

Can we imagine? *Men*

Lyssiotis writes, 'Darwin's dictum was Let us Imagine. So let's find the courage to follow his instructions and see if we can imagine the possibility of a nineteenth century notebook!' Charles Darwin was a prolific writer and correspondent on scientific matters, keeping thorough journals, notebooks and scientific diaries. Of particular importance was his *Journal of researches*, an account of his voyage around the world on HMS *Beagle* (1831-36). Lyssiotis' essential hypothesis is that Darwin may also have kept a hitherto undiscovered personal journal to reflect, draw and 'Imagine'.

Friendship and vanity account for my writing the introductory essay ... The vanity is in my desire to be associated with the creativity of one of our country's premier visual artists.

Humphrey McQueen

Lyssiotis and McQueen had often discussed the possibility of collaborating. McQueen, with his background as a historian, author and journalist, penned the scholarly introduction, contextualising Darwin through the work of two other outstanding nineteenth-century botanists/scientists: Joseph Hooker (1817-1911), and Gregor Mendel (1822-84). Hooker, a close personal friend of Darwin's and a defender of natural selection, catalogued 7000 of Darwin's Australian specimens in the Kew Herbarium. Mendel, an Austrian scientist, is acknowledged as the Father of Genetics. McQueen also examines evolutionary theory and the creation controversy so prevalent at the time. Darwin's *On the origin of species* sounded the death knell of teleology (intelligent design) and the concept of Divine intervention.

Once upon a time, there were no flowers at all.

Loren Eiseley

Central to McQueen's essay is Darwin's notion of natural selection through the inherent beauty and colour of flowers. He viewed this coloration as a device for attracting insects and birds for pollination. McQueen alludes to Charles Darwin, his son Francis, and Thomas Huxley's argument that 'The colour in plants was for propagation, not to convey the creator's benign aesthetic'. McQueen's extensive research on Darwin

CASSIE DOYLE EXPLORES THIS STUNNING TITLE FROM THE LIBRARY'S COLLECTION OF ARTISTS' BOOKS.

Above and opposite: Various plates from H McQueen & P Lyssiotis, *Men of flowers*, Masterthief, Melbourne, 2010.

The year 2009 marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Darwin, and the 150th anniversary of the first edition of *On the origin of species*. It also marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, which commissioned a book to celebrate.

Men of flowers: Charles Darwin, Joseph Hooker and Gregor Mendel is the visually stunning and meticulously crafted outcome of that commission, a collaboration between Humphrey McQueen and Peter Lyssiotis. Completed in 2010, in an edition of ten copies with three artist's proofs signed by the authors, it closely follows the style of nineteenth-century illustrated botanical works, including the large format, appropriate typeface, scholarly introductory essay and sumptuous illustrations.

of flowers

led him to the works of American natural science writer, anthropologist, philosopher and educator Loren Eiseley (1907-77), whose work was heavily influenced by Darwin and 'The Age of Flowers'. A poetical and imaginative essayist, Eiseley wrote:

The flowers bloomed and bloomed in ever larger and more spectacular varieties. Some were pale unearthly night flowers intended to lure moths in the evening twilight, some among the orchids even took the shape of female spiders in order to attract wandering males, some flamed redly in the light of noon or twinkled modestly in the meadow grasses.

Lyssiotis is a productive collaborator, as demonstrated by other books held in the Fryer Library, such as *1316* with Angela Cavalieri (2004), *A gardener at midnight: travels in the Holy Land; from drawings made on the spot* by Yabez Al-Kitab with Brian Castro (2004) and *The bird, the belltower* with Dimitris Vardoulakis (2005).

Integral to *Men of flowers* is Lyssiotis' concept of 'imagination', which is reflected in the illustrations. Lyssiotis pays homage to the style

of botanical books of old, but his luminous, imaginative and brilliantly coloured illustrations do not reflect or dictate the scientific and detailed botanical drawings demanded of similar florilegia in the nineteenth century. Rather, his work alludes to Darwin's possible emotions during the five-year voyage around the world on HMS *Beagle*: the colourful pencil sketches in the imaginary personal journal may reflect Darwin's moods and emotional state of mind at the time.

Could Darwin have ever 'imagined' his blessed orchids and plants so visually?

Fryer Library holds copy number seven. The typeface is Bauer Bodoni 30 pt and was set by Andrew Cunningham. The printing is by Bernie Rackham of Redwood Limited Prints and it is printed on 200 gsm Magnani, Velata Avorio paper. It is hand-bound by the Bindery of Wayne Stock, particularly by Imogen Yang.

CASSIE DOYLE has worked in arts librarianship for over twenty-five years at the State Library of Queensland and The University of Queensland. She curated the online exhibition *Daphne Mayo: a significant woman of her time* for Fryer Library and *More than gloss: Australian limited edition and deluxe art books* for the State Library.

