Skin Deep looks at the preoccupations of European-Australians in their encounters with Aboriginal women and the stereotypes and perceptions that seeped into everyday settler-colonial thinking. Early erroneous and uninformed accounts of Aboriginal women and culture were repeated throughout various print forms and imagery, both in Australia and in Europe, with names, dates and locations erased so that individual women were anonymised as ‘gins’ and ‘lubras’. Liz Conor identifies and traces the various tropes used to typecast Aboriginal women, contributing to their lasting hold on the colonial imagination even after conflicting records emerged.

The maligning of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, motherhood, domicile and appearance was part of the colonial project. Conor shows how industrialised print coincided with colonial expansion and became critical to rationales of dispossession. For nearly all settlers typecasting Aboriginal women through the repetition of stereotypes sufficed to evoke an understanding that was surface-based and half-knowing: merely skin deep.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Liz Conor is an ARC Future Fellow at La Trobe University and author of The Spectacular Modern Woman (Indiana 2004). She is the editor of the journal Aboriginal History, former editor of Metro Magazine and a columnist at New Matilda. She publishes and comments regularly on feminism, pornography, race relations and Australian history in both the mainstream press and scholarly publications.

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