



Cooee AUSTRALIA IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Curator Martin Terry introduces the Library's current exhibition

Cooee evokes 19th-century Australia by drawing from across a wide array of the Library's collections of drawings, watercolours and photographs. Australia can be viewed through a multi-faceted prism—for instance via our political history, our fascination with natural history, or perhaps via our role in the Pacific. While acknowledging these and other possible approaches to such an exhibition, *Cooee* takes as its brief the two particular questions: 'Who were we?', and 'How did we live?' Being restricted for reasons of space to selecting only 150 interesting items to represent this complex world has made the exhibition a challenging task.

To William Westall, the artist aboard Matthew Flinders' *Investigator* circumnavigating Australia (1801–03), it was obvious what was interesting about New South Wales. He hadn't voyaged thousands

of miles from his homeland to portray the English flotsam and jetsam, felon and free, that had washed up at Sydney Cove. When, however, he saw an Aboriginal elder in the streets of Sydney, he evoked him in terms of the ancient Greek and Roman plaster mod that had surrounded him as a student at the Royal Academy. (Pencil sketch, *Port Jackson An Old Blind Man*, 1802.)

While towns were being established in the new colony's coastal fringes, settlers were pushing further into the surrounding bush and beyond. The British were expert with axe and the survey-chain. Apart from the presence of snakes, the lack of dangerous animals helped this expansion.

Many sought freedom in a hard life on the ever expanding frontier. As flocks and herds pressed further into Aboriginal country, open conflict flared. Edward Russell, in a remote part of South Australia described a more ambiguous outcome in racial relations. Has the Aboriginal woman who features prominently in his pen and ink sketch, *Government House, Ungutibee*

above:
Edward Russell
Government House, Ungutibee, Fowlers Bay, So. Australia 1873
pen and ink drawing; 14.7 x 23.7 cm
Pictures Collection
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below:
William Westall (1781–1850)
Port Jackson, an Old Blind Man



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 summers. (*Interior of St. James Church,
 Blakiston, 1847*)



above right:
 S.T. Gill (1818–1880)
*Interior of St James Church,
 Blakiston, Mt Barker, South
 Australia 1847*
 watercolour; 27.1 x 38.0 cm
 Pictures Collection
 nla.pic-an2376854

below left:
 Henry Winkles (1800–1860)
*View of Gold Diggings, Victoria
 c.1853*
 watercolour; 48.1 x 71.0 cm
 Pictures Collection
 nla.pic-an6629372

below right:
 Emily Macarthur (1806–1880)
*Portrait of Elizabeth Macarthur
 with her Dog, October 23, 1845*
 pencil and watercolour
 drawing; 15.0 x 13.5 cm
 Pictures Collection
 nla.pic-an11460939

If 19th-century Australian men are often depicted riding horses, clearing, shearing or building, the women were largely obliged to lead more domestic lives. Emily Macarthur (married to grazier, James Macarthur) gives us, in a sketchbook or scrapbook as crowded with images as a cluttered drawing room, a vivid picture of the tranquil world of the Camden estates south-west of Sydney. (*Portrait of Elizabeth Macarthur with her Dog, 1845.*)

The pivot-point of the Coöee exhibition occurs neatly at mid-century, with the discovery of gold in Australia. Gold

In his depiction of pre-goldrush countryside, Conrad Martens exemplifies the old order. The foregrounds of his watercolours have often been cleared of bush and are seen proudly under cultivation; in the middle distance is a homestead, while the background of often forested hills suggests possibilities of further exploration and development. On the goldfields, by contrast, as seen in the work of an artist like Henry Winkles (*View of Gold Diggings, Vic., c.1853*), cultivation and settlement hardly have a foothold. The scene is of ground completely broken and pitted while



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Garden, includi
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 and opened in
Gardens, Adelaide c.1877)

Photography also helped spread the fame of the age's celebrities. Subjects ranged from cricketers, actors and singers, and political figures, through to shipwreck survivors, and men lost in the bush. In a special 'celebrity' category were the so-called 'remnants of a dying race', the Tasmanian Aborigines. Shown adorned with her shell necklaces in her albumen photographic portrait, the Aboriginal woman Trugernanner (Truganini) was used to being

which had collected Lanney's and other Aboriginal people's skeletons, she managed to live a highly scrutinised life with considerable poise. She is 19th-century Australia's most natural sitter. (Albumen photograph, *William Lanney and Trucanini*, 1866)

Cooee: Australia in the 19th Century
 runs in the National Library's
 exhibition gallery from 14 June to
 9 September 2007

Palm House c.1877
 albumen print; 26.0 x 33.0 cm
 Pictures Collection
 nla.pic-an14484190-45

below:
 Unknown photographer
Aborigines of Tasmania. William Lanney, Coal River Tribe, 26 Years; Lallah Rookh, or Truganini (Seaweed), Female, Bumi Island Tribe, 65 Years 1866
 b&w photograph; 19.2 x 36.2 cm
 Pictures Collection
 nla.pic-an24616463

