

Dialoguing and Designing Towards Reconciliation

Steelcase hosts and co-leads Melbourne Design Week art and talk series

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At over 300 programs that span an 11 day period, Melbourne Design Week (MDW) is Australia's largest design event and platform that brings together designers, thinkers, educators and businesses to celebrate design, share ideas and consider how design can be used as a force for good in an increasingly complex and precarious world.

This Melbourne Design Week, Steelcase Australia was excited to host a program focused on taking purposeful actions to advance Australia's Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs). The Steelcase program brought together initiatives supporting the core pillars of RAPs – relationships, respect and opportunities. RAPs provide tangible and substantive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In collaboration with leading Melbourne-based architectural design practice, peckvonhartel (designer of the new Steelcase Melbourne showroom), Steelcase hosted an art installation and talk series titled, "Making Nation." The series explored the intersection between 'Civic Good' and 'Making Good' across two panel discussions framed by art installation pieces from First Nations artist Simone Thomson, and architecture design studio, peckvonhartel.

DESIGN THAT CONNECTS

In the first panel discussion, "Civic Good — Design that connects," panelists explored the question, how can a global commercial business undertake a reconciliation action plan in an authentic way? Acting as a visual accompaniment and frame to the conversation was Thomson's art piece, commissioned by Steelcase as a part of their Reconciliation Action Plan.

Rich with symbolism, Thomson's work uses color and culturally significant motifs, such as the Bogong Moth to visually describe the journey between worlds and Steelcase's reconciliation path. The conversation brought together an artist, academic, architect and Steelcase, to explore how design can help build connectivity to First Nations in a more meaningful and respectful way.

"We want to focus on the rich and beautiful culture here in Australia and support Aboriginal people to continue sharing their stories through art, music and story-telling," says Vanessa Panotas, Business Development Manager, Steelcase Melbourne and working group member on Steelcase's RAP journey.

"There is so much we can learn from a culture that is over 60,000 years old." As a design oriented, human-centric company, art has proven to be an integral part of making the Steelcase Reconciliation journey with the Bunurong and Wurundjeri peoples a more intimate and meaningful experience.

DESIGN THAT LASTS

The second panel discussion, “Making Good — Design that Lasts,” focused on the question, how can you measure and advocate for design of quality? Framing this conversation was an installation piece by peckvonhartel featuring over 300 toothbrushes – the average number people use and discard over the course of their lifetimes. Against this backdrop, Rebecca Daff, National Practice Leader and Architect at peckvonhartel facilitated dialogue around the idea that designing for longevity creates better outcomes both ethically and commercially.

“Steelcase has always aspired to create lasting value for people, including our customers but also our employees, communities and partners,” says Andrew Dwyer, Director of Steelcase Melbourne, who participated in the panel on Steelcase’s own efforts to design for quality and longevity.

“We aspire to work with both global and local leading organizations that recognise the value of a quality built environment.”

While MDW 2022 has concluded, artwork by Simone Thomson remains installed in the Steelcase Melbourne showroom as a beautiful reminder and ongoing commitment to the idea that design can be a force for good in a world and can act as a potent intermediary between people, companies and nations.

About

Simone Thomson – Simone is a Woi-Wurrung Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta Traditional Owner and Artist based in Naarm (Melbourne) who has been engaged to undertake an artwork for Steelcase’s new location. She draws inspiration through her ancestral bonds to the sacred waterways of the Birrarung (Yarra River) and Dhungala (the Murray River) and her spiritual connection to Country. She works to carry the language, stories and ancestral oral history and knowledge passed down to her from her mother and grandmother.

peckvonhartel – peckvonhartel is a widely recognised national architectural design practice with the reputation and commitment to deliver exceptional design and professional expertise. As long time advocates of sustainable design and specializing in interiors, their work has characterized buildings and spaces around Melbourne and Australia, including the Steelcase Melbourne showroom.

Whether you are interested in learning more about what we do, or just want to pop by to see Thomson’s artwork, we would love to chat. Visit us [here](#):

*Steelcase Showroom, Suite G.06/54 Market St,
Southbank VIC 3006.*