

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

12 JANUARY 2009

MODERN TIMES
THE UNTOLD STORY OF MODERNISM IN AUSTRALIA
PRESENTED IN MELBOURNE BY CONNEX

The exhibition *Modern times: the untold story of modernism in Australia* reveals the transformations in art and life across a period of five decades – 1917 to 1967. Developed by the Powerhouse Museum and presented at Heide Museum of Modern Art from 21 March – 12 July 2009, the exhibition surveys a tumultuous period in Australian history, marked by global wars, economic depression, a technological revolution, major social changes and the shaping of a modern cosmopolitan culture.

Including over 300 objects across art, animation, fashion, design, film, photography and architecture, *Modern times* encompasses diverse themes from international exchanges, the modern body and so-called modernist 'primitivism', to the city, modern pools and the Space Age. The exhibition reveals how the built environment of skyscrapers and the entertainment landscape of cinemas, swimming pools and cafés are all legacies of modernism.

The exhibition includes the work of major artists such as Sidney Nolan, Margaret Preston, Albert Tucker, Sam Atyeo, Grace Cossington Smith, Max Dupain, Wolfgang Sievers, Janet Dawson and Clement Meadmore, alongside key architects Robin Boyd, Roy Grounds and Harry Seidler, designers Fred Ward and Grant and Mary Featherston, as well as many other practitioners. Internationally acclaimed Madrid-based Australian artist Narelle Jubelin is also represented, in a contemporary adjunct to the exhibition which proposes a continuing encounter with the sources of modernism through Jubelin's own practice.

'Modernism was the major international movement of the 20th century spanning art, design and architecture,' said Ann Stephen, principal curator of *Modern times* from the Powerhouse Museum. 'While the modernist movement was inspired by various European avant-gardes that projected visions of a better future, it was always controversial and shaped by many competing positions. The exhibition reveals that it was through émigrés, expatriates, travellers, exhibitions, films and publications that modernism took hold in Australia,' said Stephen.

The exhibition highlights stories of international contact with key modernist sources, such as the Bauhaus school in Germany, where the artist and teacher Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack ran the first colour classes in 1922–23. Deported to Australia as an enemy alien in 1940, Hirschfeld-Mack subsequently taught Bauhaus principles and was influential both as an artist and teacher. A film reconstruction of his extraordinary *Colour Light Play* of 1923 is shown for the first time in Australia.

The Bauhaus was also a powerful influence on renowned émigré architect Harry Seidler, who was schooled by Bauhaus luminaries Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and Josef Albers and in Australia played a key role in shaping the modern city. Seidler's 1948 studio, designed on his arrival from New York, is re-created in the exhibition.

Other highlights of *Modern times* include the visionary *Colour in Art* project of 1919, an experiment in colour theory by young artists Roy de Maistre and Roland Wakelin, (courtesy of Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney); a model of Robin Boyd's innovative 'House of Tomorrow', that featured at the 1949 Modern Home Exhibition in Melbourne; and James Maccormack's memorable Australian pavilion at the 1967 Montreal Expo, where the iconic Featherston winged sound chairs were showcased, alongside hostesses dressed by Zara Holt, wife of then prime minister Harold Holt.

An immersive, panoramic audio visual display celebrates the most Australian of past-times, swimming at the pool. It features the first artificial public pools designed in this country as part of an international swimming

boom in the early 20th century, and the spectacular modernist designs boosted by the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Alongside the pools are the swimming costumes of silent film star Annette Kellerman, five decades of 'Speedos' and an early bikini.

The exhibition features new forms of public art and design, including the abstract fountains by Gerald Lewers for ICI House and Robert Woodward at Sydney's Kings Cross. The exhibition ends on an exultant explosion of experiments with new technologies and Space Age forms in the 1950s and 60s and spectacular architectural feats such as Roy Grounds' dome for the Australian Academy of Science in Canberra and Jørn Utzon's internationally-acclaimed Sydney Opera House.

Narelle Jubelin's installation *Cannibal tours* is a contemporary companion to *Modern times*, displayed in the Albert & Barbara Tucker Gallery and Kerry Gardner & Andrew Myer Project Gallery. The project includes photographs by Albert Tucker displayed alongside three of Sidney Nolan's 'Moon Boy' works, among them the major painting *Boy in the Moon* (1939–40), on loan from the National Gallery of Australia. These images are juxtaposed with Jubelin's own pieces, such as *Boxed set*, consisting of eleven petit-point renditions representing formative childhood brushes with modernism, as well as *Trade delivers people*, a 'cannibalised' work comprising two series of petit-point renditions intercut with ready-made 'primitive' tribal masks and other museum objects.

In a first for Heide Museum of Modern Art, *Modern times* is presented as a 'whole of site' exhibition, across all four of the Museum's gallery spaces, including: Central Galleries, Albert & Barbara Tucker Gallery, Kerry Gardner & Andrew Myer Project Gallery and Heide II.

Modern times: the untold story of modernism in Australia, a lavish publication co-published by The Miegunyah Press and the Powerhouse Museum, is available at Heide Store, \$49.95.

Curator Ann Stephen and project architectural advisor Professor Philip Goad are available for interview.

Modern times: the untold story of modernism in Australia

21 March – 12 July 2009

Heide Museum of Modern Art

Curator: Dr Ann Stephen

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Tue–Fri 10.00am–5.00pm

Sat/Sun/Public Hols 12.00noon–5.00pm

Admission: Adult \$12, Senior \$10, Concession \$8,

Gardens free

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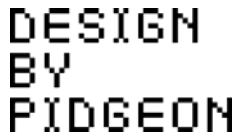
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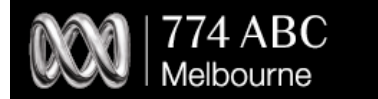
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