



MAX DUPAIN

THE ARCHITECTURE OF UNSW

This online exhibition will be on view until December 2025

A decade after its foundation in 1949, UNSW entered a period of major campus development. During this time, from 1959 to 1970, UNSW's main photographer of record was Max Dupain.

Max Dupain (1911 – 1992) is one of the leading figures of 20th-century Australian photography. He is renowned for his modernist approach and his photographs of beach culture are among the most iconic images in Australian history.

Alongside his art photography, Dupain primarily worked as a commercial architecture photographer – but his artistic vision was always present. Dupain's associate Jill White has said of his attitude to his commercial work that “he wanted to come up with the best possible result for the client, who would often be surprised to see his building or facilities treated in such a way”.

This Online Exhibition is drawn from photographs collected by the [University Archives](#) from the roughly 140 jobs Dupain carried out for UNSW. The presence and absence of familiar architecture in the campus and its surrounds documents a campus – and a city – in a period of rapid growth and change. These images vividly attest to the artistic vision of their photographer, demonstrating Dupain's characteristically modernist treatment of line and form.

Established in 1980, the University Archives acquires and preserves the records, photographs, film and other items of long-term value relating to the life of the university and its members and makes these available to users now and in the future.

[*Max Dupain: the architecture of UNSW*](#) was originally shown as an exhibition at UNSW Main Library from 23 April – 31 May 2018.



Western Grounds - Courtyard for the building, which then housed the Faculty of Commerce, the School of Mathematics and the School of Applied Psychology, 1959

Archives reference number CN945/58/02



View from Main Building to Dalton Building and construction of Webster Building, 1959

Archives reference number CN945/12(1)/2



Interior Courtyard of Basser College, 1959

Archives reference number CN945/19/02



Kensington Campus - Corner of Anzac Parade and High St, c. 1960s

Archives reference number CN945/11(2)/22



Dalton Building and Heffron Building, with Science Theatre at right, c. 1962

Archives reference number CN945/16/18



**View of the Old Tote Precinct, Randwick Racecourse and Basser College from the Heffron Building,
12 December 1961**

Archives reference number CN945/10/51

Max Dupain began experimenting with photography at a young age, becoming a leading modernist photographer in the late 1930s. His subject matter was diverse, capturing contemporary life in cities and rural settings, documenting industrial and metropolitan people and places. In the 1950s, he shifted towards architectural photography, capturing built form with a sculptural aesthetic.

His architectural photography documented modernist forms in black and white, evoking depth and

meaning using shadow and perspective. He often used architectural elements, like a balcony or doorway to frame an image, with its shadow creating dramatic contrast. He has used the high vantage point of the newly built Heffron building to capture a scene below of a rapidly growing University. At the time this photograph was taken, the Robert Heffron building (which was still under construction, and is now known as the UNSW Business School) was to be the biggest and most well equipped building on campus, a tribute to Robert Heffron, who was pivotal in the establishment and development of UNSW.

This photograph documents some of the oldest buildings on the Kensington campus including the Whitehouse, Old Tote and Fig Tree Theatre which were all used as part of the Kensington Racecourse until it closed in 1942. This area that forms the UNSW Main Campus at Kensington was utilised during the Boer War (1899–1902) and World Wars I and II (1914–18 and 1939–1945). The Racecourse was taken over as a military camp, while a migrant hostel was located on the site in the late 1940s.





Construction - View from Heffron Building showing Engineering complex foundations with Webster Building on right and Wallace Wurth School of Medicine and Biological Sciences building construction at skyline, July 1961

Archives reference number CN945/12(1)/19

The Kensington campus was acquired by the University in parts and at various times throughout the 1950s. The land of the upper campus was once leased for quarrying and was later known as Randwick Oval. This area now holds the Morven Brown, Library and Chancellery buildings, while the parcel of land home to the Wallace Wurth School of Medicine, Biological Sciences and Lowy Cancer Research Centre buildings was previously a golf course, the Randwick Municipal Golf Links.

Dupain has framed the scene using the geometric design of the Heffron building balcony, using the elevated viewpoint to convey the size of the new modernist building and the scale of the University's plans.



Construction of the Wallace Wurth School of Medicine and Biological Sciences Buildings, December 1961

Archives reference number CN945/43/02



Dalton Building and Science Theatre with (at rear) construction of the Heffron Building, February 1961

Archives reference number CN945/11(2)/15



Roundhouse from Anzac Parade, 1963

Archives reference number CN122/29



Metallurgy Building from the balcony of the Roundhouse, 1962

Archives reference number CN945/44/28

Max Dupain's first camera was the small portable Kodak Box Brownie. He undertook formal training in the 1930s, studying at the East Sydney Technical College and the Julian Ashton Art School, Sydney, while undertaking an apprenticeship with Cecil Bostock 1930–33. Bostock was known within the pictorialist movement, a style of photography in the late nineteenth century which sought to engage the medium's artistic and interpretive qualities.

This early training informs Dupain's work in his dramatic use of atmospheric effects while evoking emotion in built forms. Having photographed privately and commercially for David Jones and in magazines like *The Home*, Dupain's shift to architectural photography in the 1950s saw him collaborate

with Australian architects including Samuel Lipson, Sydney Ancher and Harry Seidler.

Through Harry I have learned a lot: the stark form, the abstract form, the functional form, Bauhaus all over with the pictorial response uppermost. In other words — 'here is a marvellous piece of precast concrete, steel and glass, how do we get it onto film with pictorial sensibility, drama and emotional involvement?'

Max Dupain, 1976



View of Main Walkway from Anzac Parade, July 1964

Archives reference number CN122/194

"... Photography is like any other graphic medium. It's got to go beyond the stage of conveying information, of telling you or showing you something you should know ... it has to involve you emotionally as well as intellectually." Max Dupain in *Artworks*, August 1980

In the early 1960s the then Vice-Chancellor Professor Philip Baxter sought to create a 'grand avenue' to the growing University, one which commanded a vista to the upper campus. He assigned the task to the Faculty of Architecture's Peter Spooner, who designed the Walkway, including the selection of trees and other foliage.

This new entrance from Anzac Parade was created and named the Walkway. From the 1960s until the 1980s, the Walkway had shrubs and lawn planted through its centre, as Dupain has captured here. This changed considerably in the 1990s where it became known as the Mall. The plants and gates to campus at Anzac Parade were removed, better reflecting the original vision of the project.

This is an iconic image of UNSW and expresses the ambitions of a young institution. Dupain has employed his characteristic use of line and perspective, focusing our attention to the parallel lines of the Walkway, as it extends to upper campus.





Goldstein College - Covered Walkway, 1964

Archives reference number CN1127/3/14/18



Goldstein College - Walkway, 1964

Archives reference number CN945/19/04



Goldstein College – Balcony, c. 1964

Archives reference number CN1127/3/14/5

After returning from service with the Royal Australian Air Force and the Army Camouflage Unit during the second World War, Dupain wanted focus more of

the built environment:

"The war... was a shock to my sensibilities. It showed me the difference between life and death, neither of which I had really considered in any depth before. This experience determined that I should not return to anything so trivial as fashion photograph. It had to be photography of some sort but please God something with meat in it... I set about getting assignments for industry – the machine form. Architecture has always been a pleasure to photograph."

Max Dupain, 1976

In 1964 Goldstein College was established, named after philanthropist Phillip Goldstein. The College also included a separate dining hall designed by E.H. Farmer and assisted by Peter Hall, the architect who succeeded Joern Utzon as supervising architect for the construction of the Sydney Opera House. In 1965 the dining hall won the prestigious Sulman Award for architecture.



Chancellery under Construction, c.1965

Archives reference number CN945/12(2)/09



Library, February 1966

Archives reference number CN122/322



View of the Library from the Chancellery, August 1966

Archives reference number CN122/265

Max Dupain has captured UNSW's new, purpose-built Library soon after its completion. His photographs from 1966 contrasts the new, modernist Library building against the raw ground on which it stands, directing the eye to the clean lines of the building's façade. This contrast conveys a sense of 'breaking new ground' and reflects the pivotal role the Library plays within the University, a site of research and exploration and community.



Morven Brown Building, July 1966

Archives reference number CN122/275



Civil Engineering Building, 1967

Archives reference number CN945/18/45

"... Modern photography must do more than entertain, it must incite thought and by its clear statements of actuality, cultivate a sympathetic understanding of men and women and the life they create and live." Max Dupain in *Max Dupain photographs*. Ure Smith Pty Ltd, Sydney 1948

Dupain has captured a spontaneous moment on the Kensington campus, three figures, perhaps students, walk along the road while a gardener waters the lawn in the central pictorial plane. Dupain has

emphasised the geometric arrangement and industrial materiality of the building and retaining wall, utilising the atmospheric effects of light and shade and formal qualities of line and contrast. He celebrates the scale and design of this modernist design as a sculptural form which contrasts with the smaller, domestic buildings in the lower right-hand-side of the image. This juxtaposition reflects the aspirations of the young University, as it continues to combat the grand challenges facing the world, embracing change and championing research, growth and development across all disciplines.

Max Dupain in *Max Dupain photographs*. Ure Smith Pty Ltd, Sydney 1948





Philip Baxter College, 1967

Archives reference number CN945/19/16



Philip Baxter College, 1967

Archives reference number CN945/19/17



Philip Baxter College, 1967

Archives reference number CN945/19/19



Bassett Steps with Bassett College in background, October – November 1967

Archives reference number CN945/19/20

This image documents a candid moment of students on campus, moving across the lower pictorial plane from left to right against the backdrop of the newly completed Bassett steps. Dupain treats the stark, white roof of the steps as a sculptural form, which appears to unfold from upper campus. Its clean lines and dramatic shadow separates the image into two jagged halves. The juxtaposition of students and modernist architecture highlights Dupain's ability to see and draw out depth, emotion and ideas in the built form that surrounds us.



Commerce Courtyard, 1967

Archives reference number CN945/21/07



Students on Basser Steps, 1968

Archives reference number CN486/1/8/20



Library - exterior - Front of library, 1967

Archives reference number CN945/37/18

A library was always in operation since the University's inception in 1949, operating out of the Sydney Technical College Library. From 1955, a library was located on the Kensington campus, housed in various locations before finding a permanent home. The initial location of the Library on Main Campus was in part of a wing of the Main Building from 1955, later moving to a floor of the Dalton Building in 1958 and then housed in the top floor of the Heffron Building from 1962. It was not until 1965–66 that

the Library occupied its own purpose-built facility. From 1973–76 the tower was added to the Library, providing additional space. In 1994–95 large aluminium UNSW letters were placed on all four sides of the Library Tower, ensuring UNSW was clearly identifiable across Sydney.



More photographs by Max Dupain held in the University Archives can be accessed through UNSW Library Digital Collections:

[GO TO UNSW LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS](#)

The University Archives welcome donations of records, photographs, film and other items of long-term value relating to the life of the university and its members. The material does not have to be old to qualify for transfer to the Archives – current items are very welcome as they will be of great value in future years. Please contact the Archives if you have material that you think may be of interest.

The purpose of collecting and preserving archival records is to make these available to users now and in the future. We welcome enquiries from those undertaking research into any part of the university's history. Resources in the Archives have been used for school & faculty histories, biographies, exhibitions, student assignments and much more.

If you wish to visit the Archives, it is important that you contact us beforehand to arrange an appointment time for your visit. Entitlements to access records held by the Archives vary and it is essential that you discuss your enquiry with an archivist to

determine whether records are available for your use.

www.recordkeeping.unsw.edu.au

archives@unsw.edu.au

(02) 9385 2906



BACK TO HOME | UNSW LIBRARY ONLINE EXHIBITIONS

Exhibition text by Jackson Mann and Alyce Neal

All artworks © the artist. Online exhibition, photos and videos © The University of New South Wales.

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form without the prior written permission of the copyright holder, unless the use falls within an exception of the Copyright Act (such as research or study).

MAX DU
THE ARCHITECTURE