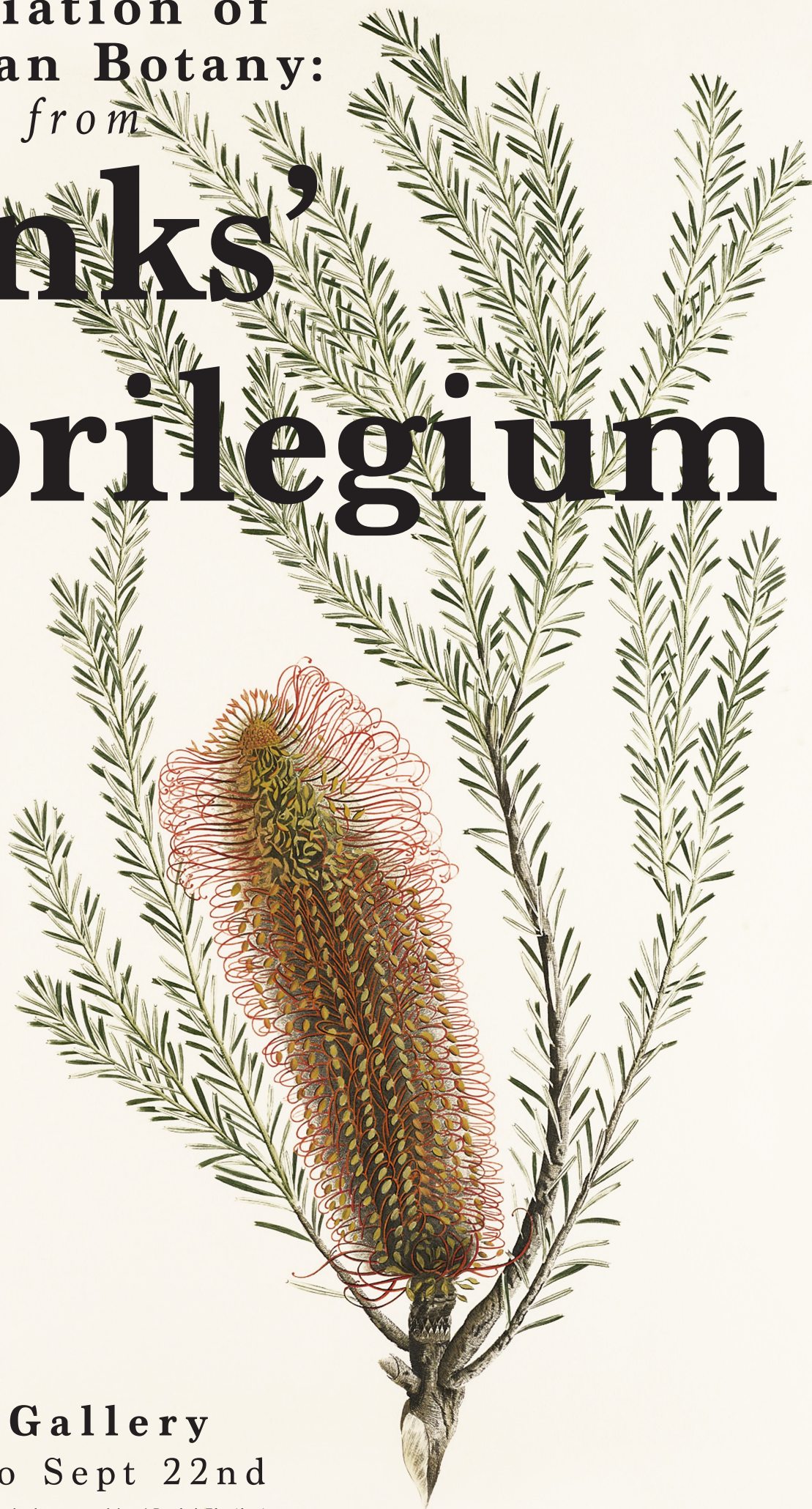


The Initiation of  
Australian Botany:  
*Selections from*

# Banks' Florilegium



**Burrinja Gallery**  
July 27th to Sept 22nd

Image credit: **Banksia ericifolia** [*Leucadendrum ericaefolium*] Banks' Florilegium (detail)

Colour engraving and etching (*à la poupée*) after watercolour by J. Frederick Miller 1773 and drawing by S. Parkinson 1770  
Engraving by R. Hughes 1986 after D. MacKenzie and T. Scratchley. (c)Alecto Historical Editions/Trustees of the Natural History Museum.  
Photography by J. Hughes. Private Collection.



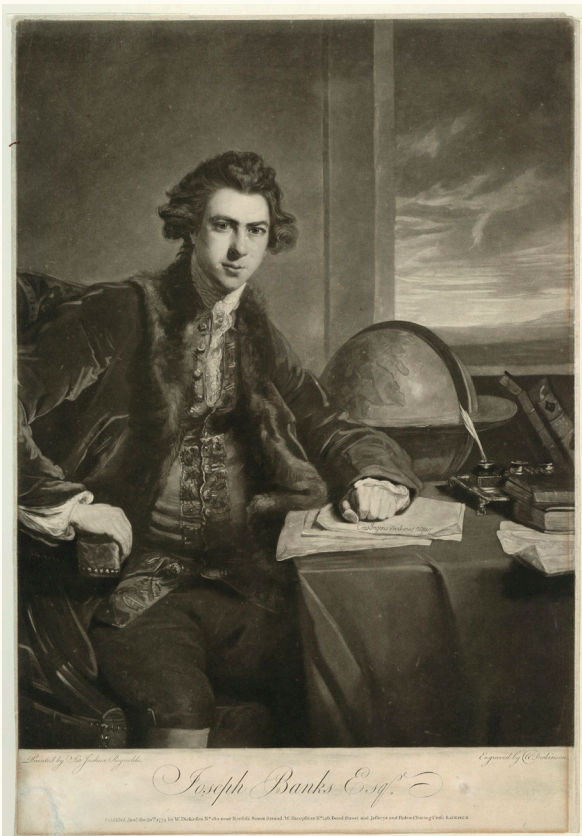
# Banks' Florilegium and the Initiation of Australian Botany

The word 'florilegium' literally means a gathering of flowers and first appeared in the late 16th century to describe a publication that is concerned with the beauty of the plants rather than their medicinal values, which had been their main interest at the time.

Florilegia flourished from the 17th century to the 19th century when the focus shifted to rare and exotic plants.

Banks' Florilegium is the result of the singular vision, passion, and drive of the young and extremely wealthy English amateur botanist Joseph Banks (1743-1820). With wide-reaching repercussion: Single-handedly, he made England in general, and his London home at 32 Soho Square and the royal gardens at Kew in particular, the centre of a global network for exploration, botany, and the exchange of knowledge and plants.

There he laid the ground work for the production of an ambitious project: a complete record of the 'immensely large' haul of specimens he had brought back from James Cook's first voyage around the world. This subsequently also helped to establish a new system of taxonomy (classification) which had been invented by the Swedish biologist and physician Carl Linnaeus. (1707-1778, later Carl von Linné)



Banks (and the many people who would later collect for him) thought collecting plants was beneficial for science - and for humanity. In the Age of Enlightenment, the 'gentlemen scientists' had no concerns about ownership. Consequences of transporting plants to across the globe and introducing foreign species into new habitats did not feature in their thinking.



From the standpoint of the 21st century, this 'advancement of knowledge and science' served an entirely Western imperialist and colonialist agenda. Tragically, it initiated yet another chapter of

exploitation, dispossession, and tragic demise of Pacific societies.

Indigenous deep-time understanding about plants and animals, weather and seasons, land and seas was ignored; knowledge that had been gathered, refined, and passed on for millennia, disregarded.

Banks' Florilegium is no exception. But it is a printing project of unparalleled quality and dedication - and the focus of this exhibition.

Almost two hundred years after Banks had initiated it, a team of dedicated, persistent and patient print makers at Alecto Historical Editions sought out to realise it for the British Museum (Natural History).



Under the guidance of its master printer Edward Egerton-Williams a process was developed to produce 743 engravings from the original copper plates after drawings by Scottish natural history artist Sydney Parkinson (1745-1771) with annotations by Swedish naturalist Dr Daniel Solander (1733-1782). For the first time the Florilegium was attempted in its entirety and in colour.

Egerton-Williams chose to print à la poupée, whereby each colour is manually worked into the copper plate with a rolled-up cloth dolly. An edition of one hundred sets was the target (with the usual additional exhibition sets and printers' proofs). To be as accurate as possible, he had his printer makers use up to fifteen colours for each plate. Watercolour artists applied the details. This was not a straight-forward process - but due to the scope of this essay, I will have to pass over its details and difficulties here. The whole project took ten years.

An irony of history: Banks' 'grand and stylish publication' disappeared into obscurity: The stack of plates, nearly a ton of finest copper, was soon forgotten, bombed (during the German Blitz in WWI), almost recycled (into ammunition in WWII), and threatened by neglect, fire and scientific irrelevance. Until 1963 when, William Stearn, an employee of the Botany Department located the plates in a cupboard in a corridor outside the British Museum Library.

Banks had envisioned to release no less than fourteen volumes as Endeavour Florilegium. He invested the small fortune at the cost of £7,000 (\$1 million in today's value) to employ a team of artists to complete Parkinson's unfinished drawings and to cut every botanical detail into the copper. It remains unclear precisely what type of print he had in mind. His archive of 100,000 letters, memoranda, and notes, bequeathed to the British Museum along with his library of 20,000 titles and herbarium, has revealed no details so far.

But Banks was in correspondence with French print makers and had travelled to Holland to study the most advanced techniques at the time. When they embarked on this immersive and ethnically challenging project in 1980, Studholme, Egerton-Williams and his team at Aleto were confronted with difficult decisions and tedious processes which were by no means smaller or less costly than 160 years earlier.

The Australian section was the first to be printed and is by far the largest of the Florilegium with over 300 engravings. Despite the short amount of time Banks, Parkinson and Solander spent collecting during HMS Endeavour's northward passage along the east coast of New Holland, a massive 130 specimens were collected on the first day of landfall, on 27 April 1770.

Among them was the leucadendrum ericaefolium. Carl Linnaeus the Younger later named the species in honour of Joseph Banks Banksia ericifolia (heath-leaved banksia).\*



Cook named the location Botany Bay. By then, he was well aware that the purpose of his voyage had shifted. The quest in the name of astronomy (the observation of the transit of Venus) had made way for the pursuit of natural history and botany. This, coincidentally, gave the second, secret reason for Cook's voyage a welcome cover, and Britain a new colony. But this is part of another story.

JD Mittmann, Curator

\* Banksia ericifolia also features on page 9 of Volume I in Celia Rosser's epic three-part Elephant Folio 'The Banksias'. The internationally acclaimed botanical illustrator and Monash University artist dedicated her life to painting the entire genus of Banksia, which took from 1974 to 2000 - the only artist to have done so.

#### Selected reference bibliography:

- Wilfred Blunt and William Stearn, Captain Cook's Florilegium, London, 1973
- Brian Adams, The Flowering of the Pacific, Being an account of Joseph Banks' travels in the South Seas and the story of his Florilegium, British Museum (Natural History), 1986
- Carr, D.J., Sydney Parkinson - Artist of Cook's Endeavour Voyage, British Museum (Natural History) and ANU, Canberra, 1983
- Zena Cumpston, Michael-Shawn Fletcher & Lesley Head, First Knowledges Plants - Past, Present and Future, Port Melbourne, 2022
- Hank Ebes, The Florilegium - Cook, Banks, Parkinson 1768 - 1771, Melbourne, 1988
- Patricia Fara, The story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks : sex botany & empire, New York, 2004
- Mel Gooding, David Mabberley, Joe Studholme, Joseph Banks' Florilegium: Botanical Treasures from Cook's First Voyage, New York, 2019
- Averil Lysaght, Banks, Sir Joseph, University of Toronto, 1983
- Bernhard Smith, European Vision and the South Pacific (3rd edition), Melbourne, 2022
- Banu Subramaniam, Botany of Empire: plant worlds and the scientific legacies of colonialism, Seattle, 2024
- Andrea Wulf, The brother gardeners : botany, empire and the birth of an obsession, London, 2008



# Drawn from Nature: **Botanical Illustration between Art and Science**

Contemporary botanical  
art by Victorian illustrators



Burrinja Gallery July 27th - Sept 22nd

**BURRINJA**  
where community & culture meet  
[burrinja.org.au](http://burrinja.org.au) | 03 9754 8723

Image credit: "Golden orbs and galls" (detail),  
*Acacia pycnantha*, **Miffy Gilbert**,  
Watercolour on Paper, 42 x 59 cm, 2022 © the artist

**CREATIVE VICTORIA**



**Yarra  
Ranges  
Council**

Drawn from Nature:  
**Botanical Illustration**  
between Art and Science

Amanda Ahmed  
Craig Lidgerwood

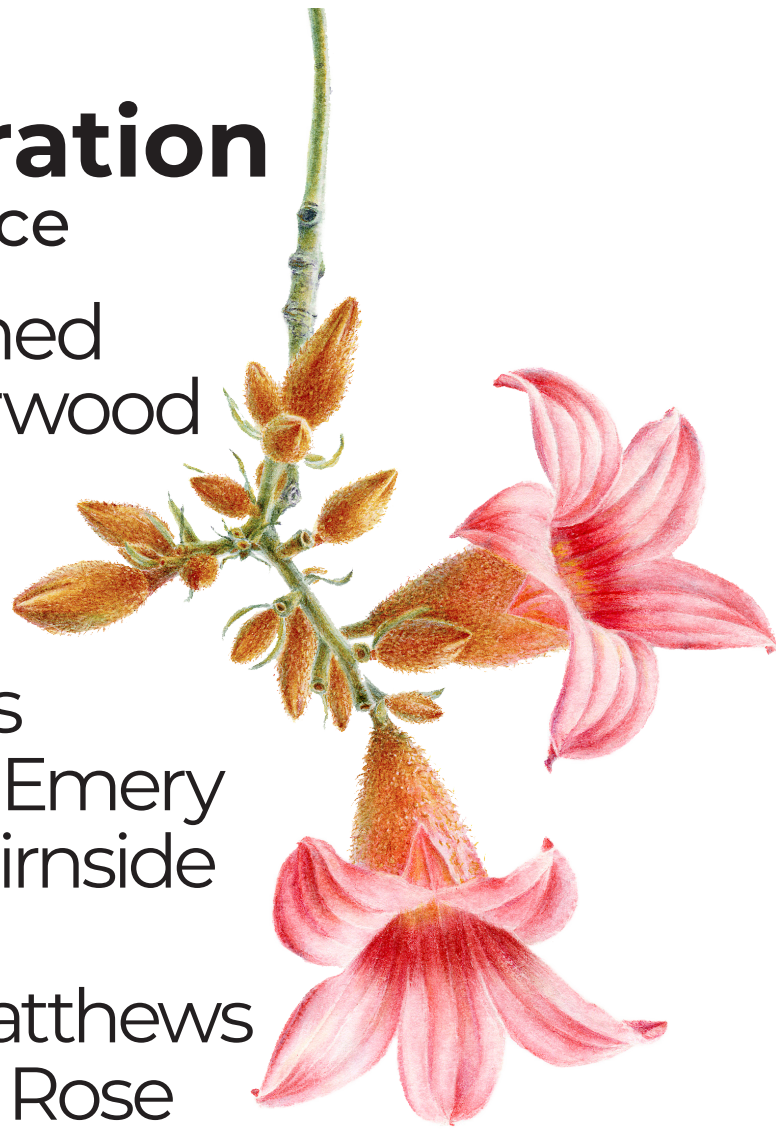
David  
Reynolds  
Dianne Emery  
Deb Chirnside

Janet Matthews  
Jessie Rose  
Ford

John Pastoriza-Piñol  
Mali Moir  
Margo Heeley

Martha Iserman  
Marta Salamon  
Miffy Gilbert  
and Simon Deere

With works by  
Celia Rosser





# Public Programs

## Workshop

Botanical art illustration workshop with Janet Matthews

**Sat 10 Aug, 10.30 am - 3.30 pm**  
- bookings online essential

## Artist Residency

Botanical art illustration demonstrations by Miffy Gilbert

**Sat 27 July, 11 am - 2 pm**  
**Sat 3 Aug, 11 am - 2 pm**

## Illustrated Curator Talk

Reckless Confidence: Joseph Banks and the Florilegium, Undertaking the world's largest fine art printing project - and pulling it off (literally)

**Sun 18 Aug, 2 - 3 pm**

## Burrinja presents Sunset Sessions: Soulful Springtime

Artist Talk by - John Pastoriza-Piñol  
other programs to be announced

**Fri 20 Sept - bookings online essential**



Image credits:

*Botanical from left to right:*

- John Pastoriza-Piñol, Sugar pine cone - *pinus lambertiana*, watercolour on Arches paper, 2022.
- Amanda Ahmed, *brachychiton*, watercolour on paper.
- Mali Moir, Chandellier D'or - *brachychiton bidwillii*, water colour and colour pencil on cotton paper.
- Martha Iserman, Gynea Lily - *doryanthes excelsa*, watercolor and gouache on paper, 2024.

*Florilegium from left to right:*

- Sir Joseph Banks, Bt by William Dickinson, after Sir Joshua Reynolds mezzotint, published 1774 NPG D7504 © National Portrait Gallery, London
- Finished print 275, Alecto Historical Editions
- Detail of plate 740, Alecto Historical Editions
- *Banksia ericifolia* L.f., Recorded by: Sir Joseph Banks, Daniel Solander, 28 - 6 / 4 - 5 / 1770. Collection code: BOT ( Botany). Natural History Museum. (2023). BM000552343 [Photograph]. Licensed under CC-BY-4.0

Words : JD Mittmann  
Design: Sally Young  
Printing: Half Price Printing

# Garden Tours

## Maranoa Garden, Balwyn

Parring Road, Balwyn

Monday to Friday 7:30 am - 4 pm

Saturday, Sunday and public holidays:  
10 am to 5 pm

## Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne

Birdwood Avenue, Melbourne

free guided walk, 1.5 hrs daily 10.30 am

(except Mondays) - bookings online essential

## Cranbourne Gardens

Ballarto Road and Botanic Drive, Cranbourne

Garden Highlights Walk in September,

1hr at 11 am - bookings online essential

## Geelong Botanical Gardens

Cnr Podbury and Eastern Park Dr,  
East Geelong

guided walks 11 am Wednesdays, 2 pm

Sundays - simply meet the guide at the  
entrance

## Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden

24 The Georgian Road, Olinda

The Garden Tour Experience via open-air  
electric people mover

Wednesdays in August, daily in

September - November (except Tuesdays)

11:00 am - 3:45 pm every 45 minutes

- tickets via the gift shop or by contacting  
8427 2087

## Chelsea Australian Garden at Olinda

24 The Georgian Road, Olinda

- located within the Dandenong Ranges  
Botanic Garden

10 am - 4:30 pm, Monday - Sunday