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The Australian

First look at Sydney's controversial Parramatta Powerhouse Museum



The design for Powerhouse Parramatta has been selected, with Moreau Kusunoki (Lead Design Architect) and Genton (Local Design Architect) chosen to establish the first major museum to be based in Western Sydney. Picture: Supplied

- **EXCLUSIVE**
[Ashleigh Wilson](#)

The new-look Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta will be brought to life by architects in Paris and Sydney after an international competition settled on a design for the contentious waterfront project.

The two firms, Moreau Kusunoki and Genton, are understood to have created the winning design for the Powerhouse, also known as the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.

The NSW government is pressing ahead with its decision to [move the museum from inner-city Ultimo to western Sydney](#) in an operation estimated to cost about \$1 billion. The project continues to gather pace [despite high profile campaign to keep the museum in Ultimo](#).

Chaired by Naomi Milgrom, the design competition was launched in January, with an initial 74 submissions from 20 countries reduced to six finalists in the second round.

Five of the six finalists were joint submissions between Australian and overseas companies, while only one design was entirely Australian: CHROFI in partnership with indigenous artist Reko Rennie.

The pairing of Moreau Kusunoki with Genton is designed to bring together local expertise and an international architectural firm with experience in large scale cultural projects.



Architect drawing of the winning Parramatta Powerhouse design. Picture: Supplied

Moreau Kusunoki — the firm, created in 2011, brings together husband and wife architects Nicolas Moreau and Hiroko Kusunoki — beat more than 1000 other entries in 2015 to be named the winners of the Guggenheim Helsinki design competition. But that project remains on ice, with the Finnish government withdrawing its support from the project the following year, reportedly over funding concerns.

Its other designs listed on the company’s website include cultural projects in France, such as the Brest National Lighthouse Museum and the House of Cultures and Memories in Cayenne.

Genton, which has offices in Sydney and Melbourne, unveiled its completed design for the Frankston train station in Melbourne earlier this year.



The design for Powerhouse Parramatta seen lit up at night. Picture: Supplied

Their pitch was designed to challenge the conventions of the contemporary museum “to create a place of collective memory, reflection and community.” It went on: “The collective vision is to instil a lasting memory through the creation of unique environmental experiences, existing in perfect harmony with the evolving social, cultural and physical landscape of the site.”

The state government’s decision to [move Powerhouse to Parramatta](#) led to a vigorous debate across the arts sector after then premier [Mike Baird announced the plan](#) during the NSW election campaign in 2015.



The winning pitch was designed to “challenge the conventions of the contemporary museum”. Picture: Supplied

A long-running parliamentary inquiry later called on the government to reverse its decision to relocate the museum to Parramatta, recommending instead a boost in funding for the existing site and the creation of another “world class cultural institution” in Parramatta.

The new museum, set to cover 18,000 square metres of exhibition and public space, will sit on the banks of the Parramatta River and is due to open in 2023. The government has promised to retain a cultural presence in Ultimo, where programming will continue until next year.