

Daniel Crooks' video wall at ANZ

A perfect union

Art and architecture get along just fine, but are they the same thing?



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On the surface it seems easy enough to tell the difference between art and architecture. Art is fantasy and imagination, while architecture is firmly rooted in science, maths and logic. If an artist fails it results in nothing more than a bruised ego, but if an architect fails lives are at risk. But to demote architecture to merely a science disregards the creativity inherent in the great architecture of history. When standing before the pyramids of Egypt or the cathedrals of Europe or even our own Opera House, one rarely thinks of these structures as just buildings. Arguably, they are art that people can interact with on a far more intimate level than a canvas on a gallery wall.

The concept of embedding art into architecture is not new – just look at the Sistine Chapel or Antoni Gaudi's unfinished masterpiece La Sagrada Familia. But the two disciplines are constantly evolving, and with modern architecture comes modern art to complement it. At two recent examples, one an office building at Docklands and the other a hotel on St Kilda Road, blending art and architecture was part of the design brief.

Art you can bank on

You don't often see the words bank and art in the same sentence, but ANZ wants to change that. The bank is now operating from its new global headquarters at Docklands. The \$478

million development is one of the biggest architectural statements in the area.

It's the largest single-tenanted office building in Australia. ANZ uses art in the foyer to make a statement about its global status. In the words of ANZ chief operating officer David Cartwright, the bank wanted "something that crossed borders and cultures and recognised our super-regional connections across Australia, New Zealand and the Asia Pacific region".

Enter Daniel Crooks. The New Zealand-born, Northcote-based video artist (he's usually referred to as a "digital artist" but says he doesn't like being called a finger-painter) was selected from a group of artists put forward by new-media art organisation Experimenta to complete a piece of video art for the entrance to ANZ.

The result was a series of 19 vignettes or "postcards" that Crooks describes as "a meditation on time and space and how they light up against each other".

Crooks says video art presents a series of logistical and technical hurdles that traditional artists don't have to contend with. "It was a huge, mammoth job. I had four computers rendering non-stop for about three months."

Integrating the purpose-built screen that will show Crooks' work was the job of Rob Backhouse, principal architect of Hassell, the firm behind the ANZ design.

"We thought we could activate the space with some sort of artwork that's more engaging than your static piece of architecture. The space is really a transition at street level to link you from Collins Street to the town square."

Sweet dreams

On St Kilda Road, the Art Series Hotel Group is preparing to launch The Blackman, the third in a series of six art-inspired hotels, due to open in mid-August. The group's first two

ventures, The Cullen and The Olsen, have been huge successes, garnering worldwide acclaim.

The Blackman is inspired by the work of Charles Blackman, most famous for his Alice in Wonderland and Schoolgirls series from the 1950s. The Blackman draws heavily on the Alice works for its interior and exterior design.

The theme at The Blackman is "the art of lucid dreaming". It's a fitting one for a hotel that is basically an art gallery you get to sleep in.

Jo Cornetta's firm Cornetta Partners was given the task of designing the building. "I see architecture as art, no doubt about it. Every architect expresses themselves through buildings, and when you get an opportunity like this, where the owners actually want to make a statement and are happy to spend a bit more to create a really unique building, that's an ideal situation for an architect," he says.

Cornetta says although Art Series had specific requirements for the interior design and room layout, he was basically given free rein over the exterior. "We've created a fairly substantial entry statement at ground level. We have a light box, which will be used as a mechanism for displaying works by the artist."

Art Series general manager Troy Cuthbertson says Art Series is all about creating a unique Melbourne experience, as much as it is about art or design. "They are not a cookie-cutter type of hotel, they're not mainstream, and we don't ever want to be mainstream. The concept will only take us so far."

But it's the concept, and especially the art, that brings the guests. "There's anywhere between 300 and 400 pieces of art right throughout the hotel in public areas and guest rooms," Cuthbertson says. Each hotel also has an in-house curator, who shares information about the works in the hotels and organises tours of Melbourne's galleries.

So how do the artists react to having