

St Kilda Road

Statement of Heritage Impact

Prepared for National Gallery of Victoria

October 2024 - FINAL



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1. Introduction

1.1 Project brief

Extent Heritage Pty Ltd has been commissioned by National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) to prepare a Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) for the temporary installation of tree wrapping to 65 London Plane trees within the St Kilda Road boulevard in front of the NGV, at 180 St Kilda Road, Southbank. The works will be undertaken in the extent of St Kilda Road which is included on the Victorian Heritage Register. The purpose of the report is to demonstrate that the proposed works will not have a detrimental impact, on the heritage significance of the subject site.

1.2 Relevant documentation

The following documents have been referred to in the preparation of this report:

- Tree Management Plan prepared by Tree Logic, dated 2 October 2024
- Design statement prepared by National Gallery of Victoria

1.3 Methodology

The preparation of this HIS involved the following steps to ensure a careful and thorough analysis of all factors relevant to the proposed works:

- a review of the relevant statutory controls, any other heritage designations, and significance;
- an overview of the history of the subject site, including reviewing primary and secondary sources;
- a description of the subject site and its context;
- a description of the proposed works;
- an assessment of the nature and level of heritage impact of the proposed works; and
- conclusion and recommendations based on this assessment.

The methodology used in the preparation of this HIS accords with the principles and definitions set out in the following documents:

- The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (the Burra Charter) (Australia ICOMOS 2013); and
- Guidelines for Preparing Heritage Impact Statements (Heritage Victoria 2021).

1.4 Limitations

Extent Heritage has not been engaged to assess historical archaeology or Aboriginal cultural heritage places and values.

No community consultation was undertaken for this report. Therefore, observations made concerning the possible social significance of places are based on publicly accessible, published materials.

The site was inspected and photographed by the author of this report on 24 September 2024. The inspection was undertaken as a visual study only.

The historical overview below offers sufficient historical background to provide an understanding of the place and to provide context related to the significance of the site. The historical background is not intended as an exhaustive history of the site.

1.5 Authorship

This report has been prepared by Charlotte Jenkins, Senior Heritage Advisor and reviewed by Caitlin Mitropoulos, Team Leader, for quality assurance purposes.

1.6 Ownership

The site, St Kilda Road, is managed by Melbourne City Council.

2. Site identification

2.1 Location

The works will be undertaken to the existing trees located along St Kilda Road in front of the NGV and is wholly situated with the City of Melbourne.

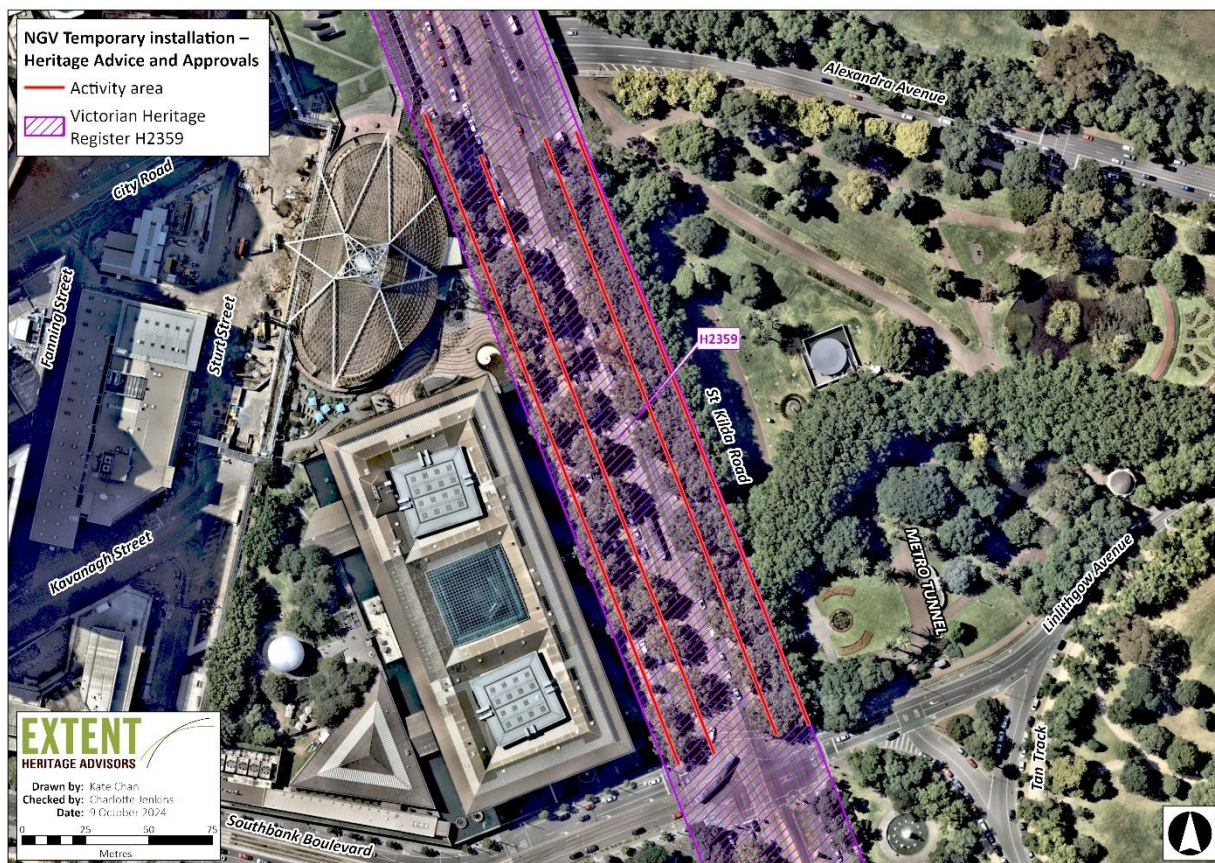


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the trees to be wrapped within St Kilda Road

3. Heritage designations and controls

3.1 Statutory heritage register listings

The site is identified on the following statutory registers:

- Melbourne Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay (HO1234); and
- Victorian Heritage Register (VHR);
- National Heritage List (NHL)

The site is not identified on the following statutory registers:

- Victorian Heritage Inventory (VHI); or
- Commonwealth Heritage List (CHL);

3.1.1 Heritage Act 2017 (Vic)

Noted above, the subject site is listed as a heritage place on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) as place number HO2359. Therefore, the proposal is subject to statutory controls under the Heritage Act 2017 (Vic).

The extent of registration for St Kilda Road is included at Figure 1 and described as follows:

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2359 encompassing St Kilda Road, being the road reserve commencing at Princes Bridge, Melbourne, at the southern boundary of Crown Allotment 2021 Parish of Melbourne South to a line drawn from the south-western corner of Lot 5 on Lodged Plan 33497 (649 St Kilda Road) perpendicular to the alignment of St Kilda Road.

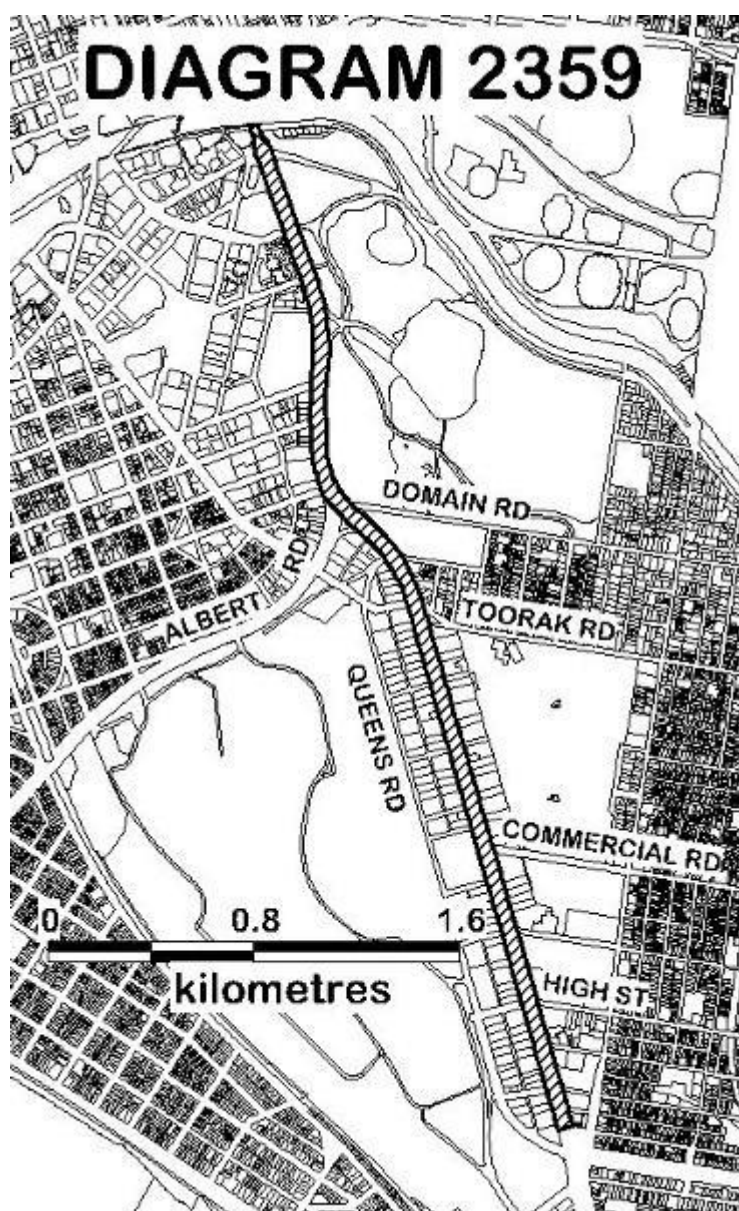


Figure 2 Diagram 2359 showing the extent of registration for St Kilda Road. Source: Victorian Heritage Database

3.1.2 Planning and Environment Act (1987)

Noted above, the subject site is included within St Kilda Road Heritage Overlay as which is identified as HO1234. The road is identified as a significant (VHR) heritage place with a significant streetscape in the incorporated document *Melbourne Planning Scheme Heritage Places Inventory March 2022* (August 2024).

As per Clause 43.01 no planning permit is required under the Heritage Overlay to develop places included on the VHR, with the exception for applications for subdivision.

3.1.3 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)

Part of St Kilda Road is included on the National Heritage List within Melbourne's Domain Parkland and Memorial Precinct, including the section of St Kilda Road where the works will be undertaken.

The summary statement of significance for the Melbourne's Domain Parkland and Memorial Precinct, as included on the Australian Heritage Database is as follows:

Melbourne's Domain Parkland and Memorial Precinct has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of its historic significance and rare characteristics.

Specifically, the Kings Domain Resting Place has outstanding National Heritage value to the nation for its association with Australia's national repatriation story. The resting place represents Indigenous communities asserting control to ensure the return and (re)burial of their ancestors is in accordance with their community's cultural protocols.

The domain parkland and memorial precinct also demonstrates a rare government domain with strong Victorian era components. The landscape as a whole is able to inform our understanding of a number of shaping cultural influences which have contributed to the making of modern Australia. The place also demonstrates a symbolic dimension which can be activated by views of the Shrine of Remembrance from the City and the Government House tower from many surrounding locations.

As the proposed works are temporary in nature, and will not result in an impact or change to the existing fabric of the place, a referral is not required under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

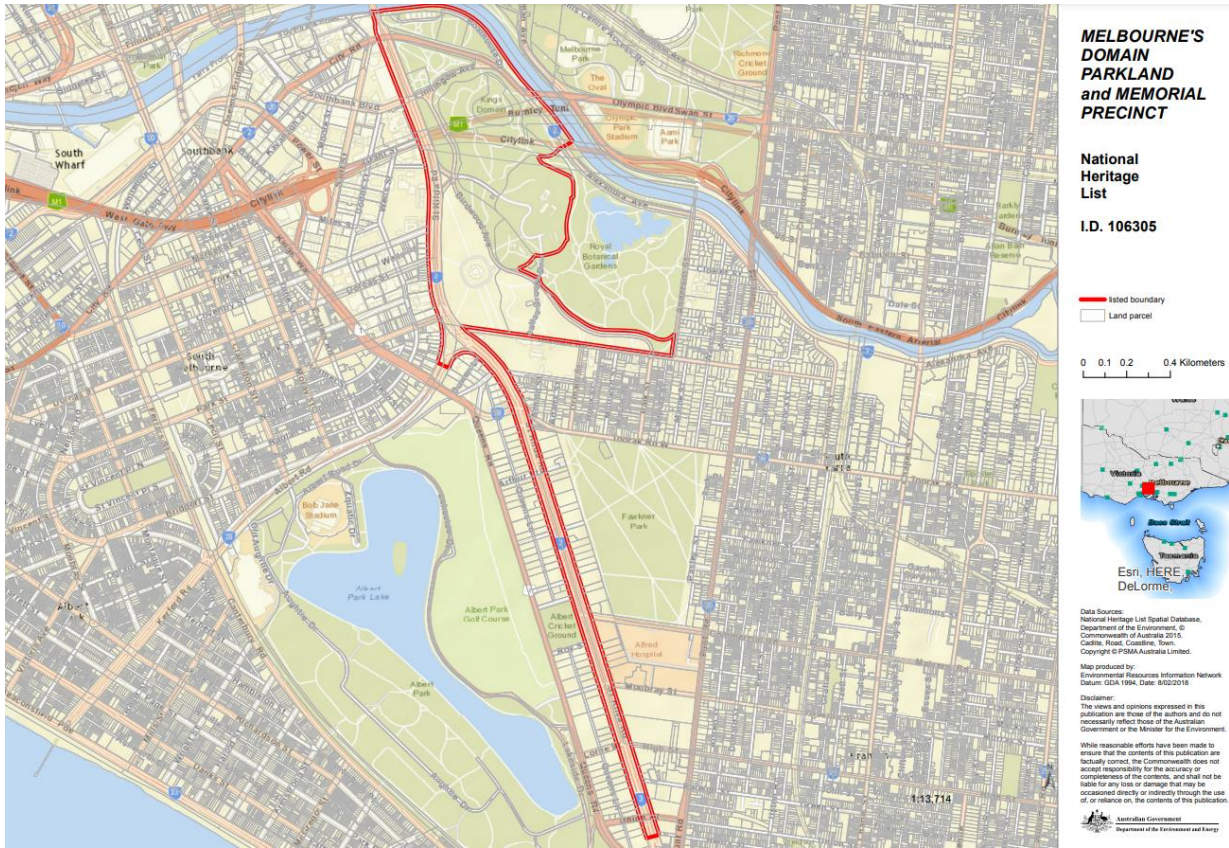


Figure 3 Plan showing the extent of the land included in the Domain Parkland and Memorial Precinct. Source: DCCEEV

3.2 Non-statutory listings

The site is not classified by the National Trust of Australia (Vic).

4. Significance

4.1 Statement of significance

The statement of significance for the place as included in the VHD is reproduced below:

What is significant?

St Kilda Road, the boulevard leading south from the city, being the road reserve commencing at Princes Bridge, Melbourne to a point close to Henry Street, Windsor near the St Kilda Junction, including the roadway, medians, garden beds, kerbing, footpaths, trees, the Edmund Fitzgibbon Memorial, and a single lamp post on the east median, south of High Street.

History Summary

St Kilda Road developed from Baxter's Track which led from Melbourne to Baxter's Stockyard in St Kilda from the 1830s. As early as the 1840s, the east side of St Kilda Road was chosen as the location of public institutions, such as the first Immigrants Home, and Governor La Trobe had reserved a site for a Government House in the nearby Domain by 1840. By the early 1850s St Kilda Road was a main thoroughfare and more institutions were built along it, such as Victoria Barracks (1856-72), Melbourne Grammar School (1856), the Observatory (1861) and the School for the Blind (1866). In the mid-1870s, the first allotments along St Kilda Road, near Fawkner Park, were auctioned for residential development. Improvements were undertaken to St Kilda Road in the late 1880s, prompted by the introduction of cable tramways along the length of the road in 1888. The road was soon after referred to as a 'boulevard'. The ceremonial and symbolic importance of St Kilda Road was enhanced with the construction of the Shrine of Remembrance in 1934 which incorporated the vista along St Kilda Road and Swanston Street. With the 1950s rezoning of land along St Kilda Road to allow for non-residential development, the character of the built form along St Kilda Road began to change, with the demolition of nineteenth century residences and construction of commercial and office buildings. The road itself has remained a boulevard, and community appreciation of it continued into the late twentieth century. St Kilda Road continues to be the southern gateway to Melbourne and an important thoroughfare connecting the southern suburbs with the city, and it retains its role as a location for public ceremonies, such as the annual Anzac Day parade, and gatherings.

Description Summary

St Kilda Road, Melbourne is approximately four kilometres in length. It is a tree-lined boulevard which includes the road reserve commencing at Princes Bridge, Melbourne to a point close to the intersection with Henry Street, Windsor near the St Kilda Junction. It includes a wide carriageway, comprising a central roadway with tram tracks, flanked by medians, outer traffic lanes, and wide footpaths. St Kilda Road has important views to the Shrine of Remembrance, and the 1908 memorial to Edmund Fitzgibbon is located on a median near the intersection of St Kilda Road and Linlithgow Avenue.

For much of its length between Linlithgow Avenue and High Street the central roadway and outer traffic lanes are separated by median plantings of Plane Trees (*Platanus x acerifolia*). There are border plantings of Elms: *Ulmus procera* (English Elms), *Ulmus x hollandica* (Dutch Elms) and *Ulmus x hollandica 'purpurascens'* (Purple-leaved Dutch Elms) along the east and west edge of the outer traffic lanes. Plantings along St Kilda Road vary in age with most trees either mature to over-mature.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Kulin Nation.

How is it significant?

St Kilda Road is of historical and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

Criterion E

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

Why is it significant?

St Kilda Road is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

St Kilda Road is historically significant as one of Melbourne's longest and grandest major thoroughfares. For over a century this European-style boulevard has had an iconic status as the southern gateway to the city. Dating from the 1850s, St Kilda Road was developed into a magnificent tree-lined boulevard during the late nineteenth century and was the location of some of Victoria's major public institutions. From the 1880s Melbourne's wealthy constructed impressive residences at this prestigious address, and from the 1950s it became a centre for commercial activity. St Kilda Road has been used for ceremonial and celebratory processions including those associated with the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to Melbourne in 1867, the opening of the International Exhibition of 1880, and the opening of the Australian Federal Parliament in 1901. It remains the site of Victoria's annual Anzac Day march, Moomba parades and political protests. [Criterion A]

St Kilda Road is significant as a fine and representative example of a boulevard. It was one of the first of Melbourne's main roads (Royal Parade, Flemington Road, Dandenong Road and Queens Parade) to be laid out as a boulevard around 1889, and is the longest metropolitan boulevard in Melbourne. Boulevards are wide and tree-lined roads which often separate traffic types with medians strips. They are an urban design form which

characterised the development of European cities from the 1750s and became evident in Australia from the mid-nineteenth century. St Kilda Road demonstrates the characteristics of a boulevard at a high level, with consistent medians and trees extending almost the whole length of the road, for approximately four kilometres, although there is variation in the intactness of some of the plantings. St Kilda Road has developed over time to safely accommodate many different forms of traffic, including trams, cars, bicycles and buses. [Criterion D]

St Kilda Road is of aesthetic significance as an iconic boulevard which has been recognised as a place of beauty and a visually outstanding element in Melbourne's urban landscape. A broad and stately thoroughfare, its intact and impressive plantings of mature Elm and Plane trees beautify the southern access to the city. The overarching tree canopies are of considerable visual appeal, provide a sense of enclosure and exemplify the aesthetic use of trees as a road design device. The sweeping views between the Shrine of Remembrance, St Kilda Road and Swanston Street are significant for their emphasis on St Kilda Rd as a processional route between the Shrine and the city. There are also important visual associations with the Queen Victoria Garden and Domain parklands to the east. [Criterion E]

4.2 Heritage places in the vicinity

The subject site is located in the vicinity of several heritage places, including:

- National Gallery of Victoria (VHR H1499 and HO792)
- Domain Parklands (VHR H2304 and HO398)
- Victorian Aerts Centre (VHR H1500 and HO760)

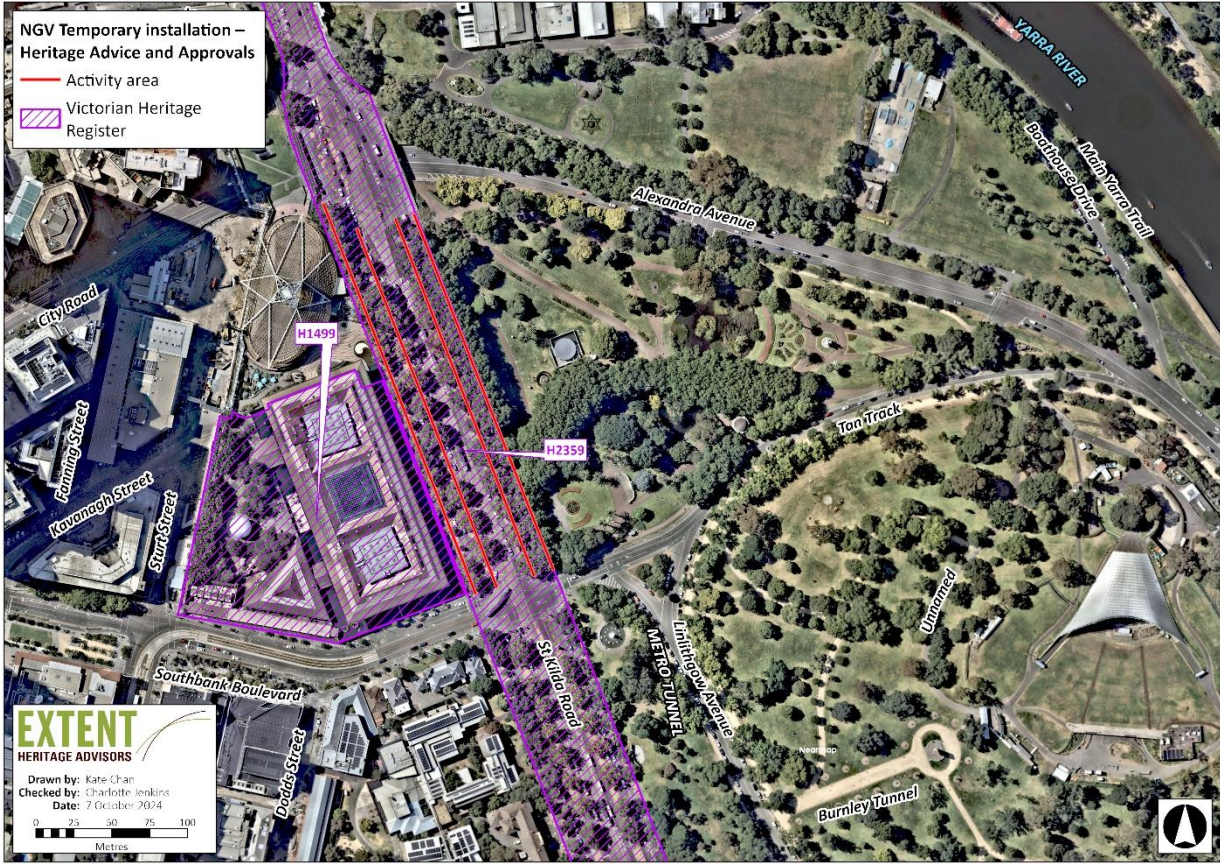


Figure 4. Plan showing the VHR extent of registration applicable to St Kilda Road and the adjacent NGV

5. Physical description

Extent Heritage carried out a physical assessment of the extent of St Kilda Road in front of the NGV on 24 September 2024, comprising a review of the existing trees and roadways. The analysis involved an investigation into the built form and landscape setting. It does not provide a detailed investigation of all fabric but an overview of the elements of the place to assist in determining significance.

St Kilda Road in front of the NGV comprises a wide extent of road incorporating footpath, road, bike lanes and tram tracks.

The outer edges comprise footpaths, with a row of trees between the footpath and the road. To the east, the trees are located in a gravel finish adjacent to the asphalt footpath. On the west, the trees are incorporated into the tiled footpath arrangement and covered by pebblecrete. St Kilda Road has two road lanes in each direction separated by a grassed median strip. A row of trees is located on the median strips.

The extent of St Kilda Road in front of the NGV comprises 65 trees (a combination of London Plane trees and Oriental or Cyprus Plane Trees) located on the nature strip and median strip of the road. The trees range from mature specimens, semi-mature to early mature trees.



Figure 5 View along St Kilda Road from the east looking south



Figure 6 View of the Plane Tree boulevard looking north



Figure 7 View of the Plane Tree boulevard looking south

6. Proposed works

6.1 Project rationale

To coincide with the NGV's 2024 Summer exhibition dedicated to renowned Japanese artist, Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), several major public installations will be presented within and beyond the NGV International building. The most visually accessible of these to the general public will be *Ascension of Polka Dots on the Trees* (2002–present), which will see Kusama's signature polka dots enveloping the avenue of trees outside NGV International on St Kilda Road. Wrapped in pink and white polka-dotted fabric, this immersive activation will transform this iconic thoroughfare that leads directly to the heart of Melbourne's CBD.

Kusama first presented *Ascension of Polka Dots on the Trees* in 2002, as a small-scale display of wrapped trees on the grounds of the Kirishima Open Air Museum in Japan. Four years later, she was given the opportunity to stage a more ambitious presentation of the work along a stretch of Singapore's famous Orchard Road, as a part of the 2006 Singapore Biennale. Kusama has since re-imagined the work in urban spaces across the globe, from Helsinki's Esplanadi park to the New York Botanical Gardens to London's South Bank. The work is typically presented with white-on-red polka-dotted fabric, but for its Australian debut, the artist has opted to replace red with a bold pink. The presentation of this unique artwork across all four rows of this central promenade further enhances its visual impact and immersive quality.

While this artwork was conceived by Kusama in the 21st century, it represents her lifelong love of nature, and her steadfast belief in its cosmic power. Kusama's affinity with nature has guided her artistic practice for over eight decades and is often represented in her use of repetitive motifs, including the polka-dot, which she has described as 'a way to infinity'. Early photographs and films of the artist in 1960s New York show her applying polka-dots to trees, one by one. Presenting this artwork in major public spaces around the globe has allowed Kusama to achieve her artistic vision on a grand scale. Simultaneously, this project has indelibly linked the presenting cities with the creative vision of one of the world's most extraordinary visual artists.

6.2 Outline

The installation of the proposed artwork comprises the installation of printed fabric wrapping to 65 of the existing London Plane trees along the St Kilda Road between Southbank Boulevard and the bridge over Alexandra Avenue, outside the NGV and Arts Centre as a temporary installation. The works will be a public installation associated with the 2024 Summer exhibition of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama at the NGV. The trees will be wrapped in late November/early December before the opening of the exhibition on 15 December. The wrapping will be removed from the trees following the closure of the exhibition on 21 April 2025, for a total period of approximately 6 months.

The proposed works are detailed in the enclosed documentation prepared by NGV. The fabric is a printed Spantex, made from polyester and elastomer, and will include a pink finish with white polka dots. The trees will be wrapped from the base (approximately 400mm above ground level) to a height in the order of 3.6m to 4m depending on the tree, with trees in the median strip

wrapped to a maximum height of 3.6m, while the trees located adjacent to the footpath will be wrapped to a maximum height of 4m.

The wrapping will use a combination of 300mm and 700mm wide fabric. The wrapping will commence either at the first junction of branches or from the base of the trunk. At the central junction staples will be used to fix the fabric to the tree. Two staples will be used when wrapping from the base to fix fabric in place, and fabric will then be wrapped to conceal the fixings. In the instance that fabric continues up the branches, the end point will be secured using a combination of staples and cable ties to ensure there is no slippage. Where the wrap height is reached prior to any branches, the fabric will be secured using staples only.

7. Assessment of heritage impact

Impact on cultural heritage significance

The proposed works comprise a temporary installation of fabric to the trees as part of a public installation forming part of the summer exhibition series at the NGV for a period of approximately six months.

The works involve the installation of fabric wrapped around the existing trees using a combination of staples and cable ties to fix the material to the trees.

Perceived as long avenues of trees, this section of St Kilda Road, characterised by the London Plane Trees the boulevard will be visually impacted by the installation. The intent of the artist through this public exhibition is to be eye-catching and draw attention to the exhibition through this unique approach. The visual impact will be considerable, with alterations to all 65 trees in this section of St Kilda Road, to a maximum height of 4m. The impact however will be temporary in nature, with no lasting impact on the heritage place or the fabric of the heritage place.

More broadly, there will be some impact on the views to the site along the St Kilda Road corridor, which will be temporarily impacted by the installation. As with the immediate visual impact, while this will have an impact on fabric, it is for a limited duration and will not have any long term impacts on the place, or an understanding of the boulevard, and therefore is not considered to have an adverse impact on the identified significance of St Kilda Road.

This form of public exhibition, 'Ascension of the Polka Dots' has previously been undertaken as part of Yayoi Kusama's exhibitions, including in London to London Plane Trees, and in New York, with the fabric held in place using staples. In both instances, trees within the public realm were utilised for the display and were not physically impacted by the installation. It is noted that the work results in the use of public space for the display of art, a method that has been used successfully in other installations of the artwork globally, which has been well received by the general public and visitors to the exhibition enjoying a welcome entrance. Examples of the tree wrapping that has been undertaken internationally are included in the design statement prepared by NGV enclosed in this application.

The wrapping material is identified as a breathable material which is important to ensure the health of the trees. As noted in the Tree Management Plan (TMP), this is essential to maintaining the health of the trees. Appropriate tree protection measures will be in place during the installation, display and removal of the public exhibition to ensure the health of the trees is not compromised by the works. This includes the use of staples to mature trees where the staples will penetrate the bark only. For the juvenile specimens, the TMP indicates that alternative methods including cable ties would be less invasive and prevent harm occurring to the trees. During installation specific measures include foam wrapping around ladders and scaffold to prevent damage to the trees, and the use of ladders and scaffold custom-fitted with adjustable legs to be positioned to ensure there is no damage to the tree roots during installation and removal of the fabric. Regular site attendance and inspection of trees undertaken by the project arborist will assist in monitoring and maintaining the health of the trees, including an inspection

of tree health following the removal of the fabric wrapping. This will be followed by ongoing monitoring to ensure there are no lasting impacts.

Following the exhibition period, the wrapped fabric will be removed including all staples and cable ties resulting in no long term visual impact to the trees or any other significant fabric. While there will be a visual impact for the duration of the exhibition, this impact will be temporary, and there will be no adverse impact on fabric or the appearance of the boulevard in the long term.

7.1.1 Reasonable and economic use considerations

No reasonable use or economic use argument has been included in the assessment of these works.

7.1.2 Any other relevant matters

The works will be in proximity to other heritage places, including the Domain Parklands and the NGV. While the works will be isolated to the St Kilda Road extent of registration, they will be visible from the adjacent heritage places for the duration of the exhibition. As noted above, the works will result in visual impact, and this may have a minor impact on views to the heritage place, and views within the adjacent heritage places, specifically the Domain Parklands. The works will not impact any significant fabric in these places and will not result in any change or significant impact on the understanding or appreciation of the heritage places, and therefore will not have an adverse impact on the significance of the adjacent heritage places.

8. Summary

8.1 Conclusion

The proposed works involve the temporary installation of artwork by way of wrapping material around 65 of the existing trees in St Kilda Road. The trees will be temporarily impacted by the artwork, with a visual change to their presentation, however, as a temporary exhibit, this visual impact will be entirely reversed following the conclusion of the exhibition. As such, the works are considered not to have any impact on the identified significance of the heritage place, with only minor visual impacts to the trees for a temporary period of time.

8.2 Conditions

The following conditions are anticipated on the permit:

- A condition enabling the installation of, and replacement of existing fabric with new to match the existing in the event of vandalism or damage to the existing fabric.
- A condition for monitoring the health of the trees both during, and post event, to ensure their health is not impacted by the works

9. References

Heritage Council Victoria. 2019. Assessing the Cultural Heritage Significance of Places and Objects for Possible State Heritage Listing: The Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Threshold Guidelines. Melbourne: Heritage Council Victoria.

Australia ICOMOS. 2013a. The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013. Burwood, Vic.: Australia ICOMOS. <https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf>.

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