

Art historiography in Australia and New Zealand

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The papers in this journal were presented at a symposium organised by the initiative to establish an Institute of Art History at the University of Melbourne and the Australian and New Zealand Association of Art Historians (AAANZ) on 28 and 29 August 2010. The symposium was conceived in conjunction with the residency of Professor Emeritus Richard Woodfield (University of Birmingham) as a visiting international fellow in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne. It was the first ever symposium on the subject, and reflects the growing international interest in Australian art historiography, which has always flourished locally, but has increased globally following the Melbourne CIHA congress, held in January 2008, *Crossing Cultures Conflict, Migration and Convergence*.¹

Art historiography has always been a subject of central importance to the teaching of art history in Melbourne and elsewhere in Australia. Initially when the department of art history was founded at Melbourne in 1946 the syllabus was predominantly European in origin, but gradually developed to reflect Australia's geographical location in the world. An early passionate attempt to analyse the development of art historiography in Australia is Terry Smith's *Writing the History of Australian Art: its past, present and possible future* 1983. When we read this historical document we realise we have come a long way since the 1980s in the presentation of indigeneity and other matters. Terry Smith continues this argument in *Inside Out, Outside In: Changing Perspectives In Australian Art Historiography*, where he sees art historiography as being more Australian than American. The contribution by Charles Green and Heather Barker focuses on the figure of Terry Smith and the role he played in the development of the Power Institute in the 1970s.

In the 1970s Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg made it fashionable to discuss the roles of the centre and the periphery in the construction of Italian Renaissance art history.² Well before that date the collecting institutions of Australia developed policies that reflected our global situation, knowingly as a centre at the periphery, irrespective of theoretical concerns, as shown in the contribution by Benjamin Thomas on one of the most important museum directors of the National Gallery of Victoria, Daryl Lindsay. As Terry Smith explains being provincial is a matter of choice not geography (*The Provincialism Problem*, 1974). There are many ways to narrate the development of art history in Australia and New Zealand as shown in these diverse papers, depending on the subjects chosen. Peter McNeil makes a witty and profound plea for the importance of design and fashion from the 1920s in any account of Australian art history in *What is the matter? The object in Australian Art History*. Helen Innis *Other Histories: Photography and Australia*

¹ Jaynie Anderson ed, *Crossing Cultures. Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, Miegunyah, 2009.

² Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, 'Centro e periferia', in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, eds. Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1979, vol. I, I, 283-352. Translated in a considerably revised form as: 'Symbolic Domination and Artistic Geography in Italian Art History', in *Art in Translation*, vol.1, i, 5-48.

delineates the range of photographic histories in Australia and how they relate to international writing.

For the symposium we devised a call for papers to ask a series of questions. What does it mean to be an art historian practicing in Australia or New Zealand? How does the region of the world we inhabit relate to what we study? When we consider the history of the discipline in Australia and New Zealand, we asked for contributions about the formal institutions that have been developed, such as museums and university departments of art history, but also about the less formal accounts produced by critics, artists and interested amateurs, as well as the research activities of certain commercial galleries, auction houses, contemporary art spaces, and indigenous art centres. What are the principal disciplinary conflicts and collaborations treated within these currents? Which specialist areas of expertise have emerged, such as the history of Australian art, indigenous protocols, women's art, the crafts, to name a few? What issues and institutions might be regarded as specifically Australian, or specific to New Zealand? Is art history practiced in distinctive ways in different places? What does art history mean in polycentric Australia, whether in Adelaide, Cairns, Yirrkala, Sydney, Wellington, Auckland, Canberra, Christmas Island, Christchurch, or Melbourne? How does art history as practiced in Australia and New Zealand relate to historical currents in art history as a discipline? The symposium provided opportunities for scholars in art history from all over Australia, to reflect critically on what they do and to define how certain distinctive patterns have emerged. It is our intention to argue for an inclusive form of art history—one that embraces the creation of art in its broadest sense and relates, if and when relevant, to archaeology, anthropology, and other disciplines.

The classic account of Australian art historiography begins with a discipline basically European in origin. It is said to date from the creation of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne in 1946. The first department had a triad of personalities, the English/Irish foundation professor Joseph Burke, the Viennese Renaissance scholar, Franz Philipp and the first Australian born art historian Bernard Smith. Sir Joseph Burke, a protégée of Kenneth Clark, and one of the earliest graduates of the Courtauld Institute of Art, was an expert on English eighteenth century art, principally Hogarth, but from his arrival in Melbourne embraced Australian painting, and did much to create the reputations of Australian artists in Europe, principally Drysdale and Nolan, as well as others. Franz Philipp was one of the last pupils of Julius von Schlosser and brought with him in his teaching the class principles of the Vienna School of Art History. In his teaching Philipp spent a considerable amount of time in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria with object-based scholarship. It was Franz Philipp who taught art historiography as a fourth year honours course. Philipp's legacy to design history in Australia is an important part of the story told by Peter MacNeill in his contribution, *What is the matter? The object in Australian Art History*.

When I returned to Australia in 1997 to take up the position of Herald Chair of Fine Arts, I gave two lectures on Joseph Burke and Franz Phillip with both of whom I had studied as an undergraduate. These lectures are reprinted in the Documents section of this volume and were important for me to come to terms with the origins and future development of art history in Australia. They are based on the considerable material about these significant scholars in the archives of the

University of Melbourne. In all their publications they exemplified that phenomenon of immigration art history of the diaspora, as defined by Horst Bredekamp.³ They brought with them methodologies of European art history which were transformed and mutated by the country to which they came. All embraced contemporary Australian art, especially modernism in Melbourne, notably the work of Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan in publications and exhibitions, even though it could only be studied at postgraduate level, when it was deemed suitable for MA or PH D theses.

The third member of the group was the first Australian born art historian, Bernard Smith, whose achievements are extraordinary. He was a prolific writer and polemicist, and his books are still highly influential. Among them Smith wrote the first ever Marxist interpretation of art history, *Place, taste and tradition: A Study of Australian Art* (Sydney: Ure Smith 1945), predating Frederick Antal's *Florentine Painting and its Social Background: the bourgeois republic before Cosimo de' Medici's advent to power* (London: Routledge 1947) and Arnold Hauser's *The Social History of Art* (London, Routledge, 1951). In *Place, taste and tradition*, Smith also used the word 'postmodernism' in an art context for the first time.⁴ Of all his books it is *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768-1850: a study in the history of art and ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), that had the greatest impact as the first cross cultural account of how European visitors attempted to represent a new antipodean landscape. Smith reversed the Eurocentric view of voyager art and instead described the impact that discoveries in the Pacific had upon European sensibilities.

How Smith taught art history is shown by his lectures from the 1950s and 1960s at the University of Melbourne, now consultable on line.⁵ Strangely for an art historian who is famous for his original contributions to Australian art, Smith's syllabus in Melbourne was just about European art, never Australian. The lectures ranged from prehistoric cave art in Southern France and Spain to Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, whose extraordinary *Banquet of Anthony and Cleopatra*, is one of the treasures of the National Gallery of Victoria. Even though Australia has the largest concentration of Australian rock art in the world Smith ignored what was Australian in favour of Lascaux.

For those of us who studied in Melbourne, from the 1940s until the 1980s, we were only allowed to work on Australian subjects for postgraduate theses. In 1968 Smith moved to Sydney and as the first professor at the Power Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Sydney, where he created the first ever department to study twentieth century art. From its foundation the Power Institute has stimulated groundbreaking scholarship on contemporary art, as much a consequence of the donor of the chair, Dr John Joseph Wardell Power, as of the recipient Bernard Smith. Power's bequest was to '*make available to the people of Australia the latest ideas and theories in plastic arts by means of lectures and teaching and by the purchase of the most recent contemporary art of the world ... so as to bring the people of*

³ Horst Bredekamp, 'Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus', *Kritische Berichte*, XIV, no 4 (1986), 39-48.

⁴As Smith later realised in 'Modernism and post-modernism: neo-colonial viewpoint—concerning the sources of modernism and post-modernism in the visual arts' *Thesis Eleven* 38 (1994) 104-117

⁵ See Bernard Smith's Lectures on the website of the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne: <http://shaps.unimelb.edu.au/community/bernardsmith/>, consulted on 7 April 2011.

Australia in more direct touch with the latest art developments in other countries’.

Eventually, grudgingly Australian contemporary art entered the syllabus. Ian McLean’s article, *Reverse perspective: Bernard Smith’s worldview and the cosmopolitan imagination* provides an affectionate but critical account of how Smith’s more recent ideas on European art have become obsolete in the new thinking about globalisation and were perhaps always slightly old fashioned. The inheritor of Bernard Smith’s mantle in Sydney was Terry Smith, who had edited and revised Smith’s classic account of Australian painting in later editions.

A frequent visitor to the Melbourne department was Dr Ursula Hoff, a graduate of the Hamburg School of Art History and friend and student of Erwin Panofsky. Hoff was only partly employed at the University, giving occasional lectures in Renaissance art. She never made much of an impact through teaching. Where she did leave a lasting legacy was as the Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the National Gallery of Victoria, where she created a very considerable prints and drawings collection, especially notable were her acquisitions of Northern European prints by Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt. Hoff has been the subject of many articles and two recent books, both of which are reviewed here by Peter McNeill. Burke invited many distinguished visitors to the department, Professor Dale Trendall, an Australian classicist, who lectured on ancient Greek vase painting and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, formerly of the Bauhaus, who became an art master at Geelong Grammar School, to lecture on German design. Another important visitor was Professor Leonhard Adam, who migrated to Australia on the legendary *Duneera*, who gave the first lectures on indigenous rock art at the University of Melbourne and also created an outstanding global collection of what he called “primitive art”.⁶

This classic view of the origins of Australian art history and the Melbourne department is somewhat challenged by Juliette Peers in her joyous account of women’s contributions, *The Canon and its Discontents*, where she reveals that women played a considerable part in the early part of the twentieth century. There were earlier attempts to create a professorship in art history at Melbourne. Peers recreates the career of the little known Stephanie Taylor, who lectured on Australian art in the 1930s and 1940s. Her advocacy to establish a chair of art history at the University of Melbourne, just as there was one in Manchester, may well have been known to the two architects who later created the post of Herald Chair of Fine Arts, Sir Daryl Lindsay and Sir Keith Murdoch. Her article examines the many contributions made by women to the development of art and culture in Australia, at a much earlier date than the traditional narratives have supposed.

Australians have the longest continuing culture in human history, or so it is increasingly said. As when Ron Radford made the assertion in the catalogue of an exhibition on *Australian Colonial Art* in 1995.⁷ It is often repeated. On 13 February

⁶ Jaynie Anderson, ‘The Creation of Indigenous Collections in Melbourne: How Kenneth Clark, Charles Mountford, and Leonhard Adam Interrogated Australian Indigeneity’, *Cannabilismes Disciplinares. Quand l’histoire de l’art et l’antropologie se rencontrent*, eds. Thierry Dufrêne and Ann Christine Taylor, Lassay-les-Châteaux: EMD, 2009, 60-77.

⁷ Ron Radford and Jane Hylton, *Australian Colonial Art 1800-1900*, exhibition at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1995, p. 18: ‘When British colonists arrived to settle they interrupted a continuous, previously undisturbed Aboriginal culture which went back more than 45,000 years. Indeed, although the settlers could not then know, it is humankind’s oldest continuous culture.’

2008, Kevin Rudd, then Prime Minister of Australia, began his moving speech to say sorry to the indigenous peoples of Australia, 'the oldest continuing cultures in human history'. A culture created over many centuries by continual migrations has produced a different approach to global mobility and to art. Throughout the journal there are many discussions of indigenous art, beginning with Susan Lowish, *Setting the scene: early writing on Australian Aboriginal art*. Benjamin Thomas' account of the career of Sir Daryl Lindsay, argues that Lindsay first espoused a collecting policy for Australian museums that was about art that was in geographical proximity to Australia for the developing national collection in Canberra, and who introduced the display of aboriginal art to the modern Australian museum. Lindsay was very aware of the merits of German Jewish intellectuals and gave Ursula Hoff her first position in the print room at the National Gallery and encouraged Leonhard Adam to create exhibitions on so-called 'primitive art'.

Cross-cultural exchanges between indigenous art and non-indigenous art occupy special chapters in this volume, such as Jonathan Mane-Wheoki's overview of New Zealand art history with many interweavings between Maori and non-indigenous art histories. His study presents the first account of the development of New Zealand art historiography. Cross-cultural experience is not limited to indigenous and non-indigenous art, for it may occur when any two countries meet. Rex Butler's contribution on the inter-relationships between Australian and New Zealand artists is a highly original account of cross-cultural experience, previously unattempted, even though New Zealand and Australia inhabit an area of the world that is comparatively close. In her often cited article Alison Inglis shows how Australia was indebted to European experience, whether France, Italy, Greece, Germany, and England. There are also special cross-cultural connections between Australia and Asia, all the more intense and important because of the geographical position we occupy that results in policies that respond to our global location.

The pioneering art historian Joan Kerr, who contributed a great deal to the development of cross-cultural art history, is the subject of an article by Susan Steggall. Susan Lowish sets the scene with her analysis of first contact experience in early writings on Aboriginal art. In the document section we reprint Howard Morphy's important and little known report to the Commonwealth of Australia on the marketing of aboriginal art in 1975 when the first art centres were created, such as Yirrkala. Mary Eagle publishes a significant chapter from her unpublished doctoral dissertation on cross-cultural exchanges in the first decades of the twentieth century. Her contribution brings to bear a wealth of experience from her many years as the principal curator of Australian painting at the National Gallery of Australia. Howard Morphy, director of research for the humanities at Australian National University, who has been publishing on aboriginal art since the 1960s analyses the changing reception of aboriginal art in Australia and how it has moved from the museum to the art gallery, from being considered craft to being designated art. Morphy is complemented by the discussion of the display of indigenous art in Australian galleries that is the subject of Ron Radford's lecture to the Australian Academy of the Humanities, delivered in November 2010, *Acquiring and presenting Aboriginal art in art museums: my first 30 years*. Radford's lecture is published for the first time in the document section. Radford, who has been director in Canberra of the National Gallery of Australia for only five years, has just succeeded in developing new indigenous galleries for the display of New Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Art, created by Andrew Andersons, one of the foremost museum architects in Australia.

The importance that curatorship and exhibitions have had in the development of art historiography in Australia is argued in different ways, both by curators and by art historians. The director of the National Museum of Australia, Andrew Sayers, in his *Curators and Australian art history: a personal view*, presents an autobiographical account in which he pays tribute to Daniel Thomas, whom he always refers to as 'the Prince of Curators'. We have all learnt from Daniel, as many others testify in this volume. Daniel Thomas presents two previously unpublished texts in the document section, a demonstration of what Sayers argues. One of these texts is a personal account of museums in Australia and the other is a polemical lecture he gave in Melbourne for a conference on the Absence of Aboriginals in Australian Art History. Daniel Thomas argues persuasively that this was untrue. Catherine De Lorenzo, Catherine Speck and Joanna Mendelsohn contend forcefully that exhibitions are a most significant factor in the creation of art historical narratives, in their joint contribution: *1968-2008: Curated exhibitions and Australian art history*. This is an initial statement for a proposed much longer study of the phenomenon.

The essays that follow have all been peer reviewed by appropriate independent, qualified experts in the field. They have all benefited from the symposium and from the generous advice of Richard Woodfield, who suggested this publication. Many of the authors are also involved in the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Australian Art*, which will be published in October 2011. The Companion will be the first cross-cultural account of Australian art history from ancient rock art until the digital age. It was commissioned by Cambridge following the CIHA congress and embraces the new philosophy that is also contained in the vision of the Institute for Australian Art History at the University of Melbourne.

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