Conrad Martens and George Edwards Peacock: Sydney artists

Colonial artists Conrad Martens and George Edwards Peacock were enthusiastic painters of the Harbour, and were closely associated with Darling Point in their depictions of its picturesque scenery and houses.

Conrad Martens began giving private lessons to Darling Point residents, including Mrs Thomas Sutcliffe Mort, in the late 1840s, making the journey to Darling Point regularly. As he could not resist sketching wherever he went, his own drawings during that period make an excellent sequence documenting this beautiful part of Sydney.

George Edwards Peacock began selling his works in the 1840s. His oils, generally small and atmospheric, concentrated on Sydney Harbour and the exclusive private villas along its foreshores. With their precise detail enlivened by artistic effect, his paintings gave a romanticism to the landscape.

‘These art treasures were collected not so much for the adornment of a noble mansion, or indeed in any respect for selfish ostentations display, as for the purpose of entertaining and improving the tastes of (their) fellow colonists…’

Conrad Martens
(1801–1878)

Conrad Martens (1801–1878) was a painter, best known for his landscapes. He became perhaps Australia's most famous colonial artist. Martens was born in England, where he trained under prominent artist and teacher, Copley Fielding.

In 1833 he became official artist on the scientific voyage of the *HMS Beagle* - a voyage made famous by the evolutionary findings of Charles Darwin. It was on this voyage that Martens developed his unique style of factually accurate, yet artistically imagined landscape painting.

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[Conrad Martens, ca. 1840 / painted by Maurice Felton]
After leaving the *Beagle* at Valparaiso in 1834, he travelled to Tahiti and then to Sydney, where he remained for the rest of his life. He was captivated by the beauty of Sydney Harbour, sketching the harbour foreshores even as his ship sailed through the Heads in 1835. With introductions to the gentry of New South Wales, he quickly became their favourite painter.

Martens built up a clientele of the colony's social elite for whom he painted, including governors, politicians, the judiciary, leading families, clergymen and merchants of New South Wales. He painted watercolours and oils of their estates as well as landscape views. He was particularly attracted to the rugged beauty of Darling Point and environs.

During the economic depression of the 1840s, Martens took on students to supplement his income. In 1846, he began giving private lessons to Mrs Sutcliffe Mort of Greenoaks, Darling Point and a number of other local residents - the Smiths of Glenrock and the Octagon, Dumaresqs of Tivoli, Mitchells of Carthona and Nortons of Ecclesbourne. Martens made the journey to Darling Point and environs regularly and could not resist sketching wherever he went, making an excellent sequence documenting this beautiful part of Sydney. Eight of the twenty lithographs in his *Sketches in the Environs of Sydney* [4] published in 1850, were after drawings made on his Eastern Suburbs trips.

Martens often made many views of, or from, his patron's residences. He became a good friend of Thomas Sutcliffe Mort and sketched freely from the landscaped grounds of Greenoaks. He later occupied a studio above Mort's auction rooms in Pitt Street, Sydney.

Apart from Martens' travels inland, the theme of Sydney Harbour continued to occupy him. In subject matter, his work resembled that of his Sydney contemporary George Edwards Peacock who began painting in the 1840s. Although Martens' work was undoubtedly seen as fine art, when compared to Peacock's more prosaic topographical productions, many colonists employed both artists.

At his death in 1878, Martens was the acknowledged father of colonial art in Australia. The State Library holds the world's largest collection of his work, including his original oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, manuscripts and journals.
Album of sketches around Sydney, ca. 1843-1852 / drawn by Conrad Martens ca. 1843-1852
Conrad Martens
Call # DL PX 25 [11]
Digital ID: a1768027
View collection item detail [12]

a1768028h.jpg [13]
Album of sketches around Sydney, ca. 1843-1852 / drawn by Conrad Martens ca. 1843-1852
Conrad Martens
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Album of sketches around Sydney, ca. 1843-1852 / drawn by Conrad Martens ca. 1843-1852
Conrad Martens
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a1768031h.jpg [17]
Album of sketches around Sydney, ca. 1843-1852 / drawn by Conrad Martens ca. 1843-1852
Conrad Martens
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Digital ID: a1768031
View collection item detail [18]

a1768032h.jpg [19]
Album of sketches around Sydney, ca. 1843-1852 / drawn by Conrad Martens ca. 1843-1852

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a1768033h.jpg [21]
Album of sketches around Sydney, ca. 1843-1852 / drawn by Conrad Martens ca. 1843-1852
Conrad Martens
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Digital ID: a1768037
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a1768041h.jpg [25]
Album of sketches around Sydney, ca. 1843-1852 / drawn by Conrad Martens ca. 1843-1852
Conrad Martens
Call # DL PX 25 [11]
Digital ID: a1768041
View collection item detail [26]

a1768042h.jpg [27]
George Edwards Peacock

George Edwards Peacock (1806–?) had originally trained as a lawyer, however when he was transported to Sydney for forgery he turned to painting to improve his straitened circumstances. Marked as a 'gentleman' convict, he worked as a meteorological recorder at the South Head weather station. It was probably here that he developed his love for Sydney Harbour and its diversity of moods. In the 1840s he began painting professionally.

His oils, generally small and atmospheric, concentrated on Sydney Harbour and the exclusive private villas along its foreshores. His paintings of Darling Point and environs feature Glenrock, the residence of Thomas Smith which was built in 1836, as well as views of Sir Thomas Mitchell's house Carthona and Thomas Sutcliffe Mort's Gothic villa Greenoaks.
[Glenrock, ca. 1846 / painted by G. E. Peacock] ca. 1846
George Edwards Peacock
Call # ML 492 [30]
Digital ID: a128043
View collection item detail [31]
Port Jackson NSW distant view from above Double Bay - on the South Head Road, 1847 / painted by G. E. Peacock 1847
George Edwards Peacock
Call # ML 237 [33]
Digital ID: a128041
View collection item detail [34]

a128039h.jpg [35]
With their precise detail enlivened by artistic effect, his exquisite paintings give a romanticism to Sydney and its harbour. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described his work as:

"carefully painted, exhibiting extreme fidelity to nature, as well as skill in miniature handling and high finish"

(SMH, 2 June 1849)

In subject-matter his work resembles that of his Sydney contemporary Conrad Martens who was giving lessons in Sydney at the time Peacock began to paint. Peacock, like Martens, had a keen interest in meteorology and, also like Martens, made many views of, or from, his patron's residences. Many colonists employed both artists.

The Library has an extensive collection of George Edwards Peacock paintings, which featured in the Library's Picture Gallery exhibition in 2002.
A number of Darling Point residents had their own private art collections which they opened to the public on regular occasions. Thomas Sutcliffe Mort had a fine collection of around 120 watercolours, as well as sculpture and old English armoury, which were housed in a purpose-built gallery designed by Edmund Blacket as part of additions to Greenoaks in 1858. Thomas Ware Smart also had a very attractive picture gallery attached to his home, Mona, which contained a superb collection of European oil paintings. Both galleries were open to the public.
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