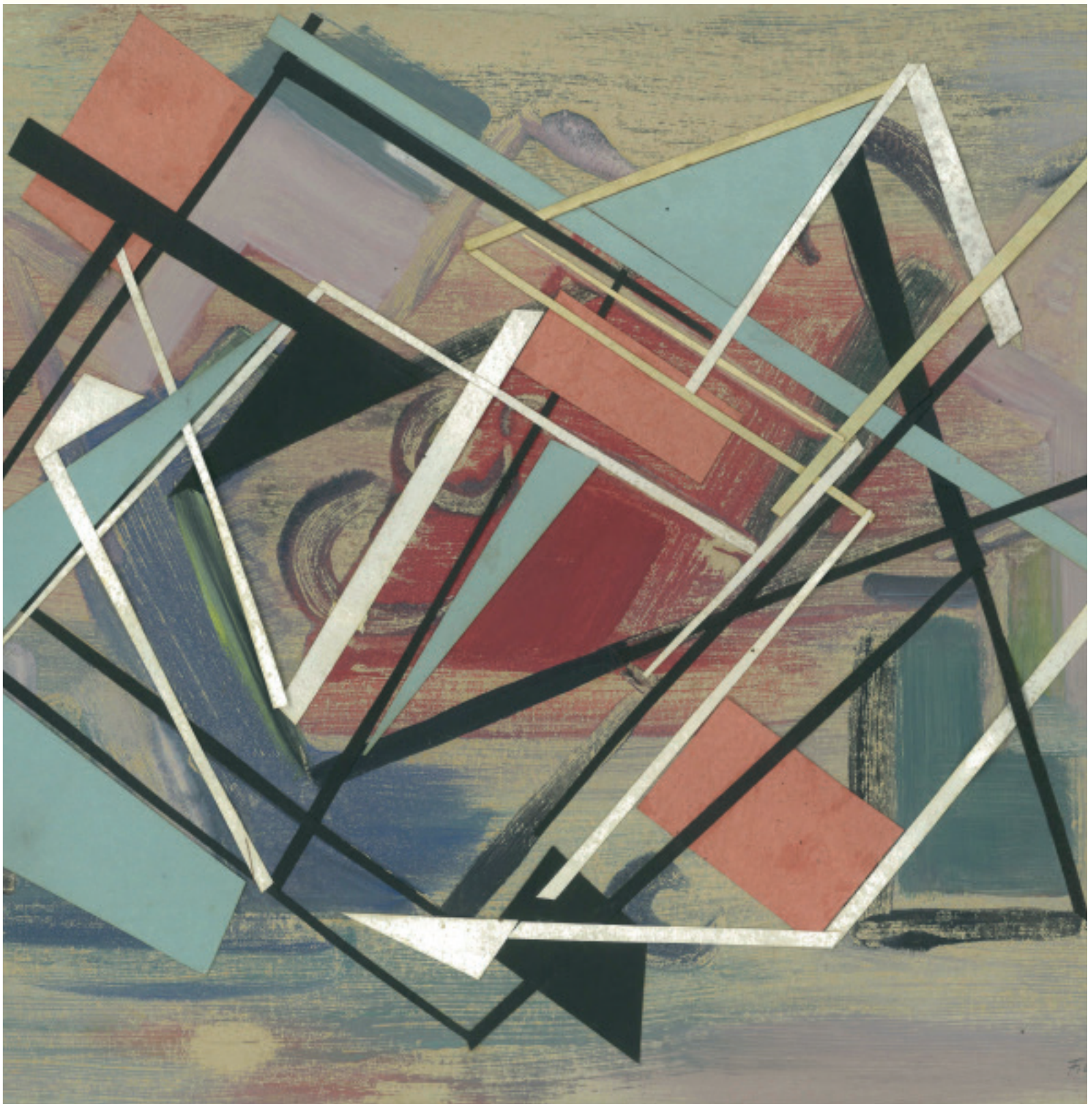


Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest

Emu Island:
Modernism in Place
26 August — 19 November 2017



Introduction

75 Years. A celebration of life, art and exhibition

This year Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest celebrates 75 years of art practice and exhibition on this site. In 1942, Gerald Lewers purchased this property to use as an occasional residence while working nearby as manager of quarrying company Farley and Lewers. A decade later, the property became the family home of Gerald and Margo Lewers and their two daughters, Darani and Tanya. It was here the family pursued their individual practices as artists and welcomed many Sydney artists, architects, writers and intellectuals. At this site in Western Sydney, modernist thinking and art practice was nurtured and flourished.

Upon the passing of Margo Lewers in 1978, the daughters of Margo and Gerald Lewers sought to honour their mother's wish that the house and garden at Emu Plains be gifted to the people of Penrith along with artworks which today form the basis of the Gallery's collection. Received by Penrith City Council in 1980, the Neville Wran led state government supported the gift with additional funds to create a purpose built gallery on site. Opened in 1981, the gallery supports a seasonal exhibition, education and public program.

Please see our website for details
penrithregionalgallery.org

Cover:
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

Introduction

Welcome to Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest Spring Exhibition Program.

This season we celebrate the gallery site as an island of Modernism over a four decade period from 1942 - 1978. Once the home of artists Margo and Gerald Lewers, the Gallery site was – and is today – a place of lively debate, artistic creation and exhibition.

Our Main Gallery exhibition *Emu Island: Modernism in Place*, takes its name from historical record, when early settlers, coming upon the Nepean River, believed the land on the western side to be an island, with emus abounding. Until found to be otherwise – this place was referred to as ‘Emu Island’.

In 1942 Gerald Lewers purchased the Emu Plains property, so he might be close to his place of work as manager of Farley & Lewers quarry at Castlereagh. The old house on site was used by Gerald Lewers during the working week and by his family on weekends and holidays. It would become the family’s full time residence when in 1950 Gerald Lewers quit his job, and Margo Lewers moved here to concentrate on their respective artistic practices. The site at Emu Plains soon became a place where extended family, such as Carl and Jocelyn Plate and artist friends Frank and Margel Hinder would gather to socialise, garden and create. In the decades that followed many others would make the trek from the city to Emu Plains to enjoy the company of like minds and to argue the forward movement of contemporary art.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place positions this site as a centre of Sydney’s Modernist movement involving artists, curators, architects, authors and intellectuals. As is evident on these walls, Modernism was an international movement, its influence, effects and proponents travelling far and wide to land here at Emu Plains. And, at the centre of Emu Plains was Margo Lewers, a force of nature, embracing of the new, and ever eager to invite others into her world and point of view.

The Modernist ethos of experimentation and looking to the future continues to inspire and shape the creative practice of many young artists. In *Young Moderns*, in Lewers House Gallery, the work

of ten early career artists displays the on-going appeal of graphic abstraction, the play of colour and light and determined explorations with new media.

In *Shifting Dirt*, in Ancher House Gallery, Artist in Residence Ian Milliss offers a poetic reading of intersecting histories: He considers how the quarry at Castlereagh and the labour of working men made possible the artistic life and practice of Gerald and Margo Lewers and the eventual creation of Gallery and Grounds.

Our Spring Exhibition program is supported by comprehensive education, holiday and public programming. We look forward to hosting your visit, and sharing with you the story of our site and Sydney Modernism.

Dr Lee-Anne Hall

Director

**Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest
August 2017**



Eva Kubbos
Untitled
1962
gouache, watercolour and
chalk on paper
74 x 97.5
Copyright courtesy of the artist

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Elwyn Lynn

Cliffs at Fall

c1961

mixed media on canvas

76.5 x 101.5

Penrith Regional Gallery

Acquisitions Fund, 1990

Penrith Regional Gallery &

The Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the

Estate of Elwyn Lynn

Emu Island:
Modernism in Place

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Emu Island: Modernism in Place positions this site at the centre of Sydney's Modernist movement over the period 1942 – 1978. Once the home of artists Margo and Gerald Lewers, it was a place where Modernist sensibilities in art and life created an environment ripe for experimentation and change. This site drew artists, curators, architects, authors and intellectuals to legendary gatherings, to enjoy the company of like minds, and to argue the forward movement of contemporary art and society. And, at the centre of Emu Plains was Margo Lewers, a force of nature, a pioneer of Australian abstraction who embraced the new, and was ever eager to invite others into her world.

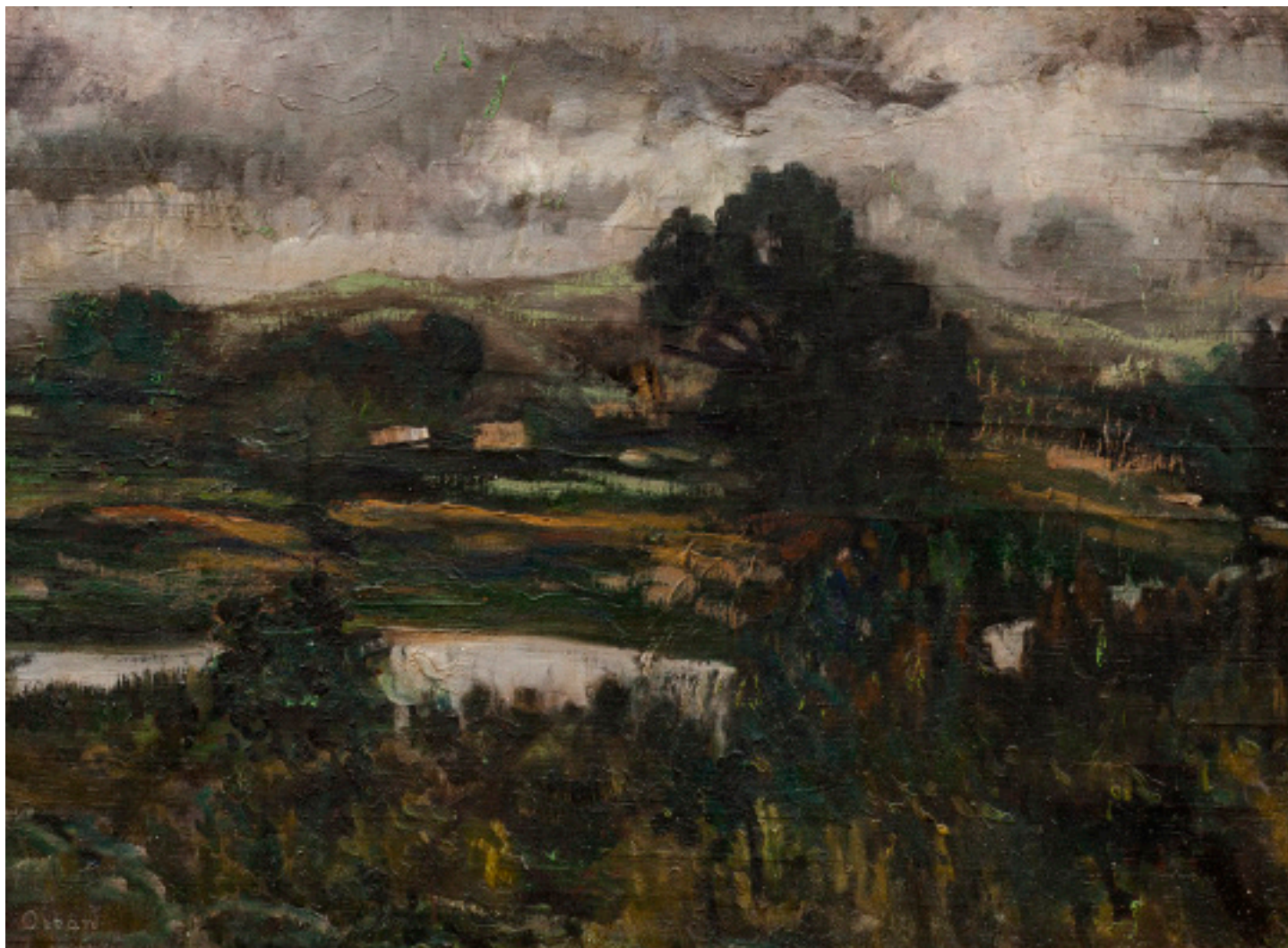
As is evident on these walls, Modernism was an international movement, its influence, effects and proponents travelling far and wide to land here at Emu Plains. Modernism offered the promise of progress through industry, technology and social transformation. The beginnings of modernist art in Australia sought to shape a national identity. In Melbourne, famously, the Antipodeans were social realists, largely concerned with figurative abstraction, urban and bush landscapes. Sydney Modernists in contrast turned towards the international language of abstraction, resulting in a host of early styles and influences including geometric and abstraction, cubism and surrealism. Modernist art, design and architecture, in its many guises, was to be a means through which Australia could develop an identity as a mature nation capable of conversing on the world stage.

Emu Island now Emu Plains, takes its name from historical record, when early settlers, coming upon the Nepean River, believed the land on the western side to be an island of Emus abounding. We take Emu Island today as a metaphor for the uniqueness of this place as an island of modernity in the mid-20th century on the outer fringes of Sydney. The Gallery site was, and remains today, a place of lively debate, artistic creation and exhibition.

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest Collection

Many of the works on these walls are permanently housed in the collection of Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest. The collection originated in 1980 from the bequest of Darani Lewers and Tanya Crothers, who on behalf of their parents Margo and Gerald Lewers, gave the Gallery site and 241 artworks to the people of Penrith.

Today the Gallery Collection has over 1600 works and continues to grow through prudent acquisitions, donations, and the Australian Government Cultural Gifts Program.



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

The old farmhouse at Emu Plains (now Lewers House Gallery) was purchased in 1942 as a weekday residence for Gerald Lewers, who worked in the family construction and quarry business at Castlereagh, north of Penrith. The 10 acre property soon became a site for weekends and holidays with family and friends including artists Carl Plate (Margo Lewers' brother), his wife Jocelyn, and longstanding friends Margel and Frank Hinder. These early days at Emu Plains are captured in works by Desiderius Orban, Carl Plate and Frank Hinder.

This happy period at Emu Plains was preceded by Margo and Gerald's extensive travel and studies in the UK and Europe in the 1930s. The experience gave both artists an introduction to international art movements, architecture and ideas which would be cultivated at home in Australia. This international outlook was further enhanced by Frank and Margel Hinder who, having studied art in the United States in the 1930s, introduced them to the vitality of North American culture. As exhibited here, Gerald Lewers' wooden sculpture, *The Rowers*, exemplifies the forward momentum and graphic form of American Modernism.

The Sydney arts community was closely inter-connected through arts training, art society memberships and commercial galleries. At this time, the work of Sydney Modernists was shifting from the representational towards abstraction, taking the lead from Cubism's multi-perspectival viewpoints and Constructivism's geometric play. In Melbourne, Modernist artists of this period such as Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and Arthur Boyd, were largely distinguished from their Sydney counterparts by their social realist subject matter, which explored the experience of war, poverty and deprivation.

By the end of the 1940s, Margo and Gerald had expanded their creative and social networks. The property at Emu Plains represented their future. As their belief in a modern visual language united them, their sense of vocation deepened.

Emu Island:
Modernism in Place

1940s

Frank Hinder
Small Animal
1946
lithograph on paper
18.5 x 21
Gift of Tanya Crothers and
Darani Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
Copyright courtesy of the
Estate of Frank Hinder



Emu Island: Modernism in Place

1940s

- List of works:
All measurements are in
cm (h x w x d)
- Gerald Lewers**
Tortoise
no date
limestone
18.8 x 37.0 x 21.2
Collection: Art Gallery of New
South Wales
Purchased 1945
- Gerald Lewers**
Camel's Head
c1934-1945
stone (trachyte)
32.2 x 30.0 x 22.3
Collection: Art Gallery of New
South Wales, Purchased 1946
- Gerald Lewers**
The Rowers
no date
rosewood
21.5 x 65.5 x 6
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Margo Lewers**
Abstract No: 3
c1940
watercolour and ink on paper
28 x 38
Gift of Rosalie McCutcheon, 1992
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Margo Lewers**
Untitled
c1940-1945
synthetic polymer on paper
27 x 37
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Margo Lewers**
Untitled
c1940-1945
synthetic polymer on paper
37 x 27
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- 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

- Carl Plate**
Nepean River
1944
black ink, watercolour on paper
25.9 x 40.5
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by Cassi Plate, 2014
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Frank Hinder**
Jerry at Work
c1945
pencil and crayon on paper
17.5 x 20.7
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1981
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Frank Hinder**
Untitled
c1945
pencil on paper
24.5 x 17.2
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1983
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Frank Hinder**
Untitled
c1945
pencil and wash on paper
20.2 x 25.2
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1981
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- 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
- Desiderius Orban**
Nepean River
c1945
oil on wood panel
38.5 x 52
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Frank Hinder**
*Figure Study - Darani, Tanya,
Enid, Margel and Mrs Plate*
1945
conte crayon on paper
33 x 39
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1983
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

- Frank Hinder**
Jerry Seated
1945
pencil and wash on paper
17.1 x 15
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Frank Hinder**
Margo and Jerry
1945
conte crayon on paper
33.5 x 40
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1983
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Frank Hinder**
*Margo, Jerry and Margel, Emu
Plains*
1945
ink on paper
23 x 18.5
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1988
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Frank Hinder**
Untitled
1945
collage and gouache on paper
24 x 29
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Margo Lewers**
Untitled - Green Abstract
1945
watercolour and ink on paper
35.5 x 53
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- 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
- Frank Hinder**
At Lewers
1946
pencil on paper
25 x 35
Gift of Frank Hinder, 1981
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

- Frank Hinder**
Small Animal
1946
lithograph on paper
18.5 x 21
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
- Artist unknown**
Market Garden, Emu Plains
c1948
watercolour
37 x 56.5
Gift of Ray Paschetto, 2016
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

In 1950 Gerald and Margo Lewers permanently relocated their family from Sydney's north shore to Emu Plains. In doing so, they committed themselves to a life as practicing artists.

Each set up studios – Margo in a room of the old farmhouse, and Gerald in a shed at the rear of the property. This was a time of hard work and artistic experimentation.

Evident at this time was the rapid expansion of Gerald's sculptural practice. The scale of his work increased with both private and public commissions, ready access to quarry stone and power tools. Gerald moved from explorations of the natural world and figuration, towards capturing movement.

For Margo Lewers, the 1950s represented a coming together of art, craft and design, which provided a foundation for life at Emu Plains. Time and energy was invested in creating a home and garden influenced by Bauhaus design and Margo's travels in both England and Japan. Modernist architect and friend, Sydney Ancher was commissioned to renovate the old servant's quarters into an open, light and airy lounge room, suitable for modern living and entertaining. Margo took to this project with gusto, designing and producing mosaics for the kitchen, bathroom and lounge. The organization and planting of the garden was organized along modernist principles that sought to integrate house with garden, framing views, creating garden 'rooms' interconnected with meandering paths.

In her art practice, Margo continued to experiment with form, material, line and colour. As with many Sydney Modernists of the era, Abstraction was the dominant mode of expression, albeit characterized by a schism. As seen in Margo Lewers' and Tony Tuckson's work, Abstraction could be a means to express depths of experience and emotion unbound by language. For other artists, Abstraction was approached as a means to communicate the velocity, order and mechanization of the new world, evident in artworks by Roy Fluke (*Night and Bridge Construction*) and Frank Hinder (*Construction*).

The post war period was a time of social conservatism. The suburbs were yet to reach Penrith, yet, at Emu Plains, Margo and Gerald were host to Sydney's elites - artists, writers, architects and public figures. It was an island of creativity and thought. As remarked by Nobel Laureate and friend, Patrick White, 'In the house at Emu Plains ideas hurtled, argument flared, voices shouted, sparks flew. It was a place in which people gathered spontaneously, to eat, drink and discuss'.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

1950s

Elwyn Lynn

The Crane

1957

oil on composition board

39.5 x 55

Penrith Regional Gallery

Acquisitions Fund, 1996

Penrith Regional Gallery &

The Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the

Estate of Elwyn Lynn



Emu Island: Modernism in Place

1950s

List of works:
All measurements are in
cm (h x w x d)

Margo Lewers
Abstract with Lines
no date
watercolour, gouache and
ink on paper
26.5 x 41
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1984
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Gerald Lewers
Seated Figure
c1950
silky oak
20.5 x 77 x 19
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Abstract No: 4
1951
poster paint on paper
27.5 x 35
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Scene Change
1951
oil on masonite
36.2 x 31.5
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Marine Composition No.1
no date
oil on masonite
35 x 76
Courtesy Private Collection

Margo Lewers
Eclipse
1952
watercolour on paper
37 x 54.4
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Composition in Orange
c1952
oil on canvas on cardboard
44.5 x 69
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Bim Hilder
Torso
1952
cassiawood
42 x 26 x 14.3
Purchased with the assistance of
The Friends of Penrith Regional
Gallery & The Lewers Bequest,
1993
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Roy Fluke
Night
1953
acrylic on canvas
75 x 113
Gift of Lily Lynn, 1997
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Looking Through
1953
watercolour, ink and poster
colour on cardboard
37.5 x 55
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Roy Fluke
Bridge construction
1954
oil on canvas
74 x 113
Courtesy Mosman Art Gallery
Collection

Margo Lewers
Orange Shapes (torso)
c1956
oil on hardboard
90.0 x 60.0
Collection: Art Gallery of New
South Wales
Bequest of Patrick White

Frank Hinder
Window
1956
oil on board
17.3 x 23.5
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Frank Hinder
Construction
1957
oil on board
20 x 26.8
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 2000
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Mine Tunnel
1956
oil on hardboard
91.5 x 137.2
Collection: Art Gallery of New
South Wales
Purchased 1956

Elwyn Lynn
The Crane
1957
oil on composition board
39.5 x 55
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1996
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

John Olsen
Child's Fifth Birthday
1957
oil on canvas
72 x 90.5
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1989
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Frank Hodgkinson
Abstract No: 17
1958
oil on composition board
66.5 x 176.5
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1987
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Tony Tuckson
No. 13
c1959
mixed media and collage on
composition board
122 x 91.2
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

The 1960s was a time of great social change across Western societies. The rise of both popular culture and protest movements challenged tradition and authority. Art school students embraced all that was new in music and art. The inner cities of Australia were the place to be and change was everywhere.

At Emu Plains, Margo Lewers had to adjust to life without Gerald, a hardship which followed his death from a riding accident in 1962. Over this decade the creative community at Emu Plains expanded. Studio space was made available to artists such as Keith Looby, in exchange for upkeep of the property and garden. Margo continued to host lunches, dinners and parties, fostering long-standing friendships between artists, architects, writers, and public figures.

In 1961 Margo embarked upon a second collaboration with Sydney Ancher to design a modernist home on the property. Completed in 1964, the building, Ancher House, offered Margo an opportunity to execute her penchant for all things modern. The interior cabinetry, walls and floors were finished in decorated surfaces including cork, mosaic and hessian, which explored both textures and a tertiary colour palette.

The 1960s saw a shift in practice from re-presentational subject matter to Abstract Expressionism. The influence of European Expressionism and Matter Painting was evident in the works of Elwyn Lynn and Carl Plate. Introduced into painting was foreign material, sand, paper, hessian, impasto paint, and dark, muddy palettes. The result was the creation of greatly emotive, textured works. Work by artists such as Henry Salkauskas and Eva Kubbos introduced gestural markings inspired by their European backgrounds and Eastern philosophy, ideas and techniques which were further explored by artists such as Guy Warren. The use of support materials such as masonite and chipboard, and mix of paints, highlights the experimental nature of the times.

Modernism as expressed through the 1960s was diverse and rapidly evolving. American Abstraction, Pop, Colour Field Painting, Minimalism and Conceptualism became dominant movements. Hungry to experience the international scene, younger artists, such as Brett Whitley, Michael Johnson, Robert Klippel, Clement Meadmore and Martin Sharp left Australia for London and New York. When they returned at the end of the decade, the Australian art scene would be greatly altered through their input.

Emu Island:
Modernism in Place

1960s

Judy Cassab
Untitled
1967
oil on canvas laid on board
40.7 x 58
Gift of Leo G. Christie, 1990
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
© Judy Cassab/Licensed
by Viscopy, 2017



Emu Island: Modernism in Place

1960s

All measurements are in
cm (h x w x d)

Gerald Lewers
Reserve Bank Maquette c1961
metal
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Nancy Borlase
Blue Centre
1960
oil and mixed media on canvas
laid on board
90.7 x 55.5
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1995
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Leonard Hessing
The Indifferent Mechanism
1960
oil on canvas
83.5 x 129.5
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1994
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Elwyn Lynn
Cliffs at Fall
c1961
mixed media on canvas
76.5 x 101.5
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1990
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Elwyn Lynn
Herculaneum
1961
mixed media on canvas
101 x 136
Gift of Victoria Lynn, 1998
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Carl Plate
Graph Segments No. 1
1961
oil and collage on composition
board
122 x 365
Courtesy Private Collection

Henry Salkauskas
Effigy
1961
gouache and watercolour on
paper
54 x 73
On permanent loan

Henry Salkauskas
Untitled
1961
Gouache and watercolour on
paper
56 x 76
Gift of the estate of Henry
Salkauskas, 1981
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Eva Kubbos
Untitled
1962
gouache, watercolour and chalk
on paper
74 x 97.5

John Ogburn
Dance of the Bunyip Bird
1962
oil on composition board
122 x 92
Gift of Viva Teece, 1994
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Marea Gazzard
Crater
1963
erthenware, tin and
interior glaze
24 x 43 x 43
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 2001
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Keith Looby
Daniel in the Lions' Den
c1964-65
Oil on canvas
136 x 174.5
Courtesy Private Collection

Lyndon Dadswell
Untitled
c1965
gummed paper on metal support
and wooden base
137 x 110 x 95
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Interior (Centre) (diptych)
c1965
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
188 x 250
Donated by The Women's
College within the University
of Sydney, 2014
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

William Rose
Untitled
1965
ink and coloured crayon on paper
59 x 41
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1989
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Guy Warren
The Clearing III
1965
watercolour on paper
54.5 x 74.5
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1988
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Guy Warren
Untitled
1966
watercolour and ink on paper
35 x 53
Gift of Leo G. Christie, 1990
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Judy Cassab
Untitled
1967
oil on canvas laid on board
40.7 x 58
Gift of Leo G. Christie, 1990
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Judy Cassab
Portrait of Margo Lewers
1967
oil on canvas
111 x 111 x 4
Collection: Art Gallery of New
South Wales, Purchased 1968

Margo Lewers
Broken Circles
c1968
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
45 x 68.3
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Wide penetration
c1968
oil on composition board
55.5 x 76.5
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Eva Kubbos
Coast
1968
synthetic polymer, PVA on board
50 x 70
Gift of Leo G. Christie, 1990
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

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

Stanislaus Rapotec
Untitled
1968
synthetic polymer on masonite
137 x 182.5
Purchased with the assistance
of the Australian Art Research
Fund, 1990
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection
Copyright courtesy The Estate of
the Artist and Charles Nodrum
Gallery

The 1970s saw the life that Margo Lewers had created at Emu Plains begin to slow down. Despite increasing poor health, Margo revealed an ongoing openness to new ideas as she continued to engage with family, friends and contemporary ideas energising the Sydney art scene.

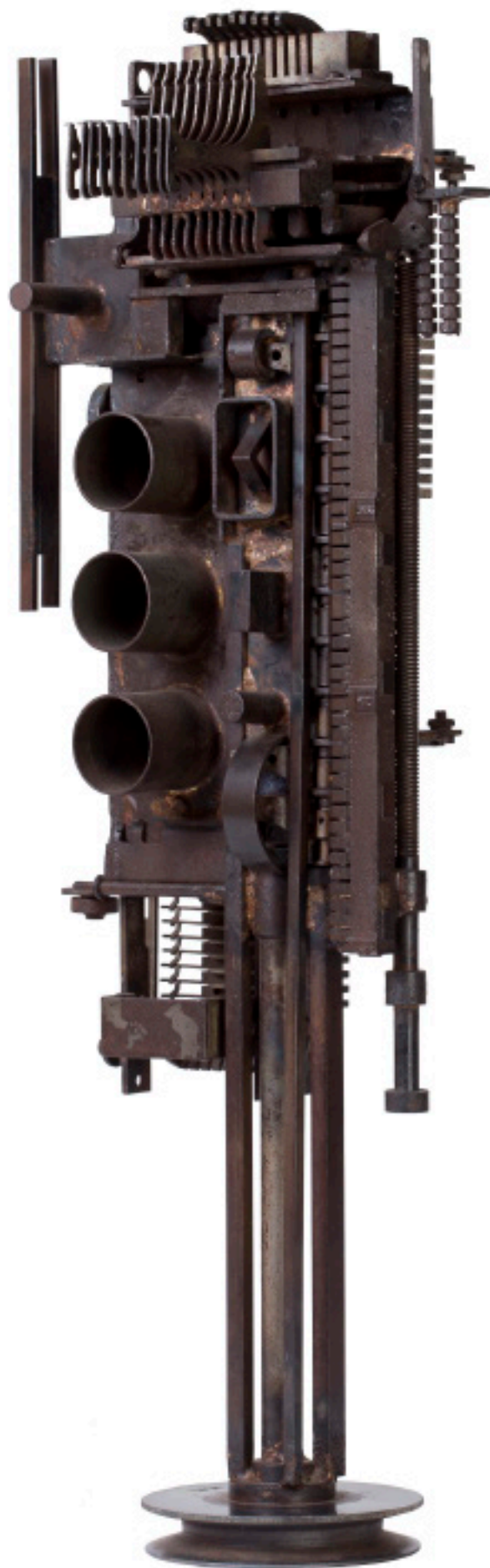
The next generation of artists, recipients of government support, disrupted established relationships between class, culture and artistic practice. The international conversation established by the Sydney Moderns encouraged others to travel. Sydney Ball, Elwyn Lynn and Patrick McCaughey travelled to the United States, and Tony McGillick to London, who on his return to Sydney established Central Street Gallery.

Art styles of the 1970s can be seen in contrast to much of the expressive, emotive visual language of the previous decades. Yet a return to Modernism's early principles is seen in the work of younger artists whose interests were ignited by colour, line and composition.

A belief in art as experimental and ever-evolving saw Margo return to the principles of abstraction, but with renewed vigor. Hinted at in her 1968 artwork *Broken Circles*, was both a psychological and conceptual shift in greeting the future. Now, large scale paintings emerged with a thin application of paint emphasising surface and reintroducing the suggestion of structural form. The architectural construction of the plexiglass sculptures reconnected Margo to her Constructivist roots of the 1930s and combined her life-long painterly interest in colour and light with a sculptor's focus on material and form. As described by Daniel Thomas, curator at the Art Gallery of NSW (1958 – 1978) the plexiglass sculptures of her late career were 'her absolute best works'.

Margo Lewers sustained contribution to modernist art and ideals placed her, and her contemporaries, at the forefront of Australian 20th century abstraction. Long after her death in February 1978 her legacy lives on at Emu Plains.

Following the wishes of their mother, in 1980 the daughters of Margo and Gerald Lewers, Darani Lewers and Tanya Crothers, gave the Emu Plains site and artworks to the people of Penrith through Penrith City Council for the purpose of an art gallery which would honour their parents legacy. Following the support of the state government in building the Main Gallery, Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest was opened in 1981 by Premier Neville Wran.



Robert Klippel

Opus 298

1970-74

bronze, steel and found objects

48.2 x 17.5 x 15

Purchased with the assistance of
The Friends of Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest, 1991

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers
Bequest Collection

© Andrew Klippel. Courtesy of
The Robert Klippel Estate,
represented by Galerie Gmurzynska,
Zurich./Licensed by Viscopy, 2017

Emu Island:
Modernism in Place

1970s

List of works:
All measurements are in
m (h x w x d)

Robert Klippel
Opus 298
1970-74
bronze, steel and found objects
48.2 x 17.5 x 15
Purchased with the assistance
of The Friends of Penrith
Regional Gallery & The Lewers
Bequest, 1991
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest
Collection

Margo Lewers
Various Colours
c1971
coloured plexiglass sculpture
50.5 x 61 x 31.5
Gift of Tanya Crothers and
Darani Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest
Collection

Margo Lewers
Orange with White
c1971
coloured Plexi Glass Sculpture
31 x 51.5 x 8.5
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest
Collection

Margo Lewers
Green on Brown
c1971
coloured Plexi Glass Sculpture
46.2 x 28.6 x 9.5
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest
Collection

Margo Lewers
Red [2]
c1971
coloured Plexi Glass Sculpture
32.4 x 36.5 x 13.8
Gift of Tanya Crothers and
Darani Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Red [1]
c1971
coloured Plexi Glass Sculpture
30.8 x 41.5 x 18.6
Gift of Tanya Crothers and
Darani Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Untitled
c1972
perspex
180.5 x 142.4 x 56.2
Gift of Tanya Crothers and
Darani Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Untitled [Door]
1975
synthetic polymer paint on
plywood door
202 x 81
Gift of Tanya Crothers and
Darani Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Plexi Glass Wall Relief
no date
perspex
138.0 x 223.9 x 23.0 Collection:
Art Gallery
of New South Wales,
Gift of the artist, 1971



Eva Kubbos

Coast

1968

synthetic polymer, PVA on board

50 x 70

Gift of Leo G. Christie, 1990

Penrith Regional Gallery &

The Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the artist



John Olsen
Child's Fifth Birthday
 1957
 oil on canvas
 72 x 90.5
 Penrith Regional Gallery Acquisitions Fund,
 1989
 Penrith Regional Gallery &
 The Lewers Bequest Collection
 © John Olsen/Licensed by Viscopy, 2017



Henry Salkauskas
Effigy
 1961
 gouache and watercolour on paper
 54 x 73
 On permanent loan
 Copyright courtesy of the
 Estate of Henry Salkauskas

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



Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Film

John Gillies
*Homage to Gerald Lewers and
Margel Hinder (ICI Fountain,
Melbourne & Newcastle Civic
Fountain)*
2015
HD video, stereo sound
duration: 11:48
Courtesy of the artist

John Gillies
*Four Pieces by Margo Lewers
and Gerald Lewers*
2017
UHD video, stereo sound
duration: 15:00
Courtesy of the artist

The Loungeroom Gallery is a recreation of the Lewers Lounge room circa 1965. Once the servant's quarters, this room was redesigned in 1955 by Modernist Architect, Sydney Anchor. Modernist domestic architecture or International style of the mid-century period is characterised by strong rectangular shapes, white walls, open floor-plans, and expansive windows which encouraged the integration of internal and external living spaces. The Loungeroom, and Anchor House to follow in 1964, became a stylish backdrop for Margo and Gerald Lewers' art and furniture. This is the site of many of Margo's celebrated parties and soirees.

Margo's selection of furniture, fabrics, colours and patterns reflected a post war desire for ease of living made possible through technological advances in manufacture. Margo and Gerald's home is remembered for the contemporary art on its walls and shelves, and throughout the garden. Art was integrated into the very fabric of the building including mosaics on the fireplace mantel, hearth, kitchen, bathroom and exterior veranda. Art, the garden, flowers, books and music were a part of everyday life at Emu Plains, shared by many.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

List of works:
All measurements are in
cm (h x w x d)

Sonia Farley
Bowl - small dark wood
no date
wood
3 x 12.5 x 7
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by David Farley, 2010
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Sonia Farley
Coolamon - small flat
1988
woody pear
2.5 x 17 x 11.5
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by David Farley, 2010
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Sonia Farley
Guinea Fowl Bowl Salt Shaker
no date
coconut, feather
15.5 x 8.5 x 9
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by David Farley, 2010
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Sonia Farley
Sea Shell
no date
wood
5.5 x 3.5 x 7
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by Kathryn Robertson,
2016 Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Sonia Farley
Serving Spoon
no date
wood
4.7 x 16.7 x 5
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by David Farley, 2010
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Sonia Farley
'Slipper' bowl
no date
wood
9 x 31.3 x 8.5
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by David Farley, 2010
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Bim Hilder
Untitled [Seated Figure]
no date
cedar
13.5 x 10.2 x 8.5
Purchased with the assistance of
The Friends of Penrith Regional
Gallery & The Lewers Bequest,
1993
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Gerald Lewers
Angel Fish on Rock
no date
wood
20 x 9 x 13
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by Kathryn Robertson,
2016 Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Gerald Lewers
Four legged wooden bowl
no date
wood
10 x 20 x 39.5
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by Kathryn Robertson,
2016 Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Gerald Lewers
Possum Door knocker
no date
wood
Courtesy Private Collection

Gerald Lewers
Untitled [Pelican]
no date
hardstone
5 x 7 x 3.5
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Gerald Lewers
Mouse
1940
soapstone
3 x 8.5 x 2.8
Gift of Frank and Margel Hinder,
1981
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Modern Living

Gerald Lewers
Dancing Forms
1951
aluminium and swamp wood
34.7 x 17 x 17
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1984
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Gerald Lewers
Projection
1953
grass tree wood
28 x 69
Courtesy Private Collection

Margo Lewers
Circular Plate
c1936
stoneware plate with yellow/
orange painted decoration
20.5 x 20.5
Gift of Mrs H Barnett, 1982
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Small pot #43
c1936
stoneware
9 x 9
Donated by John and Alison
Waters, 2015
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
One of a Set of Six Bowls
c1936
stoneware bowl with brown/
yellow painted decoration
7 x 14.2
Gift of Mrs H Barnett, 1982
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
One of a Set of Six Bowls
c1936
stoneware bowl with blue
painted decoration
8 x 14.2
Gift of Mrs H Barnett, 1982
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Vase #46
c1936
stoneware
15.5 x 19
Donated by John and Alison
Waters, 2015
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Alleyne Zander
Lewers House, Emu Plains
1940s
oil on paper
35 x 51
Gift of Jocelyn Plate, 1992
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Space Distributed
c1969
synthetic polymer paint
on canvas
106.5 x 137
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Red Circle
1969
acrylic and oil on canvas
136 x 161
Penrith Regional Gallery
Acquisitions Fund, 1985
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Centred
1975
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
32 x 28.5
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Early
1975
synthetic polymer paint
on masonite
27.3 x 38.3
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Card
1973
paper on card
15 x 12
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Emu Island: Modernism is Place

Modern Living

Margo Lewers
Card
1973
paper on card
20 x 13
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Untitled [Door]
1975
synthetic polymer paint on
plywood door
202.2 x 81.3 x 3.5
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Margo Lewers
Mainly Vertical
1976
synthetic polymer paint on paper
laid on composition board
37.7 x 26.6
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Unknown Photographer
Loungeoom
1956
photograph
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani
Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery & The
Lewers Bequest Collection

Many notable Australian authors, journalists and poets were part of the cultural milieu at Emu Plains, including Margo and Gerald Lewers' close friend Patrick White. Other known associates include John Douglas Pringle, George and Noni Farwell, Elizabeth Riddell, Phil Roberts and Jean Storey.

The Lewers built a significant library of Modernist authors, international art journals and magazines that were shared and discussed at their Emu Plains home. Notably, Margo and Gerald were introduced to the influential British art critic and historian Herbert Read by Gerald's brother-in-law Arthur Wheen while in London in 1934. His books, including *Art Now* (1933), were widely read by the Lewers and their peers in Australia from the 1940s through the 1960s.

A selection of books from their collection have been included in the exhibition. Philip Roberts' collection of poems *Crux* (1973) is the second copy in an edition of ten, including five drawings by Margo, signed by both the artist and the author.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Library

Works on exhibition from the library include:

Patrick White
The Cockatoos
1974
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
Library

Patrick White
The Tree of Man
1956
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
Library

Philip Roberts
Crux
1973
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
Library
Herbert Read

Art Now
1933
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
Library

Herbert Read (ed)
*Unit 1: The Modern Movement
in English Architecture Painting
and Sculpture*
1934
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
Library

Herbert Read
*Art and Alienation: The Role of
the Artist in Society*
1967
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
Library

Emu Island:
Modernism in Place
Biographies



Gerald Lewers

Gerald Lewers working on reclining figure

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

Margo Lewers (1908 – 1978)

Margo Lewers was one of Australia's foremost abstract artists, working successfully across media—painting, collage, mosaics, sculpture, fabric and plexiglass. Margo met her husband Gerald Lewers in the late 1920s at night classes taught by Dattilo Rubbo, a friend of her father, artist Adolph Gustav Plate. She later studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London, under New Zealand artist John Farleigh (1933). In London Margo was influenced by leading modernist artists Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Ben Nicholson. Upon her return to Sydney she studied under Desiderius Orban (1945-1950) and found herself to be at the heart of lively modernist debates with Sydney's most regarded artists, creatives and professionals.

Both Gerald and Margo were recognised with significant prizes, commissions and the acquisition of their work by major galleries during their lifetimes. Margo exhibited widely and represented Australia in key international exhibitions, including: *Contemporary Australian Painting: Pacific Loan Exhibition*, 1956; *Contemporary Australian Painters*, 1957, National Gallery of Canada; *Fifteen Australian Painters*, New Vision Centre, London, 1960; *Paintings from the Pacific*, 1961, shown in Japan, USA, New Zealand and Australia; and the Tate Gallery, London, *Australian Painting: Colonial, Landscape, Contemporary*, 1963.

In 1963, Margo observed of her own practice: 'As an abstract painter, penetration of light through colour, space, tensions, physical forces, surface movement and textures all occupy my attention'. These investigations culminated, at the end of her career, in a series of plexiglass sculptures exhibited here, which returned to her early interest in Constructivism. Margo said of the work: 'The forms together are a combination of the penetration and play of light upon different planes and angles.' Daniel Thomas—at the time curator at the Art Gallery of NSW (1958 – 1978)—described these sculptures as her absolute best works, highlighting Margo's rigorous and sustained investigations of abstraction through different media.

Gerald Lewers (1905 – 1962)

Principally a sculptor, Gerald Lewers studied under John Skeaping at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, exhibiting his work for the first time in *Six Colonial Artists* at the Cooling Galleries, London, in 1934.

Gerald was the manager of Farley and Lewers Quarry in the 1940s—situated on Castlereagh Road to the north of Penrith, granting him access to quality stone and wood. His practice was renowned for exemplifying the 'truth to materials' assertion of Henry Moore, and was attuned to the contemporary English sculpture movement of the 1930s to the 1950s. Gerald demonstrated an affinity with his materials, initially stone and wood, employing new technologies to construct large, usually copper, increasingly abstract, public fountains and commissions in the 1950s.

Gerald was a founding member of the Sculptors Society, and the driver behind the first exhibition introducing contemporary public sculpture into Sydney in 1951: *Exhibition of Sculpture In Open Air* on the slopes of the Botanic Gardens. He was awarded many major commissions, including the *ICI Building Fountain*, Melbourne (1958) and the *Four Pieces* sculpture for the Reserve Bank, Canberra, commissioned through his association with Governor of the Reserve Bank Dr H C 'Nugget' Coombs. Incomplete at the time of Gerald's passing in 1962, Margo Lewers completed *Four Pieces* in 1964.

In his obituary, Gerald was described by his friend, Australian author Patrick White, as a 'relaxed, informal, *Australian* artist,' of an 'honest eye' and 'vigorous mind.' Having been a full-time sculptor for only 12-years, peers and critics lamented his unrealised potential.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

Nancy Borlase (1914-2006)

New Zealand-born Nancy Borlase was a prolific painter and noted art critic. Borlase moved to Australia in 1937 and studied drawing and sculpture with Lyndon Dadswell and Frank Medworth at East Sydney Technical College, before switching to painting. In the 1950s and 1960s she conducted study tours to America, Europe and China. A trip to New York in 1956 brought Borlase in contact with the New York School, in particular artists Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko, having a significant influence on her shift from figurative painting to Abstract Expressionism.

Borlase's art training and familiarity with the Australian and International art scene led to her latter career as a critic writing for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Bulletin* (taking over Elwyn Lynn's post) in the 1970s and 1980s.

Borlase's painting *Blue Centre* was a noteworthy inclusion in her first solo exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries, Sydney in 1960. The exhibition, comprising of twenty-two abstract oil paintings was celebrated for her assured expression of nervous abstract shapes and evocative colour arrangements.

Borlase was well associated with the Lewers; she was both a member of the Contemporary Art Society from 1952 to 1970, and attended the parties at Emu Plains. After Margo's passing, Borlase wrote of Margo as a woman of tremendous character, and 'the most convinced and unswervingly dedicated abstract painter of her generation.'

Judy Cassab (1920 – 2015)

Born in Austria, Judy Cassab studied at the Academy of Art in Prague in 1938, and migrated to Australia in 1951. Settling in Sydney, she established herself as a portrait painter of distinction, rendering her subjects with an expressionist style influenced by European painters. Cassab also boldly pursued abstraction, influenced by the writings of Bauhaus inspired painter, designer, educator and art theorist György Kepes and Zen philosophy. Her abstract style concentrated on the formal aspects of painting, seen in the work *Untitled*, 1967.

Cassab's portraiture work was in high demand, both nationally and internationally, though she increasingly preferred non-commissioned portraits of friends in which she could be more experimental. According to artist and critic Elwyn Lynn, Cassab went beyond the common camera-like representations expected of portraits, revealing the essential character of her sitters. Cassab's expressionist style is epitomised in portraits of her artist friends Stanislaus Rapotec and Margo Lewers, both subjects of her 1960 and 1967 Archibald wins—making her the first woman to win the Archibald Prize twice.



Judy Cassab
Portrait of Margo Lewers 1967
 oil on canvas
 Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales
 Purchased 1968
 Photo: Diana Panuccioi ©AGNSW

Emu Island: Modernism in Place Biographies

Lyndon Dadswell (1908 – 1986)

Lyndon Dadswell's significant contribution to Australian sculpture encompassed his own substantial and varied body of studio work and his innovative activities as Head of Fine Arts at East Sydney Technical College. He was a promoter of major civic commissions as the founding Vice-President of The Sculptors Society. Dadswell's work attracted critical acclaim, being awarded the International Co-operation Art Award and the Britannica Australia award for art in 1967, and an Australia Council for the Arts Award in 1973. His work is represented in the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery of Australia and most State galleries.

As with Margo and Gerald Lewers, Dadswell was particularly inspired by the work of British sculptors Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, and the modernist ideal: 'truth to materials'. Dadswell socialised with the Lewers, often visiting their home at Emu Plains. Throughout his career he engaged with formalist aesthetics such as shape, proportion, scale, structure, texture, colour and context, his work capturing a sense of *happening*, rather than of *being made*. After four decades of teaching, Margel Hinder noted: there is hardly a sculptor in Sydney who is not indebted to Dadswell in some measure. His teaching contributed to the development of notable sculptors: Marea Gazzard, Robert Klippel, Ian McKay, Paul Selwood and Ron Robertson-Swann.

Roy Fluke (b. 1921)

Artist Roy Fluke was born near London in 1921 and came to Australia in 1925. He arrived in Sydney in 1928 and studied part-time at the East Sydney Technical College from 1939 to 1941, joining the staff in 1960. In the mid-1950s Fluke was part of the new leadership of the NSW Contemporary Art Society who advocated for the promotion of Abstract Expressionism as a revolutionary art form. His work drew on the early geometric abstraction of artists such as Frank Hinder, Ralph Balson and Grace Crowley, but with less uniformity and a progression towards Abstract Expressionism. He was part of the crowd of creatives and artists visiting Emu Plains.

Fluke's controversial win of the Mosman Prize in 1954 with his impression of the construction of the new Spit Bridge: *Bridge construction*, saw the Council ban abstract art from Council competitions for the following two years. Fluke said of the work, 'My painting is not how a bridge builder would see the bridge. It is what I see of it in synthesis.'

Next Page:

Lyndon Dadswell

Untitled

c1965

brown gummed paper on metal support and wooden base

137 x 110 x 95

Gift of Tanya Crothers and

Darani Lewers, 1980

Penrith Regional Gallery &

The Lewers Bequest Collection

Copyright courtesy of the

Estate of Lyndon Dadswell



Emu Island: Modernism in Place Biographies

Marea Gazzard (1928 – 2013)

Marea Gazzard was a celebrated sculptor and ceramicist. It was her desire to break down the boundaries between art and craft that saw her work move increasingly towards sculptures, organic in form, as in *Crater*, 1963. Gazzard lived and worked in the United Kingdom during the 1950s, studying under Eduardo Paolozzi and, on returning to Australia, under Lyndon Dadswell at East Sydney Technical College. Gazzard believed in form as a universal language, a belief derived in part from the reading of Carl Jung and an interest in Tantric art.

Gazzard championed the cause for ceramics and craftspeople in Australia. She was pivotal in the international Arts and Crafts movement, and in 1980 she became the first elected President of the World Crafts Council. Gazzard was part of the social circle of the Lewers in Emu Plains.

John Gillies (b. 1960)

John Gillies is a multi-disciplinary artist and musician noted for his long standing video practice, having exhibited in over twenty-three countries. His recent work aims to investigate and reclaim histories of Modernism in Australia, including the visit of the Polish modernist artist Witkacy in 1914, and the large scale installation and film work *Witkacy & Malinowski: a cinematic séance in 23 scenes*.

Gillies' video works are held in a number of public collections including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Australia, Queensland Gallery of Art and the Fukuyama Art Museum, Hiroshima.

Homage to Gerald Lewers and Margel Hinder (2015) and *Four Pieces by Margo Lewers and Gerald Lewers* (2017) celebrate major public commissions of Margo and Gerald Lewers and Margel Hinder completed in the late 1950s and 1960s. Gillies' videos capture the interaction of natural and scientific worlds and the performing of space in these significant modernist sculptures.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

Leonard Hessing (1931 – 2004)

Leonard Hessing was a Romanian artist who worked in Australia in 1951 – 1966. He studied art in Paris with the modernist French painter, sculptor and filmmaker Fernand Leger before migrating to Australia in 1951. He brought with him a strong surrealist influence from Paris which pervaded his work for many years. Hessing became a leading theorist and practitioner in Sydney, investigating new ideas, exploring plastics and three-dimensional works inspired by his architectural studies at Sydney University.

Hessing exhibited in *Fifteen Contemporary Australian Painters* at The New Vision Centre Gallery, London, in 1960 with NSW Contemporary Art Society artists including Margo Lewers, Elwyn Lynn, Nancy Borlase and Frank Hinder. He was a key figure in the NSW Contemporary Art Society from the late 1950s, becoming Vice-President in 1960-61.

Bim Hilder (1909 – 1990)

Bim Hilder was a sculptor, painter and printmaker, born in Parramatta. He developed an interest in architecture and furniture design during the 1920s working with American architect Walter Burley Griffin at Castlecrag, Sydney. Hilder attended East Sydney Technical College 1925-1926, becoming a part-time teacher in 1962. That same year he won a competition for a 'wall enrichment' for the new Reserve Bank building in Martin Place, Sydney. Hilder notes two main approaches to his sculptural work—one is to allow the shape of the grain of the wood to influence organic forms, as in *Torso* (1952); the other is to use copper beating, welding, and cutting away like a three dimensional drawing in space.

Along with Gerald Lewers and Robert Klippel, Hilder was a foundation member of the Sculptors Society established in 1951—preliminary meetings for which were held at the Lewers' house. When the society was formed, Hilder gained a number of commissions by approaching architects. Hilder was a member of the Contemporary Art Society between 1949 and 1952. He was twice president of the Sculptors Society and completed many large public commissions in metal. In 1978 he was awarded an MBE for his services to the arts.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

Frank Hinder (1906 – 1992)

Frank Hinder was a pioneer of abstraction in Australia, driven, in his work, to make modern philosophy and science visible. The artwork of Frank and his wife Margel Hinder has been recognised for the conceptual link it provides between the emergence of abstraction in Sydney in the 1930s and the development of Abstract Expressionism that became prominent in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Hinder studied under Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo in 1924, and later sculptor Lyndon Dadswell at the East Sydney Technical College. Hinder's development was uniquely shaped by his studies at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art, (Parsons) 1928 to 1929, where he learnt the principles of dynamic symmetry: linking the natural world with mathematical pattern as a vehicle to abstraction.

Returning to Australia with his wife Margel in 1934, Hinder recognised the unique character of Australian life—light, movement, harmony and order shaped his abstract and semi-abstract works. Hinder was closely attuned to the ideas and works coming out of America and Europe at the time, with a strong interest in cubist and constructivist principles. He made many preliminary drawings for his works, experimenting with different influences and styles. Sketches included in this exhibition show a sophisticated and analytical division of space and form, alongside others more fluid and calligraphic in approach.

Hinder's affection for his close friend Gerald Lewers is felt in the countless drawings he made of Gerald at work, sitting on the ground, entangled in his carvings. Hinder donated many of his drawings, of Gerald, and the tight knit community of Emu Plains and its surrounds, to Penrith Regional Gallery in the 1980s.

Margel Hinder (1906 – 1995)

American-born Margel Hinder moved to Australia with her husband, Frank Hinder, in 1934. Margel was a pioneer of abstract sculpture. She exhibited alongside Gerald Lewers in the 1939 landmark *Exhibition 1*, that brought together painters and sculptors exploring approaches to abstraction through the figure for the first time. Margel worked with wood, metal and mixed media to generate and articulate movement, light, space and time.

Margel gained significant recognition for her work, in particular through winning the international Unknown Political Prisoner Competition (1953), and obtaining major commissions such as the *Civic Park Fountain*, Newcastle (1966). However, it is only in the last decade that Margel's work has been acknowledged and celebrated for its international, sophisticated outlook and significance to the modern technological era, demonstrated in this exhibition in *Currawongs* and *Six Day War I* found in the Gallery garden.

The Hinders, along with the Lewers and Carl and Jocelyn Plate, were founding members of the NSW Contemporary Art Society in 1939-40. These were interdependent communities, significant in stimulating a national debate about the role of art and the need to relate to the ideals and dilemmas of the modern world.

The six were known as close friends—they had all travelled, studied and absorbed different forms of Modernism overseas. Daniel Thomas, a prominent curator at the Art Gallery of NSW (1958 – 1978), recalls a number of Margel's works as a wonderful and memorable part of the house at Emu Plains.



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

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

Frank Hodgkinson (1919 – 2001)

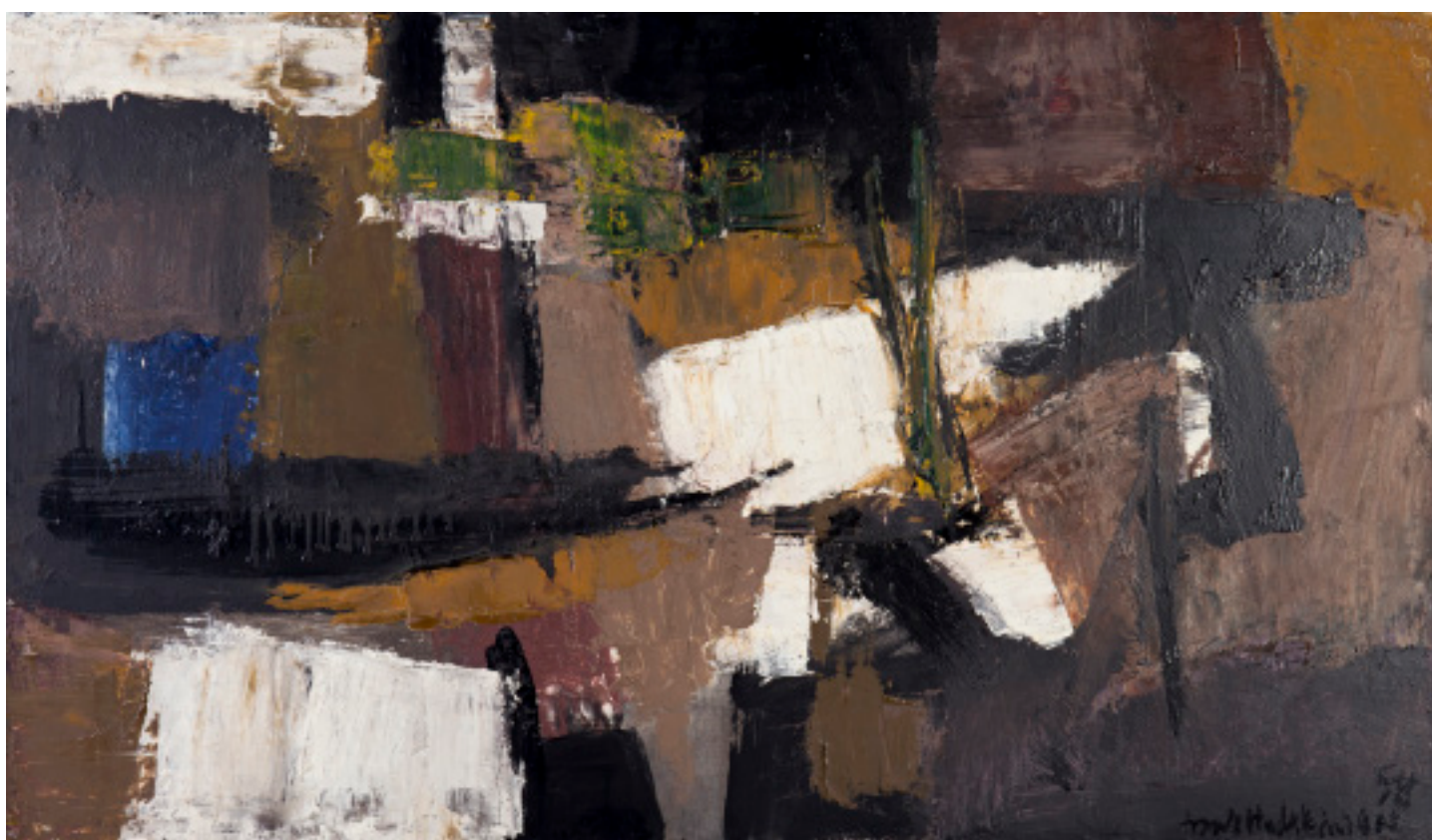
Frank Hodgkinson studied at the Royal Art Society under Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo at age sixteen. He was a printmaker, painter and graphic artist at the forefront of the Abstract Expressionist movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and part of the Lewers' social circle at Emu Plains. Hodgkinson made his first experiments with abstraction in Europe in the late 1940s. In Paris he encountered a freedom of expression from representational painting and upon returning to Australia in 1953, he became very interested in Aboriginal art, as well as the analytical psychology of Carl Jung and Zen Buddhism.

In 1958 Hodgkinson became the first winner of the Helena Rubenstein Travelling Art Scholarship and spent the next two years based in Spain. He was very influenced by the Spanish modernists, experimenting with the expressive possibilities of layering textures.

Robert Klippel (1920 – 2001)

Declared Australia's leading sculptor in the 1950s, Robert Klippel developed a personal language of sculptural forms exploring philosophy, organic and mechanical materials and techniques. Klippel studied at East Sydney Technical College under Lyndon Dadswell in 1945-47. Along with Gerald Lewers and Bim Hilder, Klippel was a foundation member of the Sculptors Society established in 1951, holding their initial meetings at the Lewers' house. He associated with many abstract artists, sharing ideas and exhibiting with John Olsen, William Rose, John Passmore and Eric Smith in *Direction 1* in 1956—the first exhibition in Australia to show work influenced by abstract principles from Cubism and Constructivism.

Klippel lived and taught in New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s, returning to Australia in 1963. He was strongly influenced by the avant-garde New York School, producing his first 'junk assemblages' in New York. Elegant assemblages of found objects from old machinery such as typewriters and cash registers met with great acclaim in both New York and Australia. As in *Opus 298*, Klippel's junk assemblages grow upwards like a plant, giving shape to his synthesis of organic and mechanical energies, of growth and geometry.



Frank Hodgkinson

Abstract No: 17

1958

oil on composition board

66.5 x 176.5

Penrith Regional Gallery

Acquisitions Fund, 1987

Penrith Regional Gallery &

The Lewers Bequest Collection

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Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

Eva Kubbos (b. 1928)

Lithuanian-born Eva Kubbos emigrated to Australia from Germany in 1952. Having lived in Melbourne and Perth, Kubbos moved to Sydney in 1960 and was strongly influenced and excited by the avant-garde scene. She moved in the same circles as the Lewers, recalling Margo as a colourful and *very arty* person. With her partner Henry Salkauskas, Kubbos attended the lively parties at Emu Plains, with many of her friends and fellow members of the NSW Contemporary Art Society.

Kubbos recalls the fantastic freedom of the 1960s in Sydney, both in art and in people, exemplified by the artists met at Emu Plains. She began to experiment with Abstract Expressionism and watercolour instead of working with figurative expressionism and woodcut printmaking techniques. She believed that Abstract Expressionism with its spontaneity and gestural characteristics, provided a means of expressing the intense mystical feelings she felt towards nature.

Keith Looby (b. 1940)

Painter and illustrator, Keith Looby was taught by John Passmore at East Sydney Technical College, having enrolled in 1955 at age fifteen. After completing his studies in 1960, Looby travelled through Europe until 1966, living in Italy and London, and exhibiting an elaborate pencil drawing at the Royal Academy, London.

In 1967 Looby moved to Emu Plains where he lived in Gerald's old studio shed for a short time, in exchange for helping out with the gardening. He remembers fondly Margo's cocker-spaniel Ceasar who kept him company. Looby, along with Guy Warren and Tony Tuckson, were part of the social and cultural milieu of Emu Plains at this time. During this residence, Looby was working on a series of drawings: *History of Australia*. These drawings later became etchings and an illustrated book, *Black and White History of Australia*. Looby won the Archibald Prize in 1984 for his portrait of Max Gillies.

Margo saw herself as a progressive abstractionist who was at odds with Looby's inclination towards figurative art. Together they had many discussions and arguments about their work. Looby recalls this as a time when many artists were actively exploring the tenets of Modernism, critically debating the future of art.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place Biographies

Elwyn Lynn (1917 – 1997)

Elwyn Lynn, known affectionately on the Sydney scene as 'Jack', was an important artist, writer and critic. He studied philosophy under John Anderson at the University of Sydney, becoming interested in psychoanalytic and aesthetic theory and the writings of influential British art critic and historian Herbert Read. Lynn was particularly attracted to the notion of unconscious motives lying beyond the surface.

Between 1955 and 1969, Lynn was the editor for the Contemporary Art Society's *Broadsheet* and art critic for *The Australian*, *The Bulletin*, *The National* and *The Sunday Mirror*. From 1969 until 1983, he worked as curator of the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art—a collection that would later form the foundation of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia.

Lynn met Margo and Gerald Lewers through the NSW Contemporary Art Society which he joined in the late 1940s as an exhibiting member. Lynn's wife Lily, interviewed in 2005 for Penrith Regional Gallery's Doyenne's Project, recalls driving the long trek from the city, together with Jack and Judy Cassab to attend many parties at Emu Plains.

John Ogburn (1925 – 2010)

John Ogburn arrived in Sydney in 1948, having worked as an industrial research chemist in Melbourne and a labourer in Queensland. While working as a freelance science journalist for the Sydney Morning Herald, Ogburn began studying under Desiderius Orban, and the philosopher Austin Woodbury. Ogburn held his first solo exhibition at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney in 1953. His work was celebrated by American art critic Clement Greenberg as both indebted to Matisse, but with its 'own kind of newness,' that of a *complete* painter.

Along with many artists in the Emu Plains circles, Ogburn was a member of the NSW Contemporary Art Society and was elected vice-president in 1957. Two years later began teaching part-time at the Orban studio. Ogburn continued to teach throughout his life, establishing the Harrington Street Artists' Co-operative Gallery in 1973 where he was revered by generations of students as an inspirational teacher.



Elwyn Lynn
Herculaneum
 1961
 mixed media on canvas
 101 x 136
 Gift of Victoria Lynn, 1998
 Penrith Regional Gallery &
 The Lewers Bequest Collection
 Copyright courtesy of the
 Estate of Elwyn Lynn

Emu Island: Modernism in Place Biographies

John Olsen (b. 1928)

John Olsen is well known for his energetic and distinctive painting style and lyrical depiction of the Australian landscape. It was John Passmore's teaching at the Julian Ashton Art School in the 1940s and 1950s that first encouraged Olsen to draw with the brush, following the inquisitive flow of the unconscious. Olsen shared with many of his peers an interest in Zen Buddhism through reading Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1953) and Carl Jung's popular concepts of archetypal forms and the collective unconscious.

In 1960 Olsen participated in the inaugural *Sydney 9* exhibition at David Jones' Gallery with: Carl Plate, Leonard Hessing, Stanislaus Rapotec, Robert Klippel, William Rose, Clement Meadmore, Hector Gilliland, and Eric Smith. Olsen was an active part of the interdependent communities of the Sydney 9 and the NSW Contemporary Art Society (1963) that encompassed Emu Plains.

After returning to Sydney in 1960, having travelled and lived in Europe for three years, Olsen began the 'You Beaut Country' series, dedicating the rest of his career to capturing the Australian landscape and identity.

Desiderius Orban (1884 – 1986)

After emigrating from Hungary to Australia in 1939, artist and teacher Desiderius Orban played an important role in bringing abstractionist ideas from Europe—including Post-Impressionism, Cubism and Fauvism—to Australia. His cosmopolitan outlook was communicated, perhaps most significantly, through his teaching.

Orban taught in Sydney from the opening of his school in Rowe street, central Sydney in 1942 until his death. He had a significant influence on the careers of many artists including: Margo Lewers, Judy Cassab, Sheila McDonald, John Ogburn, and John Olsen. Margo regarded Orban as the greatest single influence on her development as an artist—his open-minded, contemporary classes shared the ideas of British art historian and critic Herbert Read, focusing on the creative imagination, intuition and emotion. Orban encouraged his students to reinvent themselves through experimenting with different mediums, a practice embraced by Margo throughout her career.

Orban was an important member of the artistic community surrounding Emu Plains, regularly attending parties and teaching a number of summer art schools on site. His teaching and his students pushed the boundaries of Australian art thinking and representational practice, celebrating the artist as innovator. Orban transitioned into abstraction in his own work the 1950s—seen through the three exhibited works. He believed that a painting should capture the immediate experience of its creation: the mistakes, the actions, the impromptu decisions.

Next Page:

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



Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

Carl Plate (1909 – 1977)

Carl Plate, Margo Lewers' younger brother, studied at East Sydney Technical College in the 1930s, and went on to establish a reputation as a significant abstract artist. The artist siblings, Margo and Carl were close, sharing similar progressive cultural and political views, speaking and visiting regularly. The Plate family always travelled from their home near Sutherland, to spend Christmas with the Lewers at Emu Plains. Along with Margo and Gerald, Plate was a founding member of the NSW Contemporary Art Society—advocating for abstract art as a powerful, unlimited and universal language. Plate and his peers were strongly influenced by British art historian and critic Herbert Read and his writings on surrealism, Constructivism and artistic anarchy.

Plate was inspired by the possibilities offered through non-representational languages and never ceased experimenting with form, line, colour, texture and space, as evident in *Graph Segments No. 1*, 1961. He held one of the few exhibitions at the 'Lewers Gallery' (run by Margo Lewers in Ancher House), showing nineteen new abstract works in 1967 for which artist and critic James Gleeson named him one of the most rewarding of contemporary Australian artists.

Stanislaus Rapotec (1913 – 1997)

Stanislaus Rapotec was a Slovenian painter, self-taught, inspired by contemporary European and American Abstract Expressionists. Rapotec migrated to Australia in 1948. Rapotec was one of a generation of postwar European immigrants who enlivened critical debate exploring the tenets of Modernism.

Rapotec believed that the painterly marks made with the guide of the subconscious, would be inherently 'good and fluent.' He worked fast, on multiple boards at a time to embrace the spontaneous and draw on his memories of events, experiences and places. Rapotec travelled extensively in Australia, his interest in the country and its people leading to many paintings of the outback.

Rapotec became good friends with author Patrick White, who visited Margo and Gerald in Emu Plains often. White purchased a number of Rapotec's works, their brooding, powerful tone was very much to White's taste. Like White, Rapotec had served in the Middle East during the war and had become fascinated by the religious melting-pot of Jerusalem, as well as by Egyptian and Greek mythology.



Carl Plate
Nepean River

1944
 black ink, watercolour on paper
 25.9 x 40.5
 Donated through the Australian
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program
 by Cassi Plate, 2014
 Penrith Regional Gallery &
 The Lewers Bequest Collection
 Copyright courtesy of the
 Estate of Carl Plate

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Biographies

William Rose (1929 – 1997)

William Rose was largely a self-taught painter, studying briefly at East Sydney Technical College after moving from Newcastle to Sydney in 1950. There he met John Olsen and Robert Klippel with whom he remained life long friends. He became close friends with Carl and Jocelyn Plate, socialising and exhibiting with the interconnected groups that brought modernist thinking and making to the forefront of the Sydney artworld. He first exhibited publicly with the NSW Contemporary Art Society in 1954 and became known for his distinctive linear depiction of the structure of forms in motion—as seen in *Untitled*, 1965.

In 1956 the exhibition *Direction 1* at Macquarie Galleries—organised by Rose and John Olsen—exhibited work by Olsen, Rose, John Passmore, Robert Klippel and Eric Smith. This exhibition was an important part of the critical discussion of the emergence of Abstract Expressionism in Australia and thrust Rose into National prominence. Rose's work demonstrated a marked difference from his Sydney Abstract Expressionist peers, which is perhaps why he described himself as a Constructivist.

Henry Salkauskas (1925 – 1979)

Lithuanian-born Henry Salkauskas, partner of Eva Kubbos, emigrated to Australia from West Germany in 1949, bringing with him a strong tradition of German Expressionism. In 1951 he moved to Sydney from Canberra and joined the NSW Contemporary Art Society. He was elected a member of the executive committee in 1957.

Salkauskas worked across painting and printmaking, drawing together Lithuanian influences of muted landscapes, black and white graphics, with an expressive interplay of planes and lines. Salkauskas was an advocate for printmaking in Australia, founding the Sydney Printmakers in 1961 and representing Australia in major international print exhibitions throughout the 1960s. He worked with a large brush over silkscreens, allowing a more expressive approach than in earlier lino cuts. By 1965 he stopped printing, focusing on watercolour and gouache paintings, increasingly abstracting his references to landscape.

Salkauskas and Kubbos were part of a generation of postwar immigrant artists who had a lasting impact on Australian art through their contribution to modernist thought. Together, Salkauskas and Kubbos attended parties with the Lewers at Emu Plains. After his sudden passing in 1979, the Art Gallery of NSW held a small retrospective of Salkauskas' paintings and prints in 1981.

Emu Island: Modernism in Place Biographies

Tony Tuckson (1921 – 1973)

Artist, curator and writer Tony Tuckson was strongly influenced by the abstract teachings of modernist painters Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson at East Sydney Technical College. He drew on European and American influences in his development of Abstract Expressionism to ultimately reduce his painting to the gesture of the line.

Tuckson was appointed Deputy Director at the Art Gallery of NSW, under Director Hal Missingham in 1957 and during this time pushed to establish an Aboriginal art collection. Tuckson was responsible for presenting some of the earliest and most comprehensive exhibitions of Aboriginal and Melanesian art, which became a significant influence in his own work. During the late 1950s, Tuckson began to experiment with newspaper and collage, and into the 1960s almost exclusively painted in red, black and white—as can be seen in his work in this exhibition.

Like Margo and Gerald, Tony and his wife Margaret were close friends with the Hinders and had fond memories of their time at Emu Plains. They attended the parties, and were invited to stay for weekends to experience boat races along the Nepean. Tony and Margo shared many discussions over wine, while Margaret and Gerald enjoyed local bush and river walks.

Guy Warren (b. 1921)

Guy Warren's painting practice has long been inspired by the beauty of landscapes, both in Australia and abroad—in particular New Guinea and Bougainville where he was stationed in WWII. Warren's work tends towards the Abstract Expressionism of his peers, seen in the works included in this exhibition, but retains a strong representational approach to his subject. He has grappled with placing figures into the landscape to represent the integral and reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment. 'It is not possible,' he says, 'to live in this country and not be moved by the power of the Australian landscape.'

Warren studied at East Sydney Technical College from 1947 to 1949 where he became close friends with Tony Tuckson. He attended many Christmas and New Years Eve parties at Emu Plains, and in conversation recalled the strong character of Margo Lewers, the beauty of their home and garden where art was everywhere.

Next page: Tony Tuckson

No. 13
c1959
mixed media and collage on
composition board
122 x 91.2
Gift of Tanya Crothers and
Darani Lewers, 1980
Penrith Regional Gallery &
The Lewers Bequest Collection
© Tony Tuckson/Licensed
by Viscopy, 2017



Emu Island: Modernism in Place Biographies

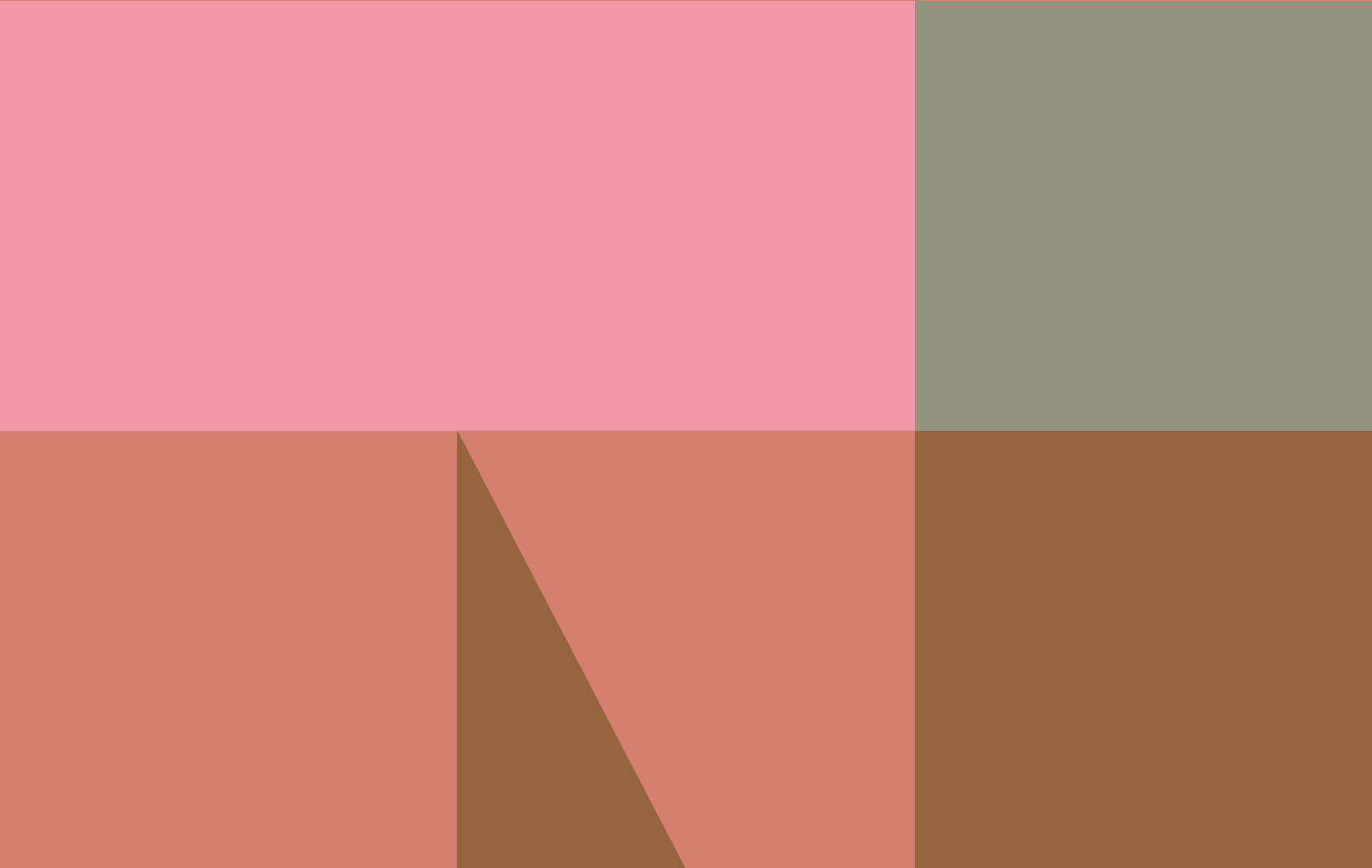
Patrick White (1912 – 1990)

Australian novelist and 1973 Nobel Prize-winner, Patrick White, was a consistent and intelligent patron of the Australian arts. Living in London during the late 1930s to 1940, White absorbed the modernist push through his mentor and lover Australian artist and expatriate Roy de Maistre. White developed an intense interest in every aspect of the art world, which in turn underpinned his writing.

White met his lifelong partner Manoly Lascaris while stationed in Alexandria, Egypt in 1941, and together they came to live in Australia permanently in 1948. By the mid-1950s he had joined the circle of Sydney modernist painters and sculptors who congregated around Gerald and Margo Lewers, and he was often present at their parties.

After Gerald unexpectedly passed away in 1962, White wrote an obituary describing him as 'happiest exploring the Australian bush,' watching and searching for natural materials and forms. Lewers' fascination with the interaction of water with static forms informed the design of his fountains—a small copper and masonry fountain was commissioned by White for his Castle Hill home. Author Helen Hewitt has written of the parallels between Lewers and the end of White's novel *Voss*: 'Some will learn to

Young Moderns





Young Moderns

The 20th Century Modernist ethos of exploratory experimentation and looking ever forward continues to inspire and shape the creative practice of many artists. *Young Moderns* includes the work of ten early career artists from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra: Emma Beer, Kieran Butler, Terrence Combos, Mason Kimber, Sanne Koelemij, Nadia Odlum, Elena Papanikolakis, Helen Shelley, Kael Stasce and Kate Tucker. In their works we see a continued and rigorous approach to abstraction. Often working across different mediums and technologies, these early-career artists are exploring the potential of their materials as they develop their own visual and conceptual language.

Speaking to the legacy of Modernism these artists explore the relationships between colour, light, form and space. The sculptural and perspex works of Koelemij, Odlum, Shelley, and Stasce trace the movement of light and of the viewer—recalling the vibrant plexiglass sculptures of Margo Lewers.

New technologies are embraced through the digital collage techniques of Butler, Kimber and Papanikolakis whose processes move between the digital and the material as a means to abstraction. Expressive and formal approaches to abstraction sit alongside each other, as seen in the work of Combos, Beer and Tucker; often held in tension within the works themselves.

The conscious engagement of art with everyday life, typified by the Modernist approach of Margo and Gerald Lewers, is demonstrated by these *Young Moderns* and their determined exploration of the very spaces, experiences and ideas that surround them.

Previous page:
Mason Kimber
Passage/Grid
2017
acrylic and oil stick on canvas
87 x 66.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Galerie pompom, Sydney

Young Moderns

Emma Beer (b. 1987, Victoria)

Emma Beer lives and works in Canberra. Beer graduated from The Australian National University School of Art in 2009 with First Class honours. She has since held solo exhibitions nationally in Melbourne and Canberra and internationally at The Reading Room Gallery in London. Beer recently exhibited in curated exhibitions: *Emerging from Canberra*, at Watters Gallery, Sydney and *10 Years of Collecting* at the ANU, The Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra. Beer's work is held in public and private collections throughout Australia, Singapore, England, Scotland, France and Spain.

Artist Statement

My painting practice is engaged with pictorial illusion through abstraction. I work with layering luminous coloured glazes to build up hard-edged colour fields that collide with the painterly gesture. Line and edge become an important means of exploring surface, space and movement.

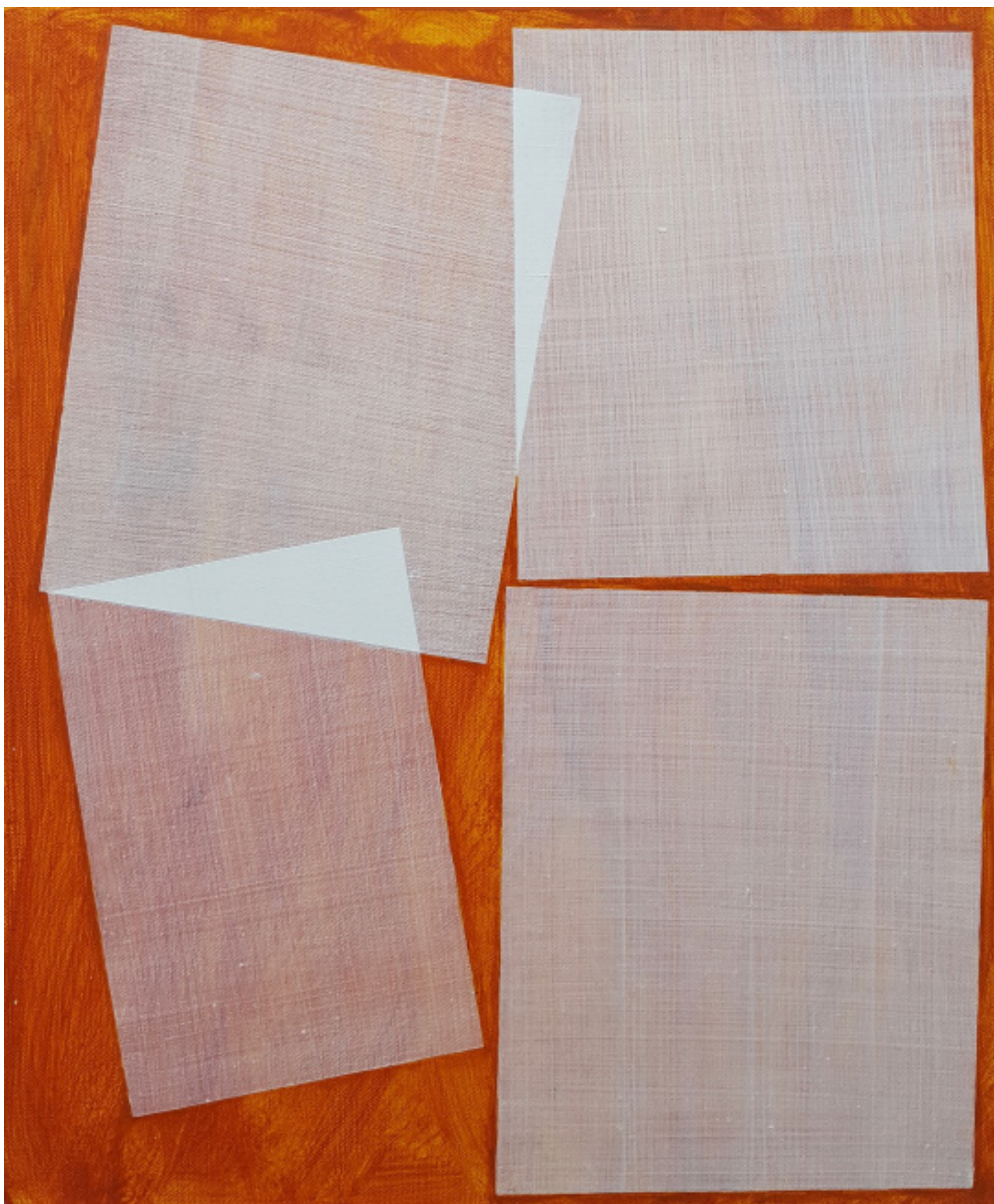
The primary focus of my work is to generate material and process based questions of the potential of painting. The paintings create a productive tension between two distinct trajectories of Modernist Abstraction: hard-edge geometry and Expressionism. The complex layering of the work is revealed through close engagement by the viewer.

A fundamental concern in my work is that of format and composition. My works utilise blankness and the void in contrast with vivid colour spaces as a literal and metaphoric engagement with the relationship of painting and technology. My major influences are Yves Klein, Callum Innes and Mary Heilmann. I revisit Klein's attitudes towards Minimalism and the 'void' to question the transcendental possibilities of painting in today's technological world.



Emma Beer
Bringing the music back in to the house
2017
acrylic on canvas
50 x 40 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Emma Beer
Ti! (a drink with jam and bread)
2017
acrylic on linen
60 x 50 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Kieran Butler (b. 1992, Sydney)

Kieran Butler is an emerging photographic artist, living and working in Sydney. Butler is twenty-five, gender queer, an Australian, a Mauritian and a millennial; their pronoun is they, them, theirs. Butler works across moving and still images, object, and installation. Butler completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (First Class Honours) at UNSW Art & Design in 2014. In 2016 they won the inaugural Gaffa Contemporary Photography prize. Butler has exhibited recently at Gaffa, MOP Projects, Verge Gallery, Airspace Projects and Articulate Project Space in Sydney, and internationally in Zalaegerszeg Hungary in conjunction with D'Clinic Studios Mixer collaborative residency program and Gdansk, Poland as part of Photomedia Site and Context Special Project.

Artist Statement

Working towards a non-binary model of photography, Butler employs transgender studies as a methodology to reflect on queer constructions of the photographic medium and gender. These works are characterised by the properties of illusion, material transformation and magic—referring to the mystery, awe, and uncertain potential/s of photography and gender identity. They draw from these properties to experiment with form and colour in the context of still-life and portraiture to explore queer gender politics, dandyism, practices of drag, and identity presentation.

‘Non-binary’ refers to gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and exist outside of the heterosexual-cis-normative binary; inclusive of transgender, gender fluid and culturally specific gender identities. By applying non-binary models to the context of the photographic still life and portrait, they hope to reach new fluid dimensions for what the photographic medium could be.



Kieran Butler
I'm just a boy
2016
ink-jet print on cotton rag,
composite timber, plaster and
resin frame
95.5 x 134cm
Courtesy of the artist



Kieran Butler
LMAO (Flahdvah)
 2016
 ink-jet print on cotton rag, composite timber,
 plaster and resin frame
 43 x 31 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

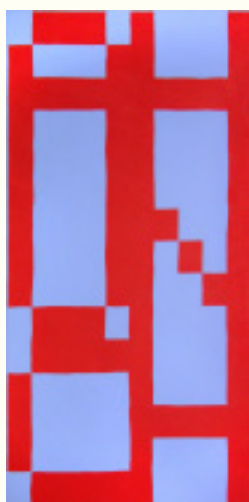
Terrence Combos (b. 1988, Sydney)

Terrence Combos is an emerging artist based in Western Sydney, primarily working in painting and drawing. He has participated in solo and group exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne. Combos' work has been selected for inclusion in the Adelaide Perry Prize for Drawing, Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award, Blacktown Art Prize and Gosford Art Prize. He was awarded the drawing prize in the Fisher's Ghost Art Award in 2013 and 2014. Terrence is a recipient of the Australian Postgraduate Award, and is currently completing a Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

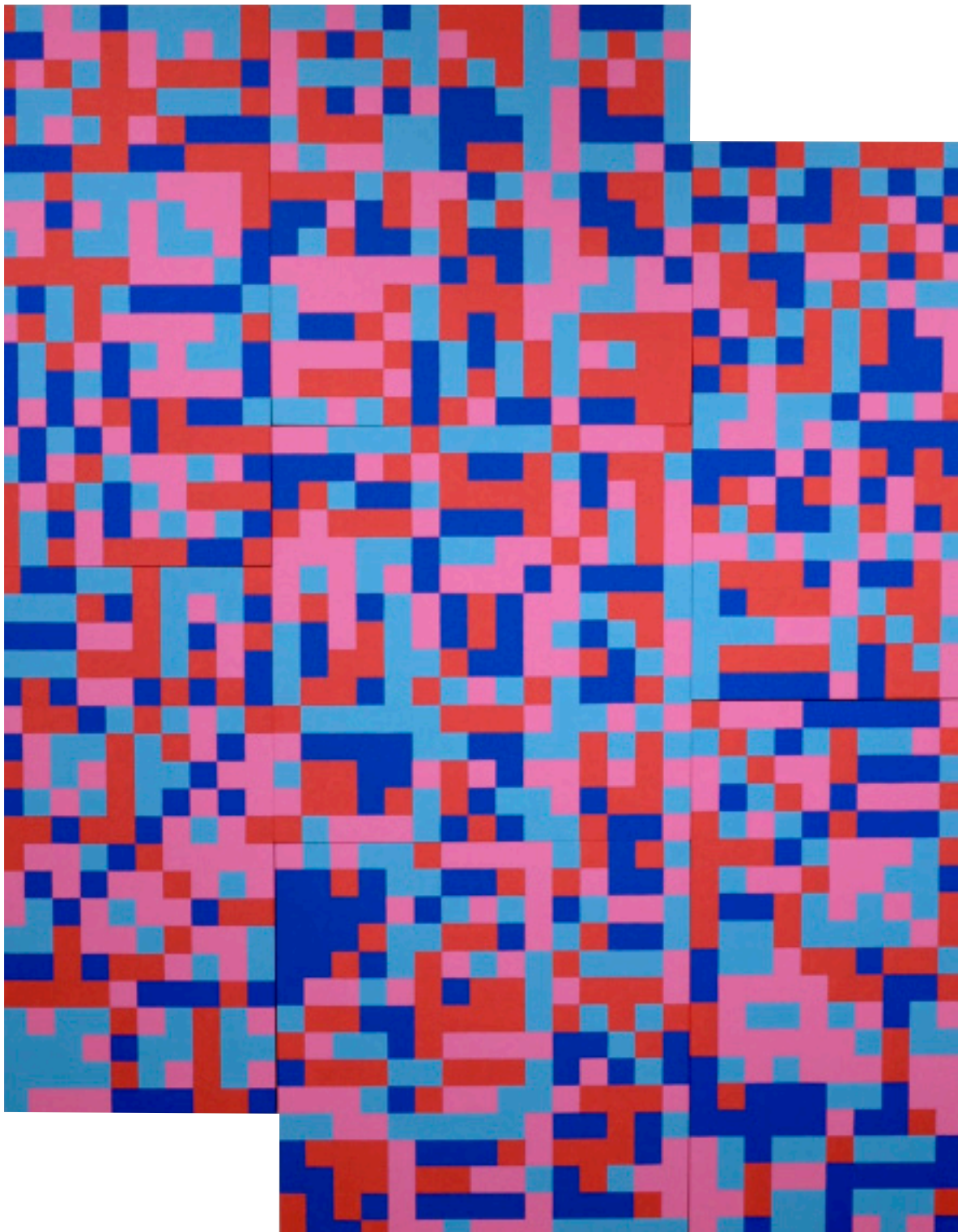
Artist Statement

Terrence Combos's work uses the grid as a tool to mediate interactions between abstraction and language. Words and phrases present in his work are veiled through the use of a restricted and compacted typographical style, which is guided by both the grid and the dimensions of the painting's surface.

In Combos' work, text functions as a system to form composition, allowing the work to be potentially read in both a formal and linguistic capacity. The phrases used for each work reflect the processes, associations and implications of working within the field of abstract art. However, the brevity of each statement often gives way to multiple readings, all of which are still dependent on the text's ability to be read. This way of presenting language leads to a drastic slowing down of the process of reading, and is prone to disrupting its comprehension altogether.



Terrence Combos
a hunch
2017
acrylic on canvas
122 x 61.5cm
Courtesy of the artist



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

Mason Kimber (b. 1985, Perth)

Mason Kimber lives and works in Sydney. Kimber completed a Master of Fine Art (Painting) from the National Art School, Sydney in 2013. The following year he was awarded the British School at Rome Residency in Italy, where he researched spatial illusion as found in fresco painting. In 2015 Kimber was a finalist for the NSW Visual Arts Fellowship (emerging) at Artspace, Sydney, and he is one of seven artists recently awarded an Artspace One Year Studio for 2017. Kimber is represented by Galerie pompom, Sydney.

Artist Statement

‘Mason is on the floor of his studio, casually shuffling through soft piles of hand-drawn sketches as if they are receipts, or quotes (albeit his own). He appears to be looking for - and finding - nothing in particular. He talks while he touches the paper. His process is to flicker - a jarring term he often uses to describe both the quality he is seeking to bring out in the paintings and the way he goes about bringing it - between the material and mannered spaces of architecture, the screen and the canvas. He wants the final images to flicker too. From the piles of paper quotations, he makes digital collages that form the basis of larger works on canvas, painted in acrylic and collaged with scraps of cheap synthetic fabric sourced from second-hand stores and torn and cut sections of his own painted canvases. He gleans from his own crops.’



Mason Kimber
Pathway/Patina
2017
acrylic, oil stick, paper, canvas
and fabric on board
79 x 59 cm
Courtesy Private Collection

Next page:
Mason Kimber
Facade/Flow
2017
acrylic, oil stick, paper, canvas and
fabric on board
79 x 59 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Galerie pompom, Sydney

Excerpt from Stella Rosa McDonald's essay
'PAINTINGS OF PAINTINGS' (2017).



Sanne Koelemij (b. 1992, The Hague, The Netherlands)

Sanne Koelemij is an emerging artist living and working in Canberra. Koelemij completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) at the Australian National University, School of Art, in 2015. Her practice explores the relationship between material and colour through abstract painting; drawing influence from Optical Art and Colour Field Abstraction. In 2016, Koelemij won the Oceania Regional Award, for Visual Arts and Design, at the international Undergraduate Awards for her thesis *Painting Beyond the Stretcher*. Since then, she has participated in eight group shows and two solo exhibitions locally and interstate. Recently, Koelemij has been involved in a Residency Program at the Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia.

Artist Statement

In *Pushing Borders*, I explore vibrant colour relationships through paint as ‘matter.’ This is achieved through painting on transparent canvases, creating tension between form and shape of similar coloured brush marks. The works are painted on both sides of the perspex surface; a process that involves painting-in-reverse as the marks are layered from foreground to background. Using perspex as a surface invites light to be a part of the work, the brush marks layered on the front casting a shadow on the composition on the reverse. The shadow is also a description of three-dimensionality, creating tension between a colour appearing as an object or a shape. The perspex itself dictates the composition of the pictorial space, becoming a further subject in the work.



Sanne Koelemij
Pushing Borders (aqua)
2016
acrylic on perspex
30.6 x 35.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Next page:
Sanne Koelemij
Pushing Borders (red)
2016
acrylic on perspex
30.6 x 35.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist



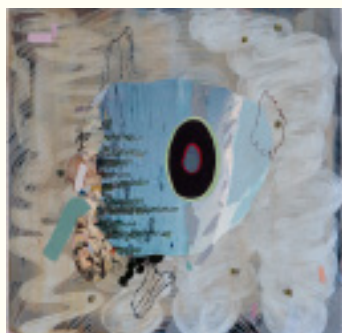
Elena Papanikolakis (b. 1984, Cootamundra)

Elena Papanikolakis is an emerging artist based in Sydney. She works across painting, collage, drawing and photography. Her recent work involves explorations of disparate found imagery and text, as well as material of personal and cultural significance. Papanikolakis graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Visual) Honours (First Class) from the Australian National University School of Art in 2007. She was a resident at Parramatta Artist Studios from 2014-2016. In 2016 she was awarded the Art Gallery of New South Wales Paris Studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts, and was the recipient of the Eva Breuer Travelling Art Scholarship. Papanikolakis presents a new body of work as part of Primavera 2017: Young Australian Artists at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia.

Artist Statement

My practice spans painting, collage, photography and text. Recently, my works have been focused around explorations of identity and authenticity and how these can be filtered through the lens of abstraction. I am interested in creating works that contain multiple notions of time, place, and narrative, and my practice explores the consequences of juxtaposing unrelated material.

My work brings together disparate materials that range from personally or culturally significant photographs and memories to found images from books and magazines, and snippets of found text. Together these materials are recontextualised and adapted through painterly interventions that connect unrelated elements. In addition to this, painterly interventions also provide points of departure from realistic depictions. As such, materials become key in enabling the works to sit between representation and abstraction, between the real and imagined.



Elena Papanikolakis
Bona fide outlook
2015
acrylic, collage, marker and pencil
on board
40 x 40
Courtesy of the artist

Next page:
Elena Papanikolakis
Links D
2014
acrylic, collage, photographs,
marker, pen and pencil on board
61 x 46cm
Courtesy of the artist



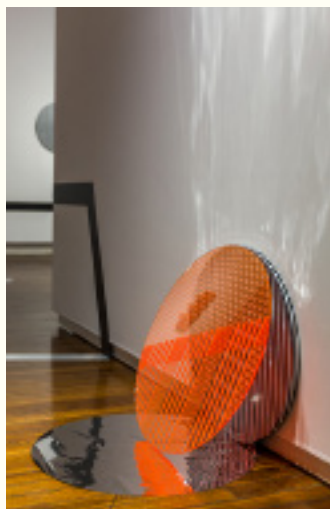
Nadia Odlum (b. 1991, Sydney)

Nadia Odlum is an emerging artist originally from Sydney, currently living and working in New York City. She completed a Master of Fine Arts by research in 2016 at UNSW Art & Design, for which she was given the Australian Postgraduate Award. Previously, she attended the National Art School, graduating in 2012 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (First Class Honors), and the Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement. Odlum has exhibited at galleries including the Murray Art Museum in Albury, Artspace (Ideas Platform), Firstdraft, Archive, Gaffa Gallery, Kudos Gallery, and Flux Factory (New York). She was a resident of Parramatta Artists Studios in 2016, and in 2015 was awarded a residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Odlum was raised in Glenbrook, in the Blue Mountains, and frequented the Penrith Regional Gallery throughout her childhood.

Artist Statement

Odlum's works make use of optical illusions, such as the moiré effect. Harnessing the kinetic nature of this effect, her work encourages spectator movement and participation. Through this, her works reflect on the processes of perception itself, and the way we move through, enact and structure our understanding of the world.

The artist gathers, catalogues and abstracts patterns and forms from the urban environment, and then translates these into paintings, sculptures, drawings and installations. Her works are frequently site-specific, drawing on nuances of architecture and space to guide or disrupt viewer movement.



Nadia Odlum
Instruction for movement II
2016
perspex, spray paint, wood, vinyl
60 x 60 x 30cm
Courtesy of the artist



Nadia Odlum
In passing I paused
 2016
 perspex, spray paint, acrylic paint, wood, vinyl
 47 x 22 x 9 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

Helen Shelley (b. 1980, Bathurst)

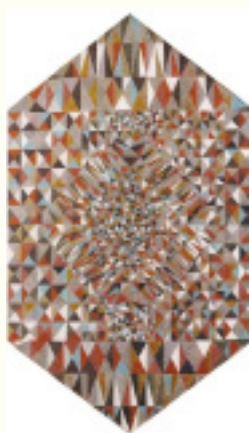
Helen Shelley lives and works in Sydney. She completed a Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney in 2015. Her practice explores the role art can play in the grieving process, and its ability to transform personal grief. Shelley has been a finalist in The Blake Prize, the Westpac Redlands Art Prize, The Churchie Emerging Artist Award and was a recipient of the Artist Society of Canberra Travelling Scholarship in 2003. Shelley has held solo exhibitions in Sydney and Canberra and has exhibited internationally at Whitespace in Auckland. Shelley's work is held in the Artbank collection, the Peter Fay collection and private collections in Australia and internationally.

Artist Statement

Helen Shelley's practice from 2003 to 2011 was concerned with capturing an optimistic imagining of the dying process, inspired by her father's diagnosis with an incurable cancer. Her work during this time was based upon her father's stories of beautiful colourful moving shapes before his eyes as he prepared for sleep. Her father found peace in these visions and Shelley hoped his death would comfort him with beautiful dancing shapes.

In the absence of religious belief, Shelley used the act of making as a ritual to process her great fear of losing her father. Her practice from 2011 onwards, is inspired by a transcendent image that occurred the night of her father's death. A vision of light particles emanating from her father's body, subsumed by her own, gave the sense that her father continued to exist in a non-physical form, becoming immortal.

Shelley's work is concerned with the way rituals symbolically immortalise late loved ones, ensuring our relationship with the dead is ongoing. Significantly, these tangible expressions of personal grief bring the often avoided topics of death and grief to the fore.



Helen Shelley
Grief, Magical Particle no.2
2013
mixed media on perspex
113 x 68cm
Courtesy of the artist

Next Page:
Helen Shelley
Death Proof no.10
2010
mixed media on perspex
21 x 20 x 5cm
Courtesy Private Collection



Kael Stasce (b. 1992, Canberra)

Kael Stasce is an emerging painter and sculptor, living and working in Canberra. Stasce completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts (First Class Honours) at the Australian National University in 2014. That same year Stasce won the Canberra Mentorship Award and the Canberra Contemporary Art Space Residency Award. In 2015 he won the inaugural Capital Arts Patrons Organisations (CAPO) Emerging Artists' Prize. Stasce's work explores industrial methods of construction to create sculptures and assemblages where the relationship between himself, the object and observer are questioned

Artist Statement

This series of assemblages challenge the audience's perception of space and scale. Using paint, wire, graphite, constructed and found materials; the work investigates movement and motion on an intimate scale. The construction of the works brings into focus the spaces between the viewer, the work and the wall. Momentary alignments are activated by movement around the work.

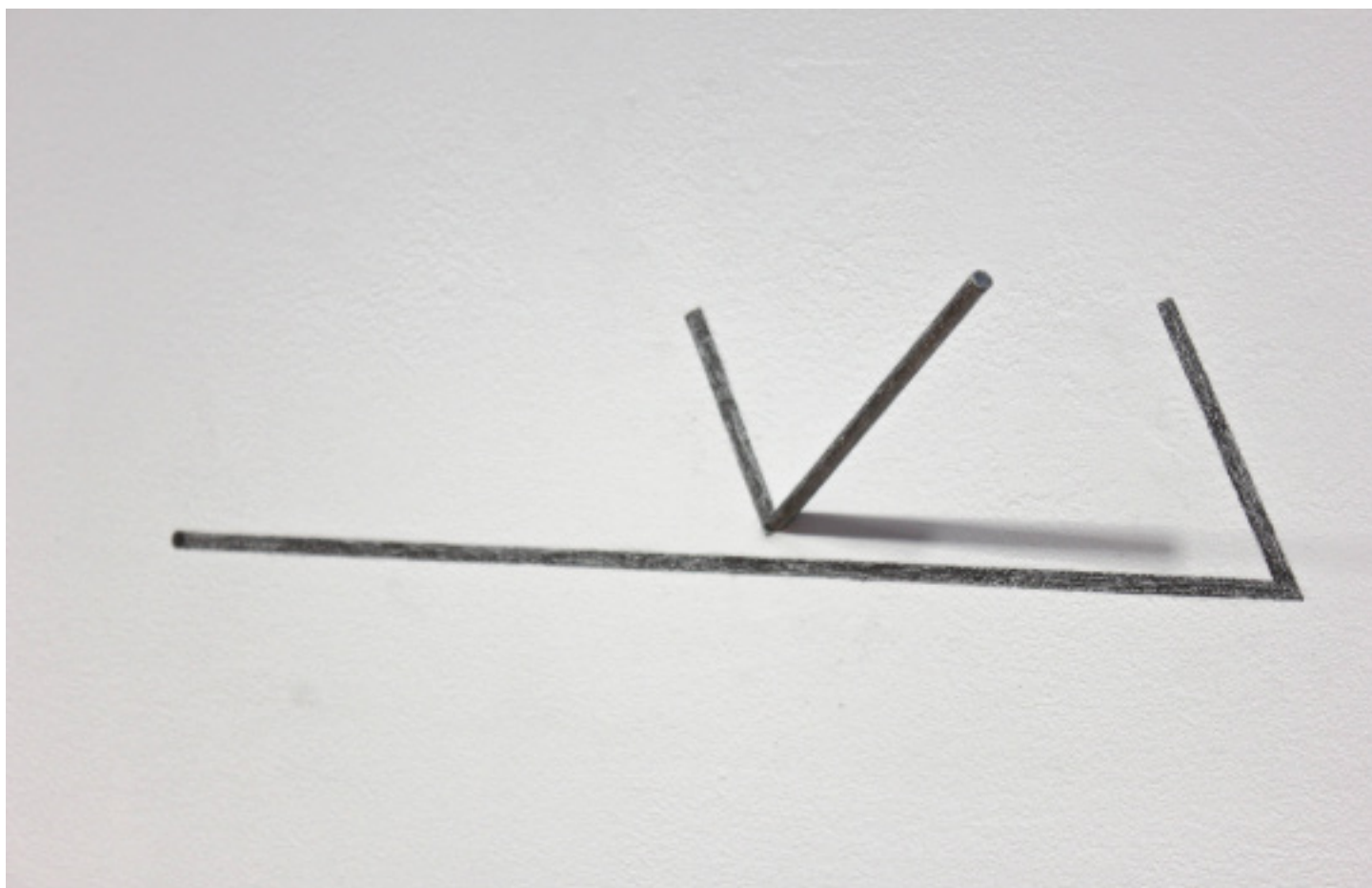
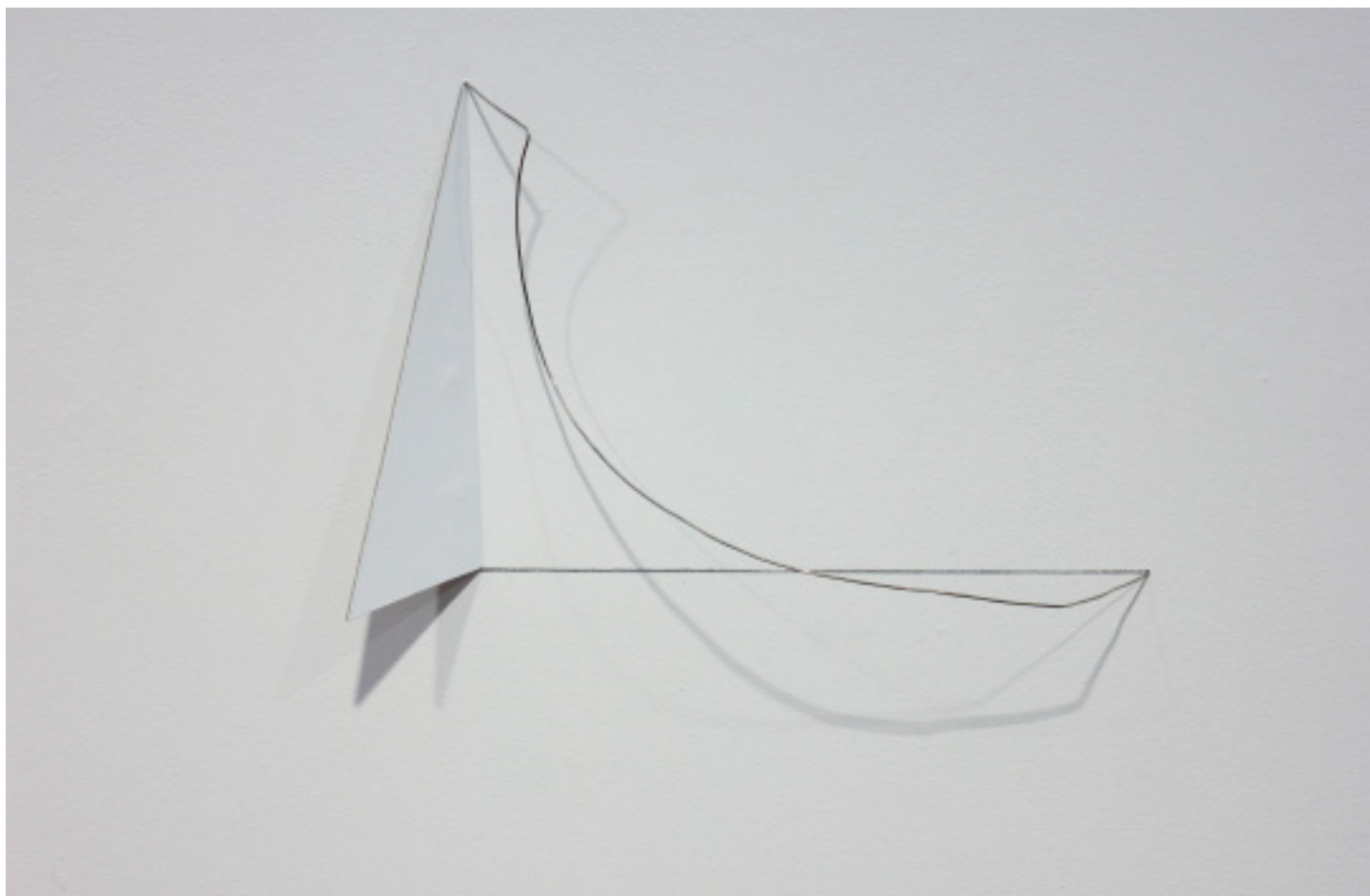
These moments are constructed to produce dynamic shifts in the experience of space, both physically and as an illusion. The work expands on the idea of painting as a flat surface, considering the connections made between the materials and their interaction with the viewer. The use of graphite directly on the gallery walls provides the illusion of physical volume among real objects. Aligning the two and three dimensional components creates a tension in the work, encouraging movement in order to fully experience the work.



Kael Stasce
A to C
2017
steel and oil paint
37 x 33 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Next page:
Kael Stasce
Caught Between
2017
board, acrylic paint wire, graphite
30.5 x 46 x 16 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Next page:
Kael Stasce
Lead Line
2017
steel, graphite
6 x 23.5 x 13 cm
Courtesy of the artist



Kate Tucker (b. 1980, Canberra)

Kate Tucker lives and works in Melbourne. Tucker received a Graduate Diploma in Visual Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2009. She has recently held solo exhibitions at Galerie pompom, Sydney; and Daine Singer and Chapter House Lane, Melbourne. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Sutton Projects, LON Gallery; SPRING 1883 with Dutton Gallery; Tristian Koenig; Caves and Linden New Art. Kate Tucker is represented by Daine Singer, Melbourne.

Artist Statement

These works are titled Counterparts to reflect the intuitive pairing which unfolded throughout the creation of the series. All works in the exhibition are paired based on their innate communication with each other: three pairs of paintings and three of the paintings paired with ceramics stands.

I create work through an accumulation of minor acts, rather than resolving an image from a preconceived idea. I consciously elevate the accidental and playful parts of the making process. Key to this, is identifying the choices I make when composing an image and deliberately challenging myself to an opposing trajectory.

This tussle between the conscious and the intuitive has played out even more overtly in these works, through the reoccurrence of specific forms. I have subconsciously duplicated each form while subjecting it to various minor shifts, in order to consider it through different eyes. The result is a series of works that seek connection, in the way forms tangle in the image space and through relationship to parts that have fallen out and become distinct, either as separate paintings, or as a means of physical support.



Kate Tucker
Counterpart 7
2017
linen, calico, cotton rag paper, acrylic
mediums, acrylic and oil on board
27.5 x 22.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer,
Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Next page:
Kate Tucker
Counterpart 9
2017
linen, acrylic mediums, acrylic
and oil on board
24 x 18.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Daine Singer, Melbourne, and
Galerie pompom, Sydney



Young Moderns

List of works
All measurements are in
cm (h x w x d)
All works courtesy of the artist
unless otherwise stated.

Emma Beer
Bringing the music back in to the house
2017
acrylic on canvas
50 x 40 cm

Emma Beer
Mi! (a name I call myself)
2017
acrylic on linen
60 x 50 cm

Emma Beer
Ti! (a drink with jam and bread)
2017
acrylic on linen
60 x 50 cm

Emma Beer
When the dogs bite
2017
acrylic on canvas
60 x 50 cm

Emma Beer
You cry a little and then you wait for the sun to come out
2017
acrylic on linen
60 x 50 cm

Kieran Butler
Fun Sticks; tosser
2016
ink-jet print on cotton rag,
composite timber, plaster and resin
frame
103 x 86cm

Kieran Butler
I'm just a boi
2016
ink-jet print on cotton rag,
composite timber, plaster and resin
frame
95.5 x 134cm

Kieran Butler
KODAK RIP[E]
2016
ink-jet print on cotton rag,
composite timber, plaster and resin
frame
67 x 47.5

Kieran Butler
LMAO (Flahdvдах)
2016
ink-jet print on cotton rag,
composite timber, plaster and resin
frame
43 x 31 cm

Kieran Butler
Yeah, nah
2016
ink-jet print on cotton rag,
composite timber, plaster and resin
frame
58.8 x 41.5

Terrence Combos
icebreaker 2
2017
acrylic on canvas
60 x 30 cm

Terrence Combos
the plot thickens
2017
acrylic on canvas
90 x 180 cm

Terrence Combos
a hunch
2017
acrylic on canvas
122 x 61.5cm

Mason Kimber
Facade/Flow
2017
acrylic, oil stick, paper, canvas and
fabric on board
79 x 59 cm
Courtesy the artist and Galerie
pompom, Sydney

Mason Kimber
Passage/Grid
2017
acrylic and oil stick on canvas
87 x 66.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Galerie
pompom, Sydney

Mason Kimber
Pathway/Patina
2017
acrylic, oil stick, paper, canvas and
fabric on board
79 x 59 cm
Courtesy Private Collection

Sanne Koelemij
Pushing Boarders (aqua)
2016
acrylic on perspex
30.6 x 35.7 cm

Sanne Koelemij
Pushing Boarders (orange)
2016
acrylic on perspex
30.6 x 35.7 cm

Sanne Koelemij
Pushing Boarders (red)
2016
acrylic on perspex
30.6 x 35.7 cm

Sanne Koelemij
Pushing Boarders (yellow ochre)
2016
acrylic on perspex
30.6 x 35.7 cm

Nadia Odlum
In passing I paused
2016
perspex, spray paint, acrylic paint,
wood, vinyl
47 x 22 x 9 cm

Nadia Odlum
Instruction for movement II
2016
perspex, spray paint, wood, vinyl
60 x 60 x 30cm

Nadia Odlum
This way (this way) that way
2015
perspex, spray paint, acrylic paint,
wood
90 x 32 x 26 cm

Elena Papanikolakis
Bona fide outlook
2015
acrylic, collage, marker and pencil
on board
40 x 40

Elena Papanikolakis
Links C
2014
acrylic, collage, photographs,
acetate, marker, pen and pencil on
board
61 x 46cm

Elena Papanikolakis
Links D
2014
acrylic, collage, photographs,
marker, pen and pencil on board
61 x 46cm
Courtesy Private Collection

Elena Papanikolakis
Not land-bound
2015
acrylic, collage and marker on board
40 x 40

Elena Papanikolakis
Orb
2015
pigment inkjet print on Hahnemuhle
51 x 41cm

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

Elena Papanikolakis
The Potential to Unwind in an Orderly Fashion
2015
pigment Inkjet Print on Hahnemuhle
51 x 41cm

Helen Shelley
Death Proof no.10
2010
mixed media on perspex
21 x 20 x 5cm
Courtesy Private Collection

Helen Shelley
Death Proof no.14
2010
mixed media on perspex
20 x 20 x 5cm

Helen Shelley
Grief, Magical Particle no.2
2013
mixed media on perspex
113 x 68cm

Kael Stasce
A to C
2017
steel and oil paint
37 x 33 cm

Kael Stasce
Caught Between
2017
board, acrylic paint wire, graphite
30.5 x 46 x 16 cm

Kael Stasce
Lead Line
2017
steel, graphite
6 x 23.5 x 13 cm

Kael Stasce
Semi-surfcool
2017
steel, oil paint, graphite
38.5 x 43 x 8.5 cm

Young Moderns

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 1
2017
linen, calico, found image, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board with glazed earthenware support
31.5 x 22.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 2
2017
calico, found image, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board with glazed earthenware support
31 x 26cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 3
2017
linen, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board with glazed earthenware
29.5 x 19cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 4
2017
linen, calico, earthenware, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board
29 x 22.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 5
2017
linen, calico, found image, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board
27.5 x 22.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 6
2017
linen, calico, found image, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board
27.5 x 22.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 7
2017
linen, calico, cotton rag paper, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board
27.5 x 22.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 8
2017
linen, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board
24 x 18cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Kate Tucker
Counterpart 9
2017
linen, acrylic mediums, acrylic and oil on board
24 x 18.5cm
Courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne, and Galerie pompom, Sydney

Ian Milliss:
Modernism in Sydney and
International Trends



Ian Milliss: Modernism in Sydney and International Trends

Ian Milliss is the 2017 Artist in Residence at the Modernist Research Centre at Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest supported by the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund, and is managed by Museums & Galleries of NSW.

As the youngest member of the late 1960s Central Street Gallery group and one of Australia's earliest conceptualists, by 1971 Ian Milliss' work quickly progressed into cultural activism beyond the conventional art world. This included green bans, resident action movement, trade unions, squatting, anti-prison activism, sustainable farming and anti-coal mining. In the late 1970s he participated in protests around the Sydney Biennale that led to the foundation of the Artworkers Union and in 1979 with Dale Keeling (and later Ian Burn) he founded Union Media Services P/L, a social marketing agency working for trade union, community groups and government. He has participated in numerous exhibitions including a 2006 retrospective at Macquarie University Art Gallery and a solo survey exhibition at Artspace Sydney in 2013. His collaboration with Lucas Ihlein, The Yeomans Project, at Art Gallery of NSW in 2013-14 has developed into a series of large scale collaborative projects focused on land use and sustainable agriculture, including the Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation and Sugar Versus The Reef, using Keyline farming techniques to protect the Great Barrier Reef. He writes regularly for Artlink magazine, guest editing the March 2017 issue on big data and data visualisation.



Farley & Lewers quarry c1940s
Photographs reproduced with the
permission of Penrith City Library

Ian Milliss: Modernism in Sydney and International Trends

‘Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, emigres, refugees.’¹

Art history tends to discuss artists as if they live in isolation from their society, concerned only with the aesthetic development of their art. Artists, on the other hand, know that the development of their art is hedged around with innumerable personal contingencies, and its future reception even more so. How do they support themselves, especially in a country like Australia where very few artists make a living from their art? How do they manage personal and family commitments and how does that effect the time available for their art? Where do they live; what personal environment do they create? What are their relations with other artists and how do those artists regard them? And finally, what is their legacy; are they eventually seen as more or less significant than they were seen in their lifetimes?

Now, 55 years after Gerald Lewers’ death and almost 40 years after Margo Lewers’, these questions demand re-examination. The social and cultural forces that framed their work during their lifetimes have played out in unpredicted ways. In retrospect, their work can be seen to exemplify cultural trends that are now more dominant and that reverse many earlier judgements of the apparent strengths and weaknesses in their work.

At the time of Gerald Lewers’ death, the conventional understanding of the artist as manufacturer of art objects had changed little from the 19th century, and Gerald’s production of utilitarian objects such as carved bowls as well as sculptures resulted in some critics questioning the seriousness of his work.²

Margo Lewers had been involved in crafts and household decoration before engaging more seriously with painting. In the years after Gerald’s death, her work developed from paintings to plexiglass constructions and, finally, large, stained, hanging fabrics and she was also constantly involved in mosaics and gardening.

This breadth of work whose domestic and utilitarian focus shows its Bauhaus-influenced roots in European modernism resulted in both artists’ work being dismissed as decorative and derivative internationalism. The Lewers were seen as good artists

who played important roles in the Sydney art world, but not the most important artists. That assessment remained unquestioned for many years; yet now, when the very idea of ‘the artwork’ is questioned in favour of a broader definition of cultural practice embracing all of an artist’s activities, the Lewers can be seen to be early exemplars of that more recent type of artistic practice. The coherence of their broader practice spanning different art and non-art media now stands in contrast to those artists such as the Heide school, who were more lauded at the time but whose nationalist storytelling and practice limited to figurative painting now appear to be a cultural dead end.

The criticism of derivative internationalism was not directed at the Lewers alone, or even specifically; it was also applied to much other post-World War II Sydney art, particularly after the 1959 Antipodean Manifesto, which pitted figuration against abstraction. It was confected cultural war revealing the social tensions of the rearguard battle fought by those promoting an Anglophile Australian nationalist identity when faced with growing multiculturalism, and was soon lost in the rapid turnover of 1960s avant-gardes, as abstraction was followed by hard-edge post-painterly abstraction and, at the end of the decade, the beginning of conceptualism and post-object art.

Bound up in these developments was the fact that Sydney’s internationalism was not derivative but inherent because of the many European immigrant artists with deep roots in European modernism. Gerald and Margo Lewers’ history as artists was intimately bound up in this Sydney and its postwar economic and cultural expansion. It was also bound up in broad political movements of the time; a political realignment from the collapsing British Empire to the newly risen US empire and its cultural capital, New York.

Sydney’s growth, based on immigration, not only provided the Lewers with financial support but also brought about their exile to the city’s outskirts – a lesser, voluntary exile that paralleled the greater exile of the many refugee and immigrant artists whose work came to dominate the Sydney art world during their lifetimes.

Ian Milliss: Modernism in Sydney and International Trends

The Lewers had both studied briefly in Europe as well as in the UK. In 1931, Gerald had briefly visited Vienna, where he studied painting and drawing at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*. In 1934, Margo had travelled to France, Belgium and Germany after attending the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. The Bauhaus and Scandinavian modernist design that she saw was to influence her approach in her interior design consultancy and Notanda Gallery design shop that she opened on her return to Sydney.

It was during the decade from 1945 that the various elements of the Lewers story came together – the quarrying business, the house, the artists – all within Sydney's development as an international city.

Underpinning all the Lewers' activities was the income from the quarrying business. Farley and Lewers, the partnership formed by Mervyn Farley and Jack Lewers, began general excavation and road construction in northern Sydney in 1927. Mervyn and Jack were joined in 1929 by Gerald, Jack's brother, and by the mid 1930s they were winning road, bridge and railway building contracts. In 1938, they acquired their first leases on the Nepean River for the extraction of sand and gravel. There they also installed their first crushing and screening plant to supply outside customers as well as providing for their own construction needs. In 1940, the partnership was incorporated as Farley & Lewers Pty Ltd and in 1956 it was listed on the Sydney Stock Exchange.³

The Lewers purchased the 10-acre River Road Emu Plains house and former pig farm around 1942 when Gerald took over management of the company's Castlereagh quarrying operations several kilometres further down the Nepean River. He lived there during the week, returning on weekends to the house in Murdoch Street, Cremorne, where Margo lived with their two daughters, Darani, born in 1936, and Tanya, born in 1941. When Gerald quit as quarry manager in 1950 to become a full-time sculptor, the family moved permanently to Emu Plains.

By that time, Australian cultural life was being driven by accelerated population growth. Beginning in 1945, the multiculturalism of that growing population

both reflected and facilitated a political realignment from White Australia's earlier Anglo-Celtic origins. From the end of the war until Margo Lewers' death in 1978, Sydney more than doubled in population.⁴ The first wave of assisted migration starting in 1947 was refugees displaced by the war, particularly from eastern Europe. The second wave beginning around 1953 was economic migration of people seeking employment and a better way of life.⁵

Many of the migrants of both waves were highly educated, middle class and urban but in Australia they faced prejudice, particularly if they spoke little English. If their qualifications were unrecognised they were forced into the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme or dirty jobs in labouring or factories. As they found their feet they began to form new, sophisticated and supportive communities. Many were creatives – artists, architects, designers, craftspeople – who were trained modernists, fully aware of the most advanced European movements. This was to create subtle conflicts in the Australian art world. As their sophisticated modernism ran up against the more anodyne Anglocentric modernism or outright conservatism that had dominated Australian arts, a series of culture wars broke out.

Both Margo and Gerald were forming their artistic practices; Gerald as sculptor of dynamic, semi-abstract wood and stone carvings, while Margo was digesting constructivist abstraction derived from Hepworth and Nicholson on the one hand and, more locally, a cubist group around their friends Ralph Balson, Grace Crowley and Rah Fizelle. In 1946, she began attending the Sydney school of Desiderius Orban. The Hungarian Orban had fled Nazi anti-Semitism, arriving in Australia in 1939 at the age of 55 after a prominent career in Budapest. Prior to World War I, Orban had studied in Paris, where he was in contact with Braque, Modigliani and Picasso, and later was a member of The Eight group, who had brought modernism to Hungary. His many Sydney students came to include Yvonne Audette, John Coburn, Virginia Cuppaidge, Sheila McDonald, John Olsen and Aileen Rogers.

Ian Milliss: Modernism in Sydney and International Trends

Orban was at the centre of the group of European modernists that developed through immigration and, as president of the NSW Contemporary Art Society (CAS) from 1946 to 1949, he was at the heart of progressive cultural thought in Sydney.

The NSW CAS was an offshoot of the Victorian CAS set up in reaction to Robert Menzies' support for an Australian Academy of Art to promote a 'national art' based on conservative and nationalist values. European modernism had come under fire in the late 1930s from figures like JS MacDonald, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and former director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), who had commented (correctly) that modern art 'is not liked by the art galleries of Australia'. His statements, 'the racial expression of others will not be ours' and 'If we so choose, we can yet be the elect of the world, the last of the pastoralists, the thoroughbred Aryans in all their nobility',⁶ betray the fascist undertones of the cultural conservatism being promoted. At its most extreme, in AGNSW trustee Sir Lionel Lindsay's 1942 essay 'Addled Art', modernism is pilloried as a Jewish communist conspiracy. In the light of later Holocaust revelations, Lindsay attempted to soften this by adding there were some 'good' Jews like Monash and Phillips Fox.⁷

The NSW CAS had been founded in 1939 with the encouragement of Dr HV Evatt following a dinner of contemporary artists at his home with guests John and Sunday Reed, who had co-founded the Victorian branch. It was to remain a central element of the Sydney art world until its closure in the mid 1970s, staging an annual exhibition of members and an under 25s exhibition, Young Contemporaries, that became an art-world initiation for most young artists.

In a peculiar political twist in the early 1950s, the CAS became involved in rivalry with the Society of Realist Arts (SORA), a communist party front promoting socialist realism. There was a profound irony in the fact that many of the supposedly communist modernists who joined the CAS in the early 1950s had in fact fled as refugees from the advancing Russian Stalinist Communists and now found themselves in conflict with the genuinely communist but aesthetically

conservative figurative social realists. This segue from communist modernism to anti-communist liberal modernism became complete during the 1960s when the rabid cold warrior Elwyn Lynn was CAS president, and abstraction, particularly American abstract expressionism and later formalist post-painterly abstraction, became the avant-garde but also the symbol of American cultural hegemony.

When Margo Lewers herself became CAS secretary in 1950, she initiated an exhibition, Art Without Epoch, that attempted to pull together much of the European art that had begun to appear in Sydney collections. The exhibition of more than 150 works contained not just modernists like Braque, Matisse and Picasso, but also works such as Gothic sculpture that reflected the modernist taste for primitivism. The first exhibition of its type to be staged in Australia, its eclecticism was paralleled in the ongoing range of subjects and speakers in the CAS lecture program that covered other arts, education and even town planning.

The Sydney modernist movement and the Lewers in particular were interested in an entire modernist lifestyle embracing both the domestic and public environment, and this approach necessarily saw painting and sculpture as just part of a broader cultural practice that also included architecture and design. This meant that sculptural downpipes that turned rainwater into a spiralling fountain, or mosaic bathroom and kitchen floors and walls, carved wooden bowls and stacks of river pebbles in the garden were all as significant as paintings and sculptures, at least in the Lewers' own domestic environment. In other words, Margo's paintings were 'decorative'. And in the 1950s and 1960s proxy wars of cultural dominance, terms like 'decorative' and 'derivative' became code for 'not British', pressed by an ageing establishment that could no longer get away with confected anti-Semitic attacks.

Through the influence of Orban; the older influence of Balson and Crowley; and the arrival of the many European modernists such as Max Feuerring, Leonard Hensing, Peter Kaiser, Eva Kubbos, Stanislaus Rapotec and Henry Salkauskas; abstraction was to become the dominant mode in Sydney from the

Ian Milliss: Modernism in Sydney and International Trends

early 1950s. In Melbourne, the influence of the Heide school and its variation of English literary figuration dominated. The familiar academic tropes of narrative and history painting continued in a semi-modernist fancy dress, a tendency that reached its low point in the 1959 Antipodean Manifesto, a call for a nationalist figurative art similar to Menzies' Australian Academy of two decades earlier but this time promoted by the left-leaning Bernard Smith, a supporter of socialist realism and in the 1940s a savage critic of the earlier promoters of nationalist art.

It was during the 1950s that the lazy but deeply entrenched cultural myths about the two cities began: that Sydney was brash and nouveau riche, internationalist in outlook but therefore superficial and derivative, leading to an interest in abstraction; and that Melbourne was establishment, Anglophile, more substantially intellectual but also conservative, cliquish, less capable of innovation and hence more supportive of figuration.

The contrast between the Reeds and the Lewers is evident in almost every detail, yet the single similarity of a post-World War II artists' enclave on the outskirts of a capital city brings into focus many of the cultural issues of the era. While the Reeds were old money patrons enacting a version of the English country house party, complete with bedroom hopping, the Lewers were artists and entrepreneurs rising in wealth, moving to the country to make money for their business and to support their art. Their contrasting situations illustrate perfectly an old joke about the difference between the cities, that if you had a good idea in Melbourne you started a magazine to tell everyone about it while in Sydney you threw a party. This joke about subtle cultural differences was literally true: while the Reeds sponsored the magazine *Angry Penguins*, the Lewers' riverside parties became legendary gatherings of Sydney's art world.

The conservative reassertion of Anglophile values disguised as Australian identity was deeply tinted by nostalgia. While this debate raged between the 'Sydney Abs' and the 'Melbourne Figs', as Robert Hughes called them,⁸ Sydney was forming

into an international city, with a genuinely original, if unavoidably regional, modernist culture.

Far more complex and contradictory forces lurked beneath the drunken braggadocio of artists' pub arguments. The insistence that art should encapsulate Australian identity was presented as progressive but was often little more than a polite symbolic formulation of White Australia's long history of racism (at that time still enshrined in law), fear of openness and diversity, and above all an underlying fear of losing control of a country so recently stolen from its Indigenous inhabitants and even more recently defended from Asian invasion, a fear still seen in hostility to refugees.

Australian art history has alternated between lengthy periods of conservative business-as-usual and brief periods of upheaval – all within an overall framework of cultural colonialism; a sense that real art happens elsewhere. Between the mid 1940s and the mid 1970s – the period of Margo Lewers' greatest activity – was one of the periods of upheaval, not simply because there were major shifts in fashionable international art styles but more importantly because of changes in transport and communication, in Australia's foreign policy orientation, population demographics and government policy in funding the institutional framework of the visual arts. These factors influenced the form and content of the art being shown in Sydney and also the artists' understanding of the possibilities available to them.

By the time of Gerald Lewers' accidental death in 1962, the Australian (as opposed to the migrant) artists had divided into three main groups – the leavers, the colonialists and the stayers – each representing a different response to the existing cultural status quo.

The leavers were those who had settled overseas even though, for some, their main market remained in Australia. This group included Yvonne Audette, Donald Friend, Clem Meadmore, Sidney Nolan, Justin O'Brien, Jeffrey Smart and Peter Upward, and also longer term expats such as Roy de Maistre. Not surprisingly, many of them were gay and fleeing a particularly intolerant Australia, but nonetheless

Ian Milliss: Modernism in Sydney and International Trends

having mostly come to prominence in the 10 years after the war, were now successful and accepted.

The colonialists were the gum tree painters, the North Shore Anglophiles clustered around the Royal Art Society, artistically irrelevant but still wielding considerable institutional power through people like the aged painter Sir Erik Langker, president of both the Royal Art Society and the Board of Trustees of the Art Gallery of NSW until the early 1970s.

The stayers were those who, although they may have gone overseas as part of their art education, were nonetheless permanently settled in Australia, but unlike the colonialists they had absorbed at least some of the lessons of European modernism. They were a wide-ranging group that included the Lewers; Grace Cossington Smith, only in her old age achieving the prominence she deserved; the adventurous Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson; John Passmore; and younger artists including John Coburn, Frank Hodgkinson, Robert Klippel, Elwyn Lynn and Carl Plate.

What happened next was unprecedented. Basically, as the population and the migrant cultural influence continued to grow, Australian art caught up with the rest of the world. Within a brief 10-year period, several waves of art fashion swept through the Sydney scene. Counting the abstract expressionists, at least three different groups of artists could successively claim to be the avant-garde of the time. The result was that Australian art on the one hand became a connected part of the international art scene. On the other hand, that very fact served to reinforce a sense of marginalisation, of being on the periphery.

At the beginning of the decade the abstract expressionists predominated. The formation of Central Street Gallery in 1966 by Royston Harpur, Tony McGillick, Harald Noritis and John White reflected a change of focus and the influence of New York at a time when US political influence had completely superseded British influence. It was aggressively graphic in form but also in its scale and ambition. Paintings by Tony McGillick or Rollin Schlicht were typically up to four metres wide and three metres high, not really made for

the polite terrace-house market. Many of the artists around Central Street had been friends in London in the early 1960s and as they drifted back to Australia they showed there briefly before they moved on to more commercial galleries like Gallery A and Rudy Komon's which began to build stables of hard-edge painters like David Aspden, Michael Johnson, Ron Robertson-Swann and Vernon Treweeke.

There was more than a little bit of jealousy and aggression vented when *The Field*, which showcased this new wave of work from throughout Australia, was the inaugural exhibition at the new premises of the NGV in 1968. And it wasn't just the abstract expressionists who were displeased; even more vocal were the remaining Antipodeans. Albert Tucker was particularly vitriolic.⁹

Since the mid 19th century, the generational succession of styles had taken two to three decades, an entire generation or more, to pass through. Suddenly, this process was being accelerated as faster transport and communications resulted in a rapid process of catch up. From abstract expressionism to hard-edge had taken only 10 years, about half the previous time.

The next step was even shorter, and it landed with an even bigger bang when Christo and Jeanne-Claude arrived in Australia in late 1969 to do their *Wrapped coast* at Little Bay. There has probably never been so much publicity for any art event in Australian history. While they were here, they also held an exhibition at Central Street. Having been on the scene for less than five years and little more than a year after their triumphal NGV Field exhibition, the hard-edge painters themselves had been trumped. Already, younger artists had begun to produce work which went beyond traditional painting and sculpture. Suddenly, painting of any sort, no matter what style and no matter how advanced, looked completely superseded. Conceptual art had arrived, and it was the beginning of the 'painting is dead' era.

In a period of only five or six years, Sydney had gone from gestural abstract expressionism to hard-edge painting to post-object or conceptual art. Despite being on the other side of the world, it was now possible

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to be aware of what was being exhibited in New York or London or Europe within a month or two of it happening – if you so desired. And, even if Sydney lacked the large art scene of those places, it was nonetheless possible if you were at all creative to pick up this ball and run with it; to experiment in your own way with the same issues.

At the beginning of this chaotic period, Margo Lewers had been preoccupied after Gerald's death finishing his last major commissions such as the Reserve Bank Building sculpture, which should be seen as a collaborative work. In 1960, Margo had produced the large (2.4 m x 14.6 m) mosaic mural for the Canberra Rex Hotel, arguably her best work. But equally noteworthy is the monochrome yellow mosaic wall in the bathroom of Ancher House, built in 1967. Margo's disregard for boundaries between art and domestic life is also seen there in the fitted wardrobe whose shelves of perspex are forerunners of her later perspex works. Margo continued to paint but in the succeeding years she was clearly influenced by hard-edge painting, the constructivism of Naum Gabo and also recent European geometric abstraction and kinetic and light works, which had been seen in the purchases made by Elwyn Lynn as curator of the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art at the University of Sydney.

The greater availability of new materials like coloured perspex had already attracted artists like Mike Kitching, who had been producing large sculptures combining perspex and polished aluminium into sculptures resembling strange satellites. In 1970, Margo began producing reliefs and sculptures which retained some of the cubist structure of her paintings but added elements of shadows and reflections on walls. These are in many ways her most enticing and successful artworks but, as usual, they were domestic in scale. They were also unsympathetically received, leading to her outburst, 'I'm not temperamentally suited for exhibitions and I never, never, never, want to have another exhibition after this one'¹⁰. While this statement has been interpreted as a result of frustration, it also hints at a more current understanding of artistic production – less as production for the market and more intended as part of the creation of a personal

environment, an activity that had always been at the forefront of Margo's practice.

Despite this statement, in the following years Margo began what would be her final burst of experimentation. Her last three exhibitions featured painted fabric wall hangings. These had grown out of a tapestry design, and while the motifs were reminiscent of her paintings, their increased scale and large, flat areas of textureless colour showed the influence of recent hard-edge painting.

In late 1977, Margo was diagnosed with lung cancer. She died in early 1978. Several years earlier she had begun planning the future of her family home and its attached gallery as an art centre and a place where artists could meet and exchange ideas; in other words, a permanent party that would carry on the traditions of the house. It was the final, clear statement that her most important work had been her practice of a creative life rather than the individual artworks produced.

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- 1 Edward Said 'Reflections on Exile' Granta 13: After the Revolution Essays & Memoirs 1st September 1984
- 2 The critic Noel Hutchinson described Gerald's work as merely decorative according to Frank Hinder quoted in Hickey, Denise Gerald and Margo Lewers Their Lives and Their Work p 69.
- 3 Farley & Lewers Limited Fiftieth Anniversary 1927-1977 memorial publication.
- 4 Australian Bureau of Statistics 3105.0.65.001 Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2014 3. Population Distribution
- 5 Australian Migration History Timeline, Migration Heritage Centre <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime-history/1945-1965/index.html> accessed 15/6/2017
- 6 quoted in Smith, Bernard 'The Fascist Mentality in Australian Art and Criticism' Reason in Revolt Source documents of Australian Radicalism; First Published: in The Communist Review, June 1946 pp. 182-4, and July 1946 pp 215-217;
- 7 ibid
- 8 Hughes, Robert Things I Didn't Know p 180
- 9 Patrick McCaughey regarded The Field as putting a stop to the debate by moving past it: "The new convention, the alignment of Australian art with the modernist tradition, however, has been mistaken for a surrender to the gods of fashion and the vicissitudes of an anonymous internationalism. The Field has done us all a service by bringing to a head the phoney debate between the conflicting allegiances of regionalism and internationalism. It is high time these two myths were laid to rest." McCaughey, Patrick 'The Significance of The Field', Art and Australia, vol.6, no.3, December 1968, p.35.
- 10 Artist in a New Medium, Daily Telegraph 26 July 1971



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List of works
All measurements are in
cm (h x w x d)

Ian Milliss
Shifting Dirt installation
2017
digital prints on paper and plastic
dimensions variable

Modernist Research Centre
Writing Project

Shirley Daborn

The Lewers:
Modernism and Difference

Shirley Daborn: The Lewers: Modernism and Difference

'There's a big row in the art world', the Sun readers set the experts arguing ...¹

Compelled to contribute opinions to the *Sun*, the 'man on the street' reveals the investment placed on the merit of art as a marker of community identity.² The newspaper headline represents the ongoing turmoil of a post-WWII art world embroiled in a dispute between the traditional art establishment and the growing number of artists experimenting with abstraction. Two of these artists were Gerald Lewers and Margo Lewers, a married couple whose creative practice saw them distil early influences of modern art, design and living into a lifelong experimentation with abstraction as a visual language that would help transform a society benefitting from the values that concepts of progress would bring to a new, modern world. Sydney artists believing in the potential of abstraction to be a unifying visual language wanted to be involved in the international conversation, and modernism provided a platform. The new was challenging the old and this dispute saw the concept of the avant-garde reaffirmed in Australia.

The belief in a constant state of societal evolution applied to the arts. Nine propositions outlining the tenets of modern art were listed in *Evolution in Modern Art*, a book owned by Gerald Lewers.³ These rules outlined that an avant-garde movement was necessary to ensure the evolution of art by tackling the hostility of the uniformed majority. Change, the tenets argued, was not possible without controversy and, ultimately, 'ignorance triumphs at a General Election'.⁴ The message for the modernist artist was clear: although a minority in number, they must unite in support of modern art values being seen as a necessity for change. Ultimately, modern art was positioned as a key signifier of a highly cultured society.

The talk of 'necessary upheaval' defined the language prevalent in much of England and Europe during the early 20th century and set the mood within the Sydney art movement of the 1930s through to the postwar period. What is crucial to consider is the degree to which culture was understood to be a foundational platform on which to build social consciousness and

civic engagement. For highly influential British poet, art critic and champion of modern art Herbert Read, 'the farther a society progresses, the more clearly the individual becomes the antithesis of the group'.⁵

In rejecting the status quo, modernist artists were striving to re-establish an art form of originality and creativity that suited the modern concept of progress. It was during this time of rejection and challenge that the established rules of visual representation were tested, creating an atmosphere ripe for experimentation to determine what the new language of abstraction could be. The endeavour resulted in a somewhat eclectic approach and a flurry of artistic styles, concepts and ideas; and approaches to art including geometric abstraction, expressionism and matter painting. The diversity of approaches to interpreting modernist ideals is apparent in the differing approaches adopted by Gerald and Margo Lewers. Gerald aimed to create emotion and viewer connection through an exploration of a material's inherent properties; Margo through skill in manipulating materials to convey conceptual truths.

What was at stake for creative individuals tackling the issue of how to make modernist ideals manifest was the ability to answer the pressing question of how society could shape a sophisticated culture through interpreting the reality of the new, modern world. This resulting state of play created a setting for a spirited debate.

Everyday modern

As modernists, Margo and Gerald Lewers found themselves embroiled in the push to position abstract art as central to modern living. Gerald and Margo's home on the Nepean River at Emu Plains exemplified modernism. For Gerald's and Margo's sense of modernism, the centre-periphery issue was a redundant notion because modernism was an intangible energy that existed wherever you may be. Modernism was not something you did – it was a way of being in the world that promised a sense of belonging to some force bigger than oneself, akin to the uniting forces of religion.

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In a way, the Emu Plains location some 37 miles (60 km) from Sydney enabled the Lewers to live modernism in a relatively unique, holistic way. The physical transformation of the property from a pig farm into a location for creating and discussing all things art stands as a signifier for the power of modernism as a universal ideal for living. The modern home the Lewers created presented a mix of art and craft. Well-designed items sat naturally side by side with art. Living amid contemporary art, handcrafted home furnishings by Margo and domestic items, such as bowls and serving spoons by Gerald, was a means of interweaving the values of the artist/artisan within everyday modern life.

The early life of Gerald and Margo established the foundation on which they would build a holistic lifestyle celebrating the modernist ethos of mixing craft and art as espoused in the doctrine of Bauhaus principles. Travelling through Europe exposed them to a wealth of new and traditional art, craft, design objects, and ideas. A visit to the Ideal Home Exhibition in London seemed to solidify Margo's belief in the importance of including good design in all aspects of life. Gerald's interpretation of modernism can be seen as closely connected with his Quaker heritage. During his schooldays, he spent one year as a boarder at the Quaker 'Friends School' in Hobart. Only Gerald's enrolment card remains on file at the school; however, the likelihood of his being taught woodwork skills by the resourceful Charles Goddard are high.⁶ Goddard oversaw a well-equipped workshop and practised the values of economy and respect of materials.⁷ Underpinning Gerald's artistic practice was his lifelong love of the bush and his valuing of the natural world, which saw him create art by working with the properties inherent to materials such as rock, stone and, later, metal.

Gerald travelled to Vienna in 1931 to study painting and drawing at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, the School of Applied Arts. The school was a result of a growing interest in science, technology and industry that was impressed upon art historian and reformist Rudolf von Eitelberger during his visit to the South Kensington Exposition of 1862, later becoming the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.⁸

Initially lacking the 'social prestige' of the Fine Arts Academy, the School of Applied Arts quickly gained a reputation for enquiry to become 'a hothouse of artistic experimentation'.⁹ Many of the school's teachers were Vienna Secession (also known as the Union of Austrian Artists) members whose manifesto decreed: 'We do not recognize any differences between 'high art' and 'lesser arts'', meaning that the Secessionists would commit themselves to a reform of arts and crafts as one aspect of the ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art.¹⁰

The school's focus on artistry formed from a mix of artisanal skill and good design would have suited Gerald's personality. The attention given to crafting materials in the service of useful objects for everyday modern living speaks to his ease of moving between the representational and the abstract, and also between art and functional ware.

Gerald and Margo's visit to London was an enormous opportunity to experience firsthand a sense of what international modernism could mean. They had both gained a taste of European-influenced teaching when studying in Sydney with Italian-born Antonio Datillo-Rubbo, whose students included Grace Cossington Smith, Roy de Maistre and Roland Wakelin. Later, in 1945, when Margo committed to becoming an artist, she enrolled to study with Hungarian-born Desiderius Orban, whose students included Judy Cassab and John Olsen. In London, Gerald and Margo met influential modern anarchist poet, writer and art critic Herbert Read, and exposure to his ideas on the emerging British modern art was pivotal to the early formation of ideas about what art could be. Read was a supporter of many artists including Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson at a time when they received little acclaim. The Lewers met with Hepworth and Nicholson and worked in their London studio. Initially unimpressed by Nicholson's work, Margo would later speak of its lasting impact on her practice.

After touring Europe and studying textile design with designer, illustrator and wood engraver John Farleigh at the Central School of Art and Craft London in 1934, Margo returned to Sydney and pursued a

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career in interior design. Establishing a studio in Sussex Street, Sydney, Margo recalled that she was:

‘the first person to show hand-blocked linen in Sydney and they were very different from the usual floral prints they had in those days. Mine were native designs, stripes – all very vigorous’.¹¹

In 1935, Margo held a solo exhibition of hand-printed textiles and handpainted pottery at the Argosy Gallery. The opening speech by Mrs Rodney Dangar, ‘praised the modern vogue for simplicity in furnishing, and said that it gave more opportunity than formerly to those who had an aptitude for decoration.’¹² The blending of art and craft was to be about more than decoration. Margo had a design included in an article titled, ‘A new approach to textile designing by a group of Australian artists’. In it she explains the importance of maintaining the integrity of the original form:

‘I believe that any well-conceived painting is dependent on its structure. By reducing this composition to the simplest forms and lines, I have tried to retain certain variations of tones which I feel are suitable to fabric design, and still convey the interest of the original form.’¹³

At Emu Plains, art and craft, old and new, flowed through the interior and exterior spaces. The old farmhouse was complemented with a modernised living annex that together created a courtyard suitable for entertaining. The garden adopted a Japanese aesthetic of individual exterior ‘rooms’ and the living spaces were decorated with ikebana-inspired arrangements. Both inside and outside, the classic art form of mosaic tiles was transformed into a modernist exploration of colour and tone.

Before the Lewers relocated permanently to Emu Plains, they spent many weekends there in the company of Margel Hinder and Frank Hinder, who documented their shared experiences in a significant number of sketches. Unlike many contemporaries who headed towards Britain, Frank had travelled to America where he studied under Emil Bisttram in Taos, New Mexico; worked as an illustrator; and married American-born artist Margel Harris. Back in Sydney, in 1934, the Hinders united with like-

minded artists such as Grace Crowley, Rah Fizelle and Eleonore Lange. The following year the Lewers returned from England and the four soon formed a significant friendship. Frank Hinder’s appetite for the theory of dynamic symmetry as conceived by Jay Hambidge would have no doubt been an added degree of intellectual rigour to current debates. Hinder’s focus on ‘movement and rhythm’ as observed by Robert Hughes¹⁴ shared similarities with Gerald’s practice. While Margo’s work engaged with intellectual principles of art practice, the concept of individual expression remained of paramount importance.

International conversation

The issue of the relationship between art and Australian identity continued to be a point for critical debate and the postwar period was a time in which critics attempted to grapple with a largely destabilised understanding of the role that art should, or could, play in a climate of rapid social change. Originally dominating the Sydney scene was the Society of Artists representing artists such as Will Ashton, George Lambert, Norman Lindsay, Lionel Lindsay and Arthur Streeton. Art patron and publisher Sydney Ure Smith was president of the Society of Artists and, as an advocate of traditional academic art, was an influential adversary of avant-garde aesthetics. The tension and passion led to some vitriolic exchanges played out in the mainstream press.¹⁵

Modernism was undoubtedly contentious and resulted in a divisive scene that managed to draw prominent political identities such as then attorney-general RG Menzies and Justice HV Evatt into the debate. Adopting polar positions, Menzies and Evatt delivered ardent opinions on either side of the traditional/modernism debate. Menzies’ opening speech at the Victorian Artists’ Society annual exhibition in 1937 clearly drew a line in the sand, declaring: ‘Great art speaks a language which every intelligent person can understand, the people who call themselves modernists today talk a different

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language.¹⁶ In contrast, Evatt's speech to launch Exhibition 1 lauded the intent of modern artists to form a connection between individual expression and concepts of reality.

In Sydney, artist and art critic Lionel Lindsay argued that modernism was European art market propaganda controlled by Jewish dealers and wrote *Addled Art*, a book in which he delivered an all-out attack on modern artists, aesthetics and what he feared to be the domination of civilisation by the avant-garde. In Melbourne, Lindsay's like-minded counterpart and Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, JS MacDonald, reported modern art to be primarily the work of 'degenerates and perverts'.¹⁷ In 1931, he stridently described how:

'we are not only a nation, but a race, and both occupy a particular territory and spring from a specific soil. The racial expressions of others will not be ours ... we will be mainly contented with our own imagery expressed in our own independent-minded sons'.¹⁸

The search to uncover an intrinsic essence was derived, according to Robert Hughes, from a belief in 'a genius loci – presumably some exhalation from the wheat and wool – which shaped the personality of Australian painters'.¹⁹ From within the turmoil of this under-explored period of modernism in Sydney emerged key organisations, collaborative groups and exhibitions with the explicit aim of promoting the value of abstraction.

Exhibition 1 is epitomised as the first earnest 'home-grown' 'public challenge to the Ure Smith-dominated Society of Artists and its claim to be Sydney's forum for progressive art'.²⁰ In 1939, Exhibition 1 – featuring modernist works by painters Ralph Balson, Grace Crowley, Rah Fizelle, Frank Hinder and Frank Medworth and sculptors Margel Hinder, Eleonore Lange and Gerald Lewers – was launched with great expectations. In the catalogue, Eleonore Lange wrote that there was a need to 'establish "a new realm of visual existence"'.²¹ For Lange and other artists involved, it was their responsibility to lead the Australian public forward into a new, modern world. Lange clearly outlined a sound belief in the importance

of modernist practice for broader societal harmony. For the 'new realm of visual existence' to succeed, it would need to supplant the old guard of traditional, academy-trained artists that had long dominated the Sydney art world.²² Modernism was to be about progress, and Exhibition 1 was to be a milestone for abstract art within an Australian context.

The same year that Sydney hosted Exhibition 1, the Contemporary Art Society was formed in Sydney, one year after Melbourne, to promote 'visual art forms which ... are original and creative or which strive to give expression to progressive contemporary thought and life'.²³ The Sydney approach resulted in a group formed from a mix of creative practitioners and professionals working in a cross-section of disciplines and aesthetic styles and was an important vehicle for artistic development and the distribution of ideas. Hosting regular exhibitions in Sydney, the society took part in the international conversation and tapped into the interest that saw artworks being brought into and being sent out of Australia. Sydneysiders, for example, keenly attended international touring exhibitions, such as an exhibition of contemporary British artists brought to Sydney before the war in 1933 by Alleyne Zander; and French Painting Today in 1953, which included modernist work by Braque, Léger, Matisse, Miró and Picasso.

Between 1941 and 1945, the exhibition Art of Australia 1788–1941 toured the USA and Canada and in 1957 works heading to Britain resulted in the 'First-ever abstract line-up art show from Australia to go overseas'.²⁴ In 1951, and largely driven by Paul Beadle, Lyndon Dadswell and Gerald Lewers, the Society of Sculptors and Associates was formed with a primary objective 'to advance the understanding and appreciation of sculpture and to encourage the use and application of sculpture and its associate arts'.²⁵ Inspired by a 1948 exhibition of international artists held in Battersea Park, England, the society held its inaugural Sydney exhibition, the Open Air Exhibition of Sculpture, 'on the pleasant slopes of the Botanic Gardens, between the Mitchell Library and the Conservatorium'.²⁶ Consisting of 32 sculptures and

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representing 18 members, the exhibition took the art out of the gallery space and placed it within the public domain.

The art movements of Europe, England and New York were highly influential on the direction of Australian abstraction, as was the modernist obsession with notions of 'primitive' art. In 1941, for example, an exhibition of Balinese art at the Notanda Gallery in Rowe Street, Sydney, run by Carl Plate, was reported in the Sydney press as a show of interest.²⁷ Like many of their contemporaries, such as Margaret Preston, Gerald's and Margo's practices were shaped by local and international study and a curiosity that saw the early traditional British influence later complemented by travels to Asian nations. It was not unusual for artists to be interested in the 'primitive', with many collecting artefacts from island cultures. Australian artists were no exception. For example, Hughes states that John Olsen was a 'collector of primitive art – arguing that it was a means of being attributed with the 'power, even the magical efficacy,' that, Olsen argued, provided a means of representing the tension that exists 'between the grotesque and the purely lyrical, the exquisitely observed landscape and the lurking beasts behind it'. These visits provided opportunities to observe different cultural practices and aesthetics that fuelled a sense of enquiry and increased awareness regarding forms of visual expression.²⁸

Gerald Lewers had an opportunity to experience the ancient art forms of China when he was part of a delegation touring China as part of the Australian Government's Colombo Plan. The initiative began in 1951 and was designed to encourage greater 'flexible understandings of social, cultural and economic forms of engagement with Asia' and ultimately 'hastened the rapid dismantling of Australia's White Australia policy'.²⁹ Gerald filled numerous sketchbooks with observations and notations of everyday materials, people and events while travelling throughout Singapore, Japan and China; his books are brimming with portraits, street scenes and various objects: bowls and utensils, modes of transport and construction, and bridges and other architectural structures. Gerald records the location and sometimes includes notations regarding the object

or event he is witnessing. His trip to the Yun Kang Caves, for example, prompted quick sketches recording the local customs of people at work, a cooking pot and a brief list of statistics and facts.

Gerald's observations are interspersed with visualisations of his emerging ideas.

Both animals and human form are, at times, represented in a state of transformation as a means of deepening his understanding of movement. The original form is increasingly simplified into an abstract representation revealing abstract works that are fundamentally a metamorphosis based within the natural world. Birds, fish, the human form, all undergo a process that reduces them to a simplified form founded on an abstracted line. The biomorphism of his early works, such as *Plough* and *Road roller* displayed in Six Colonial Artists in London, is shown to have remained to some degree throughout his practice. Gerald's sketchbooks reveal a man interested in the particular – in the numerous interconnections that exist between function and form in everyday life.

In contrast, Margo's interests suggest a greater interest in abstraction as it relates to broader, universal concepts. Margo embraced abstraction as non-representational art created from an intuitive expression that distilled reality to its essence as a fundamental means of communication. From the beginning of her career as a modern artist, the principles of colour and light provided a formal platform on which Margo would continually experiment and generate new works. Margo explained:

'As an abstract painter, penetration of light through colour, space, tensions, physical forces, surface movement and textures all occupy my attention. The emphasis on any of these alters in degree according to my conception at any given time. I hope to unlink the false visual appearances and to portray the universal life beneath – primary essentials which could comprise all particulars in any place at any time.'³⁰

Margo's modernism was an abstraction formed from an understanding that the conveyance of emotion was central to artistic practice. Rather than representing the immediacy of the moment, as

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with impressionism, Margo was driven by a belief in a shared visual language that, when expressed by the artist, could communicate feelings and emotions intuitively.

Modern industrial

Much abstract art of the postwar period echoed the busyness and transformation of the concept of landscape in art away from nature and towards one that was 'man-made'. Construction and development were favoured areas of exploration and the industrial, urban landscape of modern progress was typified by an art of line and gridding.

Sydney modernism during this time was a dynamic, energetic force that was particularly shaped by urban development and a desire to place the city and the nation on the world stage. The newly mechanised and industrialised environment of postwar Sydney saw the championing of the international style as critical to the nation's status as a world player. Modern architecture was to provide simplicity of form that would enable a focus on function to direct society towards a progressive future. A focus on abstraction, progress and international communication saw the coming together of like-minded individuals from the art scene and the business world.

Prominent public servant HC (Nugget) Coombs (1906–97) held many significant positions that had a direct impact on Australia's cultural life including chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs and head of the Australia Council for the Arts. Coombs displayed his social consciousness by championing for a future founded on rebuilding family life and continually considered ways in which art could mediate cultural change.³¹ He was heavily involved in building a postwar society with the necessary facilities to deliver modern community amenities to modern families.³² Coombs was an important advocate for modernism and the contribution that art could make to the overall wellbeing of society.

The establishment of the Australian National University in 1946 with Coombs' involvement was a

prime opportunity to execute a modernist, holistic approach to design. University House became a beacon to the modernist aesthetic. Designed by University of Melbourne Professor of Architecture Brian Lewis, it included 'linear, stylised animals in brass inlaid in the terrazzo foyer floor' by Frank Hinder and modern furniture designed by Fred Ward utilising Australian timbers.³³ Gerald Lewers' commissioned piece *Reclining figure (Relaxation)* adorns the entrance to University House. Situating modern art and architecture at the heart of modern learning was a clear public message that the arts were culturally significant and integral to the development of a healthy civic identity.

Completed in 1960, the Reserve Bank in Martin Place, Sydney, epitomised the cross-disciplinary ideals represented by the Contemporary Art Society and the Society of Sculptors and Associates. Designed in the international style, the building was a celebration of fluid space with a sense of openness achieved by large-scale glass windows and was in stark contrast to the heavy solidity of traditional bank architecture.³⁴ As governor of the Commonwealth Bank, Coombs oversaw the integration of art and architecture through commissions and competitions resulting in modern Australian art adorning the foyers and offices, and the development of a substantial art collection. Coombs also requested modern work by artists, including Grace Cossington Smith, Margaret Preston and Margo Lewers, be used on the company Christmas cards instead of traditional European scenery.

Also critical was the provision of art within the public domain. Existing as symbols of urban and cosmopolitan living in a capitalist world, the role of public art is to unite a society by the retelling of stories about oneself and subsequently promoting civic coherence and pride. The inclusion of site-specific modern art was to communicate to the public a representation of a modern Australian identity.³⁵

While abstraction was not unique to Sydney artists, the interconnectedness between a desire for the new, a belief in progress and an embrace of experimentation led to an art of abstraction that

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coalesced well with broader international modern development ideals and notions of civic identity. As artists grappled with the ideological potential of abstraction as a new visual language within modern life, a range of ideals became manifest within diverse artistic styles, practices and art movements. The diversity of artistic approaches highlights the energy and passion that underpinned the Sydney art scene and challenges the simplified understanding of modernism in Australia.

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- 1 'There's a big row in the art world', *Sun*, 1963, newspaper clipping, archives, Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
- 2 It was not uncommon for editorials during the 1950s–60s to refer to the 'man on the street' as an analogy for common sense.
- 3 Frank Rutter 1926, 'Nine Propositions', *Evolution in Modern Art, a Study of Modern Painting 1870–1925*, George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, London, p. 9.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 9.

- 5 Herbert Read, <https://allauthor.com/quotes/22343/>
- 6 Conversation with Melinda Clarke, archivist, The Friends School, 17.02.17.
- 7 Kathy Rundle 2012, *The People of the School, 125 Years of Names at Friends*, The Friends School, Tasmania, p. 42.
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- 9 *ibid.*, p. 279.
- 10 Christian Brandstätter 2005, 'The Wiener Werkstätte', Christian Brandstätter (ed.), *Vienna 1900 and the Heroes of Modernism*, Thames & Hudson, London, pp. 174–199, p. 175.
- 11 Alister Brass 1969, 'Talking with Margo Lewers', *Art and Australia*, December, pp. 235–242, p. 242.
- 12 'Handprinted. Exhibition of textiles. Margo Lewers' work, for women, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June 1935, p. 4.
- 13 Margo Lewers quoted in Ure Smith 1947, *A New Approach to Textile Designing by a Group of Australian Artists*, Sydney, p. 24.
- 14 Robert Hughes 1966, *The Art of Australia*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria, p. 255.
- 15 The polar arguments appear in many articles including Annette Fielding-Jones 1952, 'Have sculptors new controversy?' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February, p. 8 and James Gleeson 1963, 'Figurative v. abstract art,' *The World of Art*, 10 February.
- 16 Graeme Sturgeon 1978, 'Individuals, groups and great events, 1939–1961,' *Development of Australian Sculpture 1788–1974*, Thames & Hudson, London, pp. 115–153, p. 118.
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- 19 *ibid.*, pp. 311–12.
- 20 Nancy DH Underhill 1991, *Making Australian Art 1916–49, Sydney Ure Smith Patron and Publisher*, Oxford University Press, p. 22.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 22.
- 22 "Without naming Ure Smith of the Society of Artists, Lange set out a 'past and present' position in the exhibition catalogue's foreword." Underhill, *ibid.*, p. 22.
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Modernist Research Centre
Writing Project

Cassi Plate:
The Modernisms of Gerald and
Margo Lewers

Cassi Plate:

The Modernisms of Gerald and Margo Lewers

Penetration of light through colour

Towards the end of an active and eventful life, Margo Lewers took on huge, new projects. She worked in three dimensions, creating sculptures in the challenging new media of plexiglass. In these architectural, constructivist-influenced works of light and form, colour is transformed through light. Working with plexiglass extended Margo's lifelong exploration of colour.

The sculptures are the crown jewels of the Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest collection, which includes work from the key artists and schools of mid-twentieth century modernism.

Margo was very specific about how to display her work. Her *Plexi-glass wall sculpture* (now called *Wall relief*) was, she writes, originally 'conceived for a 48ft. long foyer'¹ (14.6 metres). The *Plexi-glass wall sculpture* or *Wall relief* featured in this exhibition is quarter scale. In typed notes, sent by Margo when the work was added to the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) collection in 1971, she writes: 'Details concerning the image the construction should present and information regarding lighting.'

Margo then specifies the essential requirements for the exhibition of her work:

'I have concentrated on the penetration of light through the planes and angles and the multiple reflections cast.

The positioning of the colours of the forms has been deliberate to achieve overlap[p]ing of tones and reflections as seen through the transparencies.

And again to produce the play of light which forms the reflection of interlocking shapes, colours and shadows descending the wall.

Sculpture must be above eye level to enable the spectator to look through the colour images ... Special attention must be given to the lighting.

The reflections and shadows are considerably weakened by the interference of general lighting.

The light must be generated from above from a concealed light source.

At least a CLEAR 400 watt globe is required to give satisfactory reflections and shadows – could require more than one.'²

In a separate information sheet, Margo refers to her plexiglass works as 'Colour Images' and 'Constructions'. She notes the technical difficulties and expense of working with the new material but writes with poetic enthusiasm about the potential of her newfound material.

'With the extensive range of brilliant colour I believe a great deal is possible – possible with the combination of transparent colour and light.

With the penetration and play of light upon colour and upon different planes and angles.

With the penetration of light through colour and overlapping shapes.

With the reflection of movement, of colour, of forms, and of shadows induced by light.

All of which are/is dependent upon the positioning of light in relation to the Plexi-glass constructions.

I believe that plastic remains an anonymous [sic] piece of material unless identifiable with light. Light releases an inner vibrant force, and can produce a variability of colour tones and astonishing results of interaction.

Naum Gabo used plastic in the early forties and since numerous artists had worked in this medium,

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but I recall only one of significance to me. Light was his concern – he directed the laser beam to the polished edges of grouped Plexi-glass shapes.’³

By 1971, when Margo created her plexiglass constructions, she was already experienced in the construction of large-scale wall reliefs, beginning with her commissioned mosaic murals. The courage to work with new materials is a constant in her work, but one given a new impetus by the research and labour involved in the production and completion of the final commission of her husband, sculptor Gerald Lewers.

After Gerald’s sudden, accidental death in 1962, Margo was approached by Dr HC ‘Nugget’ Coombs, then Governor of the Reserve Bank. Coombs had been one of the intellectual leaders of Australia’s postwar reconstruction and an advocate of a new ideology of consensus.⁴ Throughout the 1960s, he built up an impressive collection of modern Australian art to adorn the new Reserve Bank buildings, which were commissioned from leading modern architects. Well aware of Margo’s capacities and her intimate knowledge of Gerald’s work, Coombs asked Margo to complete Gerald’s commission for the newly built Reserve Bank in Canberra. Assisted by daughter Darani and others and with only Gerald’s small study or maquette to work from, Margo constructed a full-size model along the back wall of the Emu Plains property. After two years work, she completed *Relief sculpture 1964* (now called *Four pieces*), a 19-metre copper wall sculpture, for the foyer of Canberra’s Reserve Bank. It is a final and magnificent work by Gerald Lewers, made possible by the skill, tenacity and commitment of Margo Lewers.

Four years later, Margo created the painting *Wide penetration*, commissioned for a tapestry to be woven at the Aubusson workshop in France, for the Reserve Bank’s boardroom in Sydney. A second version of this tapestry is held by the National Gallery of Australia.

Partners in art

From the very first, Margo and Gerald’s careers as artists proceeded in tandem. Margo trained briefly

with Dattillo-Rubbo, a friend of her artist father’s, who taught from a studio in Sydney’s Rowe Street. For several months in London, in 1934, she received training in textile design and fabric printing at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Gerald, who met Margo at Dattillo-Rubbo’s classes, received invaluable instruction from the London-based sculptor and artist John Skeaping. Margo and Gerald were introduced to English sculptor Richard Bedford and visited the studio of sculptor Barbara Hepworth and artist Ben Nicholson.

Later in 1934, Margo assisted with the finishing, sanding and polishing of Gerald’s seven timber sculptures for his first exhibition, *Six Colonial Artists*, held at London’s prestigious Cooling Galleries. Reviews singled out Gerald’s work for praise.

One of Australia’s first modern sculptors, Gerald was renowned for exemplifying the ‘truth to materials’ dictum of Henry Moore and the contemporary English sculpture movement of the 1930s to 1950s. He responded directly to his materials, beginning with stone and wood, before turning to new technologies and constructing large, increasingly abstract, public fountains and commissions in the 1950s, usually in his favoured material, copper.

From their freezing lodgings in London they could walk to the annual Ideal Home Exhibition at nearby Olympia, where Margo was inspired by the possibilities of fabric. She wrote to her mother:

‘It was so simple and seemed to open up such a wide field in interior decoration, as carpets, curtains, cushion covers, in fact any furnishing materials could be designed in any colours to suit any rooms and we immediately thought of the Australian Agency ...’

Margo was similarly enthusiastic about the garden displays: ‘Could you imagine being thrust into an ocean of rainbow fire which seemed to sweep round you, burning your lips, eyes, ears ...’⁵ Travelling through Germany, the couple visited a furniture and decorating store in Hamburg with 500 showrooms.

Back in Sydney, an inspired Margo held her first exhibition in 1935, a show of hand-blocked fabrics at the Argosy Gallery in Hunter Street. She was the first artist in Sydney to produce hand-block printed material.

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The Argosy Gallery retailed small works of art and ornaments, and the experience may have emboldened her next initiative.

The following year, Margo established the Bauhaus-influenced Notanda Gallery in Rowe Street, where she ran an interior design consultancy and sold her own designs for furniture, ceramics and hand-printed material. Margo was later one of 33 artists commissioned to design for Claudio Alcorso's 'Modernage' textiles. This groundbreaking initiative by Alcorso in 1947 was the first time artists had been commissioned to provide the material inspiration for industry. The Rowe Street laneway near Martin Place became a mecca for contemporary art and design for the modern home.

Shortage of materials in wartime Sydney led to the closing of Margo's Notanda Gallery in 1939, to be reopened further down the laneway as a modern art gallery by her brother and artist Carl Plate the following year, where it remained a centre of modern art for the next 34 years.

The year 1939 was momentous. In the same year as the outbreak of World War II, Gerald Lewers became a founding member of the NSW Contemporary Art Society (CAS), which Margo joined soon after. In August, Gerald was one of eight artists invited to participate in Exhibition 1, the first in Australia to show work influenced by abstract principles from cubism and constructivism. Gerald exhibited two works from his London exhibition: *Plough* (now in the Art Gallery of South Australia collection) and *Bunyip*, along with four new works. Of the other exhibitors – Ralph Balson, Grace Crowley, Rah Fizelle, Margel Hinder, Frank Hinder, Eleonore Lange and Frank Medworth – all of whom, along with Gerald, who exhibited the sculpture *Crane*, were participants in the inaugural NSW CAS show in 1940.

Margo and Gerald Lewers, although not unique, were unusual by any standard – a husband and wife artist couple, like their close friends Margel and Frank Hinder, who exhibited and created both separately and together.

With two small children, Margo shifted away

from design and towards painting, studying with Desiderius Orban from 1945, and participating for the first time in the NSW CAS's First State Exhibition (1945). Of her seven exhibited works, three are titled *Abstract* and only one, *Boat*, implies an object. Margo Lewers was already one of Australia's few non-figurative artists. In 1955, the Art Gallery of NSW made its first purchase from a CAS exhibition: *Composition in Blue* by Margo Lewers.

Between 1945 and 1955, Gerald and Margo exhibited in 10 CAS exhibitions together. They held three major joint exhibitions, at Sydney's David Jones Gallery and the Peter Bray Gallery in Melbourne.

Gerald and Margo each created large-scale commissions. These included Margo's mosaic murals for the lobby of the Engineering School Building at the University of Western Australia in 1961 and *Expansion*, created in 1960 for the Canberra Rex Hotel, one of the largest and most prominent abstract expressionist public artworks in Australia.⁶

The Rex Hotel also commissioned a fountain by Gerald, who undertook 15 major commissions for public works, several of which included Margo's landscape design of the surrounding area, and several more private commissions. Gerald's interest in movement and his fascination in combining kinetic and static forms led him towards the construction of fountains. His final works, notably his ICI Fountain in Melbourne (1958), explore the dynamic movement created by water.

NSW Contemporary Art Society

'Abstract art is a powerful, unlimited and universal language'⁷

Gerald and Margo Lewers were founding and active members of the societies and associations that were critical to the understanding and promotion of non-representational, contemporary art. They and many of their artist colleagues believed fervently in the power and importance of art to overcome the divisive nationalism and destruction of the World Wars. Studying and travelling in Europe, they had

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been horrified by the rise of Hitler worship when they journeyed through Germany in August 1934.⁸ That experience would have consolidated their desire to find ways of working that would be capable of creating a new democratic and humanist world order. The new art of abstraction, with its ability to create a common language, was essential to this.

Gerald and Margo had met Herbert Read during their time in the UK in 1934. Soon to be the most influential person in the British art world, Read was a close friend of Gerald's brother-in-law, Arthur Wheen. In his writings and books, including 'What is Revolutionary Art?' (1935) and *Art and Society* (1945), Herbert Read 'extolled the persuasive theory that abstract art had the power and potential to be the most revolutionary art of all.'⁹ By rejecting imitation and promoting experimentation with new forms to express universal values, abstract art offered the world the opportunity to create a new social reality.¹⁰

The formation in 1939 of the NSW branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) came a year after the establishment of the Victorian CAS. Their first catalogues included quotes about art from Herbert Read. CAS played a key role in educating Australians towards the appreciation of contemporary abstraction, and promoting the importance of abstract art and internationalism to the development of Australian culture in the postwar years.

The charter of the CAS makes it clear that the society was anti-establishment. It stood against the established governments and institutions of the day and believed that Australian culture was in need of reform. When promoting the 'contemporary', the CAS was wary of any tendency to be prescriptive or dogmatic or to compromise the ideal of artistic freedom of expression. Key to its endeavour was the commitment to accept for exhibition any work of art that was striving beyond representation. True contemporary art was indefinable beyond the premise that it could not be imitative.¹¹ The society's constitution spelled out that art and society were interwoven and the artists' responsibility was not to government but to society in general.

The drive towards abstraction was a core difference between the NSW CAS and Victorian CAS, as well as a difference between artists within the Victorian branch. The NSW CAS did not discriminate against figurative, semi-abstractionist artists such as Weaver Hawkins, who was one of its longest-serving presidents. However, as Denise Whitehouse argues, the history of 'contemporary' art in Australia has focused on figurative modernism and the achievements of the Melbourne-based CAS, the 'Angry Penguins' and the Antipodean group.

Artists who later formed the Society Of Realist Art (SORA) were not solely committed to the pursuit of more figurative art but also to 'the hope that the new Australia would be formed according to socialist ideals and a humanist commitment to improve the plight of the common man' [sic].¹²

The CAS and the later Society of Sculptors and Associates (1951) contributed to the development of an informed and outward-looking Australian culture from the 1940s onwards. Gerald Lewers also exhibited with a newly formed Sydney Group, established by art critic Paul Haefliger, another sign of the diversity and liveliness of the Sydney art scene in the 1940s and 1950s.

There was an outward-looking cosmopolitanism about the NSW CAS. Rather than search for nationalist imagery, the Sydney artists saw the development of abstract form as inherently inclusive, democratic and international.

Margo's formidable powers as a social organiser and hostess and networker were important to the success of the CAS. As honorary secretary on the committee of the CAS, 1949–50, Margo Lewers initiated and organised an exhibition of borrowed works for a loan exhibition of overseas art, exhibited as *Art Without Epoch* in April 1950. The society drew upon artworks in private collections, many owned by refugees and immigrants, as well as expatriate artists and writers who returned to Australia during the war. Daughter Tanya Crothers can remember driving all over Sydney, climbing up stairs, picking up paintings. It was an ambitious exhibition; works borrowed ranged from

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a Rembrandt lent by Oscar Edwards to works by Ben Nicholson and Paul Klee, two of 13 works lent by Carl Plate. Altogether, the CAS borrowed 187 works from 39 collectors for Art Without Epoch. Norman Bartlett's review was titled 'Sydney's £100,000 art show is a history of man's [sic] response to life'.

The exhibition heralded a decade remembered by 'many members of the Sydney art world ... as punctuated with frequent and often heated debates between the abstract and figurative artists'.¹³ It also drew to a close an enthusiasm within CAS for the post-fascism artistic revolution in that:

'it involved the creation of a whole new artistic language, so it demanded experimentation with materials, processes and subject matter, with colour, collage and drawing, and different modes of abstraction. It also demanded a great deal of debate about the definition of modern art and its role in the present day ... The early NSW CAS abstractionists laid the foundations for developments in the 1950s, establishing both a supporting infrastructure and sustaining discourse.'¹⁴

Art, sculpture, architecture

Unlike the Melbourne-based CAS, the New South Wales branch 'cultivated a general public by encouraging an open membership which included artists, craftspeople, designers, architects, educators, amateurs of all persuasions', and supporters, from the entire state.¹⁵ The catalogue of the third annual (1941) CAS exhibition in Sydney states that 'Lectures, debates, touring exhibitions, and broadcasts are included in its activities.'

From 1949, Sydney's CAS exhibitions included architectural drawings by Sydney Ancher, Arthur Baldwinson, Bunning & Madden, Harry Seidler and Douglas Snelling. Baldwinson, Seidler and Snelling remained actively involved in the CAS. In November 1949, Harry Seidler contributed to the CAS lecture program 'Painting toward Architecture' and designed the layout of the exhibition, while Arthur Baldwinson became vice-president and helped hang the shows. By

the following year, the list of exhibiting architects had expanded to include Max Collard, Phillip R Jackson, AJ Read, Adrian Snodgrass and K Willcox; Seidler and Snelling were members of the CAS Committee.

'In the postwar years then, the NSW CAS worked as a forum for advanced architects, sculptors and designers rather than as a forum for contemporary painting. It is interesting to speculate how this focus on the abstract arts of architecture, design and drawing influenced the development of abstract expressionist painting and how the reactivation of the NSW CAS as an avant-garde force was related to Australia's move into corporate capitalism and international modernism.'¹⁶

Just after he had finally given up full-time work to concentrate on sculpting, Gerald, together with Paul Beadle and Lynden Dadswell, took a central role in the establishment of the Society of Sculptors and Associates in 1951.

The previous century's stonemason's art had been shorn from the functionalism of mid 20th-century buildings. This now began to change with the unity between artists and architects, fostered from the beginning by CAS NSW, which believed that architecture was perhaps the most humanitarian, democratic contribution of modernism. Along with the aim of encouraging appreciation and standards of sculpture, the Society of Sculptors and Associates actively promoted the commissioning of sculpture in all new buildings and public spaces. It engaged with architects, many of whom were the 'Associates', and the next two decades saw a resurgence of commissioned sculptures on public buildings, notably in Canberra.¹⁷

This era saw the establishment of Pettit & Sevvitt in 1961, with the aim of bringing mid-century modernism to the masses through the supply of modest, affordable housing, constructing 3500 buildings before 1977. Not enough architectural attention has been paid to modest, affordable housing in the past four decades, but the recent popularity of minimalist, eco-friendly houses has rebirthed the company, to create smaller dwellings as an antidote to excess.¹⁸

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The Lewers compound of the Penrith Regional Gallery features two distinct examples of mid-century modernism. The rear extension to the original farmhouse – best viewed from the large, southern courtyard – was designed and built by Syd Ancher in 1955. The extension features floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding doors opening onto a paved area, perfect for parties. The later ‘Ancher’ or ‘Courtyard House’ (1962) was designed with similar glazed, full-length doors, mirroring the previous addition to open onto a courtyard. It houses a study centre and occasional exhibition space for 20th-century modernism.

Architect Andrew Anderson, who designed the main gallery, spoke about the way that Gerald’s work in particular is often integrated with architecture.

‘Most of his later commissions are, in a sense, architectural commissions ... sculpture in architectural settings ... in gardens, fountains ... the fanciful down pipes ... were where the dividing line between architecture and art is obscured. And, similarly, Margo herself lavished attention on architectural embellishments, especially in the house for her mother, the stained cork panelled areas, the mosaic tiled floors – all of those things show her attitude that the fusion between art and architecture is a sort of blurred area.’¹⁹

Gesamtkunstwerk or total work of art

The life and art of Margo Lewers and the way she and Gerald Lewers lived their lives at Emu Plains defined an idea at the heart of modernism: *Gesamtkunstwerk* or ‘total work of art’.

Primarily a painter, Margo constructed her life as a work of art. Through garden creation; sculpture; handpainted furniture and textiles; flower arrangements; dramatic food presentation; designing her own clothing (turned into garments by her stylish friend Mary Smith); and painting, finally directly onto textiles, Margo embodied the idea of artistic synthesis. Her aesthetic was influenced by the simplicity and elegance of Asian art and architecture as well as 20th-century modernism, which in turn had been influenced by Japanese art and design.

More than merely aesthetic, *Gesamtkunstwerk* was also political and spiritual, bound up with the desire for social and cultural renewal. The original garden – the site of the Lewers’ house – the current Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest – was virtually bare when the family moved to Emu Plains in 1950. Gerald was involved with ‘sculpting’ the garden – bringing in river rocks and placing them with Margo. The pair won garden prizes. Their work on the garden was an important shared project, which became the genesis for their later, large-scale public commissions for sculpture gardens and mosaic murals.

The arts community was small in the 1940s and 1950s; writers, poets, architects, journalists, musicians and visual artists were friends who met together, and many travelled to Emu Plains from every corner of Sydney for Margo and Gerald’s parties. Architect Andrew Anderson has vivid memories of the parties he was invited to during his student years at the then conservative Department of Architecture at Sydney University in the 1950s:

‘There was a very lively art scene, a contemporary art scene, and Margo seemed to be a strong person promoting it. And Gerry one admired simply because of the innate beauty and craftsmanship of his work ... he was obviously very close to the nature of materials ... A high degree of aesthetic endeavour permeated everything they did.

The food, literally, looked like a work of art. Huge platters, probably hand-crafted by Gerry ... which not only had conventional edible material, but there were nasturtiums and violets and larkspurs, and edible or not it looked fantastic ... the garden was a work of art; the house was a work of art; there were works of art exhibited everywhere, the downpipes were works of art ... how [they] pruned the trees was extraordinary – everything about the place demonstrated some kind of visually driven intervention, and so it was a very complete aesthetic experience.

Lots of people from the architecture school would come ... and I remember a few years down the track, probably in the sixties, Margo had fancy-dress parties. One had a ‘marine’ theme, and architecture students

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were very good at fancy dress, coming as octopuses or giant squids or mermaids ... all these architecture students dressed as full-size, or double full-size marine creatures all over their lovely garden and living rooms!

... the garden had some real and emotive quality, rather than just being pretty. I'm very sympathetic to the ideals that you can create a wonderful environment which has a relationship between the inside and an outside, and there are old things and there are new things; and there are wonderful plants, and you can grow some food, and you can have great parties, and you can have wonderful conversation – they're all things that they did better than anybody else I knew ... theirs were the most memorable events; no one I knew had parties like Margo and Gerry.

The Syd Anchor addition to the farmhouse is an exemplar of good thinking ... how you can take a charming but really dull, in some ways, four-square, very modest little farmhouse ... four rooms and a passage down the middle of the veranda, round the side, and a little kitchen leaning off to one side, and a funny bathroom, and then turn it into something quite wonderful: the very long glass room, looking into the gardens ...

So it was a very fine piece of architecture, quite modest in terms of expenditure, but a lot of impact; and the quite narrow but beautiful floor-to-ceiling, double-hung windows, surrounded by a veranda. I don't know whether it was Syd or Gerry that then created the kind of sleep-out, the veranda extends in one area, just transformed something commonplace into something special. And it's always the sign of a great architect who can, with modest means, take something ordinary and make something special out of it, create a great sense of place. And then the subsequent ['Anchor'] house, which is the opposite in a way, with the courtyard, the house with its blank walls and internal focus – it's a kind of yin–yang thing; one looks out, one looks in – they make a very nice pair.”²⁰

He could have been talking about Margo and Gerald Lewers.

Cassi Plate

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- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 ZEUS_Aura_4610_001.pdf, AGNSW archive.
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- 6 Peter Pinson 2011, *Expansion*, exhibition catalogue, p. 5.
- 7 Ben Nicholson 1941, 'Notes on abstract art', p. 276, *Horizon: a review of literature and art*, Cyril Connolly (ed.), Oct, vol. 4, no. 22, pp. 272–6.
- 8 Tanya Crothers 2013, *Overseas with Margo*, pp. 28–36.
- 9 Denise Whitehouse 1999, 'The Contemporary Art Society of NSW and the theory and production of contemporary abstraction in Australia: 1947–1961', Visual Arts thesis, Monash University, p. 23. Other Sydney artists came to similar positions through the influential ideas of Sydney philosopher John Anderson, who argued against nationalism and rejected representational and imitative art, arguing that formalist considerations within the art object offered an objective metaphor for the struggle, conflict and complexity that form the essence of life.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 NSW records c.1945–6, Federal Constitution and Rules of the CAS of Australia.
- 12 SORA was formed by Hal Missingham, later Director of AGNSW; Bernard Smith; and James Cant; among others. Whitehouse, p. 43.
- 13 Christine France 1998, 'Encountering Dynamic Symmetry: Frank Hinder and Margel Hinder', in *Brought to Light: Australian Art 1850–1965 from Queensland Art Gallery collection*, L Seear & J Ewington (eds), p. 234.
- 14 Whitehouse, pp. 38–41.
- 15 Whitehouse, p. 34.
- 16 *ibid.* p. 78.
- 17 Peter Pinson 2016, *Gerald Lewers sculptor*, Phillip Mathews, Sydney, pp. 45–6.
- 18 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Domain', 1 April 2017, pp. 4–5.
- 19 Interview with author, 28 September 2005.
- 20 Andrew Anderson, interview with the author, 28 September 2005.

Modernist Research Centre
Writing Project

Rhonda Davis:
Design in the home: Margo Lewers
and Margaret Preston

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are 'housed'. Our soul is an abode. And by remembering 'houses' and 'rooms', we learn to 'abide' within ourselves. Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them.

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

The interior modernisms of Margaret Preston, Margo Lewers and Central Street Gallery

Margaret Preston and Margo Lewers shared, in common, living spaces that intersected with their modernism – an acute synthesis of design for living submerged within their art practices that began when the artists found it necessary to retreat from the hectic pace of the city to a quieter, rural life on the outskirts of Sydney. I refer to this as an embodied and social modernism linked with the interiors of their living room spaces. It encompasses objects as active agencies within the social, cultural and political spheres of power. A portable, material aesthetic – enmeshed within their everyday living spaces – infused their modernism at conscious and unconscious levels.

Jean Baudrillard's conception of the object possessing a 'sign-value' as an expression of the owner's social status informs the basis for this essay. Applying Baudrillard's theory to the interior space/ styles of Preston and Lewers reveals fresh information about the role of the decorative arts in relation to modernism. The spatiality of the Central Street Gallery space, the first gallery in Australia to introduce the 'white cube', heralded the sociopolitical dimensions of modernism.

This comparative study offers ways of thinking about interior spaces in relation to an embodied and social modernism over a three-decade period.

Margaret Preston's home

In August 1931, William and Margaret Preston purchased their one and only house at the unlikely location of Berowra, a small, rural community

situated north of Sydney. Some seven months later, the couple purchased another lot which contained a water course, doubling the size of the original holding to just over 11 acres.

We witness a striking development in the architectural refurbishment of the Prestons' home compared with the sprinkling of Federation homes that had been built in this area. Transforming it into the epitome of the modern home, Preston merged the stylistic innovations of the California bungalow with a low-pitched roof with stylistic elements borrowed from the Arts and Crafts movement. The Prestons undertook major refurbishments to the existing structure using 'design for living' concepts, which effectively connected the outdoor with the indoor, exuding a progressive, modern look. The extension of the verandah by additional lengths accommodated a new workspace for Margaret, allowing her an immersion into the applied arts and woodblock printing. The view from the verandah 'gazes out over softly blue-misted gullies towards distant hills'.¹

The property, known as 'The Springs' due to its natural water reserve, was considered the showpiece of Berowra. It comprised a mix of cultivated land harvesting a plentiful supply of citrus fruits and an English-style garden with 250 varieties of roses amid the sprawl of a native bush garden. Featured upon the wide borders on either side of the turfed driveway grew the torch plant, native plum, and the pink and red varieties of bottlebrush, punctuated by the more architectural form of the blue eucalyptus. Along the long driveway a verdant growth of native cypress trees made an impressive entrance for the weekend visitors who frequented the property – the Prestons, like the Lewers, relished the company of art circles and intellectuals.

It was a home; a space where Margaret Preston explored the inner trajectories of modernism intertwined within the lived experiences she encountered within this rural setting. Captivated by the mellow control of this new-found experience of home, Preston stated: 'I'm always home & one can talk in comfort in one's own surroundings.'²

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

The redeeming qualities that afforded Preston in closely studying native flowers in situ were necessarily remarkable: 'Should ... start work in Aug. – as all the flowers will be out then'.³ A few months later she had sent John Young the new work inspired by the Berowra bush: 'I am so pleased many thanks about fresh work ... The native flowers are passing and I am not interested in garden ones.'⁴ Discovering the geometric patterning of native plants in context of location expanded Preston's view of abstraction. Coupled with an intense period working in the applied arts realised her modernist objectives; a hybridisation of ideas and processes strongly linked to the spatial arrangements of her interiors.

Finding the rooms small and confined, Preston arranged to have walls knocked down in the hallway – opening the space in the living room and injecting air and light. She made a low settee in an L-shape bordering the entrance of the living room and continued it around to the fireplace. The handcrafted piece was meticulously upholstered in a streamlined, modern fashion – flat, angular and uncomplicated – the essence of a material modernism. Cushions made with felt were flawlessly arranged on the settee; one notable with bold, vivid stripes. The floors were covered in inexpensive matting, conceivably sourced from Anthony Hordern & Sons' store, since William Preston was the director of the company. The store's available matting consisted of natural fibres that matched Preston's design for living ideas: 'The patterns and colourings are distinctly Oriental, bold geometrical designs being woven in Browns, Blues, Greens, and Reds.'⁵

Featured in *Home Beautiful* in 1937, Preston appears at ease. Splendidly photographed in the domain of her living room, she is turning the pages of a large book perhaps entitled, 'Art of the US', which would highlight the cultural and political affiliations of her modernism. She is surrounded by a series of artefacts I nominate as 'status objects': 'Objects can also be semiotically interpreted and manipulated as indices of social status.'⁶ Images of art and history populate the space, clearly demonstrating Preston's cosmopolitanism. Here is Preston surrounded by the objects that demand her attention: 'An inanimate object

has to be endowed with the spirit of life by the artist who paints it.'⁷

Preston's personal collection of paintings hang from wires hooked upon the cornices of the walls. *Implement blue*, 1927, Preston's modern masterpiece,⁸ is displayed in the corner of the room with next to what could be identified as a Thea Proctor fan painting, then next to the window is what appears to be a drawing depicting a local waterfall scene. The library objectively defines her status as an artist, housing as it does a variety of books devoted to the visual arts. The library acts as eyewitness to the spectrum of her daily routines. It must be summer; the fireplace is clean without any remnants of ash and debris, and decorated with objects Margaret collected on her travels throughout South-East Asia. The oriental vase on top of the bookshelf is filled with a spectacular arrangement of local Australian rock lilies that once grew in profusion in rock shelters distributed throughout the Berowra bushland. This signifies one of Margaret's direct encounters with the bush. (It was a widespread practice for locals to collect huge bunches of the lilies; it was not an offence at the time.) The curtains in the middle of the holland blinds – made of light material, redolent of a 'primrose coloured spun silk' – preserve a sheerness and luminosity.

The dramatic effect of displaying artefacts Preston collected while on her extensive travels overseas within and above the fireplace contrasts with the serenity of the bookcase confined with the influences from Europe, China and Japan. Preston displays an exceptional example of a kava bowl and other 'curios' deemed within a grid-like spatial arrangement. Disturbingly, a shrunken head as a trophy is sited at the mid top range of the fireplace. Her motives behind the illegal importation are unclear but suggest it was part of her obsession with the 'curio' trade and collecting the bizarre. The artefacts formed part of her social mobility as 'culturally expressive, symbolic objects'⁹ and used to engage the congregation of weekend visitors with associated commentary.

Two rare provenanced rag rugs designed and created by Preston especially for the Berowra home

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

represent a zenith level of experimentation.¹⁰ The mode of production reflects the notion of an embodied modernism – a felt and sensory signification through ‘a daily, tangible, tactile continuum within the experience of living’.¹¹ An array of fabrics were used for making the rugs derived from 1920s and 1930s fashion: soft jersey knits infused with mottled patterning, drill cottons, lisle stocking material, swimming costumes and a variety of wool blends. The *Eucalyptus* rug (c. 1933) encapsulates the forms of the foliage, fruit and trunk of the tree into a flattened, interconnecting design. Margaret Preston’s earliest attempts into abstraction were conveyed in the production of the *Hakea* rug (c. 1934). It is arguably one of the earliest and successful forms of marrying Indigenous with Western art forms. The interpenetrating forms, shapes and colours are reminiscent of Aboriginal painted shields, with the ovular shape of the hakea seed exposed to reveal its inner shell resplendent with an intense red colour. The rug provides an in-depth meditation on the concept of an embodied modernism.

The production of the rugs within the context of rural Berowra shows the importance of regional variations in the development of modernism. By translating the geometric shapes and forms of native plants into design motifs within the rugs, hinged the gap between concept and practice and subscribed Preston with solutions she found difficult to resolve in painting. Preston’s reality and projection of modernism was expanded through the applied arts practiced within a rural environment. As Humphrey McQueen once argued:

‘... the post-cubists was to make artistic forms by reconstructing the crudities of nature according to geometry. Yet, because nature was not the same everywhere and was altered by people, this universal problem for art required regional solutions suitable for each particular time.’¹²

The original source of Preston’s modernism sat with the design processes sympathetically drawn from objects within her sphere of domestic control:

‘I design with the utmost care, the exact position of every tiny detail in leaf and flower, bowl or pot which will fit into that frame. It takes me ten times longer to get

the design perfect in my mind as it does to do the work. You will find little scraps of paper all over the house when I am designing a new woodcut and woe betide the person who touches one of the scraps.’¹³

Preston’s focus on the applied arts was intrinsic to her modernism; it allowed the accretion of material force to infuse her work with texture, line and form that was distinguishably modern – pottery, china painting, beadwork, basket making and stencilling working with a variety of materials such as wool, hessian, burlap, woolpack and raffia. In a similar vein to the work of Sonia Delaunay, there was:

‘no gap between my painting and my decorative work and ... the minor art had never been an artistic frustration but a free expression, a conquest of new space. It was an application of the same research.’¹⁴

If we reframe the interior design works of Preston within the discourse of Australian modernism, we see an expansiveness that crosses a multiplicity of pathways. It brings us to the interior design works of Margo Lewers – a hybridisation of Arts and Crafts combined with Bauhaus produced, ‘high-status’ spaces within the home she and Gerald Lewers created at Emu Plains. ‘A high-status living room may have more surprising and unexpected co-locations, more objects may demand an explanation because of their unusual placement, exoticism, or prominence.’¹⁵

Margo Lewers at Notanda

In 1937, Margo Lewers established the Notanda Gallery, a tastemaking sojourn that captivated her lifelong inventiveness and flair for interior design. A portable and evolving modernism burgeoned from her time at Notanda and transmitted a decade later into the living spaces she created at Emu Plains.

Notanda qualified Margo’s standing as a serious tastemaker and was fundamental to her developing modernism, personified from the materiality that affords the applied arts. Margo designed furniture and created stunning, hand-blocked printed linens and a range of pottery. The linens engaged the quality and texture of designs that encapsulated the essence of a modernism akin to

Rhonda Davis:

Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

Preston's in their use of Indigenous motifs:

'I was the first person to show hand-blocked linen in Sydney and they were different from the usual floral prints they had in those days. Mine were native designs, stripes – all very vigorous.'¹⁶

The hand-block prints shown at Notanda transmitted a blend of local, Mexican and European modernist influences. Margo's predilections for the linens by process and form channelled her future development as a modernist. The process of creating the hand-blocked linens engaged her with the texture and feel for creating interiors in relation to the active social relationships she pursued with the family's relocation to Emu Plains.

At one stage, Preston and Lewers were in contact with each other; this is evidenced by the Christmas card made by the Lewers addressed to Mrs Preston. The exact circumstance of their contact has not yet been ascertained but it shows how modernism was fuelled by a series of overlaps and connections.

Modernism's cross-pollination between successive periods becomes more apparent when examined within the context of interior decoration. Modernism was transitioning in small increments and did not necessarily conform to the imposed conventional boundaries of early or mid to late modernism.

Lewers, like Preston, sequestered any opportunities for exercising the design process:

'I would seize on anything that was new, that I had no discrimination whatsoever; ... I do remember striping all the Venetian blinds to match the floor mats, and every chair in the living-room was painted a different colour.'¹⁷

Emu Plains

As the Prestons departed Berowra in 1939, at the beginning of World War II, the Lewers purchased their property of 10 acres at Emu Plains during the war years. Like Preston, Margo also relished the space and time the rural life afforded for an artist to work without too many disruptions. 'I have

more room to work up here, more time and better surroundings – and I'm the type who needs to see a lot of free time ahead before I start work.'¹⁸

The interior design of Ancher House with its precision of lines and uncomplicated textures displays the same rhythm and flavour as the architect Eileen Gray's living room in the villa 'E1027', which she designed and built in 1929. An important Sydney tastemaker, Margo Lewers carried forth the distinguishing and functional elements of modernism existent in the city and reinvented those holdings within the context of what could be ascribed as a rural cosmopolitan.

The influence of the Bauhaus is strongly evident in the industrial aesthetic of the cupboards Margo Lewers designed and fabricated. The cupboards dominate the entire background at the end facing the entrance of the house. Constructed in proportionate detail and exactitude using subdued, cool colours, and covered with felt, the geometric modelling is robust to a Bauhaus aesthetic. The significance of this interior design work metaphorically links Lewers with the Central Street artists who were well-versed in the Bauhaus and the work of Josef Albers.

Ancher House in its final incarnation was transformed into a space for exhibiting Lewers' work including the translucent forms of the plexiglass constructions. The textile *Wall hanging 10*, c.1970, marks a threshold in the redeeming qualities of an embodied modernism stemmed from Lewers' time in designing the interiors of Ancher House. Made with fabric and silkscreened, the sensory and textured layers create a durable force that obliquely references the work *Rug design abstract*, circa 1930s, watercolour and ink by Roy de Maistre. The works are both rendered on the vertical axis using vibrant colours and show the crossovers between fabric and rug designs, the broadening aesthetic and integration of fine and applied arts. The focus within the Ancher House interior became the placement of artefactual displays, exceptional in their production and a measure of personal and, in this case, public identity.

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

The living room

Margo Lewers' ebullient penchant for hosting parties for the artistic milieu of Sydney was represented within the living spaces of the Emu Plains home. She designed and created those spaces according to the status and frequency of her visitors and, in turn, their expectations were met:

Margo and Gerry Lewers kind of led an artist's and crafts movement in Sydney as well, because a high aesthetic endeavor permeated everything they did, because there was everyone going – and this is where it does get memorable – to a party at Emu Plains, and you realise that the whole thing was one integrated happening ... there were great artefacts, there were great bowls, dishes, objects that were elements that Margo had been associated with earlier ... everything about the place demonstrated some kind of ... visually-driven intervention in something, and so it was a very complete aesthetic experience.¹⁹

Margo Lewers used design influences from both here and abroad. It is more than likely she studied the interior decoration works of artists Francis Bacon and Roy de Maistre not only through the magazine *The Studio* but during her studies while living in London during the 1930s. *The Studio* was the main source for Australian artists to find out about the latest art and ideas happening overseas. Lewers once said: 'You see, we didn't have access to the literature in those days – no magazines at all beyond the old *Studio*.'²⁰

Francis Bacon's interiors published in the August 1930 issue of *The Studio* were acclaimed as 'the new look in British decoration, and his carpets, woven by the Wilton Royal Carpet Factory, echo these Cubist sensibilities'.²¹ In that same year, de Maistre painted the work *Interior*, oil on canvas, which promulgates the configuration of Bacon's interior design studio. The work reveals the verisimilitudes of the designer – austere, compact, minimal and uncluttered – unlike Bacon's painting studio of a later period. *Interior* shows the exact placement of a vase and flowers on an in-built cupboard, and tubular furniture with perpendicular lines that correspond to the floor and walls. The bold and abstract design of the rug unifies the space offset

by the small sculpture placed on what appears to be a glass table top. Margo Lewers' decoration of her lounge room is not dissimilar. The diffusion of light, air and space is achieved through the selection of objects counterpoised into exact position. The timber in-built sideboard stands as the centrepiece of the room; it dictates the activities of the room in both quiet and disorderly moments. The single table and thoughtful placement of the vase with flowers, influenced by modernism's integration of Chinese and Japanese interiors and prints, creates a unilateral harmony. Gerald Lewers' sculpture is prominently displayed on the sideboard. Intuitively placed, it matches the overall style of the lounge room, which requires room for flexibility depending upon the style of party and visitors that will inhabit the space.

The bookcase acts as the "witnessing object", an artifact testifying to the family's actual social class'.²² In this case, the bookcase witnesses the conversations, the networks, the arguments and the exultations of the cultural elite that once comprised the Sydney art world.

The rug creates balance and volume in relation to the construction of the streamlined cupboards that also vouch as the library and display areas. A uniform thickness is evident in this handcrafted rug, not unlike the textile work of Jutta Feddersen done in the 1970s. The edges, replete with a string border at either end, maintain the overall integrity of the support. The layered texture and durability of the rug additionally retains a physicality aligned to the work of Otti Berger's flat weave rugs from the Bauhaus.²³

'Material practice as an expression of agency, decorations on the wall, the clothes people are wearing, the way things are ordered around the house, that's not something that people are necessarily talking about.'²⁴

The sequencing of activities shown in the available photographs reveals the lounge room as a space for both contemplation and movement. Gerald Lewers' sculpture, furniture, objects and books housed in the timber shelf are shifted to accommodate the bustle of social occasions. When the parties commenced, the space gushed with various modes of activity; the aesthetic experience of being surrounded by high-status objects in the Lewers' lounge room

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

appears to have steered the conversations, the way people sat and acted and, on special celebrations, the way people dressed. The lower shelf of the timber cupboards acts as the centrepiece for Lewers' parties. Food, drink and other items are randomly placed on this bench and nothing remains on the periphery. The objects ritualise the space as active agencies of a social modernism, adaptable to change and formalities. Margo Lewers orientated her stance towards this area and bench, using it like a launch pad for overseeing what was happening within her domain.

Central Street space

The revolution of Central Street happened in April 1966 on the first floor of a warehouse building in Central Lane, a discrete laneway that runs between Pitt and George Streets in Sydney – in an unconventional space reached by ascending a steep flight of stairs: 'The gallery was perched on the first floor of a gloomy warehouse-like building ... it is both literally and metaphorically a perilous descent from the gallery back to everyday life.'²⁵

The building was grounded in the aesthetics of an avant-gardism comprised of young artists determined to break the shackles of provincialism. Stemmed from ideas espoused by Antonov (better known as Tony) McGillick, Central Street was an experimentation in the restructuring of the modernist aesthetic. His father (also Tony) was a leading member of the Communist Party of Australia, with a network that extended beyond the Australian borders into Moscow; it would seem Antonov inherited some of his father's revolutionary traits.

The gallery rested on the cusp of change – enabling the imperatives of international art practices to infiltrate, adapt, transform and expand the trajectory of Australian art, culminating in the arrival of contemporary art through the work of Ian Milliss showing within the context of group exhibitions at Central Street. The reinvention of avant-garde practices was sequential to the opening of Central Street. Subsumed by calling for radical change to the domination of the radical nationalists, it catapulted

the safety net of modernism into uncharted waters.

Central Street created a sixties vanguard that sharpened and hastened the pace – experimentation, discussion and debate lay at the core of their modernism. Witnessing the pace at which Australia was catching up with the rest of the world, McGillick writes in the vernacular of sixties language, calling for action:

'The younger people of today want more bigger-volume turned up-multiplied-the beat. Australian artists remain deliberately provincial. If Australian artists could develop a confidence-be braver – there's so much could be done.'

The seeds of Central Street began in London; among the thick of the 1960s counterculture, where the artists congregated around Ladbroke Grove. There they were living in a loose collective, soaking up the atmosphere essential to their developing modernism, based on the spatial and material effects they experienced in London. The combination of American style with London attitude produced an art and attitude that reflected a two-pronged influence – shifting the stakes both aesthetically and politically.

Tony McGillick and his wife Elizabeth returned to Sydney in 1965 after an extended period overseas. Their stopover in New York on their return was to have a significant effect on the way McGillick set up Central Street a year later. On his initial arrival in Sydney he sensed a different place emerging, a more charged atmosphere where opportunities were afoot:

'I am in a strange condition at the moment and although in following letters I may alter my appraisal, first impressions could be of some interest. There is a tremendous air of confidence ... They are doing things at a pace and scale, which is quite exciting. How do I mean? Well the city has shifted its focal point from 5 years ago ... The skyline is a mad man's vision of cranes and skeletons at the heart where perhaps 50 are in progress at the moment. It really is beginning to look like downtown N.Y. from the harbor view. The buildings seem to have no space between ... These points may not conjure much for you; it certainly was something for me.'²⁶

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

Central Street contained a space free of the decorative elements associated with domesticity. Comparative with many of the commercial galleries of the time embellished with the distracting elements of flowers, lounges and lamps, Central Street was unadorned, kept to a minimal space. It highlights the way Central Street introduced a new level of professionalism to the commercial gallery sector as early as 1966. The marketing ploys championed by New York art dealer Leo Castelli were adopted by Central Street, especially the production of affordable posters promoting each exhibition.

‘We were ambitious and put posters up for every show, using silkscreen which worked as advertising. We would sell the leftovers for \$2.00 and that covered the cost of making them. Yet other galleries didn’t have posters so we got well known doing these high-grade posters ... it was a real workshop-type place. This was the first stage and the Central Street Gallery went through several stages.’²⁷

In 1968, Central Street located to a new, much larger space downstairs. Arguably Australia’s first white cube designed by the architect/artist Rollin Schlicht, the space was hailed by Daniel Thomas as an architectural triumph with its ‘new, lofty white walls and wooden struts and beams of Central Street’s downstairs room where the new abstractionists revel in the spatial freedom’. The space influenced the artists’ production; it witnessed some of the largest canvases being executed in the country during this period. Donald Brook, one of the leading contemporary critics of the time, references the space an ‘artificial indoor paradise’, conjuring the interior design works of both Preston and Lewers in their aims to propagate spaces of the material world.

‘In a sudden flurry of activity before Xmas, the most striking event is the opening of a new ground floor gallery at Central Street. From the sunless, narrow and uncompromising lane one now turns into a high white space that burns with colour as brilliantly as an artificial indoor paradise.’²⁸

Postmodernism caused a separation of forces between the successes and failures of modernism, a post-historical syndrome. Analytical frameworks

that solely rely upon formalism unfortunately glaze over the importance of materiality and spatiality that did come to shape Central Street. As Timothy Clark ruminates, the ‘ruins can stand for the triumphs’:

‘Modernism is unintelligible now because it had struck with a modernity not yet fully in place. Post-modernism mistakes the ruins of those previous representations, or the fact that from where we stand they seem ruinous, for the ruin of modernity itself – not seeing that what we are living through is modernity’s triumph.’²⁹

Central Street Gallery cultivated a feel, a look and a sensation of experiencing art as a vehicle for discussion and debate, only made possible within the context of the space specifically designed to be without distraction. In the process of its operations over a five-year period, the space transitioned as a continuum; an intergenerational space that encouraged experimentation. McGillick once said that Central Street did not ‘close’, but the keys were ceremoniously handed over to the next generation. The cyclic nature of the continuum, operating within a system of exchanges and cultural affiliations, produced a hybrid modernism that slightly shifted with each turn of the wheel. The changing shifts in modes of production, patronage and public opinion amid the emerging postwar capitalist economy were paramount to Central Street’s reputation as a space that was desirable to be noticed, the fraternity of the avant-garde. The reception of a new set of collectors and patrons was integral; local tastes were changing culturally, politically and economically in step with the expansion of the city.

Central Street artists adhered to a conceptual framework that was non-conformist with an underlying conceptualism that was considered unpatriotic. This situation has led to the abrogation of their contribution to the story of modernism in Australian art. Fracturing its lineage from the likes of Margaret Preston, Grace Crowley and Dorrit Black, Ralph Balson’s non-objective paintings of the 1950s and abstract expressionism including the interior design works of Margot Lewers have effectively deprived Central Street of its position within Australian modernism.

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

Modernism was taking shape at Central Street under a transnational convergence bordering the realm of contemporary art practice – temporality, immersive environments, multiples and relational aesthetics. The different modes of production took shape under the spatial freedom of a decluttered, industrialised space with concrete floors and white walls. Tony McGillick's shaped canvases reconfigured using one basic shape; Max Cullen's serialised multiples; Dick Watkins' appropriations; Alan Oldfield's Pop and homoerotic imagery; Vernon Treweeke's psychedelic installations; Rollin Schlicht's underlying shamanism; Wendy Paramor's use of local colour instilling the feminine into hard-edge abstraction cannot simply be explained through a formalist reading.

Streaming the threads of adaption, translation and reappearance marks those shifts from the modern to the contemporary. The salient features of the contemporary being present within modernity can be retraced through the crushed canvas works of Ian Milliss shown within the context of the Central Street space.

'Perhaps even sketch a prehistory, of contemporary within modern art. Exploring such situations in depth is an important task: it would be foundational to a well-grounded history of contemporary art ... the complexity, of the prehistory of the contemporary within the modern. They suggest, too, the interest may lie – for the 'alternative modernities' or 'cosmopolitan modernisms' project – in tracking these largely forgotten pathways. As well as a further challenge: tracing the distinctive ways in which art in each of these regions shifted from modern to contemporary art.'³⁰

The manifestations of modernism continue to prevail amid current global practices. Central Street synthesised the local within the global, but to date has remained largely undocumented. Central Street generated its own modernism based on the space and people it cultivated.

'The "provinces" generated their own modernities, and they did so in varying degrees of awareness of their contemporaneousness with art being generated at the centers ... with the breaking

apart of the colonial system and the division of the world into numbered spheres, the conditions for making modern art began to change, then lifted seismically.

Contemporary art has inherited all of these changes – indeed, I would argue, it is all of these changes as they continue to play out *as art*.³¹

'The Central Street artists took formalism further than it was meant to go,' said Ian Milliss back in 2002.³² In the context of the local, it was not a sudden leap from modernism to the contemporary but one that slightly nudged its way into the arena, the mutability of the white cube space. I would argue this took place through the work of the youngest member of that collective, Ian Milliss. The ordering of his display of the crushed canvas work ensconced at a visual distance allowed the conditions of contemporary art to emerge.

The systematic patterns of object selection and order sited in the homes of Margaret Preston and Margo Lewers steered the trajectory of their modernisms based upon everyday living. The Central Street space reinvented the spatial order to accommodate a much faster pace and quickening of modernism, destined for the reception of contemporary art.

Rhonda Davis: Design in the home: Margo Lewers and Margaret Preston

- 1 'An air of space ... even the small cottage need not be cramped, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 10 November 1933, p. 4.
- 2 Margaret Preston to John Young letter dated 10/5/33. Art Gallery of New South Wales Research library and archive.
- 3 Letter to John Young dated 23 July 1932.
- 4 Letter to John Young dated Thurs 17 Nov. 1932.
- 5 *Anthony Horden's Catalogue*, January 1924, p. 943.
- 6 Stephen Harold Riggins (ed.) 1994, *The Socialness of Things Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects*, 'Fieldwork in the living room', Mouton de Gruyter, p. 112.
- 7 'Women Artists', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 September 1933, p. 5.
- 8 This painting remained in the artist's private collection until she gifted the work to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1960.
- 9 op. cit. no 6, p. 343.
- 10 Rhonda Davis 2005, *Berowra Visions: Margaret Preston & Beyond* exhibition catalogue, Macquarie University Art Gallery. The catalogue provides a more detailed account and story that led to the recovery of the rugs in 2005.
- 11 *International Textile design*, Mary Schoeser, Lawrence King, London, 1995.
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- 16 *ibid.*, p. 242.
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- 25 Patrick McCaughey 1968, '21st Show', 7 February.
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- 27 Tony McGillick, taped interview, 1988.
- 28 Donald Brook, December 21, 1968.
- 29 TJ Clark 1999, *Farewell to an Idea: episodes from a history of modernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, USA.
- 30 Terry Smith 2009, *What is Contemporary Art?*, The University of Chicago Press, p. 257.
- 31 *ibid.*, p. 263.
- 32 Christopher Dean 2002, 'I Dream of Central Street', *Central Street Live* exhibition catalogue, p. 38.

Kirsty Grant:
Modern through and through: the art and
lives of Gerald and Margo Lewers

Kirsty Grant: Modern through and through: the art and lives of Gerald and Margo Lewers

'In the house at Emu Plains ideas hurtled, argument 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 watergarden, 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 civilisation.'¹

In his evocative recollection of the lives that Gerald and Margo Lewers lived at Emu Plains in Penrith, their friend and renowned Australian author, Patrick White, described an atmosphere in which art, ideas, beauty and community were nurtured and celebrated in equal measure. For him, the Lewers' home represented a haven in which creativity flourished and intellectual challenge and enquiry was encouraged and where, consequently, some of the diverse strands of endeavour and thought that combined to form a modern and distinctly Australian culture were able to develop.

The Lewers' contribution to Australian cultural life was located firmly within the context of modernism. Both Gerald and Margo were born in the first decade of the 20th century, their formative years taking place against a backdrop of immense social, cultural and technological change, when new ideas and ways of living were transforming the traditions and habits of the past. They both shared an artistic vocation and established significant careers – Gerald working in three dimensions as a sculptor in wood, stone and later metals, and Margo, after being one of a handful of pioneering figures who promoted modernism within the field of interior design in Sydney during the 1930s, working across textiles, painting and sculpture. Both artists were recognised with prizes, commissions and the acquisition of their work by major galleries during their lifetimes. They were also responsible for major public commissions during the 1950s and 1960s that introduced the language of modernist abstraction into the suburbs and the cities.

Gerald and Margo Lewers also played active roles in Sydney's broader cultural and creative life through their involvement with influential groups such as the NSW branch of the Contemporary Art Society

and the Society of Sculptors and Associates. Within the modernist context, perhaps equally as important as their public endeavours was the way in which the Lewers lived, incorporating creative expression into every aspect of their lives so that it ran like an interconnecting thread between the art they exhibited, the design of their home and its interior, the garden they created at Emu Plains and, as Patrick White recalled, even the food they served.

It was at night classes with Antonio Dattillo-Rubbo in Sydney in the late 1920s that Gerald and Margo met and where, along with fellow students including Frank Hinder, they were exposed to modern ideas about art as well as receiving foundational academic training. Margo hailed from a creative family; her father was an artist and her younger brother, Carl Plate, would study at the East Sydney Technical College in the 1930s and establish a reputation as a significant abstract artist. Like so many women of her generation, Margo's initial training led to secretarial work; however, she quickly gravitated towards a more creative field, working as a cadet commercial artist with the *Daily Telegraph* and then employed to decorate domestic wooden objects before establishing her own design workshop and later, operating a commercial pottery business. Gerald had studied art part-time at the East Sydney Technical College during the mid 1920s and in 1926 he joined Farley & Lewers, a construction and quarrying company with a family connection, working there until 1950 when he left to make art full time.²

Gerald and Margo married in 1932 and in 1934 they travelled to London and enrolled at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Gerald had studied painting and drawing at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna in 1931 and in London, he took classes with the British sculptor John Skeaping, while Margo studied textile design and painting with John Farleigh. Gerald's brother-in-law, Arthur Wheen, was assistant librarian at the Victoria and Albert Museum and, with an established network among progressive artistic and literary circles in London, he provided useful introductions to the visiting Australian couple. Through him, Gerald and Margo met Herbert Read, the art critic

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and a vocal advocate for modernism, and artists Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth. In a letter sent home to her mother in April after visiting the Hampstead enclave where the three lived and worked in close proximity, Margo expressed some misgivings, writing ‘... it would seem, at least to me, that the scribblings of a child was their basis. Ben Nicholson, who cuts holes in cardboard, and pastes them on squares and even rips pieces right out of the picture, paints over it and sells it to the nearest mug. His [companion] was Barbara Hepworth, who sculpts. Some of her more representative pieces were quite nice, but when it came to placing one stone on top of another and calling it a *Composition* or *Mother and child* ... I was just left in a daze.’³ However, by the time Margo wrote a piece for the *Sydney Morning Herald* that was published two months later, she had significantly revised her opinions on the merits of Nicholson and Hepworth’s approach to art. ‘I was ushered into an entirely new world of ideas, where the photographic style of reproduction is discarded, and in its place these contemporaries strive to portray with a penetration into the reality, and an expression of the significance of life.’⁴ She also signalled the beginnings of what would become a lifelong interest in and adherence to the abstract idiom in her own practice, stating: ‘There is no doubt that this less representative art gives more interest, and surely it must have great depths when it evolves from sincerity and emotional feelings.’⁵

During her visit, Margo Lewers also noted ‘a few hand-printed material lengths ... draped here and there [and] ... the most delightful mat, carried out in the rarest colours, mechanical balances and movements of their own invention’.⁶ The British artists’ unified approach to living, in which their distinctive aesthetic was carried across to the decoration of functional objects and their domestic interior, must have influenced the Lewers who, upon their return to Australia, infused all aspects of their lives with their own distinctive vision and style. The concept of a creative aesthetic applied to both the fine and applied arts, as well as to architecture, was presented to the Lewers again later in the year when they travelled to Europe and in Germany, witnessed the influence of the revolutionary Bauhaus which,

although it had closed the previous year in the face of pressure from the Nazi regime, was still strong in all areas of art and design. Margo was impressed by the modern architecture she saw, as well as the design of contemporary pared-back timber furniture, textiles and decorative ceramics⁷ and this, combined with other overseas experiences, inspired Margo to adopt the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* – the total creative work in which various different art forms are synthesised – a principle as well as an active practice that would remain a fundamental feature of the Lewers’ life.

Following her return to Sydney, Margo produced a range of functional modern ceramics and hand-printed textiles, and in 1936, with characteristic drive and determination, she opened Notanda Gallery in the stylish hub of Rowe Street, Sydney. ‘I thought I was pregnant at the time, but was not going to allow that to interfere. The day I knew for certain, I went in and signed the lease.’⁸ Describing it as ‘the only shop ... like it at the time’, she explained:

‘as an interior consultant I designed furniture. I sold bold natural-wood bowls, hand-printed linens to order, original small sculpture and drawings, my own pots, pottery sent from Mexico by my brother, hand-beaten aluminium bowls and dishes, and prints of the Impressionists ... most of my clients were architects who had come back from overseas. The average person didn’t like what I sold at all.’⁹

Even if Notanda’s clientele was mostly limited to those who already had an openness to progressive design in interiors, the gallery made a significant contribution to the growing awareness of modernism in Sydney, promoting its wares in articles – some written by Margo – and simply through its presence. In Melbourne during the early 1930s, Cynthia Reed operated a modern art and design business in Collins Street which, like Notanda, was the only place of its kind that promoted and sold the elements of the modern interior, including furniture by Fred Ward and Sam Atyeo, and textiles by Michael O’Connell, as well as exhibiting contemporary art.¹⁰ It was often the case that modernism was first accepted in the context of functional design and work designated as craft, which held a lower place in the fine arts hierarchy and

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was less fiercely protected by the establishment. In the words of Roy de Maistre, an early proponent of modernism in Sydney, 'people understand ... interior decoration ... but when they see the same point of view expressed in pictures they are quite at sea ... in Art they narrow things down to a very rigid formula.'¹¹

Reflecting the Lewers' cross-disciplinary approach, Notanda also became a venue for exhibitions of fine art¹² with the first held in 1936 displaying a selection of animal drawings by John Skeaping that they had brought home from England. Material shortages and difficulties importing goods into Australia caused by the outbreak of the World War II prompted Lewers to close Notanda Gallery in 1939; however, her brother, Carl Plate, opened a gallery under the same name two doors up in Rowe Street late the following year. Showing the work of local and international modern artists, Plate's first exhibition, *England Today*, included work by Ben Nicholson, Paul Nash and Henry Moore. Like Gino Nibbi's Leonardo Bookshop in Melbourne, Plate also stocked postcards, prints and publications on modern art, and Notanda Gallery became a popular meeting place, where knowledge was shared and ideas discussed, as well as a vital source of information about contemporary international developments.

When Gerald and Margo returned to Sydney, they were in the enviable and rare position of having had firsthand exposure to some of the most advanced developments in modern art and design and having established contacts with influential artists and writers overseas. Gerald had also begun his professional career, exhibiting a group of striking modern sculptures that was very positively received by the London critics. Their role as conduits of information was significant and Margo's report for the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggests that she was conscious of the vast distance that separated Australia and its artists from activities in the leading international centres and the value of current information from people 'on the ground'. Like Dorrit Black and Grace Crowley before them, and artists including Yvonne Audette, John Olsen and Robert Jacks in the generation that followed, the Lewers' experiences and knowledge, shared informally through their circle of friends and the

larger artistic community, as well as reflected in their unique approach to art and life, contributed to the local understanding of modernism and acceptance of new thinking and ways of creating. The eventual evolution of their Emu Plains home into a public gallery that honours their role in the creative life of 20th century Australia and supports the contemporary artistic practice of today through the presentation of exhibitions, education and practical programs continues this process on a large scale. While the Lewers' experiences overseas saw them poised to develop careers at the forefront of the avant-garde, this took some time to manifest as the realities of daily life and prevailing social mores of 1930s Australia exerted their influence. Gerald returned to full-time work and in 1936, their first child was born, a second daughter following five years later. Inevitably, this slowed them down and it was not until Gerald retired and they moved to Emu Plains in 1950 that both were able to devote more time to making art and their careers realised their fullest potential.

Having returned to his job at Farley & Lewers, Gerald made sculpture in his spare time, but one of the upsides of his professional life was that the company's quarrying activities gave him access to a diverse range of stone for carving, as well as exposure to different timbers. He had a facility with these materials, a stated desire to discover the best form for each of them, and a sensitivity for his subject matter that prompted the artist and critic James Gleeson to write that it was 'as though he had some secret knowledge of the nature of wood and stone, birds, fish and animals denied to the rest of us.'¹³

Gerald quickly established a reputation as a sculptor of significance with his work being selected for public commission as early as 1940 and two stone sculptures of stylised animal forms being acquired for the collection of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales (now Art Gallery of New South Wales) by 1946. There was, however, an inevitable loss of momentum and the strikingly modern machine-inspired sculptures such as *Plough*, 1934, that he had made and exhibited in London to considerable critical acclaim did not reappear. He showed two of those sculptures, along

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with several others made following his return in Exhibition 1, the landmark 1939 exhibition that brought together a disparate group of painters and sculptors including Ralph Balson, Grace Crowley, Eleonore Lange, Frank and Margel Hinder, who were each exploring approaches to abstraction through the figure.

Sharing an openness to the modern and a willingness to cast off tradition, it was this group of artists that was instrumental in the establishment of the New South Wales branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS). Founded in Melbourne in 1938 in response to the restrictive conservatism of the establishment and reactionary nature of the Australian Academy of Art, the CAS sought to encourage and foster 'contemporary painting, sculpture and other visual art forms which ... strive to give expression to progressive contemporary thought and life, as opposed to work which is reactionary, retrogressive, including work which has no aim other than representation.'¹⁴ Preliminary meetings of the Sydney group were held at Rah Fizelle's studio in 1939 and soon after the NSW branch was fully operational with Fizelle as president and Peter Bellew elected secretary. Gerald was a founding member and participated in the inaugural exhibition and throughout the war years, both Margo and her brother Carl Plate were on the committee, Frank Hinder recalling that in effect, they ran it.¹⁵ Margo later became more involved taking on the role of secretary around 1949–50, during which time the NSW committee organised Art Without Epoch, a major loan exhibition of European art spanning the 13th to 20th centuries that included work by Breughel, Rembrandt, Turner, Manet, Van Gogh and Picasso, among others. An ambitious undertaking by any standard, the exhibition was without precedent in Australia in terms of its scale, range and the quality of material displayed.¹⁶

While artistic and political divisions among the members of the Melbourne CAS during its early years resulted in various breakaway groups, with those who remained being largely socially-motivated artists whose figurative art revealed a strong expressionist inflection, the attitude in Sydney was radically different. From the outset, the NSW branch of the CAS was determinedly liberal in its approach, welcoming a

diverse membership of all artistic persuasions that included craftspeople, designers, architects, educators and amateurs – a non-hierarchical approach that acknowledged all forms of creativity and that mirrored the Lewers' own inclusive attitudes. Artistic freedom was the guiding principle and there was 'a deep distrust of any form of social order or artistic dogma that might restrict individual creativity in any way ... Rather than pursuing nationalist themes and overt social criticism, NSW CAS members took a pluralist approach turning their focus outwards and in several directions [from] ... developments in constructivism and abstraction ... [and] surrealism [to] ... the grand tradition of European art'.¹⁷ This welcoming attitude was reflected in annual exhibitions that were open to all members (despite frequent criticism of the unedited nature and variable quality of the entries), as well as in wide-ranging monthly public lectures and a broadsheet that was published from 1947.

It has been argued that the NSW CAS was also distinguished from its other Australian counterparts by its active promotion of abstraction as an advanced stream of modernism,¹⁸ and the activities of the organisation and energy of its early members helped pave the way for Sydney to become the most vigorous centre of contemporary abstract painting in the 1950s and beyond. This development also owed much to the fact that the abstract idiom had long been a prominent element of the art of the harbour city with the first wave of 'Sydney moderns' including Balson, Crowley and de Maistre, discarding traditional styles of painting in favour of non-representational imagery in the first decades of the 20th century.

The Lewers were part of this generation of artists active in the mid 20th century who sought to develop a new visual language 'that expressed the ideals and dilemmas of the new modern world rather than the world of appearances'¹⁹ and in Sydney they found a supportive environment. Gerald's work shows a steady progression towards pure abstraction and the expression of a singular, highly personal vision based on his affinity with the natural world, from the early sculptures that reflect the influence of Skeaping in their stylised figuration of animal

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forms, to the graceful refinement of mature works such as *Sleeping bird* (c. 1950), and the late steel sculptures and fountains that miraculously convey dynamic movement through static form. From the very beginning Margo's work was characterised by a consistent focus on abstraction. She believed that 'by reducing the whole to an abstract minimum, the painting should say more'²⁰ and during the course of her career working across various media, she responded to the contemporary zeitgeist in art, moving from geometric imagery in the 1950s, to gestural expressionism the following decade and vibrantly coloured hard-edged sculpture in the 1970s.

Gerald left Farley & Lewers in 1950 and in the same year, moved with his family from Sydney to Emu Plains, almost 60 kilometres west of the city, to a 10-acre block on the banks of the Nepean River. While at first Margo felt isolated from their friends and the busy life of the city, the move would represent a significant turning point for her and for Gerald. Now able to work on his art full time, Gerald received a series of commissions from 1952 and would undertake the biggest projects of his career over the next decade. With their daughters at boarding school, Margo was freed from some of her family and domestic responsibilities and able to paint consistently for the first time.²¹ As well as making art in their studios, Margo and Gerald worked on the Emu Plains garden that became a major collaborative project. Rocks brought up from the river and placed according to Margo's design, sculptures, a pool and fishpond, as well as striking plantings were brought together on the property that, apart from two trees, had been completely bare when they bought it. Reflecting their philosophy of the total work of art and belief that a landscape, like a work of art, could provoke both an emotional and aesthetic response²², the garden has been likened to an abstract expressionist painting: 'meandering paths like broad, snaking calligraphic lines ... flower-beds ... with plantings filling in colour and texture ... straight lines ... avoided ... plants [spilling] from the garden beds onto the grass, like a watercolourist's paint bleeding from one shape into another; shrubs ... inclined to be unruly and never

pruned into formal shapes; and belligerent conflicts of scale, shape and texture ... embraced.'²³

Free from the commitments of full-time work, Gerald was instrumental in the establishment of the Society of Sculptors and Associates in 1951. Preliminary meetings were held at the Lewers' house and he was subsequently elected inaugural treasurer alongside Paul Beadle as secretary, Lyndon Dadswell as vice-president and Professor Denis Winston as president. Founded along similar lines as the Victorian Sculptors' Society that had been established three years earlier, the society aimed to promote understanding and appreciation of sculpture and, importantly, to lobby government and industry for greater opportunities and support for sculptors. Lewers was the driving force behind the first exhibition of outdoor sculpture held in Sydney, a major undertaking that introduced the work of contemporary sculptors to the public in 1951. The advantages of a close association between architecture and sculpture – something the Melbourne-based Centre Five group had been advocating for since the early 1950s – was recognised, and while membership was offered to sculptors, associate membership was available to architects, town planners and designers. In this regard the society achieved success, contributing to the resurgence of interest in the commissioning of public art as part of major new public buildings in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁴

It is not surprising then that Gerald's work in these years is marked by a series of major public commissions in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and beyond. Placed in relation to prominent new structures including the Reserve Bank building in York Street, Sydney, and University House at the Australian National University, Canberra, these sculptures and fountains allowed Gerald to work on an unprecedented scale and brought contemporary abstraction into the public domain. Word of the Emu Plains garden must have spread because in 1957 the Lewers were commissioned to design a landscaped rock garden (combining sculpture, rocks and plants) for the MLC Building in North Sydney. Similarly, the copper fountain Gerald made for ICI House in Spring Street, Melbourne in 1958, was also commissioned as part of a garden, the

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overall design of which was a collaboration between the architects, Gerald and landscape consultant, Jon Stevens.²⁵ Designed by Bates Smart McCutcheon, ICI House was the tallest building in Melbourne at the time, a stark and ultramodern tower of steel and glass. From 1958 Gerald began to work primarily in metals and moved more decisively towards total abstraction. The ICI commission revealed his natural skill with both his new medium and non-representational form. As a fountain, this work incorporated moving water, which contributed to the overall expression of movement, as well as introducing a dynamic sound component as it poured and splashed onto the stones beneath. Fellow sculptor Lyndon Dadswell wrote of this piece 'that [Lewers'] solving the problem of wedding his fountain to the ICI Building ... [was] so successful that, if ever a man made a memorial to himself, it was in this splendid integration of sculpture and architecture.'²⁶ While this was not what Gerald had in mind when he made the ICI sculpture, his life would end prematurely in a riding accident only four years later.

Margo's career developed dramatically in the 1950s and following the joint exhibitions held with Gerald in 1952 at David Jones Art Gallery, Sydney, and Peter Bray Gallery, Melbourne, she exhibited commercially almost every year until the end of her life. Her work had been acquired by the National Art Gallery of New South Wales in the 1940s, and this very public recognition and support of her art continued with further purchases throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. She was commissioned to produce a large-scale mosaic for the new Rex Hotel in Canberra and from the late 1950s onwards won numerous prizes including the Mosman Art Prize in 1959 and 1960. By the early 1960s Margo had established herself as a major figure in contemporary Australian art, a measure of her standing reflected in her inclusion in the landmark exhibition *Recent Australian Painting* that introduced contemporary Australian art to a British audience at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1961. Several years later, her painting *Something to come*, 1964, was acquired for the collection that Kym Bonython was developing for Harold E Mertz, a wealthy American who wanted a comprehensive survey of paintings

by the very best Australian artists practising at the time. Within a group of 200 paintings by 84 artists that included John Brack, Russell Drysdale, Brett Whiteley and Fred Williams, Margo Lewers was one of only three women to be represented.²⁷

From the beginning, Margo's practice was characterised by a singular commitment to abstraction; however, it was not in her nature to stand still, and her work continued to evolve throughout her career as she responded to various influences, experimenting with new materials, techniques and modes of expression. Her willingness to change direction was shown in the early 1970s when she made perhaps the most dramatic shift of her career and produced a small group of sculptures using coloured plexiglass. There were numerous influences at work: her long-held interest in light and colour, and the ways in which they interact; the memory of seeing work in perspex by the constructivist Naum Gabo in London almost 40 years earlier; the example of other artists, including her friend Frank Hinder, working with plastics that were becoming increasingly accessible; the contemporary trend in art towards the hard-edge and bright colour; and her own recent paintings which overlaid large, geometric planes of flat colour to create the illusion of three-dimensional space. Margo's decision to work in three dimensions may also have been influenced by her experience of completing two of Gerald's large sculptural commissions after his death,²⁸ and they were arguably the most unique and distinctive works of her career.

In describing the Lewers' house at Emu Plains as a focus point of Australia's still tentative civilisation, Patrick White recognised it as a site of progressive thought and activity. Gerald and Margo Lewers created that place, consciously fashioning an environment that allowed them and the circle of people that gathered around them to foster innovative ideas and to express themselves in new and inventive ways.

Within the history of the visual arts in Australia, Gerald and Margo Lewers are key figures who played a pivotal role in the introduction of modernist ideas and ideals, and each made a significant contribution to the development of a modernist language in design, painting and sculpture. The Lewers are unusual in that

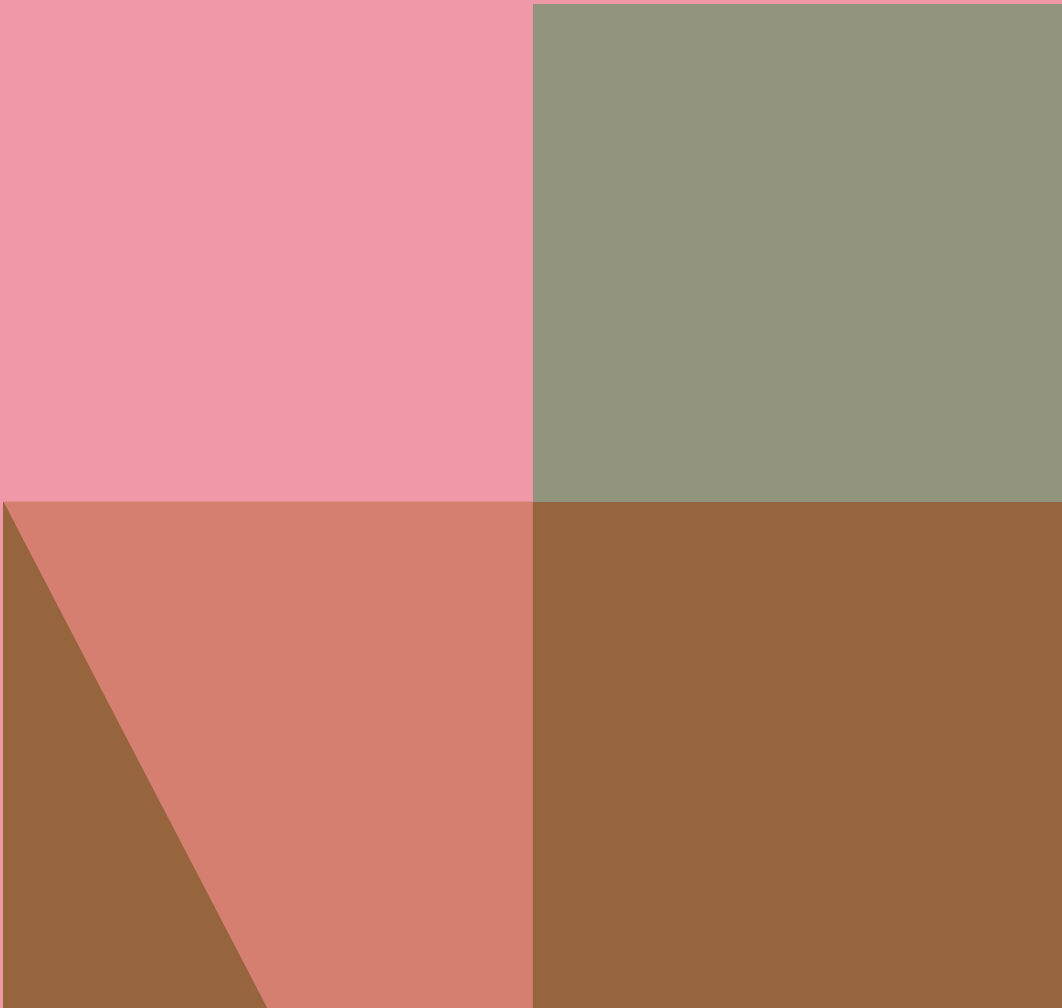
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they were a couple, united by marriage and a shared goal that was expressed through their individual practices and the way they lived. Unlike the work of many artists, which is typically seen in private spaces, the Lewers both eventually worked on a grand scale, undertaking major public commissions that brought contemporary abstraction into the public realm and, while they may not be household names, their work – from Melbourne to Canberra, Sydney and beyond – remains familiar. It is fitting that their spirit and vision is continued in the Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest at their home in Emu Plains, celebrating their work and encouraging that of subsequent generations.

Kirsty Grant
July 2017

- 1 Patrick White 1962, 'Gerry Lewers has left us', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 August, p. 12.
- 2 See Denise Hickey 1982, *Gerald and Margo Lewers: their lives and work*, Grasstree Press, Mosman, p. 40 and Michael Crayford, 'Lewers, Gerald Francis (1905–1962)' in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lewers-gerald-francis-10821>, accessed 31 May 2017.
- 3 Letter dated 24 April 1934, quoted in Peter Pinson 2016, *Gerald Lewers sculptor*, Phillip Mathews Book Publishers, Willoughby, pp. 16–17. Pinson notes that the letter goes on to clarify that the 'mug' who bought work by Nicholson on that occasion was Arthur Wheen, who paid 10 guineas for a painting.
- 4 Margo Lewers 1934, 'Modern art: an Australian in London, where we fail', *Sydney Morning Herald (Women's Supplement)*, 28 June, p. 7.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 See Pamela Bell 2013, 'Margo Lewers and the establishment of Notanda Gallery' in Deborah Edwards & Denise Mimmochi (eds), *Sydney moderns: art for a new world*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, pp. 274–75.
- 8 Alister Brass 1969, 'Talking with Margo Lewers', *Art and Australia*, vol. 7, no. 3, December, p. 242.
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 See ME McGuire 2016, *Cynthia Nolan, a biography*, Melbourne Books, Melbourne, pp. 60–80.
- 11 Heather Johnson 1988, *Roy de Maistre: the Australian years 1894–1930*, Craftsman House, Sydney, p. 77.
- 12 See Cassi Plate 2013, 'Carl Plate and the Notanda Gallery' in Edwards & Mimmochi, *op. cit.*, pp. 226–227.
- 13 Ames Gleeson, 'Fine sculpture in exhibition', *The Sun*, March 1952, p. 34.
- 14 Allan R Henderson 1939, 'Contemporary art advances', *Art in Australia*, 3rd series, no. 76, August 1939, p. 14.
- 15 Hickey, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
- 16 Nancy Borlase 1968, 'Three decades of the contemporary art society', *Art and Australia*, vol. 6, no. 1, June, p. 71.
- 17 Denise Whitehouse 1999, 'The Contemporary Art Society of NSW and the theory and production of contemporary abstraction in Australia 1947–1961', PhD thesis, Monash University, p. 27.
- 18 *ibid.*, p. 37.
- 19 *ibid.*, p. 38.
- 20 Margo Lewers & Hazel de Berg 1962, Margo Lewers interviewed by Hazel De Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection (sound recordings). <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-214235794>
- 21 Margo said that prior to moving to Emu Plains where there were few interruptions, no telephone and her daughters were away at boarding school, she only produced two or three paintings a year, working whenever she could find time. Margo Lewers & Hazel de Berg 1962, *op. cit.*
- 22 Pinson, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 63.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 46 and Hickey, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–64.
- 25 Philip Goad 2002, 'New land, new language: shifting grounds in Australian attitudes to landscape, architecture, and modernism' in Marc Treib (ed.), *The architecture of landscape 1940–1960*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 257.
- 26 Quoted in Ken Scarlett 1980, *Australian sculptors*, Nelson, West Melbourne, p. 379.
- 27 The other female artists were Eva Kubbos and Jacqueline Hick. See Ross K. Luck, 1976, *The Australian Painters, 1964–1966: Contemporary Painting from the Mertz Collection*, Griffin Press, Adelaide.
- 28 See Hickey, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–103 and Pinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–76.

Modernist Research Centre Shed Project



Modernist Research Centre Shed Project

Hidden away for almost four decades, the contents of Margo Lewers' shed at the rear of the Lounge room Gallery was recently retrieved, cleaned, catalogued and rehoused. Found in the shed were tools and wooden crates packed with ceramic and glass tiles, used by Margo Lewers for her mosaic projects. This undertaking was carried out under supervision by University of Sydney postgraduate intern Difei Feng, working Gallery volunteers Kelsey Neumann and Jenny Hotop.

To our great excitement Difei Feng discovered what we recognised as the maquette designed by Gerald Lewers for his Reserve Bank commission. In addition to the maquette, the ceramic materials and tools uncovered add to our knowledge of Margo Lewers artistic practice on site, and her chosen colour palette.

Education
Public Programs
Acknowledgements

Education

School visits

The Gallery's Education Programs offer outstanding opportunities for students to engage with the Gallery's changing exhibition program and heritage site, through lively syllabus linked exhibition tours, hands-on studio-based workshops and site visits.

Contact our Education Manager to arrange your visit.

Naomi McCarthy

Telephone 4735 8701

naomi.mccarthy@penrith.city

School Holiday Workshops

3- 6 October

All Workshops 10am – 12pm

Ages: 5-17

Cost \$30 per class

Term Classes

Wednesday Drawing School

Every Wednesday 4 – 5.30pm

18 October- 6 December

Ages: 8 – 12

Art Attack Saturday Workshops

Every Saturday 10 – 12pm

21 October- 9 December

Cost: \$180 (term)

Mixed media

Ages: 5- 9

Illustration and animation

Ages: 7 - 10

Art Blocks for Tots

Ages: 3 – 6

Time: 10 – 11am

19 September, 27 October, 24 November

Cost \$12 (individual classes)

Carers do not pay but must stay

Tuesday Art Club

24 October – 28 November

Studio based workshop program

for adults who identify as living with a disability

Tuesday 10:30 – 12:30pm

Cost: \$120 (term)

Contact Education for participation details

All Materials provided

Bookings are essential

Telephone 4735 1100

For more details visit

penrithregionalgallery.org

gallery@penrithcity.nsw.gov.au

Public Programs

17.9

Modernism in the Garden

Explore Margo Lewers’ original garden design through garden tours and talks. Enjoy a jazz trio, and picnic in the garden, buy plants and flowers.

11-3pm Sunday 17 September

Free

24.9

Into the Archives Storytelling and Research

Local historians, curators, archivists and librarians reveal the process of digging into the archives to bring the past to life.

2-4pm Sunday 24 September

Bookings essential

Free

15.10

Emu Island: Modernism in Place

Author and Exhibition Curator talks

2-4pm Sunday 15 October

Places limited, bookings essential

Free

22.10

Modernist Art and Architecture

On site and out of site, Author, Artist and Architect talks

2-4pm Sunday 22 October

Places limited, bookings essential

Free

Acknowledgements

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest would like to thank the following participating artists and organisations:	Exhibition Team	Essays	National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entryCreator: Daborn, Shirley, author.
Artists	Director Dr Lee-Anne Hall	Dr Shirley Daborn Curator	Title: Penrith Regional Gallery & the Lewers Bequest Spring Exhibition Suite 2017 / Dr ShirleyDaborn, Kirsty Grant, Ian Milliss, Rhonda Davis, Cassi Plate, essayists.
Emu Island: Modernism in Place Main Gallery	Curator Dr Shirley Daborn	Rhonda Davis Curator Macquarie University	ISBN: 9781875143634 (ebook)
Nancy Borlase Judy Cassab Lyndon Dadswell Roy Fluke Leonard Hessing Bim Hilder Frank Hinder Margel Hinder Robert Klippel Eva Kubbos Gerald Lewers Margo Lewers Elwyn Lynn John Olsen John Ogburn Desiderius Orban Carl Plate Henry Salkauskus Guy Warren	Consulting Curator Dr Cassi Plate	Kirsty Grant Freelance Curator	Subjects: Lewers, Gerald, 1905-1962--Exhibitions. Lewers, Margo, 1908-1978--Exhibitions. Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest--Exhibitions. Art, Australian--Exhibitions. Art, Modern--Exhibitions.
	Exhibition Manager Marian Simpson	Ian Milliss Artist in Residence 2017	Other Creators/Contributors: Grant, Kirsty, author. Milliss, Ian, author. Davis, Rhonda, author. Plate, Cassi, author.
	Lead Technician Graeme Robinson	Dr Cassi Plate Consulting Curator	Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest is operated by Penrith Performing and Visual Arts. It receives the funding support of Penrith City Council and Arts NSW.
	Education Manager Naomi McCarthy	Jacqui Stone Editor	
	Education Coordinator Christine Ghali	With thanks to	
	Gallery Assistant Fiona Knoke	Tanya Crothers Darani Lewers Art Gallery of NSW Mosman Art Gallery Conal Coad Colin Beutel	
	Curatorial Assistant Hayley Megan French		
	PR Articulate Claire Martin		
Shifting Dirt Ancher House	Marketing Manager Krissie Scudds		
Ian Millis Ian Milliss' Artist Residency program is supported by the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund, and is managed by Museums & Galleries of NSW.	Rachel Roberts Curatorial Intern		
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