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In a volume as captivating as its subject, *Florence Broadhurst* paints an unforgettable portrait of a woman ahead of her time. To this day, mystery shrouds her myriad persona: starlet, couturier, painter as well as her unsolved murder. One thing, however, is certain: Broadhurst's place in the history of interior decor. Recognized worldwide for her groundbreaking wallpaper patterns, this enigmatic Australian left behind a trove of exquisite work, brilliantly displayed here in the first-ever authorized biography of the design icon. Broadhurst's wallpapers out of circulation for nearly 20 years are just now being restored and sold globally to much fanfare. This amazing package showcases more than 100 never-before-published patterns and popular prints such as those owned by Marc Jacobs, Stella McCartney, and Carly Simon alongside a fascinating murder mystery.

Florence Broadhurst: Her Secret & Extraordinary Lives Details

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From Reader Review Florence Broadhurst: Her Secret & Extraordinary Lives for online ebook

Jenny Thayer says

This is a compelling biography. Mysterious lady, who you never really figure out. Who will ever know the truth? Her design house produces some amazing work during it's time. I find the most amazing designs are the ones you only get to see a photograph of a room, but can't see the design up close. Such a shame.

Anna says

Just a gorgeous object and worth having for the reproduction of the wallpapers. I'll never be able to afford to hang any.

Two thoughts:

Firstly, I can't believe it took so long for someone to kill Florence. She was just insufferable.

Secondly, for a book on an inventive and accomplished liar, who had toured China and the sub-continent in the dirty dying days of Colonial knees-up, who then popped up in London as a faux-Parisian couturier to the bobos on the up-and-up and finally returning to have an incredible career in swinging seventies Sydney...possibly then murdered by a famous serial killer...

Why was the text so boring?

It needed far more quotation from Ms Broadhurst's personal correspondence and far less psychodramatic bushwah from the author. But this is my beef with biography in general.

Vivienne Strauss says

Completely mesmerizing and inspiring! Sat down with this last night intending to read a chapter or two but couldn't stop until I finished.

Lizzie says

A biography of Florence Broadbent, an Australian woman who had a career as a singer in various places, then ran a dress shop, and finally, back in Australia, reinvented herself in the 70s as a high end wallpaper designer. She was a crazy, flamboyant personality whose designs are now being reproduced and have appeared in museums where she's regarded as a pioneer of Australian design. She was murdered in her studio and the crime remains unsolved (though she was known to carry large sums of money at all times and it

seems likely that was the motive.)

It reminds me of the biography of P.L. Travers that I read earlier this year, another Australian who used the theater as a way to get away from her roots, and who lied about her origins and presented herself as more English than the English.

People like this make me think about the line between "reinvented herself" and "fraud". Her designs were drawn by people who worked for her, but she knew what she wanted them to do and she was was skilled at bringing design elements together. Reading the zeitgeist and producing what people wanted to buy is a skill, too.

It was mildly interesting as a story of one woman's strange life, but not great.

Lorenzo Phillibuster Fireworks says

This was a very special book. If I could have justified buying the very expensive book as a student I would have. The entire book, cover, the paper used, the pictures and the text were all an art experience.

I first learnt of Florence Broadhurst and her work through a TAFE excursion to Signature Prints, the company that bought her designs and silk screens and brought them back to life. The next year I chose to study her as a designer but what was so amazing about Florence Broadhurst's life was that she only became a designer in her 60's, and partly by chance. The biography provides a well written account of her entire life, from her birth in a country town, to her many travels overseas as a singer, to establishing her wallpaper and prints business to her murder that has never been solved. There is also suspicion that, with Broadhurst's failing eyesight, she may not have had as much input into the designs as she claimed.

This book was put together really well. The text and the pictures all flow really well and make the book itself as special as Florence Broadhurst's designs.

Amanda says

One of the most intriguing biographies I have ever read! Florence Broadhurst went from young starlet traveling the world to a newly married couturier to grand dame of wallpaper design. She was a true master of reinvention! All the more fascinating is her mysterious murder that remains unsolved today. This book reads like a fictional mystery, making it hard to put down once you start.

And if the story doesn't pique your interest even just a little, the full color pages of her work are AMAZING. This design icon's work is making a LOUD comeback today, being used by Marc Jacobs and Stella McCartney, so if you have not heard of her yet, you likely will.

Belinda says

Quite apart from the gorgeous textile designs, this is a great yarn (pun intended). Florence was almost blind,

yet she produced an amazing array of designs right up until her untimely and still-unsolved murder. She was incredibly resourceful, a career chameleon, and knew exactly how to make a profit from society's snobbery.

Emily says

Another split review. The design of the book is incredible and is of the highest quality. Broadhurst's designs leap off the page in a dazzling array of styles and colors. She (or whoever really did design them) was incredibly gifted and this book will be a treasure trove for designers (5 stars for design).

The text of the book is another story. The problem is that too much of the story is devoted to examining who murdered her. For someone who lived in a large manner over three continents and then went on to found such an influential design firm, the number of pages devoted to solving this gristly crime borders on tawdry. I wish more time had been spent on her earlier life, or perhaps her social contacts in Australia that she used to develop her business, or anything else (1.5 stars for text). The feel is really that a journalist wrote this as a prolonged piece about the murder with a lot of background on the victim thrown in. Florence Broadhurst's life was far more exciting than her death.

Muffy Kroha says

This is the lady who invented reinvention. She was an Australian who ended her days as a famous wallpaper designer- Fabulous stuff BTW-She even got herself murdered in her 70's- But her life leading up to this is nuts-running away to a career on the stage in the Orient as a young girl- Fashion designer in London later on- Lots of husbands and a whole lot more- It's a good one!

Kate says

Fraud, sham, or the definition of 'reinvention'? I'll get to that...

Florence Broadhurst: Her Secret & Extraordinary Lives by Helen O'Neill is unquestionably a beautiful book. I'd go so far as saying it's one of the loveliest books I own.

My first edition is covered in red cloth, embossed with a striking crisp white print in Broadhurst's signature floral pattern. The pages are thick, a matte varnish giving the numerous colour plates lustre. Full pages are devoted to Broadhurst's designs, the colours popping. Yes, this is a book to own and cherish.

Broadhurst lead a colourful and mysterious life. Born in 1899 on a cattle station in outback Queensland, Florence had her sights set on great things from a young age. In her twenties, she was a singer, dancer and comedienne touring South East Asia and China, and then ran a finishing school for the Colonial-elite in Shanghai.

She moved to London, rebranding herself as a 'French' fashion designer. She married (twice) and returned to Australia as a 'British' society figure. Settling in Sydney, she became a landscape painter, a car salesperson, and finally (and most notably), a wallpaper designer and printer.

Broadhurst was known for her outrageous and colourful fashion sense (from her bright orange hair and matching false eyelashes to her boldly patterned kaftans and flashy jewellery) - she commanded attention. She was also known to be demanding, eccentric and relentless - although she had a small group of devotees, there was a high turnover of employees in her wallpaper business, with few willing to put up with her outrageous demands and unpredictable ways.

Broadhurst was bludgeoned to death in her studio in 1977. The murder was never solved, although O'Neill details compelling evidence that suggests she was a victim of serial killer, John Wayne Glover.

Interestingly, no one person knew 'all' of Florence. Many of those close to her didn't discover significant details about her life - for example her true age, or that she was born in Queensland rather than into British society - until after her death. Some call it reinvention, some call it clever, and others use the word fraud.

While she left many questions unanswered, including whether she was actually the artist of her designs (her eyesight was very poor making the intricate wallpaper work near impossible), she did leave her mark on interior design in Australia and internationally.

Viewed today, the Broadhurst designs appear to demonstrate a remarkable awareness of 'Australia-ness' at a time when the nation was only beginning to come to grips with where its heritage lay.

Broadhurst produced hundreds of designs, many of which have become iconic - Japanese Floral, Solar, Turnabouts and Horses Stampede, to name a few.

Her style was varied and she drew inspiration from multiple sources. Her designs range from psychedelic and geometric prints that scream the sixties and seventies, to delicate Victorian florals and Asian-inspired bird prints.

...the images that emerged from the Broadhurst wallpaper studio as the years passed became emphatically more striking. That trend was definitely propelled by Broadhurst's failing eyes says her son. 'That is why [the colours] were so far out. It was her eyesight driving her. "I want it brighter, I want it stronger. I want to see it."'

Regardless of whether her wallpapers were done with her own hand, Florence had a knack for colour, predicting trends and marketing - skills that cannot be ignored.

Reading this book was a true pleasure. I relished the details of wallpaper printing (it's a very complex art), and marvelled at how Florence got away with what she did - sorting the fact from the fiction was fascinating. My only quibble was the large portion of the book that O'Neill devoted to Florence's death and the control of her designs since then - although her death and the rediscovery of her prints by current fashion designers is interesting, it is Florence's nutso life that made for compelling reading.

4/5 Gorgeous.

Hope says

Beautiful book- impeccably designed and laid out. I usually don't go for biographies, but this is 1/2 art book; so very visually interesting. I want to own this just for the aesthetic factor.

Like many other reviewers it seems, I didn't care much for the actual writing. The author is alternatively kind and cruel to Broadhurst and her family. There wasn't a clear voice, and a lot is blown out of proportion to make her actions seem much more scandalous than they likely were.

O'Neill made every little thing, such as drawing inspiration from things like magazines, textiles, and international designs, or suiting her designs to the tastes of her clients out to be a crime. It made me roll my eyes because everyone should know this is completely common practice in any artistic industry. (ever watched project runway?) I would have preferred half the text, and more of the full color page spreads of wallpaper designs. I really hope in the future for there to be a coffee-table book of wallpaper samples- that would be totally covetable!

Erika says

A beautifully produced book; however, the story felt dull and hollow despite the intrigue that suffused the subject's life. The preface poses a number of questions about Broadhurst's "secret and extraordinary lives" but is more or less unable to answer any of them. A life that is a mystery can still be compelling and interesting, but not in this case.

The book is wonderful to look at, but not a particularly great read.

Lindsey Clewett says

A fascinating account of the secret lives of a larger than life, determined and strong character. Not even her closest associates knew the details of Florence's past, many thinking she was from London, rather than a cattle station in country Queensland and 20 years younger than she was. Not always likeable, it's fair to say that the book doesn't paint an entirely positive portrait of Broadhurst, but it certainly is a vibrant and colourful one, and, at times, glamorous. The book touches upon mysteries surrounding how a woman with failing eye sight could be such a prolific and successful wallpaper designer, and how she came to die such a brutally violent, humiliating and murderous death. Her beautiful and radiant designs live on today and are as relevant now as they were in the 60s and 70s, although thankfully are no longer limited to wallpapers. I would recommend this book to anyone, not merely those interested in design, fashion, the arts or business. This may not be a book for everyone but it's probably one for most.

Jennifer Sullivan says

Perfect combo of my three topics; design, murder and fraud. The character, Florence Broadhurst was just that, a character. A woman that constantly reinvented herself to get ahead and succeed. She gets whacked in the end but it only adds to the appeal of her story. Loved it and gorgeous reproductions of her work. If not for the story, pick it up for a design reference book.

Jody says

While there are a countable 97 awesomely beautiful, psychedelic, victorian, op art, refined, Japanese-inspired, geometric gamut running designs in this book that will alternately make you laugh/gasp/drop your jaw, you can't necessarily count the number of interesting, if fake and fabulous, stories Broadhurst told about herself. Rad.
