

Cosmopolitan

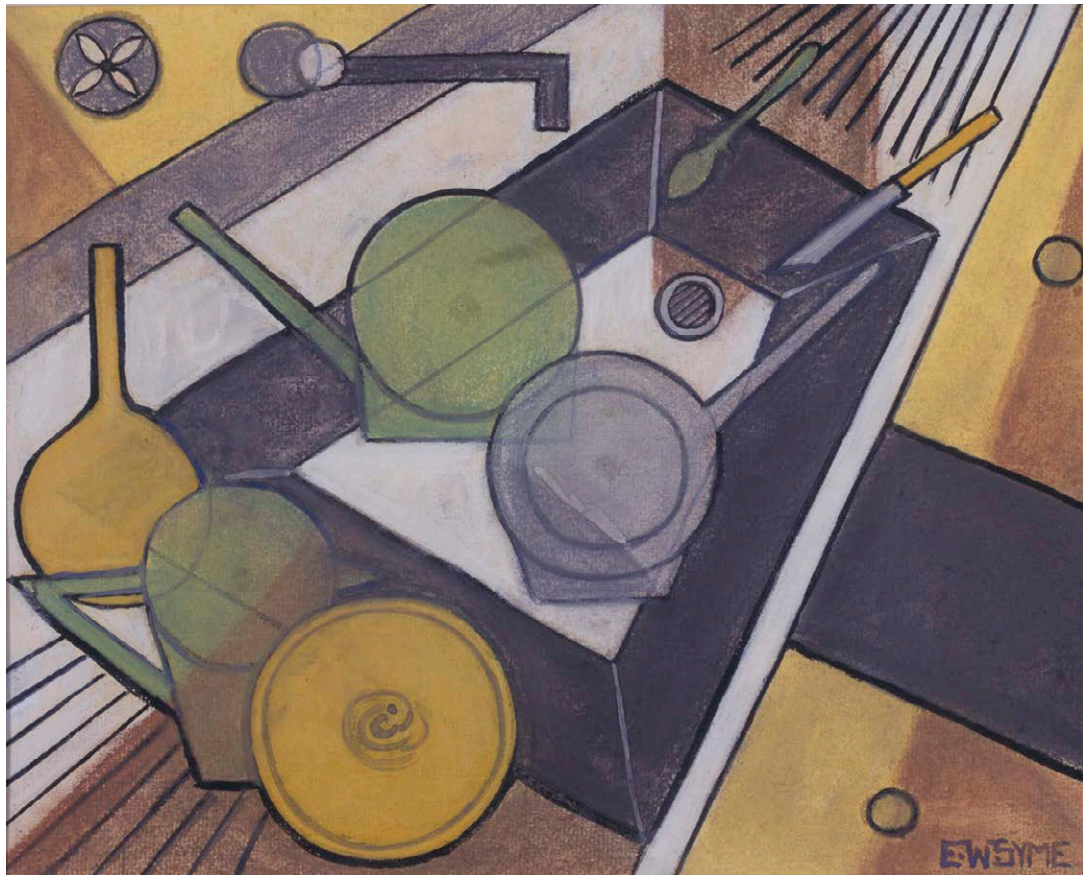
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery
31 August — 7 December 2019





Image left:
Peter Purves Smith, *Sketch for New York*, c. 1936, watercolour and pencil, 53 x 35.4 cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Dr Albert Gild Fund, 1981

Image right:
Eveline Syme, *The kitchen sink*, c. 1930s, pastel, 25.5 x 32.5 cm, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia, CCWA 412



Cosmopolitan

Art from the 1930s in the University of Western Australia Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art

Cosmopolitan brings together works from the 1930s held in two collections at the university – the University of Western Australia Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art. The exhibition presents a range of works – from realist art to the modernist styles of Surrealism and Cubism – reflecting the eclectic nature of art of the period.

The 1930s in Australia was framed by two cataclysmic events – the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 which precipitated the Great Depression, and entry into the Second World War in September 1939. Bearing witness to the widespread poverty and social unrest of the Depression, as well as the rise of totalitarian regimes of the extreme right in Europe, prompted a new political consciousness in many Australian artists. Harald Vike expressed his left-wing views through images of the working class and unemployed of Perth. Conversely, James Gleeson responded to what he described as the 'lurking terror' of impending war through the personal and anarchic forms of Surrealism, utilising the deeper subconscious mind of dreams and fantasy.

Many artists travelled overseas to further their studies, as international travel became increasingly accessible. A number of artists trained under pioneering Cubists André Lhote and Albert Gleizes in Paris, and with Iain Macnab and Claude Flight at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art in London. Concentration on the formal elements of the composition was encouraged – with emphasis on strong colour and the interaction of geometric forms – to create a unified design. The object was not relinquished but, rather, transformed and refined through this process. Such an approach can be seen in the works of Grace Crowley, Rah Fizelle, Alison Rehfisch and Eveline Syme. The exhibition also includes works by artists who visited Australia in the

1930s, such as Ian Fairweather, and émigré artists who settled in Australia, including Elise Blumann.

Subjects associated with the speed and dynamism of modern life can be seen in many works on display. Adelaide Perry's *Woman pilot*, 1931, captures the casual glamour and intrepid nature of female aviators of the period, such as Amelia Earhart, Amy Johnson and Australia's Nancy Bird Walton, whose global travels were widely published in the media, particularly newsreels. A number of artworks celebrate life in the modern city, such as John Oldham's *The Gledden Building*, 1936. The tenor of the times also inspired dystopian visions of technology and the metropolis, as in Peter Purves Smith's *Sketch for New York*, c. 1936.

Art was produced for an increasingly wide range of contexts and printmaking enjoyed a significant renewal: Margaret Preston produced prints for covers of 'The Home' magazine and other household journals, and Eric Thake made a series of highly inventive bookplates. In addition to examples of Australian printmaking, there are six prints produced in the United States on display. These works show the parallel development of the medium across the Pacific.

The art of *Cosmopolitan* reflects the experience of artists in an increasingly globalised and technologically driven world. This environment stimulated a range of approaches to art – from a concentration on formal and aesthetic elements, to a belief that art had a key role to play in political debate and societal change.

Sally Quin
Curator
The University of Western Australia Art Collection



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Adelaide Perry, *Woman pilot*, 1931, oil on composition board, 49.5 x 39.3 cm.
The University of Western Australia Art Collection, McGillivray Bequest Fund, 1983



Yvonne Atkinson, *Fisherwoman with cat*, 1937, oil on board, 49.7 x 38.5 cm,
Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia, CCWA 257

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Cover image: John Oldham, *The Gledden Building*, 1936, watercolour, 59.5 x 39 cm,
The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Oldham, Boas, Ednie Brown Architects, 1937



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