



THE AUSTRALIAN UGLINESS

By Eugenia Lim



23 July – 25 August 2018
Melbourne School of Design
Masson Road, University Of Melbourne
Parkville Campus, Parkville 3010

Free – no bookings necessary
Gallery hours:
Monday to Friday, 10am-5pm
Saturday, 12pm-5pm

Presented by Open House Melbourne and Melbourne School of Design

All images: Eugenia Lim, *THE AUSTRALIAN UGLINESS* (2018), production still by Tom Ross

UGLY-BEAUTIFUL AUSTRALIA

The first time I read *The Australian Ugliness*, it was the height of summer. I was staying in a suburban-style weatherboard house in a town called Mount Beauty in Victoria’s north-east. The air-con was full-tilt; the January heat easily permeated timber and plasterboard. The house and me within it baked. It was clear that mod-cons and add-ons are no match for the Australian climate – without context-sensitive design, the heat and the vastness will always win.

If architecture is the reimagining of the world as human, what do our buildings say about us? Through choreographed actions and interventions by ambiguous, coloured, ageing or queer bodies into the icons and interiors of Australia, my take on ‘Ugliness’ seeks to question: who holds the right to design our spaces, and who are they designed for? Who shapes our built environment and in turn, how do these forces shape us? In his polemic book, Robin Boyd merged architectural and human skins, suggesting that the way we mask, Alucabond® or distract in our built environments is an allegory for ourselves: *“The ugliness I mean is skin deep... But skin is as important as its admirers like to make it, and Australians make much of it. This is a country of many colourful, patterned, plastic veneers, of brick-veneered villas, and the White Australia Policy.”* Boyd equated our tendency towards the kitsch, the macho and the superficial to a deeper aesthetic and ethical gap in the national psyche. He called this ‘featurism’: a satisfaction with the mediocre or cosmetic. 50 years on we are more self-aware and globalised, yet featurism is still deployed to mask the ingrained colonial fiction of terra nullius; of Indigenous subjugation; of our inhumane treatment of refugees; and a culture that still privileges the white, the male, and the monumental.

As an Australian who is none of those things, I want to continue Boyd’s line of culture-making, to reflect back a vision of this country that is more cacophonous and feminist: both ugly and beautiful. Philip Goad writes that Boyd was a man of ideas who believed design was a practice of “public action with public consequences”. This too is a project that seeks to collide the field of architecture with the every-people who inhabit it, through the projection of ideas. Reflecting on Boyd’s *Antiarchitecture*, Naomi Stead writes: *“Maybe its time has come... to overcome our docile apathy, our polite fatalism, our beholdenness to (apolitical) disciplinary institutions and (repressive) disciplinary canons. Maybe it’s time we finally found our passion and our righteous fury, and joined the protest. Maybe the moment is finally here: to smash open the core of architecture, and be ready to embrace the ‘absolutely different’ social and political antiarchitectural practices we find inside.”*

In the work, I shape-shift as ‘the Ambassador’ across more than 30 sites and spaces across Australia, from Wood Marsh’s enigmatic Gottlieb House (1994) to Peter McIntyre’s elegantly engineered River House (1954) and Cassandra Complex’s ‘trophy home’ for the Smiths, the Smith Great Aussie Home (2006). We visit 91-year-old Myra Demetriou in Tao Gofer’s brutalist social housing project Sirius (1978) in the months before she is forced out and the site of Sydney’s contemporary ‘culture wars’ goes on the market. Looking back to Melbourne from Craigieburn, the work considers the limits of architecture – where are architects absent? Curator and architect Rory Hyde observes that today, architecture is notably absent from the suburbs of Australia, “hitching its wagon to the boutique luxury apartment market of the inner ring. Could these issues be addressed with a new Small Homes Service for today? What would such a program look like? And if he were here now, what would Boyd do?”

A site of ‘eternal return’ in the work is Boyd’s home designed in 1957 for his family in Walsh Street, South Yarra. In 2016-17, I spent time as an artist-in-residence at both Walsh Street and Robin’s cousin Arthur Boyd’s Bundanon (NSW). These experiences researching and experimenting in sites of Boyd work and life have infused this project which, like Boyd’s book, is a site-responsive love letter and critique of our national identity and context. Viewers experience the work in a yellow and gold pavilion, a reimagining of Neptune’s Fishbowl (1970) in South Yarra, one of Boyd’s last projects. Yellow is a direct reference to Ron Robertson-Swann’s *Vault* (1978) or ‘yellow peril’ – a colour that continues to permeate the built fabric of Melbourne and beyond. For John Denton of DCM, original commissioners of Vault and repeat-users of yellow in their architecture, yellow is a provocation: a sign that “design culture has won.” ARM deploys the ‘yellow peril’ typology and colour almost obsessively – even in Asia. As an Asian-Australian born and based in Melbourne, ‘yellow peril’ is in my blood. And, it’s become my own visual shorthand to collide a personal, national and geopolitical exploration of identity.

Eugenia Lim



PUBLIC PROGRAM

The Australian Ugliness is a keynote of this year’s Open House Melbourne program and is accompanied by a series of related public talks. Visit openhousemelbourne.org/the-australian-ugliness for public program updates, bookings and a full list of project collaborators.

6.30pm 24 July
ARCHITECTURE IS EVERYDAY
Theatre B117,
Melbourne School of Design
Featuring Louise Wright (barraco+wright), Philip Goad (Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor and Chair of Architecture, MSD), Monique Woodward (WOWOWA), Jonathan Cowle (Rothelowman) and Emma Telfer (Open House Melbourne).
Free – bookings recommended

12pm daily on Sat 28 July and Sunday 29 July
OPEN HOUSE MELBOURNE WEEKEND
Artist floor talks
Dulux Gallery,
Melbourne School of Design
Eugenia Lim with Andre Bonnice (WOWOWA)
Free – bookings recommended

6.30pm 9 August
OTHERING ARCHITECTURE: DIVERSITY ON SCREEN AND IN SPACE
Robin Boyd Foundation,
Walsh Street South Yarra
Featuring Amos Gebhardt (artist), Reko Rennie (artist), Eugenia Lim (artist), Simona Castircum (musician, performer, DJ and architecture academic).
Tickets: \$20 full / \$15 conc / \$10 foundation members

6.30pm 19 August
GENDER EQUITY: ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS
B121 Theatre,
Melbourne School of Design
Featuring Ingrid Bakker (HASSELL), Cameron Bruhn (Architecture Media) and Eugenia Lim.
Free – bookings recommended

6.30pm 23 August
UGLY-BEAUTIFUL: AESTHETICS AND ICONS IN AUSTRALIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE
Robin Boyd Foundation,
Walsh Street South Yarra
Featuring Andre Bonnice (WOWOWA), Eugenia Lim (artist) and Jonathan Cowle (Rothelowman)
Tickets: \$20 full / \$15 conc / \$10 foundation members

12pm daily on 3, 10 & 19 August
ARTIST FLOOR TALKS
Dulux Gallery,
Melbourne School of Design
Eugenia Lim and collaborators
Free – bookings recommended

This project has been supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts Visual Arts funding, the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, the City of Melbourne’s Arts Grants Program and Gertrude Contemporary’s studio program

Project Collaborators:

Eugenia Lim – writer, director, performer, editor
Alexandra George – producer
Virginia Kay and Jamie Hougé – executive producers
Tim Hillier – cinematographer
Dan West – composition and sound design
WOWOWA with Robin Boyd – installation design
The Post Lounge – Kurt Royan (General Manager), Ela Furdas (Post Producer), Kali Bateman (Colourist), Alan Bennett (Online Editor)
Amos Gebhardt – mentor
Nat Cursio – choreography
Kat Chan – costume design
Julia Spizzica – wardrobe assistant
Tom Ross – stills photographer
Eleanor Orchard, Alice Cummins, James Andrews, Gregory Lorenzutti, Alice Dixon – costumed figures
Dan West, Jessie French, Emma McRae, Georgia Nowak, James Stephens, Louise Terry, Rachel Feery, Simon Winkler, Belle Bassin, Sophia Cameron, Bridie Wilkinson – Walsh St partygoers
Shylo Tui – lighting consultant (Walsh Street)
MADA Wearing the City designers
Tony Isaacson – project manager
Peter Felicetti – structural engineer
Lapel Industries – construction
Paul Christian and Emeile Dawkins – installation
3D Inflate – inflatable
Mitra Farjipoor – curtain maker
Jacqueline Miller and Grace Carver – studio assistants
Warren Davey – signwriter

Thank yous

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Bill Buckley
Byron Scullin
Callum Morton
Dan West
Daniella Salazar
Daria Tolotchkov
Denton Corker Marshall
Diana Streak
Ela Furdas
Emeile Dawkins
Emma Telfer
Glenn Wiley
Grace Carver
Ida Holland Lim
Jacqueline Miller
Jamie Hougé
Jane McIntyre
John Dunn
John Denton
John Wardle
Julia Spizzica
Kali Bateman
Kane Constructions
Kat Chan
Katie Little

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Mohamed Aljibali
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MADA Wearing the City program
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Michele Burder
Nat Cursio
Open House Melbourne
Paul Christian
Phoebe Kramer
Peter McIntyre
Pesa Gottlieb and family
Peter Felicetti
Philippa Knock
Rees Quilford
Quino Holland
Rifat Muharram
Roger Wood
Sara Brocklesby
Save Our Sirius
Serana Smith and family
Shaun Carter
Shylo Tui
Simon Knott
Steve Howden
Susie Quillinan
Susan Boag

Tracy Sutherland
Tamara Baksheev
The entire TAU cast, crew and build team
The Holland Michel family
The Lim family
The Post Lounge
Tim Hillier
Tim Eastaugh
Tom Ross
Tony Isaacson
Virginia Kay
Warren Davey
Wojciech Pluta
Walsh Street partygoers
Zoe Meagher

Location partners
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Australian Academy of Science
AIATSIS
Australian Islamic Centre
MAB NewQuay
Docklands
Melbourne Museum
Melbourne Recital Centre
National Museum of Australia
Save Our Sirius
RMIT University
Scape Swanston
Sydney Opera House
University of Melbourne
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