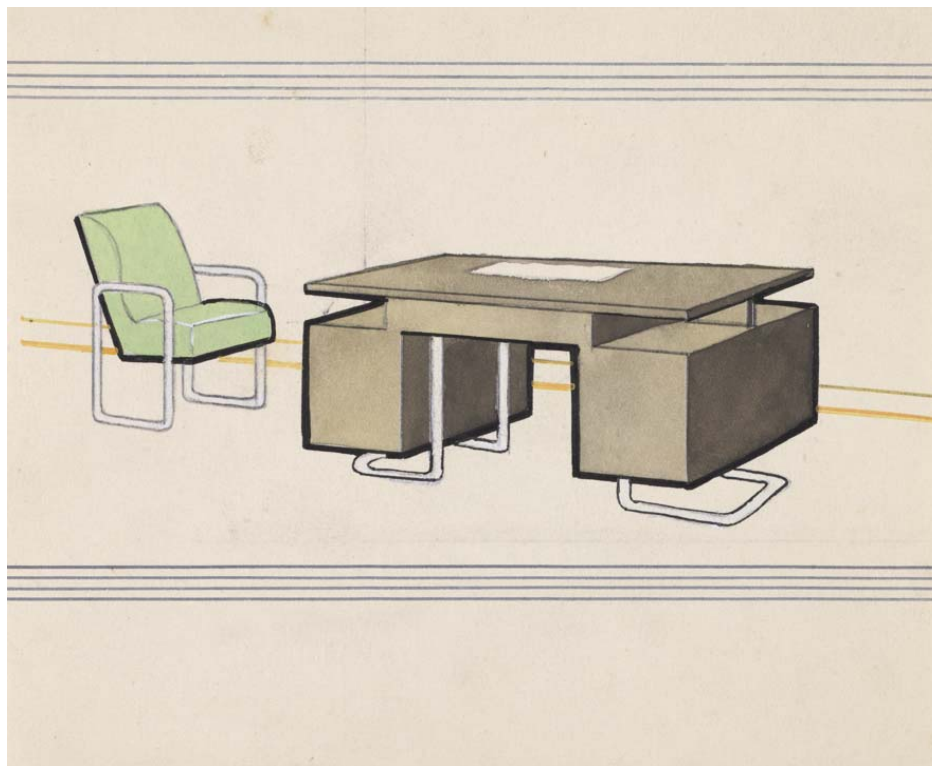


EDUCATION KIT

Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939



Sam Atyeo

Album of designs: tables c. 1933-36

Page 3 - design for chair (green) and desk (brown)
watercolour, brush and coloured inks and coloured pencils,

14 designs on cream paper in 16 page album

30.0 x 19.2 cm (page); 30.0 x 20.8 x 0.8 cm (closed)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of the artist 1988

© Courtesy Mrs Sam Atyeo



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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Brief introduction to the exhibition

The emergence of modernist design in Melbourne in the 1930s was the result of a shift by Australian designers, away from British influences and towards internationalism. Britain had been traditionally regarded as the touchstone for Australian culture, and while architects and designers continued to look to London in the 1930s, they were increasingly drawn to the modernist design of Europe and the United States. The austerity of this approach and its use of relatively economical local materials was partly the effect of a significant influence – the Depression, which began in the early 1930s.

These difficult economic conditions fostered public acceptance of modernist design, where a section of the middle class, (whose incomes had remained intact or even improved), looked unfavourably on the perceived flashiness of Art Deco designs of the 1920s.

Fred Ward was the most significant designer of modernist furniture in Melbourne in the early part of the decade. During the same period, Michael and Ella O’Connell began designing and printing boldly patterned furnishing fabrics and wall hangings using lino blocks and heavy Irish linen.

In 1931 the bicycle manufacturer and radio dealer AG Healing introduced tubular steel furniture to the market, capitalising on its manufacturing capacity, after which the major department store, the Myer Emporium, began selling modular ‘unit’ furniture to a wider public.

The *Ideal Home Exhibitions* – first held in 1934 in the furniture department of the Myer Emporium – raised widespread popular interest in modernist solutions for the design of houses, domestic interiors and furnishings. By mid-decade, the proliferation of this new architecture had encouraged a widespread engagement with modernist design, reflected in the pages of Melbourne’s newspapers and popular magazines such as *Australian Home Beautiful* and *Australian Woman’s World*.

Savage Luxury is the first exhibition to comprehensively review the emergence of early modernist furniture and interior design in Melbourne in the 1930s.

*This overview is adapted from *Savage Luxury* catalogue essays by Nanette Carter.

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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Wood/Timber



Sam Atyeo
Album of designs: tables c. 1933–36
Page 10 – design for a coffee table
watercolour, brush and coloured inks and
coloured pencils, 14 designs on cream paper in
16 page album
30.0 x 19.2 cm (page); 30.0 x 20.8 x 0.8 cm
(closed)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of the artist 1988
© Courtesy Mrs Sam Atyeo

Background to key Australian designers

Fred Ward was the most successful designer of modernist furniture and interiors in Melbourne in the early 1930s. Ward began experimenting with furniture design and manufacture in 1930 after his employment as an illustrator and cartoonist with the *Herald and Weekly Times*.

Initially Ward preferred to use slats for chair backs and bed-ends rather than solid sheets of timber, a method that was economical, minimised materials and allowed for ventilation during hot Melbourne summers. Seat cushions protruded over a recessed space in his chairs to prevent dislodgement; a small, practical feature typical of Ward's thoughtful approach to design was evident in details such as a recessed space in chairs, which prevented cushions being dislodged.

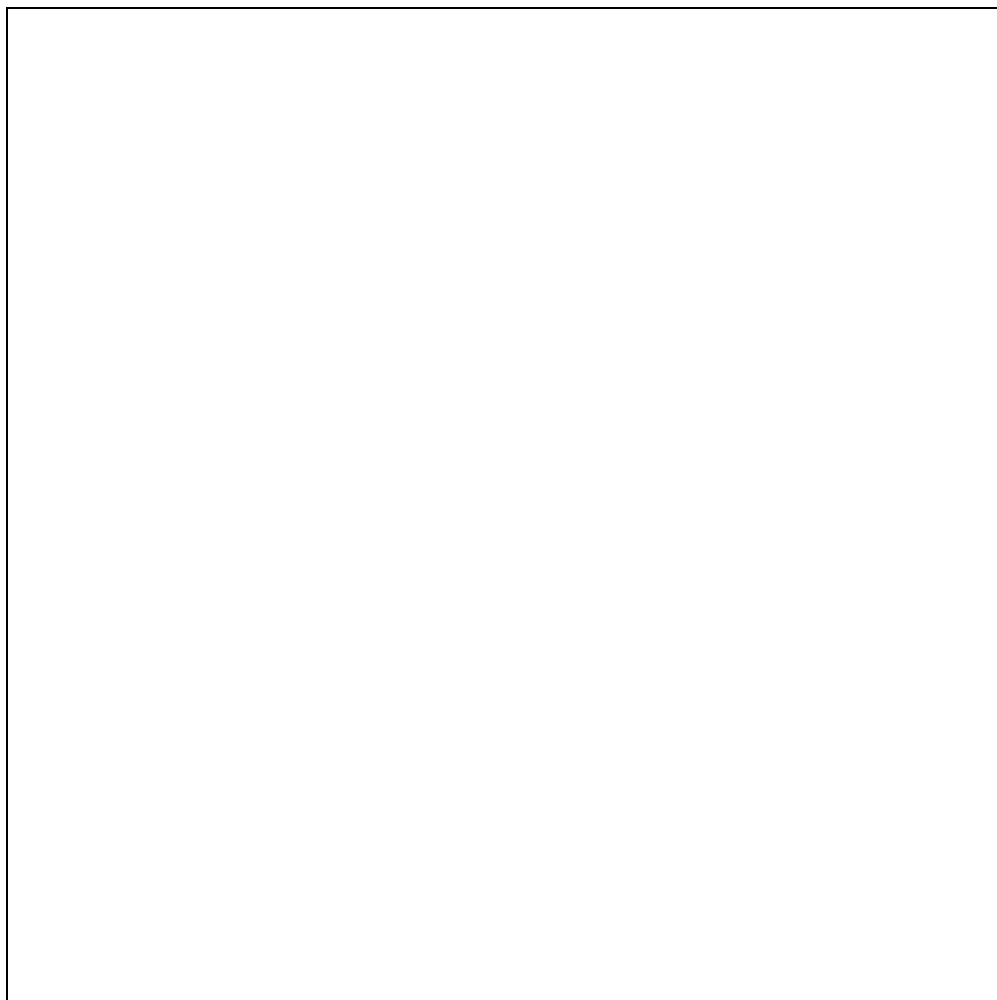
Ward's early chairs were not upholstered, lending them a sense of informality. Loose covered cushions could be changed seasonally, in response to new fashions in colour or textiles.

Around 1934, Sam Atyeo, under the influence of Ward, began to design furniture using native timbers. Five volumes of Atyeo's furniture designs demonstrate his commitment to the use of jarrah, mountain ash and blackwood, and the specification of imported or exotic timbers only as occasional exceptions, such as finishing details in Japanese oak or walnut.

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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Choose one wooden chair design from the exhibition and make a sketch of it in the box provided.



Fill in the following details:

Designer: _____

Object: _____

Date of Production: _____

Materials: _____

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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Complete a PMI chart for your chosen design:

Plus (Positive aspects of the design)	Minus (Negative aspects of the design)	Interesting (What makes the object likeable)

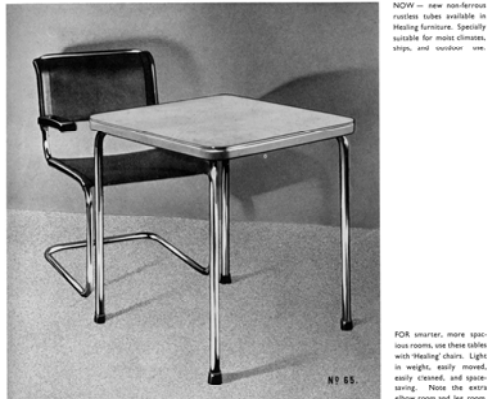
Write a production plan for the manufacture of this design:

Process	Materials Substances Chemicals	Tools Equipment and Machinery	Risk assessment and safety considerations

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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Tubular Steel Furniture



Create Smartness with

METAL-TUBE FURNITURE

by Healings

283 SWANSTON STREET MELB.

VISIT OUR SHOWROOM, OR SEND FOR NEW CATALOG

Healings advertisement for tubular steel furniture
As published in *Lines: a journal of architecture and
allied interests*, 1935, p. i
Reproduced courtesy Design Special Collection,
Swinburne University of Technology Library,
Melbourne

Background to key Australian designers

In 1925 a photograph of Marcel Breuer's first cantilever chair in tubular steel was published in Europe, illustrating a new kind of furniture symbolising modernist style and the experience of modernity. In Melbourne, tubular steel furniture was sold in Australia by Healings, the retail arm of AG Healing, a Melbourne bicycle manufacturer and radio dealer.

Despite the early efforts of local journals and magazines in Melbourne to promote this new furniture for domestic use, it seems that the Australian response was cautious. Tubular steel was however accepted for use in cafeterias and in institutions such as the new Mercy Hospital (1935) where it was perceived as suitably hygienic.

Fred Ward incorporated a tubular steel chair in an interior for a 'den' – a study or home office – in a display for the 1934 Building Industry Congress's centenary *Ideal Homes Exhibition*.

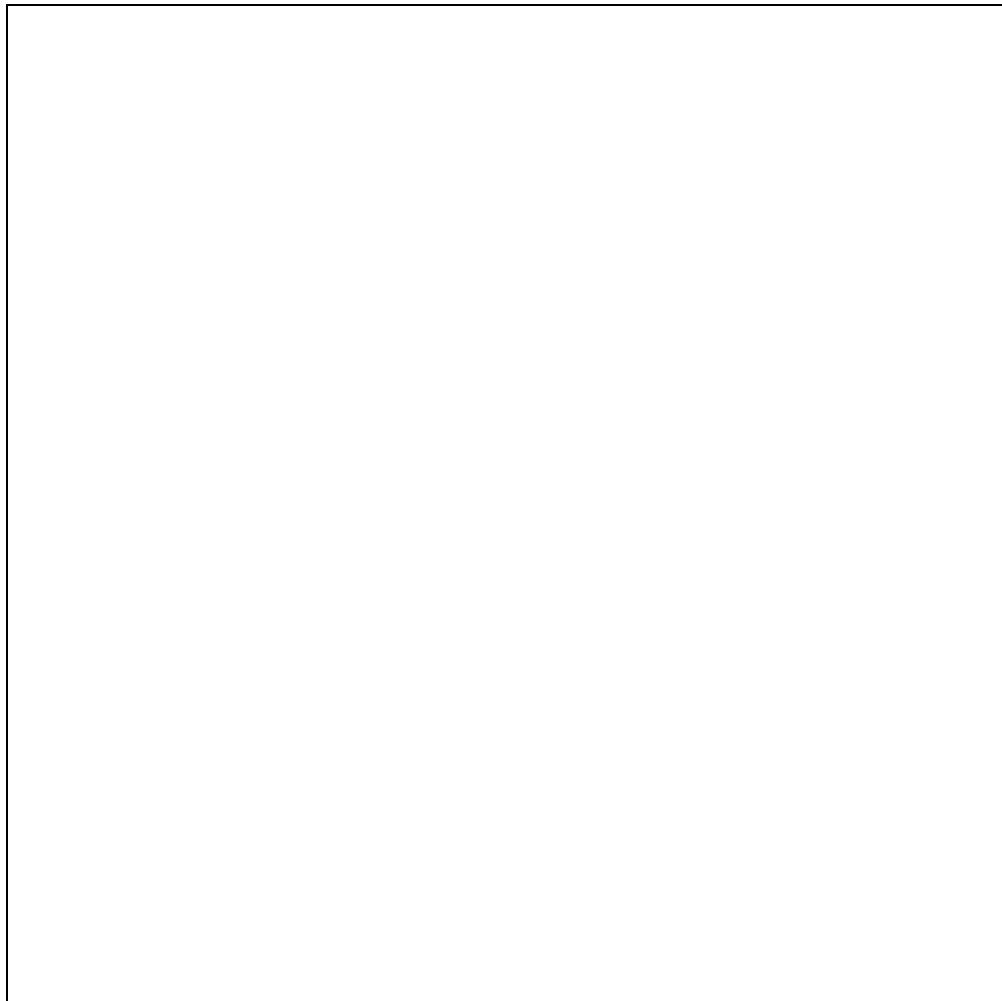
Sam Atyeo's volumes of designs include a desk incorporating curved tubular steel legs, a wood top and side drawers together with a matching

EDUCATION KIT

Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

tubular steel chair, (It is this design which you see on the cover of this education kit).

Choose one tubular steel chair design from the exhibition and make a sketch of it in the box provided.



Fill in the following details:

Designer: _____

Object: _____

Date of Production: _____

Materials: _____

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Complete a PMI chart for your chosen design:

Plus (Positive aspects of the design)	Minus (Negative aspects of the design)	Interesting (What makes the object likeable)

Write a production plan for the manufacture of this design:

Process	Materials Substances Chemicals	Tools Equipment Machinery	Risk assessment and safety considerations

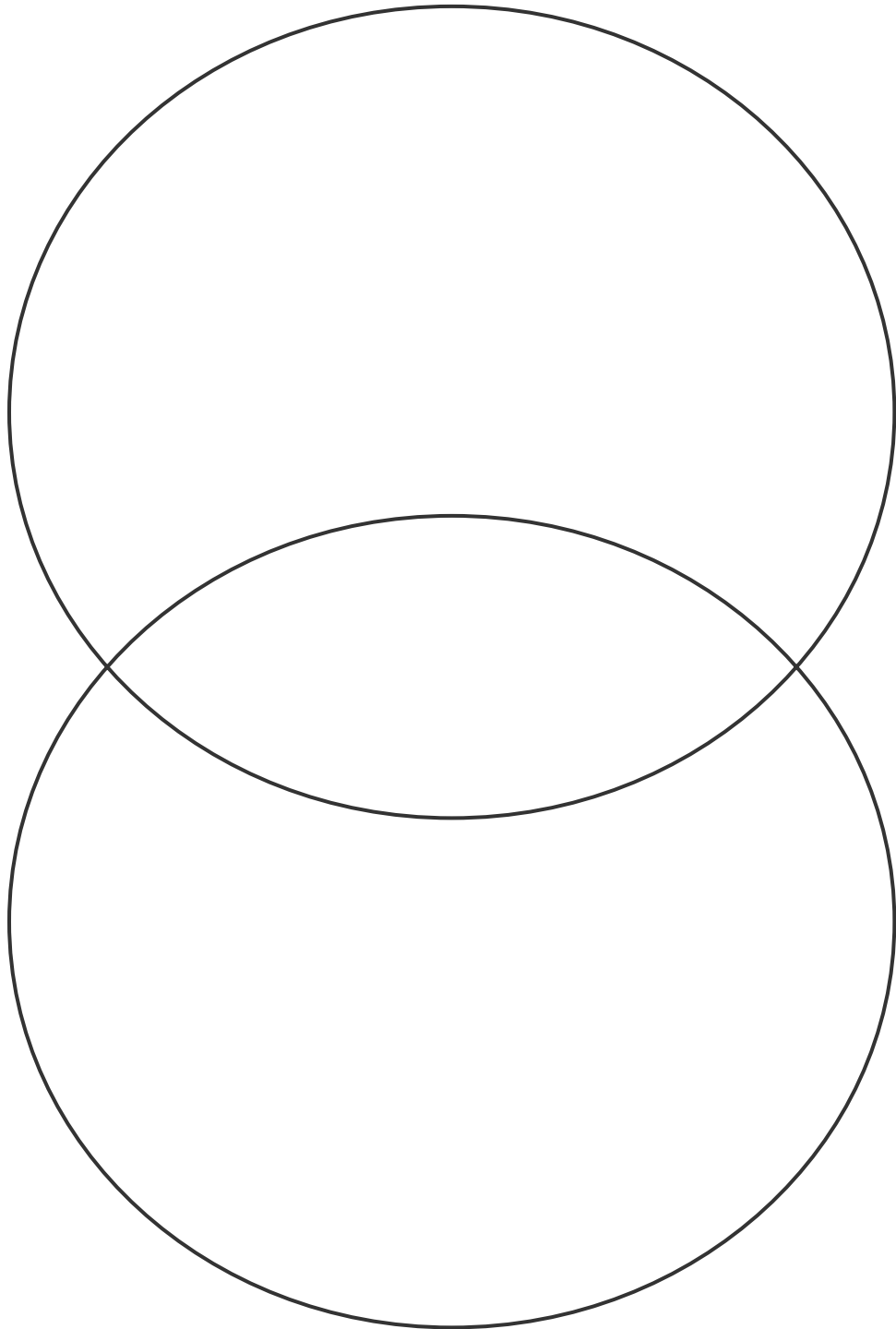
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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Use the Venn diagram on this page to compare and contrast the two chair designs you have chosen.

Chair 1

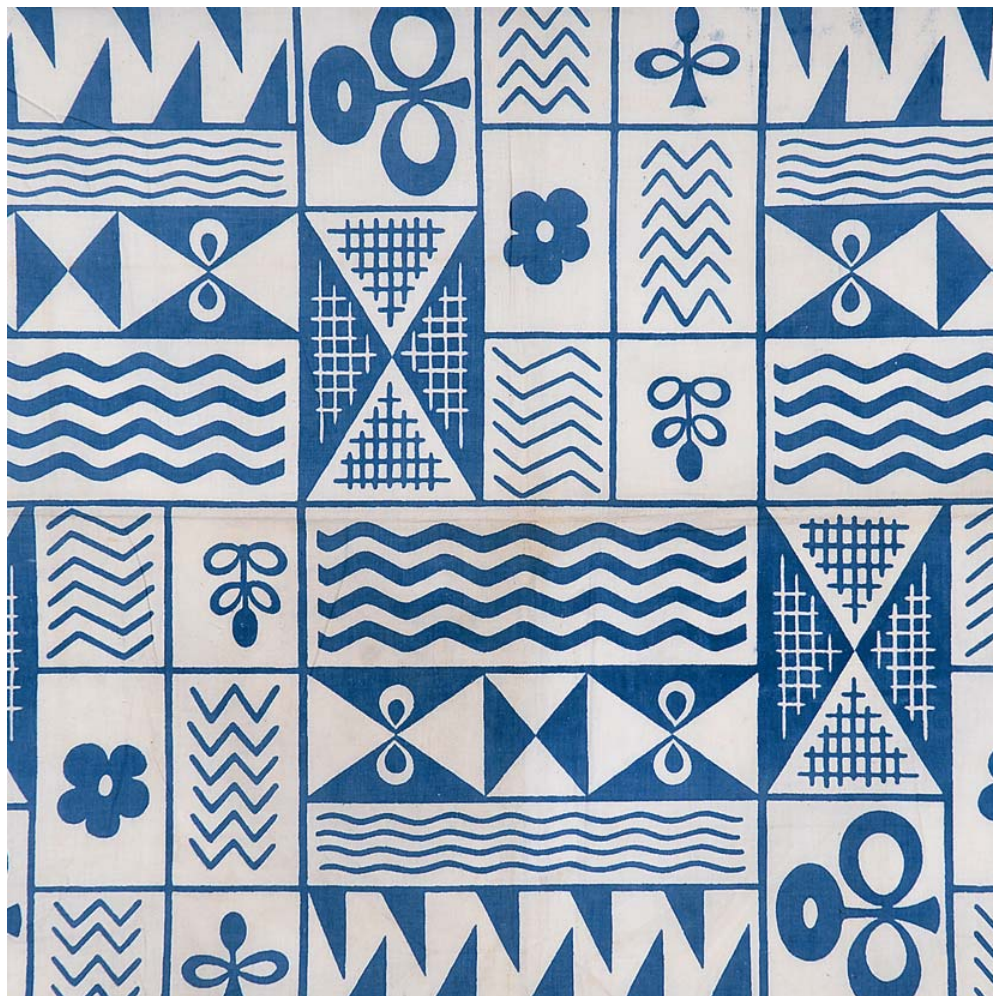
Chair 2



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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Textiles



Frances Burke
Samoa (detail) c. 1939
screenprint on cotton
89.0 x 66.0 cm
Frances Burke Centre
RMIT University, Melbourne
Gift of Dr Frances Mary Burke MBE
Photographer: John Brash 2007
© Frances Burke Centre



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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Background to key Australian designers

Michael and Ella O'Connell

Living in Melbourne from 1930 to 1937, Michael and Ella O'Connell collaborated on the design and production of textiles following their travels to Europe, Britain, India and South East Asia during 1929 and 1930. Prior to their meeting Ella O'Connell practised printmaking and embroidery and was Secretary of the Victorian Arts and Crafts Society in the 1920s. British-born Michael O'Connell served in World War I and arrived in Australia in 1920 planning to become a farmer. Settling in Melbourne however, from the early 1920s he painted, worked in landscape gardening, and designed and constructed his own house using concrete blocks. The O'Connells were married in 1931 and began designing and printing boldly patterned furnishing fabrics and wall hangings using lino blocks to print on heavy Irish linen and silk. The O'Connell's design practice was varied. One common characteristic was the repetition of a set of simple, often classically inspired motifs.

The most popular of the O'Connells' designs comprised an abstract organic line printed in a single colour on raw linen. Based on natural phenomena, it held associations of plant forms, animal skins or sand dunes, and was often printed in a rust colour over a natural linen background or over a darker brown or orange.

Frances Burke

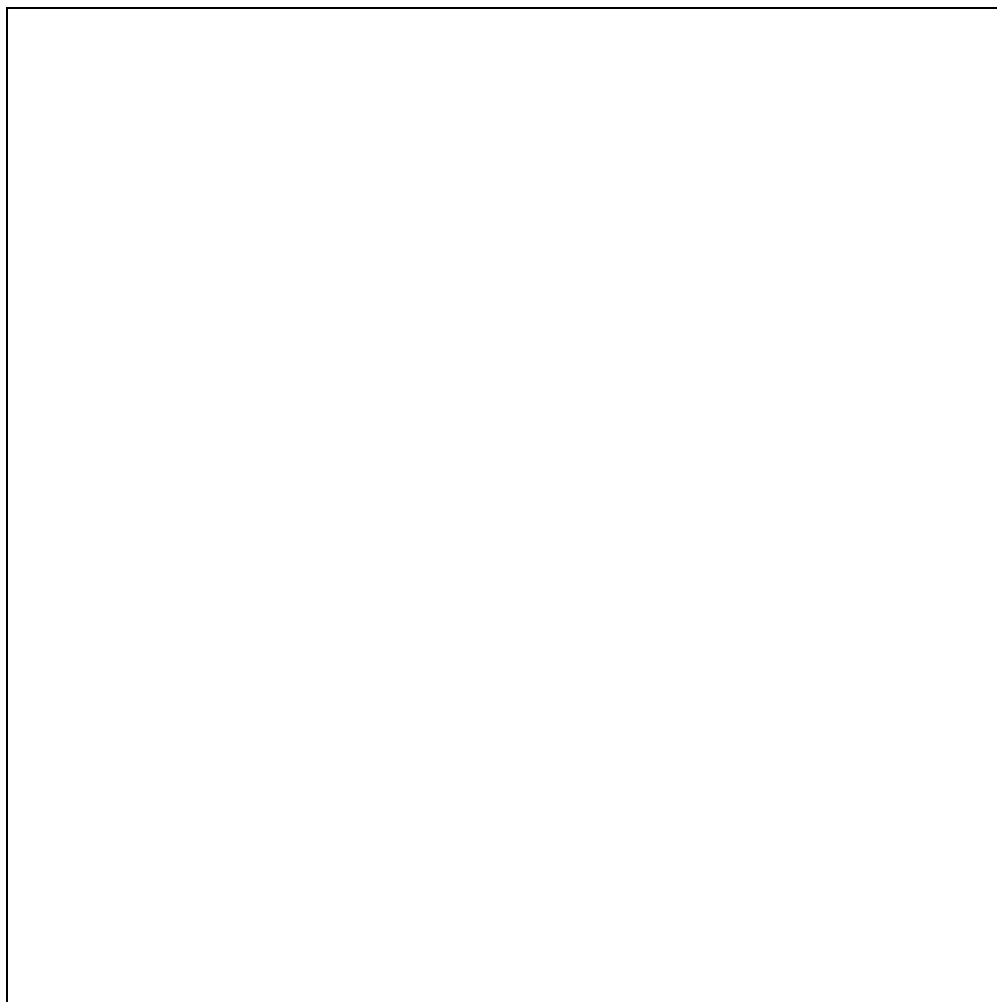
After training as a nurse in the early 1930s, Frances Burke enrolled in evening classes at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School, Melbourne and subsequently studied textile design and printing under Michael O'Connell at Melbourne Technical College.

Burke's career as a textile designer began in 1937 when her work was commissioned by the fashion department of Georges of Collins Street. In 1938 she established the Burway fabric printing company with Morris Holloway (a fellow Melbourne Technical College student), renamed Textile Converters in the late 1930s.

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Choose one textile design from the exhibition and make a sketch of it in the box provided.



Fill in the following details:

Designer: _____

Object: _____

Date of Production: _____

Materials: _____

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Complete a PMI chart for your chosen design:

Plus (Positive aspects of the design)	Minus (Negative aspects of the design)	Interesting (What makes the object likeable)

Write a production plan for the manufacture of this design:

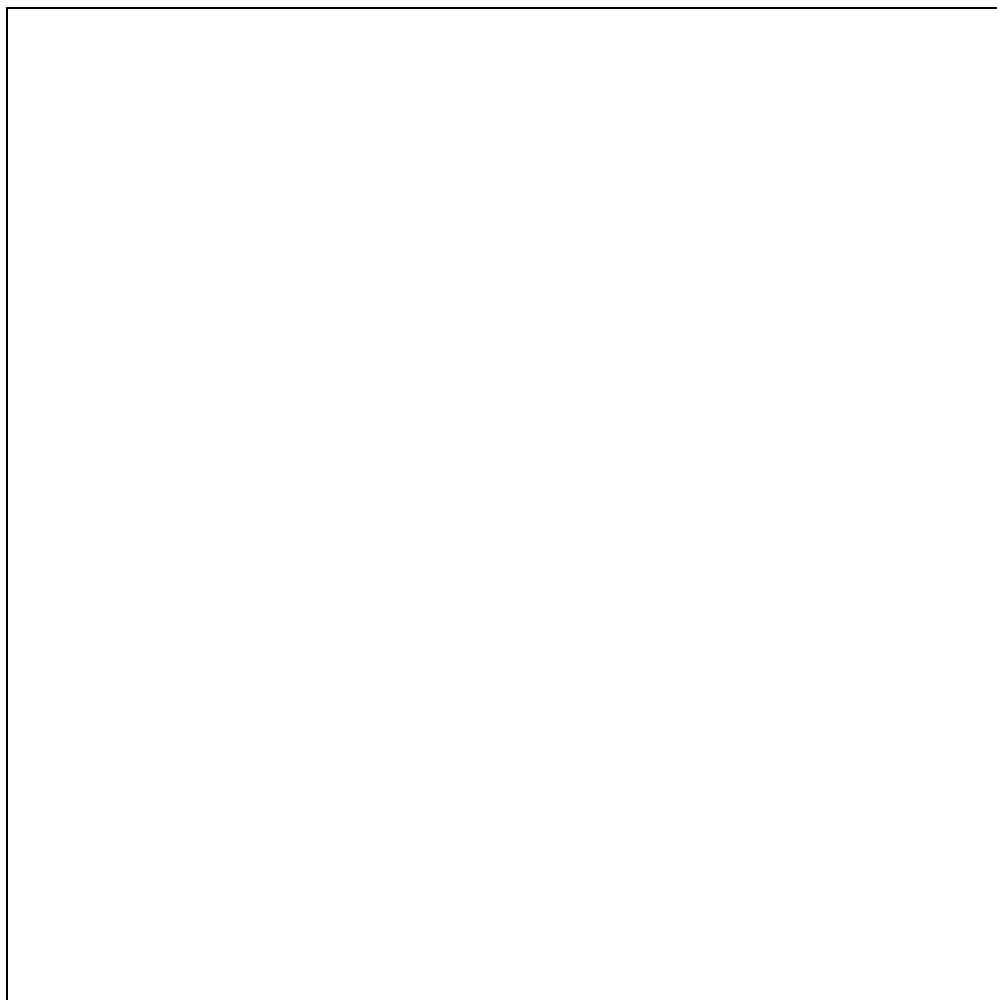
Process	Materials Substances Chemicals	Tools Equipment and Machinery	Risk assessment and safety considerations



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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Choose a second textile design from the exhibition and make a sketch of it in the box provided.



Fill in the following details:

Designer: _____

Object: _____

Date of Production: _____

Materials: _____

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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Complete a PMI chart for your chosen design:

Plus (Positive aspects of the design)	Minus (Negative aspects of the design)	Interesting (What makes the object likeable)

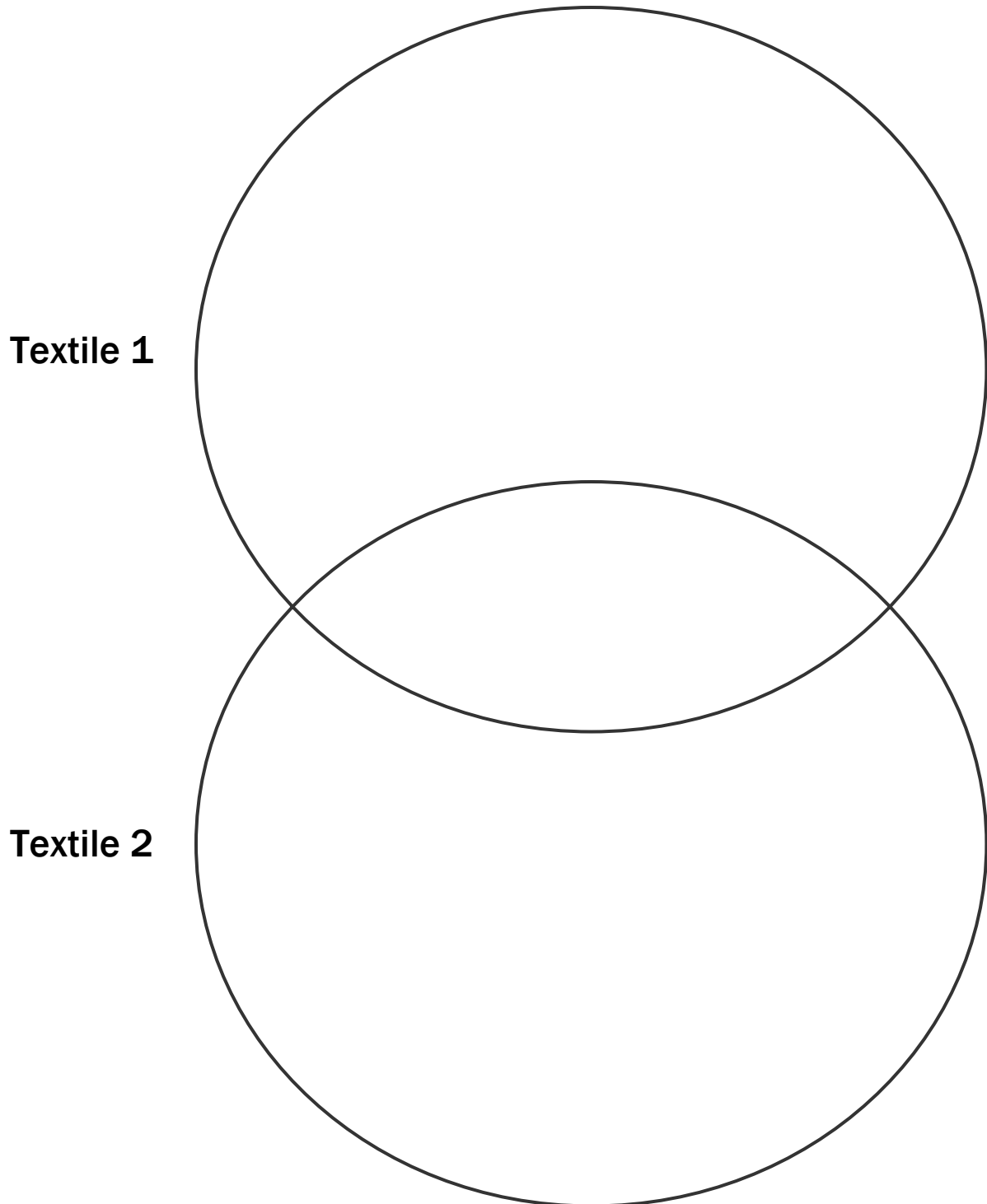
Write a production plan for the manufacture of this design:

Process	Materials Substances Chemicals	Tools Equipment and Machinery	Risk assessment and safety considerations

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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Use the Venn diagram on this page to compare and contrast the two textile designs you have chosen.





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Savage Luxury: Modernist Design in Melbourne 1930-1939

Topics for further research

- *Bauhaus* design
- The Depression beginning 1929/30
- Art Deco design
- Tubular Steel Furniture
- Furniture design by Fred Ward
- Textiles by Michael and Ella O'Connell
- Australian Timbers
- Textile printing methods
- The development of plastics i.e. Bakelite
- Indigenous cultures as resource for textile design

Extension tasks

- Research the designs of Nicola Cerini and compare her work with the designs of Frances Burke or Michael and Ella O'Connell.
- Develop a collaborative design for a chair or wall hanging using the artists listed above as resource.
- Develop a contemporary design for a chair or wall hanging using materials sourced only from Australian manufacturers.

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14 July – 4 November 2007

Written by Clayton Tremlett, Education Officer, Heide Museum of Modern Art

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