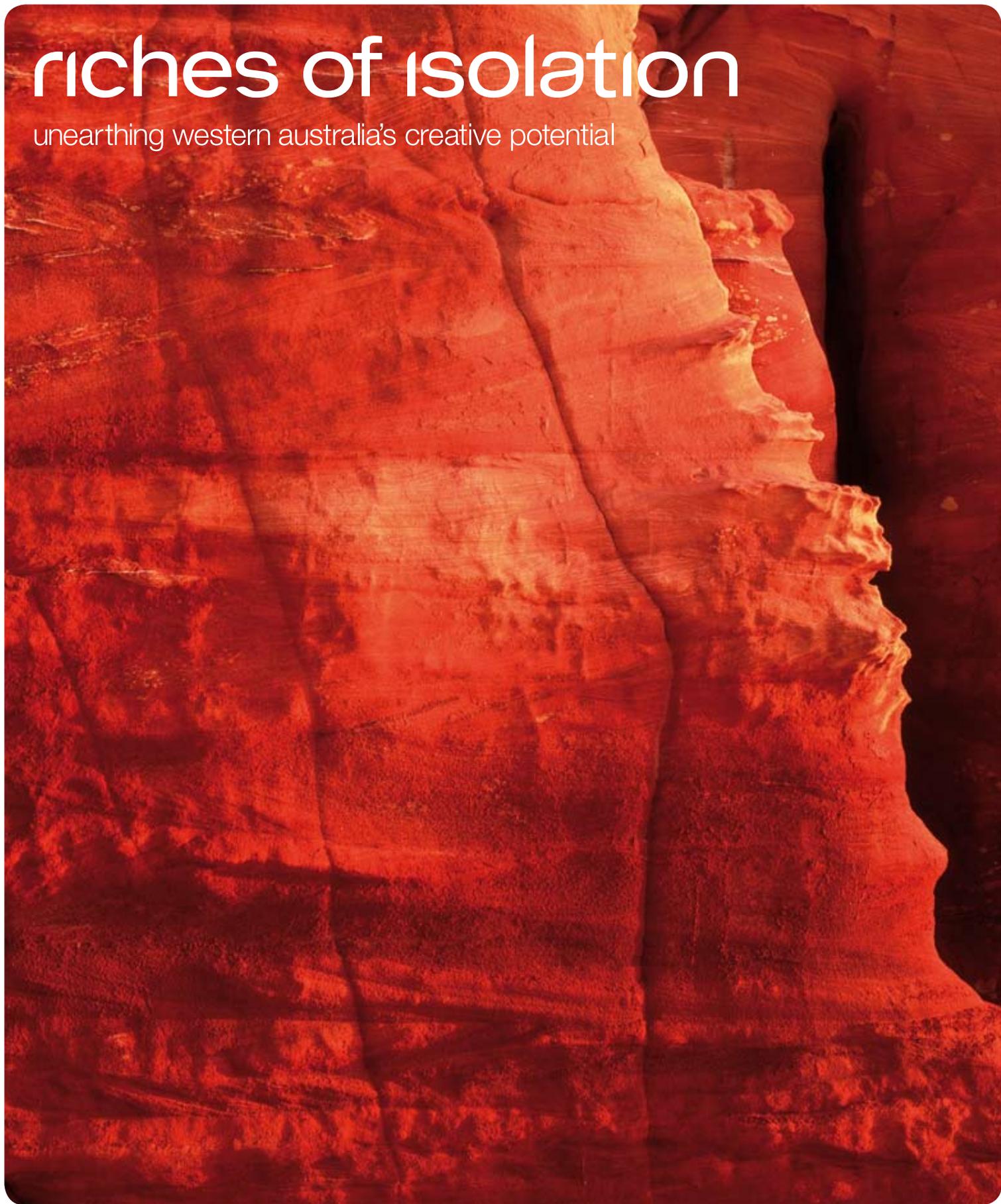


# riches of isolation

unearthing western australia's creative potential





Isolation is not a physical impediment – it is a state of mind. The issue is not distance as such, but how people respond to distance.

Paul McGillick

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## foreword: a unique collaboration

“...design culture has a delicate and fundamental role to play, reflecting on the one hand what already exists and on the other acting as a stimulus towards the future.”

Anna Lombardi and Patrizia Lugo, 2001, 'Directions for Use' in “Blue Industry #2: In Form and Action”

*Riches of Isolation* is a unique collaboration by Curtin University of Technology and FORM Contemporary Craft and Design, intended to nurture Western Australia's design talent and help build a dynamic culture of creativity in the State.

FORM is one of Australia's most dynamic creative industries organisations and Curtin is a leading university. Curtin's design courses are renowned as among the best in Australia, providing an excellent foundation for students to enter professional practice. FORM works to assist emerging and professional designers through an array of innovative education and training programs, including its award-winning initiative, *Designing Futures*, which assists emerging designers to design, manufacture and market new products. Both organisations are working to advance the creativity and enterprise of Western Australian designers, collaborating often. This spirit of cooperation now manifests as the exhibition, *Riches of Isolation*.

*Riches of Isolation* has been curated specifically to showcase innovative designs by participants in FORM's and Curtin's programs. For these designers, this project provides an invaluable experience of a large-scale, international exhibition, set within an event – the Salone Internazionale del Mobile - that showcases the leading edge of design today. The exhibited works seek to reflect a uniquely Western Australian design ethos and identity, thereby establishing a point of difference for local products in the international market.

*Riches of Isolation* also emphasises the benefits of collaboration between the education sector and industry, which assists graduates, emerging designers and professionals alike. Cross-institutional collaborations are essential for building a dynamic and robust design industry. They illuminate career pathways for graduates, promote lifelong learning for professionals and create a network of stakeholders who will work to sustain the industry's growth.

Curtin, FORM and the exhibited designers welcome this opportunity to showcase the best of design talent emerging from Curtin and FORM's training programs, with works inspired by our unique setting that will begin to forge an identity for Western Australian design on the world stage. We welcome the opportunity to strengthen our links with the global design community.

Lynda Dorrington

Executive Director  
FORM Contemporary Craft  
and Design

Professor Tom Stannage

Executive Dean  
Division of Humanities  
Curtin University of Technology

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## penelope forlano

### Lux Table

Carbon fibre, high density foam

W 1600 D 900 H 720

2004-05

Isolation encourages fresh ideas not constrained by the past and the resourceful use of materials and technological processes. Lux reflects this and West Australia's flat, arid landscape, a visually strong horizon and lean yet surprisingly resilient foliage.



### Linea Shelf

Carbon fibre, high density foam

W 1500 D 300 H 10

2004-05

The linea shelving range utilises unconventional furniture materials to illustrate the potential of composite construction to create lightweight, strong and slender furniture. With no visible fixings and extreme slenderness, the shelving is designed to be discrete and allow the displayed items to be the focus.



## riches of isolation : unearthing western australia's creative potential

At the Salone Satellite 2006, through the *Riches of Isolation* exhibition, we seek to showcase the distinctive designs that are inspired by our unique cultural and environmental riches, and to strengthen our links with the global design community.

**riches of isolation** Unearthing the creative potential of Western Australian designers, FORM and Curtin University are exhibiting works by designers involved with their training programs at the prestigious Milan Furniture Fair. *Riches of Isolation* speaks of three key themes: Identity, Design and the Designer.

**identity** Western Australia is a remote and isolated place which has given rise to a unique environment, a small but diverse population and an abundance of cultural and natural riches. The vast and ancient terrain forms a powerful and complex reference for our society and its emergent design identity.

We are a young design community, which values its particularly strong links with Europe and Asia. By building on the distinctiveness of Western Australia, we can offer the world design that is refreshing, playful and resourceful.

**design** Our strong sunlight deepens textures and bleaches colours; our climatic extremes compel resourcefulness, lightness and a unique response to our needs. Without the boundaries of convention and historical precedent, Western Australian design has a liberating freedom to explore.

Western Australian design is also characterised by a distinctive sense of identity, remarkable manipulation of materials and innovative use of technology. These qualities impact not only how we live and how we see ourselves but ultimately how we design the objects that enrich our lives. As an isolated but outward-looking community, we take pride in our designs and their distinctive contribution to the global industry.

**the designer** The Western Australian designer values collaboration, mutual support and ingenuity, as isolation breeds many challenges. Local designers seek to fully explore available resources, eliciting a unique mastery of material and process, and nurturing great design innovation. Each of the individuals taking part in this exhibition has grappled with these issues and has forged their own response to them.

This showcase will be a valuable new addition to the cultural riches of Western Australia and an exciting platform for engaging with the global community at Salone Satellite, 2006.

*Riches of Isolation* emphasises the benefits of collaboration between the education sector and industry, which assists graduates, emerging designers and professionals alike. Cross-institutional collaborations are essential for building a dynamic and robust design industry.

**daniel troy**

Untitled Table 01

Moulded marine plywood, acrylic

W 950 D 1030 H 290

2004

The piece uses structurally efficient geometry generating a light and fragile form. Something new and energetic unfolds from manipulating the plywood into a compound curve creating the structural strength of this poetic piece.



**anna radeski**

Lean Backrest

Felt, heavy weight interfacing

W 670 D 335 H 335

2003

*Lean* is constructed using origami principles of folding.

*Lean* is a support unit, folded from six sheets of material, and is available in two sizes, mini-backrest (shown) and micro-headrest. Multiples of the backrest fit together creating pods or linear arrangements on floors or platforms. It is a lightweight, inventive product suitable for adult and child environments.



## a matter of attitude

### “The phenomenon of the ‘designer-maker’ is probably characteristic of Australian designers – that Antipodean ethic of self-reliance.”

Andrew Last, 2005, *Vast Terrain* catalogue

Designer-maker Anthony Docherty lives in Denmark, Western Australia, a town about 480km from Perth. His studio workshop is set amongst the stunning tingle and karri forests of the State's south west. So what does this mean for Anthony as an emerging designer trying to grow his practice? Often, it means six hours on the long, though beautiful, road to Perth to source components, talk to manufacturers, discuss designs with retailers, research markets and attend training programs to further his career – longer, if he encounters the road-trains that frequent these highways.

In Western Australia, the tyranny of distance means work has to be designed for ease of freighting. Ultimately, it requires the designer to be resourceful and ensure a design is one that can be brought to life independently by its creator.

Never one to be deterred, Anthony has translated the challenges of working in isolation into the driving inspiration for his *Taglio Series*. The series reflects his upbringing in an isolated regional community. "Growing up and surviving in a harsh environment meant being multi-skilled, flexible and adaptable. I have incorporated these characteristics into the *Taglio Series*". For Anthony, realising his designs within the Designing Futures training programs has involved more than the process of translating inspiration into form and function, with a little bit of that special 'X' factor in the mix; in fact, at this point the challenges were just beginning, as he then had create the tools with which to conjure up the final *pièce de resistance*. Unable to rely on the virtually non-existent manufacturing sector, Anthony developed the jigs, sourced all the required materials and applied his knowledge of timber and making skills to create the piece. Chris Robins and Warren East, also working in remote environments, face similar issues in creating their

products. The recipe for success of 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration has never been truer than for Western Australia's creative talent.

In a similar manner, Holly Grace, Angela Mellor, Daniel Troy, Jennelle Horsford and Malcolm Harris have each developed works in which the details and nuances of unique environments that have caught their imaginations have been translated into expressive designs that capture lyrical beauty in a non-literal form. Each has turned isolation to their advantage with works that draw inspiration from their environmental surrounds, be they natural or architectural.

Such an immediate connection to, and experience of, the environment has also informed designs which express a concern for ecological sensitivity. Stephen Cestrilli, for example, has developed *Onui* –an experimental piece pushing the boundaries of a piece of furniture. Considered ESD processes and materials are embodied in all aspects of the product illustrating how innovations can be employed for a more environmentally conscious product. Olivia George's *Green Seat* is an example of the inventive application of new materials from recycled waste, and Irene Schneider's *Luminance* exploits the low energy, heat radiating qualities of a traditional material.

Stuart Williams' inspiration for a light stems from his wish to communicate his interpretations of native flora playfully, resulting in *Helix Light*. Williams united this inspiration from the natural world with a sense of the unique lifestyle that has resulted in response to this environment. His light provides a practical solution for a mobile, robust, stand-alone lighting system that is designed to enhance outdoor settings. Debbie Cluer's *Adapt Beach Chair* also reflects this adaptation for a distinctively Australian way of life.

One doesn't have to live in far-off rural regions to feel the impact of the unique circumstances of our state, nor are these always overtly environmental. From the capital city, the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean stretches westward to southern Africa, with the Nullabor Plain mirroring this expanse overland to the east. In this setting, emerging designers such as Penelope Forlano, Holly Grace, Malcolm Harris, Tim Whiteman, and Steve Pooley deal with issues such as the difficulty of manufacturing components during a mining boom that marginalises small clients, an underdeveloped and sometimes conservative local market place which forces designers to look beyond their immediate setting, and the cost of developing the infrastructure needed to take on production of designs independently. And still there is the problem of isolation – not the isolation of living in a vast country, but the isolation of an often solitary, necessarily self-reliant working life as a designer.

It is, perhaps, in addressing this issue that many of the exhibiting designers find one of the most valuable facets of their involvement with the training programs offered by FORM and Curtin. Alongside the importance of a strong design education is the significance of these programs for providing forums for interaction, building support and professional networks. They facilitate opportunities to discuss and explore ideas, problems and solutions with like-minded individuals who are also teeming with information and resources to share, as well as an equal desire to engage and collaborate.

The *Gaiya Design* range of office products developed in collaboration by Carolyn Smith, Phil Ryan and Stephen Cestrilli exemplifies the benefits that can arise from an openness to exchange. Through the pooling of skills for market research, design, product branding, and manufacturing they successfully distributed a first run of their playful cast resin accessories in 2005. The learning from this project is reflected in a similar breadth and depth of development in the other pieces shown by Carolyn and Stephen.

The sense of fun that has emerged through the work of this trio is also evident in the works of other individuals. Sarah Sandler's *Ausame Light* examines the impact on Australian identity relative to American culture, expressed in a light-hearted approach which reflects the 'Aussie' larrikin sense of humour. Kate Stokes, Nicole Rogers, Michelle Salomone and Anna Radeski's designs similarly explore cultural concepts through the form and materiality of their pieces.

In trying to articulate an identity for Western Australian design through the *Riches of Isolation* exhibition, each exhibitor has responded to the show's themes, proposing their own concepts of what WA design is about. The exhibition showcases the diversity of approaches that fall under this banner. Selections from 95 entries were made through a two tiered process. The final pieces were selected by an independent jury for their innovation and interpretation of the themes.

Through innovations in the approach to education and training, both Curtin University and FORM seek to develop programs that respond to the unique characteristics, opportunities and challenges of a career in Western Australia. The aim is to effectively contribute to building a stronger and more vibrant creative industry. But in a State eight and a half times the size of Italy, how do you form a cohesive design community? How do you offer accessible and viable education opportunities that make the most of synergies between people? How do you teach the ingenuity required to make a successful practice in Western Australia?

Leaping in at the deep end, FORM and Curtin University have undertaken the *Riches of Isolation* project to begin to address some of these issues and illustrate the possibilities for emerging Western Australian designers. This project is a matter of attitude. It started with nothing but the belief and energy of a handful of staff and students willing to donate their time to pursue a dream. We developed a plan of attack and along the way gathered an amazing array of collaborators and supporters. The fact that we started with no invitation (to exhibit at the Salone Satellite), no money and no exhibitors did not deter us from our vision. This project illustrates to Western Australians that working synergistically, we can impact the destinies of creative people in this State.

We conducted the Riches of Isolation project to place ourselves in a global context and examine where we fit within it, to engender confidence in our abilities and to understand how to differentiate ourselves in the international market. We want to raise the bar, teach our designers how to present their work and learn how to compete in a global industry. We want to show the industry in Perth and abroad the best work coming out of Curtin University's and FORM's programs.

Projects such as this provide valuable opportunities for people to work together for the benefit of the sector overall as well as those directly involved. Each of the participants and organisers has employed their tenacity and resourcefulness to create the works and bring this show into being. It would not have been possible without the talent of the exhibitors, the dedication and pro-activity of the organisers and the support of the broader community interested in an improved creative industry.

But perhaps one of the greatest aims of this exhibition has been to break down the mental barriers associated with isolation. With this exhibition, we can illustrate the career paths open to Western Australian designers and hopefully show that it is not so inconceivable to establish a global career in an isolated setting. *Riches of Isolation* shows that the distance between Western Australia and the rest of the world is but a small step of ambition, a perception to be dismantled. With this exhibition, we can show what is possible; we can show the immense talent Western Australian designers can offer.

From what began as a matter of attitude, we are beginning to articulate an identity for Western Australian design that can enhance our dialogue with the international community. We are finding a place in the global design arena that celebrates the distinctiveness emerging from the challenges and opportunities presented in Western Australia; that celebrates our riches of isolation.

By Rebecca Eggleston, Marina Lommerse, Kris Brankovic and Penelope Forlano

**stuart williams**

**Helix Light**

Moulded UV resistant opal acrylic, aluminium, LED lights

W 1400 D 200 H 2400

2005

This landscape light embodies the floating nature of seeds. As an adaptive mechanism, flora native to Western Australia travels great distances to reproduce, survive and thrive in harsh and isolated environments. The light is intended for exterior use, uses weather retardant materials and can be staked into the ground. Future development will provide for small solar panels to power the light.



**carolyn smith**

**Clusta Childs Play**

Fabric covered foam with moulded laminated plywood inserts

W 1200 D 500 H 400

2004

Clusta fills a gap in the market for sophisticated play furniture with longevity. In one compact design it provides furniture, play equipment and building blocks for a cubby. It will have children from 12 months to seven years jumping, tumbling, hiding, balancing and lifting. Cost effective to manufacture out of one piece of foam, it was designed with packing and distribution ease in mind. It is light weight and can be shrink-wrapped into a compact parcel.



## chris robins

Cadiz Chair  
W 800 D 800 H 800

Cadiz Footstool and Side Table  
W 690 D 420 H 410

Moulded veneer plywood, brushed stainless steel. Shown here in jarrah and silver ash.

2004-05

Chris utilised an innovative technique of stressing plywood sheets, allowing the inherent resistance within the timber to define the chair shell form. "The challenge in making the shell is to apply the veneers on a closed form with complex compound curves. This unusual approach results in a generous, organic seating support that cradles the user."



## jennelle horsford

Knitted Pendant

Wool yarn, synthetic fibres, steel ring

Diameter 450 H 1200

2005

The delicate aura of the Western Australian bush and native flora is reflected in the pendant's weave, fibre and structure. The ethereal glow of the fixture emulates the light filtered through the bush at dawn and dusk.



## is your design really necessary?

Perth is said to be the world's most isolated capital. What impact does this fact have on the creative potential of designers living there and in the regional areas of Western Australia? The steady drain of talent out of Perth to the eastern seaboard of Australia suggests it is a strongly negative factor – a restricted market base with a low design awareness, a small manufacturing sector, and the difficulties and expense of distributing product beyond Western Australia. But if we cut through the surface of international design fashion, what stands out is the fact that the finest design invariably grows out of a sense of place, exploiting local materials within a rigorous design practice. This suggests that, far from being an obstacle, distance from the world design hot spots ought to be a huge advantage, enabling designers to develop an authentic language and offer work with a clear point of difference.

**what is distance?** Isolation has been decisive in forming Australians' sense of who they are, both in relationship to the rest of the world and between themselves, bearing in mind that the continent is 5,000 kilometres across and not much less from north to south with vast stretches of inhospitable terrain in between. In many parts of the world, a single valley can generate two quite distinct cultures and languages. So, in Australia, it is actually surprising that regional cultural differences are not more marked than they are. Still, there are cultural and linguistic differences across Australia which are often overlooked as a result of the lazy assumption that Australia and Australians are all more or less the same.

Perth is to Sydney as Vancouver is to Toronto, or San Francisco to New York. This west coast-east coast cultural divide is reinforced by geological, topographical and climatic differences. In geological terms, the west coast is immensely older than the east. In the west, the limestone of the coast has been eroded by millennia of sea and wind, as distinct from the sandstone base of the east with its drowned river valleys and vestigial rainforest. The flat, sun-bleached western seaboard is in stark contrast to the more rugged eastern seaboard, formed as it was by violent and, in geological terms, relatively recent tectonic shifts.

When my family moved to Perth from Sydney in 1960 we thought we had arrived on a different planet. The journey itself had taken seven days by rail (with multiple changes due to differing gauges) and crossing the vast Nullabor Plain, which seemed like a never-ending film strip outside the carriage window, was equivalent to passing through a transitional space separating one world from another. On arrival, we were seen as aliens – known as 'eastern-staters' – who were potentially problematic. Western Australians were traditionally suspicious of the Eastern States. A referendum held shortly before Federation

and the formation of Australia into a single nation asked Western Australians if they wished to be a part of the federation. Almost certainly the answer would have been 'no' had it not been for the key voting block of the Goldfields (the gold rush of the early 1890s centred on Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie had generated unprecedented wealth for the colony). Partly because many of the people drawn there by the gold rush were from the Eastern States and partly because they wished to be commercially and industrially integrated with the rest of Australia, they voted overwhelmingly to be a part of the new Commonwealth. But at that time and again in the 1960s with the first resources boom, and now once again with the second resources boom, Western Australians felt that they were making a contribution to the wealth of the country out of all proportion to the size of their population and without acknowledgement, leading to periodic debates about secession.

This suspicion is not without justification. The major capitals of Sydney and Melbourne are very focused on themselves and as far as the 'regional' capitals are concerned it is a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'. During my fifteen years as chief visual and performing arts critic for *The Australian Financial Review*, a glazed look would always come across the face of my editor whenever I suggested a story from Perth. And, when just a few years ago, the Perth International Arts Fair was established, it chose to market itself to South-East Asia and Africa rather than eastern Australia because it thought it would get more response from the Region than from the eastern seaboard of Australia.

But isolation is not a physical impediment – it is a state of mind. The issue is not distance as such, but how people respond to distance. Habits of mind can attach communities to a distant homeland or to ways of life which are no longer appropriate in a new landscape and climate. There is an enduring conviction that what matters is 'back there' or in some metropolitan centre elsewhere. This is a colonial mentality.

Of course, distance can matter. The historian, Geoffrey Blainey, famously referred to the "tyranny of distance" in his study of how distance has shaped Australia's history. But on examination, the response to the problems thrown up by distance usually proves to be more important than the distance itself. In the first few years, the colony in Sydney almost starved to death waiting on supplies from England. Yet a major part of the problem was a failure to recognise indigenous sources of food. It took some time before the colonists learned to identify and use local materials for building. And it was necessity that forced the colony to look to South-East and South Asia rather than Britain for more readily available supplies.

Distance can be a concrete fact or it can be a mental space. Substantial amounts of iron were not produced in Australia until the early 20th Century, forcing artisans either to depend on unreliable and irregular supplies from Britain or to experiment with local materials, the latter leading to some remarkable industrial design, primarily for the agricultural sector. It was really a case of 'necessity being the mother invention', something thrown into even higher relief by the use of local timber for furniture. This resulted in a fine tradition of colonial Australian timber furniture which is scarcely recognised in the contemporary rush to produce Australian variations of an international style.<sup>i</sup>

Modernity is a mental construct which is not constrained by geographical location. Scandinavian design has had a powerful influence on the development of Australian design, primarily since the Second World War, although the strength of that influence has tended to wax and wane according to the international profile of Scandinavian design. To some extent the influence can be explained by a shared sense of 'isolation' and a common attachment to landscape. Today, when Scandinavian design – architectural, product and industrial design – tends to be seen (along with Italian design) as the benchmark of modernity, it is easy to forget that Denmark, Sweden and Finland were viewed until relatively recently as provincial backwaters. Indeed, the Scandinavians saw themselves that way and when the likes of Aalto, Mathsson, Mogensen, Jacobsen and Kjærholm made their sorties to Western Europe and the U.S. these were major expeditions. Fortunately, their work was invariably so well received that it reinforced the singular practice which the Scandinavian designers had developed. This was a highly rigorous practice which balanced process and product and stressed the symbiosis of form and function. It was also based on a strong tradition of artisanship, the use of local materials and – crucially – a coherent and deeply felt set of social values.

In short, it was a design of place. Isolation, in so far as it mattered at all, was seen as an advantage because the designers could focus on the integrity of their own work without the distraction of international fashion.

The mental distance which often shapes the post-colonial mind frequently fails to appreciate that the products it sets up as models to be imitated often have their origin in a strong sense of place. While this sense of place may be manifest in the materials used and even pictorial references (such as Aalto's free-form vases, supposedly representing Finland's landscape of lakes<sup>ii</sup>), the ethical and cultural imperatives may not be immediately apparent at a distance.

Mental distance can also vary over time. Throughout the colonial period, Australians exhibited a hunger to remain connected with Europe, specifically Britain. Despite physical distance – by the late 1870s the average time for mail to reach Australia from Britain was still 45 days and was not to reduce very much more until long-distance airplane travel was introduced - this connection was maintained remarkably well. And the curiosity was quite eclectic. The Futurist Manifesto, for example, was published in full in *The Sydney Mail* on September 3, 1913, complete with illustrations. Today it is inconceivable that a tabloid newspaper would do the same.

But the First World War changed all that, leading to what John Williams terms a "quarantined culture"<sup>iii</sup> Appalled by the First World War, Australians were convinced Europe was hopelessly decadent and that Australia represented

a new arcadia. The country turned inward and rejected modernism. It wasn't until the late 1920s that modernism began to re-assert itself and then largely in homeware design, promoted in particular by *The Home* magazine (1920-42) and supported by key department stores such as David Jones in Sydney and including Boans in Perth. The Depression and the Second World War again disturbed the connection to internationalism and it wasn't until the early 1950s that it began to be restored.

Michael Bogle<sup>iv</sup> points to an ongoing tension between urban modernism and Australian regionalism against a background of "a profound attachment to Britain" which shaped Australian design throughout the 20th Century. It is a tension which has marked the history of design in Western Australia probably even more than the rest of Australia because the region is physically isolated not just from the international centres of modernism, but from the rest of Australia.

The challenge for Australian design today, especially for Western Australians, is to query that 'either/or' proposition: either international modernism or a regionally marked design practice. The challenge is to develop a design culture which is unself-consciously of its place, but with a global appeal and utility.

This raises two issues. Firstly, in what ways should Western Australian design be distinctive and how can such distinctiveness be embodied in the final product without descending into cliché and the picturesque? Secondly, what implications are there for the way we train our designers?

There can be no answer to the first question if we look only at design as product. Design is a process. The product is the artefact left behind at the end of the design, development and production process which is when a secondary process begins - another relationship – between the product and the person who has acquired that product. The same principle applies to art and architecture. The experience of art lies not in the object itself, but in the experience of the object by the viewer. The object serves to trigger that experience. However, this is not to deny the materiality of the object and its importance for the viewer. Similarly, for architecture the process is all important. But, like art, if the conceptual element takes over at the expense of the haptic (the experiential or material) character of a building, the experience of the building (or work of art) is diminished, as is its function.

The parallels with design are clear, especially when we acknowledge that design, like architecture, is not a solo act – it is a team effort. In the process from initial conceptual play to production, it is rare for there not to be a number of people involved, with the original design concept undergoing constant adaptation as a result of the synergy between designer (or designers), artisans, manufacturers and retailers. Behind this whole process a crucial question should always lurk in the back of the designer's mind: Is your design really necessary?

One of the most important researchers in recent years into the creativity of professionals was the late Donald A. Schön<sup>v</sup> who argued that the professional process is "learnable, coachable, but not teachable." (1987:58). This has important implications for the education of designers, which Schön himself explored as part of a series of case studies in his 1987 book.

Without going into detail here, Schön argues that the key to unlocking creativity in professional practice is to move away from the notion

## is your design really necessary?

of 'problem-solving' (which implies analysing, and being bound to, precedents and ignoring the fact that the vast majority of challenges faced by professionals are unique) and adopt the strategy of 'problem-setting' which he describes as follows:

"In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioners as givens, they must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense... When we set the problem, we select what we will treat as the 'things' of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong, and in what directions the situation needs to be changed. Problem-setting is a process in which, interactively, we *name* the things to which we will attend and *frame* the context in which we attend to them." (1983:40)

This is highly relevant to design education because the product which emerges at the end of the design process needs to be justified by social utility. I am reminded of Poul Kjærholm who once commented that all he wanted was to design the perfect chair.

In looking for an appropriate design pedagogy it is useful to keep Scandinavia in mind as a model. Right now, for example, Sweden is experiencing a surge in enthusiasm for design so strong that it has resulted in a powerful new sector in the Swedish economy and even the re-invigoration of whole precincts in the city of Stockholm. What is noteworthy about this renaissance in Sweden is that the emerging generation of designers feel no need to pay obeisance to international design fashion. They form a community of their own, generating its own energy and critical reflection. Crucially, this surge of creative activity in Sweden is taking place within the context of a network of supporting showrooms and manufacturers such as Offecct, David Design, Design House Stockholm and Snowcrash (until its demise).

This implies that design education in Australia needs to teach design as a complex, interactive process involving constant adaptation to materials, production processes and social need as embodied in showrooms and manufacturers. Instead of beginning with theory, pedagogical practice should be essentially inductive, with theory derived from practice.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, 1968, *The Tyranny of Distance*. Melbourne: Macmillan.

<sup>2</sup> The Adelaide-based designer-maker, Khai Liew, is an outstanding example of an alternative response. He has made a major study of colonial Australian furniture and has produced a body of work based on a cross-fertilisation of early Australian furniture and a contemporary, universalist sensibility.

<sup>3</sup> Western Australian furniture designer, Leslie John Wright (now resident in Sydney), is an interesting local example of this. He often incorporates driftwood found on the beach into his designs, while the irregular timber table tops reference the distinctive Western Australian coastline.

The new generation of Swedish designers also work within an historical context. They are conscious of working within an on-going tradition. They may react against that tradition, but that reaction is vital to defining their own identity as contemporary designers. Design education in Australia needs to include thorough familiarisation with the history of Australian design. That history is impressive. But the purpose in teaching it is not to promote sentimental nationalism, but to help the student to identify with a tangible tradition which has responded to the shifting everyday needs of a specific culture. International design fashion is an abstraction accessed at long distance through the design press which, like the rest of the press, tends to deal with illusion rather than reality. Australian design students need to take ownership of their own outstanding design history. That will promote self-belief and an understanding that, despite all the apparent impediments to a strong design culture in Australia, it is possible to be a career designer – the many successful contemporary Australian industrial designers is testimony to that.

Finally, design education in Australia can also learn from the strong social democratic tradition in Scandinavia. In other words, it is important that emerging designers work from an ethical base with a clear understanding of the social responsibility of design. Like historical awareness, a clear set of values helps to forge identity. The focus on design as process within an historical and ethical context will result naturally in a design of place with its own points of difference to distinguish it from the rest of the design world.

In the words of Victor Papanek: "Design must be an innovative, highly creative, cross-disciplinary tool responsive to the true needs of men."<sup>vi</sup>

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His most recent book is Sydney Architecture (Pesaro).**

<sup>v</sup> John Williams, 1995, *The Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism 1913-1939*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>vi</sup> Michael Bogle, 1998, *Design in Australia 1880-1970*. Sydney: Craftsman House.

<sup>vii</sup> Donald A. Schön, 1983, *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York: Basic Books, 1987, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>viii</sup> Victor Papanek, 1977, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*. Frogmore, St Albans: Paladin.

## stephen julius cestrilli

### Solaris Table

Recycled styrofoam, fibreglass, resin

W 1150 D 690 H 450

2004

Inspired by the sun setting over the Indian Ocean the table creates a floating illusion by its soft edges and reflective surface. The symmetrical outer form flows into an asymmetrical internal shape allowing light to pass through. The piece is intended for production through rota moulding.



## tim whiteman

### The Cache Series

Australian timber veneers,  
neodymium 'rare earth' magnets

W 215 D 145 H 70;

W 310 D 165 H 85;

W 390 D 195 H 105

2004

The Cache Series ingeniously deconstructs the notion of the popular gift item, the timber box. It captures through its form and veneers the eucalypt forests of Western Australia. Using vacuum forming the pieces are constructed using thin layers of timber. The two sections of the boxes are drawn together by embedded magnets.





**debbie cluer**

**Adapt Beach Chair**

Recycled jarrah and karri,  
organ oil

W 550 D 1477 H 553

2004

The beach chair is quintessentially Australian and this chair comes apart in three pieces for easy transport to the beach and storage back home. The concept reflects Australian multiculturalism and the adaptative process to a new life in Australia. Recycled jarrah and karri have been used to form the slats in the chair – each having its own history but when machined, finished and put together they form a cohesive community.



**penelope forlano**

**Wild Creeper Rack**

Plywood, steel

W 350 D 250 H 500

2005

On initial viewing the work seems organic and random yet is accurately machined and made of identical components. Depending on its configuration chosen by the user the piece can create a sense of disorder and movement or of consistency and order.





**angela mellor**

Dendrophilia Pendant

Slip cast bone china (etched),  
stainless steel, halogen light

Diameter 105 H 430

2003

Western Australia's coastlines are renowned for their pristine ocean beaches. The marine environment is a constant source of inspiration. "The West's brilliant sunlight influences my exploration of the whiteness and translucency of bone china. This work represents coral likely to be found along the coast."

**holly grace**

Autumn-Denmark (below)

Mouth blown glass with  
sand carved decoration

Coloured set of five  
W 125 D 25 H 50

2006

Sweden (right)

Mouth blown glass with  
sandblasted decoration

Clear set of three  
W 65 D 25 H 45

2005

Through my observations of nature I seek to interpret light, shadow and form, through the inherent qualities in glass. The work expresses an affinity for the underlying connection between the Scandinavian and Australian landscape and design. The technique of transferring photographic images onto glass is a recent American invention used primarily in flat-glass architectural applications. I have combined contemporary technological techniques with one of the oldest crafts, glassblowing.



## penelope forlano

### Slide Cabinet

Stained ash veneer on substrate  
and solid ash

W 925 D 600 H 450

2005

Slide embodies Western Australia's flatness of landscape where the horizon is always a strong visual element. The Slide range employs a continuous design language through a slat component. This allows for the simple sliding together of cabinets to ensure a secure stack whether side by side or vertically. Slide reads as a finely crafted yet contemporary work, suiting mass production methods.



## steven pooley

### Mini Pendant

Die cut polypropylene, nylon rivets

W 300 H 300 D 120

2005

This light emerged in the pursuit of creating a beautiful object from the simplest of materials and manufacturing processes. Using recyclable materials and a flat-packing format for transportability, this piece embodies the characteristics of environmental sensitivity and mobility, inspired by the challenge posed by our distance to markets.



**stephen julius cestrilli**

Onui Liveable

Hand processed Marino wool felt shell, recycled cotton pulp inlay, magnets

W 1800 D 50 H 2100

2004

The handmade appeal and malleable nature of Onui encourages its use as a floor covering, a low seat, a reclining platform, a blanket or a shawl. It transforms by magnets attached to each limb. Considered ESD processes and materials are embodied in all aspects of the product.

**tim whiteman**

Unite

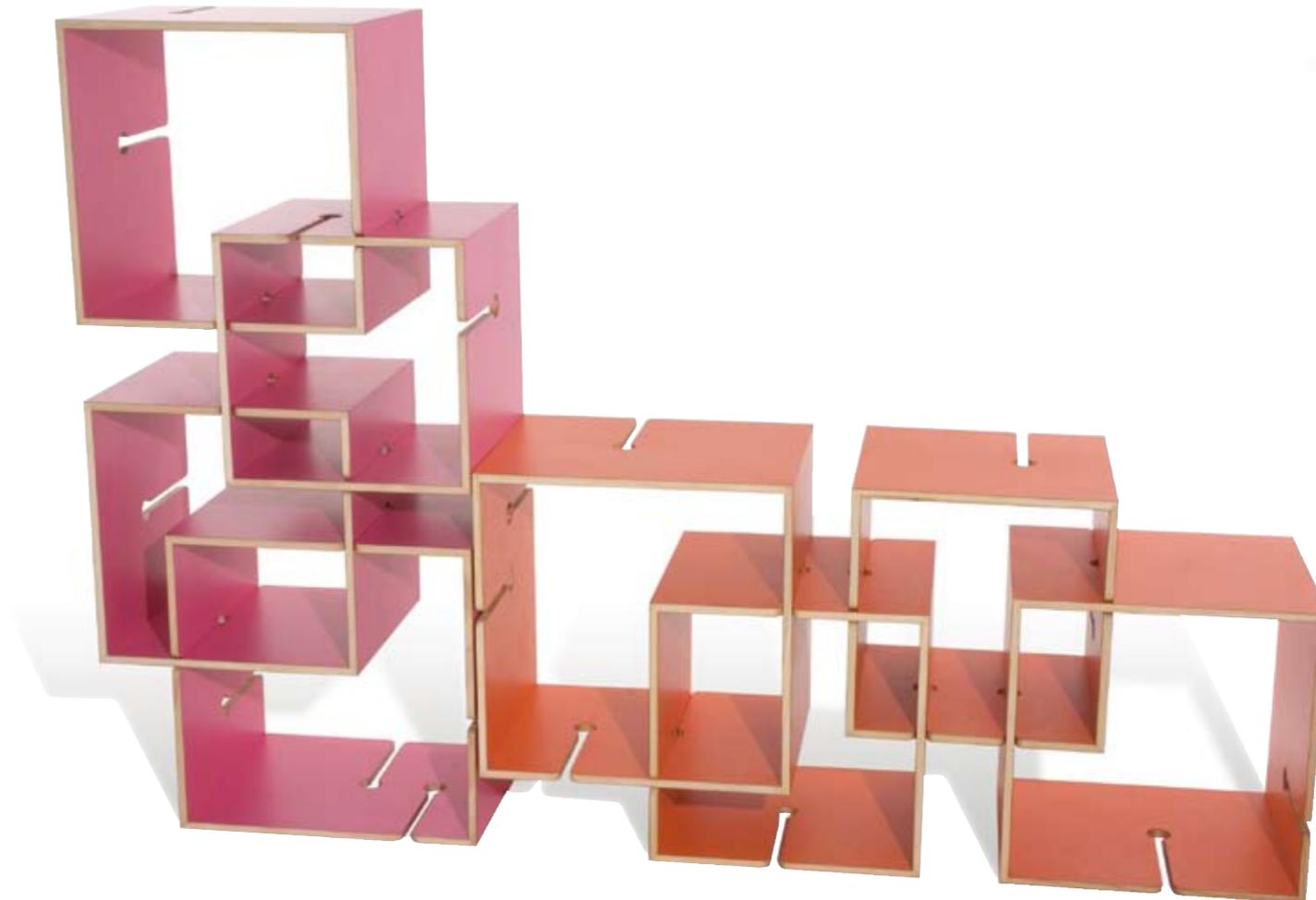
Paulownia, plastic laminate

Pack size—set of four

W 480 D 480 H 380

2005

This sculptural linking of boxes through a simple slot detail allows the owner to create storage, display, seating, an entertainment unit or room divider. The plantation grown, featherweight structural timber core, and the ease of fitting four cubes into each other for portability, make this a friendly product for shipping and moving.



**stephen julius cestrilli**  
**carolyn smith**  
**phil ryan**

Gaiya Designs Office Accessories:

Cast polyester resin

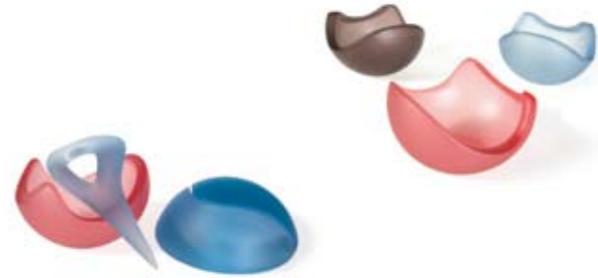
Letter opener  
W 53 D 15 H 155

Paper holder  
Diameter 80 H 38

Desktop dish  
Diameter 80 H 50

2004

The organic resin forms of the Gaiya Designs range of desktop office accessories challenge the usual (characterless) style of office products on the market. The products were developed by a partnership of product design students starting their business through The Young Achievement Australia Entrepreneur program.



**warren east**

**Segmented Platter**

Laser cut aluminium, spindle moulded jarrah

W 300 D 300 H 60

2004

The platter is comprised of slender, streamlined components which create a simple contemporary form. The glue less construction of multiple half lap joints which are self supporting and load sharing, makes it easily disassembled and ideal for flat packing. Designed for efficient batch production it is available with aluminium or wood as the base. Future production will incorporate a range of colours and materials.



**kate stokes**

**Loop Table Bench Shelving Sculpture**

Moulded laminated plywood, non-toxic water based finish, stainless steel

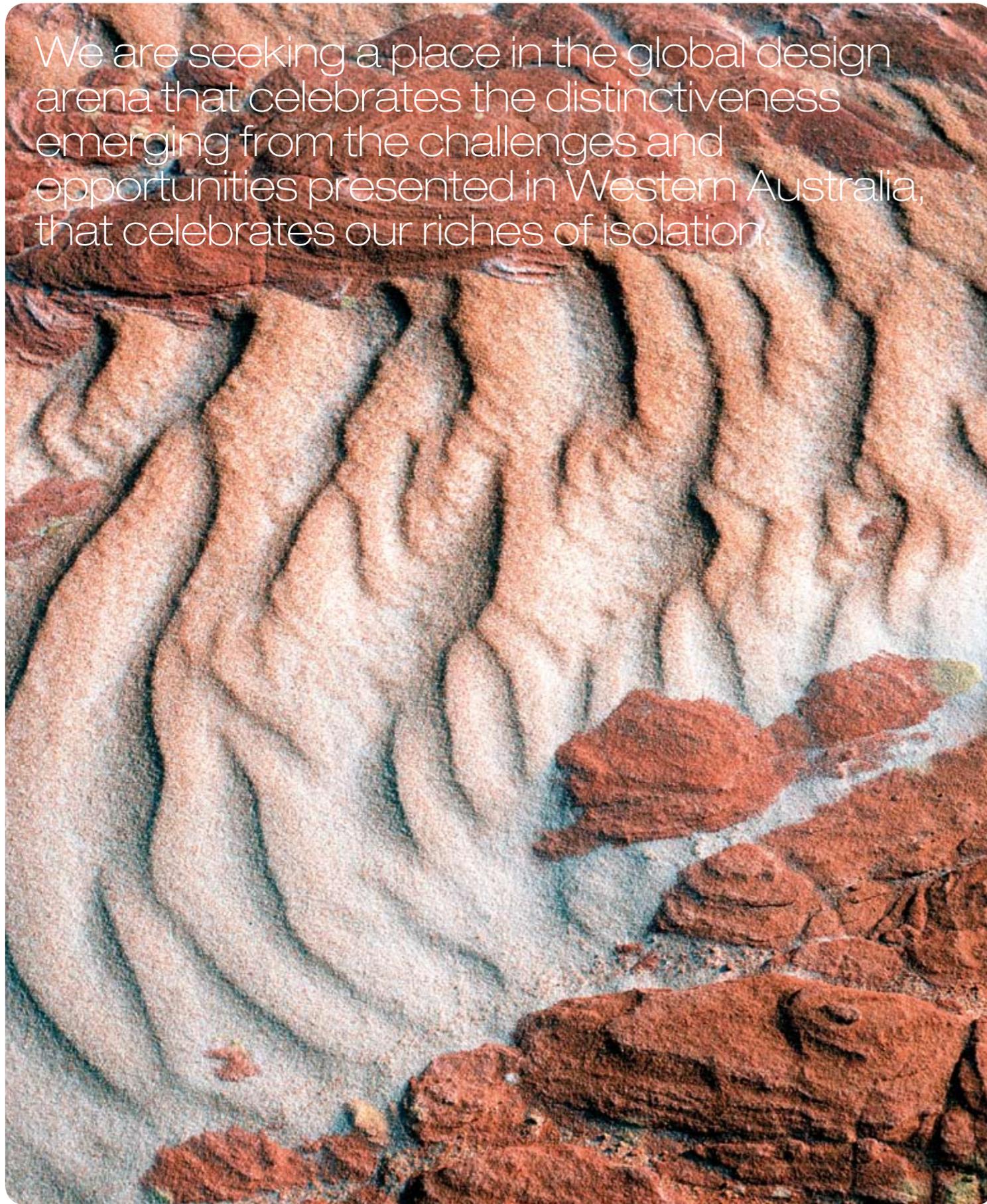
W 400 D 820 H 350

2005

"I wanted to design a piece which encouraged contemplation, interaction and invention." Loop functions somewhere between table and bench, shelving and sculpture and encourages the user to interact with the furniture. The clever interlocking system enables a diverse range of forms, and easy disassembly for shipping.



We are seeking a place in the global design arena that celebrates the distinctiveness emerging from the challenges and opportunities presented in Western Australia, that celebrates our riches of isolation.



### malcolm harris

#### Dune Pendant

Tasmanian blackwood and rock maple fins, translucent acrylic tube, fluorescent light

Long pendant  
Diameter 40-150 H 1000

Short pendant  
Diameter 40-130 H 692

2005

Spectacular forms are produced in dune systems, defined by the leeward edge where the sand particles drop out of the moving air, forming a crisp line.

These works employ an extracted layered construction technique to suggest the solid yet transient nature of the dune systems.





**anthony docherty**

**Taglio Cube**

Plantation grown hoop pine marine plywood

W 390 D 590 H 1190

2004

The simple dissected cube creates a strong visual impact. The Taglio series is playful, allowing multiple uses as room divider, display, storage, tables and seating.



**michelle salomone**

**Resonance Screen**

Jarrah veneer, fibreglass

W 2100 D 300 H 1800

2005

Early settlers when faced with the reality of Australia described it as having a 'dead heart'. The form of the screen acts as a pulse; the shapely part represents early settlers' excitement and expectations, however, as they reached Australia, their expectations were shattered and the form flattens.



**irene schneider**

**Luminance Heat Lamp**

Ceramic

Diameter 115 H 400

2004

Made of all natural, renewable materials the perforated ceramic container disperses heat and light from a kerosene based flame inside.

**nicole rogers**

**Memory Table and Light**

Corian, LED light

W 500 D 500 H 500

2004

"Memory is a direct response to my childhood recollections where history is embedded in my memories of surroundings". The pattern and materiality of this piece are reminiscent of Nicole's grandmother's wallpaper, and all those memories associated with it.



**olivia george**

**Green Stool**

'echo panel' (100% PET), steel

W 350 D 350 H 400-700

2005

The stacked contours of the stool were inspired by the segmented trunk of the indigenous Australian grass tree, and the open cut gold mines found in remote towns that bare the earth in ochre-layered contours. Using a recycled product the movable layers and adjustable steel post allows for individualisation of colour and height.

**sarah sandler**

**Ausame Light**

100% recycled chrome plated mild steel , anodised aluminium, fluorescent light

Diameter 360 H 390

2004

Ausame provides social commentary on the current 'Americanisation of Australia'. Constructed from a steel frame, the tiered shade is composed of a series of suspended aluminium and steel silhouettes of iconic American symbols of differing contexts - the Statue of Liberty, an Army Tank, and Ronald McDonald. The silhouettes are removable from their frame to be utilised as satirical Australian "tools" - a barbeque scraper, Philips head screwdriver and bottle opener. This tongue-in-cheek response reflects the Aussie larrikin attitude.



## a team effort

### FORM Contemporary Craft and Design

FORM is the peak professional body for craft and design working towards a Western Australia enriched by the enterprise and creativity of its design and craftsmanship. FORM nurtures craft and design talent, seeks to build a dynamic culture of creativity through a range of programs, and identifies opportunities for the creative sector to fulfill its potential in commercial as well as artistic terms.

FORM has developed the award-winning *Designing Futures* program which seeks to provide training and assistance with design, production, business management and market research to allow the growth of creative practices. The current iteration of *Designing Futures* focuses on nurturing clusters of craft and design through a framework that encourages groups of designers to collaborate or interact, and provides these groups with access to mentoring, appropriate expertise and support networks.

For the emerging practitioners associated with *Designing Futures*, participating in the *Riches of Isolation* showcase at Salone Satellite in 2006 presents an invaluable opportunity for exposure at an international level, establishing vital networks, and increased understanding of international markets. The works exhibited by *Designing Futures* participants illustrate the significant level of development achievable with strategic investment in skills development in this creative sector. These initiatives have positive effects that reach far beyond those participants directly involved, as through *Designing Futures* and through *Riches of Isolation* FORM hopes to catalyse a transition for craftspeople and designers, contributing to a sustainable, vibrant creative industry in Western Australia.

**FORM project coordinators:** Kris Brankovic and Rebecca Eggleston

### Curtin University's Faculty of the Built Environment, Art, Design

Curtin has an international reputation as an excellent teaching university. Projects like *Riches of Isolation* reflect the innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The project emphasises learning by doing, teaching by coaching, and exemplifies student-centred experiential learning. As the project is in the public domain, the feedback the students will receive goes beyond the response of teaching staff, exposes their work to a more comprehensive critique in addition to having the opportunity to experience a year long project, gain insights and links to leading edge international events.

As well as the design studios students attended in the development of the creative pieces you see illustrated in this catalogue, a student group of twenty-two were organised into teams responsible for various aspects of the exhibition project. They were coached by teaching staff and responded to the client needs outlined by FORM and Curtin. Transferable skills such as project co-ordination, exhibition design, public relations, fundraising writing and events management were experienced.

The Faculty offers undergraduate and graduate programs in the Built Environment, Art and Design. We provide professionally relevant, environmentally sensitive and socially aware directions to our students' learning and we actively engage with the changing needs of modern society. We are proud of the fact that we offer our courses in Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and China as this affirms the regional relevance of our programs and our commitment to embracing cultural diversity within our courses.

**Curtin University project coordinators:** Associate Professor Marina Lommerse and Penelope Forlano

#### Designing Futures Participants

Anthony Docherty  
Warren East  
Penelope Forlano  
Holly Grace  
Malcolm Harris  
Angela Mellor  
Steven Pooley  
Chris Robins  
Tim Whiteman  
Stuart Williams

#### Curtin University of Technology Participants

**BA Interior Architecture**  
Debbie Cluer  
Olivia George  
Anna Radeski  
Nicole Rogers  
Michelle Salomone  
Sarah Sandler

**BA Product Design**  
Stephen Julius Cestrilli  
Phil Ryan  
Carolyn Smith  
Kate Stokes

**Honours Design**  
Irene Schneider

**BA Fashion and Textiles**  
Jennelle Horsford

**Bachelor of Architecture**  
Daniel Troy

# riches of isolation

unearthing western australia's creative potential

## milano

5-10 April 2006

Salone Satellite,  
Salone Internazionale del Mobile,  
Fiera Milano, Nuovo Quartiere Fieristico, Rho Pero, Milano Italia

## perth

27 April-26 May 2006

FORM Gallery, King St Arts Centre,  
357 Murray St, Perth, Australia  
Telephone: +61 8 9226 2799

**Co Curators** Marina Lommerse, Penelope Forlano, Kris Brankovic and Rebecca Eggleston

**Exhibition Design** Penelope Forlano, Debbie Cluer and Hayley Naisbitt

**Editors** Rebecca Eggleston and Marina Lommerse

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<http://bead.curtin.edu.au>

[www.form.net.au](http://www.form.net.au)

**form.**  
building a state of creativity

**Curtin**  
University of Technology

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