

Country & LANDSCAPE

Country and landscape are two words that resonate with an association of ideas linked to an enduring sense of place. Both have tangible physical presence and intangible symbolic values. For Aborigines, country encapsulates the rich meaning of inter-relationships between people and places. Landscape is a European notion that also centres on people and places; something we see with our eye but interpret with our mind.¹ So, underpinning Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attachment to country and landscape respectively are deeply rooted values, ideologies, and meanings. An aesthetic response to both—in the context of aesthetics as a way of seeing based on experience and traditions—may be seen to have cross-cultural connections and common ground as well as differences.



Samuel Thomas Gill (1818–1880)
Drove of cattle by a pond in the bush 1840s

Using pictorial images and written descriptions in the collections of the National Library of Australia we can see how, at times, the early colonial view of landscape unwittingly recorded some aspects of the inter-relationships implied by the term 'country'. It was a dialogue that fused culture and nature, mistaking the former for the latter in its assumption that the picturesque, park-like landscape of south-eastern Australia and Western Australia was a natural Garden of Eden, a pastoral Arcadia waiting to be occupied. S.T. Gill's *Drove of cattle by a pond in the bush* gives a remarkable glimpse of this landscape with its lightly wooded, abundantly grassed, park-like scene. Here is a mirror on Henry David Thoreau's apt comment that: 'What we call wilderness is a civilisation other than our own'. So we may ask the question: whose nature, whose culture do we see?

The British tradition of eighteenth century picturesque landscape with its intellectual underpinnings and melding of nature and culture—where beauty and economic utility combined—found fertile ground in colonial Australia. Nature was the supreme aesthetic, social and political value in eighteenth century Britain. It underpinned much of the learned discussion on landscape and the movement that saw the design and implementation of the great landscape estates, gardens and parks by William Kent, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton. Horace Walpole described Kent's talent as the ability to leap the fence to see 'that all nature was a garden'. Alexander Pope, celebrated essayist and poet, in his 1731 *Epistle IV*

on gardening principles to Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, suggested likening it to the way one '*Paints as you plant*' that:

To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
To rear the column, or the arch to bend,
To swell the terrace, or to sink the grot;
In all, let nature never be forgot. ...
Consult the genius of the place in all; ...

Written and graphic images eulogised the park-like landscape of south-eastern Australia and the coastal belt of Western Australia. Here was the picturesque—Arcadia in the Antipodes—as nature intended. The ideal of the picturesque therefore was primal to the engagement of the early explorers and settlers with *Terra Australis*. It was central to the act of constructing a known place, *terra cognita*, instead of a *terra incognita*. It was part of a nostalgia for a dreamed-of Arcadia, a powerful sentiment transferred to Australia.

British landscape images were informed by the idealism of a poetic kind of idyllic, pastoral landscape inspired by the seventeenth century paintings of artists such as Claude Lorrain. These influenced European thoughts. In particular, Lorrain's bucolic style—a mixture of history scenes, pastoral beauty and sublime nature based on the countryside around Rome—appealed to the English in the eighteenth century. The paintings often had a humanised foreground with water in the middle ground against a backdrop of sublime nature.

Picturesque landscape was therefore 'a theory of association, a function of the imagination'.² This is a reference to the 1794 and 1805 writings of the scholar, Richard Payne Knight, and his contention that the picturesque was an association of ideas acutely involving the role of memory and emotions. 'For Knight, the purpose of [picturesque] landscape was to arouse the emotions, stir the imagination, and to delight the eye with its naturalness.'³ The tradition in Britain had been popularised by William Gilpin's travel writings. Gilpin described appropriate picturesque landscape scenery, where the roughness and intricacies of nature might be found that could arouse admiration or reverie in the viewer. William Westall's *King George's Sound: View from Peak Head* is a good example of this. Notably, this watercolour sketch is likely to be an accurate representation of what he saw, including the somewhat rough foreground. When, however, he transferred this scene into oils he embellished the foreground to improve on nature as Gilpin also entreated artists to do. The picturesque, like all landscape images, carried ideological significance.



William Westall (1781–1850)
King George's Sound, view from Peak Head 1801

The term 'picturesque', as seen in a Claude Lorrain painting, became applied to the actual scenery, particularly pastoral scenes. It was then transferred to the English landscape parks and gardens as a stylised representation of nature. Paul Shepard suggests that 'the discovery of pastoral beauty [which] fully liberated the abstraction of "scenery" from nature ... may well have been the most important esthetic [sic] event of modern times'.⁴ The conjunction of the two words 'picturesque' and 'landscape' was inevitable.

Conrad Martens' *Lake Illawarra NSW* mimics Lorrain's genre. Here we see Gilpin's picturesque roughness and intricacies of nature in the foreground prospect with evidence of human activity—nature rendered fit for human consumption—and in the background, sublime nature itself.



Conrad Martens (1801–1878)
Lake Illawarra, N.S.W. 1835

In the middle-ground is water. In England ideological adherence to the picturesque was in response to its disappearance as the enclosure movement changed the landscape. In Australia the picturesque was ubiquitous, although in viewing artistic renditions we must accept that artists more than likely 'improved' on what they saw, somewhat in line with Gilpin's comment that: 'We must ever recollect that nature is most defective in composition; and must be a little assisted'.⁵

The convict artist, Joseph Lycett, in his book of *Views in Australia* (1824/5), had a similar goal to the writings of Gilpin, but with the added piquancy of showing viewers in Britain the opportunities presented by picturesque Australia. Lycett's aquatints, published in England after he won his reprieve, clothed the landscape in greens that were lightened from his original watercolours with their Australian brown hues, presumably to attract would-be colonists. Accompanying texts to the scenes were seductive, whilst many of them reflected the aura of an extensive landscape park or garden. Such is his *View on the South Esk River, Van Diemens Land* or *View of Lake George, New South Wales*. The South Esk view has this description:

The South Esk River rises under Tasman's Peak, and, winding its course through a most delightful tract of land for more than fifty miles, affords some of the finest specimens of beautiful scenery of nature, for which this part of the globe is so remarkable. The plains through which it passes are, many of them,



Joseph Lycett (c.1775–1828)
View upon the South Esk River, Van Diemens Land 1825

very extensive; most of them are fertile, with their borders richly adorned with timber; and produces [sic] excellent pasturage for sheep and cattle ... The high lands represented in the distance, are the range of Hills adjoining TASMAN'S PEAK, which are in general very barren, although a large tract of land in their neighbourhood, at present unallotted, is very capable of being converted into excellent farms. The land in general is particularly rich and good, ... well adapted for agricultural purposes.

Other pictorial images were a direct reflection of an English country park estate and grazing landscape in the Antipodes: a model of high civility and nature, as with R. Bruce's 1866 engraving after an S.T. Gill drawing of *Government House, Hobart Town, and the River Derwent from the Domain*. If it were not for the gum trees this could be England. The Australian colonial landscape narrative in paintings and descriptions was fundamentally an imaginative occupation of the country prior to its physical occupation by a settler group. Graphic display and critical engagement with landscape was in turn an assumed legitimisation of the process of imaginative and physical appropriation. Written descriptions put into words what the artists captured.

On 25 March 1841, Louisa Clifton—newly ashore—described in her journal the following scene near Bunbury in Western Australia:

We then mounted the hills to the left of Mr Eliot's house, and were charmed with the exquisite view of the estuary, the hills beyond, dips and dells, and knolls beautifully studded with large and picturesque trees forming the nearest landscape. At length we arrived at Government House, situated on the summit of one of these high round knolls, commanding a lovely prospect.

A similar prospect drawn by her is *A View of Koombana Bay on Port Leschanault, Australind, Western Australia*. Engraved by Thomas Dibdin, it is a charming pastoral scene combining classic picturesque components of people and cattle in the foreground, with aged trees, rocky outcrops, open grassy glades, water in the middle ground and the hint of sublime nature in the distant hills—the entire composition is framed by stately foreground trees. This could be the scene on the other side of the continent described by Surgeon Peter Cunningham RN in 1827 with the words:

*the trees, also being slightly clothed and all evergreens ... afford both a cool retreat for the cattle in the summer heats and a tolerable sward of native grass which everywhere abounds. Hence all kinds of stock may be kept there at the outset.*⁶



Thomas Colman Dibdin, engraver (1810–1893)
A view of Koombana Bay on Port Leschenault, Australind, Western Australia c.1840

On 7 December 1820, Charles Throsby Smith, after travelling from the Gungahlin area looking for the Murrumbidgee River came to 'a most beautiful country ... a very extensive plain, Rich Soil and plenty of Grass ... Came to a Beautiful River' (presumably the Limestone Plains and Molonglo River). After camping on the banks of what the Aboriginal people called Yealam-bidgee (Molonglo) Throsby Smith writes in his journal for 8 December:

*At ten o'clock we ascended a very high hill from the top of which we had an extensive view all round and finding the waters continue to run in a S.W. direction we declined going down the River ... the banks of the River on both sides the whole of the way we went which was a distance of about 10 miles is a most beautiful forest as far as we could see thinly wooded by gums and Bastard Box.*⁷

Part of this scene looking over the future site of the federal capital was captured in 1832 by the surveyor, Robert Hoddle, in his watercolour *View from Limestone Hill called Campbell's Hill, New South Wales*. This view is likely taken from the lower slopes of present-day Mount Pleasant. Writing



Robert Hoddle (1794–1881)
View from Limestone Hill called Campbell's Hill, New South Wales, March 1832

in his diary a few years later, physician and naturalist John Lhotsky referred to the slopes as lightly wooded. Hoddle's view shows this. Notably, the current density of trees on Mount Pleasant now far exceeds what it was in 1832. Do the Aboriginal family group in the foreground suggest a clue as to why the landscape has changed? Before addressing this, it is appropriate to look at how Aboriginal people were portrayed in colonial images.

The inclusion of Aboriginal people in early colonial art and their association with landscape is a notable aspect of this period. They are often shown not in contrast to the composition, but rather adorning it as part of the harmonious whole as in the engraving *The Gwalior Plains* by J.C. Armytage. However, behind the inclusion is the ambiguity of the people's future which is tacitly implied, but explicitly left unanswered. Indigenous people were presumably seen as part of the exotic otherness and scientific wonder of the new colony, very much part of the landscape; they were 'Nature's children' who would disappear with the civilising influence of European domination. S.T. Gill's *Cattlemen and natives by gum trees* is in this idiom—a picturesque landscape of limitless grazing potential set to be taken over from its original inhabitants.

The Aboriginal people were also included in rural and town scenes where they were subsidiary to the improvements brought by the settlers and were to be regarded as temporary figures on the landscape stage, as in Armytage's *Brisbane, from South Brisbane*.⁸ They are now visitors to someone-else's landscape: their manifest destiny is to disappear. In these scenes Indigenous people posed no threat at all to the colonists because the landscape had been appropriated from them. Many of the views with Aboriginal people were for British consumption or painted back in England from notes and sketches.



J.C. Armytage
The Gwalior Plains 1874?

Many colonial written descriptions refer to the use of fire by Aboriginal people. Louisa Clifton on 18 March 1841, a few days before landing at Port Leschenault, described 'the native fires burning along the country'. On 2 April she recorded that: 'We have been sitting on deck watching the fires on shore ... the lurid flash and the curling grey and vermilion smoke of the fire throwing a bright redness over the scene.'⁹ Here is the clue to the making of the picturesque landscape: burning by Aboriginal people. It was a long held tradition of managing the landscape to maintain grassy plains and open park-like woodland and to control fire-prone flora which had evolved over millions of years prior to human settlement some 60 000 years ago. Fire evolved not just as a land-care tool, but it also developed a deep symbolism associated with ceremony and sacred rituals linked to territory. Fire stories and fire dreamings are critical to Aboriginal relationship with country.

The lithograph *Tower Hill* (after Eugene von Guérard's oil painting of c.1855) shows Aboriginal people living in the kind of landscape they



Samuel Thomas Gill (1818–1880)
Cattlemen and natives by gum trees 1840s

In many of the paintings the genre is Romantic. It is a Garden of Eden—a benign wilderness setting—where Aborigines appear as leading an idyllic life or cast in the role of Adam and Eve before the fall brought about by European settlement, as in William Westall's *Port Bowen* or John Glover's sketch *On the Oose River*. Here is a romantic landscape setting reminiscent of a Golden Age, particularly *Port Bowen* in which the picturesque scene with sublime undercurrents of wild nature is adorned by three Aboriginal people by a fire at the foot of the gnarled tree.



William Westall (1781–1850)
Port Bowen 1802?

created and cared for. In the background can be seen smoke from fires. One of the most valuable collections of landscape paintings showing Aboriginal people involved in daily life is a series of twenty watercolours from about 1818 painted by the convict artist, Joseph Lycett. These paintings are ‘an important documentary record of the life of Australia’s indigenous people’.¹⁰



John Glover (1767–1849)
On the Oose River 1834?

Lycett’s Aboriginal watercolours are significant as works of art and as rare historical documents. They depict Aboriginal people going about their daily lives in scenes of fishing and hunting, of family groups in social settings, of men holding a corroboree. The figures, whilst essential to the compositions, do not dominate the picturesque landscape scenes. Rather the landscapes are seen as a bountiful kaleidoscope of rolling forested hills with open grassy plains abundantly stocked with kangaroos and other game, and rivers or coastal areas teeming with fish and waterbirds. See in particular how the use of fire for hunting is vividly presented and tells a pictorial story of how the open park-like landscape so loved by the Europeans was in fact Indigenous country as in *Aborigines using fire to hunt kangaroos*. This is the technique of land management called ‘firestick farming’ by Rhys Jones.¹¹

In viewing the images in the exhibition you are invited to ponder whose landscape, whose country do we see?

Guest Curator
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Joseph Lycett (c.1775–1828)
Aborigines using fire to hunt kangaroos c.1818

- ¹ D.W. Meinig, ed. ‘Introduction’ *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes. Geographical Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- ² J.D. Hunt and P. Willis, eds, *The Genius of the Place. The English Landscape Garden 1620–1820*. London: Paul Elek, 1975, p.342. See also A. Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology. The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pp.70/71.
- ³ Bermingham, p.72.
- ⁴ Paul Shepard, *Man in the Landscape; A historic view of the esthetics of nature*. New York: Knopf, 1969, p170 ff.
- ⁵ W. Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque travel and Sketching Landscape to Which Is Added a Poem on Landscape Painting* 4th ed., London: R. Blamire, 1792, p.67.
- ⁶ P. Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales* 2nd ed. London: Henry Coburn, 1966, p.11.
- ⁷ Charles Throsby Smith journal entries quoted in F. Watson, *A Brief History of Canberra the capital city of Australia*. Canberra: Federal Capital Press, 1927, pp.8-9.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, p.188. ff.
- ⁹ Louisa Clifton, (1840-1841), *Diary*, NLA MS 2801.
- ¹⁰ J. Hoorn, *The Lycett Album: Drawings of Aborigines and Australian Scenery*. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1990, p.vii.
- ¹¹ R. Jones, ‘The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the hunting gardeners: Man and land in the Antipodes’ *Quaternary Studies: Selected Papers from IX International Congress INQUA, December 1973*, (Royal Society of New Zealand), pp.21-34.

CHECKLIST

George A. Appleton (fl.1861–1866)
after Eugene von Guérard (1811–1901)
View on the upper Mitta Mitta, the property of F. Kawerau, Esq.
Melbourne: Published by C. Troedel, 1864
tinted lithograph; 26.5 x 36.4 cm
nla.pic-an8810990

J.C. Armytage
Brisbane, from South Brisbane
London: Virtue & Co., 1874?
hand col. engraving; 19.5 x 26.5 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an7372850

The Gwalior Plains
London: Virtue & Co., 1874?
hand col. engraving; 19.5 x 26.5 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an7370494

R. Bruce
after S.T. Gill (1818–1880)
Government House, Hobart Town, and the River Derwent from the Domain 1866
wood engraving; 17.8 x 22.8 cm
nla.pic-an7566598

Thomas Colman Dibdin, engraver (1810–1893)
after Louisa Clifton (1814–1880)
A view of Koombana Bay on Port Leschenault, Australind, Western Australia
London: Smith, Elder & Co. for the Western Australian Company, c.1840
hand col. lithograph; 47.3 x 63.7 cm
nla.pic-an6016139

Augustus Earle (1793–1838)
Wellington Valley, New South Wales, looking east from Government House 1826?
watercolour; 20.0 x 37.5 cm
nla.pic-an2818294

Samuel Thomas Gill (1818–1880)
Aborigines and white men hunting kangaroos
c.1850
sepia wash drawing; 24 x 37.1 cm
nla.pic-an2377232

Ana-branch of the Darling 1846
watercolour; 13.5 x 22.0 cm
nla.pic-an3728628

Cattlemen and natives by gum trees 1840s
watercolour; 21.7 x 34.2 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2376895

Drove of cattle by a pond in the bush 1840s
watercolour; 21.8 x 34.6 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2376899

Early Australian landscape 1840s
watercolour ; 40.5 x 35.1 cm
nla.pic-an4696666

Kangaroos and grass tree 1840s
wash drawing; 12.3 x 17.4 cm
nla.pic-an2376826

The Ranges, the residence & property of H.S. Russell esqr. 1860s
watercolour; 41.2 x 67.2 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2376903

John Glover (1767–1849)
The Eden 1829?
pen, ink and wash drawing; 17.8 x 26.3 cm
nla.pic-an4653048

On the Oose River 1834?
pen, ink and wash drawing; 17.8 x 26.5 cm
nla.pic-an4622225

Robert Havell (1769–1832)
after Robert Dale (1810–1856)
Panoramic view of King George's Sound, part of the colony of Swan River
London: Robt. Havell, 1834
nla.pic-an7404363-7

after William Light (1786–1839)
A view of the country and of the temporary erections near the site for the proposed town of Adelaide in South Australia
London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1838
hand col. aquatint; 41.5 x 56.5 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an7830546

after James Taylor (1785–1829)
The town of Sydney in New South Wales
London: Colnaghi & Co., 1823
hand col. aquatint; 47.8 x 65 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an5575515

Robert Hoddle (1794–1881)
Ginninginderry Plains, New South Wales c.1835
watercolour; 18.0 x 41.7 cm
nla.pic-vn3423118

View from Limestone Hill called Campbell's Hill, New South Wales, March 1832
watercolour; 27.5 x 42.0 cm
nla.pic-vn3289506

Journey of discovery to Port Phillip, New South Wales in 1824 and 1825, by W.H. Hovell and H. Hume, Esquires
2nd ed.
Sydney: James Tegg, 1837
FRM F2234

John William Lewin (1770–1819)
View of Sydney looking south c.1811
watercolour; 32.4 x 58.5 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2970650

Joseph Lycett (c.1775–1828)
View of Lake George, New South Wales, from the north east
London: J. Souter, 1825
hand col. aquatint; 23.2 x 33.0 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an7690945

View upon the South Esk River, Van Diemens Land
London: J. Souter, 1825
hand col. aquatint; 23.2 x 33.0 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an7692969

Conrad Martens (1801–1878)
Australian view with figures 1845
watercolour; 18.1 x 25.3 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2390667

Craigend, Sydney 1836
watercolour; 46.5 x 66.2 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2390727

Lake Illawarra, N.S.W. 1835
watercolour; 29.0 x 41.2 cm
nla.pic-an2390747

Landscape with farm building amongst trees c.1840
watercolour; 18.1 x 28.0 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2390662

On the road to Sydney c.1840
watercolour; 17.0 x 25.1 cm
nla.pic-an2390732

River Hawkesbury, near Wiseman's Ferry, N.S.W. 1838
watercolour; 46.3 x 66.3 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2390720

Sir Thomas Mitchell (1792–1855)
Journal of an expedition into the interior of tropical Australia, in search of a route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria
London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848
Rex Nan Kivell Collection

John Skinner Prout (1805–1876)
The city of Sydney, N.S.W., from the government paddock, Parramatta Street
Hobart Town V.D.L.: T. Bluett, 1844
hand col. lithograph; 26.2 x 44.2 cm
nla.pic-an6940153

Corio Bay from the Barrabool Hills
Melbourne: 1847
tinted lithograph; 26.0 x 37.2 cm
nla.pic-an6940168

Geelong, 1847
Melbourne: 1847
tinted lithograph; 23.8 x 35.6 cm
nla.pic-an6940170

Mount Macedon, Victoria c.1847
watercolour; 25.0 x 37.1 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an2479125

John Pye, engraver (1782–1874)
after William Westall (1781–1850)
View of Port Jackson taken from the South Head
London: G. & W. Nicol, 1814
engraving; sheet 30.0 x 24.2 cm
nla.pic-an7746475

George Penkivil Slade (1832–1896)
Throsby Park, nr. Berrima 1870
pencil and wash; 16.9 x 27.7 cm
nla.pic-an6452988

Eugene von Guérard (1811–1901)
Ben Lomond, Epping Forest, Tasmania

Melbourne: Hamel & Ferguson, 1867
hand col. lithograph; 32.5 x 51.0 cm
nla.pic-an7744666

Native encampment 1873
Melbourne: The Commissioners, 1873
wood engraving; 42.5 x 29.0 cm
nla.pic-an10267866-59

Top of Mount Lofty near Adelaide
Melbourne: Hamel & Ferguson, 1867
hand col. lithograph; 32.5 x 51.0 cm

Tower Hill, extinct volcano between Lady Bay & Port Fairy in Australia Felix
London: Thos. McLean, c.1860
hand col. lithograph; 57.0 x 85.3 cm
nla.pic-an6016215

Yarra Yarra, 4 miles Melbourne, ... Heidelberg Road, 13 Ap. 55 1855
pen and wash; 27.0 x 34.2 cm
nla.pic-an3100005

William Westall (1781–1850)
Hawkesbury River, view no. 7 1802
pencil drawing; 18.2 x 26.7 cm
nla.pic-an4562973

Hawkesbury River, view no. 8 1802
pencil drawing; 19.1 x 26.7 cm
nla.pic-an4562984

Hawkesbury River, view no. 13 1802
pencil drawing; 17.9 x 27.3 cm
nla.pic-an4563075

King George's Sound, part of Oyster Harbour
1801
pencil and wash; 17.6 x 25.0 cm
nla.pic-an4561262

King George's Sound, view from Peak Head
1801
pencil and wash; 15.7 x 27.0 cm
nla.pic-an4561301

Port Bowen 1802?
watercolour; 56.0 x 77.5 cm
nla.pic-an4910293

Port Lincoln, taken from the south
London: Published by Ackermann & Co., 1835
hand col. aquatint; 22.8 x 30.8 cm
Rex Nan Kivell Collection
nla.pic-an7832573

William Woolnoth, engraver
after William Westall (1781–1850)
View on the north side of Kangaroo (sic) Island
London: G. & W. Nicol, 1814
engraving; 30 x 24.2 cm
nla.pic-an7746463

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Cover:
Eugene von Guérard (1811–1901)
Tower Hill, extinct volcano ... (detail)