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RMIT opens unique Indigenous garden on City campus

RMIT has opened “Ngarara Place” – a unique Indigenous landscape and urban design space in the heart of the University’s City campus.

Designed by award winning Melbourne-based architecture and interior design firm Greenaway Architects, Ngarara Place’s design draws on four key pillars – Connection to Country, Cultural Motifs, Contemporary Aboriginal Art, and Knowledge exchange.

Created, designed and built by a mainly Indigenous team, this unique space includes an Indigenous themed courtyard area; amphitheatre-style seating; sculptural laser-cut smoke pit; and a space to host Indigenous ceremonies, gatherings and events – with the key design narrative of the landscape focussing on the Seven Seasons of the Kulin Nations.

The initial idea for Ngarara Place came from RMIT’s Ngarara Willim Centre – to build a visible presence and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultures and histories as connected among the lands of the Kulin Nations on which RMIT stands.

Ngarara Willim Centre’s Senior Manager, Stacey Campton, said she and her team felt recognition and acknowledgement of the Aboriginal land on which RMIT sits should not only be allocated to the Indigenous Education Centre, Ngarara Willim Centre or the flagpoles at all campuses.

“This distinctive and special outdoor space will allow for greater access by the wider RMIT community and the Melbourne community – to showcase Indigenous culture and our respect of the standing Australia’s First Nation’s people hold at RMIT,” Campton said.

A striking feature of the space is the inclusion of an unashamedly contemporary and specifically curated piece of artwork by Aboriginal digital artist Aroha Groves.

Greenaway Architect’s Director and Project Manager, Jefa Greenaway, said the piece of artwork stands vertically on the adjacent building and is a perfect modern contrast to the garden space.

“The piece evokes nature, place and connections to Country and acts as a backdrop that reinforces the landscape setting in which it is located,” Greenaway said.

“Also, importantly, the whole space acts as a place of pause or contemplation, within the hustle and bustle of a busy University counteracted by an intimately scaled landscape setting; and all plants used are endemic and Indigenous species to the local area and include specimens traditionally used for eating, medicine and practical purposes including weaving.

“The pedagogical panels also provide a cultural context of interpretation as a means of cultural exchange for people to engage with,” he said.

Ngarara Place at RMIT City campus opens at the same time as RMIT University launches its first [Reconciliation Action Plan](#) – during National Reconciliation Week 2016.

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