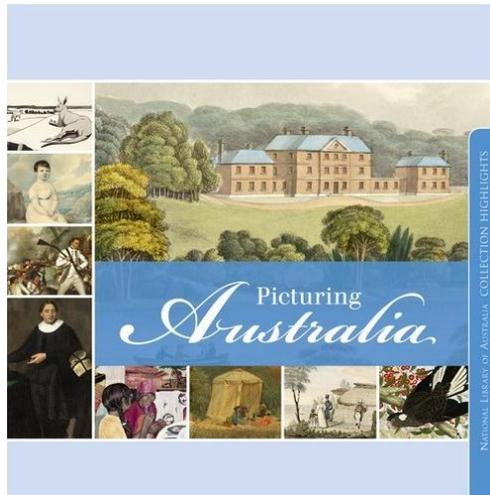


*Picturing Australia* by John Clark. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2009, pp. 87, AUD \$24.95 Paperback, ISBN: 9780642276667.



*Picturing Australia* is one of only a few books that deal with the entire history of art in Australia, addressing both Indigenous Australian and European Australian art history. In this book John Clark provides the most contemporary account of this history, focusing on the collections of the National Library of Australia (NLA). The NLA's collections contain around 647,000 prints, drawings, paintings and photographs, many of which depict key moments in Australian history from the 1630s to the present day. The book sets out to aid 'our understanding of Australia and its people' (4) and includes images that record Australia's colonial history and its role within its territories both past and present.

The premise of the book is that 'if every picture tells a story, then the National Library of Australia is teeming with tales' (4) and Clark's mini-catalogue recounts some of these. *Picturing Australia* comprises thirty-seven vignettes taken from the NLA's holdings of prints, drawings and paintings. The book is divided into two sections: 'the artists' impression' and 'impressions of the artist'. Each section features a series of images presented chronologically alongside a short piece of text about some aspect of that image. The first section privileges the event or person depicted in the image, whilst the second section privileges the artist, considering their role in the subject of that image. Clark begins by providing a brief history of the collecting practices of the NLA, explaining that the images chosen for the catalogue are not necessarily the most aesthetically pleasing or technically skilled images but those that have interesting stories attached to them, whether that be of the sitter, the event, the artist or the way the image was acquired.

For a non-Australian reader this catalogue revisits several moments in Australian history known widely outside that country, including 'the dingo's got my baby' story (44), captured by artist Neville Dawson in 1992 in a portrait of Lindy Chamberlain, the mother who alleged that a dingo had snatched away her child. The book also highlights lesser-known moments in Australian history such as the 1804 Castle Hill rebellion (12), the first uprising of convicts in New South Wales which was painted by an unknown artist. We experience the artist's place in Australian history through convict artist Joseph Lycett, gold-digger-turned-artist Eugene von Guerard and expedition artist William Hodgkinson.

Clark's selection of images traces not just the historical development of Australian art but also its social development. The beginning of European exploration of the Pacific region is explored through George Carter's *The Death of Captain Cook* (11), the work of convict workers through Augustus Earle's *Mrs Macquarie's Chair* (19), missions and their 'civilising' of Aborigines in J. M. Crossland's portraits of Aboriginal men from Poonindie Mission (27), and the contemporary issues of Indigenous Australians through Julie Dowling's *Learning How to Be Stupid*. (47) The range of stories presented in the book reflects Australia's turbulent history and the necessary role of the artist in depicting it. Clark's clever choice of images also reflects the variety within the collections of the NLA and the book can also be seen as an opportunity to advertise the NLA's online catalogue.

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