

NO LONGER LOCKED DOWN

WE RETURN TO THE CITY

OCTOBER 27TH 2021

On 25th October, while I led a party in the bushland on Jibbon Head one of our party, Ann McArthur, mentioned an art exhibition I'd like over at the Mosman Art Gallery. That had me wistfully remembering the last time we were there. There was an exhibition of the art of Wendy Sharpe but, more importantly for us, a concert with Susannah Lawergren (soprano) and Georgie Lowe (harp). As is often the case, on the very next day Susannah sent me a message to alert me to when she and Georgie would again be performing. The first task this morning, after breakfast, was to book those tickets. It was like my own "Freedom Day". But that is in anticipation! It is in late November.

And so, in celebration, today we braved the trains and headed into the city! And in a double celebration of a delightful day, I write these words with a Randal Tomich Sauvignon Blanc by my side and an Eastern Koel calling outside!

As if to greet us, when we disembarked from an almost-empty train at Martin Place, we walked south along Macquarie Street towards Hyde Park and in the flower boxes outside the old Rum Hospital we saw our first Blue-banded Bee for the season. Such must be the heat bubble that is the city. Nights are still too cool for them to make an appearance in Engadine.





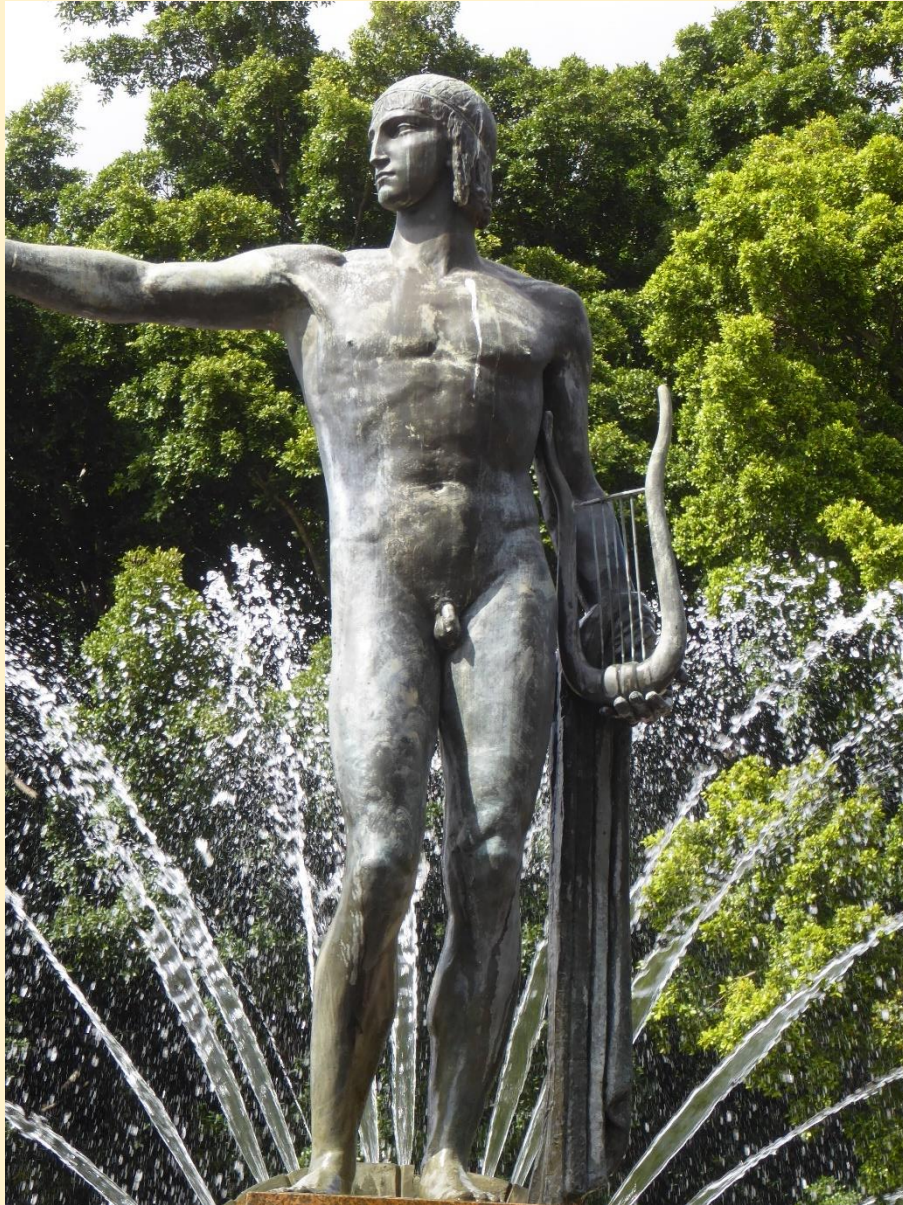
We then walked through the northern half of Hyde Park. It's hard to now image that this was a swamp in 1788 and that the traditional owners hunted ducks there! By all accounts it was also an important Aboriginal contest ground. Very quickly it became "the Common" and later it became the colony's first sports centre and racecourse. Prize fights and cricket matches were held here.

The history of the site is quite fascinating¹ but of interest for me today on this day of returning to the urban(e) were the public monuments! Perhaps inspired by an earlier discussion about the removal of statues in the USA, in England and here in Australia, I have taken an interest in who is "remembered" and who is often "missing" from the story.

And what better example of that "memory celebration" than the Archibald Fountain! It was created by French sculptor François-Léon Sicard, following a bequest from its namesake Mr J.F. Archibald. He was a true Francophile². It was to commemorate the association of Australia and France in the First World War. I wonder what Macron would think of that after AUKUS and Morrison's shabby treatment of the French when cancelling the submarine contract.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyde_Park,_Sydney

² The memorial's bronze statues were cast in France over several years and the granite fountain was later constructed on site. The statues include the mythological figures of Apollo, Diana, Pan and Theseus, as well as a variety of animals. The dedication of the memorial took place on 14 March 1932.
<https://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/content/archibald-memorial-fountain>



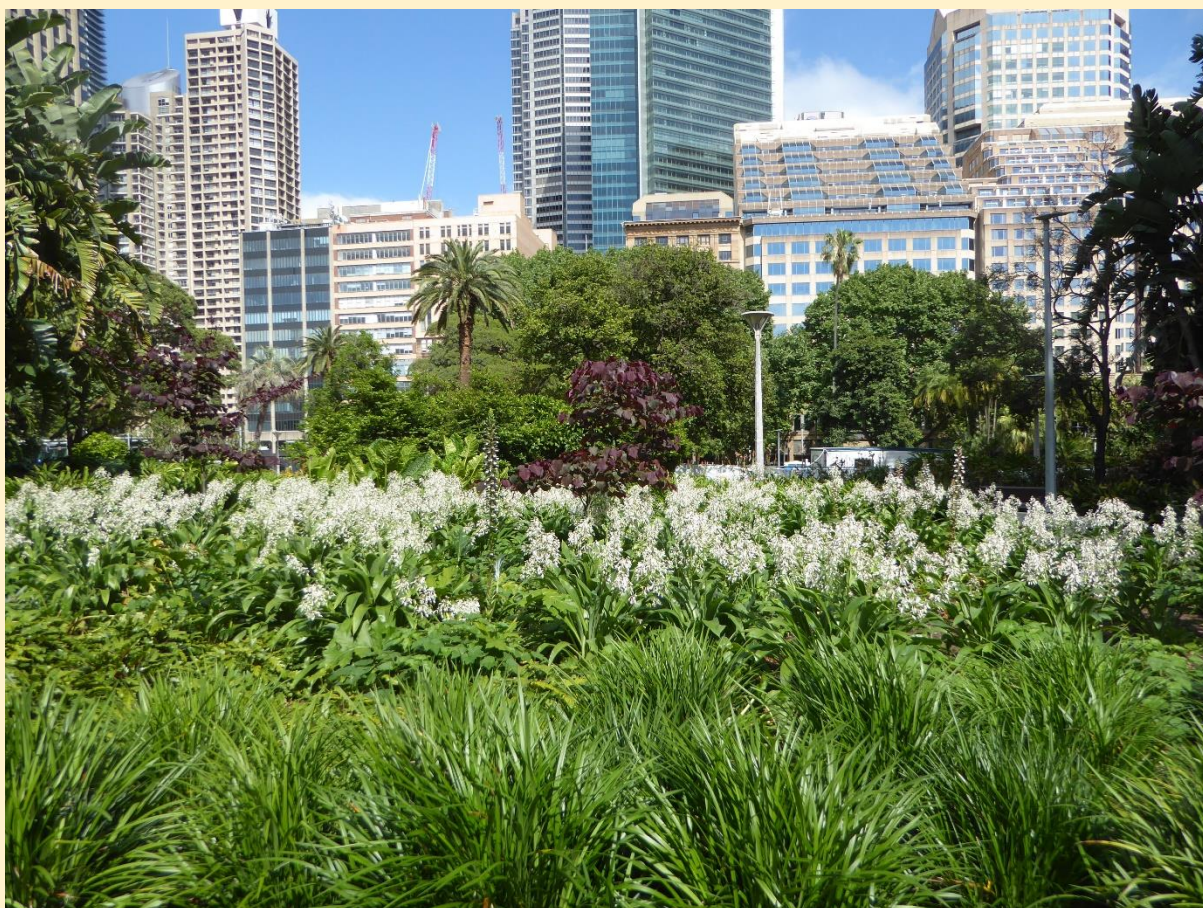
Apollo

He stands with his right arm outstretched, while holding a lyre in his left hand. Numerous water jets spray a fan-like shape around the statue, representing the popular Art Deco motif of a rising sun and drawing the eye upwards.³

³ Ibid







The city from Hyde Park



And from The Domain



The Art Gallery of NSW extension in progress

By now we were entering the Botanical Gardens⁴!

Ian Willis writes:

“The Domain and Royal Botanic Gardens are some of the most important open spaces in Australia’s urban landscape. The 29 hectares of gardens are surrounded by 51 hectares of parkland including the Sydney Domain. They were officially recognised as a botanic garden in 1816, while only becoming ‘Royal’ in 1959. The site is one of the world’s oldest colonial botanic gardens and one of the most important botanical gardens in the Southern Hemisphere (only Rio de Janeiro is older).⁵”

It also sits on “Farm Cove”, the site of the first attempt to grow vegetables under Governor Philip. Governor Phillip had ordered the cultivation of 20 acres in 1788, with that area part of his private reserve.

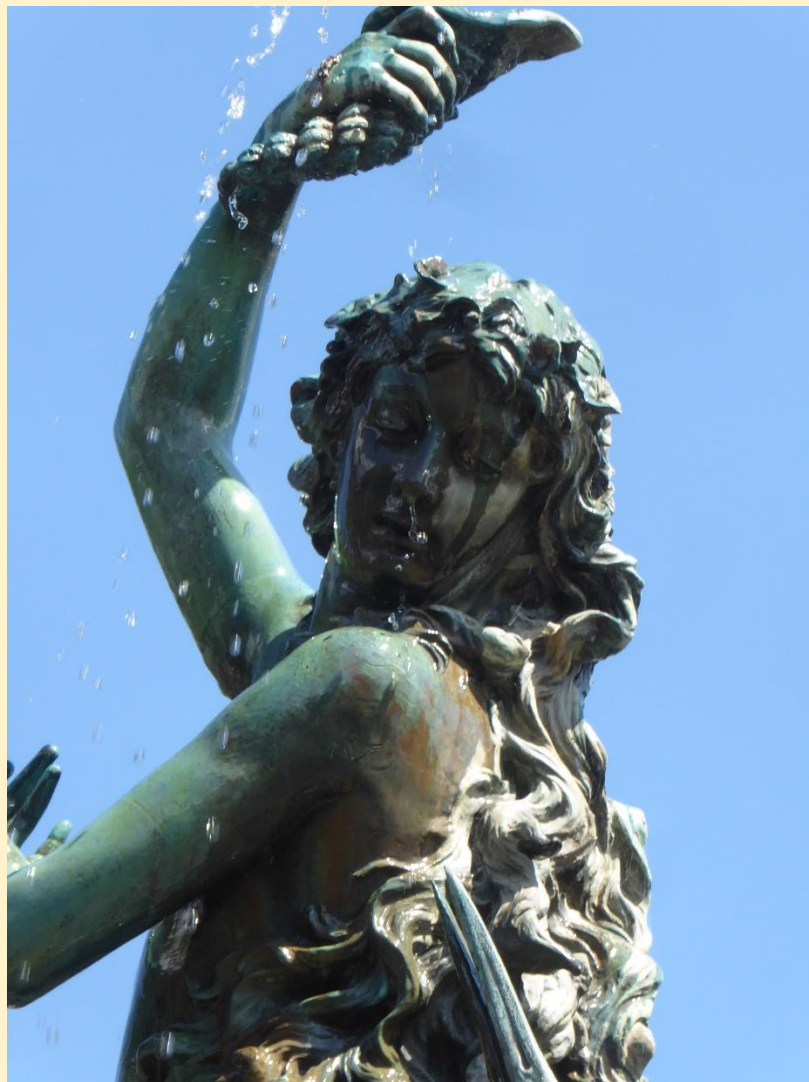
The Domain and gardens were also the site of the 1878 International Exhibition and the Garden Palace (1879) which burnt down in a spectacular fire in 1882. This was the first exhibition in Australia featuring arts and industrial displays. The Garden Palace was located between the Conservatorium of Music (formerly the Government House Stables) and Macquarie Street⁶.

⁴ <https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/>

⁵ <https://www.phansw.org.au/sydneys-royal-botanic-gardens-an-historical-source/>

⁶ <https://camdenhistorynotes.com/2017/01/26/sydneys-royal-botanic-gardens/>

Now a wander through a Botanic Garden might not strike many as a “return to the city” but for us it was a delightful break! And, following the theme of memorials, we were immediately attracted to this!

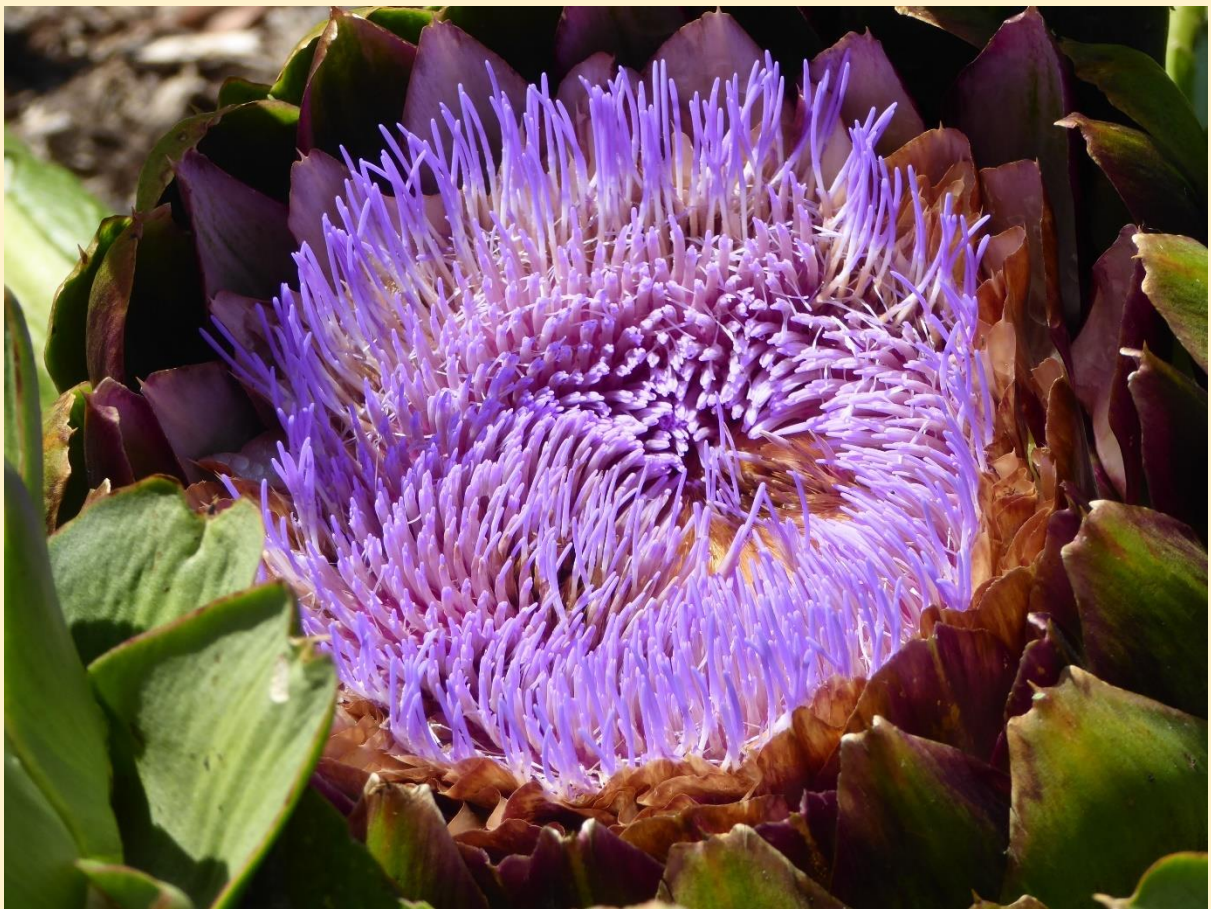


The family of Lewis Wolfe Levy paid for this statue to be erected in the gardens in honour of their illustrious family member. He was born in London in 1815, migrated to Sydney, went into business and soon did quite well in both Maitland and Tamworth before moving to Sydney.

“His business reputation grew steadily and from the mid-1870s he occupied an increasing number of commercial posts, becoming chairman of the Hunter River New Steam Navigation Co. and a director of the Newcastle Wallsend Coal Co., the Australian Gaslight Co., the United Insurance Co., the Commercial Banking Co. of Sydney and the Australasian Steam Navigation Co. He also acquired pastoral interests and by 1871 held Yarraman on the Liverpool Plains and was a partner in seven other runs.”⁷

And of course, he entered politics! But in that realm his heart was not truly engaged. At least this somewhat grumpy man was involved in charity! Here, probably unremembered, his memorial stands!

⁷ <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/levy-lewis-wolfe-4017>









By now we clutched our ice coffees and sat by the gardens, resting and watching art students draw the flowers!







Time to pause and admire the architecture

The new AMP building – with double-deck lifts!⁸

⁸ The tower is in the form of ‘campus-style’ offices formed into a series of five vertical villages stacked at different angles on each other, designed by Danish firm 3XN Architects, their sister company GXN Innovation, BVN Architects and the newly appointed Design Research Studio.

The building will offer 2000-square-metre floorplates, with an atrium cut all the way through the building from bottom to top to maximise the daylight, sun and views for the people working inside. The double-deck lifts are essentially two cabs on top of each other which allow passengers on consecutive floors to use the lift at the same time.

The tower is targeting a 6-star Green Star rating 5, particularly through the design of the façade’s sun-shading hoods that wrap the stacked blocks of the tower, says Chris Nunn, head of sustainability, real estate, at AMP Capital Investors. They eliminate the need for blinds, and the electricity to run them.

Ref: <https://www.commercialrealestate.com.au/news/amps-new-quay-quarter-tower-to-be-a-building-of-so-many-firsts-47258/>





Earth Mother – by Helen Leete (1993)⁹

⁹ <https://www.helenleete.com/blog.html>

This Earthmother was first exhibited at the Art Gallery of N.S.W. in 1993. It was short listed for the Wynne Prize, and one of only two sculptures in the Archibald/Wynne/Sulman exhibition. There it was admired by the Director of the Botanic Gardens, Professor Carrick Chambers, so after the AGNSW exhibition, it was moved to the Royal Botanic Gardens. The site chosen for it was a rocky outcrop, above Farm Cove, near the Opera House Gate. For several years, until the trees below the rock grew tall, it could easily be seen from the Opera House.

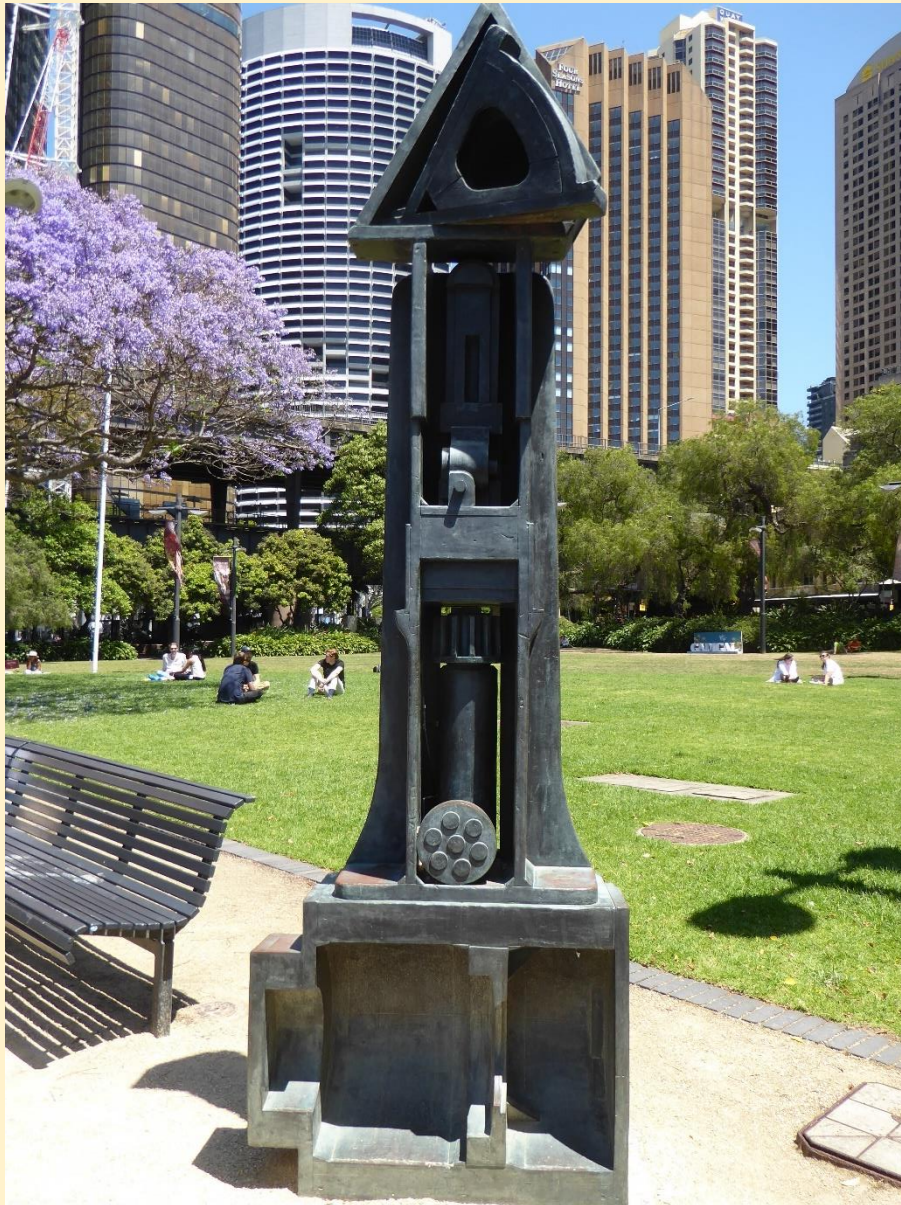


And so, we leave the gardens and the satyr and head over to the MCA. It was then that we discovered the toll the various lock-downs had demanded. So many small businesses here were closed, for good!



Empty shops and empty of people





The Beacon – Robert Klippel

We had to return to an art gallery and today we opted to head to the MCA to see the latest exhibition on Doug Aitken. After some problems with our membership card (they appear to have issued new member numbers but we are paid up until September 2022) we were soon inside and enjoying his work.

“My MCA survey uses many mediums. It’s open and expansive, the kind of project I want the viewer to be immersed in. I see it as an exhibition that’s specific to Sydney and the harbour – but, once inside, it could be everywhere and anywhere. You could really fall into the works, get lost in them...”¹⁰

It is an exhibition to return to! One does need time to immerse in the videos, to let the sounds and sights swell around you.

¹⁰ <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/doug-aitken-new-era/>



Sonic Fountain 11



And with a nod to Lindy Lee we head home!

It has been great to return to some semblance of normality!

Brian Everingham