



Strange Women: Essays in Art and Gender

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The history of modernist painting in Australia is a masculine narrative, one in which the projects of male artists have been privileged. This is in spite of the fact that the most interesting and innovative early modernist painting was produced by women. In an account of the painting of artists such as Grace Cossington-Smith, Margaret Preston, Grace Crowley and Ann Dangar, Jeanette Hoorn argues that it was in their painting, rather than the work of such artists as Roy de Maistre, Roland Wakelin and Frank Hinder, that the groundwork for much of early modernist practice was laid out. Hoorn argues that the work of the early women artists has been surrounded by perjorative criticism of a type which male critics reserved for the art of women. This work explores ways in which culture was regulated in Australia in the period 1860-1940 and how the art of women was repressed through such mainstream discursive formations as nationalism. The essays examine the subject of the exclusion of such artists as Hilda Rix Nicholas along nationalist and gender lines; the absence of the representation of the family, and of contented mothers, in nationalist iconographies in 19th-century academic painting in Australia; the place of the verandah as a feminine site; and the positioning of the home in relationship to men's journeys. The place of the nude in public debate and in art critical writing is considered in essays which examine the art of Charles Wheeler, Norman Lindsay and Jules Lefevre's "Chloe". These essays examine ways in which the body is inscribed in cultural production when the discourses of propriety and desire are juxtaposed.

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