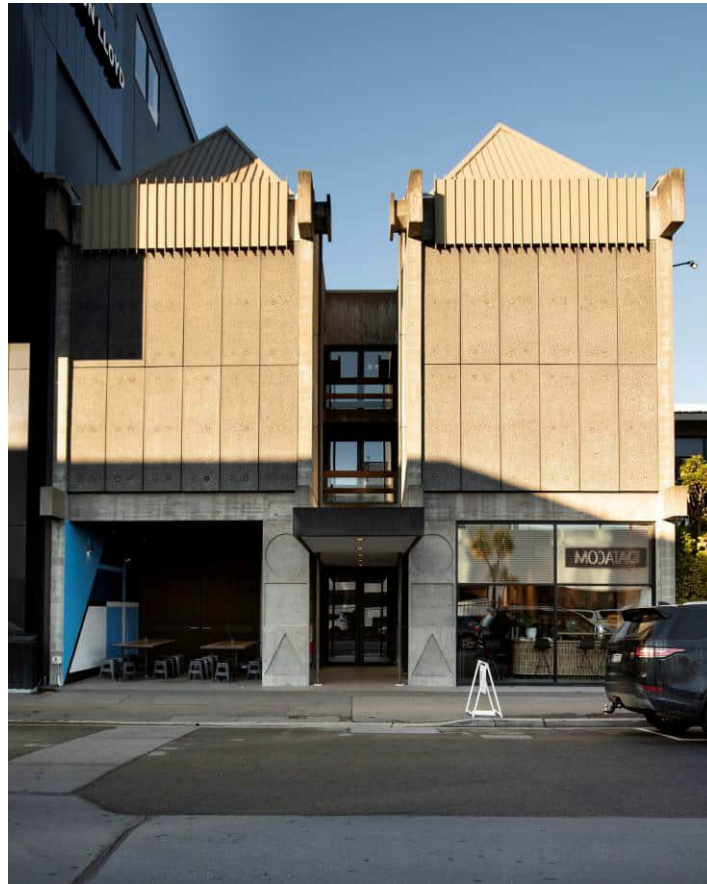


**CHRISTCHURCH DISTRICT PLAN – SCHEDULED HERITAGE PLACE  
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE  
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 1354  
FORMER CSA/ COCA GALLERY AND SETTING – 66  
GLOUCESTER STREET, CHRISTCHURCH**



**PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL 2021**

### **HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Historical and social values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular person, group, organisation, institution, event, phase or activity; the continuity and/or change of a phase or activity; social, historical, traditional, economic, political or other patterns.*

The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery (CoCA) has high historical and social significance as the oldest arts institution in Canterbury being established in 1880. It was formerly known as The Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) and from 1895 until 1968 exhibitions were held in the now demolished CSA art gallery on the corner of Durham Street and Armagh Street designed by B. W. Mountfort with additions by R. D. Harmen. Restrictions in space, increasing membership and the need for a purpose-built gallery with adequate, lighting, display and storage facilities meant that by the early 1960s the original gallery was no longer adequate for the CSA's purposes. In a 1963 Council meeting of the CSA, debate took place over the relocation of the Society into a new gallery and site in Christchurch. Architects Minson & Henning-Hanson and Dines provided plans in 1965 for a new gallery to be built at 66 Gloucester Street; the new gallery was opened in 1968.

It was requested in the original brief by the sub-committee of the CSA (consisting of Peter Beaven, Miles Warren, Quentin Macfarlane, Rhona Flemming, Rusty Laidlaw, Paul Pascoe, and S. E. Mair) to the architects that the gallery was to be entirely functional: it should consist of the largest possible hanging space in one related space, be bare of fixtures and dependant as much as possible on natural lighting, there should be adequate storage, working, kitchen, and cloak rooms and the building should be structurally strengthened to allow for further building of up to six stories, and provision should be made for a lecture and projection room. The opening of the new gallery was a milestone for the visual arts in Christchurch as it was not only a purpose-built contemporary art gallery for the display of working artists, but also the first time that a local gallery had specific spaces to accommodate solo exhibitions rather than group shows. In 1996 the gallery underwent a name change and renovation to ensure that it retained a relevance to working artists and issues of relevance to the arts. As the Centre of Contemporary Art the gallery sought to act “as a dynamic and vibrant centre that embraces the diversity of contemporary cultural production.”

In recent years the Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery continued to function in terms of its exhibition programme according to the dictates of the exhibition spaces. An art classroom was sited within the Print Room and the mezzanine level was an art gallery exclusively for the exhibition of the art work of young people. The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery sustained moderate damage in the 2010/2011 Christchurch earthquakes. It was closed for repairs and reopened in 2016. Repair work included the replacement and insulation of the roofing system, including the skylights in the roof pyramids which have all been replaced with toughened glass. All walls are now insulated and lined with plywood and board. The plywood allows for more efficient exhibition installations. The 1970s addition at the back of the building has been demolished, the 130m<sup>2</sup> space will be used as an outdoor gallery / project space. Enclosed by the concrete walls of the surrounding buildings with an open view of the sky, this space is intended to provide a very distinctive experience.

## **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Cultural and spiritual values that demonstrate or are associated with the distinctive characteristics of a way of life, philosophy, tradition, religion, or other belief, including: the symbolic or commemorative value of the place; significance to Tangata Whenua; and/or associations with an identifiable group and esteemed by this group for its cultural values.*

The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery has high cultural significance because of its contribution to the arts in Canterbury and the wider community. The gallery has acted as an exhibition space for hundreds of local artists and is an important cultural institution in Christchurch. Artists recently graduated from art schools and polytechnics have often held their first solo exhibition at the gallery or received an award to further their study in the arts, or received acknowledgment through an exhibition such as the annual members' exhibition and award. The Centre of Contemporary Art has a well-established association with the community. This is both historical and a consequence of the range of services, events, and education programmes it provides. Until the early 1970s the gallery occupied a critical place in the development of the arts in the City, actively participating through exhibitions and education. This was particularly important, with an absence of dealer galleries in Christchurch, and the public art gallery's role primarily restricted to use as an art museum.

The gallery's use remains similar to when it opened in 1968, with exhibition spaces featuring changing shows, as well as art classes and an education programme for the arts. The gallery is also used for community and business functions on a regular basis. As an arts institution within the cultural precinct, it maintains a profile with local visitors and with tourists.

The Centre of Contemporary Art continues to play an important role in the development of the arts and artists of Christchurch. In 2023 the Canterbury Museum opened a pop-up museum on the first floor while the redevelopment of the museum buildings took place.

## **ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

*Architectural and aesthetic values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular style, period or designer, design values, form, scale, colour, texture and material of the place.*

The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery is of high architectural and aesthetic significance; the building was designed by architects Minson, Henning-Hanson and Dines in 1965 and is an excellent example of modernist architecture in New Zealand. Architects Stewart Minson and Holger Henning-Hansen have been identified as contributing to the emergence of contemporary architecture in New Zealand. Both worked in the domestic field and Henning Hansen was noted in the late 1950s with a house in Burnside of 1958 whose “designs were the first clear expression in Canterbury of the precise care for natural materials and the empirical simplicity of the best Scandinavian work”.

The exterior of the gallery is deceptive in appearance in the effort to fit it on to a narrow inner-city site; this belies the ample exhibition space within made up of five exhibition spaces, a classroom for art education, a racked display and storage area for art works and storage space. The building reflects Brutalist principles in its use of poured concrete and aggregate panels. The street façade presents two twin rectangular forms with separate roof forms and separated by a recessed area. The symbol of the gallery – a circle, square and triangle form are recessed into the concrete piers either side of the entrance. The building was constructed with a ground floor, first floor and mezzanine level with administration and storage areas. It consisted of five gallery spaces including four smaller galleries for solo artist’s exhibitions and a large gallery (the Mair Gallery) 16 metres in length by 10 metres width for touring and themed exhibitions.

The interior spaces are a continuation of the simplicity and Brutalist principles expressed on the exterior, dominated by concrete walls and floors with timber contrast in details such as the balustrades, secondary stairs, and internal doors. The whole interior of the building has heritage significance including the layout and spaces, structure and linings, fixtures, hardware, materials and finishes. The interior is a key element of the design of the building and reflects the work of the architect and construction professionals. The interior evidences the original and continued use as an art gallery through its spaces and layout.

The gallery received an Enduring Architecture Award from the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 2002. This was entirely appropriate as it remains as functional and vital in its use as a purpose-built art gallery as it did when it was opened in 1968. The judges in 2002 commented that “After 25 years the gallery remains a stimulating environment in which both art and architecture can be equally appreciated”. As an institution that has acted as a venue for numerous artists and arts events it continues to make a significant contribution to the arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE**

*Technological and craftsmanship values that demonstrate or are associated with: the nature and use of materials, finishes and/or technological or constructional methods which were innovative, or of notable quality for the period.*

The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery is of high technological and craftsmanship significance as an excellent example of 1960s concrete construction and detailing, and

gallery lighting design. The exterior features concrete block and poured concrete beams and piers, and the use of large riverbed stones embedded into panels on the first level of the building. The logo of the CSA is embossed into two columns. Internally the spaces were designed to allow natural light in the main gallery through the pyramidal roof system and natural lighting enters gallery spaces through light tunnels.

## **CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Contextual values that demonstrate or are associated with: a relationship to the environment (constructed and natural), a landscape, setting, group, precinct or streetscape; a degree of consistency in terms of type, scale, form, materials, texture, colour, style and/or detail; recognised landmarks and landscape which are recognised and contribute to the unique identity of the environment.*

The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery is of high contextual significance due to its location in the central city with its distinctive features lending it landmark status. The gallery, sited at 66 Gloucester Street, is part of area of the city which was historically the location of a number of educational institutions. This included the opening of the Canterbury Museum in 1870, Canterbury (university) College in 1877, the School of Art in 1882, and its predecessor the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1880. The Centre of Contemporary Art is an important part of this area being sited adjacent to The Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū and close to the Provincial Council Buildings. In terms of architectural type, material, colour and texture, the Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery relates to the nearby former New Zealand Post Building, now the Christchurch City Council's Civic Offices, in Hereford Street.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE**

*Archaeological or scientific values that demonstrate or are associated with: the potential to provide information through physical or scientific evidence an understanding about social historical, cultural, spiritual, technological or other values of past events, activities, structures or people.*

The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery is of some archaeological significance as the site is in the vicinity of the area once occupied by the Waitaha Pā, Puari. In European terms the archaeological significance of the site dates from the mid to late 1800s when the Gloucester Street area was developed. Construction of the Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery was completed in 1968. It is possible that during the construction of the Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery any existing archaeological evidence would have been, disturbed, modified or destroyed.

## **ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

The Centre of Contemporary Art, including the whole interior and setting, is of high heritage significance to the Christchurch District, including Banks Peninsula. The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery has high historical and social significance as the home of the institution formerly called The Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) – the oldest arts institution in Canterbury which was established in 1880, and was the first local gallery which had specific spaces to accommodate solo exhibitions rather than group shows. The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery has high cultural significance as a well-established arts institution with the community. The current building has ensured the continuance of the oldest art organisation in the City. The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery has high architectural and aesthetic significance as an example of modernist architecture of the period which expresses Brutalist principles, which has received an *Enduring Architecture Award* from the New

Zealand Institute of Architects. The Centre of Contemporary Art Gallery is of high technological and craftsmanship significance as an example of 1960s concrete construction techniques and finishes. The building is of contextual significance as one of a number of buildings in this part of the central city that have supported Canterbury's long tradition in arts and education and as a landmark for its use and distinctive appearance.

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**REPORT DATED:** 28 JANUARY, 2015    **UPDATED:** 16 DECEMBER 2021

PLEASE NOTE THIS ASSESSMENT IS BASED ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF WRITING. DUE TO THE ONGOING NATURE OF HERITAGE RESEARCH, FUTURE REASSESSMENT OF THIS HERITAGE ITEM MAY BE NECESSARY TO REFLECT ANY CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ITS HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE.

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