



SYDNEY 6

HINDERS LEWERS PLATES

**ABSTRACT ARTISTS,
FRIENDS,
PARTNERS,
SIBLINGS,
1940s - 1970s**

09 MAY - 02 AUGUST 2015



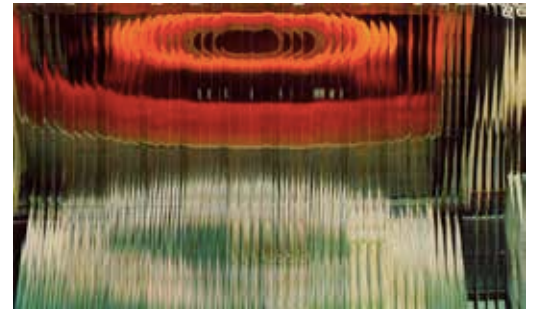
Gerald Lewers
Flight of Birds 1952
 wood sculpture
 120.0 cm x 50.0 cm
 Forestry Corporation NSW collection



Jocelyn Zander Plate
Red Bottle 1945
 oil on canvas
 48.0 x 21.7 cm
 Cassi Plate collection



Frank Hinder
Blue Arcs 1967
 aluminium, plywood, glass, plastics, tungsten lighting,
 motorised parts
 60.0 x 65.5 x 20.3 cm
 Gift of an anonymous donor 1968
 Newcastle Art Gallery collection



Carl Plate
Tough Stretch 1975
 collage of cut magazines
 23.1 x 38.4 cm
 Purchased 2009
 National Gallery of Australia collection



Margo Lewers
Orange with white 1971
 plexiglass construction
 31.0 x 51.5 x 12.3 cm
 Gift of Tanya Crothers and Darani Lewers 1979
 Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest collection



Margel Hinder
Abstract wood carving 1952
 Queensland maple
 44.8 x 34.5 x 19.0 cm
 Purchased 1973
 Newcastle Art Gallery collection

All above images shown in detail on front cover.

FOREWORD

Sarah Johnson, Curator
Newcastle Art Gallery

Newcastle Art Gallery is proud to present *Sydney 6 - Hinders, Lewers, Plates: Abstract artists, friends, partners, siblings, 1940s-1970s* from 9 May – 2 August 2015. This exhibition showcases the important partnerships between the six artists, Frank and Margel Hinder, Gerald and Margo Lewers and Carl and Jocelyn Plate, who championed modernism through their diverse art practices. It features works of art from private, national, state and regional gallery collections with works also drawn from Newcastle Art Gallery's extensive collection.

The Gallery collection has over sixty works by these artists that cover the period from 1939-1983 in media such as drawings, luminal kinetics, paintings, printmaking, and sculpture. The holdings of work by the artists illustrates Newcastle's enduring and leading role championing Australian modernism over the years. The Gallery has also hosted significant exhibitions featuring Carl Plate in 1958, Frank and Margel Hinder in the *Balson, Crowley, Fizelle, Hinder retrospective* in 1966 and the *Frank and Margel Hinder retrospective* in 1973. Frank and Margel Hinder, and Margo Lewers, were also regular exhibitors at the prestigious Anne von Bertouch Galleries in Newcastle.

Sydney 6 is the first large-scale exhibition that focuses on the inter-relationships between these six artists' respective art practices, media, technique and subject matter.

The exhibition also connects to the iconic *Captain James Cook Memorial Fountain* 1966 in Newcastle's Civic Park adjacent to the Gallery. Part of a nationwide design competition, the announcement of Margel Hinder in 1961 as the winning artist was a symbolic moment in the artist's career and a defining moment for the city of Newcastle in embracing modernism. Subject to much public debate at the time, the fountain has become an indelible feature of contemporary Newcastle. Of this work, Margel Hinder said, '*I hope I have (achieved in the sculpture)...a certain rugged character because I feel the city has that character.*'¹ The links between this fountain and the *Sydney 6* exhibition connect the Gallery to the exterior life of Newcastle in the twenty-first century.

Dr Cassi Plate, curator of the *Sydney 6* exhibition, speaks of a time when modernism was much maligned in mainstream Australia. This exhibition celebrates the determination of the Hinders, Lewers and Plates in rallying against the prevailing attitudes and criticisms of modernism while remaining dedicated to their respective art practices.

Sydney 6 marks an important epoch in Australian art history demonstrated through vibrant and avant-garde works of art by artists whose works of art remain relevant and topical in the present day.

¹Margel Hinder, 'Fountain that will read as sculpture' in *The Newcastle Herald*, 3 October 1966.

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF ABSTRACT ART

Dr Cassi Plate

Between the 1940s and 1970s, a close-knit group of friends, partners and relatives: Frank and Margel Hinder, Gerald and Margo Lewers, Carl Plate, and in the early years, Jocelyn Plate, were key to Sydney's Second Wave of Moderns.¹

Christine France describes the Hinders as a link between; *'the first generation of abstract artists who worked in Sydney in the 1930s and the emergence of more expressive abstraction that became prominent in the late 50s and early 60s'; the Hinders, the Lewers and the Plates were linked by their passionate belief 'in an art which sought a reality beyond representation.'*²

They were dedicated internationalists, committed to exploring new ideas and materials throughout their working lives. The *Sydney 6* exhibition brings together key works produced within these important creative partnerships.³

From 1939-40 the *Sydney 6* joined forces with like-minded artists to form Sydney's Contemporary Art Society (CAS) *'as an oppositional artist's group dedicated to the production [and exhibition] of experimental art, which in its unfamiliarity and originality, attacked the values of the establishment.'*⁴

The Lewers house near Penrith in western Sydney (like John and Sunday Reed's 'Heide' property outside Melbourne), the CAS and Carl Plate's Notanda Gallery in Sydney's Rowe Street, were their hubs. They collaborated, shared the latest art journals and books, argued about the meaning of art and the political and cultural events of their day, and held memorable parties.

Exploring movement was a way of arriving at abstraction. From the study of birds, trams, horses, people, insects, reptiles and escalators, they began working with movement, colour and light itself, creating sculptures which revolve, collages which fracture time, stage sets, tapestries, textiles and mosaics. Almost half the works in the exhibition are sculptural in material



Margo Lewers
Unseen n.d.
oil on paper mounted on board
37.2 x 27cm
Anne von Bertouch OAM bequest through the
Newcastle Region Art Gallery Foundation 2003
Newcastle Art Gallery collection

or form. During their early years, when abstract art was literally spat upon, these supportive, close friendships were critical to the continuance of their work.

*'Art has become abstract only to the extent that the world itself has become abstract.'*⁵

Developments in art closely follow advances in science, and the Hinders, Lewers and Plates were part of a generation fascinated by science. They believed in a world of great complexity, in paradox and flux. In the late 1940s-50s abstract art was validated as a more truthful representation of what science had already revealed – that light, space and time characterized the universe, and solid matter was itself an illusion.

Their work coalesced yet diverged. The tensions within the group represented the diversity of the modern movement; from Frank Hinder's ongoing investigations into the science of visual perception, to the sculpture of Gerald Lewers within a humanist tradition, one that offers itself as an inviting touch. The abstraction of Margo Lewers and Carl Plate embraces a sculptural 'will to form'. Like Margel Hinder's work, their abstraction references nature as well as pure form. They flourished in the liberating intellectual and artistic climate of the wild, anything-goes decade from the late 1950s-60s.⁶ Their contribution to the momentum of the era in which Australian art was creating its own identity was recognised by a few perceptive critics, some from overseas.

Frank Hinder created luminal kinetics, becoming a *'poet-painter of light'*⁷; *'Mrs Lewers and her husband "Jerry", belong to that circle of Australian artists who are working to give Australian artists a new and vigorous national art'*, wrote the *Hong Kong South China Morning Post* in 1958. *'She paints in the abstract manner because she believes that painting must not be just*



Margel Hinder
Revolving Ball 1954
metal sculpture, engine
165.0 cm diameter
Gift of the artist 1983
Art Gallery of New South Wales collection

recognised as one of the pioneers of abstraction in sculpture in this country.

One of the first artists to engage with Margel Hinder about her work was sculptor **GERALD LEWERS**. The two couples, the Lewers and the Hinders, became devoted friends despite divergent approaches to their art practice. Gerald Lewers, one of Australia's first modern sculptors, was renowned for exemplifying the 'truth to materials' dictum of Henry Moore and the contemporary English sculpture movement of the 1930s-50s. He responded directly to his materials, beginning with stone and wood, used in the work *Flight of Birds* 1952, before turning to new technologies and constructing large, increasingly abstract, public fountains and commissions in the 1950s; usually in his favoured material, copper. His interest in movement and fascination in combining kinetic and static forms led him toward the construction of fountains. His final works, principally the *ICI Fountain* 1958, located in Melbourne, explore the dynamic movement created by water. In these works, and his relief for interior wall Reserve Bank, Canberra, later built and installed by Margo, '*idea and material were wedded in unique, powerful and beautiful forms, strong and sensitive like himself.*'¹⁴ His early death cut short his output and *Sydney 6* is the first major exhibition of work by Gerald Lewers since his Memorial Exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1963.

The life and art of **MARGO LEWERS** defined an idea at the heart of modernism – *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total-work-of-art. Primarily an abstract expressionist painter, Lewers constructed her whole life as a work of art. Through mosaic, garden creation, sculpture, hand-painted furniture and textiles, flower arrangements, dramatic food presentation and clothing, she embodied the idea of artistic synthesis. More than merely aesthetic, *Gesamtkunstwerk* was also political



Gerald Lewers
Camel's Head 1935-45
stone (trachyte)
32.2 x 30.0 x 22.3 cm
Purchased 1946
Art Gallery of New South Wales collection

illustrative; that it must be an expression of universal truth, not just of a particular truth, or place or time. Her paintings are characterized by movement and translucence.'⁸

Carl Plate was 'Australia's first abstract painter to be given a one-man show in London'⁹ and Margel Hinder created Newcastle's fountain in Civic Park, considered the finest in Australia.¹⁰ The work of the Sydney Second Wave Moderns 'sits well outside the myth-making and national identity concerns of the Australian culture' and is 'truly international and inter-cultural' in 'the ways in which they addressed modernist issues in a non-parochial way.' They did not choose to stick to recognizable formulas that met public approval but deliberately extended themselves through continual challenges and experimentation.¹¹

MARGEL HINDER won two key prizes for her sculpture, one as a child in America, the other as the only unknown sculptor to win a prize (equal third in 1953) in an international sculpture competition *The Unknown Political Prisoner*. She competed alongside important international sculptors such as Alexander Calder (1898-1976), Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), Naum Gabo (1890-1977) and Antoine Pevsner (1886-1962). Margel Hinder was awarded major commissions in Australia, for the Reserve Bank of Australia in Sydney with the work *Free Standing Sculpture* 1964, and for the city of Newcastle the *Captain James Cook Memorial Fountain* 1966. Margel responded to the ideas and forms of the modern period's most challenging international sculptors, Gabo, Pevsner and László Moholy-Nagy, whose work, along with Constantin Brâncuși's 'Bird in Flight' she saw in Boston USA. Her revolving constructions, exhibited in *Sydney 6*, move beyond the most experimental but mainly static works of these artists and were described by James Gleeson as equal parts '*geometry and poetry.*'¹² Above all her work '*is a consistent investigation of space and of relationships in space.*'¹³ Margel Hinder is



Frank Hinder
Study for 'Tram Kaleidoscope' 1939
tempera on paper
21.7 x 18.0 cm
Purchased 1974
Newcastle Art Gallery collection



Frank Hinder
Abstract 4 1976
 synthetic polymer paint on cardboard
 101.0 x 76.0cm
 Gift of Dr and Mrs Egon Auerbach 1976
 Art Gallery of New South Wales collection

and spiritual, bound up with the desire for social and cultural renewal. This direct influence from the Bauhaus, which she visited in the 1930s, also contributed to an ability to work across a wide range of media. It also prepared her for the task of completing large scale collaborative projects, including a vast, copper wall sculpture, based on a small maquette made by her husband Gerald before his accidental death. In her last years, in a move away from abstract expressionism towards constructivist principles, Margo Lewers created sculptures from the new material of plexiglass, designed to suspend and move freely, splintering the light.

FRANK HINDER was defined by his intellectual and disciplined approach to artmaking. Unlike contemporaries who flocked to London and Europe to study art, Frank Hinder, along with American-born wife Margel, studied in the USA where he engaged with Dynamic Symmetry, a method of linking the natural world with mathematical patterns. The dynamic linking suggests the energy forming everything, leading to ideas of universal rhythm. Upon returning to Australia, the unique character and light here shaped his semi-abstracts. Works like his *Tram Kaleidoscope* 1939-1948 series were '*signs of movements observed*', later developed to create motion and rhythm in his moving light sculptures. Changes in early twentieth century scientific thinking – Einstein's introduction of a fourth dimension to space, combined with the 'taming' of electricity as technology – led to light, colour and movement being incorporated into sculpture.

'Frank Hinder was particularly interested in light as the raw source of colour and as a way of producing a colour intensity stronger than ... paint'; colour 'for its sheer glory ... he explored in the manner of a musician exploring the tonal

*range of a musical score.'*¹⁵

He called his moving light sculptures luminal kinetics.

While the other five artists were born within four years of each other, **JOCELYN (ZANDER) PLATE** was almost a generation younger. The only daughter of Alleyne Clarice Zander, an artist, curator, gallery manager and press officer at London's Royal Academy, her formative years were steeped in art and she remains a keenly visual person. She studied at London's Royal Academy School of Art, returning to Australia in 1940 as the war broke out and enrolling at East Sydney Technical College. As part of Sydney's emerging modern art scene, Jocelyn Plate exhibited works, featured in *Sydney 6*, with the Contemporary Arts Society, the 'Under 30s' group and the Society of Artists. She ultimately channelled her creativity into training as an Occupational Therapist, working with returned soldiers, before marrying and raising a family with Carl Plate. Her art training and sympathetic yet critical intellect made her an integral part of the group of six artists.

CARL PLATE'S work is described by curator Nick Waterlow as '*quite unlike any other artist in Australia of his generation. ... The unique abstract language he developed combined a European awareness and sensibility with an acute understanding of the psyche of the place he lived.*'¹⁶

Carl Plate was inspired by the possibilities offered through the creation of new abstract, non-representational languages, open to all, and never ceased experimenting with ways to free the components of his paintings – '*form, line, colour, texture and space, from their descriptive and symbolic roles.*'¹⁷ The shimmering and rippling movement of the later collages simultaneously beckon with references to the material world, while moving us 'between the "familiar [and] unfamiliar", which he described as the central concern of his work.'¹⁸

His history of collage making over three decades describes the arc of twentieth century modern art, from surrealism to time-based work. Carl Plate's last collages and paintings are at once a return to an earlier engagement with illusionistic space and a leap into new and startlingly original places.



Carl Plate
Below 1972-3
 PVA on canvas
 91.0 x 152.0 cm
 Cassi Plate collection



ENDNOTES

¹ This term refers to some of the key abstract artists 1940s-1970s. Ian Cornford, *The Sculpture of Margel Hinder*, Phillip Mathews, 2013, p. 134; Douglas Dundas calls it 'The second contemporary Australian movement', *AGNSW Quarterly*, vol 5, no 3, April 1964.

² Christine France, 'Encountering Dynamic Symmetry: Frank & Margel Hinder', *Brought to Light: Australian Art 1850-1965 from Queensland Art Gallery collection*, L Seear & J Ewington Eds., 1998, p. 234. The earlier 'Sydney Moderns' were the subject of a comprehensive exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW, 2013.

³ Other artist couples include their contemporaries: Dahl & Geoff Collings, James Cant & Dora Chapman, Grace Crowley & Ralph Balson, Alison Rehfish & George Duncan, Eric Wilson & Jean Appleton, Jean Bellette & Paul Haefliger, Margaret & Tony Tuckson, Anne Dangar & Grace Crowley, Margaret Preston & Gladys Reynell (potter), Thea Proctor & George Lambert, Douglas Dundas & Dorothy Thornhill, Gladys & John D. Moore, Olive Cotton & Max Dupain.

⁴ Denise Whitehouse, 'The Contemporary Art Society of NSW and the Production of Contemporary Abstraction in Australia 1947-1961', unpublished thesis, Monash University, 1999.

⁵ Peter Blanc, 'The Artist and the Atom', pamphlet published by The Smithsonian Institute, 1951.

⁶ Patrick McCaughey, *Strange Country: Why Australian Painting Matters*, Miegunyah Press, 2014, p. 257.

⁷ John Henshaw, 'Art: Real Cool Kinetics', *The Australian*, 26 October 1968.

⁸ *Hong Kong South China Morning Post*, 16 July 1958.

⁹ Michael Shepherd *Art News and Review*, London, 10 October 1959.

¹⁰ John Henshaw, 'Frank and Margel Hinder: 1930-1980', *Art & Australia*, vol 18, no. 3, Autumn 1981, pp. 219-220.

¹¹ Ian Cornford, op.cit., pp. 138-9.

¹² James Gleeson 'Seeking Refuge in Sculpture', *Sun* (Sydney), 10 April 1957, p. 36.

¹³ Tom Heath, 'The Recent Sculpture of Margel Hinder', *Architecture in Australia*, vol 49, no. 4, Dec 1960, p. 94.

¹⁴ Laurie Thomas, *Gerald Lewers Memorial Exhibition*, catalogue, Art Gallery of NSW, 1963.

¹⁵ Steven Jones, *Synthetics: Aspects of Art & Technology in Australia 1956-75*, MIT, Cambridge Mass USA, 2011, pp. 105-6; 113.

¹⁶ Nick Waterlow, 'Curating the COFA Collection', Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of NSW, 2009.

¹⁷ Denise Whitehouse, 'Carl Plate LAB 1974', *Cubism and Australian Art*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, The Miegunyah Press, 2009, p. 214.

¹⁸ Denise Whitehouse *ibid.*, quoting a letter by Carl Plate in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, reprinted in *Broadsheet of the Contemporary Art Society of Australia*, Dec 1965, pp. 6-7.

Above images left to right

Frank and Margel Hinder outside studio in Gordon c 1980
 Gerald Lewers at work with pneumatic hammer on 'Reclining Figure', a commission for University House, Canberra, 1952, made at back of Lewers house Emu Plains
 Margo Lewers 1977 - Photograph by Dalman and Smith
 Carl and Jocelyn Plate Sydney 1946



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Above image
Margel Hinder during installation of the Captain James Cook
Memorial Fountain 1961-66. Image courtesy Brian Suters AM.