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Relics of Encounter: Rapport and Trust in the Early Portraits of the Aborigines of New South Wales

Elisabeth Findlay*

'The natives are extremely fond of painting, and often sit hours by me when at work.'
Thomas Watling, *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay* (1793)

In 1793, the artist Thomas Watling wrote to his aunt in Scotland and described his unhappy experience of living in the colony of New South Wales.[1] As a disgruntled convict, Watling was far from impressed with his new surroundings; little escaped his diatribe, from the dull landscape to the unfair policies of the Governor. While Watling's words are cheerless and dismissive of the fledgling community at Sydney Cove, they still offer us tantalising insights into colonial life, particularly regarding the colonisers' interactions with the local inhabitants.

When Watling writes about the 'hours' that the 'natives' would sit with him and watch him work, he conjures up an intriguing scene of people from vastly different worlds sitting calmly together and observing each other. Watling noted that it is 'no small compliment' to the art of painting that it is found in different countries, observing that 'several rocks round us have outré figures engraven in them'.[2] But such glimpses fuel further questions: Who were these Aborigines? Why were they so fascinated by Watling's work? Could these moments of contact have changed the relationship between people who were of such different cultural backgrounds?

This article analyses the portraits of Aborigines produced by artists working in Australia during the first two decades of the European settlement of New South Wales, concentrating on the period from 1788 through to the start of the nineteenth century. The images are examined in relation to European colonisation and Enlightenment thinking, as well as via an attempt to gauge the perspective of the sitters. The study is limited to portraits (as opposed representations of a 'type', or unnamed, anonymous, generic figures), because portraits inherently involve negotiation between the artist and sitter, and the nature of this exchange is the focus of this study. The portrait is analysed as a relic of encounter, an object that has survived historical vagaries and is the product of a particular meeting at a particular time. A portrait arguably captures a more

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immediate, intimate and tangible moment compared to most other art forms. It is a vestige of a meeting between sitter and portraitist, and close visual analysis allows us to posit an interpretation of the nature of this meeting. I will argue here that the very early portraits from colonisation involve a more complex and nuanced form of cultural exchange than has often been recognised.

Four major artists produced portraits of the Aborigines of New South Wales in the early decades of colonisation: Thomas Watling, the 'Port Jackson Painter', William Westall and Nicolas-Martin Petit. Often, these artists are discussed separately and demarcated as either settler artists or exploration artists. There are good reasons for this divide, with the exploration artists working as trained professionals with clear directives, while the settler artists were not as well schooled and their work was produced in a more reactionary and haphazard manner. Despite the different backgrounds and motivations of the four artists, they were united by the factors of location and time. Combined, their portraits offer important and, I will argue, consistent and similar insights into the nature of settler/explorer interactions with the Aboriginal people of the Port Jackson area. I will contend that the hallmark of these interactions is that they suggest relationships of relatively good rapport and mutual trust.

Setting the Scene: Understanding and Contextualising the Early Portraits

The portraits of the Aborigines of New South Wales produced at the turn of the nineteenth century defy neat categorisation. They occupy an equivocal position, falling between the pre-settlement notion of the idealised 'noble savage' and the mid-nineteenth century 'comic savage' and/or colonised indigene.[3] The images do not fit into the hagiography of the ideal indigene that flowed from Cook's voyage, or into the category of recrimination that emerged with the grotesque caricaturing of Aborigines in the 1840s. They cannot even be comfortably paired with the later nineteenth-century return to sympathetic imagery in which the Aborigines are unmistakably depicted as colonial subjects.[4] This position is recognised by writers such as Geoffrey Dutton, who, in *White on Black: The Australian Aborigine Portrayed in Art* (1974), argues that Watling and his contemporaries depicted their Indigenous subjects with 'sympathy and delicacy'. [5] Similarly, in Ian and Tamsin Donaldson's *Seeing the First Australians* (1985) there is an acknowledgement that the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century images of Aborigines reveal a greater sense of rapport compared to later works.[6] Here, I will magnify such observations; however, I do not want to suggest that later artists were not capable of depicting the Aborigines with sensitivity, but rather that there is a discrete set of characteristics that differentiate this group of works. Within New South Wales in the 1820s and 1830s, Augustus Earle and Charles Rodius continued to produce sympathetic images of Aborigines (while also being capable of producing very harsh and racist imagery for popular consumption), but the overwhelming number of their sitters appear clothed and/or bear clear symbols of their colonisation. Outside of the colony, and later into the century, artists such as Thomas Bock, William Strutt, John Michael Crossland and Tom Roberts produced many compassionate and poignant images. But again their portraits are redolent of colonisation, usually referenced in the form of clothing or by

a return to the 'noble savage' stereotype, and thus differ significantly from the work of Watling, 'The Port Jackson Painter', Westall and Petit, where any references to colonisation are not overt.

Our understanding of these portraits is enhanced by recent historical scholarship in which it has been argued that the 1790s and early 1800s belong to a brief period when there was a relatively high degree of trust between the Indigenous population and the European settlers in New South Wales. Inga Clendinnen, in *Dancing with Strangers* (2005), pointed to a 'springtime of trust', when there was usually mutual goodwill between the two groups.[7] She states that in the early days of colonisation the Europeans and the Aborigines did not always view each other as a threat, but rather as objects of curiosity. In *The Colony* (2009), Grace Karskens pursues similar arguments in her analysis of the historical and social development of Sydney up until 1840, addressing the major theme of race relations and how the Aborigines survived, particularly in an increasingly urbanised and stratified environment.[8]

Also in reflections on the early period of colonisation, the issue of Aboriginal agency has been increasingly addressed. One of my major arguments here is that Aboriginal agency is clearly discernable in these portraits, and that the images are evidence of the Aborigines' manoeuvrings in settler society; it is a mistake to see the sitters as passive subjects posing for the artist's amusement. While the historical archive is skewed towards European traditions and the portraits are firmly entrenched in European codes of representation, it is possible to conceptualise Aboriginal views and the nature of the sitters' involvement in the image-making process. In this regard, the recent writings of Bronwen Douglas, Shino Konishi and Maria Nugent are particularly important to this study.[9] These authors do not deal with portraits per se, but they do privilege encounters and the act of meeting and highlight how important contact was in shaping relationships and ideas of race. These scholars argue that the images and accounts of encounter do not just reflect a binary of dominant, metropolitan thinking on the one hand and local colonial experience on the other; nor necessarily revolve around dramatic, confrontational and cataclysmic events; but instead that they were bound up in a permeable relationship of exchange, which was sometimes even mundane in nature. Or, as Bernard Smith states, although the act of drawing was itself a kind of assertion of European power, 'drawing of the living . . . presupposed amicability and interaction . . . It was a relationship not wholly of dominance and subordination.'[10]

The First Fleet Collection and the Settler Artists

Many of the earliest portraits of the Aborigines belong to the so-called 'First Fleet Collection' in the Natural History Museum in London. Most of them, however, have nothing to do with the First Fleet and were produced later by settler artists. Nevertheless, the label has stuck. The provenance of the collection is uncertain, and it is impossible to securely date and identify the authorship of many of the drawings. The First Fleet Collection is largely a natural history collection, but buried between the sheets of birds and flowers are intriguing portraits by Thomas Watling and the 'Port Jackson Painter'. [11]

Thomas Watling was a portrait painter who worked in Scotland before he was sentenced to 14 years' transportation for forging banknotes.[12] When he arrived in New South Wales in 1792, he was assigned to John White, the Surgeon-General to the First Fleet, who put him to work illustrating White's publication on Australian flora and fauna. Watling also embarked on his own account of the colony, but neither project was ever realised.[13]

Watling's portraits represent a who's who of the Aboriginal community that was living in the environs of Sydney in the 1790s.[14] By the time Watling arrived, many of the local Aborigines had moved into the settlement in what Vincent Smith describes as 'the coming in' of the Eora people.[15] This process had begun in earnest in 1789, when Governor Phillip became frustrated by his inability to engage with the local population and so proceeded to seize Aborigines from their lands and use them as mediators. Among the first to be 'recruited' by Phillip was Colebee, a Cadigal man and warrior whose territory ran along the southern and eastern shores of Port Jackson from South Head to Darling Harbour.[16] Colebee was kidnapped while he was fishing, but he easily fooled his captors and absconded only weeks later. Not long after the debacle of his escape, Colebee considered his position and in September 1790 freely decided to bring his family to live in the settlement.[17]

Watling produced two portraits of Colebee. They are simple pencil drawings with the sitter depicted at between half and three-quarter length, and are typical of Watling's style (fig. 1). Watling pays close attention to the facial details, and the close perspective infers a degree of intimacy, or physical proximity at the very least. As noted by Rex and Thea Rienits, Watling's images were a 'straightforward and honest portrayal of what he saw . . . and with a feeling about them of simple truth'.[18] Colebee's forceful gaze imbues the Aboriginal leader with pride and grandeur; there are no downcast eyes here that would indicate a sense of victimisation. As is the case with all but a few of Watling's portraits from this period, Colebee does not appear in European clothing and the evidence of European contact only creeps in with the object he holds. This is possibly the hatchet that he demanded from Governor Phillip in 1790 when he concluded a peace negotiation, and as such Colebee could be deliberately alluding to his negotiating power and status in colonial society.

When Watling was working there were no strict codified ways of depicting people of other cultures,[19] so there is no universal formula to be detected in these images. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, there was considerable uncertainty about the nature of humanity, with monogenist and polygenist debates tackling the question of whether the differences between people were contingent on and the result of their environment, or were innate and racially defined. In England, ethnography, a branch of anthropology that scientifically studies and observes cultural groups, was only in its infancy. There was, however, a great deal of curiosity in the skin, hair and bodies of the Indigenous population. In *The Aboriginal Male in the Enlightenment World* (2012), Konishi explores the Enlightenment-era fascination with Aboriginal bodies, skin, hair and faces, and this is evident in Watling's work.[20]

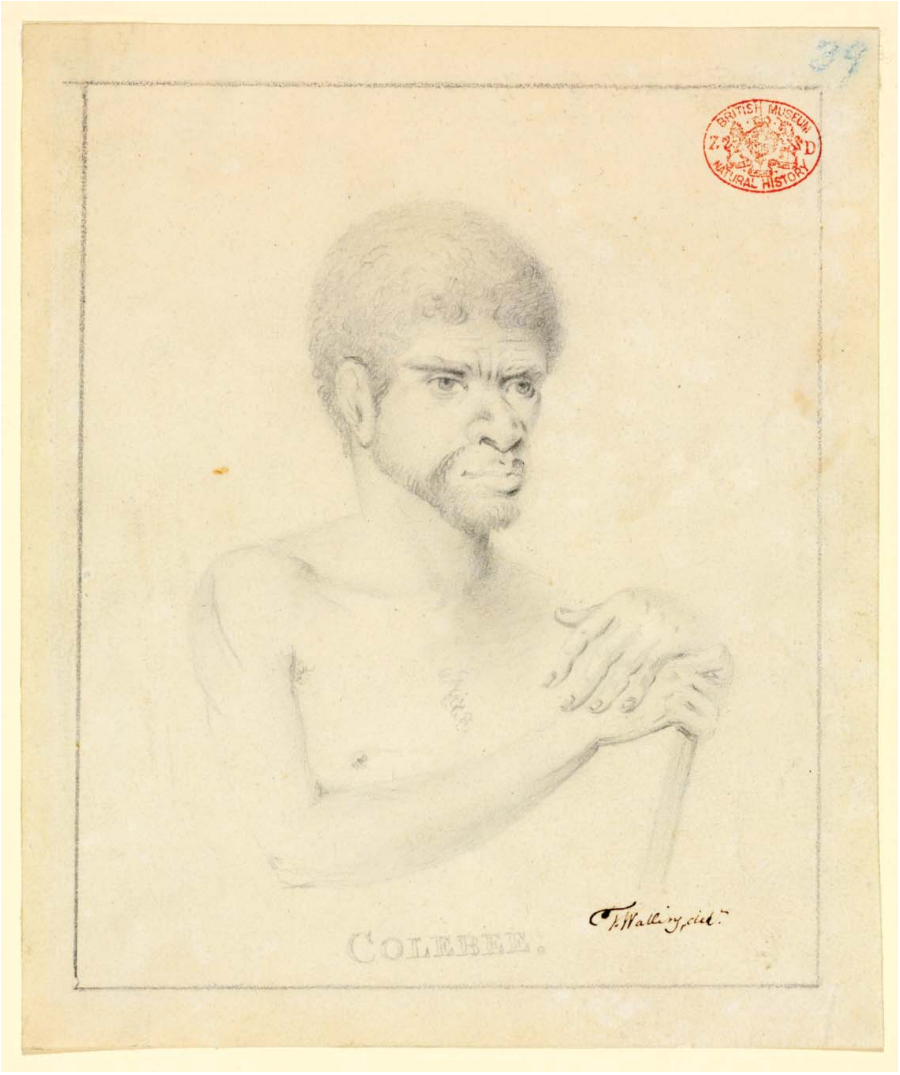

Figure 1. Thomas Watling, *Portrait of Colebee*, between 1792 and 1797, pencil on paper, 20 × 17 cm, Natural History Museum London.

While Enlightenment curiosity explains the European interest in images of Colebee, it is more difficult to comprehend why Colebee posed for Watling. There is no evidence that he was coerced or forced—in fact, quite the opposite. From all the information gleaned on Colebee, he appears to have been enterprising and would have employed considerable nous to carve out a place of influence in the world of settler politics. He knew how to the play to the proclivities of the Europeans. Watling tells us that 'considering the state of nature which he [Colebee] has been brought up in, he may be called a polite man, as he performs every action of bowing, drinking health, returning thanks, with the most scrupulous attention'.[21] We can tell from Watling's remarks that Colebee easily mimicked European ways, to the point that he was even able to ingratiate himself with the usually disenchanted Watling.[22] Colebee was an adroit player in colonial society.

The most likely explanation for why Colebee sat for his portrait is that it was for financial or material remuneration—he might have been lured by such items as a jacket or another hatchet, items much prized by the Aborigines by that time. But we can also reasonably conclude that Colebee understood that a portrait was a mark of social standing; just as he copied other European habits to advance his place in the social hierarchy, he also understood there were benefits to be being represented in a portrait. Through his exchanges with Watling he must have garnered a considerable amount of information on European visual culture. Watling writes on one of his drawings that the local inhabitants could recognise the people in his portraits.[23] People such as Colebee were clearly observant enough to have also noticed the European practice and convention of displaying portraits. We also have evidence that the settlers showed and explained portraits to the Indigenous population. Watkin Tench, in his report on the initiation of the young Aborigine Arabanoo, provides an account of him being shown a portrait of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cumberland:

> When pictures were shown to him [Arabanoo] he knew directly those which represented the human figure, among others a large, handsome print of H.R.H. the Duchess of Cumberland being produced called out 'woman', a name by which we [unidentified Sydney colonists] had just before taught him to call the female convicts.[24]

This account offers a fascinating insight into the processes of exchange. It demonstrates that the Aborigines' induction into European culture involved portraits, and from this account we can speculate that the Aborigines gained at least some awareness of how portraiture was valued and used to represent people of significance and rank. Colebee may well have posed for his portraits for very similar reasons to the many Europeans who also sat for theirs: as an assertive act calculated to raise one's status.

Watling also depicted Colebee's wife, Daringa, and their child who later died at five months of age. Colebee's wife was the half-sister of the clan leader, Moorooboora, and again there must have been some negotiation for her to have posed with her infant. Similarly, in the portrait of Dirr-a-goa (fig. 2), Watling has closely studied his sitter and has taken care in his references to Aboriginal customs. She is depicted in

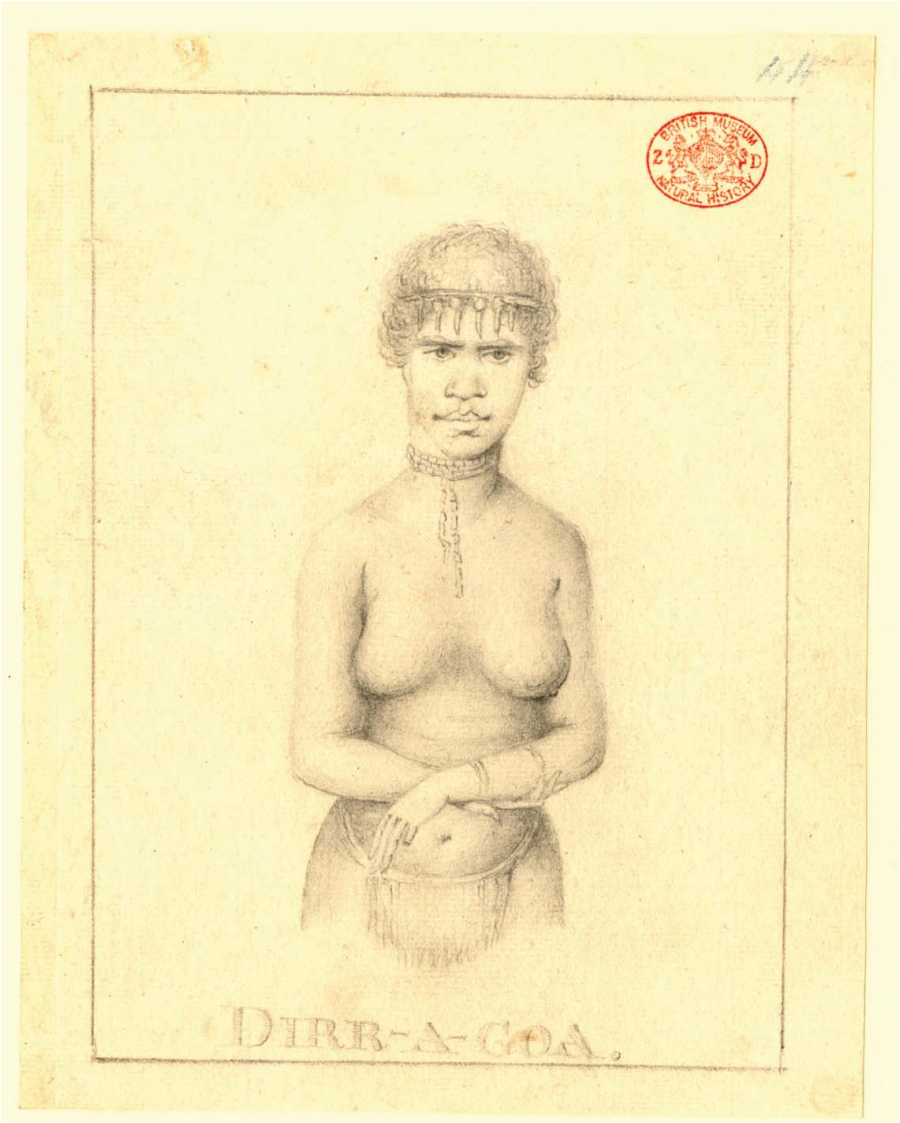

Figure 2. Thomas Watling, *Portrait of Dirr-a-goa*, between 1792 and 1797, pencil on paper, 21 × 17 cm, Natural History Museum London.

full-frontal view with her arms crossed, and displays her left hand with the upper part of her little finger missing. She wears a headband decorated with hanging tooth ornaments, a necklace made from split reeds and a waistband known as a 'bar-rin', which was worn by young women until they married.[25]

While ostensibly driven by the need to authentically record Aboriginal appearances and customs, Watling's depictions of women in half-naked poses depart markedly from the European image of womanhood, bringing the intersection of colonisation and sexual and cultural difference to the fore. This is a complex area in need of much further research in the context of early Australian colonial imagery. Patty O'Brien has noted the volume of commentary on women's breasts, while Kathleen Wilson, in her discussion of Cook's voyages, argues that the shape of the breast became metonymic for either cultural progress or degeneration.[26] Pendulous breasts represented a deformed and stunted femininity and were associated with societies in which women were used as beasts of burden. Rounded breasts, on the other hand, were considered erotic, aesthetically pleasing, and symbolic of an advanced society. In some images, it appears that Watling may be aware of the breast as metonym; for example, he employs the derisive stereotype of pendulous breasts in his *Group on the North Shore of Port Jackson, New South Wales* (between 1792 and 1797). But in his paintings of identified people—his portraits—there is a different dynamic at play. While arriving at criteria for what constitutes a pendulous or rounded breast is a veritable minefield, we can at the very least argue that Watling avoids any extreme trope of the degenerate female in his portraits.

The refined and relatively intimate poses in Watling's portraits imply that the works were born of a reasonable degree of interaction and trust. Their sensitivity is, however, at odds with his writing. While his portraits may be imbued with a sense of rapport, his letters home to his aunt in Dumfries are extremely dismissive of the Aborigines:

> The people are in general very straight and firm, but extremely ill featured; and in my opinion the women more so than the men. Irascibility, ferocity, cunning, treachery, revenge, filth, and immodesty, are strikingly their dark characteristics—their virtues are so far from conspicuous, that I have not, as yet, been able to discern them. [27]

His words are akin to Joseph Banks' earlier critical views of the Australian Aborigines as uncivilised and close to brutes—a view that managed to co-exist with the idea of the noble savage in the 1770s. So how can Watling's images be reconciled with his vitriolic words? Dutton, in his discussion of Watling, struggles to align the portraits with such harsh sentiments, and indeed praises Watling for the dignity and tenderness with which he depicts the Aborigines.[28] Ross Gibson, in his analysis of Watling's writings, identifies a tension between the artist's subjective response to a new environment and his scientific objectivity. Gibson argues that Watling's erratic views are symptomatic of him coming to terms with upheavals in late-eighteenth-century thought. [29] Similarly, in the portraits there are fracture lines between Watling's subjective experiences of encounter and his ethnographic attempt to understand the Other. Watling may have changed his harsh views after his extended engagement with the Aborigines, and

shifted his perceptions from those he expressed earlier in his *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay*. As Bernard Smith notes, transfers of loyalty could take place, and the importance of negotiations and interactions between artist and subject needs to be fully appreciated. Watling's work is a melting pot of conflicting influences, and there is nothing neat or formulaic in his depictions of the Aboriginal population.

Also interspersed within the 'First Fleet Collection' is the work of the artist dubbed 'The Port Jackson Painter'. Bernard Smith has outlined the characteristics of 'The Port Jackson Painter', who may be one or more artists, and noted the traditions of topography in his work, rather than classical training.[30] Smith also remarks that 'into the ethnographic record there has crept an amused superiority not altogether untempered by a certain tenderness of feeling.'[31]

'The Port Jackson Painter' depicted many of the same people as Watling. For example, he produced images of both Colebee (fig. 3) and Da-ring-ha (Colebee's wife). Like Watling, he also applied a formula in his portraits, usually presenting full-frontal bodies with heads unnaturally swivelled to present their profiles, which was in keeping with Carl Linnaeus's physiognomic theories that the profile portrait was the best way to read the character of the sitter. As with Watlins' works, the figures are placed against a blank background, but with a rather incongruous use of the classical tondo frame. Again, the Aborigines are presented without European clothes, and close attention is paid to the sitter's body markings. 'The Port Jackson Painter' concentrates on cicatrices and body paint, with the addition of descriptive texts, such as in the portrait of Da-ring-ha who has been 'smeared over with burnt stick and grease'. Colebee, who had been attending the funeral of Balloderree, is depicted as having been painted with red and white, as was customary for a Moobee, the chief mourner at an Aboriginal funeral.

The Exploration Artists

Thomas Watling and 'The Port Jackson Painter' were in many ways accidental portraitists to the Aborigines—one a disaffected convict artist and the other presumed to be an amateur. In contrast, the exploration artists who worked in New South Wales in the early years of the nineteenth century were trained artists assigned to record the land and people of the South Seas. Yet again, however, their portraits occupy a middle ground, depicting neither the stereotypical idealised indigene nor the depraved savage. Close visual analysis of their portraits reveal the traces of amicable interactions between artists and sitters.

William Westall was a young artist who had just finished his training when he joined Captain Matthew Flinders' voyage to circumnavigate Australia, charting the coast over the years 1801 to 1803. Westall was initially full of anticipation and excitement, but as the journey wore on he became disillusioned and disappointed in an Australian landscape that he found dull and uninspiring.[32] On 9 May 1802, the expedition arrived in Sydney to replenish stores and make repairs to the *Investigator*. They stayed in port until 22 July, and over this period of two months Westall made several pencil portraits of the Aborigines.[33]

Westall's portraits show that he was well versed in figure drawing and reflect his training as an academic artist. Westall's sitters have physiques akin to classical Greek

Figure 3. The Port Jackson Painter, *Colebee, when a Moobee, after Balloderree's burial*, c. 1791, ink and watercolour on paper, 13 × 12 cm, Natural History Museum London.

statuary, and their expressions hint at the influence of French academic artist Charles Le Brun. Le Brun wrote a handbook concerning how a range of expressions, from joy to anger, should be depicted. Le Brun's rendering of expression was often quite contorted and overstated, and this sense of contrived exaggeration can be detected in Westall's work. Indeed, Westall's drawings have attracted criticism for being sterile exercises in academic drawing, falling into a category of images described as 'white man smeared with soot'.[34] But this is a harsh criticism. There can be no denying the presence of academic tropes, but this does not equate to an absence of sympathy.

Westall opts for a close perspective rather than a distanced view, imbuing the portraits with a sense of intimacy. As was the case with Watling, Westall and his subjects

must have spent some time together, negotiating and interacting, in order for him to produce these likenesses. The figures are regally posed, harking back to 'noble savage' imagery, but their troubled expressions are an important departure from the conventions of depicting the Indigenous population as unemotional objects for ethnographic analysis. In one image (fig. 4), possibly another portrait of Colebee, the gaze is confronting as the sitter peers out at us from beneath a furrowed brow.[35] These expressions immediately provoke the question: Why is the sitter is so troubled? Could it be that Westall is sympathetic to the predicament of his sitters' place in colonial society?

The idea of 'sympathy' has been discussed in recent postcolonial literary scholarship. Writers such as John O'Leary and Laura Mielke have asked whether in nineteenth-century colonial societies there was universal bad faith toward Indigenes on the part of settler writers. In his study of Australian settler verse, O'Leary argues that poetry may have been designed to illicit sympathy, and while this sympathy may still be complicit in the dispossession of the Indigenous population, it belongs to a discourse that is distinct from the dichotomy of hagiography or recrimination.[36] I would argue that this thread of sympathy is present in Westall's work, and may explain why these images were never reproduced when he returned to England—they arguably put a personal face to colonisation, albeit a romantic one, that may have been considered unpalatable and even disturbing.

The other explorer artist working in New South Wales was Nicolas-Martin Petit. Petit accompanied Nicholas-Thomas Baudin on the French exploration of the southern lands between the years 1800 and 1804, which, under Napoleon Bonaparte's instructions, was a mission of scientific discovery. Petit is most often remembered for his images of the Tasmanian Aborigines, but these are usually regarded as less successful than his Port Jackson works, which are much fewer in number. Rhys Jones and Philip Jones have both argued that the Tasmanian images are awkward, tending toward caricature, while the New South Wales portraits reveal much more of the individual character of the sitters.[37] Howard Morphy contends that a number of factors may explain the differences between the New South Wales and Tasmanian works, including the possibility that Petit took some time after the Tasmanian series to develop a schema for depicting the Indigenous population. Morphy also notes that there was much less tension between the Europeans and the Port Jackson Aborigines, with a reasonably tolerant relationship having formed between the groups.[38] He also supposes that the Port Jackson Aborigines were by that time no longer pristine examples of pre-contact Indigenous society, and therefore would have been considered unsuitable for scientific scrutiny.[39]

Like all the other artists, Petit of course worked in the space of encounter with his own preconceived ideas and familiarity with certain modes of visual representation. While Westall worked from the background of a professional who had been schooled in the ways of the British Academy, Petit came from a culture that was more concerned with ethnographic detail, with the world's first anthropological society established in Paris in 1799. Unlike the other artists working in Australia at the time, Petit was influenced by the theories of the naturalist Georges Cuvier, who had constructed a set of guidelines for Baudin's anthropologists to work by in his

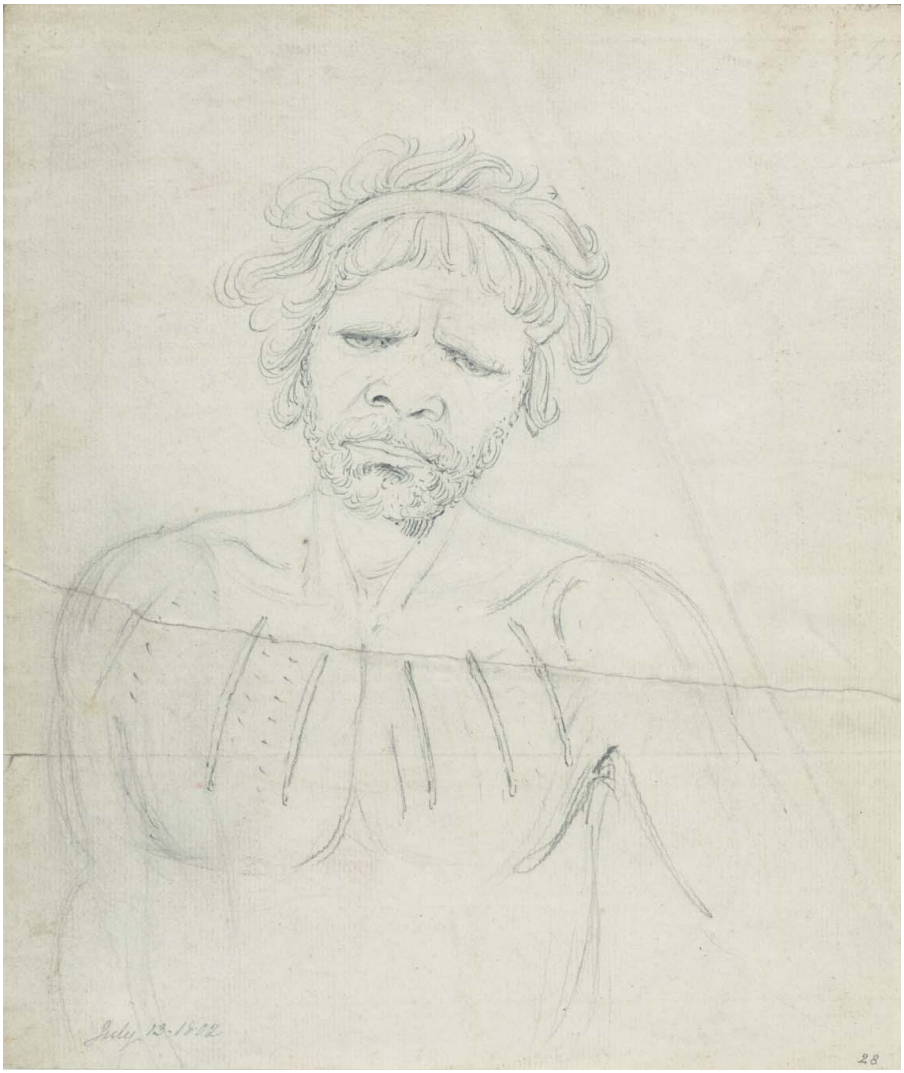

Figure 4. William Westall, *Port Jackson, a native (possibly Colebee)*, 1802, pencil on paper, 26 × 22 cm, Canberra: National Library of Australia.

Instructive Note on the Researches to be Made Relative to the Anatomical Differences between Diverse Races of Men (1800). [40] Cuvier, in turn, was influenced by Petrus Camper's idea of the facial angle, in which he asserted that humans had facial angles of between 70 and 80 degrees and that races could be differentiated by such angles. These angles were then used to set up hierarchies of beauty. Cuvier praised and expanded

on Camper's idea and commented that geometric precision and straight profiles were crucial to the study of race.

While Cuvier outlined his standards for a new type of ethnographic portraiture, Petit did not abide by these dictates. The example of Killpriera (fig. 5)

Figure 5. Nicolas-Martin Petit (engraver E. Piper), *Killpriera, a Native of New South Wales*, published 1803, hand coloured mezzotint, 27 × 22 cm, Canberra: National Library of Australia.

is instructive. To begin with, it does not comply with Cuvier's instructions to ignore dress and ornament. Cuvier believed that any markings 'disfigured' the face and detracted from its true character, but Petit ignores this opinion and shows the bodily scarifications of his sitters. Cuvier also advocated the use of the profile, but instead Petit consistently opts for a three-quarter pose, or even near full-frontal. Thus, instead of applying the profile's harsh contouring of the skull, nose, and chin, Petit exposes the full faces of his sitters. Like Watling, his naming of the figures and interest in their relationship and origins indicates an interest in their individual stories, and not just their role as specimens of a particular race, ready to be incorporated into the theories of comparative anatomy. Killpriera's expression again reveals the artist's sympathetic attitude, despite the caption that accompanies the image stating she was 'extremely savage and untameable', which, as in Watling's work, is another example of where the sentiments of text and imagery do no align.[41] Again, the conditions in the contact zone of portraiture precipitated new and largely unexpected modes of representation—in this case a tension between ethnographic type and individual peculiarities. The circumstances of encounter, the first-hand relationship and transactions between the artist and the sitter, are an important determinant in the imagery. As Jones notes, the 'natural man' of French Enlightenment imagination had become an altogether more realistic figure.[42]

Conclusions

In *The Colony*, Karskens remarks that the fact 'that we may still look upon their likenesses, captured in paint on paper, is wondrous as well as sad'.[43] The portraits from the first decades of European settlement of Australia remain particularly poignant, and display a rapport and trust that begins to wane with later representations. As Smith remarks, the harsh realities of the frontier environment soon emerged and the humanitarian ideals of the Enlightenment began to crumble.[44] The relationship between the colonisers and colonised deteriorated, with the history of settlement marked by growing marginalisation, discord and violence. While later portraits by artists in New South Wales, such as Augustus Earle and Charles Rodius, often reflected a sympathetic attitude, the Aborigines depicted were increasingly moved into the category of the marginalised subject. By the 1840s, this marginalisation was openly declared through the trope of the drunk and debauched Aborigine.

As the first moments of encounter receded and the gulf between the colonisers and the local inhabitants deepened, the type of portraits made by Watling, 'The Port Jackson Painter', Westall and Petit were replaced by images of the Aborigines as the colonised. I have argued here that the portraits of the Aborigines produced in Australia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries escaped the stereotypes of the noble savage, the ethnographic specimen, and the colonised Other or victim. Watling, Westall and Petit in particular used styles, poses and perspectives that indicate a respectful and carefully negotiated relationship between portraitist and sitter. The gaze and expressions of the subjects and the close attention to facial and bodily details, and the choice of half-length compositions made from close

proximity, all suggest a sense of trust and positive rapport. In these images there are almost no symbols of European civilisation, and very few hints of colonisation, setting these portraits apart from later imagery.

What forces led to the creation of such sensitive portraits? The most prosaic, but nevertheless most critical, explanation is the degree of extended contact between the artist and the sitter during this early period. We must not underestimate the degree to which these images were the product of prolonged encounters, based on the extensive interaction afforded by the early days of settlement. In an environment of meeting, posing and talking, the artists and sitters potentially had the opportunity to reflect and develop a relationship with each other. The Aborigines also appear to have been willing participants in this image-making, and these portraits are some of the earliest examples to challenge the notion that Aborigines were simply passive subjects. Clearly, people like Colebee, a forerunner to colonial celebrities such as Bungaree, were astute observers and pupils of European ways. They were adept at forging a place for themselves in the changing world of Sydney Cove, and as such it is highly conceivable that the Aboriginal sitters understood that portraits were items of status. They were most likely deliberately mimicking yet another European practice by allowing the artists to capture their likeness, and in doing so imbued these images with a strong sense of agency. The 1790s and early 1800s was also a period when ideas of race were changing. Scientific theories of racial difference were in their infancy and had not yet hardened into dogma, or into notions of racial hierarchy. Codes of representation and ideas of ethnographic portraiture were in a state of flux, creating the leeway and the possibility for artists to respond, in various ways, to the subjects before them. The images suggest that the artists did not rely solely on scientific schema. As Karskens again notes, those who actually visited or lived in the colonies were not limited by the crude dichotomy between the noble savage and the brute.[45] Or, as John O'Leary contends, the existence of such subgenres reveals that 'nineteenth century settler culture was capable of a degree of self-reflexivity and ethical consideration which it has not traditionally been credited with.'[46]

As concepts of innate racial difference headed towards the entrenched theories of Darwinism, and colonial Sydney expanded, the Aborigines were placed at the bottom of an increasingly stratified society. The dynamics of exchange were fundamentally altered and, while there are later examples of artists showing sympathy towards the Aborigines, there was a general power shift towards the artist and away from the sitter. The images by Thomas Watling, 'The Port Jackson Painter', William Westall and Nicolas-Martin Petit belong to a moment of first-settler encounter; they remain relics from a period before the full impact of colonisation was realised, when the artist and sitter developed a perceptible sense of rapport and trust.

1. Thomas Watling, *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay, to his Aunt in Dumfries: Giving a Particular Account of the Settlement of New South Wales, with the Customs and Manners of the Inhabitants*, (Sydney: University of Sydney Library, 1999).

2. Watling, *Letters from an Exile*, np.

3. For a discussion of the emergence of the 'comic' savage see Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd edn (Sydney: Harper & Row, 1985), 169–177.

4. For a discussion of the shift towards more racist imagery in the late 1830s, see Elisabeth Findlay, 'Peddling Prejudice: "A Series of Twelve Profile Portraits of the Aborigines of New South Wales"', *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy* 16, no. 1 (2013): 2–27. See also Sasha Grishin, 'Realism, Caricature and Phrenology: Early Depictions of the Indigenous Peoples of Australia', *The World Upside Down: Australia 1788–1830* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2000), 13–19.
5. Geoffrey Dutton, *White on Black: The Australian Aborigine Portrayed in Art* (Melbourne: Macmillan in association with the Art Gallery Board of South Australia, 1974), 7.
6. Ian Donaldson and Tamsin Donaldson, eds, *Seeing the First Australians* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985).
7. Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers: Europeans and Australians at First Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Clendinnen views the mid-1790s as a point of decline, but here it will be argued that evidence of a relationship of trust can be seen in the images into the first years of the 1800s.
8. Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2009).
9. See in particular Bronwen Douglas, 'Voyages, Encounters, and Agency in Oceania: Captain Cook and Indigenous People', *History Compass* 6, no. 3 (2008): 712–37 and 'Introduction: Foreign Bodies in Oceania', in *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race 1750–1940*, ed. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Canberra: ANU EPress, 2008), 1–30; Shino Konishi, *The Aboriginal Male in the Enlightenment World* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012); and Maria Nugent, 'Encounters between Captain Cook and Indigenous People at Botany Bay in 1770', *History Compass* 6, no. 2 (2008): 469–87.
10. Bernard Smith, 'The First European Depictions', in *Seeing the First Australians*, 21–34, 29.
11. For a discussion of the collection see Bernard Smith and Alwyne Wheeler, eds, *Art of the First Fleet and Other Early Australian Drawings* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the British Museum (Natural History), 1988); Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific in the Wake of Cook's Voyages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and Peter Emmett, *Fleeting Encounters: Pictures and Chronicles of the First Fleet* (Glebe: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1995). The collection includes a subset of works labelled 'Banks Ms34' because it was once part of Sir Joseph Banks's library. It is now known as the 'Watling Collection', but the title is again a misnomer because the work of other artists is catalogued within the group.
12. For a discussion of Watling see Hugh Gladstone, *Thomas Watling Limner of Dumfries* (Dumfries: Privately Published, 1938); Sasha Grishin, *Australian Art: A History* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2014), 42–44; and Rex Rienits and Thea Rienits, 'Thomas Watling', in *Early Artists of Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963), 56–79.
13. In *Letters from an Exile*, he requested that his aunt in Scotland place an advertisement in a local paper for subscribers. He stated that 'one or two years would return me back with as correct an history, and a faithful and finished a set of drawings of the picturesque, botanic, or animate curiosities of N. S. Wales, as has ever yet been received in England'. In the *Dumfries Weekly Journal* of 25 March 1794 he also placed an advertisement for subscribers to his work, which would include 'native groupes (sic)', and stated that he had already begun the book.
14. One of the most prominent figures from this period was Bennelong, but most of the images of him were made in England and therefore do not fit within the parameters of this paper on early settler/explorer imagery. The contrast between the images produced in London and those made in Australia is illuminating, and highlights how important the encounter space was. See Kate Fullager, 'Bennelong from *Res Nullius*: the Decline of Savagery', *The Savage Visit: New World People and Popular Imperial Culture in Britain 1710–1795* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 177–87.
15. Keith Vincent Smith, *Bennelong: The Coming In of the Eora: Sydney Cove 1788–1792* (East Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 2001).
16. Keith Vincent Smith, 'Colebee', *Dictionary of Sydney* (2008), http://trove.nla.gov.au/goto?i=article&w=163285966&d=http%3A%2F2Fdictionaryofsydney.org%2Fentry%2Fcolebee.
17. Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*.
18. Rienits and Rienits, 'Thomas Watling', 56.
19. Bronwen Douglas, '"*Novus Orbis Australis*" in *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race 1750–1940*, ed. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard (Canberra: ANU ePress), 99–155.
20. Konishi, *The Aboriginal Male*.
21. Watling, *Letters from an Exile*.
22. For a discussion of the Aboriginal attitudes to encounter and the place of imitation, see David Hansen, 'Death Dance', *Australian Book Review* (April 2007): 27–32; and Paul Carter, 'Encounters', in *Fleeting Encounters*, 16.
23. See Watling's *Wear Rung Commonly Known by the Name of Mr Long and Karra Da who Exchanged Names with Captain Ball* in the Natural History Museum in London (Watling Drawing, no. 36).
24. Watkin Tench, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (London: Nicol and Sewell, 1793), 139.
25. R. J. Lampert, 'Aboriginal Life Around Port Jackson', in *Art of the First Fleet*, 19–69.
26. Kathleen Wilson, 'Breasts, Sodomy and the Lash: Masculinity and Enlightenment Aboard Cook's Voyages', in *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), 169–200. See also Patty O'Brien's 'The Gaze of the Ghosts: European Images of the Aboriginal Women in New South Wales and Port Phillip 1800–1860', in ed. Jan Kociumbas. *Maps, Dreams, History: Race and Representation in Australia* (Sydney: Braxus Publishing, 1998); and ed. Jan Kociumbas, *The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2006).

27. Watling, *Letters from an Exile*.
28. Dutton, *White on Black*, 17. For a discussion of the complex and erratic writing in Watling's letters see Ross Gibson's publications: 'This Prison this Language: Thomas Watling's "Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay"', in *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, ed. Paul Foss (Leichhardt: Pluto Press, 1988), 4–28 and Ross Gibson, '"Each Wild Idea as It Presents Itself": A Commentary on Thomas Watling's *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay*', in *South of West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 19–41.
29. See Gibson, 'This Prison this Language', 4–28 and Gibson, '"Each Wild Idea as It Presents Itself"', 19–41.
30. Smith, *European Vision*, 160.
31. Smith, *European Vision*, 162.
32. See Elisabeth Findlay, *Arcadian Quest: William Westall's Australian Sketches* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1998); T. M. Perry and Donald H. Simpson, eds, *Drawings by William Westall* (London: Royal Commonwealth Society, 1962); Richard J. Westall, 'William Westall in Australia', *Art and Australia*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1992): 252–56.

Jacqueline Bonnemains, Elliott Forsyth and Bernard Smith, eds, *Baudin in Australian Waters: the Artwork of the French Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands 1800–1804* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press in Association with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1988).
33. His sitters are not identified, partly because these works do not appear to have been made for official purposes or publication, but they can still be classified as portraits because of the focus on capturing individual detail.
34. See Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, 'Taming the Unknown: The Representation of Terra Australis by the Baudin Expedition 1801–1803', in *Encountering Terra Australis*, ed. Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath and John West-Sooby (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2004), 71.
35. Keith Vincent Smith has argued that the Westall image is of Colebee; see Keith Vincent Smith, 'Port Jackson People', *National Library of Australia News* 15, no. 9 (July 2005): 7–9.
36. John O'Leary, '"Unlocking the Fountain of the Heart": Settler Verse and the Politics of Sympathy', *Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 55–70.
37. Rhys Jones, 'Images of Natural Man', in *Baudin in Australian Waters*, 35–64; and Philip Jones, 'In the Mirror of Contact: Art of the French Encounters', in *The Encounter, 1802: Art of the Flinders and Baudin Voyages*, ed. Sarah Thomas (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2002), 164-175.
38. Howard Morphy, 'Encountering Aborigines', in *The Encounter, 1802*,153–54.
39. Morphy, *The Encounter, 1802*.
40. For a discussion of Cuvier see Bronwen Douglas, 'Climate to Crania: Science and the Racialization of Human Difference', in *Foreign Bodies*, 33–96; Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Georges Cuvier, Fossil Bones and Geological Catastrophes* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997); and Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1992), 186–87.
41. The original image is three-quarter length and is held in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Le Havre. This image, in which the damning letterpress is added, is engraved by E. Piper.
42. Philip Jones, *The Encounter, 1802*, 172.
43. Karskens, *The Colony*, 41.
44. See Bernard Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, 1980 Boyer Lectures transcript (Sydney: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1980), 17–18.
45. Karskens, *The Colony*.
46. O'Leary, '"Unlocking the Fountain of the Heart"', 68.