

SOS Brutalism

A Global Survey



**A collaboration
by the Deutsches
Architekturmuseum
and the
Wüstenrot Foundation
Park Books**

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



1

2



1
Photo: Craig Hayman, 2017
2
Photo: Alisha Gore, 2016

1978^D–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.

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

Bibliography

John Dunn, Ben Peaker, and Amiera Piscopo, *Sirius* (Dawes Point: Piper Press, 2017)

Grace Karskens, “On the Rocks,” *UNSW Magazine*, December 15, 2016, <http://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/social-affairs/rocks> (accessed May 10, 2017)

James Colman, *The House that Jack Built: Jack Munday, green bans hero*, (Sydney: NewSouth, 2016)

Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans Red Union: Environmental activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 1998)

Jack Munday, *Green Bans and Beyond* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981)

Sirius was based on another Housing Commission residential block (The Laurels, 1974^F) 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 (1961^D–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



3

4



5





6

7

- 3 Postcard, circa 1980
- 4 Floor plan
- 5 Drawing



6, 7
Photos: Alisha Gore, 2016

Imprint

The graphic design of this book is a tribute to the German edition of the 1966 book *Brutalismus in der Architektur: Ethik oder Ästhetik?* by Reyner Banham, published by Karl Krämer, Stuttgart

Publication

This book accompanies the exhibition

SOS Brutalism — Save the Concrete Monsters!

November 9, 2017 – April 2, 2018

Deutsches Architekturmuseum
Department of Culture and Science
City of Frankfurt / Main

Edited by

Oliver Elser, Philip Kurz, Peter Cachola Schmal

Scientific editing

Felix Torkar, Maximilian Liesner

Project management

Karoline Mueller-Stahl

Editorial assistance

Miriam Kremser

Translations

Andrew Horsfield pp. 11, 15–19, 32–39, 78–79,
86–89, 106–07, 114–15, 158–63, 168–73, 198–201,
226–31, 252–53, 258–61, 348–51, 362–69, 376–77,
382–87, 442–47

Sanja Jurca Avci pp. 388–89

Ryusuke Kojio pp. 290–91

Gen Machida pp. 280–83

Kenneth MacInnes pp. 402–05, 238–45, 254–57

Lisa Rosenblatt pp. 40–45, 448–75

Copy editing and proofreading

Charlotte Eckler

Graphic design

Rahlwes.Pietz

Typeface

Replica

Paper

100 g/qm Inapa Bavaria matt

Lithography, printing, and binding

DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg GmbH, Thuringia

Screen printing

Novak Siebdruck, Berlin

© 2017 Deutsches Architekturmuseum,
Wüstenrot Foundation and Park Books AG, Zurich

Park Books
Niederdorfstrasse 54
8001 Zurich
Switzerland
www.park-books.com

Park Books is being supported by the Federal
Office of Culture with a general subsidy for the
years 2016–2020.

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may
be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior written consent of the publisher.

ISBN 978-3-03860-075-6

German edition: ISBN 978-3-03860-074-9