

MAIN SECTION

Curating Architecture and the City: Recent Australian Pavilions

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, pavilions have emerged as a popular vehicle for exhibitions of architecture: these often spectacular structures and immersive environments becoming both the object and subject of display. Yet, despite their ubiquity, and the increasing interest of art galleries and institutions in exhibiting and commissioning architectural projects, the pavilion has largely escaped interrogation within the discourse and practice of curation. Taking three recent Australian pavilion programs as its focus, this essay examines the diverse challenges of curating this kind of full-scale architecture, and the ways in which architecture is curated in or through them. In particular, the Australian pavilions raise important questions concerning the curatorial work: what is being curated, by whom, and to what ends? Such questions are critical to understanding the changing place of architecture in contemporary culture, but also the limits and opportunities presented by architecture in an ever-widening field of curation.

KEYWORDS

Pavilion; Curation; Curating Architecture; Architecture Exhibition

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Pavilions and the possibility of curating architecture

In 2014 Julia Peyton-Jones, celebrated curator and, at that time, co-director of the Serpentine Galleries in London opened the inaugural Sean Godsell-designed MPavilion in Melbourne with the remark: "It's exciting that our annual pavilion now has a twin in Australia."¹ Instigated by the philanthropist Naomi Milgrom through her Naomi Milgrom Foundation with sponsorship from the City of Melbourne, the MPavilion is part of a global proliferation of pavilion programs that have emerged in the wake of the annual Serpentine Pavilions that pop-up in London's Hyde Park each summer. The MPavilion follows a similar formula, inviting a high-profile architect to realize a temporary structure in Melbourne's Queen Victoria Gardens for the summer months, as both an immersive exhibition of architecture and a setting for an extensive program of free cultural events. It has garnered much attention since the delicate aluminum mesh walls of Godsell's pavilion were first lifted over a curious crowd.

The MPavilion is one of several programs that have become part of the cultural scene in Australia in recent years. In 2013, gallerist and philanthropist Gene Sherman, also inspired by the Serpentine Pavilions, initiated *Fugitive Structures*, an annual series of temporary structures designed for the courtyard of Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF) in Sydney, which ran from 2013-2016. While in 2015, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) took the model into a state institution, initiating an annual Architecture Commission for an ephemeral structure to be realized in its Grollo Equiset Garden courtyard. The commission has since become a key project of the Gallery's new Department of Contemporary Architecture and Design, also established in 2015.

These Australian programs attest to the multi-faceted ways in which the Serpentine model has proliferated in a range of institutional contexts and physical settings. More than this, the diversity of the Australian programs highlights how the contemporary pavilion has emerged as an object of curation—evidencing both the recent popularity of architecture as a subject of exhibitions and, more generally, the expansion of the role of the curator, and of curating, as an activity of contemporary culture. In the discipline of architecture itself, the case for a dedicated discourse of architectural curation has been made by Cynthia Davidson in a 2010 special edition of *Log Journal* dedicated to the topic.² Moreover, the professionalisation of the field is demonstrated by such programs as Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) which offers a Master degree in Critical, Curatorial, and Conceptual Practices in Architecture. Importantly, however, these are

1 Quoted in Linda Cheng, "Sean Godsell's MPavilion Unfurled," *ArchitectureAU*, 6 October 2014, <https://architectureau.com/articles/mpavilion-opens/>.

2 Cynthia Davidson, ed. *Log 20: Curating Architecture* (2010).

all but a small part of what David Balzer has described more generally as an “acceleration of the curatorial impulse” that has occurred since the mid-1990s.³

Furthermore, pavilions—especially those commissioned and built by art galleries and museums—must also be seen in the broader context of the spectacularisation of art, and the shift in recent decades towards the curation of single, large-scale artworks often presented as exhibitions in which they are the only object on display. Here, the curatorial act is one of selecting, commissioning and midwifing often temporary artworks for institutional spaces. But, at the same time, pavilions can appear to escape the reach of curation. As relatively unmediated exhibitions of architecture, their apparent need and capacity for curation is diminished: the pavilion is often understood as a kind of exhibition that does not require curation, where the chosen architect is commissioned and the creative act of their design stands on its own. It is perhaps for this reason that they are somewhat overlooked or dismissed in the art world,⁴ and have largely eluded interrogation through the theme of curation.

In fact, much of the rhetoric around the contemporary pavilion as a format for the exhibition of architecture has focused on its capacity to exhibit architecture directly, at 1:1 scale. In this respect they appear to overcome the problems that have typically been associated with the exhibition of architecture. As Jean-Louis Cohen, former director of the Cité de l’Architecture et du Patrimoine in Paris, has suggested in his often-cited discussion of the dilemma of exhibiting architecture:

Exhibiting art is usually involved in showing the work. Exhibiting architecture is a matter of showing indices of something which, when the work is built, is out there. In French there are two terms translated as “work.” One is *ouvrage*, referring to the built work; and one is *oeuvre*, referring to the project, the design, the intellectual work. ... So relating the documentation of the work/oeuvre to the work/ouvrage on the wall or somewhere is one of the challenges of architectural exhibitions.⁵

In this context, the contemporary pavilion has emerged as a perfect vehicle to overcome the oeuvre/ouvrage disjunction. Julia Peyton-Jones, who led the Serpentine Pavilion program from 2000 until her departure in 2016, has often emphasized this point as a way to explain the logic of the Serpentine Pavilions as exhibitions of themselves⁶—a point she

³ David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014), 8.

⁴ One of the key exceptions to this is: Joel Robinson, ed. *Open Arts Journal Issue 2: Pavilions* (2013).

⁵ Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Jean-Louis Cohen, “A Conversation with Jean-Louis Cohen,” *October* 89 (1999): 6.

⁶ Philip Jodidio, “Interview with Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist,” in *Serpentine Gallery Pavilions*, ed. Philip Jodidio (Köln: Taschen, 2011), 16.



FIG. 1 Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), 2016 Serpentine Pavilion, London. Source: Photograph by Ashley Paine, 2016

reiterated at the opening of Godsell's MPavilion in describing the pavilion as "exhibiting architecture through built space rather than in an exhibition."⁷ [Fig. 1]

At the same time, Peyton-Jones has spoken about the process of commissioning architects for the Serpentine Pavilions as an extension of the way the gallery developed a practice of commissioning artists to make site-specific works for the gallery during the 1990s.⁸ The Serpentine Pavilion program has certainly, over time, exploited the disciplinary ambiguity that lingers around the pavilions. On the one-hand, they are an accessible form of art exhibition that brings new audiences to the gallery, on the other, they are, in the words of Peyton-Jones herself, "the new wing we build each year."⁹ Construed as a form of large-scale site-specific art makes sense of their seriality and temporariness, except that few of the pavilions have been site-specific in the way that architects use this concept and have typically been relocated to new homes after their Serpentine seasons. The pavilions thus highlight a key question concerning the

7 Cheng, "Sean Godsell's MPavilion Unfurled".

8 Jodidio, "Interview with Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist," 8. See also: Susan Holden, "To be with architecture is all we ask': A critical genealogy of the Serpentine Pavilions," in *Quotation Quotation: Proceedings of the 34th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand*, eds. Gevork Hartoonian and John Ting (Canberra: SAHANZ, 2017), 255-266.

9 Jodidio, "Interview with Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist," 16.

constraints and particularities associated with the exhibition of architecture: what does it mean for architecture to be curated?

The Serpentine Pavilions elevates the role of the curator in several significant ways. The Artistic Directors of the Gallery—Peyton-Jones (until 2016) and Hans Ulrich Obrist (co-director from 2006, and then director from 2016)—assume a prominent place alongside the architects, as creators, if not of the pavilion designs, then certainly of the contemporary pavilion as a format.¹⁰ In addition to the realization of the pavilions themselves, there is also the curatorial work associated with programming the events that have become inextricably linked with the pavilions since the arrival of Obrist and his introduction of the 24-hour Serpentine Marathon talk-fest that first ran in conjunction with the Rem Koolhaas and Cecil Balmond Pavilion under its crowning balloon of hot air. Certainly, the activity of curating has changed alongside the evolution of art practices in the later part of the twentieth century. Where once “curator” referred to a custodian of a collection, or someone who managed a museum, since the 1980s usage has expanded to embrace such activities as selecting “performers or performances to be included in a festival, album, programme” or more simply, “selecting, organizing and presenting content.”¹¹ Hence, “curating” today is a nebulous array of activities that encompasses a diverse set of tasks that might previously have been described as arts management, funding, producing, directing, commissioning, editing, programming, planning and criticism.

Obrist’s trajectory as an über curator has been significantly propelled by the Serpentine Pavilions, and he has become a key figure in contemporary architectural culture through his curatorial activities, including his involvement in the Venice Architecture Biennale. His *Interview Project and Unbuilt Project*—which have no or little material expression—attests to his power to foreground curating as a primary cultural activity. This is something he has also done through numerous books on curating, which Daniel Birnbaum describes in the postface to Obrist’s *A Brief History of Curating*, as articulating an expanded spectrum of curation. According to Birnbaum, this spectrum, is defined at one extreme by Pontus Hulten’s reinvention of the cultural institution from within and, at the other, by Harold Szeemann’s reinvention of the concept of the exhibition through his wide-ranging freelance work.¹² Sylvia Lavin’s remark that “Obrist curates curation” is an apt description of the way he has claimed not only the activity but the topic as well.¹³

10 Obrist has suggested that Julia Peyton-Jones effectively “invented” the pavilion in 2000 with Zaha Hadid. See: Julian Rose et al., “Trading Spaces: A Roundtable on Art and Architecture,” *Artforum International* 51, no. 2 (2012): 204.

11 This shift is noted in the OED’s Draft Additions from July 2011. See: “curate, v.,” in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

12 Birnbaum, Daniel postscript to Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP | Ringier; Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2008), 238.

13 Sylvia Lavin, “Showing Work,” *Log 20: Curating Architecture* (Fall 2010): 7.

If the contemporary pavilion is one of the most significant instances of the exhibition of architecture in the contemporary scene, it still remains to be understood in what ways architecture, and the city itself, is curated in or through them, and how they might indicate the limits of architecture's capacity to be curated. Like the Serpentine Pavilions, all of the Australian pavilion programs involve the work of curators, but in ways that are not always obvious. Rather, they tend to be idiosyncratically shaped by their specific institutional and funding contexts, and their specific sites, which range from private and public galleries to a public park. The following analysis of the Australian pavilion programs aims to open up such a discussion, and give a more nuanced picture of how the activity of curating architecture takes place in the pavilions.

The MPavilion: Curating the city

Of all the Australian pavilion commissions, the MPavilion most closely follows the Serpentine Galleries' model through their direct commissioning by Milgrom and her team.¹⁴ They are realized as discrete structures that capitalize on the name and reputation of the chosen architect, and play a recognized game of distilling the architect's oeuvre while maintaining an experimental edge. They also most seriously engage with the event programming aspect of the Serpentine model.

Perhaps in a more significant way than the Serpentine Pavilions, the MPavilions have a role in giving a tangible presence to the Naomi Milgrom Foundation, at least for the summer months when they sit in Queen Victoria Gardens in Melbourne's Southbank Arts Precinct. More than just a "new wing," they become the primary architectural statement of the Foundation and its mission to cultivate a discourse on design in the city. The pavilions are capital 'A' architecture, despite being peripatetic, and have been designed by a series of high-profile architects with international reputations: Sean Godsell (2014), Amanda Levete of AL_A (2015), Bijoy Jain of Studio Mumbai (2016), Rem Koolhaas and David Gianotten of OMA (2017), Carme Pinós (2018) and, most recently, Glenn Murcutt (2019). What is interesting, however, is that while Milgrom has a long history of engagement with the arts, she is not a professional curator: her role in the MPavilion blurs the lines between commissioning and curating.¹⁵ Much like the curators of the Serpentine Pavilions, Milgrom has established herself as a creative presence in the program, frequently appearing in photographs alongside the pavilions' architects.

14 Naomi Milgrom acknowledges the Serpentine Pavilion program as an inspiration for the MPavilion projects. Heidi Dokulil, "How the MPavilion is reshaping how we see the city," 2 November 2016 <https://morespace.spacefurniture.com/latest-news/2016/10/31/how-the-mpavilion-is-reshaping-how-we-see-the-city>; Cheng, "Sean Godsell's MPavilion Unfurled"; "Naomi Milgrom Foundation," <http://mpavilion.org/about/naomi-milgrom-foundation/>.

15 Lisa Clausen, "A city's celebration of lives less ordinary, Naomi Milgrom and MPavilion," *Age*, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/a-citys-celebration-of-lives-less-ordinary-naomi-milgrom-and-mpavilion-20141203-11zh3s.html>.

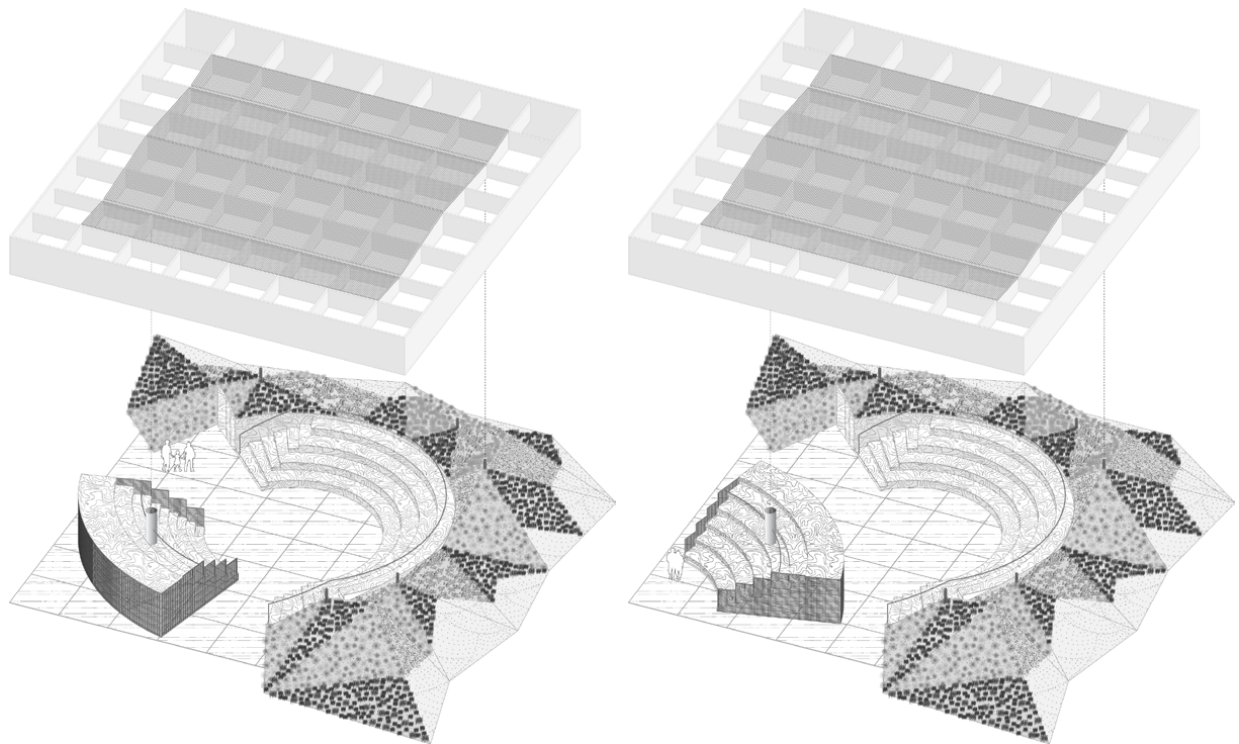


FIG. 2 Rem Koolhaas and David Gianotten / OMA, 2017 MPavilion, Melbourne. Source: Photograph by Ashley Paine, 2017

Moreover, the “M” in “MPavilion” which ostensibly refers to the city of Melbourne, fortuitously also implies Milgrom’s own name, and is a reminder of her role as the commissioner and instigator of the program. It also highlights the public-private-partnership model through which the civic realm is now increasingly made [Fig. 2].

Drawing upon a diverse and shifting group of government, industry, education and cultural partners, the MPavilion is supported each year by a team of events programmers and production assistants that play an important role in the curation of the pavilion’s events program, which extends across the Summer, and includes talks on topics as diverse as cities, philosophy and astronomy as well as a range of events, installations, performances and children’s activities. As such, the pavilion designs are often concerned with the spatial arrangement of their gatherings: they demonstrate a range of counterforms—archetypal or avant-garde—that anticipate a crowd. Studio Mumbai’s design, for example, provided a generous roofed space with a symbolic central void, while Koolhaas’s amphitheater-like design incorporated a small rotating grandstand that could turn towards the center of the pavilion or out to the park [Figs. 3a-3b].

The MPavilion programming also has a specific agenda to curate conversations about architecture and in all cases the architects have been involved in the events. In 2017 Koolhaas and Gianotten contributed to the curation of the programming which included a Regional Program,



FIGS. 3A-B 3a Rem Koolhaas and David Gianotten / OMA, 2017 MPavilion, Melbourne. Source: Courtesy OMA.

following an explicit research interest of OMA.¹⁶ Another program offshoot is the Living Cities Forum, an annual event organised by the Naomi Milgrom Foundation held in Melbourne in advance of the construction of the Pavilion. The Living Cities Forum has a more serious ambition to engage with topics of city making. It is an example of the event programming escaping the pavilion and becoming a primary curatorial endeavor.¹⁷

Despite many similarities, the MPavilions differ from the Serpentine Pavilions in the way they are ultimately distributed across the city, intended as new pieces of civic infrastructure. After their short life in Queen Victoria Gardens over the summer, each of the MPavilions is intended to have a second life, relocated to sites around Melbourne. Godsell's Pavilion was relocated to the Hellenic Museum, Levete's to a park in the inner-city Docklands redevelopment, Studio Mumbai's to Melbourne Zoo, OMA's to Monash University and Murcutt's will find a new home at Melbourne University. This is different from the Serpentine Pavilions which are sold in advance to fund their construction, often to gallery benefactors, art collectors, estate owners or urban developers who have the wherewithal to move them, and the space to put them.¹⁸

16 Tania Davidge, "2018 MPavilion - Naomi Milgrom & Carme Pinós," 13 February 2018, <http://archiparlour.org/2018-mpavilion-milgrom-pinos/>.

17 This is also the point made by Andrea Phillips in her examination of the Serpentine Pavilions. See: Andrea Phillips, "Pavilion Politics," *Log 20: Curating Architecture* (Fall 2010).

18 At least one pavilion—Zaha Hadid's *Lilas* from 2017—subsequently entered the art market via a Sotheby's sale of "monumental outdoor sculpture" in 2016. See: Ben Luke, "Zaha Hadid's *Lilas* in Bloom," *Sotheby's Magazine*, 12 September 2016, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2016/beyond-limits-116010.html>.



FIG. 4 ALA, 2015 MPavilion, relocated to Docklands Park, Melbourne in 2016. Source: Photograph by Ashley Paine, 2016

Indeed, in the repetition of the commission and in the dispersal of the pavilions, it is possible to identify another curatorial activity, one that plays out not only temporally, over the life-span of the project, but also spatially over the city of Melbourne. This is not necessarily about organizing a series of related works (the pavilions as a set are, after all, incredibly eclectic), or bringing them into an interpretative framework (the sites of the relocated pavilions have no pre-ordained relationship). Nor does it make the MPavilion like the kind of serial pavilion projects of the 1990s, such as Parc de la Villette, with their unifying themes, internal logics, and controlled sites. It does, however, suggest a curatorial activity that sits above the individual pavilion designs and has a strategic, even creative intent [Fig. 4].

One way to understand this intent is as an ambition to curate the city itself. Milgrom wants the relocated pavilions to be moments of good design that invite engagement in the civic realm (even though the pavilions are designed without fore-knowledge of their ultimate sites). But more than

this, Milgrom wants to have a tangible impact on the future design of the city. If the Living Cities Forum is meant to set an agenda for good urban design, then the MPavilion is intended as a catalyst for its realization. Through the MPavilion program, urban design is presented as a curatorial task: orchestrating project opportunities, highlighting design quality, and cultivating an interested and informed public. As such, the pavilion structures emerge as a means to opportunistically operate directly upon the urban fabric of the city, which is understood here as a dynamic and evolving palimpsest of buildings and spaces, a “collection to be curated.”¹⁹ Milgrom herself emerges as a figure directly involved in shaping the city.

The NGV’s Architecture Commission: Curating architecture in the gallery

Across St Kilda Road, the MPavilion’s institutional neighbor generates its own curatorial curiosities with its pavilion-building activities. Located in the sculpture garden of the NGV, the annual Architecture Commission invites the participation of designers through an open, two-stage competition. Unique amongst the Australian pavilions, it is an open competition in more ways than one. The commission brief welcomes multidisciplinary teams to produce a temporary, site-specific work of architecture in the broadest sense, whether that be a useful space or a functionless intervention into the landscape.²⁰ In either case, the design has been used as a catalyst (and venue) for a suite of related public programs and events [Fig. 5].

Despite this ambivalence to conventional architectural outcomes, the first two built works were decidedly of the pavilion genus: John Wardle Architects’ pink canopy *I Dips Me Lid* from 2015, and its chromatically consistent follow-up, *Haven’t you always wanted...?* by M@ STUDIO Architects in 2016. Both were discrete, self-contained structures that appear to occupy the garden more by coincidence than design, making formal references beyond the NGV site: to the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, and to a suburban car wash in Blackburn respectively.²¹ Subsequent projects have been more diverse and have involved multi-disciplinary collaborations. In 2017 *Garden Wall* by Retallack Thompson and Other Architects, and in 2018 *Doubleground* by Muir + Openwork, took up the challenge of directly engaging with the NGV and its garden, while in 2019 *In Absence* by Yhonnie Scarce and Edition Office was an artist led collaboration

19 Sarah Chaplin and Alexandra Stara, “Introduction,” in *Curating Architecture and the City*, ed. Sarah Chaplin and Alexandra Stara (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.

20 National Gallery of Victoria, “2018 NGV Architecture Commission Design Competition,” <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/curatorial/design-architecture/2018-ngv-architecture-commission-design-competition/>. Teams are required to be led by an Australian registered architect.

21 National Gallery of Victoria, “2015 Summer Architecture Commission: John Wardle Architects,” <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/john-wardle-architects/>; National Gallery of Victoria, “2016 NGV Architecture Commission: M@STUDIO Architects,” <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/2016-ngv-architecture-commission/>



FIG. 5 M@ Studio, 2016 NGV Architecture Commission, Haven't you always wanted...?, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Source: Photograph by Ashley Paine, 2016

that explored the history of Indigenous design industry and agriculture. In *Garden Wall* the designers framed the landscape with a labyrinth of scrim, creating rooms and passages for visitors to play a game of hide and seek with the gallery's outdoor sculpture collection.²² In *Doubleground* the designers constructed a landscape that incorporated formal motifs derived from the Roy Grounds-designed host museum upon its fiftieth birthday [Figs. 6-7].

What is most interesting about the commission, however, is the competition process itself, which places the NGV's architectural program

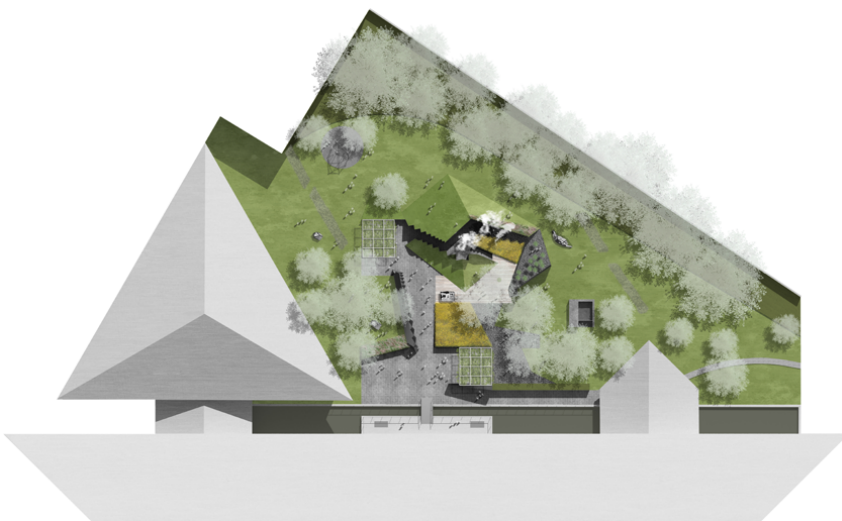


FIG. 6 Muir + Openwork, 2018 NGV Architecture Commission Doubleground. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Source: Muir + Openwork and NGV

22 Susan Holden, "Refiguring the Pavilion: Garden wWall, 2017 NGV Architecture Commission by Retallack Thompson and Other Architects," *Australian and New Zealand Art Journal* 18, No. 1 (2018): 154-57.

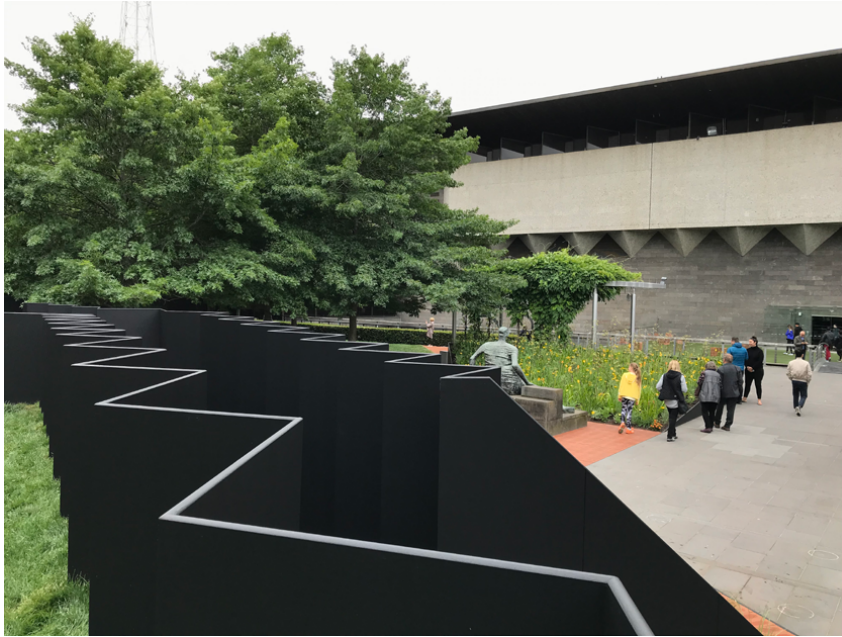


FIG. 7 Muir + Openwork, 2018 NGV Architecture Commission Doubleground. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Source: Photograph by Susan Holden, 2018

in conflict with the very idea of curation. Despite its loose definition of architecture, and its placement in a dedicated garden for sculpture, its procurement via a competition situates the commission within the familiar disciplinary practices of architecture, rather than the curatorial procedures of the museum.²³ This is all the more striking given that the NGV is the only state gallery in the country to have a curatorial department dedicated to architecture and design. While the gallery says that the competition is “led” by the newly formed department, the design competition is developed and administered each year by an external consultant firm, CityLab.²⁴ Reassuringly, the NGV appears committed to the open process, and largely refrains from stacking the jury: the 2018 and 2019 panels, for example, included none of the department’s own staff—the NGV’s Deputy Director, Andrew Clark, was the sole gallery representative.²⁵ And, while in 2017, Ewan McEoin, Curator of Contemporary Design and Architecture, was the lone NGV participant in the selection process, the jury for the 2016 commission included no gallery staff at all.

23 There is at least one precedent for the use of the competition model for commissioning of pavilions. MoMA PS1’s Young Architects Program (YAP) is one of the best known annual “pavilion” programs, and uses an invited competition process to seek out young talented designers. Its jury, however, is largely constituted of MoMA curators. A useful by-product of the competition process is the production of a series of models, drawings and other presentation material that is also exhibited by MoMA. See: Museum of Modern Art, “Young Architects Program (YAP),” <https://www.moma.org/calendar/groups/8>; Matthew Messner, “Meet the finalists for the 2018 MoMA PS1 Young Architects Program,” 2 November, 2017, <https://archpaper.com/2017/11/finalists-ps1-yap/>

24 John Wardle Architects’ commission is an exception: the office was approached directly by the NGV for the project. National Gallery of Victoria, “The Making of the Inaugural Summer Architecture Series: John Wardle Architects,” <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/multimedia/the-making-of-the-inaugural-summer-architecture-series/>.

25 National Gallery of Victoria, “2018 NGV Architecture Commission Design Competition”.

It is perhaps for reasons of transparency and accountability that the NGV has turned to external juries and managers for the commissioning of building works using public funding—an obligation avoided by independent commissioners such as Milgrom, even though that program is also supported by public funds. However, such concerns are rarely exposed so nakedly in the gallery's day-to-day curatorial operations—it is almost unimaginable that such curatorial outsourcing would occur in any other department for such an important gallery commission. The architectural competition process effectively short-circuits the curatorial selection, control and expertise usually exercised over objects of display; the garden structures escaping the scrutiny of connoisseurship to find a backdoor into the gallery.

Ultimately this produces a paradoxical situation in which the NGV's curators in the Department of Contemporary Design and Architecture appear to miss out on an opportunity to have strategic oversight over the signature piece in their annual program. Even though it is seemingly the most curatable commission of all the Australian programs: its site forcibly places the architectural design amongst other works in the NGV's permanent collection and, in principle, provides an opportunity to situate architecture carefully and intelligently within the gallery's own curatorial agenda and exhibition programs. This potential of the NGV Architecture Commission is particularly conspicuous given its rescheduling in 2017 to coincide with the new NGV Triennial which, from its first iteration in December of that year, places art on display alongside architecture and design in one of the city's largest and most prominent exhibition events. As such, the winning design of the annual competition will be presented and seen every three years as a part of the Triennial—a key exhibitionary context for the project, but seemingly without the possibility of its strategic development in relation to that exhibition's overarching themes.

This is not to suggest, however, that curation does not have an important role to play in the NGV's Architecture Commission—only that most of the curatorial opportunities lie with the designers of the architectural project themselves. In particular, this agency comes from the chance to engage with the garden site and the existing sculpture collection; both are inherently curatorial decisions. Evidence of this is visible in the first installation by John Wardle Architects which staged the Henry Moore bronze, *Draped Seated Woman* (1958) beneath a canopy of color and, to a much greater extent, in the 2017 *Garden Wall*. The white translucent panels of this installation “curates” the sculpture collection and the garden using the principle framing device of the gallery itself: the white wall. As such, the project conflates its “curatorial” gestures with the scenographic and staging techniques of exhibition design. At the same time, the project demonstrates a strong resemblance to works by artist Robert Irwin, and adopts the well-established strategies of site-specific art. Certainly, there is nothing radical about this chameleon manoeuvre—of architecture

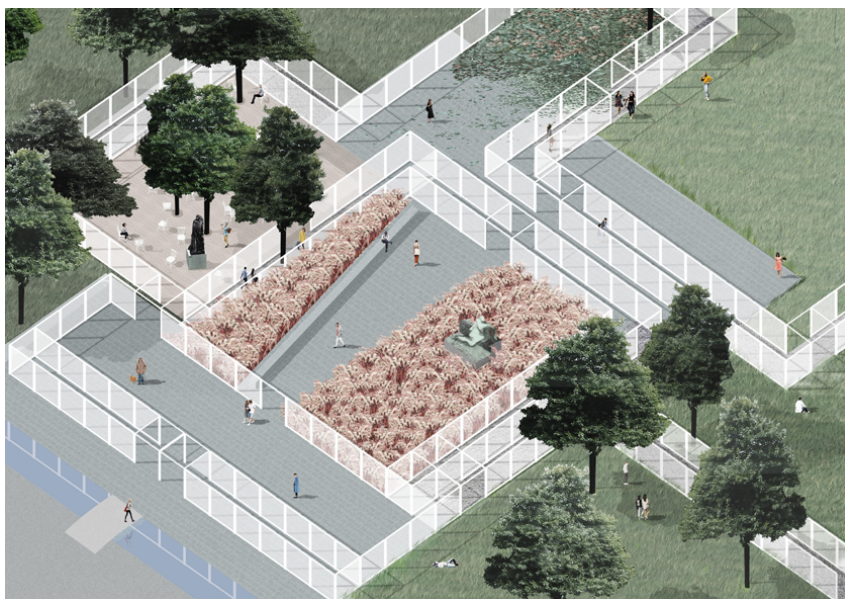


FIG. 8 Retallack Thompson and Other Architects, 2017 NGV Architecture Commission, Garden Wall, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Source: Retallack Thompson and Other Architects and NGV



FIG. 9 Retallack Thompson and Other Architects, 2017 NGV Architecture Commission, Garden Wall, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Source: Photograph by Susan Holden, 2017

masquerading as art—but in the case of *Garden Wall*, it allows the project to ingratiate itself and become one of the many sculptures exhibited in the garden. This is curation by stealth [Figs. 8-9]

While the NGV readily embraces the design ideas and intellectual content of each commission, the fact remains that the competition selection process gives the gallery little control over the architectural message at that important point of inception, rendering it all but useless for broader curatorial purposes. Any conceptual links between the annual commission

and the other works on show can only ever be coincidental.²⁶ Yet while the commissions themselves appear to elude curation by the Gallery, they re-emerge as vehicles for the experimental curatorial activities of the architect-designer-curator to operate within the setting of the institution, and work directly upon the NGV's collection and garden. As such, parallels may be drawn to wider trends within an expanded concept of curation: the curator emerging as an independent creator of exhibitions. Today it is a commonplace in the visual arts for freelance curators, and artists-as-curators, to operate on collections and in institutional contexts around the world, seeking novel ways to reinterpret and re-present them. The NGV's approach to the curatorial activities of its Architecture Commission seem to coincide with these expanded curatorial practices in contemporary art, where curation is no longer an invisible activity that sits over the work to provide it a cohesive narrative, but is now celebrated as a creative work in its own right. What is novel in the NGV Architecture Commission, is that this creative act of curation is embodied in the structures themselves.

SCAF's Fugitive Structures: Curating architecture and culture

In contrast to the NGV Architecture Commission, the suite of four pavilions commissioned by the Sydney-based Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF) between 2013 and 2016 under the title *Fugitive Structures*, represent the most tightly curated collection of pavilions in the Australian context. Based on the Serpentine Pavilion model, SCAF developed their own curatorial agenda for the pavilion program under the leadership of Artistic Director Gene Sherman, formalizing Sherman's long-standing interest in exhibiting a broad range of arts. Indeed, *Fugitive Structures* was not only the first Australian pavilion program (arriving a year before MPavilion, and two before the first NGV project), but it was preceded by a series of architectural projects commissioned and exhibited by SCAF, including a major installation in 2009 by Japanese architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa / SANAA.

For the *Fugitive Structures* projects, Sherman sought out early- to mid-career architects from Australia and the Asia-Pacific region, via an invited selection process, in line with the Foundation's commitment to developing exhibitions from the region otherwise not possible in commercial or public galleries.²⁷ The first structure *Crescent House* was designed by Andrew Burns in 2013, followed by *Trifolium* in 2014 by AR-MA, both

26 Linda Cheng, for example, has highlighted a resonance between *Garden Wall* and Richard Mosse's video installation included in the inaugural 2017 Triennial which showed scenes of the Syrian refugee crisis. Linda Cheng, "A landscape on an object: NGV's 2017 Architecture Commission opens," *ArchitectureAU*, 15 December 2017, <https://architectureau.com/articles/a-landscape-on-an-object-ngvs-2017-architecture-commission-opens/>.

27 Gene Sherman, "Preface," in *Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa / SANAA* (Sydney: Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, 2009).



FIG. 10 Vo Trong Nghia Architects, 2016 *Fugitive Structures* project, *Green Ladder*, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF), Sydney. Source: Photograph by Ashley Paine, 2016

Australian-based designers. The 2015 structure *Sway* was by a multi-disciplinary collective based in Tel Aviv, Sack and Reicher + Muller with Eyal Zur, while *Green Ladder* in 2016 was designed by Vietnamese architect Vo Trong Nghia. Importantly, the works were commissioned following the same methodology as applied to other projects commissioned by the Gallery, blurring disciplinary distinctions between art and architecture. And, like SCAF's other projects, the pavilions were also complemented by a broad range of cultural events including talks, film screenings, performances, children's workshops, yoga and cooking classes. With this inclusive approach, Sherman stands apart as a pioneer in the exhibition and curation of architecture in Australia [Fig. 10].

Tellingly, SCAF's final exhibition in 2017, after a decade of some thirty-five major projects, once again featured an architect: Japan's Shigeru Ban. The exhibition also foreshadowed Sherman's next move—namely SCAF's transformation into the Sherman Centre for Culture and Ideas (SCCI) through which Sherman has redefined her cultural vision and curatorial ambitions. Launched in 2018, SCCI is a five-year proposition which sees Sherman concentrate her focus on fashion and architecture, in two annual events each spread over two weeks: a Fashion Hub in autumn,



FIG. 11 Shigeru Ban Architects, installation view from the 2017 exhibition, *The Invented Work of Shigeru Ban*, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF), Sydney. Source: Photograph by Susan Holden, 2017

and an Architecture Hub in spring. What is most interesting, however, is that Sherman seems to have done away with exhibitions and pavilions to reimagine SCCI as a “unique, event-based cultural enterprise” and a “platform for the exchange of ideas.”²⁸ The Architecture Hubs in 2018 and 2019 included lectures, film screenings and book clubs, involving an international cast of architects, artists, curators, academics, writers, editors, journalists, activists and film makers.

Given Sherman’s previous efforts at the leading edge of architectural exhibition and curation in Australia, what should be made of SCCI’s shift in formats: from exhibition to event, and from architecture pavilions to Architecture Hub? Certainly, it follows a discursive turn in contemporary art practices, and the playing out of conceptual art’s legacy beyond its original disciplinary limits. But the change may also be in part due to the practical difficulties (not to mention the economic cost and material

28 Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, “Press Release: SCCI Sherman Centre for Culture & Ideas: Dr Gene Sherman Launches Sherman Centre for Culture & Ideas,” <http://sherman-scaf.org.au/idea/scci-press-release/>.

consumption) associated with realizing pavilions.²⁹ While, as a temporary structure, the pavilion has often been an “event” in and of itself, it is also the case that in recent times, the pavilion has successfully provided the means for architecture to enter the gallery. Now that the pavilion has made the space and the audience for architectural exhibitions—not to mention a venue for a curated program of cultural activities—can the object now be abandoned, in favor of a public discourse on the culture of architecture that might be sustained in its own right? Was the pavilion only ever an architectural Trojan Horse?

Whatever the fate of the pavilions, their curation at SCAF through the *Fugitive Structures* program exposes the capacity of these 1:1 structures to become objects of curation, handled in the same way as other more conventional artistic artifacts and exhibitions. But with SCCI’s move to a program-based events platform, the question of architecture’s capacity to be curated is refocused on the curation of architectural ideas and discourse, and the expansion of curation itself to include what might otherwise be thought of as events management and programming. It also opens architecture’s curatorial activities to cultural discourses more generally, as well as a new role in shaping the cultural agenda for cities and communities.

Curating architecture beyond the pavilion

What is striking about the contemporary pavilion is that it has appeared to escape theorization as a subject of curation. Yet, the form is clearly an instance of the expansion of curation as an activity of contemporary culture, and a vehicle through which the curation of architecture can occur. In this respect, the Australian pavilion programs present similar challenges to those in the visual arts, where curating is now considered a creative, even artistic, practice in its own right, and where the professional intent and artistic ambition associated with the activities of curating may blur or even be at odds. As shown here, pavilions are at once exhibited works and urban artefacts, immersive environments and spaces for events, temporary and permanent. What is curated is also multifaceted: it is the pavilion itself, an existing collection of sculpture, a cultural program, and a city image. In many of the Australian cases, the “curation” of the pavilion involves two or more of these operations at once.

The Australian pavilions thus open architecture up to a range of important questions regarding where the curatorial work takes place—what is being curated and by whom—and to what end? Such questions are important in understanding the changing place of architecture in contemporary

29 SCAF facilitated the relocation of the first of the *Fugitive Structures*, Andrew Burns’ 2013 *Crescent House*, which is now permanently housed at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne. Similarly, the final project, Vo Trong Nghia Architects’ *Green Ladder* from 2016 was recently on display in Sydney’s Barangaroo.

culture, but also how new cultural practices are intersecting with practices of architectural design. Recognizing pavilions as subjects of curation allows the conversation to turn from one focused on understanding the pavilion as an architectural type, to questions such as: how does curation intersect with architectural and exhibition design, and when does design intersect with programming as a kind of curatorial practice?

At base, all three pavilion programs discussed here are “curated” simply by the fact of their seasonal construction. That is, to exhibit these works in an annual sequence implies a certain degree of curatorial control, even if that control is lightly administered as in the case of the NGV’s Architecture Commission. This curatorial work is being done by program patrons and administrators as often as by professional curators, through the selection of architects as well as through the designs themselves. It also intersects with the design work done by architects—in some cases, the design strategies can be considered distinctly curatorial, involving explicit reference to long-standing strategies of curation that intersect with exhibition scenography or practices of institutional critique that involve exhibition design to draw attention to the institutional frame, as in the case of the NGV’s *Garden Wall* project from 2017.

Beyond this, events programs are also curated, and through this activity the pavilions and their architects become part of a larger cultural agenda, as both subjects and producers. The design work in pavilions is, in turn, shaped by this situation: the performative aspects of culture have become a distinct register on which the design of pavilions can now operate—in addition to being an intensification, or distillation, of an architect’s oeuvre and/or their spatial, formal or material experiments in architecture, as they have often been characterized.

The larger cultural agendas that the Australian pavilions play into, are also multifaceted. The NGV aims to make a place for contemporary design in the art gallery, responding to recognized shifts in cultural practices and recent public policy and investment focused on the creative industries. The MPavilion and SCCI Architecture Hub both have an ambition to elevate the place of architecture and design in contemporary culture. While in the case of the SCCI Architecture Hub, this might now take the form of a virtual “pavilion of ideas,” for the MPavilion, it is still very much attached to the physical pavilions themselves, as festive objects during their summer season in Queen Victoria Park, and also in their afterlives as curios dispersed across the city which, if nothing else, secure a tangible legacy for the program. How this translates to better cities is a longer game and harder to judge.

Finally, if, as Balzer argues, the “curatorial impulse” is symptomatic of the alliance and proximity between capitalism and culture, in which curating is a complicit value-making enterprise, then there is a real question about what is being valued in the curatorial activities associated with

architecture, and what this means for the values of architecture as a cultural form or practice.³⁰ The Australian pavilions begin to tell us something of this. While their persistent and ubiquitous popularity as a mode of in-situ immersive exhibition tells us something of the current obsessions of the experience economy, it is in the particularities of their commissioning and realization that we can better understand what is at stake in architecture becoming a subject of new cultural practices such as curation: what is opened up and what is closed down.

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30 Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, 9.

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