



Max Dupain's Manly

The artist and the Northern Beaches series

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Crowded afternoon, Manly #40

Max Dupain is renowned for his beach photography. For many his unique vision defines the Australian beach culture of the 1930s and 40s, but for Dupain it was simply, 'how I used to spend my weekends, taking pictures for exhibition as a break from commercial work.'¹ In fact his most celebrated beach image, *Sunbaker*, 1937, was taken while on holidays - 'The best work is always done on holidays'.²

What attracted Dupain to Manly were his favorite subjects: sunshine, sand, surf and people enjoying their leisure. Another key attraction was Manly's modern face, with the elegant contours of its contemporary architecture framing people participating in Australia's most popular pastime. Indeed, Dupain's photographs of Manly are modern and sophisticated, not only in their subject matter but also in their technique and spirit - 'Great art has always been contemporary in spirit'.³

When Dupain began photographing Manly in 1938, aged 27, he was already established as a bold and innovative professional. Experimenting with the controversial ideas of the 'New Photography' - extreme angles, unusual viewpoints, close-ups and raking light, he produced daring and original images, many of which were published in Sydney Ure Smith's consciously modern *Home* magazine. Manly's shark tower provided him with unusual angles of the beach and surf, while close up action shots of lifesavers were obtained when he ventured into the surf with his precious camera. Often he waited patiently on the beach for the raking light to elongate shadows, define forms and highlight pattern, seeking that decisive moment when 'subject matter just comes to you, you don't go to it'.⁴

These evocative depictions of Manly reflect an intimate understanding of the beach, resulting from many happy childhood holidays spent at the family cottage in Newport. They combine his love of monumental form, his abiding interest in light, and his quest for modernity.

Journey to Manly

Dupain, like many visitors to Manly, often began his journey at Circular Quay, aboard the ferry 'Curl Curl'. The exhilarating seven mile journey across the most beautiful sections of Sydney Harbour concluded at the Ferry Wharf, where Dupain was inspired by the modern contours and the sweeping curve of its awning to create the dynamic composition, *Arriving at the Manly Wharf*.

Across the road from the wharf, the Manly Hotel provided Dupain with an excellent aerial view of the *West Esplanade and Harbour Pool*, where double decker buses terminated their journeys and alighting passengers headed down the Corso, which linked the harbour with the surf.

Here, Dupain documented one of the popular pastimes of the period - a winter stroll along South Steyne, past the Surf Pavilion and Fairy Bower to the secluded Shelly Beach. In *Sunday Promenade* he photographed the crowd dressed in their Sunday best, stopping along the way, *Taking the Air*, and enjoying the magnificent views from the comfort of a deck chair.

Arriving at Manly Wharf II #2





Sunday promenade, Manly #12



Manly Surf Pavilion from the Shark Tower #8

Manly Surf Pavilion

The South Steyne Surf Pavilion, home to the Manly Surf Life Saving Club, featured prominently in Dupain's Manly photographs. His attraction to this building was probably due to his love of all things modern, but also to the fact that he was a frustrated architect. His regard for its aesthetics, especially its striking shark observation tower, foreshadowed his professional career as an architectural photographer - *'I always had a hankering for architecture... and thought seriously about becoming an architect. But mathematics and physics were my undoing... I practiced architectural photography for over 30 years almost as a full time occupation and I consider some of my best work has been produced in this area of photography.'*⁵

Eric Andrew's pavilion design, which introduced 'modernism' to Manly architecture, won the Sir John Sulman Award in 1939. Combining functionalism and simple streamlined forms, the horizontal sand-coloured building with its promenade cantilevered across the entire frontage was photographed from its tower and the beach.

In the tightly cropped *Manly Surf Pavilion from the Shark Tower*, the building's clean geometric lines are heightened by the contrasting textures in the sand below, its pictorial tension held by the broken line etched into the sand. Shot from the sand, *Manly Surf Pavilion* reveals how the building echoed the curve of the beach and headland, while the concentric curves of its 'art deco' rails are featured in the photograph, *Arm in Arm*, 1943.

From the Shark Tower

At the southern end of the pavilion rose an imposing seven metre high shark observation tower, which was manned by lifesavers. Dupain captured its 'modern' spirit in the uncompromising *Shark Tower, Manly Beach*, 1938, shot from a very low angle to emphasise the monumentality of its starkly modeled form.

Using this brand new construction, he experimented with a dramatic bird's eye view, creating many of his Manly masterpieces, including vistas of sun-baking, surfing and life saving, as well as views over the pavilion and promenade - *'Heights have always excited me. This viewpoint opens out the subject material, extends the pattern potential and avoids confusion caused by overlap, as from eye level.'*⁶

There is no confusion in the dramatic framing of *Manly*, 1940, another shot taken from the shark observation tower of the launching of a surf boat observed by Sunday spectators. The strong diagonals of the promenade and the boat abstract the composition, while the tiny, surreal shadow at the top, provides an unexpected and mysterious element. Surreal shadows, caused by the raking afternoon light, also feature in *View from the Shark Tower*, 1938, projecting the elongated forms of Sunday strollers on to the pathway before them.

Surf Life Saving

Dupain's interest in health and physical fitness was imbued in him by his father, a pioneer in physical education, and accorded with the then-fashionable belief in 'a healthy body, a healthy mind'. Heroic lifesavers, competing in the rigors of surf carnivals, embodied these ideals and were documented in all their glory.

For many Australians, the lifesaver had replaced the digger and the drover as the 'national type', and for Dupain the surf carnival was *'a parade of masculinity'* which *'typified Australia'*.⁸ He keenly documented its popularity in the wide shot, *Surf Carnival Manly Beach*, and in close ups of its surf boat races, rescue and resuscitation displays, and the militaristic march past.

In the series demonstrating the 'line and reel' rescue method, Dupain emphasised the self-discipline of these perfect physical specimens, while the action shots, *Surf's Up* and *Surf Race Start*, captured their competitive spirit - *'Actions like this have to be anticipated; in this case by me standing out in the surf with camera and waiting for*



Shark Tower at Manly Beach 1938 #5



Arm in Arm 1943 #10

the start. One shot only - I had to be happy and I was'.⁹ While Dupain enjoyed the gladiatorial spectacle of the surf carnival, he also appreciated the linear formations of the march past. In *Surf Carnival Judging* he contrasts the march past with the relaxed crowd of onlookers, while in *Surf Carnival Inspection*, the oblique lines of lifesavers and their shadows are used as a compositional device.

These photographs of Manly's heroes of the surf, imbued with a sense of duty and sacrifice and drilled military precision, heralded their destiny in the armed forces of World War II.

Beach Bodies

Although Dupain admired heroic lifesavers and the physically fit, he also had an affection for ordinary Australians enjoying a day at the beach, as seen in his unobtrusive close-ups of women chatting and lovers walking hand in hand, all taken on the Promenade. In the 1930s and 40s, Manly was one of Sydney's most popular weekend destinations, attracting a wide assortment of characters, as seen in *Crowded afternoon, Manly*, where beachgoers in various states of undress compete for space to sunbake or shelter in the shade. While sightseers enjoyed the view from above, those below seem oblivious to both their gaze and to Dupain taking their photograph.

Dupain seldom confronted his subjects, preferring to take his photographs at a distance or from behind. Clearly he was more interested in beach body language, and the way light molded muscular physiques, than in personalities. His most famous beach image shot from behind, *Bondi*, 1939, 'occurred spontaneously, during a sun baking session, never to be seen again...This group represents what Picasso used to call "found things".'¹⁰ While it has become an icon, a similar 'thing' is seen in *Forms at Manly*, c1940, which remained in the Dupain Archives, unprinted for over sixty years.

Footnotes:

1. Max Dupain, *Max Dupain's Australia*: Viking Press, Ringwood VIC, 1986, p.163.
2. Max Dupain, *Max Dupain's Australian Landscapes*: Viking Press, Ringwood VIC, 1988, p.114.
3. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 March, 1938.
4. Max Dupain in Gael Newton, 'Max Dupain', *Light Vision*, No.5, May-June, 1978.
5. Max Dupain, *Max Dupain's Australia*: Viking Press, Ringwood VIC, 1986, p.16.
6. Max Dupain, *Max Dupain's Australia*: Viking Press, Ringwood VIC, 1986, p.156.
7. Max Dupain, *Max Dupain's Australian Landscapes*: Viking Press, Ringwood VIC, 1988, p.172.
8. *Photographers of Australia*, video, Film Australia, Sydney, 1992.
9. Max Dupain, *Max Dupain's Australia*: Viking Press, Ringwood VIC, 1986, p.144.
10. Max Dupain, *Max Dupain's Australia*: Viking Press, Ringwood VIC, 1986, p.84.

Forms at Manly #16



From the archive

I was delighted when it was suggested that we might have a Max Dupain Manly exhibition. Firstly, because of the venue, a very fitting one for this work, and secondly, it has been a chance to print and exhibit most of the remaining Dupain images of the Manly Beach area.

Although several of the negatives had been published recently in *Dupain's Beaches*, (Chapter & Verse), for obvious reasons there was the necessity to curtail the number of pictures of Manly, and as a result of that research it became evident that there were many more which would be left unseen. So now, with this show, we are able to complete the unveiling and present many of those remaining pictures.

This collection of photographs, showing the people of Sydney and visitors on and around Manly Beach, symbolise the health, vitality and celebration of the physical life for which we Australians are renowned and for Dupain this was a pretty important life component. His idea of a good holiday was, not to head for distant shores, but to spend the precious week or so by the sea where the camera was ever present.

However, this collection of photographs, I think, was a result of a commission to provide pictures for a publication. But, as with much of his work, Max would not only take the shots for his client, he would go that little bit further and see the possibilities of an "exhibition" negative. And many of these prints on the walls of the Manly Art Gallery & Museum in 2002 are, hopefully, some of those special and personal visions as seen by him - and who knows maybe another 'icon' will emerge!

Jill White

Jill White, a well known Sydney photographer, worked with Max Dupain for over 25 years and is the custodian of his Exhibition Negative Archive, printing, publishing and exhibiting it as set out in his will. Her two recent publications are *Dupain's Sydney*, which contains comprehensive biographical information by Zeny Edwards, and *Dupain's Beaches*, which has an extensive analysis of Dupain's beach photography, written by Sebastian Smees. Jill is currently working on her new book and exhibition *Dupain's Australians*.

Manly Beach from the Shark Tower 1938 #19



Rescue and Resuscitation I #32

List of works

1. *Manly Ferry Wharf, Circular Quay*, 1938
2. *Arriving at Manly Wharf II*
3. *West Esplanade and Harbour Pool, Manly*
4. *'Pause, Lean and Muse'*
5. *Shark Tower at Manly Beach*, 1938
6. *View from the Shark Tower, Manly Beach*, 1938
7. *Sunny Afternoon*
8. *Manly Surf Pavilion, from the Shark Tower*
9. *Sailors and their Girls, Manly*, 1943
10. *Arm in Arm*, 1943
11. *Taking the Air*
12. *Sunday Promenade, Manly*
13. *Sunbathing on the Rocks*
14. *Returning from Shelley Beach*
15. *Manly Surf Pavilion*
16. *Forms at Manly*
17. *Beautiful Backs*
18. *Umbrellas and Wigwags*
19. *Manly Beach from the Shark Tower*, 1938
20. *Shadow Patterns, South Steyne*, 1938
21. *Manly Surfing*
22. *Manly*
23. *Manly from the Shark Tower*, 1938
24. *Surf Carnival Judging*
25. *Surf Carnival Inspection*
26. *End of the Race*
27. *Beaching the Lifeboat*
28. *Surf Lifesavers with their Boards*
29. *Solitary Lifesaver*
30. *Surf Carnival Manly Beach*
31. *Surfs Up, Manly*
32. *Rescue and Resuscitation I*
33. *Rescue and Resuscitation II*
34. *Rescue and Resuscitation III*
35. *Rescue and Resuscitation IV*
36. *Rescue and Resuscitation VI*
37. *Deck Chairs for Hire*
38. *Sailor and his Girl*, c.1950s
39. *Seaside Chat*, c.1950s
40. *Crowded Afternoon Manly*
41. *Manly Afternoon*
42. *Surf Race Start*

Note: all works are dated c.1940s unless otherwise noted.



Manly #22

Manly Art Gallery & Museum
6 September - 6 October 2002

Exhibition Curator
Linda Slutzkin

Photographs printed by Jill White from the
Max Dupain Exhibition Negative Archive

Manly Art Gallery & Museum
West Esplanade Reserve, Manly
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Manly Afternoon #41

