



# Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages

*Bernard Smith*

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## **Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages** Bernard Smith

In this book Bernard Smith explores in more depth the issues first dealt with in his classic *European Vision and the South Pacific*. He continues his careful examination of how European artists and scientists travelling to the Pacific during the time of Cook's voyages were stimulated to see the world in new and creative ways. In analysing intensely personal responses to a newly accessible environment, Bernard Smith shows how science, topography and travel had an impact on current pictorial genres, how an empirical naturalism affected long-standing classical conventions, and how difficult it was for the artists to portray people and places they knew little about. Smith's scrutiny of the pictorial and documentary evidence results in some surprising findings. He argues that the obligation science placed on art to provide information was a factor in the triumph of Impressionism during the late nineteenth century. He points out, for example, that William Hodges, Cook's official artist on his second voyage to the Pacific, was one of the first artists to adopt plein-air methods of painting. Describing the impact of the Pacific world on burgeoning English Romanticism, Smith tells of the crucial influence of Cook's astronomer, William Wales, on S.T. Coleridge's imaginative development. He describes how John Webber's apparently documentary art was fashioned to suit political concerns. He examines critically the relevance of Edward Said's *Orientalism* for our understanding of European perceptions of the Pacific. With its breadth of vision and attention to detail, its exploration of the complex relationship between the pursuit of knowledge and the exercise of power, *Imagining the Pacific* will take its place alongside Bernard Smith's earlier work as a milestone in historical scholarship and a major contribution to an understanding of the development of European art.

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