TAKE A SEAT
Australian Modernist Seating
Each year Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest programs exhibitions which explore aspects of the modernist era and endeavour. We do so in acknowledgement and celebration of the Gallery’s modernist foundations as the Emu Plains home and studio of artists, Gerald and Margo Lewers, until their respective deaths in 1962 and 1978. This summer, in consideration of its Modernist history, Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest presents, Take a Seat – Australian Modernist Seating. This exhibition explores a period (1940-1975) of immense vitality and productivity in Australian seating design.

In the prime of their careers, Margo and Gerald Lewers embraced modernist principles in their art practice; in their engagement with modernist architect Sydney Ancher; in the design and construction of their own furniture, and interior detailing and decoration. These artists were part of the wider Australian intellectual and artistic milieu associated with the development of Australian modernism. In Sydney, Margo and Gerald Lewers opened their home to artists, writers and intellectual such as Frank Hinder, Elwyn Lynn and Patrick White. Likewise, in Melbourne, Heide, the home of art patrons John and Sunday Reed, provided a base and support for modernist artists such as Sidney Nolan, Joy Hester and Albert Tucker.

Canberra based curator, Meredith Hinchcliffe, has brought together fine examples of mid-20th century Australian furniture seating design classics. These works are shown in relation to select modernist paintings by Margo Lewers, from the Gallery’s own collection.

The furniture herein is drawn from collections across NSW and the ACT. Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest would like to thank the following institutions and private collectors for making these pieces available to the wider public: The Powerhouse Museum, The Australian National University, Ken Neale, Meredith Hinchcliffe, Constantin Nikolakopoulos, Christopher Snelling, the Lindsay Family, MAKE Furniture, Mike Dawborn 50/60/70, Melanie Morris and various private collectors.

The modernist aesthetic is celebrated elsewhere across the Gallery site; including, modernist artworks from the collection (Lewers House); The architecture of Douglas Snelling, as photographed by Max Dupain (Lounge), and, a recreation of artist Margo Lewers’ own living room, in (Ancher House), circa 1970.
‘A chair is a stool with a back-rest, and a stool is a board elevated from the ground by supports’.¹

Christopher Dresser, 1873

The above description of a chair and stool by Christopher Dresser, English designer, and design philosopher of utilitarian objects, is an accurate, albeit limited description of these objects. A chair is also an object capable of giving to the user both physical and psychological comfort and aesthetic pleasure.

Take a Seat – Australian Modernist Seating explores seating design and construction during the period 1940 – 1975. It unpacks the chair as it evolved as a result of Modernist philosophy and manufacture, to become an object of daily use and desire. Modernism was the prevailing movement and philosophy of economic, social, political and cultural life of much of the 20th century. Behind this movement were industrialisation, technology, war, global migration, travel, and the rise of mass media and communications. Social progression, the belief that society would benefit and move forward as a consequence of these factors was a key tenet of modernism. Likewise, furniture design and manufacture reflected the principles and realities of the modern era; furniture was to be improving of the human experience.

In their book *The Modern Chair*, Charlotte and Peter Fiell write, ‘modernism is not a style, but a philosophical movement which promotes classical and humanising ideology that can be applied to furniture design, including the harmonising of functionalism and aesthetics’.² Indeed, it is rare to find one without the other. Designers looked to the future, asking ‘what do people need?’ rather than ‘what was made in the past?’ “Good design is necessarily a Modernist approach that has little to do with design and everything to do with correctly perceiving social needs.”³

Modernist design principles were enabled and enhanced by industrialisation, and coincidentally, world wars which had led to the development of new materials, their manufacture and application. With the increased demand for goods to service the military effort during war time, manufacturing came into its own as did research and development for industries specific to the war effort such as aircraft building and fit-outs. New materials and manufacturing processes and techniques had a fundamental impact upon chair designs. Alternative materials, such as synthetics for webbing, foam fill and ply moulding had a significant impact on the furniture industry, design and construction.⁴ As a result, in peacetime designers and manufacturers began to apply the most efficient technology in the creation of durable furniture products.

Seating Design

‘Good design is the conscious act of bringing order and grace to a product, so as to imbue it with aesthetic qualities beyond, but including, the functional.’⁵ Gordon Andrews

‘Design adds value, whether to an object or a service or an experience... designers solve problems with elegant and practical solutions.’⁶ Susan Cohn, 2014

As Australians were introduced to modernism through travel, migration, literature and art and architecture publications, thus began a vital period in the history of Australian art and design. This period was enlivened by European furniture makers, designers and artists fleeing Nazi Europe and post war gloom and devastation. The late 1940s and 1950s provided the perfect environment for designers to explore innovative ideas in furniture, particularly in seating. The home-maker market was burgeoning. Magazines and newspapers were filled with the latest trends in European and American design, information
and advice on how to make furniture, design homes and decorate them. Increasingly, the heavy ‘brown’ furniture of the past lost favour. Designers looked to express a post war lightness of mood and optimism in their furniture.

Australian designers, artists and architects all used their talents to reimagine furniture, interiors and architecture. They utilised Modernist principles of clean, pared back lines, and often, they revealed elements of construction. Architects such as Neville Gruzman, Harry Seidler and Douglas Snelling, often specified furniture or designed it, to enhance and enliven the interiors of their buildings. They had already embraced new technology and ideas for their buildings and were quick to respond to the innovative use of materials and technology in their furniture. For these architects, chairs and other pieces of furniture represented quicker and cheaper ways of expressing their design philosophies.

Designer Fred Ward, created paper patterns for people to cut and make their own furniture, and soon followed these with flat packs of timber and other materials, which required only simple tools for construction. Also, producing furniture flat-packs was Karen Ingeborg & Associates, under the brand, Swedish Craft Furniture with DIY instructional leaflets. In Sydney, these furniture packs were sold through Diments Department Store in Hurstville.

The wood surfaces of much of the furniture was waxed to allow the character and colour of the timber to be seen to its best advantage. Fred Ward in particular, who began designing and making simple, expressive and functional furniture in the late 1920s, highlighted the characteristics and properties of different timbers, and used construction details in decorative ways, for example butterbox joints, dovetails and wedged tenons.

Architect and designer, Derek Wrigley wrote: “Chair designing and making is a complex art and is one of the most skilled areas of the woodworking industry, involving complex structural stresses ...” For Wrigley, the basic elements of a structurally sound chair, one that is a coherent, organic whole are rails, legs, splats, and arms: each has its place. Chairs with light legs, rather than solid seats, allow a grouping of furniture behind them to be visible. The result is an elegant economy of form – nothing more can be taken away or the object is not fit for the purpose.

The New

European modernism was characterised by the belief that current forms of expression were not only irrelevant to a modern world, they acted as constraints. European designs found inspiration in contemporary forms – locomotives, steamships, aeroplanes with little or no historical precedents.
In furniture, with the introduction of radios into every home in Britain, special cabinets to house them offered designers new objects to consider.

Modern architecture addressed a need for public housing and low-cost furniture was being discussed in the late 1920s in Europe. Architect, Le Corbusier saw the need to provide better living conditions in crowded cities. He believed everyone had a right to live in peace and comfort. He left the interior of the houses and apartments he designed aesthetically spare, with any movable furniture made of tubular metal frames. Living spaces were opened up – there was more light, more sunshine.

More open planning introduced by progressive architects affected the small house. Light, air, and simplicity were seen as desirable qualities. Homemakers needed furniture which was adaptable and could be added to easily for rooms with multiple uses. The concept of ‘unit’ furniture was introduced in Australia in the 1930s and critics were amazed it had not been thought of earlier. Homemakers could buy one or two pieces of furniture. Instead of a lounge suite, they could buy a sofa and a chair and later purchase more pieces as they could afford it.

Scandinavian designers removed several layers of veneer thereby increasing the material’s malleability. Gentler, more tactile, this furniture was well received in America and Britain during the between 1920s-1940s. Heavily influenced by these designs were Charles and Ray Eames (USA) who researched low cost wood laminates and mouldings for use and mass production of their often light and playful furniture pieces. In their designs, moulded plywood was adapted to fit the body without need for upholstery. It was a technique which was soon borrowed in Australia by George Korody, Julius Soos and TH Brown. Also influenced was self-trained architect, Douglas Snelling, who upon his return from the United States in 1946, received several large commissions. As with architect, Neville Gruzman he designed a range of furniture ‘ideally suited to Australian living conditions’.

Ever new materials enabled designers to express abstract concepts more akin to sculpture than furniture as revealed in Gordon Andrews’ Spider Chair, and Grant and Mary Featherston’s Numero VII. Clement Meadmore and Michael Hirst’s string chairs, and the metal garden chair echo diamond chairs design by Harry Bertoia who said “Chairs are studies in space, form and metal”, much the same as his sculptures. Space passes through them. Organic designs

TAKE A SEAT

ESSAY

MAIN GALLERY
followed and led to the introduction of fibreglass-reinforced plastic and designers explored the use of foam rubber as a suitable material for upholstery. (Featherston Numero VII).

In the post war period, Australia experienced an unprecedented economic boom. The 1950s were a hopeful and forward-looking period with rising immigration, increased demand for housing and consequently a demand for domestic furniture. In the late 1950s to early 1960s the furniture market grew with the changing social demographic, with increased leisure time coupled with disposable income. In turn, furniture design responded, resulting in furniture which was suitable for outdoor living, and within the house, lounge rooms focussed around the television.

At this time, designers worked with furniture manufacturers to produce limited editions: Douglas Snelling worked with Terry Palmerston at Functional Products, Clement Meadmore with Michael Hirst, and Tony Parker brought contemporary design principles to his family business, extending their furniture line. The demand for office furniture, as a lucrative sector of the furniture manufacturing sector, resulted in increased research and development budgets which designers could access, leading to an awareness of the ergonomics of good design. Inevitably this led to changes in domestic seating, the incorporation of comfort with new materials and good looking design.

In design and production, Modernist furniture had a democratic sense and purpose. The industrialisation of furniture manufacturing enabled designs to reach a much wider market. As Canberra based furniture designer, Fred Ward argued, everyone should have access to well-designed furniture. Good design would provide solutions to social problems such as small living spaces, low incomes and lack of knowledge of well-made furniture. Designer Gordon Andrews made a similar observation: “If a product is more efficient, more comfortable, more visually attractive and handles better than its competitor, it will be appreciated, attain a high value and sell well.”

The furniture in this exhibition remains contemporary in styling and form despite being designed up to 70 years ago. Australian furniture designs embody the principles of simplicity, honesty in construction, truth to materials – all principles held dear by the proponents of the modernist movement.

Timeless and elegant, Modernist furniture engages in a dialogue with the body and the intellect. As such, they are so much more than the functional object described by Christopher Dresser.

Meredith Hinchliffe
November 2014

2. Charlotte and Peter Fiell, pp 11-12
3. Charlotte and Peter Fiell, pp 11-12
4. Fred Ward worked at the Department of Aircraft Production in Victoria. His knowledge of Australian timber proved invaluable for the Mosquito, a wooden-framed fighter bomber designed in Britain and made in Victoria. Gordon Andrews worked in De Havilland in NSW, helping to design troop-carrying gliders.
5. Gordon Andrews, op cit, p 98
7. Derek Wrigley, The ANU Years, Fred Ward: A Selection of Furniture and Drawings

Curator

Meredith Hinchliffe has long been involved in the arts and crafts movement in the ACT as a writer, curator and arts administrator. She is also a passionate collector of mid-century chairs, specifically the chairs and furniture of Fred Ward. Hinchliffe capped this love of Fred Ward furniture when she was invited to curate Fred Ward - a life in design for Canberra’s Gallery of Australian Design in 2013, which was subsequently nominated as one of the ACT’s top ten exhibitions for 2013.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist/Designers</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Courtesies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gordon Andrews (b. Australia 1914 - 2001), Paul Kafka base (b. Austria 1907-1972))</td>
<td>Coffee Table</td>
<td>c. 1950s</td>
<td>timber legs, terrazzo</td>
<td>Meredith Hinchliffe, Canberra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breeze (Victoria)</td>
<td>Chair and footstool</td>
<td>c. 1950s</td>
<td>metal frame, plastic cord</td>
<td>Ken Neale, Sydney.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Outdoor chair</td>
<td>c. 1950s</td>
<td>Plastic coated steel wire</td>
<td>Ken Neale, Sydney.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant Featherston (b. Australia 1922 – 1995)</td>
<td>Z300 Chaise Lounge</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>timber frame and legs, wool fleck upholstery, brass caps</td>
<td>Lindsay Collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Featherston and Mary Featherston</td>
<td>Numero VII</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>moulded Polyurethane foam, metal tube frame, steel webbing, rigid plastic base</td>
<td>Collection of Penrith Regional Gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF WORKS

Fred Lowen (b. Germany 1919 – 2005. Active in Australia 1940-2005) designed for FLER furniture
FLER SC58
c. 1955 – 1958
timber frame, legs and arms, new upholstery
Private collection, Sydney.

Neville Gruzman (b. Australia 1925 – 2005)
Arm Chair
c. 1958 – 1965
timber frame, feather cushions and loose cover
Private collection, Darling Point.

Neville Gruzman (b. Australia 1925 – 2005)
Dining Chair
c. 1958 – 1965
timber frame, metal support rod, upholstered seat and back
Private collection, Darling Point.

Karen Ingeborg & Associates
Dining chair and advertising leaflet
1953 – 1960
paper leaflet and photos mounted on board
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Mr Bill Diment, 1994.

Karen Ingeborg & Associates for Swedish craft packaged furniture
Dining chair
1953 – 1960
timber
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Mr Bill Diment, 1994.

Karen Ingeborg & Associates
Instructional sheets for ‘do-it-yourself’ assembly of a dining chair
1953 – 1960
Paper leaflet, photo mounted on board (reverse side)
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Mr Bill Diment, 1994.

George Korody (b. Hungary 1890 active Australia 1940-1957)
Upholstered dining chair
c. 1953
timber and velvet upholstery
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

George Korody (b. Hungary 1890 active Australia 1940-1957)
Repose arm chair
1953
timber and cane rattan seat
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Steven Kalmar (b. Hungary 1909 worked in Sydney 1939-89)
White upholstered arm chair
1952
timber frame and arms, upholstered seat and back
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Paul Kafka (b. Austria 1907-1972)
White cut out table with timber legs and trim (one of a pair)
c. 1950s
vitrolite, timber legs and frame and brass caps
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Fred Lowen (b. Germany 1919, active in Australia 1940-2005)
Form line dining chair SC55
c. 1955
timber and wool upholstery
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Gerald Lewers (b. Australia 1905 - 1962)
Grey chair, red upholstery
c. mid to late 1930s (remodelled in 1950s)
timber, fibreglass, rubber, cotton upholstery
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers, 1979.
LIST OF WORKS

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Unknown
Dining suite (6 chairs and table)
c. 1950s
Silky oak, wool upholstered seat
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers, 1979.

Unknown
Day bed
c. 1950s
timber and mattress
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers, 1979.

Roger McLay (b. Australia 1922 - 2000)
Kone Chair
c. 1948
marine plywood shell, metal legs with rubber stoppers
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

Michael Hirst (b. Australia 1929 - 2005) and Clement Meadmore (b. Australia 1929, USA 1963 - 2005)
DC601A chair
1959 – 1965
plastic coated steel with padded cushion seat
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

Michael Hirst (b. Australia 1929 - 2005) and Clement Meadmore (b. Australia 1929, USA 1963 - 2005)
DC601A chair
1959 – 1965
plastic coated steel, recoated
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Clement Meadmore (b. Australia 1929, USA 1963 - 2005)
Stool
c. 1957
Enamel paint on steel frame, cord
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Clement Meadmore (b. Australia 1929, USA 1963 - 2005)
Corded chair
1952
Enamel paint on steel frame, cord
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Clement Meadmore (b. Australia 1929, USA 1963 - 2005)
Corded armchair
1952
Enamel paint on steel frame, cotton cord, timber arms
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Clement Meadmore (b. Australia 1929, USA 1963 - 2005)
Canvas sling chair
1955
Enamel paint on steel frame, canvas
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Coffee table
1955 – 1956
blue-green mosaic glass tiles, enamel paint on steel frame, brass edging
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.
LIST OF WORKS

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Parker Furniture (1935 - 1995)
Cane backed lounge chair 111
1963
timber and rattan back
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Parker Furniture (1935 - 1995)
Dining chair
1963
timber frame, rattan back, wool upholstery
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Parker Furniture (1935 - 1995) [attributed]
Upholstered dining chair 107
1963
timber, beige wool upholstery
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Dining chair
1947 – 1955
Australian hardwood, Saran black webbing
Private Collection, Sydney.

Douglas Snelling, Functional Products
Glass top table
1956
Australian hardwood, black vitrolux
Private Collection, Sydney.

Dining chair
1947 – 1955
Australian hardwood, cotton webbing, replacement and
dyed by Fay Skyring
Courtesy Meredith Hinchcliffe, Canberra.

Rocking chair
1946 – 1955
Timber and Saran webbing
Courtesy Robert and Eugenie Bell.

Arm chair and stool
1957
Australian hardwood, cotton webbing
Courtesy the estate of Douglas B. Snelling, architect.

Two seat lounge
1955
c. 1955
Australian various hardwood, cotton webbing
Collection Mike Dawborn, 506070, Sydney

Coffee table
1955
Queensland maple
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Irene Rolfe, 1983.

Guyla (Julius) Soos (b. Hungary nd, arrived Australia c. 1950)
Soos chair
1955
Queensland maple, cotton upholstery
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Purchased 1989.

Guyla (Julius) Soos (b. Hungary nd, arrived Australia c. 1950)
Soos chair
1955
Painted Queensland maple
Private collection, Blue Mountains.
LIST OF WORKS

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P.J. Sorensen, Unley, S.A
*Sling back chair*
1950
Timber frame and webbing
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Van Treight Furniture (New South Wales)
*Arm chair*
c. 1965
Tasmanian Oak
Private Collection, M. Morris, Sydney.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
*Dining chair*
Mid 1950s
Timber frame wool upholstery (replacement) hand dyed and woven by Fay Skyring
Courtesy Meredith Hinchliffe, Canberra.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
*Armchair*
c. 1955
Timber frame, upholstered seat and back (wool)
Courtesy Meredith Hinchliffe, Canberra.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
*Stool*
1952 – 1954
Timber (coachwood), upholstered seat
Courtesy Meredith Hinchliffe, Canberra.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
*Dining chair*
Early 1950s
timber frame, with new upholstery
Private Collection, C. Nikolakopoulos.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
*High backed chair*
c. 1953
Timber (blackbean), rubber webbing, upholstered seat, wool, rubber cushion
Private Collection, C. Nikolakopoulos.

Derek Wrigley (b. England 1924)
*Arm Chair*
1961
timber upholstered seat (wool)
Private Collection, C. Nikolakopoulos.

Derek Wrigley (b. England 1924)
*Armchair*
c. 1960
timber upholstered seat (wool)
Private Collection, Canberra.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
Pictorial Drawing of a desk chair for Flats in University House
c. 1951
Paper Illustration
Courtesy Australian National University, Collection.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
*Desk Chair*
1953
Timber frame, upholstered
Courtesy Australian National University, Collection.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
Pictorial Drawing of a desk chair for Flats in University House - Standard Chair
c. 1951
Courtesy Australian National University, Collection.
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**Paper Illustration**
Canadian National University, Collection.
Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
Pictorial Drawing of a desk chair for Flats in University House – In domestic staff quarters
c. 1948 - 1952 Paper Illustration
Courtesy Australian National University, Collection.

Fred Ward (b. Australia 1900 - 1990)
Pictorial Drawing of a desk chair for Flats in University House – Armchair University College Council Room
c. 1948 - 1952 Paper Illustration
Courtesy Australian National University, Collection.

Unknown
Column Light
c. 1950s
Timber legs, cylinder hessian wrap with green-blue tile decorative strip
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Unknown
Metal frame chair with timber arms
c. 1950s
Steel frame and springs, timber arms
Courtesy Ken Neale, Sydney.

Kiyoshi Saito
Cat
c. 1950s
Japanese woodblock print
Private Collection, Canberra.

Kiyoshi Saito
Maiko (I)
c. 1950s
Japanese woodblock print
Private Collection, Canberra.

Unknown
Swedish Craft Packaged Furniture leaflet
Original leaflet and photo reproductions
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Mr Bill Diment, 1994.

Unknown
Assembly of Swedish-Craft furniture
1953 -1960
Original leaflet and photo reproductions
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Mr Bill Diment, 1994.

Unknown
How to bring out the beauty in your Swedish furniture
1953 -1960
Original leaflet and photo reproductions
Courtesy the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.
Gift of Mr Bill Diment, 1994.

Unknown
Cotton Fabric print
Date unknown Cotton fabric
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest

Unknown
Cotton Fabric print
Date unknown Cotton fabric
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest
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John Firth-Smith
Oil Sketch No.2
1981
oil on linen

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.

Margo Lewers
Spring
c. 1966
synthetic polymer paint on masonite

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Looking Through
1953
watercolour, ink and poster paint on cardboard

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Untitled (Green Abstract)
1945
watercolour and ink on paper

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Colour Sensations
c. 1965
synthetic polymer paint on masonite

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Drought
c. 1963
synthetic polymer paint on paper on masonite

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Broken Circles
c. 1968
synthetic polymer paint on masonite

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Between
1977
synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Abstract No. 3
c. 1940
watercolour and ink on paper

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.

Margo Lewers
Untitled
1955
watercolour on paper

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
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TAKE A SEAT

Margo Lewers
Blue 2
1977
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Composition in Blue
1956
oil on masonite
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Composition
1957
oil on masonite
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
The Site
c. 1970
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Margo Lewers
Composition in Orange
c. 1952
oil on canvas on cardboard
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Composition in Orange
Image courtesy of Penrith Regional Gallery
Gordon Andrews (1914-2001)

Gordon Andrews was born in Ashfield, Sydney in 1914. In his late teens, he gained industrial experience in his father’s workshop while learning his trade as a fitter and turner at Sydney Technical College, before later studying art and design at East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School). In 1937, he moved to London and gained experience in graphic design through his work at Stuart’s Advertising Agency. Andrews returned to Australia in 1939 and worked as a designer for de Havilland Aircraft Company during the war.

Andrews is best-known for his designs of the first decimal currency of Australia, consisting of the $1, $2, $5, $10, $20 and $50 notes, for which he was commissioned by the Reserve Bank of Australia from 1963-66. He has been the recipient of a number of design awards including a gold medal from the Design Institute of Australia in 1985. He was also the first Australian to be elected as a Fellow of the UK Society of Industrial Artists and Designers. The Powerhouse Museum acquired his first design archive in 1989, and later acquired his second archive of designs for the banknotes, shortly before staging a retrospective of his work in 1993. Andrews retired to Lovett Bay on the Hawkesbury River before bushfires destroyed his home, causing him to return to live in Sydney before his death in 2001 at the age of 87.

Grant Featherston and Mary Featherston

Grant Featherston was born in Geelong, Victoria in 1922. He served in the army from 1940-1944, before designing the highly successful plywood shell Contour chairs in 1951. Self taught in design, he opened Featherston Contract Interiors in 1956 and one year later, became a consultant for Aristoc Industries.

Mary Featherston (nee Currey) was born in Surrey, England in 1943. She came to Australia at the age of ten and later studied interior design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Grant and Mary became life and professional partners in 1965.

Grant and Mary Featherston worked mainly on furniture, exhibitions and graphics. While their output was a largely collaborative effort, Grant focused on furniture design and Mary focused on educational design projects, which she has continued to do since Grant’s death in 1995. Some of their major furniture design projects were those for Aristoc Industries, Uniroyal/Bridgestone and the Children’s Museum of Victoria. An exhibition of their design at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1988 marked the beginnings of a renewed interest in their work over recent years. In 1996, the Featherstons were inducted into the Design Institute of Australia Hall of Fame.

T.H. Brown and Sons (established 1911)

T.H. Brown and Sons is a furniture maker that was founded in Adelaide in 1911. In its earlier days, the company was known for its timber furniture and sold to retailers such as Myer. The company continues to operate, but is now known as Workspace Commercial Furniture. The work of T.H. Brown and Sons makes up part of the Art Gallery of South Australia’s strong Australian Decorative Arts Collection.

T.H. Brown and Sons’ 1960s range of moulded timber furniture was developed at a time when Australian furniture designers were exposed to the Scandinavian style, characterised by solid pieces of timber hand-crafted and finished in natural oils so as to emphasize the inherent beauty of the material. The furniture of T.H. Brown and Sons was showcased in the exhibition 20th Century Style: Furniture, held at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2003.
FLER Furniture

FLER Furniture was founded in Richmond, Melbourne in 1946 by Fred Lowen and Ernest Rodeck. Combining the founders’ initials to form its name, the company became one of the most successful Australian furniture manufacturers in the early post war years. FLER Furniture is known for its combination of appealing aesthetics with practicality and comfort. FLER’s pieces retain a handcrafted Scandinavian feel, yet with a distinctly Australian touch.

Neville Gruzman

Neville Gruzman (b. Australia 1925-2005) was a modernist architect and furniture designer (built-ins and cabinetry) who lived and worked in Sydney. Gruzman entered the University of Sydney in the late 1940s where he was influenced by the European Modernists in his architecture and interiors designs. Following graduation Gruzman travelled to Europe (1952-53) and Japan (1955). He was further influenced in this period by the work of American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Upon Gruzman’s return to Australia he formed his own architectural practice. In his architectural work upon the South Head Synagogue, Gruzman worked with furniture designer and manufacturer Paul Kafka in the interior fit-out. In 1961 Gruzman took up a part time teaching position at the University of NSW, where he influenced a new generation of architects.

The chairs in this exhibition (lounge chair and dining chair) were created for Gruzman’s own home in Darling Point (built 1958-1965). Opera House designer Jorn Utzon said of the Gruzman house, it had the ‘best living room in Australia’.

Marion Hall Best (1905-1988)

Marion Hall Best was born in Dubbo, New South Wales in 1905. Hall Best first trained and worked as a nurse at the Coast Hospital, Little Bay. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, she attended the embroidery classes of June Scott Stevenson, and the art and design classes of Thea Proctor. In 1938, she enrolled in first-year architecture at the University of Sydney, before completing a correspondence course in interior decoration from New York.

In 1938, she opened Marion Best Fabrics, a workroom with a display area in Woollahra, which later became her retail outlet. Here she stocked the work of influential designers including furniture by Gordon Andrews and Clement Meadmore, and textiles by Frances Burke and Douglas Annand. In 1949, Hall Best opened another shop in Rowe Street, Sydney, a laneway known for its bohemian art and design culture.

Like many of the Sydney modernists, Hall Best was known for her incorporation of international modernist ideas into her work, becoming one of the most influential Australian interior designers of the 20th century. Specifically, in terms of her own practice, her work demonstrates a refined use of colour, incorporating a range of international and local influences including Henri Matisse, the Fauves, and Sydney artist and colourist Justin O’Brien.

Like fellow designer Gordon Andrews, she worked at de Havilland Aircraft Company during the war. From 1947-48, she ran the David Jones Art Gallery and was a founding member of the Society of Interior Designers of Australia in 1951. Her work is held in major Australian public collections including the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales,
Sydney, and the Australian National Gallery, Canberra. She was highly influential throughout her career in facilitating the emergence of interior design as a professional field. Hall Best died in 1988 at Elizabeth Bay, Sydney.

Michael Hirst (1917-2002)

Michael Hirst was born in England in 1917, before moving to Australia as a child in 1922 and growing up in Regional Victoria. In the early 1950s, Hirst worked for Melbourne furniture manufacturer Bambra Cabinets, before establishing his own business in East Hawthorn in 1955. Perhaps his best-known work came out of his collaboration with Clement Meadmore from 1955-56, which resulted in the DC601A chair, as well as a coffee table known as the Meadmore Principle. In the past, these designs were attributed solely to Meadmore. However, it has been found that Hirst played a significant role in the design process.

Hirst later found success in his plastic-coated wire reinterpretation of the DC601A chair, which was sold nationally. Such work goes some way to show the mark of Hirst’s design in his collaborations with Meadmore, and is, at the same time, a testament to his original talent as a designer and manufacturer. Hirst died in 2002.

Paul Kafka (1907-1972)

Paul Kafka was born in Vienna in 1907. His father was a furniture maker, and he worked in his factory before studying furniture design and interior decoration at the Academy of Arts in Vienna. In 1939, Kafka emigrated to Australia, and has since been described as one of the most important post-war furniture designers to have worked in Sydney.

In the early 1940s, Kafka established a furniture factory in Sydney where he later employed other designers and tradesmen to produce custom-made furniture for individual clients. After establishing his practice in Sydney, Kafka worked with prominent Sydney architects such as Harry Seidler, and was often commissioned to produce built-in pieces. His work is characterised by striped veneers and geometric detailing that can be seen to reference the art deco stylistic movement, to which he was exposed in his formative years in Vienna. Kafka died in Sydney in 1972.

Steven Kalmar (1909-1989)

Steven Kalmar was born in Hungary in 1909. Like fellow designer, George Korody, Kalmar trained as an architect in Hungary, before moving to Sydney in 1939. During the Second World War, Kalmar worked at the University of Sydney in optical munitions. In 1949, Kalmar opened his store, Kalmar Interiors, which operated as a retail store and consultancy for commissions. Kalmar closed down the retail side of the business in 1957 to focus on commissions such as the interior design of the Indian Tea Centre in Pitt Street, Sydney.

For a number of years throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Kalmar contributed a weekly article on interior decoration to the Sunday Telegraph. He was also a regular contributor on design for the Woman’s Day from 1971-86. Kalmar is said to have drawn inspiration from contemporary American and Scandinavian design, and his designs have been credited
with helping to introduce an international modern aesthetic to Sydney in the post-war period. Kalmar died in 1989.

George Korody (1890-1957)

George Korody was born in Hungary in 1890. After training as an architect and interior designer, Korody lectured at Budapest University and worked for the Hungarian Government, designing homes and interiors for World Fairs. For such work, he won gold and silver medals at the Paris Exhibition in 1937. In 1940, Korody travelled to Sydney to stage an exhibition of Hungarian applied arts. The outbreak of the Second World War meant that Korody decided to stay in Australia.

During the early 1940s, Korody designed and produced a series of ceramics and furniture. In 1947, he formalised a business partnership with Elsie Segaert, resulting in the joint re-establishment of Segaert’s Artes Studios in Castlereagh Street, Sydney. Here Korody designed and sold his furniture, while also offering a custom interior and furniture design service.

Along with fellow designer, Marion Hall Best, Korody was a founding member of the Society of Interior Designers of Australia. A number of his furniture pieces are included in the Powerhouse Museum Collection. In a newspaper article in 1949, Korody described some of his furniture design considerations as: “lightweight, of simple construction and without any meaningless ornamentation.” Korody died in 1957.

Fred Lowen (1919-2005)

Fred Lowen was born Fritz Loewenstein in Germany in 1919. He studied art in Berlin before fleeing to Belgium in 1938. In early 1940, he was forced to flee again, this time to England. By late 1940, Lowen was transported to Sydney on HMT Dunera and was forced to intern for two years at the Tatura internment camp in Victoria. Here Lowen met Ernest Rodeck, with whom he later founded the iconic furniture company FLER Furniture in 1946. Combining the founders’ initials to form its name, FLER Furniture is known for its combination of appealing aesthetics with practicality and comfort.

FLER Furniture continued to grow throughout the 1960s and became the first Australian furniture company to be floated on the Australian Stock Exchange. In 1968, after four years back in Germany studying art and furniture design, Lowen left FLER and founded Twen, a furniture export market. After his retirement from full-time work in 1986, Lowen worked as a consultant. In 1987, Lowen was awarded the Order of Australia (AM) for his significant contribution to furniture design and manufacturing. In 1999, he was inducted into the Design Institute of Australia Hall of Fame and completed his autobiography in 2001 titled Fred Lowen: Dunera Boy, Furniture Designer, Artist. Lowen died in Melbourne in 2005.

Clement Meadmore (1929-2005)

Clement Meadmore was born in Melbourne in 1929. In the late 1940s, he studied aeronautical engineering and industrial design at the Melbourne Technical College (now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology). While Meadmore is perhaps more readily remembered for his contribution to sculpture, early in his career he experienced success as an industrial designer. In 1952, he designed a corded dining chair, which saw him win the Good Design Award in 1953 from the Good Design Society, Sydney. Marion Hall Best featured the dining chair in her Woollahra and Rowe Street stores in Sydney. During this period, Meadmore designed lighting, some of which was exhibited in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics Arts Festival. Throughout the 1950s, he also produced sculptures and ran Gallery A, Melbourne for a couple of years.

In 1960, Meadmore moved to Sydney and placed a greater focus on his sculpture. After three years in Sydney, he moved to New York to pursue his sculptural practice.
However, he did stay in contact with Australian furniture designer and manufacturer Michael Hirst, who manufactured and sold his designs in Melbourne. While he committed himself to sculpture in New York for the remainder of his life, he remained passionate about furniture design and wrote two books on the subject: How to Make Furniture Without Tools (1975) and The Modern Chair: Classic Designs by Thonet, Breuer, Le Corbusier, Eames and Others (1997). Meadmore died in New York City in 2005, leaving behind an influential oeuvre of sculpture and furniture design.

Roger McLay

Roger McLay was born in Sydney in Australia in 1922. He studied at the National Art School in Sydney (1938-41) until his studies were interrupted by WWII and service with the Royal Australian Air Force. On his way to begin his European service McLay stopped off in New York where he was greatly inspired by the city’s great energy and design. This visit, and the War itself, would inspire McLay’s approach to design, his use of new materials, and technical innovations. Following the War McLay returned to the National Art School (1945-47) intent on pursuing his interest in industrial design.

McLay established an independent design practice in Sydney in 1947, for which he undertook commissions for furniture, packaging and interior design. McLay is most well known for the Kone chair, first produced in 1948. The Kone chair comprised a single sheet of wood laminate wrapt upon itself, affixed to steel rod legs. Following McLay’s departure for the UK in the mid 1950s, manufacture of the Kone Chair was licenced to Sydney’s Roseberry Veneers between 1948 until 1960. These manufacturers used the technological advances honed during the War, when they had produced the veneers required for the DeHaviland ‘Mosquito Bomber’. Roger McLay returned to Australia in the mid-1960s, finally retiring from his design practice in 1987. Roger McLay died in Sydney in 2000.

Gyula (Julius) Soos

Gyula Soos came to Australia from Hungary with his brother Imre Soos in about 1950s. Both brothers worked on the Snowy Mountains scheme before starting their own design business, specialising in the interiors of coffee shops and restaurants during the 1950s, including The American Espresso Coffee Lounge at Wymnyard (1957) and the Double Bay Espresso Coffee Bar in Pitt Street (1957). He designed a limited edition of chairs – now known as ‘Soos’ chairs in 1955.

Douglas Snelling

UK born furniture born furniture designer and architect, Douglas Snelling (1916 - 1925) moved to Sydney in 1942. Although Australia remained his base for 30 years, Snelling travelled extensively, working for periods in the United States and New Zealand, and developing a particular attachment to Cambodia, its people and culture. Douglas Snelling moved to Hawaii in 1977, where he spent the last years of his life.

In Sydney, Snelling cut a glamorous figure. He was sought after for his architecture, interiors furniture and company. His design work showed the design work of American, Scandinavian and Japanese design in use of materials and response to light. Likewise, his furniture responded to the post war desire for affordable furniture, and their utility in open plan houses.

Snelling chairs are notable for their structure and appearance for his chairs, which used webbing for seats and backs over timber frame. The webbing material, known as ‘saran’ was an early woven synthetic strong in nature which had been used in air craft fit outs.

In 1947, Snelling formed a partnership with Terry Palmerston and Robert Shaw as Functional Products. The firm operated in St. Peters in a factory designed by Douglas Snelling. Here they mass produce “Snelling Line” furniture including chairs, lounges, coffee and dining tables into the 1950s.
Following his time at Functional Products, Snelling moved on, concentrating his efforts on furniture and interior designs for his own architecture. Today, Snelling Line furniture is much sought after by collectors of mid-century Australian designed furniture. It reveals the influence of his international peers, but also his distinct response to Australian conditions and lifestyle.

Tessa Furniture

Fred Lowen opened Twen furniture company with his brother Howard Lindsey in 1968, before renaming the company Tessa, after the daughter of a friend. The company soon became widely renowned for its designs and won the Dunhill Design Award in 1970. Tessa Furniture still operates in Melbourne and has a commitment to quality and design, continuing Lowen’s legacy.

Fred Ward (1900-1990)

Fred Ward was born in Melbourne, Australia. He attended the School of Drawing at the National Art Gallery of Victoria, after which he became an illustrator and cartoonist for publications including, The Bulletin and the Melbourne Herald. Ward pursued his growing interest in furniture design by attending evening technical classes and making individual pieces for family and friends. Ward’s furniture design and production increased during the 1930s, where he developed the ‘Unit Range’ of furniture for Myer Emporium. These simple timber designs were affordable, allowing individual pieces to be purchased over time. This range ‘consolidated Ward’s reputation as Australia’s leading Modernist designer’ (Wrigley, 2013). In the subsequent years, Ward established Patterncraft, in association with Australian Home Beautiful, to enable furniture to be made by the home handyman. Following WWII, Fred Ward took up a commission to design furniture for the Australian National University and thereafter other Commonwealth buildings between 1948-1952. During this period Ward was also active in teaching interior design at the University of Melbourne. In 1952 Fred moved to Canberra to supervise his commissions, whereupon he was soon invited to take on the position of University Designer. After his retirement in 1961, Fred Ward travelled extensively and took on select furniture commissions for commercial and public buildings, including the Reserve Bank (1962), the National Library (1964), the Australian Pavilion at the Montreal Exposition in (1967) and Canberra and Government House (1971). Ill health led to permanent retirement in 1980. Fred Ward died at the age of 90 having lived a life of service to Australian design.

Derek Wrigley (Born 1924)

Derek Wrigley was born in Lancashire, England in 1924. He studied architecture, structural engineering and town planning at Manchester University. In 1947, Wrigley emigrated to Sydney, and shortly after, began lecturing in architecture at the University of Technology, Sydney, where he stayed until 1957. Wrigley then moved to Canberra to become an assistant to fellow designer, Fred Ward, at the Australian National University. In 1953, he co-founded a NSW Chapter of the Society for Designers, which is now known as the Design Institute of Australia.

After Ward retired in 1961, Wrigley was appointed to University Architect, a position that he held up until his retirement in 1977. From 1978-80, he was one of the main designers of furniture and also a number of the coat of arms for the High Court of Australia. Wrigley has been extremely active since his retirement, writing numerous books on sustainable design and an autobiography on his close friend, Fred Ward. Wrigley was awarded a Life Fellowship of the Design Institute of Australia in 1980.
Douglas Snelling (1916 - 1985) was an Australian born, self taught architect and furniture designer. In this essay, his son Christopher Snelling recounts the experience of living in his father's house in Vaucluse in Sydney's East.

My childhood memories of growing up in a house designed by my father are many and varied. Our home and his architectural practice (based in our house) featured furniture by internationally acclaimed twentieth century designers.

Memories include summer outdoor garden parties with guests reclining in Harry Bertoia diamond wire mesh chairs around a glowing firepit while the Akai reel to reel player provided the sounds of Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack. Of an evening my father could often be found relaxing in ‘his’ chair – the iconic black leather Charles Eames lounge and ottoman while he sipped on a scotch and soda with a Peter Stuyvesant cigarette gracefully removed from a Cambodian embossed sliver cigarette box. Visitors to my father’s architectural practice were invited to sit in one of two classic Hans Wegner folding chairs holding pride of place in his office reception. My parent’s retreat also housed a well-used Hans Wegner valet chair often home to one of my father’s tweed jackets and woollen knitted necktie.

Snelling custom designed built-in furniture was commonplace in many rooms in our house including my bedroom. My childhood bedroom featured a pair of single beds (complete with turquoise piped Thai silk bedspreads) at right angles in one corner of the room with a custom designed teak lidded toybox as the anchor corner piece for the beds – one bed actually slid halfway under the corner toybox to create more space in the room while also becoming a seat with removable bolster cushion. A built in desk, floor to ceiling large teak doors concealing wardrobes and storage, and an Eames plywood chair completed the Snelling designed Asian artefacts, in particular Khmer sculpture and Japanese woodblock prints were collecting passions of my father and featured predominantly throughout our house. Built in turquoise velvet canter levered banquette seating and a large black and white television hidden from view inside a Snelling custom designed teak wall unit complemented the formal sitting room and could be said to be a pre cursor to the now mandatory media room of today.

Gardens featured indoors and out with an indoor palm garden by Sydney horticulturalist Vernon Kuchel as a feature of the dining room. Outside fish ponds complete with Japanese koi carp and a suite of three large Fijian drum totem poles acted as sentries guarding over the swimming pool surrounded by sandstone crazy paving. As a very young child I have memories of feeding the koi fish and also driving around the garden in my Mercedes Benz pedal car. My father was a Benz fanatic having purchased a classic Mercedes Benz 190S gull wing in the late 1950s only to sell it when my mother fell pregnant with me in 1963.

Dinner parties at home were many and lively with guests sharing food and conversation around a Snelling custom designed twelve-seater round teak dining table complete with an in-built flush black granite lazy susan partnered with beautifully placed iconic George Jensen cutlery (often complete with splades). As a child I have memories of sharing meals with colourful dinner guests including legendary science communicators Julius Sumner Miller and Harry Messel, Sydney fashion doyenne Sheila Scotter and members of Sydney’s Black and White Committee, Sydney eastern suburbs fashion designer Beril Jents – “Australia’s first queen of haute couture”, Robert Haines then director of the David Jones Art Gallery, Carlos Zalapa the Consul General for Mexico, and even I’ve been told a dinner party for Sammy Davis Jr when he toured Sydney in April 1959 (even though this was four years before I was born).

Christopher Snelling

October 2014
Australian photographer, Max Dupain was born in Sydney Australia (1911 – 1992). Dupain was given his first camera at the age of 13 and quickly developed a passionate interest in photography. In 1930, Dupain commenced a three-year apprenticeship with Sydney photographer Cecil Bostock and by 1934 he had opened a studio in Bond Street, Sydney.

In 1937, while on the south coast of New South Wales, he photographed his most famous image entitled Sunbaker, the head and shoulders of a friend lying on the beach.

During his career, Dupain operated a commercial photography business, which included commissions for the Australian Government and large corporations. His images have been widely used to promote immigration, tourism, trade and investment.

Max Dupain was greatly influenced by modernist art and architecture and the use of simple abstracted forms. His commissioned work for architects such as Jorn Utzon (Sydney Opera House), Harry Seidler and Douglas Snelling are a celebration of some of Australia’s most iconic buildings and their interiors. His work can be found in Australian and international collections.

The photographs in this exhibition provide a record of four of Douglas Snelling’s most well-known buildings and interiors. They include Kelly House 1955, Bachelor Flat 1963, Snelling House 1957-1963 and Blau House 1962.
Japanese Wood Block Prints:

1. Kiyoshi Saito, Cat (untitled) – Well loved image of a seated cat with focus on the white face and large eyes, its black, grey body against a mottled brown background
2. Kiyoshi Saito, Maiko (I) c1950s, 11.5 x 17.5inches: Elegant and graceful image of the elegant standing Maiko. The beautiful nape of her neck seen at its best, outlined in red, leading up to the soft roundness of her cheek and hair; her gown is a magnificent composition of light brown and black pattern, enhanced by green and warm red, against the mottled grey of the woodblock background

Photograph Set 1: Snelling House 1957 – 1965 from top, clockwise

1. Snelling House Interior, Dining Room Annex featuring Snelling designs, Shoji screens and timber ceiling detail
2. Snelling House exterior, from garden
3. Snelling House, interior, living room

Photograph Set 2: Kelly House No. 1 1953 - 1955

1. Kelly House 1, exterior from Victoria Road, Bellevue Hill
2. Kelly House 1, interior, custom design Sandstone fireplace
3. Kelly House 1, interior, living room featuring Snelling custom design built in furniture
4. Photography: Nov 1955
   1956 Womens Weekly, state library

Photograph Set 3: Bachelor Flat, 76 Roslyn Gardens, Elizabeth Bay

1. Interior living area featuring Snelling custom design built in furniture.
2. Interior living area featuring Snelling custom design built in furniture.
3. Photography: Sept 1963

Photograph Set 4: Blau House (Chinaman’s beach, Sydney 1959 - 1962)

1. Blau House, interior and exterior
2. Blau House, Douglas Snelling architect with client, Patricia Blau
3. Blau House, interior living room
THOROUGHLY MODERN

Focusing on Australian abstraction from the 1940s to the early 1970s, Thoroughly Modern showcases a selection of artworks from the Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest collection. Each work has been chosen to highlight the importance of the permanent Collection as it relates to the modernist art practice that dominated the Sydney art scene, as experienced by artists Margo and Gerald Lewers and their contemporaries. Beginning as a bequest, the collection continues to grow through the generosity of donors and prudent acquisitions.

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

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

Several commonalities emerge when reviewing the lives of artists whose works make up the Gallery collection. Many of the artists studied at the same Sydney art schools - such as the Julian Ashton Art School and East Sydney Technical College - and were taught by the same leading art teachers - for example Dattilo-Rubbo and Desiderius Orban. They also undertook study trips to Europe, London and America, with many exhibiting together in key international shows, such as Recent Australian Painting at the Whitechapel Gallery in London (1961) and Australian Artists Exhibition at the Raymond Burr Galleries, Los Angeles (1961).

WWII was another factor that influenced many modernist artists. A lot of the Australian born artists served as servicemen, war artists or camouflage experts, while a number of European born artists immigrated to Sydney following the disruptions of WWII.

The combination of Australian culture and European influences saw modernist artists, like those represented in Thoroughly Modern, become significant and influential Sydney based artists who participated in the rise of modernism and partook in art’s critical shift towards abstraction.

Harold Abbott, Flight, 1971
Acrylic on linen on board
Image courtesy of Penrith Regional Gallery
LIST OF WORKS

THOROUGHLY MODERN

Harold Abbott (1906 - 1986)

*Flight*
1971
acrylic on linen on board
117.5 x 88

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift in memory of the artist by his wife Gwenda Abbott 1996.

Yvonne Audette

*Dream of an Ancient Tablet*
1963
oil on masonite
99 x 84


Ralph Balson

*The Construction...Transparent Planes*
1942
oil on cardboard
68.4 x 90

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest. Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Ralph Balson

*Constructive Elements*
1944
oil on board
49.7 x 60

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest. Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Nancy Borlase

*Blue Centre*
1960
oil and mixed media on canvas on board
91 x 56


Judy Cassab

*Untitled*
1967
mixed media on masonite
41 x 59


Leonard Hessing

*The Indifferent Mechanism*
1960
oil on canvas
83.5 x 129.5


Bim Hilder

*Torso*
1952
cassia wood
42 x 26 x 14.3

**LIST OF WORKS**

**THOROUGHLY MODERN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frank Hinder</td>
<td>Margel and Gerry</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>pencil and watercolour on paper</td>
<td>17 x 25.7</td>
<td>Collection Penrith Regional Gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest. Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers, 1979.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank Hinder</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>c. 1943</td>
<td>egg tempera on paper</td>
<td>40.5 x 48</td>
<td>Collection Penrith Regional Gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest. Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank Hodgkinson</td>
<td>Abstract No. 7</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>oil on composition board</td>
<td>44.5 x 76</td>
<td>Collection Penrith Regional Gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest. Acquisition Fund 1987.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inge King (b.1918)</td>
<td>Flying Form (maquette)</td>
<td>1961-2</td>
<td>painted steel</td>
<td>20.2 x 27 x 10.5</td>
<td>Collection Penrith Regional gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest. Gift of Darani and Tanya Lewers 1979.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Klippel</td>
<td>Optus 298</td>
<td>1970-74</td>
<td>bronze and welded steel, found objects</td>
<td>48.2 x 17.5 x 15 cm</td>
<td>Collection Penrith Regional Gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest. Acquisitions Fund and Friends of Penrith Regional Gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest 1991.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eva Kubbos</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>gouache, watercolour and chalk on paper</td>
<td>74 x 97.5</td>
<td>On permanent Loan.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eva Kubbos</td>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>synthetic polymer paint on board</td>
<td>36 x 49</td>
<td>Gift of Mr Leo Christie through the Taxation Incentives for the arts 1990.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elwyn Lynn</td>
<td>Cliffs at Fall</td>
<td>c. 1961</td>
<td>mixed media on canvas</td>
<td>76 x 102</td>
<td>Collection Penrith Regional Gallery &amp; The Lewers Bequest. Acquisitions Fund 1990.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF WORKS

THOROUGHLY MODERN

Elwyn Lynn
Herculaneum
1961
mixed media on canvas
102 x 137

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.

John Olsen
Child’s Fifth Birthday
1957
oil on canvas
71.5 x 90

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Acquisition Fund 1989.

Stanislaus Rapotec
Untitled
1968
synthetic polymer on masonite
137 x 182.5

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Acquisition fund, 1990.

Henry Salkauskas,
Effigy
1961
Indian ink and brush
54 x 73.5

On Permanent Loan.

Gerald Lewers
Carved chair
[no date]
ironwood
56 x 49 x 58.5

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Henry Salkauskas,
Untitled
C. 1962
monotype print
29 x 40

On Permanent Loan.

Tony Tuckson
No. 13
C. 1959
collage and mixed media on masonite
122 x 91.7

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Darani Lewers and Tanya Crothers 1979.

Peter Upward
July Tenth
1961-2
PVA on board
91 x 122

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Randall Reed 2001.

Peter Upward
Untitled
1963
oil on composition board
61 x 45.7

On Permanent Loan.

Peter Upward
Untitled
1963
acrylic on board
61 x 45.8

On Permanent Loan.
Harold Abbott (1906 – 1986)

Harold Abbott explored a wide range of painting styles, before beginning abstract painting in 1964, following the first of five visits to Japan in 1963. Towards the end of his career he developed a highly individualistic approach to abstraction, which he called ‘reflections’; closely examining the effects of colour contrasts, composition, rhythm, movement and space.

Yvonne Audette (b. 1930)

Freedom of brushwork, calligraphic and graffiti line opens up new possibilities, the mystical art of painting is all important. The gesture, the sign, the mark should all speak for themselves – they are forms free of association and remain valid in their own right. Yvonne Audette

Yvonne Audette won a Scholarship to the New York Academy of Fine Art in 1952, where she became friends with key figures such as Clement Greenberg and Willem de Kooning. Before moving back to Sydney in 1966, she settled in Italy, exhibiting in Milan, Florence and Paris and travelling extensively throughout Europe.

Ralph Balson (1890 – 1964)

Instead of the old world of absolute values, ours is a world of relativity, a world of ceaseless movement where reality is nothingness and nothingness is reality. My painting is not associative of England or Australia, or going for a walk or coming back from one. Ralph Balson

Ralph Balson began sketching and painting while working as a house painter during the 1920s in Sydney. He was greatly influenced by artist Grace Crowley and became committed to abstract art, pursuing an idealised art based on a universal language of geometry. The influence of Cubism resulted in works such as his constructive paintings and his 1941 exhibition is recognised as the first solo show in Australia of non-figurative paintings.

Nancy Borlase (1914 – 2006)

It is the disturbing relentlessness of change that I seek to express in my work. The image is not static but is in a continued state of flux, of varying tempo; it emerges from the organic vitality of the visual elements. Nancy Borlase

Nancy Borlase studied drawing and sculpture with Lyndon Dadswell and Frank Medworth at East Sydney Technical College and life drawing at the Crowley-Fizelle School with practicing modern artists, Grace Crowley and Rah Fizelle. She was an active member of the Contemporary Art Society, Sydney and, between 1956 and 1960, travelled to America and Europe.

Judy Cassab (b. 1920)

The relevant darkness of the night is soothing. My eyes burn from the vivid colours of the day. I have never experienced this. Colour has always been something which pops up here and there in spots and hues, something on which the painter’s glance focuses. Judy Cassab

Judy Cassab was interested in exploring new ways of looking at the challenges faced by the twentieth century and gained a reputation for her distinctive expressionist technique. She was the first woman to have won the Archibald Prize twice, with a portrait of Stanislaus Rapotec in 1960 and Margo Lewers in 1967. Cassab was influenced by the writings of Bauhaus inspired painter, designer, educator and art theorist György Kepes and Eugen Herrigel’s book, Zen in the Art of Archery (1948).
John Coburn (b. 1925)

*My aim in my paintings is to create formal harmonies of shapes and colours that exist in their own right and, at the same time, evoke moods and feelings. I seek images that are charged with associations and memories of places and things I have experienced.* John Coburn

John Coburn became interested in the philosophy of Carl Jung and, in the early 1960s, was influenced by the New York School artist Robert Motherwell. He began abstract painting after seeing the work of modern artists, such as Braque, Léger, Matisse, Miró and Picasso exhibited in the influential 1953 exhibition French Painting Today at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Kevin Connor (b. 1932)

*I could live without painting and making sculptures but I just could not live without drawing. Drawing is the very basis of everything. I could happily take my sketchbook and draw for the rest of my life and show nobody.* Kevin Connor

Kevin Connor is known for his expressionistic style and revered for his ability to capture the energy of the urban landscape. He earned success winning prestigious Australian art prizes, including the Archibald Prize for portraiture twice, with a portrait of Sir Frank Kitto in 1975 and fellow artist Robert Klippel in 1977. He also won the Sulman Prize for best subject or genre painting twice in 1991 and 1997 and is the only artist to have won the Dobell Prize for drawing twice, in 1992 and 2005.

Lyndon Dadswell (1908 – 1986)

*In the easy, undulating flow of their concave and convex forms they capture, one might say, nature’s rhythms. They have a sense of happening rather than of being made.* Nancy Borlase

Lyndon Dadswell was inspired by the work of British sculptors Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and was particularly influenced by the dictum that underpinned their practice, ‘truth to materials’. Throughout his career, he continued to engage with traditional formalist aesthetics, such as, shape, proportion, scale, structure, texture, colour and context.

John Firth-Smith (b. 1943)

*I’ve always had the belief that you can make the finest line with a six-inch house paint brush, which you can. You just put paint on the very corner of it and use that, you see, and use it like a tiny little brush.* John Firth Smith

John Firth-Smith was greatly influenced by the Two Decades of American Painting (1946-1966) exhibition, which toured to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1967. The exhibition featured works by by American abstract expressionists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. Described as ‘Post-Painterly’ American critic, Clement Greenberg, proposed that the artists who painted in this manner were immersed in colour, and that colour formed the primary means of expression. Firth-Smith mastered this art form and in 1975 was awarded the Patrick McCaughey Painting Prize.

Thomas Gleghorn (b. 1925)

*My painting takes on this particular form of abstraction, for only in this way can I gain coherence to personal problems derived from a passionate feeling for the landscape in which I live.* Thomas Gleghorn

Thomas Gleghorn initially studied privately with renowned painter William Dobell. He came to prominence as a painter during the 1950s after winning a string of important awards, including the Blake Christus Prize in 1958. He became Director of Blaxland Gallery in 1958 and worked extensively in art education roles throughout his career.

Stanislaw Halpern (1919 – 1969)

Stanislaw Halpern developed an interest in pottery during the mid-1940s while working for a commercial firm in
Melbourne. During this time he began selling his work through the Primrose Pottery Shop and befriended Arthur Boyd, who had established the Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery at Murrumbeena with John Perceval. His paintings of the mid-to-late 1950s were expressionistic landscapes and streetscapes, painted quickly and confidently, with thick paint and calligraphic line work.

Leonard Hessing (1931 – 2004)

The re-enactment of experience on canvas has to do with energy, change; and reality does not become ‘real’ until it has undergone certain transformations: like sea into vapour, cloud into rain, rain into sea. Leonard Hessing

Following WWII, Leonard Hessing travelled widely throughout Russia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean islands. He also studied art in Paris with the modernist French painter, sculptor and filmmaker Fernand Léger before migrating to Australia in 1951. He became a leading theorist and practitioner in Sydney, investigating new ideas, exploring plastics and 3D relief wall hangings. His work reflects many of the sophisticated trends of abstract expressionist painting of the period.

Bim Hilder (1909 – 1990)

All natural phenomena fascinates me, the flight of birds, wave formation, patterns of erosion, characteristics of plant growth, marine life, crystal structure... I don’t have any great aims or direction – I just do the best I can with the ability I have. Bim Hilder

Bim Hilder was a sculptor, painter and printmaker. He developed an interest in architecture and furniture design during the 1920s, when he began working with American architect Walter Burley Griffin at Castlecrag, Sydney. He also worked on theatre sets, opera and film productions and, during WWII, worked designing camouflage and new construction methods.

Frank Hinder (1906 – 1992)

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

Frank Hinder embraced the idea of ‘Dynamic Symmetry’, as a way of representing universal truths. His belief that the universe was ordered and mathematical situated the ideas of rhythm within nature, mathematic repetition and abstraction central to his practice. During WWII, he used his knowledge of abstract shapes, colour and repetition to create the Hinder Spider camouflage design while assigned to the Royal Australian Engineer’s Camouflage Wing.

Frank Hodgkinson (1919 – 2001)

I paint to regain lost innocence. Beyond childhood it is impossible to have an innocent eye, but I do attempt each day to place myself in the position of primitive man rather than be led by his findings. Frank Hodgkinson

Frank Hodgkinson studied with Bernard Meninsky in London and at the Academie de la Grand Chaumiere in Paris, which supported the practice of abstraction. In 1953 he returned to Sydney, becoming very interested in Aboriginal art, as well as the analytical psychology of Carl Jung and Zen Buddhism. He painted landscapes with a monochromatic palette of mostly ambers, creams and ochres. Using muted, earthy colours he often collaged with hessian, later including sand to build varying levels and depths of relief. His work influenced other Australian artists, such as Elwyn Lynn and Peter Kaiser.

Mimi Jaksic-Berger (b. 1936)

Mimi Jaksic-Berger adopted watercolour as her preferred medium and moved from figuration to lyrical abstraction in the mid-1960s. Her individual style employs bright colours
to perform luminous effects resembling landscapes during sunset. Her technique often involves the use of thin washes of poured paint to reinforce a sense of fragility. She became a member of the Australian Watercolour Institute in 1968.

Louis James (1920 – 1996)

Louis James had no formal art training but, following WWII, he and his wife sold all their possessions and moved to London for 15 years. He exhibited with the London Group - the oldest standing artist led organisation in the world whose members included Henry Moore, Roy de Maistre and John Skeaping. Following his return to Australia, he was involved with the well-known exhibition space Gallery A, along with fellow artists such as Carl Plate, Brett Whiteley, Arthur Boyd, John Brack and Judy Cassab.

Inge King (b. 1918)

Inge King was inspired by the welded sculptural works she encountered while in New York and began working with industrial steel and arc welding in the early 1960s. She has often described her sculptures as a ‘vision in motion’. Her practice typically explores the formal spatial elements of sculpture and she has become widely recognised as a major contributor to Australian modern abstraction.

Robert Klippel (1920 – 2001)

I am interested in finding the equivalent in plants and flowers of things growing, something which has life in it. That is the nature of art, to give life to forms. Robert Klippel

Robert Klippel stayed in London during the late 1940s and attended the lectures of Indian philosopher and spiritualist Jiddu Krishnamurti, whose Vitalist philosophy would underpin his practice. In 1960, influenced by the avant-garde New York School during a visit to America, he produced his first ‘junk assemblages’, using various parts from old machinery, such as typewriters and cash registers.

Eva Kubbos (b. 1928)

I have a sense my theme and understanding it from inside in order to convey any significant idea about the world I know and then transfer it into visual terms: but after the drawing exists for itself and in itself. Eva Kubbos.

Eva Kubbos became influenced by the avant-garde scene in Sydney, after moving there from Melbourne in 1960. 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.

Peter Laverty (1926 – 2013)

Peter Laverty taught at the National Art School in Sydney from 1952 to 1971 where, inspired by his early training as a photographer, he introduced photography as a subject. He then served as director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales before retiring in 1977 to allow more time to paint. He commissioned modernist architect Sydney Ancher to design a house with a skillion roof, plenty of floor-to-ceiling windows and a large studio in which he and his wife could both paint. His sweeping, abstract impressionist landscapes were often flooded with the light and space of the Australian landscape.

Margo Lewers (1908–1978)

The paintings in Take a Seat are the work of Australian modernist Margo Lewers. These works form part of the Lewers Bequest, given to the Gallery on behalf of Margo Lewers by her daughters, Darani Lewers and Tanya Crothers.
Margo Lewers (nee Plate) was married to sculptor Gerald Lewers. In the prime of their careers, these artists embraced modernist principles in their art practice. These artists were part of the wider intellectual and artistic milieu centred in Sydney and Melbourne, associated with the development of Australian modernism. In Sydney, Margo and Gerald opened their home here at Emu Plains, to artists, writers and intellectuals. Likewise, in Melbourne, art patrons John and Sunday Reed opened their home Heide, to provide a base and support for modernist artists such as Sidney Nolan, Joy Hester and Albert Tucker.

The paintings chosen by curator Meredith Hinchliffe for exhibition within Take a Seat evince Margo Lewers's enthusiasm for colour, light and experimentation within the field of lyrical abstractionism. Their placement provides a context for the period and setting in which the seating was first designed and used.

Post War, Australian homes and interior decoration began to reflect an informality led by social and economic changes and influenced by knowledge of and access to the design aesthetic of Europe, North America and Japan. Margo and Gerald welcomed these influences and began to design, build and commission their own furniture and built-in pieces for their home here in Emu Plains, examples of which can be seen in Ancher House.

Gerald Lewers (1905 – 1962)

Love and understanding for the wood and stone of his own land, coupled with his sensitivity for the inner life of wild animals and birds, carried out with his assured craftsmanship, led to some of his finest and most distinguished works. Margel Hinder

Gerald Lewers studied sculpture at the Central School of Art in London under the tutelage of John Skeaping and was greatly influenced by his interest in the natural world, which drew an affinity with his own. His appreciation for the qualities inherent within the wood and stone, with which he chose to work, saw him create sculptures that reveal an appreciation for the inherent formation and movement of materials.

Elwyn Lynn (1917 – 1997)

The aim is not to shock or amuse in the spirit of Dada, but to avoid stereotyped associational evocations in making an art from ‘anti-art’ materials; if art is concerned with the symbolic expression of feelings and not mere visual appearance, these works may realise emotions unattainable in other media. Elwyn Lynn

Elwyn Lynn was a self-taught artist, becoming enthralled with Spanish Matter painters such as Antoni Tapies, from whom he learnt about the use of PVA glue as a painting medium. He studied philosophy and was interested in psychoanalysis and aesthetic theory, also reading the influential book Surrealism edited by the poet and literary critic Herbert Read. Between 1955 and 1969, he was the editor for the Contemporary Art Society’s Broadsheet and an art critic for The Australian, The Bulletin, The Nation and The Sunday Mirror. From 1969 until 1983, he worked as Curator of the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art, Power Institute of Fine Art; a collection that would later become the foundation of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

John Olsen (b. 1928)

John Olsen developed an expressionistic style, influenced by the artists’ group COBRA, whose manifesto moved away from surrealism, rather advocating for a complete freedom of colour and form. Olsen was also influenced by writers such as Yeats, Joyce and Beckett. In 1960 he participated in the inaugural Sydney 9 exhibition, along with other contemporary Australian abstract artists including, Hector Gilliland, Carl Plate, Leonard Hessing, Stan Rapotec, Robert Klippel, Clement Meadmore and William Rose. The Sydney 9 group, who also recruited the young upcoming critic Robert Hughes, was established to counter the Melbourne based Antipodean Group of artists who were supported by contemporary art historian Bernard Smith.
Stanislaus Rapotec (1913 – 1997)

Rapotec’s work is, explosive and provocatively, pure abstract gestures from the subconscious. Daniel Thomas

Stanislaus Rapotec was a self-taught painter who gained a strong grounding in art history by undertaking independent research. He was inspired by contemporary European and American Abstract Expressionists. Rapotec never pre-selected his colours, preferring to dip spontaneously into a range of different tins with the same brush, to get the sort of mixture which will come out through millions of little accidents when you are making your stroke. He worked rapidly with large, well-worn, second-hand, house-painting brushes, applying paint to horizontally positioned composition boards. From the mid-1950s he worked exclusively with synthetic polyvinyl acetate polymer paints, for their fluid and smooth drying qualities.

Henry Salkauskas (1925 - 1979)

Lines moving as lines or as masses, represent creativity ruminating over, or being ecstatic about water, earth, sky and cities. But it is the rumination and ecstasy that I want to put down. Henry Salkauskas

Henry Salkauskas experimented with the new abstract expressionist style, creating a striking juxtaposition between the use of black and white and the interplay of planes and lines. He adopted the mediums of silkscreens (serigraphs) and watercolour because the freer abstract style required media more pliable and easy to handle. His abstract style shares a calligraphic affinity with the renowned abstract artist Pierre Soulages.

Eric Smith (b. 1919)

Eric Smith developed a successful career, winning significant awards multiple times. In 1945 he was runner-up in the Archibald Prize for a self-portrait he painted on an army canvas. He then won the Archibald Prize in 1970 for his portrait of Sydney architect Neville Gruzman and, in 1981, his third Archibald Prize win sparked controversy when previously disqualified artist, John Bloomfield, suggested Smith had painted from a photograph. Smith was exonerated and awarded the prize. He also won the Wynne Prize twice and the Sulman Prize three times. Known for his vibrant use of colour and thick textual paint, he won the Blake Prize for Religious Art six times, including with this work Christ in 1956.

Tony Tuckson (1921 – 1973)

Tony Tuckson was greatly influenced by modernists Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson, who were teachers in abstract painting. During the late 1950s, he began to work with newspaper, experiment with collage and, into the first half of the 1960s, almost exclusively painted in red, black and white. He was appointed Deputy Director at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1957 and, during this time, pushed to establish an Aboriginal Art Collection. In 1960-61 he curated Australian Aboriginal Art, which toured Australian state galleries.

Peter Upward (1932 – 1983)

Disillusioned with the popular styles of figurative and realist imagery taught in Melbourne, Peter Upward enrolled to study abstraction at the Julian Ashton Art School in Sydney, under the tutelage of John Passmore. Upward studied Chinese and Japanese calligraphy and was heavily influenced by Zen. He began to create works by pouring paint and, using large mops as brushes, would work the paint to create an expression of energy rather than an energetic expression. His fascination with the process of creating a record of the transition between paint as a liquid medium and the final painting as a completed work, led to him often titling his works using the date upon which it was created.
ANCHER HOUSE

Completed in 1964, Ancher House is a rare example of modernist architecture in western Sydney and demonstrates a post-war change in attitude towards design and residential living. Ancher house designed by modernist architect Sydney Ancher was commissioned by Margo Lewers on behalf of her mother Gilly Plate. Representing the attributes of a particular way of life and the key characteristics of the post-war international style, the appeal of Ancher House lay in its demonstration of modernist principles as applied to everyday living.

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

Resulting from a collaboration between an artist and an architect, Ancher House was, observed architect Andrew Andersons, the kind of fusion of art and architecture that was the aspiration of William Morris and his followers a century earlier.

SYDNEY ANCHER
1904 – 1979

Sydney Ancher graduated as an architect from Sydney Technical College in 1929 and, in 1930, he was awarded the prestigious Australian medallion and Travelling Scholarship from the Board of Architects of New South Wales.

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

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

In 1952 Ancher formed the partnership Ancher, Mortlock & Murray, and was joined by Ken Woolley in 1964. Ancher retired from the firm in 1966 and was awarded the Royal Australian Institute of Architects gold medal in 1975.
Margo’s practice was underpinned by the values espoused by the Bauhaus art school movement, which asserted that art, craft, architecture and design should all be linked together. These principles were reflected in the life she created at Emu Plains. Modern architecture and art were set within a well-designed garden, becoming a stylish backdrop for creating art and hosting vibrant parties. As famed Australian writer Patrick White wrote: ideas hurtled, argument flared, voices shouted, sparks flew... the (Lewers) house provides one of the focus points of our still tentative civilisation.

During the late 1920s, Margo studied with the Sydney based art teacher Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo before travelling to Europe and London, where she enrolled at the Central School of Arts and Crafts to study textile design, painting and drawing. On her return to Sydney, Margo practiced as a textile designer and potter. In 1936 she opened Notanda Gallery; a modern interior design shop that promoted the work of avant-garde designers.

During the 1940s, Margo became an active member of the Sydney Contemporary Art Society and, like many of her fellow artists, attended painting classes with renowned Hungarian painter, printmaker and teacher Desiderius Orban. While her early works explored formal geometric abstraction, she earned critical recognition for her later abstract expressionist work. Investigating the principles of colour and light remained a consistent driving force throughout Margo’s career, culminating in her sculptural exploration of the translucent qualities of Plexiglas during the 1970s.

Margo’s early experiences as an interior designer, and her subsequent career as a modernist artist, greatly influenced the final design of Ancher House. She corresponded frequently with modernist architect Sydney Ancher to address particular design issues. For example, in order to maintain privacy, Margo preferred the southern wall of the house facing the courtyard to remain free of windows. Her influence is most evident in the mosaic work she designed for the bathrooms and kitchen and her chosen colour palette. In particular, the purpose built wall unit is comprised of cork veneer sections; each carefully dyed a different shade of blue and turquoise and suggestive of Piet Mondrian paintings, which were reduced to a series of asymmetrical rectangular shapes and geometric lines.

Margo’s choice of furniture and furnishings was also integral to creating a very particular living environment. The chosen fabrics, colours and textures, combined with contemporary art and ceramics, were all carefully selected and designed to reflect a holistic approach to living a modern lifestyle.

Margo Lewers  
*Triptych*  
c. 1970  
synthetic polymer on masonite  
183 x 83; 183 x 66; 183 x 94.8  
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.  
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers  
*untitled*  
c. 1970  
synthetic polymer on canvas  
168 x 244  
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.  
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers  
*Tones Predominant*  
c. 1971  
synthetic polymer on paper on masonite  
87.8 x 122.5  
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.  
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers  
*A Promise*  
1975  
synthetic polymer paint on paper on masonite  
36.2 x 26.3  
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.  
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers  
*Centred*  
1975  
synthetic polymer paint on masonite  
32.5 x 29  
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.  
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.
LIST OF WORKS

THE LIVING ROOM

Margo Lewers
Early
1975
synthetic polymer paint on masonite
27.2 x 38.4

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Outside
1975
synthetic polymer paint on paper on masonite
30.9 x 41.4

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Two Moods
c. 1975
synthetic polymer on canvas
213.6 x 150.4
Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Mainly Vertical
1976
synthetic polymer on paper on masonite
38 x 27

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Today
1976
synthetic polymer on paper on masonite
38.1 x 28.4

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.

Margo Lewers
Eclipse
c. 1952
watercolour and ink on paper
38.5 x 56

Collection Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest.
Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979.
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Take a Seat - Australian Modernist Seating
Curator: Meredith Hinchliffe
Catalogue Essay: Meredith Hinchliffe

The Architecture of Douglas Snelling - Photographs by Max Dupain
Essay: Christopher Snelling

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