

LINDA TYLER

## Imric Porsolt: The “Messenger of Modernism” in Exile

Hungarian Imric Porsolt (1909–2005), a graduate in architecture from the Czech Technical University in Prague, arrived in Auckland as a 30 year old in June 1939. He practised as an architect for over a decade and then taught full-time at the Auckland School of Architecture, in both architectural history and design studio, from 1950 until his retirement in 1974. Speaking with a pronounced middle European accent, he brought a dramatic presentational style and breadth of learning to his lectures.

Porsolt was employed in the School of Architecture only a short time after it had experienced a period of revolt against poor studio teaching. After World War II, staffing of the School was meagre: Professor Cyril Knight as Head of School was joined by English academic Charles Light, who was appointed to a professorial Chair in Design in 1947; Edmund Ferriday, Sammy Crookes, and Arthur Marshall taught construction; muralist James Turkington taught art, with Vernon Brown and Richard Toy in studio. Recent graduates and current students worked as part-time tutors. In 1946, the Architectural Group produced a magazine, *Planning*, with a content critical of the limited scope of the School’s curriculum. In 1948, they and others offered a new vision for the Bachelor of Architecture and their complaints were escalated to the University’s Professorial Board (Gatley 2017: 44–50). The students had requested changes to the history and theory courses in particular, and although Knight defended the focus on “the evolution of European civilisation” (Gatley 2017: 50), it is evident that Porsolt’s encyclopedic approach to teaching the history of buildings—which included African, Persian, Chinese, and Japanese construction—was an attempt to redress the imbalance of his predecessors. Porsolt took challenges to his content and ideas in good spirit, later remembering that in those early years, “I met a very restive generation of young architects” (Porsolt 1984b: 3). Five years after he retired, the School of Architecture invited him to publish 12 of his architectural history lectures as study papers, inaugurating the School of Architecture series: *Italian Architecture* (1980); *Axial Symmetry in Classical Greece* (1980); *Romantic and Nineteenth Century Architecture* (1980); *The History of Building: An Outline History of Structural Thought* (1980); *A Brief Outline of World History* (1981); *A History of the Dwelling and of Places of Meeting Considered Together* (1981); *The History of City Forms as Artifacts in the Landscape* (1981); *The History and Design of Vertical*