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"Landscape Histories: Mapping Environmental and Ecological Change Through the Landscape Art of the Swan River Region of Western Australia"

Gaynor, Andrea, and Ian McLean

Gaynor, Andrea, and Ian McLean. "Landscape Histories: Mapping Environmental and Ecological Change Through the Landscape Art of the Swan River Region of Western Australia." *Environment and History* 14, no. 2, "Australia Revisited" special issue (May, 2008): 187–204. doi:10.3197/096734008X303728 . What can works of landscape art tell us about past ecologies? This article describes a pilot study in which a method for systematically recording the aesthetic, ecological and environmental content of landscape artworks was investigated. Using database software that allows for the identification and evaluation of relationships between aesthetic criteria (such as style) and environmental content (such as vegetation characteristics), the authors surveyed landscape artworks of the Swan River region of Western Australia created between 1827 and 1950. The database was first populated with aesthetic and ecological surveys of selected artworks, then the data was analysed in order to identify patterns of ecological change that are readily amenable to historical explanation. The veracity of such explanations was supported by a more fine-grained analysis of a specific site, for which the depiction of the environment in artworks was compared with that in written and photographic sources. Collectively, the artworks appeared to reflect probable changes in the prevalence of large trees and the broad composition of flora, with the site-specific study finding more specific correspondences between artworks and other sources. Although further research is required in order to expand and verify findings, these initial results suggest that there is scope for more extensive use of fine art in the production of the environmental histories and historical ecologies that increasingly inform ecological restoration and management projects. All rights reserved. © 2008 The White Horse Press

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