

Peter H. Hoffenberg, *Durable Monuments: Claiming Bodies, Souls and the Past in Colonial Australia*. North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2024. xvi + 235. 978-1-923068-77-3.

Peter Hoffenberg is one of our most respected scholars of nineteenth-century Exhibition History. Since 2000, Hoffenberg has presented a number of conference papers, and published dozens of articles including ten important essays, book chapters, and books on Oceanic participation in exhibitions from The Crystal Palace in 1851 to World War I. In *Durable Monuments*, he continues to build on his important research into the meaning and cultural significance of nineteenth-century exhibitions and associated activities for Oceanic cultures. While *Durable Monuments* does not focus on exhibitions *per se*, it does include a key chapter on the role and relationship of durable monuments to the selection of items included in international exhibitions. In his opening remarks, Hoffenberg explains that Durable Monuments are those created places and things that claim spaces with cultural and emotional significance. His key argument is that the creation of monuments is an essential component of cultural development, which the creators of monuments use as a way of creating a historical claim to land and to being a unique people. *Durable Monuments* discusses the nature, roles, and meanings of human-made landscapes and structures in later nineteenth and earlier twentieth-century colonial Australia. The title is derived from the explorer David Livingstone's observation that in Southern Africa (and by Hoffenberg's extension, in Australia), because there is no apparent precolonial civilization there are no pre-colonial Durable Monuments: no man-made bridges, roads, farms, railroads, fortresses, no historically important battlefields and so on, unlike in India, which is awash in roads, walls, temples, and palaces, both pre- and post-colonial. In Australia, the Indigenous People left no remarkable Durable Monuments; as far as the early Australian colonists were concerned, the Indigenous People did not matter. The settler society charged itself with developing such monuments, thus claiming the "pristine" land for the new white, Christian, primarily Anglo culture which would become Indigenous for lack of any competition. Of course, the older the monument, the better the claim: thus, settler graves in the Outback, old sheep station buildings, and perhaps rusted farm machinery and even disposable artifacts like feed sacks are converted into monuments of an Indigenous *ancien régime* that was as Hoffenberg says, hardly *ancien* and barely a *régime*.

Hoffenberg points out that few of the Australian entries in major expositions included more than a handful of items created by the Indigenous People. Most Australian exhibits focused primarily on contributions from the "old colonists," generally accepted to be those whose colonial roots did not include convicts. Later participants included members of one of the "Native Associations," which were comprised of men above the age of sixteen who were born in Australia. The objects being exhibited—objects that would, it was assumed, define Australia in the eyes of the world—included relics and antiquities to provide a physical connection as well as a claim to a constructed past; agricultural products and natural resources (minerals, fish, timber) to provide a claim to the present; and inventions and machinery to claim the future.

Those "old" relics, and the virtual exclusion of Indigenous artifacts, contributed to creating an Australian identity as "Indigenous People," that is, as the original occupants of the land as proven by the monuments therein. The genuine Indigenous People were thus the white settlers, not the ghostly peoples who lived in the "blank" (at least blank on maps) lands of Australia that

white settlers were in the constant process of discovering. “Indigenous” to the Australians didn’t mean the first chronologically; it meant the first to mark the land, create a local identity, control the land by farming it, raising sheep, and/or building permanent edifices of some cultural or commercial (or both) value. In other words, *Durable Monuments*. Hoffenberg also discusses the importance of death rituals (funerals) and death monuments (gravestones, cemetery statuary) to claiming both the past *and* the landscape.

Finally, he discusses the Australian experience in the Great War in the context of *Durable Monuments*, both physical and emotional. World War One provided white Australians the sites for monuments abroad (in the battlefields in France, Africa, and of course Gallipoli) and monuments commemorating those events at home. Hoffenberg explains that the war’s barren, hostile, uncanny landscapes became analogous to the early settlers’ relationship to the “unique and hostile, pre-historical Australian landscape. ... The war’s relationship to the landscape provided a particularly powerful Australian narrative. That relationship allowed the Australians to assimilate into their own public culture, history and memory this seemingly unprecedented moment or event” (166). The *Durable Monuments* associated with the Great War (statues, street names, museums, archives) gave the Australian continent its history, he says. Australia had no great battlefields until 1914. That meant one of the classic sites of *Durable Monuments* was missing. Now, finally, Australia had those sites, both in faraway places in France, Turkey, and the Middle East, and here at home: *Durable Monuments* could be constructed both at the actual site and in a protected place in an Australian city (indeed, most Australian cities have their WWI memorial).

Hoffenberg’s study covers extensive territory (settler history, exhibitions, WWI, Australians traveling in Europe) and is exhaustively researched. Including the influence of the Great War alone unlocks an avalanche of scholarship, the mere examination of which is an overwhelming challenge. His conclusions about the nature and central importance of *Durable Monuments* to nation-building are clearly argued, though, and carefully supported by evidence from his exhaustive research. Caveats? I have none of any importance. I would wish that he had included Jenny MacLeod’s 2016 *Gallipoli* which includes an extensive study of how the defeat in the Dardanelles worked its way into Australian national culture, what she describes as the gendered, racialized Australian myth, but that is more a personal suggestion than a criticism. Hoffenberg’s study is a valuable addition to Australian studies.

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