

Finch & C^o



AN ALBUMEN PRINT OF TWO AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES LOUIS AND HIS WIFE 'IN THE WILD'

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FROM THE CLARENCE RIVER REGION

BY J.W. LINDT (1845 – 1926)

EARLY 1870'S

SIZE: 19.5CM HIGH, 15CM WIDE – 7¾ INS HIGH, 6 INS WIDE

LITERATURE

ONE OF THE DRIVING FORCES IN THE COLLECTION OF AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY WAS THE IDEA THAT ABORIGINES WERE A 'DYING RACE'. ABORIGINAL SOCIETY WAS VIEWED AS DEGRADED AND TOTALLY LACKING IN SOCIAL DYNAMIC AND THUS ITS EXTINCTION WAS BY EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS INEVITABLE. IMAGES OF ABORIGINES WERE INTENDED PRECISELY TO CAPTURE THE 'REALITY' BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE. AMONGST THE MOST CELEBRATED IMAGES, SOMETIMES ENTITLED 'LAST OF A€¦', WERE THOSE OF J.W. LINDT, A GERMAN BORN PHOTOGRAPHER.

IN THE 1870'S RELATIVELY FEW 'FIELD' IMAGES WERE MADE BECAUSE OF THE TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED AND CONSTRUCTED GENRE PIECES WERE PRODUCED IN A STUDIO SHOWING THE DESIRED ASPECTS OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE. LINDT'S IMAGES ARE POWERFULLY SYMPATHETIC AND STATUESQUE, BUT IT IS THE SYMPATHY OF ROMANTIC SENTIMENT FOR A 'DYING RACE'. THESE SENTIMENTS ARE ECHOED IN THE STILL LETHARGY, THE SENSE OF RESIGNATION WHICH SUFFUSES THE IMAGES.

LINDT'S MOST FAMOUS IMAGES ARE THOSE FROM THE SERIES ENTITLED 'THE CLARENCE RIVER PEOPLE' TAKEN IN THE 1870'S DEPICTING SUBJECTS SURROUNDED BY ITEMS OF THEIR MATERIAL CULTURE AGAINST A SOFT ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE. DESPITE THE HIGHLY CONSTRUCTED NATURE OF THESE IMAGES LINDT'S CONTEMPORARIES DESCRIBED THEM AS 'THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT AT REPRESENTING THE NATIVE BLACKS TRUTHFULLY AS WELL AS ARTISTICALLY' (THE MECHANICAL EYE IN AUSTRALIA; DAVIES AND STANBURY, 1985) WHICH SUGGESTS THAT THEY FULFILLED CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTION OF THE ABORIGINAL RACE. THE INFLUENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES, AND OF THE EARLIER 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS AND ENGRAVINGS, IN BOTH MOULDING AND PERPETUATING EUROPEAN IDEAS OF AUSTRALIA AND ITS NATIVE PEOPLES SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.

