

# Michael O'Connell

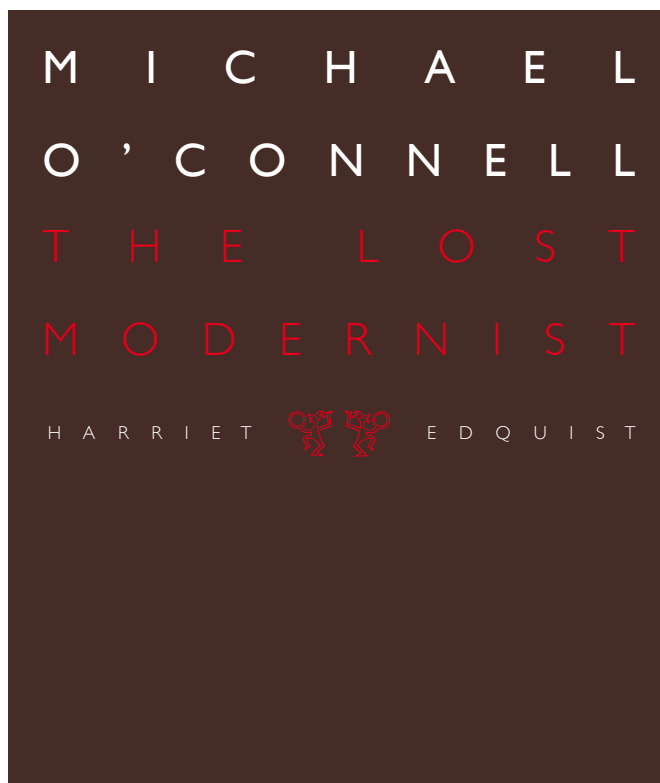
## THE LOST MODERNIST

HARRIET EDQUIST

*Michael O'Connell: The Lost Modernist* is a beautifully produced book that documents the life and work of this major figure in Anglo-Australian design history.

Born in Cumbria in 1898 Michael O'Connell saw action on the Western Front in WWI before moving to Australia in 1920. Over the following 17 years he became a critical member of the burgeoning Modernist movement in Melbourne primarily through his innovative and dynamic textiles. First exhibited in 1930 his hand block-printed fabrics revolutionised Australian textile design, which at the time was an entirely amateur affair, and laid the foundations of its future development. On his return to the UK in 1937, O'Connell became a key figure in contemporary textile design, producing fabrics for Edinburgh Weavers in 1938 and then for Heals during the 1940s and 1950s. He was involved in a number of progressive government-initiated projects for schools and public institutions in the optimistic years of post-war Britain, including the celebrated wall hangings for the Country Pavilion at the Festival of Britain in 1951. During the 1960s until his death in 1976 O'Connell kept pace with contemporary art practice from his studio-home in Perry Green Hertfordshire, producing large-scale, innovative 'textile murals' in his unique combination of batik and resist dyeing.

*The Lost Modernist* illustrates and discusses over 100 works from Australian and British public and private collections within the context of 20<sup>th</sup> century design history and the framework of O'Connell's life.



#### THE AUTHOR:

Harriet Edquist is professor of Architectural History at RMIT University. She has published extensively on Australian architecture, art and design. Her books include: *The Culture of Landscape Architecture* (1994); *Frederick Romberg: The Architecture of migration 1938-1975* (2000); *Harold Desproue-Anneer: A Life in Architecture* (2004); *Pioneers of Modernism: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Australia* (2008); *George Baldessin; Paradox and Persuasion* (2009) and *Designing Place: An Archaeology of the Western District* (2010).

Harriet is also director of the RMIT Design Archives, a facility that is focused on preserving and researching the heritage of design practices in Melbourne and its region from the twentieth century to the present.

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