



William Macmahon Ball Theatre, Faculty of Arts

Project Details

Client: Graduate School of Social
Science, The University of Melbourne
Location: Melbourne
Floor Area: 250 m²
Completion: December, 2013

Contact

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Awards

2014 CEFP (VIC) Awards for
Outstanding School Facilities:
Commendation - Education Initiative
or Design Solution for an Innovative
Program

Challenging the drive to turn education digital, the William Macmahon Ball Theatre reinvents the traditional lecture theatre, as an elliptical space, within the shell of an old hall, in the University of Melbourne's Old Arts building. The seventy-five seat hemicycle configuration was carefully planned to operate as a signature, 'hybrid' pedagogical space: specifically tailored to encourage participation and discussion; available generally as a bookable space; supporting all graduate programs of the Faculty of Arts; and completed in time for the 2014 opening of the new Graduate School of Government.

With a character that is intentionally 'parliamentary', yet relaxed and informal, the theatre performs as a political arena – an authentic context for oration and debate of reasoned argument. It also switches between a diverse mix of teaching practices and learning processes.

Consultant inputs were paramount: for acoustic consistency (voice projection without amplification); variable lighting conditions (daylight to complete

blackout); and resolution of complex dimensional relationships (between structural, fixed, flexible and mobile elements).

A double ceiling gathers the solutions for light and sound. Acoustic fabric is stretched around a reinstated skylight and, suspended on a steel frame, a glowing parametric surface is contoured with clear and translucent acrylic elements, digitally optimised for economy. In combination with insulation and wall finishes, the ceilings define and light the space, ameliorate reverberation and evenly dispense sound, no matter where the speaker is positioned.

Below the luminous lower ceiling, finishes are generally recessive, in neutral or natural tones. Chairs are the exception, upholstered in four vibrant shades to emphasise the individual or collective position of occupants.