



# Media release



## See Australia's first celebrity exports in new State Library exhibition

6/7/2015

Before they became celebrated Australian icons, the koala and waratah left early colonists almost 'star struck' with their unique and striking appearance! And this fascination with Australia's flora and fauna hasn't waned.

A new exhibition opening at the State Library of NSW on Wednesday 8 July will explore how the koala and the waratah were first depicted over 200 years ago, and how they – along with the Sydney Opera House – have evolved over time to quickly become national icons.

According to *Australian Inspiration* curator Sarah Morley, "The koala was so unique that early colonists found it difficult to draw – In 1803, Australian artist John William Lewin (1770-1819), was the first person to draw a koala, from a specimen that was brought from Mount Kembla to Sydney."

Ms Morley says Lewin was instantly captivated by the foreign landscape and exotic wildlife and was the first to turn Australia's emblematic natural history into art!

"Dorothy Wall brought the koala to life in 1933 with her cheeky little character called Blinky Bill, and by the 1960s it was used by Qantas to promote Australian tourism."

The waratah has had a similarly fascinating journey that helped establish an Australian national identity and give NSW its state flower.

The earliest known drawing dates back to 1794 and it continues to be a source of inspiration for fashion designers (eg. Jenny Kee and *Romance was Born*), artists (eg. Julie Patterson and paper technician Benja Harney) and lighting artists (the waratah featured prominently on Customs House during VIVID).

Jorn Utzon's original sketch of Australia's most iconic building, the Sydney Opera House, has captured people's imagination internationally. It has not only sold Australia to the world, but inspired designs by our leading artists including Martin Sharp, Peter Kingston and Barbara Davidson.

"*Australian Inspiration* will not only tell the evolving story of our national icons, but also showcase the role of the State Library's extraordinary collections in arts and design," says Ms Morley.

As part of the *Australian Inspiration* exhibition, artist-in-residence Julie Paterson will create a new work inspired by the State Library's waratah collection.

AUSTRALIAN  
Inspiration

James Sowerby, *Embothrium speciosissimum* (detail), in *Zoology and botany of New Holland and the Isles adjacent*, by George Shaw and James Edward Smith [1794], Q79/59

8 JULY TO  
27 SEPTEMBER



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## AUSTRALIAN Inspiration

*How Holland and the Isles adjacent, by George Shaw and James Edward Smith [1794], Q79/59*

*James Sowerby, Embbothrium speciosissimum (detail), in Zc*

### Highlights of the *Australian Inspiration* display include:

- some of the earliest known drawings of Australian flora and fauna;
- original Dorothy Wall drawings of Blinky Bill and her earlier characters in *Tommy Bear and the Zookies* from c.1920;
- quirky waratah costume designs created for the 1938 Sesquicentenary of Australia;
- Jorn Utzon's original sketch of the Sydney Opera House, as well as his Red and Yellow Books and
- Opera House inspired designs by Martin Sharp, Peter Kingston and Barbara Davidson.

*Australian Inspiration* will be shown alongside *Inspiration by Design: Word and Image from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, both on show from 8 July 2015 to 27 September 2015.

**Sarah Morley is available for interviews.**

### For more information, interviews and images, please contact:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communication Branch, State Library of NSW  
(02) 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, [vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au)

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