

# Basic Detail Report

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## Title

Marcus Show Girls

## Date

1930s

## Primary Maker

E H Turnor

## Medium

Two glass plates fixed together with tan masking tape borders, black and white with colour detail

## Dimensions

Overall: 120 x 165 x 4 mm, 176 g

## Name

Glass plate transparency

## History

This coloured glass plate transparency depicts six 'Marcus Show Girls' modelling 'Seagull'-branded swimsuits (in the one-piece 'maillot' style) on a beach, possibly Brighton Beach in Victoria, Australia. A lone man is seen walking in the background, dressed in a dark full-body one-piece bathing suit. Peter O'Sullivan designed swimwear for various companies including 'Seagull', mainly during the mid to late 1930s. The Seagull company was a subsidiary of the Botany Knitting Mills Pty Ltd, which was first established in Melbourne in 1931. Peter O'Sullivan worked at the company probably when the image was taken. The swimsuits worn by the Marcus Show Girls clearly feature the company's distinctive white seagull logo on the left pant-leg of the swimsuits. Peter O'Sullivan became the first Australian to successfully design swimwear for export to the United States of America. This success was mainly due to two innovations which became hallmarks of swimwear design and popular culture domestically and internationally: the Superman buckle and modesty panel (the latter was patented in 1937). The square-shaped buckle was immortalised in Superman's costume, and the panel of material across the front of men's and women's swimsuits conformed to the strict social conservatism of the period. The modesty panel in particular became influential in Australian and international swimsuit design up until the 1970s. The Marcus Show Girls were part of a travelling performance group established in 1902 which was popular in the United States of America and also in Australia. They greeted and entertained patrons at their 'Marcus Show' productions. Marcus Show Girls were famous in film as well as on stage, featuring in two short American films in 1937 titled 'Hollywood Party' and 'Cinema Circus'. The women featured in the transparency were part of this glamorous group. According to local newspapers, the Marcus Show Girls were in Australia in 1937 performing in Sydney and Melbourne. This indicates that the image was taken in 1937, which is

consistent with the late 1930s swimwear designs and with Peter O'Sullivan's career development. The 1930s was a decade when swimwear became progressively daring and vibrant, influenced by local conditions and international fashion trends from America and Europe. The Seagull swimwear range was known for its use of exotic colours and patterns, alongside the main dark block-colour designs, which are shown in the women's swimsuits in the image. At that time, women's swimsuit design (often in the form of the 'maillot' bathing suit) accentuated the curves of the hips and exposed more of the shoulders. Men's swimsuit fashions generally consisted of the conservative one-piece bathing suit, alongside more daring detachable zipper-topped designs and even more revealing trunks. In most cases, swimwear was governed by legislation (often stipulating that, for instance, male swimsuits must cover the front body up to the armpits, the back body up to the waist and a substantial amount of the thigh area).