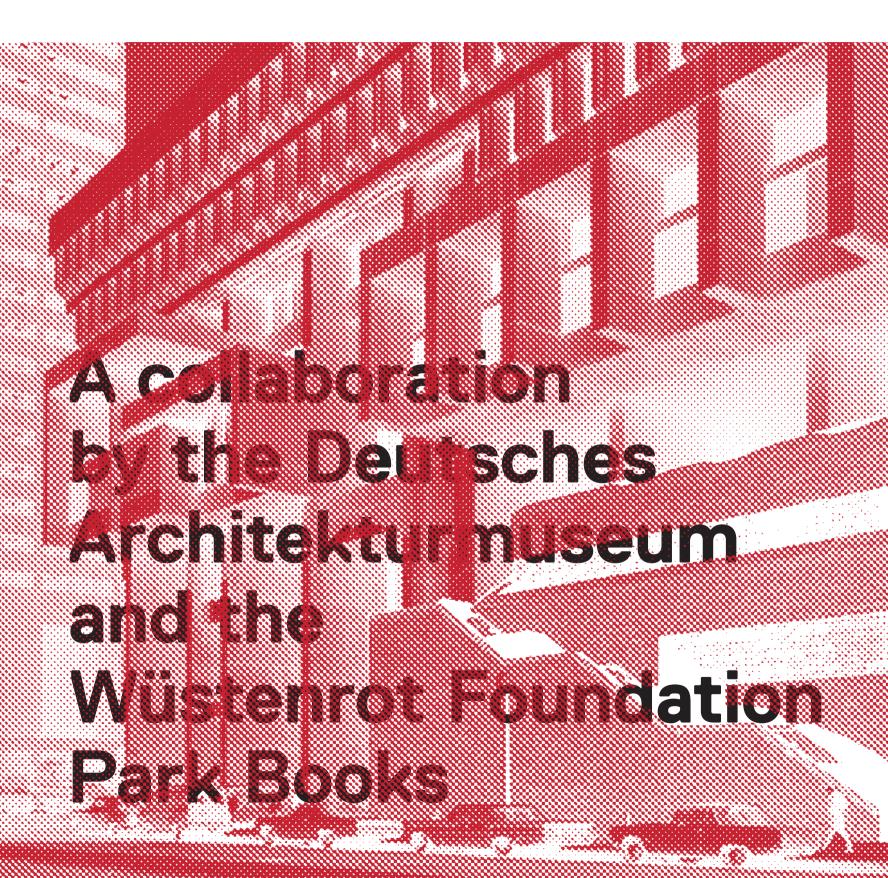
SOS Brutalism A Global Survey



SOS Brutalism

A Global Survey

A collaboration by the Deutsches Architekturmuseum and the Wüstenrot Foundation

Edited by Oliver Elser Philip Kurz Peter Cachola Schmal

Scientific editing Felix Torkar Maximilian Liesner



Oceania

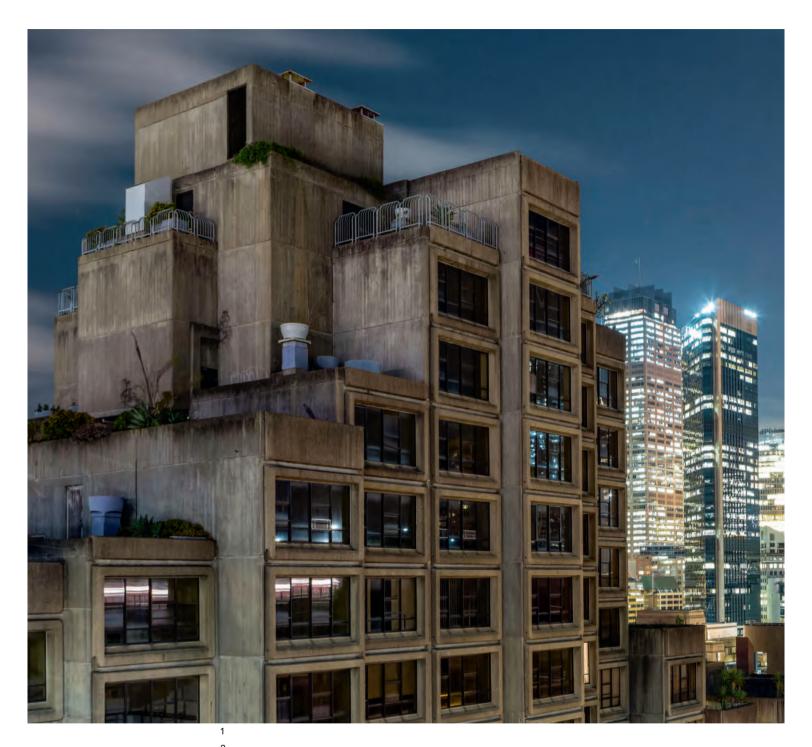




Photo: Craig Hayman, 2017 2 Photo: Alisha Gore, 2016

1978D-1980 threatened

Theodore "Tao" Gofers Sirius Apartment Building, Sydney, Australia

Sirius, a block of public housing apartments designed in 1978, is one of Sydney's best known Brutalist buildings for a number of reasons. For a start, its location in The Rocks is unmissable, rising up beside the southern approach to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The building's Lego-like form is eye-catching, resembling a stack of cubes with a stepped profile that responds to the topography and site context. The exposed off-form concrete façade features acid-etched, precast concrete window hoods that define each cube and accentuate the building's modulated form. Rising from five to eleven floors, the stepped roofs house planter beds and, in the building's heyday, these gardens were a major design element, providing outdoor spaces for residents on the upper floors.

The building's birth was a troubled one, finally marking the end to a long battle between the Millers Point residents—supported by the construction unions—and the New South Wales state government which wanted to redevelop the area in the late 1960s and 1970s, razing the Rocks' historic streetscapes and its existing public housing. The unions refused to break up the close-knit community and would not work on the sites, placing what would become known as "green bans" (some of the world's first) on the area. After several years of hostilities, during which time many terraces were demolished, the government suspended its plans and agreed to provide new housing for those low-income families that had been displaced in the process. The Department of Housing architect given the task of designing the new project was Gofers. He consulted with prospective tenants and responded with a seventy-nine-unit building that comprised a range of accommodations to ensure a mix of households from one- to four-bedroom apartments, including ground-floor flats for elderly residents complete with distress-call buttons that lit up on a board in the foyer.

Sirius was based on another Housing Commission residential block (The Laurels, 1974F) designed by Gofers in the southern beachside suburb of Sans Souci. Both buildings are reminiscent of Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 housing complex in Montreal (1961D-1967). Like Safdie's building, their stepped, modulated format visually expresses each individual unit. However, when it was completed, Sirius was derided by many as an eyesore and today it is again at the center of another divisive battle. The current New South Wales government wants to allow it to be demolished and to sell off the site for a luxury apartment block that would capitalize on the panoramic harbor views. Most of the tenants have been forcibly removed and the building, unchanged since it was built, now stands virtually empty. The rooftop gardens have long since withered, the purple exhaust vents

have faded to a dusty mauve, and the building's robust façade—originally intended to receive a final coat of white concrete, but denied that due to budget constraints—needs a clean.

But Sydneysiders are rallying again. Both the New South Wales Heritage Council and the National Trust have called for Sirius to be heritage listed due to its aesthetic and social significance, however the government has so far refused. The Sirius Foundation has been formed and is working in association with the Millers Point Community, which is fighting the continued selling off of public housing properties in the area. Funds were raised through crowdsourcing to mount a legal challenge of the legitimacy of that refusal, and the case was heard in the New South Wales Land and Environment Court in early April 2017. At the time of press. a decision was still pending and the unions had issued a new green ban over the site. The fight to save Sirius continues.

Jenna Reed Burns

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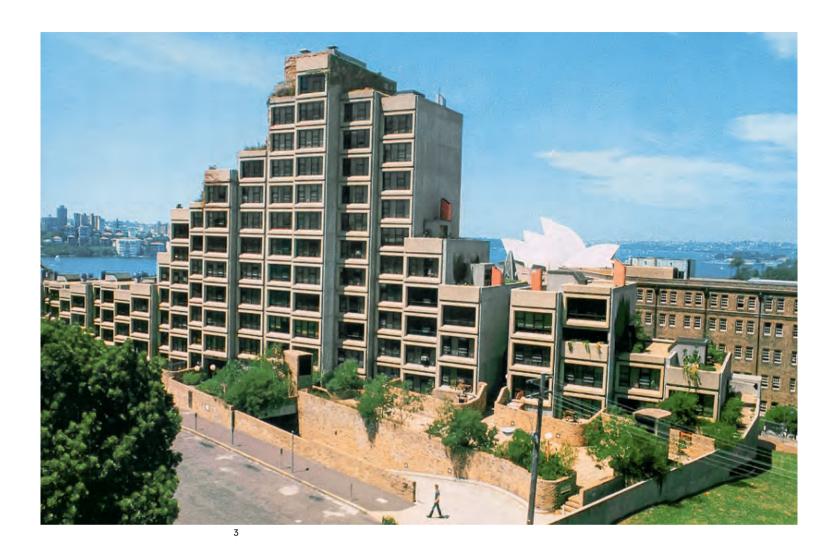
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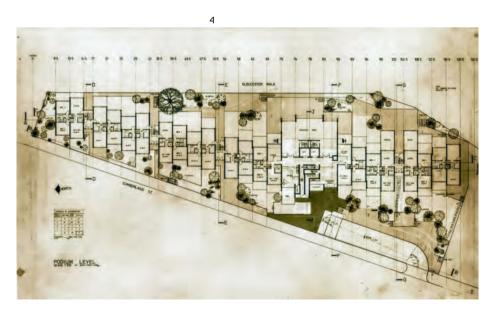
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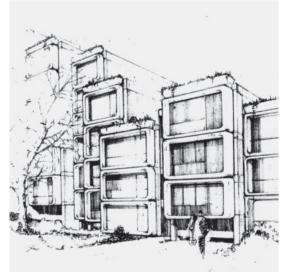
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3 Postcard, circa 1980 4 Floor plan 5 Drawing



6, 7 Photos: Alisha Gore, 2016

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