

Sydney Design 99

Viewpoints in Time

XVIII ICOGRADA World Congress, 26 - 29 September, 1999 - Sydney, Australia
by Robert L. Peters, FGDC



SYDNEY, HARBOUR VIEW

From left to right:
RON NEWMAN,
MADLINE LESTER,
JOHN FROSTELL,
MARIANNE FRANSEN,
AUGUSTO MORELLO
AND GUY-A. SCHOCKAERT



Sydney Design 99 was the 18th world design congress of the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA), and the sixth held jointly with the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), and the International Federation of Interior Architects/Interior Designers (IFI).

More than 1400 delegates from over 45 countries took in presentations from nearly 100 speakers, making this the largest multi-disciplinary design congress ever held in the southern hemisphere. Over 70 exhibitors and sponsors showed their wares, and numerous parallel functions, receptions, launches, awards presentations, signings, and exhibitions kept delegates hopping (like kangaroos) across Sydney.

A more ideal setting for a world design congress could hardly be imagined. Sydney is a spectacular city, built around a stunningly beautiful natural harbor. With opening ceremonies in the foyers of Sydney's iconic Opera House, three conference days at scenic Darling Harbour, and a gala dinner in The Dome at Olympic Park, visitors were treated to the best that Sydney has to offer. While still crane-studded in preparation for the 2000 Olympics, this city of four million is clean, stylish, and inviting. Some locals complain that the city has lost some of its innate character to the developer's wrecking ball. Others fear that the city's transport systems and infrastructure will be overwhelmed by the millennium year's events. My only real complaint was the cab drivers - the rudest, most incompetent I have encountered anywhere.

*Let's not be sared
to ælebate our
provincialism
onæ in a while.*

*The global
communiætion
sausage machine
is becoming more and
more homogenized.*

MIMMO COZZOLINO

Congress sessions began on Monday with a rousing welcome by the Honorable Frank Sorter, Lord Mayor of Sydney, who stressed that good design is an enduring objective. Dr. Pat O'Shane, Australia's first Aboriginal magistrate, delivered the opening address in which she railed against the imbalance evident in city environments, where, she suggested, "unbalanced profit motives create hard, concrete places unfriendly to the human condition, contributing to the idleness, alienation, and anti-social behavior of urban youth."

Chuck Geschke, co-founder of Adobe, began plenary sessions with a talk on the enormous promise that the convergence of TV, video and the internet hold for the design community. Self-promoter/designer Alan Chan of Hong Kong recapped his entrepreneurial career, which includes his own line of souvenir merchandise, shops, and even a "Mr. Chan" brand of iced tea. In a profoundly moving presentation that spontaneously brought the crowd to their feet, Swedish jewelry designer and silversmith Vivianna Torun Bulow-Hube shared insights from an inspiring lifetime in design and showed her exquisite designs for Georg Jensen. Backing her assertion that "to be is more than to seem," Vivianna spoke of "a timeless form language of 'less is more'," and shared stories of the jewelry collective she runs today in Indonesia, where artisans' profits support orphanages, schools and social initiatives.

With dozens of afternoon breakout sessions, delegates were deluged with choice. Massimo and Lella Vignelli discussed the criteria behind their constancy of design approach and paid homage to Euclidian geometry. Renowned British architect Eva Jiricna lectured on the designer's role in the life of a community. Ros and John Moriarty told of their Balarinji design studio and their commercial success in bringing aboriginal Australian designs to the world. Other presenters included Marcello Minale, Peter Geyer, Jon Bannenberg, Tony Fry, Ruth McDermott, Prudence Black, Ian Howard, Michael Bogle, and Melbourne's inimitable Mimmo Cozzolino.

On Monday evening many delegates took in Sydney's sunset on a dinner harbor cruise, and Australia Post released a special set of four stamps showcasing Australian design excellence. Guests at a special stamp launch cocktail party were treated to spectacular views of the city from the revolving Summit Restaurant.

Tuesday began with plenary keynote presentations by award winning Olympic film-maker Bud Greenspan, amputee Paralympian runner and catwalk model Aimee Mullins, and sports bra inventor Hinda Miller. Bud showed samples of his moving films which depict the struggle for Olympic glory and the quest for excellence. Aimee shared her story of drive and determination, and showed off samples of her interchangeable prosthetic legs - "cheetah-style" Kevlar for sprinting, and "52-inch heel" versions for photographic modeling. Hinda told the story of the Jogbra's creation, and stressed that "small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises." Continuing with the sports theme, Trevor Flett of FNA Image Design discussed branding and the identity for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, and his partner Richard Henderson outlined some of the challenges of designing for "a cumulative audience of 25 billion."

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Numerous other presenters outlined the multi-disciplinary design approach for the Olympic games' venues, ceremonies, products, and communications in a plethora of breakout sessions. Presenters included Michael Bryce, Bridget Smyth, Chris Johnson, Jonathan Nolan, Peter Tonkin, Ken Maher, Philip Cox, Paul Rolfe, Bernard Fehon, Sheldon King, Christopher Proctor, Iain Clark, Suzy Grierson, Annabell Lahz, Bill Tsakalos, Louise Walsh, Mark Armstrong, John Harrington, Penny Baker, Gabrielle Ranaldi, Julianne Masterman, Peter Cook, Peter England, Leon Paroissien, Sally Couacaud, and Janet Lawrence.

Afternoon tea was followed by yet more breakout sessions, with a wide range of topics including design education, management, practice, and history. With presenters from the far corners of the globe, and representing the built environment, products, and communications, many delegates were numbed by the choices available. Sessions I took in included Marcello Aflalo on a search for Brazil's design identity; Alvaro Rego of Mexico on the exploration of design history, analysis and criticism; and Michael Smythe on design in New Zealand and his heartfelt call to designers the world over to avoid "globalization, 'Coca-colanization' and 'McColonization'." Other presenters and topics included: Steven Cornwell on The Ripe Group Project; Geoffrey Adams, Gregorie Bisson and Charles Alexander on design protection; Anne-lise Kjaer on the Colour Marketing Group; Nigel Smith on branding in Asia; Lynn Chalmers on continuing professional development; Rick Bennett, Dr. Ajanta Sen Poovaiah and Ron Nabarro on design education; Jack Davis on design as story telling; Jason Grant on design and social change; Paul Schremmer on 50 years of product design; Cal Swann on twentieth century visual communication; Ms. E. Simon and Faizal Deyal on creative challenges in South Africa; Anthony Cahalan on type as a design chronometer, David Whitbread on the universality of graphic design; Jenny Wolmark and Eleanor Gates on "design, parasite, and the unreadability of texts"; Martin Woolley on the future of retail environments; Paul Green-Armytage on the language of color; Surendra Shah on the cooling of natural structures; Dan Harel on global user experience (GLUE); Nigel Malone on ecology, ethics and the design process; Mitzi Vernon with "the measurable and the immeasurable - a conversation"; Keith Russell on design theory and the perfect chocolate wrapper; and Mark Pennington of Formway, Fumio Okura of JIDA, and the Singapore Trade and Development Board on the 7th International Design Forum.

Following a jam-packed day of sessions, delegates were happy to board a special train from Central Station to a gala dinner/dance and awards presentation in The Dome at Homebush Bay, the Olympic site's showcase architectural structure. Finally, participants were able to interact and engage in exchange and dialogue first hand. Impromptu design debates and spirited conversation ran late into the night.

Day three, Wednesday, began with plenary sessions by Jason Grant of Inkahoots Design in Brisbane; Wang Xu from Guangzhou, China; American Lisa Krohn, William Harald-Wang of Malaysia, and Joost Roozkrans of Studio Dumber in the Netherlands. Jason contends that designers' ideas should sometimes

offend in order to make a difference. He stressed that there are social consequences to the choices we make, and that there is no such thing as an apolitical stance for designers. Wang Xu also talked of the designer as an agent of change, and illustrated how he has been involved in bringing awareness of Western design to China by means of publishing books featuring prominent contemporary graphic designers from around the world. Lisa presented exquisite designs for electronic products and experimental new "soft product" forms, and William talked of the challenges of cultural differences and working around religious taboos in cross-cultural Asia.

After lunch, breakout sessions once again provided delegates with choices. Presentations included Tiffany Turkington on design practice in the next decade, Karen Webster on changing consumer trends, Jack Davis on humanizing the digital image, Brigitte Wolf on design for business, Richard Buchanan on the design school of the future, and Robert Blaich on design leadership. Closing plenary sessions followed with presentations and reflection by Ken Cato, Lella Vignelli, and Ken Done. Ken Cato outlined practice challenges that designers face, and stressed that "We must be more supportive of each other." Lella noted that we are in a period of great choice and that "Multiple points of view are available to everyone." Shameless self promoter Ken Done described his entrepreneurial success and opined that "The best client you'll ever have is yourself." Following official farewell speeches by the organizing and sponsoring bodies, the South African delegation made a final presentation on "Continental Shift 2001 - World Design Convergence," the next biennial ICOGRADA and IFI Congresses which will take place in Sandton.

While the number of serious congress presentations at times seemed overwhelming, there was entertainment as well. Antiom, the acclaimed British design company, put on their celebrated "RGB Performance" in an explosion of computer controlled sound and graphics. The Korean contingent hosted a reception under the theme of Oullim (the Great Harmony) complete with traditional music, food, and colorful dancers (as well as prize expense-paid trips to Korea for the 'Oullim' event October 24 - 27, 2000). Many extra-curricular opportunities to consume fine Australian wine also presented themselves at associated events around Sydney.

As one might expect, the issue of Aussie-style, Australianism or Australiana was roundly debated during the congress. In spite of the pressure to conform that comes with globalization, Australia does have unique visual voices and vernacular to share - from its traditional indigenous Aboriginal art to contemporary attitude-rich exports such as Mambo. According to Mimmo Cozzolino, a designer who researched and assembled the first collection of Australia's trademarks and early commercial art, Oz design today is typified by beach culture and a sense of humor. As a souvenir of our time "down under," congress delegates each received an attractive catalog showcasing Australian graphic design, produced by the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA).

Following the congress, international association representatives from each of the three design disciplines met for their respective general assemblies. A highlight of the ICOGRADA general assembly was the addition of four new member associations: The Graphic Design Association of the Republic of China; The Lithuanian Association of Graphic Designers; Regroupement des Graphistes et Sérigraphes de Kinshasa, Congo; and the Taiwan Graphic Design Association. ICOGRADA also ratified the formation of Design for the World (DW), a multi-disciplinary, project-based, self financing nongovernmental organization concerned with implementing design solutions to acute problems facing



The quest for the Holy Grail is not the Cup, but the journey.
AIMEE MULLINS, double amputee, fashion model, and US Paralympic athlete.



The event included an exhibition with exhibitors including trade suppliers, design practices, universities and national stands representing examples of design from countries such as South Africa, Singapore, Germany, Korea and Ireland.

**Conformity
is the jailer
of excellence.**

HINDA MILLER