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Abstract

A significant number of central European and German refugees and émigrés sought refuge from war and fascism in Australia during the inter-war and post-World War Two years. While many historical accounts of Antipodean modernism stress its distance from French avant-garde sources, this generation of refugees and émigrés brought local practitioners into direct contact with aspects of the modernist endeavour. In particular, these refugees and émigrés introduced an approach to modernism that was cross-disciplinary and derived its inspiration from a systematic approach to arts education. This conception tended to

highlight the common elements between art, design and architecture. While there have been numerous, individual studies of this generation, this paper foreshadows a much larger research project that aims to link these individual histories into one coherent study. In this paper we offer an indicative sample of a select number of case studies in order to highlight some of these commonalities, such as a commitment to reform education, a systemic interdisciplinary approach to modernist art education and, finally, colour-light explorations in art, design and architecture that arise as a consequence of these educational philosophies.

Keywords

Bauhaus; Australia; refugees; émigrés; modernism; avant-garde; art education

Introduction

The rise of Fascism and the resulting diaspora from World War Two brought many émigrés and refugees to Australia. These émigrés and refugees had a profound impact upon the emergence of modernism in Australia. In most cases, their practices – whether as artists, designers or architects – were interdisciplinary. In addition, they placed a strong emphasis on art education as well as on understanding art, architecture and design in a broader social context. To date, however, this talented, but displaced generation have only received limited and sporadic attention, which has the consequence of limiting the scope of their endeavours.¹

In Australia, there were no comparable single or “marquee” institutions such as those in the United States, whether Black Mountain College (1933), the short-lived New Bauhaus (1937-38) or the School of Design (1939) in Chicago. The impact in Australia was, however, arguably similar in impact, but more diffuse and thus it is difficult to trace in terms of one particular standout institution or practice. By linking such expatriates together, their crucial role as innovators and also mediators between cultures begins to become apparent. Yet to date there has been no comprehensive study of the combined effect of so many European modernist émigré and refugees arriving and working in Australia at the one time. Unlike the English and much celebrated French influences on modernism, the difference was that – due to the rise of Fascism – German, Austrian and central European figures were forced to migrate so they were actually living, working and teaching in Australia. Thus, they exerted their influence first hand and more directly than other sources of modernist inspiration. By linking these expatriates together, their crucial role as innovators and also mediators between cultures starts to become apparent.

This is not only a matter of shifting perspective in any traditional account of the Australian reception of modernism, but also a way of opening up a new space for understanding the multiple inter-connections between Australia and German and central European cultural contexts at a foundational and formative period. Furthermore, the story of the Bauhaus – those trained at the Bauhaus or in Bauhaus-like methods – is directly relevant to the Australian context, even though it is a relatively unknown history in the international context. These practitioners were distinct in that their understanding of modernism was largely interdisciplinary, systematic and holistic. In this essay, we present a selection of

1. See for example: Paul McGillick, 'Five Migrant Artists in Australia,' *Aspect: Art and Literature*, vol. 5, nos. 1-2, pp. 11-26; Jenny Zimmer, 'Five Berliners in Melbourne,' *Aspect: Art and Literature*, nos. 29-30, Autumn 1984, pp. 133-160; the broad overview provided by Rex Butler and A.D.S. Donaldson, 'War and Peace: 200 Years of Australian-German Artistic Relations,' *emaj*, 8, April 2015.

examples to indicate the scope of this neglected history, which explains a more diffuse and widespread reception of modernist tenets at a time of global crisis.

Eleonore Lange (1893-1990)

One of the earliest émigrés was Eleonore Lange, who arrived in Australia from Germany in 1930. The circumstances behind her arrival are obscure, although Lange declared that she had reacted to the growing rise of fascism early on (thus leaving Germany before the Nazis ever came to power at the national level). In Sydney, Lange was soon involved in activities with local modernist groups. She wrote and lectured regularly on modern art as well as practicing as an artist, primarily as a sculptor. The irony is that Lange was not an especially abstract artist before arriving in Sydney, but she became an enthusiastic advocate of its possibilities, especially in the decade after her arrival in Australia, which corresponded with the National Socialists assuming power, imposing a dictatorship in Germany and the tense lead up to another war in Europe.

There are very few works by Lange that remain. This is because she largely abandoned her artistic ambitions after her first decade in Australia and focused instead on art education. One of Lange's most prominent works is *Seraph of Light*, a plaster figurine or maquette, which she exhibited in the Women Artists of Australia Exhibition at the Education Department Gallery in Sydney, in July 1934.² *Seraph of Light* was intended to be a memorial for an astronomer, thus combining Lange's interests in art and science. Although the commission was never realised, Lange's intentions express grand ambitions. Today, it looks a little like a sculptural version of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* except that its fluted forms ascend to the sky rather than travel downwards. At its peak, a sphere crowns the abstracted figure, as if to suggest a planet or another celestial entity. The monument was meant to be composed of glass 'with the faceted "wings" creating form through a spectrum of colour as refracted light.'³ Lange declared her ambitions to be a sculptor of light and was often frustrated by the lack of opportunities and technical capacity to carry out her plans in this field.⁴

The theme of a radiant beacon of light illuminating a path ahead and beyond its viewers was one that was common to the early generation of modernist artists. A new form of enlightenment based on an art and life merger underpinned

2. Geoffrey Batchen, 'Eleonore Henrietta Lange,' Dictionary of Design and Art Australia Online, 1995/2011. www.daaao.org.au/bio/eleonore-henrietta-lange/biography

3. Lesley Harding, 'Australia in the World and the World in Australia 1930-1939' in Lesley Harding and Sue Cramer, *Cubism & Australia*, The Miegunyah Press/Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2009, p. 92.

4. Steven Miller, 'Biographical Note,' Guide to the Papers of Eleonore Lange, MS 1990.1

their utopian aspirations for a new life based on greater social equity and the integration of various components of contemporary life's disparate potentials. Compared to the darkening political realities, this remained a highly optimistic agenda for a better way of life and of living against the forbidding circumstances that confronted them.

In 1939 Lange participated in Exhibition I, a showcasing of Sydney modernism on the eve of World War Two (as a consequence of the outbreak of war, there was no Exhibition 2, or 3, etc.). Lange also wrote the foreword to their catalogue, in which she made a general call for the promotion of abstraction in art as well as a greater tolerance of modernist abstraction by the wider public. To this end, Lange provided an outline of its ambition, as she understood it. Her account of modernism referred to a 'new realm of visual existence' that departed from Renaissance perspective and from the focus on external appearance, one that acknowledged the reality of two-dimensional picture plane, and moved instead to the abstract evocation of a more spiritual or enhanced reality. In heralding abstraction, however, Lange also felt that art could forge a closer connection to everyday modern industrial life: 'the musical ear,' she stated in her Foreword, 'can recognize in any noises, for instance the hum in a machine-room, the intervals of sound and time-measure of its rhythm.' Similarly, Lange asserts, the modern artist concentrates on 'inherent colour-sensations' in order to emphasize the structure of 'colour relations.'⁵

Lange thereafter primarily focused on art education and in 1947 she attained a teaching position at Frensham School, Mittagong.⁶ Her strength was that she offered a coherent program of modernist aspiration and allied it to pedagogical practices. Lange had a background in reform education in Germany as well as experience in teaching children with disabilities; in addition, in Frankfurt she had studied aesthetics with Hans Cornelius. According to Miller, during the first years after World War One, Lange 'began to develop many of her fundamental ideas about the social, spiritual and therapeutic functions of art and about the importance of abstract art.'⁷ Between 1936 and 1939, Lange spent time formulating her ideas in a thesis, 'On Spectral Colour Forms: An Outline of a theory on the physical and biological function of art.' What Lange's example indicates is that it was in arts education where the avant-garde's influence could often be most profound and most wide reaching.

5. Eleonore H. Lange, 'Foreword,' Exhibition I, David Jones' Exhibition Galleries, 17 August-2 September 1939.

6. Miller, 'Biographical Note'; Batchen, 'Eleonore Henrietta Lange.'

7. Ibid.

Karl (1903-1969) and Gertrude (1909-1984) Langer

The Viennese refugee couple met Eleonore Lange in Sydney shortly after their arrival on the east coast of Australia in 1939. They shared a similar sounding name and also shared Lange's focus on education and modernism. The Langers fled Austria a few months before the outbreak of World War Two and sought refugee status in Greece (although secular, Gertrude was from a Jewish family). Both had PhDs: Gertrude studied with Josef Strzygowski in Vienna and briefly with Focillon at the Sorbonne in Paris, while Karl worked as head architect in Peter Behren's office between 1928 and 1934 after which he set up his own office.

Gertrude was schooled in the latest reform education ideas as she attended the Schwarzwald school (*Schwarzwaldschule*), which was notable for its tolerant, liberal outlook and its advocacy of equal education for girls. Furthermore, in order to promote girls' education, its founder, Eugenie Schwarzwald employed highly notable figures to teach, such as Adolf Loos for architecture, Arnold Schönberg for music, Grete Wiesenthal for dance, and Oskar Kokoschka taught drawing. Notable finishing students included the actress Helena Weigel, writer Hilda Spiel and the theatre actress Elizabeth Neumann-Veitel.

In Brisbane, Gertrude gave art history private art history lectures in the couple's apartment. These lectures were advertised and a small fee charged. From these humble beginnings, Langer devoted herself to art criticism, public and private lecturing, art education (declaring one of her self-appointed tasks was to inform her audience about modern art), as well as helping to foster local art institutions. By training with Strzygowski, Langer trained under the revisionist offshoot of "Vienna School" of art history. Strzygowski's approach to art history advocated what we would call today a type of world art approach to art-historical inquiry, or even a non-Western art-cultural analysis and criticism. Gertrude Langer suggested that there was an ethical dimension to this approach that she maintained through her life: tolerance to all people and cultures as well as all races. In her long career in art criticism, she regularly touched on Japanese or Asian art, and she remained highly supportive of Aboriginal art. When asked by Barbara Blackman what Australian art galleries should show, in her interview before the national gallery in Canberra opened, she advocated the radical policy that the national and state galleries should exhibit Australian art in its fullest breadth and take Aboriginal art out of the anthropology museums and display it alongside such art. It would take a while for such an approach to become standard.

When she first arrived in their new city, sub-tropical Brisbane, Gertrude thought she felt she would never survive the heat and asked in exasperation

when winter would arrive. The perplexed locals could only reply: it's August, this is winter! Of course, summer was the next great shock – and Langer had to do a lot of housework she had barely done before, but now in heat and humidity. If Karl Langer's well-known treatise on sub-tropical housing could be imagined as a work of fiction, then heat would be its main character: it poses as a brooding menace that saps the life out of inhabitants. While Karl Langer was responding both to local and international precedents for his reshaping of subtropical housing, it is easy to imagine Langer, as an architect, being urged to devise a brief to redesign living arrangements to appease his harried spouse. Langer's 1944 pamphlet on sub-tropical housing includes indicative references to the problems of a housewife having to carry out duties in such oppressive conditions and climbing stairs devoid of energy. Brightness and light in the new environment was thus something to be carefully controlled and worked around. It was a barrier to a comfortable life. While Langer is often regarded as introducing modernist principles in defiance of the local vernacular corrugated iron and timber housing structure, he can just as readily be seen as reaching an accommodation with his environment (just as his wife, Gertrude, did in her art criticism). For housing, Langer emphasized a solution in modernist terms conducive to an open-plan approach, a house based on a concrete slab, but admitting a permeable inside-outside dynamic to flow through the design of his plans, which also created a fluid interplay with the surrounding landscape and which manage to perpetuate the key sub-tropical architectural tenets, though in new forms.

Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack (1893–1965)

One of Australia's most direct links to the Bauhaus and its teaching influence was through Hirschfeld-Mack, who was deported from England to Australia in 1940 as an 'enemy alien' as a consequence of the declaration of war between the United Kingdom and Germany. Hirschfeld-Mack was a student at the early Weimar Bauhaus. Like Eleonore Lange, his concerns had extended to championing the significance of art education; colour and light experiments in art; rejuvenating the role of art through abstraction; the ambition to achieve a spiritual quest for art in modernity.

After serving in the First World War, Hirschfeld-Mack became a life-long pacifist and went to studies in Stuttgart to study colour theory with Adolf Hölzel, where he encountered an advertisement for the Bauhaus School. He enrolled at the Weimar Bauhaus in 1919 and entered the print department in 1920. The early Bauhaus years were dominated by new educational approaches to arts and

crafts education.⁸ The Bauhaus *Vorkurs* (preliminary course) were organized around the various materials in use: stone, wood, metal, textile, colour, glass, and ceramics. The preliminary course lasted six months and was followed by three years of study in one of the workshops – either stone sculpture, wood carving, metal, pottery, wall painting, glass painting, cabinet-making, weaving, printing, or bookbinding.

As a member of the first generation of Bauhaus students, Hirschfeld-Mack completed the preliminary course under the direction of Johannes Itten, who initially dominated Bauhaus education with his artistic, educational, and metaphysical concepts.⁹ Itten had studied art at the École des Beaux-Arts in Geneva and also (like Hirschfeld-Mack) with Adolf Hölzel at the Art Academy in Stuttgart. He opened his own private art school in Vienna in 1916 before arriving at the Bauhaus in 1919. Influenced by Hölzel, Itten rejected established academic traditions in both art and education. In Weimar, he was responsible for developing the preliminary course; his three goals were:

- 1) To unleash the students' creative powers and thereby their artistic talents;
- 2) To enable them to make an informed choice of craft specialty (and thus workshop);
- 3) To convey to them the fundamental principles of design, laws of form and colour etc.¹⁰

The preliminary course, as designed by Itten, included structural analyses of works of the old masters, studies from nature with an emphasis on observation, and the development of three-dimensional compositions based on a variety of materials.¹¹ Students were encouraged to develop a feel for the materials they were working with, to discover their essential properties, and at the same time free themselves from the prejudices imposed by traditional uses. Participation in the course was mandatory; students were initially admitted 'for a trial period of six months.'¹²

Hirschfeld-Mack already achieved renown while at the Bauhaus due to his avant-garde experiments in colour and light linked to music. He sought to develop machines

8. Rainer Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000, 34-38; Hans M. Wingler, *Das Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin 1919-1933*, Cologne: DuMont, 2002, 35-75.

9. Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, 92-130.

10. Johannes Itten, *Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1964, 9.

11. Wingler, *Das Bauhaus*, 277-286.

12. 'Die Satzungen des Staatlichen Bauhauses zu Weimar' ('Statutes of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar, January 1921'), in Wingler, *Das Bauhaus*, 54. English translation: Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, 67.



Fig. 1 · Langer apartment, Vienna, mid-1930s.

Courtesy of the Karl Langer Collection, UQFL158_b44_0001, Fryer Library, University of Queensland Library.

Fig. 2 · Hirschfeld-Mack, Lanternfest construction, Wickersdorf, 1926.

Courtesy of Kaj Delugan and Christofer Bell.

that could accommodate his colour-music fusions throughout the early 1920s. In 1922, he was elected to the Bauhaus Council, and subsequently developed a colour seminar, which he unofficially taught after Itten's departure in 1923.

The climax of the 1923 exhibition was Bauhaus week, which consisted of performances, concerts and light shows. This exhibition included Hirschfeld-Mack's early experiments with projected light, as he explained: 'At a simple shadow show that had been planned for a lantern party ... shadows appeared double on the translucent paper screen and because of the many different coloured acetylene lamps a "cold" and a "warm" shadow became visible.' Inspired by this example, Hirschfeld-Mack was by 1924 devoting most of his time and energy to the creation of his "reflective light effects" – experiments with colour-light projections that led directly to his subsequent *Farbenlichtspiele* (Colour-Light plays). As he notes, 'We specified for some of the moving-light compositions some interwoven music in simple rhythms.'¹³ The projections were made with templates of various coloured patterns, while allowing for a degree of improvisation.

When the Bauhaus moved to Dessau in 1925, Hirschfeld-Mack remained in Weimar where he dedicated himself to art education and education reform in general, while also seeking patents for his colour-light machine (*Farbenlichtspiele*). First, he worked as an art teacher at the nearby progressive school "Freie Schulgemeinde Wickersdorf," where he instructed school children in drawing, painting, and supervised the carpentry workshop. The foundation of his instruction was the conviction that "playing" is the most natural and purest expression of the child's creative ability.'¹⁴ His teaching was therefore guided by the idea to 'not restrict small children in their choice of materials' because 'they find out by trial and error... what can be done with a certain material and what cannot be done.... The driving forces are intuition, imagination and fantasy.'¹⁵ His work with primary school children on studying a broad variety of materials, their properties, and the ways in which they can be used is best reflected in the construction of lanterns and kites – a tradition he brought along from the Bauhaus.

In 1928, Hirschfeld-Mack was appointed lecturer for colour and form theory at the successor to the Weimar Bauhaus, the School of Craft, Design, and Architecture. He taught the preliminary course for architects, which consisted of studies of materials and material exercises, and headed the department of mural painting. As architect Otto Bartning, director of the school, confirmed in a reference letter of October 1937, Hirschfeld-Mack established and led the department

13. Hirschfeld Mack, Wingler, 1978, 83

14. Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, 'Creative Activity and Material Study,' 1954, unpublished manuscript, Hirschfeld-Mack Papers, Archives, University of Melbourne, 1.

15. Ibid., 2.

for general form and colour instruction, which also conducted practical exercises.¹⁶ In the 1930s, Hirschfeld-Mack taught at pedagogical academies in Frankfurt (Oder) and Kiel as well as various progressive reform schools in Berlin. In teachers' instruction, he once again emphasized the need 'to preserve the child's devotion and enthusiasm' for play. The aim of the teacher was to promote play and 'learning through direct experience rather than being taught' in order to foster 'discovery and rediscovery of methods.'¹⁷ A closer look at his notes on materials and material design for school children, which he formalized while teaching at the pedagogical academy in Kiel in 1932, reveals his focus on collecting, sorting, and systematizing various basic materials, including paper, cardboard, wood, plant materials (leaves, potatoes, straw, etc.) animal materials (feathers, wool, leather, etc.), textiles, metal, glass, inorganic materials (clay, sand, stone, etc.), and manufactured products. The focus for primary school children was on 'free, playful, and constructive work with all materials,' middle school children were supposed to 'explore the functional properties of one specific material,' and secondary school children should 'investigate and analyse individual materials, create material constructions, and come up with proper functional and economic solutions for material production.'¹⁸ Hirschfeld-Mack always emphasized that the study of materials was accessible because it did not require a lot of resources. It could be done with the materials at hand and could be collected from the surroundings, even at poorly equipped village schools. This austerity reflected the experience of the Weimar Bauhaus, where the supply of materials and funding was often beleaguered. Yet, it also reflected the early avant-garde commitment to breaking down art-life boundaries by the use of everyday, ready-to-hand materials.

In 1936, Hirschfeld-Mack left Nazi Germany for England. In the first few years of rule, the National Socialists had closed most of the alternative education schools in Germany, but in addition a new wave of anti-Semitic laws that made it increasingly difficult for Hirschfeld-Mack, whose paternal grandfather was Jewish. In England, he caught up once again with the Bauhäuslers, Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. While in England, he continued to pursue a career in education, constructing musical instruments, and continuing to look to patent and develop his colour-light plays. In 1936-37, he worked with unemployed miners and headed the carpentry workshop of the Subsistence Production Society of the Eastern Valley of Monmouthshire, Pontypool. In 1938-39, he taught

16. Otto Bartning, letter to Hirschfeld-Mack, October 26, 1937, Hirschfeld-Mack Papers, Archives, University of Melbourne.

17. Hirschfeld-Mack, "Creative Activity and Material Study," 1-2.

18. Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, "Material-Merkzettel und einige Rezepte für Materialgestaltung an der Volksschule," Archives, Harvard University, 41-369-72.

socially disadvantaged children at the Peckham Health Centre in Southeast London. There he developed his color-coded instruments, by means of which he instructed students in building simple instruments and set up an orchestra, and he supervised an open-air theatre with an associated student camp. Hirschfeld-Mack furthermore registered various patents, explored the commercial use of his colour-light plays in advertising, cinemas and dance halls; in addition, he sold his musical instruments and a variety of pedagogical toys through a London distributor. Gropius and Albers both tried to bring Hirschfeld-Mack to the United States, but before he could arrange the necessary papers, he was deported to Australia as an “enemy alien” on the infamous Dunera prison ship in 1940.

Hirschfeld-Mack was interned in the New South Wales rural prison camps of Hay, Orange, and Tatura for two years with others also deemed ‘enemy aliens’, which included a mix of German Jews and German expatriates, some of them Nazi party supporters. The living conditions in the camp brought a new, elementary side to working with materials in order to attend to the basic needs of everyone in the camp – a fact that is well documented in the collection of the Tatura Museum. In detention he held art classes for other internees as well as making simple musical instruments and toys for the children, who were imprisoned, and a series of woodcuts depicting the bleak conditions of detention. The best-known and most reproduced of these prints, *Desolation, Internment Camp, Hay NSW*, 1940-41 (NGA 79.812), is also the most minimal. Its exaggerated vertical block is almost entirely filled by the night sky, broken by the rough lines of a barbed wire fence that dwarfs the lone figure of the asylum seeker standing under the unfamiliar constellation of the Southern Cross. In a melancholic inversion, the illuminating light is located beyond, outside the barbed-wire fence, rather than stemming from within some inner animating light. Its bleakness refers not only to the dislocating experience of being incarcerated in some strange, distant land, but also it is compounded by a confrontation with the fact that the source of this light has expired at the original source of this vision. There is no solace in projecting to Weimar, Dessau, or anywhere else; just like for the Langers, who missed the old Vienna of the inter-war years, this reality no longer existed and in fact had been extinguished under totalitarian control. There is, at this moment in time, no beyond to appeal to as a source of inspiration.

Yet, this seems a passing moment in Hirschfeld-Mack’s experience. Alongside sketches of his fellow inmates and the landscape, Hirschfeld-Mack used water-colours to make symbolic forms to return to the theme of an imagined, alternative future. In at least a dozen variations of a globe-like form, he began to pattern circles formed from figures linked by hands and feet, in concentric bands of light. These detention ‘wheels’ are very different to the colour wheels he made



Fig. 3 · Hirschfeld-Mack, Bauhaus Exhibition display, colour charts, spinning tops and colour blends, Gallery A Melbourne, August 1961.
Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack collection, University of Melbourne Archives, 1971.0009.00007. Copyright Kaj Delugan and Chris Bell.

in teaching at the Bauhaus. Instead of demonstrating the science of perception, they appear to be spiritually illuminated from the centre, one entitled *The World to Come* (AGNSW WA1.1970) is ringed by darkness, and appears as an aerial view like a Renaissance dome, another *The Tale of Man* (NGA 79.798AB) is more Islamic in design, with its intricate flat pattern formed from triple rows of figures. Another is made from reverberating waves of light *Tale of Man (Growing)* (NGV P74-1971), while *Story of the Shell* (NGV P75-1971), is an organic spiral with only the barest outlines of bodies picked out in flat abstract pastel washes, against a dark sea.

It was only through the intervention and sponsorship of James R. Darling, a progressive headmaster of the Geelong Church of England Grammar School who had a strong interest in reform art education that Hirschfeld-Mack was released from the camp in 1942. He became art master at Darling's elite school, where he worked until his retirement in 1957. Teaching at Geelong, he followed Bauhaus pedagogical methods, introduced the pupils to the study of materials, and built with them lanterns, kites, and color-coded instruments. For Hirschfeld-Mack, art education was crucial in liberating 'the creative powers, which lie dormant in every child.'¹⁹ He was convinced that all young people – not only those with special talents – would benefit from an art education, and he saw art instruction not as a system of imparting rules, styles, or techniques, but of leading them to a greater awareness of what they were seeing and doing. When touring Australia in 1954, Walter Gropius made a special visit to Geelong to offer Hirschfeld-Mack a teaching position in America. As Gropius explained to Hirschfeld-Mack, the transformation of art education, rather than a minor feature of the avant-garde ambition, was in fact central to the aspirations of the Bauhaus and Gropius felt Hirschfeld-Mack's continuing commitment to art education was exemplary.²⁰

Along with a strong emphasis on self-discovery, he emphasized material studies and experimentation. He saw the main aim of the study of materials as 'to arouse in the average boy, who will not become a professional artist or architect, the latent appreciation and understanding of the art of the industrial age in which he is living.'²¹ Summarizing his work of the past thirty years, in 1954, Hirschfeld-Mack wrote: 'We introduced the Study of Materials in our preliminary course in the Bauhaus, a school in Germany for artists and architects, about 30 years

19. Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack: "Art Education," Geelong Grammar School, Corio, Victoria, undated manuscript, Archives, University of Melbourne, 1.

20. In 1946, Hirschfeld-Mack was also appointed a guest lecturer at the University of Melbourne. In the 1950s and 1960s, he became active in the education of art history students, art teachers, kindergarten teachers, art therapists, social workers, and others. Through these years, he delivered annual lectures on the Bauhaus.

21. Ibid, 2.



Fig. 4 · Stan Ostoja-Kotkowski, in the Experimental Laboratory at Sepulveda Veteran Hospital, California 1973.

'Working on the possibilities of the use of Alpha Waves in the Human Brain in the field of the arts, June 1973', The Shaw Research Library, National Gallery of Victoria. Courtesy of Jane and Edward Booth. The estate of J. S. Ostoja-Kotkowski

ago.... This work was completely interrupted by Nazism but it has been continued in America by Joseph Albers who introduced it in his teaching of students and adults.”²² He concluded: ‘I feel our art education ought to visualize the needs of the present and of the coming generations. Our future demands human beings who have the logical and truthfully working brain of an engineer and at the same time develop the soul and mind of an artist’.²³

Hirschfeld-Mack’s slim volume, *The Bauhaus: An Introductory Survey*, though modest in scale, was amongst the earliest historical surveys available in English and was distinguished by having a foreword by Gropius and an epilogue by Sir Herbert Read. Beyond the principles of designing for mass production, of linking art and industry, of fusing fine and applied arts, and of developing new methods of art teaching Mack proclaimed of the Bauhaus, ‘its influence has spread and is still spreading throughout the world.’ To Gropius he confessed that, ‘the concept of the Bauhaus has become “classical” in Victoria, with one of the exam questions in art... asking: ‘Give examples of the Bauhaus, Baroque, etc.’, adding with a mix of pleasure and bemusement, ‘and this in the distant continent of Australia.’²⁴

Stan Ostoja-Kotkowski (1922-1994)

Josef Stanislaw (Stan) Ostoja-Kotkowski was born in Poland and removed to Germany during World War Two on a forced labour program.²⁵ Subsequently, released by American troops at the end of the war, Ostoja-Kotkowski remained in Germany and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf in the second half of the 1940s. Despite such differences, there are similarities between Ostoja-Kotkowski and Hirschfeld-Mack. While Hirschfeld-Mack introduced local materials into his study of materials once in Australia, he extended this in the Australian context to include local materials, Ostoja-Kotkowski took this one step further and, as a consequence of the experience of being in Australia, he took light itself as his preferred medium. Furthermore, while Hirschfeld-Mack referred to his colour-light plays (*Farbelichtspiele*) as propelling abstract painting into motion, Ostoja-Kotkowski explored kinetic projections through as many new media and technologies as he could access. As a result, Ostoja-Kotkowski became one of Australia’s first electronic inter-media artists.

The experience of working in central Australia prompted Ostoja-Kotkowski to state that he wanted to become an artist of light by which he took light to be a malleable form and yet a key source of life. To this end, Ostoja-Kotkowski

22. Hirschfeld-Mack, “Creative Activity and Material Study,” 1.

23. Ibid, 6.

24. Hirschfeld Mack to Gropius, Dec 1963: 2/1/2/9, University of Melbourne.

25. Stephen Jones, ‘Light Becomes The Medium,’ *Meanjin*, 1, 2009, p. 29.

declared that his medium was light rather than painting – or painting with light – and his investigation of laser light projection and computer art grew (seemingly naturally enough) from his intricate “Op-like” paintings utilizing strips of brightly coloured plastic to create similarly vivid colour contrasts and optical sensations. Focused on multi-media light performances, Ostoja-Kotkowski eventually extended his practice to include the apparatuses that Lange felt she was denied, such as lasers and computers, in order to take colour-light experimentation out of the gallery and into the street by illuminating light projections or projecting onto buildings, thus once again seeking to re-animate the art-life dynamic. He pioneered the use of laser effects in theatre (1968) and opera (1974), generated music with “theremins” (1975), built a chromo-sonic singing tower that reacted to street traffic using pulsating lights (1978) and a kinetic solar fresco, *Solaris* (1986). These were concerns that revived as much as transformed earlier colour-form experimentation.

In effect, Ostoja-Kotkowski took up and continued the ambitions of Lange and Hirschfeld-Mack, but took their interests in colour and light experimentation and extended it into new technologies. His cross-disciplinary ambitions in this area extended to art, dance, stage design, film and music. A feature of Ostoja-Kotkowski’s practice was his intrigue with new technology in his explorations of light and colour as well as his willingness to engage and work with industry partners in order to extend the range of possibilities then available to art. Criticism at the time noted that the work’s fascination with ‘pure shapes’ had its origins ‘in the Bauhaus.’²⁶

Indeed, Ostoja-Kotkowski’s interest in an art of motion and composed of light continues the cross-disciplinary explorations of abstraction found in the philosophies of Lange at the outset of this period we are surveying and also with the artistic and educational practices of Hirschfeld-Mack. And like the Langers from Vienna, they originally found themselves dislocated in their new environment but eventually discovered a lot of resources in their new location that they could accommodate with their modernist ambitions. While there is this continuity, each figure extends the ambitions and takes them in new directions as the time, opportunity, and technology affords each figure in their different circumstances.

Conclusion

All these figures played significant roles in the development of modernism in Australia across a number of fields, and yet all are marginal to the central accounts of Australian art history of this period. This suggests a continuing

26. Margaret Garlick, 1965, cited in *ibid.*

saga of displacement that was a consequence of fascism and of war, but this also afforded the opportunity for a new encounter, far removed from the original circumstances of each figure. Yet, all these people chose to stay in their new environment and make the most of this encounter. This interaction was the direct consequence of one of the largest displacements of people in the twentieth century and the source of its greatest tragedies and suffering. Such displacement meant that for all these figures their straitened circumstances afforded an opportunity to enhance possibilities and to give back, but also to contribute to initiating new ways of thinking and of integrating art into their new community.

This approach was conjoined with a commitment to enhancing the broader social impact of their aesthetic program – in other words, it took a whole of culture approach that also encompassed social and cultural transformation. All these examples came from a training that emphasizes an analytical and all-encompassing approach to training and art-design practices, which they introduced to Australia. Their influence enriched the Australian cultural scene by enlarging the array of theoretical options and aesthetic perspectives then available. From such displacement, a generation of émigrés and refugees exerted a remarkable influence in introducing these new ideas and approaches to practice, which exerted their greatest influence through the transformation of training and educational institutions.

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