

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Visual Arts Syllabus
Stages 5 - 6



PP&VA



PENRITH
CITY COUNCIL



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Frank Hinder

Untitled

1945

collage and gouache on paper

24 x 29

Penrith Regional Gallery & The

Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Frank Hinder



Margel Hinder

Currawongs

c1946

shale and aluminium

25.2 x 27 x 11

Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani

Lewers, 1980

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Margel Hinder

*light through
colour
light through the
garden
light in space*

Margo Lewers



Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Emu Island: Modernism in Place celebrates 75 years of Modernist art and living. Once the home and studio of artist Margo and Gerald Lewers, the gallery site, was, as it is today - a place of lively debate, artistic creation and exhibitions at the foot of the Blue Mountains. The gallery is located on River Road beside the banks of the Nepean River.

Once called Emu Island, Emu Plains was considered to be the land's end, but as the home of artist Margo and Gerald Lewers it became the place for new beginnings. Creating a home founded on the principles of modernism, the Lewers lived, worked and entertained like-minded contemporaries set on fostering modernism as a holistic way of living.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place showcases the work of the Lewers and their immediate contemporaries over the four-decade period of their residence (1942-1978). In this place, artists and friends gathered, and were inspired by the energy and experimentation of the Lewers home, and beyond, by a rapidly changing world.



SYLLABUS LINKS

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

This resource provides a focused guide through the use of the Visual Arts Syllabus to appreciate Sydney modernism through a study of *Emu Island: Modernism in Place*, 1942-78

This resource interprets *Emu Island: Modernism in Place*, through the conceptual framework:

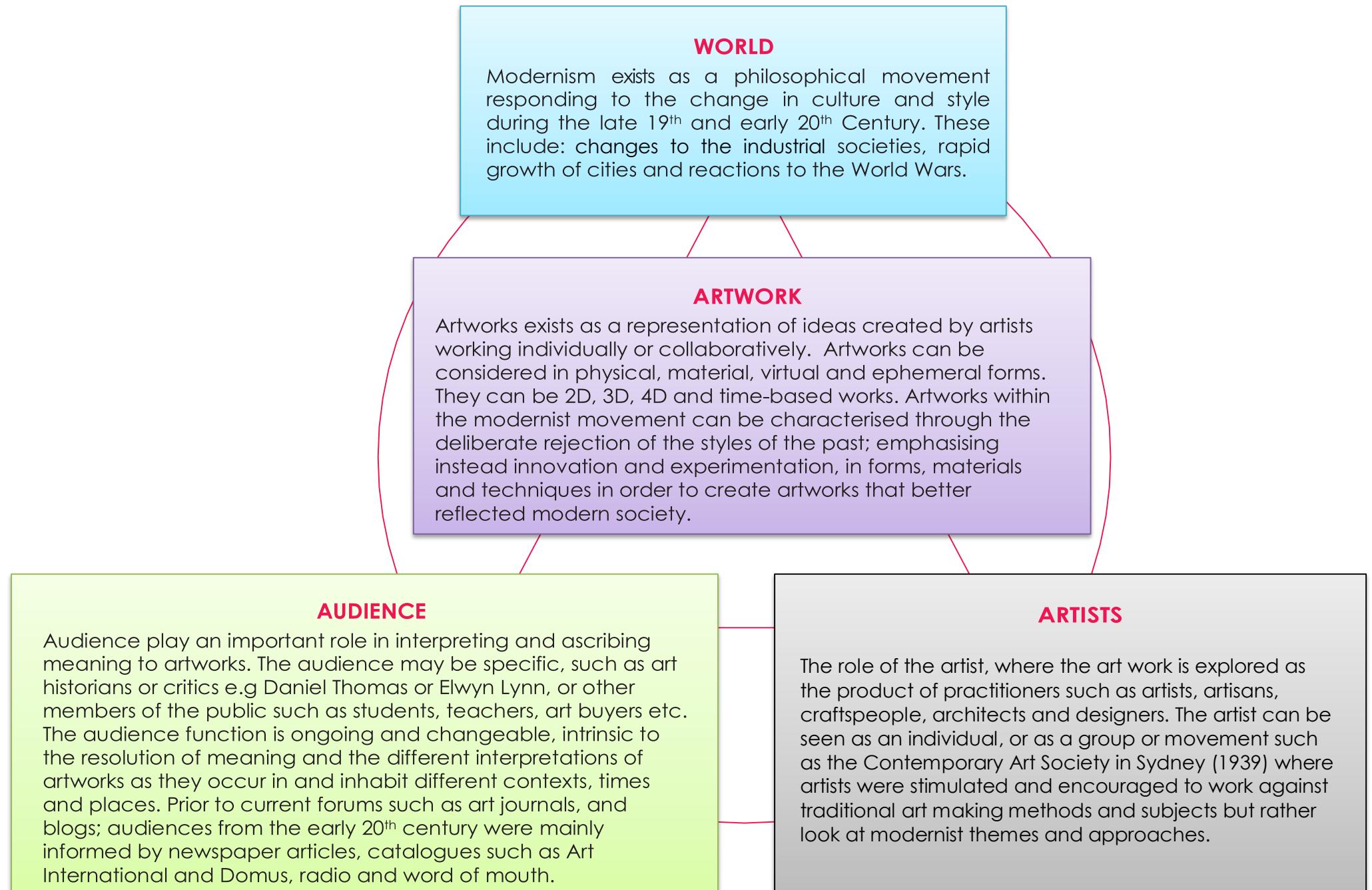
1. Artists and their contemporaries (which fit both in the category of artist and audience).
2. World: 1942 – 1978, the home and studio of Margo and Gerald Lewers now the site of Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
3. Audiences, including critics.
4. Artworks, either displayed in this resource, the online exhibition catalogue or from your own research.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Teachers can use this resource as a complete case study on Sydney modernism or choose to select focus artists as a catalyst for classroom lessons, discussions and independent study. This resource provides documentation including images, quotes and critical writing excerpts about modernism in Sydney. This kit also introduces Young Moderns, ten early career artists whose practice focuses on abstraction, exhibited concurrently with *Emu Island: Modernism in Place*

Frank Hinder
Margel and Gerry Reading
1942
pencil and watercolour on paper
17 x 25.7
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Frank Hinder

USING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND MODERNISM



MODERNISM IN SYDNEY

Modernist artists explored aesthetic principles, and the inherent properties of materials, to create a visual language that could communicate universal ideas. As a result, they typically created abstract or semi-abstract artwork, rather than representational or illusionistic art. In 1953 the exhibition *French Painting Today* was shown in Sydney and included the modernist work of Braque, Léger, Matisse, Miró and Picasso, as well as work by Buffet, da Silva, de Staël and Hartung. This touring exhibition proved to be highly influential to many Sydney based artists whom had previously relied on art books and magazines as the primary source of information about modern art.

I am intensely interested in colour. It excites me and I want to show the effect of one colour upon another and the influence of light upon colour... Margo Lewers

Gerald and Margo Lewers were actively involved in the Sydney modern art movement during the early to mid-twentieth century and advocated for the development of experimental ideas and practices within the visual arts. Both Margo and Gerald were involved in the Sydney branch of the Contemporary Art Society, actively promoting contemporary art as integral to modern life and championing the inclusion of public art in all new urban development.

The combination of Australian culture and European influences saw modernist artists, like those represented in *Emu Island- Modernism in Place* become instrumental in the rise of modernism and the critical shift towards abstraction.

EXAMPLES OF WELL KNOWN INTERNATIONAL MODERNIST ARTIST

- 1 Pablo Picasso
- 2 Paul Cezane
- 3 Henri Matisse
- 4 Wassily Kandinsky
- 5 Tapies Antonio

KEYWORDS

Abstract

Relating to or denoting art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but rather seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, colours, and textures.

Aesthetic

A set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement; concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty.

Contemporary

Following modern ideas in style or design in the 15 to 20 years of the present day. For example a contemporary artist now (2017) would be an artist practicing from the year 2000 onwards.

Representational

Relating to or denoting art which aims to depict the physical appearance of things.

MARGO LEWERS

1908-1978

Born in Mosman, Sydney in 1908 Margo Lewers (née Plate) was a significant female Australian interdisciplinary abstract artist. She had a diverse body of work ranging from her abstract paintings, to sculptures, tapestries, mosaics, ceramics and drawings.

Margo started her working life as a secretary then, a cadet commercial artist with the *Daily Telegraph*. She moved on to making wooden objects at a small firm before establishing her own studio producing pottery and hand printed textiles. She later began designing pots for R. Fowler Ltd.

Before becoming a full time artist Margo opened a design shop on Rowe Street, Sydney titled *Notanda* - derived from the word Notandum meaning a thing to be noted or observed.

Believing that the internal, unconscious world was common to all human beings. Margo saw this as a resource to be drawn upon to create an external reality... Instead of words, Margo translated her interior monologue into visual markings on canvas, paper, masonite and other materials. The beginnings were often random; after several brushstrokes, an image began to emerge, remaining in a constant state of flux, as brushstrokes were added or subtracted until she thought the painting was resolved. If she was not satisfied, the work was painted over and the process repeated.

Darani quoted in *Margo Lewers – Retrospective*
by Pamela Bell



Photograph of Margo c.1952

GERALD LEWERS

1905-1962

A sculpture and construction engineer, Gerald Lewers was born in Hobart, 1905. As a student Gerald would spend his time in the art and woodworking rooms, which were open on weekends. He was also a natural athlete and whilst at High School at Barker College in Sydney Gerald made the First XI cricket and First XV Rugby teams in 1922 and 1923.

In the 1940's Gerald was the manager of Farley and Lewers Quarry which gave him access to quality stone and wood. His practice became known through his representation of form and use of materials. Starting with stone and wood Gerald engaged with new technologies and ideas to construct large and increasingly abstract, public fountains and commissions in the 1950s. Later in his career Gerald began reducing his sculptures to their most essential, simple forms, inspired by animals and the flowing, rhythmic movements of dance.

James Gleeson felt that each piece 'had an intimacy about it that made you want to hold it in your hands, to trace its contours with your fingertips, to feel the forms and textures as an actual tactical experience'.

Gerald and Margo Lewers, Their Lives and Their Work
by Denise Hickey.



Photograph Gerald working on *Reclining Figure*

Margo Gerald And Emu Plains

Gerald and Margo met at Datile Rubbo's Art School in Sydney in the early 1920's. They got married in 1932 before both studying together in London

in 1934 at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. Whilst in London, Gerald studied under John Skeaping and he exhibited in Six Colonial Artists at the Cooling Galleries, New Bond Street.

Margo worked on textile design, painting and drawing with John Farleigh.

After returning home, the Lewers dedicated their work to the growing modern art movement in Sydney during the 1930's – 50s. Gerry was one of the founders of the Society of Sculptures and Associates and both Margo and Gerry played major roles in establishing the Sydney Branch of the Contemporary Art Society.

Gerry's own work is perhaps best remembered in two of its manifestations; first, the intimate wood and stone sculptures of animals which captured the feeling and unique movement of the animal with attention to the innate quality of the materials used; and second, his fountains in copper which emphasis the movement of water in relation to the curvilinear forms created. Margo primarily a painter, was most at home in the abstract idiom. From early geometric construction she experimented with abstract expressionism to become one of its foremost exponents. While she was acclaimed for her painting, winning some 14 art prizes in all. She worked across a range of mediums including wall mosaics, paintings and plexiglass sculpture. Margo also completed two large sculptural commissions for Gerry after his sudden death in 1962.

Their home in Emu Plains was always seen as a total environment. The gardens and the interior decorations were all part of this environment they created around themselves and their two daughters Darani and Tanya.

In the house at Emu Plains ideas hurtled, arguments flared, voices shouted, sparks flew. It was a place in which people gathered spontaneously to eat, drink and discuss... Along with the paintings and the sculpture, the mosaics and the water garden, an ephemeral dish of food wore the expression of a work of art. As I see it, the house on the Nepean... provided one of the focus points of our still tentative civilization.

Patrick White, *Gerry Lewers has left us*, SMH 18Aug 1962 p12

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

The home of Margo and Gerald Lewers was a place that provided a setting for artists of similar interests to exchange ideas which informed their practices.

Questions

1. Evaluate the view that art reflects the social values of a particular time and place.

Further research

2. Explain how particular artworks and/or exhibitions of art have caused changes in art world beliefs and practices.

[Link to catalogue click here](#)

1940's

The 1940's sees the beginning of *Emu Island- Modernism in Place*. It was during the 1940's that Gerald Lewers purchased the Emu Plains property, where he would work during the week and go back to the family home in Cremone on the weekends. The Emu Plains site would also become the backdrop to the parties that Margo would host for the next several decades.

These gatherings on weekends saw the art community come together socially but also provided a space to discuss, debate and challenge ideas on the art world. We also see the likes of Frank Hinder come to the Emu Plains property and complete his early sketches for e.g. *Margel and Gerry Reading*, 1942. It was also during the 40's that Gerald was acknowledged as an important sculpture in Australia.

1960's

Gerald Lewers passes away from a horse riding accident in 1962. Just prior to his death he was commissioned by the Reserve Bank to create a fountain with complex hydraulics. Still in the rough model stage, Margo completed the full scale model and successfully completed the sculpture.

During the 60's, Margo started to look at new mediums, one of which were her mosaics. She had previously created mosaic works at her Emu Plains home but was now creating larger commissioned works. Her painting during this decade became more considerate and less impulsive similar, to her early geometric abstract work e.g. *Red Circles*, 1969. Her works were now bigger and bolder.

1950's

During the 1950's Margo and Gerald make the permanent move to Emu Plains and Margo develops her practice using one of the rooms in the original homestead as her studio. Margo moves from organic pastels and drawings of the 40's and begins her abstract and geometric paintings.

In the late 50's, the style of her work becomes more known for its abstract expressionist qualities e.g. *Composition*, 1957. During this time, she was beginning to exhibit widely and represented Australia in many international exhibitions e.g. *Contemporary Australian Painters*, Canada 1957-58

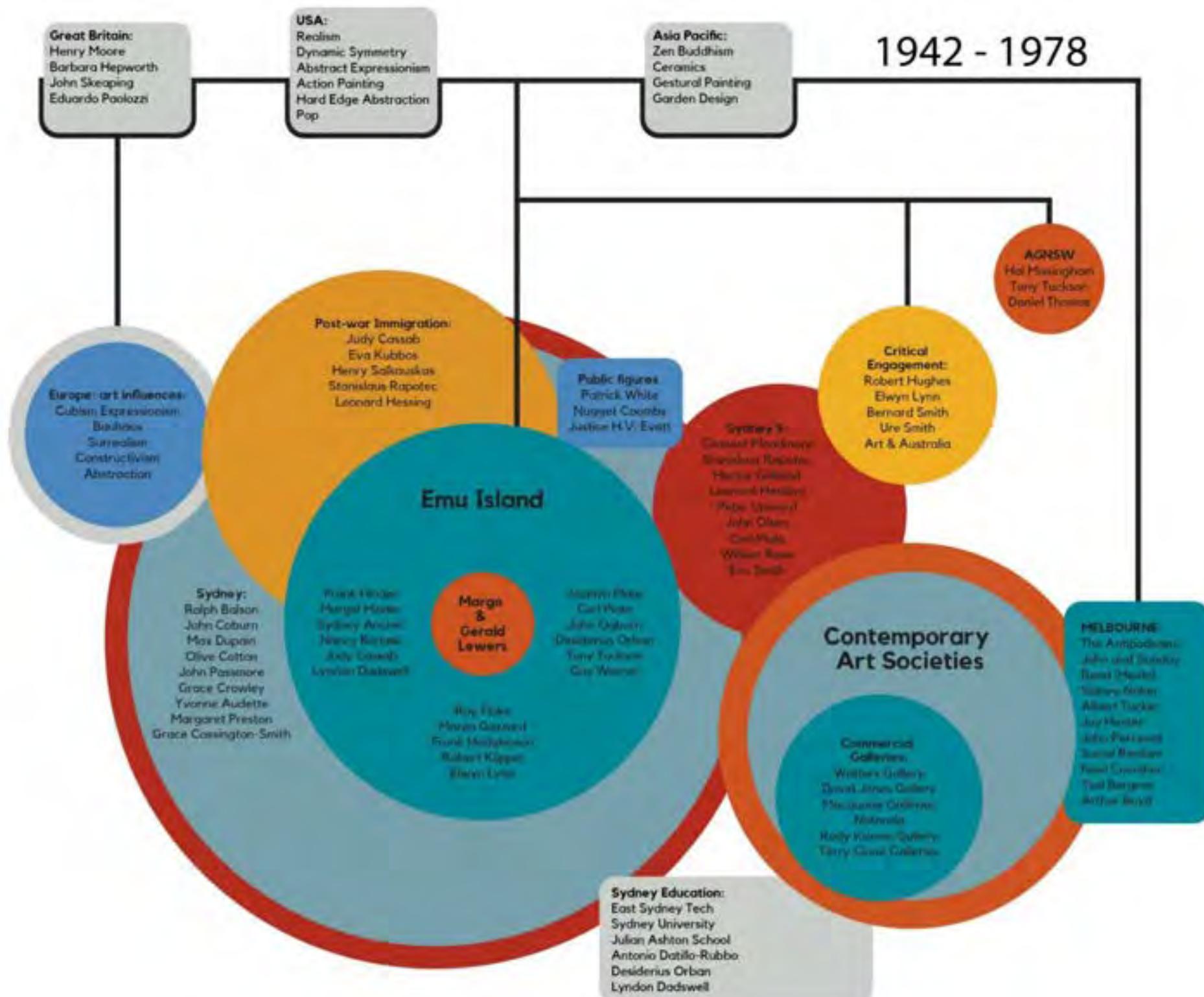
Throughout the 50's, Gerald experimented with copper, stone and wood, which started his practice of fountain sculpture. Unlike his sculptures, his copper fountains were mostly abstract.

1970's

During the 70's, Margo continued to experiment in new mediums. In the first half of the decade it was with plexiglass. She later became known for her three dimensional constructed works that explored the way light and colour interacts and overlap.

By the mid 70's Margo moved on to hand painted textiles, creating a number of wall hangings. Just before being diagnosed with lung cancer in the tail end of 77, she exhibited her wall hangings at the Verlie Just Town Gallery in Brisbane, which was praised as "the most important exhibition seen there in a long time" as quoted by curator, writer and researcher Pamela Bell in *Margo Lewers Retrospective*.

1942 - 1978





Notanda Gallery
17 Rowe St Sydney c. 1937

- 1939 WW2 begins
1942 Japanese subs attack Sydney Harbour
1942 Lewers purchase Emu Plains property
1945 Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
1945 WW2 ends
1945 For Love Alone, Christina Stead
1949 Robert Menzies elected PM (1949-66)
1949 Post war immigration drive
1950s 1950s Australia finds its voice, as the economy grows
1951 Australia signs ANZUS Treaty
1953 Maralinga atomic tests in South Australia
1954 Visit of Queen Elizabeth II
1954 Barry Humphries creates Edna Everage
1954 Petroy Affair
1955 Jeddah first film to star Aboriginal actors
1956 Television first broadcast
1956 Melbourne Olympics
1962 Pop Art explodes, New York and London
1960s 1960s Cultural & Social
1964 Beatles tour Australia
1965 Charles Perkins leads 'Freedom Ride', Western NSW
1965 Australia enters Vietnam war
1965 End of White Australia policy
1965 Easybeats' Friday on my mind
1960s 1960s Political, Social & Cultural Controversy
1966 Decimal currency
1966 They've a Weird Mob released
1966 Central Street Gallery Sydney opens
1966 Blonde on Blonde, Bob Dylan
1967 Commonwealth Referendum
1967 Australia Council for the Arts established
1970s 1970s Political, Social & Cultural Controversy
1969 Moon landing
1969 Christo wraps Little Bay
1969 Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch published
1970 Yellow House artists collective est.
1970 Vietnam War moratorium
1972 Gough Whitlam elected (1972-75)
1971-72 Papunya Tula Artists
1970s 1970s Artistic & Cultural Developments
1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy (Canberra)
1972 Aboriginal Flag designed Harold Thomas
1972-73 Brett Whiteley creates Alchemy
1973 Australia withdraws from Vietnam war
1973 Sydney Opera House opens
1973 Blue Poles purchased by NGA for \$1.3 million
1973 Patrick White wins Nobel Prize
1975 Australian Film Commission
1976 Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act
1977 First refugees from Indo-China arrive
1980s 1980s Cultural Shift
1980 Lewers Bequest to Penrith City Council
1981 Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest opens

EMU ISLAND - SHAPING ART AND DESIGN

The home of Margo and Gerald Lewers was not only a place to live and work- it was also a place for inspiration and conversation in the art world.

All of the following artists have experienced this first hand at 86 River Road Emu Plains, formerly known as Emu Island.

Focus Artist: TONY TUCKSON

Tony (John Anthony Tuckson) is known as one of the most respected Australian advocates of abstract expressionism.

Before becoming an assistant director and deputy director at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Tuckson was inspired by the likes of modern artists' Picasso, Matisse, Klee, Pollock and Cezanne. He also became known for his early support of Melanesian and Indigenous Australian artists, a commitment he maintained throughout his life.

Tuckson's artistic vision was based on a lifetime of study, drawing, painting and contemplation. He wasn't 'interested in the art that conceals the effort', but instead: ... showed the making of a painting with all the travail fully exposed; there is something almost shocking in the completeness of the exposure ... In the end he triumphs because he does communicate his urgency through the painting'.

- Daniel Thomas , curator

Tony Tuckson along with wife, potter and founding member of the Potters Society of Australia, Margaret Tuckson were both good friends to Gerald and Margo Lewers. He supported the Contemporary Art Society, that Gerald and Margo helped establish, through the submission of paintings to their annual exhibitions.

The Tucksons often attended the parties at the Emu Plains property, where conversations and ideas about art and the changing art world were shared and discussed. They were also invited to stay for weekends to experience boat races along the Nepean.

The people were nearly all artists of some sort or another, some of whom we'd see occasionally, some of whom we hadn't seen for ages, and so it was a wonderful get together for artist, of all sorts.

QUESTIONS

Spend some time researching Tuckson and his art practice. Then choose an artwork or two and answer the following questions.

1. What emotive response does Tuckson's the artwork provoke in you? Explain your answer.
2. Use the structural frame to analyse one of Tuckson's artwork Refer to the quote by Daniel Thomas in your response.

*Travail = painful or laborious effort.



Carl Plate

Graph Segments No. 1 1961

oil and collage on composition board 122 x 365

Courtesy Private Collection

Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Carl Plate

FOCUS Artist: CARL PLATE

Margo Lewers' younger brother, Carl Plate was born in 1909 and moved from Western Australia to Sydney with his family in 1913. Plate exhibited nationally and internationally as a contemporary artist and is known to be one of the first Australian abstract artist's to have a solo exhibition in London.

Plate travelled to Europe multiple times throughout his career to study and develop his art practice. Plate was influenced by Surrealism early on as this was becoming the trend in the 1920s and 30's. He visited key places like France, Germany, Belgium and the USSR. He also studied in at the Central School of Arts and crafts in London which gave him the opportunity to meet with artists and writers such as Henry Moore and TS Eliot.

On returning to Sydney in 1940 Plate became an early member of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) Sydney and re-invented Notanda Gallery in Rowe Street, Sydney, exhibiting British and Australian modern art as well as selling art books and posters.

Plate curated key exhibitions that brought the latest of modern European art to Sydney, for example, *England Today: Exhibition of Modern British Art*, which featured work from 32 modern British artists and Modern French Art and showcased gouaches, etchings and drawings by artists such as Bonnard, Braque, de Chirico, Klee, Léger, Matisse, Miro, Modigliani, Picasso and Roualt. Plate curated a series of exhibitions presenting contemporary Australian artists including Dobell, Fizelle, Friend, Gleeson, Hinder and Desiderious Orban. Likewise, Plate delivered several public modern art lectures at the Contemporary Art Society, including a Discussion on 'isms' with Bernard Smith, A.J. Halls and Desiderious Orban and, in 1973, delivered a lecture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales titled *Mainly About the Acceptance of Modern Art Over the Years*.

During the 1950s, 60s and 70s, Plate continued to travel, visiting England, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, the Netherlands and Sweden – also residing for periods of time in Paris. In 1967 Margo Lewers showcased Carl Plate's works in an inaugural exhibition, in Ancher House (on the Lewer's property in Emu Plains), which she had established as a gallery.

Key words

Surrealist

An artist or writer who is an exponent of the 20th century avant-garde movement in art and literature which sought to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind, for example by the irrational juxtaposition of images, Informed by the philosophies of Sigmund Freud.

Curate

Select, organise, and look after the items in (a collection or exhibition).

'Isms'

A distinctive practice, system, or philosophy, typically a political ideology or an artistic movement. E.g. surrealism, realism, modernism etc.

Comparative study

1. Select an international modernist from the list below.
2. Research your chosen artist and identify a major work.
3. Critically compare and contrast Carl Plates' Graph Segments No 1, with your chosen artwork. Your answers should analyse both works and evaluate how and why they are similar and what makes them different.

Extension

4. Use the conceptual framework to explain the modernist properties of the work, make sure to consider the importance of place in the creation of the artwork.

List of artists

- Henri Matisse
- Willem De Kooning
- Joan Miro
- Georges Braque
- Paul Klee

The above images are easily accessed online

I'm trying to suggest another level which is a combination of what is seen and what is not seen, and finally to create something which exists by itself outside of any visual experience. ... Inside all my (work) I hope there is some little heart that people will recognize. But it is imprecise. I can't say any more about it.

- Artist Carl Plate

Close friends to both Margo and Gerald Lewers, Frank and Margel Hinder were both active modernist artists.

Focus Artist: FRANK HINDER

Are we all here for a certain purpose... the Scientist to discover and prove, the Philosopher to speculate, the Artist to make visible and understandable their discoveries? Frank Hinder, 1938 diary entry.

At the age of 18 Francis (Frank) Hinder began studying art at Royal Art Society School, Sydney in 1924, continuing his studies at East Sydney Technical College from 1925-27. During 1927 Hinder travelled to America, where he began studying at the Art Institute of Chicago, and then at the School of Fine Arts, New York, in 1929. From 1930 to 1931 Hinder studied at the Master Institute of the Roerich Museum, New York, before returning to Australia in 1934 with his wife, Margel Hinder, and their daughter, Enid.

During his time in America, Hinder embraced the idea of 'Dynamic Symmetry', which held that the universe, and everything within that universe, was ordered and mathematical. This method of engaging geometry and reason was, Hinder believed, a way of representing universal truths. The ideas of rhythm within nature, mathematic repetition and abstraction became the foundation of Hinder's art practice. On returning to Australia, Hinder became involved with the Sydney modernist movement along with Margo Lewers, Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson. In 1939 Hinder worked on *Exhibition 1* at David Jones Gallery in Sydney, a group show headlining the works of Sydney's modernist artists.

For the duration of World War Two, Hinder was assigned to the Royal Australian Engineer's Camouflage Wing where he used his knowledge of abstract shapes, colour, and repetition to create the Hinder Spider camouflage design. After the war, Hinder began teaching at East Sydney Technical College and he created theatre designs for the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Frank and Margel Hinder spent many weekends at the home of fellow artists Margo and Gerald Lewers. While at Emu Planes, Hinder sketched images of the Lewers, especially Gerald, depicting not only the people but the shapes and rhythms created by that person's interaction with their surroundings.



*Dynamic = movement,
Symmetry = relationship;
Dynamic Symmetry
is...concerned with the actual
living movement you get in
growth.*

Frank Hinder
At Lewers
1946
pencil on paper
25 x 35

Gift of Frank Hinder, 1981
Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest Collection
Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Frank Hinder



Frank Hinder
Untitled
c1945
pencil on paper 24.5 x 17.2
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1983 Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest Collection
Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Frank Hinder

Questions

1. Using the information provided and your own research, add details to the conceptual framework table on the right.
2. Pick one of Hinders artworks in *Emu Island- Modernism in Place* and analyse it using the structural and subjective Frame.
3. With reference to quotes provided in this resource, discuss the significance of conceptual practice to artmaking.
Refer to a range of examples in your answer.

Artist

The role and influence of his upbringing, training, mentors and environment

Philosophies and ideas about his Art

World

Influence of the world wars, industrial and cultural changes

Impact from his time abroad

Interests in the art world at the time of his artmaking

Work

Approach to his practice

Transitions through different styles of modernist painting

diverse scope of work

Audience

Early reception and critique

Reviews of later exhibitions

Significance as one of Australia's Influential artist

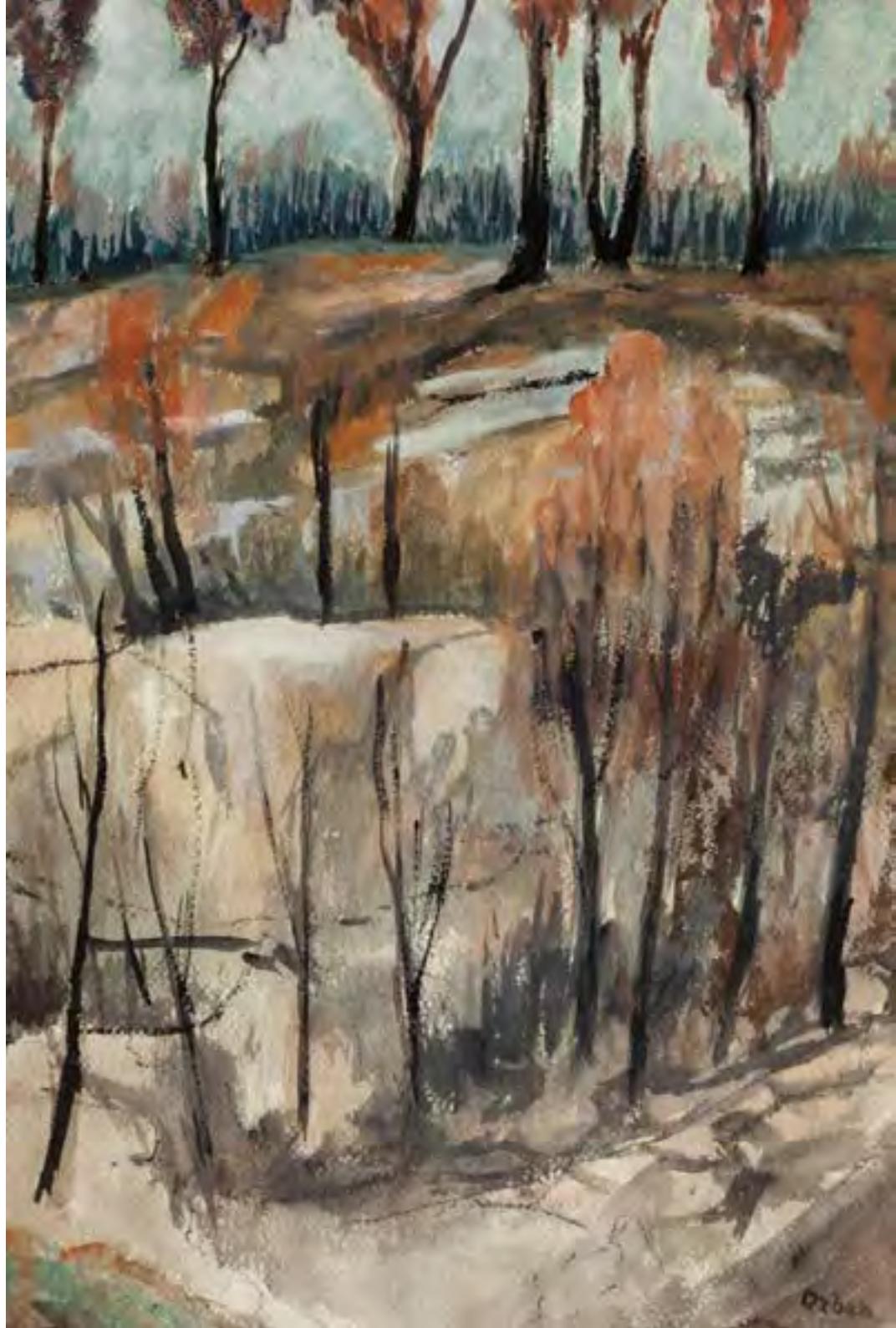
Focus Artist: DESIDERIUS ORBAN (1884 – 1986)

After immigrating to Australia in 1939, established artist and teacher Desiderius Orban played an important role in bringing ideas around abstraction from Hungary—including post-impressionism, cubism and fauvism—to Australia.

Orban taught in Sydney from the opening of his school in Rowe street in 1942 until his death, having a significant influence on the careers of many artists including: Margo Lewers, Judy Cassab, Sheila McDonald, John Ogburn, and John Olsen. He was an important part of the community (surrounding Emu Plains), regularly attending parties at the Lewers home in Emu Plains and teaching a number of summer art schools on site. His teaching and his students pushed the boundaries of (traditional/ representational) Australian art thinking and practice—celebrating the artist as innovator. Orban transitioned into abstraction in his own work the 1950s. He believed that a painting should capture the immediate experience of its creation: the mistakes, the actions, the impromptu decisions.

Question

Explain the ways that Orban has represented the Australian landscape. Your response should include the abstract qualities of the work including colour, tone, and composition of the work.



Desiderius Orban

Untitled c1945

watercolour, gouache and ink on paper 54 x 36.5

Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers, 1980

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Desiderius Orban

KEY WORDS

Post impressionism

The work or style of a varied group of late 19th-century and early 20th-century artists. They reacted against the naturalism of the impressionists to explore color, line, and form, and the emotional response of the artist, a concern which led to the development of expressionism.

Cubism

An early 20th-century style and movement in art, especially painting, in which perspective with a single viewpoint was abandoned and use was made of simple geometric shapes, interlocking planes, and, later, collage. In cubism, geometrical forms and fragmentations are favored.

Fauvism

A style of painting with vivid expressionistic and non-naturalistic use of colour that flourished in Paris from 1905 and, although short-lived, had an important influence on subsequent artists, especially the German expressionists.

Critical and Historical Thinking

Using the text provided and your own research, analyse how and why Orban, and at least one other artist, use approaches other than realism in their practice. You may like to use artists in this resource or research your own.



Desiderius Orban

Silence

1968

ink on silver foil , 90.6 x 75

Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers, 1980

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the Estate of Desiderius Orban

MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Modern architecture developed from the revolutions in technology, engineering and building materials, and from a desire to break away from historical architectural styles whilst inventing something that was functional and new.

Informed by Bauhaus, Modern architecture is primarily based on new technologies of construction, particularly the use of glass, steel and reinforced concrete. The style is based on abstraction, which is created by clean lines, basic shapes, and forms.

Characteristically simple, geometric forms, rectangular shapes, and linear elements make the characteristics of modern architecture; rejecting the Beaux-Arts styles that were popular prior to modernity.

KEYWORDS

Architecture

The art or practice of designing and constructing buildings; the style in which a building is designed and constructed, especially with regard to a specific period, place, or culture.

Modernity

The quality or condition of being modern: A modern way of thinking, working, etc.

Bauhaus

Famous for their approach to design, Staallitches Bauhaus was an art school in Germany that combined the crafts and fine arts.

Beaux-Arts

A style of architecture, popularly associated with the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, that prevailed in France in the late 19th century and was adopted in the U.S. and elsewhere c1900. Characterised by the free and eclectic use and adaptation of French architectural features of the 16th - 18th centuries combined to give a massive, elaborate, and often ostentatious effect, and also by the use of symmetrical plans preferably allowing vast amounts of interior space.

Ancher House

When Margo Lewers wanted a new home built for her mother Gilly Plate, she asked her friend, and leading modernist architect, Sydney Ancher. Completed in 1964, Ancher House is a rare example of modern architecture in western Sydney and demonstrates a post war change in attitude towards design and residential living. Representing the attributes of a particular way of life and the key characteristics of the post war international style, the appeal of Ancher House lay in its demonstration of modernist principles as applied to everyday living.

The perceived possibilities of this new approach to architecture included a freer life-style for its occupants. With a focus on modern materials and 'open-plan' living, the large sliding glass doors facilitate a blending between the indoor and outdoor space. As a result, the stone verandah and sheltered courtyard, which then housed several of Gerald's sculptures, became an ideal setting for Margo's unique configuration of rocks and plants designed to enhance the garden's distinct style. Another sheltered courtyard was created at the rear of the building (now subsumed by the restaurant kitchen) and Margo's daughter Darani Lewers was commissioned to create a contemporary downpipe on the south corner of the front verandah.

Resulting from a collaboration between an artist and an architect, Ancher House represents a change in attitude to design and residential living.



SYDNEY ANCHER (1904 – 1979)

After only a year since graduating from the Sydney Technical College in 1929, Sydney Ancher was awarded the prestigious Australian Medallion and Travelling Scholarship from the Board of Architects of New South Wales.

Throughout the 1930s Ancher travelled to Europe and London, where he worked for leading British architects and saw first hand the modernist architecture of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. He was also greatly influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright's lectures on modern architecture. Ancher's design aesthetic and philosophy was also influenced by his posting to the Middle East while serving in the Australian Imperial Force for the duration of WWII.

His return to private practice in 1945 saw him become well regarded for his modern housing designs and in the same year he was awarded the Sulman Medal for 3 Maytome Avenue, Killara. His commitment to modern design meant his work was not without controversy. In particular, the flat-roof design confronted traditional perceptions of domestic style which, in 1947, resulted in a court dispute and an historic judgement in favour of the architect.

In 1952 Ancher formed the partnership Ancher, Mortlock & Murray, and was joined by Ken Woolley in 1964. Ancher retired from the firm in 1966 and was awarded the Royal Australian Institute of Architects gold medal in 1975.

ART CRITICAL AND ART HISTORICAL STUDY

Ancher house is a significant, rare example of collaboration between artist and architect. Situated in Emu Plains, it is also the only example of Ancher's work in western Sydney. Interior decoration and detailing, including extensive mosaic work, was completed by Margo. The unique landscaped gardens and grounds were designed by both Margo and Gerald to complement the buildings, their artwork, the environment and their lifestyle.

In the garden, copper fountains, downpipes and pipe bird baths acted as a focus at strategic points, while the variety of colour and texture and placement of trees and plants conveyed the impression of planned chaos. The creation of a material world became her spiritual home.

Having watched her at work, I now see a relationship between the garden and Margo's abstract expressionist paintings. The garden was a living abstraction of sights, smells, sounds and surfaces. Superficially undisciplined, on closer inspection it revealed an internal order requiring constant attention to survive the fierce summers and frosty winters.

The garden was her daytime artwork; her painting and other media occupied the night shift.

Darani quoted in Margo Lewers – Retrospective by Pamela Bell

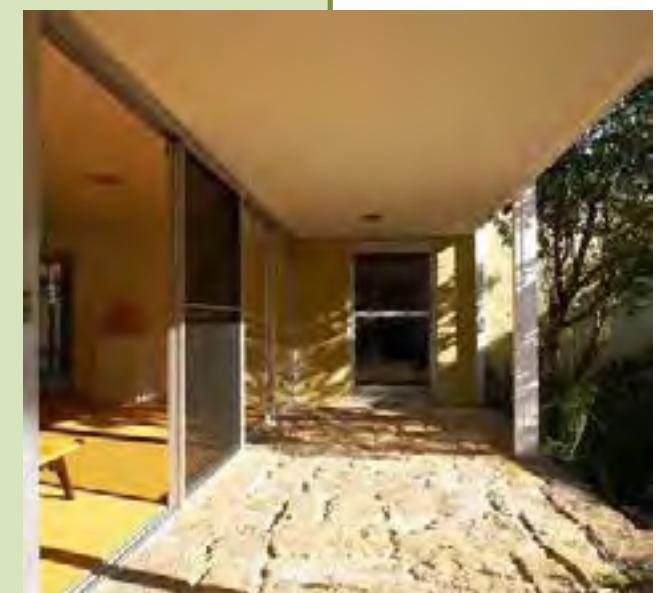
Side view of Ancher House

1. What defines Modernist Architecture?

2. Research examples of Bauhaus and Beaux-Arts style Architecture. Compare and contrast these types of architecture with key modern building, Ancher House.

3. Explain how the work of Sydney Ancher has developed as a result of interactions in the art world. In your response, you may consider global communication, innovative technologies and travel.

4. What is the significate of having this building in Emu Plains?



Young Moderns

Lewers House

Young Moderns, which is hung in the Lewers family home now known as the exhibiting space 'Lewers Gallery' showcases 10 early career artists that have continued the modernist philosophy of experimentation.

All of the featured artists demonstrate the continuing appeal of graphic abstraction, the play of colour and light, as well as the exploration of materials, and mediums including modern technology.

Question

After watching the curator talk, discuss how modernity has influenced the practice of artists using the cultural/structural frames.

Please pick at least two of the following artists.
Further information can be found in the suite's catalogue

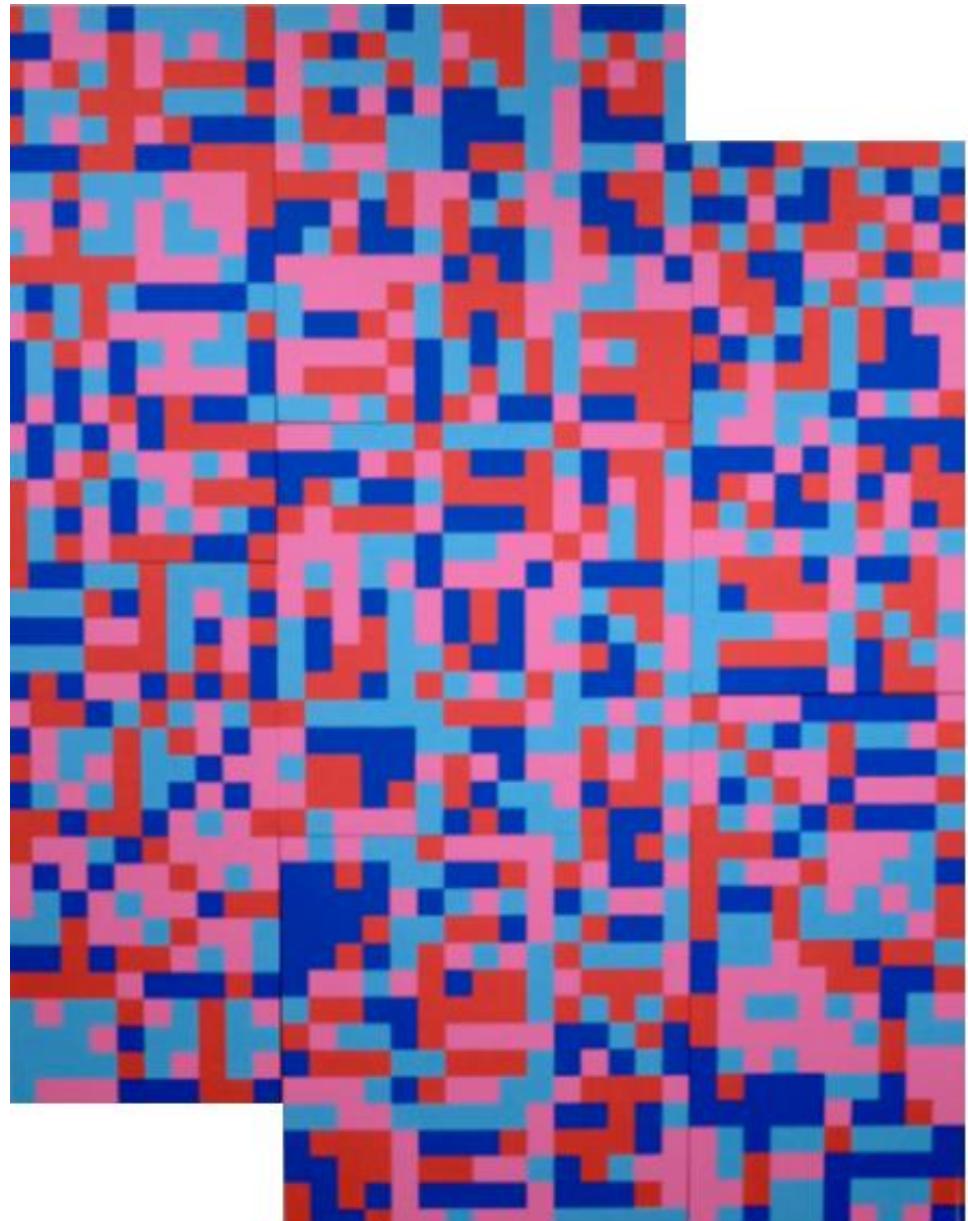
Emma Beer	Nadia Odium
Kieran Butler	Elena Papanikolakis
Terrence Combos	Helen Shelley
Mason Kimber	Kael Stasce
Sanne Koelemij	Kate Tucker

Elena Papanikolakis
Slippery Slope
2015
acrylic, collage, marker and acetate on board
51 x 41cm
Courtesy of the artist



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- 1, 2 Pamela Bell, *Margo Lewers: retrospective* 2002 p51
- 3 Denise Hickey, *Gerald and Margo Lewers, their lives and their work* 1982 p 40
- 4 Patrick White, *Gerry Lewers has left us*, SMH 18Aug 1962 p12
- 5 Daniel Thomas, 'An introduction to Tony Tuckson 1921–1973', in Tony Tuckson, Craftsman House, Roseville, 1989, p.40.
6. Margaret Tuckson, Doyennes Oral History Project, Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest, 2005
- 7 Carl Plate, interview with Laurie Thomas, *The Australian*, 2/11/68
- 8 Frank Hinder, 1938 diary entry
- 10 Pamela Bell, *Margo Lewers: retrospective* 2002 p51-52



Terrence Combos (Young Moderns)
the plot thickens
2017
acrylic on canvas
90 x 180 cm
Courtesy of the artist

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The sculpture of Margel Hinder

An inside on American born sculpture Margel Hinder (1906 1995). Margel was one of Australias most creative modernist sculptors. In America, she experienced at first hand works by Brancusi, Gabo, Pevsner, Archipenko and Epstein, who were to have major impact on 20th century modernist sculpture.

- Foster, Hal Art since 1900 : modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism (2nd ed). Thames & Hudson, London, 2011.

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The Art of Frank Hinder

The book explores the work of Frank Hinder from 1906 to 1992. It is a thorough and well written book that surveys Hinder's career, looking at his early life, his return to Australia, his time in the war, and his career after the war. Whilst covering a range of painting styles that Hinder explored.

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Denise Hickey

This book provides a record of the lives and practices of artists Gerald and Margo Lewers. The information presented is compiled from Hickeys own research as well as through interviews and excerpts from the Lewers' family and friends which captures the narrative of the site.

Catalogues

- Bell, Pamela. and National Trust of Australia (New South Wales). *Margo Lewers : retrospective / Pamela Bell* National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.) Sydney 2002

Margo Lewers Retrospective

A well written and thorough catalogue which accompanied the exhibition *Margo Lewes Retrospective* at S.H Ervin Gallery in 2002. The retrospective not only celebrates Margo's achievements but also celebrates the ingenuity behind this leading Australian female artist.

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Carl Plate: collage 1938-1976

A catalogue of an exhibition held at Hazlehurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre. Written by Carl Plate's daughter Cassi Plate, this catalogue provides a comprehensive summary as well as providing biographical notes on the famous artist.

Further Reading

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