

## BOOK REVIEW

Joan Kerr, ed., *The Dictionary of Australian Artists, Painters, Sketchers, Photographers and Engravers to 1870*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1992, xxii-889 pp., Aust. \$200.00.

Anyone who had encountered *Dictionary of Australian Artists. Working Paper 1: Painters, Photographers and Engravers 1770-1870 A-H* (Sydney, Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1984), also edited by Joan Kerr, knew that a superior work was in preparation. *The Dictionary of Australian Artists* certainly does not disappoint that expectation. Although *Explorations* is not the place to conduct a wide-ranging discussion of a major contribution to Australian cultural history, the information distilled in the many pages of this comprehensive reference tool is sufficiently relevant to our concerns to deserve more than passing notice.

Joan Kerr's "Introduction" (pp. vi-x) sets out quite trenchantly what is novel is an enterprise firmly grounded in social history. There is no whiggishness here, no picking—with hindsight—of the consecrated members of the pantheon of "High Art". The aim is to be all-inclusive by "examining all known (named) persons who made a variety of two-dimensional images during this period—paintings, sketches, photographs and pictorial prints" (p. vi). Or again: "Our sole criterion for inclusion was that a person must have set foot on Australian soil before 1870 and made a painting, sketch, photograph or pictorial print". Thus some 2500 names, many of them quite obscure or unexpected, are treated in all. The entries vary from very short notes that call explicitly for further information on mysterious and half-identified figures to substantial signed articles incorporating new and pertinent research. Indeed the "Introduction" ends (p. x) with an invitation to "report [. . .] inevitable discoveries, divergences and disillusionments to the *Dictionary of Australian Artists*' project". The long list of "Acknowledgements" (pp. xi-xiii) and the impressive roll of "Contributors", "Staff Writers" and "Research Assistants" (pp. xiv-xviii) demonstrate how many people here and elsewhere have already participated. Similarly the catalogue of "Major Exhibitions to 1870" (pp. xix-xx) and even the "Abbreviations" (p. xxi) and "Institutions" (p. xxii) prove how widely the net has been cast.

After pointing to the preponderance of artists from the British Isles, Joan Kerr's "Introduction" stresses (p. vii) that "a broad range of other peoples and nations helped create the distinctive mixture that is Australian art. France is not only represented by Lesueur, Pellion and Petit—who like all exploration artists had virtually no impact in Australia—but also by D. N. Joubert (here identified as Australia's first photographer), Antoine Fauchery and Louis Marcellin Martin, each of whom made a significant contribution to the art of this continent." Several of these personages are the subjects of signed articles by Sophie Ducker, Dianne Reilly and Roger Collins amongst others. The surprises of the volume are often in the notes on minor representatives of the French tradition. For example, "Dellas, A., art teacher" (at Melbourne Church of England Grammar School in 1866) (p. 203) is, of course, the Aristide Dellas whose *Key to the Pronunciation of French as spoken in Paris* was published by H. T. Dwight in Melbourne in 1868 and who, as readers of *Explorations* will remember, was a friend of Charles D'Aloustel. The teaching of art, music and languages was a not infrequent recourse for expatriates of some standing and educational accomplishments. Their whole milieu would be a fruitful topic for a patient social and cultural historian. In the meantime ISFAR could well give thought to taking on as a project—an ambitious one—a biographical dictionary of the French presence in Australia.

It is one of the many virtues of the *Dictionary of Australian Artists* to inspire such reflections. For those who are addicted to dipping into dictionaries and encyclopaedias this one promises endless delights and occasions for stimulation reinforced by the many black-and-white illustrations scattered through its pages.

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Camera-ready copy for n° 14 of *Explorations* was prepared by Meredith Sherlock as Technical Editor. The printing was done by Monash University Printing Services.