I stress two things, simplicity and directness. This means reduction of the subject to elementary or even symbolic terms, by devious selection of viewpoint, by lighting, by after treatment. I do not always print the total negative ... I work mostly in black and white. It suits my will to interpret and to dramatise. I have more control with black and white without which the very personal element is lost forever ...

Max Dupain, 1978
Max Dupain — Modernist is a free exhibition from 9 June to 23 September 2007

Exhibition opening hours:
9 am to 5 pm weekdays
11 am to 5 pm weekends

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Photographs and prints from this exhibition can be ordered from the Library Shop, telephone 9273 1611 or email <libshop@sl.nsw.gov.au>
The State Library of NSW is proud to host our fifth exhibition featuring Max Dupain’s photography. This is the first comprehensive look at Dupain’s architectural photographic legacy.

From the early modernists of the 1930s through to Utzon and Seidler, Dupain captured a revolution in Australian architecture over his 60-year career. These images highlight Dupain’s modernist approach — his use of interesting angles and stark contrasts to reveal the ‘essence’ of a building.

In presenting Max Dupain — Modernist, I am excited to announce that the 200 images featured in the Mitchell galleries will ultimately join the Library’s collection of over one million photographs. The works also complement our significant architectural collection, including plans, drawings and supporting material from many of Dupain’s internationally recognised clients.

This exhibition, curated by Avryl Whitnall, would not have been possible without the support and assistance of two of Dupain’s former colleagues, Eric Sierins, director of Max Dupain & Associates, and Jill White, custodian of the Max Dupain Exhibition Negative Archive.

Regina A Sutton
State Librarian & Chief Executive
This exhibition presents the architectural photography of Max Dupain (1911–1992), one of Australia's best-known and best-loved photographers.

His interest in and knowledge of architecture, combined with a critical approach to photographing his subjects, meant that Dupain became the photographer of choice for the founding architects of Australian modernism in the 1930s and 1940s. At his death in 1992, Dupain’s clients numbered into the thousands — many of the architects he worked for became personal friends, including Harry Seidler, Glenn Murcutt, Sydney Ancher, Samuel Lipson and Jørn Utzon.

When first considering images for the exhibition, I was amazed at the number of photographs available and the wide range of architectural styles Dupain had captured — from 19th-century colonial to 20th-century brutalist; from industrial to public to domestic.

Dupain was famous for working closely with the architect, sizing up a building, determining the best angle and lighting conditions, and taking a handful of shots to capture the structure for posterity. He liked to ‘keep things simple’, and preferred black and white to colour photography.

Among the more straightforward photographs in Dupain’s archive, several visual themes keep emerging: buildings at twilight; buildings reflected in water; buildings and gum trees; buildings under a vast Australian sky. These photographs were welcomed by clients such as Ancher, who stated in a letter of appreciation: ‘I can’t tell you how much your work has been admired over the years. It’s generally agreed that you make any architectural creation look so much better than it really is — and not by trick photography either …’

The most striking architectural images include those featured in publications and art gallery exhibitions as stand-alone prints. They are photographs where Dupain has ‘extract[ed] every ounce of content from any exciting form’, using strong light and shade detail and selective close-ups. These images are indicative of the modernist movement which...
impacted on Australian photography and other art forms from the 1930s. They became the key images for the exhibition, demonstrating Dupain’s continued interest in the early modernist approach to photography, which he carried through his long career.

Max Dupain — Modernist provides the viewer with an essential experience of Dupain’s vast archive of architectural photography. The images with lasting resonance are those where he has created art out of architecture, where he has applied his camera to capture the essence of an architectural design — his ‘modernist’ shots.

Auryl Whitnall
Curator
The text below is from Max Dupain’s typewritten notes, c. 1976

Was born into happy home. Only child — spoiled rotten. Both my parents were devoted to each other. My father a life student of medicine and physical education was totally involved in his work and, lucky for him, my mother backed him up in every possible way. He wrote five books and hundreds of articles — all dealing with the attainment of good physical/mental health and endurance. The titles range from ‘Diet & Physical Fitness’ to ‘Curing Constipation Naturally’.

He owned and operated a first class gymnasium in the city ... I used to work in the gym often, particularly at giant tennis [played with a medicine ball] and probably owe my reasonably good physical condition to just that. Dietwise there was no question that the tucker I ate was properly balanced and adequate. In the Dupain household it was mandatory. I know the old man was disappointed because I did not take over his work; but he never ever murmured his disapproval of my seeking a totally different profession, believing, unlike his own father, that it is the individual who must make the decision.

His income was modest but adequate and enough to send me to what was then (and still is!) an expensive Great Public School — Sydney Grammar. I left that school at the end of the first term, 1930 [at 18] — after the rowing! My scholastic achievements could be chalked up as nil. But thanks to my sixth form English master, ‘Sandy’ Phillips, I learned to love Shakespeare and can still quote numbers of salient extracts which we were required to learn by heart.

How all this has shaped my outlook in photography would be hard to determine. Fortuitously the work I have chosen to do is physically arduous and demanding and I often feel that I could not cope with it if I were not fit. I think I learned discipline as I grew up and my work progressed. I am quite anti laissez faire and the innocuous ‘fun thing’ that pervades a lot of current photography. My close association with architecture has underpinned this factor in all my work.
The pursuance of architecture, not for photography necessarily, but for its own sake, has aroused in me a strong sense of symmetry. I find this so pronounced in the old Georgian architecture of this country and to blend this with the astringency of modern architecture is to give pictorial vent to something pretty much to the point with no humbuggery whatsoever. That's how I like it.

A very likeable uncle once gave me his old camera. Believe it or not it was a bloody Box Brownie — the poor man's instamatic. He used to process the film for me in the laundry at Alt St., Ashfield, the home of my mother's family. In those days Kodak had produced a daylight processing kit whereby film was spooked into a light-proof apron in a light tight box — the whole lot taken out and immersed in a tank of developing agent. Then washed and fixed and washed again. It was fascinating.

I was at school, aged 16. I acquired one of these magic boxes and when the family set up a new house I was able to convert the old pantry into a darkroom. Then it was really on. This was photography for me. I left school after winning the Carter Memorial Prize for productive use of spare time. Straight away got a job as an apprentice with Cecil Bostock,
whom I have described elsewhere as an intransigent man with a lot of hang-ups. Like [Harold] Cazneaux (they were bracketed as top flight photographers in Sydney) he worked in isolation. But he had terrific technique. He was a craftsman of the first order ... But something killed him in the end; I think it was his inability to rise superior to the crap he had to photograph for a living. Pictorially emasculated by boredom. I have nothing but heart felt sympathy for him.

He had some good clients, Harry Bindoff of David Jones was his friend ... an extremely talented designer of window display, and at night in order to avoid reflection in the glass we would make photographs of these star windows ...

Bostock used to work for Mauri Bros and Thompson. Engineers. This was good stuff too and CB enjoyed doing it. I remember an installation somewhere in the city which was quite well lit by available light but CB wanted to give a kick to the highlights — the metal, so while I opened the shutter he fired a small flash obliquely to do just this. The small flash consisted of magnesium powder mixed with clay and poured into a pan and fired by wick and match. This was about 1932.

It was a similar situation as that experienced by Cazneaux. One had to be versatile or else. A portrait one day, a machine the next, maybe a fashion shot and a still life to follow. It was all good training for me ... 

I did a lot of fashion photography for David Jones before the war — about 3 years of it. Some of my best illustration was done at that period but it was illustration only and could not be anything else. I keep the best of it stowed way in a cupboard as a souvenir of a diverting interlude. One cannot say the possibilities of fashion photography are limitless. They are strictly contained within the guidelines of the client's requirements and those of the blockmakers and printer.

The war or my very limited part in it was a shock to my sensibilities. It showed me the difference between life and death, neither of which I had really considered in any depth before. This experience determined that I should not return to anything so trivial as fashion photography. It had to be photography of some sort but please God something with meat in it; not ephemeral bullshit. I set about getting assignments for industry — the machine form. Architecture was always a pleasure to photograph. Sometimes you have
a spontaneous affinity for something but you don’t register this for years afterwards. I think
architect, Samuel Lipson, an old friend indeed, asked me to make photographs of some of
his houses. We worked at night and the results were dramatic. The pictures got Sammy
a lot more architectural assignments. Syd Ancher, the arch priest of domestic architecture
in Australia had me photograph his houses. He hated photographs by night — figured the
dark would cover up bad detailing if it existed (and I know it didn’t). He was prepared to
let the world know about it and to hell. Good on him! Then Harry Seidler. I have 25 years
documentation of Harry’s work in my files and it’s not finished yet. Through Harry I have
learned a lot: the stark form, the abstract form, the functional form. Bauhaus all over with
the pictorial response uppermost. In other words — ‘here is a marvellous piece of precast
concrete, steel and glass, how do we get it onto film with pictorial sensibility, drama and
emotional involvement?’

… I departed from the Bostock studio in 1934 — not without reluctance. It was the natural
thing to get out on your own. An Australian prerogative. Set up sharing a darkroom and
studio in Bond Street. Later moved up to the top floor and took a lot more space. About
that time David Jones came in as major clients.

While with Bostock indulged in sending pictures to international salons like London, Paris,
Amsterdam etc. I had pictures accepted there — it was another in thing in the 30s. This
salon indulgence petered out when I discovered Man Ray, Hoyningen Huene, Horst,
Eugene Smith, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Brandt, Brassai, Bresson etc, etc. Man Ray
particularly appealed to my sense of the radical. Let’s kick convention right up the arse and
do a new thing. I still like to think I think that way!
By a strange coincidence the plumber who rigged my home darkroom was a keen amateur photographer and a member of the NSW Photographic Society. He persuaded me to join it. That's democratic Australia for you! I think everyone belonged to it except some of the elite from The Sydney Camera Circle. I met and received encouragement from Arthur Smith, HN Jones, Henri Mallard, Doug Hill, Harold Cazneaux and others. The monthly competitions were a great thing. Pictures were hung as in a gallery and you saw your own work alongside work by other photographers.

Missonne [Belgian pictorialist photographer Léonard Missonne (1870–1943)] was a pure romantic and my early work had a lot of that too. In fact I think you could say it was pretty universal when you take a look at the landscape of the twenties and thirties. There was this terrible make believe thing; it was just unable to be avoided at that moment. Missonne was adored by the ‘pictorialists’. There are several originals around in Sydney including one in this house! It’s called ‘Nuages’ dated 1927 …

… In perspective, one looks at [Cazneaux’s] work as a whole piece. It was a consistent style from beginning to end and now it has more content than previously — that of history. It tells the story of Pictorial Photography in Australia. As a young contemporary of Caz, the wholeness did not come out then; rather one was seduced by a picture at a time except in the case of infrequent exhibitions of his work. I think Caz was short sheeted by circumstance, his own and the ‘moribund Australia’ around him.

… I can’t get away from Documentary. (It is the school I have adopted and will stand by. Any other attitude would be phony.) That is if you mean optical accuracy mixed up with ‘creative treatment’. I think this applies to the things I’m interested in now and they mean much more
to me than ‘Meat queue’, ‘Sunbaker’, ‘Torsos’ and landscapes. People are almost out right now — it’s what they make or build that interests me. You have hit it when you talk about ‘purity, form, space’ — an almost abstract concoction. Add to that strength and drama. I want to extract every ounce of content from any exciting form. I want a full range of tonality, especially the blacks, and I want to give life to the inanimate. It’s a sort of extension of my penchant for still life as in the old days eg. ‘Bondi’ was intended as nothing more than a comparison of two contrasting shapes. The fact that the woman reached behind and adjusted her costume at the moment of exposure was sheer incidental luck.

We fed our spiritual selves on books and magazine articles. I can remember the excitement in the studio when a new copy of ‘Photography’ or ‘Das Deutsche’ hit the book stalls. Souls condemned to starvation, saved once more from pictorial purgatory!

Yes, ‘The Home’ magazine and ‘Art in Australia’ were very important to all of us. Syd [Ure Smith] had no money to speak of but that did not matter; it was the enthusiasm to get pictures published and on show to the public that mattered, an audience of some sort for christ’s sake! …

The retrospective show at the Centre [Australian Centre for Photography]* was a great stimulation. Just to bring all those old things out of the moth balls was something in itself. I guess David Moore was the party responsible for initiating it. He is the only photographer with David Potts with whom I have any sympathetic rapport …

I have always adored DH Lawrence. He was my mother’s favourite author and my father read him at a distance. The old man was science and reason, Lawrence was all instinct and intuition. He figured that man had lost his real lust for life because all his instincts and native intuitions had been civilised out of him. ‘Destroy the machine before it destroys man.’ I worshipped his sensitivity to life and circumstances, his beautiful verbal response to nature, man and women. I wanted to believe that I was just as sensitive and could respond to my world in terms of the machine image. I would bend the machine to suit my own reflective terms.

Max Dupain, c. 1976

Note:
*The Australian Centre for Photography was co-founded by David Moore, with Wes Stacey and others, in 1974. The exhibition Max Dupain: Retrospective was held at the Australian Centre for Photography in 1975.
Max Dupain quoted from:

- Letter to the Editor, Sydney Morning Herald, 30 March 1938
- Australian Camera Personalities: Max Dupain, Contemporary Photography, January-February 1947
- 'The photographers — Max Dupain', Architecture in Australia, February 1975
- Max Dupain, Light Vision, May-June 1978
- Interview, Artworks, August 1980

Note:

Dupain's many handwritten notes were typed by Jill White in her long-term role as studio manager, photographer and assistant to Dupain. The typewritten notes are usually untitled and often untitled, so a date has been estimated using references in the text.
The architectural photographs

Max Dupain MODERNIST
Great art has always been contemporary in spirit. To-day we feel the surge of aesthetic exploration along abstract lines, the social economic order impinging itself on art, the repudiation of the "truth to nature criterion", and the galvanising of art and psychology.

Max Dupain, Letter to the Editor, Sydney Morning Herald, 30 March 1938
I want to use more sunlight in my work ... The point is that photography is at its best when it shows a thing clearly and simply. To fake is in bad taste. The studio is synonymous with fake.

Max Dupain in Contemporary Photography, 1947

38 House (Poyntzfield), Killara, c. 1946
37 Sunday promenade, Manly, 1943
42 House (McCulloch), Whale Beach, c. 1949
70  Anzac House, 1957
45  House (Rose), Turramurra, c. 1951
54  House (Stack), Point Piper, 1953
61  Builders and Traders Exhibition Building, 1955
74  House (Goodman), Middle Harbour, 1959
One hopes that the new generation of photographers in Australia will graduate to the outdoors and make naturalness and spontaneity the underlying qualities of their work. It is so necessary to learn from other countries but forever keeping in mind that a national photography will contribute greatly to Australian culture. Let one see and photograph Australia’s way of life as it is, not as one would wish it to be. It is wasting the dynamic recording capacity of the camera to work otherwise.

Max Dupain
in Contemporary Photography, 1947
Max Dupain, photographed by Jill White, 1962

117 Wentworth Memorial Church, 1966
100 Goldstein Hall, University of NSW, 1964
105 Australia Square Tower, 1968
94 BOAC Booking Office, 1963

Opposite page
132 Sydney Opera House, c. 1964
Let’s not talk too much, there is a great deal of material out there to be taken hold of, grappled with and hammered down into beautiful photographic prints. Let’s get on with it.

Max Dupain in Light Vision, 1978
I suppose photography is like any other graphic medium. It’s got to go beyond the stage of conveying information, of telling you or showing you something you should know ... it has to involve you emotionally as well as intellectually.

Max Dupain in Artworks, August 1980
Take home your own Max Dupain print or photograph from the Library Shop

All images featured in this exhibition are for sale. Prices start at $550. They come from two archives: Max Dupain & Associates and the Max Dupain Exhibition Negative Archive. You can identify which archive an image is from by looking at the item list opposite.

**Max Dupain & Associates**

Prints and photographs are available from the Max Dupain & Associates archive.

Prints are digitally reproduced for you exactly as they appear in the exhibition.

**Paper:** 310gsm 100% cotton rag watercolour paper

**Size:** Approx. 35 cm (width) x 28 cm (height)

**Price:** $550

**Also available:** Collector’s edition photographs, printed from Max Dupain & Associates archive original Dupain negatives, are also available as silver gelatin prints on archival, fibre-based paper, and hand-printed in a darkroom by Eric Sierins, director of Max Dupain & Associates.

**Price:** $990

**Max Dupain Exhibition Negative Archive**

Photographs are available from the Max Dupain Exhibition Negative Archive.

Posthumously printed in a limited edition of 90, from Dupain’s original negatives, by Jill White, Director of the Archive, and an associate of Dupain from 1958.

Each silver gelatin photograph is selenium-toned on archival, fibre-based paper, authenticated with a blind embossed stamp, and signed, dated and numbered on the back by White. Prices increase as the edition sells.

**Price:** from $1650
Pictorially, the simpler the form, the more impact it has on the viewer and the drama is intensified; to me that is terribly important...

Architecture is like a gigantic still life — only instead of moving the bits and pieces around you move round the bits and pieces. And the direction of light is of course one of the prime factors in that respect.

Max Dupain,
‘Sunday Afternoon with Peter Ross’, ABC Television, 1991