

Case 13 2012/13: two paintings by George Stubbs, *The Kongouro from New Holland* (The Kangaroo) and *Portrait of a Large Dog* (The Dingo)

Expert adviser's statement

Reviewing Committee Secretary's note: Please note that any illustrations referred to have not been reproduced on the Arts Council England Website

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item(s)

- **What is it?**

A pair of paintings by George Stubbs representing Australian mammals in landscape settings, one identified as a Kangaroo and the other as a Dingo

- **What is it made of?**

Oil paint on two panels

- **What are its measurements?**

60.5 x 71.5 cms and 61 x 71 cms

- **Who is the artist/maker and what are their dates?**

George Stubbs (1724-1806)

- **What date is the item?**

Both panels are signed and dated 1772

- **What condition is it in?**

We believe the paintings to be in good condition. They have been exhibited at Parham House during the public openings and are currently advertised on-line as among the highlights of the display there (<http://www.parhaminsussex.co.uk/the-house/collections.html>). Only the Kangaroo has been exhibited in gallery exhibitions in modern times (in 1951 and 1957)

2. Context

- **Provenance**

Both pictures share an ownership history:

Commissioned by Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) in 1771-2; by descent through the family of his widow, Dorothea (née Hugessen; 1758-1828); by descent to Mrs Mary Keith OBE, (née Knatchbull-Hugessen; b.1909); sold through Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox to the Hon Clive Pearson and Mrs Alicia Pearson (née Knatchbull) of Parham Park, Sussex in 1970; by descent to the present owner

- **Key literary and exhibition references**

Exhibitions:

Society of Artists, London 1773, no. 318 ('Portrait of the Kongouro from New Holland, 1770') and no. 319 ('Ditto, of a large dog')

George Stubbs, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool 1951 no.64 ('Kangaroo')

George Stubbs, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1957 no.52 ('A Kangaroo')

Literary references:

Averil Lysaght, 'Captain Cook's Kangaroo', *New Scientist*, 14 March 1957, pp.17-19

Rex and Thea Reinets, *Early Artists of Australia*, Sydney 1963, pp.11-12

M.K. Beddie ed., *Bibliography of Captain James Cook*, Library of New South Wales, Sydney 2nd edn 1970, pp.183-4

Basil Taylor, *Stubbs*, London 1971, p.30

Constance-Anne Parker, *Mr Stubbs, the Horse Painter*, London 1971, pp.47, 90

Averil Lysaght, 'Banks's Artists and his *Endeavour* Collections', in *Captain Cook and the South Pacific*, The British Museum Yearbook 3, London 1979, pp.9-50

Robert Fountain and Alfred Gates, *Stubbs's Dogs: The Hounds and Domestic Dogs of the Eighteenth Century as Seen through the Paintings of George Stubbs*, London 1984, cat. no. 8, and pp.68-70

George Stubbs, 1724-1806, exh. cat., Tate Gallery London 1984, p.120.

Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd edn, New Haven and London 1985, pp.14, 167

Harold B. Carter, *Sir Joseph Banks*, British Museum (Natural History), London 1988, pp.90-1

J. H. Callaby, 'The Natural History Drawings' in Bernard Smith and Alwynne Wheeler eds, *The Art of the First Fleet*, New Haven and London 1988, pp.149-50

Christopher Lennox-Boyd, Rob Dixon and Tim Clayton, *George Stubbs: The Complete Engraved Works*, London 1989, pp.56-60 and nos.361-472

Jakelin Troy, *King Plates: A History of Aboriginal Gorgets*, Canberra 1993, p.55

Rüdiger Joppien, 'Sir Joseph Banks and the World of Art in Great Britain', in R.E.R. Banks et al eds, *Sir Joseph Banks: A Global Perspective*, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew 1994 pp.87-103

Peter Beilharz, *Imagining the Antipodes: Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith*, Cambridge 1997, p.77

Markman Ellis, 'Tales of Wonder: Constructions of the Kangaroo in Late Eighteenth-Century Scientific Discourse' in Margaret Lincoln ed., *Science and Exploration in the Pacific: European Voyages to the Southern Oceans in the Eighteenth Century*, Woodbridge 1998, pp.163-182

Victoria Dickenson, *Drawn from Life: Science and Art in the Portrayal of the New World*, Toronto 1998, pp.166-7

Malcolm Cormack, 'Stubbs and Science' in Nicholas J. Hall ed., *Fearful Symmetry: George Stubbs, painter of the English Enlightenment*, New York 2000, p.43

Judy Egerton, *George Stubbs, Painter: Catalogue Raisonné*, New Haven and London 2007, nos. 143 and 144

Eric Frederick Gollanek, "'Empire Follows Art": Exchange and the Sensory Worlds of Empire in Britain and its Colonies, 1740-1775', PhD, University of Delaware 2008 p.298

John McDonald, *Art of Australia*, vol,1, Sydney 2008, ill. p.27

Bregtje Hatendorf-Wallach, 'Le Spectacle de la Nature, or, Nature Display'd: The Spectacularization of Nature in Eighteenth-Century France and England', PhD, New York University 2011, p.158

3. Waverley criteria

- Which of the Waverley criteria does the item meet? (If it is of 'outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art learning or history' which area of art learning or history).
- Very briefly why?

Waverley 1: It is so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune because:

George Stubbs was the outstanding painter of animals in eighteenth century Britain, and a figure of pivotal importance in the history of British art more widely. These are highly exceptional examples of his paintings of 'exotic' subjects, part of a very small group of such works by this artist which have exerted an enormous influence on British perceptions of the wider world, on the genres of sporting and animal painting, and on natural history illustration. Commissioned by Sir Joseph Banks, arising from Captain James Cook's celebrated 'first voyage of discovery' and representing iconic Australian animals, this pair of works vividly illuminate the moment of the British discovery of Australia and tie together in a quite unique way three of the most historically significant figures in, respectively, British art, science and exploration.

Waverley 3: It is of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history.

The paintings are of outstanding significance for the study of art history and for the history of exploration, science and natural history illustration. The circumstances in which these paintings were produced illuminate the intersection of art, exploration and science at a seminal moment in the development of each of these areas of human endeavour. Both images have accordingly been highly important reference points in the specialist literatures in all these fields; the image of the *Kangaroo*, in particular, was endlessly reproduced and discussed throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

What does it depict?

One panel represents a fox-like animal walking, from right to left, before an open landscape of low hills. The creature was first identified as a 'Large Dog' and is believed to be intended as a Dingo, native to Australia.

The other panel represents an upright mammal, looking back over its shoulder and sitting on a rock before an extensive, sparsely wooded landscape with mountains in the background. The creature was identified by the artist when the painting was first exhibited as a 'Kongouro, from New Holland, 1770'. The precise species has been disputed in modern times, and the animal has been variously identified as a wallaby, wallaroo, or a small or young kangaroo, all of which are native to Australia.

What does it tell us about that period?

The two paintings were the result of a commission to the artist from the scientist Sir Joseph Banks, immediately following his part in Captain James Cook's 'first voyage of discovery' to the Pacific (1768-1771). The voyage is traditionally identified as the moment of European discovery of Australia; while not strictly true, it was certainly the point at which the region was first subjected to modern scientific scrutiny, resulting in a plethora of discoveries which inspired a new interest in scientific exploration at home. The seminal importance of the voyage for science and for perceptions of Britain's place in the world can hardly be overstated. Stubbs' paintings are the most significant artistic products directly related to that voyage: first exhibited in London in 1773 immediately after their execution, they brought to public attention two of the animals who were to be most closely identified with the extraordinary, even baffling, new world of Australia. That Banks set out on the voyage accompanied by visual artists, and that he moved so swiftly after his return to England to engage the talents of the leading animal painter of the day to create images in oils, indicates the centrality of visual documentation to scientific enquiry in the eighteenth century and the particular role of the fine artist (as opposed to the illustrator or draughtsman). The paintings are an eloquent testimony to the role of art, with its imaginative and sensual aspects, in public understanding of scientific exploration and the natural world at the dawning of the modern era: they are iconic not only of the discovery of Australia, but of the values and methods of the Enlightenment as a whole.

Who made it/painted it/wrote it?

George Stubbs (1724-1806)

No. of comparable items by the same artist already in the UK, in both public and private collections?

Predominantly a painter of horses, dogs and sporting subjects, Stubbs also produced a small number of studies of 'exotic' animals.

Surviving pictures in the UK include: the *Bull Moose* (1770) and *Blackbuck* (c.1770-8), both painted for the anatomist William Hunter (Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow); *Bailey's Monkey and Mr Gough's Monkey* (c.1770-5) (Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow), a *Yak* (1791; versions in a private collection and Royal College of Surgeons) and *Rhinoceros* (1790?; Royal College of Surgeons) all commissioned by the anatomist John Hunter; and the 'Green Monkey' (1774; private collection and Walker Art Gallery). Among graphic works, we would note the group of drawings of 'Marmaduke Tunstall's Mouse Lemur' bequeathed by Sir Joseph Banks to The British Museum.

Stubbs also produced a series of images on the 'Horse and Lion' theme and individual pictures including tigers, lions and cheetahs, but these subjects were taken up for dramatic effect rather than, as with the aforementioned pictures, documentary or scientific purposes.

The pair of paintings of a *Kangaroo* and *Dingo* remains unique as painted portraits by Stubbs of Australian animals and as the only definite commissions from Sir Joseph Banks. Besides the drawings of Lemurs noted here, which were associated with Banks, the posthumous sale catalogue of Stubbs' studio contents (26-27 May 1807) included two pictures connecting him with the artist: 'A Horse in spirited action with the Portrait of a celebrated Dog, Carlo, the property of Sir Joseph Banks' and 'Portrait of a Horse, formerly belonging to Earl Pomfret, and a favorite Dog of Sir Joseph Banks' introduced in a Landscape'. Neither survive and the titles would indicate that they were conventional horse and dog portraits.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).

Significance of figures associated with the item(s): maker/client/owners?

George Stubbs was the pre-eminent painter of animal subjects in the eighteenth century who established the standard for sporting art for the generations to come. He is a major figure in British art history and internationally acknowledged as an eighteenth-century master. Sir Joseph Banks, who commissioned the pictures, is the most important figure in the development of natural history in Britain. His scientific achievements exercised an enormous influence; the bulk of his collections passed to the British Museum in 1827 and has accordingly been in the public domain since that time. Captain James Cook is one of the most famous explorers in history: his three 'voyages of discovery' to the Pacific were of seminal importance in

the expansion of Britain's global enterprise and defining moments in the emergence of modern Britain.

Significance of subject-matter?

The subject matter of both paintings is of exceptional interest from the point of view of the history of exploration, natural history, and zoological illustration.

The paintings represent two creatures who were discovered by Europeans only with the voyage of the *Endeavour* to Australia in 1770. The kangaroo, at first identified by the explorers only as 'the animal' was first sighted in June and July 1770; Sydney Parkinson, a draughtsman accompanying the expedition, made two sketches of the creature at that time. Several were killed, including an immature female brought down by Banks's greyhound, and the skins and skeletons of these were returned to England. After embarking on the return journey, on 4 August 1770, Joseph Banks wrote up his observations of the creature and identified it, for the first time, as a 'Kangooroo', taking the name from what he had heard in the speech of aborigines in Queensland. Banks returned to England with the rest of the expedition in July 1771, and must have commissioned the painting from Stubbs soon after. The resulting picture was exhibited at the Society of Artists in London in 1773 as 'The Kongouro from New Holland, 1770', a title which makes explicit the origins of the image in those first, historic encounters three years earlier. In modern times there has been considerable discussion about the precise identity of the species represented by Stubbs and the nature of the specimens on which he must have based the image. The generally accepted viewpoint now is that it was based on the skin of the young female kangaroo brought down by Banks's dog, which would have been stuffed or inflated. Stubbs would also have had reference to Banks's notes and recollections, and to the two drawings by Parkinson although the artist himself had died on the return voyage. Importantly, the physical specimens on which Stubbs must have based his painting of the Kangaroo are now lost or destroyed, so the painting survives as the most substantial piece of material evidence relating to the first sight of this iconic animal.

Stubbs' painting was reproduced as an engraving for John Hawkesworth's *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of His present Majesty for making discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere* (1773) and thereafter formed the basis of the earliest scientific descriptions and zoological illustrations. It became 'the definitive representation of this previously unrecorded species' (Lennox-Boyd, p.58) and 'the image that established the animal in the public mind' (Ellis, p.175). Charles Lennox-Boyd, in his definitive catalogue of engravings after Stubbs, records no less than 111 printed reproductions and derivations, in books about Cook's voyages, in works of natural history, in encyclopaedias and dictionaries of animals, in illustrations by Thomas Bewick and his circle, and in other contexts, even then taking the record only down to around 1850. Reproductions of the image have proliferated since that date, in popular and scholarly publications, as a motif in the design of Aboriginal Gorgets, and even inspiring the title of a piece, 'Stubbs Inflates a Kangaroo' by the British jazz-rock outfit The Creams (2009).

The *Dingo* appears to have been based only on Banks's eyewitness accounts of the animal: no specimens relating to the species are known to have been brought back by the *Endeavour*. It was first exhibited alongside the *Kangaroo* in 1773 as a matching 'Portrait of a Large Dog' and the modern view is that the image reflects only a rather generalised understanding of the animal's anatomy and character. Although arguably as novel as the *Kangaroo* as a first attempt to picture this iconic animal, it did not have the same pictorial legacy and was superseded by an engraving based on observations of a living specimen as early as 1789. Nonetheless, the picture forms a partner to the *Kangaroo*; they were exhibited together as a matching pair by the artist, and appear to have remained together since the time of their creation.

Significance of materials/process/usage?

There are only a very small number of oil paintings representing scientific specimens: Stubbs is pre-eminent in that genre and the major examples of his output in that vein are identified in this document (above). While there are broadly comparable drawings, and a multitude of engraved images which ultimately disseminated very widely (including to Australia), these lack the artistic ambition, imaginative engagement and, crucially, texture and colour, represented in the original oils.

Egerton asserts (p.337): 'The kangaroo and the dingo are the only creatures Stubbs was unable to paint from life'. As noted above, he was obliged instead to work from verbal accounts, and in the case of the kangaroo, from slight sketches and preserved skin and skeleton which no longer survive. While this explains the shortcomings, from a strictly scientific point of view, in the treatment of the anatomy of these animals, and while it may also have contributed to the relative weakness of these images as artworks according to conventional aesthetic criteria, the process behind the production of these works is historically significant. It exposes the material circumstances which helped determine the transmission of knowledge about Australia to Britain, and the importance of pictures – and of art as such, with its imaginative dimension – in disseminating that knowledge.

Is/are the item(s) of local/regional/national importance?

The items are of national importance, relating to a seminal moment in the history of British scientific exploration and the discovery of Australia

Summary of related items in public/private ownership in the UK

The other paintings of 'exotic' animals by Stubbs in the UK are identified above, under (1). The *Kangaroo* was engraved many times, and versions of the printed images published in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are accessible in many public libraries and museum collections. Sidney Parkinson's two drawings of a Kangaroo, which probably provided in part the basis of Stubbs' painting, are now in the collection of the Natural History Museum among the large quantity of his drawings relating to the voyage of

the *Endeavour* left by Banks to the nation. Further drawings of Pacific animals from the collection of Joseph Banks are in The British Museum and The British Library. The two paintings are therefore part of a larger body of visual and documentary materials with an established place within the national heritage.