LIGHT LINES

architecture for a modern age

LANE GALLERY
LIBRARYMUSEUM
ALBURY, NSW
8 JULY – 8 OCTOBER 2011

dirk spennemann
The ‘story’ of this exhibition is ‘architecture for a new age’ – an age where architectural styling of design became simpler, materials such as cement render and metal appeared on buildings, and new building technology enabled buildings to be taller, stronger and faster to build. The result was a range of distinctive buildings around the world suitable for a generation experiencing massive changes in how they lived, worked and relaxed.

Dirk Spennemann’s images highlight the drama and starkness of many interwar buildings. Included are houses, a theatre, commercial buildings, a school, a war memorial and importantly, three pubs. Because the universal application of the new style was distinguished by a disdain for, and rejection of, applied ornamentation to building exteriors, some of the most telling images are of details—a curved parapet, a row of incised bricks or one of raised bricks, a stepped chimney and a streamlined group of portholes.

All of the featured buildings are from Albury and nearby towns, illustrating the fashionable adoption of the new styling in this region of Australia as it recovered from the crippling Depression. Spending on construction of new offices, shops and pubs was crucial to recovery, and the use of new styling in ‘architecture for a new age’ was clearly intended to attract customers and shoppers. The new age encouraged buildings that were taller than ever and were made possible by new technology, such as improved lifts. A number of the images, shot from the base and peering upwards, provide an appreciation of verticality. Others, such as the New Albury Hotel and T&G building, demonstrate how regional buildings competed with those of the ‘big cities’ in the inevitable climb upwards.
The styling of the 'new age' was often based on geometric composition. Elements such as lettering and the representation of abstract designs on interior details are included, together with a range of images showing 'stepping' - from a mirror with an Aztec influence to a number of stepped elements on chimneys. In an era where speed dominated people's consciousness and the catchcry was 'Faster! Faster!', imagery of speed often appeared on buildings - extended straight lines that curve around corners, a pub with a series of 'speedlines' across the façade, and buildings that look like ocean liners steaming towards the horizon.

The new styling extended to many fashionable new houses around Albury, which were sure to have raised eyebrows amongst the locals when they were built. The exhibition shows houses that were invariably large, with frontages combining rectangles and bulging semi-circles, entrances that demonstrate the use of curves at the roofline and in the stairs at the entrance, and outdoor relaxing areas encased by nautical railings. Other images provide us with a peep into the stylish light-filled interiors and we gain glimpses of details of ceilings and the way in the latest fittings were used.

The exhibition provides its own paradox in the presentation of the buildings. One of the major themes of the era was the use of colour, often used on internal elements and, on the exterior, in sharp contrast to large expanses of monocoloured cement render. But here we see the images presented in black and white, which matches (and enhances) the dramatic starkness of the buildings and details, and is enhanced by the emphasis on angularity - a very effective approach that also draws on contrasts provided by the sun on geometric shapes.

The exhibition of 'architecture for a new age' is a passionate display of imagery of buildings that Dirk Spennemann knows well and has photographed beautifully.

Robin Grow
President, Art Deco & Modernism Society, Melbourne
ONWARDS AND UPWARDS
War Memorial, Monument Hill, Albury
ALBURY'S ANSWER TO NEW YORK

Tower, Temperance & General Mutual Life Assurance Society Building, Dean Street, Albury
SKYLINES

Entrance Pilaster, former Blacklock's Building, Olive Street, Albury
WIDE OPEN SPACES
Living Room. Residence, Beechworth Road, Wodonga
ENTER HERE FOR PROGRESS

Entrance, former Wodonga Technical College, High Street, Wodonga
STEPPED CROWN

Ceiling Detail. Residence. David Street. Albury
FORTRESSED

Parapet Detail, former Rural Bank of NSW, Sanger Street, Corowa
THE SOARING HEIGHTS OF PROGRESS
Grain Silos, Balladale
ARTIST’S STATEMENT

An essential skill for anyone working in the field of cultural heritage management is the ability to ‘read’ buildings. Deconstructing their appearance and examining the finer details allows us to understand something of the original intentions of their makers.

This interest in details, whether of hands, eyes, faces, facades or even landscapes, has become a significant aspect of my work as a photographer. In this exhibition, I have tried to re-direct the audiences gaze to the ‘small print’ of the Art Deco architecture in Albury and the surrounding region. A number of these images were shot with a vintage 1933 Art-Deco Rolleicord camera.

The clean and uncompromising lines of Art Deco buildings invoke a sense of progress, sending a message to the passer-by: this building’s owner looks to the future. The black and white images shown here capture the interplay of light and shadow on these highly structured façades, drawing the observer’s eye, imparting a sense of direction: onwards and upwards, a future of progress awaits.

DIRK SPENNEMANN
CASCADES OF LIGHT
Entrance Pilaster, former Blacklock's Building, Olive Street, Albury
AZTEC HEADDRESS

Ornament above Restroom entrance. former Rex Theatre. Sanger Street. Corowa
NIGHT LINES
Regent Theatre, Dean Street, Albury
Chimney Detail, Residence, Edmondson Avenue, Albury
LUXURY

Internal Bathroom, Residence, Beechworth Road, Wodonga
THE SWEEPING CURVES OF HOME
Residence, Wyse Street, Albury
A CURVED WELCOME
Residence, David Street, Albury
ABOUT THE ARTIST
Dirk Spennemann is an Albury-based photographer whose work explores the interaction of cultural heritage, landscape and human experience. He is Associate Professor of cultural heritage management at Charles Sturt University.

Art Exhibitions

2011 Light Lines
Albury, NSW

2011 Façades
Hahndorf, SA

2011 Dead End
Anchorage, AK, USA

2010 1000 Prayers
Benalla, Vic.

2009 Tantalizing & Troubling Visions
Saipan, Micronesia

Cross-Over Exhibitions

2011-12 Solitude Recaptured
Riverside, CA, & Juneau, AK, USA

2010-11 War on the Tundra
Anchorage, AK, USA

2009 eyes } world { hands
Albury, NSW

2008-09 Echoes of the Past
(Touring Exhibition, NSW and SA)