

Claudio Alcorso and Post-War Textile Culture in Australia

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**This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the award of
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the
University of Technology Sydney**

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Tracey Lisa Sernack-Chee Quee declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Design, Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This study of Australian textile manufacturer Claudio Alcorso (b. 1913 Rome, Italy - d. 2000 Hobart, Tasmania) reconsiders the role of the Italian-born entrepreneur, tastemaker and cultural broker with a focus on his commissioning of artist-designed textile prints from 1945 to 1970. As well as being a design history, it provides a wider cultural study of the agency of European migrants and their impact on the post-war Australian textile and fashion industries. This historical study of Alcorso's life, family background, international outlook and connections of his Australian-based businesses Silk & Textile Printers (STP) and Universal Textiles Australia (UTA), provide insights into the workings of a local manufacturing industry that had largely vanished by the end of the twentieth century.

The study aims to address the relative paucity of academic studies of the relationship between Australian fashion and textile producers of the second half of the twentieth century. Its focus on textile production for the middle-class supplants previous histories that have tended to focus on elite culture, fashion couturiers and artisanal textile producers who designed and produced exclusive, limited edition products. New findings are presented concerning the inter-relationship of artists and designers who created textile prints, workers who printed fabrics and design intermediaries involved in the manufacture and distribution of fabric. Considerable attention is paid to fashions and furnishings sold in retail chain and department stores in Australia and overseas, presenting new findings on Australian post-war consumption.

It is argued here that Alcorso's contribution to Australian textile culture in relation to design commissions and textile manufacturing was more expansive than previous writing about him suggests. A previous focus on his celebrated Modernage collection of artist-designed textiles produced in 1946-

1947 has tended to obscure the more complex series of events and impacts initiated by the Modernage episode. By examining Alcorso's production of commercial, artist-designed textile prints in with a new, archival focus on the ecology of his business associates, customers and competitors, a new picture emerges of the integral contribution of innovative art and design to commercial success in the textile industry during the second half of the twentieth century. The study further demonstrates the impact of global networks and the local agency of migrant entrepreneurs such as the Alcorso family on the art, design and textile ecosystem in post-war Australia.