

**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 471**

***ROBERT MCDUGALL ART GALLERY AND SETTING –
9 ROLLESTON AVENUE, CHRISTCHURCH***



PHOTOGRAPH: M.VAIR-PIOVA, 4/12/2014

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 Robert McDougall Art Gallery is of high historical and social significance as the city's former public art gallery and for its association with Robert McDougall (1860-1942), prominent Christchurch businessman and philanthropist, who donated £25,000 to fund the gallery's construction. The building is also associated with the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA), which was instrumental in securing the site of the gallery, and with James Jamieson, a prominent Christchurch builder, who bequeathed his extensive art collection to the city in 1927, with the proviso that a new gallery was built to house it.

The gallery is also associated with architect Samuel Hurst Seager, who wrote the brief for the gallery's design and was involved in the assessment of competitors. Gisborne-born architect

Edward Armstrong won the design competition in 1930 and the building opened in 1932. Somewhat unusually the foundation stone had been laid by R E McDougall four years earlier, in 1928. The gallery has further historical and social significance for its association with various directors, curators, artists and exhibitions, including William Baverstock who was the first Curator/Director (1932-69). The gallery closed in June 2002 and its collection was then relocated to the new Christchurch Art Gallery, which opened in May 2003. Two artworks from the McDougall Collection remain in situ; the Paul Dibble sculptures *E Noho Ra De Chirico*, which adorned the portico from 1996 to 2002 and were returned to their original position in August 2010. The building remains in the ownership of the Christchurch City Council and it is planned that it will become an extension of the Canterbury Museum. It received some damage in the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010/11 and remains closed while work continues on assessing and repairing it.

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 building is of high cultural significance for its use as Christchurch's public art gallery for seventy years. Its ties to the cultural community extend beyond Christchurch to national and international circles as the showcase of local and overseas exhibitions. Temporary exhibitions and additions to the permanent collection often sparked passionate debate in Christchurch about the merits of particular artworks. The controversial acquisition of Frances Hodgkins' *The Pleasure Garden* by the gallery in 1951 is considered to be a milestone in New Zealand art history.

The Robert McDougall Art Gallery has cultural significance for its long association with the Canterbury Society of the Arts, which has played an important role in the development of Canterbury's artistic and cultural life. As a forum for cultural ideas and expression, the gallery also hosted concerts and public talks as part of an education outreach programme, and was supported in these endeavours by the Friends of the Robert McDougall Gallery (est. 1971).

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 building is of high architectural and aesthetic significance for its design by architect Edward Armstrong. Armstrong was the son of an engineer and after serving overseas during World War I he studied at the Architectural Association in London. He won the Henry Jarvis Scholarship in 1920 and continued to study at the British School in Rome. Following this Armstrong lived and worked in Burma (Myanmar). Armstrong won the competition to design the Robert McDougall Art Gallery while in London and returned to New Zealand to begin the project in April 1930. Whanganui's Sarjeant Art Gallery was cited by Edward Armstrong as a reference point for the design of the McDougall Art Gallery. In 1931, Armstrong returned to London leaving the construction to be overseen by local architect William Trengrove. Trengrove designed the original furniture of the gallery and the boardroom.

The gallery has high architectural and aesthetic significance as an example of inter-war Neo-classicism. The influence of Palladian architecture can be seen in its symmetrical façade, axial planning and classical motifs both externally and internally. Internally there is fine

detailed profiles on the dado, around wall openings between galleries and skirtings, The central courtyard has Scagliola columns. It has what was considered ground breaking in its day, a natural lighting system which des remain in situ though now covered. It was designed by renowned Christchurch architect, Samuel Hurst Seager. An expert in the lighting of art galleries, Seager introduced the system to New Zealand first at the Sarjeant Gallery in Whanganui and secondly to the Robert McDougall Gallery. Seager's system was also adopted overseas. The system was considered to let in too much daylight which caused paintings to fade, resulting in the roof lights being painted over or covered in corrugated steel.

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 building has high technological and craftsmanship significance for its construction, detailing and use of materials. The building is notable for its high quality craftsmanship, which can be seen in the external stone and brick work and the execution of the sculpture court, with plastered mouldings, timber trim and terrazzo floors and Scagliola columns - a composite substance which is made to imitate marble and other hard stones. The innovative natural lighting system is particularly significant. The "top side" roof lighting system, where a series of angled roof lights on either side of a central lowered ceiling reflected natural light on to the gallery walls and art work, was an important innovation for the period, receiving international acclaim at the time of the gallery's opening.

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 building is of contextual significance for its setting in the Botanic Gardens. The cultivated landscape of the Botanic Gardens contains some of the earliest public plantings in the city. Aspects of the gallery's forecourt still reflect the original design intention to foreground the gallery with a well-proportioned open space, which complemented the scale of the building. The setting reflects 19th century ornamental and boundary tree planting fashions, and includes one near threatened tree species *Laurelia sempervirens*, assessed by the ICUN as being at a higher risk of global extinction. The setting also contains a plinth for the sculpture *Ex Tenebris Lux* (1937), which was removed to the Christchurch Art Gallery. The plinth was designed by Edward Armstrong.

The Gallery also has wider contextual significance in relation to other Christchurch art galleries, including the two buildings erected for the Canterbury Society of Arts in Armagh Street (1890/1894, demolished 2012 as a result of the Canterbury earthquakes), and in 1968 in Gloucester now being repaired. The gallery has further local contextual significance in relation to the former McDougall family home 'Fitzroy in Merivale, which was gifted by R E McDougall's three daughters to Nurse Maude District Nursing Association for use as a hospital.

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 building and setting are of archaeological significance for their potential to hold evidence of human activity, including that which pre-dates 1900. Prior to European settlement, a large area that included the eastern part of the Botanic Gardens was a mahinga kai (food resource area) for local iwi. The Ōtākaro (River Avon), which meanders through the Botanic Gardens to the north and south of the Gallery site, was an important resource for Ngāi Tahu (Pearson, 2010). While no confirmed record exists of encampments on the site of the gallery and its immediate surroundings, anecdotal accounts document the discovery of historical artefacts and physical remains in the early 20th century. These finds by gardening staff included a Māori axe found in the 1920s and a number of koiwi (human bones). The site of the gallery also has archaeological significance given the development of the Botanic Gardens from 1859 onwards.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

The Robert McDougall Gallery is of high heritage significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula as the city's former public art gallery. It is of high historical and social significance for its associations with the Canterbury Society of the Arts, Robert McDougall and James Jamieson. The Gallery is also of historical and social significance for its association with international, national and regionally significant exhibitions, artworks and artists. The Gallery has high cultural significance for its use as an art gallery for 70 years. The building is of high architectural and aesthetic significance for its design by New Zealand architect Edward Armstrong in the Neo-classical style. The building is of high technological and craftsmanship significance for its construction, detailing and use of materials, and in particular for the Samuel Hurst Seager-inspired natural lighting system, which was innovative both nationally and internationally. The building is of high contextual significance, being located in the Botanic Gardens. The gallery and its setting are of archaeological significance for the history of pre-1900 activity on the site by Maori and Europeans.

REFERENCES:

Robert McDougall Gallery Christchurch Conservation Plan, Dave Pearson Architects Ltd., 2010.

Historic Place item # 303 – Heritage New Zealand List
<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/303>

Christchurch Libraries – Biography of RE McDougal
<http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/People/McDougallRE/>

'A Conservation Plan for Hagley Park and the Christchurch Botanic Gardens – Volume 1 History'

http://resources.ccc.govt.nz/files/CityLeisure/parkswalkways/christchurchbotanicgardens/conservationplan/Vol1History/01_Vol%201_History_Sections%201-3.2.pdf

REPORT DATED: 1 NOVEMBER 2014

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.

PLEASE USE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CCC HERITAGE FILES.