Edge Abstract Sculpture 1960s-70s," *NGV Essays*, 12 February 2016; and Rebecca Edwards and Beckett Rozentals, "For Kids: Ron Robertson-Swann. *Maquette for Vault* Exhibition Label," *Hard Edge Abstract Sculpture 1960s-70s* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria Australia, 2016).

47 Georges Mora, "Give Sculpture Chance of Time," *The Age* (July 16, 1980): 12.

48 Michael Davie, "Editorial Opinion – Rough Justice for Sculpture," *The Age* (September 4, 1980): 13.

49 Penelope Seidler, "Yellow Peril Welcome," *The Sydney Morning Herald* (August 7, 1980): 4.

50 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 71-72.

51 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 29.

52 Cf. Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 29; Harris, "Sculpture: Second Thoughts," 5; and Rooney, "Square Row," 2.

53 Wallis questions whether the public were really considered in this decision. Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 88.

At three AM on a winter morning in 1981, *Vault* was dismantled and removed from the City Square.⁵⁴ Its pieces were transported to a windswept patch of riverbank at the southwest corner of the grid (Fig. 2). The Council had recently designated this area as a public space, and had named it 'Batman Park' after Melbourne's founder John Batman.⁵⁵ However, this was "a park in name only".⁵⁶ Until its official opening in October of 1982, Batman Park was not much more than a muddy expanse. When Robertson-Swann saw his work's new destination, he vindicated the fears of his supporters. The artist worried that removed from its context's energy, and without the passage of people within and around its vaulted form, the sculpture would lose its function.⁵⁷ Exclusion from the CBD did not only denigrate Robertson-Swann and his work. By removing *Vault* from the Square, its opponents also prevented its disciplinary liminality, and by extension its meaning. Unless interventions were made into the surrounding landscape, *Vault* would hold only a singular status as an aesthetic object.⁵⁸ At this point in its history, physical liminality overpowered the work's meaning. This conceptual reduction has persisted in *Vault*'s current (and hopefully final) location (Figs. 4-5).

In 2002, *Vault* was moved from Batman Park and across the river that borders the city grid, and placed in the forecourt of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) in Melbourne's art precinct (Figs. 4-5). This has been the most recent, and the most complex, incarnation of the sculpture and its space. Unlike 1981, this relocation celebrated *Vault* by placing it prominently before Wood Marsh's striking rusted geometric architecture.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, a nagging sense of dislocation continues to pervade the work. *Vault* may not be in a "halfway house" at ACCA.⁶⁰ But it is still divorced from its original context, and from the inner-city energy that it was designed to accommodate. *Vault* remains a sculptural accent to an independent architectural space. Nonetheless, relocation to a forecourt in the art precinct did return *Vault* – literally and figuratively – to the centre of the art world, and attempted to recreate its original function. In this new context, movement to a 'centre' removed the borders that *Vault* inadvertently created in its community, and reaffirmed those that it had occupied.

As *Vault* was derided, applauded, located, and relocated, it had a profound artistic reception.⁶¹ With the exception of minor happenings and political cartoons, these all appeared only after *Vault* was ignominiously uprooted from the City Square. Through being pushed to the margins of acceptability, and of the urban arena, *Vault* became something more communal than its rarefied origins as a pre-selected and tailored work. "It is a curious psychological phenomenon," Robertson-Swann reflected in 1989 "that the sculpture has turned into a ritual object for the whole town to play with".⁶² DCM, who initially chose Robertson-Swann and have conceptually offered *Vault* a new home in their own works, have peppered Melbourne's landscape with subtle reflections of *Vault* celebrating its intrinsic disciplinary marginality.

Many of DCM's projects in and around the CBD feature the sculpture's bold yellow.⁶³ DCM "purposely adopted yellow in spirited defiance..." of *Vault*'s opponents, as "yellow is the victory

54 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 98.

55 Davie, "Editorial Opinion," 13.

56 Ibid.

57 Robertson-Swann, quoted in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 97.

58 Cf. John MacDonald, *Federation: Australian Art and Society* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2001), 215.

59 Davina Jackson, "Perfect Square: Untangling the Post-Completion Politics," in *Museum, Gallery and Cultural Architecture in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Region*, ed. Michael J. Oswald and Steven Fleming (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 133.

60 Shane Green, "Should it be Back to Square One for the Yellow Peril?" *The Age* (August 17, 2013): 3.

61 As well as the works discussed in this paper, see Ashton Raggatt McDougall, Storey Hall (Swanston Street Facade). 1995. Various materials, including Penrose tiles. Melbourne: Australia; and Emily Floyd, *Public Art Strategy*. 2014. Fabricated steel. EastLink Freeway: Melbourne. See Norman Day, "Storey Hall," *Architecture Australia* 85, 1 (1996): 25; and John Denton, Bill Corker, and Barrie Marshall, "Denton Corker Marshall in Melbourne," in *Non-Fictional: Denton Corker Marshall*, ed. Leon van Schaik (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2008), 28.

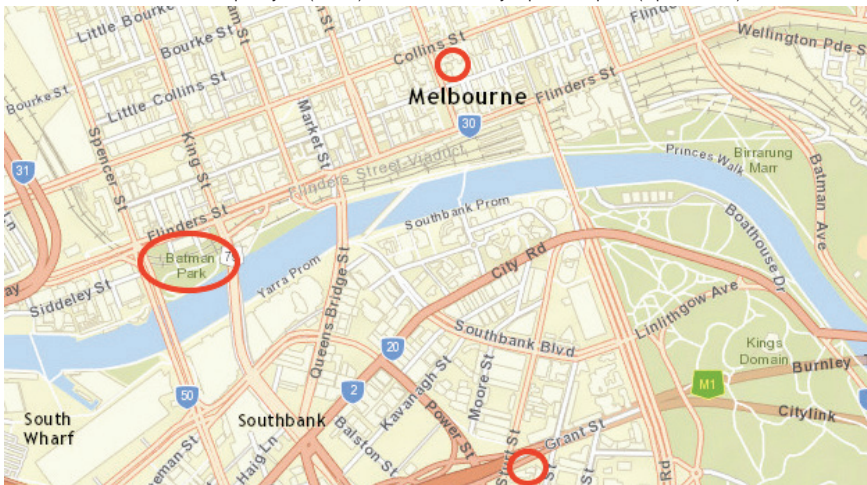
62 Robertson-Swann, quoted in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 114.

63 Denton, Corker, and Marshall, "Denton Corker Marshall," 28.



Fig. 4: Ron Robertson-Swann, *Vault*. 1978-1980. Prefabricated steel. Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

Fig. 5: Map of Melbourne and southern Arts Precinct showing the City Square and subsequent Batman Park and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) locations of the City Square sculpture (top to bottom).



signal that our design culture has won".⁶⁴ This colour is often placed upon an element that is either not structural, or that is rendered equally aesthetic by its bright colour and exaggeration of its form.⁶⁵ These indications of art in architecture mirror *Vault's* architecture in art. Abstracted to a colour and a concept, Robertson-Swann's sculpture has become a concept that infuses the urban landscape with its presence. At greater Melbourne's urban margins, DCM's ornamental/structural *Melbourne Gateway* makes *Vault* an informing emblem of the city's space.⁶⁶ *Vault* was prevented from being a "marker..." for the City Square and the CBD. The monumental yellow bar of *Melbourne Gateway*, however, is a triumphant sentry for the city as a whole. Yet it also sits at the city's periphery. DCM's outlying *Melbourne Gateway* perpetuates the sculpture's liminality as much as it counters its derogatory effect. By enacting *Vault's* enforced marginality, *Melbourne Gateway* reminds the city of, and reinstates, the object's displaced dignity in the face of condemning authorities. In conjuring up the work's history, its descendants also assume some of its power to alter the cityscape's function and meaning. Just as *Vault* transformed DCM's City Square into a fusion of created and built form, so do its similarly cross-disciplinary echoes infuse previously utilitarian spaces with creative status.

Identity

Vault's disciplinary fusion effected a wider crisis of identity for the work, its audience, and its series of spaces across Melbourne. This began as soon as *Vault* was installed in the City Square. Architectural authority had been essentially absolute at the beginning of the project. Although DCM were nominally employed by the Council, their status as a leading firm saw them take almost free rein over the City Square design, including the brief and selection of its ill-fated sculpture. Winning the 1996 Australian Institute of Landscape Architects National Project Award (Credit) both professionally sanctioned the City Square project and emphasised the inherent cross-disciplinary position of DCM.⁶⁷ This recognition would have cemented public reception of DCM as the space's authors. However, *Vault* had already taken on a life of its own in the same arena. As debate about the work grew, and increasingly centred upon its relationship with DCM's design, the latter became a secondary concept. What had been designed as an urban architectural space with a complementary sculpture was subsumed by its own object.

Council reaction to Denton's letter of protest unequivocally stated how far not only the designed space, but also its architects, had been pushed to the sidelines. Where Council had previously deferred to DCM's judgment in government of the Square, Denton's argument that it should not be altered was now dismissed as "quite improper" by its members.⁶⁸ *Melbourne Gateway* and other DCM works demonstrate that the architects reclaimed their authorship elsewhere in the city. However, this came later. With the destiny of City Square no longer in the hands of its creators in 1980, its space was irretrievably turned from its original intention. In the following year, *Vault* was removed totally from the inner city space and its understanding. *Australian Architects: Denton Corker Marshall*, published in 1987, includes the City Square in its critical appraisal of DCM's oeuvre.⁶⁹ Yet the sculpture is not mentioned. Despite having been integral to the architects' concept from its beginning, once the sculpture was removed it could no longer contribute to the identity of its original space or its patrons.

Movement around the city imbued *Vault* with a new identity. This transcended the work's original function as an "urban" sculpture..., to become a multi-dimensional statement expressing

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See for example DCM, Melbourne Exhibition Centre. 1996. Metal and glass cladding. Melbourne: Australia.

⁶⁶ DCM, *Melbourne Gateway*. 2000. Fabricated steel. Melbourne: Australia. DCM have highlighted this work's disciplinary crossing in Denton, Corker, and Marshall, "Denton Corker Marshall," 44.

⁶⁷ Andrew Sagina, *Making Landscape Architecture in Australia* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2012), 278.

⁶⁸ Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 52.

⁶⁹ Beck and Cooper, *Australian Architects*, 43-44, 47-48.

Melbourne's opinions, authorities, and spaces.⁷⁰ This was especially true of its period in Batman Park in 1981–2002. Unofficially and often privately, the audience of *Vault* in its new space gave the work its own site-specific meaning. *Vault*'s architectural form, and marginal location between the city-fringe offices and the largely ignored riverbank and railway line, made it an ideal shelter from the elements for Melbourne's workers during the day and its homeless at night.⁷¹ This was unquestionably "an insult..." to the magnificent sculpture, and far from the proud intentions of its creator.⁷² However, it also reveals *Vault*'s formative impact upon its environment when partnered with its audience. The Council – ignoring the artist, architects, and much of the public – had declared the work unfit for the people of Melbourne and banished it to a largely forgotten corner of the city fringe. With its authors, function, and context removed, and its new authorities wary of its dominance, *Vault* was open to interpretation. In this identity freefall, members of the public alternately claimed *Vault* as their own. It was not admired in exclusive urban architecture as its authors had hoped. However, some members of the public did continue to recognise *Vault*'s potential interaction with the landscape, and unlike the city's authorities, did allow this to continue in its new context as far as they could. When it could no longer be a static landmark at the city centre, through which people could move on their way to another part of the cityscape, *Vault* became the site of fluid user-driven transient architecture.

Vault's new function as a 'shelter' in Batman Park was not merely physical. Reflecting on the object's history in 2001, Paul Katsieris revealed that "I suppose the saga of [the sculpture] touched me as, being the child of Greek migrants, I identified with its perpetual outsider status..."⁷³ *Vault*'s enforced marginality emotively represents the experience of many Australians, and in its rehabilitation at ACCA suggests the place making that can finally bring a sense of identity after displacement. Multiculturalism has intrinsically shaped both the cultural and physical landscapes of Australia.⁷⁴ In one of the most recent artistic responses to *Vault*, Eugenia Lim uses the sculpture and its reception to explore these dynamics in Melbourne and wider Victoria. Lim's 2015 mixed-media *Yellow Peril*, in which *Vault* appears frequently, explores the experience of Chinese immigrants to Australia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁵ Its title exposes the xenophobic origins of the sculpture's unofficial title, and much like Katsieris' comment, sees the history of *Vault* through the lens of the "outsider..."⁷⁶ In one of Lim's works, the sculpture can be seen in the City Square behind the artist's parents.⁷⁷ This photo is screen-printed onto a gold Mylar blanket, which reduces the image to a series of tones. With Lim's parents and *Vault* washed with the same colour, the sculpture's fluid boundary presence is a metaphor for the immigrant experience and the search for emotional and physical 'shelter'.

In *Yellow Peril*, Robertson-Swann's work moves beyond the physical. It becomes a symbol of the Chinese community's struggle to determine their own place, and identity, in their new home

70 Denton Corker Marshall, "City Square," in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 16.

71 Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 114–117.

72 Davie, "Editorial Opinion," 13.

73 Paul Katsieris, quoted in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 72.

74 For a variety of perspectives, see Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 289–291; dal Borgo, "Signs of Italian Culture," 4–8; David Beynon, "Centres on the Edge: Multicultural Built Environments in Melbourne," in *Everyday Multiculturalism Conference Proceedings, Macquarie University 28–29 September 2006*, ed. Selvaraj Velayutham and Amanda Wise (Sydney: Macquarie University, 2007) 3ff; and David Beynon, "Architecture, Multiculturalism and Cultural Sustainability in Australian Cities," *International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic & Social Sustainability* 5, 2 (2009): 45–58 passim.

75 Eugenia Lim, *Yellow Peril*. 2015. Mixed media. Private collection. Eugenia Lim, "Yellow Peril," *Eugenia Lim*, 2016, <http://www.eugenialim.com/?portfolio=yellow-peril>. See also Courtney Coombs, *Yellow Peril. Catalogue Essay for Eugenia Lim's Exhibition, Metro Arts, Brisbane 2015* (Brisbane: Metro Arts, 2015), 1; and Urszula Dawkins, "The Mining of Image and Metaphor," *Real Time* 127 (2015): 15.

76 Paul Katsieris, quoted in Wallis, *Peril in the Square*, 72.

77 Eugenia Lim, *Untitled – Yellow Peril*. 2015. Screen-printed gold Mylar blanket. Private collection.

in the last two hundred years.⁷⁸ In the audio-visual component of *Yellow Peril*, Lim walks alone through the crowds in the recreated townscape of Ballarat's mid-nineteenth century Sovereign Hill.⁷⁹ As the 'Ambiguous Ambassador', Lim enacts the liminality of the immigrant experience and the dislocation created by xenophobia.⁸⁰ Lim's historic modernity, much like the peripheral urban responses to *Vault*, emotively perpetuates enforced marginality into the present. In one of the last images, Lim is photographed holding a model of *Vault*. In Lim's work, *Vault*'s history allows it to transcend its physicality to become a work of cultural architecture. The sculpture provides a conceptual and emotional framework in which to spatially negotiate the past and reflect upon the present.

Conclusion

The history of *Vault* charts Melbourne's development as a contemporary cultural city. When Council began to consider the site in 1970, the local chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects advised they keep in mind that above all,

"if the Square does not fulfil the needs of the people of the city now and in the foreseeable future...[it] has no legitimacy. And who better to judge the needs of the people than the people themselves?"⁸¹

At its origins, the City Square was exposed to anything other than the potential idiosyncrasy of public opinion. In an urban landscape of sprawling containment, the City Square was intended to herald Melbourne's movement forward into a future as streamlined and current as DCM's urban architecture. And as the landmark punctuating this space, *Vault* was envisioned as a visual manifestation of this optimism. Instead, the sculpture pulled Melbourne into a convoluted argument that pushed the accepted to the limits, and made liminality acceptable.

As *Vault*'s destiny was debated back and forth across the public arena in the late 1970s and early 1980s, its fate – and that of the space it inextricably represented – was certainly a triumph of public opinion. Despite the sculpture's sheltered beginnings, the people recast *Vault* as a platform from which to shape their city, and to determine the "legitimacy..." of its spaces.⁸² But whose judgement had held sway over Melbourne's communal architecture? With opinions split between those that approved of the cross-disciplinary object and those that abhorred it for the very same reason, the similarly divided Council appeared to reflect the voice of the people. However, as *Vault* began to move around the city fringes, and to interact with new spaces, its saga offered a new perspective. Public responses to the object questioned – and often undermined – the authority that determined the cityscape.

Vault reveals how central space can be ruled by its borders. Through re-examining its history through the different lenses of the object's own liminality, we can appreciate the multifaceted identity that it both assumed, and effected, in Melbourne's social and architectural spaces. Although *Vault* appears to have finally found a welcome resting-place, its story is not finished (Fig. 4). Sitting proudly in the ACCA forecourt, the object is a monument to the shifting cultural dynamics that rule its city. More pervasive are its echoes throughout the physical and conceptual landscapes. DCM's now emblematic yellow is vibrant against the predominant historic stone and contemporary glass of Melbourne, and easily recognised throughout its space. The prominence intended for *Vault*, now reclaimed by its descendants, has become a silent history that sits at the edge of the public's consciousness and challenges its future decisions.

78 Beynon, "Architecture, Multiculturalism and Cultural Sustainability," 8-9; Davison, *The Rise and Fall*, 289-291; and Andrew Jakubowicz, "Living on the Outside: Cultural Diversity and the Transformation of Public Space in Melbourne," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 2, 3 (2010): 56-70.

79 Eugenia Lim, *Yellow Peril*. 2015. Video recording. Private collection.

80 Lim, "Yellow Peril,".

81 Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Victorian Chapter), *Melbourne Civic Square*, 12.

82 Ibid.

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- Fig.3: Author's photograph, 2016.
- Fig.4: Author's photograph, 2016.
- Fig.5: Street image from National Geographic's MapMaker Interactive; data from esri, author's additions 2016.