

THE LEGACIES OF BERNARD SMITH

THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY The University of Melbourne 20 and 21 September 2012

DAY ONE

20 September 2012

9.30am – 10.00am **Jaynie Anderson, Herald Chair of Fine Art, University of Melbourne
Introduction to the Symposium**

Session one ***Encountering Australia: 'European Vision and the South Pacific'*
Chaired by Jaynie Anderson, Herald Chair of Fine Art, University of Melbourne**

10.00am – 10.45am **Keynote Address: Andrew Sayers, AM, Director of the National Museum of Australia,
Canberra**

A half-century on

A little over fifty years ago, *European Vision and the South Pacific* appeared in the firmament. From the vantage point of the present it is possible to see the legacy of this pioneering study. Bernard Smith, himself, described the book as something of an anomaly within the practice of art history as it was understood at the time of its appearance 'since its main concerns lay not with art masterpieces but with visual images produced primarily for information'. If we look at changes in the practice of art history during the last half-century, we can see that many of these changes are amplifications of Smith's approach in the book. And what of today? To what extent is it possible to construct Australian art histories based on 'art as information' as opposed to what he described as the 'central myth of art history' – the creative role of artists in their society?

10.45am **Morning Break**

Judith Ryan - presentation of *Oceania* by Professor Nick Thomas

11.30am – 12.00pm **Associate Professor Robert Gaston, The University of Melbourne**

'My greatest debt': Bernard Smith, the Warburg Institute, and the evolution of 'European Vision'

Bernard Smith's encounters with the scholars of the Warburg Institute, London University, in 1948-49, where his first version of *European Vision* found its genesis, are acknowledged in the 1950 article and his 1960 book, but their potential significance awaits exploration. There are easily traceable influences of Warburg scholars in Smith's two publications, but my focus is the theoretical difficulties then experienced by the Warburg group themselves in researching early modern science and art, European and colonial landscape, and representing the body. Their diverse responses suggested a complexity of methodological approaches through and around which Smith characteristically charted his own theoretical passage.

12.00pm- 12.30pm Elizabeth Findlay, Senior Lecturer, The Australian National University, Canberra

Bernard Smith's Noble Savage and Concepts of Race

In *European Vision and the South Pacific* Bernard Smith argued that images of the noble savage appealed greatly to armchair travellers and men of taste. Smith maintained that before the advent of the 'caricatured' noble savage it was possible in the 1770s and 1780s to present the Australian Aborigine as an idealised figure derived from Classical art. In this paper I will expand on Smith's observations, analysing his concept of the noble savage in light of current scholarship on race and racism. I will demonstrate how recent writings on monogenist/polygenist views of race reinforce Smith's observations.

12.30pm – 1.00pm Dr Kathleen Davidson, The University of Sydney

Photography and the Triumph of Science in Bernard Smith's European Vision and the South Pacific

In his landmark study *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Bernard Smith identifies photography as both contributing to changes in artists' representations of nature and a vital new technology for the natural sciences. While Smith's discussion of photography in relation to his central thesis on vision and the Western imagination occurs in his final chapter, it represents more than just a convenient historical point at which to conclude his inquiry. His conclusion sets out the epistemological context of photography and tacitly recognises that science was also undergoing a fundamental transformation. As he remarks, 'even before the appearance of photography scientific draughtsmanship was revealing a tendency to move away from a preoccupation with the graphic delineation of surfaces towards an analytical interpretation of the structure of things'. In this paper I examine the early uses of photography by naturalists and evaluate this significant but often overlooked aspect of Smith's thesis on the interrelationship of art and science in British expansionism.

1.00pm – 2.15pm Lunch break

***Session Two* Defining Australian Art
Chaired by Peter Beilharz**

2.15pm – 2.45pm Sarah Scott, The Australian National University, Canberra

Defining an Australian art? Revisiting the Antipodean Manifesto

The "Antipodean Manifesto" written by Bernard Smith in 1959 and signed by participating artists dismissed abstract art as representative of a bland type of internationalism that threatened to obliterate regional differences. Only figural art that responded to the local environment Smith argued, could allow Australian art to make an impact upon the international art scene. CASNSW President Elwyn Lynn, disagreed, believing that abstract art could both engage with current 'international' aesthetic concerns and be informed by local traditions. This paper will review how this debate shaped the canonical exhibition. Recent Australian Painting presented at London's Whitechapel art gallery in 1961. More broadly it will consider if Smith's idea of 'the local' still has significance in today's increasingly globalized art world.

2.45pm – 3.15pm Associate Professor Catherine Speck, University of Adelaide

Outward bound: national art without borders

In *Modernism's History*, Bernard Smith's Hegelianism had become fully synthesised, and late in his career he spoke of Australia's relationship with Europe as 'my antipodes, seeing it from a distance, and yet seeing it also as part of myself, my cognitive space and my culture' (p. 7). This paper focuses on Bernard Smith's writings about Australian art, but with specific reference to artists working offshore. From 1880-1940 numerous expatriate Australian artists working in Paris and London were immersed in metropolitan centres, and their work frequently engaged with cosmopolitan subjects. As a consequence, their paintings, drawings and sculpture manifested little regard for Smith's earlier ideas in *Place Taste and Tradition* of a 'national traditional reflecting the life of the Australian people and their movement in the imbricated structure of Australian society' (p.30). Their art is now embraced within collections of Australian art, and their offshore work is intrinsic to contemporary art historical writing about artists' lives and their oeuvre.

The mismatch between the earlier art historical writing and the praxis of Australian art points to the complexities within ideas of national style and national art, and how expatriate artists moved beyond national concerns to embrace cosmopolitan subjects and perform hybrid identities. This paper will examine these issues and how Smith's late career writing of 1998 set the stage for the more recent probing of national v. international art histories, and how to situate Australian artists working offshore from the 1880-1940s.

3.15pm – 3.45pm **Dr Catherine De Lorenzo, Adjunct Research Fellow at COFA, University of New South Wales and Monash University**

Bernard Smith, 'cultural convergence' and art history

In his 1980 Boyer lectures *The Spectre of Truganini*, Bernard Smith argued that settler Australians typically avoided tragedy because it disturbs 'the conscience' (22, 32) and requires reflection on 'moral values born of its own [cross cultural] experience' (11). Smith's words acted as a clarion call to those curators and art historians who sought to consider Aboriginal art as more than just inspirational on settler modernism or as solely grounded in issues of cultural and experiential knowledge. By examining some of the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous art writers (e.g. Mundine, Sayers) frame their interpretation of art within a broader context of cross cultural dispossession and convergence, this paper analyses and questions the impact of Smith's insights on tragedy-avoidance within Australian curatorial and art historical discourse.

3.45pm – 5.00pm **Afternoon break**

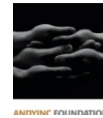
Session Three ***Power Professor of Art History and Visual Culture, University of Sydney***
Chaired by Mark Ledbury

5.00pm – 6.00pm **Nicholas Thomas, Professor of Historical Anthropology, & Director Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge**

Out of Place: history and art in the Pacific

Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* not only took art history to the Pacific, but explored the history of what would subsequently be called the visual culture of the region. It also alluded to and pointed toward another history that it did not undertake, that of the arts of Oceania themselves. This lecture addresses that project. While the longstanding approach has been to contextualise Pacific arts in place and culture, they are rather arguably cosmopolitan, caught up in multiple voyages and exchanges. The historic arts are moreover out of place in the sense that they are represented largely by museum collections outside the region. This lecture concludes by considering what we make today of this expatriate heritage.

6.00pm **Vote of thanks - Professor Rachel Fensham, Head, School of Culture and Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne**



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DAY TWO

21 September 2012

Session One ***Bernard Smith's Personal Legacies***
Chaired by Dr Christopher Marshall, University of Melbourne

9.30am – 10.30am **Professor Rüdiger Joppien, University of Hamburg**

Cooperation and Friendship – Correspondence with Bernard Smith on “The Art of Captain Cook’s Voyages”

My correspondence with Bernard Smith began in December 1973 and continued until October 2010. Our most intense period of collaboration was from 1975 until 1987, during the publication of our joint work *The Arts of Captain Cook’s Voyages*. When Bernard had finished *European Vision and the South Pacific*, he thought of it as his final statement about Captain Cook, but through the stimulation of a new project, Bernard became deeply engaged again. For the preparation of the volumes Bernard and I met all over the world, in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney, as well as in London, Vancouver, Honolulu and Hamburg. My presentation will examine our collaboration through our correspondence, which provides many insights into Bernard’s character as a scholar.

10.30am – 11.00am **Morning break**

11.00am – 11.30am **Dr Kate Challis**

The Marxist Patron: Bernard Smith’s Art Collection

It is a curious matter that my grandfather, Bernard Smith, was an art historian at all, given his self-professed Marxism and non-materialism. He considered objects with suspicion, especially their ownership; what excited him were ideas. Yet, over the course of his life, my grandparents amassed a sizable and significant art collection, which included works by John Perceval, Eugene von Guerard, Noel Counihan, Vic O'Connor, Sali Herman, Grace Cossington Smith, Jean Bellette, Richard Larter and Colin McCahon. Despite my grandfather's protestations that 'you do need something to hang on your walls' there was, of course, a larger agenda at play. This paper will examine the art Bernard and Kate Smith acquired and how they went about this. It will also address the ethos behind their collecting. Ironically, it will show how it was this activity, never intended as an investment, enabled Bernard to become an important philanthropist and to set up the Kate Challis RAKA Award, which, at the time it was established, was the most prestigious and valuable award for Indigenous arts in the country. A glimpse into Bernard and Kate Smith’s art collecting provides a specific example of how two culturally-involved people at mid-century saw their role as patrons first, collectors second. It will also draw out the implications of the change in outlook over subsequent generations with the rise of the art market and increasing government and institutional patronage.

11.30am – 12.00pm **Professor Kate Darian Smith, The University of Melbourne**

The Kate Challis RAKA Award for Indigenous Creative Arts: Legacies and Impact

In 1991 Bernard Smith established the RAKA Award for Indigenous Creative Arts to honour of the memory his late wife, Kate Challis. The award (now worth \$25,000) was encompassing and visionary in its scope. In a five-year cycle it recognises Indigenous achievements across a range of arts forms: creative prose, drama, the visual arts, scriptwriting and poetry. Previous winners have included Jack Davis, Kevin Gilbert, Lin Onus, Tracey Moffatt, Ricky Maynard, Brook Andrew, Ivan Sen, Warwick Thornton, Kim Scott and other leading Indigenous artists, filmmakers and writers. Drawing on archival, press and oral sources, this paper will explore Smith's commitment to the RAKA Award's celebration of the Indigenous arts, and assess the Award's legacies and impact in promoting Indigenous arts in Australia more generally.

12.00pm – 12.30pm **Philip Morrissey, The University of Melbourne**

Encountering Aboriginal Art

In 2010 the winner of the RAKA Award for Literature was Kim Scott for *That Deadman Dance*. Alex Wright's *Carpentaria* was one of the runners up. Both novels had previously won Miles Franklin awards and were literary novels, informed by a reading and awareness of other writers, concerned with language, and driven by the creative vision of the authors without reference to a community of consensus. It was a fitting tribute to Bernard Smith and the vision of the RAKA. This paper will discuss extracts from both texts in relation to each other and the continued role of Aboriginal artists and writers in disclosing new possibilities for re-visioning the past and visioning the future.

12.30pm – 2.30pm **Lunch Break**

Session Two

The RAKA Award

Chaired by Professor Marcia Langton, Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies, Centre for Health & Society, University of Melbourne

2.30pm – 3.30pm **Tracey Moffatt**

An informal presentation on her work, her practice and the art world.

4.00pm – 5.00pm **Warwick Thornton in conversation with Professor Marcia Langton**

From 'Mimi' to 'Mother Courage' - a conversation with Warwick Thornton about the place of art in his film work

From Warwick Thornton's two short films *Mimi* and *Nana* to his 2009 RAKA award winning feature film *Samson & Delilah* and now to his art installations - *Stranded* and *Mother Courage*, Warwick has often woven the creation and commercialisation of Aboriginal art into his own art. Marcia Langton will chat to Warwick Thornton about life, love and his recent foray into video installation art. Warwick Thornton's latest work - *Mother Courage* - is part of **dOCUMENTA (13)** in Kassel, Germany. Early next year it will be installed at ACMI, who co-commissioned the piece with **dOCUMENTA (13)**.

5.00pm **Vote of thanks - Tony Ellwood, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria**