

Media Release



New home for rare & priceless maps at NSW State Library

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For the first time, visitors to the State Library of NSW can explore five centuries of cartography from around the world in one place with the opening of its new Map Rooms **TODAY [Friday 16 April]**.

According to State Librarian John Vallance: “Despite the challenges of COVID, we’re continuing our quest to place jewels from the State Library’s collections on public view. Now it’s the turn of our collection of maps – arguably the most significant in Australia.”

“We have brought some of our most important maps, globes and navigation instruments out of the vaults and into a new public home for all to see and enjoy. The Map Rooms have been designed for everyone, but we hope they will also encourage specialist cartographic research,” says Dr Vallance

“The exciting new rooms are located on the first floor of the Mitchell Building, and will be open to the public every day. They have been created thanks to the generosity of private donors and the Library’s Foundation.”

One of the major highlights is a chart of the Indian Ocean and Asia — one of only four copies in the world — printed on vellum by Jacob Colom in 1633. “The expert work of our Library conservators is displayed in this chart in the network of threads which maintain the tension of the vellum within its frame,” explains Maggie Patton, the State Library’s maps expert.

Another highlight is Edouard Nuel’s 1911 copy of Nicholas-André Monsiau’s historic 1817 painting depicting Louis XVI giving final instructions to the Comte de La Pérouse.

Measuring 218 x 274 cms, this dramatic painting had previously been stored offsite while the Library found a location big enough to display it.

“La Pérouse famously arrived in Botany Bay just a few days after the First Fleet in 1788, before disappearing. The painting imagines an intimate conversation between Louis XVI and La Pérouse planning his voyage and possible triumphs for the French King,” says Ms Patton.

Some of the Library’s most rare and interesting maps can be found in the drawers of a custom-made map table. And a pair of large digital screens will display more of the collection in innovative ways, through the work of the Library’s DX Lab.

Library curators will lead monthly public tours to share the fascinating backstories of the maps on display and reveal the contents of the drawers.

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Other highlights include:

- an extremely rare 1515 map by Albrecht Dürer and Johannes Stabius depicting the world as a sphere;
- a beautiful hand-coloured copy of the iconic nineteen counties (the legal boundaries of the colony up to that date) map produced by Sir Thomas Mitchell in 1834;
- the recently acquired silver punchbowl in the shape of a globe (with Antarctica sitting on its lid) commissioned by botanist Sir Joseph Banks in 1772;
- the 1940 Tindale map showing the distribution of Aboriginal nations in NSW; and
- a selection of rare early maps showing the gradual colonisation and expansion of Sydney from a penal settlement to a bustling metropolis.

“Map lovers will find the Map Rooms irresistible, and curious visitors will be enchanted by the visual stories maps tell about our past. The larger of the two rooms will also offer an inspiring quiet space for researchers to work,” says Ms Patton.

With more than 200,000 maps in the State Library’s priceless collection, the Map Rooms will be refreshed every 12 months. Visitors can also view more of the Library’s collection in a new exhibition, *Mapping the Pacific*, opening 12 July 2021.

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