

Southbank Major Public Art Commission

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

Former Victoria Police Depot, Southbank VIC 3006

June 2026

Prepared for



**CITY OF
MELBOURNE**

Prepared by

LOVELL CHEN





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The City of Melbourne respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we govern, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong / Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and honour the unbroken spiritual, cultural and political connection they have maintained to this unique place for more than 2000 generations.

We accept the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart and are committed to walking together to build a better future.

Quality Assurance Register

The following register documents the development and issue of this report prepared by Lovell Chen Pty Ltd in accordance with our certified quality management system.



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Cover image: Former Stables, Drill Hall and Riding School, view from south-west towards octagonal entrance

Source: Lovell Chen, August 2025

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1.0 Introduction

This Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) has been prepared for the City of Melbourne (CoM). It provides a summary of works proposed for the Southbank Major Public Art Commission (SMPAC), to be undertaken on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong / Boon Wurrung Country.

The project is to be undertaken at the Former Victoria Police Depot, Southbank, which is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) as a Registered place (H1541) (Figure 1). The works will occur at the Former Stables, Drill Hall and Riding School (the stables complex), which is identified as B2 in the Extent of Registration and marked as such on the Extent of Registration Diagram 1541 for the place (Figure 2). The works will be limited to the former stables wing of the building (aligned with Dodds Street). One component of the work, Artwork K – which is an illuminated work by a contemporary international artist – is the subject of this permit application. The remaining works are outside of the Extent of Registration for H1541.

The Former Victoria Police Depot, including the former stables, is part of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) campus of the University of Melbourne (UoM). The project proponent for these works is CoM under a licence agreement with UoM.

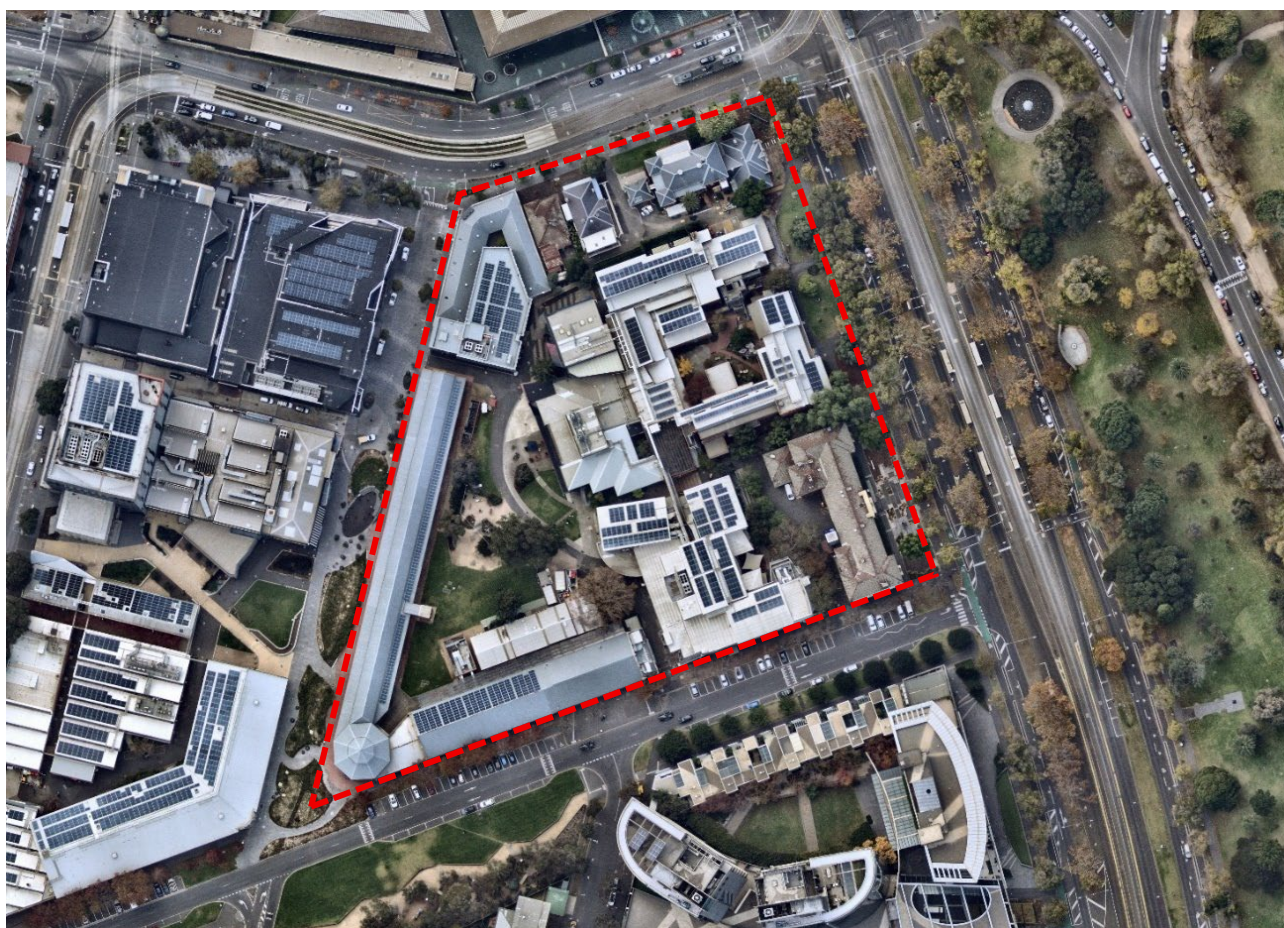


Figure 1 Aerial photograph of the Former Victoria Police Depot, Southbank, showing approximate outline of VHR Extent of Registration (H1541)
Source: Nearmap, 26 May 2025

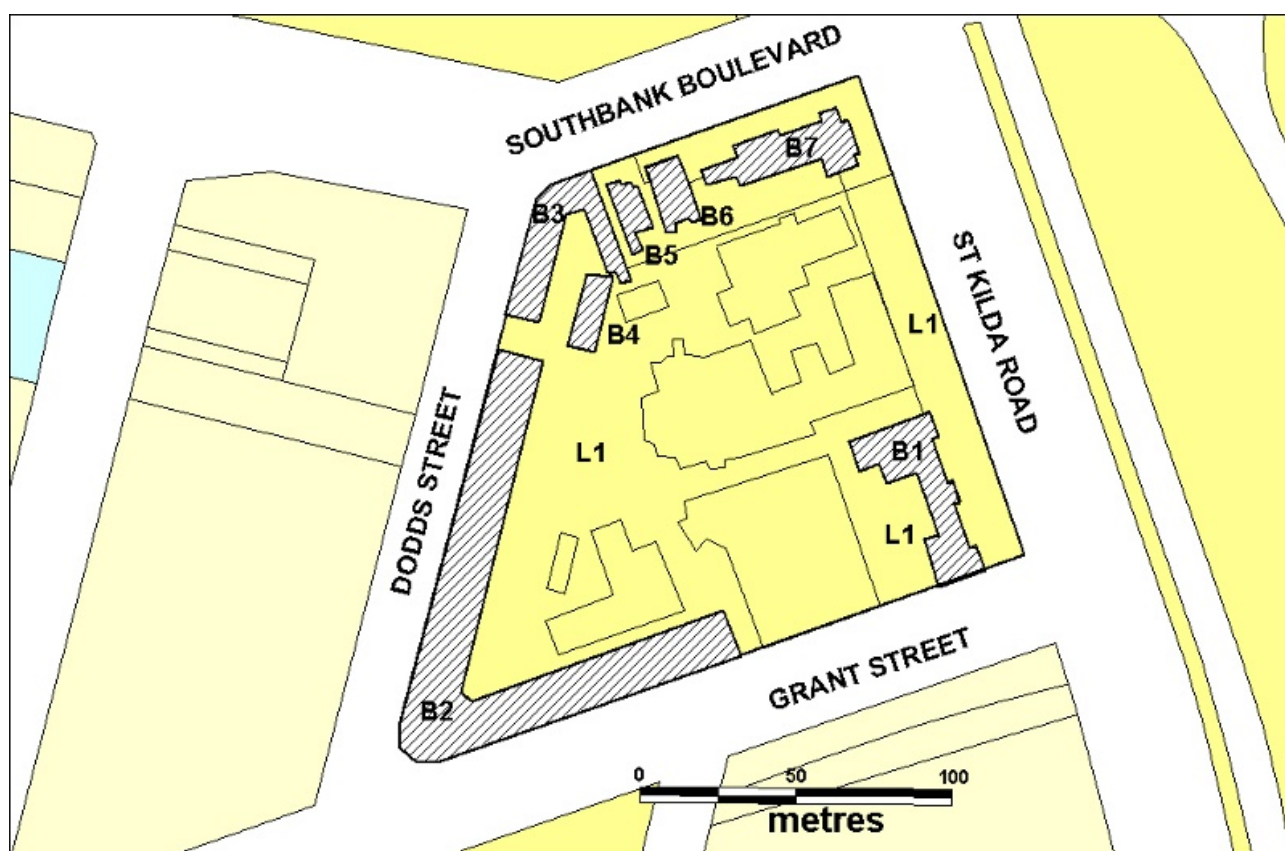


Figure 2 Diagram 1541 showing the mapped Extent of Registration for H1541 (the Former Stables, Drill Hall and Riding School is B2)
Source: Victorian Heritage Database, accessed 25 August 2025

1.1 Pre-application meeting

A pre-application meeting was held with Heritage Victoria officers on 29 October 2025. Following the meeting, written feedback was provided on the proposal.

The matters raised have been incorporated into this HIS as follows:

Background and rationale for project, including relationship with Melbourne Arts Precinct Blueprint	Section 1.4, 4.0
Rationale for location and scale of artwork	Section 4.3, 6.4.2
Installation and maintenance requirements	Section 5.0
Transparency, materiality, size, design and siting of artwork and supporting elements	Section 5.2
Nature and operational behaviour of the artwork	Section 5.2.1
Visual impact and change to aesthetic character, and impact on views	Section 6.3
Luminance, brightness and compliance with lighting standards	Section 6.3.3
Amenity impact	Section 6.3.3
Consideration of reasonable or economic use	Section 6.4

1.2 Terminology and acronyms

To maintain confidentiality, the artwork is referred to as 'Artwork K' throughout this HIS.

The following acronyms are also used throughout:

CoM	City of Melbourne
MAP	Melbourne Arts Precinct
MAPT	Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation
SMPAC	Southbank Major Public Art Commission
The stables complex	The Former Stables, Drill Hall and Riding School
The stables wing	The Former Stables (the wing of the stables complex aligned with Dodds Street)
UoM	University of Melbourne
VCA	Victorian College of the Arts
VHR	Victorian Heritage Register

1.3 Documentation

In preparation of this report, reference has been made to the following documentation and reports:

- Lovell Chen, *Former Victoria Police Depot Southbank The Stables Building*, Architectural drawings numbered A00 -A04 (inclusive) all Rev HV1, dated January 2026
- RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *Victoria Police Stables Complex, 13-39 Dodds Street, Southbank, Conservation Management Plan*, March 2013
- Robert Bird Group, *Artwork K – Structural Design Report, Southbank Major Public Art Commission*, 31 March 2025
- Robert Bird Group, *Roof steelwork framing general arrangement plan, sections and details, Sheets 1-2 + 4 (rev P2) sheet 4 rev P3*, 15 December 2023
- Webb Australia Group, *Dodds Street Electrical Works, the Stables Building – Artwork K*, dwg PS-100 Rev 02, dwgs PS-110, PS-120, PS-130 + PS-200 all Rev 03, dated 20 December 2023
- Webb Australia Group, *Southbank Major Public Art Commission – Lighting impact assessment report*, Rev. 04, 3 October 2025.

1.4 Background

The stables complex is located to the south-west corner of the Former Victoria Police Depot, Southbank (Figure 1). The V-shaped building, built to the Dodds and Grant streets property boundaries, comprises the stables wing along Dodds Street, and the riding school and drill hall wing along Grant Street, connected at the corner by a two-storey octagonal building housing the principal entrance.

Since 2018, the Former Victoria Police Depot has been part of the VCA campus of UoM. As part of the adaptive re-use of the place by the VCA, the stables complex was modified for use as art studios, offices, and performance and exhibition spaces.

In total, SMPAC comprises the installation of four sculptural works to Dodds Street as well as the extant landscape component currently known as Dodds Street Linear Park. In addition to Artwork K, which is proposed for installation to the lantern roof of the stables wing, there will be three sculptures installed on the Dodds Street ground plane. The installation of artworks in this area responds to actions included in CoM and state government strategic plans relating to public art and public space in Southbank (section 4.1).

The broader context for SMPAC includes the Melbourne Arts Precinct (MAP), a whole-of-place approach to cultural infrastructure in Melbourne. The Former Victoria Police Depot is included in the MAP, to the south of the current Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation (MAPT) area (Figure 3). The SMPAC will play a pivotal role in drawing visitors to and through the MAP, and ensure cohesion and connection throughout the precinct (section 4.2).

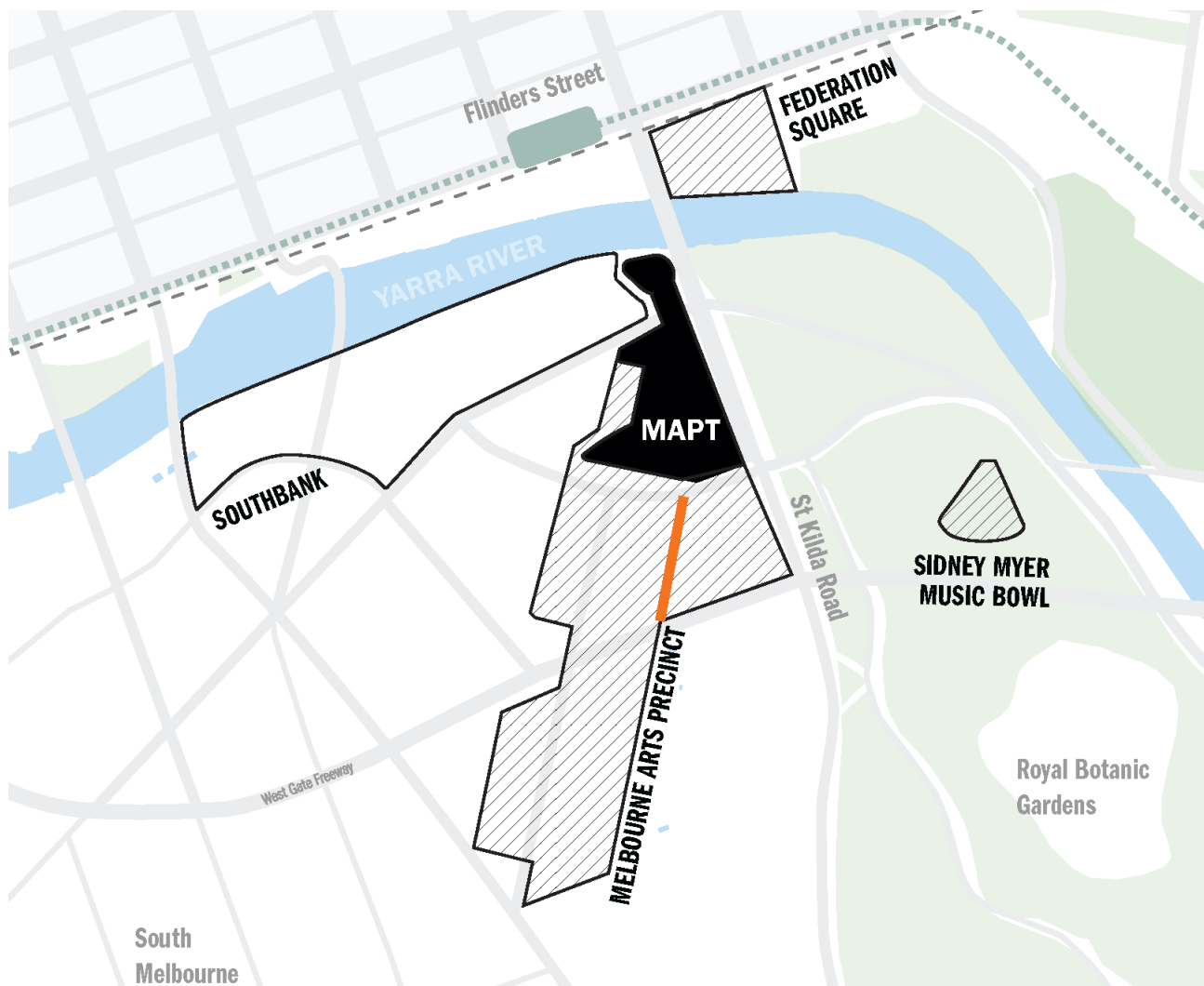


Figure 3 Melbourne Arts Precinct, showing the MAPT area and Dodds Street (orange line)
Source: City of Melbourne

2.0 Statutory heritage controls

2.1 Heritage Act 2017

The Former Victoria Police Depot is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) as place number H1541 for its architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. The extent of registration for the place as included in the VHR documentation is described as follows, and mapped as shown at Figure 2:

1. All the buildings marked as follows on Diagram 1541 held by the Executive Director:
 - B1 Former Police Barracks (1925)
 - B2 Former Stables, Drill Hall and Riding School (1912-13)
 - B3 Former Workshops and Stores (c.1916-20) including the original perimeter wall to Dodds Street and Southbank Boulevard.
 - B4 Former Workshops and Stores (c.1916-20)
 - B5 Former Rough Riders Residence (1929)
 - B6 Former Dispensers Residence (1914)
 - B7 Former Police Hospital (1914)
2. All the land bounded by Dodds Street, Southbank Boulevard, St Kilda Road and Grant Street marked L1 on Diagram 1541 held by the Executive Director.

The statement of significance as included in the VHR documentation is as follows (it is noted that since the time that this statement was prepared, the stables no longer remain in use by Victoria Police):

What is significant?

The Former Victoria Police Depot, including the Stables, the Riding School, and Drill Hall (1912-13), Police Hospital and Dispensers Residence (1914), Police Stores and Workshop, (c. 1916-20), Police Barracks (1925) and Rough Riders Residence (1929), was constructed between 1912 and 1929 as the headquarters for police training and mounted police operations in Victoria. The building resulted from the Federal Government's decision to establish the Victoria Barracks as the headquarters for the newly formed Commonwealth Department of Defence in 1906. As the Victoria Police had occupied a significant proportion of the Barracks since 1881, provisions were made by the Government to relocate the Police to the nearby St Kilda Road site. The St. Kilda Road site of the former Barracks has important associations with the history of Melbourne as the location of Canvas Town in 1852-54 and the Immigrants Home from 1856-1914. The Victorian College of the Arts began occupying the police buildings on the site from 1973. They subsequently erected substantial buildings and now occupy all the site except the Police Stables which remain in their original use by the Police as the Operational Headquarters for Mounted Police in Victoria. The whole of the land is significant as the curtilage of the island site of the Victoria Police Depot notwithstanding the buildings which have been erected or modified by the Victoria College of the Arts.

How is it significant?

The former Victoria Police Depot is architecturally and historically important to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Former Victoria Police Depot is historically significant as a police training establishment of the early twentieth century and a police hospital. The Former Police Depot demonstrates the association of the site with the Victoria Police and in particular the Mounted Police Branch since 1912. The St. Kilda Road site of the former Depot has important associations with the history of

Melbourne as the location of Canvas Town in 1852-54 and the Immigrants Home from 1856-1914.

The Police Barracks within the Police Depot (now the Administration Building for the Victorian College of the Arts) is historically significant for its association to the police strike of November 1923 and subsequent Royal Commission in 1924, which found that many police barracks and stations provided poor living conditions for officers. As a result, the old Immigrants Home buildings previously used by the Police recruits were demolished and construction of the new barracks was commenced. The new building set new standards for the accommodation of recruits with the provision of comfortable living conditions and recreational grounds and facilities.

The former Rough Riders' Residence within the Police Depot is historically significant as a representative example of a police residence, but also as one for a special use as it was erected to accommodate those involved with breaking in new horses acquired for police work.

The Police Depot is architecturally significant in providing an extremely rare and unique solution to the institution's requirements. The architectural form of the stables, riding school and drill hall demonstrates the reliance on the horse as a means of transport for police work at that time. The combination of stables, octagonal entrance hall, riding school and drill hall was regarded with pride at the time it was built. The Stables is one of the largest stable buildings to have been constructed and to still remain in metropolitan Melbourne. The original design for the Riding School and former Drill Hall was for one large open space divided in the centre by a mezzanine viewing platform. The Riding School is located in the wing extending east from the octagonal entrance hall.

The former Police Hospital is historically and architecturally significant as the first purpose-built Police Hospital to be constructed in Victoria and one of the few Police buildings to still remain in metropolitan Melbourne. Its design was based on the pavilion principle, which expressed the late nineteenth and early twentieth century attitudes to hospital design. The design was intended to provide ample sunlight and ventilation for the convalescing patients, and included a two-levelled verandah on the north and south elevations. The hospital building included a dispensary, reflecting the function carried out by the dispenser in medical practice at that time. The hospital also included a single storey operating theatre attached to the western end of the building. The associated former Dispenser's Residence remains virtually intact. It is significant in medical history as it demonstrates the role of the dispenser in the early twentieth century medicine, in providing 24 hour medical assistance to the Police Hospital. The Rough Riders' Residence is historically significant in the history of mounted police in Victoria, as it is contemporaneous [sic] with the continuing training of police horses on this site in the period after the introduction of motor transport to police work. In the twentieth century the emphasis was changed from general transport use in city and rural areas. Horses had to be trained for ceremonial work and the control of hostile crowds, a use which continues to be necessary today. The police stores and workshop buildings as remaining elements of the entire complex help link the buildings and contribute to an understanding of the historical use and appearance of the site.

The former Police Barracks is architecturally significant as a notable example of the Georgian Revival style which developed in Australia during the early twentieth century. The building is a rare example of the combination of this building type with the Georgian Revival style, as it was an aesthetic usually reserved for private residences or commercial buildings such as banks and offices. The design of the former Police Barracks is a major example of the work of the architect, E. Evan Smith. As Chief Architect of the Public Works Department from 1922-1929, Smith was responsible for many buildings, none of which were as controversial or publicly discussed as this. Smith's signature style of Georgian Revival also forms an important part of Australia's

architectural history as it was the first time that an earlier style practised in this country was revived.

2.2 Planning and Environment Act

The Former Victoria Police Depot is individually identified as HO910 in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (HO) of the Melbourne Planning Scheme. The extent of the HO matches the VHR extent of registration for the place. It is noted that under Clause 43.01 of the Melbourne Planning Scheme, no permit is required for works or to develop places included on the VHR (with the exception of applications for subdivision).

3.0 Description of the place

3.1.1 Brief history of the place

Pre-colonial history

For tens of thousands of years prior to European colonisation, First Peoples of the Kulin nation inhabited the south bank of the Birrarung (Yarra River). The area, which would flood periodically, was used for camping and fishing, and the swamps and billabongs of Southbank provided rich and diverse sources of food.¹ Emerald Hill on higher ground to the south was an important meeting place and a location for corroborees and other ceremonies. First Peoples from different clans shared land in the area and managed the landscape with fire.² During the early years of colonisation, First Peoples continued to live in the Southbank area and carry out their cultural traditions.³

Former Victoria Police Depot

From the late nineteenth century, the Victorian police force occupied part of the Victoria Barracks on St Kilda Road. The Victoria Barracks was, at the time, occupied by both the police force and the Defence Department and by 1910 the accommodation at the barracks was no longer sufficient. As a result, a six-acre site to the north of the barracks on the west side of St Kilda Road was chosen for the accommodation of the police.

The site selected for the Police Depot was from the early 1850s occupied by a makeshift tent settlement, known as Canvas Town, which accommodated large numbers of newly arrived immigrants drawn to Victoria by the discovery of gold. Following the closure of Canvas Town, temporary buildings were constructed on this site which formed part of the Immigrants' Home, established by the Immigrants' Aid Society. At the time of the establishment of the Police Depot in 1912, the site was partly occupied by immigrants' home buildings.

The Police Depot was established on the St Kilda Road site to accommodate the mounted police force and as the headquarters for police training. As noted in the *Argus* in 1912:

The whole scheme will provide for barracks for 60 men, a hospital, a riding school, a ménage, a drill-hall, extensive stores for all the police department, stables for 75 horses, workshops for mechanics, horse-breaking yards, quarters for sub-officers and waggon [sic] and van sheds.⁴

The stables were the first part of the complex to be constructed in 1912 ('B2' in the VHR extent). The stables building was followed by the riding school and drill hall in 1913 (also part of 'B2'), the police hospital in 1913-14 ('B7'), and the dispenser's residence in 1914 ('B6'). The Stores and Workshops were constructed in c. 1916 and remodelled in 1927-1929 (Figure 4).

By the 1970s, many of the police operations had outgrown the St Kilda Road site and were moved to new locations. The Police General Store was transferred to a newly acquired site on Wellington Street, Collingwood. Aside from the police stables and hospital, the site was taken over by the VCA in the 1970s. The VCA subsequently erected a number of buildings, adapted existing buildings for use as arts and education facilities, and consolidated their use of the whole of the site (with the exception until recently of the stables complex).

¹ Context Ptd Ltd, *The Domain Parklands Conservation Management Plan*, June 2016, p. 15.

² Biosis Pty Ltd, *Southbank Heritage Review*, 2017 (updated November 2020), p. 22.

³ City of Melbourne, *Mapping Aboriginal Melbourne*, <https://aboriginal-map.melbourne.vic.gov.au/87>, accessed 6 October 2025.

⁴ *Argus*, 27 July 1912, p. 21.

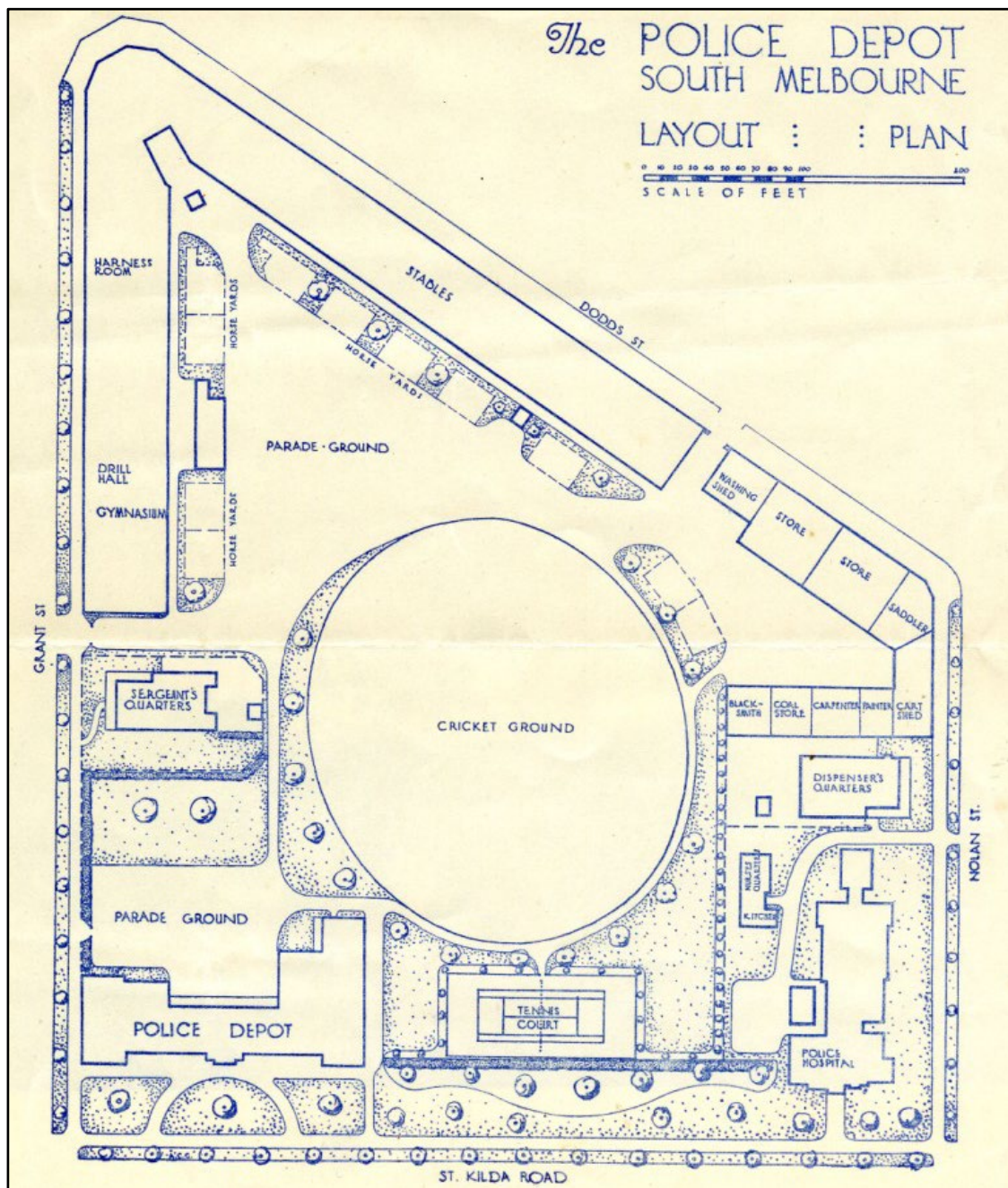


Figure 4 Police Depot site plan, 1926; note the parade ground and horse yards within the stables complex courtyard at the top left of the image (north is at right)
Source: Victoria Police Heritage Unit

The stables wing

The stables complex (including the riding school, drill hall and octagonal entrance) was designed by the Public Works Department during George Watson's tenure as Chief Architect and constructed in 1912 by Coates Bros at a total cost of £14,064. The stables wing was made up of 53 loose boxes with a mezzanine above which extended along the length of the building. The riding school and drill hall was constructed as a single space, separated by a central mezzanine platform. Entry to both wings of the building was via the octagonal entrance hall.

Soon after its construction, the stables complex was used as a temporary hospital (part of No. 5 Australian General Hospital) as part of the World War I effort. At the start of the war, military hospital facilities in Victoria were scarce and not equipped to cope with the large number of wounded soldiers returning from conflict. Early in 1915, the newly constructed but as yet unoccupied police hospital building within the Police Depot ('B7') was used as a convalescent hospital by the Department of Defence. Only a few months later, patient demand required the expansion of hospital facilities within the Police Depot. Temporary hospital structures were erected within the site and permission was granted to make use of the stables complex for this purpose also. A 1918 account of the No. 5 Australian General Hospital noted as follows:

In July 1915, the stables building belonging to the Police Department were converted into Wards 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20, providing accommodation for 400 patients.⁵

Wards 16 and 17 were located in the drill hall and riding school and accommodated 88 and 100 beds for returned soldiers respectively. Wards 18-20 were located in the stables wing and accommodated 300 beds. In order to accommodate the hospital use of the buildings, minor adaptation works were undertaken, including partitions to the mezzanine in the stables and new timber flooring in the riding school. The police force resumed occupation of the Depot in 1920, and the remnant immigrant's home buildings were used as the store and administration offices.

By the late 1920s, horse yards had been established aligning the parade ground/courtyard elevations of both wings of the stables complex. Several outbuildings were also variously constructed and removed along these elevations throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

External alterations to the stables complex include the following:

- North elevation of stables wing rebuilt, c. 1940s-60s
- Riding school doors replaced, c. 1950s
- Main entry to octagonal entrance hall enlarged and replaced with metal roller door, c. 1970s
- Ground floor windows added either side of main entry to octagonal entrance hall, c. 1945-70s
- Door added at south end of stables wing (Dodds Street elevation), c. 1980s
- New entries introduced to the stables and octagon, installation of new insulated roofs, and repair and conservation works to external fabric of the stables, octagon and riding school; construction of an external lift and bridge; and construction of new structures to house mechanical and hydraulic plant within the courtyard of the Former Victoria Police Depot, completed 2018

Internal alterations include the following:

- First floor added to the octagonal entrance hall, c. 1950s
- Drill Hall converted for use as a theatre (Grant Street Theatre), 1975-76. Mezzanine level between riding school and drill hall bricked in
- Offices added to south end of stables wing (ground and first floor)
- Office and loose box on ground floor altered and stairs added to accommodate new entry at south end of stables wing, c. 1980s
- Wholesale refurbishment of the stables complex to support use for the VCA, completed 2018.

⁵ F C Hawker, *No. 5 Australian General Hospital*, 1918.

3.1.2 Description of the place

All images in this section were taken by Lovell Chen in August 2025 unless otherwise stated.

The Former Victoria Police Depot is a complex of buildings, landscaping and open space bounded by Southbank Boulevard, St Kilda Road, Grant Street and Dodds Street in Southbank. Buildings on the site associated with police training and operations use are the Stables, Drill Hall and Riding School, the Police Hospital and Dispensers Residence, Police Stores and Workshop, Police Barracks and Rough Riders Residence. Since the 1970s, infill buildings have been constructed on the site for the VCA campus.

The stables complex is a V-shaped building built to the Dodds and Grant streets property boundaries of the Former Victoria Police Depot. It comprises the stables wing along Dodds Street, and the riding school and drill hall wing along Grant Street, which are connected at the corner by a two-storey octagonal plan form building housing the principal entrance (Figure 5, Figure 6).



Figure 5 Aerial photograph showing elements of the stables complex
Source: Nearmap, 26 May 2025



Figure 6 View to stables complex from the south-west; the stables wing is to the left (Dodds Street); the octagonal entrance building is in the centre; and the riding school and drill hall are to the right (Grant Street)

The stables wing is an elongated (116 metres in length) double-height red brick building with its length oriented to Dodds Street (Figure 7). It is composed of regular bays to the east and west elevations defined by brick pilasters, and is detailed with stepped corbels to the upper section of each bay. The north elevation expresses the stepped form of the building with skillion wings flanking the central gable-ended bay outlining the form of the central roof lantern (clerestory). To the east and west elevations there is uniform fenestration comprising windows with rendered concrete lintels and sills to the ground floor, and matching windows to the first floor on alternating bays. The windows are steel-framed and multi-paned with a central opening sash (Figure 8 and Figure 9).

The central lantern (clerestory) is composed of alternating multi-framed clear glazed windows and louvres. The external roof fabric is modern corrugated galvanised roof sheet cladding on new structural steel purlins installed over the original roof as part of the 2017-18 works. The roofs (lower skillions and hipped roof to the clerestory) were raised slightly to accommodate insulation and new structure installed between the retained original roof and the new roof (see section 3.1.3 and Figure 10). The south end of the building connects to the octagonal entrance, with the hipped end terminating at the octagon.

The stables wing is largely intact externally, with alterations to introduce two new doorways from Dodds Street and the aforementioned alterations to the roofs. Within the courtyard, the east elevation incorporates new entrances corresponding to those on the west Dodds Street elevation, and alterations to the roof and upper wall fabric to accommodate the glazed bridge to the lift (Figure 9).



Figure 7 The stables wing west elevation, viewed from the north, seen in the context of Dodds Street



Figure 8 View of the south end of the stables wing (west elevation), with Dodds Street Linear Park in foreground; the octagon is at right



Figure 9 The stables wing (east elevation), with freestanding lift shaft and glazed bridge at right



Figure 10 Part west elevation of the stables wing, showing the new galvanised roof to the lantern (clerestory) and introduced entry (indicated)

3.1.3 Previous works

From 2017-18, works were undertaken by Kerstin Thompson Architects (KTA) and Lovell Chen to adapt and refurbish the stables complex at the Former Victoria Police Depot as an arts studio complex for use by VCA students and staff. These works comprised:

- Conservation works
- New openings
- Provision of studios and exhibition space to the stables wing
- Removal of fibre glass roof sheeting, cladding and downpipes, with installation of roof insulation, new corrugated galvanised roof sheet cladding on new structural roof purlins, extension of timber fasciae, and new rainwater goods
- Removal of small sections of brickwork to provide a small number of brick vents
- Provision of a freestanding lift shaft and associated bridge in the courtyard and connecting to the first floor level
- Installation of solar panels to internal courtyard facing roof of the stables wing
- General landscape works.

4.0 Strategic context for the works

This section sets out the artistic and strategic context for SMPAC and Artwork K, including the artist's intent, the strategic context of CoM, and the broader MAP context.

4.1 City of Melbourne strategic context

Arts and culture are central to CoM's strategic priorities, as reflected in the plans and strategies discussed below. In its current 2025-29 Council Plan, CoM reinforces its commitment to ensure 'uniquely Melbourne experiences are accessible to everyone through city and local events and creative offerings' and that the 'places and partners that contribute to Melbourne's creative identity, collaborate to ensure Melbourne remains a world-class creative capital'.

As an international commission, SMPAC forms part of the broader public art program of CoM which includes local and international commissions, opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and the installation of temporary as well as long-term works. As one of Australia's cultural capitals, CoM has a distinct and unique role to play in the commissioning of public art. Applicants are expected to respond to place and given the opportunity to engage with Traditional Owners.

Outside of visiting family and friends, arts and culture are Melbourne's biggest tourism drivers. SMPAC is envisioned as an enduring cultural asset and a milestone addition to CoM's Art and Heritage Collection. It is estimated that this commission will deliver a \$63 million increase to tourist spending and a boost of \$67.5 million in total income in its first year alone.⁶

⁶ Figures based on City of Melbourne and SGS Economics and Planning Pty Ltd, *Economic Contribution of Public Art*, February 2021.

4.1.1 *Southbank Boulevard and Dodds Street Draft Concept Plan, 2017*

In 2017, the Future Melbourne Committee endorsed the Southbank Boulevard and Dodds Street Draft Concept Plan, which outlines the vision of CoM to create great public spaces for people in Southbank. The concept plan sets the direction and plan to transform the streets, which sit in the heart of the MAP, into one of Australia's most pedestrian-friendly places, linking the Domain Parklands to the Yarra River.

The concept plan was based on extensive community and stakeholder engagement and recognises the rich history and stories of the site. Between 2015-18, two rounds of consultation were undertaken with CoM, and Wurundjeri-Woi wurrung, Boon Wurrung and Bunurong representatives. During consultation, a number of elements were identified as integral to Traditional Owner groups when considering works in the Southbank precinct. Public art was identified as a critical component of the project by all the Traditional Owner groups, together with community and Council. Use of local language and meaningful open spaces with indigenous planting and landscapes were also raised as important elements.

Action 5 in the concept plan, 'Public art in Southbank', expresses the aim of 'opening up city spaces to create encounters with the unexpected for the people of Melbourne'. Artworks to be selected for Southbank Boulevard and Dodds Street were envisioned as 'enduring, site-responsive and commissioned through a rigorous selection process'.

The information generated through the 2015-18 consultation informed the Southbank Public Art Strategy (section 4.1.2) and subsequently the SMPAC artist brief.

4.1.2 *Southbank Public Art Strategy, 2018*

The Southbank Public Art Strategy was completed in 2017 and endorsed by Council in 2018. The strategy proposed that CoM commission extraordinary artworks that enhance the civic environment of Southbank, while identifying Southbank as a destination and centre of excellence for world-class art experiences.

The first commission recommended in the strategy was a major immersive work of ambitious scale and international standing: a site-specific, destination artwork of enduring conceptual quality that would add value to the MAP and attract repeat visitation from locals and visitors across the globe (this is SMPAC, the subject of this HIS).

4.1.3 *City of Melbourne Public Art Framework, 2021-31*

The City of Melbourne Public Art Framework 2021-31 responded to a changed context, as it was prepared following the Covid-19 pandemic and associated shutdowns. It was also prepared after the commissioning of SMPAC; while the below reinforces the direction of the commission, it was not applicable to decision-making.

The public art framework advocates for 'ambitious public art projects' to draw residents, workers and visitors back to Melbourne. The priorities for future public art commissions were stated as being works of outstanding quality and international standing which demonstrate uniqueness to place, and which are capability building.

4.1.4 *Comment*

Artwork K aligns with the aims and actions set out in the above CoM strategic documents as follows:

- The commission aligns with Action 5 of the concept plan by introducing a significant public artwork to Southbank. Artwork K is also a site-responsive and enduring artwork. The juxtaposition of the artwork with its setting is intended to provide opportunities for encounters with the unexpected
- The scale, quality and immersive nature of the artwork, as well as the international reputation of the artist, align with the ambition of the Southbank Public Art Strategy to deliver extraordinary artworks that enhance the civic environment of Southbank, while identifying Southbank as a destination and centre of excellence for world-class art experiences

- As an ambitious public artwork that will act as a drawcard for residents, workers and visitors to Southbank, Artwork K aligns with the CoM Public Art Framework. It is an artwork by a contemporary artist of international standing and is thematically grounded in the history and uniqueness of the place.

4.2 Melbourne Arts Precinct context

The location for SMPAC is within the MAP, which stretches from Federation Square to Southbank and beyond. The MAP includes more than 30 arts, media and arts education institutions. In 2018, the Victorian Government announced the MAPT, a whole-of-place approach to cultural infrastructure in the precinct.

The SMPAC complements the MAP master plan and is designed to draw visitors into this relatively isolated part of the city and encourage repeat visitation. It will play a critical role in connecting public and institutional spaces in Southbank and expressing the values of the precinct in the public realm.

4.2.1 Melbourne Arts Precinct Blueprint, 2011

The Melbourne Arts Precinct Blueprint was initiated by the State Government of Victoria in May 2011 with a \$500,000 commitment to deliver a road map for the future development of the MAP. The project leveraged additional funding through the Commonwealth Government's Liveable Cities program with in-kind support from CoM and UoM.

As expressed in the Blueprint, the aspiration of the project was to develop Southbank into a world-leading arts and cultural district. Key tenets of the project, as related to the subject site, were to:

- Bring life to the streets – with a rolling program of visual arts, performing arts, music and new or experimental art mediums
- Create a quintessential Melbourne experience, with its own distinctive look and feel as a vibrant place by day and night
- More cultural programming, including public art, outdoor performances and events
- Improve connections and amenities, including pocket parks and more pedestrian space with road closures, without crossing the threshold of a building or institution.

In the Blueprint, Dodds Street (then open to vehicular traffic) was identified as future public realm space with outdoor arts programming and events to generate street life and build the precinct's reputation as a vibrant destination.

SMPAC responds to these goals for the MAP by:

- Transforming Dodds Street with the installation of the Dodds Street Linear Park, pedestrian-friendly removal of kerb and channel, and creation of an amphitheatre and spaces for the community to gather, rest, create and explore
- Commissioning a destination artwork - of which Artwork K is one component - that engages both daytime and nighttime visitors, encourages repeat visitation, and supports the city's night-time economy
- Democratising public art, by providing locals and visitors an opportunity to engage with high-quality artworks for free.

4.3 Artistic context

In 2018, CoM issued a creative brief for proposals for SMPAC, which stated that:

This major commission will result in a work of significant scale and artistic ambition, making a powerful contribution to Melbourne's vision of a bold, inspirational and sustainable city.

The work should be immersive and impactful, taking account of the history, climate and use of its surroundings, while creating a new place in Dodds Street and meaning for Southbank. This

commission is considered a 'destination' artwork, a term which emphasises that it is to be visited and considered over and over again, day and night.

The creative brief described the intent for the artwork as:

- An immersive, site-specific artwork of ambitious scale which identifies Southbank and adds value to the MAP
- To act as a bridge to the natural and built environment in a manner which takes account of its situation on the land and under the sky, as well as within the city. This connects to how tools and techniques in Australia's Indigenous cultures are designed with an understanding of 'technology' as a means to manage, harness or enhance the natural environment
- To inspire the local stakeholders: community, office workers, residents, VCA staff and students, as well as the arts industry in Australia and around the world.

Following the EOI process, each shortlisted artist or team was offered support from CoM to connect with Traditional Owners as they developed their proposals throughout 2018. Not all artists chose to consult deeply or equally or at all. The artist selected for SMPAC stood out for the active relationship they immediately sought, secured and maintained, walking Country with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal leaders. The selection panel and subsequently Council unanimously selected and endorsed the chosen artist and project for SMPAC in late 2018, with the work commissioned in 2019.

4.3.1 *Artwork K*

The artist's intent for Artwork K takes as its starting point the thousands of years of First Peoples history in Southbank and seeks to reveal the continuation of Aboriginal existence alongside more recent histories and existing city environments. The location of the artwork on the roof of a building now used by the VCA for art education underscores the artist's idea that knowledge, wisdom and education are essential to the creation of a shared future for all people. The choice of location also responds to the SMPAC artist's brief for an artwork to act as a bridge between the land, built environment and sky.

In the artwork, a horizontal neon rainbow brings to light the act of discovery, paving the way for knowledge. It is intended as a hopeful and energetic response that respects the history of the stables, the operations of the VCA and the heritage significance of the place. Currently, Dodds Street is predominantly utilised by local residents, VCA students and staff, and staff at neighbouring cultural institutions. Artwork K will draw an audience to the site, and will increase engagement with the heritage place, particularly at night.

The artist also seeks to interpret the history of the Former Victoria Police Depot through an interrogation of the principles of justice for all, reconciliation, the sovereignty and authority of First Peoples, and what it means to be a visitor on First Peoples Country. Artwork K asks us to take our position in the journey of recognition, reflection, re-balancing and reconciliation. Deliberately, it is not an example of safe, hyper-palatable art, but aims to be transformational.

5.0 Proposed works

5.1 Evolution of project

Over the course of the SMPAC, the design for Artwork K has evolved to reduce impacts on the heritage fabric and values of the Former Victoria Police Depot, and the stables complex in particular.

5.1.1 Structural design

The initial concept positioned Artwork K on the lower roof of the stables wing. The artwork support frame was 87 metres long with 48 no. x 150mm PFC support columns. This positioning and sizing were found to obscure the upper lantern windows from the exterior, and impacted views out from the interior, diminishing essential natural light for the students working in the studios inside the building. Initially, the proposed roof access system was a permanent angled cage ladder system attached to the northern gable end of the stables wing, which would also have obscured and impacted the roof of the building.

In response, the design was refined to reposition the artwork on the lantern roof, close to the gutter line to reduce overall height and to contain the visual impact to within the upper roof section. The frame design was refined in scale to a length of 86.5 metres with 32 no. x 65mm SHS support columns to reduce visual impact to the fabric of the roof. It was also re-designed to have no impact on original fabric. The roof access system was streamlined and re-located to the rear (east) elevation of the stables wing (see section 6.3.3).

The outcome of the design development has been to achieve greater transparency to the artwork. This has the effect of reducing potential heritage impacts to the stables wing by enabling views through the artwork to the roof of the stables wing.

5.2 Works that are the subject of this application

The proposed works to install Artwork K to the lower part of the lantern roof to the stables wing are described below. The artwork is proposed to be installed for a term of 25 years.

See also the following documentation:

- Lovell Chen, *Former Victoria Police Depot Southbank The Stables Building*, Architectural drawings numbered A00 -A04 (inclusive) all Rev HV1, dated January 2026
- Robert Bird Group, *Artwork K – Structural Design Report, Southbank Major Public Art Commission*, 31 March 2025
- Robert Bird Group, *Roof steelwork framing general arrangement plan, sections and details, Sheets 1-2 + 4 (rev P2) sheet 4 rev P3*, 15 December 2023
- Webb Australia Group, *Dodds Street Electrical Works, the Stables Building – Artwork K*, dwg PS-100 Rev 02, dwgs PS-110, PS-120, PS-130 + PS-200 all Rev 03, dated 20 December 2023
- Webb Australia Group, *Southbank Major Public Art Commission – Lighting impact assessment report*, Rev. 04, 3 October 2025.

The proposed works comprise:

- Installation of an illuminated, permeable artwork (Artwork K) to the lantern roof to the west elevation of the stables wing (see renders at Figure 11-Figure 17, noting that these do not show the transparency of the work), with details as follows:
 - The artwork dimensions are 2.0 metres (height) and 86.5 metres (length)

- The artwork will be positioned 9.0 metres above ground level and set back 4.0 metres from the property boundary
- The central section of the artwork is set forward, with sections to the north and south set further back (Figure 18-Figure 19)
- The artwork is composed of stainless steel and neon elements, with neon fixtures suspended on an open support frame
- The central portion of the artwork has seven irregularly sized and shaped lightboxes ranging from 1.3-1.8 metres wide, spaced from 1.1-1.6 metres apart. Each lightbox contains five rows of neon glass tubes in various colours. This section has a transparency of 65% (i.e. 65% of the area will be open)
- To either side, there are 44 neon sticks varying in length from 1100-3300 millimetres, in various colours. These sections have a transparency of 74% (Figure 20)
- The artwork will be slightly shorter than the frame, with an overhang of 1.745 metres at the south end and 1.24 metres at the north end
- Components of the artwork will be hinged for maintenance and repairs.
- Installation of a steel frame supporting the artwork, shown in Figure 21 and comprising:
 - New stub columns (32 no. x 65mm SHS support columns) connecting to structural steel purlins in the previously refurbished roofing cavity, with new flashing and stiffeners
 - The central section of the artwork will have additional support from welded portal frames.
- Works to provide safe access for installation and maintenance of the artwork, shown in Figure 14, Figure 15 and Figure 22, and comprising:
 - New roof access rung ladder to east elevation of the stables wing, with guardrails, roof access walkway and hinged lockable door
 - New sliding roof access hatch
 - Localised and temporary removal of roof sheets, ridge capping and insulation to allow installation of steel structure, with reinstatement at completion of works in the roof space
 - Temporary removal of existing tray deck roof sheets to relocate bracing and install hatch.
- Electrical works to support installation of artwork, comprising:
 - New main switchboard for artwork (to be located above the lift to east elevation of stables wing)
 - New steel cable tray to run along full length of walkway to main switch board and new aluminium roof access stair system
 - Internal works to the ground and first floors, located within the bay to the immediate north of the existing lift shaft and bridge to the east elevation of the stables wing (location shown at Figure 23)
 - The internal works will provide an electrical connection to the new main switchboard, and require penetration through modern fabric of the ground floor false ceiling to the first floor to enable cable run up to roof switchboard
 - A new cable tray and digital multiplex (DMX) control system will be installed to the first floor in this location (Figure 24).



Figure 11 View of the stables with the location and outline of Artwork K and its supporting frame (specific details and transparency not shown), looking to west elevation of the stables wing from the south-west, with Dodds Street Linear Park in foreground
Source: Lovell Chen, September 2025



Figure 12 View of the stables with the location and outline of Artwork K and its supporting frame (specific details and transparency not shown), looking to west elevation of the stables wing from the west
Source: Lovell Chen, September 2025



Figure 13 View of the stables with the location and outline of Artwork K and its supporting frame (specific details and transparency not shown), looking to west elevation of the stables wing from the north-west
Source: Lovell Chen, September 2025



Figure 14 Rendered view of stables wing from east within the former parade ground, illustrating the safe access ladder to east elevation of lantern roof
Source: Lovell Chen, September 2025



Figure 15 Rendered view of stables wing from south-east, illustrating the safe access ladder visible to east elevation of lantern roof
Source: Lovell Chen, September 2025



Figure 16 West elevation of the stables wing, showing the location and outline of Artwork K to the lantern roof in green (specific details and transparency not shown)
Source: Lovell Chen, 01 – west elevation, drawing A02, Rev HV1, January 2026



Figure 17 East elevation of the stables wing, showing the location and outline of Artwork K to the lantern roof in green (specific details and transparency not shown)
Source: Lovell Chen, 02 – east elevation, drawing A02, Rev HV1, January 2026

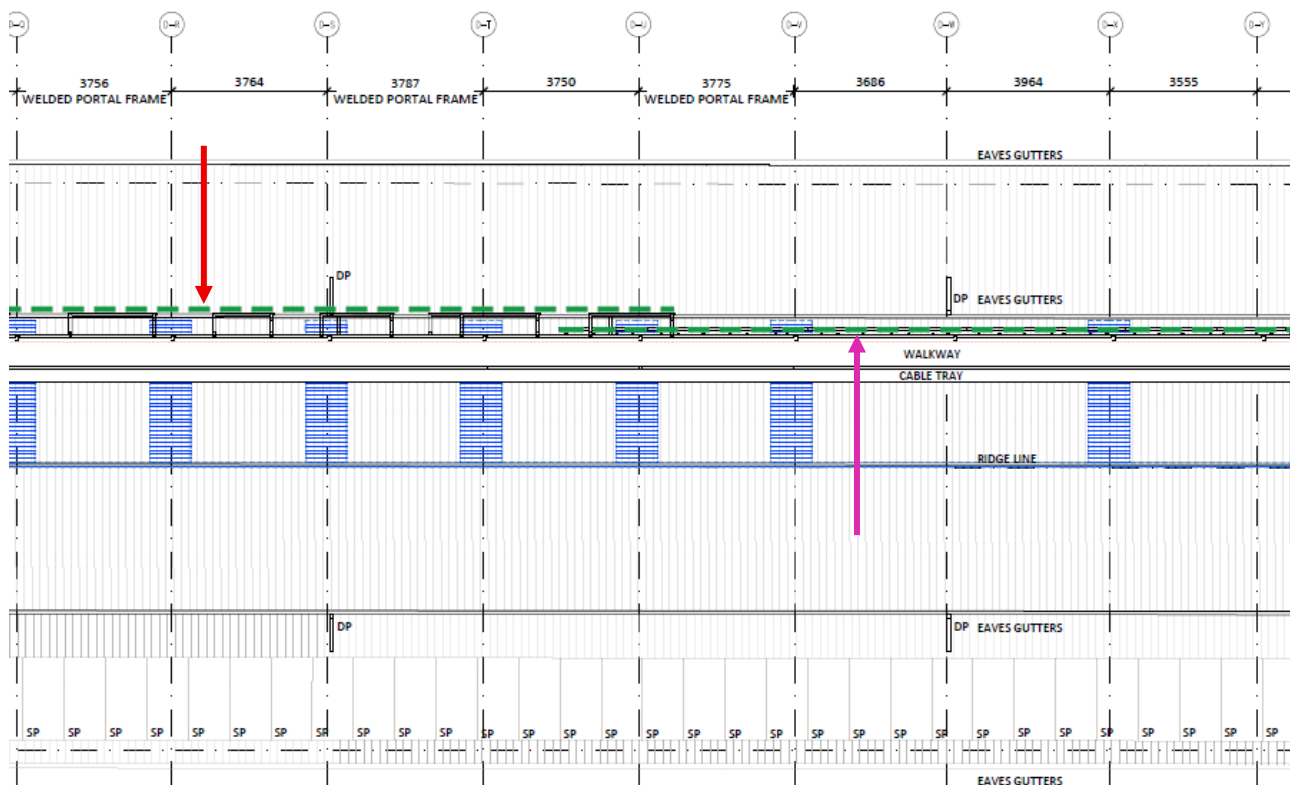
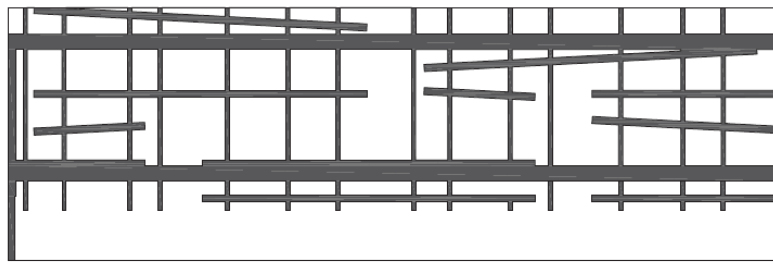


Figure 18 Detail roof plan showing the central, and slightly set forward (red arrow), and the north (pink arrow) sections of Artwork K (shown as two green dashed lines); blue panels show roof sheets to be dismantled and re-instated
Source: Lovell Chen, roof plan, detail 02, drawing A01, Rev HV1, January 2026



Figure 19 Diagram showing the components of the central portion of Artwork K; represented as irregular shapes indicating visual transparency, and outline of the frame and neon sticks
Source: City of Melbourne



TYPICAL NEON STICKS BAY

BAY AREA - 19.1M2
 FRAME AND ARTWORK AREA - 5M2
 COVERAGE - 26.2%
 TRANSPARENCY - 73.8%

Figure 20 Detail of Artwork K transparency test (elevation); showing the combined visual transparency of the structural frame, supports and neon elements in silhouette
 Source: City of Melbourne

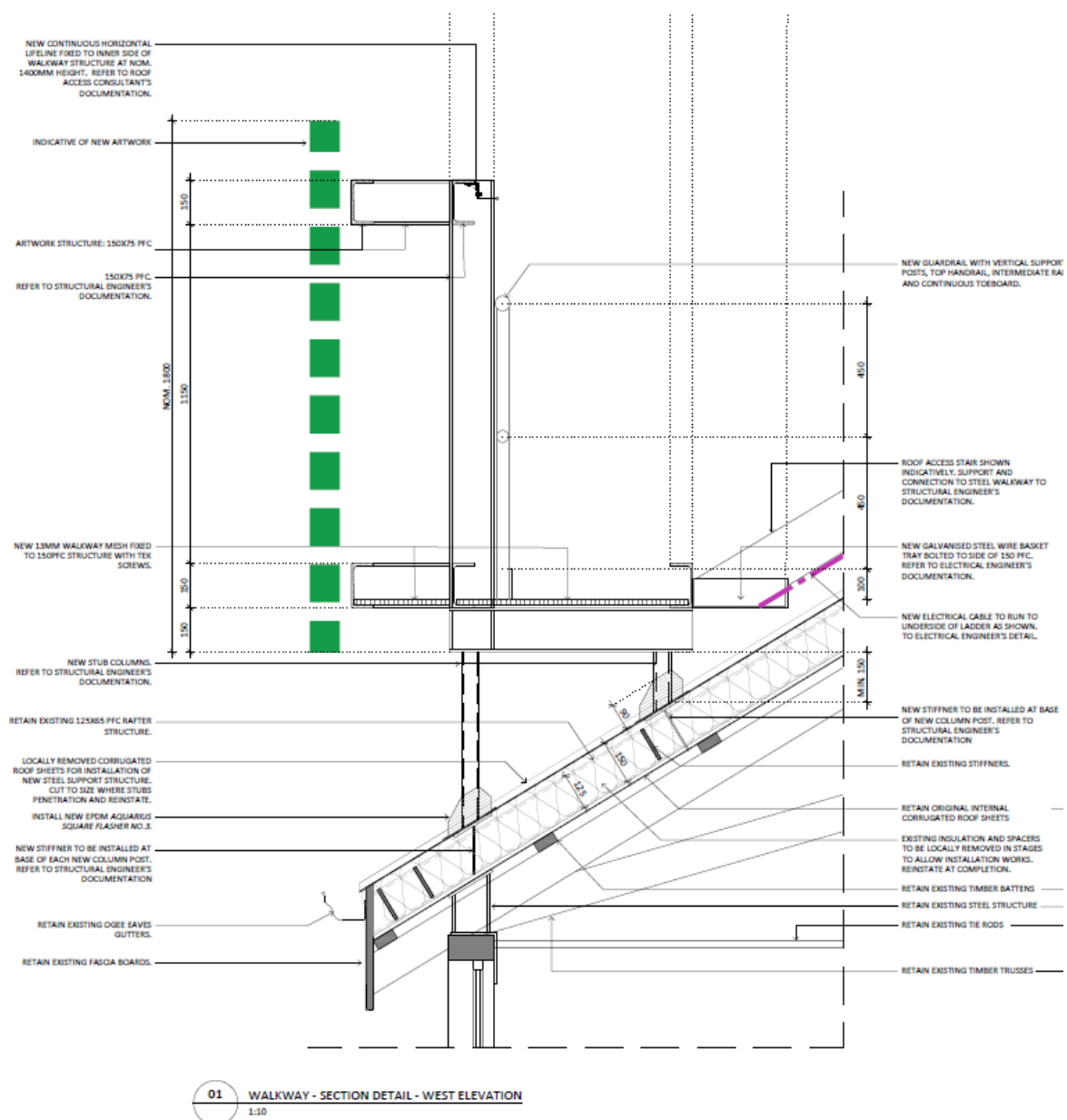


Figure 21 Section detail showing installation method for Artwork K (green dash) to west elevation of lantern roof
 Source: Lovell Chen, section, drawing A02, Rev HV1, January 2026

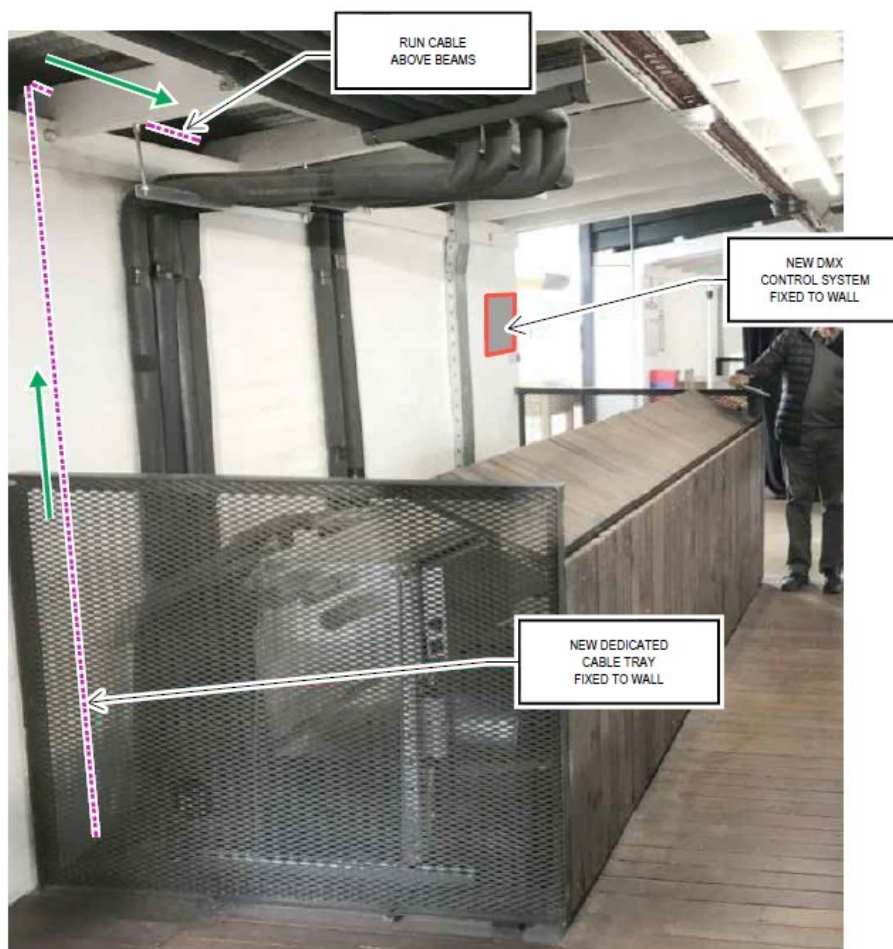


Figure 24 Cable route and DMX control system to first floor shown relative to existing infrastructure
Source: Webb Australia Group, schematic diagrams and details, drawing PS-200, Rev 03, 13 February 2023

5.2.1 *Nature and operational behaviour*

Artwork K is a neon illuminated artwork with a variable operating behaviour. When it is illuminated the neon tubes and sticks will gently fade in and out of a range of colours over a period of time. Some areas will be dimmer and some brighter (with luminance levels complying with and below all relevant standards, see section 6.3.3). The lighting transition will be soft and slow, with the neon sticks appearing to ‘breathe’ in and out, achieving a meditative movement of light. The transitions will not be quick or frenetic, or introduce strident or rapid pattern change.

6.0 Assessment of heritage impacts

6.1 *Heritage Act 2017* considerations

This section provides an assessment of the heritage impacts under the *Heritage Act 2017* in relation to the installation of Artwork K to the lantern roof of the stables wing at the Former Victoria Police Depot. It discusses the impact on significant values and fabric at the place, management and mitigation measures, and reasonable use considerations.

6.2 Significant values

The VHR statement of significance for the Former Victoria Police Depot notes that the place is architecturally and historically significant to the State of Victoria. The statement of significance relates to the whole of the registered place. Only the sections which relate the place as a whole or are relevant to the stables wing are reproduced below.

6.2.1 *Historical significance*

The Former Victoria Police Depot is historically significant:

The Former Victoria Police Depot is historically significant as a police training establishment of the early twentieth century and a police hospital. The Former Police Depot demonstrates the association of the site with the Victoria Police and in particular the Mounted Police Branch since 1912. The St. Kilda Road site of the former Depot has important associations with the history of Melbourne as the location of Canvas Town in 1852-54 and the Immigrants Home from 1856-1914.

The stables complex was the first element within the Police Depot to be constructed in 1912-13, and remained in use as a stable and open riding school until 2016, albeit with some change including the use of the building as a hospital during WWI and the conversion of the Drill Hall to the Grant Street Theatre in the 1970s. It was the last building within the depot to remain in use by Victoria Police for its original purpose, and the long association with the Mounted Branch of Victoria Police is evident in the fabric of the complex.

The adaptation of the stables complex by the VCA resulted in a change in use, without diminishing the historical significance of the building.

6.2.2 *Architectural significance*

The Former Victoria Police Depot, and in particular the stables complex, is architecturally significant:

The Police Depot is architecturally significant in providing an extremely rare and unique solution to the institution's requirements. The architectural form of the stables, riding school and drill hall demonstrates the reliance on the horse as a means of transport for police work at that time. The combination of stables, octagonal entrance hall, riding school and drill hall was regarded with pride at the time it was built. The Stables is one of the largest stable buildings to have been constructed and to still remain in metropolitan Melbourne. The original design for the Riding School and former Drill Hall was for one large open space divided in the centre by a mezzanine viewing platform. The Riding School is located in the wing extending east from the octagonal entrance hall.

As an individual component of a larger collection of buildings associated with the Former Victoria Police Depot, the architectural significance of the stables complex derives predominantly from its unusual form, designed to accommodate the stabling and working/training requirements of the Mounted Branch of Victoria Police. The stables complex as constructed in 1912-13 was one of the largest stables complexes known to have been constructed in metropolitan Melbourne.⁷ Its external form and presentation, with its prominent corner octagon and long narrow

⁷ RBA Architects, *Victoria Police Stables Complex Conservation Management Plan*, March 2013, p. 50.

wings, demonstrates a practical response to the site requirements and limitations, and resulted in an imposing form within the former depot site. Collectively, it is one of a number of buildings constructed on the site as the headquarters for police training and mounted police operations in Victoria.

Adaptation of the stables complex for use by the VCA necessitated changes to fabric, and the formal arrangement of internal spaces. That said, the adaptation works were designed to retain the legibility and expression of the original design and detail of the building. Modifications, for the most part, are reversible and designed to conceal original retained fabric beneath new interventions. The key features expressing the architectural significance attributed to the stables wing were largely unchanged in the works to adapt the building for arts studios and teaching spaces.

6.3 Impact on the cultural heritage significance of the place - [s.101(2)(a)]

6.3.1 *Impact on significant values*

Historical values

As with the earlier adaptation of the stables complex by the VCA, the change in external presentation will not diminish the historical significance of the building. The installation of Artwork K to the roof of the stables wing will be read and understood as part of the broader use of the site as the VCA campus and the adaptation of the site for the purposes of arts education.

The long association of the stables complex with the Mounted Branch of Victoria Police in particular will remain evident in the fabric and form of the complex. The association of the broader place with the Victoria Police (and its earlier associations with the history of Melbourne as the location of Canvas Town and the Immigrants Home) will remain intact. Overall, the historical values of the heritage place will not be affected by the proposed works.

Architectural values

Impacts on architectural values are considered in relation to the physical change to the building fabric to enable the installation of Artwork K (discussed further at section 6.3.2), and legibility and appreciation of the stables complex, the stables wing and its overall form. Affecting only the stables wing, there will be no impact on architectural significance as related to other significant buildings at the Former Victoria Police Depot.

It is acknowledged that the proposed works will alter the presentation and legibility of the stables wing, as the artwork will be part of how the place is read and understood in views from the west, and to a lesser degree from the east. The large-scale external form and presentation of the stables complex will remain legible in all views, with the artwork largely contained within the extent of the roof lantern. Valued design elements such as the regular bayed arrangement of the external walls and fenestration patterning of the west elevation will not be affected; nor will the form and fabric of the lower skillion roof and band of windows and louvres to the lantern (clerestory). The volumetric arrangement of the stables wing, whereby the octagon is the taller and more architecturally complex element completing this elevation, will remain unchanged.

While Artwork K introduces a large element to the west face of the stables wing, the octagon with its stepped roof form will be maintained unhindered as the visually dominant element in the composition of the stables complex. At approximately 15 metres, the separation between Artwork K and the north faces of the octagon roof is sufficient to maintain the distinct presentation and prominence of this element. At the north end, the stables wing roof ridge will be unencumbered for approximately 15 metres.

The key area of change is to the lantern roof. While positioned on the lower part of the west face of this roof, the broad extent of Artwork K extends above the ridge line, partially covering views to this for the length of the artwork. However, Artwork K is highly visually permeable, maintaining the legibility of the lantern roof ridge through the artwork, and consequently the appreciation of the building volume and form overall. In views from the south-west,

the octagon volume is the visually dominant form and element and, due to both the position of the lantern (which is set back and concealed by the octagon) and the slenderness of the artwork, it will remain as such.

Within the former parade ground, and when viewed from the east, there will be no substantial change to the appreciation of the volume and form of the stables wing. As illustrated in Figure 14, Figure 15 and Figure 17, only a very narrow section of Artwork K will be visible above the ridge (in direct, elevational views), with this less visible in oblique views.

While Artwork K introduces an element of scale to the principal west elevation of the stables wing, the artwork is highly visually permeable, maintaining the ability to appreciate the valued architectural form of the building, composition and volume, and the stables complex as a whole will not be adversely affected. Accepting some change to its presentation, the change will not affect the architectural significance of the stables wing and the Former Victoria Police Depot.

Visual impact

With consideration of the significance of the heritage place, the heritage values attributed to the stables complex derive in part from its architectural and aesthetic qualities, particularly as related to its presentation to Dodds and Grant streets.

It is recognised that the introduction of Artwork K to the lantern roof of the Dodds Street elevation will alter the context and presentation of the building to some degree, primarily in direct and mid-range views from the west, and oblique mid-range views from the north-west and south-west. Due to the position of the artwork, the potential for visual impact is greatest to the west elevation of the stables wing (see Figure 11-Figure 13).

Artwork K will partially obscure, but not entirely conceal, views to the lantern roof fabric from the west, and will be partly visible (along with the safe access ladder) in views from the east (Figure 14-Figure 15). The artwork is designed to be a contemporary and contrasting element to the building and by its very nature, introduces the potential for visual impact.

Having regard for these considerations, there will be some adverse visual impact on the architectural significance of the stables complex arising from the installation of the artwork in views from the west. This is recognising that its state-level values are based in large part from its architectural/aesthetic qualities as they are legible in the public realm, including its notable scale and distinctive design with repetitive bays. The stables complex is a landmark in Dodds and Grant streets, with the octagon being a dominant element at the intersection of these. Although it is acknowledged that the proposed works will have some visual impact, as discussed in section 6.3.4, the robust scale of the building, and its distinctive form and design, are balancing factors that will allow it to retain its prominence in Dodds Street.

In relation to adverse impacts in views from the east and within the former parade ground, it is noted that the roof mounted elements are located in alignment with the modern lift shaft and on the glazed bridge link. The roof mounted elements will be visible, though legible as utilitarian roof-mounted equipment, and are made to be as visually lightweight as is feasible. The artwork will have very limited visibility above the ridge line in these views and there will be a negligible impact in direct and oblique views from within the site from the east.

Over the course of the day, the visual impact in views to the stables wing will vary. During daytime, the building will be more prominent as the background to the work, visible through the frame and overlaid elements. When the artwork is illuminated at night, the building will be less prominent, but still visible behind and through the work. Any visual impact is mediated by the permeability of the artwork, and the retained legibility of the building.

Overall, the impact of the artwork on views to the balance of the stables complex – comprising the octagon, riding school and drill hall wing – from key external viewpoints and in views from the east and north within the former parade ground will be negligible.

The introduction of a contemporary artwork to the roof of the stables wing will be understood in the context of the SMPAC suite of works to Dodds Street, as well as the existing contexts of the VCA and broader MAP. Appreciating this evolved cultural context does, to some extent, mediate the visual impact of the installation by allowing the artwork to be understood as part of a large complex artwork and more broadly, for VCA to be understood as a part of the MAP. Artwork K will be less of a contrasting element in this context.

6.3.2 *Impact on significant fabric*

The works will involve discrete locations of impact to the building fabric of the stables wing, namely:

- Penetrations to west elevation of the lantern roof (modern fabric) to connect to structural steel purlins in the previously refurbished roof cavity
- Installation of an access system to the east elevation of the lantern roof and freestanding lift shaft and bridge (modern fabric)
- Dismantling and reinstatement of modern roofing to facilitate works
- Internal works to ground floor ceiling and first floor wall to provide for electrical connections for new switchboard.

The works propose no change to early or original fabric, and where physical connections are proposed, these will be made to modern fabric introduced in the 2018 works. The works are localised in nature and designed to be reversible and accordingly any impact arising from change to fabric are considered to be of a minor order.

New electrical cabling will be consolidated with existing services introduced in the 2018 works.

6.3.3 *Other potential impacts*

Amenity impacts

Users of Dodds Street or the stables complex and local residents will not experience any additional amenity impacts arising from the works. The works are limited to the overall lantern roof height of the stables wing. As a public artwork, the installation is likely to improve amenity to users by emphasising the role of the place in the provision of arts education.

Lighting impacts

Webb Australia Group were engaged to provide a lighting impact assessment for Artwork K (*Webb Australia Group, Southbank Major Public Art Commission – Lighting impact assessment report, Rev. 04, 3 October 2025.*).

The proposed lighting arrangement was modelled in AGI32 (industry standard lighting software) against Australian Standards, with various luminance and illuminance calculations undertaken along adjacent properties and roadways. The calculations for the proposed installation were completed with linear LED fittings with an average output of 300 lumens per metre (lm/m) to represent the neon tubes for illumination calculations. The actual average is estimated to be 291 lm/m. The peak level of 758 lm/m is used for the luminance calculations.

The assessment found that luminance levels of Artwork K were well below the recommended levels and no further dimming of the light features is necessary. Illuminance levels at the residential properties are negligible and compliant with all relevant standards. The threshold increments calculations complied with all relevant standards. To ensure impacts have been fully considered and minimised, the proposed artwork conforms to the Australian Standards for Control of the Obtrusive effects of Outdoor Lighting, as well as the illumination requirements outlined in Draft changes to Melbourne Planning Scheme Clause 15.01-1L-02. Signs.

Visual clutter

As related to the potential for visual clutter, the roof access system required for maintenance and safe access to the artwork has been streamlined to consolidate and conceal elements where possible. The system utilises a ceiling access panel and internal drop-down stair in the modern lift shaft; small, fixed ladder sections on the eastern façade with drop down handrails; and a cable support safety system for low visual impact. The artwork framing integrates an access system which will also improve access for general maintenance of the building roof more broadly, thus future proofing access requirements.

While the east side rooftop elements will be visible, these are positioned near the modern lift shaft and will be read en-suite with these modern interventions.

6.3.4 *Mitigation of impacts*

As discussed above, the impact to cultural heritage significance is limited to the potential visual impact on the presentation of the stables wing. This impact is, however, mitigated by several factors, predominantly the position and permeability of the artwork.

The placement of Artwork K on the lantern roof (the higher roof of the two roofs to the stables wing) ensures that the bulk of the building and clerestory windows remain visible and unimpeded in principal views. It is only the upper part of the roof form that will be affected. Further, the permeable nature of the artwork and frame allow the roof form and fabric to be perceived through openings in the frame and overlaid neon elements. As shown in Figure 20, a section of a typical bay of neon sticks has a transparency of 73.8%. This is a relatively high level of transparency and demonstrates the sparse nature of the artwork.

As related to impact on architectural value, this is mitigated by the selection of the stables wing as the location for the artwork. The scale of the building – in particular, the length of the stables wing – as well as its robust design and repetitive bays will enable the expression of its architectural significance to remain evident. The contemporary nature of the illuminated artwork will not compete with the early twentieth-century design and fabric of the stables complex, and instead will be juxtaposed against the existing building, allowing both to be appreciated.

It is important to note that the location of Artwork K to the west elevation of the stables wing provides for the maintenance of largely clear and unimpeded views of the building in viewpoints from the south. The building complex will retain its character as an imposing form within the larger heritage place. This impact on presentation is also reversible, as the artwork and associated fittings can be removed at the conclusion of the project.

6.3.5 *Conclusion*

The impact of the proposal on the cultural heritage significance of the place is limited to a visual impact on the presentation of the stables wing, primarily in direct views from the west. The historical value of the building will not be affected by the proposed works. As related to architectural significance, the impact on presentation will be mitigated by the permeable nature of the artwork, its placement on the lantern roof, and the scale, design and prominence of the building itself. Views to the building will also be maintained from within the site and to the south.

6.4 Reasonable use considerations [s.101(2)(b)]

6.4.1 Introduction

Under section 101(2)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2017*, the Executive Director must consider the effect on the reasonable or economic use of the place if the proposal were to be refused. The 'reasonable use' consideration is an objective assessment and is concerned with the reasonable use of the registered place or object, not what is subjectively reasonable.

Heritage Victoria's policy *Reasonable or economic use: Relevant matters for the consideration of section 101(2)(b) of the Heritage Act 2017* elaborates on s 101(2)(b):

When taking into account the circumstances of the permit application and the registered place or object, the Executive Director may consider: (1) the historic, recent and current uses of the registered place or object, (2) other compatible uses of the registered place or object, (3) the context and setting within which the place or object is located, and (4) other relevant matters.

As noted in the Heritage Victoria policy, 'compatible use' means a use which respects the cultural significance of a place. Such a use involves no, or minimal, impact on cultural significance.⁸

It is further noted that:

Refusal to issue a permit for works to enable a change in use may affect the reasonable use of a place to a greater extent if the historic or recent use is now obsolete, than if the historic or recent use is not obsolete. For example, an adaptive re-use proposal for a now redundant industrial complex.

6.4.2 Reasonable use statement

It is submitted that the use of the stables wing for the exhibition of a contemporary artwork is a reasonable use of the place. This proposal is consistent with the historical and longstanding (since 1973) use of the Former Victoria Police Depot by the VCA for arts education, production and display. The use of the site, and in particular the stables wing, associated with its VHR registration (the police depot) has also ceased.

The context and setting of the place are also relevant considerations in relation to reasonable use. The VCA is co-located with several key arts and cultural institutions such as the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Australia Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) and Southbank Theatre, as reflected in the MAP context. Although these are outside the extent of registration for the Former Victoria Police Depot, they establish a broader setting and context for the artwork. The association of the setting with contemporary public art will be further emphasised by the installation of the remaining SMPAC suite of works in Dodds Street.

With consideration to the relationship and context of the immediate arts precinct and setting, the installation of the artwork on the west plane of the stables wing lantern roof is consistent with the accepted use of the place. Until relatively recently (2016), this wing was occupied by the Mounted Police branch of the Victoria Police, but this use is now obsolete. While the stables wing was only recently adapted for use as student artist studios, teaching and exhibition spaces, the VCA began occupying buildings on the broader site from 1973 (see statement of significance at section 2.1). The long-standing presence of the VCA has added another layer of history to the place; the association of the site with contemporary art education, within the contemporary art precinct of Southbank, is well-established. The selection of the stables wing as the location for Artwork K refers to this multi-layered history, building on the transformation of the building in 2018, the closure of Dodds Street to traffic and the recent completion of the landscaped component of the SMPAC (currently known as Dodds Street Linear Park).

⁸

Article 1.11, *The Burra Charter: the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, 2013.

The historical significance of the broader site derives from the twentieth-century use of the place as a police training establishment (with the stables complex being the first element constructed at the site). With consideration to the recent conversion of the building to accommodate arts education (aligned with the balance of the VCA campus), the installation of Artwork K on the stables wing is a continuation of the modern/adapted purpose of the place as a whole.

This location has been selected by the artist due to the building's size, scale, orientation and elongated form, as well as the historical associations of the stables wing and the Former Victoria Police Depot site. The physical features will give scale and height to Artwork K, and also allow for the installation of a work of substantial scale to the roof without diminishing the architectural values of the building. This responds to the artist's brief (section 4.3) to create a site-specific, immersive, destination artwork that encourages repeat visitation during the day and night, creates an identity for Southbank and adds value to the MAP. The artwork also acts as a bridge between the built environment of the stables wing, the natural environment of the Dodds Street Linear Park, and the sky above.

As related to the broader concept of adaptation of or interventions into heritage places for arts purposes, there are many precedents for the installation of contemporary artworks in heritage places, both in Australia and internationally. Appendix A includes several examples where heritage places are a critical and engaged part of the making and presentation of contemporary artworks. The precedents demonstrate some of the challenges, but also the positive outcomes, of installing contemporary artworks in diverse heritage settings. They demonstrate how public art can supplement – rather than diminish – the heritage values of public places, by asking questions, uncovering layers of history and exploring hidden meanings and stories. Public artworks can also support the revitalisation of city spaces and attract new audiences to heritage places.

Artwork K sits in this artistic context, a point reinforced by its location on a building that has been adaptively repurposed for arts education. Alluding to the transformative power of education (or knowledge) by its location on the roof of an arts education building, Artwork K is an intermediary between the traumas of the past and the possibilities of the future.

It is submitted that reasonable use of the place would be constrained if the proposed works were to be refused, as it would create restrictions on the type or nature of artworks that could be installed or exhibited at a place that has historically (since 1973) and is currently used for art education, production and exhibition.

6.5 Potential impacts on adjacent or neighbouring heritage places - [section 101(3)(a)]

Under section 101(3)(a) of the *Heritage Act 2017*, in determining a permit application the Executive Director may consider the extent to which the application, if approved, would affect the cultural heritage significance of any adjacent or neighbouring property that is included in the VHR or subject to a heritage requirement or control in the relevant planning scheme (in this instance, the Melbourne Planning Scheme).

Adjacent heritage places are shown at Figure 25, and identified as:

- Victorian Heritage Register, H2359, St Kilda Road (also HO1234 in the Melbourne Planning Scheme)
- Victorian Heritage Register, H2450, Vault 111 Sturt Street, Southbank (also HO1225 in the Melbourne Planning Scheme)
- Melbourne Planning Scheme, HO1201, PMG Postal Workshops, Garage and Stores complex, part 45-99 Sturt Street Southbank.

It is submitted that the proposed works would have no impact on the cultural heritage significance of any adjacent or neighbouring property included in the VHR or Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (HO) of the Melbourne Planning Scheme. The VHR place at H2359 (St Kilda Road) is located over 200 metres to the east, on the opposite side of the Former Victoria Police Depot/VCA campus. *Vault*, which has recently been included in the VHR, is a work of

contemporary art. Its heritage significance will be complemented by the proposed works, and will be enhanced by the broader SMPAC project to introduce public art to Dodds Street, linking it and the forecourt of ACCA. The local heritage place at HO1201 is located opposite the stables complex, to the west side of Dodds Street, and has also been adapted for re-use by the VCA. Similarly to the stables complex, it is a building of substantial scale and robust design that will not be diminished by the location of an illuminated artwork to the roof of a building on the opposite side of Dodds Street.

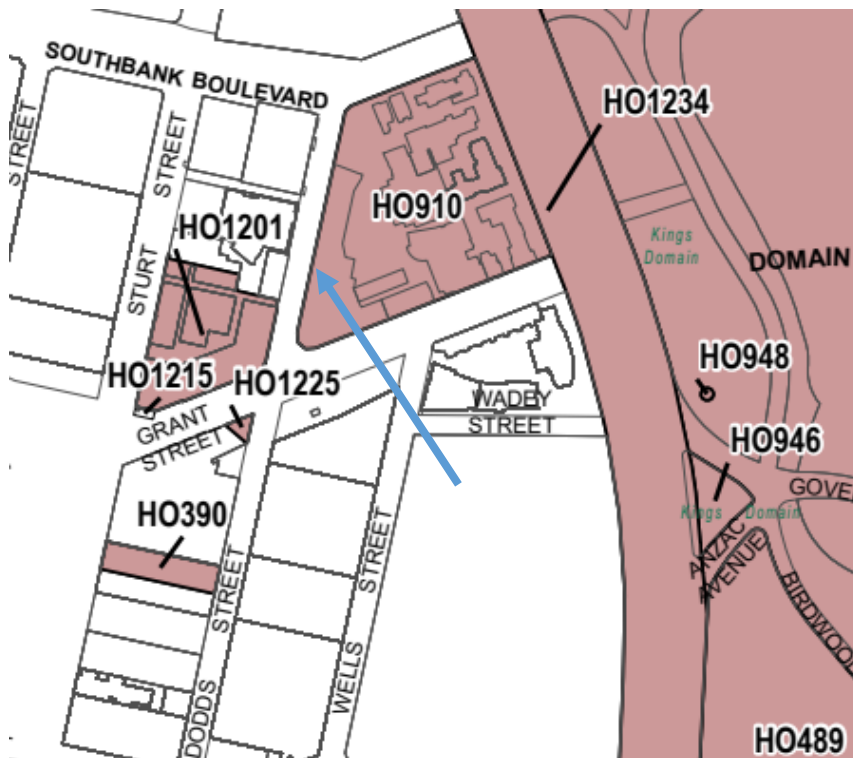


Figure 25 Heritage places adjacent to the Former Victoria Police Depot (approximate location of Artwork K indicated with arrow)

Source: State Government of Victoria, Department of Transport and Planning, Melbourne Planning Scheme – Local Provision, Map No. 8HO

6.6 Conservation Management Plan

6.6.1 CMP policies and guidelines

A conservation management plan (CMP) was prepared for the stables complex in 2013 by RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants. At the time the CMP was prepared, the building was still in use by Victoria Police and had not been adapted for use by the VCA. Its recommendations therefore do not take later changes to fabric and use into account.

The CMP identified the following elements as being of primary significance:⁹

- Exterior of the building generally, including the regular fenestration pattern [and] the brickwork detailing
- The steel-framed windows

⁹ RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *Victoria Police Stables Complex, 13-39 Dodds Street, Southbank, Conservation Management Plan*, March 2013, p. 53.

- The original plan form, including arrangement of loose boxes and the original sections of mezzanine
- Remnant sections of internal walls related to the former drill hall (now Grant Street Theatre)
- The roof form and trusses
- Original timber doors, both boarded and panelled
- Original/early fixtures and the like, such as the trolley and rail to the mezzanine, and timber plates with hooks
- Original hard paving associated with the building: long bricked apron to the east side of the stables wing and basalt pavers in front of the octagonal entrance hall
- Brick pier abutting the north-west corner of stables wing

Two of these elements are relevant to the proposed works: the exterior of the building, and the roof form. None of the elements identified as being of contributory significance are relevant.

Chapter 6 of the CMP identifies the principal heritage values of the site to be conserved as the 'utilitarian character of the building' and the 'historical and social associations to the Mounted Police Branch'.¹⁰ Chapter 7 includes conservation policies for the place with policies relevant to the proposed works excerpted in Table 1. Chapter 8 includes guidelines for adaptive re-use of the building. Relevant general guidelines are excerpted in Table 2.

The specific adaptive re-use guidelines for the stables do not include any recommendations relevant to the roof or general presentation of the west elevation of the building.

Table 1 Extracts from CMP policies (RBA Architects, 2013, pp. 61-62)

Policy	Policy	Actions
7.5, Use	The Victoria Police Stables Complex should be used in a sympathetic manner so that its cultural significance is retained and conserved. If a new use is required, it should be compatible, that is, involve limited change, especially to areas of primary significance	Ensure that the site is used in an appropriate manner so that its cultural significance is conserved and the fabric of the building continues to be maintained
7.6, Future change	Future change should be carefully considered so as not to compromise the cultural significance of the Victoria Police Stables Complex. Any alterations, either modifications or new works should be sympathetic to the extant significant fabric and character of the Victoria Police Stables Complex	If change was to occur, the [...] utilitarian character of the building should be retained and the historical and social associations to the Mounted Police Branch should be reflected or interpreted in the new works [...] Carefully consider the implication of change and its potential impact on the cultural significance of the place [...]

¹⁰ RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *Victoria Police Stables Complex, 13-39 Dodds Street, Southbank, Conservation Management Plan*, March 2013, p. 57.

Table 2 Extracts from general adaptive re-use guidelines (RBA Architects, 2013, p. 68)

Action	Guidelines
Modifications to the original external fabric could be possible	Generally changes to the exterior would be possible if undertaken in a sympathetic or complimentary [sic] manner (in terms of scale, form, materials and colours) so that the original design is largely retained. Key considerations at the Victoria Police Stables Complex are: • Limiting the impact on the facades/public realm • Retention of the primacy of the octagonal entrance hall • Retention of the particular rhythm of the fenestration pattern Guidelines: • Retain existing building envelope • Locate additions to the rear (rather than disrupting the long extruded forms of the wings or the octagonal hall). These should be subservient and distinguished from the original part of the building • Introduce new openings in a regular manner, thus creating a secondary/subsidiary pattern to the original rigorous regularity • Introduce doors below existing windows (as has occurred at a few locations across the building) • New doors might be of a contemporary but sympathetic design • Limit signage to discreet areas

6.6.2 Response

The proposed works are consistent with the CMP policies and guidelines for adaptive re-use, in the context of later alterations and re-use of the place by the VCA for arts education from 2017.

As discussed at section 6.0, the historical significance (and associations of the place with the Mounted Police Branch) will not be affected by the proposed works. While there will be an impact on the presentation of the west elevation of the stables wing, the works are limited to the upper lantern roof and the 'utilitarian character of the building' will be retained in views from the public realm.

The roof form is identified as an element of primary significance in the CMP. As discussed in section 3.1.3, the 2017-18 works to the building involved the retention of the original roof (to remain visible internally) and introduction of new structural roof purlins, insulation and corrugated galvanised roof sheeting above, the extension of timber fasciae and new rainwater goods. The proposed works are located in an area that has previously accommodated change, are reversible, and involve no impact to early or original fabric. Their location to the lantern roof ensures that the lower roof form remains entirely visible, and the permeability of the design allows the form and extent of the clerestory roof to be visible to either side of, and through, the artwork.

The proposed works comply with the relevant adaptive re-use guidelines listed in the CMP. In particular, they:

- Limit the impact on facades and views from the public realm. While the impact on presentation in views from the west is acknowledged, the location of the artwork to the lantern roof of the stables wing ensures that the impact on views is limited to the roofline in views from the west
- Retain the primacy of the octagonal entrance hall, with no impact on views to this element of the building
- Have no impact on the particular rhythm of the fenestration pattern

- Retain the existing building envelope
- Locate additions (works required for safe access and maintenance) to the rear, being the east elevation of the stables wing.

7.0 Conclusion

It is recognised that the installation of a contemporary illuminated artwork to the roof of the stables wing could be seen as a challenging proposition, resulting in a change to the presentation of this part of the building in views from the west. However, the proposed works have been designed to minimise impacts on the significant fabric and values of the stables complex, and to enable safe access for long-term maintenance. The physical impacts and visual and presentational impacts associated with the works are managed through the siting, position and permeability of the artwork. Due to these mitigating factors, the stables complex will retain its character and dominant presence within the larger heritage place. The potential for visual clutter is minimised through the streamlined design and position of the access system to the rear elevation, in alignment with other contemporary introduced elements (the lift shaft and bridge). Visual and presentational impacts are also reversible, as the artwork and associated fittings can be removed at the conclusion of the project.

Overall, the works will not have an adverse impact on the heritage significance of the place, and are considered to be a positive intervention that aligns with the ongoing use and appreciation of the place. There will also be no adverse impact on amenity or arising from illumination of the artwork. The proposed artwork is part of the broader context of SMPAC, a major component of CoM's public art program and the MAPT revitalisation of the Southbank arts precinct, and will increase engagement with the whole heritage place. The works also constitute a reasonable use of the Former Victoria Police Depot, consistent with the longstanding use of the site for arts education, production and display.

APPENDIX A

Artistic precedents





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1.0 Artistic precedents

This appendix compiles national and international examples of precedents for the installation of contemporary artworks in heritage places.

1.1 Scotsman Steps

In 2011, the artist Martin Creed's work *Scotsman Steps* was installed in a stone tower that forms a pedestrian link between North Bridge and Market Street, Edinburgh. The steps within the tower are known as the Scotsman Steps, built between 1899-1902 as part of the construction of the Scotsman Newspaper buildings. The steps were Category A listed in 1974 and sit at the heart of the Old Town Conservation area and World Heritage Site. By the early twenty-first century, the condition of the steps and tower had deteriorated, leading Edinburgh World Heritage and the Edinburgh City Council to develop a programme of renovation.

As part of the renovation, a new public art installation was commissioned from Turner-Prize winning artist Martin Creed. This entailed resurfacing the steps with different and contrasting marbles from all over the world (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Martin Creed, *Scotsman Steps*, 2011
Source: subberculture, Flickr



Creed's intent was to create a microcosm of the world, while still recognising and respecting the historical importance of the building and city. The work involves the direct engagement of the public when they use the steps. It engages audiences outside the gallery environment in a heritage context, becoming part of the everyday experience of navigating the city, challenging expectations of performing the simple action of walking up or down a set of steps. The installation of Creed's artwork has reportedly impacted positively on the local community, increasing access to art and revitalising the historic throughfare.

1.2 Yininmadyemi / Thou didst let fall

Yininmadyemi / Thou didst let fall is a permanent installation by the artist Tony Albert in Hyde Park, NSW, positioned beside the ANZAC Memorial, a major commemorative site within the park. Both Hyde Park and the war memorial are included in the NSW State Heritage Inventory.

The artwork was commissioned by the City of Sydney as part of the Eora Journey program, which aims to recognise and celebrate the ongoing significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history in the public domain. The sculpture comprises four seven-metre-tall bullets and three fallen shell casings on a base that is shaped like a boomerang; it acknowledges the service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women in the Australian Defence Force (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Tony Albert, *Yininmadyemi / Thou didst let fall* (pictured in 2015)
Source: Silverfig, Wikimedia Commons



Albert has commented that he ‘envisage[s] this memorial in Hyde Park to be a special and powerful place for contemplation and remembrance, a space for all our stories to be heard and recognised.’¹ The striking, prominent artwork is placed in conversation with the ANZAC Memorial (1934), which has been identified as being of historical significance to the State for its embodiment of the collective grief of the people of NSW at the loss of Australian servicemen and women since World War One, and aesthetic significance as a great work of public art. It also brings to the fore the longer history of inhabitation of Sydney by the Eora people, and the discrimination and lack of recognition of the military service of Indigenous veterans.

1.3 The Lighthouse / Tū Whenua-a-Kura

The Lighthouse / Tū Whenua-a-Kura is a permanent installation by the artist Michael Parekōwhai at Queens Wharf, Auckland. Externally, it is in the form of an 8.5-metre-high ‘state house’ (social housing) (Figure 3). The interior features a neon light installation as well as a stainless steel sculpture of Captain Cook titled *The English Channel*. It is surrounded by a wooden jetty. The public can explore the work by looking in its windows, through its door and by climbing the staircase.



Figure 3 Michael Parekōwhai, *The Lighthouse / Tū Whenua-a-Kura* (pictured in 2022)
Source: Ann Woolliams, Wikimedia Commons

¹ <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/monuments-and-memorials/yininmadyemi-thou-didst-let-fall>



The location, Queens Wharf, is a sensitive heritage place with the wharf being one of the earliest reinforced concrete wharves in New Zealand (constructed 1907-13). It is associated with historical events such as strikes, the influenza pandemic and wartime embarkations and retains structures and features linked with its early use. The wharf is included in the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero as a Historic Place Category 1, and it remains a fully working wharf today.

Parekōwhai's artwork was installed in 2017 by Auckland Council. The interior finish of the house features clusters of neon lights that represent the 88 known star constellations, with the coloured light alluding to the Māori principle of ahi kā, the burning fires of continuous occupation and use of land. Captain Cook is represented not as a heroic figure but as one deep in thought. It has been described as '... a singularly important artwork. It simultaneously memorialises Māori resistance, pays tribute to our shared histories of navigation and migration, honours our egalitarian past, and acts as a gesture of permanent subterfuge in the heart of our property-obsessed city'.

As such, the artwork can be seen as a subversive interpretation of the history and significance of Queens Wharf. Rather than uncritically celebrating the past, Parekōwhai reveals its contradictions and poses questions for the audience about the apparent binaries of colonial and Māori heritage; land dispossession and protest occupation; and egalitarian and neo-liberal housing policies.

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