



Michael O'Connell: The Lost Modernist

Harriet Edquist

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Michael O'Connell: The Lost Modernist is a beautifully produced book that documents the life and work of this major figure in Anglo-Australian design history. Born in Cumbria in 1898 Michael O'Connell saw action on the Western Front in WWI before moving to Australia in 1920. Over the following 17 years he became a critical member of the burgeoning Modernist movement in Melbourne primarily through his innovative and dynamic textiles. First exhibited in 1930 his hand block-printed fabrics revolutionised Australian textile design, which at the time was an entirely amateur affair, and laid the foundations of its future development. On his return to the UK in 1937, O'Connell became a key figure in contemporary textile design, producing fabrics for Edinburgh Weavers in 1938 and then for Heals during the 1940s and 1950s. He was involved in a number of progressive government-initiated projects for schools and public institutions in the optimistic years of post-war Britain, including the celebrated wall hangings for the Country Pavilion at the Festival of Britain in 1951. During the 1960s until his death in 1976 O'Connell kept pace with contemporary art practice from his studio-home in Perry Green Hertfordshire, producing large-scale, innovative textile murals in his unique combination of batik and resist dyeing. The Lost Modernist illustrates and discusses over 100 works from Australian and British public and private collections within the context of 20th century design history and the framework of O'Connell's life.

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