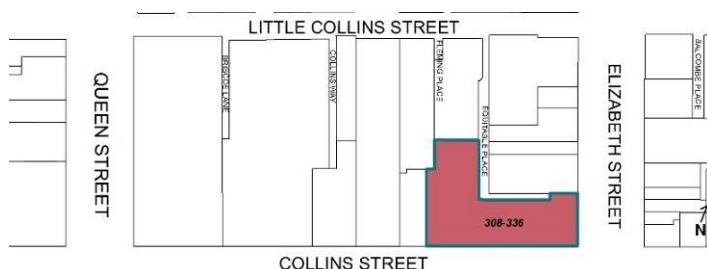


STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Heritage Place: Former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society Building with Plaza and 'Children's Tree' sculpture



PS ref no: HO1320



What is significant?

The former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society building, built in 1959-63 to a design by Stephenson & Turner, and publicly accessible plaza with bronze 'Children's Tree' sculpture, created in 1963 by Tom Bass at 308-336 Collins Street, Melbourne, is significant.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- Original building form and scale;
- Original publicly accessible plaza setting with bronze 'Children's Tree' sculpture, created in 1963 by Tom Bass;
- Original pattern of fenestrations; and
- Original double height building base with granite cladding and aluminium windows.

Later alterations, particularly at street level, are not significant.

How it is significant?

The former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society Building with Plaza and 'Children's Tree' sculpture at 308-336 Collins Street is of local historic, representative and aesthetic significance to the City of Melbourne.

Why it is significant?

The former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society building, constructed in 1959-63 to a design by Stephenson & Turner, for the Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society (founded in Melbourne in 1873), is significant as part of the post-World War Two development and the rapid growth of the corporate architecture of the 1950s-1970s. Its development reflected the expansion of large national and international companies opting for construction and naming rights of new city office buildings as a form of promotion and fund investment. The former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance building is significant historically as a reflection of the growth of insurance and assurance companies in Victoria during the 1950s-60s resulting in many company-named buildings being commissioned and constructed. (Criterion A)

The former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society building and plaza is also historically significant as an example of a postwar office site that provided a publicly accessible plaza, demonstrating one of the key aspects of the postwar corporate buildings in Melbourne. Many postwar office towers also played a gallery role as sculpture, paintings and tapestries were installed in their foyers, meeting rooms and forecourts. The provision of the forecourt or plaza in the curtilages of building allotments created a specific urban form in the central city. The former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society building and plaza is an important example that still retains the ground level plaza and commissioned artwork by sculptor Tom Bass, 'Children's Tree'. (Criteria A and D)

The former Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society building is a good example of post war development in central Melbourne that retains its original form, scale and characteristic stylistic details which reflect the era and original design in which it was constructed. It exhibits a design aesthetic characteristic of its type, medium/high rise commercial office buildings that combine expansive glazed panel with solid sections to achieve a distinctive expressed aesthetic. Key stylistic details include the regular grid pattern of windows above ground level and the original double height building base, clad in granite and retaining the original aluminium framed windows. It is unusual in retaining its original plaza and bronze sculpture 'Children's Tree' created in 1963 by Tom Bass specifically for this space. (Criterion D)

The bronze sculpture 'Children's Tree', created in 1963 by celebrated Australian sculptor Tom Bass, and set within its original plaza setting is aesthetically significant. The aesthetic qualities of the place are enhanced by the incorporation of an outstanding piece of publicly accessible artwork in the plaza, which was commissioned by the Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society. The sculpture and plaza were integral parts of the original design of the building at 308-336 Collins Street, by architects Stephenson & Turner. (Criterion E)

Primary source

Hoddle Grid Heritage Review (Context & GJM Heritage, 2020)