



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

ARM MELBOURNE STUDIO LAUNCH

Wednesday 11 February 2026

Acknowledgments

Ian McDougall, Co-founder

Howard Raggatt, Co-founder and Director

Jesse Judd, Director

and **Other Directors, Principals and Staff**, ARM Architecture

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this building stands – the Wurundjeri people of the Eastern Kulin Nation – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

Tonight, we reflect on an architectural legacy of almost four decades.

About ten years ago, the much-awarded *Mongrel Rapture, The Architecture of Ashton Raggatt McDougall* was published.

Stuart Geddes opined that

“...the form of the book owes much to the work it’s in the act of capturing: the diverse, obsessive, relentless and involved work of ARM”.

The title and the experience of that book say much about the nature and the impact of ARM.

Others, from the fields of design, including the current principals of ARM, can speak more expertly about their oeuvre of these last four decades.

I will reflect from my perspective – an unapologetically Melbourne, Victoria perspective – on ARM's contribution to our place and our culture.

In 1960, renowned Melburnian architect Robin Boyd published a scathing critique of Australia's built landscape.

Boyd wrote:

"There can be few other nations which are less certain than Australia as to what they are and where they are."

His analysis can be read as a desire for our nation to break free of its insecurities and to explore design that is sensitive to the contexts and conditions unique to Australia.

ARM, formed more than twenty years after *The Australian Ugliness*, credit Peter Corrigan (and the work of Corrigan and Edmonds among others) with inspiring the strength and originality of their contributions.

Of course, Boyd was a modernist and would likely never have imagined his lament answered by the distinctive and expressive work of ARM.

Let me speak about the marks ARM has made on the civic spine of Melbourne.

Let us start at the top of the CBD in Swanston St with Storey Hall, ARM's first internationally recognised work, and to this day still iconic.

The impact of that startling exterior, as well as the less often seen full interior glory weaves the local references into the heart of that once Hibernian Hall.

I well remember walking that block in the 1990s and being overwhelmed by it (alongside Corrigan and Edmonds' Building 8) and feeling (as I still do) that this gave a particular design heart and direction to RMIT and was also quintessentially Melbourne.

The addition of the Green Brain on the corner of Swanston and La Trobe Streets completed that piece of reworking of the heritage of one of the nation's greatest design universities and of a new expression of Melbourne.

And then let us continue past Melbourne Central, which is the creation of a shopping centre that speaks of the laneways and crannies of our retail past, across the bridge onto St Kilda Rd and sweep into the Arts Precinct down Southbank Boulevard.

Here the Melbourne Recital Centre comes upon us first through the skeletal and illuminated presence of the metaphorical black box, which is the theatres for the MTC, and into the MRC – inside the wooden music box that resonates and reverberates.

Last week I was at the MRC's gala dinner and not only experienced the delight of that spectacular musical space but saw tea-lights in all the grooves of the wall carvings of the Dame Elizabeth Murdoch Theatre that make the acoustics and the beauty.

It was breathtaking, and speaks to the craft that makes new buildings that embrace and surround the performances, and with that also, make material the beauty of the performance experience we seek.

And from this new complex back into the heightening and refocusing of heritage with ARM's work underneath the Shrine of Remembrance.

Here as one who spends time in ceremony at this place, the trenches that explain the purpose of the Shrine above make this a place that connects.

And if we move above onto the steps and stare down that civic vista we see the face of William Barak, 'last chief of the Yarra Yarra tribe', on the commercial building that terminates the visual spine.

Here in this journey, we see a practice, so original, reworking and expressing our history and our culture; providing places where we express our culture in performance or learning or living.

The experience of this architecture is a lived part of the experience of so many people and will be for decades to come.

I have seen other examples of ARM's work on my travels as Governor in Geelong and Shepparton.

Each one speaks to an understanding of ourselves.

But let me conclude with for me the most glorious recent example of your work, the design and completion of the Chancellery at Monash University, completed in 2020 – one where I was able to watch the whole process and then work in that new place.

One unexpected sign of a great building – this Chancellery was completed as COVID struck into a world where suddenly the environment for our working interactions turned upside down and distanced.

It worked so well and then worked again when the dictates of the pandemic receded.

It is beautiful and speaks to the University's heritage and purpose – as well as to its physical environment.

It is like no other Chancellery I have seen; it is Australian in its materials and expression.

In your words (the words of Ian McDougall):

"The ARM experiment is about the attempt to manufacture culture ...[with] some key conditions ... a dynamic, intelligent and integrated university scene; an understanding of, and passion for, the city's cultural inheritance; open ...discussion; a professional body that is design-focused ...; a supportive college of 'master' architectural operators.

As individuals and as a practice, we have participated in their erratic eruption".

Your contribution extends beyond your portfolio of work, enriching not only the broader architectural profession but also the cultural fabric of our society.

Congratulations on almost four decades of commitment to this ethos.

Here is to many more years of meaningful expression.

Thank you.