

Joe Greenberg

Joe Greenberg was a leading Australian graphic designer whose career spanned five decades. An early work of note was a poster commissioned by the Commonwealth department of Information in 1948 entitled 'Australia, land of Tomorrow', which was displayed in a number of migrant camps throughout Europe. Greenberg was later told by a Czech immigrant that it had influenced him to come to Australia (Museum Victoria 2008)

Joe Greenberg's first period of enrolment in the Swinburne School of Art was 1940-41 when he studied Commercial Art aged 16. He recalled elements of the syllabus, doing traditional skill-building exercises such as drawing from still lifes and plaster casts of leaves in the academic tradition and studying lettering. He considered a highlight of the course were classes of life drawing from the nude with noted Australian artist William Dargie. Students under Dargie's instruction referred to Grays' *Anatomy* in order to draw the human figure with great accuracy.

Commercial Art students in the School of Art, including Greenberg, sought foreign magazines—mostly American rather than British editions — such as *American Artist*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Cosmo*, which published the work of top international commercial artists. He considered that the Swinburne library was poorly stocked with these kinds of publications during his studies. At this time illustrations for fiction books were well paid and Swinburne students who were headed for a career in illustration sought to learn about best practice through imported publications.

With the outbreak of World War II Greenberg's education was interrupted while he served in the AIF for three and a half years in New Guinea and the islands of New Britain to its north. After the war ended he returned to study at Swinburne on a Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme award from September 1945 until September 1947. Among his fellow students whose studies were interrupted by war service was flay Crooke, who would become a become a significant Australian artist in the post-war period for his expressive works representing the life, heat and colours of far North Queensland and the Pacific Islands.

On completing his training Greenberg worked for the Herald and Weekly Times book department creating promotional designs. In 1949 he drew political cartoons for the left-wing Guardian newspaper for a year, taking over from leading Australian artist and activist Noel Counihan while he travelled abroad. Greenberg reflected that artists in the 1950s competed for limited opportunities and sought to sell their work to newspapers, print shops and

advertising agencies. He held memberships of ACIM, which looked after the interests of commercial artists and industrial designers, and was also a member of the Australian Journalists Association.

Greenberg participated in the rich creative life of Melbourne that began to flourish after the war. Australia's leading architect critic and cultural theorist of the post war period, Robin Boyd, designed his first home. He attended the New Theatre in Flinders Street, which put on left-wing plays and attended screenings Italian films in cinemas throughout the city. He recalled the growth of Melbourne's European- style cafes and restaurants with great pleasure. The Art Directors' Cafe and Pelligrini's in Bourke Street were favoured designers' haunts.

A designer's group was formed, presumably over good lunches at such cafes, called the Society of the Ambulant Cheese, which later grew into the Art Director's Society. There were seven original members including Greenberg, most of whom were freelance commercial artists who met for social and professional reasons, including details such as working out how much to charge clients. Members who met at The Art Directors' Cafe included Richard Beck, Patrick Russell, Eric Maguire, Owen Foulkes, Don Nelson and Roy Burs

After the excitement of Melbourne's 1956 Olympics had passed, Greenberg left Australia to work in New York, London and Norway from 1957 to 1970 as a creative director in advertising agencies. Reflecting upon his life and practice, Greenberg felt the 'Australianness' of the 1950s sought by Douglas Annand (commercial art) Francis Burke (textile design) and Fred Ward (furniture design) had become hard to discern (Greenberg 1994). To the history of graphic design in Australia, Greenberg's own name needs to be added to the list of designers who helped define the look of modern Australia and expressed its values through his lively illustrations and innovative layouts.

Simon Jackson