

State Library galleries reopen with new exhibition which tackles Cook's legacy

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"We discovered them before they even set foot on land!" – senior Gweagal knowledge holder, Shayne Williams, 2020.

The State Library of NSW's galleries will reopen **TODAY [Monday 13 July]** with its long-awaited exhibition, *Eight Days in Kamay* - an online version opened in May following the Library's closure due to COVID-19.

While the exhibition marks the 250th anniversary of James Cook and the Endeavour's short stay in Kamay (Botany Bay), the State Library's decision to revisit these events from the perspective of Kamay's Gweagal people has drawn some criticism.

According to Damien Webb, head of the State Library's Indigenous Engagement team: "The observation that the Gweagal people of Kamay discovered Cook in 1770 is a view we do not give enough credence to, and one which has struck a raw nerve for many people."

"These events changed the course of Australia's history, and are still being hotly debated, contested, felt, 250 years later," says Mr Webb.

The exhibition explores what those fateful eight days looked like through the eyes of the Gweagal people, with knowledge gained through community consultations in La Perouse and by senior Gweagal knowledge holder Shayne Williams.

It brings together a selection of sketches and samples collected by Sydney Parkinson, Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander of this newly 'discovered' natural world contextualised by Gweagal knowledge, and challenges visitors to view the journals of Banks, Cook and other Endeavour crew members from a different lens.

NSW State Librarian John Vallance says, "At its best, history has always involved a determined effort to make sense of the past from different positions. This exhibition is a particularly good example and I hope it draws crowds of people curious to explore important things they may not have encountered in their own history lessons at school."

eight days in
Kamay

Media Release



Visitors to the exhibition will witness the extraordinary demonstration of April 1970 which saw Aboriginal leaders and activists from across Australia protest against the Cook bi-centenary celebrations at Kurnell, attended by Britain's Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip and Princess Anne.

The continuing impact of the events of those eight days in 1770 are explored through contemporary artwork by Vincent Namatjira, Jason Wing, Michael Cook, Karla Dickens and Daniel Boyd.

Mr Webb says "the events of 1770 have profoundly impacted the lives of everyone since, but we sometimes forget they happened to real and sovereign people on the shores of Kamay. How we reconcile with the realities and legacies of colonisation is a difficult thing to imagine. But, as always, we must begin with truth."

Eight Days in Kamay is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW, Macquarie St, Sydney. On show 13 July 2020 to 28 February 2021. www.sl.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/eight-days-kamay

Damien Webb is available for interviews. Curator Ronald Briggs can also talk about the 1970 protest.

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