Max Dupain on Assignment features over 80 images by one of Australia’s most well-known photographers Max Dupain, many of which have never previously been displayed to the public.
EXHIBITION AIDS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Exhibition aims

Max Dupain on Assignment showcases the commercial work of eminent Australian photographer Max Dupain. The exhibition spans Dupain’s development as a photographer and demonstrates two influential elements in his career – his work with the Australian government and a relationship with a major client. Together the photographs provide a rich visual record documenting post-World War II social change in Australia.

Learning opportunities

The photography of Max Dupain provides students with learning opportunities to undertake critical analysis of visual art works, looking specifically at the elements of composition, line, light and form of historic photographs and to investigate post-World War II Australian society through observation and discussion. The photographs on display will provide inspiration for your students’ own creative works.

Curriculum links

The National education and the arts statement released by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and the Cultural Ministers Council in late 2007 recognises how integral the arts are to our sense of identity, and the importance of creativity in fostering imagination, risk-taking, and curiosity.

Max Dupain on Assignment offers students opportunities to:

• experience, express, interpret and critique the cultural, geographic, political and social landscapes of our society
• experience excellence in the arts, experiment with ideas, learn about cultural traditions and exhibit and perform alongside respected artists.

While visiting the exhibition please note that:

• no food or drink is allowed in the gallery spaces
• due to copyright and conservation concerns, no photography is allowed
• we have limited capacity to store bags, if possible please leave them on the bus
• pencils and clipboards are available on request.
Maxwell Spencer Dupain (1911–92) was born in Sydney. His interest in photography started early. He was given a Box Brownie camera in 1924 when he was 13, followed by a Vest Pocket camera in 1926. In 1928 he joined the Photographic Society of NSW where he began to enter competitions and submit entries for display. He spent three years as a photographic studio apprentice before opening his own studio in 1934, where he specialised in advertising, fashion, still life and portraits. In addition to formal portraiture, Dupain started to experiment with human forms and produced some of his outstanding photographs of Australian beach culture, including in 1937, his most recognisable image *Sunbaker*.

In 1942 Dupain joined the war effort as a camouflage designer and photographer serving in Darwin and New Guinea as part of the Sydney Camouflage Group. Although not an official war photographer, in 1943 he was assigned to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) to research, photograph and report on the camouflage work being done by Australian and US forces. Towards the end of the war, he applied for a transfer to the Department of Information to become an official war photographer. However at the end of the war the department changed its focus to promoting Australia to an overseas audience, particularly potential immigrants.

Dupain was commissioned to contribute to a large-scale campaign to increase migration to Australia and travelled the country to photograph Australia’s way of life. Works in the ‘Selling a Nation’ section of the exhibition are from this period of his career and demonstrate the development of his documentary style with images of a young and prosperous society.

The government images in this exhibition were created predominantly for the Department of Information (later the Australian News and Information Bureau), the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the Department of Trade. The breadth of the departments which commissioned Dupain reflects the diversity of the topics he was hired to document.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Dupain continued his work with government departments. He was commissioned to capture the artistic passion of life as a member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Robert Masters Quartet and other well-known musicians. Examples of these images can be seen in the ‘Promoting Personalities’ section of the exhibition. The portraits appear highly dramatic with strong lighting and intense expressions are a common feature.
In the late 1960s and continuing in the 1970s Dupain specialised in architecture and industrial assignments further exploring his interest in light, line and form. The sections ‘Showcasing Industry’, ‘Documenting a Company’ and ‘Engaging with Architecture’ in the exhibition show many examples of this focus. These images use dramatic compositions, shape and texture. Sculptural forms of machinery demonstrate his sense of fascination and beauty in the modern era. As he said in 1986:

*Industrial form is such a fascinating subject. The camera has an affinity with the machine and the machine-made products. A product of the 20th century, the camera is a machine/instrument like any other – for making pictures.*

(Max Dupain on Assignment exhibition catalogue, page 15)

Dupain’s ability to document industry creatively is also illustrated by the images that were commissioned by the Australian company Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR Limited), a relationship that began in 1936 and continued throughout his career. These images illustrate a range of techniques in Dupain’s documentary style, from children in the cane fields to striking architectural forms employing light and shade, futuristic metallic structures, and abstract compositions.

Spanning over 40 years, all the works on display are an important visual record of the changing post-war Australian society, from capital cities, architecture and industry, to rural scenes and people. Together they form a set of narrative photographs which document Australian history, society and people. These images further enhance our understanding and appreciation of Dupain’s role in Australian photographic history and many of them are being exhibited for the first time. They show prosperous Australian cities, healthy children and rich rural opportunities – images designed to convey a country filled with promise for those wanting to create a new life.

Over 400 photographs by Dupain have been identified in the collection of the National Archives of Australia to date.

Dupain’s partnership with CSR Limited produced a large photographic archive documenting the growth of an iconic Australian company. The photographs are now part of the CSR Limited Collection at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University.

Further information about Max Dupain can be found in the exhibition catalogue, *Max Dupain on Assignment*, National Archives of Australia, 2007.
Students will have the opportunity to explore and discuss the exhibition with an Educator as well as participate in a drawing workshop. A worksheet is included for guiding students through the exhibition.

Observe and discuss using the exhibition’s themes

1. Selling a Nation
As Dupain stated in 1947:

*Let one see and photograph Australia’s way of life as it is, not as one would wish it to be.*

(Max Dupain on Assignment exhibition catalogue, page 29)

Look at the images in the section ‘Selling a Nation’ or in the flip book ‘Australia and You’. What impression of Australia do you get from the images? How has Australian society changed over time?

Many of the photographs were taken with the aim of attracting migrants to Australia. How does Dupain sell Australia? Focus on the images of Hagley Farm School and cities.

2. Promoting Personalities
Look at the portraits in the ‘Promoting Personalities’ section of the exhibition. How would you describe the mood of the images? What do the images tell us about the individuals represented?

3. Showcasing Industry
Dupain said in 1981:

*Some of the forms thrown up [in industry] have an aesthetic entity of their own and this is what makes industrial photography so interesting.*

(Max Dupain on Assignment exhibition catalogue, page 55)

Look at the images in ‘Showcasing Industry’. What words would you use to describe some of the images you can see? What kinds of environments do the images remind you of?

4. Engaging with Architecture
In Dupain’s architectural photographs he takes a modernist approach – he displays an interest in light and shade, strong lines and unusual angles. Dupain was the photographer of choice for many architects including Jørn Utzon who designed the Sydney Opera House and Harry Seidler.

Pick one of the images in this section. What feeling do you get from the spaces depicted in the photographs?

Dupain’s architectural and industry images focus on textures. Explore the materials and textures in and around the National Archives heritage-listed building in Parkes, Canberra. Examine these textures up close and draw, photograph, observe or make rubbings of them. How would you describe these different textures? How can you represent these different textures? Discuss your observations.

5. Documenting a Company
The images in this section reflect three distinct, but diverse themes – work, architecture and people. The images were commissioned by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited (CSR Limited), beginning in 1936. What information can we gather from these images about the Australian sugar industry?
**Canberra images:** on show at the National Archives of Australia, Parkes, Canberra

Dupain employs a strong use of light and dark in the Canberra images. What overall effect does this have on the images?

Compare and contrast photographs of the buildings and views Dupain took of Canberra. How have they changed or stayed the same?

Interstate students can research historic photos of their town and compare with the current view.

**Drawing workshop**

The exhibition can be used by students as a stimulus for their own art practice to:

- draw from observation and explore line, light and texture
- focus on light and shade, line and angles of the 1927 National Archives building
- draw an image that they like in the exhibition
- create an original artwork by focusing on a particular section of an image in the exhibition.

**Post-visit activities**

- Find an image from your local community and create a travel poster to encourage tourists and migrants to your town.

- **Write a review of the Max Dupain on Assignment exhibition.** Have a look at some exhibition reviews that art critics have written. Take note of how they have described the space, exhibition layout and design, lighting, and the mood or feel of the space. Use the same techniques in your exhibition review. Remember to describe the themes in the exhibition. What are the images about? Is there an overall message of the exhibition? Choose two photographs to write about in detail – they may be an image you really liked and one you disliked on your visit. Students could publish their reviews in the school newsletter.

- Pick an image from the exhibition. Write a fictional story that goes with it.

- Explore the idea of ‘commissions’. What would you like to be commissioned to take photographs of? If you could choose an artist to commission a photograph of you who would it be?

- Create a students’ exhibition of drawings from the National Archives inspired by your experience at Max Dupain on Assignment.
• Explore Max Dupain on Assignment in pairs or small groups
• Identify the different subjects and themes represented in the exhibition
• Record information in the exhibition to use for follow-up activities in the classroom

Find an image that you like and another that you dislike
What do you like about it? Think about a range of elements including light, line, shape, tone and texture. Tell a friend about why you like it.

Which is your least favourite photograph in the exhibition? What do you dislike about it? Show a friend the photograph and explain why you don’t like it.

Choose a different photograph
Write down four words that the image makes you think of. Find someone who has chosen the same image and share your words with them.

1. ........................................... 2. ...........................................
3.. ........................................... 4.. ..........................................

Did you write the same words? Were the words similar or different? What does this tell you?

Find two photographs with the same theme (for example in ‘Selling a Nation’)
What is similar about them? What is different about them? Talk to a friend about which image you think is the most successful.
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