

## ***Transnational Design Histories***

Livia Lazzaro Rezende and Isabel Rousset

Chair: Jesse Adams Stein

Wednesday 7 August, 5pm - 6:30pm

Maps Room, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

*Livia Rezende and Isabel Rousset explore the ways in which international exchange and transcultural connections inform design and visual histories.*

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 0:05**

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us here. So lovely to see so many of you. My name is Jessie Adam-Stein. I'm here in my capacity as Program Director of History Now 2024, and I'm a member of both the History Council of New South Wales and the Australian Centre for Public History at UTS and part of the UTS School of Design. I'm also the chair for tonight's event.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 0:27**

So before we begin, I'd like to start, as I should, by acknowledging the place upon which we are holding this event on Gadigal country and at the State Library of New South Wales, which is on the top of the hill close to Warrain Sydney Cove. I'd like to acknowledge that the Gadigal are the traditional custodians of this place and pay my respects to elders and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. I'd also like to acknowledge that the disciplines of design history and architectural history are thankfully now beginning to come to grips with the immensely long history of First Nations. Knowledge about making, about design, about materials and about building on country, and this connected way of thinking about design on country is a really fundamental component of understanding Indigenous approaches to design. Country as a concept includes the built environment and objects making up an integrated cultural landscape, not separate things in opposition, not this polarity between the human-made and the natural. Country is all one thing, and I acknowledge Alison Page and Paul Memmott's work in relation to what I just said. Now, although this particular History Now session is not directly addressing First Nations approaches to design or architecture, our speakers today are grappling with how to convey design and architectural histories in the context of the legacies and continuities of colonisation, as well as quite consciously positioning their design and architectural histories in ways that account for a breadth of voices and perspectives, as well as in ways that help us understand our present context, our globalised politics and the built environment. Now, before I expand on today's topic any further, I just want to say a few words about History Now as a whole series.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 2:19**

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History Now is, in fact, a long-running series and it's been handed from group to group and person to person over the years. It's always had the aim to bring excellent historical research into public discourse. We feature professional and academic historians, as well as experts who use historical research in their practice in various ways. So this year for 2024, history now is being coordinated by me, but it sits in multiple places it sits within the History Council of New South Wales, but also through the Australian Centre for Public History. Our venue partner for the in-person events is the State Library of New South Wales. We thank them for the use of their space. In History Now 2024, we have eight sessions. We started in March and we go through to November. You can find out the full program through a quick search engine inquiry.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 3:09**

I think the disciplines of design history and architectural history suffer similar but not quite identical problems. Much of the work that's being done by historians and scholars in these fields today is vastly different, I think, from what many outside of those fields might assume design history and architectural history is about. So there are assumptions that these fields might be just about superficial styling or movements over time, and I don't say this to be snobby or exclusive. It's actually quite the contrary, because the problems of the misunderstanding of these fields are the responsibility of people. Misunderstanding of these fields are the responsibility of people like me, design historians, to address. So I'm the problem, it's me.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 3:53**

A related issue I want to point to is an inherited problem for these disciplines, which is to do with the way design history and architectural history has emerged historically, particularly in Western contexts. They both emerged in different ways, as 20th century studies that were originally focused on style, on connoisseurship and taste and on, for example, the classical orders in architecture and, of course, modernism. That counts for both disciplines and those mid to late 20th century. Ways of understanding design and architecture were very much based and this is not a new critique, this is a very old critique now, but very much based in a canon of a small number of heroic designers and architects who were generally white, male, european or American and whose practice was presented as good design and whose canonical works we were encouraged and I was encouraged at university and undergraduate years to memorise in slide tests, and I did my fair share of memorising for slide tests.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 4:54**

Now, those more traditional approaches to design and architectural history certainly do have some uses. They give us this visual vocabulary, they give us a way of looking, for instance, at the cities around us and understanding those paths in more

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depth and, for example, those you know you still see coffee table design books and architecture books, which still do carry a kind of canonical understanding. They still have functions. For example, they breed interest in design and architecture. So I see them as kind of like a gateway drug. So I am, though, particularly delighted and relieved to say that in the past, say three or four decades, both fields have changed a great deal and are now maturing alongside changes to practice based disciplines in both design and architecture. So the field of inquiry has expanded exponentially and design and architectural histories are now widely understood to be multiple, to be diverse, to challenge more traditional conceptions around design vis-a-vis, for example, gender, race, colonization, universalism, the environment, climate. The list goes on.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 5:58**

So there's certainly been a move away from focusing on style and form toward an appreciation of the complexities of ideas and concepts, towards looking at design in broader social and political and economic contexts, as well as the complexities of how we might evaluate objects and the built environment. Do we look at users? Do we look at designers? Do we look at waste? Do we look at failure? Do we look at what was not built? How does you know class, gender politics have a role? All these questions are now being asked and, most importantly, how does this knowledge about the past meaningfully help us drive change in the present?

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 6:36**

This expansion of what constitutes design and design history, for example, is sometimes seen as a bit of a problem, because once you start expanding the field this far, things become, you know, maybe a little bit vague. But I think, more interestingly, this expansion enables analysis to step into other disciplines. So, for example, I'm not strictly just a design historian, I am other things too, and effectively some of the work I do counts as labour history, for example. So I think in a place such as Australia there is more work to be done in these fields. The fields of design history and architectural history in Australia are really quite small, smaller than Australian history. That's pretty small too. So there are so many more stories to be told and many more avenues to be questioned and analysed.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 7:27**

And in addition to the sort of stultifying weight of the Western canon that I referred to earlier, Australian design history and architectural history has other issues to be grappled with. There's a long history of cultural cringe and a comparatively recent history of colonisation to be dealt with and a fairly anti-intellectual mainstream culture. So our two speakers today are very much engaged in telling more nuanced and interesting stories about design and architecture in our past and what that means for us in the present, both with reference to Australia but also Brazil, and

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most likely we will hear about other places too. Importantly, their analytical lens and approach expands beyond national borders, beyond these more traditional ideas about nationalism, taking into account complex histories involved with the continuing legacies of colonisation and resistance across the globe, as well as histories of migration and cross-cultural connection over time. So Dr Livia Rezende has a PhD in the history of design and is a senior lecturer and postgraduate research coordinator at UNSW Art and Design.

### **Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 8:38**

Her current research examines the formation of transnational networks that led to the institutionalisation of modern design in Latin America during the Cold War. Her previous research discussed national identity formation and raw material displays in 19th century international exhibitions, expositions, universelles and world's fairs. Livia's writing has been published in a number of different texts in academic journals, for example *Design and Displacement*, and she serves as book series editor for Manchester University Press and editor for the *Journal of Design History*. I also note from Livia's LinkedIn profile that she has braved four international relocations and lived in half the planet's continents. So in her paper today, Livia will be asking what does it mean to approach the past from the perspective of design history? Why and how might we approach design history from a transnational lens, and how might transnational design histories be beneficial for places that continually grapple with colonial histories, such as Australia? Please join me in welcoming Livia.

### **Dr Livia Rezende: 9:48**

Well, thank you so much, Jess. Thank you, History Council of New South Wales State Library, UTS, and Jess in particular, because of the invitation to talk about transnational design histories alongside Isabel tonight. I have been working in the field of design history for over 20 years, a field that has existed for at least 50. And, as Jess introduced, I do feel a little bit like I also ought to explain what the field is. So, I am aware that perhaps our field of research, the subjects that we address, our methods of inquiry and our disciplinary positions are not always clear or differentiated from other areas of history. So, for this reason, I'll start my talk by addressing design history as a field and how it can help us explore current and compelling issues affecting the practice of contemporary history. After this introduction, I'll discuss my most recent project and my approaches to the study of history from a transnational perspective. So, is design history a history of beautiful, expensive objects and iconic designers? The short answer is no. Like those working in art or architectural history, design historians address design as an entry point to understand the human condition. In design history, we study artifacts, even those not designed by professional designers, as they still pertain and inform our visual and material culture, past and present. These include, for example, artifacts made in the

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Renaissance, when makers could have identified themselves as draughts people or mathematicians, as your own work testifies, Jess, the boundaries between craft and design are also sometimes blurred, and design historians are very much interested in the blurriness of things and ask why sometimes makers identify themselves as craftspeople and, at other times, as industrial designers, for instance. Artifacts are understood in their wider acceptance. They are not just objects and products. We also investigate interiors, textiles, digital artifacts, designed interactions and services, printed material, exhibitions, and several other things made from human activity. Our methods of analysis are therefore mostly qualitative, and we employ conceptual frameworks from across the humanities. As with other sub-areas of history, design historians engage mostly in archival research and oral histories, but our eyes are mostly drawn to the visual, material, spatial, sensorial and behavioural qualities of our sources. As we'll soon discuss in the context of my most recent research project, design historians also study the formation of the design profession and discipline, again, as entry points to problematize and understand wider social, political, cultural and economic contexts, but I'll come back to this point soon.

**Dr Livia Rezende:** 13:10

Now I'd like to briefly talk to you about one of the objects in design history, and one that you might have seen on the invitation to the event tonight. On the screen, you see a label for what would be considered today an FMCG or a fast-moving consumer good. This label circulated on boxes of bottles of pineapple liquor produced by H Rouquayrol in Brazil and consumed in the 19th century. This label was exquisitely chromolithographed in Paris and printed in two languages. After having been produced in the Brazilian province of Pernambuco, the pineapple liqueur was exported to France and possibly beyond. Another key element that evidences the transnational life of this product hangs above the central depiction of this indigenous woman. These are medals won at world's fairs and international exhibitions that happened across Europe and the United States. Just by looking at those medals, we can tell that this product travelled to Vienna in 1873 to participate in the celebration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It also travelled to Philadelphia in 1876 when the US celebrated its centennial with a World's Fair.

**Dr Livia Rezende:** 14:36

As a design historian, what really interests me in the history of this label is the central image printed on it, an image that also travelled and portrayed the young empire of Brazil overseas. But before I can analyse what is happening in this image, it will be important to talk about this unusual process of colonization and national formation in Brazil. So-called 'discovered' in the 16th century, Brazil remained a

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colonial possession of Portugal for three centuries, a period when millions of indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their land and gradually decimated by war, illnesses, forced labour and other deleterious consequences of colonization. At the same time, millions of peoples were enslaved in Africa, transferred to Brazil, and forced into chattel slavery. In 1808, unexpectedly, Brazil became the seat of the Portuguese Empire when the crown moved to Rio, fleeing the Napoleonic Wars. When the crown left in 1815, the country became the kingdom of Brazil and, after its independence from Portugal, the Empire of Brazil was founded in 1822. Brazil was therefore an empire located on a previous colonial territory and without overseas possessions. So, what we see on the image of this label is a designed attempt at making sense of this complex history while mitigating and erasing colonial violence.

**Dr Livia Rezende: 16:17**

Here, we see a somewhat placid indigenous woman in a neoclassical drapery, leaning on a shield and placed among a crop of pineapples ripe for liquor production. The indigenous woman wears a headgear that resembles a crown, and her shield is stamped with the coat of arms of the Empire of Brazil. So, who is she? Is she someone belonging to the several hundreds of indigenous tribes that existed in what has become known as Brazil? Or, is she a regal figure that oversees international trade with Europe and Brazil's place in the new world order of late 19th century, global capitalist expansion? I propose that the power of this image rests precisely on its indeterminacy and liminality. This figure is both indigenous and regal, naked and primitive, while neoclassical and sophisticated. She represents both the original peoples of Brazil and imperial power. But rather than the peaceful reconciliation that the label was designed to convey, the design historian sees how settler, colonialist myths of the noble savage were created, consumed, and naturalized. The significance of this myth in visual culture is heightened if we consider that this label, or the labels that were part of that collection, were consumed by a population that was vastly illiterate. If I remember my statistics right, about three quarters of Brazilians were illiterate at this time in the late 19th century. This label, as with other popular artifacts that promoted this myth, was an agent in the formation of the Brazilian empire, as it encapsulated and promoted colonialism.

**Dr Livia Rezende: 18:17**

My forays into histories of colonization and colonialism have taken me to a current research project that will culminate in a book named the *Discipline of Modern Design: Professionalization, Modernization and Authoritarianism in Brazil during the Cold War*, with some rough dates between 1947 and 1985. This is the project that I had mentioned before, in which I've been studying the formation of the design profession

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and discipline in Latin America, but, crucially, I have been approaching this history with a transnational lens and considering decolonial approaches as part of my analytical toolbox. The historical problem I've encountered is no longer one of overt colonization, as when writing the history of those labels, but it is a problem that still concerns how colonialism and cultural dominance have been upheld. I'm now faced with the challenge of exploring the lingering effects of cultural dominance in design. I am interested in problematizing how, in regions like Latin America, modern design has been an exclusionary cultural practice that displaced local, place-based ways of knowing and making, as seen in craft, for example. Another example is in the juxtaposition on the screen: on the left-hand side one of the key vehicles for modern design in Latin America, *nueva visión*, issued in Argentina in 1951. In contrast, I put a Brazilian illustrated magazine from circa 1860s to illustrate what is meant by local, place-based ways of knowing and making that have been displaced by this canon, in which I'm going to delve more in a minute. For full disclosure, I am a design practitioner, I was taught design, and a bit like what Jess was saying, when I started doing my design degree I didn't have slide cards to memorize, but that cover of that magazine, that was totally beyond not just my knowledge and my visual culture understanding of what design might have been in Brazil, but it was totally beyond what I could use as my source of investigation during my bachelor's. So obviously, as a good rebel that I am, that's what I did for my master's: I studied 19th century graphic design. But let's contextualize the rationale for this project first before detailing it further.

**Dr Livia Rezende:** 20:59

During the Cold War, Latin America witnessed a boom in modern design practice and the professionalization of the discipline. This resulted from decades of import substitution industrialization policies that aimed at replacing imported goods with domestic production. These policies led to significant industrial and economic growth. This boom was evidenced by the construction of modernist Brasilia, inaugurated in 1960, and the cutting-edge cybernetic project called Cybersyn in Chile, developed between 1971 and 1973. Alongside this prosperous moment for design, the region became the focus of intense geopolitical tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, as exemplified by the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. So-called 'anti-communist' intervention in the region resulted in several military coups and the installation of authoritarian regimes backed by the United States. So, one of the key premises of my research project is to ask how and why the institutionalization and professionalization of modern design was associated with the rise of authoritarianism underpinned by Cold War politics. This is a history to be written from a transnational perspective, not only because of US interventions, but also because the modern design practice to which I've been alluding has a long and

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complex history that cannot be delimited by national borders. So, what is modern design? This term denotes a specific way of designing that is ruled by industrial processes and that accepts as valid design artifacts that have been industrially manufactured and that follow certain tenets.

**Dr Livia Rezende: 22:54**

Modern design has a history linked to the interwar period, the Republic of Weimar, and the opening of the Bauhaus in 1919. The Bauhaus was an art and design school that, motivated by the destructions of World War I, fomented the rethinking of the relationship between Western society and its cultural material production. The social reform project of the Bauhaus was later taken up by another German design school in the aftermath of World War II. The Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, considered Bauhaus' successor in design education.

**Dr Livia Rezende: 23:34**

Out of Germany and Switzerland came this approach to designing that became known as die Gute Form, or 'Good Design', which was one of the key pillars of post-war modern design. Adepts of good design proposed functionalism as the key guiding principle and rationale for making and consuming artifacts in the post-war period. Among several dictums of the good design credo, one could find: 1) that product formal laws should be based on elementary geometry, or that 2) form and colour must be restrained, or even that 3) embellishments or decoration of any unnecessary detail must be rejected. These are well exemplified by, on the right hand side, one of Max Bill's designs from 1949. In Europe, some of these dictums stemmed from post-war efforts for denazification and eradication of nationalist symbols from the collective consciousness, efforts for the rationalization of construction and use of materials, and also for the internationalization of democratic values and their promotion in design practice and artifacts. However, in other parts of the world, these modern design dictums literally dictated what would be a valid form for products and visual communication in an industrial age.

**Dr Livia Rezende: 25:12**

The post-war transnational exchanges between international designers and their Brazilian counterparts were multifarious and lasted for decades. Crucially, these exchanges with key actors in Latin America, Europe and the US promoted this, the institutionalization and professionalization of design in Brazil mostly predicated on those modern design, or, even, the 'good design' dictums that I've just explained. To illustrate some of these exchanges, we could mention Max Bill, the former



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Bauhausler, who between 1953 and 1956 directed the Hochschule für Gestaltung, which I'll start calling HfG in Ulm, to save you from my German pronunciation, or just Ulm, and Max Bill's ideas were actually impactful in Brazil. His artwork was exhibited and awarded in the first São Paulo Art Biennale in 1951, and further visits ensued in the following years.

**Dr Livia Rezende: 26:21**

The 1960s saw the flows between Brazil and Germany-based designers strengthened. Brazilian design students who had studied in Ulm returned to the country alongside German and Swiss Ulm alumni to promote the ideas of modern design and 'good form'. Ulm staff included Joseph Albers and Abraham Moles, who also engaged with Brazilian design institutions and travelled to Brazil to teach. Max Bense, another staff from Ulm, travelled the country four times and published the book *Brazilian Intelligence*, where he narrated his encounters with artists and intellectuals who, he hailed, had the capacity to look towards the modern. Otl Aicher, and Argentinian artist and design educator, Tomás Maldonado – the two key figures behind Ulm–, also taught a visual communication course in Rio's Museum of Modern Art, in 1959. This course, which was intended to be a pilot for a larger project known as Escola Técnica de Criação, or, School for Technical Creativity. Although this school did not eventuate, another design school known as ESDI was founded in 1963. Today, ESDI is considered the first and one of the main modern design schools in Latin America, which was predicated on the Ulm model for design education and, for full disclosure, that is where I was educated in design, I think you probably have guessed it, right?

**Dr Livia Rezende: 27:52**

Unlike other revisionist histories of modernism, my research also explores the rise in modern design practice, professionalization, and education in Brazil from the perspective of economic and industrial policies implemented by the military. Politically speaking, the establishment of modern design institutions in Brazil coincided with the civil-military coup that ousted President João Goulart in 1964, with the backing of the Lyndon Johnson administration and the US Central Intelligence Agency. After the coup, the tightening of the military regime in 1968 led Brazilian society into a long and brutal period of censorship, suspension of human rights and widespread state violence and torture, and I haven't put it here, but I just realized I didn't mention that the processes of re-democratization that started around the late 1970s were very protracted in Brazil and re-democratization only eventuated in 1985.

**Dr Livia Rezende:** 29:03

But for many, the history of dictatorship had an upside. Brazilian military governments implemented heavy-handed and anti-democratic economic and financial policies which, coupled with large multinational infrastructure projects, led the country to extraordinary economic growth. The temporal alignment between these two events on the one hand, the consolidation of modern design practice and education in Brazil, on the other hand, the Brazilian 'economic miracle' meant that designers helped advance the military's national modernization agenda. This association is evidenced, for example, in the numerous visual identity projects that provided a modern language to state companies and infrastructural developments and that ended up underwriting the military's modernization and nation-building efforts.

**Dr Livia Rezende:** 30:03

To conclude, I hope that the links between the adoption of modern design in Brazil and authoritarianism are becoming clearer. To the extent to which the practice of modern design and authoritarianism intersected forms my key research question. The recent rise of far-right politics and conservatism across the globe also drive my inquiry. In Brazil, this rise has manifested in the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro in 2019. More recently, far-right uprisings led to the failed military coup in January 2023, when a mob of discontents, guided by Bolsonaro's acolytes, stormed into the legislative chambers in Brasilia to impede elected President Lula's inauguration. Needless to say, this uprising mirrored the 2021 Capitol attacks in the US. Perhaps another transnational history there...

**Dr Livia Rezende:** 30:59

Through a transnational approach to design history, my project provides much-needed new insight into key contemporary debates, including the role that design and designers have played in averting or promoting authoritarianism. And, as I have announced on Instagram today, this is the world's premiere of the project! Nobody knew about it until I came here apart from me, my mentor and the publisher. So. please watch this space. Ask me as many questions as you can, if that has interested you, during our Q&A, because it's going to be incredibly important to see where I can take this project. Thank you so much.

**Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 31:57**

Thank you, Livia. I'll just introduce Dr Isabel Rousset. She's an architectural historian and research fellow at the University of Technology Sydney. Her research explores historical cross-sections between art, architecture and politics. Her book, the Architecture of Social Reform was published by Manchester University Press and it explores how the past was used to shape debates on housing design in modern Germany. Isabel's current research, which I think is what we're gonna hear about today, explores the experiences and impact of Central European migrant architects in Australia. So in her presentation today, Isabel will introduce a pretty new project. So again, it's really exciting to see the brand new projects being shared, but I will let Isabel tell us all about that. Thank you very much. Please join me in welcoming Isabel.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 32:52**

Thank you also to Jesse, thank you for inviting me to present, thank you for organising this incredible series and thank you also to the partners for putting this whole event together. And I'd also like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, on whose lands we gather this evening and pay my respects to elders past and present. So this evening I'd like to present my current research, which examines the phenomenon of transnational migration of architects who trained in Central Europe and who, by force or by choice, came to practice in Australia. And this is certainly not a new topic, but it has had a presence in scholarship ever since the history of architecture in this part of the world began to be written.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 33:44**

In Australian ugliness, a book I'm sure you're all familiar with, Robin Boyd famously talked of the contribution of Central European migrant architects in disapproving terms, describing the prevalence of featurism in the 1950s. Boyd wrote that quote. At this time, the Australian scene was undergoing another, more important change an injection of something like 10% of continental European stock into its Anglo-Saxon blood. As numerous observers forecast, this transfusion was enormously beneficial to the patient in many fields, such as coffee making, music skiing and the stocking of delicatessen shops. But, contrary to some prophets, it did not assist in broadening or sharpening the taste as manifest in the suburban street end quote.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 34:40**

Since Boyd's critique there's been plenty of literature that has provided a corrective, recognising not just Harry Seidler as the most convincing representative of a Bauhaus-style modernism in Australia, but the work of other migrants who helped catalyse the nation's embrace of modernism. This literature has helped expand the

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canon and destabilise the Britain-centric view of modernism's arrival advanced by John Maxwell Freeland and Donald Leslie Johnson. So this is the literature here that I refer to. So if this literature has largely focused on the question of the migrant contribution, architectural historian Mariana Lozanovska has recently provided additional balance, focusing on the forces in Australian society that have habitually excluded migrants from the profession. But in this talk I'd like to reflect on how we might write design histories on transnational migration. Now I'd like to ask not what migrants tell us about a national history of Australian architecture, but rather to ask how architecture reflects migrant experiences of cultural displacement. So I'll spend the rest of this talk offering a brief narration of the career of Hungarian-born Perth architect Julius Elisha and he's a white male European, so sorry about that, that's not quite the brief that I was given.

### **Dr Isabel Rousset: 36:24**

Boccia was born in 1918 in the midst of political turmoil following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the formation of a much truncated Hungarian Democratic Republic. He began his architectural studies in Budapest in 1937 at the Royal Joseph Polytechnic University. He received a scholarship to attend the Bauhaus but had his plans thwarted by its closure and the imminent breakout of World War II. After imprisonment and subsequent escape from Soviet forces in Hungary in 1951, he emigrated to Australia to seek better opportunities. Elisha worked briefly for the local architect Reginald Summerhays before gaining registration with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in the 60s. His best known work the Fuchs Taylor Furniture Showroom of 1965, launched his career and he would remain in Perth.

### **Dr Isabel Rousset: 37:19**

Elisha's style alternated between bold Corbusian sculptural gestures for civic works and a more conventional Mediterranean idiom for residential works in the tradition of Perth locals Marshall Clifton and Gus Ferguson, a tradition discussed recently by Duncan Richards and Andrew Murray, recently by Duncan Richards and Andrew Murray. Elisha's residential work in particular was instrumental in bringing spec building to Perth, much of it realised in the then fashionable Spanish mission style. His residential complexes were the first on the west coast to take a fully integrated spatial, visual and landscaped approach to suburban residential building in Landahl's Mediterranean village. Nonetheless, home buyers on a tight budget were given the semblance of choice with available house types, including the Attica, the Andalusia, the Almalfi and the Ancona. Equally important in Elisha's practice was a string of houses he constructed in the late 1960s for a clientele of Nouveau-Riche Italian immigrants, including the Branchi House, the Smetana House and the D'Orsonia House you can still buy D'Orsonia ham in Woolworths I think they all combined the architect's quintessential cubic forms with eclectic Italianate elements, including

generous patios and Elisha's characteristic balustrades. It was in these houses that Elisha began to work closely with brass designer Stelio Cotterley, whom I have not managed to find out much information so far. But after migrating from Trieste in northern Italy and initially working in the refrigeration factory, cotterley achieved rapid success, catering to Perth's growing elite with opulent and unique brass furniture and fittings.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 39:14**

Elisha's later works ventured into a more featurest mode, such as in the Yokine Baptist Church of 1971, a modernist box with the words Jesus said lead the way, carved conspicuously in brick in the spirit of a Venturian decorated shed. Yet there is little evidence to show that Elisha kept abreast with international trends in post-modernism. Unlike Venturi's modesty, elisha bothered little with theory. No building encapsulates Elisha's sincerity better than one of his later works, and it's this work that I give most attention in the remainder of this talk.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 39:56**

El Caballo Blanco, a kitschy Moorish-themed hotel and equestrian centre in the rural district of Ruraloo, one hour outside of Perth, and so this is not the Sydney one that I'm sure you're more familiar with. El Caballo Blanco was the latest venture of Perth entrepreneur and owner of Tip Top Butchers, ray Williams, who in 1969 bought the 13 acre property with dreams to establish a world-class stable for cross-breeding Spanish horses, which could also serve as a lucrative resort centre. During his travels around Spain in search of a purebred Andalusian stallion, william met his second wife, edith Evans Williams, a Texan breeder and the world's first female bullfighter who would accompany Williams back to Western Australia. To become El Caballo Blanco's chief performer For the centre's architecture, elisha worked with a team of very recent migrants the builders Angela and Vincenzo La Carva and the designer Stelio Cotterley. The builders Vincenzo La Cava and the designer Stelio Cotterley. The builders Vincenzo and Angela La Cava likewise migrated from Italy in 1956 and 1958, respectively, angela arriving when she was just 14 years old. Shortly after meeting at a dance in Perth, they married and started La Cava Construction Company. Angela began studying at Leederville TAFE, becoming the first woman in the state to receive a certificate in building and construction. After managing a handful of construction projects in City Beach, it must have been an incredible feeling for Vincenzo and Angela the latter still only 28, to have received a multi-million dollar commission for the equestrian fantasy land, the most capital-intensive tourist project yet to be built in the state. El Caballo Blanco encapsulated the synergy of these new ideas and materials flowing into WA. Oh, sorry, I've missed a paragraph there. The commission would allow the Locavas to establish Interceramics, one of the first outlets for Italian ceramic tiles in WA, and eventually to importing and fabricating marble, granite and limestone. The showroom of their stone processing factory in Osborne Park bears

another migrant connection as one of the last works of Harry Seidler. So El Caballo Blanco encapsulates the synergy of these new ideas and materials flowing into WA.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 42:27**

Arriving off the greatest eastern highway, the spectacular entry, wrapped by sweeping lodges and framed with reflective pools, would have immediately transported visitors right back to 11th century Al-Andalus. In the central interior, a network of bars, foyer spaces and restaurant space, guests would experience a kaleidoscope of columns and exaggerated horseshoe arches dotted with fountains, pools, gardens and courtyards. In the two central interior courtyards. Elish's keen spatial sense combined with the material opulence of the carver's colourful tiling I think I might be behind on my slides here. Colourful tiling and Cotterley's lighting fixtures and blue metal work to create a total artwork. Elish's characteristic balustrades frame the outdoor arena where spectators would watch the Spanish horses kneel and dance. The Moorish flourishes extend onto the motel wing framed around a pool, providing guests with the perfect escape from the monotony of suburban Perth.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 43:47**

El Caballo Blanco's homogenised and exoticised display of Spanish culture undoubtedly helped sharpen WA's claim to be a tourist destination offering unique experiences. The opening of the Equestrian Centre in 1973 coincided with the launch of WA Tourism, that WA Tourism Bureau's new and ultimately much ridiculed slogan Relax in a State of Excitement. During the first few years, el Caballo attracted thousands of tourists weekly, becoming the main cultural drawcard in the state. Wa's obsession with the Mediterranean continued on in other leisure projects, public and private, from Gus Ferguson's powerful and enduring tourist accommodation on Rottnest Island to Alan Bond's ambitious Yanchep Sun City development. The latter included Forbes and Fitzharding's acclaimed Two Rocks Town Centre model on the Mediterranean village, along with the less convincing but nonetheless popular Greco-Roman Atlantis Marine Park. After increasing pressure from environmentalists, its performing dolphins were set free in 1990 and the park shut down. Like El Caballo, it now stands derelict, although the limestone statue to Neptune that probably overlooked the park still stands as a much-loved local icon.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 45:08**

The Mediterranean obsession proved to be brief, as leisure patterns shifted away from theme parks and tourists began to seek new experiences that aligned culturally with the Pacific and Indian Ocean worlds, rather than the Mediterranean. The 1980s would be defined by large corporate driven infrastructure projects such as John Andrews Portman-esque Merlin Hotel, city Merlin Hotel in Perth. City Projects like Merlin, in the words of one critic, brought an element of downtown Dallas glitz to

Perth, catering to tourists quote burdened with travel fatigue and American Express cards. Meanwhile, el Caballo Blanco continued to operate as a hotel. Ray Williams went on to establish another El Caballo resort in New South Wales before selling both and trying his luck with similar ventures in the United States. Abandoned by his wife, Edith, and facing increasing financial woes and an Alzheimer's diagnosis, he died in 1983 of self-inflicted gunshot wounds. The Worralloo Equestrian Centre would continue to operate as a hotel and golf resort even after its horses had long departed and, according to its online reviews, offered an increasingly underwhelming experience until it eventually shut its doors in 1999.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 46:31**

So I'd like to spend the conclusion of this talk speculating on the significance of this commission for Julia's Elisha. One might be tempted to read El Caballo Blanco as an oddity in the oeuvre of this Hungarian-born architect who in his youth, aspired to reach the Bauhaus and who brought the most convincing interpretation of international-style modernism to Perth in the Fuchs-Taylor showroom. The 2003 exhibition on Elisha, held at UWA, that's, the University of Western Australia's Cullity Gallery, rightfully championed Elisha's combined studio and residence in Broadway, Netherlands, shown here, built in 1969. An exploded modernist box on the exterior. The interior nonetheless conveys something more romantic, featuring as its centrepiece an elaborate winding metal staircase that culminates in an abstract aluminium rose window by Stelio Cotterley. The exhibition notes the radical notion of mixed-use living offered by the Elisha studio. Radical notion of mixed-use living offered by the Elisha studio.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 47:44**

But in fact Elisha's main residence, main family residence, was located in a much more conventional suburban street in Netherlands, in a Spanish-themed house he designed for himself in 1976.

**Dr Isabel Rousset: 47:56**

Its exterior, with its remarkable entrance gate, likewise likely designed by Stelio Cotterley, clearly takes El Caballo Blanco as its departure point. At the centre of the house plan is void an open courtyard that, by an account of one of my architecture students seemingly exhibits a modernist sense of free planning, but more likely it conveys Elisha's deeply felt sympathies with the architecture of Moorish Spain acting as a foil to his more pragmatic, public-facing modernist works. The Moorish-inspired paintings and sculptures of horses are dotted throughout, maintained faithfully by the architect's daughter, Francesca, until the recent sale of the house. In the context of Elisha's personal biography, at least, the commission of the equestrian centre seems to have functioned as a salve for the psychological and physical wounds inflicted by his European experience of war and a sense of cultural displacement.

## Transcription

Recreated in Elish's Netherlands residence, el Caballo Blanco provided the architect with a necessary form of escapism. So I'll leave it there and I'll look forward to.

**Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 49:23**

Thank you so much, Livia and Isabel. Let's give them a clap and also just to acknowledge that events such as these are not just done by me. We are part of a team. So the History Council of New South Wales I do want to acknowledge Catherine Shirley, who has been recording today and does all the back-end work making it all happen, Amanda Wells and Lauren Chater. We've thanked the State Library for their venue and I guess also just to say what's coming up, the History Council.

**Dr Jesse Adams Stein: 49:53**

We have History Week next month. The theme for the entire week is marking time. If you're an academic, that might mean something slightly different, but that's not quite what we mean. It has much more interesting connotations and part of that week is the annual history lecture and awards night and the lecturer is Frank Bongiorno. That should be fascinating. That's on the 10th of September and then the following month. More Than Human Histories is the History Now topic for October. On the 10th of September and then the following month. More Than Human Histories is the History Now topic for October. On the 16th of October here in the MAPS room at 5pm with Emily O'Gorman and Taylor Coyne. I should also note the History Council receives funding from New South Wales Government via Create New South Wales. Very important to acknowledge that and I really hope to see you all at the next History Now event or at the annual history lecture or at other History Week events. Thank you for being such a lovely audience. See you again, bye-bye, applause.