

In 2015, Tony Ellwood, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), announced that its exhibition program would include an annual Summer Architecture Commission to activate the Grollo Equiset Garden at the back of the international gallery's site. An initiative of the NGV's newly established Department of Contemporary Design and Architecture, the activation seemed to pick up on a wave of attention being cast on more experimental forms of architecture.

Pond[er] by Taylor Knights Architects in Collaboration with James Carey

Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Words by Kirsten Rann • Photography by Tom Ross and Derek Swalwell

In 2014, the Naomi Milgrom Foundation's MPavilion – situated in the Queen Victoria Gardens opposite the NGV – was announced as a quadrennial architecture commission, now extended to 2022. In 2013, Australian architect Rory Hyde had an architectural art installation included in the NGV's inaugural Melbourne Now exhibition, setting off days after its opening for London, where he took up a role as the V&A's first Curator of Architecture and Urbanism. And in 2000, London's Serpentine Gallery initiated the annual commissioning of a summer pavilion in the Kensington Gardens.

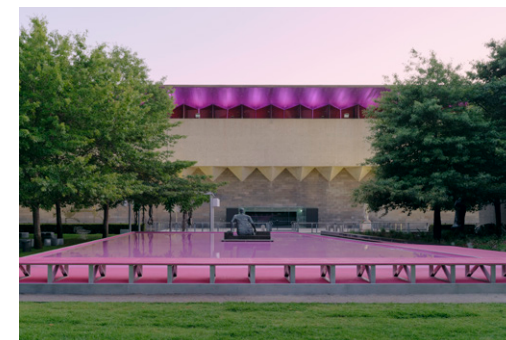
For centuries, the model of the pavilion has offered itself as the perfect form for experimentation, which John Wardle's inaugural NGV Summer Architecture Commission reflected structurally, materially and sustainably. The ensuing years have seen a variety of forms succeed as well, including M@'s reference to a suburban car wash in 2016. As a large pink rectilinear pool – or pond – the 2021 commission differs substantially to all its predecessors by being a form that interacts at ground level and with the gardens, rather than a separate standing structure. Reminiscent of the NGV's moat, the knee-deep water in this instance surrounds Henry Moore's Draped Seated Woman (1958) sitting atop her Besser block plinth.

A collaboration between Melbourne-based architects Taylor Knights and visual artist James Carey, the dimensions of the pond refer to the now missing open-air courtyards that once existed in Roy Grounds's original NGV, removed during refurbishments by Mario

Bellini Associates to provide more interior space. Like the gallery's moat, Pond[er] is lacking any walls; during Melbourne's hot summer days, small children and even adults frolicked in the water – an interactivity exemplifying the intention of the work.

The pond is also surrounded by beds of specifically selected species of wildflowers swaying gently in the with different varieties appearing over the period of the installation. Together, the body of water and the wildflowers resemble a natural setting that could be anywhere in the world, but there are notable differences. One of these includes Henry Moore's woman, who sits leaning sideways on one arm with her other arm casually resting by her side and her head facing across the water. It's a gentle maternal pose, as though she is watching over the children in front of her or simply observing or pondering the wildflowers, the other people or plants in the gardens, or even the sky.

This is to remind us to do the same, to ponder the delicate balance of our environment and the impending scarcity of water, which the pink colour of the pond reflects in reference to Australia's vast internal salt lakes. The structure itself uses the NGV's recycled water system and is constructed out of sustainable materials that are easily dismantled so the materials can be re-used once the commission finishes. This sustainability focus of the commission, combined with its temporary and esthetic nature, incites us to think of how we can live together with the environment and each other in an increasingly precarious world.



Referencing Australia's pink salt lakes, Pond[er] speaks to the scarcity yet importance of water.

The Commercial Project



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