Edward P. Taylor Research Library

Aboriginal Australian Art Resource Guide

Introduction

This is a guide to the Edward P. Taylor Reference Library’s resources in Aboriginal Australian art. The library has an extensive collection of books related to Aboriginal Australian art, culture, religion, mythology and archaeology. Resources pertinent to works in the A.G.O.’s collection have been given preference here; for that reason, this is by no means an exhaustive list of all of the library’s resources relating to the field. Many additional resources can be found by searching the library’s online catalogue, using the ‘Subject Headings’ section below as your guide.

Most of the pieces in the Aboriginal Australian collection defy classification in traditional art historical terms. The collection includes boomerangs, spear throwers, and other ceremonial and utilitarian objects. For this reason, books which address contextual topics, such as culture and sociology, have been included here. It should also be noted that an effort has been made in this resource guide to highlight basic texts in related fields (such as archaeology and prehistory), which are in the library’s collection.

If you are just beginning your research in Aboriginal Australian art, start with some of the ‘General books’ (especially Caruana 2003, and Morphy 1998), as well as the Grove Dictionary of Art’s entry, s.v. ‘Aboriginal Australia’.

Subject Headings

- General subject headings
- Regions
- Peoples
- Media/type
- Contextual topics

Items in the Library’s Collection

- General books
- Collection/exhibition catalogues
- Media
- Art by region/peoples
- Aboriginal societies
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Online Resources

Appendices

Appendix A – Excerpts from ‘Note on Aboriginal Names’ from Caruana 2003, op. cit., 228.
Subject Headings

As few Aboriginal Australian works in the A.G.O.‘s collection are catalogued by artist name, the best way to search for information the library’s online catalogue is by subject heading. Examples of various types of Aboriginal Australian Art subject headings are listed below:

General subject headings

Art, Aboriginal Australian

Art, Oceania
Art, Australian
Art, Maori
Art – Australia – Torres Strait Islands
Art, Colonial

Art, Australian – Bibliography

For art from a specific century, search in the following format:
Art, Aboriginal Australian – 20th century

For exhibitions from a specific century, search in the following format:
Art, Aboriginal Australian – 20th century – Exhibitions

And for a specific decade in that century:
Art, Aboriginal Australian – 20th century (1990s) – Exhibitions

Regions

Many of the subject headings can be made more specific by adding a geographical area as a qualifier. For example:

Art, Aboriginal Australian – Australia – Arnhem Land (N.T.)
Art, Aboriginal Australian – Australia – Oenepelli (N.T.)
Art, Aboriginal Australian – Australia – Western Desert (W.A.)
Etc.

Or for more general information regarding peoples from a specific region:

Aboriginal Australians – Australia – Adelaide Region
Aboriginal Australians – Australia – Queensland
Aboriginal Australians – Australia – Western Australia
Etc.

Peoples

Search for resources related to a specific Aboriginal Australian people using subject headings such as:

Kurnai (Australian people)
Tiwi (Australian people)
Warlpiri (Australian people)
Worora (Australian people)
Torres Strait Islanders
Etc.
Media/type

To search by specific media look under subject headings such as:

Rock paintings – Australia
Petroglyphs – Australia
Painting, Aboriginal Australian
Picture writing – Australia
Prints, Aboriginal Australian

Boomerangs
Shields – Australia
 Masks – Australia

Dissident Art – Australia
Mounds – Australia

For works in a specific media, from a specific region, search in the following format:
Rock Paintings – Australia – New South Wales

Contextual topics

Art, Aboriginal Australian – Foreign influences
Art, Aboriginal Australian – Moral and ethical aspects
Art, Aboriginal Australian – Social aspects
Art, Aboriginal Australian – Symbolic aspects
Art, Aboriginal Australian – Western influences

Aboriginal Australians – Ethnic Identity
Aboriginal Australians – Costume and adornment
Aboriginal Australians – First contact with Europeans
Aboriginal Australians – Government policy
Aboriginal Australians – Government relations
Aboriginal Australians – History
Aboriginal Australians – Rites and ceremonies
Aboriginal Australians – Social life and customs
Aboriginal Australians – Weapons

Australia – Colonization
Australia – Discovery and exploration
Australia – Historical geography
Australia – History – 1788-1851
Australia – Race relations

Mythology, Aboriginal Australian
Mythology, Aboriginal Australian, in art

Maori (New Zealand people) – Ethnic identity

Women, Aboriginal Australian
Women artisans – Australia
If you would like to see a more exhaustive list of Aboriginal Australian subject headings search ‘Art, Aboriginal Australian’ or ‘Aboriginal Australians’ in the ‘Subject Headings Alphabetical’ field of the library’s online catalogue.
Items in the Library’s Collection
(Listed by relevance)

General books

709.94 M82 MAIN

An excellent concise introduction to Aboriginal Australian art. Examines the colonial ‘discovery’ of Aboriginal art, rock art, art and religion, ritual and aesthetics, as well as contemporary practice. Includes brief artist biographies, glossary, key dates, maps, an extensive and current annotated bibliography, and index.

709.940904 C25 MAIN

A selective, and very current, survey of Aboriginal Australian art. Organised geographically, it contains discussions of regions such as Arnhem Land, the desert, the Kimberley, North Queensland and the Torres Strait islands, as well as contemporary Aboriginal art. Includes a map, select bibliography, glossary and index.

709.94 Ox2 RS

A thorough introduction to Aboriginal Australian art. Part one contains chapters organized geographically and subdivided into topics such as ‘Gender, Aesthetics, Performance’ and ‘From Conquest to Resistance’. Part two is organized as an encyclopedia, with biographical entries on individuals and groups of artists, as well as subject entries on central Aboriginal Australian social and cultural issues and modes of artistic production. Includes bibliographic references and maps throughout.

709.011 B45 MAIN

A survey of Aboriginal Australian art in various media (including rock art, painting, drawing, sculpture, sacred figures, and domestic art), which attempts to place these works within their ritual, social, and cultural contexts. Includes a preliminary discussion of ritual and mythology. Contains a bibliography of mostly pre-1970s works, and index.

709.94 Ad3 1988 MAIN

A collection of essays which address various issues in Aboriginal art, most notably ‘dreaming’ – the ‘foundation of traditional aboriginal thought’. As a result, the book provides an account of Aboriginal religious beliefs, as well as a more general discussion of style, Aboriginal aesthetics, and colonialism. Includes a catalogue of works from the South Australian Museum, maps, biographies of artists, an extensive bibliography, and index.

709.94 Sa9 MAIN

A basic introduction to Australian art as a whole (with Aboriginal art consisting of roughly half). Concerned mostly with twentieth-century traditions in art. Includes a timeline, guide to further reading, websites, and index.
709.94 B45 1964 RB

An important early work on Aboriginal Australian art. A good example of the methodology of early Aboriginal Australian art history.

Germaine, Max, *Artists and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand* (Sydney: Landsdowne Editions, 1979)
709.9 G31 RS

A biographical dictionary of living artists, as well as a list of galleries and other art-related information.

709.94016 C45 RS


**Collection/exhibition catalogues**

709.011 Au7 1981 MAIN

Three introductory essays preface the exhibition catalogue: Art of Temperate Southeast Australia, Art of the Desert, and Art of Northern Australia. Providing basic introductions to each geographical region. The exhibition catalogue presents exemplary works in a variety of media from a number of peoples and regions. Includes a brief bibliography.

759.994 D86.6

Exhibition catalogue featuring contemporary and traditional Aboriginal Australian art; mainly twentieth-century. Contains a series of prefatory essays on topics as diverse as racism and conflict, encounters with aesthetic products of other cultures, and the status of women. Also contains a series of essays on specific regions. Includes an extensive bibliography, and glossary.

759.994 C16 1997 MAIN

Exhibition catalogue of the 'Wagilag Sisters Story', cataloguing works done by various artists between 1937 and 1997 in Central and Eastern Arnhem Land depicting the creation myth of the same name.
Media


A detailed and extensive study of bark painting in Western Arnhem Land. Mostly examines contemporary practice, however there is a great deal of information on themes in painting and ceremonial use, metaphors employed, formal components, iconic representation, and an examination of x-ray paintings among much else. Contains a bibliography and index.


Catalogue of selected painted works from the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. Mostly from the latter-half of the 20th century. Contains suggestions for further reading.

Godden, Elaine, and J. Malnic, Rock Paintings of Aboriginal Australia (Sydney: Reed, 1997) 759.994 G54 MAIN

Straightforward introduction to Aboriginal Australian rock paintings. Includes a catalogue of works, as well as essays on prehistory, 'dreaming', technique, peoples, and case studies. Includes bibliography.

Sayers, Andrew, Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century (Melboume: O.U.P. in association with National Gallery of Australia, 1994) 741.0899915 Sa9 MAIN

Examines the work of nineteenth-century Aboriginal Australian artists, mostly working in pencil and ink on paper. Discusses how Aboriginal drawings on paper serve as documents of colonial contact. Concentrates on Barak, Tommy McRae, and Mickey of Ulladulla. Contains a catalogue of drawings from various collections, bibliography and index.

For drawings of Aboriginal Australians by European colonizers, see Chapter 1 of: Smith, Bernard, and A. Wheeler, eds., The Art of the First Fleet and Other Early Australian Drawings (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1988) 994 Sm5 1988 MAIN

Art by region/peoples

Elkin, A.P., Art in Arnhem Land (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1950) 709.94 EL5 Rare Book

A early survey of art in Arnhem Land. Contains a detailed map (ca. 1950) of the 'Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve and Vicinity', and various indices.


A detailed study of the iconography of 'toas' (small, generally wooden, sculptures) of the Lake Eyre region.
994.0049915 N92 MAIN

An insightful study of Walbiri iconography. It provides an in-depth study of symbols within a particular Aboriginal semiotic system, and explains the potential for these individual symbols to be combined to create totemic designs.

Aboriginal societies

305.89915 B45 MAIN

An extensive study of traditional Aboriginal Australian life, including discussions of social organization and structure, economics, life cycles, religious belief and practice, magic and sorcery, law and politics, art and aesthetic expression, death and the afterlife, and contemporary society. Extensive bibliography.

The following are among the earliest studies of Aboriginal Australian peoples:

Spencer, Baldwin, Sir, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1914)  
305.89915 Sp3 1914 RB

919.18 Sp3 RB

Howitt, A.W., *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904)  
305.89915 H84 RB

994.0019915 Sp3 RB

305.89915 Sp3 RB

Aboriginal mythology

Isaacs, Jennifer, ed., *Australian Dreaming: 40,000 years of Aboriginal History*,  
398.20994 Au7 MAIN

An extensive selection of Aboriginal Australian myths (many with related illustrations). Includes bibliography and index.

398.20994/M86 MAIN

Aboriginal myths as ‘re-told’ by a non-Aboriginal anthropologist, and accompanied by paintings by a non-Aboriginal Australian artist.
398.20994/B71 MAIN

A compilation of selected Aboriginal Australian myths; some illustrations.

Aboriginal prehistory/archaeology

994.01 F65 MAIN

An extensive and foundational survey of the archaeology of prehistoric Australia. Contains discussions of trade, religion, and art, as well as chapters on the examination of material evidence, migration patterns, case studies, art and technology, and the development of agriculture. Includes an extensive bibliography, glossary, and index.

919.4 F65 MAIN

Organised geographically, this guide to prehistoric Australian sites throughout the continent provides a general introduction to the prehistory of each region, as well as more detailed case studies of specific sites. Includes a list of contacts, glossary, guide to further reading, and notes.

919.4031 M91 MAIN

A highly-specialised survey of the Australian prehistory. Includes illustrations and an extensive bibliography.
Online Resources

There are a few good online resources related to Oceanic and Aboriginal Australian Art.

Website

Art History Resources on the Web
– Oceanic Art
http://witcombe.sbc.edu/ARTHamerica/oceania.html#oceania

National Gallery of Australia
http://www.nga.gov.au/

Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

State Library of Tasmania, Image
Database

National Library of Australia

Berndt Museum of Anthropology
http://www.berndt.uwa.edu.au

Appendices

Appendix A – Excerpts from ‘Note on Aboriginal Names’ from Caruana 2003, op. cit., 228.

“The recording and writing of Aboriginal languages has only occurred since European colonization and there is no standardized orthography in use throughout Australia. Orthographies have changed over time, and vary not only from region to region, but often within a region and even within one language. […]

In addition, as it is customary not to utter the names of the recently deceased, a number of artists have been recorded by researchers with mourning names that differ from their usual working names. […]

Aboriginal languages contain many synonyms, including those of the names of creator ancestors, supernatural beings, cosmological phenomena, natural species and material objects. The use of many names is restricted to specific contextual situations, or to those people of relevant status.”