

# *Distance Eclipsed in the “Big Little Show”: The Australian Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition*

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*If the Australian government’s tardy response to the invitation to exhibit at the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne in France, showed “indifference,” the same cannot be said of the lively Advisory Committee that in less than three months devised a thoughtful exhibition in Australia’s first modernist pavilion. On November 23, 1936, the Committee invited Stephenson, Meldrum & Turner’s Sydney office to design a small (233 sqm) Australian pavilion to be “of the simplest character.” Ten days later their circular design was approved and sent to a Paris architectural firm for construction. The firm continued to work with the Advisory Committee, overseeing the design of the interior fit out including lighting and display furniture, and adjacent landscaping. Unlike earlier exhibitions that prioritised primary produce, this Australian pavilion would exemplify artistic merit, simplicity and “the impression of spaciousness.” The visitor was offered “a cycloramic impression of a new nation’s significance in the world of art and industry.” The decision to fuse art and design paid off, with the Visitors’ Book showing numerous testimonials to the intelligence and imagination of the whole. This paper examines how the architectural team and the Advisory Committee worked together to ensure the pavilion would present a coherent and lively sense of contemporary Australian culture to people in distant lands. The paper draws on archival research in France and Australia.*

*Keywords: Australian pavilion; Paris International exhibition 1937; international exhibitions; Stephenson, Meldrum & Turner; art and architecture*

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The Australian Pavilion for the 1937 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* (fig. 1) was probably the first time that Australia presented herself to the world as an independent, modern nation. The streamlined, largely-cylindrical (a-shaped) architectural form dispensed with elaborate architectural trappings of empire that had been seen in the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition in London, England and the 1915 Pan-Pacific International Expo in San Francisco, North America. This was not an opportunity for crowded exhibits of primary produce as seen in the 1924 British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, England, and the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg, South Africa. Drawing on archives from Australia and France, this paper tells the story of the genesis of the core ideas for the pavilion and its intimately-integrated exhibition, identifies issues arising from its size and location, and evaluates immediate and more recent critical responses.

## Genesis

Although Australia must have been advised shortly after December 1934 by the British Ambassador in Paris that France intended to host an International Exhibition in Paris 1937 addressing art and design in modern life, little notice was taken of the opportunity. Even as late as September 1936, Australia

Figure 1. [H. Chipault], *Pavillon de l'Australie, Exposition Internationale, Paris, France, 1937*, postcard. (Courtesy of the National Library of Australia, NAA: 6449044.)



remained reluctant, putting some store on the opinion of the High Commissioner in London, ex-Prime Minister Mr Stanley Bruce, that “little value would result” from participation. In the end, however, the indefatigable efforts of M. Suzor, the French Consul-General in Sydney, prevailed. With just four days to go before the final deadline, Australia advised the French government of its decision to participate. That was October 26, 1936. The exhibition was scheduled to open May 1, 1937.<sup>1</sup>

1 Incessant rain and industrial disputes deferred the official opening to May 24.

The last-minute change of mind appears to have been prompted by Charles Lloyd Jones, the Chair of the official Advisory Committee, who wrote to Earle Page, Minister for Commerce, on September 14, urging Australia’s involvement. He argued that, in addition to wool and wood, “It is very desirable also that a representative collection of Australian landscape art should be shown there to give the French people an idea of our cultural development...”<sup>2</sup> He proposed Page establish “a small committee with the outlook, vision and taste to make such an Exhibition worthy of Australia,” recommended the committee be “preferably from outside Government departments,” and added that his views were shared by Prof EG Waterhouse at the University of Sydney, and Mr Sydney Ure Smith, President of the Society of Artists.<sup>3</sup> Days before the Government made its decision, Page put a three-page document before Cabinet in which he argued that “a virile and interesting exhibit will stimulate interest in Australia generally.”<sup>4</sup> He was aware that there was “an idea that Australians lack ‘culture,’” so “a cultural exhibit would assist in dispelling this fallacy by making contact with the intellectual class.”<sup>5</sup> Page imagined Australia could respond to the core themes of the Exhibition by showcasing photography, radio communications, press and propaganda, the layout of towns, public buildings, preservation of buildings, architecture, painting, sculpture, books and magazines, fabrics, transport & touring—yachting, aeronautics and surfing. Sydney Ure Smith had advised Page that the “the exhibit would have to be of a high standard; one capable of comparison with the best artistic work of Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

2 National Archives of Australia: A601, 666/6/3. Paris Exhibition 1937 – General, 23-24.

3 NAA: A601, 666/6/3.

4 NAA: A601, 666/6/3, 32-34.

5 NAA: A601, 666/6/3.

6 NAA: A601, 666/6/3, 30.

The official Advisory Committee was just four people: Charles Lloyd Jones (Chair), Director of David Jones Ltd, a Trustee of the Art Gallery of NSW, and on the board of the Australian National Travel Association; Sydney Ure Smith, President of the Society of Artists and editor and publisher of *Art in Australia*, *The Home*, and other journals fostering modern art and design; G.V.F. (Gother Victor Fyers) Mann, chairman of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board; Ulrich R. Ellis (Secretary), Commercial Intelligence Officer, Department of Commerce.

The first three gentlemen were all amateur or part-time artists and held positions of influence within business and government circles. Ellis must be credited as the steadfast bureaucrat who upheld the committee's wishes in the storms that lay ahead, a role ably matched by the Australian Trade Commissioner in Paris, Clive H. Voss.

The Advisory Committee first met November 18, and thereafter at least weekly. Their first major decision was to invite to the next meeting someone from the Sydney office of the Melbourne architectural firm Stephen, Meldrum & Turner (SM&T) in order to discuss the pavilion design. Thereafter Mr G.L. Moline, Mr H.J. Tribe or Mr Simpson from SM&T would attend each meeting and assist the committee in integrating the exhibition content and the emerging interior design. Also Mr H.W. (Henry) Bindoff, a designer at David Jones, and Russell Roberts, a leading commercial photographer, were invited to attend. From the very start art and design were integral to the thinking about the pavilion.

The speed with which the Committee worked was astounding. They wanted a building “of the simplest character.”<sup>7</sup> Ellis elaborated: “It is desired to express in as simple a form as possible the development of industry, the arts and culture in Australia; also to demonstrate the community life of our people and to illustrate the natural attractions of this country from a tourist point of view.”<sup>8</sup> Two weeks later, on December 9, draft plans for the 230 sqm circular building were approved, with the final designs sent to Paris just one week later.<sup>9</sup> Australia had extracted an agreement from the French exhibition committee for the hosts to cover most of the construction costs. Moline, from SM&T, and Bindoff, from David Jones, jointly designed the “showcases and display facilities,” also to be fabricated in Paris.<sup>10</sup> As the floor plan shows (fig. 2), the building had no screens interrupting the space. There were a few showcases as well as a “rotunda” in the centre of the space, “equipped with transparencies and surrounded with a table of Australian timbers.”<sup>11</sup>

7 NAA: A601, 666/6/10. Paris Exhibition 1937 – Advisory Committee Minutes, 28-29.

8 NAA: A601, 666/6/4. Paris Exhibition 1937 - Organisation - Part 1, 139.

9 NAA: A601, 666/6/10.

10 NAA: A601, 666/6/10, 23.

11 NAA: A601, 666/6/10, 26-27.

## Key Elements of the Interior

Because the architects were invited to the meeting, they understood the goals of the committee, later summarised as “two main principles—artistic merit and simplicity of presentation”;<sup>12</sup> unlike the more elaborate buildings and crowded displays of earlier exhibitions. At the time the plans were approved decisions had been made about space allocation:

12 NAA: A601, 666/6/11. Paris Exhibition 1937 Organisation Pt. III, 219-33.

half of one side to wool, half to timber and the opposite side to exhibits giving a general impression of Australia to be organised in cooperation with the National Travel Association [ANTA]. ... the walls opposite the entrance should be devoted to the Art exhibit; ... the rotunda should be equipped with transparencies and surrounded with a table of Australian timbers... [and] a map of Australia in relation to the world should decorate the ceiling, while the walls would be decorated with large photographs depicting Australian industries and scenes.<sup>13</sup>

13 NAA: A601, 666/6/10, 26.

It was just three weeks since the Committee first met, and this guiding concept remained intact. Two weeks later the Committee approached Dr Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, “with the object of organising an exhibit of Aboriginal and New Guinea Art, special emphasis to be laid on the use of native design for fabrics.”<sup>14</sup>

14 NAA: A601, 666/6/10, 22-23.

By January 20, they could list the key components of the exhibition.<sup>15</sup> Three weeks later they reviewed the arrangement of the works at a mock display at David Jones, and agreed on the principles for captions as well as the scope of the catalogue. Packaging, insurance and shipping arrangements were finalised, and the exhibition left Australia’s shore on February 18, 1937, exactly three months after the Committee first met.<sup>16</sup>

15 NAA: A601, 666/6/10, 16.

16 NAA: A601, 666/6/9. Paris Exhibition 1937 – Finance.

It was at this time that the Committee arranged for Melocco Bros. to make a model of the pavilion, 3’9” x 3’ x 30” (114

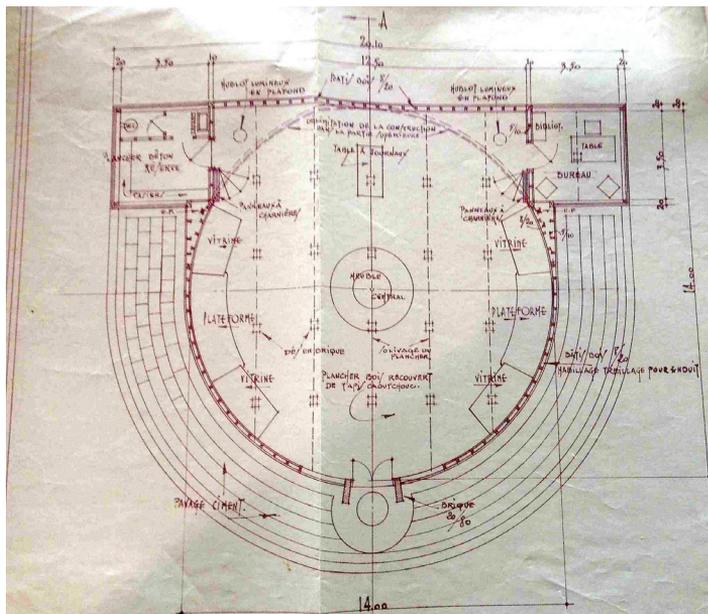


Figure 2. Stephenson, Meldrum & Turner, Australian Pavilion for the International Exhibition, Paris, 1937. Floor plan. (Courtesy of Archives nationales (France) 1937, F/12/12537.)

x 91 x 76 cm), to circulate some of the capital cities.<sup>17</sup> The accompanying press release began as follows:

*Within the Pavilion, in an atmosphere of simplicity and spaciousness, the story of Australian life and progress has been epitomised. The exhibit has been so arranged that the spectator, standing some distance within the entrance may gain a cycloramic impression of a new nation's significance in the world of art and industry.*<sup>18</sup>

The *Melbourne Herald* (April 1) elaborated, noting the word "Australia" is illuminated at night with orange Neon lights, with interior walls "painted duck-egg green, growing lighter as it reaches the ceiling and across to the edge of the roof light," and the floor of "varying shades of green, ranging from dark at the centre to light at the walls."<sup>19</sup> It continued:

*A map, 10ft in diameter, indicating the travel routes by air and by sea between France and Australia, will provide the central feature of the ceiling, the details being brought into relief by concealed lighting.... One of the main features of the display will be a selection of Australian works of art, which will occupy the back wall. On the side walls, photographic enlargements of beauty spots and industries will hang, and show cases and platforms will contain exhibits of woollen goods, precious stones, examples of [A]boriginal art, colour printing, Australian literature, and timbers and oils.... All show cases, platforms and internal fittings will be constructed of Australian timbers. Leading Australian newspapers will be on view.*<sup>20</sup>

Strong though the commitment was to Australian art, there was no doubting that any exhibition sponsored by the Department of Commerce had to foreground primary products, which in this instance included wool, wood and opals. The Committee worked with the newly-formed Australian Wool Board whose job it was to put together a wool display and publish a brochure on the significance of wool to the Australian economy. But because the Paris Exhibition was on art and design, and given that Australia seemed to care little about secondary industries that might have seen wool developed into coveted fashion designs, the committee looked no further than David Jones Ltd to find modern and distinctive woollen products in subdued browns, reds and pale ochres with touches of white and black.<sup>21</sup> With Australian Wool Board approval, the committee allocated one of the cabinets to exhibit smaller items of Aboriginal art alongside the woollen products in the hope that Europeans would recognise that "[A]

17 Philip Goad, "Projecting the Nation," *Architecture Australia* 99, no. 5 (September 2010), <https://architectureau.com/articles/projecting-the-nation/>

18 NAA: A601, 666/6/11, 219-33.

19 NAA: A601, 666/6/11, 358.

20 *Melbourne Herald*, April 1, 1937.

21 NAA: A601, 666/6/9.

boriginal designs might be copied by textile designers”—an intent that proved stronger in the desire than the reality.<sup>22</sup>

22 NAA: A601, 666/6/11.

Linking all the disparate elements was the photo-mural of “Australian scenes and industries” compiled and processed by Russell Roberts.<sup>23</sup> These images, each 6’ x 3¼” (183 x 91 cm), were designed to overlap and thus be read as a continuous mural. They elicited much praise from visitors.

23 NAA: A601, 666/6/9. Paris Exhibition 1937 Finance, Minute paper, December 20, 1936.

The committee’s attention to Aboriginal art and design was reflected in the catalogue, in a letter from the French Consul-General in Sydney to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, and in an article published by the *Bulletin* of the British Chamber of Commerce in Paris.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, it must have been devastating for the Advisory Committee to read a report in the *Journal Industrielle*, one month before the official opening of the display, that the Australian Pavilion had “wool, furs, metals, minerals, pearls, fresh and canned fruits, dried fruits and wines as well as various Australian wood species,” in addition to Australian art objects and paintings, tourist posters books and brochures, exotic fish and a lovely exhibition of opals and sapphires.<sup>25</sup> This spin, which could not have come from sources based in Australia, reads as if it was originally drafted for the display for the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg, with amendments acknowledging the inclusion of art for the Paris exhibition. Certainly, Australian politicians with affiliations to primary producers, dignitaries including ex-prime minister Stanley Bruce in London, and representatives from the London office of the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA), used their combined power to ensure that more travel and commercial items were included than were envisaged by the Committee. It was Bruce who had actively dissuaded Australia from participating in the exhibition and his distaste did not abate.<sup>26</sup> Immediately following the inauguration of the Pavilion, he wrote to Acting Prime Minister Sir Earle Page (Minister for Commerce, the very ministry that took carriage of the Australian pavilion), complaining about the emphasis on art and design over “primary products.”<sup>27</sup> A brief article in *The Home* confirmed that the “usual display of primary produce and tinned goods was not given any space in the exhibition, and this fact seemed to cause adverse comment.”<sup>28</sup> Ellis, the departmental representative on the Committee held firm when negative impressions hit the press. He was able to reassure his boss that the design of the interior did indeed convey spaciousness and avoid overcrowding, a fact that only disappointed those “persons going to the pavilion with the idea that they would see piles of eggs and dried fruit and butter.”<sup>29</sup>

24 Respectively, *L'exposition Internationale de Paris, 1937, Pavillon Australien*, Publié par le gouvernement de Commonwealth Australien, 1937; Letter February 22, 1937 from M. Suzor, in ANF: F/12/12359; “International Exhibition, Paris: Australian Participation,” *Bulletin* 401, March 1937.

25 *La Journée Industrielle*, May 16-18, 1937. Press cutting in ANF: F/12/12143. Translation by the author.

26 Australian government ministers attending the May coronation of George VI declined to launch the Paris pavilion. Eventually the Minister of Defence did so on June, 24.

27 NAA: A601, 666/6/11, 86..

28 Anon. “The Australian Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition,” *The Home: An Australian Quarterly* (October 1937): 92.

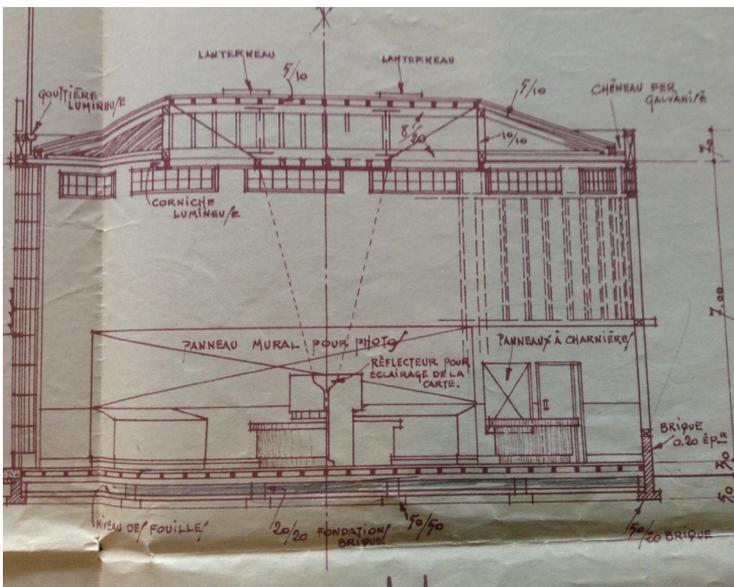
29 NAA: A601, 666/6/11, 155-58.

This paper elaborates on the exhibition contents because the building and the display it housed were integrally linked. As yet, good photographs of the interior have not been located, although the architectural drawings do reveal the intended design and useful details (figs 2 & 3).<sup>30</sup> Fortunately, there exist vivid verbal accounts of the interior fit-out.<sup>31</sup> Along the (straight) back wall was the display of Australian art. On each side was a low, six inch (15 cm), wooden platform supporting a two-shelved vitrine at either end. To the right was the display of Aboriginal art and wool products. To the left were samples of Australian publications including Louise Dyer's *L'oiseau lyre* music books, the ANTA material, and the opal display. On either side of the entrance was a wall display of Aboriginal weapons and objects. In the centre was a "rotunda" consisting of a table of Australian woods and a central translucent cylinder with eleven transparencies of Australian life, the illumination from the core of the cylinder coming from a spotlight directed to the Douglas Annand map on the ceiling above. Likewise, a table positioned near the back of the room was admired for its timbers. The carpentry, made in Paris with Australian timbers and specifications, was designed to allow the eye to scan the entire wall at mid-point and get a sense of the whole. Alas, the low platform and shelving system were too low: the lower shelf in the vitrines required visitors to bend over to peer at products; and all the items on the shelves were filthy because relentless rain in Paris in the months before the official opening resulted in all manner of delays including the repaving of access paths.

30 The author is still trying to locate photographs taken by Russell Roberts of the mock-up exhibition in Sydney prior to its departure. "The Australian Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition" includes two poor images of the Paris interior.

31 The following accounts come from the British Chamber of Commerce's *Bulletin* article in May, and a report from Voss in June.

Figure 3. Stephenson, Meldrum & Turner, Australian Pavilion for the International Exhibition Paris 1937. Cross sectional drawing. (Courtesy of Archives nationales (France): 1937, F/12/12537.)



Following complaints from London, the Advisory Committee agreed to raise the platform and shelves.

## Early Responses to the Building and Location

The interior was generally admired for its restraint and spaciousness. The Visitors' Book, which captured impressions of visitors from around the world, acknowledges this fact, with many admiring the beauty of the building and the display. Many commented on its small size: "The pavilion is small but attractive" (Czechoslovakia), "Small pavilion but very attractive," and "The Australian pavilion is one of the most beautiful in the exhibition" (France), "Small but good," "Little and good," "one of the most effective displays in view of space," and "very good display for space" (Australia), "A gem, but small for Australia" (India).<sup>32</sup> Although the Australian media ran stories on the inadequacies of the pavilion, especially the display, the Visitors Book shows that people admired the building, the interior display, the quality of the art, the photographs and the opals. Sydney Ure Smith summed it up when he said: "No other Dominion spent such a small sum on its Pavilion as Australia, but in spite of considerable hostile criticism, in all cases from Australians, the Government's representative in Paris, Mr. C. H. Voss, has received many congratulations on the excellent taste and simplicity of the arrangements and particularly on the quality of the Australian Art Exhibition."<sup>33</sup> It was Australians also who were most embarrassed by the Aboriginal works for fear they gave "the impression to foreigners that Australia was still a black man's country."<sup>34</sup> Europeans, other Commonwealth countries and of course many Australians as well, were genuinely impressed.

The cylindrical form of the building and its slight protrusion beyond the set-back line meant that, despite its modest size at 233 sqm and its peripheral location, the orange-neon AUSTRALIA sign could be seen from the high terrace at the centre of the new Palais de Chaillot at the Trocadero. With the internal diameter at just 14 metres it was a far cry from the almost six-acre space occupied by Australia at the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, 1924.<sup>35</sup> No one remarked that its form, understood as a surprising commitment to modernity in Australia, included a passing nod to the cylindrical British pavilion at the Johannesburg Empire Exhibition the previous year.<sup>36</sup>

There were, however, two aspects to the pavilion that attracted universal criticism: the building's location, and the paltry

<sup>32</sup> *Visitors' Book from the International Exhibition, Paris 1937, Australian Pavilion*, 1937. National Library of Australia, MS 442.

<sup>33</sup> Voss report, NAA: A601, 666/6/11.

<sup>34</sup> Voss report, NAA: A601, 666/6/11.

<sup>35</sup> *The British Empire Exhibition 1924: Official Guide* (London, United Kingdom: Fleetway Press, 1924); *Empire Exhibition, Scotland -1938. Official Guide* (Glasgow: McCorquodale & Co., 1938)

<sup>36</sup> A sketch of the British pavilion, designed by Howard Robertson, in *The Architects' Journal*, August 6, 1936.

budget. As mentioned at the outset, Australia was late in accepting the invitation to participate with the result that its site was on the periphery of the main attractions. These were on two axes, north-south from the Trocadero high on the right bank the across the river past the Eiffel Tower to the Champs de Mars beyond, and east-west along the River Seine. Australia was allocated a space well into the Champs de Mars (behind the Eiffel Tower), opposite Haiti and further from the centre of things than the tiny pavilion dedicated to the French animal welfare organisation, the Association française pour la défense des animaux. Australia struck a bargain with the French that the host government would pay for all basic construction costs, with Australia only having to cover the costs of building embellishments inside and out plus all transport and administration costs associated with the exhibition. For the Empire exhibitions in Wembley (1924) and Glasgow (1938) Australia committed £200,000 on the exhibits.<sup>37</sup> For the entire Paris project, including: the chrome Coat of Arms, building name and flag poles; furniture fabrication; lighting fabrication and electricity costs inside and out; the catalogue; shipping and insurance; administration; plus unexpected costs for the glass façade, etc., the Australian government allocated just £3000 (in today's terms, \$AU277,160.00).<sup>38</sup> As Ellis noted, "even Siam is spending £11,000 with most other countries increasing their votes as a result of a 45% spike in labour costs in France in the six months prior to opening."<sup>39</sup> Eventually Australia allocated an additional £400 after the criticisms and proposed amendments from its representatives in London. These were the realities under which the Advisory Committee had to work, and any fair assessment of the Australian pavilion would have to acknowledge the creativity and ingenuity of Committee and its supporting architects and designers.

Not many visitors to the pavilion identified themselves as architects. Some names are easy to recognise. Walter Bunning (then working for SM&T) thought it "well organised & with care. Quite pleased with interior." And A.H. Mack added: "A compliment to Stephenson, Meldrum and Turner."<sup>40</sup> A French architect found it "very interesting" and a Swiss saw it as "very original."<sup>41</sup> Bunning later wrote that the building was "quite effective, considering the small amount extended thereon [but] It has an unfortunate position..." and Mack added that "The Australian pavilion is quite a nice little thing. There is a remarkable interest evinced in Australia, and it is to be hoped that, on a future occasion, Australian industries will be represented more adequately."<sup>42</sup>

37 Sarah Britton, "Narration, Performance, Resistance: Showcasing Nation and Empire in British Interwar Exhibitions" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2006).

38 Calculation from the Reserve Bank of Australia website: <https://www.rba.gov.au/calculator/annualPreDecimal.html>.

39 March 12, 1937, A601, 666/6/11, 219-23.

40 *Visitors' Book*.

41 *Visitors' Book*, author's translations.

42 Walter Bunning, "Mainly European Travel," *Architecture: An Australian monthly devoted to architecture and the allied arts, and the Official Journal of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and the Board of Architects of New South Wales* (July 1938): 159; A.H. Mack, "Continental Tour," *Architecture* (July 1938), 166.

## Later Responses

The little scholarship that exists on the Australian Pavilion in France is mostly located within the architectural and design historiography. Surprisingly, much of this has been negative towards the architectural and design endeavours of the Advisory Committee. In 1983 Geoffrey Caban quoted Gordon Andrews as saying the exhibit was “the most disgusting thing I’ve ever seen.”<sup>43</sup> A monograph on the acclaimed designer has Andrews recall an exterior “with letters spelling A U S T R A L I A like a row of birds perched on the top” and an interior with “pyramids of jams and canned fruit, here and there punctuated by moth-eaten stuffed koalas and wallabies, no doubt dredged up from one of our embassies. It was without a doubt the worst exhibit of all; the so-called primitive countries did far better.”<sup>44</sup> The only koala was a photograph of the Australian mascot in the photo mural. There were no pyramids of canned produce, although there were plenty in Johannesburg in 1936 and in Glasgow in 1938. Indeed, when one Australian visitor to the Paris pavilion berated the “very poor display...no canned or dried fruits, wheat, etc,” another quipped: “what does he think the pavilion is: a farm?”<sup>45</sup> If Andrews did indeed visit the Australian pavilion he did not sign the Visitors’ Book. Memory can play cruel tricks. It is possible that Andrews confused aspects of both the Paris and Glasgow pavilions; either way his remarks form a poor premise for an appraisal of the Australian Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition.

Nonetheless, Australian architectural historiography has continued the lacklustre appraisal. Philip Goad describes the pavilion as “an unremarkable Moderne cylinder” containing “a travel advice bureau, a collection of paintings that focused on natural and agricultural landscapes, photographs of a koala, an aborigine [sic], a woman surfing, and a house by Leslie Wilkinson amongst other images,” and notes expatriate Australian architect Raymond McGrath’s comment that “the place was awful” and that he was ashamed to think that Arthur Stephenson had attached his name to it.<sup>46</sup> Although generally damning, at least design and architectural historians have acknowledged the existence of the pavilion. Until now it has been ignored in Australia’s art and cultural histories.

The Australian Pavilion for the 1937 Paris International Exhibition deserves a reappraisal. On one level close attention should be paid to the unusual bureaucratic process. Having been persuaded by the French Consul and Sydney Ure Smith in Sydney, the Minister of Commerce was able to sway a

43 Geoffrey Caban, *A Fine Line: A History of Australian Commercial Art* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), 76, with no sources cited. This quote was reprised in Anne McDonald’s *Douglas Annand: The Art of Life* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2001, 36), and was used as evidence for her argument that the pavilion project was “an opportunity missed.

44 Gordon Andrews, *Gordon Andrews: A Designer’s Life* (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1993), 26-27.

45 *Visitors’ book*. Comments dated August 17, 1937.

46 Philip Goad, “Collusions of Modernity: Australian Pavilions in New York and Wellington, 1939,” *Fabrications* 10, no. 1 (August 1999), 25.

recalcitrant prime minister and cabinet to endorse Australia's representation in the 1937 exhibition, albeit with a miniscule budget. In turn, the steady resolve of the Minister's Commercial Intelligence Officer, Ulrich R. Ellis, and the Australian Trade Commissioner in Paris, Clive Voss, to hold true to the Advisory Committee's goals, meant that the project was able to weather the small, orchestrated storm that greeted its very existence. Although Australia briefly reverted to a display of primary produce for the Glasgow exhibition the following year,<sup>47</sup> it was the experience gained in putting together the pavilion in Paris, one that sought to eclipse the distance between Europe and the Antipodes, that equipped much the same team to present Australia effectively in the New York World Fair of 1939, North America, and the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in Wellington in 1939-40.<sup>48</sup>

The small but considered pavilion held its own against the financial and locational odds. Its embrace of European modernism may have lacked the finesse of Aalto's Finnish pavilion and the raw inventiveness of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's Temps Nouveaux pavilion.<sup>49</sup> However, the combined architectural and exhibition program forged a concept of Australia as progressive, with a sense of its own identity beyond being a British dominion and a primary producer, proud of its art, and willing to declare a position in relation to design.

47 *Empire Exhibition, Scotland - 1938. Official Guide* (Glasgow: McCorquodale & Co, 1938), 184-89, shows Australia sent mainly wool, timbers, grains, bottled/canned goods and some manufactured goods, plus unidentified works by seventeen artists.

48 For more on this see Philip Goad, "Collusions of Modernity Australian Pavilions in New York and Wellington, 1939," *Fabrications* 10, no. 1 (1999): 22-45.

49 Respectively, Fabienne Chevallier, "Finland through French Eyes: Alvar Aalto's Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition of 1937," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 7, no. 1 (1999): 65-105; and Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Le Corbusier and the Paris Exhibition of 1937: The Temps Nouveaux Pavilion," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56, no. 1 (1997): 42-63.