

**RMIT  
DESIGN  
ARCHIVES  
JOURNAL**

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

VOL 1 Nº 1 2011



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designer, illustrator  
and animator  
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#### Images

##### Cover

Alex Stitt.

'Norm'.

Designed 1975 for the

'Life. Be in it.' campaign.

Published with permission

from 'Life. Be in it.'

Australia Ltd.

##### Opposite Page

Alex Stitt.

'ICPOTA'.

Designed in 1968 for

the Age newspaper

classified pages.



A FILM BY  
FRED SCHEPISI  
FROM THE  
NOVEL BY  
THOMAS  
KENEALLY

THE  
CHANT OF  
JIMMIE  
BLACKSMITH



This gift includes biographical documentation, correspondence, media clippings, magazines, photographs, and design work including storyboards, comic strips, posters and drawings, relating to the life and career of Alex Stitt.

**Alex Stitt** (b.1937): designer, illustrator and animator

*Russell Bevers*

Alex Stitt likes to draw.  
In fact Stitt has always drawn.

That passion for drawing, what some might look on as a skill or the link between head and hand makes Stitt's graphic work highly personal, with a well-developed sense of fun and creative invention. But it is more than just a skill, Stitt has never been stuck with one style, one way of developing an idea, one way of drawing. He has always been highly versatile in the way he approaches a project or develops a character. At the same time he has seen the value of digital technology and has employed it as a tool in much of his work in recent years.

Alex Stitt sees himself as a designer not just an illustrator and he has turned his talents to many forms of graphic design. That is the way it has been from the start when he studied, at what he fondly calls 'Melbourne Tech', now RMIT University. Stitt was always eager to get involved in student projects that needed some form of printed communication, for example, *Catalyst*. That enthusiasm led him to a job in 1957 at Castle Jackson Advertising.

At this time he started to develop skills in animation making several animated commercials for the agency. In 1959 he joined the animation team at television station Channel Nine that was set up to produce animated films and commercials and was managed by an American, John Wilson, with a staff of 30 people. It was here Stitt met and worked with Bruce Weatherhead, later to become his business partner. Stitt worked on animation projects during business hours and squeezed in freelance graphic design work after hours. A colleague and animator Frank Hellard remembers:

*Stitt wasn't only a good designer; he had a gift for stories and design generally, and a fifth sense about what was possible in animation. He'd always think of a new problem that was soluble. He didn't know how to*

*solve it, but it was soluble. I think it's an inventor's pre-thinking of a solution to a job. He could write something into a story that you would really have to think about for a long time before you've found a way of doing it.<sup>1</sup>*

After a year, animation work started to dry up and Channel Nine cut staff. Stitt stayed and continued to supervise the design department and do freelance work. In 1963, Weatherhead proposed that he and Stitt start their own design studio. Weatherhead and Stitt lasted ten years. Ned Culic, now a well established illustrator, started working with them as a young designer and remembers:

*... it was an incredible atmosphere. You just knew you were at the best, most creative place in Australia. I had to keep pinching myself. It was the most awarded design group ever.<sup>2</sup>*

This time saw the growth of overseas advertising agencies – USP Needham, J Walter Thompson, McCann Erickson and the maturing of the Australian design industry. Australian designers like Eric Maguire, Arthur Leydin and Lance Sterling furthered their careers and others like Les Mason, Robert Rosetzky and Frank Eidlitz arrived from overseas to try their luck. All prospered.

In 1965 film director Fred Schepisi proposed that Stitt and Weatherhead join him in launching a new film production business. They christened it the Film House. The plan was to produce commercials and short films. After Weatherhead and Stitt ceased as a partnership Stitt continued to work with Schepisi on film titles, posters and animations. Noteworthy projects were the graphics for *The Devil's Playground* (1976) and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978). Stitt continued to work with Schepisi when the director commenced working in the USA on projects such as *The Russia House* (1990), *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993), *I.Q.* (1994) and others.

**Image**  
**Opposite Page**  
Alex Stitt.  
Promotional graphic  
for director Fred Schepisi's  
film *The Chant of Jimmie*  
*Blacksmith*. 1978.

In 1970 Weatherhead and Stitt established the Jigsaw Factory. The idea came out of the work they were doing for educators Bill and Lorna Hannan who produced the magazine for the Secondary Teachers Association and an English reading program that included activities that put fun into learning. The idea of 'fun in learning' grew into a big concept, generating a range of posters, cut-outs, puzzles and games, supported by inventive and fun characters who engaged and entertained children while developing their learning through play. The idea grew into a physical place and the Jigsaw Factory in Bridge Road, Richmond, was born.

The Jigsaw Factory produced a multitude of board games including *Spellbound* (spelling), *Tableland* (times tables), *The Mining Game* and the *Gate of the Sun*. Then there were Og and Oliver - Og was the Jigsaw giant and Oliver his pal, an ostrich. They featured in a cartoon strip, which appeared in the *Age* newspaper over three years - Stitt drew more than 1000 strips during that time. Journalist James Button remembers:

*Jigsaw had two doors. A normal one and a tiny one for children. Inside people who were small enough could crawl through wooden houses, giant snakes or a sunken pit full of toys, bean bags and orange and purple cubes.*<sup>3</sup>

The Jigsaw Factory was not a shop but a place for children to have fun, and without knowing it - to learn. Theatre workshops were run by Nancy Gato from the ABC's television program *Adventure Island*, and Bruce Woodley from the Seekers came along on Sunday afternoons to sing for and with the children.

The Jigsaw Factory was a great concept but it never really made money. So in 1973 it closed, much to the sadness of many children and designers who appreciated the quirky and individual style of design produced by the team. It is appropriate here to mention ICPOTA (*In The Classified Pages Of The Age*), a little animated figure made of folded newsprint, who became a mascot to promote advertising in the *Age* classified pages. Stitt created ICPOTA in March 1968 and he appeared in television commercials and in print. ICPOTA was a very successful and popular character and marketing strategy for the *Age* that lasted a long time.

Phillip Adams, principal of Monahan Dayman Adams advertising agency, was also a filmmaker. He was one of the catalysts for the rebirth of the Australian film industry in the 1970s and Stitt had worked with him from the late 1950s designing film titles for short films. The Victorian State Government through the Department of Youth Sport and Recreation commissioned Monahan Dayman Adams to develop a 'get healthy program' and in 1975 'Life. Be in it.' was born.

Adams had come up with the concept behind the program and asked Stitt to bring it to life for television and print. Stitt had started a new design consultancy called Al et al Pty Ltd after the demise of Jigsaw and Weatherhead and Stitt. The 'Life. Be in it.' material flowed from this studio. Stitt created and wrote the character Norm, an anti-hero who ultimately became a cult figure. He was an overweight couch potato who in TV commercials and cartoons was confronted with various scenarios encouraging him to get active and healthier. Peter Best wrote a catchy jingle for the 'Life. Be in it.' TV commercials. The campaign was hugely popular and a multitude of applications and extensions to the 'Life. Be in it.' franchise developed over the next 10 years: TV commercials, guide books about neglected sports, an annual calendar and Norm comic strips which ran in the *Sun* newspaper for over three years. The name 'Norm' entered popular culture to mean any average Australian who was completely averse to physical activity but addicted to watching sport on TV, usually with a beer in hand.

The 'Life. Be in it.' campaign proved that broad social values could be changed by media campaigns. Stitt's ingenious (visual) characterisation of Norm was at the campaign's core and a key to its success. Monahan Dayman Adams followed up with a commission from the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria (now Cancer Council Victoria), which was to be a skin cancer prevention program. Given the Australian love of getting a sun tan, lying on the beach, playing sport, it was going to be tough to persuade Australians to change their ways. The 'Slip! Slop! Slap!' campaign was born with a TV campaign animated by Stitt and starring Sid the Seagull. Over a seven-year period the 'Slip! Slop! Slap!' campaign was adopted by each Australian state, demonstrating once again Stitt's ability to package an important health issue in a humorous and accessible way.

The 'Slip! Slop! Slap!' campaign and ongoing publicity about the dangers of exposure to the sun really did change Australians' attitude to sun protection. Craig Sinclair, manager of the SunSmart Program, said at the time of the 2002 summer campaign launch that the original 'Slip! Slop! Slap!' advertisement was as relevant then as it was in 1981 when it was first launched:

*With over three decades of campaigns, we have very good evidence that the vast majority of Victorians have improved their behaviour in terms of sun protection. However since the advertisement disappeared from our television screens in 1987, there has been a huge migration into Victoria as well as a new generation of children who may have never seen the advertisement or heard the jingle even though they will know the 'Slip! Slop! Slap!' slogan. Cancer Council*

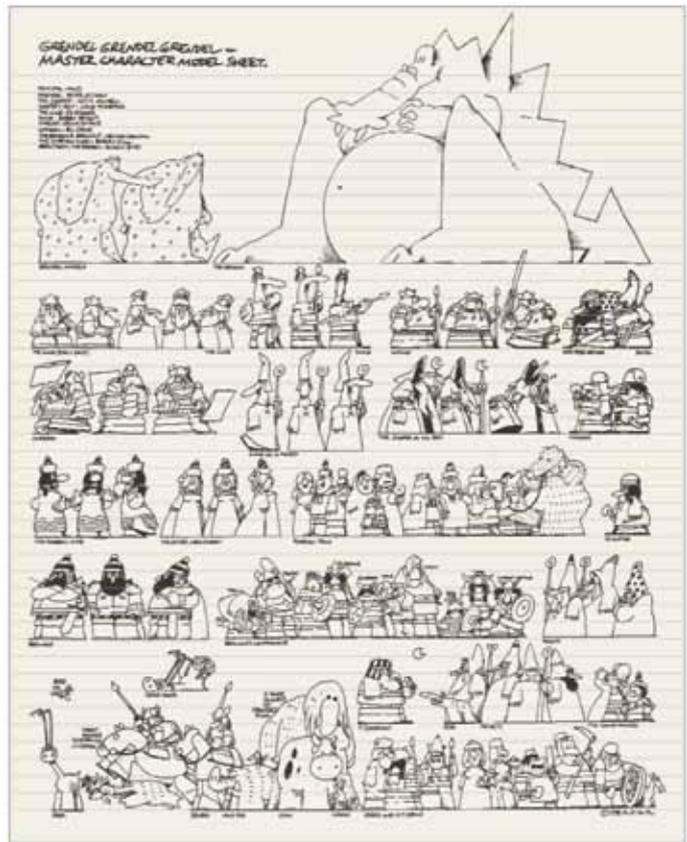
#### Images

##### Opposite Page Left

Alex Stitt. Frames from an animation featuring Sid the Seagull designed 1981 for the 'Slip! Slop! Slap!' television campaign. Published with permission from Cancer Council Victoria.

##### Right

Alex Stitt. Master character model sheet designed 1977-1980 for the animated feature film, *Grendel, Grendel, Grendel* (1981), written and directed by Stitt.



Victoria research shows that campaigns such as 'Slip! Slop! Slap!' can have a significant impact on reducing sunburn rates in Victoria.<sup>4</sup>

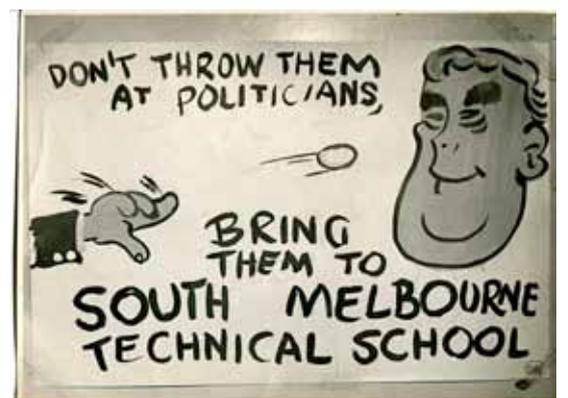
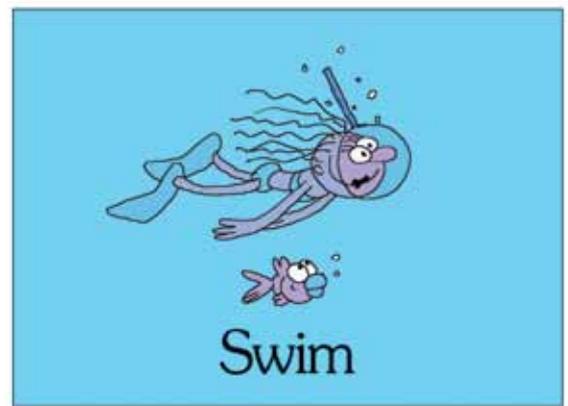
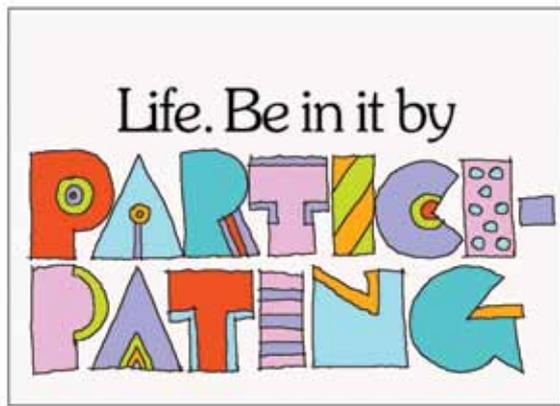
In 2010, on the 30-year anniversary of the campaign, Sue Heward, current SunSmart Manager said: *while we've come a long way from the days of tin-foil, reef-oil and the dark tan aspirations of the 80s, there is still work to be done.*<sup>5</sup>

When the first television licences were awarded, a condition was that each network was to allocate a certain amount of time to religious programming. The Reverend Douglas Tasker was in charge of the Christian Television Association and was enthusiastic about using the new medium. He and Stitt teamed up to produce some memorable and significant television campaigns. Their work 'sold' religion on television which would seem to be counter-intuitive but it successfully managed to convey messages about ethics and Christian values through community service announcements. Once again Stitt's clever concepts for taking a single idea and creating an animation that was humorous and entertaining came to the fore. The Christian Television Association could afford to produce about a dozen or so TV advertisements a year in place of expensive half hour scripted programs and Alex produced about three a year for fifteen years.

From 1977 to 1980 Stitt and his team worked on an animated feature called *Grendel Grendel Grendel*, a high point in Stitt's animation career. Lienors Torre has noted:

*His work is striking for its careful attention to design, for its use of colour and form; yet, perhaps most intriguingly, in its use of line. Although the works themselves have been diverse, there is always an overall quality that labels each a design by Stitt. In the traditional animation process, colour, form and line are distinctive elements that come together in the assemblage of the completed work. Stitt makes use of these distinctions, whether it is the broken, staccato line of the characters in many of the screen advertisements or his visually stunning animated features *Abra Cadabra* and then *Grendel Grendel Grendel*.<sup>6</sup>*

*Grendel* did away with black outline for the characters, thus 'achieving a certain status in dimensional believability.'<sup>7</sup> The effect was what could be termed more filmic, where light, shadow and colour define shape and form. This was a new look for animation, and all done without the aid of computer technology. *Grendel* was a big production in every way, with music by Bruce Smeaton and voice characterisations by Peter Ustinov, Keith Michell and others. It was taken to the Cannes Film Festival in 1980. Work on another animated feature started in 1982. This one called *Abra Cadabra*. The key feature was a new 3D process developed by Mike Browning which used multi-plane separations and projections rather than a two-camera system. (The work also included hand-written text in a style that fitted with that of the drawn characters, and the animators working with Stitt all contributed to character development after Stitt had set the style for each character.)



**Images**

**Top and Bottom Left:** Alex Stitt. Frames from 'Life. Be in it by Participating' television animation designed c.1978 for the 'Life. Be in it' campaign. Published with permission from 'Life. Be in it.' Australia Ltd.

**Bottom Right:** Alex Stitt. Artwork for a charity egg drive by teenage Stitt while a student at South Melbourne Technical School. 1951.

The project was never finished. The film was an Adams/Packer production and when Kerry Packer sold the Channel Nine network to Alan Bond all the completed work to that date was shipped off to the new owner never to be seen again.

In 1988 Paddy Stitt joined Alex in a new business called Alexander Stitt and Partner (ASAP). Paddy brought her skills in management and copy writing to the business which was located in an old boiled lolly factory at 2 Hazeldon Place, South Yarra. The ASAP partnership saw the introduction of the Macintosh computer in 1991. Both Paddy and Alex embraced this technology as a reality of design practice and no enemy of the hand drawn image. Eleanor Curtain shared office space at Hazeldon Place. Her educational publishing business, Eleanor Curtain Publishing, has produced comprehensive literacy programs for primary schools under the names of Alphakids, Explorations and others. Stitt designed over 500 books and illustrated many of them, and also designed teaching manuals, templates for interactive CDs and packaging and promotional material for the company.

Through the 1980s and '90s Stitt worked on diverse projects such as the creation of the 'Bicentanimals' characters for Australia's Bicentennial; Australia Post commissions for stamps; and, a lot of work for Eleanor Curtain Publishing who became an important and regular client. The success of 'Life. Be in it.' has continued to encourage other government bodies and organisations to commission Stitt to produce animated community service messages for television. It is for animation and the creation of memorable characters that Stitt is best known:

*...because we didn't have any competition and because nobody knew much, our emphasis was really on the art. The films sold; they managed to do their primary job while we were having fun doing what we really wanted to do.<sup>8</sup>*

Stitt has continued to work on film titles including *The Interview* (1998), *Peaches* (2004), *Empire Falls* (2005) and *The Eye of the Storm* (2011). He also continues his long association with Eleanor Curtain Publishing.

**Russell Bevers** is Program Director, Master of Design, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University.

1. Hellard, F. cited in Lienors Torre and Dan Torre, *Australian animation: Alex Stitt*, (Victoria: Cinematic Seedlings, 2007).

2. Ned Culic cited in Robinson, M., 'AGDA Paperpoint Hall of Fame-Weatherhead and Stitt. 1964-1973',

<http://archive.agda.com.au/recognition/agdaawards/AGDAPo1.html>, viewed December 15, 2010.

3. James Button cited in Sophie Cunningham, 'Life by Design. Sophie Cunningham Talks to Alex Stitt', *Meanjin* 69 (2) (June 2010), 34-45.

4. Sinclair, C., Borland, R., Davidson, M., & Noy, S., 'From Slip Slop Slap to Sun Smart, a profile of a health education campaign', *Cancer Forum*, 18(3) November 1994, 183-187.

5. [http://www.sunsmart.com.au/news\\_and\\_media/media\\_releases/media\\_release\\_20100912.html](http://www.sunsmart.com.au/news_and_media/media_releases/media_release_20100912.html)

6. Torre and Torre, *Australian animation: Alex Stitt*.

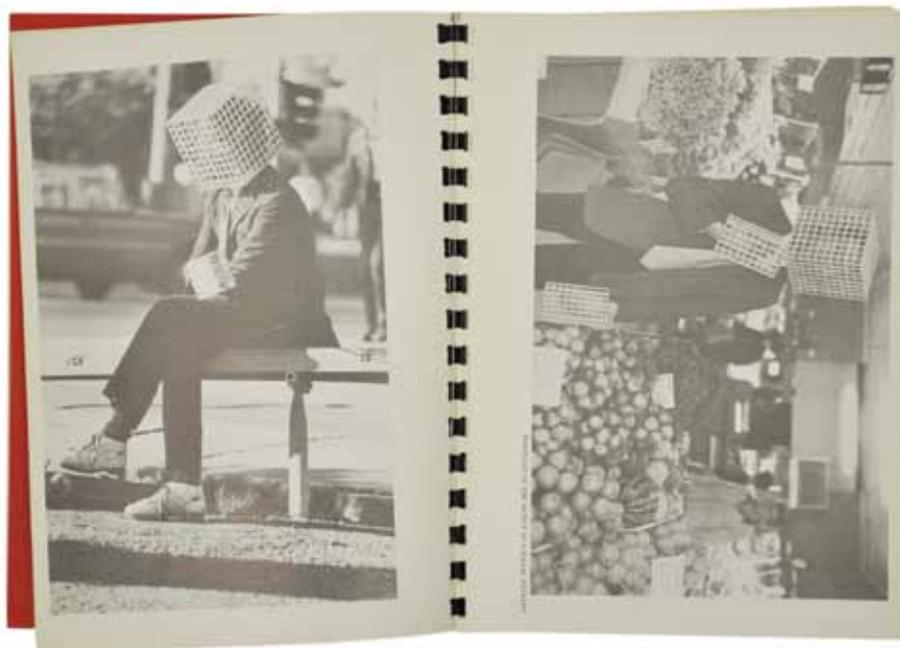
7. Torre and Torre, *Australian animation: Alex Stitt*.

8. Stitt quoted in Sophie Cunningham, 'Life by Design'

This gift includes books, magazines and postcards relating to Champion Books/Backyard Press

**Champion Books/Backyard Press (1976–1992):**  
an experiment in collective publishing

*Marius Foley*



Melbourne was the site of an outbreak of activity in independent media in the 1970s and 80s. Radio stations 3RRR ('76), 3CR ('76) and printers Walker Press (circa '72), Bloody Good Grafix ('83), Jill Posters ('83), Another Planet Posters ('85) and Champion Books/Backyard Press ('76) were set up as local alternatives to the mainstream media.

Each had a particular ambition and audience, yet shared the idea that controlling the 'means of production' was the best way to voice the ideas coming from the contemporary counter culture. The heady oppositional politics of anti-Vietnam protests and the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government gave way to lifestyle political movements: feminism, environmentalism and gay liberation. The ideals of collective social and working relationships were being experimented with, in small, alternative organisations. Alongside this, an energetic audience was growing large enough to support these new ways of producing media, fashion, architecture, food and music.

Champion Books/Backyard Press was one instance of this shift towards collective, experimental

publishing. Ted Hopkins, one of the founders of Champion/Backyard, inherited a small offset printing press from his father. Ted and friends were already publishing *Champion* newspaper, a contentious local paper in Albury, regional Victoria, and were venturing into alternative book publishing. Circumstances led Ted and partner Sharon Hill to move the Press to Melbourne and set-up in Prahran. They soon became part of the active local scene of artists and musicians.

Backyard Press was established as the commercial side of the print and publishing venture. It quickly took off by supplying local rock musicians with promotional posters and pamphlets. The live music scene was buoyant and starting to grow. New venues were opening in Prahran, Richmond, St Kilda, Fitzroy and Brunswick in response to the emergence of a vibrant sub-culture of musicians and audiences. This was the start of a wave of live music culture that still exists today. Backyard was established in a large terrace shop front/residence at 54 Greville Street, Prahran. The premises had a backyard shed big enough to house the small offset press and pre-press equipment. Greville Street at

**Images**

Glen Clarke.  
Photograph.  
*Portrait of the Artist as a Twentieth Century Village Idiot from Suppression = Alienation = Oppression*. Published by Champion Books. 1979.

Glen Clarke.  
Photograph.  
*Portrait of the Artist as a Social Deviant from Suppression = Alienation = Oppression*. Published by Champion Books. 1979.

the time had an alternative retail strip; the Station Hotel, one of the key live music venues, and, abundant low-cost housing turned into communal residences. Musicians from seminal bands such as The Sports, Pelaco Bros, and The Coloured Balls lived and performed nearby. It wasn't long before Backyard became the printer of choice for these bands and word spread through the music scene. It offered cheap, quick printing with no restrictions on the content.

At the same time, the music scene was being transformed into a more commercial music industry. The new entrepreneurial promoters and venue managers started to bring jobs in. Backyard Press was then in a position to expand and capitalise on the growth in the industry.

Champion Books was the experimental publishing side of the equation. Champion set out to publish books that were not being picked up by mainstream publishers either because the content was seen as too experimental and with limited audience, or because the production required was too expensive. Backyard Press created the income and resources needed to produce the works while Champion turned this into a range of novel outcomes. In 1977, Champion published *The Coals of Juniper* by Graham Jackson.

Ted Hopkins had previously made a name for himself as a premiership footballer playing for Carlton in the 1970 Grand Final. I read an article in the *Age*, titled 'Footballer Turns Publisher' about the publishing venture, which led me to contact Ted. I was working at Walker Press in Collingwood.<sup>1</sup> Walker Press was a left-wing propaganda press, printing material for Melbourne's social and political action groups, Aboriginal rights, anti-apartheid and environmental groups among them. Soon after making contact I started work at Champion Books and Backyard Press, which offered an opportunity to explore both the form of the book (Champion) and collective work structures (Backyard).

Backyard Press co-evolved with the emerging music industry, keeping pace with the demand for larger quantities of material, quick turnaround, and large format, colour printing. This meant bringing in more people and improving the technologies. We set up a worker co-operative structure, co-owned and self managed by the full-time workers. At one time there were 16 members, working across offset printing, pre-press operations, screenprinting and accounts and production management. Any profits from the Press were churned back into improving the plant and often diverted to Champion Books to publish works without need for government funding.



We eventually built a facility that included a Bromide camera and plate-making facilities, a Heidelberg KORD 20" x 30" offset press, a semi-automatic 60" x 40" screenprint table, upgraded small offset printers and a Roland 60" x 40" offset press. The latter was acquired in a merger with VersaPrint who had previously been supplying us with high-run colour posters.

These technologies were, on the whole, open for use by a growing community that formed around Backyard/Champion. Ian Robertson produced his series of posters: *Accordion to Mao*, *Mao Goes Mambo* and *A-political Accordion Snap*. An art/political group, the RASCALS (Rational And Sane Citizens Against Liberal Stupidity) formed to produce posters, newspaper banners and postcards against then Liberal Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, for the 1980 Federal election. These carried titles such as *I've Had a Fraser of a Day*, *He Lies and He Knows He Lies*, *Beau's Not Voting Liberal* (Beau was the Backyard Press dog) and *Blues Drop Mal*. Others did short-run posters and ephemera in the Press downtime.

Champion Books flourished on the back of these new resources as well as the close relations we established with local printers, plate-makers and binders. We were able to subsidise publication of works that otherwise would have been prohibitively expensive and time-consuming. Notable among these were *Teledex* and *The Book of Slab* by Ted Hopkins, *Journey of a Wise Electron* by Peter Lyssiotis and *Business As Usual* by Paul Greene, all donated to the RMIT Design Archives by Ted Hopkins in 2010.<sup>2</sup>

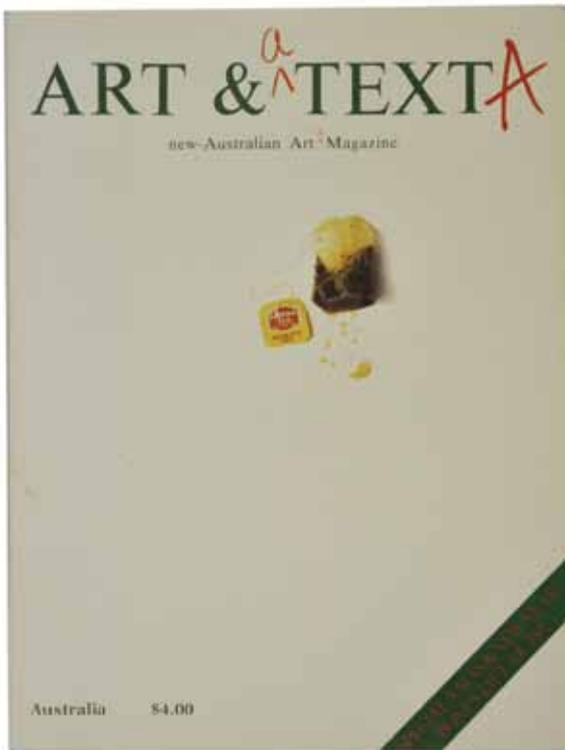
#### Images

##### This Page

Barry Wold.  
Photograph.  
Circles on Yallourn  
Sports Oval from  
*The Yallourn Stories*  
compiled by Ted  
Hopkins and Slab.  
Published by  
Champion Books.  
1982.

##### Opposite Page

'Mary Cox'.  
Photograph.  
*Liptons Tea - Quality*  
*No. 1 from Art and a*  
*Texta: new Australian*  
*Art a Magazine*.  
Published by  
Champion Books.  
c1983.



*Teledex* is a collection of poems arranged in alphabetical order and housed in a simulated teledex (telephone directory) format. The author's intention was to present poetry in a form that suggested everyday access to poetry, as ubiquitous as phone numbers. The piece is manufactured in a metal box with tabbed and ruled card inserts.

*The Book of Slab* takes its cue from the popular *Time Life Science* book series. *Slab* is both a compilation of writing and a collection of what was possible in printing at the time. The material form of this book was a deliberate writing strategy that brought the materials and processes into discourse with the writing to create an integrated text. *Slab* contains reproduced found objects such as commercial letterheads, a torn page from a book as well as a red polyester 45 rpm single (record) titled *Slab Goes Italiano*. It also includes extensive full-colour process printing and a die-cut map of Australia on the cover; both processes were especially expensive to achieve at the time.

*Journey of a Wise Electron* was the first book created by Peter Lyssiotis, one of Australia's leading producers of Artist Books. *Journey* was produced as a compilation of three art exhibitions held at Pinacotheca Gallery, Richmond. Lyssiotis joined Champion, attracted by what he calls 'a place of ideas, not just a place of production.' He goes on to say:

*... ideas afoot here, and I'd like to muck about with those ideas. I knew it was going to be chaotic, and a long time in coming. But that's the trade-off in working in a non-commercial place.*<sup>3</sup>

Lyssiotis recognised that producing a book is a collaborative process and that constructing the book-object was a type of writing. The images in *Journey of a Wise Electron* were printed as duotones, which is a process where two colours are overprinted to give a rich tonal range. We knew the process was possible, but not how to achieve it. For the idea to be realised we needed to work closely with a pre-press producer (filmwork and printing plates) and with other printers. Lyssiotis continues to create Artist Books, using diverse print processes. They are collected locally and internationally and represented in the State Library of Victoria, Sydney's Mitchell Library and the Tate Modern, London.

Other works in the Champion Books/Backyard Press collection acquired by the RMIT Design Archives include promotional ephemera, small press publications and a set of postcards produced by RASCALS.

*Business As Usual* by Paul Greene is a collection of illustrations produced by the artist. Greene worked as a graphic designer and practised as a visual artist. His illustrations are immediate and often absurd views of life. The publication emulates the fast and simple line drawings as a set of random visual thoughts. It is printed black on white art stock, bound with Chicago screws with coloured endpapers.

Behind the story of the works discussed above are numerous people who in one way or another contributed to Champion and Backyard and the social life that grew up around them. The Press was housed in two large houses at 54 and 48 Greville Street, Prahran, where various people lived and worked. It was rare for the place to be empty and was more often than not the site for book launches, performance events and after work gatherings. The audience that formed around the works and events became participants in the workplace and on occasion produced work themselves, not unlike the social media that we engage with today.<sup>4</sup>

**Marius Foley** is a Lecturer, Communication Design, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University.

1. For an oral history of Walker Press see the National Library of Australia: <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/4665789>
2. Monica Oppen who runs Bibliotheca Librorum apud Artificem (<http://www.bibliotheca.org.au/bibliotheca/>), recently renewed interest in Champion Books and Backyard Press, publishing a pamphlet about the venture and the works.
3. Peter Lyssiotis, recorded conversation with the author, 2010.
4. For more on Champion Books/Backyard Press see the upcoming issue of *Journal of Artists' Books*, Chicago University Art Faculty <http://journalofartistsbooks.org/index.php>

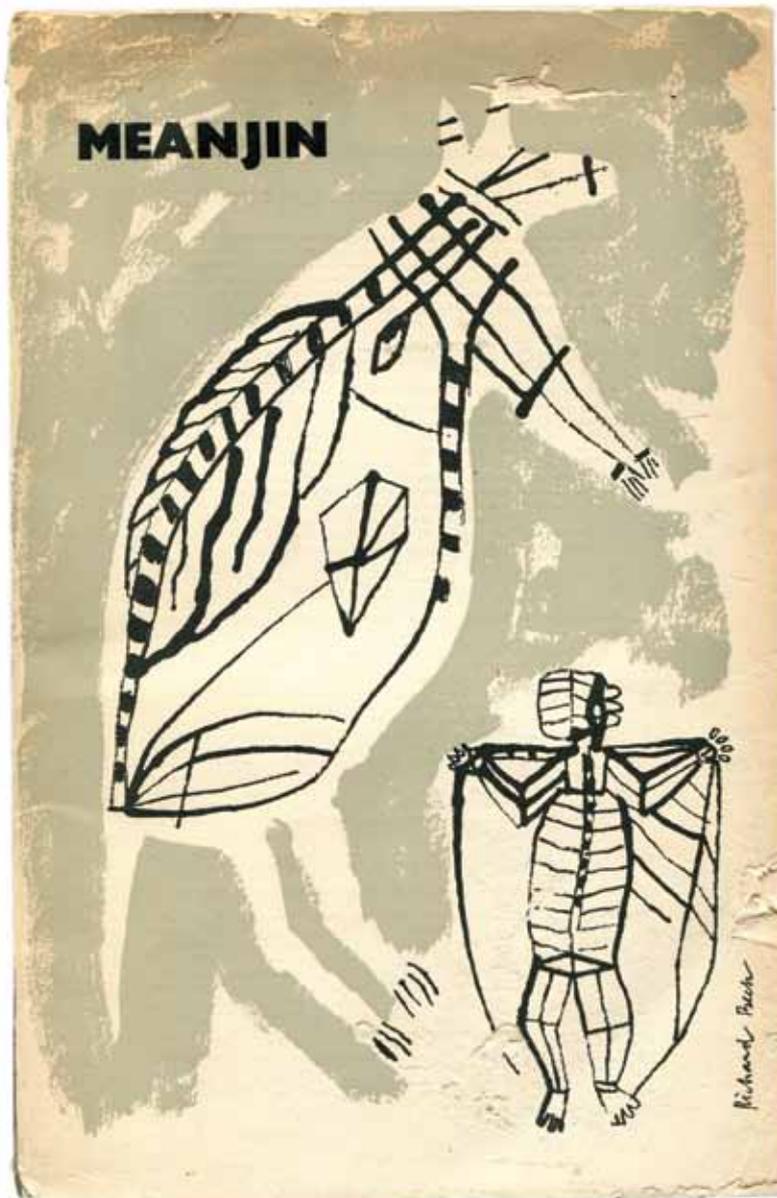
RICHARD AND  
BARBARA BECK  
PAPERS

GIFT OF  
BARBARA BECK

This gift includes biographical documentation, correspondence, newspaper clippings, magazines, books, photographs and design work relating to the life and career of Richard Beck.

**Richard Beck** (1912–1985): designer and photographer

*Harriet Edquist*



Richard Beck is known in Australia primarily for two works that have become icons of post-war design, the 1956 Olympic Games poster and the label for Coonawarra wines. But he sustained a fifty-year career in the broad field of communication design, describing himself in 1968 as a graphic designer, illustrator, photographer, advertising consultant, and consultant in public relations and company identity design, and architectural typography.<sup>1</sup> When he was appointed to the School of Art and Design at Prahran College of Technology (now Swinburne University of Technology) in 1969, he became an educator as well.

Richard Beck was born in Christchurch, UK, in 1912, and when still in his teens attended the Slade School of Art in London and the Blocherer School in Munich, a private technical high school, where he came into contact with contemporary German design. Returning to London, he established a consultancy as an industrial designer, designing posters, booklets and advertisements for London Transport, Shell-Mex, Orient Line and the London G.P.O. His work was illustrated in *Radio Times*, *Evening Standard* and *News Chronicle*. His posters used innovative montage and surrealist techniques reminiscent of E McKnight Kauffer who dominated commercial art in England before the War. The London journal *Art and Industry* reproduced a number of Beck's posters for the Orient Line and London Transport and in 1938 *Modern Publicity's* annual round-up featured Beck's cover design and included a profile of his work, commenting on the variety of his styles and his debt to Herbert Bayer, Kauffer and Surrealism.<sup>2</sup>

In 1940 *Art and Industry* reproduced his Kynoch Press Diary drawings noting that they were 'so pleasingly derived from the work of Jean Cocteau, [and] have the bizarre and inconsequential madness of a midsummer night's dream.'<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Burke, foundation Professor of Fine Arts at Melbourne University, remembered that when he was Assistant Keeper at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, he was instructed to form a collection of modern posters during the course of which he found himself visiting France, Germany, Sweden and Norway, and Richard Beck:

*I had found that his posters were well known and greatly admired works of art not only by my colleagues and superiors in the museum, but in all five countries to which my enquiries led me.*<sup>4</sup>

In 1939 Beck was appointed a design consultant on the British Pavilion at the Wellington Centennial Exhibition in New Zealand that opened on 8 November at the outset of the Second World War. The Exhibition celebrated 'a century of colonisation and commemorated the achievements of the British in New Zealand' in Edmund Anscombe's formal, axially aligned group of buildings at Rongotai.

The British and Australian pavilions faced each other across the main avenue, the former somewhat conservative with its stripped classicism and Art Deco ornamentation and the latter more progressively aligned to the International Style.<sup>5</sup> While the interior of the British Pavilion focussed on the global reach of British air, land and sea transport, that of the Australian Pavilion included obligatory references to surf, sunshine and sheep, but also featured the work of leading designers Frederick Romberg, Douglas Annand, Gert Sellheim, Eric Thake, Adrian Feint and Donald Friend, and Beck may have been favourably impressed. Perhaps he already knew some of the Australian designers working in London, for example Dahl and Geoffrey Collings who had worked with Moholy Nagy and Gyorgy Kepes, or Alistair Morrison who was also there in the 1930s. Instead of returning to England, Beck migrated to Australia in 1940, joined the 2nd AIF and served in Australia and overseas until 1945.

At the end of the War Beck established a design consultancy in Melbourne, working in advertising, illustration and exhibition design for T.A.A., A.P.M., the Australian Civil Aviation Dept., ICIANZ, Dunlop Rubber and Glazebrooks Paints. From 1950 to 1963 he was appointed by the prescient David Wynn as advertising and design consultant to S Wynn and Co. where he designed the label for David Wynn's Coonawarra Estate claret, one of his most famous designs. In 1951 it won a Bronze Medal from the Australian Commercial and Industrial Artists Association and over the next thirteen years as Wynn's design consultant Beck created labels, wine packs, advertisements and point of sale design.

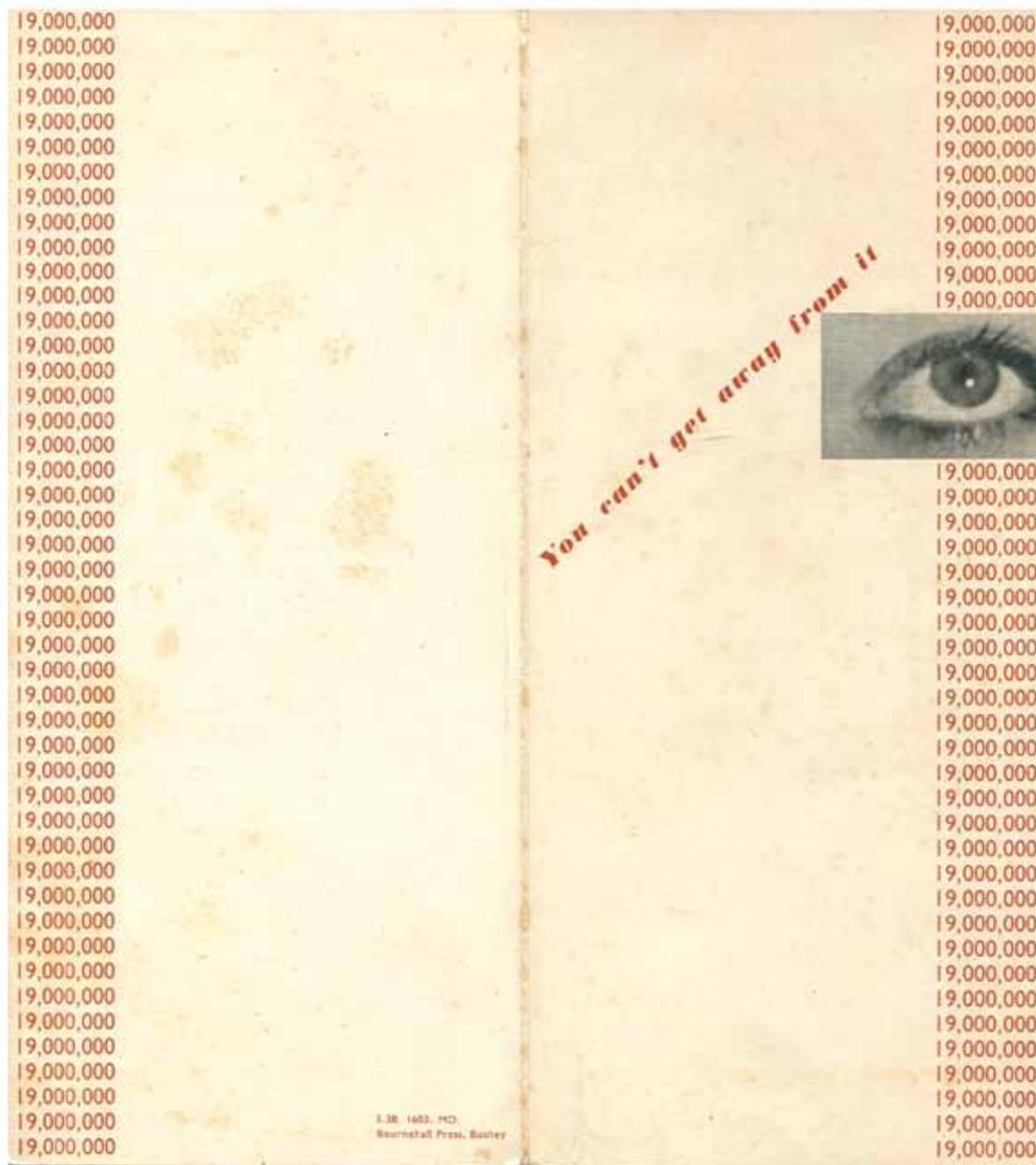
In 1954 Beck won the limited competition for the Olympic Games poster, his design being, in the eyes of the judges, 'a departure from the illustrative or symbolic designs previously favoured for the Olympic Games, [being] a simple clean-cut design.'<sup>6</sup>

**Images**  
**Opposite Page**  
**Left**

Richard Beck.  
Cover *Meanjin* 1951,  
No 4. Published  
with permission  
from *Meanjin*.

**Right**

Richard Beck.  
Award winning  
Wynns Coonawarra  
Estate wine label.  
c. 1951.



**Images**

**This Page**

Richard Beck.  
London Transport  
brochure, unfolded  
(cover). c1930s.

**Opposite Page**

Richard Beck.  
London Transport  
brochure, unfolded  
(inside). c1930s.

In May 1954 Beck's poster was also chosen as the basis of the Olympic publicity stamp issued in December 1954 and it subsequently won a Bronze Medal from the Italian Government at the International Stamp Congress in Milan in 1956.

It was one of four stamps designed for the Commonwealth of Australia at this time. Beck also designed the guide to the Arts Festival of the Olympic Games.<sup>7</sup>

The Games gave Beck the opportunity to expand the reach of his work into the urban setting. The Olympic Civic Committee commissioned a number of street decorations for Melbourne's major thoroughfares and Beck was selected along with young architects and architecture students in a program overseen by the Olympic Design Panel chaired by Robert Eggleston. In fact his first sortie into the urban realm had been in 1954 when he designed the decorations for the Royal tram which

toured the city and suburbs, illuminated at night. Then in 1955 he was commissioned to design a four-storey ceramic mural on Mussen McKay and Potter's International Style Hosie's Hotel at the intersection of Flinders and Elizabeth streets, built to take advantage of the anticipated tourist trade during the Olympics. The mural is now listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

The Olympic street decorations included Peter McIntyre's and Dione McIntyre's steel frame torch, 8.3 metres high, suspended above the Swanston, Flinders and Princes Bridge intersection, Don Fulton's 13.7 metre pylons 'Gateway to the Games' and W Gower's decorative open-web steel pylons.<sup>8</sup> All of these were indebted to the new architecture that had been a feature of the South Bank Exhibition of the Festival of Britain in 1951, in particular the Skylon. Circular metal discs, mimicking the Olympic rings, were another theme

***Every advertisement in the stations, trains, buses, trolleybuses and trams is placed just where it catches the eye***

***There are 19 million eyes in the area of London Transport. Everywhere go its 12,000 vehicles, all showing posters at their best for 19 hours a day, all of them getting customers for somebody***

***YOUR advertisement, too, can have mass attention—for as little as a penny a day***

***Ask the Commercial Advertising Officer about it***

***55 Broadway, London S.W.1. ABBey 1234***

★  
London Transport carries 3,600,000,000 passengers a year

of the decorations, appearing on the McIntyres' torch, Murphy and Mockeridge's tubular steel suspended wheels each of which included spin mobiles, Max Forbes' 'avenue of shimmering screens', and Beck's spinmobiles. These two structures stood near the southern end of Princes Bridge on either side of St Kilda Road and continued the theme of tall kinetic sculptural effects that Melbourne had borrowed from London. They consisted of tubular steel central columns, 14.3 metres high, within a metal framework 1.5 metres wide. Cut into this framework were the metal circular mobiles revolving on ball bearings painted in high-gloss enamel in Olympic colours.<sup>9</sup> The structure was a modern interpretation of the traditional triumphal arch and welcomed the visitor to a city that was on the verge of its greatest transformation in 100 years.

After the Olympics came new clients including B.H.P, Cheshire Publishing, the B.S. & A Bank, Neptune Oil, Danish De Luxe Furniture, Bell Chemical, Stoneyfell Wines, SAFCOL, Jay Chemical and others. In 1964 Beck was appointed to a panel for the design of Australian decimal notes and coins and in 1967 was one of a number of Melburnians to contribute designs to the Australian Pavilion at Montreal Expo. Perrot Lyon Timlock and Kesa, and Kevin Borland were among his architectural clients.

As a young man in England Beck had bought a Leica camera and had become more and more engrossed in photography, an occupation which would continue throughout his life. During the War he took photographs of fellow soldiers and field operations which together with some ink drawings and oils are in the collection of the Australian War Memorial. In the 1960s he

embarked on an ambitious project to record his numerous friends amongst Australia's arts community, possibly inspired by the work of English photographer Bill Brandt. In April 1978, 40 of these portraits were included in a joint exhibition with his friend Hal Missingham at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Titled *Photographs of Some Artists* it toured to a number of state and regional galleries. Examples from this body of work were included in *A Century of Portraits* at the Mitchell and Dixon Galleries, State Library of NSW (1979) and more recently in *Famous (and not so famous) Faces* at Horsham Regional Art Gallery (2006). The portraits have been one of the most enduring of Beck's contributions to Australian art and design and examples are held in most regional and state collections. Of similar ambition and scope were the photographs of Australian churches that Beck provided for *Historic Churches of Australia* (1978) published by Macmillan with text by T T Reed, former Anglican Archbishop of Adelaide.

Richard Beck won many awards from the Australian Commercial and Industrial Artists Association, National Packaging Association and the Industrial Design Council, and in 1992 was posthumously awarded the inaugural Hall of Fame Pinnacle Award by the Australian Graphic Design Association. In 1969 he was appointed Senior Lecturer in Graphic Design in the School of Art and Design at Prahran College of Technology where in the early 1970s his colleagues included Athol Shmith, Paul Cox, Fred Cress and Sandra

Leveson. In previous years he had been a lecturer at RMIT and Alex Stitt and the late Bruce Weatherhead were among his students. The first survey exhibition of Beck's career was curated by Merle Hathaway for Horsham Art Gallery in 1996 and since this time his work has been represented in a number of themed exhibitions including mid-century design, war photography, travel posters and the Olympic Games.

In 1943 Richard Beck married Joan Barbara Isaacson who had studied photography at the Melbourne Tech. After working as an assistant to Melbourne photographer Dickinson Montieth she was employed as a darkroom assistant for the Department of Information and then seconded to the Army's Directorate of Public Relations in 1943 as an official photographer. 'With her trusty Rolleicord, she accompanied journalists Connie Robertson, Patricia Knox and Rita Dunstan, among others, up and down the Australian east coast documenting AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] work for the Australian press.'<sup>10</sup> Her work was represented in the Australian War Memorial's publication *Contact: Photographs and the Modern Experience of War* (2006) and in their exhibition *Icon and Archive: Photography and the World Wars* (2008). Newspaper clippings on Barbara Beck's War work are included in this gift.

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1. Details of Richard Beck's biography are taken from material in the Beck papers and existing files on Richard Beck held at the RMIT Design Archives.
2. *Art and Industry* 22 (1937), 140, 147, 180; *Art and Industry* 23 (1937-38), 152-155; *Art and Industry* 25 (1938), 174.
3. Nicholas Drew, 'Kynoch Press Diaries', *Art and Industry* (1940), 78.
4. Joseph Burke, 'AGDA/ Paperpoint Hall of Fame', *Design World* 25 (1992), 5.
5. Greg Bowron, 'A Brilliant Spectacle. The Centennial Exhibition Buildings', in John Wilson (ed.) *Zeal and Crusade. The Modern Movement in Wellington*, (Wellington: Te Waihora Press, 1996), 39.
6. The official report of the organizing Committee for the Games of the XVI Olympiad Melbourne 1956, (Melbourne 1958), 142.
7. *The Arts Festival of the Olympic Games, Melbourne: a guide to the exhibitions with introductory commentaries on the Arts in Australia*, (Melbourne, 1956).
8. 'Olympic Games decorations, Melbourne, 1956', *Architecture and Arts* (November 1956), 24.
9. The design for the spinmobile was published in colour in *Cross Section* (June 1956).
10. The *Courier-Mail* (27 April 2007), 17.



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