

A Swarm of Fish

Claudia Perren



Stan Symonds, Jobson House, Sydney, New South Wales, 1963

Modernism, born in Europe, underwent a long process of maturation before reaching Australia, arriving on fertile soil. The climate in Australia seems to demand an architecture which, according to the principles of modernism, is based on light, air, and sun. But not exclusively. The exhibition *Living the Modern—Australian Architecture* presents the development of modern architecture in Australia, specific in terms of culture, location, and climate, by displaying its residential architecture. The spotlight is set upon twenty-five architects who have adopted, utilized, transformed, interpreted, and altered aspects of modernism in the last fifteen years. Thus, for the first time, this exhibition provides a portrait of the significantly interesting tradition and transformation of a multifaceted “progressing modernism” in Australia. Progressing more than anything because modernism in Australia is not considered a condition which is established, deadlocked, or at the end of its development. Modernism in Australia is an open experiment, influenced by global debates on modernism.

The fact that Australia, as a former colony of Great Britain, has not introduced modernism as an import from its mother country, is of particular interest. Instead, it received its character as a combination of influences from Europe, America, and Asia. An increase in the debate on modern expression of form can be observed since the 1950s. The Austrian-born architect Harry Seidler, for instance, introduced a modernism to Australia that was influenced by Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Josef Albers, and Oscar Niemeyer (e.g., Seidler House, Killara, 1967; Rose House, Wahroonga, 1950). Neville Gruzman, on the other hand, was strongly influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, but also traditional Japanese architecture (Goodman House, Middle Cove, 1956; Rosenburg/Hills House, Sydney, 1966). Then again, Robyn Boyd explored, in social and spatial terms, the concepts of “open plan” and “courtyard house” as championed by Mies van der Rohe. By doing so, he also expanded the concepts into the vertical structure of residential houses (Featherston House, Melbourne, 1969; Grounds Romberg Boyd, Lloyd House, Brighton, 1958). Gabriel Poole and Jean Fomberteaux probed the possibilities of living within prefabricated steel frame constructions, in reference to the Eames House as well as the De Stijl movement (Fomberteaux House, Sydney, 1966; Dobie House, Buderim, 1972). Echoes of the sculptural language of Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer can be found in the houses of Stan Symonds (Jobson House, Sydney, 1963; Schuchard House, Seaforth, 1967). The houses built of concrete masonry block by Iwan Iwanoff oscillate between sculpture and relief, reminiscent of the Case Study Houses in the United States in the 1940s to 1960s (Burszyn House, Perth, 1969; Kessel House, Perth, 1975). Glenn Murcutt combines his studies on the pavilion architecture of Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson with an Australian Aboriginal proverb: “One must touch this earth lightl,” thus opening the architecture toward the landscape (Douglas Murcutt House, Belrose, 1972; Laurie Short House, Terrey Hills, 1973). These are only a few of the protagonists of modernism in Australia, creating a backdrop for the exhibition. More in-depth



Iwan Iwanoff, Kessel House, Perth, Western Australia, 1975