

palimpsest

The theme we propose for the Australian exhibition at the 2023 Architecture Biennale is “palimpsest”.

Palimpsest is traditionally writing upon writing, where previous writings can still be read. In visual culture it has also come to mean heterogeneity of authorship and a polyphony of voices.

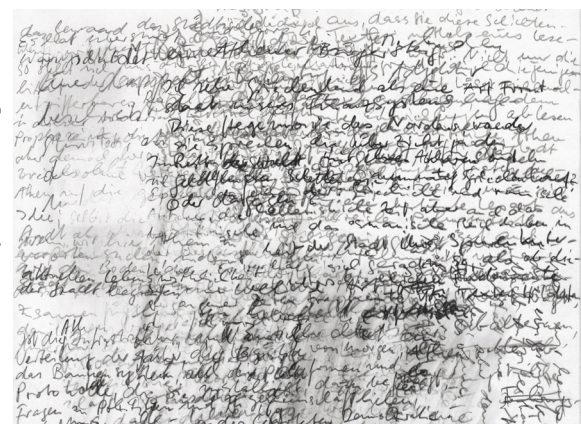
Here we invoke palimpsest in the realm of architecture: that the Laboratory of the Future is to build on/with/in what is already there.

We do this with two main convictions. The first is in the cause of pluralism. The idea that contemporary architectural

trajectories find richness not only in the isolated individual work or person, but in the palimpsest: the relationships with other work and other people, in particular what is already there. It draws its strength from its associations.

The second is an environmental imperative. The palimpsest city is the sustainable city *par excellence*. Building creatively on itself with itself is its *raison d'être*. Such a mode of practice demotes the cult of newness in favour of the richness and inventiveness of reuse. It elevates the value of what is existing and those relationships, and works with them.

Katja Pudor, Palimpsest (2018)





A terrace house in Sydney transmogrifies into a Buddhist Temple at ground floor. Such architectural over-writing is often inadvertently moving, or humorous.

The idea of palimpsest inherently refutes the blank page, Tabula Rasa, Terra Nullis. It recognises the pre-existence and equal status of others. It reminds current authors: "you too will one day be over-written". As a mode of practice it represents a shift: build now understanding others will build over, in, with and around you.

In the context of Australian history, the metaphor of palimpsest has

special meaning. Contrary to a colonial narrative of erasure or assimilation, the presence and clear legibility of First Nations Australians themselves and their story is fundamental.

A palimpsest is also an ongoing dynamic, involving ever more actors. It provokes the over-arching question: where are all our over-writings taking us?

Writing upon writing:
City grain and
landscape in Sydney,
and also in the
"geography of the
mind": map by artist
Adrian George Feint,
1935.

State Library NSW



Jessica Spresser, Peter Besley

Historically young, low density, resource intensive and yet rapidly expanding, Australian cities urgently need a compelling language of Reuse. Out of step with younger generations fluent in the aesthetics and values of pluralism, they must provide a future which is more than just a casualty of the past.

Our team is well placed to advance this effort, with expertise at national and international levels in: architecture and urban design; curatorial, event and publication design; management; image-making and media work at the highest level, and First Nations representation.

Creative Team

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Experience and Capability

Jessica Spresser and Peter Besley work collaboratively on many of their projects. In 2020, they jointly won a national competition for the Barangaroo Pier Pavilion, which is due for completion in 2023. More recently in 2022, they won a national competition for a significant memorial in Canberra, with construction due to begin later this year. The two practices draw on their varying expertise and interests to propose and deliver bespoke, concept-driven pieces of architecture.

Current project roles include: Head Consultant management of all consultant teams, design and documentation for construction, delivery to budget and time constraints, and communication and presentation to stakeholders and the media. The two studios have the capacity to deliver the project in Venice and subsequent exhibitions and presentations in Australia.

Jessica and Peter are both financial members of the Australian Institute of Architects and registered with the Board of Architects.

Jessica Spresser

Jessica Spresser is an emerging Australian architect. Her Sydney-based studio SPRESSER engages with built and speculative architectural work, object design and fine art. She has practiced internationally in London, Tokyo and Venice. Jessica holds a Master of Architecture from the University of Queensland, where she was awarded the Karl & Gertrude Langer Memorial Prize for Design in 2011.

In 2012 she assisted architect Anupama Kundoo in the realisation of her Venice Biennale exhibition *Feel the Ground, Wall House: One to One*, where she spent a total of nine months organising logistics and assisting in the design and construction of the exhibit in the Biennale's Arsenale.

Jessica is currently undertaking a PhD in Exhibition Design and the intersection of Architecture and Art at the University of Queensland. In 2022 Jessica presented recent projects at the National Architecture Conference, *Lost Opportunities*, and in 2021 at The Architecture Symposium, *Beyond the Building*.

Peter Besley

Peter Besley has been active in the fields of architecture and urban design at national and international levels for over 20 years. In 2004 Peter co-founded Assemblage, a London-based studio of architects and urban designers which he ran until 2018. At Assemblage Peter led the design and execution of numerous high-profile projects including the winning scheme for the \$1Bn Iraqi Parliament Complex and the Design District in London UK (completed 2021).

Peter has led university studios in urban design and architecture at Masters level: in the UK at the Bartlett School of Architecture UCL, and in Australia at the University of Queensland. Whilst at the Bartlett, Peter curated his Masters' Unit Summer Exhibitions for 5 years.

Peter is currently practicing and teaching in Australia. His studio is engaged in the design of a number of unique private houses and civic buildings, including *Couldrey House*, which received a High Commendation in the international AR House Awards in 2020.