

EXHIBITION » PUBLIC OFFER

PROJECT ROOMS 1 AND 2 » 1 FEBRUARY – 27 MARCH 2013

PUBLIC OFFER – WAYS TO SHARE DESIGN PIN. LIKE. PRINT. POST.



An initial public offering (IPO) involves shares of a stock in a company being first sold to the general public. To buy into the equity of a business suggests there is something of value to share — even if this value depends upon metrics that fluctuate as much as the financial markets. The idea of making a ‘public offer’, to share and exchange value, also suggests having a position on what is of value to a broader audience.

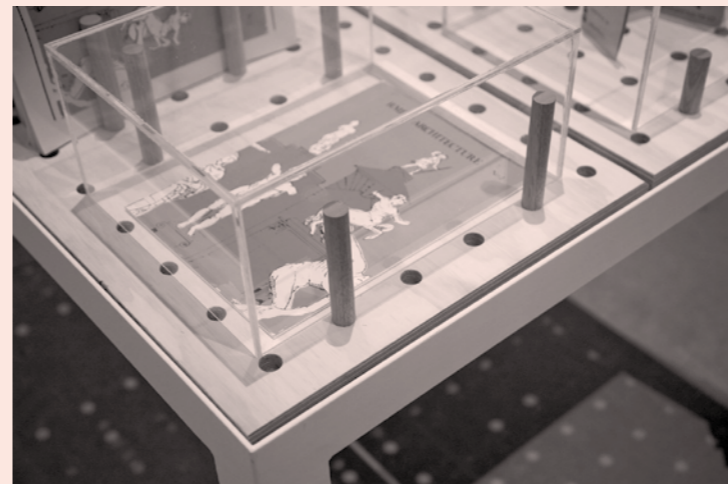
It is the sharing and broadcasting of value that goes to the crux of *Public Offer*, a survey of design publishing in Melbourne over the last 60-odd years. In this exhibition, this declaration of worth is made by designers as a social projection, a proposition that says ‘We have something to say: Is anyone listening?’ It is the generous, sometimes arrogant or angry, but always enthusiastic and usually polemical publishing of viewpoints or a call made to convene. This public offering is at times a reaction: tired with what’s on offer and seeking change, or seeing an abyss and wanting to fill a gap. Just read the editorials of issue number one or the initial postings of each publication, regardless of the discipline, and you will discover that the public offer is made in clear terms: the thirst to engage.

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Designers in Melbourne have long been part of this public offering, sharing their views on such things as the state of practice, on being a designer, design education and the design industry. *Public Offer – Ways to Share Design* aggregates various discussion platforms that have existed since the mid twentieth century — zines and magazines, journals, posters, newsletters, blogs, apps, informal exchange circles and clubs and radio shows. Public Offer includes both printed and online publications and many hardcopy titles are strengthened and expanded with social media tools. The exhibition features commercial mainstream, academic and independent and alternative titles, each with wildly different funding structures and formats from high gloss mass printing to the handmade with painstaking, individual tip-ins.¹ Some are text heavy, journal-of-record type publications, others are almost entirely image-driven and multiple languages, styles and disciplinary jargon are used. Editorial boards and committees guide some magazines and others are directed by a single voice (and these extremes are often only obvious after reading the colophon, such is the accessibility of high quality printing and publishing tools available today). Some publications are professionally circulated (not only the commercial ones) while some editors note ‘shop-dropping’ as a method of dissemination.²

The exhibition collates serial, even if irregular or thwarted publishing efforts (where in some cases only one issue was ever produced). The net effect is to see, hear and feel how publishing, and the people who publish, have shaped the broader conversation about this city, its design culture and issues beyond over the last 60 plus years. In part, *Public Offer* is an exhibition of knowledge objects and knowledge experiences. Through this presentation (of fashion, architecture, industrial design, landscape architecture, graphic design and the linked circles of music, literature and the arts), the show prompts the questions: What have designers had to say over this time? What have designers offered by going public with their ideas, writing, projects and criticism?

Melbourne has been chosen as a specific parameter, as has the rhythm of the periodical, so that our look into publishing is necessarily selective. We are intrigued by this desire to make a public offer, and to share design, in a committed and regular way, even if in fits and starts, that stretches over time and builds a readership community. Sometimes the publications in the exhibition folded because of a lack of time and energy or friction between their makers, but more often than not a lack of money is the cause – rather than real social dysfunction. The social, indeed local, aspect of publishing – between publishers, editors, writers, distributors and readers is the design glue making the whole system function. All the publications, or their makers, lived or now live in Melbourne. Collecting the makers in a ‘people archive’ is essential to *Public Offer*. The assembled material in the exhibition is unpacked through several voices that have become additional audio guides. These personal narratives are accompanied by a program of public activities including sports, evening drinks, roundtables, coffee breaks, beamer presentations and talks that recreate the communal space vital for an exchange of ideas.



Top left: Projections, Project Space 2.
Top right: Exhibition detail
Bottom: Project Space 2

Clockwise from top: View of exhibition design
by SIBLING, detail of table adjustment system,
view through gallery, detail of table design

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Melbourne-based collective SIBLING has been commissioned to create the exhibition design for *Public Offer*. The layout is outfitted to recall a sports field – tapping into sport’s quality of the to-and-fro and its social dimension. Wooden bleachers are a significant feature of the design – they offer a place to view the exhibition and associated public programs, other exhibition visitors and they encourage the dimension of ‘slow’ that is inherent to an exhibition where reading is the primary way to consume what is on display. To that end, wooden gymnastic rings have been used as levers to pull hinged sections of the exhibition tables up and down so visitors are encouraged to find their preferred reading positions – as they can in the domed reading room at the State Library down the street – as well as browse, flick and linger. A netball / badminton court is part of the exhibition, directly bringing the themes of the back and forth of informal exchange and sharing into the room. In the middle of the exhibition is a making space – an open workshop / print shop zone where designers are taking up residence to make within this exhibition about making, to ‘crack open’ aspects of how a publication is put together and to encourage visitors to create, critique and experiment too.

Sport’s competitive quality is also brought to bare and has been used to highlight the co-locating of two exhibitions within *Public Offer*. The international touring exhibition *Archizines* curated by Elias Redstone brings ninety architecture-focused publications from more than twenty countries into the exhibition space, alongside video interviews with their makers.³ These contemporary magazines, pamphlets, fanzines and journals face off with the publications in *Public Offer* – one kitted in blue, the other in grey bookmarks that contain basic cataloguing details.⁴ The most obvious distinction between the two, apart from how publications from ‘here’ compare with those from ‘elsewhere’, *Archizines* is of the post-internet era, while *Public Offer* sweeps across several decades giving us the linear (print) vs time flux (online). *Archizines* and *Public Offer* are part of a series of recent exhibitions on design publishing, with the zines of the 1960s and 70s research project, book and exhibition *Clip/ Stamp/ Fold* possibly being the best known.⁵ These exhibitions have raised questions such as ‘Is the publication still the relevant place to make radical statements about practice?’ and ‘Who gets to make their opinions public?’

To make *Public Offer* we met with many people, enjoyed many phone and email conversations. Our publications master list was sent far and wide for feedback and input. We ran a number of discussion circle events to bring diverse minds together, where memories and theories were bounced back and forth. There are some publications that only exist as a vague memory for people – a launch attended, a copy once flicked through or owned for a short time, a club joined or even just heard about was sometimes all that could be found. While not all the suggested or remembered publications could be tracked down, we have attempted to capture these ‘publication shadows’ in the timeline presented within the exhibition, which provides context, information on formats and an ability to see what is happening across the disciplines, both in print and online.

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Many of the publications – at the time cheaply made and ephemeral – are now rare and fragile so simple facsimiles have been made (with the originals on sealed display) enabling visitors to still read the content and get a sense of the layouts and rhythms of these publications. We also understand the exhibition to be ‘live’. That is, we hope it will grow as the publications we’ve not yet uncovered are brought to light, or new information about the publications we have found is revealed. We hope that *Public Offer* jogs more thoughts and resonances and encourages writers, readers and publishers.

With such a huge quantity of printed and online matter collated in the exhibition, the task is shared with visitors to interpret the threads and the shapes of the content on show and to unpick the stories that 60 years of publishing might tell. There are multiple narratives and ideological battles to be found here. *Public Offer* presents one history; the next phase of its meaning is coupled to those are willing to engage with it.

Public Offer is the inaugural exhibition of RMIT Design Hub – a new creative home for design in Melbourne. Design Hub is the first purpose-built space in this city dedicated exclusively to design research, exhibitions and associated activities. In Melbourne, design does not have the number or diversity of physical spaces for meeting, exhibiting and conversation common to the visual arts. Physical spaces and the regularity of exhibition programming in the visual arts mean that this community frequently sees one another and a dialogue is established that is both social and critical. We speculate that the lack of spaces for meeting around design has had some impact on how design is communicated – both amongst designers and the public. Arguably, this impact has been negative, at times creating disciplinary silos, cliques rather than open platforms for conversation, and only a small community of critics or opinion-leaders who are both generous and constructively critical. We find that some disciplines publish more than others – architecture publications, in particular, dominate *Public Offer*. (Perhaps it is easier to publish than to build.) Physical places to gather or ‘places to meet’ on paper or online encourage networks of dialogue and the need for independent thought, as architect and writer Pedro Godanho notes, has a permanent urgency.⁶ In this way, that *Public Offer* is the first exhibition at the Design Hub is highly appropriate. This new home wants to be the place for these meetings of diverse disciplines, skills, genders and agendas to meet and grow our collective thinking.

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Endnotes

1. A tip-in is adding an additional leaf of paper or card into an already formatted printed booklet or magazine.
2. Also known as reverse shoplifting, shop-dropping describes the act of sneaking specifically marked items into a shop and placing them on display.
3. *Archizines* has been significantly updated for Melbourne. In its first exhibition at the Architectural Association in London, sixty publications were shown.
4. According to curator Elias Redstone, *Archizines* celebrates the resurgence of alternative and independent architectural publishing in recent years. Edited by architects, artists and students, these new publications provide platforms for commentary, criticism and research into the spaces we inhabit and the practice of architecture. The *Archizines* project was initially presented online to catalogue, celebrate and promote this explosion of publishing activity.
5. The exhibition *Clip/Stamp/Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines, 196X – 197X* tracked the critical function of the ‘little magazine’ in architecture when a remarkable outburst of publications disseminated and catalyzed a range of experimental practices. See also *Midnight Oil* (2006) an exhibition curated by Stuart Geddes and Ray Edgar exploring independent magazine publishing in Melbourne, pre blogs and webzines.
6. Pedro Godanho, ‘On Experimental Architectural Writing and its Media’ *Archizines* Bedford Press: London, 2011.

List of publications

Ad Art (also Advertising Art), Ampersand, An Indulgence, Archetype, Architecture and Arts, Architecture Australia, Architectural Design Research, Architectural Review Asia Pacific, Architect Victoria, Arkatekcha, Art Deco Buildings, Art Directors Society, Artichoke, Australian InFront, Australian Fashion News, Backlogue: Journal of the Half Time Club, Boyd Homes Group, Burning Down The House, Butterpaper, Cemetery Zine, Collecting Melbourne, Collections Magazine: Pictures Worth 1000 Words, Condiment: Adventures in Food and Form, Craft Culture, Critical Cities, Cross Section, Crowd, Curve, Cut, Design Files, Design Ink, Design World, Design Reporter, Designer Dialect, Desktop, Dream Build, E 1207, Endless Lonely Planet, Exedra, F de C de Rigueur Reader, Fallen, Fashion-Able, Fashion Films, Fashion in Australia, Fashion Torque Show, Fast Forward, Festival of The Photocopier, Footpath Zeitgeist, Freerange Journal, Fresh!, Good Bad and the Ugly, Half Time Club, Head Full of Snakes, Helter Shelter, Hetrochronia, Higher Arc, I Don’t Wear Black, Imaginary Alphabets, I Love Hot Bread Rolls, Index: Index the Arts, INK, Is Not Magazine, Jason McDermott, January Biannual, Kerb, LAG, Landscape Architecture Australia, Leave Room For Growth, Leo Greenfield, Line Feed, Lines, Made Quarterly, Meet Me in the Streets, Melbourne Curious, Melbourne Type, Meta, Mongrel: Issue + Subaud, Monument, Name, New Architects Melbourne, Nevolution, Nitty Gritty, NO FRILLS, Note to Self, Panifilocaldai, Parlour, Patterns of Creative Aggression, Pataphysics, Pecha Kucha, Post, Poster, Process Journal, QWERTY, RANT, Re:Collection, Response, RMIT Architecture, RMIT Design Archive Journal, Rory Hyde Blog, Sacred Spaces, Serps, Slave, Calories, Sandwich, Sneaker Freaker, Smudges, Society of the Ambulant Cheese, Subaud, Sub Plot, Studley Park Modern, Stuffed, Stuffing, Straight to the Pool Room, Style Standards, TED X Melbourne, The Architects, The Babel Fiasco, The Interior, The Island Continent, The Urbanist, Temper, Tension, The Design Papers, The Virgin Press, They Shoot Homos Don’t They?, Transition, Type Club, UME, Urban Design Forum, Women’s Winter School of Feminism and Architecture, Westinghouse, WON, Xenodochium, 21•C, 38South: The Graduate Journal of Architecture and Urban Design from RMIT.

Public Offer:

Timothy Moore is partner of architecture practice SIBLING

Kate Rhodes is Curator at RMIT Design Hub

Three Thousand is a presenting partner of Public Offer

Public Offer is an official part of the 2013 L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival Cultural Program

Exhibition Dates: 1 February – 27 March 2013

Curators: Timothy Moore, Kate Rhodes

Exhibition Design: SIBLING

Research Assistant: Andrew Murray

Design Hub Curator: Fleur Watson

Creative Production: Nella Themelios

Exhibition Technician: Erik North

Volunteer (Production): Elisheva Elsass, Esther Stewart

Fashion Film Curation: Nicole Rose of Rose Coloured World

Exhibition Room Guide: Fabio Ongarato Design

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Thank you to all of those who have lent publications to the exhibition and who are participating in our public programs

Thank you to Imagetec for assistance with the Risograph printer

Opening Hours:

Monday – Friday, 11am – 6pm

Closed Public Holidays

Admission is free

Café:

Monday – Friday, 7am – 4:30pm

The Café is located in the forecourt and accessible via the Victoria Street entrance

RMIT Design Archives:

By Appointment

The RMIT Design Archives is located on the western side of the forecourt. Contact the Archives to make an appointment to view the collection:
rmitdesignarchives@rmit.edu.au

Location:

Building 100, Corner Victoria and Swanston Streets, Carlton, 3053

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