


RMIT DESIGN ARCHIVES JOURNAL

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WOMEN, WRITING, DESIGN







**RMIT
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JOURNAL**

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WOMEN, WRITING, DESIGN

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We acknowledge the people of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct our business and we respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

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Cover
Kartell 4970-84 Round Modular Units, 1964-69, designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri, ABS injection-moulded plastic, Anna Castelli Ferrieri Archives ©Museo Kartell.

Previous Pages
Pier Luigi Nervi, Palace of Labour Ribbed Floor Slab System, Turin, 1961. ©Pier Luigi Nervi Project Association.

Below
Nellie Payne in her coach-house studio in Kent, England, photograph courtesy Rosemary Bowman.

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This issue of the RMIT *Design Archives Journal* celebrates the great contribution of Harriet Edquist AM, Professor Emerita at RMIT University, to architectural and design history, archives, criticism and exhibitions. As the founding Director of the RMIT Design Archives as well as a leading scholar, commentator and editor and generous friend, colleague and mentor, Edquist has been integral to the recognition and preservation of Australian architecture and design history.

As an architectural historian, Edquist's commitment to making public the rich histories of women's work in Australia to make and remake the built environment and everyday experience through architecture, art, craft and design has fundamentally transformed the public record of these fields. Her driving curiosity and understanding of creative practice as situated, contingent on geography as on social relations and material possibilities, underscores her publications and exhibitions on topics as diverse as the Arts and Crafts Movement in Australia, the role of emigré architects in shaping postwar Melbourne and the history of Australian automotive design at Holden's Fishermans Bend Technical Centre.

In June 2021, colleagues Phillip Goad and Catherine Townsend from the University of Melbourne, working with the RMIT Design Archives, organized an international symposium on interdisciplinary approaches across architectural and design history, archives and curating, to honour Edquist and her contributions. This special issue of the RMIT Design Archives presents papers originally given at the festschrift, in tandem with issue 32:1 of *Fabrications* (2022), the journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand, along with new work that similarly explores the intersections between art, design, archives, historical inquiry and creative practice and women's agency in them.

Sarah Teasley,
co-editor, RMIT Design Archives Journal

Opposite
RMIT University,
RMIT Design Archives,
2017, ©RMIT University

The *RMIT Design Archives Journal* is produced by a design archive situated within a university environment where design research is conducted principally by practice.

The RMIT Design Archives thus maintains a unique space where, within the framework of a collection, the intersections between historical inquiry and creative practice are explored, whether in collaborations that combine analogue and digital, in past and present modes of understanding the legacy and agency of design, in novel forms of history writing, and in the design of the journal itself. The environment affords researchers the opportunity to travel through experimental and pragmatic work to pose and answer questions, working with and from archives, across the various disciplines that comprise design.

And so it is with this issue of the journal. In their respective articles, Hannah Lewi and Laurene Vaughan employ a first-person narrative to reflect on their engagement with history as designers, while Annmarie Brennan and Harriet Edquist employ a discursive narrative form to discuss historical examples of women's creative practice that both build on and confound taxonomies.

Lewi's article takes the reader through her speculations about the agency of archives in order to "playfully and serendipitously explore the role that the RMIT Design Archives, and archives more broadly can take in fuelling the imagination as well as knowledge gathering." Framed by writings on the archive by Albená Yaneva, Mark Wigley, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida and methodologically informed by Mitchell Whitelaw's algorithmic method of working with digital archival collections, Lewi's article begins with a foray into the digital artefacts of the RMIT Design Archives to uncover what she describes as "serendipitous" arrangements. The main focus of her article however is a restaging of the celebrated photographic image of Andre Malraux and his Musée Imaginaire – or "book on the floor" – which, she argues "is prescient for an inquiry into the creative potentials of digital archives, as enabled by the internet and mass digitization." This knowing design intervention into what is already an artfully constructed image is intended to provoke the viewer into a re-engagement with the original image, and to prompt larger reflections on power, memory and design archives.

While Vaughan's article similarly explores learning gained through reflexive practice, it takes the form of a meditation on her design/craft practice over the last 20 or so years. Grounded in the work of John Berger, Yi-Fun Tuan and Michel de Certeau it is also engaged with archives "as living entities, that facilitated conversations between practices and artefacts of the past and the present, that could inform future practices," drawing connections between memories embedded in environments shaped over time and more formal archival practices. Vaughan begins her article with a reflection on her collaborative work with Harriet Edquist between 2007 and 2011 when they led the multi-disciplinary Geoplaced Knowledge Project within the Design Research Institute at RMIT. In particular, she draws out of their numerous collaborations the Stony Rises Project, which led to an exhibition with curator Lisa Byrne and a book, *Designing Place*. In hindsight, Vaughan understands the project to be a pivotal one in her own work and that of Edquist, offering the concept of "temporal recursive computation" as a way to articulate the encoding of learning into creative practice and other forms of research and making, over time.

Complementing the reflexive articles by Lewi and Vaughan, Brennan and Edquist's articles are discursive reviews of women's work: Italian architect and designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri on the one hand, and Tasmanian woodcarver Ellen Nora Payne on the other. While Castelli Ferrieri's work for Kartell, the company she founded with her husband Giulio Castelli, is celebrated, Brennan focuses on the impact of her architectural training on Castelli Ferrieri's approaches to designing products for mass manufacture in plastic, a new material. In doing so, Brennan both illuminates the cross disciplinary nature of post-war Italian design culture and offers an account of postwar Italian design driven by an understanding of material affordances and process. Brennan introduces her discussion with the lectures and workshops Castelli Ferrieri delivered in Melbourne in the early 1990s, as part of the Domus Winter School under the auspices of the Centre for Design (CfD) at RMIT University. This historical moment in both the history of the CfD and RMIT's design culture is little known. As the CfD archive is now housed in the RMIT Design Archives, Brennan's article, quite apart from shedding new light on Castelli Ferrieri's innovative interventions into the tectonics of plastic, opens up possibilities of further explorations of Melbourne design culture and education within global networks.

Edquist's article, in the spirit of Marisa J Fuentes' work into the lost or fragmented archives of women, repositions the career of woodcarver Ellen Nora Payne from the margins to somewhere near the centre of the early Arts and Crafts movement in Melbourne in the 1890s. In Payne's case, her status as a middle-class settler colonial woman afforded her participation in organized – and documented – exhibitions and study, providing a distributed, fragmentary archive in the form of remaining works, oral histories, and publications recording these events. Focusing on Payne's unresearched early Melbourne work and the gestation of one craft medium – woodcarving – in colonial Australia, within the wider networks of nineteenth-century Britain, Edquist argues that despite or perhaps thanks to "its disruptive demand for space, tools and equipment more usually associated with male endeavour," woodcarving both offered women of Payne's status a creative medium and ensured their misrecognition subsequently. The detailed study allows Edquist to cast into question the current historiography not only of Payne but also of the Australian Arts and Crafts Movement in general and the place of women's work within it.

Whether through first-person reflections on practice research or discursive analyses of the practice of others, the articles in this issue of the RMIT Design Archives Journal present new knowledge and fresh arguments about design practice from the nineteenth century to the present day, across networks spanning Australia and Europe. Each of the articles also offers a model for reconsidering the design archive, whether formal or fragmentary, public or personal. We hope you enjoy reading them and are provoked, and prompted, to look anew at the creative and generative potential of the design archive, and at the decisions shaping the stories we tell.

Harriet Edquist and Sarah Teasley,
co-editors, *RMIT Design Archives Journal*

Opposite
RMIT Design Archives,
2012, photographer
Margund Sallowsky

**Ellen Nora Payne, women art woodcarvers and
the early Arts and Crafts movement in Melbourne**

Harriet Edquist



Ellen Nora Payne, women art woodcarvers and the early Arts and Crafts movement in Melbourne

Harriet Edquist



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ABSTRACT

This article explores the beginning of art woodcarving in Australia, taking the formative years in Melbourne of Tasmanian woodcarver Ellen Nora Payne as a case study. It does this with a view to addressing the marginalisation and under-representation of women entrepreneurs and makers in the present histories of Australian design, craft and material culture, a situation which is not unique to this country.¹ At issue here is what Marisa Fuentes has identified as the “fragmentary and incomplete” nature of women’s archives which often renders them and their work invisible in the larger narratives of modernism.² Added to this are the gender ideologies of the nineteenth

century which tended to align middle-class women to the domestic sphere where their hand work could be dismissed as amateur. By the late nineteenth-century, however, Australian women were mobilising their domestic expertise in craft and handwork to claim space in the public sphere although they did so against vocal and well-organised resistance by men. In this battle for ‘a room of their own’, home studios became significant sites of a contested subjecthood. This examination of Payne’s early career casts light on all these issues and suggests new ways to approach the historiography of women’s work and its place in the Australian Arts and Crafts movement.³

In 1907 three Tasmanian women, Sarah Squire Todd, Dora Walch and Ellen Nora Payne submitted examples of woodcarving to the First Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work (FAEWW). The FAEWW opened at the Exhibition Building, Melbourne on 23 October and closed just over five weeks later. With over 16,000 exhibits from all the States of Australia and from Britain, Europe, North and South America, Africa, India, and elsewhere in Asia, it showcased the work of women musicians, artists, designers and craft workers and was visited by in excess of 250,000 people.⁴ Among the works on display were over 100 pieces of hand-carved furniture and objects. Ellen Payne submitted an oak china cabinet and eclipsed all her peers – it carried off the silver medal and special prize of £5 for the Best Carved Piece of Furniture. It also won a special prize of £2 for the best exhibit in two other categories.⁵

Ellen (known as Nellie) Payne has long been recognised by craft historians as an exceptional woodcarver but accounts of her career are still confused about her status – amateur or professional – and short on detail. Scholarly research on her work is surprisingly scarce for one so prominent in her field. But she was a woman, a woodcarver, and a Tasmanian, not a promising start if one is looking for a berth in the annals of Australian art. Women’s woodcarving, unlike other craft media such as ceramics, needlework, or weaving, has struggled to find a place in the historiography of Australian women’s craft and design or, indeed of British women’s craft. It is absent from Hadjiafxendi and Zakreski’s important book *Crafting the Woman Professional in the Long Nineteenth Century*. With its focus on the Women’s Art Guild, Zoe Thomas’ award-winning *Women Art Workers and the Arts and Crafts Movement* includes discussion on

guild member and woodcarver Julia Hilliam who, however, abandoned her work on marriage. Thomas also briefly introduces educator Eleanor Rowe, Louise Powell, who was primarily a potter, and Ruth Bannister, who was Australian. The question is, as one reviewer of this article pointed out: “Why were there not more women woodworkers gaining access to the Women’s Guild of Arts, the foremost organization for women in the Arts and Crafts movement in England?” Early woodcarving does not appear at all in Tanya Harrod’s magisterial history of British craft.⁶ This neglect is curious given the popularity of woodcarving and the successful careers of English women such as the Pinwill sisters of Devon. One reason may be that woodcarving is an exception to prevailing accounts of woman’s craft work, a point I will discuss below. Wildly popular in the two decades before WWI, it gradually fell out of fashion as

Preceding Pages

View of former Field home Westfield, Westbury, Tasmania, photograph courtesy Steven French.

Opposite

The Field Cabinet, 1907, carver, Nellie Payne, iron hinges made by Hobart architect Alan Walker, photograph courtesy Steven French.



clean-lined modern furniture came to dominate interior design and women had access to more opportunities for education and training. And as it fell out of favour so, too did the histories of its women makers. None of the women woodcarvers listed as prize winners at the FAEWW, apart from Payne, has yet been the subject of biographical study.

Unlike many of her peers whose work was confined to the domestic interior and became increasingly irrelevant, Payne managed to practise well into the modernist era by specialising in commemorative and ceremonial pieces which withstood changes in taste. It is for this reason that a large body of her work survives. Most of the information in current circulation about Payne's career is derived from Russell Atkinson's slim book *Ellen Nora Payne*.

Woodcarver of Tasmania published nearly 50 years ago.⁷ Atkinson was a journalist and while he knew and admired Payne and had access to her family records he had little knowledge of the context, apart from familial, in which Nellie produced her work. For all that his book, which includes 30 photographs of Payne's furniture, remains the best source of published information we have. Caroline Miley's catalogue to her 1987 exhibition *Beautiful and Useful. The Arts and Crafts Movement in Tasmania* builds on Atkinson's work by contextualising Payne's career within the Arts and Crafts movement, but her discussion of Payne "foremost among Tasmania's amateur woodcarvers" is brief.⁸ Grace Cochrane's 1992 survey of Australian craft, *The Craft Movement in Australia. A History* includes two sentences on Payne and the photograph of her carving the Westbury pulpit in her coach-house studio in Kent.⁹ Peter Mercer's sympathetically written entries in Joan Kerr's 1994 encyclopedia of women's work *Heritage* add little to Atkinson's account, and like the latter assures us that Payne, while a prodigious worker "was not commercially orientated."¹⁰ Mercer published the Westbury pulpit photograph in his biographical entry on Payne but he chose one of Payne's ceremonial chairs as his focus subject, providing some historical context for these objects which are a feature of her practice.¹¹ If this record is slight, in Tasmania Payne's legacy has not been forgotten. In 2015 a group of local Westbury historians and business owners got together to celebrate the 150th anniversary of her birth. They documented over 200 pieces of furniture and chose 70 for exhibition.¹² The brief catalogue features in situ photographs of the exhibition spaces but has no descriptive or explanatory text, however the associated website identifies each piece of furniture where documentary evidence allows.¹³

Women and woodcarving

The popularity of woodcarving among Australian women followed international trends although as an organised craft for women it was little over a decade old when they took it up. Until the 1880s woodcarving was not among the sanctioned genres of colonial women's work, it was located within the male province of the furniture trade in which carving was incorporated as one of its specialised skills. The shift from skilled trade to the women's so-called 'amateur' sphere occurred in the 1880s and early 1890s. There were, for example, no woodcarving exhibits in the Women's Court at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, or at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition or Sydney Women's Industry Exhibition, both in 1888, but in the Women's Building at the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893 there were dozens.¹⁴ Under 'Carvings in various materials' the catalogue listed carved panels (the majority of entries), table tops, chests, screens, boxes, cabinets, chairs, stools and other pieces of furniture.¹⁵ The majority of these entries were from the United

States, but there were some from Britain, Scandinavia and Russia. There were none from New South Wales, the only Australian colony represented in the pavilion. Yet, by 1907 as the FAEWW demonstrates, woodcarving was thriving among Australian women.

English women had access to professional training from 1879 when the School of Art Woodcarving was established at South Kensington. The Polytechnic School of Art in Regent Street was offering day classes in art woodcarving to women in the 1880s and the Goldsmiths Company established a school of arts and crafts in 1891 which also taught woodcarving.¹⁶ Eleanor Rowe studied under Italian sculptor Anton Bulletti at the South Kensington school and was considered his most outstanding pupil. She was promoted to manager and assistant teacher in 1881 and then, when Bulletti left in 1882, manager of the school until 1902.¹⁷

In this role Rowe developed a reputation as an authority on woodcarving and importantly for Australian women workers, she published popular manuals that found their way to colonial libraries. Titles included: *Hints on wood-carving for beginners* (1886) and *Studies from the Museums: Wood carvings from the South Kensington Museum* (1889). As early as 1867 George Alfred Rogers had published his manual *The art of woodcarving. Practical hints to amateurs, and a short history of the art*. Rogers was an accomplished carver and was particularly known for his rehabilitation of the reputation of Grinling Gibbons, the great Anglo-Dutch wood carver to the Stuart and Hanoverian courts.¹⁸ Gibbons' work was emulated by Sydney woodcarver Ruth Bannister who was celebrated for her expertise and exhibited in London at the Englishwoman Exhibition in 1915.¹⁹ Wood carver and teacher Joseph Phillips published a text in 1896 that was aimed directly at technical schools, *Wood carving: being a carefully graduated educational course for schools and adult classes*.²⁰ It was on a book list published by George Robertson booksellers of Melbourne for the use of architects and craft workers in 1898.²¹ In America, Charles G Leland, who was fascinated by so-called 'lesser' cultures and 'minor arts', published seven books on the emerging Arts and Crafts movement including, in 1891, the illustrated *A Manual of Wood Carving*.²²

In Nellie Payne's home state of Tasmania, colonial settler women had a long tradition as craft workers and had been active on the international exhibition circuit since the Great Exhibition of 1851 (which also included work of Indigenous Tasmanian women), exhibiting needlework, botanical illustration, painted tables, fretwork and natural specimens. Their woodcarving first appears under Women's Industries in the Hobart International Exhibition of Industry, Science, and Art held at Queen's Domain, Hobart from 1894 to 1895.²³ Under 'Mechanical work' Catherine Saunders exhibited a Huon pine and myrtle chest of drawers; and the 'Decorative work, furnishing, carving on wood etc.' section included Emily Carter's wood carving and Sara Todd's "decorative needlework and wall panel" the latter generally taken to be a carved piece.²⁴

The Fine Arts category included "design" and here a number of pupils from the Ladies College, including a young Dora Walch exhibited designs for door panels, probably intended for woodcarving. In 1897, the minutes of the Fine Arts Society noted that along with the 100 pictures on display at their annual exhibition were "10 exhibits in the arts and crafts section comprising wood carving pyrography and stained glass work etc."²⁵ While the notice doesn't specify whether men or women carved the pieces, given the popularity of the craft in Tasmania and their expertise, it was probably women. The question arises: where did they learn this craft?



Formal instruction in art woodcarving for Australian women lagged behind English institutions and only entered technical colleges from the mid-1890s. In 1896, for example, English-born Lewis John Godfrey was appointed instructor in woodcarving in the School of Applied Art, Working Men's College, Melbourne, a position he held until 1913. While little known today, Godfrey was exceptionally well-trained in the English naturalistic tradition going back through Rogers to Gibbons.²⁶ The South Australian School of Design instituted classes at the same time as Melbourne, and Brisbane Technical College was offering woodcarving from 1895.²⁷ It was not, however, until 1899 that woodcarving entered the curriculum of Hobart Technical College where it was taught by W A Russell; it is conceivable, however, that Art Instructor J R Tranthim-Fryer, a versatile practitioner who had exhibited woodcarving at the Hobart Exhibition, taught the craft informally during his association with Hobart Tech between 1891 and 1895.²⁸ The establishment of formal training in woodcarving in the 1890s did not coincide however with the acquisition of woodcarving skills by the first women practitioners. Early women carvers like Nellie Payne, Daisy Archer at 'Gracemere' in Rockhampton, Queensland, Suzanne Gether in Sydney, and Isabel McDonald who exhibited carved furniture at the Queensland National Agricultural and Industrial Association show in 1898, were taught privately by individuals or in professional workshops. It would seem, therefore, that the establishment of institutional art woodcarving classes followed rather than led women's involvement in the craft.²⁹ While some women confined their work to the domestic sphere others leveraged their expertise in woodcarving to establish a professional career as a carver or a teacher; sometimes both. At Adelaide School of Mines, Charlotte Benda was the first woman to be appointed as a teacher of the craft in 1900.³⁰

Compared with china painting or needlework the objects of woodcarving were often large and made bold statements in domestic, institutional or ecclesiastical settings. These could be spatial, as in a screen or decorative, as in a wall panel. The career of Nellie Payne shows that woodcarving could develop into a spatial practice when the objects

carved formed part of the structure of interior space. The implications of this are quite profound. As Caroline Jordan has noted, middle-class colonial women possessed of an "ornamental education", that is knowledge of drawing, watercolour painting, some languages, some music, could exercise a certain influence over the interior design of their houses, but generally this was restricted to a choice of available designs provided by a male professional. Where women of rank and privilege and with talent could influence or design "improvements" to their property, the idea that they would thereby have an entree into the design professions was not a possibility in the nineteenth century.³¹ Woodcarvers such as the successful Pinwill sisters in England, however, often collaborated with architects, particularly on church interiors where their work had a significant impact.³² Woodcarving allowed women to break out of the mould of traditional domestic work, cross the boundary into the public sphere and take on a craft which might involve collaborations with the professional cabinet makers who made up their pieces, builders who installed them if they were fixed furniture and sometimes, architects. In Tasmania, for example, a number of women including Payne, contributed furniture and fittings to historic churches although this work has not been the subject of research.³³ It may be that woodcarving was attractive to Australian women because it formed one line of assault on the practice of architecture and interior design. Another was their increasing mobilisation of print media including women's journals and women's pages of the daily newspapers to advocate for and demonstrate their expertise in the domestic design sphere.³⁴

Nellie Payne

Ellen Nora Payne, known as Nellie Payne (1865–1962), was one of the most accomplished and prolific woodcarvers in Australia. She was born in 1865 at Westfield, Westbury, a small village south-west of Launceston in northern Tasmania, twelfth of fourteen children of Thomas and Elizabeth Field. She was educated at home and from 1878 as a boarder at the Ladies' Grammar School in Hobart.³⁵ In 1887 she married Charles Payne, an English medical practitioner. They lived in Hobart where their first two children Madge and Geoffrey were born. In 1892 they moved to Melbourne where Charles set up practice and home at 372 Church Street, Richmond and where, in January 1896 Nellie gave birth to their third child Alan. It was during their eight-year sojourn in Melbourne that Payne became a woodcarver and by great good fortune two dated works from this period survive, a hall settle of 1897 and a sideboard of 1898. It is unlikely she began her training in the year Alan was born so, let's assume she began carving in 1897.

While Zoe Thomas notes it was rare for an English woman who was not married to a fellow artist to continue practising after she married, Payne began her career as a woodcarver after she had married a doctor and had three children.³⁶ The tradition of colonial women makers and exhibitors, so strong in Tasmania, might have helped.³⁷ Sarah Todd also took up woodcarving after she married Thomas Todd, manager of Hobart's Cascade Brewery and had children; furthermore her husband and their three daughters all shared in her interest.³⁸ Unlike the English women documented by Thomas, settler Tasmanian women were accustomed to 'making do' with their own labour. Women's work, often focused on the home, was often a necessity, not a pastime.

We do not know the reason why Nellie took this quite radical step into a woodcarving career. Atkinson hints at difficulties in the relationship between Nellie and Charles which they learned over time to either iron out or ignore.

Charles, he notes, took himself very seriously and levity “irked him.” Nellie by contrast “possessed the saving qualities of serenity and irrepressible humour.” While later on in their marriage Charles came to admire her fame, in the early years “he appears to have found it hard to take her artistic leanings seriously.”³⁹ It may well be that Nellie found satisfaction in creating a career outside the domestic realm, one that was carried out in spaces over which she had control.

The 1897 Settle

If we do not know why Nellie took up woodcarving, the historical evidence provides some context for the decision. Nellie’s earliest extant dated work, a settle, was carved in Melbourne under the tutelage of Robert Prenzel. It has her initials and date 1897, carved in a central shield on the back, suggesting pride in what was probably her first completed work. Inside a plate records that it was carved by “E. N. Payne who lived in Church Street, Richmond, Victoria, 1897. Designed and put together by Messrs. Treede and Prenzel, of Melbourne, Victoria.”

According to Russell Atkinson, Payne had private lessons with Prenzel from whom “she learned to use mallet and chisel and gouge [and] the properties of different timbers, and the rudiments of design.”⁴⁰ Prenzel was born and trained as a cabinet maker and woodcarver in Germany before he emigrated to Melbourne in 1888 joining the city’s large and influential German community. In 1891 he entered into partnership with fellow German, Johann Treede and for the following decade they operated a successful practice as architectural carvers, modellers and designers. They specialised in the German Renaissance Revival style, featuring “snarling lion masks, vigorously scrolling foliage, grotesques and scale pattern borders.”⁴¹ Prenzel’s biographer Terence Lane notes that women took lessons from Treede and Prenzel and later, Prenzel after he had left the partnership in 1901 and established his own studio. Other firms likewise offered tuition in ‘Gothic, ‘Renaissance’ or ‘Rococo’ carving; in 1898 for example, H F Dunne advertised their classes in the Yarra Sculpture Society Catalogue.⁴² Studying with industry professionals on their premises would have been a significant drawback for women and it was the only craftwork open to them that offered this opportunity outside the apprenticeship system.

Across the back of the large settle that Nellie carved under Prenzel’s direction is the popular Arts and Crafts homily ‘East West Hame’s Best’ in Gothic-inspired lettering; beneath is the shield with Nellie’s initials and date flanked by heraldic gryphons carved in low relief, while naturalistic relief carving arranged in a lozenge shape decorates the base. The arms are of pierced work in the form of lions or perhaps gryphons. The decoration combines the Germanic tradition of Prenzel with tropes of the Arts and Crafts movement in a somewhat uneasy way. It is unlikely Prenzel suggested a settle to carve; it was popular with British designers and he did not include it in his repertoire until the early twentieth century when, having established his own studio, he began to respond to the influence of Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts movement.

Similarly, the Scottish homily East West Hame’s Best, something of an Arts and Crafts cliché, is out of character for this traditional German carver.⁴³ It is likely that Nellie decided on the settle format and chose the motto, while Prenzel supplied the decorative designs for the rest and assembled it.⁴⁴ If this is the case, Nellie had already become knowledgeable about the Arts and Crafts movement in Melbourne in the 1890s which placed her somewhat outside Prenzel’s sphere of influence as this was still dominated by the European classical tradition.



Above
Settle, 1897, carved under the supervision of Robert Prenzel by Nellie Payne, photograph courtesy Rosemary Bowman.

The association of Payne with Prenzel brings together Australia’s two most successful and prolific woodcarvers. They were born within a year of each other and both had long fifty-year careers carving furniture for private and institutional clients. They came from opposite sides of the world and represented two different traditions; on the one hand the European classical tradition with its high finish and polished, bravura forms, and on the other the English Arts and Crafts tradition where value resided in visualising the hand of the maker through the marks of the tools. Prenzel, a male woodcarver, operated out of visible commercial premises and studios while Payne worked invisibly from her home. Prenzel’s highly regarded work is recorded in a professional archive that was donated to the National Gallery of Victoria in 1972; this formed the basis of Lane’s 1994 monograph.⁴⁵ Payne’s work is barely known outside Tasmania; Atkinson’s biography notwithstanding. While useful, it focuses on Payne’s life and family connections rather than her work. No archive like Prenzel’s has yet emerged and as Payne worked from home and did not operate a commercial studio her archive resides principally in the works themselves, the oral histories that surround them and fragments of records in the public domain. The task therefore is to reveal, examine and extrapolate from these fragments.

The Arts and Crafts movement in Melbourne

The evidence of the 1897 settle suggests that Nellie was familiar with the Arts and Crafts movement. Knowledge could have come from her reading of contemporary journals

such as the London-based *Studio* which began publishing in 1893 but also from two local sources. One was the first Arts and Crafts exhibition ever mounted in Australia which took place in 1896 and consisted solely of woodcarving and the other was the appearance of *Arts & Crafts*, the most important, indeed only, magazine devoted to the early Australian movement first published in 1895.

In 1893 English-born architect Walter Butler delivered a paper to his architecture colleagues in Melbourne on the development of art among the handicrafts which gave a broad overview of the Arts and Crafts movement in England, which he had been familiar with as a young architect in London in the 1880s before he migrated to Australia.⁴⁶ He thought that the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society founded in 1887 to promote applied arts, “can only prove great help to the production and execution of much good design amongst the handicrafts.” Something similar, he urged, might be accomplished in Australia.⁴⁷ Following Butler’s paper, perhaps in the same year, but independently of him, a so-called ‘guild’ was formed. The guild coalesced around Bernard Hall, who had been appointed Director of the National Gallery and Head of the Art School and had taken up his position in March 1892, just as Melbourne’s economy careered into its worst phase of economic recession that followed the bank crash. Hall had begun his art training in 1874 at the School of Design, South Kensington which laid the foundations of his strong advocacy for technical expertise, craftsmanship and manual skill. Being aware of recent movements in design reform

in Britain, he was keen to instigate something similar in Melbourne as this manifesto published in *Arts & Crafts* in 1895 demonstrates:

It occurred to several professional men, from frequently meeting each other in the performance of duties in various domains of Art, that it would be to their advantage to meet regularly to discuss matters affecting Art and its application to the practical purposes of life. ... a guild was formed, and meetings held at fortnightly intervals for a period of twelve months, during which time excellent practical work was done and profitable research made into the various departments of Art, both as regards design and manufacture... Japanese craftwork, wood carving, brass chasing, ironwork and native timbers formed subsequently the objects of special enquiries. The records of the guild will no doubt be cast into a form suitable for publication in *Arts & Crafts*, and the various specimens of handiwork be made the subjects of future illustration.⁴⁸

The group included Hall, Francis Smart and William Tappin, principles of the architectural firm Reed, Smart & Tappin (which had been engaged in building the Library, Gallery and Museum complex since 1854), architect and furniture designer Gordon Hyndman, architect Guyon Purchas, glass artist William Montgomery and sculptor Charles Richardson, all men. The group set to with a will and published *Arts & Crafts*, the first issue appearing in October 1895. Two more issues followed in September 1896 and March 1898 before it folded. Its articles covered art, metal work, stained glass, embroidery, architecture, furniture, design and Australian timbers (illustrated with examples of woodcarving by Godfrey and Prenzel). In his first article on furniture in the 1895 issue, Tappin sets forth Arts and Crafts principles of design, illustrated by a photograph of a walnut and Kauri cabinet decorated with pyrography work, presumably designed by him and commissioned by Hall. His second article, in 1896, focuses on furniture decoration including carving where he observes that members of a household “if they have artistic tendencies” can contribute to this decorative work; clearly by this stage the women of Melbourne had started carving. The 1898 issue of *Arts & Crafts* used its pages to exhort good design principles in decorative work; Tappin on the design and construction of furniture and Hyndman on surface decoration for woodwork illustrated by examples of his own work. Guyon Purchas’ article on ‘design’ was accompanied by photographs of modern furniture designed by him but possibly executed by students. This issue also published Harry Gill’s account of the woodcarving class at the South Australian School of Design, accompanied by a full page photograph of the students’ work. By 1898 woodcarving was thriving. The focus on design, noticeable in the last issue of the journal reflected the hierarchical arrangement of applied arts practice in Britain where design stood at the apex of endeavour and execution somewhere beneath. It was also quite stridently gendered, as male architects and designers attempted to temper women’s involvement in a previously male trade by surrounding it with fixed rules of engagement and emphasising the professional/amateur divide. Hyndman set the tone in an article clearly aimed at women working in the domestic sphere:

That [the Arts and Crafts revival] has reached Australia seems evident, if an opinion can be based on numerous examples of wood-carving, repoussé, metal and needle work met with in most houses of late. These numerous examples, however, as a general rule, do not show any very intelligent grasp of the subject, and in almost all cases want of simplicity in design and faulty execution are



Above
Sideboard, 1898, carved
under the influence
of Guyon Purchas by
Nellie Payne, photograph
courtesy Steven French.

Opposite
Sideboard, designed
by Guyon Purchas and
probably executed by his
students, illustrated in
Arts & Crafts, March 1898.

only too evident; in fact, in the greater number of instances good material has been spoiled.

This failure to gain an effective and artistic result is not due to any want of care or application on the part of the workers, but rather to the fact that they have chosen to work at a craft that requires, not only years of careful training and steady application, but also natural talent and a good deal of technical skill.⁴⁹

The “years of careful training,” such as had been available to male cabinet makers, architects and other designers for centuries was a deliberate phrase designed to make it clear that women were excluded from being considered anything other than rather poor amateurs at their craft. This view would surface again in the published reviews of the craft work exhibited at the FAEWW in 1907, drawing a line between male professionals and female amateurs that still underwrites commentary on Payne’s career. It paralleled the situation in England. Thomas notes that as the number of women pursuing art and craft increased at the turn of the century, “the term ‘amateur’ began to be understood as having disparaging, gendered connotations, persistently associated with women’s pursuits, despite the

‘gentleman amateur’ historically having been a respectable term for learned men.”⁵⁰

Guyon Purchas and the woodcarving ‘school’ at the National Gallery of Victoria 1896–1897

On the back of the collaborative ‘guild’ venture evidenced in *Arts & Crafts*, Hall decided that the National Gallery needed an Applied Art School modelled on South Kensington and that Purchas should run it. He wrote to the Trustees in October 1895 offering:

a new scheme for making more practical use of the objects stored in the Art Museum, thereby enlarging the educational scope of the Institution.

I consider the time is ripe & the material at hand for inaugurating, in a small way and with nominal expense what I believe to be your long-deferred idea of a school of applied art – thus putting the application of Art to industrial use upon a sound and practical footing.⁵¹

It took some time for this idea to trickle through the layers of institutional bureaucracy but on 6 July 1896 the Librarian wrote to Purchas asking him what course of instruction he had in mind and the fee structure.⁵² Purchas replied the same month outlining his course which, he thought,



would encompass: modelling ornament in wax or clay; wood carving, high and low relief, chip and flat carving; the requirements of design to fit it for use; stamping and embossing leather; inlaying woods; repoussé work in brass and copper; ironwork.⁵³

Guyon Purchas was a young, successful architect who had established his practice in the early 1880s and consolidated it in 1887 with the prestigious commission of a new wing for the Women’s Hospital in Carlton, in red-brick Queen Anne.⁵⁴ In 1891, after an extensive overseas trip he built his extravagant family house in the well-to-do suburb of Hawthorn (renamed Tay Creggan by later owners). Like many Melburnians, Purchas came unstuck in the 1893 bank crash – perhaps he speculated poorly in the late 1880s land boom or overspent on his house – the upshot of which was a forced sale of the contents of the house which were advertised in *The Argus* in September 1894 as: “magnificent examples of antique art furniture” exhibiting “rare taste and judgment,” as well as Persian carpets, old tapestries and other art treasures “collected by Guyon Purchas, Esq. during his travels in Europe and the East.”⁵⁵ With work hard to come by, the position at the gallery would have been appealing. Purchas’s proposal was accepted and he set up his studio in the Gallery complex “between the lending library and the sculpture gallery.”

In September 1896 students from this innovative ‘school’ held an exhibition of their work at the Gallery. The review published in *Table Talk* is a crucial but hitherto neglected text in the historiography of the early Australian Arts and Crafts movement. *Table Talk* was expansive about the fitness of Purchas for his new role at the gallery. He was, the reviewer noted, “particularly well-fitted to teach wood-carving” as “the subject of wood-carving fascinated him early in life” and he had studied the best examples during his overseas tour.⁵⁶ The review goes on:

The art of wood-carving is so little understood in Melbourne that the exhibition of pupils’ work, which Mr Guyon Purchas held last Friday must be regarded as a notable event in its way. His studio at the National Gallery... was thronged with a fashionable gathering, eager to see the various exhibits, concerning which rumour had been saying a great deal... The exhibition was of singular interest as being, with the exception of the carving of Mr Purchas himself, the work of ladies. Hitherto whatever has been shown in Melbourne in the way of wood carving has been restricted to frames, brackets, and similar efforts. The influence of the Queen Anne style of furniture, with its numberless corners and settees, and recesses, has resulted in a new development, to which Ruskin may be said to have given the first impetus, and the increasing desire for “art in the household” has caused wood-carving to be seized upon with avidity as supplying considerable scope for deft fingers and cultured intelligence.⁵⁷

The reviewer was astute: they pointed out that while women had carved before the exhibition their carving had been confined to small items, but now in the post-classical world of Queen Anne design the scope for carving large pieces of furniture to fill the new interior spaces had increased. They mentioned Ruskin’s ‘artistic home’ and knowingly or not paraphrased the motto of the Working Men’s College that lay opposite the Gallery in La Trobe Street: ‘A skilled hand and cultured mind.’ The description of the woodcarving executed and exhibited by Purchas himself indicates that it conformed in style with the Art Nouveau aesthetic displayed in his domestic interiors.⁵⁸ His pupils’ work was more eclectic. The reviewer praised three exhibits of Mrs Bird, “a most enthusiastic worker;” namely an oak hall cupboard, a bookshelf “in Scandinavian design” and a cornerpiece combining settee, cupboard and table with a motif “sun dispelling night... illustrated by owls and other nocturnal birds flying before the advancing sunrays.” These pieces show the array of sources available to the women, from flat Scandinavian pattern to symbolist carving. Jacobean furniture was a popular source of inspiration here as in Britain as evidenced by Mrs Strachan’s “seventeenth century wood-box,” Miss Murray Smith’s oak settee, and a chest by Miss Currie in seventeenth century “flatwork.” Miss Chomley exhibited a table designed in “the more ornate style of the Moresque school.” Bertha Lang exhibited an oak hanging cupboard and an oak settee “embodying a group of griffins.”

The Moresque style of Miss Chomley’s table had been popularised by Liberty of London and their carved and inlaid “Moorish” tables were quite possibly the source of inspiration here; the neo-Renaissance griffins carved by Bertha Lang were popular motifs used by both Robert Prentzel and Purchas while Mrs Bird’s Scandinavian bookcase indicates that the Scandinavian Arts and Crafts revival was known to Melburnians. In Norway the movement was aligned to nationalist agitation for independence from Sweden and was visualised in Viking forms. These might have attracted Mrs Bird while W S Bergstrom’s *Ornamenter fur norsk traeskjaererkunst* of 1886 guided the work of Daisy Archer in Queensland, the Archers being of Scottish-Norwegian heritage.⁵⁹ Also of note were the settees and a dower chest as they were both popular forms of British Arts and Crafts furniture and would become central to Nellie Payne’s practice.

The exhibition, retrieved from oblivion by this single document, was the first stand-alone Arts and Crafts exhibition held in Melbourne, indeed in Australia, that showcased applied art albeit in one form, almost all of which was executed by women. As such, it marks the entry of woodcarving into the accepted field of women’s work, alongside painting, china painting, lace making, embroidery, basketry, and economic botany. The considerable reputation Purchas had accrued as a furniture designer and artisan (some of his pieces were exhibited and listed alongside his students and two were illustrated in *Arts & Crafts*) was contingent on his female clients and women overwhelmingly followed him into his Gallery studio, learnt the craft and used the exhibition format to validate their work in the public sphere. It is not by chance therefore that the second Arts and Crafts exhibition held in Australia, which included 200 examples of women’s work across all media, was organised by women at the Austral Salon in Melbourne in 1903⁶⁰ and that the FAEWW, also organised by and for women, was the impetus behind the establishment of the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria in 1908, a joint venture of women and men.⁶¹ The fragmentary nature of the archival evidence, however, which in this case comprises

Continued



Left
Prayer desk, St Andrew's
Anglican Church,
Westbury, 1906 carved by
Nellie Payne, photograph
courtesy Steven French

Middle
Interior of St Andrew's
Anglican Church,
Westbury Tasmania,
photograph Harriet
Edquist.

Opposite
Richard Field settle, 1900,
carved by Nellie Payne,
photograph courtesy
Steven French.



two relatively obscure texts - the *Table Talk* review and a small notice in *The New Idea* of the Austral Salon exhibition - has to date rendered this historical continuum invisible. No doubt there was other activity organised by women between these two exhibitions that has disappeared into history. Viewed in this light, we could conclude that the Arts and Crafts movement in Victoria was founded on women's cooperative labour. In just eleven years, between the Gallery woodcarving exhibition and the vast international exhibition of women's work, Australian women had exploited their agency as craft workers to forge a highly visible and influential position as advocates for women in the public sphere.

Nellie Payne's sideboard 1898

The exhibition caused quite a stir in Melbourne and it is possible Nellie visited it or heard about it. It could have prompted her to take up woodcarving, and the popular settle form that was chosen by Mrs Bird, Miss Murray Smith and Bertha Lang for exhibition would have appealed to her sense of practicality - it was a versatile storage box after all. As English Arts and Crafts theorist William Lethaby observed, the box, once the most useful and beautiful of all pieces of movable furniture was now used for multiple purposes - a seat, coffer and table the top of which was sometimes inlaid for chess.⁶²

So, we can surmise that, inspired by the example of this exhibition of women's work Nellie approached Robert Prenzel for tuition and carved her own settle in 1897. The following year she completed an oak sideboard, the date '1898' carved on a shield on the lower right cupboard door. This piece is noticeably different from the settle and

suggests that Nellie had moved out of Prenzel's orbit and into that of Guyon Purchas. The top section of the sideboard is sedately designed and her carving, confined to the small cupboard doors, and decorative edging is modest and subordinate to the overall form. The composition, with its asymmetry and ogee arch is a reference to the Aesthetic movement. It is also almost identical to a cabinet designed by Purchas and published, along with others, in his article on design in *Arts & Crafts* in 1898.⁶³ Payne mounted the Purchas-designed piece on top of a conventional two-door cupboard the doors of which she had also carved. The carving on all four doors is of a generic leaf and fruit form, similar in style to the carving on the base of the Prenzel settle and unlike the formalised, geometric, sometimes neo-Celtic carving on the Purchas furniture. So this hybrid piece combines Purchas design with a traditional cupboard and a carving style learnt in Prenzel's studio. It is experimental and uncertain but shows a determined woman who wished to learn and expand her skills and one who had already recognised in the Arts and Crafts movement the future of her craft, rather than in the studio of Prenzel.

We can only conjecture the means by which Payne came into contact with Purchas' school. By mid-1897 the woodcarving class at the Gallery suddenly closed when Purchas abandoned it. He left the Gallery and took students with him, much to Hall's displeasure:

On enquiry I learnt that you had not been to the class for a fortnight. Am I to consider from this that your gallery class has been disbanded and that those of it who are working with you are private pupils?⁶⁴

If Purchas had taken on private pupils, Nellie might have joined them. But in 1897 she was working under Prenzel's direction. Perhaps Purchas continued private tuition into 1898 because it is probable his students executed the work he published in *Arts & Crafts* that year, and Nellie could have been one of them. The illustrated pieces are instructive because they were carved to conform with the controlling design aesthetic of the architect whereas the work in the 1896 exhibition was eclectic and showed the personal aesthetic choices of the women carvers. 'Design' in this instance was wielded by Purchas to nip aberrant individuality in the bud and assert his agency as creator. His school of carving, unlike the unrulier version at the Gallery, served architecture, not his students.

It is possible that Nellie carved the published shelves under Purchas's supervision and then carved her own version of them for herself. Her reworking of objects designed by others can be seen elsewhere. In 1900 she carved a settle for her brother Richard which was a reworking of the settle she had carved with Prenzel which she clearly was not happy with. The caption to a photograph of this 1897 settle in her album states 'the design not original'.⁶⁵ Similarly, in 1906 she carved another settle for her nephew George Field which incorporated a panel of Renaissance style Italian carving and the album photograph is captioned: 'Settle in Tasmanian Oak, with panel of Italian walnut, old Italian design. Other part original'.⁶⁶ She emphasised what was her work, and what was not. In 1916 she reworked the design of that Italian panel on a dowry chest for her son Geoffrey. While these instances indicate that copying and adapting models was part of Payne's early practice, in the South

Kensington manner, they also show that she was careful to distinguish her originality as a designer; that design was where authorship lay. In reworking the Purchas sideboard, Nellie was asserting her independence and authorship.

Payne's two Melbourne pieces of furniture are foundational and pioneering works not only for her career but also for the history of Melbourne's Arts and Crafts movement as they are, with Bernard Hall's sideboard of 1895, among the earliest dated freestanding Arts and Crafts furniture with a secure provenance known to survive. Her 1900 settle for Richard Field is the earliest fully documented piece of furniture in the Tasmanian women's woodcarving movement.⁶⁷ Her experience furthermore illustrates women's activism in embracing a new form of applied art that crossed boundaries of professional expertise and gave women unprecedented access to work in the built environment outside their own domestic sphere. In 1895, just before Payne embarked on woodcarving, another woman, Mabel Young, arrived in Melbourne from England with her husband, artist Blamire Young. She was 19 and had some (unspecified) training at Bushey, Hertfordshire but it is conceivable she took further classes in Melbourne. A photograph published around 1898 of her in a studio with an elaborately carved coffer shows a skillful and innovative worker.⁶⁸

Later, in the early twentieth century she collaborated with Walter Butler on architectural projects but her contributions were modest.⁶⁹ As her husband was somewhat improvident and they had two children her work was not a hobby, it provided necessary income for her family.⁷⁰ Whether or not Nellie knew Mabel is not recorded but if she did know her,



or know of her work, it would have provided a model for a woman's professional life in woodcarving.

England

In late 1899 Payne left Australia for England with her family, returning twice before coming back to Hobart for good in 1908. Established at a house/surgery at St. Brelades, Lee, Kent a few miles from central London with her own studio in the coach house, she studied design and woodcarving at Goldsmith's and clay modelling, leather work, beaten copper work and classical embroidery at another institution.⁷¹ As Zoe Thomas notes, for women art workers in England:

homes and studios played a fundamental role in the daily maintenance of artistic lives. [Their] homes constituted key sites of resistance and self-expression. In the quest to find 'a room of one's own', women art workers increasingly sought access to their own studios, which functioned as the central space in their lives.⁷²

This is especially pertinent in the case of woodcarving which was not a traditional female activity and couldn't be carried out in front of a fire or in a parlour, sewing room or even house studio. It needed ample space, preferably a shed or stables area, with dedicated bench space and sharp tools that hitherto had been the preserve of men.

So women could use woodwork to mark out their own territory apart from the domestic sphere. This was certainly the case with Payne with her "commodious old coach house"⁷³ in Kent and, later, "a roomy outbuilding at the back" in her Hobart home where she could "work at her craft undisturbed and undisturbing."⁷⁴ Women's woodcarving noticeably falls outside the discursive framework of the

handicrafts laid out by Hadjiafxendi and Kakreski just as it falls outside - literally - the domestic sphere. In its disruptive demand for space, tools and equipment more usually associated with male endeavour, it exemplifies the problems with the 'separate spheres ideology' (male/female; public/private) discussed by Judy Attfield.⁷⁵

The 1909 testimonial of one of her teachers at Goldsmith's, Amor Fenn, indicates how far Payne's studies had taken her:

Mrs. E. N. Payne for some years studied design and woodcarving, with its associated crafts, under my direction, during which period she carried out work of considerable magnitude and merit. Her knowledge of the technical side of her craft is very complete, her treatment skillful and marked with nice discrimination and personality. Energetic and strong in temperament, her work is always sound and characterized by a vigorous, but at the same time sympathetic, rendering, closely allied to the spirit of the old work which she has studied to advantage.

In construction details she was always deeply interested, and her designing faculty, with her personal manner, should ensure the successful conduct and direction of those placed in her charge.⁷⁶

What this work of magnitude and merit was, Fenn does not disclose. However, two settles of 1903 and Payne's first large commission, the pulpit for St Andrews at Westbury (1904-5) were completed while she was studying at Goldsmith's under Fenn's tutelage. Perhaps he was referring to them. What is significant and typical of these works is that they were made for family and for the church; Payne

Opposite
Nellie Payne in her coach-house studio in Kent, England, photograph courtesy Rosemary Bowman.

Above
Gibson Settle, 1903, carved by Nellie Payne, photograph courtesy Steven French.



carved dozens of furniture pieces for her family and friends over a fifty-year period while over the same period she embellished St Andrew's Westbury with all its major pieces of furniture as well as carved memorials for parishioners. This work was a way of preserving familial and community ties, of expressing care for the recipients, and for the most part the furniture is still in family possession and still performs its role at St Andrew's.

Conclusion

By piecing together these historical fragments, reconstructing the archive, a picture of Nellie Payne in Melbourne begins to emerge. It is one that demonstrates not only the beginning of a woman's lifework but also the value of approaching well established histories, such as that of the Arts and Crafts movement, from unfamiliar paths.⁷⁷

From a study of Payne's early work it is apparent that she challenged the traditions Prenzler represented and chose rather to follow the emerging Arts and Crafts movement where she was to forge her career. The reconstructed archive also allows us to extrapolate a larger thesis. In Melbourne, it can be argued, the Arts and Crafts movement formalised in the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria was founded on women's work, not on male institutions as was the case in Britain. While Melbourne's first self-identified Arts and Crafts architects looked to the British movement for legitimacy, the parallel, independent stream of women's maker culture carried on what it had been doing for decades and aligned itself to the Arts and Crafts movement as a means to achieve its goals (public exhibition, advocacy for women), not as an end in itself. While women's woodcarving is often referred to as a product of the Arts and Crafts movement, its early development in Australia was co-terminus with the development of the movement among architects and preceded the establishment of state Arts and Crafts Societies by a decade. Indeed, carved furniture was not encouraged by Arts and Crafts architects or furniture designers who focused rather on innovative form and if ornament were required, preferred inlay or flatwork. What is revealed here are two parallel developments: a women's Arts and Crafts movement founded on a vibrant maker culture and women's advocacy for a place in the sun and a male Arts and Crafts movement founded on British ideology and dedicated to the professional advancement of male architects.

Opposite
Pulpit, St Andrew's Church Westbury, 1904, carved by Nellie Payne, photograph Harriet Edquist.

Above
Pulpit (detail), St Andrew's Church Westbury, 1904, carved by Nellie Payne, photograph Harriet Edquist.

Bottom
Memorial plaque to Sarah Lindsay, St Andrew's Church, Westbury. Carving and repoussé by Nellie Payne early 20th century, photograph courtesy Steven French.

Endnotes

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- 41 Terence Lane, *Robert Prenzel 1866–1941: His life and work*, (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1994), 8.
- 42 Lane, *Robert Prenzel*, 49–50.
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- 45 Lane, *Robert Prenzel*, 56.
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- 64 Bernard Hall to Guyon Purchas, 23 June 1897, Hall papers, Australian National Gallery.
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- 67 Photographs of Nellie’s work together with a timeline can be found at <https://nelliepayne.com>. They form the documentation for the exhibition by Westbury and District Historical Society, *Nellie Payne. Woodcarver. Sesquicentenary Exhibition*, Westbury 2015.
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- 69 For examples of Young’s interior work with Walter Butler see Jessie Serle and Terence Lane, *Australians at Home A Documentary History of Australian Domestic Interiors from 1788 to 1914*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), 395 and Harriet Edquist, *Pioneers of Modernism*, 140.
- 70 J F Bruce, “Blamire Young, Artist” in *The Art of Blamire Young*, (Sydney: Art and Australia, 1921), 11–12.
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Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to those who assisted with my research for this article: Pam Swain who was one of the organisers of the 2015 Nellie Payne exhibition at Westbury; Steven French who photographed the exhibition and kindly allowed me to use his work and Tanis Wilson, with whom I explored Westbury and visited Nellie Payne’s carvings in St Andrew’s church. I am also indebted to the reviewers of this article for their knowledgeable and perceptive remarks on content and structure.

Riffing on Malraux

Hannah Lewi

The YALLOURN STORIES
Compiled by Ted Hopkins & Slab



The YALLOURN STORIES

Compiled by Ted Hopkins & Slab

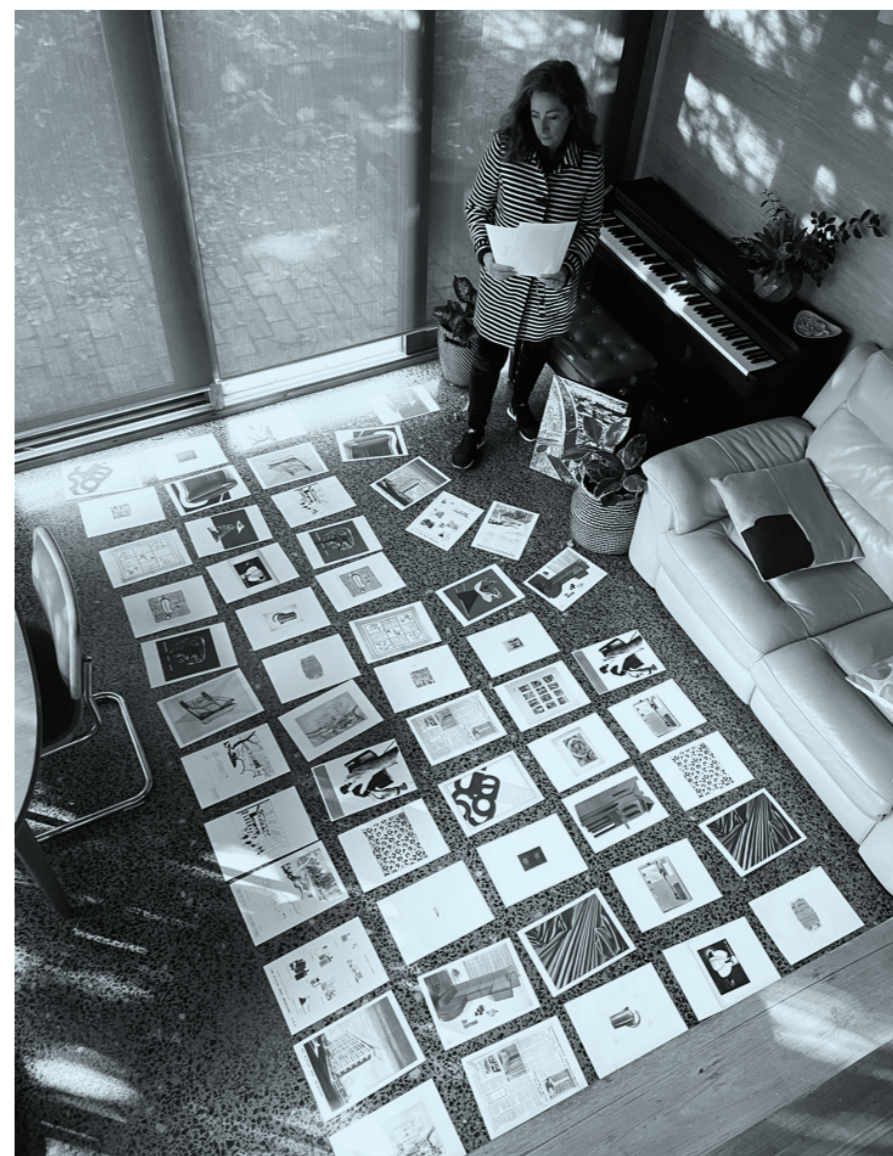
The YALLOURN STORIES
Compiled by Ted Hopkins & Slab

The YALLOURN STORIES
Compiled by Ted Hopkins & Slab



This page
André Malraux, 1954,
photographed by
Maurice Jarnoux, 1954,
Source: Getty Images.

Opposite
The Archive on the Floor,
2021, created by Hannah
Lewi.



So, on a rainy Sunday afternoon during Melbourne's lockdown I began to pretend I was an algorithm, albeit a rather clumsy one, so as to attempt to mimic the serendipity of a machine by randomly selecting digitised artefacts from the RMIT archive to play with, juxtapose and manipulate into simple composite images. This process was far less about the end result and far more about the simple process of looking more carefully at these digital artefacts as I selected, copied and overlaid them. And in another departure, digital composites stretched into ovoid selections become a kind of flower or weed – akin to the painter Hans Holbein's famous anamorphic Memento Mori skull in the foreground of 'The Ambassadors' of 1533 – acting as little reminders of the death of the living, functional artefact now sequestered in an archive.

This was a distracting little precursor, however, as then André Malraux entered the scene. I had long been fascinated with the now iconic photograph of the French writer, poet, art critic, Minister of Cultural Affairs and publisher André Malraux and what has become known as his *Musée Imaginaire* – or his “book on the floor.” The photograph was taken as part of a series by Maurice Jarnoux for *Paris Match* in 1954. And Walter Grasskamp's recent excellent book published by the Getty Foundation interrogates this very same series of images.

Here, the controversial figure of Malraux was captured

in a pose of supreme confidence, with what is believed to be the spreads of his new book artfully, casually, lying around his feet. Of course, the image was staged with great sophistication. At first glance it may seem that we are witnessing the author working on the final ordering of images for his book. However, on closer inspection, it is clear that the sequence of the images on the floor did not at all follow the same sequence as that of his bound volumes, and the images are facing the wrong way, appearing either face down or upside down to Malraux himself. A small space is cleared around Malraux, in what looks like a command-post or halo. But, in reality, there is insufficient space for making proper layout decisions. As Grasskamp notes: “Clearly ... the pages of the book have been arranged with the photographer – and the viewer – in mind.”

This is therefore a complex, highly orchestrated and constructed image: an image akin to Yaneva's work on the CCA, that evokes the archive as subject, and an image not about ‘doing the work’ but about ‘representing the work’ of the artistic collector and arranger. It speaks of the continuation of the enlightenment project of ordering knowledge as in a museum or an encyclopedia. It is also about the translation and dissemination of art through photography. Malraux was a contemporary of the German art historian and writer Walter Benjamin who also critically examined the authenticity and status of the work of art in

the age of photographic reproduction via the camera and mass printing. On the proliferation of the copy, Benjamin noted that the photograph of an artwork had the ability to “put the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself... By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.”

Through black and white copies of artworks, sculptures and artefacts drawn from many international sources – mostly collected in the Louvre as a locus of French Imperial expansion – these works have been described as “liberated” from their geographical, cultural contexts and constraints and “combined at will” in a series of photographic plates. It is this loosely bound book of singular photographic documents that becomes famously characterised by Malraux as his *Musée imaginaire*. Photographs of artefacts were of course much easier to collect, order and play with, than real weighty objects in a museum, and much easier to sell and distribute. Although it is interesting that Malraux's first idea for the project was to create an ideal museum filled with photographic reproductions on a scale of 1:1, but this was doomed to failure through technical problems. Malraux overlaid the term *imaginaire*, which originally meant ‘relating to images’, with another more ambiguous meaning of ‘being in one's mind,’ or not being ‘real.’ Thus the publication could be seen as both an “imaginary” and “illusionary” museum. Grasskamp's analysis elaborates on

the poetic allure of this metaphor: “In the wider sense of the term, *musée imaginaire* is a magic formula, the open sesame for a treasure trove that one fills oneself – worth anything and everything – without ever having to handle a single item, creating combinations that spark off each other and produce completely unexpected ideas.”

As a conceptual model, the *musée imaginaire* is prescient for an inquiry into the creative potentials of digital archives, as enabled by the internet and mass digitization. However, as Grasskamp also points out, in the context of the mid-20th century, Malraux's *Musée imaginaire* should equally be seen as marking out a paradigm shift in the way traditional modes of collecting and intellectualizing works of art were perceived and reproduced. With the evolution of printing technologies in France in the 1950s, the creation of pairs of large-format photographic reproductions placed an emphasis on making visual comparisons between mostly exotic artefacts collected from Asian and non-Western contexts. Learning about art history was thereby fundamentally reframed as a pedagogical and cultural project reliant on such comparisons, and this ‘compare the pair’ approach was also seen coincidentally through the uptake of illustrated lectures by slide projection at the same time in American and British intellectual traditions of art history education. Photographs could now be reproduced and bound in large format art volumes books that were easily accessible to the general public. And as



Top
André Malraux, 1954,
photographed by
Maurice Jarnoux,
Source: Getty Images

Bottom
Composite Digital Image,
created by Hannah Lewi,
2022

Source material:

Textile featuring
geometric pattern, c.
1952, designer Stanislaus
Ostoja-Kotkowski for
Prestige Fabrics,
RMIT Design Archives.

Perspective, Trevi Lounge,
Trevi Fountain Café, c.
1955, architect Ernest
Fooks, RMIT Design
Archives.

MK II, No. 2,
June 1970, (Brisbane:
QLD: Queensland
University Architecture
Students Association),
RMIT Design Archives.

collections of images with short captions rather than long accompanying texts that was more typically used in art books, it is the compositional arrangements of images that carried meaning and associations – albeit superficially in the sense of being based entirely on the visual. Malraux was therefore an editor and a curator, but above all a magical collagist who was playing with reproductions, resemblances, and differences in the manner we are very familiar with today.

To return to the particular photograph in question, it was consciously staged in a domestic setting and not in a commercial publishing house or gallery. Therefore, this scene of visual work further serves to decontextualise the photographs of exotic artworks and re-situate them in the context of the European bourgeois connoisseur at home. Malraux was 53 when this photograph was taken in his salon. I am also 53, and with some time on my hands I decided to try and recreate this image through a staged performative image, so as to interrogate it further as in my flirting with digital collages of artefacts from the RMIT Design Archives. And, as I was largely confined to home through the pandemic in Melbourne, this domestic setting also seemed a fitting one to examine.

In re-staging a photographic image, I was also inspired by a friend in London who recreated photographic snaps of Picasso, Modigliani, and comrades out and about in Montparnasse, Paris. Taken originally by Jean Cocteau in



1916, the series was obsessively re-plotted as to their timing and location in a book by Billy Klüver published in 1997. The exact scenes of the photographic series were playfully recreated yet again as part of a holiday itinerary in Paris in 2006. Here, the only tenuous connection to Malraux is that the writer Max Jacob, who is featured in the Picasso series, was also a friend of Malraux. My re-staging was also about performing, in a bodily sense, some kind of appropriation that becomes part exploration, part satire and part creative act that asks the viewer to also take a closer look at the original images through their new incarnations. As Didi-Huberman suggests about the images of Cindy Sherman: “one has to posit the need to take a fresh look at images” that are part of our cultural lexicon.

I am also not alone in re-staging Malraux's picture and concept of an imaginary museum, which has been riffed on by artists and photographers, cartoonists and more – all interested in this intriguing imaging of the archive. Malraux's “paper museum” also drew further attention to the floor as a place for exhibiting, at a time when plinths were disappearing from sculptures and works were being provocatively staged on floors of galleries. It may be a truism to say that today the screen has well and truly eclipsed both the floor and the book: pairs of projected or printed images have been replaced by grids, arrays, scrollbars, and databases affording endless possibilities for comparisons and similarities.

Top
The Archive on the Floor,
relaxing at home, 2021,
created by Hannah Lewi

Bottom
Composite Digital Image,
created by Hannah Lewi,
2022

Source material:

Furnishing Fabric titled
Aboriginal, c. 1951,
designers Beverley
Knox for Ailsa
Graham Art Fabrics,
RMIT Design Archives.

Cover for record titled
“Strawinsky: Firebird
Suite, Bizet: Children's
Game Suite, Ravel:
Mother Goose Suite,”
1961, designer Max
Robinson for World
Record Club,
RMIT Design Archives.

Photograph of Lansell
Road Flats, 1951,
architect Ernest Fooks,
photographer
Wolfgang Sievers,
RMIT Design Archives.

Top
Composite Digital Image,
created by Hannah Lewi,
2022

Source material:
“Interior Design,”
The Leader, Wednesday,
June 6, 1956,
RMIT Design Archives

Perspective of 437
St. Kilda Road,
Melbourne, 1960,
architect, Geoffrey
Woodfall for Woodfall
and Reynolds Architects,
RMIT Design Archives.

Drawing of proposed
GMH Caprice tail lamp,
c. 1968, designer, Phillip
Zmood, RMIT Design
Archives.

Bottom
Composite Digital Image,
created by Hannah Lewi,
2022

Source material:
Student architectural
model of a two-storey
terrace house, c. 1960-
1970, creator unknown,
RMIT Design Archives.

Photograph of Prestige
Fabric designed by
Gerard Herbst, 1951,
photographer, Wolfgang
Sievers, RMIT Design
Archives.

Cover of *Fabric in Motion*
program, 1953, designed
by The House of Prestige
for the ANA, Brighton
Branch, RMIT Design
Archives.

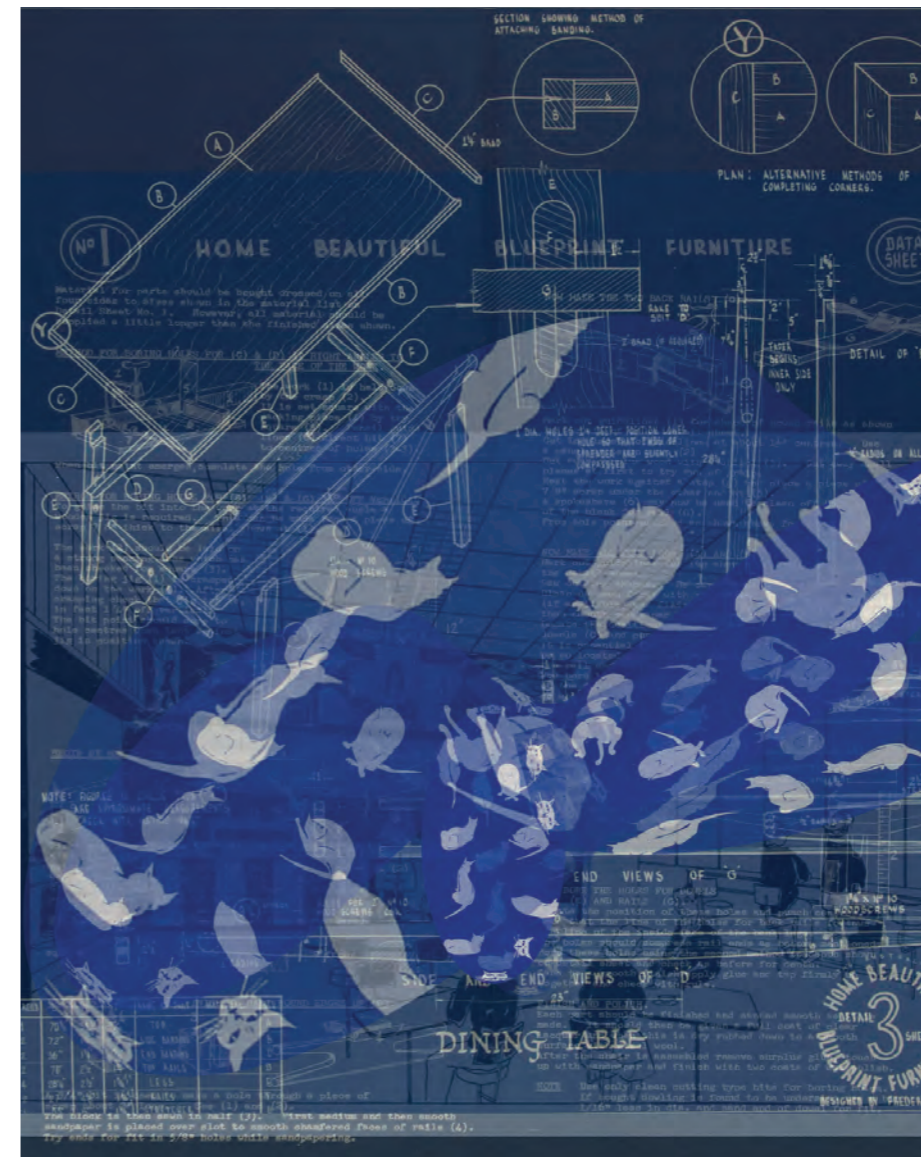
Opposite
Composite Digital Image,
created by Hannah Lewi,
2022

Source material:
Wall hanging featuring
Family Cat design fabric,
designer Frances Burke
Fabrics Pty Ltd, c. 1950,
RMIT Design Archives.

Blueprints for “Home
Beautiful Blueprint
Furniture’ Dining Table
No. 3, designer Fred Ward
for *The Australian Home
Beautiful*, RMIT Design
Archives.



With textual commentary often fading into the background, and enabled by an ignorance of scale, provenance etc. we can create endless online resemblances and differences however superficial. Perhaps then the enduring fascination with the mid-twentieth century paper museum is explained by its continued prescience as a metaphor for our collective fascination with the image today and its inexorable slide into the digital imaginary. Malraux wanted to create a kind of museum that was flexible, endless, and universal, albeit with all the problems and contradictions that this poetic vision entailed, then as it still does now about image agency, display and dissemination. My own experimentation with the RMIT Design Archives, along with projects like Whitelaw’s ‘Succession,’ and Yaneva’s work with the CCA, in contrast seeks to explore the specificity that archive collections can also offer; their selectivity and connectivity to the particular and the situated rather than the universal and the place-less. The original series of photographs of Malraux, taken by Maurice Jarnoux, included other images that are less well known and clearly taken late in the shoot. One shot, in particular, depicts Malraux lying somewhat inelegantly on the floor as though he has now retreated fully into his domestic life and setting again, which the critic Amédée Ozenfant called a “musée total à domicile” and which translates as “an entire museum in one’s own home.”



The fluidity of separation between work and home, as this image predicts, intensified immeasurably over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. We now routinely undertake knowledge work from domestic settings in the production and consumption of culture, and we all carry around shiny little, “total domestic museums,” in our pockets that can be consulted at any moment while reclining on the floor in our living rooms.

Finally, in conclusion, I return to Yaneva on the architectural archive and her account of the CCA. An event like the one held in honour of Harriet Edquist’s work in 2021, the ensuing publication and the work that will hopefully follow from the continued existence of the RMIT Design Archives, illustrate the crucial role that archives continue to play as sources for future historical writing and creative projects. Yaneva teases out both the potentials and the pitfalls of the archive impulse in pursuit of “the fragility and clumsiness of what is called Architectural History”: its limitations, biases and lacunae. Yet archives such as this can also deeply influence the way we continue to make representations of our shared design histories that are, unlike Malraux’s museum, profoundly situated in places — whether that be entire cities, singular buildings, on the floor, the screen or exhibition walls.

Endnotes

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- 6 Whitelaw, “Succession,” 395.
- 7 Whitelaw, “Succession,” 395.
- 8 Walter Grasskamp, *The Book on the Floor, André Malraux and the Imaginary Museum*, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2016). See also: Walter Grasskamp on André Malraux, Getty Art & Ideas podcast, released November 30, 2021. Accessed April, 20, 2021, <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/audio-walter-grasskamp-on-andre-malraux/>
- 9 Grasskamp, *The Book on the Floor*, 5.
- 10 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 4.



**Anna Castelli Ferrieri and the Tectonics of Plastic
in Industrial Design**

AnnMarie Brennan



Anna Castelli Ferrieri and the Tectonics of Plastic in Industrial Design

AnnMarie Brennan

ABSTRACT

The article examines three key works by the Italian designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri (1918–2006), whose career began in urban planning and architecture yet proceeded to gain the most success within the field of industrial design. It foregrounds her interdisciplinary career, traversing professional boundaries between the fields of urban planning, architecture and industrial design through a socio-technical framework of the material objects that she designed. By investigating the commercial success of the

Kartell 4970-84 Modular containers, the 4870 Stackable Chair, and the 4822-44 Stool, this research identifies a particular characteristic of Castelli Ferrieri's design method; an approach which, this article argues, draws upon her education, knowledge, and experience in architecture. It is with these projects that we can see how Castelli Ferrieri attempted to create, with the limitations of manufacturing processes and the characteristics of materials: a tectonics of plastic.

During the first week of July 1992 at RMIT in Melbourne, the Italian architect and designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri presented a series of lectures as part of the Domus Winter School. This initiative was part of the RMIT Centre for Design's initiative for an international collaboration with Domus Academy, a Milanese research centre and graduate institution affiliated with the well-known *Domus* magazine. Its sponsors included federal, state and industrial partners such as the City of Melbourne, the Australian Council, the National Industry Extension Scheme, and the Plastics Institute of Australia. From 1991 to 1996 this collaboration resulted in a week-long annual event attended by thirty to forty design professionals, students, and academics.¹

Castelli Ferrieri was selected among a group of other design professionals teaching at Domus Academy which included Michele di Lucchi, Clino Trini Castell, Ezio Manzini, Mario Trimarchi, James Wines, Mario Bellini, and John Thackara. Reflecting on her work, personal story and professional background, Castelli Ferrieri's experience stands out as exceptional. Her unique professional life consisted of the highs and lows of post-war Italy: the continuation of ideals from a Rational Modernist architecture and a career that actually followed the dictum of Italian architect Ernesto Rogers, who stated that the new realm of the architect in the post-war era included everything in scope and scale from the "city to the spoon."² While Roger's sentiment is often repeated and cited to describe the post-war aspirations of the architectural profession, his proclamation was rarely practiced as it was in the life and career of Anna Castelli Ferrieri.

Castelli Ferrieri's first Domus Winter School lecture, titled "Italian Design Experience on the Threshold of the Next Millennium," was the first introductory lecture in a series of four that occurred during her visit. The presentation

provided a rapid historical and critical review of Italian design in the preceding fifty years, posing the question, "What's the secret of Italian design?" For Castelli Ferrieri, "Italian design is always alive because it has always been aware of the political, social, [and] economic."³ The second lecture, 'Design Keys for Urban Design: Quality of Public Areas,' served to inspire students for a studio exercise to follow, combining Castelli Ferrieri's background in urban design with industrial design.⁴ After explaining the theme and the problems of designing within an urban context, she presented successful urban case studies from around the world ideally suited to the people who inhabited them and possessed what she termed 'socially aggregating qualities.' The third lecture focused on her work across the fields of urban planning and architecture. The final lesson, 'New Frontiers of Design: The Materials,' provided a detailed look at her industrial design products and is the lecture most relevant to this article as it touches on the topic of materiality and its formal implications.

The multiple disciplines of Castelli Ferrieri's background are a large part of her professional narrative, from urban



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Preceding Pages

Kartell 4870 Stackable Chair, 1986, designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri, ABS injection-moulded plastic. Anna Castelli Ferrieri Archives ©Museo Kartell.

Opposite

Anna Castelli Ferrieri in her Milan studio, 1974. Photo Valerio Castelli. Anna Castelli Ferrieri Archives ©Museo Kartell.



This Page
Kartell 4970-84 Round
Modular Units, 1964–69,
designer Anna Castelli
Ferrieri, ABS injection-
moulded plastic, Anna
Castelli Ferrieri Archives
©Museo Kartell.

to work in industrial design since a profession of trained industrial designers was yet to be established. Architects were the closest ‘experts’ schooled in design subjects such as structure, materiality, detail, and proportion. The claim that “Italian design was born at the heart of Italian architectural culture,” can be seen in the varying scales of projects; from the design of exhibition and interiors to office buildings and lighting fixtures, by architects such as Gio Ponti, Franco Albini, Achille Castiglioni, Vico Magistretti, Marco Zanuso and Ettore Sottsass.²⁴

Unlike the architecture profession, industrial design was injected with national and international capital from the Italian Economic Miracle. As a result of these circumstances, Castelli Ferrieri directed her focus toward serving as Art Director and designing furniture for the company she co-founded with her husband Giulio Castelli starting in the late-1960s. By designing everyday objects, Castelli Ferrieri found the most satisfaction and professional success, recalling in 1997: “I begin to design objects: they are everywhere almost instantaneously ... Every object is a message which awaits many answers.”²⁵ Indeed, Castelli Ferrieri’s designs won two Compasso d’Oro awards, the first for the 4870 Stackable Chair in 1987 and the second in 1994 for the Hannah cutlery line for Sambonet. Her designed objects are exhibited in museums such as MoMA in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Triennale Design Museum in Milan, and the Chicago Athenaeum. From 1969 – 1970, Castelli Ferrieri became the first woman to chair the Italian Design Association (ADI) – an Italian design institution which she and Giulio Castelli founded.

Kartell: the emergence of plastic and the relationship between architects and industrial design in Italy

The pre-eminence of Milanese design culture in the post-war era can be attributed to access to the latest research and technology, a tradition of working with local craftsmen, and the ability to work closely with manufacturers and experiment with new materials.²⁶ At the Politecnico di Milano, fellow scientist Giulio Natta conducted research on plastic materials, specifically, isotactic polypropylene, and was awarded the Nobel prize for his efforts in 1963.²⁷ This research environment contributed to the schooling and entrepreneurship of Giulio Castelli, a student of chemical

engineering, and inspired him to establish in 1949 one of the most successful plastic goods company – Kartell.²⁸

At the centre of this post-war Italian design phenomenon was the partnership, both personal and professional, of Giulio Castelli and Anna Castelli Ferrieri. They were friends since high school and were married soon after Anna completed her degree in 1943. When Giulio asked Anna to solve some problems at the company, she was a bit reluctant as she did not want to work with her husband in a professional capacity.²⁹ However Castelli Ferrieri realised that the collaborative relationship presented a special opportunity for designer and manufacturer, as communication and prototyping between the two occurred very easily, often resulting in creating close ties between companies and designers.³⁰ Their collaboration in founding Kartell created new typologies of plastic products designed with an aesthetic consideration. As architect and former Curator of Design at MoMA Emilio Ambasz observed, Castelli Ferrieri “was not only influential as a professional designer, she educated her husband, an industrialist and engineer, on the importance of quality in design. ... Together they took great risks.”³¹ The couple did not realise it at the time, but their work contributed to establishing an emerging field that would later be designated as Italian industrial design. Their challenge was to find “new solutions for everyday problems by using new technologies that allowed us to solve them well and cheaply.”³² The situation required them to understand the changing relationship with materials and methods used to manufacture products. Traditional modes of manufacturing at the time, such as cutting, turning, and milling, were used to shape wood or metal. Plastic required the development of novel manufacturing technologies to form the material, such as fusion, stamping or injection moulding. As Castelli Ferrieri notes, “This new material had no shape. It was neutral: A cultural material that would take a shape only through our design work.”³³

During Castelli Ferrieri’s early career she observed, first-hand, an emerging trend in the practice of architecture in Italy during the 1950s and 60s which would have an impact on her approach to industrial design. Architects that she worked for such as Albini and Gardella, along with Carlo

Scarpa, Pier Luigi Nervi, and Mario Ridolfi were regarded for their attention to architectural technology as expressed in a project’s detailing, whether it was for an exhibition installation, piece of furniture, or an entire building. The architect Vittorio Gregotti, a student of Rogers, would write in 1983 about these architects and their prioritisation of the tectonic detail, by emphasising the “analysis and displays of materials, provided by the laws of constructions and formation of the architectural object, constitute[ing] its principal support.”³⁴

Gregotti was one of a group of architectural theorists who sought to critique the hegemony of Postmodern architecture by delving into examples found in the past where architects sought to abandon adhering to a superficial style of architecture derived from a pastiche of the Neo-Classical order, and instead looked to find the poetic or expressive nature of architecture embodied within a building’s tectonics. By tectonics, Gregotti and colleagues meant the consideration for the structure of a building, the structural properties of the building material, and the detailing of individual parts or components and how they are joined together.³⁵ In other words, architectural tectonics not only encompasses an understanding of construction methods in relation to material and form; it serves as a building’s primary means of aesthetic expression. For Gregotti, architects Albini, Scarpa, Ridolfi and others in this group prioritised the detail [particolari architettomici] showcasing the technological assembly of building parts in order to create meaning through form: “The connection between the floors, the relation of the materials and the differences in the use, both practical and symbolic, thus became more explicit and for the first time expressive.”³⁶

Architectural tectonic theory is further categorised into two means of construction: additive methods using individual elements, such as a timber framework, and the stereotomic, which is a carving away from a solid heavy mass, such as a load-bearing stone wall.³⁷ Many times through her text and lectures, Castelli Ferrieri applied this same thinking to industrial design and provided the example of Michelangelo: “[He] used to say that his sculptures already existed inside the block of marble; what was important was to know how to draw them out.”³⁸ Castelli Ferrieri approached the designing of form in a similar way: “At the beginning of my work, materials were something existing and which we had known before being born: wood, metals, stone, glass, clay. ... The working procedure – which we term as mechanical now – followed Michelangelo’s “removing by force’ approach.”³⁹ The following three case studies demonstrate Castelli Ferrieri’s design strategy. They explore the influence of her architectural training and innate knowledge of materials and tectonic detail, in which the design is based upon knowing when certain types of materials and forms will perform better than others in certain instances, some for tensile structural forces and others for compression, and using that technical knowledge as a means of formal expression.

4962-64 Square and 4970-84 Round modular units (aka Componibili)

During her work, Castelli Ferrieri came to understand that there were two ways to stimulate innovation in product design. The first was to develop a new material or new manufacturing technique. The second entailed creating a new typology. The latter was the most ideal means to drive innovation as it was, she noted, the “sort of challenge that implies in-depth involvement in the continuous evolution of style of living that alone allows one to understand the existing unexpressed needs and then transform the future into the present.”⁴⁰

While managing some of the first furniture pieces made entirely out of plastic at Kartell, Castelli Ferrieri worked on her own major product; a square modular container that stacked onto other units to create different storage solutions.⁴¹ With the 4962-64 Square modular units, and later the cylindrical units, Castelli Ferrieri implemented both of these innovative methods by creating a new type of furniture reflecting the casualisation of domestic realm during the mid-1960s.⁴² Depending on the number of containers stacked upon each other, the modules could create a nightstand, a set of drawers for the kitchen, or a tower for the living room. Indeed, the modular units were the best-selling Kartell products for 10 years and they are still sold by the company decades after they were first introduced to the market.

The significance of Castelli Ferrieri’s modular units within Italian design history can be understood through the theoretical concepts posed by designer and theorist Tomás Maldonado in 1976, design historian Augusto Morello in 1984, and recently, the architect and designer Michele De Lucchi at the 50th anniversary of the modular unit’s creation in 2022. Morello described them as “the product that perhaps more than any other summarizes in itself the quality that specifically characterizes Kartell production and the one whose number of innovative records is still unsurpassed today.”⁴³ He claimed that Kartell’s furniture business approach began with the 1967 production of Castelli Ferrieri’s 4970–84 modular units; a type of product he referred to as an ‘interstitial object’ that was a dominant, versatile piece used in any room in the home which affected the rest of the living environment. The units epitomised the idea of the interstitial object as they are “items of furniture or accessories that have a form substantially complete onto itself.”⁴⁴

In his volume of essays, *Disegno industriale: un riesame*, Maldonado described the Italian industrial design products from this moment in a similar manner, explaining that the products were directed toward the emergence of a new type of elite consumer in industrial countries. This elite consumer was, according to Maldonado, uncomfortable with their newfound wealth and was “still restless, hesitant, not at all sure of the role conferred by a purchasing power that has just been obtained, but which, precisely for this reason, is no longer at ease in the traditional home environment,” which recreated a “simulacra of continuity.”⁴⁵ More recently, commenting on the fiftieth anniversary of the Componibili, Italian designer Michele De Lucchi explains how the modular units disrupted this phenomenon of the simulacra of continuity:

Anna Castelli Ferrieri’s Componibili isn’t just an excellent, functional, practical, and long-lasting Kartell product, but an important milestone in the culture of design. I connect it above all to the “mismatched” phenomenon that introduced a new and revolutionary parameter of imagination and freedom to home furnishings. Good-bye to matching upholstery and drapes. So long paired tables and chairs.

No more drapes and tablecloths with the same pattern.⁴⁶

Maldonado referred to this new post-war socio-economic phenomenon as a “simulacrum of precariousness” where new typologies of furniture express a ‘precarious aesthetic’: bold, funny, irreverent, and always a point of conversation.⁴⁷ Certainly, Castelli Ferrieri’s square and round modular units fit this description as they are open and versatile, allowing for the consumer to assemble, arrange and ‘design’ the final form of the furniture.

The square module units, along with Zanuso and Sapper’s 4999 children’s chair for Kartell, used the novel



manufacturing method of injection moulding and a new type of plastic called acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS). While there are multiple reasons plastic furniture became popular in the 1960s and 70s, the performance, quality, and price of this new material along with the possibility of adding any colour, contributed to its popularity.⁴⁸ ABS was rigid enough to allow for the units to be assembled by simply stacking one onto another without requiring screws or tools. A solid coupling made of a groove in the bottom of each modular unit with a corresponding ridge in the top of another unit below stabilised the pieces so that the units would not slide off each other. Former curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at MoMA Paola Antonelli notes the tectonics at play in terms of the form and material coming together, claiming,

The Componibili are not only an example of elegance and synthesis, but experimentation as well. Before then, ABS had never been used in such an innovative way, its futuristic splendour contrasting with the traditional smack of a shutter door furnishing element, and its mechanical limits (an excessively large surface would have been too fragile) overcome by the modularity of the system, to create tiny Metabolist-style architectural constructions...⁴⁹

Advancements in the composition of plastic and in injection moulding processes allowed for precision in the production of parts, continuously repeated thousands of times over. Modularity allowed the furniture piece to be broken down into separate smaller parts to accommodate the machining of appropriate moulds for the machine tools. When understood in terms of the limitations of the manufacturing processes of plastic, one can comprehend why an entire plastic table or bookcase could not be injection-moulded as one piece and that the modularity of the Componibili was crucial to its design.

4870 Stackable Chair

To understand the significance of the 4870 Stackable chair one needs to look at the first two chairs made entirely out of plastic by Kartell: the 4999 Children's chair/toy designed by Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper and the 4867 chair by Joe Colombo. By 1964, the patent for polyurethane had expired

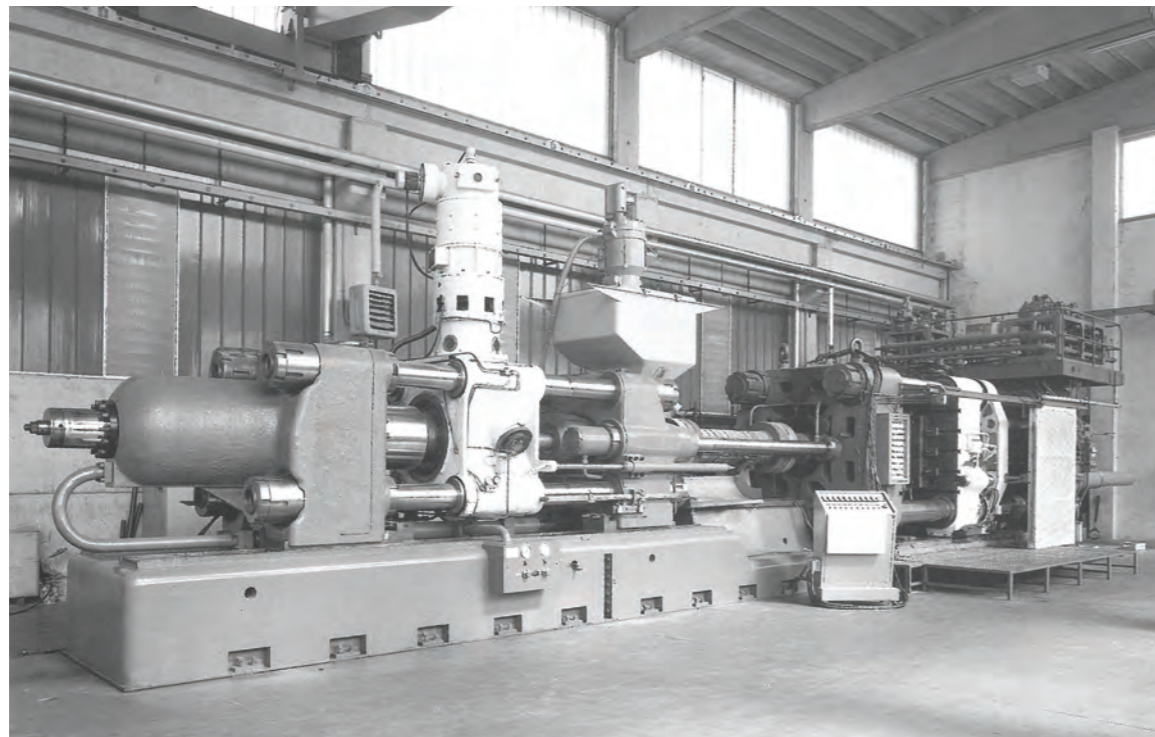
and its price had dropped, providing Kartell the possibility of creating a plastic product larger than their regular line at the time, which included mostly domestic wares such as buckets and food containers. The lower price allowed for a new realm of possibilities to experiment and apply this type of plastic to a loading bearing children's chair which could also perform as a stacking toy. The small scale ensured that the structural integrity of the plastic could carry the weight of a child, versus an adult, and the small size accommodated the limitations of the injection moulding machine, the most expensive part of the manufacturing process.⁵⁰ The success of this chair led to an adult chair produced entirely out of plastic, the 4867 chair by Joe Colombo. By the mid-1980s, Kartell's catalogue lacked a stackable plastic chair, therefore the business impetus behind the design and production of a new plastic chair was to revisit the typology and fill the market niche. Castelli Ferrieri observed the technological successes and failures of these earlier projects and applied this insight to her design for the 4870 Stackable chair.

The first design objective – to make a comfortable chair – focused on the design of the backrest; a rigid lower back structured for support and an upper part formed for flexibility of movement of the upper body. To accommodate the ergonomic priorities of the design, the mould for injection moulding required a more complex articulation to avoid undercutting.⁵¹ The challenge of making the chair “stackable” in an efficient, practical, and aesthetic manner was resolved by having the two back legs insert into slots in the seat of another chair, rather placing them on the outer edge of the chair seat. The location of the back legs also permitted the chairs to be placed next to each other, reducing the amount of space in between chairs when arranged, for example, in a lecture hall for a large audience. The main body, including the seat and backrest, was manufactured as one injection-moulded piece. The individual legs are inserted using a solid joint of male and female connectors, where the four legs slide onto the cylindrical pegs at the four corners on the underside of the seat. This joint does not require any additional parts or fasteners for the connection, contributing to both the ease of chair's assembly, packaging, shipping and distribution.

Above
The “nerviated” underside of the 4870 stackable chair. Designer, Anna Castelli Ferrieri Anna Castelli Ferrieri Archives ©Museo Kartell.

Opposite
Pier Luigi Nervi, Palace of Labour Ribbed Floor Slab System, Turin, 1961. ©Pier Luigi Nervi Project Association.

Continued



This Page
Injection Moulding
machine for the Kartell
4870 Stackable chair.
Anna Castelli Ferrieri
Archives ©Museo Kartell.

Opposite
Kartell 4870 Stackable
Chair, 1986, designer
Anna Castelli Ferrieri.
Anna Castelli Ferrieri
Archives ©Museo Kartell.

“Chairs,” as Castelli Ferrieri noted, “are the articles of furniture that suffer the greatest structural strain a designer is likely to encounter.”⁵² On the underside of the chair is a dense series of ribs used to structurally stiffen the seat, a feature Castelli Ferrieri referred to as ‘nerviati.’ While at first it may seem that she is citing the branching of the human nervous system, it is a reference to the design and structural work of the Italian architect and engineer Pier Luigi Nervi, who became known for designing large, self-supporting, column-less thin shell structures for stadiums made of concrete. Nervi’s designs were significant as he only added structure to where it was required in a ribbed factory floor slab system, following the forces of the structural loads and exploiting the plastic nature of reinforced concrete or ferrocement – a ‘plastic’ building material that can be easily moulded and tectonically does well in both tension and compression. Moreover, Nervi’s unadorned structures served as the building’s central mode of expression without the need to add superficial decoration or cladding, thereby introducing a technology-based aesthetic in Italy.⁵³

In a similar manner, Castelli Ferrieri added to the chair seat a motif of grooves marking the net configuration of structural ribs on the underside of the chair. This decorative element expresses the structural tectonics of the chair while at the same time disguising an expected visual defect caused by a suction mark during the manufacturing process. As Castelli Ferrieri explains, “With the 4870 chair, I have shown that even with a poor material in terms of structural resistance, it is possible to achieve a snappy and solid shape; just use it in thicknesses and with the structural setting appropriate to its performance characteristics.”⁵⁴

The 4870 Stackable chair considers the manufacturing process and, similar to tectonic expression in architecture, the traces from the processes of production perform as aesthetic inspiration for many of her design decisions, which required an in-depth understanding how the machine tools operate. The injection moulding machine for the 4870 chair, weighing 1500 tons, was the result of 8,000 hours of labour to create a machine that “spits out a shiny finished chair every 80 seconds.”⁵⁵ Released in 1985, the 4870 chair received the Compasso D’Oro award two years later.

4822-44 Stool

Kartell was eager to manufacture stools for many years, however the stability and rigidity of this seating type made entirely of plastic posed a structural challenge. By 1984, advancements in injection moulding along with the development of theoretical testing of structural loads on the chairs and stools with computer software, allowed designers to “concentrate their attention on the linguistic resolution of the complex relationship between structural, ergonomic and manufacturing requirements.”⁵⁶ As per Castelli Ferrieri’s previous observation that innovation in industrial design arises from the invention of a new typology or advances in technology and materials, the realisation of the 4822-44 stool followed the advancement of technology for the injection moulding of structural polyurethane. This advancement allowed for the possibility to embed metal reinforcing within polyurethane and take the form of a fabric in rigid or flexible form.

Polyurethanes were discovered by the German industrial chemist Otto Bayer in 1937 however the material was not used for industrial purposes until the 1950s. Today we encounter polyurethanes in the forms of earplugs, packaging, adhesives, and foam cushions for mattresses and upholstery. A key attribute that distinguishes polyurethanes from other types of plastic is the production method, which does not require machine tools to provide heat or high pressure as the material expands into a foam formed by a mould.⁵⁷ By 1969 Bayer made an entire car out of plastic and created the first automobile bodywork from a new production method called ‘structural’ or reinforced or injection moulding (RRIM) using polyurethane.⁵⁸ The stiffness of the polyurethane bodywork was increased by adding fiberglass mats into the mould cavity. According to Castelli Ferrieri, by 1971, the industry would refer to RRIM as the “reinforced cement of plastic materials.”⁵⁹ Following Bayer’s manufacturing methods for the plastic car, Kartell used the injection moulded method to create thin yet strong polyurethane walls between 4 to 50 mm for its furniture.

The first project to use polyurethane in the Kartell line was a set of furniture for FIAT car dealers designed by architect and designer Gae Aulenti. Consisting of the 4854 chair, the



Kartell
progetti per il presente / design for the present

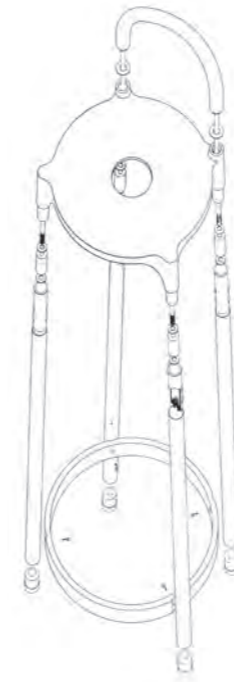


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Stool from the Kartell Stools series, 1979-98, designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri, polypropylene, polyurethane, iron, polyamide, Photographer Centrokappa, Anna Castelli Ferrieri Archives ©Museo Kartell.

Opposite

Exploded axonometric drawing of the Kartell 4822-44 stools, 1979, designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri. Anna Castelli Ferrieri Archives ©Museo Kartell.



4794 easy chair, and the 4894 coffee table, the project was an exercise in corporate branding as it attempted to mimic the curved smooth lines of FIAT automobile bodywork in the furniture. Being made of polyurethane, the material and production method allowed for this new type of form since the material did not require expensive steel pressurized moulds. Following the production of the 4854 chair in 1972, the easy armchair and coffee table entered production in 1973 and continued within the Kartell Collection for 11 years. The 4854 chair, Kartell's first polyurethane chair, was rigid but not reinforced, so mistakes were made in the measurements of the moulds and consequently it encountered issues in terms of comfort, strength, sales, and durability and it ceased production soon after it entered the market.⁶⁰

With the knowledge and experience of the 4854 chair, Castelli Ferrieri originally determined that the stool seat should be made in polyurethane, since the sudden differences in the thickness of the seat required a foamed material. However, this version of the design encountered repeated problems due to the material's weaknesses. As Castelli Ferrieri later reflected, "polyurethane had structural limits – the tensile stress was very heavy, there was some yielding, there were complaints ... and our bodies move in ways that computer [structural modelling] can't predict."⁶¹ The solution arrived through Bayer's development of rigid glass-reinforced polyurethane. Similar to Bayer's automotive bodywork panels, the seat was injection-moulded with foamed polypropylene reinforced by fiberglass.⁶²

Castelli Ferrieri's focus on the tectonics of detailing and the points of connection between different types of material comes into play in the design of the stool. The first model failed because the plastic seat was not strong enough and cracked at the leg joints. It was then reinforced with a thin disc of plywood encapsulated within the polyurethane, adding to the seat's tensile strength. Inspired by bicycle handlebars, the stool's handle in the form of a double curve posed a manufacturing problem since it could not be manufactured by bending a metal tube. This issue was resolved by moulding the handle in polypropylene and reinforcing it lengthwise with a metal structure that crossed the seat and ended in the threading, which the metal legs could screw into. Another challenge entailed the footrest ring that served to align and stabilize the four stool legs.

Initially manufactured from high-impact polystyrene, the tests demonstrated that its strength was inconsistent. Again, the tactic of reinforcing the polypropylene with metal rectified the issue.⁶³

The stool began production in 1979 and was considered a very successful product for Kartell. For one, the Italian fast food restaurant chain Ciao! purchased the stool for their franchises. As Castelli Ferrieri noted:

When I pass by Piazza Cordusio (Milan) and see them in Ciao! ... I realize that they are very decorative. Yet, this stool, the 4822-44, which was my biggest success, represents no typological innovation. It was born suddenly, late one evening, a bit like all my things, since I like to go to bed late. The next morning in the studio I drew it to life with all its details since I already had it perfectly finished in my head. Everyone has always liked it since the beginning and it sells very well both in Italy and abroad, indeed it is more successful in Italy.⁶⁴

According to Morello, the success of this stool can be attributed to a combination of forces: its form and design, the ability to overcome technological difficulties to expand the range of products, targeted marketing campaigns and the streamlining of national and international distribution channels organised by an updated company and managerial business structure.

Conclusion

Reflecting on her career in 1997, Castelli Ferrieri stated, "My life is long and rich in work that crosses all aspects of design, from city planning to architecture and industrial design. I don't think that the approaches to design changes in tackling these different dimensions."⁶⁵ Indeed, this approach, which originates from this moment in post-war Italy, resonates with the establishment of a contemporary global practice as it addresses an appreciation for the expanding field of design dependent upon advancements in technology, a progressive broad outlook and transdisciplinary knowledge.

More so than any of her contemporaries, Castelli Ferrieri understood the intricacies of plastic material and its manufacturing processes and could speak and write in detail about them. As co-founder of Kartell, she possessed an intimate knowledge of the machine tools and manufacturing processes. This knowledge was directly applied to her design approach and determined the specific forms of products. In explaining her design methods, Castelli Ferrieri points out how the formal aesthetics and detailing of her objects were driven by the properties of the material – plastic – along with a deep knowledge of advanced methods of manufacturing technology and the creation and use of the machine tools.

The lessons on architectural tectonics and the importance of the detail while working with Albini, along with the aspirational goals of a post-war international rational architecture movement, had a lasting impression. This experience not only informed her design decisions but contributed to the establishment of an entire Italian industrial design profession. When asked to reflect upon her professional experience, Castelli Ferrieri responded: "I must say that perhaps, I am one of the few people who has lived completely in first person, truly in first person, the whole history of design, of Italian rationalist design."⁶⁶ By revisiting these projects through the conceptual framework of architectural tectonics, we can see how Castelli Ferrieri's architectural background bolstered by her insight into manufacturing processes, had a unique impact on her work.

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66 Morozzi, *I designer Anna Castelli Ferrieri*, 98.

Acknowledgements

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Craft (ing) Place
A reflection, and reflections on, the complexity of place

Laurene Vaughan





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ABSTRACT

This reflective essay is an attempt to draw threads of connectivity between people, places and projects that I collaborated with Harriet Edquist on between 2007–2011. These projects traversed many landscapes, embraced different disciplines, and worked to build communities of enquiry that manifest in exhibitions and books.

Here I reflect on a project *The Stony Rises Project* and a book *Designing Place*, and how through them we discovered the nuances of place and the artefacts that make it. Like all research projects, they had origins in research that came prior and they have gone on to be the basis for new projects – the precedents for research and scholarship can take many forms.

The making of place, and the crafting of landscapes of home is an area of research and scholarship that has occupied many from across the discipline fields. It is a concern that has occupied me for nearly fifteen years in numerous forms and collaborations.

Between 2007 and 2011, in collaboration with Harriet Edquist, I explored the complexity of place. Situated within the Design Research Institute at RMIT, we co-led two transdisciplinary, cross university communities of enquiry. The first was titled the *Mediated City*, a collection of projects that sought to understand and identify the diverse ways that people mediate their experience of the city in its built and ephemeral form. Through this work key themes and constructs began to emerge across the projects. These included the role of archives, as living entities, that facilitated conversations between practices and artefacts of the past and the present, that could inform future practices. Harriet’s establishment of the RMIT Design Archives was part of this work, and collaborators included ACMI, the Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, State Library of Victoria and the Melbourne Museum.

Concurrently another thread emerged within the various projects, this was the way that location, landscape, cultures, and cultural heritage were fundamental to the experience and manifestation of place. Place within this context is phenomenological. It is grounded in the work of Berger¹, Tuan² and de Certeau³ – all of whom argue that is the intersection between people, practices, artefacts and locations which make place and our experience of it. Where Michel de Certeau argues that place is manifested through practices, John Berger claims that place is manifest as a result of presence and the traces of what has been. Yi-Fun Tuan argues that “objects anchor time,”⁴ they place us in

locations and they are cultural and reflect us back to the world. The various social and cultural practices that were central to the work of the researchers, were the means and the manifestation of the discovery.

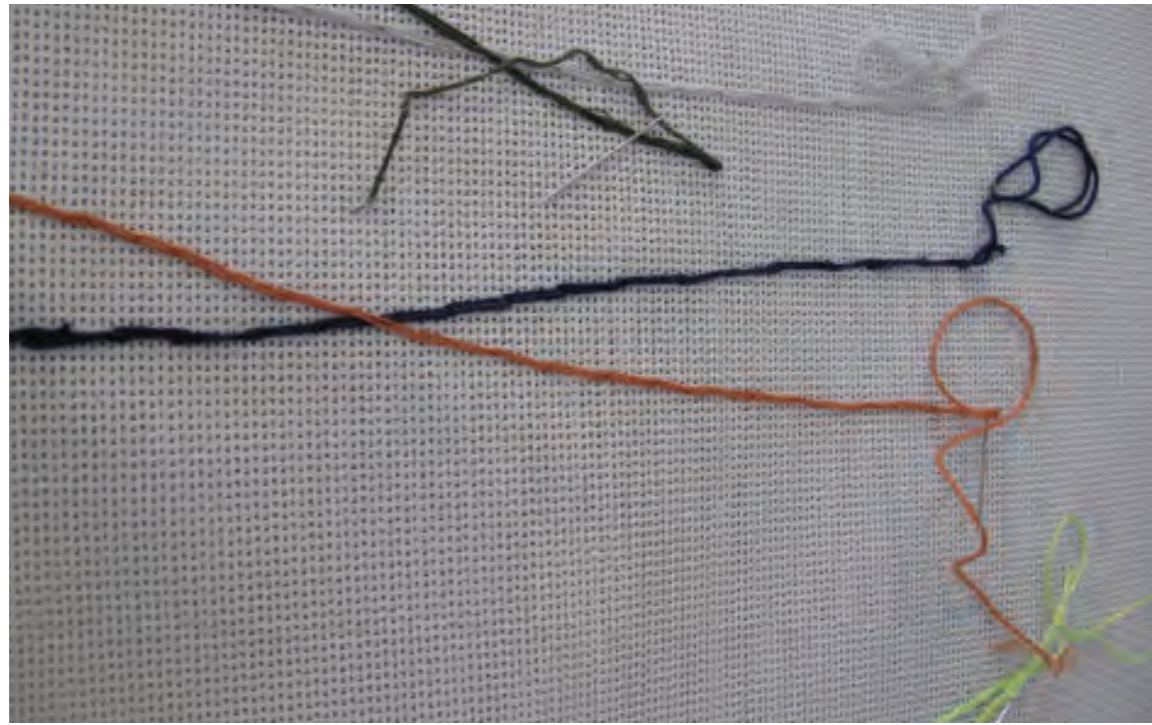
Through this body of work an interdisciplinary international collaboration emerged. Led by William Cartwright who was a leader of the International Cartographic Society and a professor at RMIT, members of the RMIT community joined and became leaders of the Art & Cartography Commission of the Society⁵ contributing to field-breaking interdisciplinary scholarship, publications, collaborations, workshops and events.

Preceding Pages
Drystone wall in Dalvue Lane. Photographer: Neil Follett. www.weekendnotes.com/dry-stone-walls-victoria/ Digitally enhanced.

Opposite
Views across Western Victoria: landscape and drystone walls, 2009, photographer Laurene Vaughan.

Cornwall drystone wall, 2009, photographer Laurene Vaughan

Continued



Above
Craft Exchange
detail, 2009, artist
and photographer
Laurene Vaughan,
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Opposite
Room, Nérac, (detail),
2019, photographer
Laurene Vaughan,
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It was at this time that the name for the research community within the Design Research Institute changed to the Geoplaced Knowledge Project, and for the next three years, a diverse and vibrant body of experimental and applied research, scholarship and practice was undertaken. Harriet and I continued to lead the community as it grew, and new areas of practice enquiry in the fields of social design and participatory art and design practices evolved. There are too many practices and projects by remarkable researchers to list here, but there is one project that for this essay I want to reflect on. This is the Stony Rises Project, curated by Harriet Edquist, Lisa Byrne and me.

For the remainder of this essay, I will reflect on the Stony Rises Project and the insights on ongoing bodies of work that Harriet and I have done, in what I tend to think of as living reflections. This will take the form of words and images.

The Stony Rises Project emerged from a chance observation I made as I stared out of the window of a train from London to Penzance in the UK. As the train traversed the country, I noticed that the landscape and the structures built upon it began to change. Slowly, and most definitely by the time the train stopped at its destination, I experienced an overwhelming sense of 'home' in a place to which I had never been. Two particular pieces of vernacular architecture drew my attention, simple stone huts beaten by robust seaside weather, and drystone walls dividing up the land into smaller allotments and roadside barriers. These were elements that I had grown up with on the other side of the world in Western Victoria, Australia.

Drystone walls are a multi-cultural phenomenon. They appear on most continents as an effective means to both clear land of rocks and dividing land into workable parcels. In many ways there is no surprise that they were in both places for they are a marker of colonial settlement in Australia, but as our research would discover they also appear in the traditional farming practices of the Gunditjmarra people of this region of Australia.

Between 2008 and 2009, Harriet, Lisa and I embarked on an enquiry that became known as the Stony Rises Project. The projects discussed here are best accessed

through the project website.⁶ In this project we developed a methodology for collaboratively investigating a deep knowledge and experience of place with a community of artists, designers, architects and cultural historians that resulted in a traveling exhibition and the book, *Designing Place*⁷ (2010).

The diverse contributions to this project in both the book and the exhibition, articulate in many ways the ambitions of the Geoplaced Knowledge Project itself. The work included digital paintings, documentaries, printmaking, installations, complex artefactual maps, sculptures, and landscape interventions. The essays in the book brought historic analysis, catalogues of homesteads, anthropological discoveries, and poetic observations into a multidimensional discourse of the region. It was a rich body of work that evidences the complexity of landscapes, colonisation, conceptions of home – its making and loss. Vicky Couzens' work "prangawan pootpakyoyano yoowa" was an articulation of the bloody realities of the wars between her People and the invading Europeans: it challenged and positioned the poetry and observations of all the other contributions. These multiple histories, through different configurations in the different galleries that it toured to, ensured that they had to speak and be seen in relation to one another.

My own work in the exhibition *Craft Exchange* reflected on the ways in which cultural landscapes articulate histories and narratives in a manner similar to a book. I proposed that these walls that make their way across the landscapes in Australia, reflect and evidence the presence of the immigrants who arrived in the 1800s to make a new life and remake the landscape of 'home,' often within a framework of survival, even as Vicky reminds us, at the great loss of those whose lands they took.

Harriet Edquist's focus in this project was on the homesteads of the Western District and the formation of a 'cultural landscape' that is known as the Stony Rises. Her essay in 'Designing Place' surveys the socio-cultural and historic origins for the region and she included a catalogue of 98 of homesteads from the 1840s to 1900, ranging from the grand to the relatively humble. Our field



Continued



Above Left and Right
Room, Nérac, (detail),
2019, photographer
Laurene Vaughan,
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Opposite
Crochet City, 2012–,
artist and photographer
Laurene Vaughan,
©Laurene Vaughan

work, engaging with communities and landowners was a catalyst for further projects for Harriet as she continued to research the complexities and constructions of colonial landscapes. A paper for the 2012 conference hosted by the Australian Garden History Society⁸ argued that homesteads in the Western District were sited according to principles of the Picturesque and not orientation to the sun, and that invariably they were on an axis with a volcanic cone or some other kind of landscape feature. In 2016 she collaborated with Stuart King to develop the interdisciplinary, cross institutional project Globalisation, Entrepreneurship and the South Pacific (GESP). This project which is still active has resulted in numerous academic publications, presentations, and seminars in Tasmania and internationally.

To Dwell

The insights and numerous projects and collaborations that emerged through my partnership with Harriet in the Design Research Institute has had a sustained impact on my ongoing explorations of the construction of place and the ways that we dwell in both analogue and digital environments. I have become increasingly aware of the recursive and temporal dimensions of lived experience, and the ways that we make, remake places in which to dwell. The duration and form of our dwelling can have many forms and our connection to them likewise. With each iteration of a 'structure' we mark our presence and perhaps even work to erase the presence of others. The drystone walls of the Stony Rises did all this. They were utilitarian responses to a desire to cultivate food and claim ownership, they were an introduced system or method that had as many variances as the people who built them, even as they had similarities to the methods used by the Indigenous peoples and first nations landowners, but they paid no heed to this as they made their mark at that time.

Over time, these walls have been remade and repaired, as Carmel Wallace's work in the Stony Rises Project, 'Wall Wounds' evidences. With each iteration there are slight signature changes, the method and style of the original builder fades, perhaps just a little or a lot. Wall building is what we may call a trade craft – a tradition passed between

families that has of recent times been formally taught. The trained eye can read the styles, in a manner that anyone with a deep knowledge of a creative or crafted form can.

What was once a necessity, is now a style, occurring in landscapes where there is no need to clear the land and the rocks are transported in from unknown locations.

Prior to the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 induced lockdowns, where extended time in a solitary room became the norm, I undertook a residency at Studio Faire in Nérac, France. Here I endeavoured to explore the nature of a closed and intense space. Inspired by Xavier de Maistre's 1994 novel, A journey around my room and George Perec's⁹ close contemplation of the nature of space(s) and the objects within, I contemplated and explored my room in the residency over a period of five days. Over time traces of past habitations and decorations became evident and I had an evolving sensation of being in and between times. I spent hours observing the room, investigating viewing points, details of walls, the condition and tone of the paint and in due course the marks on the walls became ever present. The room was furnished with period pieces of furniture but they did not perform as anchors and communicators of time in the way that marks on walls did. Perhaps it was their impermanence in the space which challenged their capacity to convey the stories of previous inhabitants. These items of furniture could be moved, they could be from elsewhere, they could even be new. Unlike the plastered walls, they had no inherent connection to this place.

The project, Room, is a scaled down application of the methodology of the Stony Rises Project. It was a deep observation of place and the layers of occupation, dwelling that had occurred overtime in one room. A room with two doors for entry and exit in what was built as a merchant's home. It might have been a grand sitting room, a master bedroom, it is uncertain. One set of stairs leads to the main entrance of the house down a formal stairway, the other to what appears to be servant quarters, evidenced by a smaller stair that leads to the garage or goods entrance. At some point the room was wallpapered to create a contemporary décor, the peeled back white painted plaster walls offered a contemporary and historic interpretation of its décor.

The interventions into the space seek only to evidence that there are marks, perhaps even wounds, from previous occupations and attempts at transformation.

Crochet City

Crochet City is a work that has been evolving since 2012. It began during my visiting professorship at the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh, USA. From my first day of arriving I was struck by the topography of the land and the style of the housing in the city. There were numerous variations of two-storey housing, especially notable being the differences between the grand homes and the worker housing. Pittsburgh is a city made from coal and steel and the intense pollution from steel production when it was at its peak, was everywhere. Although the cityscape was familiar from what I had seen in movies and the like, it felt like a truly foreign place.

Thus it was that I began to explore vernacular building forms constructed through an ad-hoc crochet method. These forms were to be both computational and timeless, over the months one building became two and it has evolved to become the foundation of a city of similar yet different structures; it is evolving.

The series of projects that Harriet Edquist and I led and participated in between 2007 and 2011 were innovative in their methodologies, their transdisciplinary communities and their focus on the complexities of place, particularly colonised place and its troubled histories. Landscapes, urban and rural were central to the projects, as were the cultural practices and artefacts that make them. The legacy of this work is evident in the ongoing research and projects of those who participated, including ourselves.

In my own practice and research, I have continued to explore these methodologies of noticing and moving through locations with the ambition of gaining insights into the many layers that make a place, a place. As I do this, I keep playing with the phrase temporal recursive computation, as a way of thinking about how we inhabit/dwell in place; and how this dwelling makes the place through its numerous iterations. I know that this phrase has foundations in technological structures and links to

the language of computation. I am not thinking that way – except when I think about the computation of crochet.

The research that I brought to our Stony Rises collaboration has become the foundation for my own thinking yet it harks back to work I had done some years earlier. It is work that seems to be temporally recursive; as it moves forward it brings the past with it. This in an area for ongoing enquiry.

Endnotes

- 1 John Berger, *The Shape of a Pocket* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002).
- 2 Yi-Fun Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- 3 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- 4 Yi-Fun Tuan, *Space and Place*. 76.
- 5 "The Art and Cartography Commission of the International Cartographic Society" accessed April 2, 2021 <https://artcarto.wordpress.com>
- 6 More details and images of the works in the exhibition and the locations that it toured to can be found at <https://netsvictoria.org.au/exhibition/the-stony-rises-project/>. *Designing Place* is available as an e-book through the Melbourne Books website, it was republished in 2022.
- 7 Harriet Edquist, Lisa Byrne & Laurene Vaughan, *Designing Place* (Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2010).
- 8 Harriet Edquist & Christine Reid, "Colonial pastoralist in western Victoria. A design history 1840–1910" (Australian Garden History Society Conference 2012).
- 9 Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, edited and translated by John Sturrock, (London: Penguin, 1997).

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Leah Martin and Simone Rule with Frances Burke textile Sea Horse stripe, RMIT Design Archives, 2021. Photography by Stephanie Bradford.

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