

The University of Adelaide

# Romaldo Giurgola in Australia and the ‘Other’ Modern Tradition

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**Aldo Giurgola, 2005 by Mandy Martin. Ochre, pigment and oil on linen. Collection: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra. Commissioned in recognition of Giurgola’s life-long contribution to architecture and funded by voluntary donations from members and friends of the architectural profession. Gift of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects 2005.**

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## **Abstract**

This research thesis examines the mature work of the architect Romaldo Giurgola in Australia. Born in 1920 in Rome, Italy, Giurgola is best known in Australia for the design of the New Parliament House, a significant contribution to Australian architecture. Yet his work beyond the parliament building has received scant attention. It is little recognised that after his decision to reside permanently in Canberra, and later becoming an Australian citizen in 2000, Giurgola designed several buildings in Australia, and two international commissions from his Canberra base.

Colin St John Wilson describes an ‘Other Tradition of Modern Architecture’ (1995) in which, rather than being an isolated movement in architectural history, he positions Modernism as an ‘uncompleted project’, one that continually emphasizes a response to specific physical and social contexts rather than the expression of abstract theories. Examining four of Giurgola’s Australian buildings, this thesis casts Giurgola’s Australian work in St John Wilson’s ‘other tradition’ of modernism. Giurgola’s geographic and intellectual traverse provides a unique journey through post-war architectural theory and practice from his architectural education in the Beaux-Arts tradition to the upheaval on the East Coast of the United States in the 1960s to the diffusion of post-modernism in Australia. His response to the specific architectural task is a continual negotiation between a set of contextual concerns, technology and his idiosyncratic concepts of ‘home’ and ‘citizenship’. I argue that the formal tension Giurgola creates between elements in his architecture reflects the complexity of contexts in which he worked, and is what, although stylistically different, brings together the work of architects that may at first glance be quite dissimilar to Giurgola such as Australian architects Glenn Murcutt, Troppo Architects, Ashton Raggatt McDougall, and Richard Leplastrier. Further, I argue that Giurgola’s encounter with Australia was a transforming experience in which he found that the discontinuity and calculated incompleteness of Nordic modernism was a good fit for Australia.

The study provides new insight into the mature work of an architect who has contributed substantially to Australian architecture, and, through the parliament building, to Australia’s image of governance.





## **Declaration**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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