

Alexander Schramm (1813-64) and the visual representation of
Aboriginal people in mid-nineteenth century colonial Australia

Susan Woodburn

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University of Adelaide

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Abstract

This thesis investigates a body of representations of Aboriginal people by the little known German-born artist Alexander Schramm (1813-64), made in the fifteen years after he emigrated to South Australia from Berlin in 1849. In these works, which consist of paintings, drawings and lithographs, Schramm depicted large and small groups of Aboriginal people travelling through the land, in camps, and in their interactions with colonists in and around the recently established settlement of Adelaide.

At a time when artistic recognition of indigenous Australians was largely as a documentary record of 'traditional' life seen as inevitably in decline, as picturesque insertions into the landscape, or as an increasingly marginal element of daily life in colonial settlements, Schramm made them the focus of his works in their own right, seemingly without ethnographic or memorial intent, and with little suggestion of cultural and racial degeneration.

It was this unusual engagement, and Schramm's seeming independence of prevailing preconceptions about Aboriginal people, that provided the initial impetus for this study of his works. A further survey of comparable works by Schramm's immediate predecessors and contemporaries was undertaken in order to identify the elements that make Schramm's engagement and representations distinctive. As most attention to Schramm has been within the framework of a new consciousness of the impact of colonial settlement on Aboriginal Australians and of broader post-colonial discourse that takes a particular stance on visual representation of Indigenous people by colonial artists generally, this study also traces in some detail the changes in the appreciation and interpretation of his works between the time they were made and their gradual re-discovery more than a century later.

The absence of Schramm's own account of his reasons for making these works limits our understanding of the images he made and why he persisted in making them despite decreasing market appeal. There is no definitive evidence to support assertions of his personal or cultural sympathies with Aboriginal people, or whether he intended a critique of their situation under colonisation. Nonetheless, his works demonstrate that there were

modes of artistic representation of Aboriginal people other than negative stereotyping or visual obliteration, and at the same time reflect not only the erosion of their numbers and traditional life with the expansion of colonial settlement but also resilience and adaptation in the face of dispossession.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and, where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of the degree.

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Introduction

This thesis is an investigation of a body of work created by Berlin-born artist Alexander Schramm (1813-64) in the fifteen years between his arrival in South Australia in 1849 and his death in November 1864. This work consists of representations of groups of Aboriginal people in camps and travelling, and scenes featuring interactions between Aboriginal people and white settlers, all seemingly set in the vicinity of Adelaide. The body of work is not large, but represents much of Schramm's known Australian *oeuvre*, and constituted the principal part of his offerings shown competitively and for sale at the exhibitions of the local Society of Arts.¹

The significance of these works extends beyond their number, as Schramm was unique among his contemporaries in taking the local Indigenous people as his principal subject, at a time when they had already been drastically reduced in numbers and had largely disappeared from the centres of colonial settlement, and when their representation in art was in decline.² Schramm depicted them in a way that was distinct from the work of most of his contemporaries of both British and European background, conforming to none of the established modes of 'manners and customs', portraiture 'representative of the race', or figures included in a landscape for compositional or symbolic purposes.

The only contemporary description of Schramm and his Australian career was a brief obituary prepared as an addendum to the annual report of the local Society of Arts for 1864. Here he was noted as 'a native of Berlin' who had studied at the Berlin Academy, travelled for three years in Italy and spent six years in Warsaw before his emigration to South Australia in 1849, and had in South Australia 'devoted considerable attention to the study of Australian scenery, and the manners and customs of the aborigines'.³ Two

¹ Twenty one such works (ten oil paintings, two water colours, three pencil drawings, some with chalk or wash and/or on tinted paper, and six lithographs) are currently on record, mostly in public collections. Schramm's total *oeuvre* was small for a professional artist, with less than fifty works known from contemporary reference, mainly through the exhibitions of the South Australian Society of Arts, or later offer for sale: some have not survived or remain undiscovered. Generic titles make exact distinction difficult, and the same work might have been shown in successive exhibitions under varying titles.

² The most recent survey of Schramm's work as a South Australian colonial artist suggests that this focus was indeed 'unique in Australian art'. Jane Hylton, *South Australia Illustrated*, Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2012 p.138

³ *South Australian Register* 25 January 1865.

articles about him published later in the century added little to this brief account, and his entry in the early study of Australian art and artists by William Moore was based largely on the obituary and on what was known through records of the Society of Arts exhibitions.⁴ A century after Schramm's death, research undertaken by Art Gallery of South Australia curator Ron Appleyard (1920-99) was able to confirm some biographical information suggested by the obituary and establish what work had been made by Schramm in Europe before coming to Australia. The article published by Appleyard in 1979 remains the basis of most subsequent accounts, though a number of significant new art works by Schramm have emerged since then.⁵ No letters or other personal papers have yet been discovered, nor have references to Schramm been identified in the correspondence or memoirs of others apart from a brief mention in relation to his last commission, a group portrait of the Gilbert family at Pewsey Vale.⁶ In the absence of primary documentation about Schramm's life or his artistic motivations there have been, perhaps inevitably, attempts to create a fuller biographical narrative, with assumptions about his skills and professional achievements, the reason for his emigration and the influence of his nationality on his art.⁷

From his earliest known Australian work of 1850 Schramm was recognised in Adelaide as a significant artist. His first publicly displayed large oil painting of an encampment of Aboriginal people along the River Torrens was described as 'masterly', and reported as intended to be taken back to England by its purchaser to present to Queen Victoria.⁸ Work submitted at the exhibitions of the Society of Arts from 1857 earned him critical praise and numerous prizes. His obituary notice would describe him as a talented painter who was 'particularly happy in his groups of natives, corroborees, and other subjects in which

⁴ William Moore, *The story of Australian art*. Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1934.

⁵ R.G. Appleyard, 'Alexander Schramm (1814?-1864)', *Bulletin of the Art Gallery of South Australia*, 18 no.1, July 1966 and 'Alexander Schramm, painter', *Bulletin of the Art Gallery of South Australia*, 37, 1979

⁶ Reminiscences and historical notes on the Gilbert family by Dorothy Gilbert and letters of William Gilbert in Gilbert family papers, PRG 266 series 15 and 5, State Library of South Australia.

⁷ Ron Radford, 'Australia's forgotten painters: South Australian colonial painting 1836-1880', *Art and Australia*, Spring 1987, 25, 1; Ron Radford and Jane Hylton, *Australian colonial art 1800-1900*. Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 1995; Janice Lally and Peter Monteath, "'Essentially South Australian": The Artist Alexander Schramm' in Peter Monteath (ed.) *Germans: travellers, settlers and their descendants in South Australia*, Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 2011, pp.144-65; Philip Jones, 'Bush visitors: Alexander Schramm and his colonial encounters', draft of unpublished essay 2015, by courtesy of the author.

⁸ *South Australian Register* 25 December 1850

the scenes and actions represented were essentially South Australian'.⁹ Already by the last few years of his life, however, the appeal of his work had started to wane, with particular criticism of its 'sameness', its repetitive subject and form, as well as of a perceived depreciation or unevenness in its quality. For a century after his death Schramm and his works would be largely forgotten.

Such posthumous neglect was common to mid-nineteenth century colonial artists; the Melbourne-based landscape artist Eugene von Guérard suffered a similar fate. Much was due initially to changing expectations and tastes, and subsequently to a preference for the work of the late nineteenth century artists who were regarded as bringing to fruition a long sought distinctively 'Australian' school of painting, one which recognised the particular quality of the landscape and reflected nationalist ambitions. In Schramm's case the relatively small volume of his work was also a factor, particularly as few paintings were reproduced or widely circulated during his lifetime, unlike those of contemporaries von Guérard, G.F. Angas or S.T. Gill. The most significant determinant in the decline in interest in Schramm's work in his later years would, however, be his continued focus on 'groups of aboriginal natives' and their distinctive depiction. Ironically, it was this same characteristic that would prompt revived interest in Schramm more than a hundred years after his death.

The climate into which his works emerged after more than a century of neglect was radically different from the one in which they had been created. Consideration of Australian colonial art, as of colonial history more generally, was entering what Terry Smith would call a particular revisionary 'moment'.¹⁰ Representations of Aboriginal people by expedition and colonial artists would be a significant part of this. Bernard Smith's characterisation of a succession of modes of representation for native peoples of Australia and the South Seas in his *European vision and the South Pacific* would exercise a major influence on perceptions of the works of Aboriginal portraiture and figural representation made up to the mid-nineteenth century, even though Smith's primary concerns were the relations between art and science and the influence of established

⁹ *South Australian Register* 25 January 1865

¹⁰ Terry Smith, 'Writing the history of Australian art: its past, present and possible future', *Australian Journal of Art*, 1983, 3, p.3

pictorial conventions on representation of unfamiliar landscapes and peoples more generally, and his attention was not specifically directed to Aboriginal representation until after his own Boyer lectures of 1980.¹¹ Tim Bonyhady's subsequent study of nineteenth century landscape painting, with its characterisation of the art of the Australian landscape as a succession of periods of representation in which Aboriginal figures would be replaced by images of settlement and new types of land use, would be equally influential.¹² The first survey exhibition of *The Australian Aborigine portrayed in art*, held at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1974, had a specific intention to demonstrate 'changing social attitudes' to Aboriginal Australians as reflected in visual representations, and to redress what anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner in his Boyer lectures of 1968 had called 'The Great Australian Silence about the Aborigines'. Works were selected by the curators, Ron Appleyard and historian Geoffrey Dutton, within the framework of a new historical consciousness and acknowledgement of 'the wrongs in the white settlement of Australia' and 'the poor conditions in which the people represented were known to exist'.¹³

This revisionism was not unique to Australia, being evident also in writing on the representations of the indigenous peoples of New Zealand, the Pacific islands, the Americas and Africa by colonial artists, reflecting a new approach to recognition of the realities of national histories and the treatment of native peoples by colonisers and

¹¹ Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850: a study in the history of art and ideas*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1960, *The spectre of Truganini*, Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1980 and 'The first European depictions' in Ian Donaldson and Tamsin Donaldson, *Seeing the first Australians*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985.

¹² Tim Bonyhady, *Images in opposition: Australian landscape painting 1801-1890*, Melbourne, OUP, 1985. Smith's impact on Australian art has been widely discussed, as in Tim Bonyhady 'An uncritical culture', *Eureka Street* 7, 8 October 1997 pp.24-32, Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche, *Double vision, art histories and colonial histories in the Pacific*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999 and Jaynie Anderson, C.R. Marshall and Andrew Yip (eds) *The legacies of Bernard Smith: essays on Australian art, history and cultural publications*, [Sydney], Power Publications, 2016. Eve Buscombe's 1980 *Portraits of the Aborigines* would already suggest that Smith's explorations 'have been so wide-ranging, scholarly and polished, as to frighten potential art scholars away from the areas of research he probed', and limit her own study to works not noticed by him, despite a wealth of primary material. The continuing influence of both Smith and Bonyhady is also recognised in Andrew Sayers, 'Curators and Australian art history' (*Journal of art historiography*, 2011, 4 p.7), W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power*, University of Chicago Press 1994 (2nd edition 2002 p.17-18 and footnotes), and in the continuing inclusion of their works in the reading lists for most courses on Australian colonial art.

¹³ Geoffrey Dutton 'The Australian Aborigine portrayed in art' in Ian North (ed.), *Art Gallery of South Australia Festival exhibitions 1974* (exhibition catalogue) pp.35-41; Geoffrey Dutton, *White on black: the Australian aborigine portrayed in art*, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1974 p.74. The original suggestion for the exhibition came from David Symon, Botanist at the University of Adelaide, but was taken up in the same spirit by Appleyard, who wrote to potential lending institutions that 'the bias will be both sociological and aesthetic'. Art Gallery of South Australia exhibitions file EX2/ID438.

imperial administrators who invaded their territories.¹⁴ This was reinforced by the adoption of some of the ideas (and language) of critical discourse analysis and postcolonial critical theory that raised questions about accepted understandings of representation across a wide spectrum, especially in relation to colonialism and imperialism. Originating in the fields of semiotics, philosophy, literary/cultural studies and politics, few of the formative theoretical works were specifically concerned with visual representation. Foucault's *The order of things*, with its rejection of authorial subjectivity, did not initially consider art at all among the 'human sciences' discussed, although opening with a beguiling riff on representation based on Velazquez's *Las Meninas*, and only later and casually suggested that the term 'author' could be extended to 'painting, music, technical fields and so forth'.¹⁵ Derrida, though taking Hegel's *Aesthetics* as his impetus, consciously wrote 'around' painting – the idea, the artefact – with the focus on presentation rather than the actual representation within a work. The basis and focus of the seminal texts of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak as applied more directly to representation of 'other' peoples have little obvious relevance to Aboriginal representation in Australian colonial art. Said's challenging and influential characterisation of the Western construction of Orientalism as exotic, unknowable and thus alluring, and Bhabha's charge against the Western view of Anglicised Indians as 'almost the same but not quite/white' have little in common with most representation of indigenous Australians. In colonial art (and in literature), unlike India or the Orient, there

¹⁴ Leonard Bell, *Colonial constructs: European images of Maori 1840-1914*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1992; Klaus Lubbers, *Born for the shade: stereotypes of the native American in United States literature and the visual arts 1776-1894*, Atlanta, Rodopi, 1994; A.E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: museums, material culture and popular imagination in late Victorian and early Edwardian England*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994; Thomas and Losche 1998; G.M. Bataille (ed.) *First encounters: Native American representation; distorted images and literary appropriation*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2001, Rebecca Parker Brienen, *Visions of savage Paradise: Albert Eckhout, court painter in Colonial Dutch Brazil*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2007; Fitz Karsten (ed.) *Visual representation of Native Americans: transnational contexts and perspectives*, American Monograph series 218, 2012. The impact of illustrations accompanying exploration narratives in the framing of perceptions of native peoples discussed by Bernard Smith in *European vision and the Pacific* has also been long recognised in relation to Native Americans, as in W.C. Sturtevant 'First visual images of America' in Fredi Chiapelli (ed.) *First images of America: the impact of the new world on the old*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976 and Stephanie Pratt 'Truth and artifice in the visualization of native peoples' in *European visions, American voices*, British Museum Research Publication 172, British Museum Press, 2009 pp.33-40 and 'Capturing captivity: visual imaginings of the English and Powhatan encounter accompanying the Virginia narratives of John Smith and Ralph Honor 1612-34' in Max Carocci and Stephanie Pratt (eds) *Native American adoption, captivity and slavery in changing contexts*, 2012.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?' (1969), *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences* 1970 (initially published in French in 1966) and *Archaeology of knowledge* 1972.

were no 'affirmative stereotypes' and no indigenous 'author' to offer counter 'testimony' or other voice of the 'subaltern' to place against images projected by the dominant culture - although appropriation of colonial art works much later by indigenous artists might usefully be considered within this strand of postcolonial theory.¹⁶

Despite this, and while (unlike the field of literary studies) there has been little direct engagement by Australian art historians with the theorists and their complex and often contrary arguments,¹⁷ some of the basic elements of this discourse have significantly influenced art historical approaches to representation.¹⁸ Art works like literary works are seen as 'texts' to be deconstructed, where interpretation is encouraged without regard to known or stated authorial intentions or previous critical understanding. There has been extensive adoption of the focus on identity and difference and the specifically political dimensions of the theoretical models, in which modes of representation are identified as power structures and criticism itself is seen as a political act, to 'bear witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order'.¹⁹

¹⁶ Roland Barthes 'The death of the author', *Aspen* 5/6, 1967; Frantz Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, London, McGibbon and Kee, 1968; Martin Derrida, *The truth in painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987 (first published in French 1978); Edward Said, *Orientalism* 1978 and *Culture and imperialism* 1993; Homi Bhabha 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourses' 1984, *Nation and narration* 1990 and *The location of culture*, London, Routledge, 1994; G.C. Spivak 'Can the subaltern speak' in *A critique of postcolonial reason: toward a history of the vanishing past*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1999 (1983).

¹⁷ Said rejected Foucault's suggestion of passivity, Bhabha argued that colonial racial discourse was more complex than suggested by Said (and indeed, frequently undermined or replaced his own ideas as well as actively engaging with the ideas of others), while Spivak's wide-ranging commentaries have questioned aspects of the constructions of both Foucault and Said.

¹⁸ Bhabha's explorations of mimicry and hybridity as ways of negotiating power relationships are implicit perhaps in commentaries that the satirical depiction of Aborigines wearing odd clothes was a reflection of an unease that settler society was being imitated, but the more formal and suggestive revisionary approach to the Said/Bhabha and constructivist accounts of colonial encounters as applied to discourse on colonial Australia by Anderson and Perrin (Kay Anderson and Comin Perrin, 'The Miserablest People in the World': Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 2007, 18(1) pp.18-39) does not specifically engage with visual representation. There has been more direct engagement with the ideas and language of post colonialism in other areas of visual culture like photography and in film, notably in works by Langton (though she specifies her stance as anti- rather than post-colonial) and in discussion of the work of some contemporary indigenous artists. Marcia Langton, *Well I heard it on the radio and I saw it on television*, Woolloomooloo, Australian Film Commission, 1993 and 'Aboriginal art and film: the politics of representation', *Race and Class* 35, 4 1994; Suneet Rekhari, *Film, representation and the exclusion of Aboriginal identity*, 2007 conference paper (accessed online); Kate MacNeil 'Undoing the colonial gaze: ambiguity in the art of Brook Andrew', *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art* 6/7, 2006.

¹⁹ Homi Bhabha, 'The postcolonial and the postmodern: the question of agency' in Bhabha 1994 p.171 (originally published in Giles Gunn and Stephen Greenblatt (eds), *Redrawing the boundary of literary study in English*, 1992)

The idea of visual imagery as a struggle in representation, ‘a battle for the power to appear’, and that the making of art is inherently political and/or must be viewed through a socio-political lens, would resonate particularly in the new attention to the representation of Aboriginal people. Colonial art, formerly regarded as unworthy of a separate history, being rather a ‘preliminary period of tutelage’, now attracted independent attention, but with seeming acceptance that artistic representations made during this period inevitably reflected a ‘colonising’ intention, ‘visual statements intended to create, justify and ultimately preserve the European colonial order’.²⁰ Contributions to colonial art history in the 1980s and 1990s would address specifically the acknowledgement or denial of an Aboriginal presence in landscape painting as a political issue intrinsically linked with colonial settlement and the historical treatment of Aboriginal people. Dutton’s presumption in ‘giving the Aborigine a face’, and the limited concept of ‘representation’ and ‘portrayal’ employed in the 1974 exhibition, would come to seem naïve if not patronising, but the concept of representation of Aboriginal Australians as a particular moral touchstone would persist.²¹ The introduction by anthropologist Rhys Jones to the 1976 exhibition *The Tasmanian Aboriginal in art* at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery saw it as both a mark of respect to Truganini on the centenary of her death and as ‘an expression of regret at the cultural loss which our nation sustained because of those terrible events long ago, when the last black and the first white Tasmanians came face to face with each other’.²² Some subsequent portrait exhibitions would express reservations with regard to the problematic or pejorative nature of such images, while others repudiated the validity of colonial imagery of Aboriginal people generally.²³ Many studies, undertaken in a general spirit of recognition of historical wrongs and with an *a priori* commitment to an ethical, social and/or political agenda (some consciously written in a spirit of reparation and even explicit expiation) have been highly selective in their use of images and reading of works, with a tendency to

²⁰ This appears to be a basic understanding of the multi-national Settler-Colonial Art History Project, as expressed on the Settler-Colonial Art History Project website at <http://settler-colonial.strikingly.com>.

²¹ There has not been the deep and continuing (and often deeply divided) discussion of Aboriginal representation in art and the right of non-Aboriginals to intervene in and interpret it that there has been about art made by Aboriginal people that is evident in the essays in Ian McLean, (ed.) *How aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art: writings on Aboriginal contemporary art*, Sydney, IMA, 2011.

²² *The Tasmanian Aboriginal in art*, Hobart, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1976.

²³ Richard Neville, *Faces of Australia: image, reality and the portrait*, State Library of New South Wales Press, 1992 pp.60-65; Joanna Gilmore, *Elegance in exile: portrait drawings from colonial Australia*, Canberra, National Portrait Gallery, 2012, pp.96-8; Liz Conor, *Skin deep: settler impressions of Aboriginal women*, University of Western Australia Publishing, 2016 and earlier articles.

subordinate nuanced critique to judgment upon the artists according to the perceived ‘sympathy’ of their representations, ahistorical judgment on individual paintings, and sweeping conclusions based on a few disparate works. While the charge of an ‘ethnocidal aesthetic’ was at the extreme end of stances taken up, the assertions of Said and other theorists/critics that the portrayal of ‘otherness’ was inherently negative were implicit in many works, with common assumptions and conclusions along the lines that ‘The European view of the Aborigines has never been innocent, nor has it ever been neutral’, that images of Aborigines produced in Australia were rarely free of ‘prejudice, guilt or self-consciousness’, and that the apparent decline in representation of Aboriginal people (specifically in landscape) from the 1850s constituted a conscious artistic obliteration.²⁴

Some of the more extreme interpretations of individual works that were generated would be questioned by other commentators, and a few art and cultural historians expressed reservations about the imposition of a generic view on all colonial representations. In her 1993 study of art and national identity Anne-Marie Willis recognised that:

There is not a smooth progression of changes in the visual imagery of Aborigines: how they were imaged depended upon the circumstances of depiction; the artist’s perception of the intended audience; and the genre and conventions within which the artists was working. Regularity is not even assured across the work of a single artist ... the conventions of each genre determine the appearances, rather than the artist’s attitude towards the subject. In the more artistically self-conscious medium of oil painting (as opposed to sketches, lithography, engraving, press illustrations) the chosen aesthetic was even more over-determining.²⁵

²⁴ Colin Symes and Bob Lingard ‘From the ethnographic to the aesthetic: an examination of the relationship between Aboriginal and European culture in Australian art 1788-1988’ in Paul Foss (ed.) *Island in the stream: myths of place in Australian culture*, 1988; Donaldson and Donaldson 1985 p.15; Christopher Allen, *Art in Australia: from colonization to postmodernism*, New York, Thames and Hudson, 1997, pp.19 and 148; Nicholas Thomas, *Possessions: Indigenous art/Colonial culture*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1999, pp.91-2; Terry Smith, *Transformations in Australian art: the nineteenth century*, Sydney, Craftsman House, 2002, p.54; Andrew Sayers, *Australian art*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.28.

²⁵ Ann-Marie Willis, *Illusions of identity: the art of nation*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1993, p.104.

There was occasional acknowledgement of the potential bias inherent in the highly selective use of artistic works in pursuit of particular arguments, as Terry Smith's admission of his limited geographical scope and that 'research done out of Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Darwin might lead to modifications of the ideas I advance, especially for the mid-and later nineteenth century', and Nicholas Thomas's recognition that his 1999 study of indigenous art within colonial culture in Australia and New Zealand was 'a partial account in many senses', 'not a study of colonial images of indigenous people but a cross cultural art history that includes indigenous narrative and art works'.²⁶ Ian McLean's discussion of Augustus Earle's portrait of Bungaree recognised the dilemma for art historians and curators: 'Do we make an historical reading which gives precedence to Earle's intent, or follow our postcolonial intuition which sees, in Earle's parody, Bungaree's parody of colonial ritual'.²⁷

Beyond such occasional cautions and instances of awareness however, there was little counter to an increasingly hegemonic reinterpretation of images of Aboriginal people by colonial artists. The only work since Dutton to attempt a broad survey of the representation of Aboriginal people in colonial painting, Roderick Macneil's 1999 thesis *Blackedout*, was embedded in the terminology and ideas of postcolonial discourse, accepting that Aboriginal people were painted out of existence in pursuit of a new (settler) national identity.²⁸ Critique of individual colonial artists for complicity in dispossession, conscious or otherwise, was widespread, with subsequent significant impact on the display and curatorial interpretation of their works.²⁹ As David Hansen, revisiting the bust of Truganini at the Tasmanian Museum, reflected in 2010:

Representations of Aborigines are not calibrated against the lie of the land, the history of the invasion, the character of the parties involved, the specific sequence of particular incidents or the sensitivity and technical accomplishments of the artist. Instead, we are presented with an abstract zone of retrospective judgement,

²⁶ Smith 2002, p.14; Thomas 1999, pp.14 and 5. Kerr also pointed to the dangers of 'a blanket assumption that all black subjects are a Good Thing and all white colonial values a Bad Thing' in relation to the appropriation of colonial representations by contemporary indigenous artists. Joan Kerr, 'Past present, the art of colonial quotation' in Thomas and Losche 1999, p.26

²⁷ Ian McLean 'Post colonial: return to sender' *Australian Humanities Review* 12, December 1998.

²⁸ R.P. Macneil, *Blackedout the representation of Aboriginal people in Australian painting 1850-1900*, Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne, 1999.

²⁹ Eugene von Guérard has been a particular focus for reinterpretation, as has Robert Dowling and, rather more surprisingly, S.T. Gill: these and other examples are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

a killing field of theory, a terra nullius where imported European aesthetic stock – the Picturesque, the Sublime, the Grotesque, the Melancholy – may safely graze.³⁰

Schramm's works gained their first wide exposure within this critical context, in the 1974 Art Gallery of South Australia exhibition *The Australian Aborigine portrayed in art*, an exhibition that owed its conception to Bernard Smith's *European Vision* and, as noted earlier, had a specific social agenda. On the basis of the two paintings and two lithographs chosen for that exhibition Schramm was claimed as an artist 'who understood both the Aborigines and the peculiar features of their landscape and its vegetation ... catching them on the tramp, noting their individuality ... their humanity intact despite their European rags'.³¹ This did not immediately earn him wider attention, his works marginalised by the focus of much of the new writing on landscape but also because they did not clearly demonstrate the characteristics of artistic moralisation, denigration and/or complicity in settler dispossession that formed a central theme in much of the writing and debate of the 1980s and 1990s.³² While Macneil included two of Schramm's paintings in his 1999 thesis, he clearly found them problematic in the context of an argument that regarded colonial representations as necessarily foregrounding such dispossession, and that sought to account for the decline in the frequency with which Aboriginal people were represented in mainstream academic art without questioning the premise itself.³³ Ultimately it would be the promotion of Schramm's works for his 'sympathetic, yet unsentimental, portrayal of Aboriginal Australians' as an aberration that would extend his reputation and exposure beyond the parochial, but this did not alter the broader understanding of representation of Aboriginal people by colonial artists. Rather, Schramm's characterisation as 'an acute and sensitive recorder of Indigenous-settler

³⁰ David Hansen, 'Seeing Truganini', *Australian Book Review*, May 2010.

³¹ Dutton 1974, p.57

³² Schramm was mentioned briefly in Bonyhady's discussion of 'Aboriginal arcadia', only to be then dismissed on the grounds that he was not essentially a landscape painter (Bonyhady 1985, p.34). Sayers' recognition that the focus on painting, and particularly landscape painting, ignoring other forms of colonial art like genre and portraiture, has given a skewed view of Aboriginal representation, was given little attention, nor was there overt recognition, as Bell noted of images of Maori by artists in New Zealand, that paintings of figures generally might be fewer *because of* the focus on landscape, rather than necessarily inherent in the way in which of the landscape was apprehended or symbolically represented.

³³ Macneil 1999, pp.117, 133,187. In a later article Macneil would place Schramm among those 'depicting the translocation of aboriginal people into the landscape', without citing any specific art works. Rod Macneil 'Time after time' in Lynette Russell (ed.) *Colonial frontiers: indigenous-European encounters in settler societies*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001

encounter on the colonial frontier' by Dutton and Appleyard was extended into claims that his paintings constitute 'important visual documentation of the processes of cultural destruction and assimilation in early South Australia' in which he 'depicted the Aborigines with great sympathy at a time when their tribal life was being disrupted by the colonists' [with] 'an empathy unique in Australian colonial art'.³⁴

Thus while renewed attention to Australian colonial history and the explorations and insights of discourse analysis and postcolonial theory have played a vital role in the revival of interest in Schramm's art works, as they have for so much other material evidence of the colonial past, they created a particular critical framework for their reinterpretation. The adoption of that thread in the highly heterogeneous field of post-colonial theory that 're-orient[s] the globe around a single binary opposition'³⁵ has tended to be reductive, creating a generic figure of artist as 'coloniser' and at the same time perpetuating the generic idea of 'the Aborigine', removing agency from the people it seeks to validate and obscuring differences over time and place.

The emphasis of this study is by contrast empirical and specific. The focus is Alexander Schramm as the creator of a body of representations of Aboriginal people made at a particular time and place. Rather than choosing selected images to support a preconceived argument, it looks at all of Schramm's works, and at changes in their form and content over his career. It examines the nature of his representations against contemporary textual descriptions, and considers his *oeuvre* against a large number of representations made by other artists working in the colonies at the time in order to illuminate the ways in which Schramm's focus and representations differed. It considers immediate and later responses to his works, and traces the progression of appreciation, disfavour, neglect and revival

³⁴ Dutton 1974, p.57; Tim Bonyhady, *The colonial image: Australian painting 1800-1880*, 1987, p. 54; Radford 1987, p.95; Ron Radford and Jane Hylton, Jane. *Australian colonial art 1800-1900*. Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 1995, p.116; Tracey Lock-Weir, *Visions of Adelaide 1836-1886*, Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2005, p. 70; Philip Jones 'Alexander Schramm, *A Scene in South Australia* and Eugene von Guérard, *Winter encampments in Wurlies...*' in Alisa Bunbury, *This wondrous land: colonial art on paper*. Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 2011, p.98; Lally and Monteath 2011, pp.145-165; Hylton 2012, pp.133-4 and 138; David Hansen (acknowledging Phillip Jones) in Sotheby's auction catalogue, Sydney, 8 May 2012; Philip Jones 'Bush visitors: Alexander Schramm and his colonial encounters', draft of unpublished essay prepared for Martyn Cook Antiques 2015, by courtesy of the author.

³⁵ Anne McClintock 'The angel of progress: pitfalls of the term 'postcolonialism' in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (eds) *Colonial discourse/postcolonial theory*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, c1994, p.22

and the socio-political contexts in which this occurred. It does not reject *a priori* the later interpretations of Schramm's work (or that of his contemporaries) made within a post-colonial framework, but compares changing 'readings' to illuminate how theoretical, like political, structures influence perceptions and interpretation. Through this approach it attempts to move beyond the motives and constraints of a prescriptive theoretical framework or social-political agenda, to revisit Schramm's works other than from the 'generalised guilt' of [Dutton's] *White on Black*' or 'that consideration of art as symptoms of something else', with its attendant danger of misrepresentation by selectivity and ahistorical political and social assumptions, and to return to 'the historical discourse within the image itself'.³⁶

I am highly conscious that this mode of investigation does not provide a definitive alternative locus for this body of work. In the absence of Schramm's own words it has not been possible to recover direct evidence of his artistic aims and intentions (which in a postcolonial framework would anyway be contested). Other material evidence is also limited, for unlike many of his contemporaries Schramm left no sketchbooks to show where, when or of whom he made his preliminary drawings or how he worked from sketch to painting. He does not identify the people he drew and painted by name, clan, place or language affiliation, made no individual portraits (at least, none that were exhibited at the time, or have survived), and left no record of his interactions with them in the process of making his works. There is equally no definitive evidence to support assertions of Schramm's personal or cultural sympathies with Aboriginal people or whether he intended his works as a critique of their situation under colonisation. Nonetheless, his works demonstrate that there were modes of artistic representation of Aboriginal people other than negative stereotyping or visual obliteration. Equally if not more importantly, while his observations of this one small community over more than a decade in a rapidly changing environment seem to reflect what is otherwise known of their numerical decline and the erosion of existing ways of life with the expansion of colonial settlement, they also suggest resilience and adaptation in the face of dispossession. As such they contribute to another narrative within colonial history,

³⁶ Smith 1983 p.19; Willis 1993; Ian Mclean, 'Figuring nature: painting the indigenous landscape' in D. Hansen (ed.) *John Glover and the colonial picturesque*, Hobart, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2003, p.122; Ian Burn 'Is art history any use to artists', *Dialogue* 1991, pp.1, 6 and 13.

otherwise based largely on oral traditions and material culture, one that does not replace the history of dispossession and violence, but recognises Aboriginal continuity and survival.³⁷

³⁷ Recognition of the complexities of Aboriginal response to colonial intrusion, of continuity and change, in Henry Reynold's seminal *The other side of the frontier*, first published in 1981, and Richard Broome's *Aboriginal Australians: black responses to white dominance 1788-1980*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1982 has been overshadowed by attention to the other element of contact response they discuss, that of violence and resistance, but has been the specific focus of more recent works, among them Mark McKenna, *From the edge: Australia's lost histories*, Carlton, Miegunyah Press, 2016 and Paul Irish *Hidden in plain view: the Aboriginal people of coastal Sydney*, Sydney, NewSouth, 2017, as well as earlier works that focus on Aboriginal agency within a smaller compass, as Alan Pope, 'Aboriginal adaptation to early colonial labour markets: the South Australian experience', *Labour History* 54, May 1988, pp.1-15, Michael Parsons, 'The tourist corroboree in South Australia to 1911', *Aboriginal History* 21, 1997, pp.46-69, I.D. Clark and Fred Cahir (eds) *The Aboriginal story of Burke and Wills: forgotten narratives*, Collingwood, CSIRO publishing, 2006, and Penelope Edmonds, 'The intimate, urbanising frontier: native camps and settler colonialism's violent array of spaces around early Melbourne' in Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, *Making settler colonial space*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010 pp.129-54.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 is a reappraisal of what is known of Schramm as an artist in Europe, the works he made and exhibited there, the evidence for his recognition and success, and the likely influences upon his decision to emigrate.

Chapter 2 introduces the colonial world of South Australia, with specific attention to its cultural climate and Schramm's prospects. It examines in detail the first major work with Aboriginal people as the subject that was painted by Schramm after his arrival, his *Encampment* of 1850, Schramm's motivations and models in making it, and how it compares with earlier representations of the local indigenous people.

Chapter 3 discusses the body of work described as 'native scenes' and 'groups of aboriginal natives' made subsequently by Schramm up to his death in 1864. It examines the people he depicted in these works and changes in the nature of their representation over the decade. Again the works are considered in the context of the position of the indigenous population and attitudes to them, and how this might have influenced the sensibility of Schramm's scenes, the form in which they were offered and their critical reception.

Chapter 4 surveys the representations of Aboriginal people made within a range of genres by other colonial artists immediately preceding and contemporary with Schramm. It focuses on selected individual works that have characteristics in common with those of Schramm, but also considers the circumstances of their creation and the nature of these particular representation within the broader context of the artist's *oeuvre*, their contacts with and attitudes expressed towards Aboriginal people, artistic imperatives, and audience.

Chapter 5 traces the decline and revaluation of Schramm's reputation and changes in the interpretation of his works from his last years to the revived interest more than a century later. It suggests that both his neglect and revival were based on attitudes to the people he depicted and their place in colonial society, but that modern readings of his works as documentation of cultural destruction impelled by 'sympathy' and/or the intention of advocacy obscures, if not misrepresents, the particularity of his representations.

Chapter 6 focuses on the distinctive characteristics of Schramm representations and reviews the suggestions that have been advanced to explain Schramm's motivations for making them. It concludes that while there is little evidence for any direct intentions of social critique, Schramm worked with an artistic integrity to what he saw that resisted the narrowing influences of an environment that was increasingly hostile to the Aboriginal presence. In the process he created images that not only reflect the impact of the colonial settlement of South Australia on the local Indigenous people, but that recognise a resilience in their response and a continued existence under changed circumstances that was otherwise largely ignored.

Titles and terminology

In this study original titles are indicated where known, in the belief that these are a valuable indicator of the content and intent of the works that Schramm and his fellow artists made, relevant to who and what they intended to depict and their anticipated audience, and that retitling considered to be more respectful or specific obscures this. For similar reasons there has been no attempt to retrospectively assign clan, tribe or language group names to the people shown in Schramm's works or those of his contemporaries. Artists other than those making consciously anthropological studies rarely distinguished the people they depicted by more than a single name and/or the location in which they were found or known to be associated. Schramm himself never identified the people he depicted, and it is impossible to say with confidence whether they were Adelaide ('Kaurna') people or those from regions to the south or the Murray. The understanding of Aboriginal society as constituted by tribes in fixed locations is indeed a modern one which owes perhaps more to the desire for classification than to the realities of fluid groupings in constant movement.³⁸ To impose an awareness of and sensitivity to this basic aspect of the organisation of Indigenous society on Schramm's and other artists' works is to further misunderstand the making of representations of Aboriginal people and 'native scenes' in mid-nineteenth century colonial art.

³⁸ Stephen Hemming 'Kaurna identity': a brief history' in *Aboriginal Adelaide, Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia special issue* 28, 1-2, December 1990, pp.126-142; Paul Monaghan 'Structures of Aboriginal life at the time of colonisation in South Australia' in Peggy Brock and Tom Gara (eds) *Colonialism and its aftermath: a history of Aboriginal South Australia*, Mile End, Wakefield Press, 2017, pp.3-26.