Elisabeth Findlay

Art and Patronage in Early Colonial Melbourne: John Pascoe Fawkner and William Strutt

Fawkner, to whom the proud city of Melbourne owes its origin, was one of the early acquaintances in the Colony and steady friend; and a man whose ability, marvellous energy and patriotism have not by any means received their due need of recognition . . . if I can add a leaf or two to the laurels which will some day, in all fairness I may say, be accorded his memory, I feel that I shall but have done my duty.[1]

JOHN PASCOE FAWKNER, the self-declared founder of Melbourne, possessed many amusing and curious habits. Amongst them was his rather eccentric routine of trekking down to the wharves to greet all new arrivals to the colony.[2] We can with some certainty speculate that Fawkner was on the docks when the frigate the *Culloden* sailed into port in July 1850, standing ready to extend the hand of friendship to the young British artist William Strutt as he disembarked. The two men quickly formed a close acquaintance and as their partnership developed they became united in their determination to create enduring and inspiring images of the people and events from Melbourne's embryonic history. Fawkner was Strutt's most constant and stalwart patron. As the opening quotation shows, Strutt was a firm acolyte of Fawkner and unwaveringly loyal.

Both men were ambitious and enterprising, devising and envisaging grand, uplifting public art schemes. Unfortunately, the duo's plans also consistently faltered, with their idealistic visions failing to come to fruition. Their ideas were regularly dismissed and even subjected to comic derision. Despite ridicule and disappointment, their enthusiasm and championing of the local visual arts represents a crucial, if often overlooked, moment in the history of not only Victorian but Australian art. This article tracks the story of the collaboration between Fawkner and Strutt, charting in particular the genesis of debates and support for public art programs, set against the changing dynamics of art patronage in Melbourne in the 1850s.[3]

Fawkner: an unlikely champion of the visual arts

Fawkner was an unlikely champion and benefactor of the visual arts. His background certainly did not dispose him to be a cultural advocate. The early chapters of Fawkner's life in Australia are not illustrious, and indeed border on the disreputable. He arrived in Tasmania as a son of a convict in 1803 and he lived in poverty with his mother and sister. He was constantly in the company of convicts and their families, an environment that fomented his revolutionary spirit. Both of Fawkner's biographers describe a complex and outspoken man, who always saw himself as a rebel and defender of the oppressed.[4] In his

early twenties he abetted a group of escaped prisoners and for his troubles was sentenced to five hundred lashes and three years labour. The episode meant that forevermore he would bear, and need to suppress, the tainted 'ex-convict' label, the son of convict who became a convict himself.

In 1822 Fawkner married Eliza Cobb. Fawkner used to tell an amusing tale of how he met Eliza. In the early years of the colonies there was a shortage of women, so men would line up along the docks in the hope of meeting a bride-to-be. Undoubtedly, this is how Fawkner developed his life-long practice of meeting ships. Clutching wedding certificates the young hopefuls would target the most attractive single women. Fawkner recounted that on the day he met Eliza he had actually chosen a prettier woman but she was stolen off him, so he opted for the plainer Eliza. In reality Eliza did not arrive on an immigrant ship but had instead been transported in 1818, at the age of 17, for stealing a baby. So she too was a convict. Fawkner's yarn about his introduction to Eliza demonstrates how adept he was at reinventing and fabricating his own life story. Eliza herself was not above such embellishment. In a quite amusing episode after John died, Eliza aged 70 married a 44 year old and declared on their marriage certificate that she was only 56.

In William Strutt's portrait of Eliza of 1856 her chequered history is obscured and replaced with an image of respectability. She appears suitably matronly in her modest day dress, typical of the 1850s and designed to fully cover the body. More flesh was only acceptable in the evenings. Eliza is shown with a headdress rather than a cap over her exactly parted hair. The headdress is quite elaborate for the period and harks back to the excesses of 1840s, complete with a flower garland, feathers, and a precisely placed curl. A delicate lace collar and long chain complete Mrs Fawkner's transformation to the wife of a gentleman. The fashion in the 1850s was not for slim silhouettes but instead large, voluminous crinolines were in vogue, so Eliza fills the canvas. Strutt though has judiciously not over-flattered his sitter, for she had a range of physical flaws that he could not avoid. Eliza had a caste to her left eye that meant her eyes did not look quite in the same direction. The condition is just hinted at in the painting with her eyes sized slightly differently. Her skin was also reputedly pock marked and Strutt has not given her perfect ivory skin. Again there is just a suggestion of her ruddy complexion.

In 1835 John and Eliza moved from Tasmania to the Port Phillip District. They erected a hotel on part of the site that would soon become Melbourne. Fawkner declared to the world that he was the founder of the city, and refuted the claims of his handsome rival John Batman, who conveniently died prematurely in 1839. Fawkner had a strong and abiding determination to be recognised as the 'Father of Melbourne', a determination bordering on obsession. His position in Melbourne society though was always tenuous and he remained a loner, never entering the fold of Melbourne's elite, always operating on the fringes of good society. He developed a reputation for being difficult, irascible

Opposite: William Strutt, *J. P. Fawkner, Esq. M. L. C.*, 1853, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 47.5 cm. State Library of Victoria [H15375]

and cantankerous but also strong and determined. In addition to working as a hotel-keeper, he was a newspaper proprietor and landowner and accumulated enough wealth to position himself as a man of influence, despite his convict background. In 1851 he was elected as a member of the Victorian Legislative Council, a position he held for eighteen years, annoying and entertaining his fellow politicians with his anti-authoritarian speeches and ranting.

William Strutt: surviving in a colonial market

William Strutt came to Australia in search of adventure and to improve his health after an exhausting period training and working in Europe. His father had died just days before he set sail. Strutt's journal reveals that he recuperated on the voyage, although he complained of the poor food and his dissolute fellow passengers.[5] He landed in Melbourne refreshed and invigorated but still no doubt appreciative of the hospitality extended by the sober father-figure of Fawkner. Fawkner was 58, now a wily well known local identity well attuned to the machinations of the colony. Strutt on the other hand was just 25, a newcomer who found everything 'so strange and new'.[6]

While Fawkner's past was unsavoury, Strutt possessed an impressive artistic pedigree. He was one of the finest – if not the finest – of the figurative artists to arrive on Australian shores in the 1850s. He had studied widely in Paris, including at the atelier of Michel Martin Drolling and Joseph-Nicholas Jouy. He gained entry to the École des Beaux-Arts and worked under the tutelage of the widely acclaimed Paul Delaroche and Horace Vernet. The approach of both these giants of the French Academy to history painting and capturing important historical events surfaced in Strutt's colonial work. Strutt's training was essentially conservative and academic and based upon the rigorous copying of plaster casts and the work of the old masters. He was a skilled draughtsman. All his work was underpinned by carefully prepared studies, with a close interplay between his sketches and finished paintings.[7]

In Europe Strutt also worked as an illustrator, gaining commercial skills that were quickly welcomed in the colony. Soon after his arrival he was absorbed into the fledgling illustrated print industry and was employed by the Ham brothers to work as an illustrator for the *Illustrated Australian Magazine*. He produced an assortment of scenes of colonial life, from images of the native police to diggers preparing for the goldfields. He also captured significant events such as the opening of Prince's Bridge by Governor La Trobe, which coincided with the celebrations of Port Phillip gaining separation from New South Wales. While Strutt captures all the pomp and ceremony of the cannons fired by soldiers on the banks of Yarra River, he is very attentive to historical detail. He carefully depicts the line of the cavalry and the crowd of excited onlookers, including Theophilus Ham, one of the publishers of the magazine, mounted on the horse in the left corner.[8] This penchant for accuracy was inherited from Vernet who steered away from idealised Classical generalisations and who advocated precise depictions of important historical events.

William Strutt, *Mrs John Pascoe Fawkner*, 1856, oil on canvas,
61.4 x 51.2 cm. State Library of Victoria [H32027]

Strutt worked for only a short time as an illustrator. After a failed attempt to win his fortune on the Ballarat goldfields, on 16 September 1851 Strutt announced to the 'gentry and the public' that he had commenced the practice of his profession as a portrait painter.[9] While Strutt is best remembered for his large history paintings, including *Bushrangers, Victoria, 1852*, *Black Thursday* and *The Burial of Burke and Wills*, these were painted after he returned to England. In Australia his main line of business was portraiture. As was the case for so many artists, portraiture was Strutt's economic staple. It was the lucrative commissions for large-scale portraits that allowed him to survive in the colony, with one commission leading to another. As the portraits were publicly displayed they served as a kind of advertisement for securing the next patron.

In his journal Strutt recalled that the 'commissions for portraits flowed in'.[10] Most of these portrait commissions were of prominent, public figures, rather than private citizens. Strutt's portraits do not have the drama of his history paintings, even though he did attempt to instil in his subjects an air of nobility. The conventions and restrictions imposed on depicting men in public office usually resulted in rather dull, safe, conservative images. Competent but dull. Strutt very quickly set up a formula for his full-length portraits, which is clearly evident in his mayoral portraits. The Melbourne City Council established a collection of portraits of the mayors, forming one of the first

William Strutt (engraver Thomas Ham), *The Opening of the Prince's Bridge, Melbourne, November 15, 1850*, 1851, zincographic engraving, 23.0 x 35.5 cm. State Library of Victoria [H82.288/123]

public collections in Australia. Although this collection was under public stewardship it was not publicly funded. Instead it was based on a donation system where the mayors themselves commissioned and paid for their portrait and then presented it to the Council. There was no financial assistance to the donors, so if a mayor wanted to secure his place in the pantheon of heroes he had to pay for it himself. The portraits were hung in the Town Hall Auditorium with the *Argus* referring to the collection as a 'portrait gallery'.[11] Unfortunately, the collection was destroyed in a fire in 1925 and only black and white photographs survive.[12]

Strutt painted two portraits for the mayoral collection, one of Dr Augustus Greeves and another of Andrew Russell, which were both displayed at the Melbourne Exhibition of October 1854. In these full-length portraits Strutt slopes the floor, pushing the sitter to a level above the viewer and forcing us to look up at Greeves and Russell. While both men could almost tumble out of their canvasses, they are poised and stare out confidently. The portrait of Russell is quite stark, as he stands with his hand in his waistcoat, a pose reaching its zenith of popularity in England in the eighteenth century and representing genteel restraint. He holds his gloves in the other hand. There are no direct references to Russell's professional status, while in the portrait of Greeves, Strutt conveys the sense that we have interrupted the mayor at work. Greeves's hand is on his hip and he impatiently observes us as he holds his place on the scroll on the desk in front of him. As Strutt was schooled in a French tradition of portraiture passed down from David and Ingres, he attempts to give his sitters the same intensity as a Napoleon at work.

Strutt sojourned in New Zealand from 1855 to 1856. After returning to Melbourne he recorded that it was harder to get commissions, stating 'a thing much more difficult than on my first arrival, for there was competition and but a slender demand for art'.[13] Artists who had not found their fortunes on the goldfields had returned to town adding to the competition, along with photography's increasing encroachment on the

Charles Nettleton, *Public Library Art Exhibition: Interior of the Exhibition*, 1869, album silver, 24.2 x 28.9 cm. State Library of Victoria [H12955]. Note the prominent position (front right) given to William Strutt's portrait of Sir John O'Shanassy (reproduced on page 43).

portrait market.[14] Portraiture though remained Strutt's mainstay. Apart from the work he undertook for Fawkner (discussed below) he worked on a couple of 'subscription' portraits. In the nineteenth century it was common practice to fund – or at least try to fund – public art commissions through subscriptions, which was essentially fund-raising. The public was called upon to make a donation and when enough funds were raised the artwork would be commissioned. The first time this type of subscription process took place in Australia was with the portrait of Governor Brisbane in Sydney.[15] Strutt's first subscription portrait was the full-length of Frederick Sargood, the first Chairman of the Municipal Council of Prahran, funded by the rate papers in 1858.

Strutt's most significant subscription commission was the imposing portrait of the prominent Irish politician John O'Shanassy.[16] In 1860 the St Patrick's Society, an organisation of Irish Catholics living in the colony, raised money from its members and funded a painting of O'Shanassy to be housed in the Society's meeting hall, with the order from the 'Portrait Committee' that it should occupy the most conspicuous part of the room.[17] The portrait of O'Shanassy is nearly three metres high. The arresting scale of the painting is captured in Charles Nettleton's photograph of the Public Library Art

Exhibition of 1869. This wonderful photograph provides a rare and valuable glimpse into display practices in the mid nineteenth century, with O'Shanassy's portrait occupying a privileged position alongside a likeness of Queen Victoria.

By the late 1850s Strutt's style and approach to portraiture shifted. Following his trip to New Zealand the French restraint in his portraits gives way to Victorian excess. The O'Shanassy portrait is more cluttered and dramatic than the earlier portraits. Consistent with many of Strutt's other portraits, the floor is tilted and O'Shanassy is depicted working; in this case he is receiving a deputation. The room though is crowded with the paraphernalia of office, with documents strewn across the desk and ledgers scattered on the floor. Most noticeably, and rather incongruously, great swathes of red fabric tumble around O'Shanassy giving a sense of swagger and theatricality. The Classical column on the left completes the framing. Such columns were an abiding feature of formal portraiture over many centuries but were particularly popular in the Victorian era because they conferred an air of culture, refinement and enduring respectability.

Fawkner's Private Commissions

Strutt's greatest patron and supporter was John Pascoe Fawkner. Fawkner was quick to realise that the young artist's talents could be put to good use and that he could play a significant role in commemorating and memorialising Fawkner's part in the foundation of Melbourne. Fawkner cleverly and pre-emptively entrenched himself as Strutt's major patron, well before the rest of colony had even registered that the skilled, well-trained painter was in their midst. Interestingly, his close association with Fawkner seems to have barred Strutt from entry into other sections of genteel colonial society. Prestigious families such as the Ward Coles and the Howitts patronised artists of their inner circle such as Thomas Woolner and Edward La Trobe Bateman but they never sought the services of Strutt, despite his artistic talents.[18]

Strutt's first portrait of Fawkner is a full-length image depicting the politician standing poised to deliver a speech. Fawkner is holding a book in his hand and is leaning on the parliamentary benches; a respectable, steadfast leader working for the greater good. Strutt has again shrewdly and deliberately angled the floor to elevate Fawkner, which was particularly important given Fawkner's lack of physical stature. Fawkner was only 158cm (five-foot-two) tall and had a slight frame, earning him the nickname of 'Little Johnny'. He was reputedly very self-conscious about his height. The pencil and watercolour study for this painting survives and in keeping with Strutt's usual practice it formed the foundation for his work in oil. Strutt has retained Fawkner's basic posture but has swapped a scroll for the book and changed the setting to ensure that there is no mistaking that Fawkner is in Parliament.

As a self-made man, Fawkner completely understood the importance of manipulating public perception and maintaining a popular persona. Given his tentative position in the colonial hierarchy, his grip on power in part depended on projecting an image as a gentleman and statesman, far removed from his convict heritage. Thinking

William Strutt, *Sir John O'Shanassy, Premier of Victoria*, 1860, oil on canvas, 290.0 x 181.0 cm. State Library of Victoria [H2003.1]

strategically, Fawkner ensured that representations of him as a respectable, admirable colonist were constantly in circulation, whether in the form of a painting, print or photograph. Strutt's 1856 portrait of Fawkner provides an instructive example. In this portrait Strutt departs from the full-length format and instead opts for the bust composition, a popular choice in the mid nineteenth century. The ailing Fawkner also may have resisted the onerous task of posing for another standing portrait. Strutt reported that when painting the second portrait Fawkner was unwell and was frequently compelled to kneel down till his coughing fits subsided.[19] Nevertheless we are still presented with a strong and commanding figure, as Fawkner defiantly folds his arms and thoughtfully gazes to a point in the distance. As with the O'Shanassy portrait, Strutt has shifted his style to cater to the more melodramatic tastes of the Victorians, with the penchant for rich red fabrics and, yes, the ubiquitous Classical column tucked away in the background, along with a dramatically lit sky.

The 1856 portrait was exhibited twice. It was displayed at Norton's picture-frame shop in Collins Street, a common venue for artists to present and advertise their work. It

was also hung again at the *Victorian Exhibition of Art*. It received favourable reviews with the *Age* noting that the portrait of our 'Oldest Inhabitant . . . was a good likeness, though it makes him too good looking'.[20] The critics were clearly alert to Fawkner's self-flattery. It was engraved by Samuel Calvert, one of the most prolific engravers in the colony, and published in the *Illustrated Journal of Australasia* in April 1857. The woodcut reached a broad audience when it appeared under the banner of 'Our Portrait Gallery', which was a 'virtual' gallery dedicated to commemorating men of eminence and recording their likenesses for posterity. Clearly the ideas surrounding the establishment of the British National Portrait Gallery in 1856, with its mandate to venerate and memorialise people of significance, were filtering into the colonies.

The Public Commissions

The concept, if not the realisation, of public art projects emerged in Melbourne in the mid 1850s. This was the result of the convergence of a number of factors. The gold rushes had brought wealth and created a richer, increasingly cosmopolitan environment more conducive to cultural growth. Victoria had also separated from New South Wales and become a colony in its own right, fostering a growing sense of colonial pride. The subsequent granting of Responsible Government also prompted discussion of art projects honouring local heroes and celebrating local history.

There was serious deliberation about erecting a statue to Fawkner. A quite extravagant proposal was promulgated for a bust *and* a large bronze estimated to cost £500 once it was erected and fenced.[21] An article in the *Age* describes how the idea for the commission arose, stating that 'on account of the many and eminent public services of Mr Fawkner, also his age and state of health, that it would be very desirable to obtain his bust, and that the subscription should be in small order and that it should come from the great body of his fellow colonists . . . '.[22] Subscriptions were restricted to half-a-crown so that up to 4000 'admirers' could contribute. Sentiment was strong, with the newspapers stating that even Fawkner's opponents must agree that he was worthy of commemoration.[23] But despite the widespread optimism the project ultimately failed. It was just too ambitious and costly. As Tim Bonyhady has noted the demise of the scheme did not reflect Fawkner's lack of popularity.[24] Rather it exposed the colony's inability to translate the growing support of local arts projects into reality. The first major bronze in Australia had only been erected in 1842, a statue of Governor Richard Bourke who was governor of New South Wales from 1831 to 1837.[25] In Victoria, Charles Summers's Burke and Wills monument, unveiled in 1865, was the first major public sculpture. Fawkner was at least in good company as proposals for statues of the Queen and of Shakespeare had also failed.[26]

The satirical *Melbourne Punch* reveled in designing its own monuments to Fawkner.[27] Following the lead of *London Punch*, *Melbourne Punch* enthusiastically targeted politicians and delighted in showing them as simple-minded and pompous. The pages of *Melbourne Punch* were filled with amusing and clever imagery, which was

arguably more nuanced and sophisticated than its London parent. In the witty *Designs for the Fawkner Statue* Mr Punch mockingly compares 'Little Johnny' to a range of heroic figures. Fawkner's wiry physique and visage is implanted into a series of iconic images of heroic figures. *Punch's* first design is adapted from David's dramatic painting of Napoleon crossing the Alps. Instead of riding on a powerful steed Fawkner is precariously balanced on a kangaroo and bears none of the swarthy good looks of the French commander. In the next image Fawkner is wearing a lion's skin with 'patriot' scrawled across the front. He is cast as Hercules swiping at a Hydra with a Papal crown. Finally he appears as a most unlikely Pallas Athene, goddess of all wisdom and guardian of the state, with an owl ridiculously perched on his helmet. The shield would normally bear the head of Medusa but has been replaced with the face of William Haines, the first Premier of Victoria.[28]

While Mr Punch mocked such schemes, Fawkner remained an energetic, proactive advocate of public art projects, most of which opportunely paid tribute to him as much as his fellow colonists. By the mid 1850s there was widespread agreement that art had an edifying effect, with the *Illustrated Journal of Australasia* verbosely asking 'which of us can stand before a fine painting without feeling its emollient influence over the asperities of nature?'[29] The delivery of such refining art to the colony is readily associated with figures such as Redmond Barry.[30] Fawkner though should also be acknowledged. He was also an important spokesman and supporter of local, colonial art and initiated important discussions on the role and nature of public art.

Fawkner's first venture into public art commissions was the idea of producing a large oil painting of the opening of the first Victorian Legislative Council in November 1851. Fawkner commissioned Strutt to produce a series of likenesses of all the noteworthy figures involved in this momentous event. In his journal, Strutt notes that Fawkner requested him to 'make such sketches of the opening scene as would enable me to paint a picture of the event, promising to get members to subscribe towards the execution of the work'.[31] As Heather Curnow notes, the artist must have approached this first historical commission with great enthusiasm.[32] A special platform was constructed in St Patrick's Hall so that Strutt could have a clear view of the gathering. Unfortunately, however, funding for the large oil painting was not secured, with Strutt blaming 'the indifference of the principal actors in this historical scene' for the demise.[33]

The next major event that raised Strutt's hopes of completing a work of historical significance was the opening of the new Houses of Parliament in November 1856. The new Houses of Parliament consisted of two separate bluestone buildings, which had appeared quickly on the Melbourne skyline, taking only ten months to construct. The interiors of the buildings were regarded as particularly impressive. In the sketch of the Legislative Council, Strutt captures the opulence of the chamber, with its towering Corinthian columns and the plush red decorations of the upper house. Fawkner and Strutt again hoped to raise the funds for a large oil painting but again the project did not advance beyond the preliminary sketches. Strutt lamented that he was 'compelled to renounce the completion of the picture and let it lapse altogether'.[34] It would be another

William Strutt, *J. P. Fawkner Settles on the Site of Melbourne 1835*, 1856, watercolour and pencil, 19.6 x 24.8 cm, Parliament House of Victoria. Copy taken from William Strutt, *Victoria the Golden: scenes, sketches and jottings from nature, 1850-1862*, edited by Marjorie Tipping. Melbourne: Library Committee, Parliament of Victoria, 1980, unpgn.

fifty years before such an ambitious scheme would be realised with Tom Roberts's *The Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia*, the so called 'Big Picture'. Strutt's Legislative Council composition echoes the 1851 design with its elevated perspective from the back of the room, receding to the Governor sitting and presiding over affairs. Once again Strutt recorded accurate likenesses of the protagonists, noting in his journal that he 'had secured admirable photographic likenesses of the parties concerned in the important event'.[35]

While working on this project Strutt met the Governor Edward Macarthur and at least salvaged one portrait commission. Strutt completed an equestrian portrait of Macarthur in 1857, which shows the Governor in his full military regalia and mounted on his favourite grey, 'Welcome'. Again we can see how closely Strutt worked to the sketch.[36] The portrait has the melodramatic flavour of Strutt's later colonial work with a turbulent sky and rugged landscape. In Strutt's papers a considerable amount of information survives on this commission, providing a rare insight into costs and negotiations. The portrait was completed in late 1857 with Strutt receiving a payment for it on 23 December, with a note in his paper making reference to the amount of £105.[37]

William Strutt, *Study for the Opening of the First Victorian Parliament Melbourne, 1856*, 1863, pencil and wash on paper, 30.7 x 41.6 cm. State Library of Victoria [H329]

This was probably a partial and final payment with Macarthur advancing Strutt money for materials. The portrait received critical acclaim after it was exhibited in the *Fine Arts Society Exhibition*. James Smith somewhat extravagantly compared it to Titian's portrait of Pope Paul III and said it had something of the spirit of a Van Dyck.[38] Macarthur was so pleased with the portrait that he had a copy made in 1859 and presented it to Parliament as a farewell gesture in 1860.

After the new Houses of Parliament were opened there was considerable discussion about how to adorn the parliamentary chambers. Many colonists hoped that the money could be found to produce a series of frescoes. Similar conversations had just taken place in England on how to decorate the British Houses of Parliament. A Royal Fine Art Commission had decided that the walls of Westminster should be embellished with scenes celebrating British history.[39] This was an era in which 'Galleries of Worthies' were popular. These galleries included imaginary portraits based on biographies and historical narratives and were reconstructions of those deemed worthy of commemoration and regarded as inspirational. There was an emphasis on biography, taking place in tandem with an ethos of self-help and nationalism. The 'worthy' tradition reached its zenith
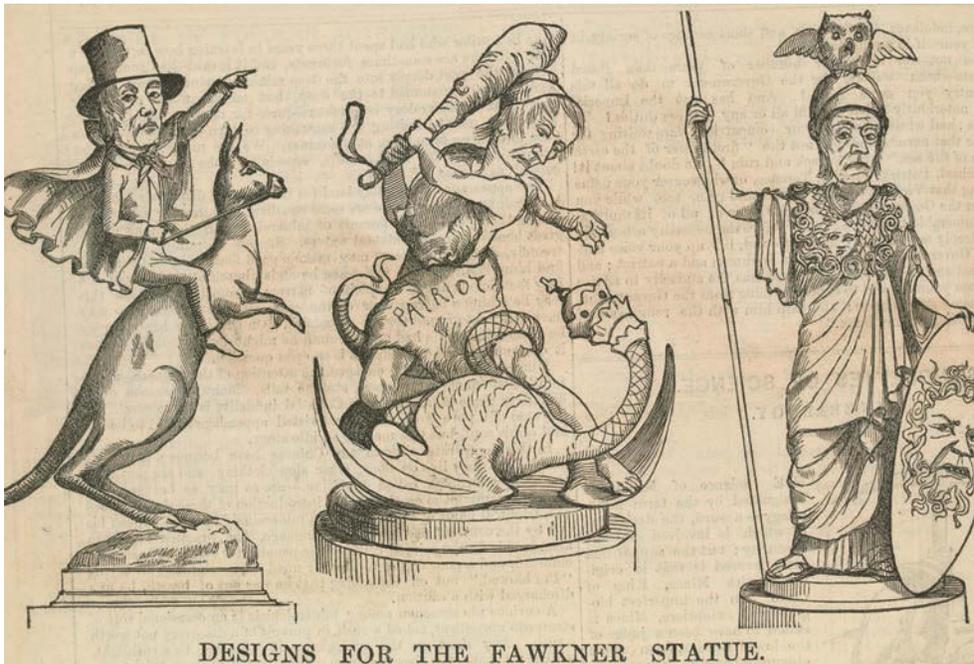
Designs for the Fawkner Statue, woodcut, 11.3 x 17.6 cm, published in *Melbourne Punch*,
11 September 1856.

of popularity alongside the establishment of the National Portrait Gallery in England, which was underpinned by Thomas Carlyle's notions of the hero.[40]

Strutt had been exposed to the ideas of reconstructed images of worthies through his teacher and during his time at the French Academy. Strutt was familiar with Delaroche's Hémicycle mural for Palais des Beaux-Arts and probably knew many of Delaroche's concocted paintings of past people and events, from *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* to *Cromwell Lifting the Coffin-lid and Looking at the Body of Charles*. Delaroche was actually the master of this kind of historic recreation and no doubt influenced Strutt's production of *J. P. Fawkner Settles on the Site of Melbourne 1835* In this portentous small image, Fawkner stands on one side with Eliza, with the tent and the plough symbolising colonisation and civilisation. On the other side the Aborigines are shown still wrapped in their traditional possum skin cloaks, while Eliza tentatively presents a red cloak as barter and John peacefully oversees negotiations. Such an historical event was potentially an ideal subject for a large scale fresco in the new colonial Houses of Parliament.

The concept of a fresco cycle was irresistible to *Melbourne Punch*. Leading colonists cast as major historical figures was easy fodder for the satirists, too easy. *Punch* published twelve suggestions for the *Frescoes for the New Houses of Parliament*. They are particularly

amusing. For instance, in one image Fawkner poses as Caesar landing at Port Phillip Bay. 'Little Johnny' is incongruously dressed as an exulted Roman Emperor, complete with Roman sandals, tunic and laurel wreath and posed next to his fluttering standard. He is completely self-absorbed and wrapped up in his own sense of importance, while in the background the new settlers introduce the Aborigines to ale, quite a contrast to Strutt's version of the same scene.

Amid this hilarity and the mirth over the anticipated frescoes, there was important debate on the future of the fine arts in the colony. In 1856 a P. Just published a pamphlet entitled *An Appeal to the Government and Colonists of Victoria in Favor of the Employment of the Arts and Sculpture, in Decorating the New Houses of Parliament and Merchant's Exchange.* Mr Just expressed his frustration at the lack of support for decorating the new Houses of Parliament, blaming the bias for art works that came from England.[41] He argued that the local market consisted of images produced in England 'by daubers who gain a livelihood by the manufacture of such trash'.[42] Similarly, other critics were exasperated at how Australians preferred the refuse of Britain, 'the daubs of Threadneedle Street and St Martin's Lane'.[43] As in America, artists often struggled to survive against the tide of British and European imports.[44]

The names of Fawkner and Strutt constantly reappear in these discussions about local art. In November 1856 the Victorian Society of Fine Art was established to support colonial art and counteract the bias for British art.[45] The society's emergence must be seen in the context of the discussion surrounding the frescoes. A committee was convened consisting of Strutt and fellow artists John Alexander Gilfillan, Charles Summers, Eugene von Guérard, Ludwig Becker and Nicholas Chevalier. Fawkner and the critic James Smith were also founding members. The object of the Society was to 'advance the cause of the fine arts in Australia' through lectures, the foundation of schools of tuition in design and the fine arts, an annual exhibition and the formation of a permanent collection of works of art and a library. One of the rules of the society was that their annual exhibition only include 'the production of artists residing in Australasia and being members of the society.'[46]

The fresco cycle though did not fail just because of a lack of faith in local artists; the lack of faith extended to local men of any profession who were deemed to be of limited worth. There was an overriding tendency to believe that even the most noteworthy colonist could not be as admirable as their British and European counterparts. The colony harboured ideas about portraiture and biography as instruments to improve and educate the emerging middle class, but there was contention regarding who should be included in these images. In a commentary on the decoration of the Houses of Parliament, the *Journal of Australasia* stated that 'we would have our lawmakers sit daily in the presence of the most illustrious statesmen . . . for we have great faith in the influence silently exercised by those mute effigies'. But the writer includes the caveat that there are 'loftier and nobler models of imitation, than are to be found in the narrow circle of our own legislative bodies'.[47] Similar sentiments were expressed in the periodical *My Note Book*:

The filling of the niches with statuary, and the covering of the panels with paintings; and in reference to this subject, I am very much of the opinion I have heard expressed, that the subject for these works were better chosen from the history of the old country than this our new home . . . A 'Fawkner statue' sounds very much like a burlesque upon that choleric old gentleman; and the 'Landing of Batman' is treated more successfully upon the pages of our caustic friend *Punch*, than it would be upon caustic lime in the council chamber.[48]

Conclusion

Fawkner and Strutt strenuously, unrelentingly and enthusiastically campaigned for a range of local arts projects, forming one of the most significant artist/patrons relationships in the history of the colony. Both men were ambitious, maybe even visionary. While there was a self-serving element in their collaboration, they were genuinely committed to commemorating and celebrating the achievements of the young colony and were staunch supporters of local fine arts. Unfortunately, not everyone shared the pair's enthusiasm and none of their major ventures came to fruition. Fawkner's and Strutt's respective critics rejected the notion that colonial heroes were worthy of homage or that local artists warranted significant patronage. The plans for the large oil paintings capturing the sittings of the Legislative Council and the opening of the new Houses of Parliament, and the even more enterprising fresco decoration of the parliamentary chambers were never realised. Strutt had to be content with successive portrait commissions, in particular subscription portraits. While Fawkner's and Strutt's projects were doomed, the very idea of them, the proposals themselves, stimulated important debate. The 1856 schemes and Fawkner's and Strutt's involvement in the *Victorian Society of Fine Art* were the catalyst for widespread, serious discussion on the encouragement and potential of the visual arts in Melbourne. The partnership of Fawkner and Strutt helped to successfully pave the way for the successes of the following decades.

Before leaving the colony in 1862 Strutt bound up his preparatory sketches from his various public art schemes and presented them to the Parliament of Victoria. He decided to leave his drawings behind with the expectation that someone else would take over the projects. No-one ever did. However, the volume of drawings was published in 1980 as *Victoria the Golden*.[49]

In January 1979 a bronze sculpture of John Pascoe Fawkner was finally erected. Commissioned by the Melbourne City Council[50] it is located just off Collins Street, near the site where Fawkner built Melbourne's first hotel. Fawkner is shown bent down marking out the streets of Melbourne with a stick. Putting aside any modern-day merits of the statue, Fawkner almost certainly would not have liked it. For a start, his rival John Batman is only metres away, standing tall. Fawkner would have preferred to be positioned near the Parliament, allowing him to act in perpetuity as a guiding, wise pioneering statesman of Victoria. He wanted to be portrayed as hero not as a crouched figure. This rather humble statue does not match Fawkner's pretensions but at least the sculptor, Michael Meszaros, was local.