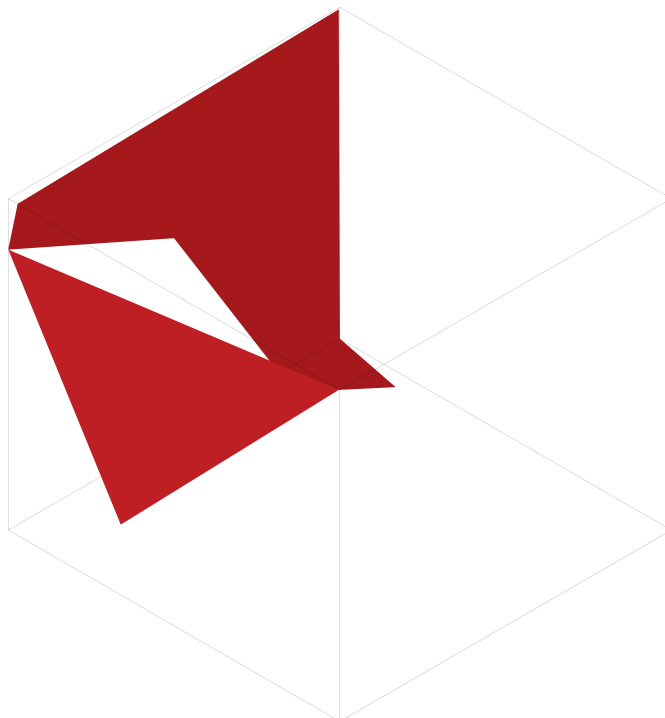


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Faculty of Design and
Creative Technologies
Auckland University of Technology
Auckland 1142, New Zealand

Eml info@materialthinking.org
Web www.materialthinking.org

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**Cultural Connection—The Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA).
Architects: Architectus (Lindsay + Kerry Clare—Design Directors 2000–2010)
with James Jones.**

Lindsay and Kerry Clare

Abstract: There is a growing desire for the architecture of galleries and museums to create a strong identity for their institutions. We argue that this identity can spring from an understanding of context and culture to achieve authenticity, connectedness, individuality and meaning. A response that favours particularisation and locale can also engage with global concerns and opportunities to create a unique cultural experience. The process for procuring and constructing new gallery buildings needs to support this architectural approach. The unique attributes and potential of any region or country are most often derived from topography, climate and social and cultural backgrounds. Relevant architectural responses to these attributes can often be found in historic or vernacular buildings. To add to the complexity, we consider that the identity of a gallery building should not be achieved to the detriment of the fundamental needs of the gallery, that is, functionality, flexibility and the ease of connecting people with art.

Keywords: GoMA, Gallery of Modern Art, Lindsay Clare, Kerry Clare, Arts Queensland, the ease of connecting people with art, urban pavilion, tradition, Queensland, character, identity, culture, vernacular, environmental design, procurement, sub-tropical, public, flexibility, functionality.

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Authors

Lindsay and Kerry Clare /

Directors, Clare Design /
Professors, Architecture + Built Environment, University of Newcastle /
Visiting Professors, Abedian School of Architecture, Bond University /
lindsay@claredesign.com.au
kerry@claredesign.com.au

Introduction

There is much discussion about museum architecture acting as a magnet to help a city or region develop a strong identity or reputation. Whilst a strong architecture can greatly enhance or enrich a visitor experience, there has been a tendency for some evocative works to emphasise architecture at the expense of the art. In this regard our design brief from Arts Queensland was extensive and thorough—a document of around 170 pages.

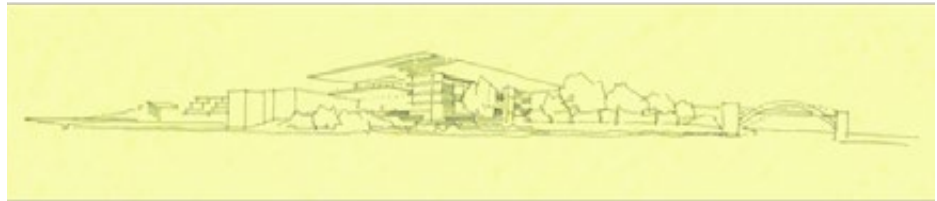
The design brief contained a detailed technical description of all spaces required along with their respective relationships. Also included was the philosophical underpinning and research undertaken to support technical requirements and museological and curatorial practice. The gallery brief underscored the importance of context within the cultural precinct, the city, and to the broader Asia Pacific region.

Our interpretation of this brief was assisted by extensive meetings and communication with three nominated client representatives; Doug Hall (Gallery Director), William Fleming (Coordinator Building and Development) and Michael Barnett (Senior Project Officer). We reported to Hall, Fleming and Barnett, who represented the Trustees and the needs of staff, curators, artists, government and the public. They had produced the brief over a number of years of planning, research and consultation. It is acknowledged by the Queensland Art Gallery that hundreds of people contributed to turning the idea for a new gallery into a reality. Major contributing factors that significantly shaped the success of the project included continuity (cultural memory) of key personnel from the government as well as the architects. This continuity was critical in maintaining agreed conceptual principles throughout the delivery of the project. Throughout the project, there were many changes in personnel within government as well as Lend Lease, the managing contractor. Not all newcomers to the project were aware of important decisions, principles or ideas previously proposed and agreed. Some claimed full understanding of the project after spending two hours viewing drawings and reading the brief (after we had spent two years working on the project with the end user client). Some newcomers brought different agendas that did not support the brief.

An art gallery is a public building. Its significance for the public consciousness is characterised by the fact that it returns enclosed public space to the city. In keeping with this view our proposal envisioned the role of an art gallery as a place for people to connect with art, in all its facets. The opportunity to enrich the cultural life of Brisbane was provided through the creation of an open, inviting, generous and democratic 'urban pavilion'—created by the ease of access, visibility to the interior and connectivity. The siting of this pavilion was both a logical and intuitive response to the curve of the river that is in dialogue with the city and stands at the threshold of the cultural precinct which comprises the Gallery of Modern Art, the State Library Queensland, Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland Museum and Queensland Performing Arts Centre.

A stated objective of the design brief was to create 'a unique cultural experience'. It is always possible to import ideas borrowed from other places and situations but they may not be relevant or appropriate to a place, or authentic to a culture. This understanding is critical and important if the concepts are to be sustainable over time. We feel very strongly about responding to the specifics of place—which is not a limiting factor, rather a springing point. Design can be used to particularise, enrich, embellish, complement and heighten our understanding of place. In a time of globalisation local understanding can be a powerful counterpoint to facilitate authentic engagement and experience.





Competition sketch - architectural concept:
Architectus (Lindsay + Kerry Clare as Design Directors 2000-2010) with James Jones.

There are many lessons from the traditional Queensland house which has become internationally recognised for simplicity of plan and form. Although the idea was originally imported—Georgian plans were modified to the climate with perimeter verandahs inspired by the Indian bungalow—local circumstances helped to evolve a simple, robust and adaptable timber structure with sheltering layers of screens and verandahs. From the mid-twentieth century this form in turn created a synergy with concepts of both outdoor living and with modernism and the open plan, which many contemporary Queensland architects have explored. Likewise Queensland public buildings have evolved by responding to function in a clear and direct manner and to their interaction with sub-tropical climate and the landscape.



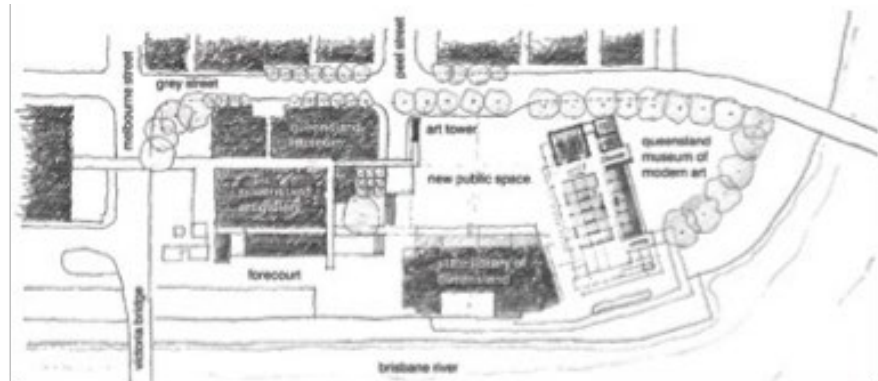
Occupation of the Queensland Verandah



Traditional Queensland house

We saw the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) as a unique opportunity to design a building that was of international standing yet locally familiar and responsive to local conditions and context. The existing cultural precinct was characterised by buildings that were oriented parallel to the Brisbane River, and the overall arrangement of Southbank built form was linear. In contrast, the new gallery building is a pavilion placed perpendicular to the river, therefore reconfiguring the urban environment. This gesture strongly defines the public plaza fronting Stanley Street, and creates the opportunity for a new public park on the bend of the river. Active social spaces are created at the edges of the building, such as terraces, verandahs, balconies, outdoor rooms, a bistro, café and generous entry

canopies (not constructed); all under the large sheltering roof—a gesture that responds to Queensland's extreme light, heat and rain.



Competition sketch—planning concept.
Architectus (Lindsay + Kerry Clare as Design Directors 2000-2010) with James Jones.

The gallery as a pavilion connects to the physical environment of the cultural precinct—public square, river, park, pedestrian movement and street patterns. The outward orientation of our design solution, consciously responds to GoMA's outward-looking philosophy as exemplified by its groundbreaking series of Asia-Pacific exhibitions. Specifically our design for the new gallery incorporates this outward-looking approach through the use of glass and the horizontal flow of the building via the system of 'public living rooms' and 'public verandahs' opening outwards into the surrounding public space, landscape and city beyond.



Open outdoor space connected to the river and city.
Photographer: Peter Hyatt.



Public circulation with balanced light and views to city.
Photographer: John Gollings.

The network of generous external public spaces continues to the interior of the project, which is ordered by a strong cruciform or 'cross street' pattern of public space and circulation. Visitors are encouraged to move to the 'centre-of-plan'—a point of orientation and recognition, before making any commitment to direction or participation, to enter, pass through or ascend.

At this junction, there is awareness of, and connection to, park, public square, street and river. Activities on various levels are visually accessible: gallery and function spaces, digital technology and screen art, café, shop, education and library. The clearly defined meeting point of 'white box' gallery and 'black box' cinematheque at the intersection of the two axes (or internal streets) is experienced with lightness and openness contrasted with darkness and intimacy.

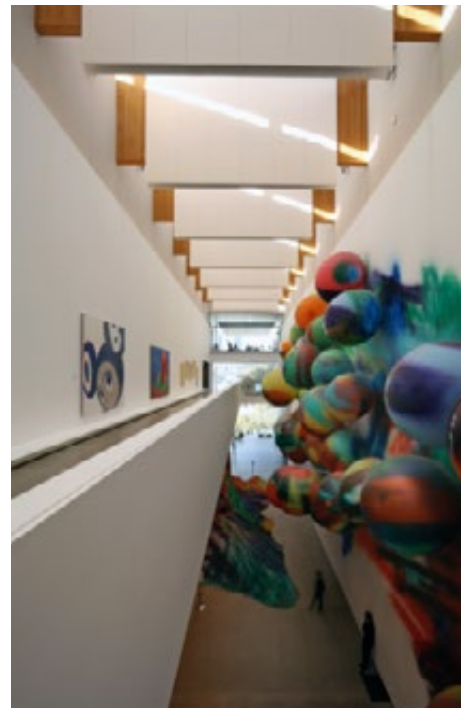
The design of GoMA has also been carefully considered to accommodate the needs of different artists and curators and the variability of contemporary art now and into the future. Considering that the existing art gallery (QAG) was designed with a fixed framework, the proposition for the new gallery was to expand on and complement this space type with a dynamic solution that could engage any form of artwork, from a traditional wall hung painting, to digital performance or installation art. Rather than designing a building that competes with the art, our approach was to provide a serviceable, flexible frame for the art with moveable walls, generous openings for large-scale works and optional systems for light. Interior spaces are neutral, allowing exhibitions to fully explore their own character without influence or domination by any particular architecture, design style, thematic display or geometry.



Major temporary exhibition gallery.
Photographer: John Gollings.



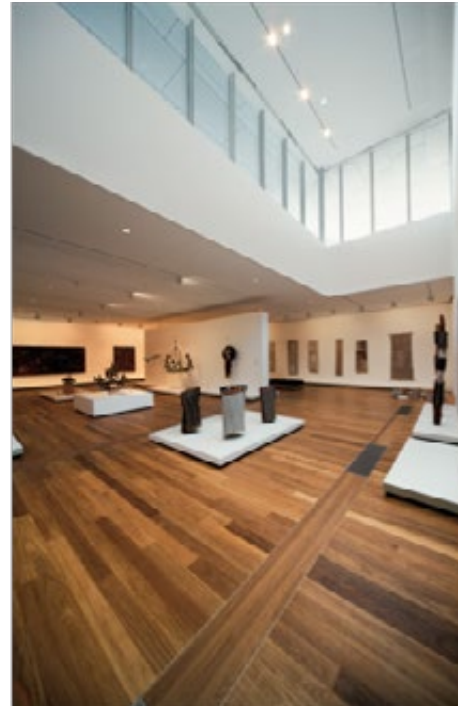
Major exhibition space upper level.
Photographer: John Gollings.



Public circulation areas as gallery space.
Photographer: Peter Hyatt

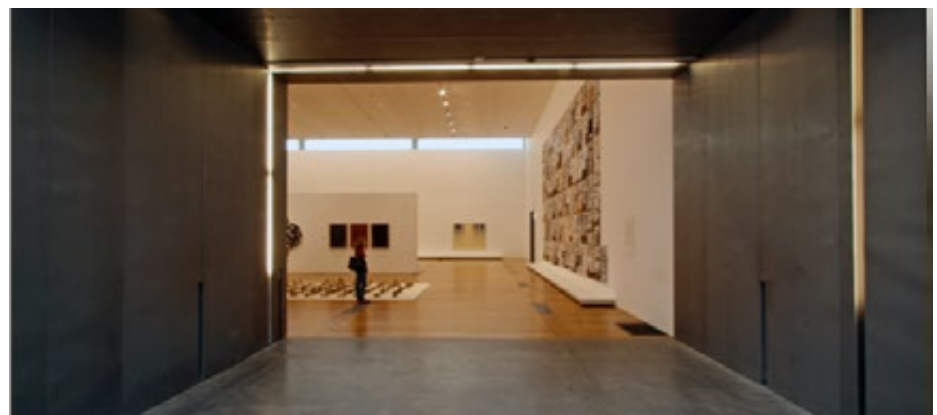


Options for natural light for selected exhibitions.
Photographer: John Gollings.



Exhibition spaces easily convert to 'black box' space.
Photographer: Peter Hyatt.

For example, fifteen gallery spaces have been created, each with their own character and function, differing in the use of light, scale and material—but similar in that they are open and inviting clear and uncomplicated spaces that enable a range of dynamic art installations and a variety of events to occur. All of these spaces can operate in traditional 'white box' mode, some with natural light if required. They can also operate in 'black box' mode, or to 'take anything an artist can throw at it'—to quote William Fleming QAG Facilities Director. The planning for the gallery spaces is highly flexible and practical. Overall GoMA comprises a combination of generous and intimate spaces many of which can be interconnected or separated to suit the scale of each exhibition. The many galleries are serviced by dedicated art lifts adjacent to the major gallery spaces and administrative, curatorial, workshop, service and collection spaces.



Use of materials—dark concrete and zinc cladding to gallery threshold. Photographer: Peter Hyatt.

The character of the architecture evident in the design of GoMA responds to both the spirit of the term 'Queensland Vernacular' and the spirit of contemporary art. We understand vernacular as 'native to a place' or 'to the everyday idiom of a place'. Vernacular is neither static nor just about form. Vernacular can be seen as a contemporary response. Contemporary art often takes its starting point from where it is—from a particular event, circumstance or location. The dialogue between architecture and the diverse nature of contemporary art is of necessity parallel, not specific—a point of view captured in the following quote by the artist Richard Serra:

...in response to the tendency for architects to treat their buildings as if they were autonomous works of art...museums, rather than just being containers for historical artefacts, or showpieces of architectural acrobatics [should] try to foster dialogue and allow for an exchange of ideas and views... and further... relate architecture to its locality, to the larger framework of a city. (Serra, 2000, p. 93).



View of gallery from north east showing generous sheltered spaces. Photograph by John Gollings.



View of gallery from north west. Large timber screen to administration and curatorial areas.
Photograph by John Gollings.

With specific reference to GoMA, architect Tom Heneghan (Professor of Architecture, Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku) states:

In its unusual porosity and openness to the surrounding city—and not only to the most picturesque of the city's scenes—GoMA serves to connect its contemporary art and its contemporary city. The simultaneity of the two is an essential aspect of what the architecture is endeavouring to reveal. The very radical nature of this move should not be overlooked... [the] broadening of the public movement zones into galleries rather than corridors, is the [cornerstone] of the design, giving an unambiguous clarity to the way the building may be navigated, without prescribing routes, and without relegating any spaces to a merely supporting role. This tall circulation zone opens up distant views, both horizontally and vertically, internally and externally, obviating the sense of compression and claustrophobia which can afflict some galleries, and offers stimulating respite from the constantly uniform lighting levels which, in other places, can reduce visitors almost to brain-numb insensibility, whatever the quality of the artworks set before them. (Heneghan, 2009, pp. 186-188).



View from entry to State Library and Queensland Art
Gallery entries Photographer: Peter Hyatt.

The theme of engagement / connection was explored through themes at a variety of scales, thus enabling people to identify with the building due to its democratic nature and relevance within its region. These themes included the connection of:

people with art—non prescriptive participation;
people with architecture—the open invitation, sheltered edge, light and lightness;
people with place—the city, site and sub-tropical climate;
people with community—informal and formal space, legibility.

The use of ‘thin plan’ concepts and separation of volumes embodies the idea of a street or an indoor/outdoor experience. There is a layering of space along this street. Gallery spaces feel connected to the ‘outside’. Natural light is introduced into the street by a long clerestory above the central circulation space, which distributes light more evenly and serves to balance the glare of daylight where the building engages with the river and the city. This moderation of light throughout the building also contributes to the sense of ease that is part of the sub tropics and the Queensland culture; ‘friendly, welcoming and extrovert’ as described by Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper (Beck, et al., 2006, p 17).

The components of the building, how they are made, brought together and experienced are important to us. In this respect a relationship with the builders and craftsmen can only make the experience more rich. We like to discuss what we are trying to achieve and the best way to make things. This process should be acknowledged in the procurement process but rarely is these days. We had to make these contacts outside of the Managing Contractor’s communication frameworks. Design refinement continues throughout the whole construction process, a point neither widely known nor understood. Architecture is created when the design architects are enabled by full engagement with the building process, not by remote control or in a vacuum.



Intimate space moderates between the foyer and the cinematheque. Photograph: John Gollings.



Evening event at GoMA - visual connection to city





Entry to Gallery and Cinematheque

Whilst the building has a civic scale and contains soaring light-filled spaces, we set out to create a welcoming and non-imposing building, enclosing public space within a sub-tropical region. The experience is enhanced through the use of materials that are familiar and details that are direct, modest and unfussed. The overall effect avoids intimidation, haughtiness, or patronisation, placing emphasis on accessible and informal connection with art.

In summary the concept of GoMA was formed in the spirit of collaboration and a respect for users and viewers. Enclosed and open space work together, navigation is easy and spaces are non-imposing. The architecture of GoMA is concerned with issues of light and lightness, connection and optimism, for the Asia Pacific, and the future, 'all given cohesion' according to Tom Heneghan 'as a single concept by the dramatic plane of its uniting roof, which frames the place where the city's cultural and communal life is brought together' (Heneghan, 2009, pp. 186-188).

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Lindsay and Kerry Clare /
Directors, Clare Design /
Professors, Architecture +
Built Environment,
University of Newcastle /
Visiting Professors, Abedian
School of Architecture,
Bond University /
lindsay@claredesign.com.au
kerry@claredesign.com.au

Kerry and Lindsay Clare have been in practice together for 35 years. Their work includes a diverse range of architectural projects, from public buildings and major urban and housing projects to individual houses. Architecturally, their work is consistently acknowledged for a rare combination of design excellence and high-level environmental performance. In 2010 the RAIA Gold Medal Jury noted that: 'Kerry and Lindsay Clare have made an enormous contribution to the advancement of architecture and particularly sustainable architecture, with a strongly held belief that good design and sustainable design are intrinsically linked'. Their work has been included in over 150 national and international books, periodicals and publications as well as numerous exhibitions including Place Makers—Contemporary Queensland Architects at GoMA in 2008 and the '10 Shades of Green' exhibition, New York, 2000. A monograph about the work of Clare Design 1980-2015, edited by Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper, will be released by ORO Editions in March/April 2015. Significant projects include the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art, University of the Sunshine Coast Chancellery, University of the Sunshine Coast Recreation Club, Docklands Library, Cotton Tree Social Housing, UNSW Student Housing, Thrupp and Summers House, White House, Clare House and the Hammond House.

