



OTHER RECENT ACQUISITIONS

If you have read this far in the magazine, you will already know about two recent acquisitions made by the Museum – the brass plaque relating to explorer Ludwig Leichhardt (pages 16-19); and the cricket collection acquired from ‘Swan’ Richards (page 20).

Another acquisition linked to a celebrated sporting identity of recent times is the purchase of racing silks worn by jockey Glen Boss, who rode Maykbe Diva to the winning post in the Melbourne Cup three times. The plucky mare became the first horse to win three successive Melbourne Cups, with Glen Boss as her rider, and the pair captured the hearts of Australians. The silks, with Boss’s signature, are not those he wore for the third record-breaking win in 2005, but may have been worn for the first two wins in 2003 and 2004. Given the place of horse racing – and in particular the Melbourne Cup – in Australians’ consciousness, this acquisition is sure to be a very popular exhibit in the Museum’s galleries.

Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira also has iconic status in Australia. Best known for his watercolours of Central Australia, in the late 1920s and early 1930s Namatjira also made plaques from oval pieces of mulga wood decorated with designs of fauna, Central Australian landscapes and native flowers. The idea of producing artefacts was introduced by the head missionary at Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission, Reverend F W Albrecht, as a way of making the mission more economically sustainable.

The Museum has acquired two mulga wood plaques decorated by Albert Namatjira. They differ from most of the artist’s work in that they consist of Christian texts: one a portion of a quotation of Jesus’s words in the Gospels – ‘I am with thee’ – and the other a line from a hymn, ‘Jesus, lover of my soul’ – ‘Other refuge have I none’. The latter plaque also carries a representation of the Cross. At the time

these plaques were decorated, Namatjira was a practising Christian, but he soon moved into a more familiar decorative mode using naturalistic motifs.

The Museum also acquired a boomerang decorated by Namatjira in 1935 to celebrate the completion of a six kilometre-long pipeline between Hermannsburg and Kaporilya Springs, which ended the mission’s dependence on water carted in by road. The pipeline was built with money raised by two sisters, Una and Violet Teague, who organised an art exhibition in Melbourne in 1934. This exhibition, and an appeal by the *Argus* newspaper, raised over £2000 for the pipeline. Over 100 works by fifty artists were included in the exhibition, by artists such as Hans Heysen, Arthur Boyd, Arthur Streeton – and Rex Battarbee, the artist who introduced Albert Namatjira to the technique of painting in watercolour.

On a more playful note, the Museum has recently purchased a board game, ‘A Race to the Gold Diggings of Australia’. Produced around 1855, the board (a hand-coloured lithographed sheet mounted on linen), printed rule card, three painted metal sheet counters and an ivory teetotum were used to play a game in which players set out from Plymouth on the hazardous sea voyage to Australia. The good luck and ill fortune of the gold digging enterprise are paralleled in the game, which is very much about winning and gaining wealth. The winner was the first person to set foot in Australia, where, according to the game, they could gather gold nuggets upon landing! The board game illustrates contemporary attitudes in England to the gold rushes in Australia, emphasises the links within Empire by placing Plymouth next to Port Phillip and highlights play as a means of learning about the world.

This article was written using research prepared by Museum curators Mat Trinca, Ian Coates and Laina Hall.

