

## Drawing Anthropocene 2024

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### DRAWINGS ARE COMPLICIT

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In Australia it is well understood that landscape drawings, such as surveys and maps have contributed to ecological and cultural disaster on a vast scale. The drawing up of maps, particularly at the height of the continent's colonisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century resulted in the genocide and relocation First Nations people and the destruction of much of their culture. In addition to this, maps and survey paved the way for drastic transformations of fragile landscapes: for example, from productive riparian zones to farmland and now dustbowls. What is less well-explored, however, is the way the practice of making drawing also resulted in violent transformations to the Australian landscape. To understand this, this paper examines several types of landscape drawings, including maps, surveys, landscape sketches and sections, and geological drawings, from the southern state of Victoria and its capital Melbourne and produced just prior to and in the early years of colonisation. It argues that in order to produce such drawings, artists and surveyors had to exert control over the landscape, sacrificially damaging it for the sake of the drawing. This paper uses a close reading of archival texts as well and historic drawings to argue for an alternate view of colonial drawing, often seen as a passive or heavily observational task.

Keywords: Colonisation, Australia, Surveys, Anthropocene

## Introduction

Those engaged in drawing Australian landscapes in the first half of the nineteenth century were both witnesses of and contributors to what we now understand as the onset of the Anthropocene. It is well understood that the creation of colonial maps and scientific illustrations at this time in Australia aided activities that had profound and still ongoing impacts on the First Nations people already occupying the continent (Wegman, 2021). Drawing up maps defined territories and divided ecologies, shifting from a model of First Nations custodianship, or 'caring for country', to a colonist's way of occupying and extracting from land. Indigenous people were forcibly driven from their homelands, which were claimed by colonists under the guise of ownership evidenced through cadastral plans. Surveys and maps allowed for landscapes to be categorized, parcelled, and then radically changed through mining, agriculture, and the development of infrastructures and settlements.

Other imagery - such as botanical, zoological and mineralogical drawings - reflected nineteenth century British and European scientific approaches to scientific orders and taxonomies, and though attempts were made to depict them accurately they were constructed through a Western gaze. Landscapes, flora and fauna that otherwise belonged to complex - and now frequently erased - networked ecologies were decontextualized from their surroundings; the drawings created at this time were in service of dislocated audiences, usually in Britain or Europe, who used such illustrations to understand the colonies, the topography and their natural resources from afar. Illustrations of flora, fauna and geologies were sent to administrators and royal courts, as well as institutions such as museums, rendering them objectified and commodified. Drawings of Australia's exotic species linked distant, fragile and long protected-by-isolation environments into global networks of extraction (Branagan and Townley, 1976).

Large-scale violences to people and ecologies in Australia were instrumentalized through drawings and drawing practices. However, we should not imagine that in this context, that drawing existed as a purely passive or neutral activity; that its role in violence was only enacted conceptually rather than physically. A close reading of archival material demonstrates that in nineteenth century Australia the production of landscape drawings - surveys, scientific illustrations and sketches - required the vandalization or even destruction of the subject landscape. This offers an alternative understanding of drawing to that which portrays the activity as connected to observation, separate from the processes it is trying to record. In the case of British and European surveyors and artists - often the two professions overlapped - the task of making landscape drawings relied on deceptively 'small' activities in the field that had long-lasting implications.

Making surveys or illustrating scientific expeditions required interdisciplinary teams who traversed landscapes and modified them as the operation required. These included experimental seeding, the compaction of soils, picking at geological specimens and felling trees. In isolation, these operations may even appear invisible, a trace of a boot print or wagon wheel, a fallen tree, the slightest adjustment to a creek edge. However, as scholars of the Anthropocene argue, the small scale and slight changes eventually escalate (Hooke, 2000).

Recent studies of First Nations land management practice have analysed the way Australian environments were worked, controlled and transformed by Indigenous people over thousands of years of occupation (Gammage, 2011). Indigenous land management practices worked with existing flora and fauna, situating human practices within wider ecological networks (Presland, 2009). In contrast to settler approaches to land management in the nineteenth century, Australian Indigenous knowledge recognises

extended timescales, understanding landscapes through knowledge accumulated over millennia. Once Europeans encroached on Indigenous Country the transformation of the environment was rapid. It is this increase in speed and scale of change that also characterises the Anthropocene - but these accelerations are almost always prefigured by marks on, and about, the landscape.

In order to better understand the way in which drawing practices directly accelerated dramatic changes to Australian landscapes and ecologies, a set of early surveys are analysed through their drawn materials, the tools and processes used to produce them, and the associated journals and text primary sources. It is possible to see the act of drawing as enacting at least two kinds of violence - the first is the violence of the survey or map that enables colonisation; the second, a stealthier set of violences required to actually complete the drawing in context. It is this kind of violence that will be unpacked and considered in subsequent sections.

## Stealth Violences

Contemporaneous images (and reflected imaginaries) of surveying practice present an understanding of the possible violences embedded in the project.

Several cultural institutions in Australia hold versions of a print titled *Surveyors* (Figure 1) created by the lithographer S.T. Gill. Dated around 1864, the image depicts five men engaged in the act of surveying a location in the southern Australian state of Victoria and was typical of Gill's oeuvre. At this time, the Victorian gold rush of the nineteenth century had reached its peak, and Gill travelled to the mining districts depicting prospecting scenes and life and work in the frontier towns that bloomed around the diggings. Alongside mining activities, Gill's lithographs, sketches and paintings captured the fervour of life in cities such as Melbourne and Sydney, the cycles of poverty, joy, civility, debauchery and tragedy. He was "the quintessential Australian colonial artist" (Grishin, 2015).

Gold was discovered in Victoria in 1851, and from that time, populations flowed to the goldfields. The need to draw up the cadastral boundaries of the landscape was acute. While the resulting surveys form key historic documents that allow an understanding of this period in Australia's history, drawings that depict the work of surveyors are seemingly rarer. Gill's lithograph therefore captures an unusual glimpse into this colonial activity. It is this invisibility surrounding the work that has in part masked surveying's complicity in environmental change. While diaries often note extensive landscape modification practices such as tree felling, track-making and botanical activities such as extracting samples and experimental seeding, the recognised legacy of the colonial survey is their output of drawings rather than the physical impacts of their field work.

In the background of *Surveyors* one member of the party looks after a horse and wagon, watching on as the rest of the crew handle various types of surveying instruments. A pair of men each hold an end of the surveyor's chain, one peers through the lens of the theodolite, and the last member of the party holds an axe aimed, seemingly, at the eucalyptus tree next to him. A full colour image, the lithograph is taken from Gill's 1864 compendium, *The Australian Sketchbook*, a gold rush era collection of drawings and watercolours, with a focus on scenes from the regional and rural or 'bush' landscapes from Victoria at that time.





FIGURE 1: ST GILL, 1864, SURVEYORS

The picture plane in the *Surveyors* is filled with figures, with each character holding their own instrument, demarcating his role in the activity. The axe-wielder is frozen, mid swing, clearing trees to allow for the key activities of surveying: viewing, measuring or traversing. Implied but not perhaps easy to miss in many of Gill's works is the damage caused to the landscapes and ecologies his often closely-cropped scenes depict. An authority on Australian printmaking, Sasha Grishin, notes Gill's keen documentary attention to detail, such as the holes in the ground where miners dig, the beginnings of tent settlements over Indigenous land, dwellings, and tracks. Because of the artist's meticulousness through this image, we are afforded a glimpse into the irony of the process of drawing the Australian landscape in colonial times; in order to record, it needed to be in part destroyed.

A second kind of damage is implied by the presence of the survey chain - which needed a clear run of generally level land between marked points - often requiring the removal of scrub, trees, and outcroppings (Hay, 2021, p.43).

*Pioneers Of Civilisation* (Figure 2) is an 1895 work by British artist, journalist and traveller, Julius Price, and is held in the Art Gallery of Western Australia's drawing collection. A later depiction of surveyors than Gill's, and geographically separated, this sketch depicts a moment of interaction between Indigenous people and the surveyors. It was sketched by Price as part of his illustrated account *The Land of Gold: The Narrative Of A Journey Through The West Australian Goldfields In The Autumn Of 1895*. Here

the surveyors sit on a fallen log, making notes, peering through the theodolite and again wielding the axe. Accompanying his illustrations, is Price's telling text; "[b]eneath one's feet lay possibly untold wealth only waiting to be developed". The survey drawing was imperative to the extractive project; it not only reflected, but required, a kind of ruthlessness in its production.

Images of colonial surveyors in Australia occasionally depict violent interactions between surveyors and Indigenous people. Surveying activities reflected and amplified aggressive attitudes towards local people. However, also evident in the images, and then in the journals, newspaper reports and reports of surveyors are the incremental, sometimes almost invisible impacts the sire to draw the land had on ecologies and landscapes. A close study of texts and images, combined with contemporary understandings of the Anthropocene and its triggers demonstrate the way early drawing-making contributed to micro intrusions on Australia's landscapes, and studied here, Victorian regional and urban environments. While relatively few images record the act of colonial survey making in Australia, text descriptions are easy to locate.



**PIONEERS OF CIVILISATION.**

FIGURE 2: JULIUS PRICE, PIONEERS OF CIVILISATION

## Seeds of the Anthropocene

During a period of an estimated 60,000 years of continued Indigenous occupation of Australia, First Nations people modified and managed the environments they lived on through controlled burning, fire stick farming, and local cultivation practices such as intensive digging for root crops such as the 'Yam Daisy' or Murnong. The result was areas of cultivated and carefully shaped anthropogenic landscapes that held and reproduced Indigenous knowledge and ways of living. Such practices now are described as 'Caring for Country' a way of viewing relationships across an interrelated web of humans, flora, fauna, soil sky and water that encompass ongoing 'reciprocal' care.

When colonisers arrived in Australia, these reciprocal relationships were overlain by alternate ways of viewing the human-ecological relationship. Landscapes became of interest to governments, industrialists and institutions on the other side of the globe. New technologies such as ploughs, drills and dredgers facilitated the rapid transformation of many Australian landscapes, changing the course of rivers, the denudation of forests, causing erosion and dryland salinity. These types of activities represent large-scale and obvious transformations to Australian environments, however the arrival of the Anthropocene in Australia first manifests in a rapid escalation of transformative environmental activities that begin on a small scale, 'small' acts often related to the operation of drawing, demarcating, or surveying.

Surveys, maps and scientific illustrations that were integral to this process are illustrations that reflect both symptoms of, and catalysts for the Anthropocene. Drawing environments and understanding the natural resources embedded within them was integral to the colonisation of Australia, examined here in particular are the coastal regions which represented early forays into the second wave of British incursion. Drawing necessitated violences on the landscape; through field work such as observation and measuring, and then the way that knowledge, though the drawing transformed understandings, evaluations and composition of the surface of the colonial city. The connection between drawing and colonising is clear, but embedded in this are disturbances of various scales that shift and remake the earth's surface, physically, culturally and conceptually. Colonial drawing of soil, earth, sediments and geologies involved blasting, cracking, trampling, cutting, burning and digging - to both expose subject material, and to prepare landscapes for survey and recording. It was not in any sense a passive activity.

Drawing in the nineteenth century actively contributed to both visions and actualisations of the Anthropocene, through changes to the geologies in present-day cities and regional landscapes, but also the way the practice of drawing relied on destructive, if micro, processes. In retrospect, we understand that the creation of colonial-era drawings, such as surveys, maps and sketches had devastating effects on the Indigenous people and landscapes, as devices for setting up land auctions, land title and new land uses. Underexplored is the damaging act of creating the drawing itself, that in pursuit of drawing a landscape - in order to understand it - it needed to be 'erased.' It is here that again reflexive ideas of drawing, construction, erasure and deconstruction can be seen. As John West-Sooby writes, natural history drawings at this time were both "a symptom and an instrument of this greater [empire-building] project" (West-Sooby, 2015, p. 55).

Different expeditions and projects required a range of illustrations that reflected different aims and ambitions. This considers the drawn artefacts of larger, subjectively 'disinterested' exploratory surveys, as well as the recordings and markings of more deliberate surveying activities in the service of invasion. Encountering the 'drawn' artefacts of these processes provides a catalyst for discussion and an additional way of seeing landscape drawing. They speculate on moments in Australian history that are now difficult to see and describe in their entirety but can be stitched together, using archival imagery, journals and historic texts and contemporary local readings and evidence of environmental histories.



## Charles Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit

Following on from the initial British colonisation of the Australian continent in 1788, a series of voyages were undertaken at the beginning of the nineteenth century by French and British crews to further understand and map more completely the Australian coastline. In 1802, Matthew Flinders began his voyage to circumnavigate Australia aboard the British vessel HMS Investigator, while Nicolas Baudin captained the French contingent of the *Géographe* and *Naturaliste*, arriving in Australia in 1801 and unintentionally meeting Flinders along the southern coast of Australia in 1802. The concurrent voyages are often seen as operating in competition, however historians note that ultimately the aims of each circumnavigation differed. Flinders expected to complete a survey of Australia's coastline to better understand its settlement potential, while the French, under the instructions of Napoleon, were to examine the landscape largely for its material and scientific properties rather than its usefulness as a colony.

Important to these expeditions were the visualisations of flora, fauna and landscape, created collaboratively by inter-disciplinary crews. Botanists, zoologists, mineralogists and gardeners provided scientific knowledge, and worked with artists, pointing out the features of note for each specimen. The collaborative nature of the work conducted on the ground here meant that artists on board, such as Charles Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit worked in ways that blurred their occupational remit; straddling the fields of art and science.

The museum at Le Havre in France holds a collection of Lesueur's drawings, paintings and etchings from the *Géographe* voyage, however these are the illustrations completed once the artist returned to Europe, and represent a refined reflection on the flora, fauna, landscapes and people the Lesueur and his colleagues encountered on their voyage. Some of the plants and animals drawn by Lesueur, such as the Banded Hare-wallaby are now classed as "presumed extinct" by the Australian Government. According to notes on the species provided by the West Australian government, the wallaby was "first described", in a European scientific taxonomy, by Lesueur with specimens taken in 1801 from Shark Bay.<sup>1</sup> The need to draw and collect specimens coalesced on voyages like these and reflected the small beginnings of an ultimately escalating set of disruptive colonial behaviours.

Historians note that no artist's sketchbooks have survived, limiting the ability to assess Lesueur's total body of work "in the field" in Australia. Individual sketch drawings do, however, exist with one example being a rare drawing in graphite was purchased by the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 2018. The artwork, titled *Cases De La Terre De Lewin*<sup>2</sup>, represents in draft form an etching already owned by the gallery and illustrates a moment of encounter the French explorers had with the Noongar people of South-West Australia. Curators from the Gallery of West Australia note the drawing's small size reflected its construction in the field, where resources and space on board the ship limited the size of the image that could be made.

Here, Lesueur has depicted through turn of the century French eyes the dwellings of the Noongar people and the landscape they occupied and managed. The focus of the work is on the First Nations' huts,

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and attractions, <https://library.dbca.wa.gov.au/static/FullTextFiles/071553.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> This image cannot be published due to copyright restrictions but is viewable here: <https://collection.artgallery.wa.gov.au/objects/24423/cases-de-la-terre-de-lewin-geographe-bay-wa>

occupying the foreground of the image, their construction and materiality appears to have been highly detailed and, it is assumed, accurately portrayed by Lesueur. Indigenous people occupy the background, some with spears and others crouching, potentially illustrating the collection of root vegetables - known staples of Australia's Indigenous people - or other surface resources. Because the Noongar people here recede into the background, it is possible that the drawing communicates a passive observation undertaken by the artists here. The viewer's perspective suggests a distanced engagement with the human subjects, however journal entries begin to unpack the political and physical violences directed at First Nations during the voyage and in the pursuit of illustrating it.

The naturalist François Péron kept a journal throughout the Baudin voyage titled *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes (A Voyage Of Discovery To The Southern Hemisphere, published in 1824)* which describes in detail the locations visited and some of the activities and events that punctuated the Baudin voyage across 1800-1803. As artists and naturalists worked side-by-side, Peron's writing allows for insight into the attitudes of the artists and their colleagues and they moved across environments foreign to them and the First Nations people they interacted with, as well as the way the surveying and illustrative work was conducted. While some art historians have noted the "sensitive"<sup>3</sup> nature with which the artists captured their subjects, including people, flora and fauna, Péron's journal describes a ruthless attitude to the people and places artists met with.

When at Shark Bay in Western Australia, Lesueur drew the Noongar people's huts in detail, and constructed a scene of picturesque and environmental information. Via the journal it can be seen that the detail described through the drawing does not correspond to a particular sensitivity or care for the subjects, with Péron and his colleagues deriding the technologies and construction techniques they observed and recorded. It was the drawing, and the scientific information it held within that was valuable to a distant scientific and courtly audience. Péron wrote of Lesueur and Petit's work, "These drawings... will ultimately be deemed the most complete and valuable collection that has yet been made by any company of philosophers". Here the subject becomes commodified, objects of fascination to be studied but not respected. They were translated, decontextualized and interrogated through artistic scientific media.

In the same vein as Lesueur's drawing in South-Western Australia, Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit produced drawings and watercolours of scenes in Tasmania; of Palawa people in canoes, flora and fauna and geological profiles. Péron's journal describes many moments of violent European incursion on Australian soil, but an event he outlines in Tasmania most graphically illustrates the connection between the ambition of the artist and the direct and physical violence they were willing to assert to complete their work. While in Tasmania, then known as Van Diemen's land, Petit and others engaged in an "interview" of First Nations people, with one of the aims being to then draw those the crew had met. The discussions did not proceed well, and by Péron's account, ended with one Palawa man "attempt[ing] to take from him the drawings he had just made". This of course infuriated the explorers, and a confrontation occurred, which Péron claimed was eventually diffused. This journal entry emphasises the active nature artists took in the disturbance of early colonial Australia. Their work was not passive or simply observational, it was intrusive and embedded in extractive approaches to people and environments, servicing distanced audiences and interested parties.

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<sup>3</sup> See discussion of Lesueur's work here <https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/the-art-of-science>



## Ferdinand Bauer and William Westall

Like Baudin, Matthew Flinders was accompanied by a team of men whose collective knowledge around mineralogy, botany, natural history and expertise in drafting and illustration would provide insight into the Australian coastline, its environment and natural resources. While the Flinders expedition was aimed much more at furthering colonisation of Australia, as with the French expedition, the maps and illustrations produced by Flinders' crew invested in scientific discovery in addition consolidating Britain's position on the Australian continent. On board the *HMS Investigator* were landscape artist William Westall and botanical artist Ferdinand Bauer, the botanist Robert Brown, horticulturalist Peter Good, the miner John Allen, and astronomer John Crosley. The fields of mineralogy and geology were nascent at this time, with soil science yet to emerge, so occupations such as "miner" or "gardener" acted as stand-ins. While smaller than the French crew, both journeys were highly interdisciplinary, and this demonstrated an approach to drawing the landscape that extended beyond passive observation: whereby it was necessary to dig, fell and interrogate in order to produce the required information and illustrations.

However, beyond the accidental disruption caused by the need to survey and draw the landscape, artists and cartographers also engaged in more direct disruptions. Ferdinand Bauer is broadly recognized as one of the "greatest" botanical artists of the nineteenth century. Bauer's work was considered particularly noteworthy because of the way he worked in the field, drawing flora and fauna where he saw them, using pencil and a numbering system to record the exact colours of the species, "by reference to a table of colours as to enable him to finish them at a leisure with perfect accuracy" (Mabberley et al, 2000, 84). When he returned to Europe he used a colour chart to then translate his pencil sketches into the polychromatic paintings he is best known for.

It was necessary to uproot the plants that he drew in order to complete studies that enabled him to produce more polished and refined works of the same subjects back in Europe. Bauer's work demonstrates the way plant specimens for example, literally had to be destroyed in order to produce scientific imagery. This is not to exaggerate the scale of Bauer's actions; they are miniscule in comparison to the loss of vegetation they came with wider farming and urbanisation that was to creep across Australia further into the nineteenth century. However an examination of Bauer's techniques for observing, understanding and drawing Australia's environments demonstrate the lack of agency and interaction artist and surveys had with the landscape and the alternate types of relationships Europeans had with the Australian landscape: its destruction, however seemingly microscopic, was in the service of providing and disseminating information and curiosities to a dislocated and foreign audience, with an interest in extraction and natural history as a field of scholarly and gentlemanly interest.

William Westall's sketch of Mount Westall in Queensland in Australia's North East coast (Fig 3) shows expanded views of the landscape, as a study in the field. To gain such views, artists would walk to high points, disturbing vegetations and making tracks as they went. Although small in scale, these activities marked the first early steps towards the transformation of the Australian coastal landscape here, and a shift from Indigenous custodianship to colonial outpost. The act of walking, a seemingly harmless one, created irreversible damage: the historian Bill Gammage notes that tracks made with hard-soled colonial boots, had the potential to compact the soft and ancient Australian soils (Gammage, 2011, p.29).

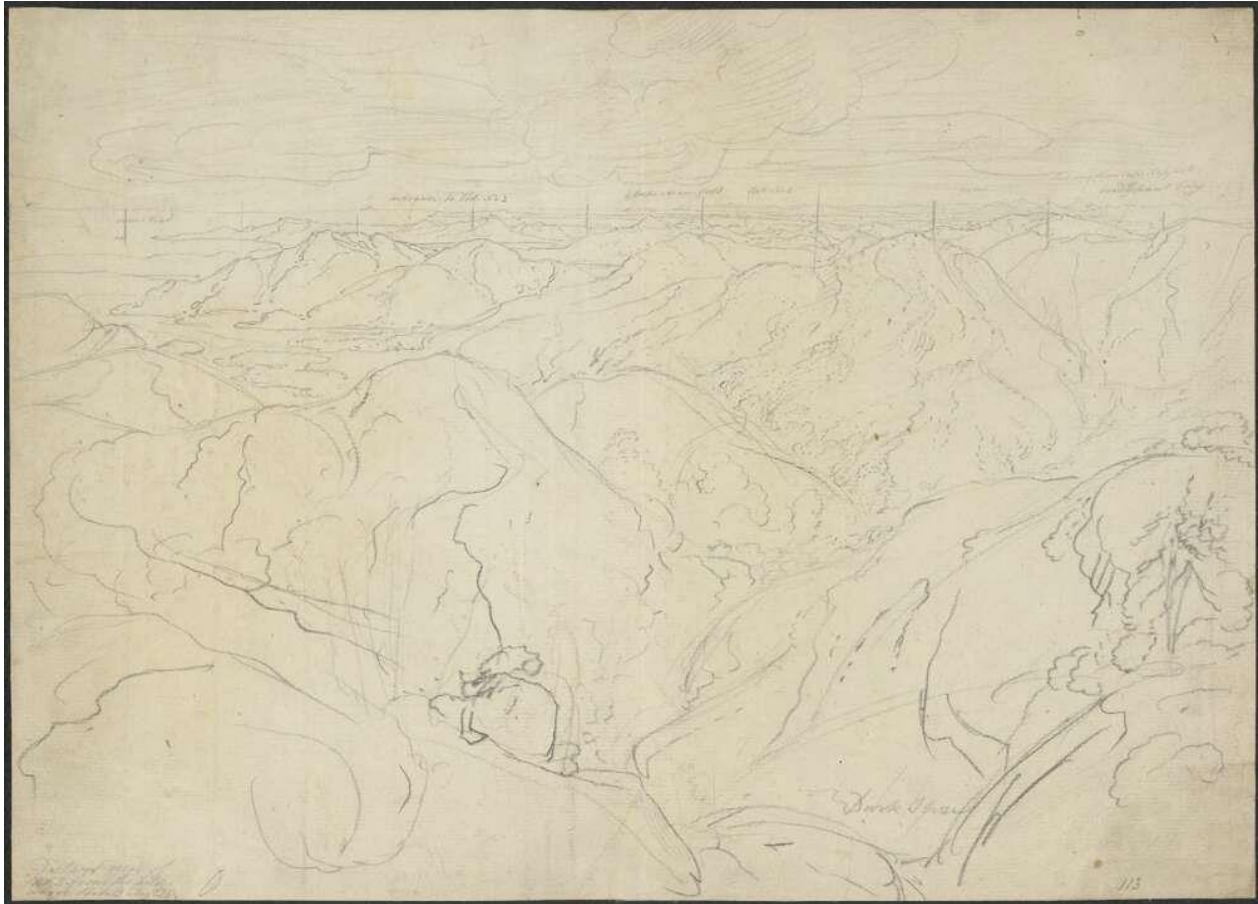


FIGURE 3: WILLIAM WESTALL, MOUNT WESTALL, VIEW SOUTH-EAST, 1802

## John Helder Wedge

Though some attempts had been made by the British to evaluate the Port Phillip area, on the southern coast of mainland, for settlement. Previous surveys of the area deemed it unsuitable for the development of a town and the required agriculture, while one small experimental settlement set up in 1803 failed. It was not until 1835 that the settlement, now the city of Melbourne, was established. Two competing groups of pastoralist speculators, led by John Batman and John Fawkner arrived as separate parties and set up camp on the banks of the Yarra River, with the surveyor John Helder Wedge brought from Tasmania to immediately commence an exploratory survey and drawings of the area.

Surveyor's sketchbooks provide a link to the work conducted in the field, and insight into the activities and therefore violence enacted on the Australian landscape in the nineteenth century. John Helder Wedge's sketches illustrate environments that were shaped through the process of drawing, and of incursions directed towards Indigenous people during the earliest attempts to urbanize the Port Phillip area. Wedge's sketchbook begins with a handwritten dictionary or sorts, listing key words that the owner of the notebook might use in communication with Wurundjeri people.<sup>4</sup> It highlights the disturbances to

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<sup>4</sup> Wedge's field book is digitized and available here [https://find.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/61SLV\\_INST/1sev8ar/alma9916380073607636](https://find.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/61SLV_INST/1sev8ar/alma9916380073607636)

ecologies and environments, that are tied to the acts of genocide and dispossession directed at Indigenous people, and the two are inextricably linked.

Wedge's sketch book of his time in Victoria in 1835 provides a firsthand account of surveyor activities and the ways in which the practice of survey drawing necessitated direct interaction and disruption to the environments Wurundjeri people occupied. For example, on 6th September, 1835, Wedge depicts the survey party crossing the Peel River at Werribee, what is now an outer western suburb of Melbourne. Wedge's sketch shows one man wading through the creek in order to cross it, while another two clamber across a tree whose low slung branch provides a dry crossing point for some of the group (Fig 4).

The notebook moves between textual information — Wedge's dictionary and site notes — to perspective and visual notes, to those which helped construct his future maps of the area. In August 1835, his notebook includes a map view of the area, overlain with annotations that describe vegetation and soil character, such as “stringybark” trees, qualities of “stone and gravel” and “clay soils”. To understand the quality of the soil and log it, Wedge must have engaged in digging it up; his notebook contains an inventory of items taken with him on the exploration, including exploratory tools such as shovels. The terrain covered by Wedge was not a huge distance and can be covered in a day or less. The holes he dug and the tracks through the land were comparatively minute, but they again they foreshadow an escalation of ecological transformations to come.

Wedge's notebook also depicts the activities of Wurundjeri people, such as his sketch of 27th August 1835 documenting women digging for murnong (Fig 5). The murnong was an important food source for Indigenous people of eastern Australia, and Wedge's sketch illustrates Indigenous cultivation practices which changed the shape of the terrain. We can draw from these ways in which settler-colonial activities began to intersect with Indigenous knowledges, and again serve as predictors for land dispossession that was still to come.



FIGURES 4 AND 5: JOHN HELDER WEDGE, SKETCHES, 1835

## Kevin O'Brien

The work of nineteenth century artists and surveyors, described in this paper, attempted to illustrate Australian environments and places in what was perceived as accurate ways. The attention to exactitude demanded a particular violence and disruption to be enacted on the space colonial illustrators encountered. There is an irony here, in that the “interest” demonstrated in the locations drawn required their destruction or vandalism. Also notable though, was the output, often decontextualized or in the case of surveyors, missing key information such as vegetation and trees, reflecting an ignorance of the landscape and an alternate way of viewing it, as a place for extraction and a terra nullius. The Australian artist Kevin O'Brien offers a contemporary counter to this, via an ongoing project first exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2012 and titled *On Country*.



In this collective work, O'Brien invited participants - designers and architects - to remove half the grid of the city of Brisbane, revealing a pre-colonial condition underneath. The maps were then collaged on a wall in Venice, offering a large scale "palimpsest" drawing of the city. The work takes aim at what is described as the "18th century European tradition of drawing on empty paper", however it also serves to use the map drawing, a tool of colonisation, as a weapon against itself. Notes on the artwork by the activist collective Down City Streets observe that "[t]he Finding Country position is that this paper is not empty, but is full of what can't be seen" (Down City Streets, n.d.). This position highlights the way colonial drawings missed or intentionally edited out vital parts of First Nations spaces during colonisation, but it might also seek to suggest the way much of the disturbances enacted during the construction of those drawings are not visible through them; they are stealth acts of violence.

The title of O'Brien's work also connects back to the work of the surveyors and artists described through this paper. As Australians begin to address their colonial histories and the transgressions against First Nations people and the environments they lived on, current best practices for being "On Country" demonstrate how the work of cartographers and illustrators contravened the way First Nations people require strangers to act while in the lands of traditional custodians. Current best practice may change from location to location, but these may encompass introducing oneself to the traditional custodians while a stranger "On Country", not taking objects off country and sensitive use of images. (Watt, 2020). While a contemporary set of guidelines, it can be seen how such protocols run contrary to the - largely invisible - activities and behaviours of colonial illustrators and problematises current surveying practices and approaches to landscape drawing.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the three surveys that were undertaken in Australia in the first half of the nineteenth century and the ways in which the constructions of associated illustrations and drawings necessitated fieldwork that resulted in small but nonetheless significant environmental change. In addition to field sketches and more polished illustrations, journal entries from officers and crew provide insight into the ways in which the act of drawing required artists and surveyors to engage in acts of violence and disturbance in the pursuit of their work.

The act of drawing the Australian landscape in the nineteenth centuries resulted in a twofold of violences. Firstly and most evidently drawings served to support activities, such as British colonial patterns of settlement, and extractive activities. In the twenty-first century these activities would be seen as participants in the Anthropocene. Secondly and more stealthily, drawing resulted in damage on a smaller, under-recognised, but still critical scale.

The desire and apparent need to know the Australian landscape through drawings and sketches in the nineteenth centuries not only facilitated anthropogenic environmental change, through their reinterpretation and commodification but that the making of these drawings involved destructive activities and violent act that links the production of visual culture to transformative periods in Australia's environmental histories. It is possibly impossible to know the result of these activities but their impact straddles both the and the conceptual. In a time of increased concern regarding Anthropogenic environmental change, and in a country reckoning with its colonial histories, interrogation of the invisible activities embedded in what may appear as "passive" drawings is critical.

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