

## **Objection to the Sydney Modern Development proposal – DA SSD6471 3/11/17 by**

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I acknowledge that some of the material and opinion set out below is included in an objection co-authored with Bruce Donald, Gillian Appleton and Ros Andrews.

I object strongly to the proposed location and consequent design of the Art Gallery of NSW's proposal for its Sydney Modern Gallery - on the grounds that it would seriously damage the highly valued visual quality of:

- The setting of the existing historically significant Art Gallery building,
- The setting of the Woolloomooloo Gate to the Botanic Garden,
- The character of Mrs Macquarie's Road.
- The view from the Art Gallery to The Harbour

and would break the continuous tree line that forms the skyline of the Domain ridge when viewed from the East.

I have carried out a detailed review (attached) of the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) prepared as part of the EIS on the Proposal, which in my opinion, grossly understates the Proposal's adverse impacts.

As a long time premium member of the Art Gallery Society, I am supportive of the Art Gallery expanding its capacity, but not in a way that is so destructive of its surroundings, of The Domain and to itself.

I believe that there are other ways of achieving its commendable objectives. To my knowledge alternatives have not (at least publicly) been adequately canvassed and they are briefly discussed below.

### **The Land-bridge**

Following the construction of the Cahill Expressway across Circular Quay, Fig tree Avenue (across the Domain adjacent to northern boundary to the Botanic Garden) was significantly widened, with a bridge across it carrying Mrs Macquarie's Road. The Art Gallery sat at the edge of a deep cut down to the new road.

The construction of the Eastern Distributor (the ED) in the late 1990's required further upgrading of this roadway. The ED was initially proposed as a surface or shallow-cut six-lane motorway from Macquarie St to the Airport. Its announcement caused a considerable public outcry and the government halted the project for review.

I was appointed by RTA as their urban design consultant to review the initial design submitted by the already selected design-build contractor for the project and assist in designing and negotiating a proposal that was more suited to its various contexts.

The notion of a tunnel from Woolloomooloo to the already existing land-bridge parallel to Macquarie Street was, at my instigation, investigated. However due to a subterranean geological fault it was found to be extremely costly – so the next best (by no means cheap) solution, a land-bridge to the north of the Gallery and the use of noise walls became the adopted solution where the motorway crosses the Domain.

**The form of the land-bridge closely follows the natural contours of the Domain prior to the construction of Fig-tree Avenue, but the location of trees upon it was influenced by structural logic. An existing stand of trees to its north was reinforced with further planting.**

The Gallery and the RBG management were both consulted during the design process. The capital cost of the land-bridge is being recovered by user tolls.

It was built largely to protect the natural context of the Art Gallery Building – not for its expansion.

### **The proposed Sydney Modern Building**

The Gallery conducted a limited design competition to select an architect and a design for Sydney Modern. The entries can be seen on the Gallery's website. The winning SANNA proposal has the virtue of relative modesty that probably explains its selection. However, the VIA (An Appendix to the EIS) clearly illustrates the substantial and adverse changes of character that it would have, but interprets these impacts as only "Moderate." This is hard to credit.

Before a considerable amount of money is committed to a site and design that are not in the public's and Gallery's best interests a

broadly based publically accessible comparative analyses of it and three alternatives should be carried out. The alternatives should include:

1. A four-storey structure attached to the Eastern end of the existing gallery building, where there is plenty of space that is of very little functional or recreational value to the Domain. The Gallery's Eastern façade has been substantially altered over time and is not, as incorrectly claimed in the EIS, a Vernon façade.

Entered at the Eastern end of the long central gallery in the building, Sydney Modern could have a clearly identified image. The new building would be prominent and could be linked at each level to the Gallery and share existing service access. It would enjoy excellent views that would include the Harbour (better than those from the proposed site).

2. Building within the splendid huge space under the Headland Park at Walsh Bay as part of the cluster of cultural institutions in this area. Without the need to build in a manner that keeps water out, generous and well-finished spaces could be afforded. A Metro station is planned immediately adjacent to this space.
3. Decentralizing to a location such as Paramatta – which could have considerable social benefits.

## **Comments on the Sydney Modern VIA**

The Clouston VIA is a long and thorough document containing good images, much of which is, however, of little relevance because in most of the more distant and complex views analyzed, the Sydney Modern Proposal is of insignificant size and its visual impacts predictably low, or it can barely be seen.

However, the VIA's analyses of critical, mostly close up, views (11 – 20) that are in or of an area of high heritage

and landscape value, because of the criteria applied in their analyses, reaches unbalanced conclusions that are inconsistent with the “before and after” images provided.

The bulk of the proposed building is misleadingly said to “cascade lightly” down to the Oil tanks. However where it is:

- adjacent to Mrs Macquarie’s Road,
- seen from the Land-bridge lawn
- seen from within the Art Gallery building, and
- seen from the Woolloomooloo Gate to the Botanic Gardens

it would appear as white, largely un-articulated, boxes replacing a substantial stand of trees and views to The Harbour (and a glass-roofed entry structure that relates to nothing and will be of limited utility in this exposed location).

The Comparative Analyses of Visual Impacts on the attached table demonstrates why the visual impact of the Sydney Modern proposal is unacceptably HIGH.

The EIS asserts that the proposed building “speaks of the future”. It would be more accurate to say that it shouts about it. **The visual relationship between the existing Art Gallery Building and its important setting and the proposed Sydney Modern Building is one of extreme and intrusive contrast.**

It is also worth noting that the claimed views from the terraces of the proposed building would be severely compromised or completely blocked by the substantial substation building to its north.