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Cover Beryl Reid, Empire Condensed Milk, 1926-1932, poster; Gift of Troedel & Cooper 1968, courtesy State Library of Victoria

This Page Robur Tea ghost sign, Lygon Street, Brunswick East, 2017 Image supplied and modified by Stephen Banham
In July 1910, *Labor Call* announced the formation of ‘an artists’ Union’, which included ‘some artists, although the title of “artist” is, qualified’. The newly formed Commercial Artists’ Union, it continued, had been formed ‘to protect, first and foremost, the artist who earns his living at the game. He needs protection in Australia.’

Shortly after affiliating with the Trades-Hall Council, the Commercial Artists’ Union looked to stage an exhibition that would illustrate the work done by members. Announcing that it would be ‘the first special exhibition of the kind held in any part of the world’, the Union explained that the event would embrace every class of work from book illustrations to 24-sheet posters. A later report on the Union’s activities noted that it would ‘embrace all kinds of artists’, including wood-engravers and stained-glass window makers. Such accounts illustrate the breadth and range of activities that have fallen under the mantle of commercial art, as well as its lack of public recognition.

In its *History of Design in Australia 1789-2002*, the Design Institute of Australia makes no mention of the Commercial Artists’ Union. However, it does list the formation of the Australian Commercial and Industrial Artists’ Association in the late 1930s as a noteworthy historical event. This inclusion implies that commercial art fed neatly into the history of design. Such a narrative can be discerned in Geoffrey Caban’s pioneering study of commercial art in *Australian Commercial Artists’ Union*. However, Alan Young’s recent study of commercial art in the history of design, as well as its lack of public recognition, demonstrates the degree to which this agency’s operations and its creative work in the 1970s and 1980s were informed by the commercial context. This collection concludes with Jane Conolly’s important study of women across advertising, graphic design, and book publishing. Spanning the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Conolly’s account combines industry data alongside the personal stories of three women to tease out the hidden stories and experiences, and to remind us of the importance of social forces and their impact across the commercial arts.

It is hoped that the strengths of this collection extend beyond the mere sum of its constituent parts. In *Design History Australia*, Tony Fry posits that ‘a history of design should be a history of formulations and process, as well as objects and form’. The articles in this special edition seek to do both. By revisiting the concepts, practices, and trades that have historically constituted commercial art, this special edition seeks to remind designers and design scholars that their field and practices cannot be fully understood without reference to their broader context – both past and present.

Robert Crawford is Professor of Advertising, and Associate Dean, Research & Innovation, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University
In October 1920, the author of a review in Brisbane’s Daily Mail welcomed the increased use of the visual in advertising. The subject of the review was a display of advertising at the Second Annual Convention of the Advertising Association of Australia (AAA), which had recently been staged in Sydney. The reviewer compared the items on display with earlier advertising, which featured ‘a page of a daily newspaper containing two-line ads, crammed in as tightly as they will be’.

This new display showed that modern advertising in Australia had reached a level of appeal that previously ‘had not been thought to exist in Australian advertising art’. The high standard of the illustration work demonstrated that the local industry had finally realised that appeals to ‘the human emotions and instincts’ were ‘the potent factor in the selling value of an ad’. It was further claimed that the work now compared favourably to American advertising art in its ‘beauty, colour and production’. The reviewer also drew attention to the importance of typography in advertising: ‘some very beautiful effects can be obtained merely by the application of the Australian Advertising Association’s art education programme and the impact of the designer of manufacturing in Australia, especially by the big newspapers and commercial art studios.

In the years immediately following the First World War, then a rapid decline and consolidation from the time of the Depression in the early 1930s. Before the war, artists had been trained using a system that saw no differentiation between ‘art for art’s sake’ (fine art) and ‘applied art’ (art produced for commercial and communication purposes).

This article traces the place of art and the artist in the Australian advertising industry between the wars, as the industry responded to unprecedented technological change. It pays particular attention to the establishment and application of the Australian Advertising Association’s art education programme and the impact of the designer of that programme, Edward Charles Perugini (1882–1956), whose experience as an art student in turn-of-the-century London helped to shape advertising art education and practice in Australia for more than half a century.

At the start of the twentieth century, advertising art involved illustration work, typography, layout and design, and was, in effect, a sub-branch of the rapidly emerging occupational category, ‘Commercial Art’. In his study of the ‘genealogy of graphic design’, the design educator Alan S Young found that those graphic designers he interviewed claimed professional status by differentiating themselves from their predecessors, the commercial artists of the first half of the twentieth century, who, the designers argued, had been plying a trade rather than pursuing a profession.

Commercial artists might have baulked a little at this simplistic formulation. It might be true that ‘commercial art never constituted an actual discourse of its own’ (unlike graphic design) but there is little doubt that commercial artists did, in fact, at various times in the twentieth century, move to professionalise their occupation. The professionalisation of any occupation typically includes the formation of an association to control and regulate membership through the payment of fees and the application of minimum education standards. Some commercial artists first attempted to organise at the start of the twentieth century by joining the Australian Writers and Artists Union (AAU), which had been formed to stand up to the power of the newspaper proprietors: the Australian Journalists’ Association (AAA) absorbed the AAU in 1913. Further attempts to organise were intermittent and broadly unsuccessful (beyond the organisation of group shows) until the formation of the Australian Commercial and Industrial Artists’ Association (ACIAA) in 1938.

The application of minimum education standards was similarly hazardous, but the trajectory of commercial art education in the first half of the twentieth century can be viewed (very broadly) as one of rapid expansion, accompanied by moves to standardise curricula and examinations, in the years immediately following the First World War, and then a rapid decline and consolidation from the time of the Depression in the early 1930s. Before the war, artists had been trained using a system that saw no differentiation between ‘art for art’s sake’ (fine art) and ‘applied art’ (art produced for commercial and communication purposes).

Graduates of the state-supported Technical Schools, and of private art schools such as Julian Ashton’s Art School, called themselves ‘artists’ and worked across both spheres, supporting their fine art by producing illustrations for newspapers and commercial art studios.

This shifted after the First World War. Fuelled by the improvements in printing techniques and the expansion of manufacturing in Australia, especially by the big international brands, and the proliferation of design work that followed, the category of advertising artist or visualiser began to emerge and consolidate. The Daily Mail reviewer’s
observations about the improvement in Australian advertising art reflect these changes. Enhanced printing techniques made a new higher standard of design possible in mass production, and magazines such as Home and Art in Australia used these improvements to introduce a higher standard of illustration work, typography, design and printing to Australian advertising and publishing more generally. Also influential were the wartime recruitment posters produced for the government by artists such as James Northfield and Harry Weston, which had shown how bold design and colour work could enhance the impact and memorability of advertising messages.6

In the wake of this impetus, and the inclusion of Commercial Art training in the repatriation scheme (perhaps an additional indication of fledging professional status), three levels of commercial art training emerged in the major Australian cities: the technical school, the privately-run commercial art school, and the business school offering commercial art classes.7 Expansion was swift. The city's first School of Applied Art had opened at the Working Men's College in Melbourne in 1917. Three years later, the returned soldier and former Victorian National Gallery School student, Cyril Layshon White opened his Commercial Art School – slogan 'Art that pays' – at 226 Little Collins Street, Melbourne. In Sydney, the artist JV Hall's School and the School of Applied Advertising specialised in advertising art. The big business colleges – Scott's, Bradshaw & Everette's, the Metropolitan Business College – all introduced commercial art classes around this time. Correspondence classes, including those provided by the Working Men’s College and the International Correspondence School, made it possible to educate large numbers of students. After graduating with diplomas, artists worked for advertising agencies and, sometimes, in in-house studios at commercial businesses. Newsprinters remained important training grounds for commercial artists.8

The Advertising Association of Australia and Art Education

As part of a push to professionalise the advertising industry, and improve its efficiency and reputation, the newly formed Advertising Association of Australia (AAA) began to reflect on the question of how advertising worked. At the Third Advertising Convention, held in Melbourne in 1921, EW Caldecoat, an AAA member based in Brisbane, discussed the comparative values of copy and illustration to effective advertising; the former was found wanting. Caldecoat argued that illustration was one of the most important factors in advertising, because ‘a picture will always attract more attention than words’. The consumer found reading an image far easier than reading copy: the ‘whole story’ could be told ‘at a glance’, and studios had found that a picture was ‘four times more effective than words’.9

Rules were formed, prescribing the correct way to illustrate an advertisement. These included ideas about the ways in which an advertisement might best connect with the individual consumer. Advertisers should move away from ‘still drawings’ of the goods, Caldecoat argued. Advertisements worked harder when they showed ‘the human touch’, where human figures were using the goods. These should be depicted ‘in action’ – using or wearing the goods – especially when advertising men’s clothes, because ‘the shirt is – well, a shirt’. Women should also be pictured in the advertisements aimed at them, but it was noted that they could be shown standing passively because ‘their blouses probably have distinctive style features’.10 Forty years later, proponents of the so-called Creative Revolution would argue that advertisers were failing to connect with consumers; that they spoke about themselves in their advertisements rather than showing consumers what the product could do for them; how it could make them feel. Caldecoat’s chapter shows that Australian advertising experts had long recognised the importance of engaging with consumers rather than lecturing to them.

It is safe to assume that Edward Perugini, the chair of the AAA’s newly formed Federal Education Board, approved Caldecoat’s chapter before it was published in the Convention’s report. The Advertising Association had first moved to develop an advertising education program in 1919, in an attempt to standardise advertising education and improve advertising efficiency. Perugini was charged with developing this education program, which included commercial art, typography, layout, design and printing. Born in England in 1882, Perugini belonged to an artistic Anglo-Italian family: his uncle Charles Edward Perugini, a renowned portrait painter, had married Kate Dickens, the famous author’s youngest daughter (and also a respected artist) in 1874. His grandfather, Leonardo Perugini and his half-sister, Madame Campbell Perugini had been influential singing teachers. Perugini would later recall meeting prominent poets and opera singers at his half-sister’s salon.11

Before sailing for Australia in 1906, Perugini studied at London’s South Kensington School of Art, an experience that shaped his work on the advertising curriculum. Perugini’s subsequent reverence for systemic training, for standardised classes and rigid examination, had its roots in his time at South Kensington. This reverence would serve well the structure and delivery of advertising education in Australia, although, as we shall see, Perugini’s hostility towards the more experimental forms of modernism, also learned at South Kensington, might have been of less benefit to the industry. South Kensington (then officially named the National Art Training School and now the Royal College of Art) was London’s prominent industrial art school. Administered by the Department of Science and Art, the school had been established to provide design education in aid of the manufacturing industry. Its method of teaching became known as the ‘South Kensington system’. Its syllabus was based on twenty subjects, including antique (drawing from plaster casts) and life classes. Students were expected to present highly finished drawings (including laborious background stippling), paintings, and models, to write papers on various art topics, and to sit for ‘rigid and thorough examinations’.12 With its emphasis on industrial design, the school provided only limited training for artists: it offered no classes in figure composition, and paid little attention to the use of colour or the handling of paint. In 1873 the art critic John Ruskin condemned South Kensington for the rigidity of its training, and fine artists began to seek training elsewhere, in London and on the Continent.13
Having completed his studies, Perugini sailed to Australia in 1906 armed with an introductory letter to his maternal uncle, Stanley Hunter, the chief geologist in Victoria’s Department of Mines. The 24-year-old found work as an advertising manager and, in 1914, was part of the group of advertising men that formed the Victorian Institute of Advertising Men (VIAM). The Institute affiliated with the AAS in 1918, and Perugini commenced work on the Association’s education program after the first Advertising Convention, held in Brisbane in 1919. By 1921, he and his committee of two had prepared a draft education program for the approval of the members gathered for the Melbourne Convention.

Topics in art and design appeared in three sections of the draft curriculum: Advertising Construction; Printing; and Commercial Art. Across the two-year graduate course, students studied the following topics: Principles of Design and Layout; Balance; Harmony; Proportion; Typographical Balance; Balance of Type and Illustration; Line Drawings – Black and White, Colour Line, Stippling; Wash Drawings – Black and White Combination Line and Wash; Colours – Oil Painting, Water Colour, Chalk (for 3 or 4 Colour Processes and Lithography); Photography – Retouching, Air Brush; Theory of Design, Theory of Colour; Theory of Tone; Relation of Art to Advertising Process Work and Printing – Suitability of Various Art Processes in Advertising; Rough Sketching; Ideas for Press Advertisements, Posters, Show Cards, etc. Students learned how to brief printers and illustrators, and were expected to produce rough layouts of advertisements in the examination.

The texts prescribed in the draft curriculum included Ernest A Batchelder’s (wrongly printed as ‘Bachelors’) Principles of Design (Chicago, 1912); Stephen Spurrier’s Black and White a Manual of Illustration (London, 1909); James Ward’s Colour Harmony and Contrast (London, 1903); and two magazines: Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art (1902–1904) and Colours (1914–32). Studio showcased works in the Art Nouveau style, which was long out of fashion by 1921, and from the Arts and Crafts movement, which had also been on the wane. Perugini’s selection of Studio is unsurprising. The Arts and Crafts movement was preeminent at South Kensington during his time there (possibly from 1900, when he would have been aged 18). Colour magazine was a more progressive choice, and its inclusion reveals Perugini to be in touch with current trends. Colour featured an eclectic mix of short stories, poetry and articles about art, alongside colour reproductions of contemporary British artists, including the Camden Town Group and the London Group. The Camden Town Group’s work has been described as ‘modern, but not modernist in style’; this might also describe Perugini’s approach to art in advertising.22 In a section of his curriculum called General Information, students studied the Arts: Graphic, Music, Literature (National, International, Australian), and were asked in the ensuing examination to address the question: “To what degree did Perugini’s views on art in advertising permeate the Australian advertising industry?” The influence of the AAS’s curriculum on art and design in Australian advertising agencies is hard to establish. Most advertising artists, designers and visualisers were not trained through the AAS’s programmes, but rather learnt their craft through specialist art and design courses in the Technical Schools or the privately-run art schools.23 The AAS’s education program produced mostly advertising managers, through specialist advertising courses offered by the various Technical Schools or the private business colleges, including Hemingway Robertson, where Perugini worked as the advertising manager from 1931. Nevertheless, these advertising managers would eventually be responsible for hiring artists and visualisers to work in advertising agencies—both permanent and freelance—as well as having the final word on what should be presented to their clients. Their views on the place of the visual in advertising affected the finished advertisement in indirect ways. Perugini and his program helped to form these views. Business students at the Hemingway Robertson Institute were told: ‘You may not be an artist but you can know what constitutes effective advertis-
The expansion in the training of commercial artists also closed. In this tough climate, work opportunities plateaued. Contracted during the Depression, agencies struggled – for visualisers was becoming harder to find. As the economy freelancers. By the mid-1930s, however, permanent work a photograph (as a small number continued to do), the task finished advertisement required an illustration rather than in the newspaper or magazine. From this point on, if the advertisement and approximate as closely as possible of most clients. Roughs had to communicate the idea behind the advertisement. The visual – illustration of an excellent standard given the poor visual imagination to brief photographers, typographers, finished artists and printers. These ‘roughs’ as they were known needed to be for approval by clients and, when approval was obtained, move them to purchase. Advertising folklore has it that, in this period, agency writers to entertain them, in order to connect them to the brand and beings. Advertisements now had to engage with consumers, treating them once again as intelligent human and humour, wit and warmth, to communicate directly with consumers’ desires better than consumers themselves. A top-down communication had developed that infantilised consumers' desires better than consumers themselves. The certainties provided by a shift to market research from the importance of the human element to successful advertising was rediscovered. Advertising folklore has it that, in this period, agency writers would develop the concepts and write the copy; before slipping their scribbles under the studio door for the visualisers to execute. In other words, visualisers were excluded from ideas generation and were employed only to render the writers’ concepts. This would change from the early 1960s in America and later in the same decade in Australia, when the importance of the human element to successful advertising was rediscovered. The certainties provided by a shift to market research from the 1950s had convinced manufacturers that they understood consumers' desires better than consumers themselves. A top-down communication had developed that infantilised and alienated consumers, especially the younger less conservative, better-educated generation that emerged in the 1960s. The Creative Revolution or New Advertising, as it was variously known, embraced the use of concise language, and humour, wit and warmth, to communicate directly with consumers, treating them once again as intelligent human beings. Advertisements now had to engage with consumers, to entertain them, in order to connect them to the brand and move them to purchase. A critical element of this shift was the expectation that the visual should work harder than previously, now working together with the headline and body copy to complete the idea behind the advertisement. The visual – illustration or photograph – had reached a new level of importance in
Edward Perugini died in 1956, a decade before the Creative Revolution with photographers, directors, typographers, and finished in the development of the idea behind the advertisement. (the presentation rough, the photograph, the typography, the visual aspects of an advertisement or a campaign being, but certainly from the perspective that together the human element in advertising rose again to take precedence over science or pure reason, perhaps not in the literal sense, as with Caldecoat’s pre- versas. Moreover, the human element in advertising rose again to take precedence over science or pure reason, perhaps not in the literal sense, as with Caldecoat’s pre- versas. Moreover, the human element in advertising rose again to take precedence over science or pure reason, perhaps not in the literal sense, as with Caldecoat’s pre- versas. Moreover, the human element in advertising rose again to take precedence over science or pure reason, perhaps not in the literal sense, as with Caldecoat’s pre- versas. Moreover, the human element in advertising rose again to take precedence over science or pure reason, perhaps not in the literal sense, as with Caldecoat’s pre- versas. Moreover, the human element in advertising rose again to take precedence over science or pure reason, perhaps not in the literal sense, as with Caldecoat’s pre- versas. Moreover, the human element in advertising rose again to take precedence over science or pure reason, perhaps not in the literal sense, as with Caldecoat’s pre-
ON THE
INDUSTRIAL FRONT

Wanted for Munitions Manufacture! Alert intelligent men, 21 years and over, able to use tools or machinery, for TECHNICAL SCHOOL TRAINING in SKILLED FITTING, TURNING, MACHINING, and other Engineering Trades. Previous workshop experience in engineering or allied work is an advantage. Trainees to receive the Federal Arbitration Court's Basic Wage while training!

Also fully qualified Turners and Fitters, or first-class Machinists are required for training as PRECISION TOOL and GAUGE MAKERS. TOOL MAKERS' AWARD RATES will be paid during training!

Full particulars in Application Forms. Write to Technical Inspector in charge of Defence Training, Education Department, or call at the National Employment Office, 110 Queen Street, Melbourne.

MUNITIONS
TRAINNEES
WANTED!

This is YOUR Opportunity!
High on the wall of an old building on Lygon Street in Brunswick East is a large painted ‘ghost sign’ for the Robur Tea Company. Commissioned around 1929-1930, the teapot bearing the Robur name is possibly the last surviving trace of one of the most concerted and multifaceted marketing campaigns of its time. During the interwar period, hundreds, possibly even thousands, of Robur teapots were painted on walls and hoardings across Australian cities. The scale of the campaign came to light in 2012 when the records of former signwriting company Lewis & Skinner were rescued from a demolition site in Melbourne’s inner west. One document from this collection details the painting of over 500 such teapots throughout metropolitan Melbourne in 1929 and 1930 alone.1 Had the Lewis and Skinner signwriting documents ended up in landfill, we may have not known that this lonely ‘ghost sign’ was part of an early multifaceted marketing strategy of interest to researchers in design and commercial history.

Robur’s painted teapots offer an important perspective into the past. They can teach us about the growing importance of coordinated marketing campaigns that incorporated large-scale outdoor advertising.2 Additionally, they offer revealing insights into Australia’s broader cultural history, notably ideas of Australian identity during a time of fundamental change. Purveyors of consumer products depend on their ability to engage and respond to social change. Marketing campaigns therefore offer something of a cultural barometer of larger events (such as war and economic depression) as well as subtle changes in cultural and societal perspectives and trends. Susie Khamsi describes this as ‘the cultural logic of branding’.3 This article focuses on Melbourne as a locus of the ‘teapot’ campaign with a view to understanding Robur’s marketing activities more generally. While the focus on Melbourne is ostensibly informed by the discovery of the Lewis and Skinner records, it also reflects Melbourne’s status as Australia’s premier tea distribution and consumption hub during the colonial era, and the fact that Robur’s headquarters were located in the Victorian capital. However, Robur undertook elaborate marketing strategies in other states too, including its interwar ‘teapot’ campaign. The Robur Tea Company was one of the few late-nineteenth century tea brands (of which there were many) that developed into household icons. An evolving roster of marketing techniques cemented Robur in the popular imagination as a solid choice for lower-middle-class consumers, who were thrifty but cared about quality. These techniques included the integrated use of commercial art, catalogues, coupons, and the production and distribution of its own teapots, and, a little later, gimmickry such as the use of live elephants. The consumer narratives woven by Robur are compared here with those undertaken by Bushells, a competitor in the tea market.4 Both brands were connected with the emergence of a new urban middle class in late Victorian and Edwardian Australia, following the gold rush and its influx of wealth. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, the two competitors adopted a range of marketing strategies. At times they copied one another; at other times, their respective strategies diverged. By examining the Robur campaigns and their relationship with Bushells, this article not only revisits the forgotten story of a significant national brand, it also reiterates the multifaceted contribution that commercial art has made to Australia’s cultural and material heritage.

A Continent of Tea Drinkers

Tea has been central to Australian life since colonisation.5 Indeed, the consumption and trading of tea, like tobacco, was long associated with the British Empire.6 By the end of the nineteenth century, Australians were drinking the most tea per capita in the world: an estimated four to five kilograms per week.7 Despite the traditional image of the outback pioneer, nearly two-thirds of Australians were living in cities or towns by 1891: a proportion greater than the United States or Canada.8 With this new urban middle class came a nascent consumer culture. This development prompted Donald Horne to muse in The Lucky Country that Australia was one of the earliest countries ‘to find the meaning of life in the purchase of consumer goods’.9 The Victorian gold rush from the early 1850s to late 1860s briefly elevated Melbourne to the status of the world’s...
The Emergence of the Robur Brand

It was in this vibrant and competitive environment of the 1880s and 1890s that the Robur brand emerged. The word Robur is Latin for vitality or, variously, 'strong as an ox'. An alcoholic concoction called “Robur tea spirit” had been advertised as a health tonic in newspapers during the 1870s, but Robur was soon used to brand actual tea. As competition for consumers intensified, Robur, like the Oriental Tea Company, Griffith’s and Bushells, developed innovative promotional strategies. These were buoyed by new packaging technologies, the rise of the department store, and the increasing gap between the production of commodities and their purchase and consumption. Consumers were increasingly sold remote in tins, jars and bottles with attractive labels, and no longer in paper bags from knowledge - consuming agents. The company’s Scottish-born namesake and founder had been a prominent tea importer and businessman, then a pugnacious and controversial political reformer who had gone on to become the Treasurer and Premier of Victoria in the 1860s. Service’s father, who had also emigrated to Australia, was a long-term activist in the temperance movement, which gained popularity in Australia during the 1870s and 1880s. As Griggs points out, this movement was a further factor in the growing consumption of tea in the Australian colonies. It indicated a shift in societal values to the ideal of a hard-working, sober and devout population and was attended by a growth in nonconformist but family-oriented Christian faiths.

James Service died a year before the acquisition of Robur. The company was then taken over by Service’s business partner, Randal James Alcock. Alcock was another big personality, a successful merchant and colonial identity. Under Alcock’s direction, James Service & Co. specialised in producing and marketing Robur Tea, and acted as agents for a range of other companies.

Robur’s new owners advertised aggressively and sales continued to grow. Victorian newspapers were swamped with advertisements. Robur’s marketing continued to use pastoral images by well-known Australian artists. Susie Khamis notes that the banking and property collapse of the 1890s had led to a heightened awareness of the rural sector and its contribution to the fragile prosperity of the new nation. This awareness was demonstrated by the popularity of the Bulletin magazine and the stories of shepherds, farmers and swagmen written by contributors like Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson. Efforts to harness the appeal of the bush in the late Victorian era were widespread, as can be seen in brand names such as Camp Tea, Pannikin Blend, Swagman Blend, Coo-ee and Billy Tea. At the same time the developing middle class, and the less financially and culturally secure ‘lower’ middle class, were keen to demonstrate their respectability and status. As tea was a relatively inexpensive product consumed by all classes, tea marketers recognised an opportunity to imbue

Opposite
Archives of Australia
Blamire Young, 1899.
poster designed by
New Seasons Robur Tea,
of NSW
courtesy State Library
Elephant tea party, 1939,
operation employed some 120 workers. In 1906 the company faced a downturn in national tea consumption, Robur’s Melbourne warehouse that dominated Clarendon Street near the Yarra docks. The building, still known as the ‘Tea House’, would be Robur’s home until the mid-1970s. In 1906 the company’s ongoing success enabled it to move to a large red-brick warehouse that dominated Clarendon Street near the Yarra docks. The building, still known as the ‘Tea House’, would be Robur’s home until the mid-1970s. Other promotional devices appealed to people in a variety of working-class professions, such as the ‘Robur Tea girl’, the ‘Robur Queen of Tea’ and the provision of brewing advice. These tactics played a key role in personalising the Robur brand at a time when the specialist advice of the local grocer was beginning to fade.

Like other entrepreneurial marketers of consumables such as sweets mogul Macpherson Robertson, Robur found an opportunity to capitalise on the First World War. Its wartime advertisements encouraged Australian women to send Robur Tea to their menfolk at the front. James Alcock was one of Robur’s key appeals relied on new silverware manufacturing technologies. Recently developed nickel-silver electroplating techniques allowed for the production of household goods that were relatively inexpensive yet retained the sheen of silver. This resulted in the teapot motif began to appear regularly in Robur’s advertising. Tea was still the young nation’s most favoured non-alcoholic drink in Sydney as well as Melbourne. Australians would retain the title of the world’s biggest tea drinkers until the great Depression, when they were out-drunk by their British cousins.30 Following the travails of the First World War, the 1920s saw renewed social and economic confidence in Melbourne, albeit at more subdued levels than previously. One of the lingering effects of the 1890s downtown was pervasive and entrenched pockets of poverty. This contrasted with the impacts of modernity including the widespread introduction of electricity, mass-produced cars, and the ideal of suburban living. Advertising played an active role in developing consumer desires for these modern ideas, incorporating increasingly sophisticated emotive strategies on the one hand and acting as a guide for people unnerved by the increased pace and changing nature of modern living on the other.31 As the keepers of household budgets, women were identified as an essential target of advertisers as well as the commercial media - women’s magazines proliferated while radio provided a new source of entertainment and information. Bushells re-entered the burgeoning Melbourne market in 1922, having exited it in 1904.32 Competition would be fierce; tea was still a lucrative business. The themes of the new era were adopted with enthusiasm by Bushells. Seeking to convey an image that appealed to the new suburban middle class, Bushells presented itself as traditional and ‘sophisticated, discerning and modern’. Advertisements featured immaculately groomed women, opulent surroundings, and the use of exoticised but servile representations of women from India and Ceylon. Such imagery also fed into the narrative of identification with an enduring Empire that by then was in decline.33 As the post-war market share intensified, attention-grabbing promotions were instigated. In 1924 Bushells gave away a half pound of free tea to every Sydney home.34 Robur sought to incorporate elements of tradition with modernity via innovative marketing strategies, albeit in a different manner to Bushells. Robur focused on thrift and value, incorporating the central motif of the woman as the keeper of the home. It spoke to a less status-conscious kind of audience than Bushells, even as it cherry-picked some of its aspirational elements. The teapot as symbol of homely comforts gained traction during this time before becoming the core of an integrated advertising and marketing campaign. By 1928, the Robur Tea Company was the most prominent and profitable of James Service & Company’s businesses. It was incorporated in its own right, took over the other James Service tea businesses, and turned to more innovative forms of marketing.35 One of Robur’s key appeals relied on new silverware manufacturing technologies. Recently developed nickel-silver electroplating techniques allowed for the production of household goods that were relatively inexpensive yet retained the sheen of silver. This resulted in the golden era for the production of domestic silverware in Australia.36

Rober in the Interwar Period

From 1918, Alcock became Robur’s sole proprietor. It was around this time that the teapot motif began to appear regularly in Robur’s advertising. Tea was still the young nation’s most favoured non-alcoholic drink in Sydney as well as Melbourne. Australians would retain the title of the world’s biggest tea drinkers until the great Depression, when they were out-drunk by their British cousins.30 Following the travails of the First World War, the 1920s saw renewed social and economic confidence in Melbourne, albeit at more subdued levels than previously. One of the lingering effects of the 1890s downtown was pervasive and entrenched pockets of poverty. This contrasted with the impacts of modernity including the widespread introduction of electricity, mass-produced cars, and the ideal of suburban living. Advertising played an active role in developing consumer desires for these modern ideas, incorporating increasingly sophisticated emotive strategies on the one hand and acting as a guide for people unnerved by the increased pace and changing nature of modern living on the other.31 As the keepers of household budgets, women were identified as an essential target of advertisers as well as the commercial media - women’s magazines proliferated while radio provided a new source of entertainment and information. Bushells re-entered the burgeoning Melbourne market in 1922, having exited it in 1904.32 Competition would be fierce; tea was still a lucrative business. The themes of the new era were adopted with enthusiasm by Bushells. Seeking to convey an image that appealed to the new suburban middle class, Bushells presented itself as traditional and ‘sophisticated, discerning and modern’. Advertisements featured immaculately groomed women, opulent surroundings, and the use of exoticised but servile representations of women from India and Ceylon. Such imagery also fed into the narrative of identification with an enduring Empire that by then was in decline.33 As the post-war market share intensified, attention-grabbing promotions were instigated. In 1924 Bushells gave away a half pound of free tea to every Sydney home.34 Robur sought to incorporate elements of tradition with modernity via innovative marketing strategies, albeit in a different manner to Bushells. Robur focused on thrift and value, incorporating the central motif of the woman as the keeper of the home. It spoke to a less status-conscious kind of audience than Bushells, even as it cherry-picked some of its aspirational elements. The teapot as symbol of homely comforts gained traction during this time before becoming the core of an integrated advertising and marketing campaign. By 1928, the Robur Tea Company was the most prominent and profitable of James Service & Company’s businesses. It was incorporated in its own right, took over the other James Service tea businesses, and turned to more innovative forms of marketing.35 One of Robur’s key appeals relied on new silverware manufacturing technologies. Recently developed nickel-silver electroplating techniques allowed for the production of household goods that were relatively inexpensive yet retained the sheen of silver. This resulted in the golden era for the production of domestic silverware in Australia.36
The production of the Perfect Teapot in the booming late 1920s heralded a wide-ranging national marketing campaign that brought together these elements in a coordinated manner. In Melbourne and other urban centres, Robur teapots were painted on shops, walls and hoardings. The Lewis & Skinner records contain a hand-written book outlining the location of Robur teapots painted from January 1929 to June 1930. Over this eighteen-month period, 541 teapot signs were painted throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria.46 Teapots also graced posters plastered on railway station platforms, on the sides of roads and elsewhere. Whereas signwriters painted the teapots directly onto walls and windows, posters were designed by commercial artists. Cyril Dillon thus produced the advertisement which features the Perfect Teapot while emphasising both the domestic charms of the brand as well as its economy.

The Depression and Aftermath

Following the US stock market crash of 24 October 1929, Australia sank deeper into depression. The Robur Tea Company, which was in the process of being taken over by the South Australian food importer and manufacturer DJ Fosler, suddenly faced a strained economic landscape. It needed to revisit its marketing strategies if it was to retain market share. One of Robur’s key Depression-era initiatives was the ‘profit-sharing catalogue’. The idea of ‘profit-sharing’ had originally referred to schemes, originating in the nineteenth century, which allowed employees to share some of their employers’ profits. The term then found its way into American retail catalogues, with customers presented as ‘shareholders’ of profit. Goods-promoting catalogues had first been used in Australia in the 1880s. From the late 1880s these catalogues became popular with rural and regional Australians, who were growing in affluence and were keen to buy into the lifestyle improvements that their urban counterparts enjoyed.47 In these catalogues, Robur argued that the company’s ability to buy in bulk allowed for economies of scale. These profits, it was claimed, were then distributed to customers in the form of vouchers or coupons for redeeming catalogue items that included not only teapots, but everything from tableware and kitchenware to aprons, beauty products, handbags, and playing cards. Robur’s ‘profit-sharing catalogue’ also echoed broader concerns. The economic crisis had propelled a growing sense of disillusionment in capitalism. Working-class people had borne the brunt of the Depression’s privations, and in Victoria the effects of the Depression had been particularly severe. One response was the establishment of cooperative movements in working-class communities that ‘promoted co-operation for mutual benefit, rather than competition for individual gain’.48 These ‘co-ops’ bought everyday staples in bulk, which could then be bought at reduced rates by members, thereby incorporating elements of both pragmatism and idealism.49 This discourse amplified the appeal of Robur’s ‘profit-sharing’ catalogues.

The Depression also informed other marketing initiatives. Khamis notes that the Depression years ‘summoned a powerful discourse of thrift and frugality’ in the psyche of most Australian households, even the more affluent ones.50 This air of restraint extended beyond the worst of the Depression years. It was well suited to Robur’s marketing strategies, which had already associated the brand with such qualities. Rather than trading on notions of glamour and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The theme of ‘quality and status, Bushells similarly opted ‘to co-opt the concept of racial superiority’.51 The 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sponsoring of scooter races, and the 1934 packaging and selling for charity (with Robur Tea promotions inside) of pieces of the “Centenary Souvenir Birthday Cake”, which, at fifty feet high, claimed to be the largest cake ever made. The high point of Robur’s golden era of marketing stunts at fifty feet high, claimed to be the largest cake ever made.

Perfect teapot and the profit-sharing catalogues often sell for hundreds of dollars.

Khamis notes that the Bushells brand of tea ‘has significantly lengthened the signs’ lives – if not the lives of the lead-poisoned people who painted them. ‘Instead, Khamis suggests they should be seen primarily as unofficial local landmarks, and nostalgia for them cling on, bolstered by the addition of lead to the paint they used to be attached to. The evocation of purely personal pasts appears to have survived, many other Robur signs can still be seen, subjects of both the collecting of Robur Tea paraphernalia: examples of both the memorabilia of the lead-poisoned people who painted them, and Groes point out that ‘the origins of globalisation as we experience it today is a continuation of earlier forms of imperialism’.66 The sole remaining Robur teapot on a Brunswick East wall is an unofficial reminder of that irony in its evocation of the everyday affordances of the past: the Bushells tea truck overturned, and people rushed to grab what tea they could.72 The street sign is actually a metaphor for the past and present to the passer-by with a metaphorical arched eyebrow. Such follies came to an end with the Second World War. Coupon-based tea rationing was imposed during the war and remained in place long after hostilities ceased, as the tea supply chains of the British Empire were disrupted and eliminated. People remained hooked on tea, complaining to parliament and the Prime Minister about the restrictions. Tea theft was rife - there was even a visit to wartime Melbourne when a Bushells Tea truck overturned, and people rushed to grab what tea they could.72 Ratington played a role in reducing Australians’ future thirst for tea. However, Khamis also warns that the kinds of early marketing verve and innovation exhibited by Bushells – and also by Robur – should not be seen as above, or independent of, the larger social and cultural forces that have generated them. Instead, Khamis suggests they should be seen primarily as a tactical accommodation of those forces to serve the immediate needs of the business owners.73 Commerce, in the end, is a pragmatic pursuit, but the traces of the artifacts generated by it can reveal broader forces from the vantage point of the future. But one must be attuned to such resonances and layers. The evocation of purely personal pasts often described by ghost sign fans and collectors of old branded paraphernalia may be valued, but may miss other kinds of readings.74

One such reading applies to both the Robur and Bushells brands, given their historical context and the products they advertised. This is that such brands are the unintentional signifiers of an empire in terminal decline. Sam Roberts and Sebastian Groes suggest that London’s ghost signs ‘could be construed as part of a mythology of loss that is a particularly strong current in this nation’s consciousness and literature’.75 A similar thing could be said of the advertising artifacts generated by the tea merchants operating in the far reaches of the British Empire. They speak of an identification with a fading mythical glory at the point of its loss, a pathos made more poignant by the fading, crumbling quality of the signs. This identification with loss, however, is ironic given what has occurred since. Citing No Logo, Naomi Klein’s 1999 examination of globalisation and its impacts, Roberts and Groes point out that ‘the origins of globalisation as we experience it today is a continuation of earlier forms of imperialism’.76 The sole remaining Robur teapot on a Brunswick East wall is an unofficial reminder of that irony in its evocation of the everyday affordances of the past: the Bushells tea truck overturned, and so have I, for Empire remains. For Roberts and Groes, London’s ghost signs ‘stress both the continuity and relationship between London’s and Britain’s economic development during the industrial revolution and late capitalism, whilst, paradoxically, the signs’ moribund status suggests a discontinuity with the past’.77

The signs produced by the Robur Tea Company provide an unexpected window into this tension and ambivalence. They are embedded in the urban fabric of the city, connecting past and present to the passer-by with a metaphorical arched eyebrow. Like the signs around Melbourne, Robur’s name has faded but it has not entirely disappeared. In more recent times, the Robur story has taken a unique twist. The firm J. Lyons took over the much-reduced Robur Tea Company in 1992, after having already taken over two other iconic tea brands, Billy Tea and Tetley. A joint venture with the Indian tea company Tata Beverages (now a diversified manufacturing conglomerate) followed in 1993, with Tata taking over Lyons Teney in 2000. Hence, a company from a country whose products were once exploited by the British Empire now owns a brand associated with the Empire and that same exploitation. Such are the ways of globalisation.
27. Khamis, “Bushells and the Cultural Logic of Branding."
38. ibid., 129.
50. ibid.
51. Khamis, “Bushells and the Cultural Logic of Branding.”
52. ibid.
53. ibid.
54. ibid., 7-11.
58. ibid.
61. Khamis, “Bushells and the Cultural Logic of Branding.”
62. ibid., 7-11.
63. ibid., 129.
66. ibid.
67. ibid. 

**Endnotes**
In the two decades following the Second World War, Australia’s design industry fundamentally changed with the institutionalisation of modernist, professional practice. Promoted as universal and timeless, modernism was also associated with scientific knowledge, technological progress and economic profitability. Formally, it was characterised by a reductive aesthetic and an emphasis on function. But, embedded within this burgeoning discourse was a paradox. Though eager to appear international, Australian designers also wanted to signify their difference and distinction, typically through reference to Indigenous flora, fauna, or Aboriginal culture.

Beginning in the inter-war period, visual representations of Aborigines and their material culture by non-Aboriginal designers were promoted as a potential – if problematic – foundation for a modern, national culture. For designers in a peripheral locale such as Australia, Aboriginal culture could serve two functions – as a cipher of localisation and as a counterpoint to modernity. Although design critics have noted the appropriation of Aboriginal imagery, there has been little detailed reflection on this phenomenon. 1 Through examining key visual examples from the 1940s and 1950s from the Australia National Journal, cover designs of the cultural magazine Meanjin, and the design of the first Australian dollar bill, this article aims to further analyse the flip-side of colonialism and modernism.

Visualising a Settler Colonial Culture

In the twenty-first century, historians have constructed new frameworks for understanding colonial relationships, and ‘settler colonialism’ has proved a useful distinction for the Australian context. 2 Previously, the term ‘colonial’ could conflated two relationships – that between imperial metropole (Britain) and colonial periphery (Australia), and that between the primarily white Anglo settlers and Indigenous Australians. These were, of course, fundamentally different economic, political, social and cultural relationships. Importantly, design, in the form of commercial art, advertising and posters, was seen by modern artists and designers in the mid-twentieth century as a means to potentially bridge these relationships. Yet, as we will see, this was a conflicted project.

A close-knit network of artists, designers, publications and organizations in the 1920s and 1930s first visualised aspects of Aboriginal culture. These included the modern lifestyle magazine, The Home, founded in 1920, that featured seminal articles on Aboriginal art by Margaret Preston; and the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA), founded in 1929. The latter produced tourist posters and publications (designed by James Northfield, Douglas Annand, and Gert Sellheim and others), which included depictions of Aboriginal people and their material culture. ANTA’s magazine Walkabout, launched in 1934, emphasised depictions of Aborigines as ‘primitive’ people with a ‘Stone Age’ culture, rendered in modern photographic techniques. 3 In advertising too, an interest in Australian history included the Aborigine as a graphic device or visual shorthand for the past. 4 During the interwar period, such representations provided a clear visual contrast with white, settler culture, reinforcing the latter’s superiority and modernity.
Margaret Preston was one of the few artists in the inter-war period with an interest in Aboriginal art. In her 1923 article, ‘The Indigenous Art of Australia’, Preston celebrated the similarity of ‘tribal’ modes and natural colours of Aboriginal visual culture and argued that ‘returning to primitive art’ could provide a foundation for a national culture. Using designs from shields and objects in the Sydney Museum as examples, Preston proposed that Aboriginal artists and designers should use for home décor, on textiles, graphic art, pottery, furniture or even ‘an amusing dado for a child’s room’. In a 1930 article on the same theme, Preston adds ‘please do not bother about what the carven meant in the way of myths, rites, etc; that is not the decorators’ affair’.

Numerous designers in the 1930s, including textile designers Frances Burke and Michael O’Connell, commercial artists Douglas Annand, Gert Selbeim, Dahl and Geoffrey Collins, Allan Moore and Gordon Andrews, took up Preston’s proposal to use Aboriginal culture. Preston too self-consciously incorporated Aboriginal motifs, patterns and colours into her paintings and prints. Although her initial exposure to Aboriginal culture was entirely through museums and the writings of anthropologists, she travelled to the Northern Territory in 1940. ‘This gave her some understanding of the regional variety of Aboriginal cultural practices, but, apart from brief references to spiritual beliefs, she remained primarily interested in form, pattern and colour.

Such appropriation of Aboriginal culture was an instance of what Marcia Langton terms ‘Aboriginality’, the consumption of Aboriginal culture and people as ‘primarily a textual or visual experience’—‘experience for most Australians’.

Langton notes thus:

‘[The familiar stereotypes and the constant stereotyping, iconising and mythologising of Aboriginal people by white people who have never had any substantial first-hand contact with Aboriginal people. These icons of “Aboriginality” are produced by Anglo-Australians, not in contact with Aboriginal people, but from other representations… imagined, inhabited, representations.

This is an apt description of the work of Preston and the designers of the 1930s, whose primary interest lay in the utilisation of Aboriginality as a distinctive marker of national difference. But, while it is tempting to dismiss all appropriations of Indigenous art as essentially exploitative, and ultimately complicit if not always consistent with this position, Preston’s Aboriginal appropriations, for example, were “for the most part greeted with indifference or actual hostility”, suggesting her cross-cultural ideals were at odds with mainstream Australian culture of that time. Primitive bodies and Stone Age material culture, objectified as visual evidence of an ‘aboriginal’ ‘primitivism’, were indissolubly linked to the modern. Yet this pairing was clearly too confronting for another time and another place, were indissolubly linked to Australian culture of that time. Primitive bodies and Stone Age material culture, objectified as visual evidence of an ‘aboriginal’ ‘primitivism’, were indissolubly linked to the modern. Yet this pairing was clearly too confronting for another time and another place, were indissolubly linked to Australian culture of that time.'
Early Meanjin covers of the 1940s featured a trail of four footprints. While they may have represented the journal’s four founders, a trail of footprints also unmistakably represented an idea borrowed from Aboriginal mythology. In an early issue, anthropologist A P Elkin related the footprints to mondui, ‘spirit-tracks’, or traces of ancient heroes or spirits: ‘To the aboriginals [sic], these foot-print[s], these mytho- logical paths, are not simply relics, fossils or memorialis of an age long past. They are steps into a present, of which the past and future are but phases. In aboriginal [sic] philosophy, as in dreaming, the limitations of time and space do not exist. They live in the “eternal now”, in all the richness of its experience and the inspiration of its conviction.’

He then described an Aboriginal ritual in some detail and concluded with the idea of an Australia in which we shall live out our ‘dream-time’ myths, sharing them with all men of vision, courage and truth. The same 1943 issue of the magazine featured a full-page reproduction of a Margaret Preston print titled ‘Aboriginal Hunt Design’ (although the ‘earthy’ ochres, yellow and black colours were lost in the ground on which Annand highlights an Aboriginal figure). This intersection of literacy, anthropological and visual cultures is characteristic of the journal’s first fifteen years or so. In 1948, the footprints disappeared, and the cover of each issue instead featured a unique design. One of the first illustrated covers, by Peter Burrowes, featured two stick figures on a ground that projected a distinctive sense of place. Even if – as the final example graphically illustrates – designs were literally stolen from Aboriginal people.

In 1963, Treasurer Harold Holt announced Australia would convert to a decimal currency in the near future. The Reserve Bank approached seven designers to produce a set of banknotes, of whom four produced a set of sample notes. Of these, Gordon Andrews’ designs were selected to become the new Australian bank notes. The original set of two, ten, twenty and fifty-dollar notes featured the head of a prominent Australian man on each side – were celebrated as bold, colourful and distinctive designs.

The one-dollar note featured the Queen on one side and Aboriginal imagery on the other. Andrews later wrote that by including Aboriginal art on a bank note, ‘I hoped to celebrate their culture through something all citizens would handle and come to respect. The idea, back in 1964, was unlikely to be accepted by the Bank, but I knew I would have an ally in the Governor, Dr Coombs.’ He noted that the images came from photographs of Karlupka’s collection of bark paintings. At the time, Andrews knew nothing about the artist or the meaning of the art, and assumed the artist was long dead.

This was soon proved incorrect. After the notes were released in 1966, Alan Fidock, of the Milingimbi Mission in Arnhem Land, recognized the image on the dollar bill as belonging to the Gurruwarungu story, which he knew belonged to David Malangi Daymirringu. It then became clear that Malangi had not given permission for the design to be used and Andrews had broken the law. Andrews later wrote that

Eric Thake’s two Meanjin covers from 1950 feature line-art portraits of Aboriginal men’s heads. Before the Second World War, Thake had worked for Paton’s advertising agency in Melbourne, and also painted and designed engravings and book plates. He gained some notoriety as a surrealist when he shared the Contemporary Art Society prize in 1949 with James Gleeson, for his painting ‘Salvation from the Evils of Earthly Existence’. After serving in the RAAF, Thake returned to Paton’s and to his design and art work, which also included covers, newspaper advertising, stamp design and murals. However, these covers are rare in their oeuvre in the overspill visualisation of Aboriginal culture. In contrast, Douglas Annand’s work was littered with Aboriginal references. His 1950 cover comprises a black background on which Amund highlights an Aboriginal figure by the use of white body paint and a ceremonial headdress. Annand grew up in Brisbane, and his design career began at Read Press where he learned printing technologies and worked on packaging, advertising and poster design. After moving to Sydney in 1930, Amund found work with David Jones and ANTA, and he became known for his innovative techniques, including photomontage and collage. Amund worked on publications such as The Home, Art in Australia and Australia: National Journal, and produced graphics for the Orient Line cruise ship company, including the ‘Kangaroo Hunt’, a mural for RMS Orcaeco inspired by the bark paintings of Arnhem Land. Expatriate British designer Richard Beck arrived in Sydney in 1940, and, after the War, worked as a freelance designer in Melbourne. Beck already had an impressive portfolio from London, including posters for Orient Line and brochures and posters for the London Transport Board. Although best known today as the designer of the 1956 Melbourne Olympic poster and the iconic Wynn’s wine label, Beck also designed a Meanjin cover inspired by Aboriginal bark painting. This same 1951 issue featured an article by Ronald
1 Not a small challenge to this is Nicola St John, "Australian Communication Design History: An Indigenous Retelling," Journal of Design History, (advance access) 2016.
2 Nothing is more so than by Peter Burrowes; 8:3 1949 by unknown; 12:1, 1953 by Ostoja-Kotkowski (this cover was repeated for the next three issues), 13:1, 1954 by Douglas Annand.
4 Margaret Preston, "The Indigenous Art of Australia," in Modern Art, 1953 by Ostoja-Kotkowski.
9 See Patrick Woolfe, "The Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Movement in the 1980s," in The Australian and-designed-for-industry-author-denise-whitehouse/ (accessed 2016); and Lynette Russell, 'Going...
MENTHOLATUM

1982 "DEEP HEAT" CREATIVE

We need more than one creative idea to take to Client. If we simply take the American "There's no beating Deep Heating" theme back to them we are not earning our Service Fee. I think we need a number of creative theme/executions/ideas — and Gurney (who is the boss from Jan. 1) is strong on the circle of relief visual idea (not necessarily these words).

Consider:

1. The zone of relief idea
2. Testimonials from sufferers

Gurney back November 23.

Material required for meeting with him approx. Nov. 25
Blakeney, Rod Blakeney recalled a more convoluted process: advertising in 2014, the creative director of Barry Banks straightforward. Interviewed shortly after he retired from media outlet. The process, however, was rarely this department, which placed the advertisement in the appro- piate media space on their behalf. Over the course of the twentieth century, agency services would branch out into other areas, including market research, public relations, and television commercials. Agencies could engage media agencies, which would buy media space. From the 1970s, smaller agencies also operated a media department, which was responsible for buying media space. From the 1970s, smaller agencies could engage media agencies, which would buy media space on their behalf. Over the course of the twentieth century, agency services would branch out into other areas, including market research, public relations, and television commercials. Within the traditional agency structure, advertising campaigns typically commenced in the account service department, where account executives were established and maintained connections with the client. Once a clear outline of the client’s needs was established, the account service team provided directions to the creative department, which then sought to develop creative responses. The account service department identified the most appropriate ideas and took them to the client for approval. Approved campaigns were then produced by the creative department. The final advertisement was forwarded to the media department, which placed the advertisement in the appropriate media outlet. The process, however, was rarely this straightforward. Interviewed shortly after he retired from advertising in 2014, the creative director of Barry Banks Blakeney, Rod Blakeney recalled a more convoluted process: An account executive would come, and give you a brief, and tell you a deadline... You would write the ad. When it was done in your satisfaction, not necessarily to his [account executive], you would go and talk to an artist, and get a rough of what an ad should look like. Remember, this is pre-computer. So the studios were awash with artists... You would have some copy and a layout... You would have a deadline... You would show it to the account executive. He would either say: “Yes, that’s just what I wanted” or “This is a pile of cocky-poo, go and do it again.” Far from being the product of a linear process, an advertising campaign was informed by a series of instructions, evaluations, negotiations, and collaborations. As Liz McFall notes, academic studies of advertising have largely prioritised the advertisement, paying scant regard to the processes and influences both informing and underpinning them. A handful of cultural historians and sociologists have recognised the importance of understanding and unpacking these processes. In their pioneering studies, Stuart Ewen and Roland Marchand unpack the ideological context in which advertising operates and its impact on advertising imagery. Building on these studies, Robert Crawford and Jackie Dickinson’s Behind Glass Doors used oral history interviews alongside documentary materials and the trade press to examine Australia’s advertising agency structures and operations during the period spanning the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, advertising’s so-called ‘golden age’. Such studies, however, have tended to focus on national or multinational agencies. Small advertising agencies with staff numbering fewer than 25 have attracted relatively little attention from scholars.

The popularity of television programs such as Mad Men, and more locally, the Gruen Transfer revealed the public’s fascination with the inner workings of the advertising industry. While such programs have helped demystify some of the industry’s tricks and practices, their focus on the more dramatic aspects of the advertising profession, such as the inspirational genius behind a campaign or the winning of a new account, tends to reinforce the image of advertising as a glamorous business. The reality, however, is somewhat more ordinary. This paper seeks to redress this imbalance by providing an insight into the everyday practices of a small Melbourne-based advertising agency, Barry Banks Blakeney, which operated in the second half of the twentieth century.
However, as Jackie Dickinson's Advertising Women in Aus-
tralia in the Twentieth Century has shown, such firms have 
been important sites of innovation. These firms not only 
offered employment opportunities to individuals who fell 
outside of the professional mainstream (ie: women), their 
most distinct size meant that they were more likely to experiment 
in terms of creative approaches, technique, and execution. 

Studies of present-day small advertising agencies indicate 
that innovation remains a hallmark of their operations. As 
Jenny-Maria Astrom et al reveal, small agencies continue 
April 2016, Barry Banks Blakeney 
collection, Gift of Rodney Blakeney, 2016, p. 10 
(305.30mm x 300.80mm)
Continued

Blakeney, 2016

Mock catalogues and pamphlets, replete with the Chem-mart chemist, were created, as well as the storyboards for the Chem-mart group members. 29 Within this strategy, designated affluent segments’ and generating ‘more profits in the chemist retail sector as well as the retailer’s current and past marketing strategies, before undertaking a market analysis. Based on these insights it offers various recommendations, from positioning ‘Chem-mart as the consumer’s choice in term [sic] of price, range and friendly helpful professional advice’ to attracting ‘new customers from designated affluent segments’ and generating ‘more profits for the Chem-mart group members’. 29 Within this strategy, advertising’s role was threefold: to increase consumer awareness, to establish favourable consumer attitudes towards Chem-mart, and to entice consumers to develop their photographic films at Chem-mart. 30

BBB hoped to differentiate Chem-mart from competitors by drawing attention to its ‘professionalism and competitive pricing’ 30 This would be encapsulated in the campaign’s central theme: ‘Chem-mart: We’ll look after you’. Describing it as an ‘open ended and emotionally-charged’ description of the ‘West Coast American greeting ‘Have a happy day!’’, BBB argued that its proposition created a ‘friendly, “make you feel good” mood’ that had ‘high visibility on radio’. 31 Songwriter Mike Brady, whose ‘Up there Cazaly’ promotion for Channel 7’s football coverage had become a chart-topping song, was employed as a freelance to write the jingle. Illustrating the agency’s production abilities, recordings of 10 radio advertisements were provided to stimulate a journey from Melbourne to Surfers Paradise. 32

The extensive number of research studies held in the BBB archive underscores the firm’s commitment to using research to guide its strategic approach and creative thinking. However, in this case, the research was not enough to win the account. 33

The 1986 pitch document for the Melbourne-based national chain of budget chemists, Chem-mart, covered similar territory, albeit with some discernible differences. It opens with an overview of the marketing context, outlining current trends in the chemist retail sector as well as the retailer’s current and past marketing strategies, before undertaking a market analysis. Based on these insights it offers various recommendations, from positioning ‘Chem-mart as the consumer’s choice in term [sic] of price, range and friendly helpful professional advice’ to attracting ‘new customers from designated affluent segments’ and generating ‘more profits for the Chem-mart group members’. 29 Within this strategy, advertising’s role was threefold: to increase consumer awareness, to establish favourable consumer attitudes towards Chem-mart, and to entice consumers to develop their photographic films at Chem-mart. 30

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The central idea's capacity to move from 'print media to television and radio' as well as its capacity to implement 'easy and low cost changes' for items on special without losing 'continuity of the theme'. Media costs and strategies are then discussed in detail, indicating again that Chem-mart were as budget conscious as their customers. Like every good advertisement, the document concludes with its call to action. In this case, it returns to business side of the pitch, concluding with further details about BBBi's relevant staff, and the agency's mode of operation in terms of payment.

The 1989 strategic plan for Mentholatum's Deep Heat line of analgesic rubs differs from the previous documents insofar as BBBi was not trying to win the account. Mentholatum was an existing client. It approached BBBi to launch a new product into the market and to counter the impact of a new competitor by updating existing lines. The document follows the set pattern of opening with background details on the market and the brand's current marketing strategies. It moves into the agency's creative ideas, beginning with packaging. As Deep Heat packaging had not changed since the 1980s, BBBi provided a detailed explanation of the new packaging and the ideas underpinning its design.

The DEEP HEAT GEL BBBi lettering had been specially developed to give the pack a unique look. It is not an existing typeface so it will never be seen on any other pack. It was a 4 colour pack for strong on-shelf recognition. Typeface, apart from the special DEEP HEAT lettering, is Helvetica. It's clean, modern, won't date and has a desirable 'ethical' feeling.9

The advertising campaign aimed to introduce the new product centre with a simple promise: 'Extra strength for hours of temporary relief from arthritis and muscle pain'.10 The execution of the television commercial was no less straightforward. Opening with a shot of the new product and packaging, its attributes are highlighted. Mindful of the need to maintain consistency, the commercial uses 'The distinctive DEEP HEAT sound ... to reinforce the nervous and extra strength: DEEP HEAT GOES DEEPER'.11 Typical users are then shown enjoying life and the convenience of the product pack. The lettering run almost the full length of the existing typeface so it will never be seen on any other pack.12

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The advertising industry venerates the creative process. Stories of copywriters and art directors drawing inspiration for successful campaigns from the unlikeliest of sources are legion. At BBBi, creative director Blakeney recalls that: 'I had a great deal of autonomy on the creative side. Keith Barry had the new business getter … he was the business head and had a great deal of autonomy on the creative side. Reflecting on the agency's philosophy towards clients, Blakeney states: 'What the client really is looking for successful campaigns from the unlikeliest of sources are legion. At BBBi, creative director Blakeney recalls that: 'I had a great deal of autonomy on the creative side. Keith Barry had the new business getter … he was the business head and had a great deal of autonomy on the creative side. Reflecting on the agency's philosophy towards clients, Blakeney states: 'What the client really is looking for successful campaigns from the unlikeliest of sources are legion.'16

The pitch documents certainly underscore this relationship and BBBi's efforts to cultivate it. In each case, the agency is speaking directly to the client with a view to persuading them that the creative concepts are consistent with client experiences and expectations on the one hand, and consumer needs on the other. Successfully negotiating these different and often inconsistent and even competing interests was integral to getting the business.

Creating Ideas

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The final statement in BBBi's response to its client's query also illustrates the impact of other influences on the marketing strategies. Marketers operating health-related fields needed to pay close attention to government regulations. In a 1979 letter from the American headquarters to its Australian office, Mentholatum noted that American authorities posed a similar challenge in forbidding the use of the term arthritis. The same letter also revealed the degree to which competitor's campaigns affected marketing strategy. Noting that 'In the USA we were pre-empted in the 'Extra Strength' category by three other competitors', the Americans observed that this did not preclude its Australian team from laying claim to the title: 'However, in your market we could be first in with the 'extra strength' which is most important'.13

In 1977 Mentholatum was looking to implement a new campaign in Australia that drew on overseas examples. Correspondence reveals that British and American approaches and views were being canvassed. In writing to Mentholatum's Australian team, Blakeney offered his experienced viewpoint:

‘The reservations expressed by the United Kingdom on the advisability of using the Heat Sensor commercial for the Australian market prompt me to add my own thoughts … It seems to me that there is a strong argument in favour of retaining the pulsating circle … You have made a considerable investment in a distinctive visual device, which would be building on an already established foundation by retaining it. By combining the pulsating circle and the Heat Sensor we are making an extremely complex communication which perhaps does not allow sufficient time to do justice to either themes.14

Two years later, Blakeney was again advising his client on the appropriate use of overseas campaigns in the Australian market. Commenting on two American storyboards (for different Mentholatum products) that had been dispatched to Australia, Blakeney writes:

Agency recommends adherence to the successful and distinctive US Pack in 4 colour design. Client intends to have Australian labels printed on adhesive plasticised labels for fixing to pack supplied from US. Client requires mock-up urgently for presentation to Vic. Health Dept.15
Concerns about the agency’s creative credentials in the lead up to a meeting with its client:
We need more than one creative idea to take to Client. If we simply take the American “There’s no beating Deep Heating!” theme back to them we are not earning our Service Fee. I think we need a number of creative theme/execution/ideas – and Gurney (who is the boss from Jan.) is strong on the circle of relief visual idea (not necessarily these words). Consider 1. the zone of relief idea 2. Testimonial from sufferers.44

Evidently, the meeting with Mentholatum went well, with minutes noting: Agency presented alternative approaches; Client approved “Testimonial” series in principle. Agency to refine both print and radio executions.45

Creative Processes

The BBB archive provides few direct details on the actual creative process. However evidence of creative thinking can nevertheless be discerned in mark ups and approvals for scripts and proofs. In order to ensure that clients remained fully abreast of each campaign, typed scripts for television commercials were dispatched for final approval. Such alterations varied in size and scope. In 1976, the script stating ‘Rheumatic and muscular pain are relieved by...’ was changed by the client to ‘Rheumatic and muscular pains may be relieved by...’, indicating the client’s wariness of using absolute claims as well as an abiding concern for government regulations.46 A different script produced around the same time was similarly amended from ‘Deep Heat Lotion brings welcome soothing relief’ to ‘Deep Heat Lotion helps bring welcome soothing relief’.47 The commercial that went to air in 1980 contained much of this script.48

Not all script changes were driven by clients. A script for a television commercial that was broadcast in 1980 was changed from ‘When muscular pain makes you wonder why you bother to play the game you love’ to the shorter ‘Why you bother to play the game you love’.49 However, the BBB archive challenges the sense that small agencies could singlehandedly create the award-winning campaign emerges as something of a myth or, at least, the exception that proves the rule.

Although creativity is an essential component of advertising and the advertising industry, the BBB archive demonstrates that advertising is fundamentally about business. The efforts made by agencies to sell the client’s business, in pitches and promotional materials, illustrate the commercial reality of the advertising industry – an agency simply cannot exist without clients. Small agencies like BBB were particularly sensitive to the arrival or departure of an account. Within this environment, innovation and risk-taking have been identified by small firms as a hallmark of their operations, providing a point of differentiation to their larger competitors. However, the BBB archive challenges the sense that small agencies are inherently risk-takers or somehow predisposed to doing things differently. BBB’s pride itself on its ability to service the client’s wishes – a small agency with big agency experience. In terms of the Mentholatum account, this meant overseeing overseas commercials. At other times, it recommended further research to ensure that the campaign was found on solid ground rather than innovative gut-feeling. Creativity and innovation were important, but only if when the client required it. The fact that the Blakeney had to encourage his agency to come up with new ideas underscores the degree to which BBB’s ‘big agency’ client-service approach permeated its work.

The BBB archive ultimately documents the unseen, neglected, and all too easily forgotten aspects of the creative process. In the process it offers a candid and unique insight into the world of advertising practices. It also records the experiences of smaller and less glamorous advertising agencies, a topic that has attracted significantly less attention from scholars and archivists alike. Finally, the BBB materials present an important resource to design historians. By illustrating past practices, the archive illustrates key aspects of advertising design practice as well as the influences affecting them.

Conclusion

At a glance, Blakeney’s claim that ‘advertising has to reflect the taste and judgement of the people it is addressing’ seems logical and relatively unimpressive.50 But when it is considered in relation to the materials held in the BBB archive, we begin to see that ways advertisements are in fact addressing multiple audiences and are doing so well before they reach the consuming public. Advertising agencies must firstly address their clients, whose views are informed by a vast range of factors – from head office decrees to government regulations to board members’ individual tastes. The BBB archive similarly reveals the agency to be an audience. Campaigns must therefore reflect an agency’s philosophical approach to advertising and, in the process, the creative team’s own taste and judgement. Within this framework of constant filtering, the image of the inspired creative who singlehandedly creates the award-winning campaign emerges as something of a myth or, at least, the exception that proves the rule.

Endnotes

2 Rod Blakeney, interview by Rosemary Francis, Series 1488539, (Melbourne: Clemenger, 1996)
7 Crawford & Dickenson, Behind Glass Doors.
10 Ibid.
12 Blakeney, interview.
15 ‘No va que, [What do, and how do we do it]’, unpaged, 1977, Box 23, BBB Collection, EMM Design Archives.
16 Ibid.
18 ‘Myrtle Bloed Presentation’, July 24, 1962, Box 22, BBB Collection, EMM Design Archives.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 ‘Presentation to Flag Inn by Barry Banks Blakeney Advertising Pty Ltd’, Book, 1 (3), February 1981, Box 22, BBB Collection, EMM Design Archives.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 The successful campaign can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5-TPvdOFJE (accessed September 12, 2018).
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., ‘Meet the Chemist’.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., ‘50 Second Television ‘Catalogue’”.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Blakeney, interview.
41 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
49 ‘Ibid,’ Script, DSR10.1.76.
50 Ibid.
51 This commercial can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=7P9dP3FITE (accessed September 12, 2018).
53 Blakeney, interview.
54 Ibid.
SONG:

Friendly advice

A bargain price

At Chem-mart

we'll look
after you.
Blind Embossing: The (in)visibility and impact of women across Australia’s advertising, graphic design and publishing industries

Jane Connory

Blind embossing is a term used by communication designers to describe a finishing process utilised in printing, where a design is raised in relief from a particular surface without the use of ink or colour. The motif makes a physical impression on the card, which becomes more visible through the shadows cast when light is directed on to it. It can take focus and attention to notice. Blind embossing offers a useful metaphor for the contributions made by women in the Australian advertising, graphic design and publishing industries, as their careers often leave an impression that remains invisible until someone actively looks for them. There is also a complexity in this metaphor, as it simultaneously represents the invisible and visible in a lived experience. By undertaking direct dialogue with professional women working in these industries, it is possible to develop further insights into these experiences and to explore the complexities that lie therein.

Much research has concluded that the contribution of women in other professional environments, like corporate boards, management teams and professional workplaces, can have a high impact on profits, competitive advantages, effectiveness and innovation. However, the impact of creative women across the advertising, graphic design and publishing industries has attracted less attention. Industry bodies representing creative directors and designers offer an important, if underutilised, avenue for identifying these women and, indeed, assessing the nature of their contribution to their respective field. The Australasian Writers and Art Directors Association (AWA), the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA) and the Australian Book Designers Association’s (ABDA) respective Hall of Fame platforms and national award programs paradoxically raise the visibility of these women while obscuring other aspects of their experiences. They therefore provide clear statistics for measuring these women’s contributions, yet at the same time, they omit their personal experiences of visibility as professional creative directors and designers.

This article seeks to establish a context for the gendered imbalance on these platforms and programs by examining the experiences of three women, whose careers have been identified and celebrated by their peers. It explores the way that gender informs their professional work through contextualising their individual experiences of visibility. In 2016, the online ‘Invisible: Women in Australian Graphic Design’ survey was conducted. The survey asked design professionals, educators and students across Australia to name women who had made significant contributions to the post-1960 history of Australian graphic design. Michaela Webb, owner and creative director at Studio Round, and Sandy Cull, a senior designer in the publishing industry, were two of the 140 women identified by participants. This list of women soon snowballed through word of mouth, and grew to include Fiona Leeming, the owner and creative director of Honey Communications. Interviews with these three women form the basis of this article.

Through these interviews, Webb, Cull, and Leeming offer important insights into their respective careers as well as their respective industries. Such interviews also underscore the blind embossing metaphor as a way of conceptualising women’s experiences and contributions to the broader commercial design field.

Women in Advertising

When examining the impact of women working as creative directors and art directors in the Australian advertising industry, it is important to quantify their visible presence. The nature of their visibility can be demonstrated through a gendered analysis of the award winners. Running in Australasia for 40 years, AWA’s charter aims to ‘set standards of creative excellence, to promote this concept in the business arena, and to educate and inspire the next creative generation’.

When analysing the gendered data of the elite Gold Pencil winners in the most recent awards (the 39th), men were more visible than women as both creative directors and art directors – 80 per cent were men, while 20 per cent were women. The jury for these awards was equally...
Leeming pushed the ‘girl power’ messaging with ‘Sportsgirl’, which is closer to the 20 per cent figure for women winning industry awards.

In 1993, she reversed the trend of the objectifying women, by launching the ‘girl power’ messaging through the Sportsgirl brand – a decade before the British girl band, the Spice Girls, became famous for doing the same. Her continued presence in the Australian advertising industry has also seen her further push the message of inclusivity, as evident in the 2016 Porter Davis #CampaignForRespect, where she directed a creative team including Joanne Bradley, Nick Leary and Rob Walker. This outdoor campaign celebrated diversity through the use of emotive portraiture. It featured 26 graphic designers, two women amongst them.

In an industry that has been accused of misogyny, sexism and promoting negative stereotypes to women, her continued presence in the Australian advertising industry has also been instrumental in raising awareness of the need for gender equality.

Leeming’s work has been recognised with many awards, including a pencil in 2016. Her ethical representation of women in advertising has been acknowledged with the Grocery Division, also established in 1992, ‘s Hall of Fame. Hall of Famer John Bevins, whose independent agency, the Grain, is also very low. Data collated from the 1994 to 2015 ADGA Hall of Fame awards, shows that only 33 per cent of the 129 jurors were women. The data also reveals that of the 4, 878 designers awarded during this time, only 23 per cent were women (71 per cent were men and 3 per cent were named as entire studios). Since its inception in 1992, ADGA’s Hall of Fame consists of 26 graphic designers. Only two women feature on the list – Dahl Collings and Alison Forbes.

This representation of women is not only alarmingly low for this sector of the Australian creative industries, it is also at odds with the gendered pipeline of graduates and the profile of an average designer. Since 1970, the number of women completing graphic design degrees at Melbourne’s Monash University has steadily increased to 71 per cent. The Design Institute of Australia’s Fees and Salary Survey from 2017 also demonstrates the preponderance of women in the industry – notably in the role of graphic designer (60.3 per cent of survey respondents were women).

Unlike the advertising industry, where the low representation of women in advertising’s creative ranks is reflected in the award winner statistics, the ADGA data altogether fails to demonstrate the presence of women in the Australian graphic design industry, let alone the scale of their contribution to it.

Michaela Webb, creative director and owner of Studio Round in Melbourne, has won and judged ADGA awards and has also served on the ADGA Council. As the most mentioned woman in the ‘Visible Women in Australian Graphic Design’ survey, Webb makes it a high priority to visibly advocate for women in the creative industries. Webb studied in New Zealand and received a Bachelor in Media Arts (Graphic Design) in 1994. She initially had few women to model what a successful graphic designer could be. Eventually, she was introduced to Lisa Grocott (who was then a lecturer in New Zealand). This enabled her to finally ‘see a senior woman in that role’ and provided her with the impetus to plan her own way forward.

Webb’s encounter with Grocott fuelled her growing ambition, which took her to London, where she gained a position at the Wolff Olins studio. Working for Wolff Olins on the branding for the arts sector including the Tate Identity, Webb moved on to Spin Communications, also in London. She would spend over two years at Spin Communications, taking a leadership role across similar arts projects, including Channel 4. During this time, she was the only woman amongst seven men. Although her team grew to 25, she nevertheless remained the only woman there. Returning to Australia in 2002, she founded Studio Round, where she continues to positively influence the visibility of women as graphic designers.

Women in Graphic Design

Founded in 1988, ADGA describes itself as ‘the peak national organisation representing the Australian communication design industry’. Like ADGA, AGDA runs its own awards scheme and has been also inducting graphic designers into its Hall of Fame since 1992. The statistical visibility of women as judges, award winners, and Hall of Fame inductees is also very low. Data collated from the 1994 to 2015 ADGA awards, shows that only 23 per cent of the 129 jurors were women. The data also reveals that of the 4, 878 designers awarded during this time, only 23 per cent were women (71 per cent were men and 3 per cent were named as entire studios). Since its inception in 1992, ADGA’s Hall of Fame consists of 26 graphic designers. Only two women feature on the list – Dahl Collings and Alison Forbes.

In 1993, she reversed the trend of the objectifying women, by launching the ‘girl power’ messaging through the Sportsgirl brand – a decade before the British girl band, the Spice Girls, became famous for doing the same. Her continued presence in the Australian advertising industry has also been instrumental in raising awareness of the need for gender equality.

Leeming’s work has been recognised with many awards, including a pencil in 2016. Her ethical representation of women in advertising has been acknowledged with the Grocery Division, also established in 1992, ‘s Hall of Fame. Hall of Famer John Bevins, whose independent agency, the Grain, is also very low. Data collated from the 1994 to 2015 ADGA Hall of Fame awards, shows that only 33 per cent of the 129 jurors were women. The data also reveals that of the 4, 878 designers awarded during this time, only 23 per cent were women (71 per cent were men and 3 per cent were named as entire studios). Since its inception in 1992, ADGA’s Hall of Fame consists of 26 graphic designers. Only two women feature on the list – Dahl Collings and Alison Forbes.

This representation of women is not only alarmingly low for this sector of the Australian creative industries, it is also at odds with the gendered pipeline of graduates and the profile of an average designer. Since 1970, the number of women completing graphic design degrees at Melbourne’s Monash University has steadily increased to 71 per cent. The Design Institute of Australia’s Fees and Salary Survey from 2017 also demonstrates the preponderance of women in the industry – notably in the role of graphic designer (60.3 per cent of survey respondents were women).

Unlike the advertising industry, where the low representation of women in advertising’s creative ranks is reflected in the award winner statistics, the ADGA data altogether fails to demonstrate the presence of women in the Australian graphic design industry, let alone the scale of their contribution to it.

Michaela Webb, creative director and owner of Studio Round in Melbourne, has won and judged ADGA awards and has also served on the ADGA Council. As the most mentioned woman in the ‘Visible Women in Australian Graphic Design’ survey, Webb makes it a high priority to visibly advocate for women in the creative industries. Webb studied in New Zealand and received a Bachelor in Media Arts (Graphic Design) in 1994. She initially had few women to model what a successful graphic designer could be. Eventually, she was introduced to Lisa Grocott (who was then a lecturer in New Zealand). This enabled her to finally ‘see a senior woman in that role’ and provided her with the impetus to plan her own way forward.

Webb’s encounter with Grocott fuelled her growing ambition, which took her to London, where she gained a position at the Wolff Olins studio. Working for Wolff Olins on the branding for the arts sector including the Tate Identity, Webb moved on to Spin Communications, also in London. She would spend over two years at Spin Communications, taking a leadership role across similar arts projects, including Channel 4. During this time, she was the only woman amongst seven men. Although her team grew to 25, she nevertheless remained the only woman there. Returning to Australia in 2002, she founded Studio Round, where she continues to positively influence the visibility of women as graphic designers.
the client’s brief as a sophisticated and minimal design, and it has gone on to become the leading personal care brand in Australia. Without such a gender diverse studio of designers to draw upon, this project may not have had such a successful outcome.

Women in Publishing

In contrast to the low visibility of women in advertising and graphic design on the ad and design platforms, the publishing industry is readily recognised as female-dominated workplace. Women were calculated as 67 per cent of authors across all genres in Australia in 2015. While women working in publishing houses often report that they are amongst the majority of those employed, the top positions continued to be occupied by men. Sandy Cull, an Australian book designer with 12 years’ experience at Penguin, explains that ‘Most of the people on the road are women. Intelligent, incredibly able, clever women’. The majority of readers are also women – approximately 55 per cent in 2017. Although it is difficult to obtain data to quantify the presence of women working within the specific role of graphic design in the publishing industry, a gender analysis of winners in the ad award archives offers some important insights.

The data collected from the ad award archives reveals that by 1990, the male dominance of jacket, cover and internal design was in decline. In 1990 women represented 53 per cent of the winners. A decade later in 2000, women accounted for 68 per cent of award winners. This figure dipped to 53 per cent in 2010, and in 2017 it had increased to 60 per cent. Associated with this increase was an elevated perception in the quality of the book designs. According to the 2014 Man Booker Prize winner, Richard Flannigan, ‘Australian book design has come on in leaps and bounds in recent years’. ad judge’s comments similarly shift from being negative around this pivotal point in 1990. A judge in 2014, for example, had complained that ‘In many cases jacket designs bore no relation to the contents of the book’.

Webb’s experiences with few female role models and colleagues reflects the low visibility of women in the ad awards and Hall of Fame. However, these experiences have also had a positive effect on the way she runs her own studio and the way she interacts with the industry more generally. Webb makes herself available to judge awards, including the 2015 ad awards, and is keen to make her voice heard at conferences, panels and seminars, including the ad/ades conference in 2006 and the Sex, Drugs & Helvetica conference in 2014. Although she does not actively seek these opportunities, she understands that visibility breeds visibility, and when invited does so ‘For my studio, and for females’. However, Webb’s willingness to put herself forward to inspire others comes with many negative effects – like being perceived as token and being open to criticism. Webb often finds herself the only woman on stage, resulting in this perceived tokenism, and has spoken transparently about the challenges of visibility for women in design.

Webb is also conscious of keeping a gendered balance in her studio, but finds it interesting the jobs that men and women gravitate towards. In 2016, she was working on a packaging design for an organic tampon brand and found that the most effective work and interest in the job came from the women in her studio, including Leah Procko and Talia Josie Heron. They were not chosen specifically to work on the brief because of their gender but, in the end, their empathy with the brand resonated in their design work, including the organic line illustration. The packaging successfully reflects the client’s brief as a sophisticated and minimal design, and it has gone on to become the leading personal care brand in Australia. Without such a gender diverse studio of designers to draw upon, this project may not have had such a successful outcome.

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By 2000, the judges were expressing significantly more positive views: “To look through the catalogue is to get a taste of the richness, quality and diversity of work being shown by women book designers.” The dominance of women within the industry ranks appears to have coincided with the improvement in the overall aesthetic and craftsmanship of book design in Australia.

Carr’s representation on the ARA awards juries also shifted in the 2000s. In 1990, there was one woman and two men on the jury. A decade later, there were seven women and six men. Yet this improvement is offset by other data. Over the seven years that book designers have been inducted into the ARA Hall of Fame, only 30 per cent of the inductees have been women. Inducted in 2011, Cull is one of these women who have been recognised by their peers (the others being Deborah Brash in 2007 and Alison Forbes in 2010). Cull’s cover designs have twice won the Best Designed Book of the Year (these being Penny: Digestions on Food in 2004/05 and Italian Joy in 2006). Cull, like Leeming, graduated from Swinburne University, albeit with a Bachelor of Art (Graphic Design), in 1984. Upon graduation, she stepped straight into the publishing industry. Her resume spans over 34 years, and includes roles at Thomas Nelson Australia, the Rankin Design Group, Southerland Hause Design in London, the Australian Consolidated Press and Penguin. However, since 2003, she has been working for herself, under the name of Figure. Her success has been fuelled by the visibility she received revisiting the design of The Cook’s Companion in 2005 – an iconic cookbook written by Stephanie Alexander. Cull’s brief for this book, under the guidance of Julie Gibbs (who was the director of the Lounsberry Imprints imprint at Penguin at the time), was to do “something completely new that would sit well in the stainless steel kitchen and go beyond the food-literate population.”

The colours were inspired in part by Matthew Johnstone, Paul Smith and the warmth of food and were incorporated into the pages alongside photography by Earl Carter. The book, in all its iterations has now sold over 500,000 copies. Thankful for the opportunities and longevity the visibility of The Cook’s Companion has given her, Cull does little to enhance her professional profile: “I don’t like being visible actually... I prefer to be in the background.”

This paradox of being appreciated and desiring invisibility is not uncommon for designers – another complexity in the embodied metaphor. There is a popular school of thought that the designer should not be evident in their work and instead be a conduit for pushing forward the author and the story held with in the book. In 1996, Beatrice Warde famously devised a metaphor for good design and typography, describing it like a delicate and transparent wine glass – designed to showcase its contents rather than draw attention to itself.”

This benevolent attitude, although focused on the skill involved in crafting a good piece of graphic design, devalues the contribution of the singular graphic designer and the personal context which they bring to their work. Despite Cull’s admission that she is neither ‘comfortable’ nor ‘confident’ with fame or self-promotion, she nevertheless feels that it is important that individual designers receive the credit they are due. During her career at Penguin, she saw colleagues rally the publisher to ensure the names of individual cover designers were accredited inside the printed editions of their work. This began to happen, but it has not become a consistent practice across Australia. Making the graphic designer invisible adds to the probability of women’s contributions in the workforce going unacknowledged.

However, Cull has also worked in other ways to ensure that the community of book designers in Australia have visible outlets for their voice and their work. She has therefore been a founding committee member of ARA, which also included Alex Ross (President), Zoe Sadokierski (Vice President), Xi Chong (Secretary), Andrew Ryan (Treasurer), Jenny Grigg, Evi Oetro, Dani New and Miriam Rosenbloom. This group of designers, 51 per cent of whom were women, continued to organise the awards even after they had been discontinued by the Australian Publishers Association (APA) in 2013. While cementing Cull’s stance towards visibility as welcomed to celebrate designers achievement in the publishing industry, her personal distaste of being in the spotlight demonstrates an inconsistency in how both impact and visibility can work against each other in the career of a designer.

Conclusion

The metaphor of blind embossing conveys the often obscure yet palpable impact of women across the design sector. When the individual careers of women working as creative directors and designers are examined, we not only begin to see the size and scope of their contribution but also their complex multiplicity. Fiona Leeming’s challenge to the negative stereotyping of women and its empowering messages across the world, for example, illustrates that while women in advertising may be a minority with low visibility, their impact has been significant. In contrast, Michaela Webb’s high visibility in Australian graphic design demonstrates the importance of studios having diverse perspectives within their teams and the urgency of instilling confidence in the many female students graduating from the education pipeline. Sandy Cull’s career in the book publishing industry demonstrates a further paradox in the presence and visibility of women in the design industries. Although women make up the majority of those working in the publishing sector, Cull has played an essential role in giving distinct authorship to designers in the field while simultaneously being uncomfortable with such exposure.

An examination of the careers of Leeming, Webb and Cull in parallel with the gendered data of the award, ADA and ARA national awards and Hall of Fame platforms, collectively demonstrate that the numerical visibility of women offers a partial or obscured impression of the significant contributions they have made. By identifying and contextualising individual designers and experiences felt by women within these scenarios, we are able to obtain deeper and more meaningful insights into their experiences and contributions, as well as the paradoxes they encounter and embody.

Endnotes
5 Ibid.
7 Leeming, interview.
13 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
27 Cull, interview.
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RMIT Design Archives
special event: Prue Action in conversation with Michael Reason, Curator, Museum of Victoria, RMIT Design Archives, 26 April 2018.
Photography by Sarah Lay

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