Diploma Lecture Series 2011
Art and Australia II: European Preludes and Parallels

The body as nation: Australian sculpture of the 1920s and '30s

Denise Mimmocchi
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Lecture summary:

The lecture examines transformations in sculpture in Australia during the interwar period through a study of the work of Rayner Hoff and his school, and some of the key figures of emerging modernist sculpture practices in the 1930s including Ola Cohn, Margel Hinder and Gerald Lewers.

The lecture will look at how these artists, while using different sculptural languages, were connected in their practices through their figuring of the body via Vitalist principles; that is, through the belief and philosophies that espoused the idea of underlying life forces which were inherent to, and driving all natural life forms.

The lecture will examine how Hoff’s Vitalist aesthetics contributed to the imagery of the body as a national ideal in the interwar decades and the years of post-war reconstruction. It will then study how modernist sculptors of the 1930s looked towards European models of contemporary sculpture which shifted meanings away from the external appearances of the body toward an abstracted rendering of its internal or spiritual forces.

Slide list:


3. Rayner Hoff, *relief panels, City Life Assurance building*, 1936, bronze, Martin Place, Sydney

4. Bruce Dellit (architect), Rayner Hoff (sculptor) *Anzac Memorial*, and Rayner Hoff sculpture *Sacrifice* bronze 1931-34, Hyde Park, Sydney


7. Rayner Hoff, *Deluge – stampede of the lower gods*, 1927, patinated plaster, National Gallery of Australia

8. Rayner Hoff, *Norman Lindsay*, 1924, bronze, Art Gallery of New South Wales


*10. Rayner Hoff, *The kiss*, 1923, bronze, Art Gallery of South Australia


20. Ola Cohn, *Head with hands*, c.1930, stone, current whereabouts unknown


*22. Ola Cohn, *Head of a virgin*, 1926, bronze, National Gallery of Victoria

23. Ola Cohn, *Earth*, c1932, stone, current whereabouts unknown

24. Ola Cohn, *Mother and child*, 1928, bronze, Bendigo Art Gallery

25. Eleanore Lange, *Seraph of light* (maquette for a proposed memorial to Walter Duffield), 1934, plaster, National Gallery of Australia


27. Margel Hinder, *Jerry*, 1945, wood, Art Gallery of New South Wales

*28. Gerald Lewers, *Plough*, 1934, limestone, Art Gallery of South Australia


30. Robert Klippel, *No. 30,0* 1972-74, brazed and welded steel, found objects

**Bibliography:**

Deborah Edwards ‘This Vital flesh: the sculpture of Rayner Hoff and his school’ Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1999

Renée Free *Frank and Margel Hinder 1930-1980* Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1980


Rayner Hoff, *Idyll: love and life*, 1923/1926, marble, Art Gallery of New South Wales
Margel Hinder, *Mother and child*, 1939, wood (ironbark), Art Gallery of New South Wales
Rayner Hoff, *The kiss*, 1923, bronze, Art Gallery of South Australia
Ola Cohn, *Head of a virgin*, 1926, bronze, National Gallery of Victoria
Gerald Lewers, *Plough*, 1934, limestone, Art Gallery of South Australia