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SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

Why the Powerhouse chose shopping centres for its first western Sydney show

Anthony Segaert and **Mostafa Rachwani**
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When considering what western Sydney has contributed to the world, the Powerhouse Parramatta team landed on a surprising choice: shopping centres.
Is it offensive or revelatory? Cringe or smart? Authentic or fake?
It all depends on who you ask.



The original Parramall Shopping Centre light fixture will be on display at The Mall exhibition.
Sitthixay Ditthavong

The first western Sydney-focused exhibition at the Powerhouse will explore the history and development of shopping centres.
The Mall is an immense, immersive two-storey exhibition that winds its way through the different eras of shopping through both curated items on display and the architecture of the show itself.
Attendees will be able to walk through some of the reconstructed history, complete with neon signs and fountains.



5:14 Take a tour of Powerhouse Parramatta
As the opening date nears, we look inside Sydney's newest cultural institution.

The exhibition is organised like a shopping centre. Visitors enter a space designed to resemble a car park, and are greeted by an electric neon sign for Parramall, the shopping strip that opened in the 1980s. The museum obtained the sign from Sydney Metro; Parramall existed on the site of the Parramatta metro station, to open in 2032.
Visitors then progress through the uncanny exhibit that can at times feel like a theme park, charting everything from window displays to payment systems, via fashion and familiar brands.
It is one of five exhibitions that form part of the Parramatta campus launch, with the $1 billion museum due to open to the public on Saturday.
Gemma Savio, head of exhibitions curatorial, said it focused on the architecture and the cultural phenomenon of the shopping mall.



Staff inspect The Mall exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum, Parramatta. Sitthixay Ditthavong



Western Sydney faces will be prominent in Moroccan-British artist Hassan Hajjaj's work in The Mall exhibition. Sitthixay Ditthavong



Youth brand Sportsgirl is featured in the Powerhouse exhibition.Sitthixay Ditthavong

“The premise for this exhibition came out of the fact that Frank Lowy was really responsible for the generation of the shopping mall and the transformation of retail spaces,” she said.

Lowy started Westfield in Blacktown in 1959, with that first centre hosting 13 stores and a car park capacity of 90. From there it expanded across Sydney and the rest of the country, revolutionising how people shopped and reshaping many suburbs in western Sydney.

“And that model has really changed the way that we spend time buying things, receiving things, and transacting with one another.”

The exhibition will feature more than 1350 objects, ranging from old signs and cash registers to eftpos machines and old Myer gift cards.

It will also feature shopfronts from brands that have partnered with the Powerhouse on the program, including Oroton, David Jones, R.M. Williams and Sportsgirl. A spokesperson for the Powerhouse said any exhibition on “Australian retail culture would be incomplete without presenting some of the brands and retail experiences that have shaped them”.

“ ‘Arcade’ in *The Mall* highlights [the] skilled practice of window dressing and visual merchandising,” they said.

“Powerhouse curators worked with the brands to curate and design the window displays. As a museum of applied arts and sciences, Powerhouse has a longstanding history of collecting and interpreting Australian design, manufacturing, fashion and retail culture.”



The Mall, a new exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta, has an advertising campaign drawn from Sydney’s western suburbs. SITTHIXAY DITTHAVONG



Powerhouse Parramatta staff put The Mall exhibition together. SITTHIXAY DITTHAVONG

The other opening shows include *The Dark*, an immersive exhibition created for children aged four to 12 years old, and *Es Devlin: The Turning*, where visitors can explore five immersive installations, as well as the First Nations-led *Overflow* and *Task Eternal*, which is focused on aerospace history and development.

As part of the opening, the Powerhouse will feature a range of unique objects pulled from its collection, including drawings from Leonardo da Vinci, a boilerplate from an Apollo command module made by NASA, and an amethyst that is more than 100 million years old.