

Tom Roberts (1856-1931)

Historical contexts:

Pictorial functions of representing the indigenous

The native group, a picturesque embellishment frequently employed by colonial topographical painters, was especially rich in historical and philosophical associations and was usually introduced in the foreground where the artist enjoyed the greatest freedom of invention. Almost all the native groups appearing in topographical views from the early decades of the nineteenth century were based on a few familiar models.... Their presence performs the same function for the philosophical reader as the natives of New Holland did for Lord Monboddo: they act as a point of reference for defining the lowest level of the hierarchy of social development. ... The ubiquitous native group, however, continues to serve as a point of reference and reminds the spectator that even the pastoral state is more advanced than the savage state. (Dixon, 1986, 58-59)

Joseph Lycett's *Distant View of Sydney, from the Light-House at South-Head*, engraving, 1824
It presents] the extreme contrast between the savage state and the consummation of empire by a study of natural and relative sources of beauty. In the foregrounds are native groups, rocky outcrops, rude trees and barren heath-like vegetation, which produce emotions of gloom, solitude, melancholy, and antiquity. In the middle distance and backgrounds, the shipping on the harbor and the principal public works of the rising commercial city are depicted with realistic precision and produce associations of comfort, utility, prosperity and 'pleasure'.
(Dixon, 1986, 71)

Mark Twain, in *Following the Equator*, 1897;

...the Australian aboriginal's pictures of animals were nicely accurate in form, attitude, carriage; and he put spirit into them, and expression. And his pictures of white people and natives were pretty nearly as good as his pictures of the other animals.
(McQueen, 1996, 408)

Myths of nature and horrors of the bush, problematics of landscape subjects

The fact that much of Australian nature was so alien and inhospitable and the cause of so much hardship through drought, bushfire, flood and sheer hard work, probably accounts for the many disturbed and ambiguous responses to it... Even the most euphoric reactions to Australia nature, those that rely for their energy on strangeness and wonder, such as the often repeated catalogue of antipodean reversals ('a land where birds cannot sing nor flower give perfume') reveal an underlying disturbance, a need always to relate the unknown to the known in a denigrating manner., (Walker, S., 1988,157)

The mythic meaning of these motifs [the madman or woman or the lost child in the bush] throughout the literature and art of the period [1855-1915] is that of fear of the vast and unknown bush. The old world myth of the lost child, for instance in Hansel and Gretel, was concerned with the metaphysical, the cosmic battle between good and evil. Innocence triumphed; the children were saved. In the new-world myth a disobedient child, who has ignored all warnings about nature, confronts a natural reality which is either treacherous or totally indifferent to human suffering, and the price is death. (Walker, Shirley, 1988, 159)

Two antithetical ways of perceiving Australian nature were to emerge during this period: towards a celebration in art, literature and popular sentiment of the Australian scene for its own sake, and a contrary impulse to read transcendental meaning into it.

(Walker, Shirley, 1988, 159)

Often in Lycett's work the primitive foregrounds of the urban views and the sublime elements of those on the frontier are entirely different in meaning, one belonging to the neo-classical concept of the melancholy savage state and the other reflecting a more romantic and pleasure in the rude scenery of nature.

Lycett's theme was a contrast between those scenes which the 'rude hand of Nature formed' and 'such as the arts of civilization have fabricated for the use of social man'...Lycett's book is, therefore, best regarded as a transitional work displaying both the eighteenth and nineteenth century interpretations of the progress of civil society, in which a symbolic association between the phases of empire and the emotions of taste could not be consistently sustained.

(Dixon, 1986, 78)

Cynical dismissal of Australia with its,
...monotonous forests, its sealing-wax gentlemen, its sterile mine-shafts, its convicts
drunk on gin, and its eternal potatoes in their jackets....

1857 Faucherie, *Lettres d'un mineur en Australia*,

(as cited by Walker, Shirley, 1988, 161)

View of Marcus Clarke, 1874, on melancholic nature, writing of Louis Buvelôt, *Waterpool near Coleraine*, 1869, oil on canvas, 42 x 60 ins. NGV Melbourne.

..The telegraph wire and the newspaper aid to develop social intelligence, and to-day barely twenty years since the plough of the first farm-owner cut the turf of the Western Plains –there exists in this rural county a civilization as complete in its degree as that of the capital itself.

The painting of M. Buvelôt, however, does not deal altogether with this new order of things. With true artistic instinct he has selected a subject which at once touches that sense of the poetic which dwells in awakened memories and suggested contrasts of past with present.

(cited by Smith, B., ed., 1975, 134)

In historic England where every rood of ground is hallowed in legend and song, the least imaginative amongst us can find food for sad reflection. In this young land, which lacks as yet sufficient history of its own to show by its exemplified teachings the littleness of man's ambitions, we meet with natural writings more sombre in their meaning for the student, if less plain to the casual glances of the hurried seeker after worldly fortune....Wrapped in the mists of early morning, her history looms vague and gigantic. The lonely horseman riding between the moonlight and the day, sees vast shadows creeping across the desolate and silent plains, hears strange noises in the primeval forests, where flourishes a vegetation long dead in other lands, and feels, despite his fortune, that the trim utilitarian civilization which bred him, shrinks into insignificance beside the contemptuous grandeur of forests and ranges coeval with an age where European scientists have cradled his own race.

(cited by Smith, B., ed., 1975, 135)

The time-worn gums shadowing the melancholy water tinged with the light of fast-dying day seem fit emblems of the departed grandeur of the wilderness, and may appear to

poetic fancy to uprear in the still evening a monument of the glories of that barbaric empire upon whose ruins the ever-restless European has found his new kingdom.

Comments of Marcus Clarke (1846-81) from his preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon, *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*, 1876 after notes for NGV photographic records of 187.
(cited by Smith, B., ed., 1975, 136)

Roberts himself, with his far closer acquaintanceship with the Australian bush, countered Clarke's notion of melancholy in table talk at a dinner in Sydney of June 12 1926:

I have been in most parts of the Australian bush at all hours of day and night, and would rather speak of its witchery than its melancholy. Witchery – that's the word. The Australian bush has a witchery all its own.
(Croll, 1935, 132)

Burn, Ian, 'Beating about the Bush: The landscapes of the Heidelberg School', in Smith, Terry, Bradley, A. eds., *Australian Art and Architecture: Essays Presented to Bernard Smith*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Any elements which might associate the image with the harshness of life in the bush, the hard labour of working in the bush, the threat to farmers of bushfire and drought, or the original owners of the bush –the Aboriginals – are all omitted.
(Burn, 1980, 82)

[In McCubbin's *The Lost Child*, 1886] The threat which is depicted is not addressed to families who live in or nearby the bush and are familiar with it. It is addressed to those *visiting* the bush. It is a fear appropriate to city people.
(Burn, 1980, 84)

The visitor relation to the bush with all its pleasures and fears
Spells out : a particular *social relationship* to the bush. It also makes clear *for whom this relationship existed*: the urban educated upper-middle class.
(Burn, 1980, 86)

For the *Bulletin* writers the cultivation of a bush ideal was not 'the transmission to the city of values nurtured at the bush frontier, so much as a projection onto the outback of values revered by an *alienated* urban intelligentsia. How far itinerant bush workers absorbed these values, or shared them already, remains an open question?
(Burn, 1980, 88)

On the other hand, Lawson, Paterson, and most of the other writers associated with the *Bulletin*, were addicted to the city but railed against its vices and squalor, including much that is linked with urban progress. Their vision of the bush, which emerged in the late 1880s, was an anti-type of the city. Thus the writers' increasingly dismal view of the city is connected to the emergence of the bush ideal, the tendency to describe the bush in mythic or legendary proportions.

(Burn, 1980, 89)

A striking feature of the story of Heidelberg school is the *rapidity* with which a definite range of imagery has developed.

(Burn, 1980, 89)

Spate argues that in observing a landscape Roberts,

Seemed to focus separately on different aspects of the view and he incorporated these separate observations in the painting, so that the viewer has difficulty in getting a sense of the whole and instead, is forced 'to look at the painting focus, by focus, detail by detail...' (Burn, 1984, 90, quoting Spate, 1972, 56)

[in comparison with Buvelot's Barbizon-style landscape] ..in the Heidelberg pictures, the range of possible ways of seeing the bush is being circumscribed, so that not just the 'look' of a particular landscape is being presented within a set of pictorial conventions, but a set of pictorial conventions is being used to *advance* a definition of the bush landscape. The effect is to impose onto the viewer a *singular* way of seeing and relating to the bush. (Burn, 1980, 90)

Main landscape motifs favoured by Heidelberg painters:

1. A tall, slender variety of gum tree, generally solitary and silhouetted.
2. Spindly new (eucalyptus) growth in the intermediate foreground.
3. Close tonal relationship between the sky and the distant or horizon landscape.
4. An exaggerated blue sky.

(Burn, 1980, 92-94)

..the artists are not interested in the workers as people, but only as *bush types*, the human spirit' of the bush

(Burn, 1980 95)

Given White Australia's foundation as a colony, it was not surprising that Euro-Australian art followed the aesthetic imperatives of colonization: imperatives which were staged by what I call a frontier ideology. The ideology has two sequential moments: an initial apocalypse or negation (invasion), followed by a transcendent civilization (settlement). (McClellan, 1994-95, 124)

..the grotesque aesthetic played an important role in providing the structure for articulating an Australian identity and history in a place where, to Englishmen, there had been none. By clearing the ground, the grotesque aesthetic created a psychological space for the colonists, whether they were ex-convicts, free settlers or officials. Because the clearing pushed both Aborigines and the endless bush into the past, it created the memory (or past) for Australia. In short, the grotesque historicized a landscape which was perceived to be featureless and without monuments

(McClellan, 1994-95, 125-126)

If Impressionism marks the redemptive moment in Australian colonialism, the redemption was not unambiguous. It came with a caveat. The break made by the Impressionists from the melancholic disposition of earlier colonial art is not the revolution generally imagined...if they forget Clarke's 'fit emblems of the departed grandeur of the wilderness' and the monuments 'of the glories of that barbaric empire', the forgetting was a discourse of repression, a nativist discourse without the Aborigines. Within Streeton's transcendent vision was repressed the subjective traumas of a nation.

(McClellan, 1994-95, 140)

Image of the City:

Its cities also seen as provincial or horrors of overcrowding:

Serpent-like gutters, choked with filth, trail before the tottering tenements, and a decayed water-butt, filled with greasy-looking rain-catchings – across which indecent slime-bred flies dart and dazzle in the sun – stands and rots at each end of each court. Brazen women, hulking bullies and grimy children, loll about the doorways.
(Frank Fowler, 1859 cited by Walker, Shirley, 1988, 163)

By the 1880s and 1890s, the typical Australian was seen, in literature, art and folklore, as the idealised bush worker, possessed of the stock male virtues of the bush: independence, fairness, resourcefulness, resentment of authority and loyalty to his mates. There were, however, suggestions of a darker side to this image; one which involved violence, drinking, boasting, and either the mistreatment of women (and horses) or a strange sexlessness.
(Walker, Shirley, 1988, 165)

Precursor and near-contemporary discourses foreign

Neo-classical metaphorical landscape: Claude, Glover

Topographical landscape: Martens, Lycett

Naturalistic sublime: Constable, Turner, Chevalier

Narrative realism: Buvelot

Lyrical Dusseldorf school: Von Guérard

Dark-ground Münchener School: Folingsby

Pleinairisme, light-toned open-air: Bastien-Lepage, Whistler

Chromatic impressionism: Monet, Renoir, Sisley

Stylistic Issues

Singularity or plurality of styles

Sydney Long, 1905:

For almost the first century of our life we were wholly dependent upon ‘foreign’ talent. Men with and without established reputations (mostly without), came and looked at our land, saw it was wonderful and beautiful, and painted it in the manner they had already acquired. Naturally it was not Australian.

..One only has to compare his work [that of Conrad Marten] with that of Streeton to see the wonderful advance that has been made in the characterization of our native landscape – to note the change – from dull skies and sunless foliage to the intense blues and golden browns typical of Australia.

..We have, unfortunately, had as yet no painter of such supreme talent as to effectively exercise a wide-ranging influence on his brother artists. And although no one, however, able, can hope to establish a National School, even in the work of a long life-time, yet every patient seeker after truth may, unwittingly, perhaps, indicate some simple principles, or contribute a word or phrase which may ultimately find a place in the National vocabulary. There are, fortunately, many of these patient seekers, earnest and capable men, who are gradually preparing the way to a better understanding of this newest and the oldest of all the Continents. A great proportion of these are ‘Foreign’ but every year marks the appearance of some native-born Australian of more or less talent, who has something to say about his own country.

Up to the present time realism has been the prevailing tendency, the surest of all foundations, and so far has been manifested solely in landscape.

The work of the Victorian artists has always been pitched in a greyer key than those of N.S.W.. But it is not the grey of Australia: it rather shows the influence of the ‘French Grey’ School. Although they are more workmanlike in their methods, due to a large

proportion of them being trained abroad, I should say that their work was more un-Australian than any of the other States. Unfortunately, too, they show a strong tendency to stick to the old hackneyed subjects of the European studies.
(Sidney Long, January 1905, edited in Smith, 1975, 263-266)

Art worlds

Training for artists:

Rules of Carolus–Duran as communicated by Daplyn:

1. A subject ought to be complete in itself, without the possibility of adding anything to the sides or top or bottom.
2. Arrange the composition in the mind before placing it on the canvas.
3. Art means choice. It is the artist's business to select from Nature – his great difficulty what to leave out.
4. Objects introduced into a composition without necessity damage it.
5. Let not one colour predominate.
6. Repetition of forms is to be avoided.
7. Simplify the coloration and vary the values.
8. The masses must be accentuated, the details contained in them simplified.
9. Never be satisfied with the nearly right.
10. True observation of values is more essential than brilliant colouring.

(A. J. Daplyn, *Landscape painting from Nature in Australia*, Sydney, 1902, cited in Smith, B., ed. 1975, 224).

Contemporary discourses with period of artist's activity

TR's friends of long standing: Lillie Williamson, Louis Abraham, Frederick McCubbin

TR's club companions: Alice Brotherton, Rodney Cherry, Jane Sutherland

TR's less intimate studio companions: John Mather, George Ashton

TR's close Associates from 1887: Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder

1889 August 17, opening of *9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* in Melbourne, "9 by 5" referring to the size in inches of the cigar box lids

Catalogue cited Gérôme thus:

When you draw, form is the important thing; but in painting the *first* thing to look for is the *general impression* of colour.An effect is only momentary ... Two half hours are never alike.

(Topliss in DAB)

None of these is to be regarded as a work of art. Neither is a painter's 'impression'. It is simply a record in colour of some fugitive effect which he sees, or professes to see in nature.

(James Smith in *The Argus*, 17 August 1889, cited Smith, B., ed., 1975, 202-204)

..in the formation of taste in this new country where art is so young and so tentative, every public expression of opinion and every show of works must have a more or less strong influence in the making of that taste.

...we will not be led by any forms of composition or light and shade; that any effect of nature which moves us strongly by its beauty, whether strong or vague in its drawing, defined or indefinite in its light, rare or ordinary in its colour, is worthy of our best efforts and of the love of those who love our art.

We believe that it is better to give our own idea than to get a merely superficial effect, which is apt to be a repetition of what others have done better before us, and may shelter

us in safe mediocrity, which, while it will not attract condemnation, could never help towards the development of what we believe will be a great school of painting in Australia (Roberts, Conder and Streeton, *The Argus*, 30 August 1889, cited Smith, B., ed. 1975, 206-208)

There was a useful comparison to be drawn between the impressionist style in [Robert] Browning's poetry and painting: [by Professor Henry Laurie whose portrait Roberts had painted in 1887]: both were characterised by the first-person form of address, the causal disregard of formality, an unconventional entrance into the subject without preliminaries, the assumption of a shared familiarity with the subject, and the choice of artistically new yet commonplace situations, phrasing and rhythms.

(Eagle in Radford, 1996, p.54. Full documentary comparison of the critics and the artists' reaction is in Smith, B., ed., 1975, 202-210)

Our main objection to their work is that it is wholly foreign to nature, and is destitute of all sense of the beautiful.

..Where we look for form and definition we find nothing but confusion and an uninteresting mystery. Instead of the beautiful gradations, the subtle harmonies, and the exquisite finish and perfection of nature, we are brought face to face with something that might be conceivable under some hardly conceivable conditions of light, atmosphere, and vegetable organization.

(James Smith *The Argus*, 4th September 1889, cited in Smith, B., ed., 1975, 208-210)

I came up the scratch again, and looking down over the vast Emu Plains behold all the sweeping grandeur of a thunder cloud suspended over the plain. The different air currents play around its edges, but the bulk is the same, and grows angry and purple in its vast strength, which measures miles. I contemplate, and ejaculate 'Glory,' 'Glory,' 'Glory' – what a sight. 'Tis like the human race, its crown is beautiful, snowy, happy like a damsel's ivory bosom; and all peace and smiles as it curls and rolls gently reclining against the deep azure dome of heaven. Then the other side; underneath it is a lowering sullen colour and lightning like a death-agony leaps downward from its heart, and it moans and thunders and then despairingly sweeps the earth with tears.

(Arthur Streeton, letter to Roberts probably of 1891, cited in Smith, B., ed., 1975, 261-2).

1898, April 2- May 7, *Exhibition of Australian Art* in Grafton Galleries, London.

The exhibition proves that French art, which has swept the European continent, has almost conquered Australia. This change has been most rapidly effected. The *Colonial Exhibition* of 1886 showed us an Australian art that was till English, or to speak more correctly, showed us fashions of painting that were founded upon the English trade picture when they were not merely untrained records of nature. In 1886 I had to search the *Colonial Exhibition* for artists, and I found scarce half a dozen artistic handlers of paint: now I found the present show abounding in virtuosity. Australia seems in an experimental mood, rather inclined to show off than think profoundly. Men appear as yet unconvinced of the past, and vary from obedience to nature to the boldest affectation of mystery. Like the Americans, they have no time to waste on the long personal elaboration of an attitude of mind.

(R.A.M. Stevenson in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, April 4th 1898, cited in Smith, B., ed., 1975, 211-212).

Successor discourses

Fellow members of Australian Artists' Association & younger National Gallery School students:

E. Phillips Fox, J. Llewellyn Jones, John Julian Gibbs, Nancy Elmhurst Goode, Arthur Streeton

They [Arthur Streeton's paintings] point the way in which life should be lived in Australia, with the maximum of flocks and the minimum of factories. If we choose we can yet be the elect of the world, the last of the pastoralists, the thoroughbred Aryans in all their nobility. (J. S. Macdonald 'Arthur Streeton', *Art in Australia*, iii, 40, October 1931, p.19, cited in Smith B., 1962,1991, 196).

If, then, we find that Australia, with hardly more than fifty years of settled history, is not so fully awake to the value of art in its various forms as those might desire who have seen the position which it holds in the estimation of older countries, we may be satisfied that it is no more than could be expected, and even congratulate ourselves on recent visible improvements in certain directions....

It is to be hoped that Mr. Roberts, Mr. McCubbin, and the others who have been impressed with the opportunities for pictorial description which lie in Australian life will not be discouraged either by silent indifference or outspoken criticism, but persevere in an effort which speaks more hopefully for Australian art than almost any other that has ever been inaugurated. If our promising young artists will but acquire the accomplished methods of a school like the modern French, and bring to bear upon them their own individual and national feeling, we shall find art making great progress amongst us: and the more especially as foreign study has the important effect of stimulating observation, which quality alone should show our artists what to paint more surely than any amount of suggestion in words.

Sidney Dickinson in *The Australasian Critic*, I, 1, October 1890, cited in Smith, B., ed., 1975, 247-251)

Whilst in conversation the other day with a much travelled Australian, he made the remark that 'There is no Australian Art', meaning that an Art truly representative of this country had yet to make its appearance. A superficial observer would find logic in his assertion, but a person who has studied the question deeply will immediately discount the truth of it. Having followed the progress of Art here, he will know that an Art truly representative of this country has existed and does exist.

..We have in our Gallery, examples of this early period of Australian Art – notably, Chevalier's *Buffalo Mountains*, Von Gerard's [sic] *Mount Kosciusco* and *Mitta Mitta Valley*. It is interesting to note, that these early expressions of Australian Art, contain very little of the human element, and to a very small extent convey a lasting impression of the country or the times. Perhaps it would be asking too much of them to expect these early Artists to give us this. It behoves us to remember that all these men hailed from Europe, that they there they had lived, studied, and worked. They were all imbued with the spirit of Europe. Hence their Art was essentially alien to its new environment. It belonged to lands of humid skies, of deciduous trees and low toned landscapes; countries so vitally different from our land of strident sunshine, clear skies, and dry atmosphere. Our flora which has to resist the fierce rays of a burning sun, and thus possesses a somewhat an faded appearance, which in a grey light, suggest something subtle, vague, and ghostlike, was a thing beyond their ken.

(Frederick McCubbin, *The Art of Frederick McCubbin*, 1916, cited in Smith, B., ed., 1975, 269-279)

Social and Historical Issues

Attitudes to Britain:

The Archibald paradox is simply the paradox of being colonial. Metropolis, the centre of language, of the dominant culture and its judgments lies away in the great Elsewhere: but the tasks of living communicating, teaching, acting-out and changing the culture must be carried on not Elsewhere but Here. To know enough of the metropolitan world, colonials must, in limited ways at least. Move and think internationally; to resist it strongly enough for the colony to cease to be colonial and become its own place, they must become nationalists.

(Lawson, 1983, ix)

The old world was murderously oppressive; the new must be just and free, untainted not only by poverty and caste but also by strangeness. Thus the paradox worked: the dominant culture, which in one breath the *Bulletin* lampooned and disavowed, was upheld vigorously in the next.

(Lawson, 1983, x)

Roberts exemplifies the perennial problem of the Australian artist torn between his feeling that his art can grow only in a context which he knows intimately, and his belief that it can develop only through continuous and natural contact with the great body of European art. Roberts' problem was compounded by the fact that he was partly English; nearly half of his seventy-five years of life was spent in England; he passed the first thirteen years of his life there and returned for those four decisive years as a student. His emotions were similarly divided.

(Spate, 1972, 122)

Attitudes to Asia or Asians:

Hatred of the Chinese and violence towards them also contradicted the popular self-image of benign decency [also contradicted by the facts of violence to aborigines]. It is debatable how much of this was due to the perceived threat of being swamped by sinister yellow hordes, and how much to the covert fear of white women being seduced by wily orientals (very few female Chinese emigrated).

(Walker, Shirley, 1988 167)

Walker 1988, also lists literary representations such as the crushing to death of a Chinese cook in a wool-press by a drunken gang of shearers, the massacre of Chinese about to stake out a new gold-find under the guise of protecting a white woman, and the characterization of a Chinese woman as a whore to the Chinese and recruiter of innocent white girls for a doss house and Chinese brothel.

Those who saw the Chinese as a threat to the cohesion and harmony of the British community believed that the British were a superior race and people. the reasonable case for restricting the Chinese was not the one most commonly heard. The loudest and most insistent voices spoke the foulest slander against the Chinese. (Hirst, 1988, 159)

Conservative opposition to populist anti-Chinese sentiment tied in to the political conviction that the behaviour [of the white masses] in this matter was a compelling demonstration of their unfitness for political rights. (Hirst, 1988, 162)

Political conflict also tied up with struggles over land allocation, where liberals wanted 'selection before survey'

(Hirst, 1988, 167)

Anti-Chinese feeling was based on fears of economic competition which translated too easily for political purposes into frenzied accounts of corrupting religious, social and sexual practice.

(Kingston, 1988, 136)

The shearers hold themselves as the aristocrats of the shed and never associate with the “rouseabouts”. To compound matters the shearers graded themselves according to their achievements with a ‘ringer’ at the top and the ‘drummer’ being among the slowest. Beneath everybody came any Chinaman in whatsoever capacity: to shear fifty sheep a day was termed ‘a Chinaman’s hundred’.

(McQueen, 1996, 293)

..it would not have occurred to them to look in this direction – how the old habits of transferred spite and cruelty were renewed in the racism of which they themselves, the radicals, liberals, republicans, reformists, were the conscious leading agents. The System’s hangover worked with those who strove hardest to expose and condemn it; it worked in Archibald [the *Bulletin* editor].

Australia for the Australians!...By the term Australia we mean not those who have been merely born in Australia. All white men who come to these shores – with a clean record...

(Lawson, 1983, 140)

Main anti-Chinese attack of the *Bulletin* came in August 1886: ‘The Mongolian Octopus – his grip on Australia’,

Disease, defilement, depravity, misery, and crime – these are the indispensable adjuncts which make Chinese camps and quarters loathsome to the sense and faculties of civilized nations. Whatever neighbourhood the Chinese choose for the curse of their presence forthwith begins to reek with the abominations which are ever associated with their vile habitations.

(Lawson, 1983, 141)

Sharing in such fears. Archibald and Edmond did not seem to notice how, when they asserted those standards of whiteness, rightness and decency against which Asians and others were measured and found wanting, they entered into complicity with the very imperialism they were so concerned to resist.

(Lawson, 1983, 148)

Attitudes and behaviour of men to women:

‘Mateship’, an expression of male solidarity, rigorously excluded the woman, delegating to her the passive virtues of stoicism and endurance....

Some document collections indicate: the hardships suffered by women in domestic life, childbearing and seated labour; the invidious double standard of colonial society and, most disturbing of all, the prostitution of convict and Aboriginal women and the removal (for their own good, of course) of children conceived by them... This distrust of women is a characteristic of colonial literature. Not only are women seen to slide all too easily into drink, deceit and whoring, but the authors, whether male or female, are all too eager to punish the victim.

(Walker Shirley, 1988, 168)

Attitudes to non-Anglo-Celtic peoples, including indigenous peoples: Roberts in his record of a trip to Torres Straits published as ‘Going North’ in *The Argus*, November-December 1892, casually comments of the crew as including three alleged seamen ‘who are all of “colour”’.

He later identifies these as a 'West Indian half-caste', a 'soft-eyed noodle from Rio' and a 'round-built negro from Rouen'.

(Croll, 1935, 208-209).

Roberts' Impressions of Cooktown (North Queensland):

Here the Chinaman flourishes and rides on horseback; the aboriginal stalks until sundown about the streets, and the gin, with old skirt hanging by the band over one shoulder, not hiding the marvelous skinniness of the legs, carries heavy water pails on the head in return for kitchen pickings or a small cut of tobacco. They collect in groups on rocks and vacant allotments, and feasts and sun themselves, and make wild calls to the men in the canoes on the lagoon below.

(Croll, 1935, 209)

At Thursday Island Roberts describes:

Where the shopkeeping is done by a dozen or twenty nationalities, Japs keeping some of the billiard tables; where one may see a couple of Englishmen taking part in a game of devil's pool with some Chinese and two or three Manila men; where along the sea front are growing coco-nut palms, and one jostles South Sea divers and boatmen of all colours, pearl shellers, and *bêche-de-mer* men, and aboriginals bring across orchids in a New Guinea canoe, and in many of the households are employed as servants.....

Even here, however, the conservative Australian development of the Anglo-Saxon has not adopted the architecture of his residence to the tropical climate, and a modified kerosene tin dropped in odd spots is still the type of the house.

(Croll, 1935, 211)

Charles H. Pearson, *National Life and Character: a Forecast*, (London: 1893) described as 'the outstanding intellectual of the Australian colonies' (Walker, D., 1991, 45), divides the world into 'higher' and 'lower' races, the former soon to lose their dominance with China as the major engine of change. This founds a long discourse in Australia, reinforced by European and North American avatars such as Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Colour* (New York: 1921) treating of 'white' and 'coloured' races with the former losing out to the numerical and intelligent energies of the latter as well as their own decadence. This later reinforced by fantasies of the diabolical but yellow genus of Fu Manchu and the social exclusion of inferior mixed races, despite many counter-recognitions of hybridity as humanly and ethnically fecundating.

(See Walker, D., 1999, 44-47, 168-194)

Historical development of culture in which art world has place

... between 1860 and 1890 Australia almost certainly came to have the highest standard of living of any country in the world; certainly higher than Britain's, probably higher than the United States.

This remarkably high standard of living was jealously guarded by Australia's Britons. In its defence they soon committed themselves to a 'White Australia' policy. That meant, among other things, that whereas the South African mining industry came to be developed by the exploitation of non-white labour, the major mines in Australia came to be worked by white miners only, and that in turn meant that the Chinese, who had at one stage made up 10 per cent of the male population of Victoria and had contributed greatly to the opening up of Australia's first alluvial mines were steadily excluded. (Low, 1991, 354)

Australia is seen as an anomaly in its region because of historical and current links with Britain and the 'West'. But Singapore in relation to China, Indonesia in relation to Muslim

world, Philippines in relation to Catholicism and ethnically mixed nature of its elite, all also anomalous in various ways.

..The fact that Australians' cultural roots lay a long distance away from their own country in no way placed them...in any very usual situation amongst other peoples of their region [making it] much less of an anomaly than most Australians liked to believe.

(Low, 1991, 359),

Consciousness of History

All history takes on the appearance of inevitableness after the event. Looking backwards the future will be tempted to say that Australian Union was Australia's destiny from the first and that nothing could have reinvented that consummation. But if this be true, it is certainly not true of its present accomplishment, whatever might have resulted in later times, hereafter, with other men and other means.

(Alfred Deakin, circa 1900, from Alfred Deakin, "*And be One People*": *Alfred Deakin's Federal Story*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995, cited by Topliss in Radford, 1996, 148).

How would the British, who had created the world's most powerful and extensive Empire, maintain their place at the pinnacle of world power? While nations and races rose to positions of dominance, it was understood they also declined and grew decadent.

Australian in various writing forms part of this much broader discourse on the relationship between national strength, military capacity and the patriotic spirit. It was a period in which decadence and the suspect masculinities it generated seemed sharply at odds with the intensifying demands for national survival.

(Walker D, 1999, 99)

If climate, soil quality and lack of water would restrict Australia's population in the twentieth century to 20 million rather than the previously predicted 200 million, Australia could no longer be pictured as an empty continent, able to absorb Asia's excess millions. The more Australia was perceived as a continent with its own unique flora, fauna and landscapes, the harder it was to imagine it as a continent inevitably destined for Asian settlement.

(Walker, 1999, 154)

Tom Roberts (1856-1931), Chronology

Edited from *Wikipedia*; Croll, 1935; Mackenzie at www.artistsfootsteps.com/html/Roberts_biography.htm; McQueen, 1996; Hylton in Radford, 1996; 1996; Smith B., 1962, 1991; Smith B., ed. 1975; Smith, T., 2003; Spate, 1972; Spate in Radford, Topliss, 1984; Topliss, 1985; Topliss in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1988), NSW Official timeline.

- 1770 April 28, Captain Cook lands at Botany Bay.
- 1788 January 18, First Fleet with 850 convicts under Captain Philipp arrives in Botany Bay. The colony of New South Wales was proclaimed on February 7, marking the onset of European armed invasion, settlement, and development of Australia.
- 1793 first free settlers arrive in New South Wales.
- 1803 Colonel Collins with party of convicts sent to occupy land in what is now Victoria to pre-empt possible French occupation. Colony moved to Tasmania in 1804 because of lack of then discoverable water.
- 1823 advisory Legislative Council established in New South Wales.
- 1835 de facto foundation of settlement in Victoria via 'treaty' of an entrepreneur Batman and eight elders of the Wurundjeri tribe (forcibly re-settled at Corranderk in 1863), later disavowed by New South Wales to allocate land monopoly to the crown.
- 1842 Melbourne incorporated as a town.
- 1851 onset of the Gold Rush.
- 1852 Eugene von Guérard (1811-1901), originally from Vienna, in Rome 1830-32 and trained at the Düsseldorf Academy 1849-51, arrived in Melbourne to try his luck on the goldfields. Master of Painting at National Gallery Art School from 1870.
- 1854 Armed revolt on goldfields over licensing system at Eureka Stockade.
- 1855 Victorian restrictions on Chinese immigration introduced; followed in 1861 in New South Wales.
- 1855 New South Wales granted responsible government, with an election in 1856, and universal male suffrage in 1858.
- 1856, March 9, Tom Roberts was born in Dorchester, England, elder son of Richard Roberts, editor of *Dorset County Chronicle*, and his wife Matilda Agnes Cela, née Evans. He attended Hardye's Grammar School, Dorchester. His childhood association with Dorset and the non-sectarian, humanist novels of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), whom he may have met as a child, and particularly with the novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), continued throughout his life.
- 1858 in this year, 12,000 Chinese arrived, and by 1861, 12.5% of males in colony of New South Wales were Chinese.
- 1859 October 24, emigration of indentured labourers to British territories is legalised, in a new treaty with China.
- 1860 & 1861 June, anti-Chinese riots by white miners at Lambing Flats, New South Wales, none of whom are prosecuted despite several Chinese deaths, injuries, and thefts from Chinese.
- 1861 Art Museum founded in Melbourne, first picture gallery opened in 1864.
- 1865 Swiss painter Louis Buvelot (1814-1888) arrives in Melbourne from Neuchâtel, Switzerland, an area from which there were other Swiss immigrants to Australia.
- 1868 January 9, last convict transport reaches Fremantle, W. Australia from United Kingdom.
- 1869 after the death of Tom Roberts' father on 30th December 1868, mother with three children migrated to Australia, arriving 22 June 1869, Tom Roberts then aged thirteen years (lived in Melbourne until 1881). Family settled in Collingwood, Melbourne. Mrs Robert's widowed mother herself had emigrated to Melbourne twenty years earlier with six children. Family were poor, Tom Roberts helped mother to stitch leather school satchels she made for her brother's business.
- 1870 critic James Smith(1820-1910) attacked von Guérard for conveying 'the meaner part of pre-Raphaelitism' [excessive detail].

- 1870s Roberts worked as a photographer's assistant arranging backdrops and settings at the photographers Stewarts in Bourke Street, to finance evening art studies. He never mastered photographic technique.
- 1873 onwards, Roberts was active as an artist; studied at East Collingwood School of Design where awarded a landscape prize from judges including Buvelot and Von Guérard. Buvelot's wife Caroline-Julie also tutors him in French.
- 1874-1880 studied evening classes at National Gallery School, Melbourne under Thomas Clark, Master of the School of Design (had studied at Royal Academy Schools and taught in English design schools). Befriended many artists including C. D. Richardson, Louis Abrahams, and Frederick McCubbin to whom he introduced native flora at nearby Studley Gardens, Kew.
- 1875 Art Gallery established in New South Wales.
- 1876 October, tried to organize a life class; applied unsuccessfully for Thomas Clark's post on his retirement.
- 1877 visited Tasmania, met family of future wife in Launceston.
- 1877-1879 studied in School of Painting of National Gallery School under Eugene von Guérard (in Australia 1852-1882).
- 1878 Roberts attended anatomy classes at University of Melbourne, also employed a male model.
- 1878 painter Julian Ashton (1851-1942) arrived and found McCubbin painting classical themes against which he advised in favour of Australian and out-of-door themes.
- 1879 Roberts again visited Tasmania.
- 1880 Roberts became a member of Victorian Academy of the Arts, two works reproduced by Art Union of Victoria. Future wife Elizabeth Williamson enrolled at National Gallery School. Roberts made copies at NGV to fund overseas travel and study.
- 1880 June, Kelly gang captured at Glenrowan, two artists, George and Julian Ashton, shown in photograph by J. W. Lindt of scene taking sketches (Keneally, 2011, 128 for detailed discussion)
- 1880 *Bulletin* magazine published which firmly associated anti-Chinese and other racist xenophobia with republican anti-conservative critiques (published until 2008).
- 1880 October 1st(-1881 April) Victorian International Exhibition opens in Melbourne, Japanese ceramics and other *objets d'art* on show.
- 1881 July 5-1884 TR studied at Royal Academy Schools London with some holiday continental European travel.
The student was taught to construct paintings by means of line or tone and to consider colour only at a late stage in the conception and execution of a painting, rather than as an essential element. (Spate, 1972, 19)
- 1881 Daplyn (1844-1926), student of Slade School in London and National Academy in New York, and studio of Gérôme in Paris, migrates to Melbourne.
- 1882 March 25th, review in Melbourne *Argus* says that Daplyn, painted in the low tones after the French method, and in the style of the "impressionists" (ADB, 1972)
- 1882 Von Guérard returns to Europe, in June succeeded by George Folingsby (1828-1891) as head of National Gallery of Art school with extensive changes in curriculum including live model from October 1883, drawing from nature outdoors, travelling scholarship planned from 1886 (McQueen, 1996, 147; see <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/folingsby-george-frederick-3545>).
- 1882 Second Exhibition of Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884) in London. Some works by Monet and Renoir shown in summer, plus representative collection of impressionists at Dowdeswell's, Bond Street in spring 1883, (McQueen, 1996, 98).
- 1883-1889 publication in Melbourne of *A Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* (Sydney: Picturesque Atlas Publishing Co., 1886 et cetera) heavily illustrated.

- 1883 August, TR toured Spain for two weeks with the future Labour politician Dr William Maloney, fellow artist John Peter Russell [friend of Van Gogh, later knew Monet, Matisse, Rodin], architect brother Percy Roberts. In Granada met Llorreano Barrau, former pupil of Jean-Léon Gérôme, (1825-1904) and Raymond Casas i Carbo (1866-1932), a former pupil of Carolus-Duran (1838-1917) who also worked in manner of Mariano Fortuny (1838-1874). Casas also left a pencil portrait of Lucien Simon (teacher of Amrita Sher-Gil). Casas applied his colours directly onto the canvas without preparing tonal substructure, his painting is ... sketchy and suggestive, while Roberts' is detailed, highly finished and descriptive..typical of the academic mode of visualisation and execution. (Spate, 1972, 23) Casas did a small portrait of Roberts, and Roberts may have done one of him. (McQueen, 1996, 345)
- 1883 *Moorish Doorway*, NGV, Melbourne. Roberts was still in Spain in October.
- 1883 October 5, *Una Muchacha* (also called *Una Habanera*)
- 1883-4 *A Spanish Beauty*
- 1883-4 *Untitled, A seated Arab* (manner of Gérôme)
- 1884 April, *Lido Venezia*, short holiday in Venice where did small Whistlerian figure studies.
- 1884 October 28, *Woman on a balcony*, in Venezia, Private Collection.
- 1884 circa, *Untitled London Street Scene* or *Rainy Street Scene*.
- 1884 TR in London contributed drawings to *The Graphic* to assist finances. Influenced by predecessor groups to New English Arts Club (1886), Whistler, Bastien Lepage and *pleinairistes*.
- 1884 May 17, Whistler's exhibition *Notes-Harmonies-Nocturnes* in London.
- 1884-5 *The sculptor's studio*, NGA Canberra, painted largely in London.
..the most significant aspect of plein-airism ... led the artist away from the academic idea of 'truth', as a collection of photographically exact details to the naturalistic ideal of expressing the *wholeness* of nature and to an awareness that truth could only be found through the close communion of the individual with nature. (Spate,1972, 20)
- 1884-5 visited Paris, studied for some period at Académie Julian, where admired manner of Gérôme, probably on advice of Thomas Clark
- 1885 February, TR briefly visited Paris, may have known of Académie Julian under Jean-Leon Gérôme.
- 1885 February 20, Whistler delivered his 'Ten o'clock lecture', Roberts apparently not present.
- 1885 (-1889 worked in Melbourne) April 25, Roberts aged 29 years, returned to Melbourne.
Worked with photographers' Barrie & Brown of Bourke Street, black and white drawing for *The Bulletin* drawings including in August *Some Melbourne Barmaids* (McQueen, 1996, 141)for *Picturesque Atlas of Australia* and *The Australian Sketcher*.
- 1885 *Winter morning after rain, Gardiner's Creek*, Art Gallery of South Australia.
- 1885 October, Whistler's *Note in Blue and Green* shown in Melbourne at Anglo-Australian Artists' Exhibition.
- 1885-6 *Coming South*, NGV, Melbourne, sent to Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London May 1886.
- 1885(-6, & 1890) *Allegro con brio, Bourke Street west*, NGA on loan from NLA, Canberra. (Three female figures at lower left added in 1890)
The way he depicted shadow in *Bourke Street* was, in fact, rather inconsistent (even the direction in which shadows fall is frequently contradictory). This suggests Roberts found it hard to represent a kind of light which had no precedent in European realism. The painting is high-keyed and yet the darker tones of the cabs and the crowd break its continuity.
...He tried to resolve the problem by using scales of colour which gave the painting a new kind of structure. He used a scale of pinks and ochres with a darker one of purple-browns and a counter-scale of white accents. (Spate, 1972, 39)

Roberts also lived at a number of artists' camps and on visits, including Box Hill, Mentone, Beaumaris, Eaglemont in Yarra Valley near Melbourne. Roberts was called 'Bulldog' by friends; he had a decisive influence on younger artists such as Arthur Streeton in founding a nationalist, regionalist identity.

1885 circa, *Quiet Stream, Heidelberg*, Private Collection.

1885 *A quiet day on Darebin Creek*, NGA, Canberra.

[Previous Melbourne artists] had tied painting the sunset with somewhat conventional results. Roberts [looking with the light not into it] pointed to the evening sky in the east and showed us the beauty of its subtle greys and the delicate flush of the afterglow when the shadow of the earth upon its atmosphere resembling a curved band of cool grey rises up and succeeds the rosy warmth as the sun descends further below the western horizon. He was the first artist in Australia to notice it and to point it out to the native-born.

(Eagle in Radford, 1996, p.42, citing Arthur Streeton in Croll, 1935, p.140)

1886 January, four works including *Mary* by Roberts sent to Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, opened May 4.

Roberts became a member of the Buonarrotti club

1886 *Coming South*, NGV

1886 *The Artists' Camp*, NGV, Melbourne. Painted at artists' camp with Frederick McCubbin and Louis Abrahams, Gardiner's Creek, Box Hill.

1886 *Charcoal burners*, [earlier erroneously called *Woodsplitters*] Ballarat Fine Art Gallery.

1886 Spring, *A Summer morning tiff*, exhibited at Australian Artists' Association, (now at Ballarat Fine Art Gallery), critic James Smith alleged this work revealed 'the influence of the Impressionists' so that 'its peculiar merit would be recognised more fully by artists than by the general public'. (McQueen, 1996, 165).

1886 May 4th, *The Argus* report discusses elaborate furnishings of studio of Austrian artist Carl Kahler (1855-1906), who had arrived the previous year. (McQueen, 1996, 245)

1886 September 16, the painter Longstaff claiming to represent 130 students of National Gallery School claimed the school's show to be the only truly representative Australian school of painting; all the students, with perhaps one exception, being native born. In contrast to which the Australian Artists' Association members were almost all foreign born where, no doubt those who obtained the most favourable notice were really "foreigners". (McQueen, 1996, 166)

1886 September, Roberts attends a lecture at Buonarrotti Club on Eadweard Muybridge's sequence of photographs of animal and human locomotion. (McQueen, 1996, 301)

1886 December, briefly visited Brocklesby Station Corowa.

1886-1887 summer, rented cottage at Mentone

1887 circa, *The Sunny South*, NGV, Melbourne.

1887 *The Chinese Cook shop*, 1887 etching on paper, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

This print was done after his return from London from an old plate. Possibly may be called *The Opium Den*, the older woman in Chinese dress holds what may be a southern Chinese *yehu*-type of vertical fiddle, the girl is dancing, and it may be the older man watching at the back also held a musical instrument.

Roberts' etching activity drew on prior example of etching by Abrahams after a watercolour by Mather; also a letter from an English friend who made money from etching. Influenced by Whistler's prints of late 1850s such as *A kitchen in Lutzelbourg* and *La Marchande de moutard*. (See Butler in Radford, 1996, p.182.)

1887 August, Grosvenor Gallery sends another collection of contemporary British art to Melbourne for sale. (McQueen, 1996, 183)

British sentimental narrative moralising also evident in Victorian Arts Academy exhibition including works like *A Credit to Her Mother*. (McQueen, 1996, 198) Other criticism of Sarah

- Bernhardt in her 1991 Sydney theatrical season or of Zola, Flaubert, even Hardy oppose Christian moralism to pagan or decadent trends in literature and art.
(McQueen, 1996, 198-199)
- 1887 October, John Peter Russel, writing to Roberts from Paris, notices that the rage is the other way. Darned fools spotting canvas with small points of pure colour. (McQueen, 1996, 234-5) The technique is also found in Vermeer's *View of Delft*, ca.1660-61, or Mariano Fortuny's *The Vicarage*, 1870.
- 1887 *Slumbering Sea, Mentone*, NGV, Melbourne
At Mentone Roberts met Arthur Streeton, a student of McCubbin at National Gallery School, and was invited to join them, and in their camp at Box Hill.
- 1888 *Evening, when the quiet east flushes faint at the sun's last look*, NGV, Victoria
- 1888 *Deny Eve*, Tom Roberts Collection.
Before 1886 we were all rather attracted by the conventional aspect of the brilliant colour of the western sky at sunset. Roberts was the first to point out the exquisite and delicate variation of colour and tone of the eastern sky at sunset.
(Arthur Streeton in Croll, 1935, 16, & Spate, 1972, 55)
- 1888 March, Victorian *Australian Artists' Society* formed in opposition to Victorian *Academy of Arts*. Roberts was on the committee of both bodies.
- 1888 March 19, arrived in Sydney.
- 1888 April, returned to Melbourne. Moved into top flat at 9 Grosvenor Chambers, 95 Collins Street
In his studio there was always a bowl of gum tips and in a darkish corner the silverness of honesty shone forth and tall bullrushes and reeds stood in an Ali Baba jar. He was always well supplied with flowers in season, masses of colourful dahlias, chrysanthemums, roses, and daffodils. Mrs Elmhirst Goode
(cited in Topliss, 1985, 70)
At social and artistic soirées there, patrons could see his latest work in a setting decked out with chinoiserie, bric-à-brac, drapes, and with the addition of musical performances which were an important part of the *mise en scène*, Streeton claimed that Roberts was the first to bring bunches of gum tips into town.
(Topliss in DAB, 1988)
- 1888 May, agitations against legal and naturalized immigrants from China results in Chinese being sent back but the Bill to Repeal the Influx of Chinese Restriction Act of 1881, was introduced in New South Wales to prevent Chinese landing. Parkes in second reading disclaim[s] any attitude of even aversion to the Chinese people settled in this country..I maintain in a country like New South Wales it is our duty to preserve the type of the British nation.
The bill did not pass but administrative methods were deployed to keep Chinese n the ships, some of whom were released by a Supreme Court recognition of *habeas corpus*, some by the acceptance of cash payments to return to China. On June 12, the inter-colonial conference on Chinese immigration starts in Sydney.
(Rolls, 1992, 481-491)
- 1888 June 2, Roberts and Streeton attend funeral of Buvelot.
- 1888 July 10 Buvelot retrospective held at National Gallery of Victoria.
- 1888 *An autumn morning, Milson's Point*, AGNSW
Despite the transformation of the forested bay into one of the chain of modern cities engendered by the great industrial Empire, Roberts conveys not the historical process, but the newness, rawness and incompleteness of the city, enacting these qualities in the paint-structure itself.
(Spate in Radford, 1996, p.74)
- 1888 *Holiday Sketch at Coogee*, AGNSW.

1888 October 1889 March 5, Roberts is best man at wedding of McCubbin.

1889 August 17, opening of *9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* in Melbourne, "9 by 5" referring to the size in inches of the cigar box lids which most of the 182 small panel paintings were done on. Most works by Roberts (62 panels), Conder (46 works), Streeton (40 works) with a few works by others including McCubbin (5 works).

(Topliss, 1985, 70)

An effect is only momentary: an impressionist artist tries to find his place. Two half hours are never alike, and he who tries to paint a sunset on two successive evenings must be more or less painting from memory. So, in these works, it has been the object of the artists to render faithfully, and thus obtain first records of effects widely differing, and often of very fleeting character.

(Statement in the catalogue, cited in Spate 1972, 69; Crawford, 1984, 152)

The high tonal key which they had taken from the [*pleinairiste*] impressionists was apt for the sun-drenched Australian landscape, while the interest in colour, the observation of tonal gradation and the effects of light, together with [Jules Bastien-] Lepage's concern with seizing momentary effects by the direct painting of rural scenes in the open air, all suited Roberts and his companions to capture in paint an Australian scene which had defied academic tradition and for which they felt a romantic passion.

... As they had not imbibed the new artistic faith at its undiluted source, it need not surprise us if their somewhat eclectic attitude towards it allowed them to depart from it, even in marked degree, should the needs of their deeper passion for Australia lead them to do so.

(Crawford, 1984, 152).

1889 *Across to the Dandenong Ranges*, NGV, Melbourne.

1889 *Going Home*, NGA Canberra

1889 Arthur Streeton, *Still Glides the Stream*, 1889, purchased by AGNSW, Sydney for 70 guineas (McQueen, 1996, 312).

1889 Melbourne Centennial International Exhibition includes eight paintings by Roberts (McQueen 1996, 250)

In the same year Roberts, following contemporary fashion, had a 'Japanese screen' in his studio.

(McQueen, 1996, 259)

1889 (-1891) active in New South Wales

Holiday Sketch at Coogee influential on the young artist, Charles Conder, who later that year joined the group of artist friends at Heidelberg.

1889 October, Sir Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales, calls for a national parliament elected by the people not a council of colonies.

1889 November, Roberts visits Collendina station where does first portrait of an indigenous person *Gubby Wellington*. (McQueen, 1996, 293)

1889 *The Camp, Sirius Cove*

1889 September 3, in reply to a critic Roberts writes to *The Argus*:

It is better to give your own idea than to get a merely superficial effect, which is apt to be a repetition of what others have done before us – which, while it will not attract condemnation, could never help towards the development of what we believe will be a great school of painting in Australia.

(Eagle in Radford, 1996, p.46.)

(1888-)1890 late May, *Shearing the Rams*, NGV, Melbourne.

Painted in situ at a sheep station at Brocklesby in southern New South Wales near Corowa which he visited three years in a row.

It seems to me that one of the best words spoken to an artist is "Paint what you love, and love what you paint," and on that I have worked: and so it came that being in the bush and

feeling the delight and fascination of the great pastoral life and work I have tried to express it [...]

...So lying on piled-up wool-bales and hearing and seeing the troops come pattering into their pens, the quick running of the wool carriers, the screwing of the presses, the subdued hum of hard fast working, and the rhythmic click of the shears, the whole lit warm with the reflection of Australian sunlight, it seemed that I had there the best expression of my subject, a subject noble and worthy enough if I could express the meaning and spirit—of strong masculine labour, the patience of the animals whose year's growth is being stripped from them for man's use and the great human interest in the whole scene.

(Tom Roberts, 1890, cited Smith, T., 2003, 370-371)

The Age reported that the painting was a 'most important work of a distinctly Australian character'.

The Argus critic James Smith commenting that the picture was too naturalistic: 'art should be of all times, not of one time, of all places, not of one place', adding 'we do not go to an art gallery to see how sheep are shorn'.

Roberts defended 'by making art the perfect expression of one time and one place, it becomes for all time and of all places'.

[*Shearing the Rams*] presents an idealised and nostalgic view of pastoral life in Australia, with no sign of the ongoing conflict then taking place between the nascent newly unionised shearers and the squatters. However, the painting would eventually be considered as 'the definitive image of an emerging national identity. (Three citations above from *Wikipedia*). Rather than a painting of the realities of pastoral life [exhausting work, bitter antagonisms between owners and men], this is an allegory of the masculine control over nature, in which an "unproductive land is turned into a productive one.

.....the "strong masculine labour" was not a matter of local conditions - of a country in economic depression, with antagonism between capital and organised labour – but of the effort that had built and was building the Empire.

(Spate in Radford, 1995, p.78).

1889 November, Roberts may have heard about the indigenous artist Tommy McCrae who had worked at Brocklesby but left no record of contact. (McQueen, 1996, 293). *Gubbie Wellington, one of the last blacks of Corowa*, possibly Roberts' first portrait of an indigenous Australian. (Topliss, 111)

1890 January, Sidney Dickinson, US' journalist and critic lectures on various schools of painting presented at the late Paris Exposition and Mr Ball spoke hopefully of the future prospects of art in Australia. Report of meeting at New England Hotel, Heidelberg at which McCubbin, Roberts, Streeton and others present.

(Smith B, 1974, p.246)

1890 June & July, *Shearing the Rams* on view a auction rooms in Melbourne for sale at 350 guineas. (McQueen, 1996, 314)

1891 *A break away!* painted at Corowa; Art Gallery of South Australia.

It is as if he were saying: I was there" or, rather, "I am here". In fact, his presence was a fiction, for he would have had to be suspended far above the scene. In short, the demands of Realism and the demands of imperial history-making are embodied in the painting itself, and is the source of much of its ambiguous fascination.

...The transformative force of Empire had to be recorded as if it were a series of stills, each of which says" this is how it was". Realist painting and the mass imagery of illustrated journals depicted historic events in the form of time suggested by photography in which each moment is detached from the continuity of time.

(Spate in Radford, 1995, p.80).

- Noted as 'an extremely clever picture of bolting sheep' by Sir Thomas Humphrey Ward, *The Times*, April 4th 1898.
(Smith, ed., 1975 216).
- 1891 Melbourne was in economic recession so Roberts followed Streeton and moved to Sydney, where Art Gallery of NSW had policy of acquiring Australian paintings.
In Sydney knew journalist J. F. Archibald (1856-1919) of the *Bulletin* (since shipboard meeting in 1885 on the *Lusitania* when he commented on Archibald's unkempt appearance (Lawson, 1983, 114), Harry Harbord (Breaker) Morant (1864-1902) a balladeer publishing in the *Bulletin* from 1891, 'Banjo' Paterson (1864-1941) a lawyer, journalist and balladeer publishing in the *Bulletin* since 1885, and many other writers and journalists at his Pitt Street studio. Member of the Dawn to Dusk Club where in this era his nationalism and democratic tendencies reinforced each other.
- 1891 Roberts established camp at Sirius Cove, Mosman where joined by Streeton and A.H. Fulwood.
- 1892 Arthur Streeton, *Golden Summer*, 1888, receives *mention honorable* at Paris, Old Salon where it also sells. (McQueen, 1996, 360)
- 1892 July, journey to Torres Straits, painted aboriginal people as individuals. Roberts published a description of journey in *The Argus* over four parts.
- 1892 ca *Aboriginal Head (Charlie Turner)*, AGNSW, first work of Roberts to enter a public collection, also *Eileen*, AGNSW.
A critic [in 1892] wrote "that its value will grow year by year with the gradual disappearance from our midst of the *original possessor of the soil*."
(Spate in Radford ed., 1996, p.64)
Roberts told a journalist in 1926 that his Aboriginal portraits "would have been an interesting record of a dying race." *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 6 June 1926
- 1892 ca. *Study of Natives & Corroboree, Murray Island*, NGA, Canberra.
- 1892 September, portrait triptych *Church, State, and the Law* exhibited at Art Society of New South Wales. (portraits of Sir Henry Parkes, Cardinal Moran, New South Wales Supreme Court Judge, Sir William Windeyer). *Aboriginal Head (Charlie Turner)* also shown in same exhibition.
- 1892 *Sir Henry Parkes*, Art Gallery South Australia, in 1893 accepted for exhibition at Royal Academy London and at Chicago Exposition where he also showed the head *Charlie Turner*. (works of Ravi Varma also shown in Ethnographic Pavilion).
- 1893 brief visit to Melbourne.
- 1893 July, second portrait of *Sir Henry Parkes*.
- 1893(-1896) *Lumbering* NGA Canberra
- 1893 publication of Charles H. Pearson, *National Life and Character: a Forecast*, (London) divides the world into 'higher' and 'lower' races.
- 1894 *The Golden Fleece* (renamed from *Shearing at Newstead*), at Newstead, northern NSW, AGNSW.
- 1894 *Shearing Shed, Newstead*, Private Collection.
- 1894 *Mosman's Bay*, New England Regional Art Museum.
- 1894 December, visited property of Edward Ogilvie at Yugilbar on River Clarence. Roberts does portraits of some indigenous Australians with whom Ogilvie was familiar or employed including *Marie Yulgilbar*.
- 1894 *Edward Ogilvie*, State Library of New South Wales.
- 1894 mid-December to 1895, stayed again at Newstead near Inverell, north-central New South Wales.
- 1895 September, *Portrait of an Aboriginal Woman (Maria Yulgilbar)* now in Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, exhibited at Society of Artists
(Topliss, 1984, 132).
- 1895 (-1927) *Bailed Up*, painting begun at Inverell, AGNSW.

- 1895 Roberts founding president of *Society of Artists* in Sydney, until 1897.
- 1895 December 4, letter to John Plummer indicates Roberts planned to make a series of portraits of indigenous people all over the colony of New South Wales.
(Topliss, 1984, 132, 136)
- 1896 April 30, aged forty years, married Elizabeth (Lillie) Williamson at Kew. May returned to Sydney. Began teaching at Vickery Chambers, 1896 – circa 1900. Studio is described thus: With its Japanese décor of ‘figured muslin in shades of grey, daffodil and faint green’ with Japanese matting on the floor.
(See *Table Talk*, 18 September 1896, 16, cited by Topliss, 1985, 72).
- 1896 Arthur Streeton, *The Purple Noon’s Transparent Might*, shown in first solo exhibition and purchased by NGV.
In this picture the glorious brilliancy of the noonday sun flooding the landscape with its white light, seems to bleach the local colour of its dominating strength The picture gives in so striking a manner, the feeling of radiance, that one realises the aptness of its title *The Purple Noon’s Transparent Might*. In what a truly marvellous fashion the Artist caught the golden grey green tones of the gums in the foreground, and reflected the sense of quivering light over the distant hills.
..You could almost take this picture as a National Symbol. To read into it what the Artist has unconsciously expressed, you might say that it typified the strength, beauty and possibilities of Australia.
(Frederick McCubbin, *The Art of Frederick McCubbin*, 1916, in Smith, ed., B., 1975, 274-275)
... however, much Australian Art owes its existence to other lands, its existence, as a National asset, has depended to a great degree upon its being an unconscious expression in some form or other of the ideals of the people amongst which it developed.
...Perhaps it is lack of confidence in their own country which urges so many of them to fly at their first available opportunity to that haunt of Artist –Paris. Some powerful influence seems to irresistibly attract them there. They read and hear of salons and exhibitions that are dazzling in their variety and beauty; of delightful coteries of artists: of new movements and new methods. The very name itself - Paris - seems to suggest to them an atmosphere of Art and Romance, whereas their own country seems dull and commonplace. But it appears to me they follow a will of the wisp.
...The student strives to echo and imitate their constantly changing extravagances. He reacts from one side to the other till he no longer progresses, but merely juggles.
...I have endeavoured to establish a claim that this country possess a National Tradition of Art, that this Art is valuable, simply because it expresses, in some form or other, the life and feeling of the country.
(Frederick McCubbin, *The Art of Frederick McCubbin*, 1916, Smith, B., ed., 1975, 276-79)
- 1897 January, Roberts at Newbold, Copmanhurst:
On the hills and valleys green a land of richness. The ranges hung with woods, the she-oaks and pine, grey and red and cream of stem. To ride all day and camp at intervals and boil the quart and sleep at night and lay by the banks of a big new river and back over fresh [Fields?] to the home station and to think if one could express it all, and make others feel what beauty there is in it. Australia hasn’t been fairly touched yet.
(Letter to S. W. Pring, cited Topliss, 1985, 73)
- 1897 Roberts moved to Balmain in Sydney.
- 1898 January 31, birth of son, Caleb.
- 1898 April, thirteen of Roberts’ paintings hung in *Exhibition of Australian Art* in Grafton Galleries, London.
The show contains pictures that certainly would make their mark at the Academy. Mr. Tom Roberts’ ‘Golden Fleece’... shows an excellent power of drawing, much careful observation of certain types of men and the business-like packing of a picture that goes to

make a good illustration. When you have seen it you will know how sheep shearing takes place in Australia; you will know the type of man produced by the country, his tallness, leanness, wiry activity and hard intelligence. But you will know little of Mr. Roberts or his way of seeing. His canvas tells nothing of general effect, of beauty, of the general outlook of the artist; it is a built up canvas, one to be studied in detail not be received on a single view. It lacks beauty of colour, unity of effect and concentration of interest; in spite of its wonderful qualities of observation and human sympathy, it chills one because it utterly lacks style and poetry of impression.

(R.A.M. Stevenson in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, April 4th 1898, cited in Smith, b., ed., 1975, 211-212).

1898 held art classes in Vickery Chambers, George Street.

1898 Arthur Streeton (1867-1943) in London, until 1906. Later returned in 1908, in 1915 was a private in Medical Corps and a war artist in 1918. Finally returned to Australia in 1922.

1899 *Professor G.W. Marshall-Hall*, Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre.

1899 *Adagio*. AGNSW.

But portraiture was not the real work he would have liked to do if he could have followed the bent of his inmost desire. That was subject painting –allegorical and historical. With a limited purse that was impossible, especially in Australia, where trained professional sitters could not be procured.

(Jane Price in the 1890s, in “Some Memories”, Croll, 1935, 151; also cited Spate, 1972, 99)
 ...A poet can so weld similes in his thought that the thought is continued through an infinite arcana of beauty..A poem moves – it goes wherever the writer’s fancy leads him. But a painting is fixed. You can, it is true, shade and modify your central idea.. by pose, by accessories and surroundings; but, once made, the modification remains ... the painting is rigid; the poem fluid. A certain brush-stroke gives you a certain effect- no more no less; and when you have got that down it is unalterable. But a touch of words gives a result that the next word may alter immeasurably.

So the painting fixes one thing for you – one scene, one mood, one idea.

(Roberts in *Bookfellow* April 29 1899, and Croll. 1935, 56-58, cited by Spate 1972, 102)

1900 March, visited New Zealand for two months.

1900 November showed 113 works including [?] 23 informal panel portraits in the manner of Whistler, at Society of Artists to raise funds for London trip. Roberts wanted to keep set together as part of a representative gallery of Australian human figures, ‘part of a programmatic design to record Australian character, both urban and rural’:

...the painter feeling that the interest of such a collection if broken up, would be to a great extent lost, especially when one considers how interesting such a group would be to us now, of similar types of, say fifty years ago ...

(cited by Topliss in Radford, 1996, p.148)

1901(- 1903) Roberts lived in Melbourne.

1901 May 9, Roberts attended first Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne, May 20. The Commonwealth Constitution did not recognize aboriginal people (who had to wait until 1967 to receive equal citizenship). Roberts was commissioned to do commemorative picture with 250 figures, the two and half years’ work provided Roberts with financial security, work completed in England.

When the great day came your mother and I went to the hall of the Exhibition Building, and without getting seats, walked quietly at the very back, and climbing up some rails, I was able to see that immense gathering of people from Australia, and from so many parts of the world. It was very solemn and great. The heads on the floor looked like a landscape...So I had been one witness of that scene, and had been able to think and ponder, without having any task behind the thought, and was somehow very content feeling that something of it all belonged to me.

- (Tom Roberts, reminiscence for his son, Caleb, from *Wikipedia* and Crawford, 1984, 153)
 And so it came about that this painter came into touch with some of the great ones of the earth, and the incongruity of it was the thought of the first early days in Australia, and the poverty and hard times for us...and then how this change would have made the poor old mother proud of her 'Tom' – all these thoughts were very much in my mind during the wild rush and excitement of those Sydney days of 'the visit'.
 (McQueen, 1996, 466)
- 1901 September, passage of *Immigration Restriction Act* to restrict Chinese and Japanese immigration. It was drafted by Roberts' friend and correspondent Alfred Deakin, Commonwealth Attorney-General, and received Royal Assent on December 23rd.
 It is not the bad qualities, but the good qualities of these alien races that make them so dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that make them such competitors.
 Deakin in debate September 12, 1901.
 (wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Australia_policy#cite_note-9, consulted 26 August 2012)
- 1901 November 13, Deakin first sat for portrait by Tom Roberts.
 (Crawford, 1964, 150)
- 1902 August 7, letter from Streeton:
 Yet there's a feeling with others and with me that you're putting too much time into your Big Gem of the Opening. Still you understand best.
 (Crawford, 1984, 154)
- 1903 March 17, left Melbourne.
- 1903, November 16, completion of *The Big Picture* or *The Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia* by H.R.H. The Duke of Cornwall and York (later H.M. King George V), May 9, 1901) 518 cm x 305 cm, Parliamentary House Art Collection, Canberra.
 Roberts said that when he painted his study of the scene he saw it as a landscape and one could speculate that, in the finished work, Roberts was painting his familiar dualism: the "strong masculine labour" of the nation-creators and the undifferentiated 'feminine' Nature which they had shaped and would continue to shape.
 (Spate in Radford-1996, p.86).
- 1903 (-1923) lived in England
- 1903-1914 lived chiefly as a picture framer, painted little except commissioned portraits
 England does not really *want* anybody; she has everybody and anybody...she only really wants the exceptional in any line
 (Interview of circa 1913-14, Croll, 1935, 99; Spate, 1972, 122)
- 1904 March Watson [Labour] succeeds Deakin as Prime Minister.
- 1904 August 4, Roberts wrote to Deakin
 Another cause of Roberts' uncertainties in the 1890s lay in the conflict between his realism and the new formalist and Symbolistic tendencies. This conflict too was more marked in London:
 ...I'm beginning to work here, and have a very uphill fight before me. The mere quantity and variety of the styles and efforts of different men, is like to affect one's own outlook, and you have to stand very firm and be sure.
 (Letter to Deakin, cited in Spate, 1972, 123; Crawford, 1984, 167)
- 1904 went to Bavaria to do portrait of Marquis of Linlithgow, 1st Governor-General of Australia, commissioned by National Gallery of South Australia.
- 1905 Lillie's father died leaving her a small inheritance.
- 1905, February, Trouble arose with Robert's' eyesight (Crawford, 1964, 168).
- 1905 July 5, Deakin became Prime Minister for second time.
- 1906 Roberts not among twelve Australians hung at Royal Academy
- 1906 August, Roberts in *British-Australasian*

- I suppose Australia's most representative feature is mateship. Every true Australian has a mate. For a man to be quite alone out there is a sign that there is something wrong about him. Even the 'hatter' generally had a pal – somewhere about. That's the spirit of Australia. Mateship. No Australian story, to be true, ought to have one hero, he's bound to have a mate.
(McQueen, 1996, 511,
- 1907 April, portrait bust of his son Caleb and painting *The Sleeper Awakened* both rejected by Royal Academy. Visited in London by Frederick McCubbin.
- 1908 May 21, 1907 Letter to Deakin
I'm working to an end that I believe good enough, the going is steep and difficult to me – one must achieve – in the end, and I shall write and tell you the steps.
(Crawford, 1964, 171)
- 1908 letter to Deakin
Again you ought even now to be getting together a National Portrait gallery.
(Crawford, 1964, 172).
- 1909 *Australia Felix* by Arthur Streeton wins a 3rd class medal at Paris Old Salon.
- 1910 March 31, April 10, again takes up issue of National Portrait Gallery in letters to Deakin.
(Crawford, 1984, 171, 172).
- 1910 *April Girl* and *Mme Hartl as La Tournabuoni* shown at Royal Academy, latter hung 'on the line' at Royal Academy.
(McQueen, 1996, 540; Spate, 1972, 124, says 1913; Crawford, 1984, 182; Topliss, 1985, 75 says 1909)
- 1911 May 30, Roberts one of two secretaries for an Australian entertainment at the Imperial Institute to celebrate coronation
- 1911 *Miss Baynton* exhibited at Royal Academy.
(Crawford, 1984, 182).
- 1912 November, exhibited *A Norfolk Barn* at Paris Salon.
- 1913 Royal Academy accepted the re-painted *The Sleeper Awakened*. ('Nude figures dancing in a flimsy net')
(McQueen, 1996, 506)
Visited Italy, stayed at Lake Como and Rome.
- 1914 February 9, exhibited alpine landscapes at Walker's Gallery, London.
- 1914 July, completed commissioned portrait of *Lord Tennyson*.
- 1915 (-1918) July, Roberts aged 57 years, worked as a nursing orderly during World War I.
- 1916 *Marianne* exhibited at Royal Academy.
(Crawford, 1984, 182)
- 1917 December, death of Frederick McCubbin in Melbourne. He had been in charge of drawing at the National Gallery School since 1886.
- 1919 *Penelope* exhibited at Royal Academy.
(Crawford, 1984, 182)
- 1919 December, Roberts alone visited Australia, relative success encouraged return.
Roberts wrote in reminiscences for son Caleb, letter to wife, 6 December 1919:
If ever, my son, you go away from the centre of our race for a long time, you will know what a sensation it is to come back. I had longed and longed, and it was all up to my longing. [Return to Australia] had the sensation that as a child you thought it was going to be heaven. I don't exaggerate.
(Spate, in Radford, 1996, 62, citing Croll, 1935).
- 1920 March, exhibition at Upper Athenaeum Gallery, Collins Street, Melbourne. *Penelope* was first purchase of Roberts' work by National Gallery of Victoria.
- 1920 June 30, Roberts happy that Australian painting had Not been infected by any mania for extravagance in the way of cubism

- (McQueen, 1996, 624)
- 1920 August, solo exhibition at Hordern Gallery, Sydney. This was the department store where Margaret Preston's husband was a director.
(McQueen, 1996, 621).
- 1921 January, returned to London.
- 1922 September 30, Caleb Roberts married Norah Watson.
- 1922 before Christmas, Streecon's give a farewell dinner for the Robertses, and Roberts chided Streecon for not having told other Artists that 'I have liked their work'.
(McQueen, 1996, 642)
- 1923 January 6, Tom and Lillie Roberts left London, February 15, arrived at Port Adelaide.
- 1923 *Country Road Makers*, Private Collection.
- 1923 March, purchased land at South Sassafras, later known as Kallista, and built a house called Talisman.
- 1923 November 4, Roberts notices that term 'pommy' had displaced 'Englishman' and previous automatic acceptance of the latter had shifted to his being put 'very much on trial' as a 'pommy'.
(McQueen, 1996, 652)
- (1923-) 1925 *Washing Day*, Kallista, AGNSW, Sydney.
- 1924 *Sherbrooke Forest*, AGNSW, Sydney.
- 1925 Roberts' friend Alfred Streecon lived near Kallista at Olinda where Roberts often visited.
- 1925 Streecon dedicates his Melbourne exhibition to Roberts
From whose quick perception and expression of the principles of impressionism, in the year 1886, sprang the first national school of painting in Australia
(McQueen, 1996, 667)
- 1926 Solo exhibition at Anthony Hordern's of twenty-seven landscapes.
- 1926 in address to Bendigo Art Society Roberts surprises some listeners:
In the beginning of the history of art in Australia, black fellows did some marvellous drawings of animals and other objects, just as good in many respects as the work done by modern artists
(McQueen, 1996, 654)
- 1927 Historical Memorials Committee commissioned a posthumous portrait of poet *Henry Kendall* (1839-1882).
- 1927 *Hillside*, Art Gallery of South Australia.
In the 1990s, I do not think we can participate in Roberts' representations of figures in the bush without thinking of the invisible presences in his paintings, without recalling the fact that he recorded 'terra nullius', not an empty land, but a land emptied of those who lived by identifying with it.
(Spate in Radford, 1996, p.92)
- 1928 January 3, death of Lillie Roberts.
- 1928 March, sold *Bailed Up*, thereby securing funds for travel.
- 1928 August 27, re-married to Jean Boyes, a longstanding Tasmanian family friend.
- 1928 September, late, returned to Kallista.
- 1929 summer, Tom and Jean Roberts spent three months in Tasmania
- 1929 June, Roberts exhibits with nine artists at Athenaeum Gallery, Melbourne.
- 1930/31 Roberts painted near Penguin in Tasmania.
- 1930 April 23, John Peter Russell died in Sydney.
- 1931 September 14, TR died of cancer in Kallista, Victoria, ashes are buried at Illawarra cemetery near Longford, Tasmania.

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