



THE WORLD TURNS MODERN

ART DECO

FROM THE NATIONAL COLLECTION

Secondary school education resource

NGA
National Gallery of Australia

 Australian Government
National Collecting Institutions
Touring & Outreach Program

Curriculum connections

This *Art Deco* education resource invites students to explore the vitality and innovation of Art Deco art and design in early twentieth-century Australia through responding and making. It explores the influence of technological advancements and urbanisation across a diverse range of artforms in the aftermath of World War I.

Art Deco is perfectly suited to foster students' critical and creative thinking skills. By applying a sequence of exercises, students will develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of problem-solving processes and interpretation. Through the creation of their own works of art, students are required to identify, explore and organise information and ideas.

This resource is directly linked to the Australian Curriculum and is designed to develop successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active, informed citizens. Students are encouraged to reflect on *Art Deco* from a contemporary perspective and to consider and question values, attitudes, perspectives and assumptions. The resource provides an opportunity for students to develop their understanding of how and why artists realise their ideas through different art practices, processes and viewpoints.

This resource is designed for secondary students and can be adapted for upper primary or tertiary students.

The key curriculum area for this resource is Visual Arts with relevance for the Humanities, Photography, Fashion, Design and Technologies.

This resource may be used to:

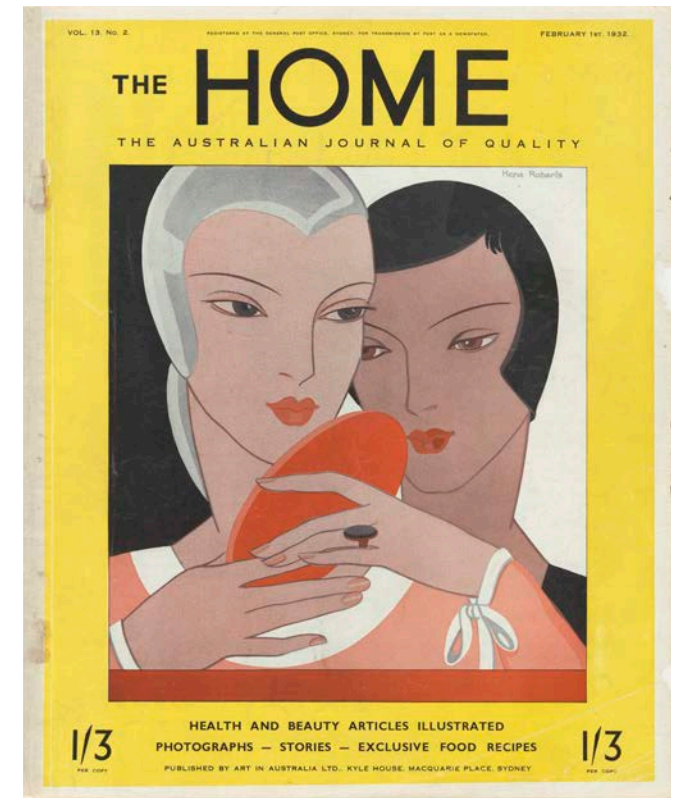
- complement an experience of *Art Deco* through activities and ideas to assist with preparation for the gallery visit
- as a reference when students are viewing the work
- deepen understanding and engagement post-visit
- support in-depth research into Art Deco art and design, its wider historical context and the work of individual artists associated with Art Deco.

The resource includes the following learning activities, paired with major themes of the exhibition:

- **Speak your mind:** Talking points or provocations to facilitate contemplation and discussion as well as offer opportunities for students to engage with art history and theory through exploratory research tasks
- **Get to work:** Creative art making suggestions that explore key concepts
- **Think it through:** Ideas, considerations and extensions to aid students in their art making.

The NGA values the feedback of students and teachers on the education resources we have produced. To share student work or your feedback on the resource, please email education@nga.gov.au.

The NGA would like to acknowledge the 2019 [National Summer Art Scholarship](#) students who contributed their ideas to this resource, with special thanks to Shannon O'Hara and Danae Carlile who conceived the 'Get to work' task for the *Expressive bodies* theme.



The Home: an Australian quarterly, vol. 13, no. 2, February 1932, process block and letterpress, National Gallery of Australia Research Library

cover: **Sydney Ure Smith** *The Home: an Australian quarterly, vol. 9, no. 10, October 1928, process block and letterpress, National Gallery of Australia Research Library*

Introduction

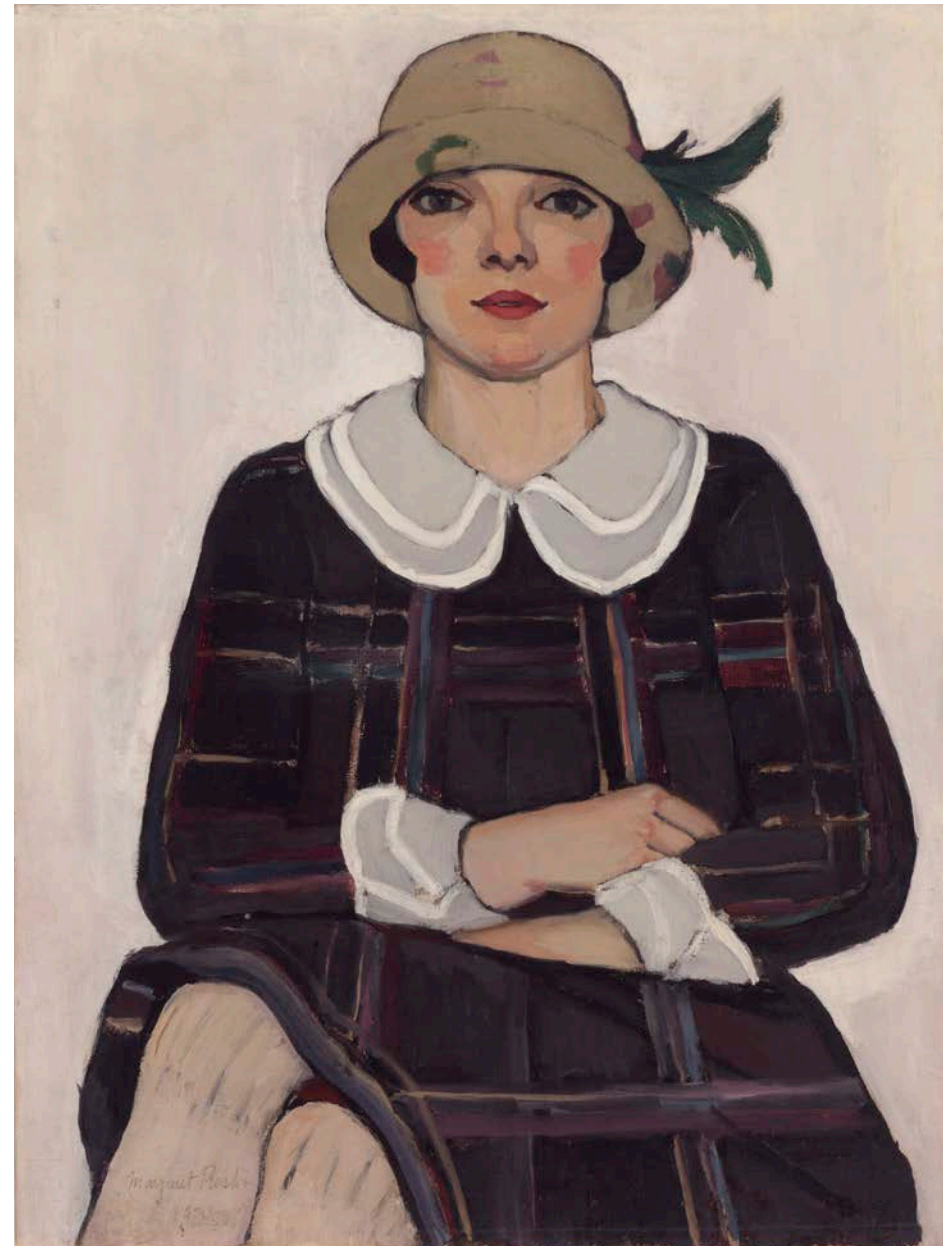
In the 1920s Australian artists reacted to the austerity of World War I by creating images of an abundant nation filled with strong, youthful figures that captured the vitalism of a nation reborn.

The rise of Art Deco as a style in fine art, architecture, design and fashion in the 1920s largely emerged from the development of modernism and abstraction in the early decades of the twentieth century. Technological advances such as electricity, motor cars and air travel, combined with urbanisation, called for a new style that echoed the modern world.

With its simplified shapes and emphasis on geometry, Art Deco provided the right aesthetic for the time. Buildings lost their decorative embellishments, fashion became less structured, and women enjoyed greater freedoms, such as the right to vote and to travel unchaperoned. The image of the stylish, independent woman became popular in portraiture, graphic design and advertising.

Art Deco was an international style. It was driven by modernist movements in Europe and America, and its popularity reached a crescendo at the Paris International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in 1925. Dedicated to 'modern' decorative arts, important architects were commissioned to design pavilions inside which visitors found rich cornucopias of modernist and Art Deco design. In Australia, magazines such as *The Home* were beacons of modern style and illustrated many of the art, objects and photographs on display in this exhibition.

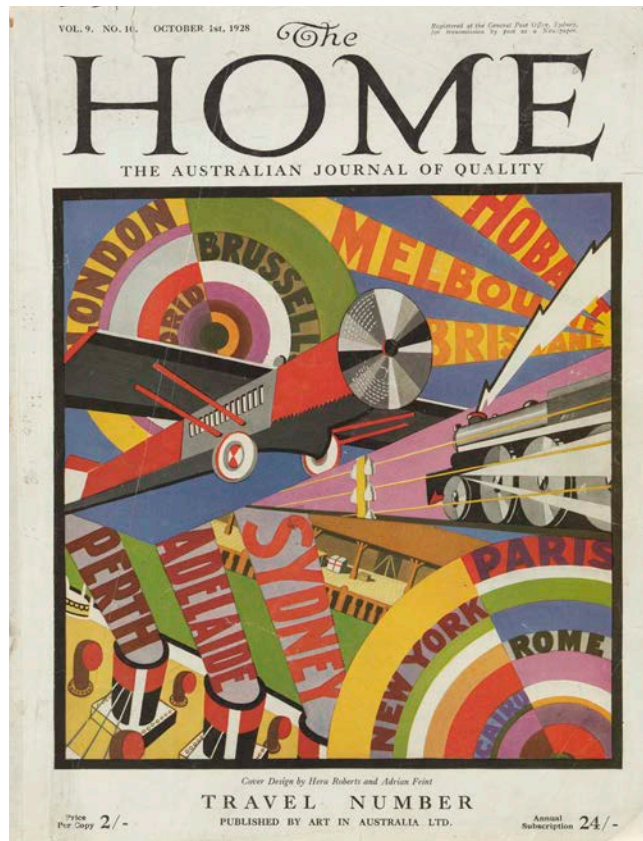
While Art Deco design and popular culture was influenced by the new and modern, there was an equally prominent fascination with spirituality, symbolism and mythology. Many artists explored a spiritual practice called Theosophy, and also drew on Classical Greek and Roman narratives to inspire their work. Depictions of the human figure often took the form of strong and youthful individuals which evolved into a style known as 'Vitalism'.



Margaret Preston *Flapper* 1925, oil paint, National Gallery of Australia, purchased with the assistance of the Cooma-Monaro Snowy River Fund 1988 © Margaret Rose Preston Estate/Copyright Agency

Shrinking the world—expanding horizons

The Art Deco period was one of rapid industrial and technological change. Adapting to the conditions of contemporary life, a new style was embraced. Within all aspects of the applied arts there was a movement towards the simplification of form that reflected the new-found efficiency that modern technologies enabled. Modern transport made holidaying more accessible, and pleasure travel became highly fashionable. Aeroplanes, ocean liners, and speeding trains were great technological marvels of the twentieth century and became symbols of the age. The dynamic travel posters of the Art Deco period inspired travellers to see the world, while the rise of amateur photography allowed them to document their journeys. The ease of travel and transmission of images between Australia, Europe and America allowed for a greater fluidity in the exchange of design aesthetics and ideas.



The Home: an Australian quarterly, vol. 9, no. 10, October 1928, process block and letterpress, National Gallery of Australia Research Library



Sven Henriksen *The Danish State Railways (Train and rail map)* 1930, lithograph printed in colour, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift in memory of Spensley Charles and Gwendoline Mary Weetman 1990

Speak your mind:

- Compare the representations of travel and transport seen on the cover of *The Home: an Australian quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 10 and *The Danish State Railways* poster. Discuss the visual choices that each artist has made in relation to colour, shape, pattern, perspective and scale. How have they suggested a sense of speed or movement? What mood or feelings do you think the artists wished to evoke?
- Investigate the new technologies represented by these works of art—both the machines depicted and those used to reproduce and distribute images to a mass audience. Discuss the impacts that new transport and communication technologies had on Australian society and daily life in the 1920s. Discuss examples of current and emerging transport and communication technologies that are continuing to shape our world today.
- Walter Dorwin Teague was a pioneer of industrial design. Research the history of industrial design and discuss what conditions led to this entirely new profession being developed in the early twentieth century. Almost everything in our lives—from cars to chairs to phones—has been made with the input of an industrial designer. Can you find examples of current products that are the equivalent of the *Gift Kodak camera*—functional items that are also designed to be a fashionable accessory?

Get to work:

- Work with a partner to create a list of objects that you use every day and discuss what makes them enjoyable or frustrating to use. Identify one object to redesign, for example a household appliance or a piece of furniture. Create a series of sketches or small models investigating improvements to the form and function of your chosen object and present your ideas to your class.

Think it through:

- German designer Dieter Rams came up with ten principles for good design. Have a look at the list here: [The power of good design](#) and consider how you can shape your design with these principles in mind.

Relevant links:

- [Walter Teague: Designer of the 1930s: Cameras](#)



Walter Dorwin Teague (designer) *No. 1A Gift Kodak camera* c1935, metal: chromed; wood, glass, enamel, leather, cloth, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased from Gallery Restaurant Funds 1998

Embracing new technologies

Along with Margaret Preston and Dorrit Black, Adelaide Perry was another artist who encouraged the popularity of the lino print in Sydney between the world wars. Linoleum was first invented as a flooring material in 1860 and artists started using it as a matrix for prints in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s lino prints had become widespread; artists enjoyed how easily it could be carved and that it did not require expensive tools and equipment. Carving tools could be fashioned from umbrella spokes, and the back of a wooden spoon could be rubbed across paper placed over the ink-covered lino to transfer the image. The work could literally be made at home on the kitchen table.

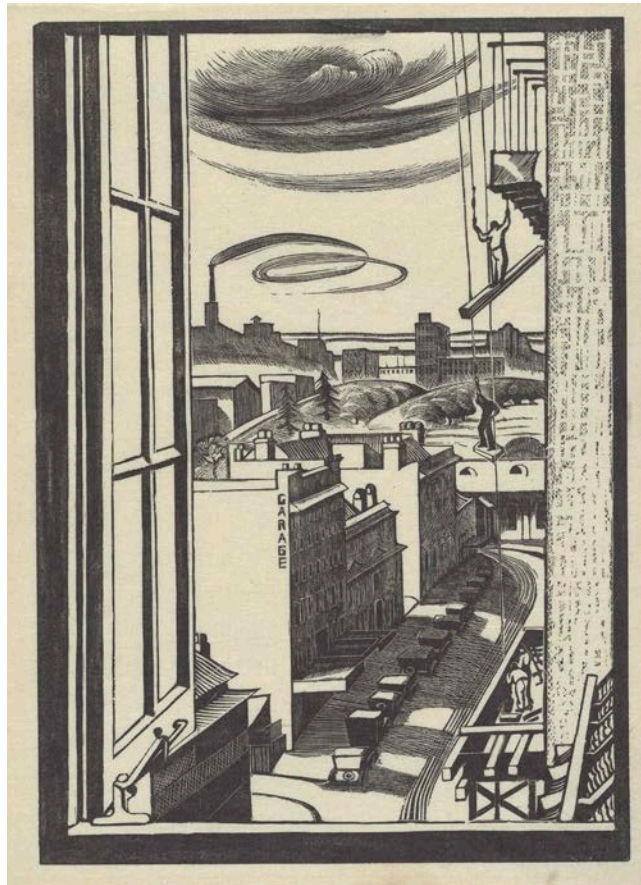
Many of the subjects of wood block and lino prints from this time came from the makers' immediate environments. In Adelaide Perry and Frank Weitzel's prints we can see an exploration of the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation in the choice to focus on the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and in the urban townscape of Perry's *Phillip Street*.

The wonders of modern construction inspired writers and poets, including the poet HE Horne who wrote an ode to the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge:

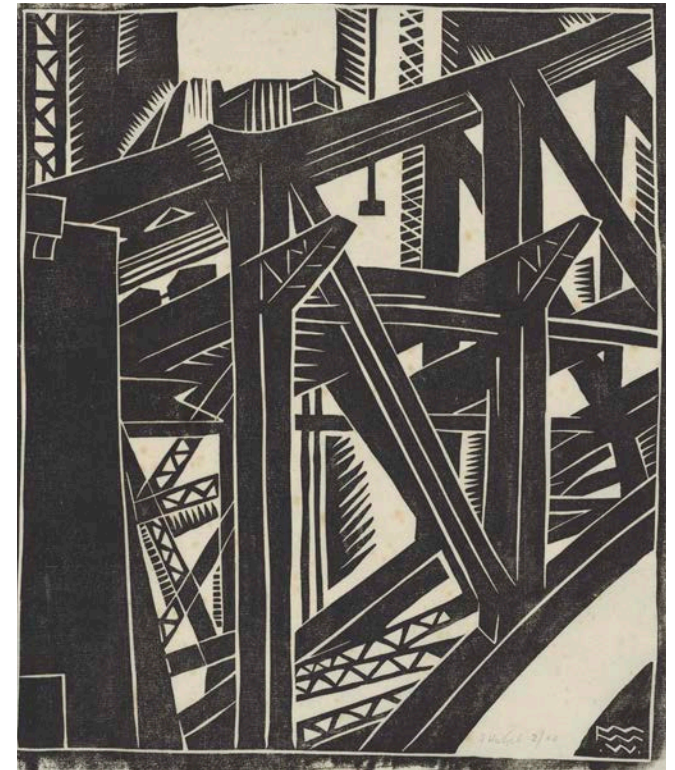
Song for the Bridge

Behold the Arch of Wonder
With sunset all aglow
When sea and sky bring heaven nigh
And tides eternal flow;
O bridge of Light to greater height
Thy call shall ever be
Where beauty dwells and casts her spells
In Sydney by the sea.

HE Horne, February 1932.



Adelaide Perry *Phillip Street* 1929, wood engraving, printed in black ink from one block, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1987
© Adelaide Perry



Frank Weitzel *Sydney Bridge* c1929, linocut printed in black ink from one block, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1993

Speak your mind

- Compare the linocut prints of Adelaide Perry and Frank Weitzel. What distinguishes Perry and Weitzel's use of visual qualities, such as line, shape, tone, contrast and framing? Consider the viewpoint adopted in Perry's [*Phillip Street*](#) and [*The Bridge, October 1929*](#) and Weitzel's [*Sydney Bridge*](#). What might each artist's chosen viewpoint say about their interests, feelings or relationship to the urban environment?
- Watch the [National Film and Sound Archive's video](#) about the construction and opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Pay attention to the different camera angles shown in the film and how they inform your experience of qualities such as scale and symmetry. Why do you think Perry, Weitzel and other artists such as [Jessie Truill](#) and [Grace Cossington Smith](#) found the construction period so exciting and inspiring?
- After watching the [National Film and Sound Archive's video](#) discuss what the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge might have meant for people living in Sydney in 1932, and what it might have symbolised for Australia as a nation. In what ways do you think the Sydney Harbour Bridge is important to Australian identity today? What landmarks come to mind when you consider what it means to be Australian?

Get to work

- Take your camera or sketchbook walking in a familiar urban environment or past a construction site and see if you can find a fresh perspective on the place. Experiment with different viewpoints, zooming in and cropping to explore abstract patterns and compositions. Select a photo or sketch to use as the starting point for a linocut print. Consider how the varied tones in your photo or drawing might be interpreted or adapted to suit the high contrast aesthetic of a black and white linocut.

Adelaide Perry *The Bridge, October 1929* 1930, linocut printed in black ink from one block, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1980 © Adelaide Perry

Think it through

- [The Virtual Instructor – Linocuts](#) tutorial offers some helpful tips to get you started with linocut. Remember that the areas you carve out will print as white (or the colour of the paper you use) and the final print will be a mirror-image of what you see on your lino block, so any words will need to be written backwards.

Relevant Links

- [National Museum of Australia: Sydney Harbour Bridge](#)



Ancient Modern

Alongside the sophistication of much Art Deco design and popular culture was an equally prominent tendency toward art inspired by Theosophy, spirituality and symbolism. Following the anguish of World War I artists and patrons looked to metaphysical concepts to make sense of the world. Classical Greek and Roman mythology also provided popular narratives. Australian painter Rupert Bunny, who emigrated to France in the nineteenth century, responded to the European interest in mythology by producing a colourful jewel-like group of mythological and allegorical paintings in the 1920s.

In Australia, this style converged with the impulse to depict an abundant and productive nation during its reconstruction following the austerity of the war. While depictions of the human form were often stylised and pared back, an archetype of the youthful, strong and fecund individual evolved into a tendency known as Vitalism.

Jean Broome-Norton *Woman with horses* 1934, patinated bronze, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift of Philip Bacon AM 2003. Reproduced with permission of the artist's estate, courtesy Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane



Speak your mind

- Compare the composition and mood of Jean Broome-Norton's bronze sculpture *Woman with horses* with Rupert Bunny's oil painting *The Fountain of Venus*. Sketch a simple diagram showing all the diagonal lines that you can see in these two works of art. What does the use of diagonals emphasise about the movement each artist has chosen to depict?
- What do you think might be going on in Jean Broome-Norton's *Woman with horses* and Rupert Bunny's *The Fountain of Venus*? What visual clues can you find that help to tell a story? Research the significance of Hippolyta and Venus in Greek mythology and consider how this additional information influences your interpretation of the works of art.
- Why do you think Jean Broome-Norton was drawn to the story of Hippolyta and what might have attracted Rupert Bunny to the subject of Venus? If you were to depict a character from Greek or Roman mythology who would you choose and why? Read the article '[The truth about the Amazons – the real Wonder Women](#)' and discuss the influence of Greek mythology on contemporary popular culture.

Rupert Bunny *The Fountain of Venus* c1921, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, bequest of Mary Meyer in memory of her husband Dr Felix Meyer 1975

Get to work

- Select a character from mythology whose special powers or attributes interest you. Sketch some ideas for compositions that emphasise a particular power or attribute e.g. strength or beauty. Use your sketches as a starting point to create a relief sculpture. Clay is a popular material for relief, allowing for free and expressive modelling of form as shown in this [tutorial](#). However, recycled materials such as cardboard can also be manipulated and layered to create a raised relief surface as demonstrated in this [tutorial](#).



Think it through

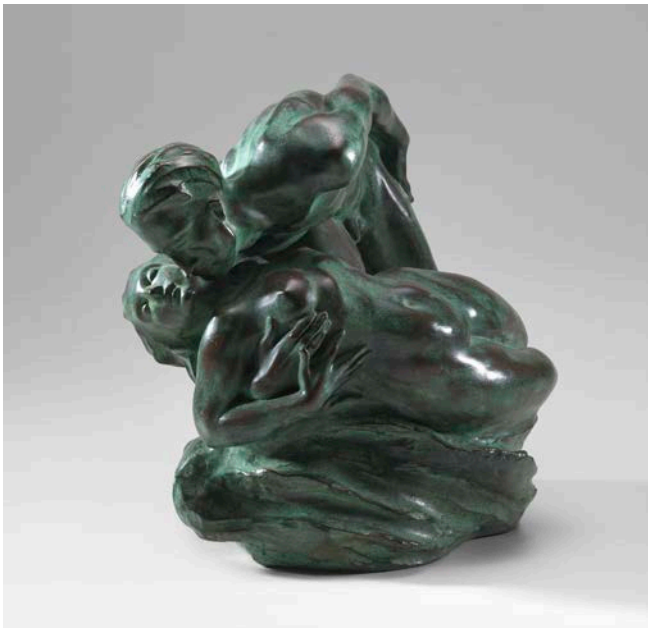
- A relief is a type of sculpture where raised or three-dimensional elements project out from a flat background as seen in Jean Broome-Norton's *Woman with horses*. Reliefs are designed to be viewed from the front, whereas 'sculpture in the round' refers to sculptures, such as Barbara Tribe's [Lovers II](#) (also in the Art Deco exhibition), which are designed to be viewed from all sides.

Relevant Links

- Raynor Hoff [Deluge – stampede of the lower gods 1927](#)

Expressive bodies

Australian artists' celebrations of physicality through Vitalism in the 1920s and 30s resonated with broader cultural shifts that associated Australian identity with an active, outdoors lifestyle. Barbara Tribe, Ethel Spowers and Jack Cato's works explore different aspects of the physicality and sensuality of human bodies. Barbara Tribe was a competitive swimmer and bodysurfer whose dynamic sculptures received critical acclaim for their expressive qualities. Jack Cato was introduced to the social and theatrical worlds in Melbourne by Dame Nellie Melba where he photographed actress and beauty salon owner Stephanie Deste. Ethel Spowers studied in London at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art under [Claude Flight](#), whose influence can be seen in the composition of her lino print *Resting models* 1933–34.



Barbara Tribe *Lovers II* 1936–37, cast 1988, bronze with green patina, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift of Barbara Tribe Foundation 2008

Jack Cato (*Stephanie Deste*) 1928, sepia toned photograph, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1991



Speak your mind

- Compare Barbara Tribe's *Lovers II*, Jack Cato's (*Stephanie Deste*) and Ethel Spowers' *Resting models*. Work in a small group to brainstorm the similarities and differences that you can see. What are the most prominent visual elements in each work of art and what qualities are highlighted by the mediums of bronze sculpture, photography and linocut? What do think connects these works of art and what sets them apart?
- Why do you think Tribe, Cato and Spowers might have chosen the human form as a subject for their work? What aspects of the human form have these artists chosen to explore or celebrate? What emotions do you feel are expressed in these works of art? Discuss the ways that each artist's compositional choices help to emphasise emotion or movement. What questions come to mind when you look at these works of art?
- The practice of life drawing from nude models is a centuries-old tradition. Read the article '[Why all artists should have naked ambition](#)'. What do you think artists learn from life drawing and why do you think it remains relevant for artists today? Read the article '[Musings of a life model](#)' and discuss Tribe, Cato and Spowers' works from the perspective of the models. How has each artist been influenced by the skill or character their models?

Get to work

- Select 1–3 songs to suit each of the 3 works of art: *Lovers II*, (*Stephanie Deste*) and *Resting models*. Consider how an accompanying piece of music might highlight or enrich different aspects of each work, for example form, movement, atmosphere, energy, emotion or narrative. Are there sounds or lyrics that come to mind when you look at the works, or emotions best evoked through music? Create a playlist on a platform such as Spotify and share it with your class. How do the different playlists affect your experience of the works of art? *

Ethel Spowers *Resting models* 1933–34, linocut printed in colour inks from four blocks, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1979

Think it through

- As an extension, design a record cover that includes your track listing and a title that sums up your playlist. The design could incorporate the human figure, or it could be abstract. It may be hand-drawn, photographic, collaged or digitally manipulated—just make sure it is eye-catching and captures the spirit of the music.

Relevant Links

- [Tune into Art](#): a series of musicians responding to works of art in the NGA collection.

* Acknowledgement: Thank you to Shannon O'Hara and Danae Carlile of the 2019 NGA National Summer Art Scholarship for contributing the 'Get to work' activity for this page



Portraits of Modern Women

In 1894 South Australia introduced legislation to give women the right to vote. When the Australian states federated to become a nation in 1902, part of the negotiation process required that no state citizens lose existing political rights, so the vote for women became

enshrined in the laws of the new nation. Through the political shifts of the early twentieth century and changes in social structures brought on by World War I, women in European countries gained political agency and greater freedom of movement. Some Australian women artists, including Margaret Preston and Agnes Goodsir, travelled to Europe to study painting and develop their careers as professional artists.

On returning to Australia they brought the influences of their studies and the vibrant European art scenes with them.

Agnes Goodsir *The Parisienne* c1924, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1993

Harold Cazneaux *The ermine coat* 1931, gelatin silver photograph, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1982



Speak your mind

- Compare Agnes Goodsir's painting [*The Parisienne*](#), Napier Waller's painting [*Christian Waller with Baldur, Undine and Siren at Fairy Hills*](#) and Harold Cazneaux's photograph *The ermine coat*. Work in a small group to brainstorm the similarities and differences that you can see. What are the most prominent visual elements in each work of art? What do you think connects these works of art and what sets them apart? What do you find distinctive about the attire of each woman?
- Napier Waller's [*Christian Waller with Baldur, Undine and Siren at Fairy Hills*](#) is a portrait of his wife, Christian. What do you think Christian's gaze, facial expression and body language might tell us about her personality and relationship with her husband? Christian was an artist, illustrator and

stained-glass window designer—make sure to have a look at her linocuts, such as [*The Spirit of Light*](#), which are included in the Art Deco exhibition.

- Discuss Goodsir, Waller and Cazneaux's portraits in the context of the article '[The 1920s: Young women took the struggle for freedom into their personal lives](#)'. Explore and compare further representations of female identities and stereotypes in this exhibition, including Margaret Preston's [*Flapper*](#), and Harold Cazneaux's [*An Australian girl*](#).

Get to work

- Create a portrait of a friend or family member in the medium of your choice, for example a painting or video. Ask your subject how they would describe their personality and share the things that you admire about their personality. Sketch out your

ideas to find an approach that reflects an aspect of your subject's character and explore options for costume, setting and props. Discuss the title that you think would suit your portrait, compared with the title that your subject would choose to identify themselves.

Think it through

- Consider the importance of gaze, facial expression and body language in portraiture. What might it mean for a person to make eye contact, compared to looking away? Would you like your subject to take on a formal or dramatic pose, or to appear caught in a natural or casual moment?

Relevant Links

- [Hilda Rix Nicholas *Une Australienne 1926*](#)

Napier Waller *Christian Waller with Baldur, Undine and Siren at Fairy Hills* 1932, oil and tempera on canvas mounted on composition board, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1984



Flapper fashion

The social changes sweeping the world at the beginning of the twentieth century impacted all aspects of art and design. As women gained political freedoms and became more able to pursue professional careers, [fashion reflected their new status](#). Items such as restrictive corsets were abandoned in favour of looser and lighter clothes. Hats suited to shorter haircuts, such as the cloche, also became popular. With rising hemlines, women's footwear became more visible and shoe designs reflected this. The flapper style shoe with a strap across the top was practical dancing footwear for women indulging in the vigorous [Charleston](#) dance craze.



unknown designer *Shrug cape* 1904–1910, velour, chiffon, marabau feathers, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Julian Robinson Collection, purchased 1976

Speak your mind

- Look closely at J & E Packer's 'High Gait' bar shoes, the *Cloche hat* and the *Shrug cape*. What do you notice about the choice of materials, colours, textures and shapes? Can you imagine how these items would look when worn? Discuss who might have worn them and what kind of events or occasions they would have been appropriate for.
- If design reflects society, what do these designs tell us about life in the 1920s? Do you think designers can contribute to social changes? Why? Work with a partner to brainstorm the fashion items that you think will define the 2010s. Read the article '[How the fashion industry is paving the way for a sustainable future](#)' and discuss the current relationship between fashion design and social issues, such as sustainability.

- In 1922 an anonymous young woman who identified as a 'flapper' penned a letter to a paper called *The Outlook*. She appealed to the older generation of her time to appreciate the virtues of the youth. Read her letter [here](#), and discuss it with your peers. Are there aspects of her appeal that are relevant to you today? Do you think each generation faces the same issues? Are there other challenges you face growing up today that didn't exist in the 1920s?

Get to work

- Select one of these items as a starting point and design an outfit inspired by it that could be worn today. Consider what kinds of colours and forms would complement the original item and be appealing to a contemporary audience. How will

your design alter or exaggerate the proportions of the body? Do you want your design to allow freedom of movement, or will your design change or restrict the way the body can move?

Think it through

- Look at [this fashion illustration](#) by Thayaht of a dress designed by [Madeline Vionnet](#). Create a promotional illustration for your design that incorporates elements of the design into the overall composition.

Relevant Links

- [Flappers, Frocks and Fashioning the Modern Woman, Tales from the Australian Dress Register](#)



J & E Packer Pair of woman's black leather 'High Gait' bar shoes c1920, leather, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Julian Robinson Collection, purchased 1976

unknown designer Cloche hat c1925, silk organza, sequins, rayon and mercerised cotton, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Julian Robinson Collection, purchased 1976

Modern on the inside

Some of the first objects associated with Art Deco design were high-end luxury items exhibited at the Paris Exposition of 1925, a vast exposition of art, design, and architecture that featured displays from countries across Europe. As the twentieth century progressed objects and images associated with Art Deco aesthetics became accessible through mass production. Today we can still purchase household goods, clothing and jewellery that have a distinctively Deco style. In Australia, many artists created experimental work by combining modernist approaches to composition with subject matter drawn from their immediate domestic environments. This approach was more 'rustic' than the Deco design being promoted in Paris, but no less innovative as these artists broke away from conventional uses of form, colour, pattern and composition.



Weaver Hawkins *Mother and child*, Malta 1925, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1976, courtesy the Estate of HF Weaver Hawkins

Speak your mind

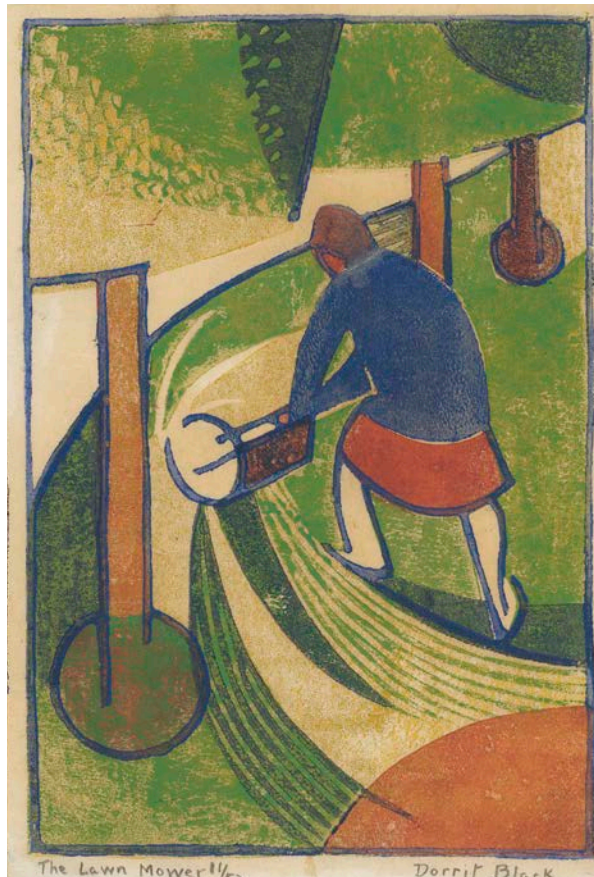
- Compare Weaver Hawkins' *Mother and child*, Dorrit Black's *The lawn mower* and Margaret Preston's *Banksia*. Work in a small group to brainstorm the similarities and differences that you can see. What are the most prominent visual elements in each work of art? What do you think connects these works of art and what sets them apart? What do you find distinctive about the point of view in these works?
- *Banksia* 1927 by Margaret Preston has been described as one of Australia's earliest examples of Modernism. While Preston was working within the age-old genre of [still life](#), what do you think defines her approach as 'modern' and what do you see that makes you say that? Although Preston had travelled the world, what do you think it was about her immediate domestic environment that encouraged some of her most experimental work?
- Preston was an advocate for the development of a distinctly Australian identity in art and was one of the first non-Indigenous Australians to look to Indigenous art as an influence. In what ways does Preston's *Banksia* relate to your ideas about Australian identity? Which works of art in this exhibition do you see as uniquely Australian and why? How do you think ideas about Australian identity have changed since Preston's lifetime?

Margaret Preston *Banksia* 1927, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1962, © Margaret Rose Preston Estate/ Copyright Agency

Dorrit Black *The lawn mower* [1] 1932, linocut, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1978

Get to work

- What are the activities and environments that make up your everyday life? Select an activity that you take for granted like brushing your teeth, waiting for the bus or checking your phone. Take some photographs or make a sketch of the activity to use as reference for a painting. Challenge yourself to reimagine an ordinary activity in an extraordinary way by adopting a fresh perspective and taking an abstract approach to colour and shape.



Think it through

- Creating an abstract composition that is removed from the reality of your initial reference photos or sketches might require some experimentation. Redrawing, simplifying, distorting or dissecting and collaging your reference material will help you to work through possibilities before you start painting.

Relevant Links

- [Margaret Preston: Art and Life](#)
- [Art Deco at the V&A](#)



Form, function and geometry

Coming from different backgrounds and life experiences, [Anne Dangar](#) and Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein were two fiercely brave artists who explored modernist design principles through the medium of ceramics. Dangar left Australia in 1930 to pursue an unorthodox life in provincial France in the artist colony of French painter [Albert Gleizes](#). One of Gleizes' influences was [Jay Hambidge](#), a Canadian mathematician who analysed the geometric ratio of Greek and Roman vases and proposed that spiral forms are the origin of all life. Many avant-garde painters investigated these ideas through abstraction, and Dangar experimented with these mathematical theories as well as sourcing inspiration from Moroccan and Celtic designs. Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein studied at the visionary [Bauhaus](#) school in Germany. While the school was known for its progressive approach, female students were discouraged from enrolling in more traditionally 'masculine' art forms such as ceramics. However, Heymann-Loebenstein pursued the study of ceramics and applied to the workshop four times before being admitted. Despite the initial discouragement of the Bauhaus, Heymann-Loebenstein later founded the Haël Werkstätten for Artistic Ceramics in 1923 in Marwitz, Germany with her economist husband Gustav Loebenstein and his brother. Unexpectedly widowed, she later assumed control of the factory and oversaw an expansive export business that placed her designs in department stores all over the world, including Australia.



Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein, *Tea set* c1928, glazed earthenware: slip cast, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased with the assistance of Diana Woollard 1988

Speak your mind

- Look closely at Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein's *Tea set* and Anne Dangar's *Plate with Celtic-style decoration* and *Pot with lid and handles*. What do you notice about the use of line, shape, form and colour? Can you imagine how these items would look and feel when used? Discuss who might have used them and in what environment? If you could have tea with Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein or dinner with Anne Dangar, what would you like to ask them?
- In 1926 Anne Dangar travelled to Paris with her dear friend and fellow artist [Grace Crowley](#) to experience the latest developments in modern art. Look at the works of [Albert Gleizes](#) and [Paul Cézanne](#) in the NGA collection. What links can you see between Dangar's work and that of the artists she admired? Watch the video [Modernism: Design](#)

[in a Nutshell](#). In what ways do you see the ideals of modernism reflected in Dangar's work?

- In 1930 Anne Dangar moved to France to live and work at the rural artists' colony, [Moly-Sabata](#), established by Gleizes. The joys and challenges of living off the land and shifting her focus from painting to ceramics are documented in her life-long correspondence with Grace Crowley. Examine this [page](#) from one of Dangar's letters to Crowley and write your own letter in response. Let Anne know what you think about her latest designs and any suggestions about how she could decorate the forms sketched in her letter.

Get to work

- Choose one or two geometric shapes, for example a triangle and a square, as the starting point for a teacup that challenges expectations. Use cut paper and tape to test ideas about how your chosen

shapes could fit together. You might repeat, reflect, rotate or change the scale of your shapes as you connect them to form a cup. Would you like your cup to be a single colour or will you use colour to draw attention to a particular feature?

Think it through

- After you have created a paper model that you are happy with, consider making a final version of your teacup out of a more permanent and functional material, such as glazed ceramic. Ask your ceramics teacher for help, or if you don't have access to a ceramic studio try using air-drying clay.

Relevant Links

- [Abstraction: Celebrating Australian women abstract artists](#)

Anne Dangar *Plate with Celtic-style decoration* 1930–1950, glazed earthenware, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 2002

Pot with lid and handles 1930–1951, glazed earthenware, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 2002



Small and large-scale architecture

In the early twentieth century new materials and methods became available to architects and town planners that enabled pre-fabrication and faster construction. Urban design and architecture also reflected societal changes as cities expanded with growing middle classes. American architects Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin were associated with the [Prairie School](#) of domestic architecture in the United States, and their interests in democratic and community-minded design informed their [design of Canberra](#). Their approach was wholistic, ranging from small details such as light fittings and furniture, and extending to entire buildings and suburbs. In 1916 the Griffins transformed the existing Vienna Café and Glen's Music Shop in Collins Street, Melbourne, into [Café Australia](#). Marion Mahony Griffin's *Café Australia Chair* 1916 is distinctive for its Art Deco design and sturdy functionality. While suburbs sprawled outwards, inner city environments became dense with skyscrapers reshaping skylines. At the time it was built, New York's Empire State Building was the tallest building in the world. The distinctive stepped pinnacle at the top of the building had the practical purpose of letting in daylight to the streets below, and it also created the archetypal Art Deco silhouette. Edward Steichen's photograph *The Maypole*, (*Empire State building*) 1932 is constructed from a double exposure that gives a sense of vertigo that you might experience while looking up at the building from the street below.



Marion Mahony Griffin, *Café Australia Chair* 1916, blackwood, plywood, leather, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 2015

Speak your mind

- Look closely at Marion Mahony Griffin's *Café Australia Chair* and Edward Steichen's *The Maypole* (*Empire State building*). What do you notice about their use of line, shape, form, space, scale and perspective? What visual elements do these works of art have in common? What do you imagine a building design based on the Café Australia Chair might look like? What could a chair design based on the Empire State building look like?
- One of the most visible and well-known aspects of Art Deco design is architecture. There are famous Art Deco buildings located around the world and across Australia. Research whether there are any Art Deco buildings in your region, or nearest town or city. Look for images of Art Deco buildings online, for example search #artdecoaustralia on Instagram. What are the visual elements that are characteristic of an Art Deco building?
- Take a look at this [archival photo](#) of Marion Mahony Griffin's *Café Australia Chair* and her [interior design](#) for Café Australia in Melbourne. In what ways does the chair design reflect or complement the broader interior of Café Australia? Imagine how this chair would accommodate the human body—how would it feel to sit in? Would it encourage a certain posture? How does it compare to the shape of your own favourite chair?

Get to work

- Create a series of black and white photographs documenting geometric shapes found in the built environment around your school or community. Look for examples of repetition and pattern in large- and small-scale architecture. Consider how perspective and cropping can emphasise or exaggerate shape and form. Experiment with layering images digitally to create further abstract compositions of intersecting shapes.

Edward Steichen *The Maypole* [*Empire State building*] 1932 printed 1979, photographic reproduction of an original Steichen print montage, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift of Baudoin Lebon 1979

Think it through

- As an extension, use lines of low-tack painter's tape or cut paper shapes to create a temporary intervention in the built environment of your school or community. Consider how your use of straight lines or geometric shapes could work with the existing geometry of the architecture. Create a series of photographs documenting your intervention and then return the site to its original state.



Relevant links

- [The Griffin Society: Australian Works](#)
- [Advertisement for Café Australia, 1916](#)
- [Deco Down Under: The Influence of Art Deco in Australia](#)