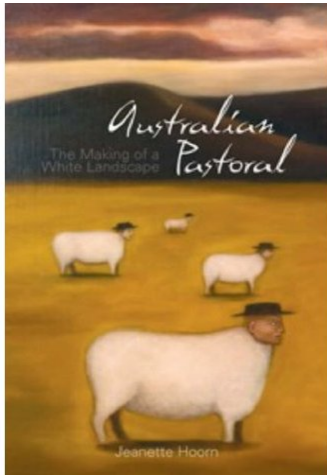


Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape by Jeanette Hoorn. Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2007, pp. 304, AUD \$29.95 Paperback, ISBN: 9781920731540.



For Australians of a certain age, no visit to a doctor's surgery was without the glimpse of a landscape print in the waiting room, as often as not a Heidelberg (or sub-Heidelberg) work. Today the print is more likely to be a Papunya painting. The urban setting for these works is perhaps odd but its occasion represents a dramatic change in the relationship of white Australia to country. If the earlier landscapes create a 'memory' of 'who we are', the later work acts as a 'reminder' of who was here first. Jeanette Hoorn's book is an inquiry into the nature of a nation's self-image and self-representation that takes in these seemingly opposed positions. Within it, history and the history of visual art intertwine in a manner to which

we have not until now been accustomed. The result is a most important piece of groundwork for future Australian studies. It is an argument or group of related arguments that Hoorn has been working on for at least twenty-five years. The time spent on the book shows: it is not one of those texts that proceed directly from a doctoral thesis nor does it read like an argument hastily concocted from an assembly of reviews.

The book details the rise of an Australian pastoral vision from earlier strictly topographic work and its subsequent elevation to nation-defining status. It establishes how artistic convention ensured the complicity of artists in the takeover of the continent. 'Without power', Hoorn argues, 'there could be no pastoral landscape'. The key term here is 'landscape' which can be either a visual or an imaginary production. A landscape is already something other than description: it is a metaphor that enables invader or 'settler' states to conceptualise their surrounds in a manner that makes everything they do seem 'natural'. Paul Carter noted the importance of convention in the transformation between explorers' notebooks and their 'written up' accounts. Hoorn evidences similar transformations between the sketch and finished painting. She points to an interesting slippage in the Australian use of the word 'pastoral'. Terms like 'pastoral industry' naturalise what once was a trope, turning an ideal into a description of reality.

This is not a coffee table book but primarily a work of history in which paintings are the source materials. Thus the illustrations are included in the body of the text for the purposes of its argument (a trade-off between utility – and cost – and legibility). While some may find this practice problematic, I think of it as a necessary corrective to views that art is simply a form of celebration. Hoorn does not simply use paintings as 'evidence'. She is meticulous in her investigation of the way the titles alone of many of the works discussed have been altered to suit the views of their owners, whether individuals or the Australian public. 'The Last Muster of the Aborigines at Risdon', for example, was a title supplied after 1905 to John Glover's 1836 work originally known as 'Landscape in the Derwent with Natives'. The painting itself shows a restful scene that doesn't relate to the corralling of the original inhabitants; the new title is complicit with the belief that there are no longer any Aborigines left in Tasmania.

Hoorn argues that the growth of 'the bush' as a theme in Australian painting predates the popular Heidelberg School. What *was* taking place in the 1890s works was the location of 'white leisure' in the country, just as the presence of 'black labour' was erased. She describes the creation of a white Australian mythology and its development. Its believers, like black-letter lawyers, claim it was always thus. But it is interesting to note that not a single

reproduction of Tom Roberts' work appears in Herbert Badham's *Study of Australian Art* (1949), and that even Bernard Smith's *Place Taste and Tradition* (1945) shows only 'Bailed Up' and his portrait of Streeton. As Hoorn notes, the National Gallery of Victoria decided not to buy Roberts' 'Shearing the Rams' until after his death in 1932, considering its 'depiction of common life too commonplace a subject for a picture in a public collection'. It was Streeton's literary Eurocentrism, his paintings with their titles taken from the romantic poets, that was for many years more attractive to the public than Roberts' documentary naturalism. 'Pastorophilia', as Hoorn terms it, was very much a construction through which Australians could invent themselves as a 'new race' and, in doing so, escape from modernity.

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