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| Preston, Margaret (1875-1963) |
| MacPherson, Margaret Rose |
| Margaret Preston was a pioneering modernist who worked across a range of media, including ceramics, china painting, and basketry, as well as painting and printmaking. Preston was attuned to modernism, like many other women artists of her generation. Her reductive portrait, titled *Flapper* (1928), profiles a forceful New Woman or ‘flapper’: a smart, working girl with her own money to spend, the type of girl who entered the factories and commercial and service sectors to fill new jobs in retail and office work after the War. In both subject matter and pictorial style, Preston aligned herself with the signs of modernity, including urban life and leisure, consumerism, and the new production processes. Preston described her kitchen table as a modernist laboratory, and she embraced new technologies, machine-like forms, materials, and processes of domestic modernity as fitting subjects for art. We see this in her domestic still life *Implement Blue* (1927), where Preston’s cubist approach to the motif also shows the influence of art deco, cinema, and glamour photography. Preston trained initially in Adelaide and at the National Gallery School in Melbourne before heading to Europe in 1904 for the first of many overseas trips. She married at the close of the War and remained childless, enjoying financial security and opportunities for international travel that fuelled an ongoing fascination with the art of other cultures. |
| Margaret Preston was a pioneering modernist who worked across a range of media, including ceramics, china painting, and basketry, as well as painting and printmaking. Preston was attuned to modernism, like many other women artists of her generation. Her reductive portrait, titled *Flapper* (1928), profiles a forceful New Woman or ‘flapper’: a smart, working girl with her own money to spend, the type of girl who entered the factories and commercial and service sectors to fill new jobs in retail and office work after the War. In both subject matter and pictorial style, Preston aligned herself with the signs of modernity, including urban life and leisure, consumerism, and the new production processes. Preston described her kitchen table as a modernist laboratory, and she embraced new technologies, machine-like forms, materials, and processes of domestic modernity as fitting subjects for art. We see this in her domestic still life *Implement Blue* (1927), where Preston’s cubist approach to the motif also shows the influence of art deco, cinema, and glamour photography. Preston trained initially in Adelaide and at the National Gallery School in Melbourne before heading to Europe in 1904 for the first of many overseas trips. She married at the close of the War and remained childless, enjoying financial security and opportunities for international travel that fuelled an ongoing fascination with the art of other cultures.  File: Morfología\_psicológcia\_(1939).jpg  Figure : Margaret Preston*, Implement Blue* (1927). Oil on canvas on hardboard, 42.5 x 43.0 cm board; 58.3 x 59.0 x 4.0 cm frame. Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of the artist, 1960.  From the mid-1920s, Preston argued for a national style based on Aboriginal art. She studied and collected such art, partly in response to the modern fascination with the arts of so-called ‘primitive’ peoples. Yet unlike the masculinist, avant-garde primitivism of Picasso or Gauguin, Preston’s appropriation of Aboriginal art is bourgeois, feminine, and domestic, as in her reductive, cubist-inspired oil painting of a bouquet of parrot feathers purchased by the artist from a souvenir stall in Far North Queensland, titled *Aboriginal Flowers* (1928), or her 1936 hooked rug, patterned with a decorative twirl of hakea flowers, in the style of the British Omega Workshop. While her formalist appropriation of Aboriginal art and design would be deemed racist by today’s standards, her claims for the international significance of Aboriginal art — and for its appropriation in modern Australian art and design — were undeniably progressive in the context of contemporary protectionist and assimilation policies towards Australia’s indigenous communities. |
| Further reading:  (Butler)  (Edwards and Peel)  (Kerr and Stephen)  (Smith) |