A Place for Indigenous Collections

Project Overview

The Place for Indigenous Art and Culture (The Place) will be an Indigenous-led research and teaching facility for cultural objects and contemporary art of Aboriginal Australian origins in the care of the University of Melbourne.

The University's art and cultural collections include significant Indigenous materials, both in dedicated collections and within other larger collections. More than 90+ communities of origin are thought to be represented.

The Place will be on the Parkville, Melbourne campus and will comprise a new purpose-built building, the refurbishment of the former Vice-Chancellor's Residence, outdoor spaces and the creation of a new Ceremonial Space.

Designed to be highly welcoming to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors, the Place will foster cultural exchange and revitalisation in an environment highly sensitive to the needs of communities of origin.

The Place will include museum grade storage, collection and archive care, learning and meeting spaces, community accommodation and an exhibition space.

The Place will provide an on Country focused, accessible and purpose-built home for Indigenous cultural objects, artworks, natural history specimens from Country beyond Victoria and archives, the Place will provide a safe and welcoming context to explore cultural knowledges, to add new knowledge to existing information and to map kinships and connections beyond the campus.

Importantly, the Place will provide a space of comfort, care and rest for collections and people.

A Signature Project

The Place for Indigenous Art and Culture is a signature project of the University of Melbourne's Indigenous Strategy 2023-2027 and a major investment in reconciliation, education and conservation of Indigenous knowledges for future generations. .
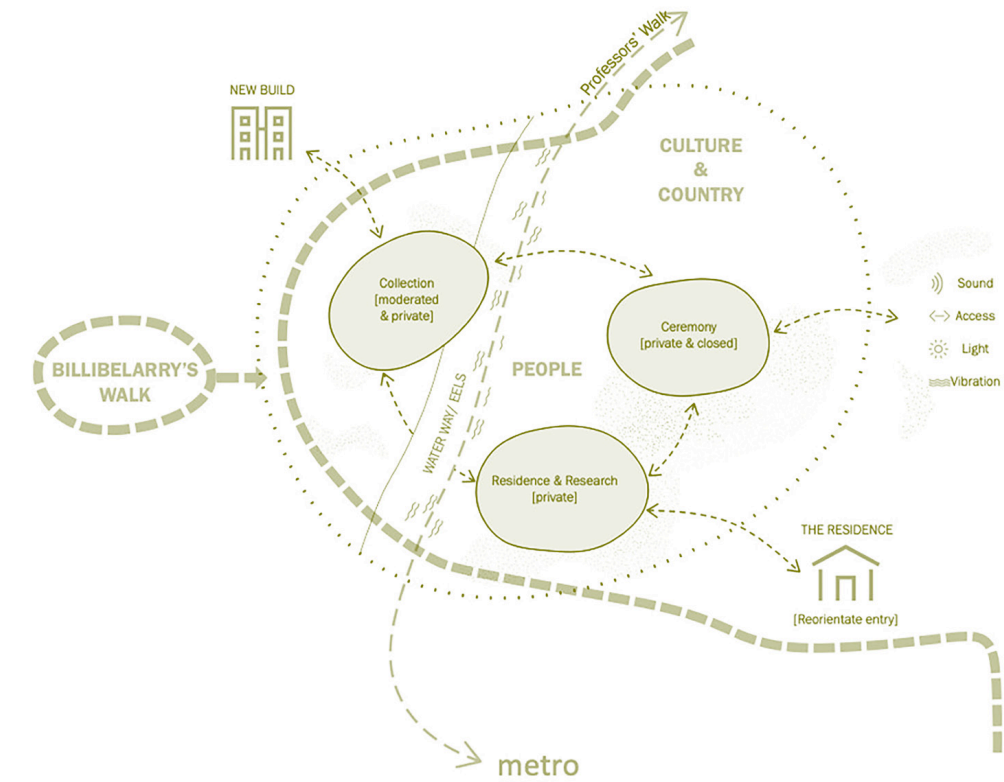
The Collections

The Place for Indigenous Collections project will co-locate four of the University's most significant Indigenous collections in the heart of the Parkville campus in Melbourne.

The Collections include: the Donald Thomson Collection, the Woodward Collection, Leonhard Adam Collection, and the Nancy Williams Library. The collections are expected to grow through strategic collecting, philanthropic donations and commissioning, including oral and written histories and other archival documentation.

The purpose built facility will not only ensure communities of origin have meaningful access to their objects, those objects will be cared for in more appropriate and accessible ways.

Connections

The vision is that the new build, Residence, Gardens and Ceremonial Space will be designed as an integrated group of elements that interrelate and "speak" to each other to create the Place for Indigenous Art and Culture. Where possible, the new build will be oriented to offer views to the Residence, Garden and the Ceremonial Space. The pathway that runs through the Place for Indigenous Art and Culture will be treated as a connecting space between the new build and the Residence, with a distinct and appropriate landscape treatment that acknowledges cultural significance and proximity to sacred spaces.

Benefits/Impacts

The Place will transform access to the collections and the wider resources of the University for Indigenous custodians and communities of origin, particularly for those who live remotely and lack the resources for travel and accommodation suited to their needs including the digitisation of collections to make access easier for those on Country.

Project Lead

Led by Dr Vanessa Russ, a Ngarinyin/Gija woman from the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and Director of Indigenous Collections.

Timeline

Current Status: Planning and Design Stage
Expected Delivery: mid 2027

The Team

Dr Vanessa Russ, Director of Indigenous Collections (Perth/Melbourne)

Christopher Durkin, Repatriation Manager (Darwin/ Melbourne)

Contact Us

If you wish to get in contact, have an enquiry or any concerns please email:
indig-collections@unimelb.edu.au