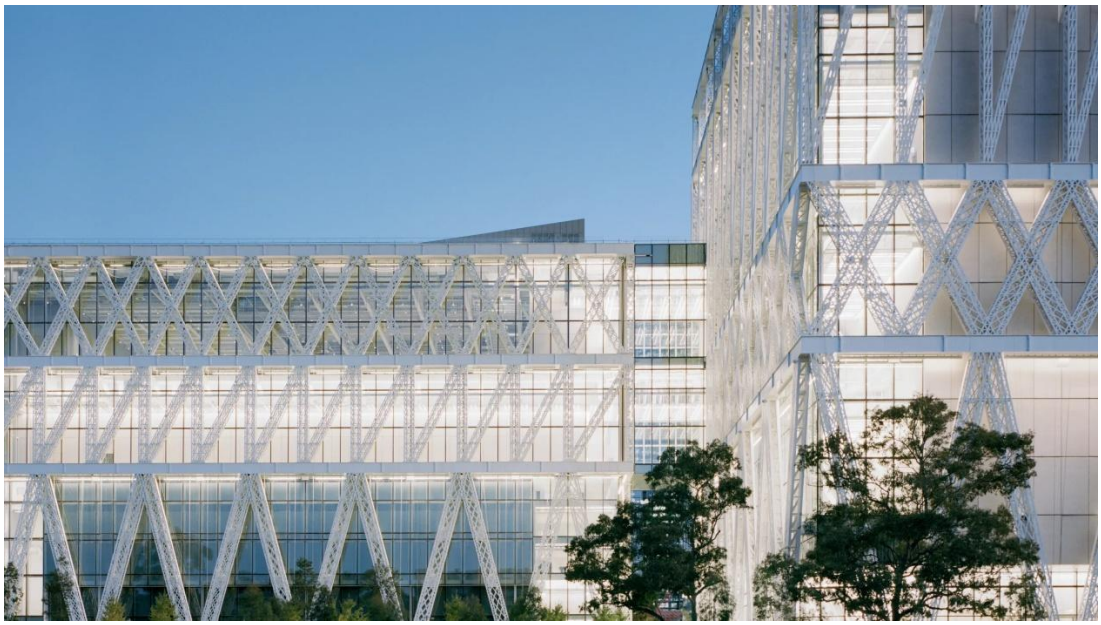
https://www.thetimes.com/travel/destinations/australasia-travel/australia/sydney/this-is-australias-biggest-attraction-since-the-sydney-opera-house-sgbbwvh3q

**Wednesday October 28 2026, 5.00am GMT,**
**The Sunday Times**
THE TIMES

# This is Australia's biggest cultural attraction since Sydney Opera House

Sydney has a new £500 million museum aptly named Powerhouse. John Arlidge heads to the western suburb of Parramatta for an exclusive preview



Powerhouse Parramatta RORY GARDINER



John Arlidge

Wednesday October 28 2026, 5.00am GMT, The Sunday Times

The Australian industrial designer Marc Newson, the British restaurateur Asma Khan and a man in Speedos walk into a museum… It's not the start of a joke. It's what will happen on Saturday, November 7, to mark the opening of the biggest single investment in art and culture in Australia since the creation of Sydney Opera House more than 50 years ago — and one that is proving to be just as controversial.

The £500m Powerhouse Parramatta, largely funded by the New South Wales government, is a vast new museum in Sydney's western suburbs, a part of the city that has not previously received any single large state-backed cultural investment. As with the Opera House, big-name foreign architects were hired — the Franco-Japanese pair Nicolas Moreau and Hiroko Kusunoki — and lots of money spent, prompting concerns about alleged extravagance. An inquiry is under way.

The good news for Powerhouse is that international visitors to Sydney this Christmas won't give a kangaroo's cuss about what may or may not have gone on behind the scenes. They will simply want to know what Powerhouse is and whether it is worth the trek from the established museums and galleries in downtown Sydney.

I was one of the first journalists to visit and I am glad to report that it *is*. That's partly because it doesn't feel like a trek. The River Cat ferry runs from Darling Harbour and Circular Quay and stops at Olympic Park, Kissing Point and Cockatoo Island before mooring a five-minute walk from the museum. Arriving by water to an art gallery is instantly special, as visitors to Venice, Abu Dhabi and Doha will know.



Powerhouse is worth the hour-long journey from downtown to the west of Sydney

For those lacking sea legs, Powerhouse will soon be connected to the Sydney metro via a new station. There is also a 16-mile cycle path from the centre of town. I recommend taking the ferry one way and cycling the other. The complex is also a 30-minute drive from Western Sydney International Airport, which opened on October 25.

The 30,000 sq m building, on an entire city block on a bend of the Parramatta River, is not “the Opera House of the west” as some have claimed. But working alongside Genton, a local architectural practice, Moreau Kusunoki has created a thrillingly light, modern landmark. By day the glass walls and bright lobbies seem to sweep you up off the pavement with the promise of style, discovery, art, science, music, food — all the good stuff. At night it resembles a lantern on the riverbank.

The lattice-like exoskeleton of the building is so strong that the galleries inside are vast and column-free and can be adapted to almost any kind of exhibition and performance. The largest is 2,500 sq m with 18m ceilings. Most of the interior walls are clad in a rough render made of crushed oyster shells. It looks and feels fantastic.



The River Cat ferry is the best way to get to Parramatta ALAMY

# What's on at the new Powerhouse

Five large exhibitions will open the new museum. They showcase some of the 500,000 objects acquired by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences founded in 1879: it has been through various incarnations and locations before culminating in the Powerhouse collection. Together, the opening exhibitions span industry, business, science, technology, transport, design and architecture.

The crowd-pleaser will be *The Mall*. A study of shopping malls in recent decades may not sound like a very Aussie idea until you realise that Westfield, the world's largest mall developer, is Australian.

The show, partly curated by Mary "Queen of Shops" Portas, features the archive of the architect Victor Gruen, who pioneered shopping malls in America. Loans from major international retailers include the Aussie brands RM Williams, Sportsgirl and — yes — Speedo. Archive images celebrate Aussie men's curious affection for the tiny "budgie smuggler" trunks.

Other highlights include the Levi's 501s worn by the Apple cofounder Steve Jobs and early designs for the first barcode. Poems riff on celebrated ad slogans: "Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline."

Map: The Times and The Sunday Times

Also popular will be *Task Eternal*, which charts the science, history and culture of flight, something Australians know a lot about since their country is so vast and so far away from other nations. Exhibits include the original 15th and 16th-century "flight machine" drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, on loan from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan; the first Qantas plane (an Avro 504k from 1921), Marc Newson's cabin designs for the airline and 1970s Qantas cabin crew uniforms by Emilio Pucci; a Nasa Apollo rocket engine; an early black-box flight recorder, an Australian innovation; and the 19th-century Baramadagal Boomerang from the British Museum.



Task Eternal charts the science, history and culture of flight ANNIKA KAFCALOUDIS

*The Dark* is a dedicated children's exhibition that tries to flip the script on darkness as a place of fear and nightmares, turning it into a "playground of curiosity". The Australian theatre director Kip Williams and the designers Elizabeth Gadsby and Marg Horwell have created a vast meteorite that takes up the whole gallery and casts a fractured glow, creating just enough light to explore the objects inside — including friendly monsters.

Children will also love the rooftop with near 360-degree views from Harbour Bridge in the east to the Blue Mountains in the west. It has a garden, greenhouses, telescopes and inside, 60-bunk accommodation for school groups. There are also studio flats for up to 30 international and national artists, researchers and students and a Vitocco Family Kitchen, where leading chefs will celebrate the culinary culture of Parramatta.

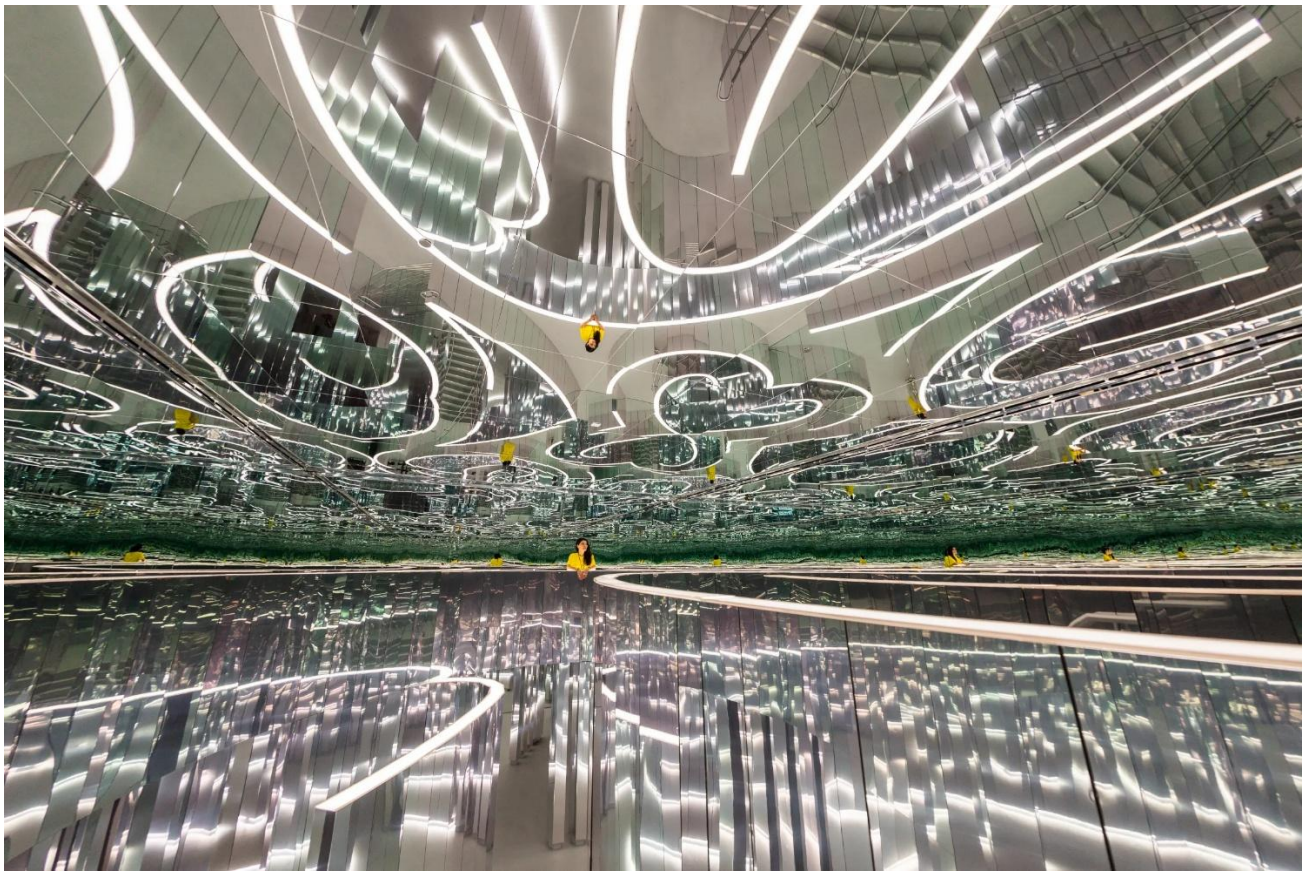


Accumulation Room film still from the exhibition The Dark POWERHOUSE DIGITAL

British visitors will enjoy the first big exhibition in Australia of works by Es Devlin, who has won Tony and Olivier awards for theatre scenic design and collaborated with Beyoncé and the Pet Shop Boys on recent tours. *The Turning* presents five commissions including *Memory Palace*, an immersive 3D cityscape; *Screenshare*, a hybrid film and installation presenting sketches from 365 books; and hand-drawn studies of flora and fauna in *Redraw the Edges of Yourself*. At the end of the show each visitor can take away a Devlin print.

*Overflow*, an exhibition showcasing how local First Nations communities have managed "water country", offers a much needed chance to take off your shoes. You can soothe your feet by paddling in the pools and channels of an 804 sq m sandstone platform, where the water levels rise and fall in sync with the Parramatta River.

To me, Powerhouse feels like a fun mash-up of the Science Museum, Natural History Museum and Design Museum in London — with a bit of art and literature thrown in for good measure. The only discordant notes were the many references to colonialism and the struggle between labour and capital. They felt clunky and hectoring in a new museum that is relentlessly modern and optimistic.



Es Devlin’s Forest of Us at Powerhouse Parramatta AMOARTS

Few new artistic institutions get off to a smooth start. The teams behind museums and galleries as varied as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, even Tate Modern in London bear some scars. But those once-risky ventures are now hailed as “must-visits” on the global artistic grand tour. I hope the same happens to Powerhouse Parramatta. It deserves it.

*All recommendations within this article are informed by independent expert editorial opinion. This article contains affiliate links and links to our in-house travel agency, Times Holidays, all of which will earn us revenue.*

**John Arlidge was a guest of Powerhouse Parramatta, which opens on November 7; most exhibitions are free, Task Eternal is £15pp (powerhouse.com.au). Fly to Sydney**