

# Foreword

In 2001, Australia is marking the centenary of Federation and the National Library of Australia is celebrating 100 years collecting, preserving and interpreting the history of Australia and the Asia–Pacific region. From its beginnings in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library in Melbourne in 1901, the National Library has gathered together extraordinary resources for research and reference, through the acquisition of major formed collections, gifts from private benefactors, and numerous purchases.

As we celebrate both Australia's and the Library's history, it seems appropriate that we should revisit the moment before the establishment of the British colony, New South Wales, in 1788. This collection of essays explores that moment through one man's journey from his home in Tahiti to London in the 1770s. Omai's story offers us new insights into the significance of Cook's three Pacific voyages and the world in which they took place.

This publication complements the exhibition *Cook & Omai: The Cult of the South Seas*, developed in association with the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University. The exhibition draws strongly on the collections of the National Library of Australia and, together with these informative and intriguing essays, reveals something of Omai's impact on the European imagination. I am delighted that the Library has been able to collaborate with some of Australia's leading historians in taking a fresh look at both the Library's collections and the events leading up to the European settlement of Australia.



Jan Fullerton  
Director-General  
National Library of Australia



William Hodges (1744–1797), *View from Point Venus, Island of Otaheite* c.1774  
oil on canvas; 29.2 x 39.4 cm