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| The Lindsay Family (1870 – 1958) |
| Percy Lindsay 1870-1952; Robert Lindsay 1872-1951; Lionel Lindsay 1874-1961; Norman Lindsay 1879-1969; Ruby Lindsay 1887-1919; Daryl Lindsay 1889-1976; Jack Lindsay 1900-1990; Philip Lindsay 1906-1958 |
| The Lindsays were a multi-generational family of artists, designers, curators and authors in Australia. The originating generation, who made the most quantifiable contribution to modern Australian art, was made up of five brothers and one sister (three other sisters and a brother did not work professionally as artists), born and raised in Creswick, Victoria. Four of the siblings trained at the National Gallery School in Melbourne and although most of the family travelled overseas to paint and exhibit, with the exception of Norman’s sons Jack and Phillip who stayed in Britain, their art and reputations were confined to Australia. Of the second generation, which included a number of artists and writers, a novelist, an art historian and a cultural commentator, Jack Lindsay had the most impact. Like the Boyd family, there was an element of unquestioned and shared talent among the siblings and their descendants. However, the family’s singularity was assiduously hyperbolised in the public eye by its member’s charismatic public performances. It was also fabricated by a heightened consciousness of the merits of family inheritance, married to a skilful awareness of an emerging media culture, deployed with an eye on posterity. |
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However, the family’s singularity was assiduously hyperbolised in the public eye by its member’s charismatic public performances. It was also fabricated by a heightened consciousness of the merits of family inheritance, married to a skilful awareness of an emerging media culture, deployed with an eye on posterity.  The Lindsay mystique was generated by supporters and courtiers who made an equal investment in the excitement of being confidants to supposed cultural legends. The film *Sirens* (1994) internationally circulated pre-existing Australian cultural mythologies ascribing a degree of philosophical and intellectual profundity to Norman Lindsay’s art that it substantially lacked. Robert Hughes’ identification of an adolescent element in Norman Lindsay’s art and his malicious but memorable image of the aging Lindsay living in the Blue Mountains ca. 1965, complacently believing that in France the equally elderly Picasso remained deeply jealous of his antipodean rival, still hold equal validity.  The family’s relationship to modernism was piecemeal and vexed, at best. Ruby Lindsay, who signed her work Ruby Lind, was a talented art nouveau graphic artist who was possibly the most committed modernist of the family insofar as her work expressed advanced styles in commercial and graphic art in the 1900s. She was the most widely commissioned female commercial artist in Melbourne in this period and made a living from her artwork. Her approach held true when she spent her later career in Britain. As she died in 1919 during the Spanish flu pandemic, her sensibilities were never tested or challenged by later developments in graphic design. Brother Daryl Lindsay, curator and gallery director, was a guarded advocate of modernism, particularly the formalist Francophile taste of the New English Art Club, (he was a protégé of Henry Tonks) and the similar Francophile thread of the mid-twentieth century public gallery history of modernism. He enthusiastically expressed the modish anti-Victorianism of the interwar period and sought to purge Victorian taste from Australian public galleries, concentrating upon a conservative, classical modernism, in addition to the “grand traditions” of Oriental art and the pre-1837 Western art canon. He also brought to Australia an awareness of emerging concepts of twentieth-century professionalism in museum and gallery curating, current particularly in North America. Joan Lindsay, his wife, was a respected author whose novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* 1967 became internationally famous as the source material for one of the key films of the Australian New Wave cinema.  Less is known about Robert Lindsay, who was engaged with modernity as a successful milliner and costume designer in London and New Orleans, and elsewhere. Nellie Melba liked his dresses and encouraged him to pursue a career outside Australia. His obituary noted that he had established an interior design business in London in the 1920s. When called back to Australia in the early 1930s to assist in supporting his elderly mother, he provided his brother Norman with details of fashion history research for books and pictures. Jack Lindsay, Norman’s oldest son, moved permanently to Britain in 1926. He actively took part in the cultural debates of his generation from a more mainstream, and less Rococo and camp stance than his father, by linking art and culture to the realities of everyday life. He conversed with many writers and creative professionals, in a career that embraced history, art history, philosophy, poetry, fiction, literary editing and theatrical scriptwriting, as well as other disciplines. Although he was well known in mid-twentieth century Britain as a Marxist intellectual, friends and associates such as Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson have now eclipsed him in public memory.  The two key members of the family, Norman and Lionel Lindsay, had consciously antipathetic relationships to modernism and there is barely any identifiable stylistic influence in their artworks. They were both highly skilled representational artists and virtuosic print makers. Lionel was notable for his woodcuts and Norman for etchings, although they each worked across both media. However, their careers unfolded in the shadow of modernist innovations and both of them addressed what they saw as modernism’s shortcomings in their written art theory and philosophy. Yet, they were highly influenced by modernism’s construct of constant evolution towards an optimised perfection in creative production. As such, they saw their aesthetic as being the true endpoint of modernist cultural development instead of non-mimetic painting and sculpture. Both also shared an accord with Nietzschean and Darwinian interpretations of creative life and human development and advocated a practical atheism and positivist drive that spurned nineteenth-century values.  Norman Lindsay, *Court*, 1935, watercolour, 56 x 70 cm, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, Australia.  The brothers later fell out permanently over Norman’s investigation of spiritualism and his belief that he could contact via séances another, non-artist brother, Reginald, who died fighting on the Western Front. In Australia Lionel Lindsay’s anti-modernist polemic *Addled Art* (1942) is still studied as part of the historiography and reception of modernism, due to memorable details including a lengthy diatribe against Salvador Dali and complaints that modernism attracted the supposedly superficial and sensation-loving subgroups within society like Jews, women and homosexuals. In public, Lionel had denounced Jewish art dealers’ promotion of modernism as early as 1927, although he also abhorred Franco and Hitler. Norman Lindsay perhaps never matched Lionel’s breadth of reading or attention to intellectual pursuits, but there is a strong popular cultural expression of aspects of the modem experience in his lush historical and orientalist mash-ups of fanciful camp details of costume and setting that resemble early cinema. His son Philip later acted as a cultural advisor to Alexander Korda’s *Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) indicating how the Lindsay aesthetic was enmeshed in popular cultural understanding of the modern. |
| Further reading:  (Hughes)  (Mendelssohn)  (Prunster, Glad and Holden)  (Smith) |