

Rebranding Art Museums

As anyone with even a passing interest in cultural institutions will know, art museums are adapting to keep up with changes in society. Do any of these newly developed spaces indicate a fundamental shift in the ways we engage with art at the beginning of the twenty-first century? The answer is a qualified Yes — and also, it must be said, No. A clear sense of this can be gained by considering the 2003 redevelopment of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne, Australia's second-largest city, in the light of the aspirations embodied in the original building that served as its template.

The first building was considered a thoroughly modern museum when it opened to the public in 1968. We should not forget that it was not all bad; there were certainly innovative aspects that one must credit to the vision and insight of the architect, Roy Grounds. For one thing, the 1968 building signaled a strong sense of engagement both in its design and layout.

It was set apart from traditional notions of art museums, and over the years, this idea has been questioned and superseded by the growing impetus towards an alternative model of the museum — one that engages the public in more open-ended ways. The layout of its galleries was designed to facilitate the rapid and efficient circulation of visitors. It also contained a series of greatly expanded temporary exhibition galleries and a vast Great Hall, which represented an unprecedented emphasis on the ancillary roles of corporate functions and public performances in the contemporary museum.

This last feature might have seemed excessive to some, yet how wise it has proven over the years as museums have come to place increasing emphasis on corporate sponsorship and the need to generate additional funds via room hire. Furthermore, the Great Hall has, for forty years, provided an area for children to roam at large before being escorted through the much less spatially accommodating galleries themselves. As an unintimidating introduction to the lifelong rigours of visiting art museums, its impact on attendance cannot be overestimated.

At the same time, other aspects of the 1968 NGV have not withstood the test of time so well. Foremost among these are the huge expanse of the exterior's windowless wall and the surrounding moat, which creates a rather unwelcoming expression of the institution.

With these considerations in mind, Mario Bellini's redeveloped NGV opened in 2003, and his design reflects what the new, improved, twenty-first-century global museum feels it should be emphasizing to its visitors. Here, the institution's energies are focused not so much on the technical subtleties of how to design the galleries themselves, but rather on

presenting to the public a spectacular image of the museum itself as a welcoming yet efficient facilitator of social interaction, popular entertainment, and public knowledge.

All of this is certainly impressive, but where has the art gone? We are not allowed to see the exhibitions until we have completed the necessary inductions. We are greeted by a hugely expanded cloakroom, screening off our vision to the right, followed by a large visitor information office leading to the ticket booths. Above us is the café, and to our left, we cannot escape the NGV shop, set alongside the exit.

And what of the redesigned galleries themselves? In fact, they represent a wonderfully elegant reframing of the permanent collections in ways that should offer first-time visitors and seasoned members alike many new avenues for engagement in the years to come. But herein lies the conundrum posed by the NGV renovation and by the global sweep of new museum projects more generally. The mainstay elements of a permanent collection can become all too easily lost in the increased prominence that these rebranding exercises tend to place on the more glamorously spectacular aspects of the institution itself.

At its most extreme, this results in the construction of new buildings that supplant the artworks inside them, becoming the major attractions themselves.

These challenges are most keenly felt in the area of the temporary exhibition. Entrance to the NGV permanent collection is now free, so the NGV needs something to keep the paying public coming back. The answer lies in the international 'blockbuster' exhibition.

For example, *The Impressionists* netted a total of 380,000 visitors, making it one of the most popular exhibitions in Australian history. There has also been, it needs to be said, a commendable attempt to leaven the international masterpieces with selected highlights from the permanent collection. Overall, though, the prevalence of these 'rental' blockbusters cannot help but introduce a certain 'off-the-rack' feeling to the institution's exhibition program.

More importantly, they narrow the options for other worthy but less glamorous projects, and they take energy away from the curators' potential to do further work on and around the permanent collection itself.

Yet the show must go on, and shows can't exist without the public. Even the most adroit organization, as the NGV assuredly is, needs to be able to juggle numerous, often conflicting priorities: the need to advance scholarship versus the imperative of access; the need to introduce audiences to new areas versus the necessity of luring them in with instant

brand recognition. Nobody said it was going to be easy, and the effect of too much innovation in museums can be disastrous.

Questions 27-30

Choose the correct letter, **A, B, C** or **D**.

27 What is the writer doing in paragraph 1?

- ☐ Comparing the old NGV with the new NGV
- ☐ Describing the role of art museums in Australian culture
- ☐ Considering the influence of gallery design on art appreciation
- ☐ Suggesting there has been little recent change in gallery design

28 The writer criticises the old NGV because

- ☐ the permanent collection was poorly displayed.
- ☐ the building tended to make art seem remote.
- ☐ Asian and Pacific art was neglected.
- ☐ the foyer resembled a shop.

29 What does the writer notice about the new NGV?

- ☐ He thinks the ticket booths are well positioned.
- ☐ He is upset that he is made to move so quickly.
- ☐ He is frustrated because the art is obscured by the entrance.
- ☐ He thinks the redevelopment fails to keep up with international trends.

30 The writer argues that rental 'blockbuster' exhibitions

- ☐ should be cheaper.
- ☐ are a financial necessity.
- ☐ should be increased in number.
- ☐ allow the museum to present an original programme.

Questions 31-35

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in Reading Passage 3?

Write:

YES if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer

NO if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

31 Roy Grounds's design failed to recognise the importance of functions and performances in museums.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

32 Mario Bellini's new NGV rejects international museum design trends.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

33 Mario Bellini's work on subsequent museum projects has been less successful than that on the NGV.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

34 The NGV monitors the number of first-time visitors to permanent collections.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

35 Too much change may have negative impacts on museums.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ NOT GIVEN

If a large space is available in the museum,

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If children are allowed to move freely in parts of the gallery,

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If too much emphasis is placed on the museum building itself,

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If there is an over-reliance on blockbuster exhibitions,

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If the NGV wants to continue to be successful,

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List of options

 Kéo đáp án thả vào ô trống, hoặc bấm chọn đáp án rồi bấm vào ô trống để điền.

the museum programme will lose its individuality.

the museum will lose credibility.

the art loses its importance.

it will have to balance opposing demands.

this will encourage museum visitors in the future.

it will have the capability of increasing revenue.

the architect's reputation might suffer.

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