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# Australian Landscape Lineages

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Stephen Krog has pointed out that landscape architecture has an ill-studied Modernist history, and further suggested that landscape architecture is too theoretically bereft to have a considered theoretical Post-Modernism anyway. The projects that make up the Sunburnt exhibition all emerge from practitioners who were educated during the Post-Modern period in Australia, roughly the 10 years between 1985 and 1995 – a period corresponding to the Australian Bicentennial celebrations in 1988. This essay will quickly trace lineages of education, office experience and ideas through the projects and practices during that period. In common with theories of Post-Modernism in architecture propounded at the time, many of the projects exhibit an interest in pluralistic views of places, cultures and issues, including engaging contextual relationships with places, and involving existing urban form. These designers were interested in form at a time when it was regarded as incidental rather than important.

The training of landscape architects is not only the province of academics, and nor is academia the sole province of ideas. Private practice has been a major force in landscape architectural education in Australia, no more so than TRACT. University of Melbourne Professor David Yencken formed TRACT in 1973, to work on Merchant Builders projects, who were innovators in high quality medium density housing in Melbourne. He was joined by Howard McCorkell, Rodney Wulff and Steve Calhoun, who all studied at Harvard Graduate School of Design. Calhoun and Wulff ran the Graduate Diploma of Landscape Architecture program at RMIT between 1976 and 1981. Calhoun was instrumental in encouraging Jim Sinatra, who taught Calhoun at the University of Iowa, to come to Australia to establish the first full undergraduate course in landscape architecture at RMIT; however, the practice has had a stronger relationship with the University of Melbourne, where Wulff and Calhoun are adjunct professors. The Masters program at the University of Melbourne produced many cross-disciplinary landscape architects, including Professor Catherin Bull, who is currently the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Professor of Landscape Architecture, and Professor Gini Lee at QUT. Calhoun worked for Sasaki Walker Associates and brought some of their methods of professional practice to TRACT, which in turn have formed the basis of many other firms, because so many people learned how to work as a landscape architect there. Conventions of site analysis and planning that come down through Ian McHarg and Kevin Lynch for defensible design decisions have generated much of the form of the broad body of projects that occupy the Australian landscape, particularly the private residential landscape. This has happened because of methods and techniques of working as much as specific design interests.

Helen Armstrong was at the University of NSW between 1977 and 1996. She and fellow educator Craig Burton taught Anton James, Richard Weller and University of Melbourne's Jillian Wallis. James remembers Armstrong as a strong advocate of design and participation, and Burton's love of art, design, and the historical dimensions of landscapes. From both they gained an interest in landscape architecture as a cultural rather than natural affair, and something with a relationship to art. Weller and James graduated into a transition period in Sydney where "Kikuyu Picturesque" (naturalistic bush parks) and Post-Modern motifs dominated, and both looked elsewhere for inspiration and

training. Weller consulted expatriate Czech landscape architect Vladimir Sitta and they furtively showed each other their drawings. Anton James moved to France where he worked very successfully for Kathryn Gustafson. Parisian landscape architect Henry Bava of Agency TER remembers his surprise that on giving the winning presentation of Gustafson's Terrasson project, James chose to return to Australia rather than continue successful practice in France. Weller also went to Europe with Berlin as a focus, and worked successfully on competition schemes for Müller, Knippschild and Wehberg, including a number with Daniel Liebeskind. James and Weller crashed on each other's couches in Paris and Berlin during this time. James' subsequent built-work-in Sydney has been consciously interested in art and has been consistently experimental. Burton started the landscape course in Perth in the mid-1990s in the antipodean Architectural Association environment of the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and the Visual Arts at the University of Western Australia. Weller joined him and has educated a generation of strong designers. The language of both James and Weller designers has moved past the literal art reference of their earlier work, with the Garden of Australian Dreams being what Weller refers to as "the end of the symbolic work". Their change of focus reflects the change of focus in landscape design from interpretation to form in the same period.

The World Expo in 1988 was significant to Queensland's landscape design culture despite how kitsch it might now seem. Brisbane's landscape architects have developed a very different approach to planting that is tropical, colourful and experimental, and which looks like a hybrid of the resort and botanic garden. This, Dr Jean Sim has referred to as "Tropicalia", a tropical version of the Gardenesque that is continued by Andrew Green. Apart from planting, this "public space as resort" model is most clearly demonstrated in the redevelopment of the site for Expo at Southbank. The 1980s still linger in Queensland with design projects that can be bold and colourful. QUT has the oldest course of landscape architecture in Australia. Stephen Pate (of Cardno S.P.L.A.T.) remembers Catherin Bull as a design teacher, Glen Thomas for his construction and Darryl Low Choy in planning. Planning is an important skill in South-East Queensland, since residential work has been the backbone of landscape architecture practice in Queensland as it boomed with development following the change of government in 1989 and the generous financial times of the 1990s. Stephen White of TRACT was also teaching at QUT in this period. (A popular myth regarding the S.P.L.A.T. office involved the director and staff taking the afternoon off to surf if the swell was particularly good.) Both Andrew Green and Stephen Pate developed their design interests independently in busy practice. Andrew Green initially worked for architect and plants-person Laurie Smith, who was heavily involved in Expo, before working in Vienna for Maria Auboeck. In the local architectural culture, Queensland has developed a design language that arises from a lifestyle focus facilitated by the sub-tropical environment. The Timber and Tin tradition of Brisbane has been modified in a unique synthesis of Modernist formal language, Post-Modern vernacular traditions, the market, anthropology, and a landscape view of architecture, from which have come the major environmental moves. Strong planting work from the landscape architects is about the creation of building context, trees tend to be small, tight and from the rainforests of South-East Queensland.

Jim Sinatra was a pivotal figure in the development of a design interest in landscape architecture at RMIT, and was himself a student at the University of Pennsylvania under Louis Kahn, Ian McHarg and Roberto Burle-Marx. Sinatra's work pushed at the edge of post-modern taste with kitsch and colourful elements, together with quixotic futurist scenarios. Perry Lethlean suggests Sinatra's enthusiasm for design was something that energised him and a generation of students to be designers. At the same time, Sinatra was attempting to earnestly engage with Aboriginal and rural communities, an interest shared with Kate Cullity and Kevin Taylor, who went on to form Taylor Cullity. Sinatra introduced them to Perry Lethlean, who later became a director of the practice. Lethlean, Cath Rush and Simone Slee worked together in the office of Mark McWha during the last recession in the early 1990s, where they were allowed to work freely and which allowed them to develop both a strong design language that used a compositional approach to space, and an interest in design detailing, particularly on Dye Works Park in Prahran. Taylor Cullity Lethlean has dominated recent design acclaim of Australian landscape architecture, and TCL's projects can be used to chart the expansion of landscape architectural design in Australia in the 1990s and 2000s. TCL were given greater design responsibility on major public works such as the Craigieburn Bypass, where they were the lead consultant for form-driven projects, often in collaboration with other architects. While many practices are larger, and tackle bigger projects, TCL have maintained an ability to undertake work of consistent quality, largely because they are selective about the work they accept.

After completing a Masters degree at Harvard, James Weirick returned from America to teach at Canberra College of Advanced Education in 1982. At Canberra, Weirick taught Cath Rush and Garth Paterson, amongst many other influential figures, including Lorrae Wilde of VicRoads, and Adrian MacGregor and Mike Horne of TURF in Sydney. Paterson quotes Weirick's approach to teaching: "I can't teach you to draw, but I can teach you to look". Weirick moved to RMIT in 1986 at the invitation of Professor Jim Sinatra and taught there until 1991, staying on to be a guest lecturer in the Master of Urban Design program that Perry Lethlean described as being personally influential in giving landscape architecture a city focus. Garth Paterson returned from Harvard and then taught at RMIT with Anne T. Pettus, who together formed Paterson + Pettus, which ultimately merged with EDAA. With a strong focus on form inherited from George Hargreaves, and Peter Walker "being in the cool aid" at Harvard (as fellow student Gary Hildebrand has noted), Garth and Anne T. also fostered a generation in teaching; in practice, they produced designers like Cassandra Chilton, now at Hassell, Tanya Court, now at the University of Adelaide and Chris Sawyer, now of Site Office. Peter Connolly, another of Weirick's students from RMIT, taught another generation who had both him and Weirick as teachers at RMIT in a period that bridged post-modernist urban readings with critical theory and post-structuralism. Michael Wright was one of the organisers of the EDGE TOO student conference in 1992, with fellow classmates Fiona Harrison, Penny Allen and New Zealand designers Steven Tupu and Megan Wraight. With Cath Rush, who taught at RMIT, he formed Rush Wright Associates, who have been prominent landscape designers in

the burgeoning "parochial" Melbourne architecture culture and have a similar interest in geometry. Connolly also taught the rising group of designers of the next generation, including Scott Adams (of TCL), Susie Kumar and Chris Sawyer (of Site Office), and at Aspect Studios, Kirsten Bauer and Sacha Coles, who also studied at UNSW under Weirick. Councils have also been significant as clients, procurers of projects, and as educators of staff. In the 1990s the City of Melbourne had a very effective urban design team headed by Rob Adams, including Malcolm Snow and Ron Jones, a student of Sinatra's from Iowa who had come to teach at RMIT and subsequently won the Royal Park competition with Laceworks partner Brian Stafford. The City of Melbourne developed the first significant urban design infrastructure in Australia of pavements and urban spaces after the models of Paris and Barcelona. Their work has stimulated other capital cities in Australia to also unify their city streets, and has involved younger designers, including Fiona Harrison.

While Melbourne was an important breeding ground for design culture in the 1990s, ironically it was Sydney that was doing the real building of landscape design projects that are now testament to a changed landscape design culture in Australia. Weirick moved to Sydney after RMIT to teach at the University of New South Wales in 1991; here he assumed what may have been his most significant role other than as an educator — as a critic and urban advocate. From his first arrival in Sydney, when he protested loudly about the destruction of the Griffin incinerators, Weirick has been involved in urban commentary of the city as it grew during and after the 2000 Olympics. Weirick, together with architects like Philip Thalis, and colleague Peter McGregor, are developing careful readings of Sydney urbanism that have Aldo Rossi qualities. Many of the Sydney landscape designers in the exhibition cut their teeth on the Olympics, though it could be argued that the Sydney work since the Olympics has been better. Sydney is developing an interesting urbanism for the myriad of specific intersections between Sydney's geology and ecology to produce some set-pieces of site-specific work, which also engage the foundational traditions of the previous generation of Sydney landscape architects like Bruce MacKenzie and Harry Howard.

At one of the endless 1990s forums dedicated to the question of "What is landscape architecture?", a design teacher complained that although educators had been earnestly trying to teach designers who seemed competent, at the end of the day, "where is the quality built work?". Like in the landscape, good things come to those who wait. While critics can argue about the design merits of this project or that project, it's easy now to forget that there was a time, less than 20 years ago, when even being interested in design was unusual in Australian landscape architecture. The question is not if Australian landscape design is of internationally recognisable quality, but rather how it sits with, engages and develops in relation to its own local specificities.

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