

CROSSING CULTURES

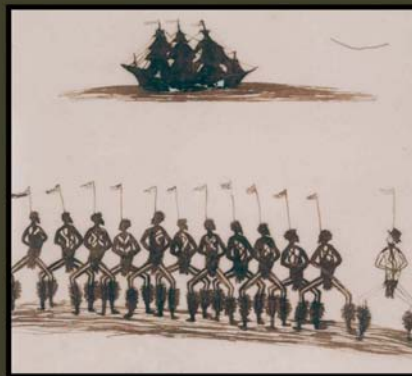
CONFLICT, MIGRATION and CONVERGENCE

The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art

Edited by PROFESSOR JAYNIE ANDERSON

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Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 32ND INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE HISTORY OF ART

Professor Jaynie Anderson (ed.)

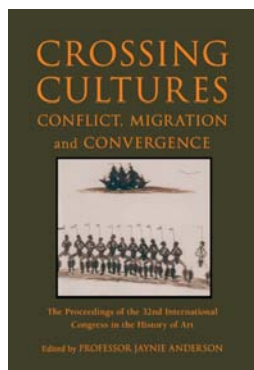
Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence is a compilation of the conference papers from the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art organised by the International Committee of the History of Art (CIHA), edited by conference convenor Professor Jaynie Anderson. *Crossing Cultures* is an in-depth examination of the effect of globalism on art and art history. Covering all aspects of art—including traditional media, painting, sculpture, architecture and the crafts, as well as design, film, visual performance and new media—it explores the themes of conflict, migration and convergence in the visual, symbolic and artistic exchanges between cultures throughout history.

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Playing between the Lines

The Melbourne Experience of Crossing Cultures

Jaynie Anderson, *University of Melbourne*

Whoever invented the CIHA conference system intended that the art historians who have the honour to be the convenors of an international art history congress such as we are holding in Melbourne have a unique opportunity to assess the practice of art history throughout the world at a particular moment in time. This singular privilege is not reflected in the literature on the subject of global art history. The concept for the congress was intended to elicit a global response, and as the size of the audience present at the Town Hall (1200 people) has revealed, it has been spectacularly successful. There are contributions from participants from fifty countries, despite the fact that we in the Antipodes live so far away from the rest of the world. To date only thirty-three countries belong to the international art historical organisation—I hope that under my presidency of the CIHA those colleagues from new countries who came to Melbourne will become members.

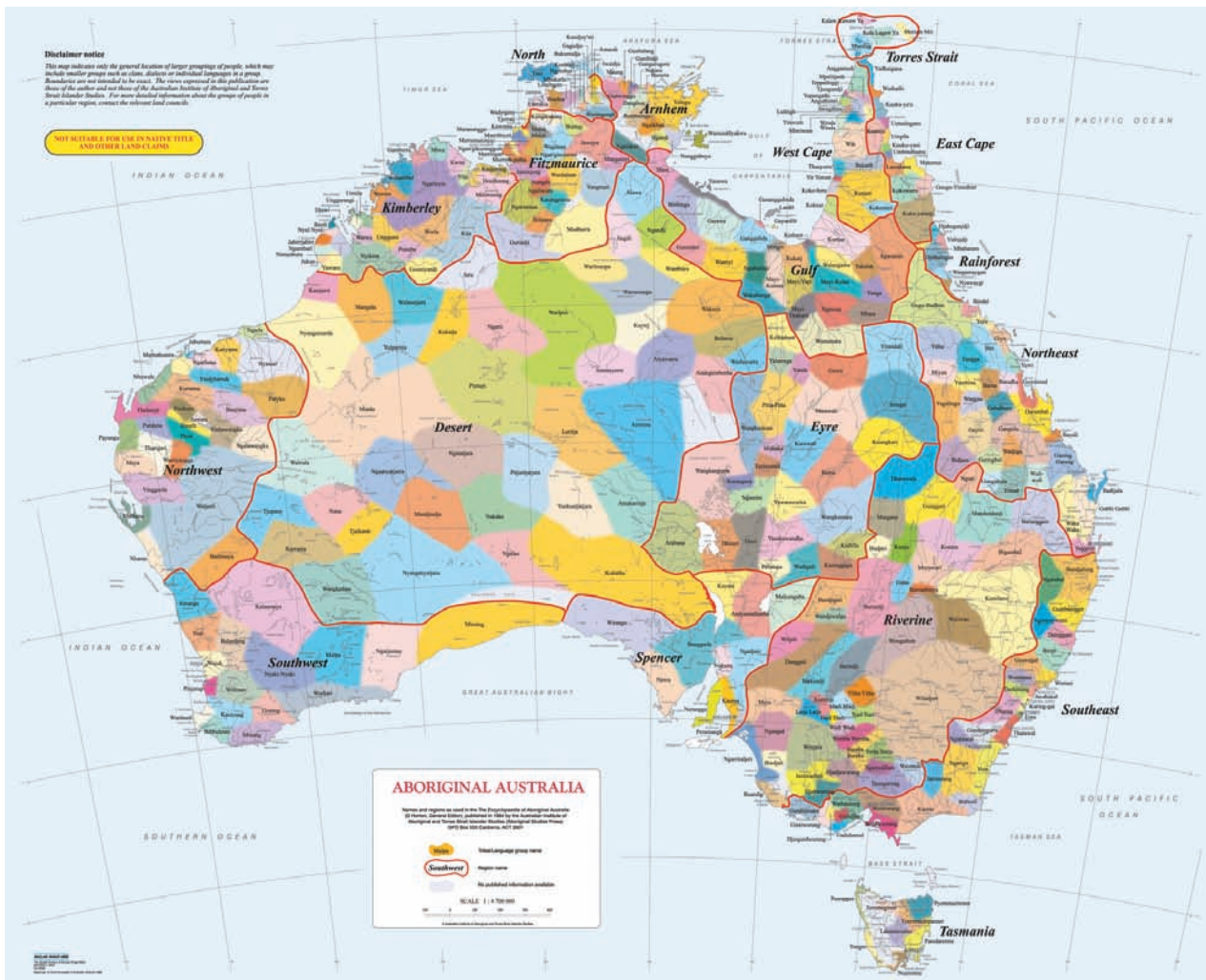
The extraordinarily popular map of Australia devised by David Horton in 1996 as an illustration for the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* charts more than 300 Indigenous languages, clans and dialects in our country (see figure 1). It is a striking visual demonstration of how the concept of the cross cultural is deeply rooted in the very landscape of our populations. It shows the remarkable linguistic diversity of Indigenous Australian populations and represents Aboriginals as many different interacting groups with different languages, some being as different as, say, Hungarian from Russian. Perhaps what makes the map so popular is the sophistication of the myriad cross-cultural interactions.

In accounts of world art history such as James Elkins's often-quoted volume *Is Art History Global?* Australia is mentioned only once, in an inaccurate statistic.¹ When an Australian does make an appearance in art history, he inevitably stands for a 'primitive', one who knows nothing of Europe. Take the case of Erwin Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology*, in which 'an Australian bushman' makes a surprising

appearance in the company of 'an ancient Greek' as a person who would not understand the significance of a European gesture such as 'lifting a hat'.² 'Our Australian Bushman', Panofsky wrote, 'would be equally unable to recognise the subject of a *Last Supper*; to him, it would only convey the idea of an excited dinner party'.³ Anyone who saw the film *Crocodile Dundee* would know that the Australian bushman Paul Hogan does raise his Akubra hat, to take over New York with the traditional greeting 'G'day'.

What could the average Australian bushman have known about art, whether he was Indigenous or non-Indigenous? He would almost certainly have had privileged contact with the imagery of ancient rock art, dated in this example some 38000 years ago, that is to be found throughout Australia but conspicuously at the Top End (see figure 2). Australia has the largest continuous record of any country in the world of human artistic expression in history, but this has never been realised in international writing. Well before Europe experienced antiquity, the first Australians invented lively traditions of painting in ochre on rocks in these galleries. These images, in remote settings difficult to access, are to some degree protected from tourism by their inaccessibility. Some Australian burial sites date to about 43000 years ago—the oldest in the world. We have often thought of the Greeks as being first in all matters, or perhaps the Chinese, but a case could be made for the first Australians.

Another bushman, Bony in the television series *Bush*, set at Lake Mungo, in western New South Wales, inhabits one of the most extraordinary landscapes in the world, known colloquially as the Walls of China. A dry lake, a stark landscape of sand, Lake Mungo contains unique archaeological evidence about hunter-gatherer society. Burials at Lake Mungo are possibly the oldest in the world, dated to 43000 years ago, according to carbon dating. These burials involved different



but elaborate behaviour that we should probably call ritual, for one of the bodies is covered in red ochre. Another provides the first evidence of cremation. Our bushmen were privileged in the ancient culture they encountered. Their potential for iconological analysis could have gone well beyond what Panofsky ever imagined.

The historiography of the concept of this congress is an ancient one, and applicable to many different contexts. Recent cross-cultural exhibitions chose to privilege Venice. One recent exhibition, ‘Bellini and the East’, devised for the National Gallery, London, with the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, explored the impact of the East on the work of a fifteenth-century Venetian painter, Gentile Bellini (1460–1507). The exhibition focused on a highly significant period in the millennium-long interaction between three cultures—Venetian, Byzantine and Turkish—as well as three religions—Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox and Islam. Gentile Bellini was one of a few European artists to be invited to the court of Sultan Mehmet II, for a few years, from 1479 to 1481, and his portrait of the sultan flattered him as a Western prince. Authors in the catalogue examined the multiple views of Bellini, the eastern, western

Figure 1 David R Horton
 Aboriginal Australia, 1996
 © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz
 This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988–1994, this map attempts to represent all the language or tribal or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. This map is NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not those of AIATSIS.

and multicultural Venetian. Simultaneously, the Metropolitan Museum conceived an exhibition with a similar subject, ‘Venice and the Islamic World 828 to 1797’, from the foundation of Venice to the so-called Fall of Venice, when Napoleon overthrew the longest living and most stable republic in the world. In all this, the precedent for the exhibitions was Deborah Howard’s book on Venetian architecture, *Venice and the East*.⁴

In searching for the right image to announce the call for papers for the conference, I came

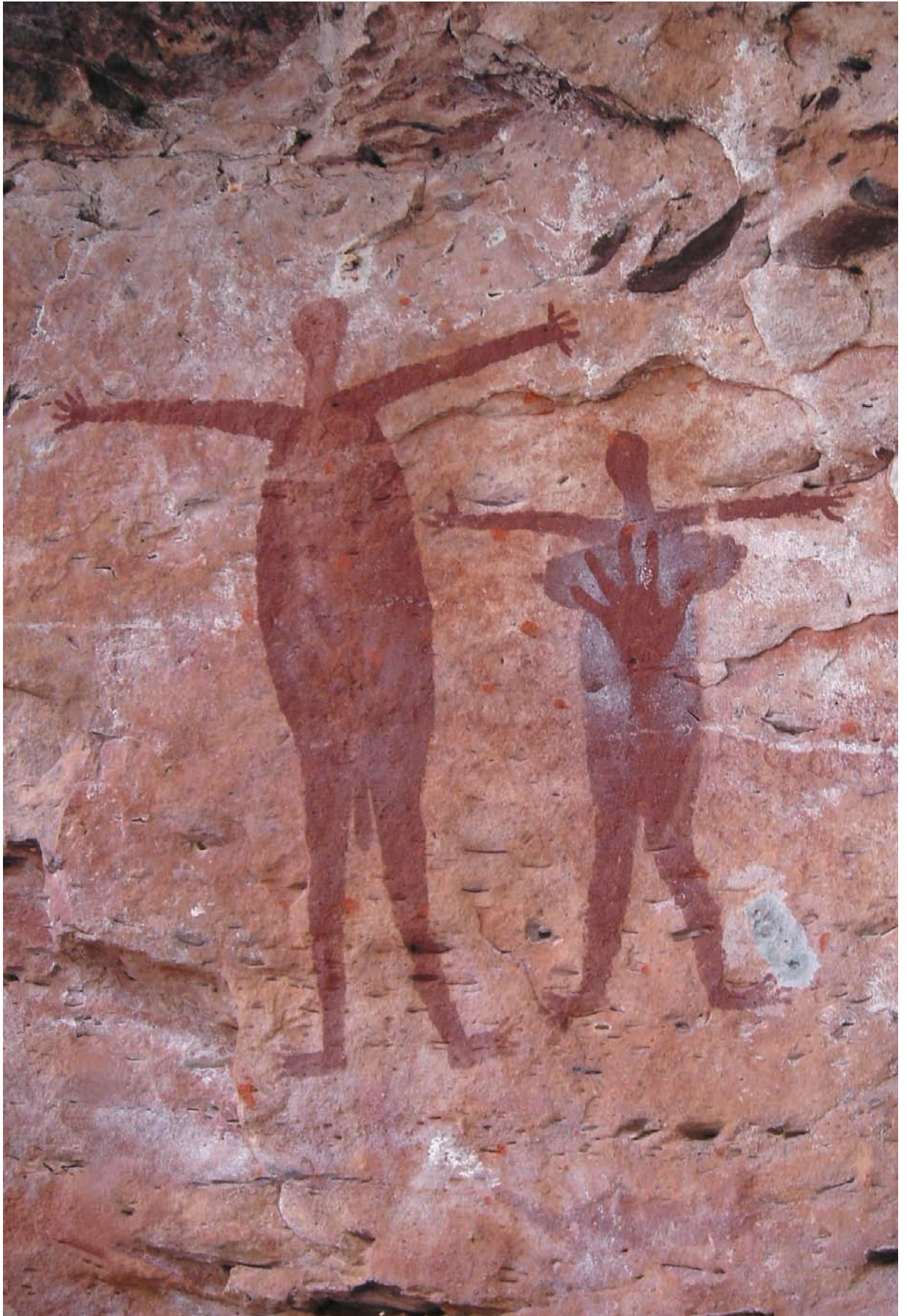


Figure 2 Unknown artist
(Jowalbinna, near Laura, Queensland)
Love Magic, 36 000 BC
life-size figures on immeasurable surface
red ochre on rock
Photograph Jaynie Anderson



Figure 3 Tommy McRae
*Corroboree or William Buckley and Dancers from the
 Wathourong People, c. 1890*
 20.5 × 25.5 cm
 ink and ochre on paper
 Archives of the University of Melbourne

across a drawing in the archives of the University of Melbourne by the nineteenth-century Aboriginal artist Tommy McRae (c. 1835–1901). He is the author of the first Australian works of art that represent crossing cultures, in such drawings as *Corroboree or William Buckley and Dancers from the Wathourong People* (see figure 3). Most Australian art histories begin with the imagery of first contact, and such encounters are always exceptional experiences. This image, a truly witty drawing, represents the Irish larrikin convict William Buckley, a 6-foot-tall redhead, living and dancing comfortably among Indigenous peoples in Victoria in the early years of the colony, the boat that brought him, the *Calcutta*, in the distance. The account of Buckley's thirty-two years with the Aboriginal people established his reputation, in his own words, as a 'wild white man'.⁵ In a number of drawings, McRae represents Buckley as a figure of convergence, the first white man to learn Indigenous languages, whereas most European artists depicted him *after* he had emerged from his years with Indigenous people. In Buckley's writing he seems to have lived in harmony with Aboriginal Victorians, notwithstanding the violence of the society. McRae has made only a brief appearance in art history, in Andrew Sayers's exhibition catalogue, *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century*,⁶ but his work, consisting of

numerous humorous drawings produced for pastoralists such as the Foord family from Rutherglen, flour-millers who commissioned this drawing, could be seen as a seminal idea for this conference. On 25 May 2006 we launched the website with this image. The choice signalled the importance of Indigeneity in the conference.

Later generations of Australians espoused the crossing of cultures as myriad interconnections of nationalities, as is shown in the cross-cultural clothing invented by Percy Grainger (see figure 4). Grainger's favourite outfit was a real fruit salad of cultures made from Turkish towelling and incorporating Anglo-Saxon, Irish and Scandinavian elements. Grainger wore the clothes when he was composing.

In the 1940s, the cultural landscape of Australia was transformed by a group of intellectuals of the Diaspora, who came from Europe and were fascinated by what they found in the Antipodes, discovering Melbourne to be a paradise after war-torn Europe. Their activities constituted an important



Figure 4 Percy Grainger
Towel clothes outfit, inspired by Maori and Anglo-Saxon
dress, c. 1934
h: 155 cm
machine- and hand-sewn manufactured Dri-Glo towel
Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne

part of the critical reception of Australian art, whether it was ancient rock art or paintings on bark. The decade of the 1940s was a period in which those involved in creating the disciplines of art history, anthropology and archaeology defined and collected an important part of Australia's patrimony. The approach was always towards a more inclusive form of art history.

What began as German or English practices of art history slowly mutated into different forms of analysis. Joe Burke, one of the first graduates of

the Courtauld Institute, found employment at 10 Downing Street during the war, as Atlee's private secretary. Recommended by Kenneth Clark, he began the Melbourne department in 1946, one of the earliest in the English-speaking world. Burke's early work was on the British eighteenth century, notably an edition of Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*. We are all his pupils. Among them numbered many professors of art history; four were women. The National Gallery of Victoria contains wonderful eighteenth-century paintings as a result of his expertise. His first book on Australian art was about Russell Drysdale, a painter who was born in Britain, and who migrated to Australia as a young man and painted subjects about immigration or sympathetic portraits of Indigenous people in outback Australia.⁷ Burke loved Australian art and made many significant introductions, including presenting Sidney Nolan to Kenneth Clark.

Ursula Hoff's formation as a scholar was principally at the University of Hamburg, during that legendary period when Aby Warburg created his institute there, which was also frequented by the young Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl. Hoff's life spanned almost a century. She was one of those fascinating German Jewish intellectuals, who taught early European art history with a real knowledge of her subject, a product of the Diaspora. We were enthralled by her elegant manners, her distinguished and severe beauty, and her lectures, which were an initiation to iconography. Her legacies to the discipline of art history and to Australian museums are diverse and important, but she is remembered principally for the crucial role that she played in the creation of the collection of prints and drawings at the National Gallery of Victoria, where she was employed from 1942 until 1975. Like Burke, she too became passionate about Australian pursuits.

Leonard Adam's first degree was a doctor of laws from Greifswald in 1916. His initial fascination with primitive law widened into a broad study of cultural anthropology, archaeology and primitive art inspired by Franz Boas, with whom he had a long correspondence beginning in 1912. From 1930 to 1933, Adam held a chair at the University of Berlin in ethnological jurisprudence. In 1934 he fled to England, where as a refugee he wrote a best-seller, the classic Penguin *Primitive Art*, published in 1940. He was deported to Australia on the legendary boat the SS *Duneera*, and taught at the University of Melbourne, where he also created an extraordinary global collection of 'primitive art' which included the early acquisition of Indigenous bark paintings.

Cross-cultural analysis has a long history in Australian art history, beginning with Bernard

Smith's pioneering *European Vision and the South Pacific*.⁸ Smith, who is the first Australian-born art historian of significance, begins his narrative about the period of first contact, seen exclusively through European eyes.

A rather surprising figure in the context of Australian art history was Kenneth Clark—a traveller rather than an immigrant. After his resignation as director of the National Gallery, London, Clark was appointed adviser to the Felton Bequest for acquisitions of European art for the National Gallery of Victoria⁹, at the suggestion of his friend and protégé Joseph Burke, newly appointed in 1946 as the professor of art history in Melbourne, the first Herald Chair of Fine Arts. At the beginning of Clark's appointment he travelled to Australia to spend half a year exploring the continent. After his return, on 26 March 1949 Clark wrote to Bernhard Berenson to give his frank impressions of the Antipodes, revealing an unexpected passion for Indigenous bark painting in the Museum of Melbourne. Clark wrote:

My dear BB,

...

I enjoyed Australia far more than I had expected to do. I find it hard to explain why without seeming patronising, but the brilliant climate seems to have had a magical effect on the Anglo Saxons, removing their inhibitions and hypocrisies. However, they are very naïve—hardly out of the pioneering stage, but they are a gifted people, only held back by laziness. It was fascinating to be in an entirely democratic country, without even the respect for wealth, or start of dispossession of the USA. The landscape ... is most beautiful and I can only convey it by saying that it is like a Piero della Francesca. The grass is white, the trunks of the trees pinkish white, the leaves glaucous, exactly as in the *Baptism*. The light comes through the leaves, so the woods are all lilac—like the most extreme Impressionist Renoir's of the late 70s. It is a country for painters, and in fact they have quite good ones—at least no more than anywhere else in these years of dearth. Jane has told you of my enthusiasm for the aboriginal paintings. They are extraordinary, and totally unlike African bushman drawings or the Palaeolithic cave paintings. They do not represent a total impression of moment, but an analytic. As you know the Australian aboriginal always draws the inside of his subject as well as the out, and he makes the heart, liver, intestines etc. with a decorative pattern. Most of the paintings are life-size, on bark lined with white clay. By some freak the Abos had what we call perfect taste—all their objects have

pretty, delicate colouring, and their fantasies are gentle, whereas those of the neighbouring Papuans are ugly and violent. Altogether, a study of Melanesian culture is a good corrective for the art historian, for each island or district has an art-form independent and fundamentally different from the other. All the material is in Australia, and has not been properly studied, or even exhibited ... I was there at not a time to learn anything, except how ignorant we are.¹⁰

Clark's letter to Berenson (more than in the anodyne account of his travels in Australia found in the second volume of his autobiography¹¹) succinctly describes the value of Aboriginal art, couched in terms of British Modernism, accentuated against Australian indifference. His observation that Aboriginal bark paintings 'do not represent a total impression of moment, but an analytic' accurately characterises the X-ray style of western Arnhem Land bark painting. Much has changed since the 1940s, as is shown in the pages of this book.

NOTES

- 1 James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?*, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 8. The statistic is the number of art history departments in Australia, which is erroneous.
- 2 Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, Harper & Row, New York and London, 1972 (1939), pp. 3–17.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 10.
- 4 Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100–1500*, Yale University Press, London, 2000.
- 5 James Bonwick, *The Wild White Man and the Blacks of Victoria*, Fergusson & Moore, Melbourne, 1863.
- 6 Andrew Sayers, *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994.
- 7 Joseph Burke, *The Paintings of Russell Drysdale*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1951.
- 8 Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969.
- 9 Clark acted as an adviser to the Felton Bequest for two years, during which time he recommended the acquisition of a notable series of paintings for the National Gallery of Victoria, including Poussin's *Crossing of the Red Sea* and Bonnard's *Siesta*.
- 10 Kenneth Clark, letter to Bernard Berenson, 26 March 1949, in Berenson's correspondence, Archives of the Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence, cited in J Anderson, "How Ignorant We Are": The Critical Reception of Indigenous Art in Australia', *Australian Book Review*, no. 296, November 2007, pp. 38–9.
- 11 Kenneth Clark, *The Other Half: A Self-Portrait*, John Murray, London, 1977, pp. 148–57.