

Editorial

Even our view of our own surroundings is characterised by conventions. This applies all the more to foreign worlds and their inhabitants. They might have been ‘explored’ by ‘discoverers’, yet their view was neither objective nor unprejudiced. This was also true in Australia. The ‘cartographic eye’ measured the landscape according to the rules of conquest and appropriation.¹ This included categorising their original owners as savages who knew neither culture nor property.

The ‘explorers’ were well aware of the violent dimension of their actions. On an expedition through East Australia in 1831/1832, Thomas Mitchell described the situation of the indigenous inhabitants as “hemmed in by the power of the white population”. He therefore regarded them as “unfortunate creatures” who “could no longer enjoy their solitary freedom; for the dominion of the white man surrounded them”.² He was also aware that the violent atmosphere of colonial land seizure related even to his supposedly purely scientific ethnographic interests. This was reflected in a significant note:



Fig. 1: Cambo

“I met with a native but recently arrived from the wilds. His terror and suspicion, when required to stand steadily before me, while I drew his portrait, were such, that, notwithstanding the power of disguising fear, so remarkable in the savage race, the stout heart of Cambo was overcome, and beat visibly; – the perspiration streamed from his breast, and he was about to sink to the ground, when he at length suddenly darted from my presence; but he speedily returned, bearing in one hand his club, and in the other his boomerang, with which he seemed to acquire just fortitude enough, to be able to stand on his legs, until I finished the sketch.”

The atmosphere described here as ‘wild fear’ of ‘civilised studies’ (see Fig. 1) was an expression of the social relationship of a settler society in which the relationship between the indigenous population and the foreign newcomers was determined by colonial violence.

It also characterised situations that artistic observers and creators of the events may have regarded as harmless posing for a portrait. In

- 1 Cf. Simon Ryan: *The Cartographic Eye. How Explorers Saw Australia*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge University Press 1996.
- 2 T. L. Mitchell: *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia [etc.]*. 2 vols. London: Boone 1839, p. 10; the following quote is from *ibid.*, pp. 20 f.

fact, they were already ‘manipulated images’ due to their genesis.³ This had structural reasons and did not only apply where they were transferred to the studio and staged photographically, as by John William Lindt, for example. His studio photographs show ‘Australian Aborigines’ with painted backgrounds, arranged plants and stuffed animals. The image of a man from New South Wales repeats the arrangement of Mitchell’s sketch (Fig. 2).

Such staging did not prevent contemporaries from categorising the obviously arranged pictures as “the first successful attempt representing the native blacks truthfully as well as artistically”.⁴ This does not rule out that “[t]oday, Gumbaynggirr and Bandjalung people have reclaimed the portraits as their heritage” and that “[m]ore than 130 years after the photographs

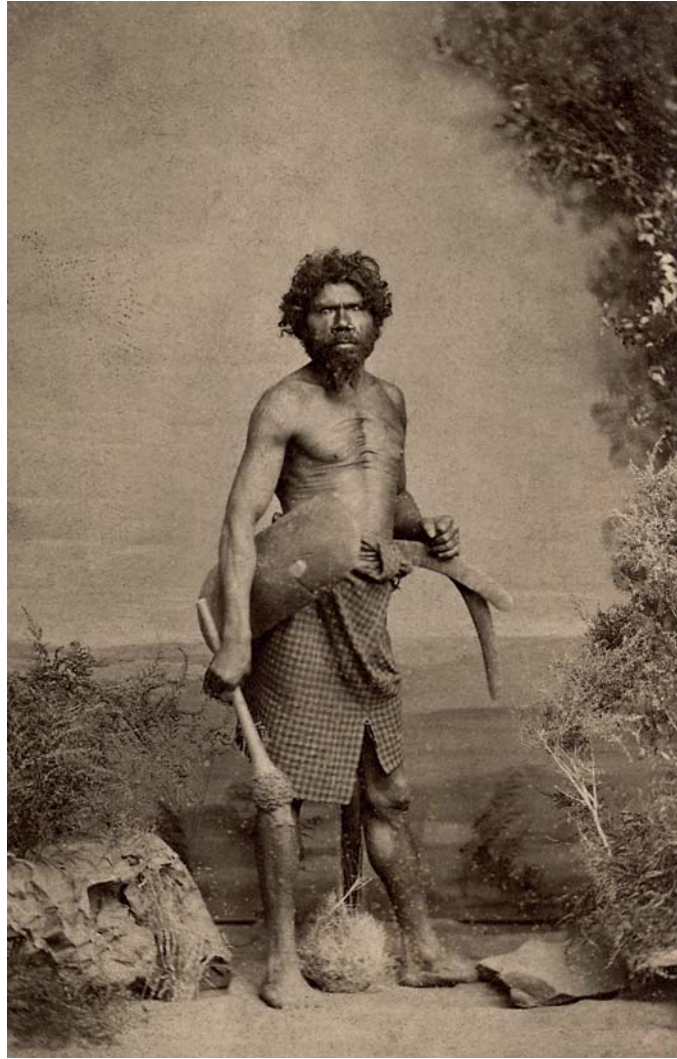


Fig. 2: In John William Lindt’s studio

were taken, some members of the indigenous community feel a deep connection to the images: they personify relatives and family histories only now being reconstructed”. However, this is not because the images were taken without prejudice, but is the result of their cultural reconstruction. Nevertheless, the colonial context of their creation does not disappear. They remain witnesses to a colonial gaze.

Lindt, who was born in Frankfurt on Main (at that time a Free City of the German Confederation) in 1845 and came to Australia at the age of 17, where he made a career as a commercial photographer, is one of the many artists of German descent not covered in this booklet.⁵ For the period of the long 19th century alone,

3 Cf. Virginia Lee-Webb: *Manipulated Images. European Photographs of Pacific People*. In: *Prehistories of the Future. The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, ed. by Elazar Barkan, Ronald Bush. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995, pp. 175-201.

4 Quoted from Jane Lydon, Sari Braithwaite, Shauna Bostock Smith: *Photographing Indigenous people in New South Wales*. In: *Calling the Shots. Aboriginal Photographies*, ed. by Jane Lydon. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press 2014, pp. 55-75, p. 58; the following quote is from *ibid.*, p. 60.

5 Cf., i.a., Rex Butler, Andrew D.S. Donaldson: *A Cain of Ponds. On German and Australian Artistic Interactions*. In: *German-Australian Encounters and Cultural Transfers. Global Dynamics in Transnational Lands*, ed. by Benjamin Nickl, Irina Herrschner, Elżbieta M. Goździak. Singapore: Springer Nature 2018, pp. 193-208.

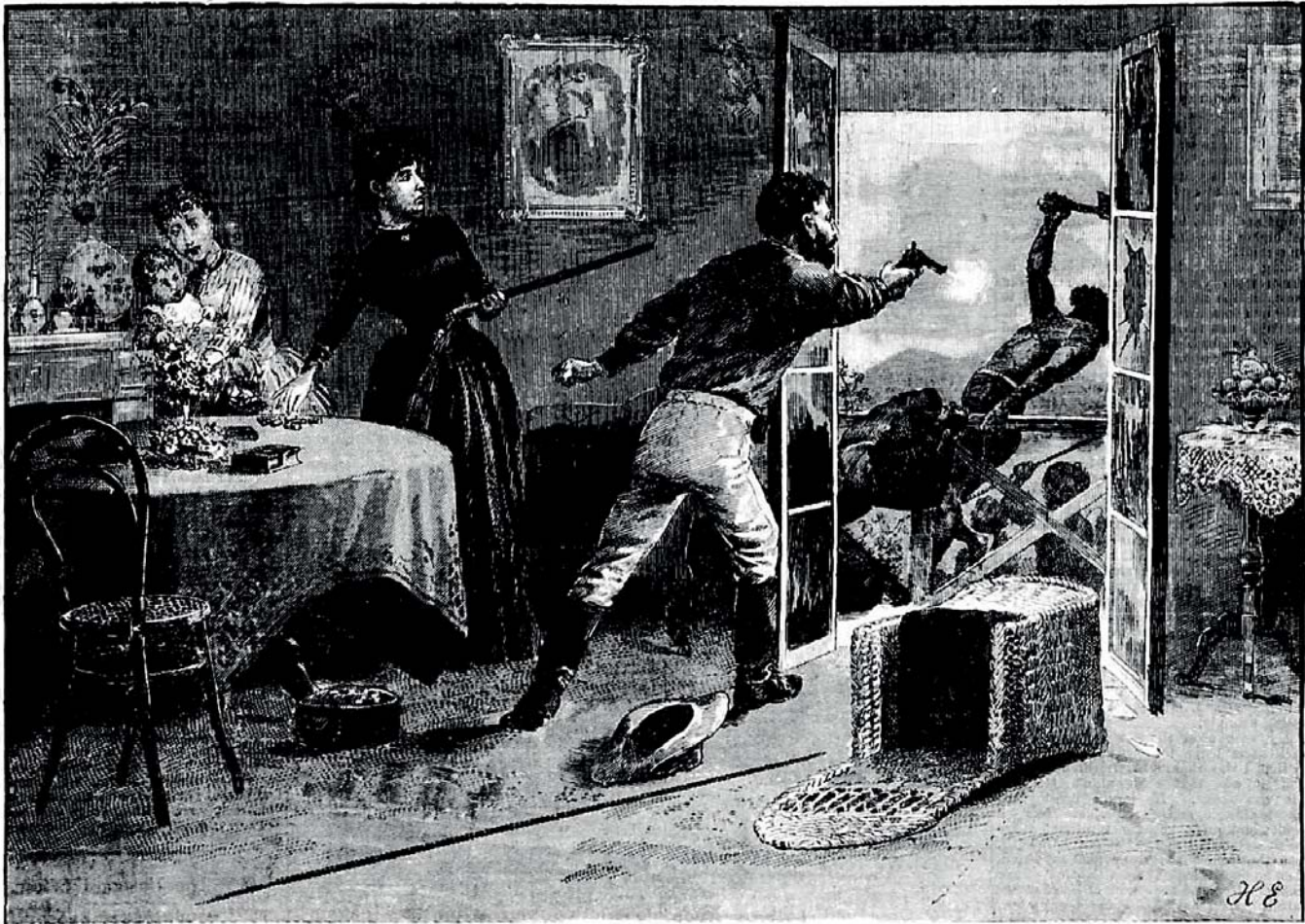


Fig. 3: Egersdorfer's illustration for 'Christmas Number 1887'

analyses of Carl Ehlers, Johann Ludwig Gerard Krefft, Fred Kruger, John Lindt, Charles Rodius, Gert Sellheim or Louis August Ludwig Tannert and others would have been worthwhile in addition to the contributions collected here.⁶ In addition, Germans who were not artists also produced pictures of indigenous Australians as part of their research.⁷ However, other respected artists of German descent were not at all interested in indigenous Australians, even though they lived in Australia for a long time.⁸ And there were artists like the lithographer, painter and cartoonist Heinrich Egersdörfer (born 1853 in Nuremberg, Bavaria), who made a living during their stay in Australia with openly racist depictions.

6 It is not least due to the extensively economised scientific system that colleagues have not had the time and leisure to respond to requests in this direction.

7 One of them, the zoologist Wilhelm von Blandowski (born 1822 in Gleiwitz, Prussia), only stayed in Australia for ten years (1849-1859). Nevertheless, a fish with the name 'Blandowskiella agassizii' was still swimming in the local waters in the middle of the 20th century (cf. Gilbert P. Whitley: *Ichthyological Notes*. In: *The Australian Zoologist*, vol. 12, 1954-59, pp. 251-261, p. 255). The poor animal exists today as 'Agassiz's Chandra Perch', but Blandowski's name is still included (see https://biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/Agassiz%27s_Glassfish). For images of Indigenous Australians in Blandowski's work, see Harry Allen: *Authorship and Ownership in Blandowski's Australia in 142 Photographic Illustrations*. In: *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 24, 2006, pp. 31-37.

8 Such as Emil Todt (born 1809 in Berlin), who arrived in Australia in 1849 to remain there until his death in 1900 (cf. Terence Lane: *A Life Reloaded. Emil Todt, a German Sculptor in Nineteenth-Century Melbourne* - <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/a-life-revealed-emil-todt-a-german-sculptor-in-nineteenth-century-melbourne>).

As Heiner Egersdorfer he worked for the 'Bulletin' and for 'The Australian Town and Country Journal' he contributed an illustration to the 'Christmas Number 1887' showing a white settler family defending their home against attacking 'blacks'.⁹

The artists documented in this issue of the 'Zeitschrift für Australienstudien | Australian Studies Journal', on the other hand, have left behind images of indigenous Australians that are generally recognised as at least less corrupt, if not outright empathetic. The fact that they are nevertheless not free from the social circumstances of their creation is shown by the studies of Jane Lydon on Carl Walter, Susan Woodburn on Alexander Schramm, Ruth Virginia Pullin on Eugen von Guérard and our paper on Ludwig Becker.

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9 Australian Town and Country Journal, 36, 1887, 936 (17 December 1887), p. 1271.