

GOLD

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND
VOL. 33**

Edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad

Published in Melbourne, Australia, by SAHANZ, 2016

ISBN: 978-0-7340-5265-0

The bibliographic citation for this paper is:

Paul Walker "John Andrews' RAIA Gold Medal: Green and Gold + Grey and White." In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 33, Gold*, edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad, 690-698. Melbourne: SAHANZ, 2016.

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JOHN ANDREWS' RAIA GOLD MEDAL: GREEN AND GOLD + GREY AND WHITE

In 1980, John Andrews was awarded the highest accolade of the architectural profession in Australia, the Gold Medal of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (R.A.I.A.). Such awards form part of the apparatus of the profession, and reinforce key beliefs in architecture such as the primacy of the individual creative genius, the centrality of design to architecture, and the importance of innovation. The award of the R.A.I.A. Gold Medal to Andrews coincided with the aftermath of a defamation case that arose from what Andrews perceived to be a serious attack on his professional credibility. In the Hook Address that he delivered to mark the award of the Gold Medal, however, far from defensive Andrews confidently sets out an agenda for an Australian architecture as part of an emergent national design sensibility. In part, Andrews defines this sensibility in distinction to what he had experienced in North America. He characterises architecture there as marked by the technical and especially the intellectual indulgences made possible by affluence. Examining the award of the Gold Medal to Andrews, then, affords opportunities to consider both architectural reputation and the imagining of a national design sensibility in contrast to the architectural culture of North America in the 1970s.

In 1980, John Andrews was awarded the highest accolade of the architectural profession in Australia, the Gold Medal of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (R.A.I.A.). First bestowed in 1960, the Gold Medal was created “to recognize Architects who have given distinguished service by designing or executing buildings of high merit or who have produced work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture or who have endowed the profession of Architecture in such a distinguished manner as to merit the receipt of the award.”¹ The award of the Gold Medal to Andrews coincided with the aftermath of a defamation case that arose from what Andrews perceived to be a serious attack on his professional credibility. This paper examines the scholarly literature around architectural awards to consider the significance of this coincidence and the manner in which the architectural profession is invested the reputations of those it most recognises. In the Hook Address that Andrews subsequently delivered to mark the award of the Gold Medal, the architect was far from defensive. Rather, he confidently sets out an agenda for an Australian architecture as part of an emergent national design sensibility. In part, Andrews defines this sensibility in distinction to what he had experienced in North America. He characterises architecture there as marked by the technical and especially the intellectual indulgences made possible by affluence. Examining the award of the Gold Medal to Andrews, then, affords opportunities to consider both architectural reputation and the imagining of a national design sensibility, the projection of the Australian national colours of green and gold – so to speak – against the Greys versus Whites disputes of American architecture in the 1970s.

Architectural Awards: Individual Recognition and Collaborative Work

Prizes form a core part of the apparatus of the architectural profession.² While they acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the profession’s best and brightest, they have wider effects than this. They are nearly always awarded to individual architects rather than to partnerships or firms, thereby emphasising and constantly reinscribing a long-standing paradigm of the architect as an individual creative genius. This aspect of architectural prizes has of course recently been scrutinized through the campaign to retrospectively change the 1991 Pritzker Prize given to Robert Venturi to being a joint award to Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown, his long-standing personal and professional partner, and his close collaborator.³

The constant reinforcement of the architectural myth of the individual creative genius, however, is not the only effect of architectural prizes. Dana Cuff has pointed to the way in which architecture is characterised by a series of “core” precepts around “the central role of the drawing, the special status of design as theory and practice, [and] architecture as art.”⁴ While Hilde Heynen has commented that these ideas go hand in hand with the gendered idea of the architectural genius, Cuff focusses her discussion of these matters rather on the role that architectural education and professional organisations such as the Royal Institute of British Architects and the American Institute of Architects play in the maintenance and reinscription from generation to generation of core ideas of what architecture is. The Australian Institute of Architects (formerly the R.A.I.A.) does this too. Prizes awarded under the auspices of professional bodies and other forms of peer recognition such as publication in journals controlled by professional bodies act as “a primary channel for the core’s persistence”.⁵ Cuff characterises the way in which the professional institutes constantly work to reinscribe the centrality of a conventionally and narrowly conceived concept of design through their overview of architectural education and their internal systems of peer-recognition as an insistence on ‘business as usual’. She compares this with sociological analyses of the architectural profession such as that of Robert Gutman, which suggest that the profession’s mystique – a range of beliefs including the precepts set out by Cuff – veils the reality of its increasing marginalisation in building and urban development processes.⁶

Another defining feature of architecture is its insistence on innovation. Again, prizes are a means by which innovation in architecture is managed and socialised. Cuff suggests that change is acceptable in architecture only to the degree that innovators are returned to the core: “To become more than an iconoclast, an architect like Frank Gehry, or for that matter Zaha Hadid or Glenn Murcutt, need followers. Then, as followers grow into creative variants of the master, the

master is folded into the professional core.”⁷ It is no coincidence that all the architects Cuff mentions in this discussion - Gehry, Hadid, and Murcutt - are winners of the Pritzker Prize.

It is particularly interesting to consider the award of the 1980 Gold Medal of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects to John Andrews in relationship to this broader discussion of architectural awards. At the time of his being awarded the Gold Medal, Andrews was on the one hand depicted as a larger than life character, an attitude exemplified in the cover of the *Architecture Australia* issue that announced his award: the cover image is of Andrews informally dressed, in what appear to be R.M. Williams boots, his sun-bleached hair is wind-ruffled, he sits on a jetty railing with Pittwater behind him.⁸ (Fig. 1) There is no overt connection with architecture in the image, just the architect, looking notably Australian, in a beautiful landscape setting. Inside the journal, there is another photograph, apparently taken in the same location, and on the same occasion as the photograph on the journal's cover. But this time, Andrews is joined by the other members of the firm John Andrews International. (Fig. 2) In the brief text below, the role of each key member of the office is explained and a commitment to informality and teamwork in the office underlined.

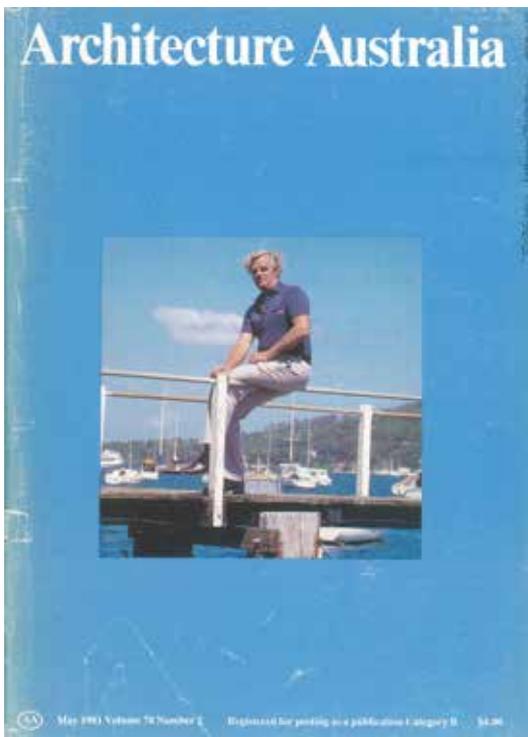


FIGURE 1 Photograph of John Andrews on the cover of *Architecture Australia* 70:2, May 1981. Photographer not identified.



FIGURE 2 The Firm, John Andrews International, *Architecture Australia* 70:2, May 1981: 38. Photographer not identified.

The balance apparent in these photographs between celebrating the individual and acknowledging the collaborative work of architecture - weighted, it has to be noted, to the individual - is also found in the texts of this issue of *Architecture Australia* marking the John Andrews Gold Medal. A survey of work then current in the office includes no direct reference to Andrews himself, except as the client for houses at Eugowra and Palm Beach. Rather, this survey is presented in terms of conceptual or typological approaches - 'Establishing a development framework', 'Utilizing low energy principles', 'Relating to context', and 'Public housing' - in each case common across several projects then being developed. This representation of the architecture of the firm of John Andrews International as a collective enterprise is balanced by an article by Jennifer Taylor, with the title 'John Andrews, architect'. In this, Andrews' personal trajectory and development are emphasised: from Sydney to North America and back again. But even this article begins by placing Andrews within larger social and cultural frameworks: "John Andrews has always been

something of an enigma in the Australian architectural profession. On the one hand, his overseas work and reputation have tended to make him seen rather remote and removed from the mainstream of local architecture. On the other hand, because of his personality and evident concern with responsible design for Australia, he is regarded as a very 'Australian' architect."⁹

Even as Andrews' individuality is emphasised, then he is returned to a broad but relevant collective, Australian architecture. This is a theme to which Andrews would himself return subsequently in his Hook Address, in which he reflected on the Gold Medal Award. This was published later in 1981, again in *Architecture Australia*.¹⁰

All this notwithstanding, the timing of the award by the R.A.I.A. of the Gold Medal is noteworthy, coinciding as it did with the aftermath of a major defamation case in which both Andrews and the firm of John Andrews International sought damages for what they - and the Australian profession more broadly - considered as a major attack on their reputations, and by extension on the integrity and competence of the profession. There is no doubt that Andrews was a worthy recipient of the Gold Medal for his professional achievements in Australia. Among the projects completed by Andrews' Australian office to 1980 were ambitious and highly regarded buildings, notably the Cameron Offices in Canberra, completed in 1977, the American Express Tower in Sydney, completed in 1976, and a series of university buildings in Canberra and in the Brisbane area. Andrews had served on the jury for New Parliament house in 1979, one of the most high profile and successful architectural competitions ever held in Australia. And in 1980 - reaffirming his international standing - Andrews won the limited competition to design the headquarters for Intelsat in Washington against shortlisted architects from Canada, Germany, the United States, and Finland. But in the thoughts of architects in Australia in 1980, and in those of their Institute, were not only these achievements, but also the defamation case in which Andrews was at the time embroiled.

Reputation Under Attack

On June 15 1978, an article appeared on page 10 of the *Sydney Morning Herald* under the headline "One Government leak is caught in buckets". It claimed that federal government officials in Canberra were concerned about security problems associated with the design of the recently opened Cameron Offices complex in Belconnen, and with leaks in the building's roof: "A senior Government official says that, not only does the building have 240 doors which have to be locked and unlocked daily, but it leaks like a sieve." The article goes on to attribute the following comments to this unnamed bureaucrat:

They're not your usual leaks of information. These are leaks caused by water seeping through the ceilings.

Some of the public servants working in the complex have to bring plastic buckets to work to catch the dripping water. Every time they plug one leak another opens up. It's like maintaining the Sydney Harbour Bridge – an endless process.¹¹

Articles based on the *Sydney Morning Herald's* appeared the following day in the Brisbane *Telegraph* and the Melbourne *Herald*.¹²

Andrews and his company John Andrews International sued the *Sydney Morning Herald's* proprietors and those of the other two newspapers for defamation. The defamation case went to court in August 1979; over the following two weeks the proceedings were widely reported in the Australian media. They aired matters such as Andrews' high international standing (the complainants pointed out that previous articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* had acknowledged this), the lack of commissions John Andrews International had received since the first newspaper report on the reputed problems at Cameron Offices, and technical issues in relation to the roof construction of the building.¹³ Andrews and his firm were awarded damages of \$480,000, reportedly the highest award made in an Australian defamation case to that date.¹⁴ This award resulted in an appeal by the three newspapers to the N.S.W. Court of Appeal, which upheld the damages awarded to the firm of John Andrews International (\$180,000) but determined that there should be a new hearing to reconsider not the finding of defamation itself but rather the damages awarded to Andrews personally. These matters dragged on through 1980, with an out of court settlement announced in March 1981.¹⁵ It was during this final phase of the legal proceedings arising from the defamation case that the R.A.I.A.'s Gold Medal was awarded to Andrews, and then that the texts in *Architecture Australia* celebrating Andrews and his firm were written.

There are several aspects of the defamation case that throw light on the nature of architectural reputation. Firstly, though Andrews was not directly named in the original article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (or the articles that followed in Brisbane and Melbourne newspapers) - the legal defence against the claims of defamation was in part constructed on this point - nevertheless, that the defamation case succeeded suggests that the attack on the design and construction integrity of the Cameron Offices was indeed taken to be an attack on the reputation of the architect and his firm. The architect is named when his or her building is named.¹⁶ Secondly, the balance of the damages as originally determined - \$180,000 to the firm and \$300,000 to Andrews - implies that the priority given to the individual architect extends beyond the profession to the broader community. It appears to be a widely held view that design and realisation of building projects is the individual achievement of the architect rather than the collective achievement of an office or project team. Thirdly, the nature of the support that Andrews received from the architectural profession in the course of the defamation case suggests that the reputation of the individual architect is linked to that of the profession more broadly. The profession therefore has an investment in defending the reputations of its members.

In relation to this last point, the design of the Cameron Offices had been acclaimed in the profession. It had been published in such professional publications as the *Architecture + Urbanism*, *Canadian Architect* and the *Architectural Review*, and it was to be described in an article that appeared in 1980 in *Architectural Record* as "eloquently reach[ing] the high planning standards of Walter Burley Griffin's Canberra".¹⁷ Andrews received wide support in taking legal action. The distinguished American urban planner Edmund Bacon sent Andrews a letter about the Cameron Offices, dated the same day as the *Sydney Morning Herald's* article:

[Cameron Offices] is one of the most interesting building complexes I have seen anywhere in the world because it relates to the larger city of which it is a part in a valid and original way....

I think Australia has shown the world new possibilities of providing the government office worker with a personal and humanistic kind of environment in which he or she is given personal recognition, yet which functions as a whole and which is not an isolated kind of institution but is clearly a part of a larger, vital functioning community.¹⁸

That the Cameron Offices were so widely admired in the profession presumably made the attack on the integrity of their design particularly galling. Andrews' friend and occasional collaborator, the Sydney architect Philip Cox, encouraged him to sue.¹⁹ So, too, did the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. RAlA president John H Davidson, wrote to Andrews that:

Few would doubt that the Cameron Offices will be recorded in history as a significant contribution to the advancement of architecture, not only nationally but internationally.

As this is one of the foremost aims of our Institute, I am seriously concerned lest obviously ill-informed and unsubstantiated criticism of this kind will reflect adversely not only on you as the architect but also on the architectural profession as a whole.

I presume you intend to take some action to correct the record, and in doing so, providing it is within our mandate, I would like to offer the support of RAlA following any reasonable request you might make.²⁰

In the light of this generous offer of support from the Institute, it is hard not to surmise that the timing of the award of the Gold Medal to Andrews was influenced by the defamation case, though it perhaps could not have been anticipated in 1978 that the litigation around the matter would continue so long. Nevertheless, the phraseology in Davidson's letter of support to Andrews echoed that of the terms of award of the Gold Medal: "to recognize Architects who have given distinguished service by designing or executing buildings of high merit or who have produced work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture or who have endowed the profession of Architecture in such a distinguished manner as to merit the receipt of the award."²¹

Green and Gold versus Grey and White

When John Andrews received the Gold Medal, these words were used in the citation by the then R.A.I.A. president, Brisbane architect Ian Ferrier: "The criteria for the highest honour which the R.A.I.A. can bestow state that recipients should have 'given distinguished service by designing or executing buildings of high merit' or 'have produced work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture' or 'have endowed the profession of architecture in a distinguished manner as to merit the receipt of the Award'. John Andrews qualifies on all three counts."²²

The rest of the citation for the award published under Ferrier's name in *Architecture Australia* in May 1981 points to a wide range of accomplishments on Andrews' part. His achievements in Canada and the United States are recounted through his most memorable buildings in those countries: Scarborough College, student residences at Guelph University, Gund Hall for Harvard's Graduate School of Design, Toronto's C.N. Tower (rather breathlessly described by Ferrier as "twice the height of the Eiffel Tower").²³ Australian work is also mentioned: Cameron Offices, King George Tower [the American Express Building], and university projects in Queensland. Andrews' service to the discipline and profession of architecture is recounted through mention of the professorship he had held at the University of Toronto, service on the R.A.I.A.'s NSW Chapter Council and the N.S.W. Board of Architectural Education, his chairing the Architecture and Design Panel of the Australia Council, and his role as juror on the competitions for the National Archives building in Canberra and New Parliament House.

As already mentioned, the coverage of Andrews' award in *Architecture Australia* included both an encomium to Andrews himself, written by Jennifer Taylor (with Andrews she was in the midst of writing the book *John Andrews Architecture: A Performing Art*, published the following year), and an account of the work of the John Andrews International office at that time, emphasising the rigour of the office's approach to planning and construction. However, only one major project produced by the firm in the 1980s – Intelsat - is anticipated in this coverage. The other significant building types to which the John Andrews International office was devoted in the period after 1980 until its wind down ten years later are not foreseen: convention centres, hotels, high rise office buildings.

The protracted defamation proceedings had been personally gruelling for Andrews and despite his winning the case, detrimental to his professional reputation. However, turning to Andrews' own comments on the occasion of receiving the R.A.I.A. Gold Medal, they find him not in a defensive or introspective mood, but philosophical and projective. In the Hook Address that he delivered to mark the award of the Gold Medal, Andrews confidently sets out an agenda for an Australian architecture as part of an emergent national design sensibility. There he alludes to the personal draw his homeland had in his deciding to return to Sydney despite the great success of his career in Canada and the United States. Commenting that as an honour awarded by his colleagues and peers, the Gold Medal "is the most important award that one, as an architect, could ever hope to achieve and is something that will outlive any other form of accolade I could receive", Andrews says that the Medal "...is of special significance to me, having spent many years overseas, establishing a practice and seeing how the other half lives. But finally I came to the realisation that Australia was my *home*. This is where I wanted to work and above all be *recognised* as an architect."²⁴

Andrews goes on to describe the draw Australia had for him in terms that are familiar to much architectural discourse in this country: its open spaces, the quality of its light, its landscapes. But in addition to these rather romantic ideas, Andrews also characterized Australia in terms, which are less familiar, "its urbanity and its incredible solitude". But this text suggests that it was not merely nostalgia that drove Andrews back to Australia. Rather, it was a sense of opportunity that in North America had been lost through levels of affluence that made anything possible. "Technology was at a level where anything an architect conceived could be built. Wealth was enormous. There was no need to think. No need to ask 'Why?' Only the need to dream. Preferably a different dream every time."²⁵

Australian architecture is not conditioned by such excess. Again, Andrews turns here to common tropes - practical exigencies of climate and limited resources led "early settlers" in Australia to produce "an architecture totally suited to this land". Andrews suggests that we have not been sufficiently mindful of this, but by looking at the achievements of early builders, and - motivated by the energy crisis and the consequent care with resources we must again cultivate - Australian architecture can again find a way forward. And in this, Australia is at an advantage: "We must now look at ourselves as having a *head start*. We don't need the catch phrases from New York. We don't need greys and the whites or the 'isms'. What we need to do is our own architecture and believe in ourselves."

The reference to the 'greys and the whites' here is of course to the dispute of the early 1970s between the New York Five on the one hand (Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey, and Michael Graves) – the Whites – and on the other, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Stern, Allan Greenberg, Jaquelin Robertson, and Charles Moore – the Greys.²⁶ While the Whites undertook design as an inquiry into architecture's autonomous compositional and syntactic strategies, the Greys insisted that architectural designs should respond to their socio-economic settings. It would be too easy to assume that Andrews' disdain for such arcane disputes came from anti-intellectualism. This is not an easy matter to untangle. While Andrews believed architecture should be driven by a philosophy of 'common sense' (an expression he used frequently, including in his Hook address), and often chose to present himself as a pragmatist, this veiled a more complex position. Taylor alluded to this when she wrote in her Gold Medal essay on Andrews, "Words... rather than buildings, make the strongest impressions on his thinking, and he acknowledges this debt to the sensitive writings of Kahn, Hertzberger and Van Eyck."²⁷ But there is no evidence that he himself read the literary works of such figures. It seems likely that mostly Andrews absorbed knowledge of the broader architectural culture through direct interactions with other architects. While these included key figures who he met both in North America and Australia - Herman Hertzberger and Aldo Van Eyck were both visitors to Toronto, for example, when Andrews was the University of Toronto's Chair of Architecture - they also included the architects employed in his practice. Many of these were of course much younger than him and likely to be curious about other contemporaneous ideals, trends, and what Andrews disparaged as 'isms'. Just as more nuanced ideas of architectural authorship have been recently adopted to apprehend the collective and culturally situated nature of architectural work,²⁸ so too there is a need to understand that the broader agency of the architect is not conditioned merely by his or her own intellectual and professional development, but also by the context of the design ideals and ideologies through which that development proceeds, no matter how eccentrically. And so, not only is the architect's production socially and culturally conditioned but also so is his or her apprehension of what other architects produce.

A further indication in Andrews' Hook address that one should not take his avowals of 'common sense' too narrowly is his suggestion that Australian architecture and the country's wider design culture are things that need nurturing like other art forms. One aspect of Australia's 'colonial mentality' is an inferiority complex that can only be overcome through education. Design education, Andrews suggests, must start early. Moreover, the development of a national design sensibility design must be supported institutionally through such efforts as those of the Australia Council's Architecture and Design Panel, which Andrews advocates should be elevated to the same status as the Australia Council's boards for literature, theatre, visual arts and so on:

I believe this is essential so that Australia can be seen both nationally and internationally as a country publicly concerned about design. It is essential if architecture and design are to develop a national attitude and identity. It will enable the design professions to take advantage of all the resources of other countries with sympathetic attitudes, and make the rest of the world aware that Australians know what they are doing and allow us to become part of the world community of design. We must leave behind the parochial, insular attitude that has restricted international appreciation of the most resourceful country in the world.²⁹

Australia's design development will therefore include international involvements such as the selection of Romaldo Giurgola for the design of Australia's new parliament, in which Andrews had played a central role. Giurgola, ironically, was one of the original 'greys'. The article on Cameron Offices that appeared in *Architectural Record* was by another core 'grey', Jaquelin Robertson.³⁰ The 'green and gold' and the 'grey and white' are not so easy to disentangle after all. Andrews again found affirmation in the words of Edmund Bacon. From the American journal *Progressive Architecture* Andrews quotes Bacon's comments on the Giurgola design for the Australian Parliament: "The Australians have seen the design of their Capital as an international issue, in which their national pride can best be served by the finest design the world can produce. That, I think, they have."³¹

Conclusion

In the scholarly literature on architectural awards one finds the view that such awards are among mechanisms by which the mystique and mythology of the profession are maintained. Awards emphasise the architect as creative genius, the centrality of design to architecture, and the importance of innovation. But while the award system attributes creativity, design, and innovation to the individual, at the same time it has the effect of socialising these things by suggesting that they belong to the profession more broadly. They are attributes that the profession projects as architecture's core.

Architecture's professional bodies, therefore, have a particular investment in the reputations of its stars.

While awards and prizes and other forms of professional recognition tend to celebrate the individual architect, in turning to the award of the R.A.I.A.'s Gold Medal to John Andrews in 1980, one finds a more nuanced situation. While Andrews as an individual takes priority – exemplified in the photograph of him that adorns the cover of the *Architecture Australia* issue announcing his award, the collaborative approach of the firm of John Andrews International is also acknowledged. The Andrews Gold Medal number of *Architecture Australia* also published a photograph of all the key members of the firm, and attributed a common approach to project planning and to technological and design innovation across the office. Furthermore, the timing of the Gold Medal, coinciding with the aftermath of Andrews' successful but taxing defamation case, suggests the investment of the profession as a whole in his award, given the recognition it had already accorded him.

Andrews' own response to the Gold Medal entails a similar shift from emphasis on him as an individual to the collective or broader community not just of his firm but of Australian architecture per se. What has been termed as a projected architecture of 'green and gold' – of Australia – is characterised by Andrews in contrast to the over-refinement of the North American scene he has left behind. This over-refinement is apparent both in a level of technological advancement that makes it feasible to build anything, and in intellectual indulgences such as the dispute of the Whites and the Greys. Cuff and Heynen point to the role of architectural awards in reasserting architecture's core beliefs and myths, and Andrews' comments on Australia in his Hook address indeed underline some of the prevailing beliefs of this country's architectural discourse, in regard to the primacy of landscape for example. Beyond this, what is significant in Andrews' response to his Gold Medal is his emphasis on the need for educational and institutional investment in design. It is only through these means that Australia's architectural and other design achievements to date can be elevated into a robust design culture. Andrews believes Australian architecture has a history distinguished by its refined pragmatism; developing this culture further will end Australian architecture's parochialism and lead to international recognition. Andrews pursued this view for much of the decade following his receiving the Gold Medal through his involvement with the design activities of the Australia Council. In retrospect, one may not be as sure as Andrews was about what is particular about Australian architecture. But his point that one needs to find this architecture's future by cultivating and promoting knowledge of its achievements to date is one which is still pressing.

Endnotes

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