

Plein Air Painting & Impressionism in Sydney

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Plein air painting and Impressionism in Sydney from the late 1870's.

The artists responded to the beauty of the city's natural setting on the harbour; Sydney's beaches, the blue of the water and the activity of a busy maritime city.

The harbour, and Sydney's climate, provided perfect conditions for outdoor recreation – boating, picnicing, fishing and bathing. Like Melbourne, an extensive rail network was already established, complemented by the ferries that plied the harbour.

Artists painted around **Richmond** and the **Hawkesbury River**, **Coogee**, **Balmoral**, **Mosman**, **Manly** and other sites around **Sydney Harbour**. There were camps at some of these sites.

Painting by the key artists continued until the 1890s – when they moved in different directions.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Sydney's art scene became increasingly professional.

When **George Collingridge** (1847-1931) arrived in the late 1870s, after studying in France (where he knew Corot) and London, he was aware of dissatisfaction with NSW Academy of Art and he and his brother Arthur took a leading role in establishment of **Art Society of NSW** in 1880.

He was also well known as an illustrator for the *Illustrated Sydney News*, *Australian Town and Country Journal* and the *Sydney Mail*.

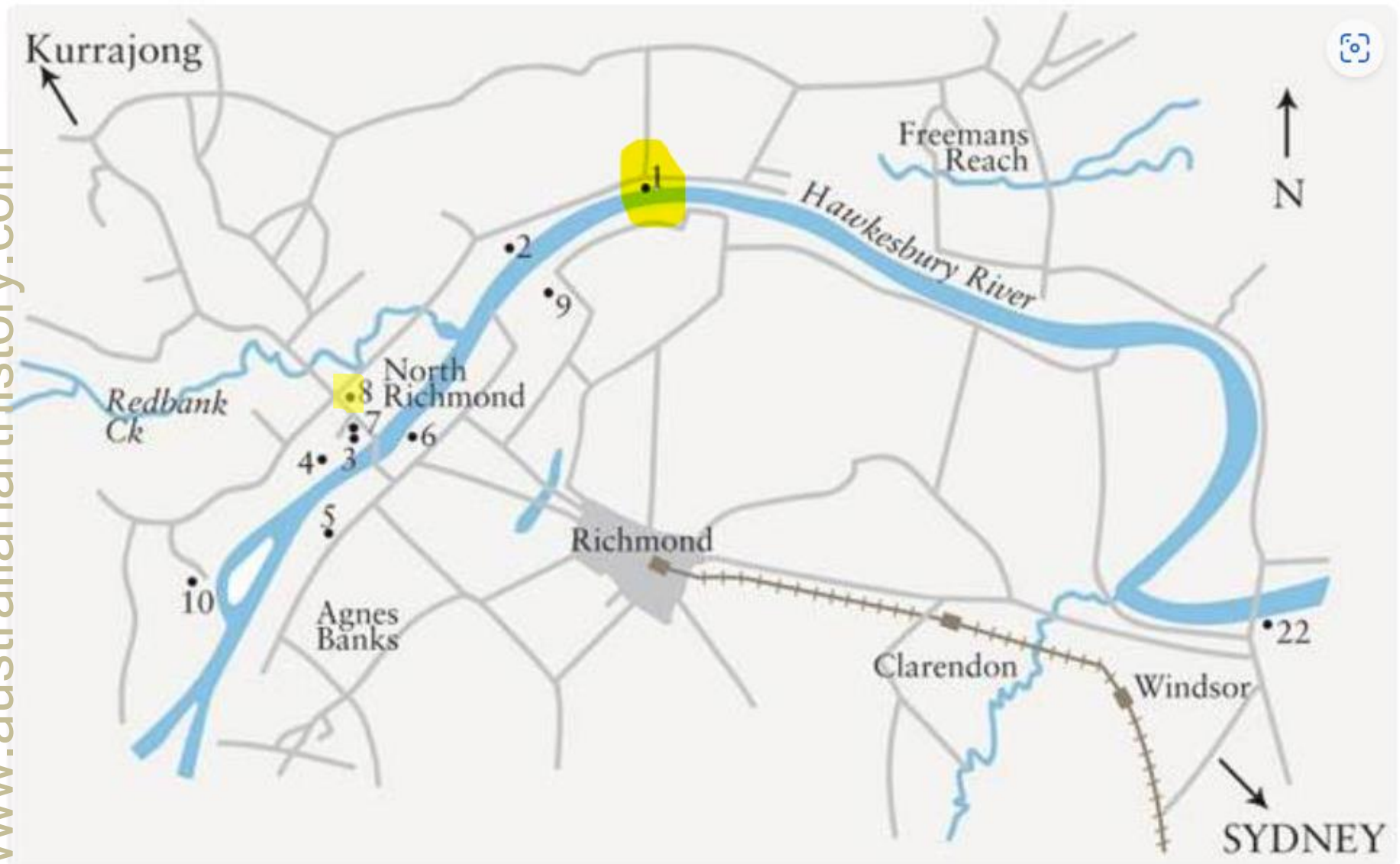
Both he and Arthur taught in schools and technical colleges and George wrote a manual *Form and Colour* at Sydney Technical College.

They had been painting scenes of the old streets of Sydney, and established the Rocks as a sketching ground; but much more importantly they opened up the Hawkesbury as a landscape subject. Arthur, who lived at Ryde, had already discovered a number of sketching sites along the Parramatta River.

They brought the Hawkesbury to the considerable attention of the next wave of painters, Julian Ashton and Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder, A Henry Fullwood and Alfred Daplyn.



George Collingridge, *Parramatta*, 1885



📷 The National Gallery of Victoria's Map of the Hawkesbury River showing the location of famous paintings. Number 1 was **Purple Noon's Transparent Might** and Number 8 was **Griffiths' farm**.



In early 1896 Streeton travelled to the upper reaches of the Hawkesbury River, between Richmond Bridge and Windsor, where he was inspired by the expansive view looking towards the Blue Mountains.

The painting takes its title from a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley that embraces the natural world – sun, sky, water and mountains.

It was painted in two days during a shade temperature of 108 degrees', in a state of *'artistic intoxication with thoughts of Shelley in my mind'*.



Arthur Streeton, *The purple noon's transparent Might*, 1896



Arthur Streeton, *The River*, 1896

Julian Ashton (1851-1942)

Ashton was a forceful personal personality and an outspoken advocate of local art.

He settled in Sydney 1883 (from Melbourne) and by 1888 was a **trustee of Art Gallery of NSW** and promoted purchase of local works by the gallery.

By 1892 he was in charge of classes at the **Art Society of NSW**, but forced to resign in 1895, after exhibiting with rival professional organisation, **The Society of Artists**.

President of the **Society of Artists** from 1897 to 1898 and then from 1907 to 1921.

Originally impressed by 'old world picturesque' of Sydney and winding streets and old buildings.



Julian Ashton, *The Classroom*, 1893

In 1896 Ashton opened **The Academy Julian** – which rapidly became the most influential art school in Sydney.

His students included George Lambert, Sydney Long, Thea Proctor, Elioth Gruner
Lambert reported that:

“ there was no false facility about his own work, no flashy or flippant effects; and his students, if they were to remain his students, must be severe and unrelenting in their work, crisp and sure in their results”.

He had studied at the **Academy Julian** in Paris and was a strong supporter of the *Plein Air* movement.

Many of his painting show brilliant sunlight.



Julian Ashton, *Horden Steps* c 1880s



Julian Ashton, *Mosman Ferry*, 1888

Julian Ashton, *Back of old house, Clyde St Miller's Point*, c1895



- In 1886 he began painting in the Hawkesbury River area with Daplyn and Conder, & later take students from his art school there.
- Situated relatively close to Sydney, and accessible by both rail and water
- He would often camp on the Hawkesbury



Julian Ashton, *Sentrybox Reach, Hawkesbury River*, 1886

In 1888 Conder joined the painting group of Julian Ashton. They painted at Griffiths' farm and at other sites along the Hawkesbury River.



Charles Conder, *The Farm*, 1888

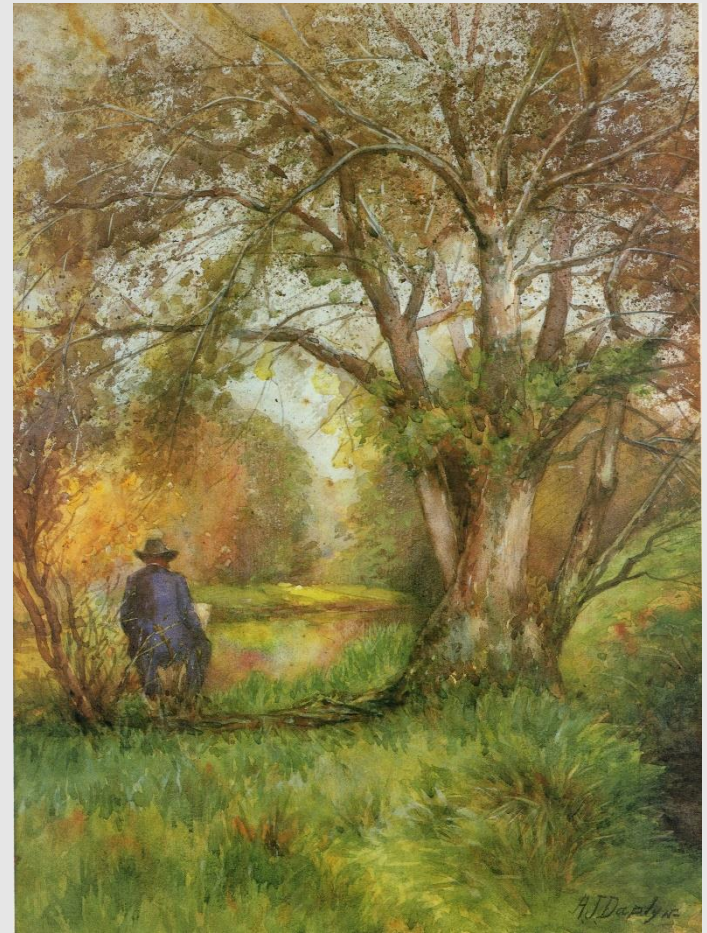
Alfred Daplyn (1844 –1926)

Moved to Sydney in 1884, became secretary of the New South Wales Art Society and its instructor in painting in 1885-92 (under direction of Ashton) with whom he often painted. His students included Charles Conder.

Set up as an art expert, giving lessons and making illustrations. In 1902 he published *Landscape Painting from Nature in Australia*, a manual for the student in oil and water colours.

He supported the importance of '**relative values**' in his teaching.

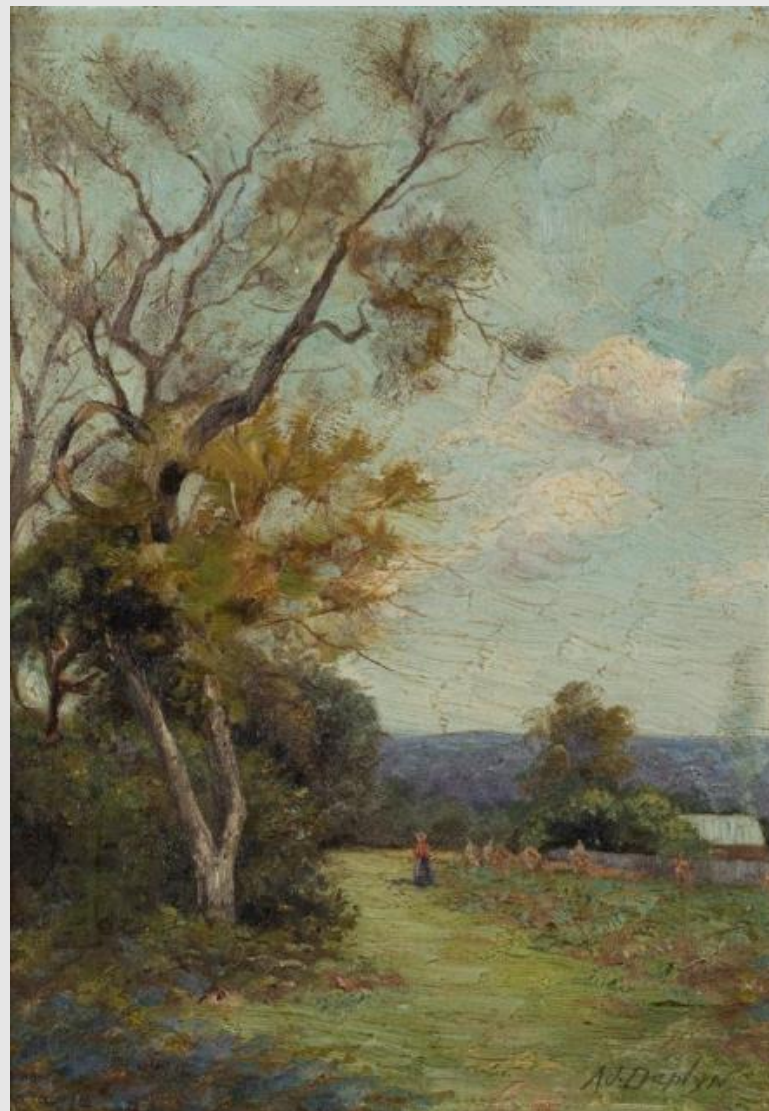
That is, *carefully adjusting the tone of a colour in relation to that immediately next to it, so that the close relationship of tones allowed a feeling of light and atmosphere to dominate the portrayal of a landscape.*



Alfred Daplyn, *The Artist at Work*, 1886

Daplyn also advised on painting materials, stating:

“Brushes should be flat hog’s-hair ... [and] A sable brush about an inch long, called a “rigger,” is useful for outlines, etc. The smaller brushes should be seldom used; acquire the habit from the beginning of working with large brushes. Do not shorten your brushes on any pretence, as they are made long so that you should be able to use them while standing a long distance from your work, and are to be held in the middle two or three inches above the tin ferrule”.



Alfred Daplyn, *Figure on a Country Track*

Before coming to Australia in 1881, Daplyn had studied under **Gerome** and **Carolus Duran** – so his style of painting was '*juste-milieu*', that is, the middle ground between painting plein, whilst respecting academic values.

Alfred Daplyn, *The Australian Artists Dream of Europe*, 1898



Girolamo Nerli (1860 - 1926)

Studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence

Like the French Impressionists he was wanted to portray light, but was less concerned with momentary effects than with conveying a metaphysical intensity of light aimed at permanence.

Often painted on small wooden panels.



Girolamo Nerli, *Beach Scene Black Rock*, c 1888

- A taste for things 'Oriental' filtered into Australian art during the late nineteenth century through French and English painting which had, in turn, been influenced by Japanese art.

The vases, fans, Japanese screens and exotic fabrics draped around the studio reflect the popularity of this style.

The studio shown in this painting was established by Nerli in 1887 at Norwich Chambers in Hunter Street, Sydney.

Arthur Streeton considered that Conder was much influenced by '*the brilliant Nerli*', whose example assumes a special significance for Australian art at this time.



Girolamo Nerli, *The Sitting*, c 1889

Late in 1889 Nerli went to Dunedin, New Zealand, to assist in setting up the New South Wales loan collection for an international exhibition, in which he exhibited nine works.

He returned to Sydney in 1890 and also spent some time was spent in Melbourne painting bayside beaches, and he may also have visited Hobart.

In 1892 he was painting at Mosman Bay with Roberts.

He left Australia, for New Zealand in about 1893, returning in about 1898 before returning permanently to Europe in 1904.



Girolamo Nerli, *The Voyagers*, c 1890

Constance Roth (1859 – 1928)

After training in London, Roth became the manager of a decorative firm in Glasgow before moving to Australia.

She worked, taught life classes (at Julian Ashton's school) and exhibited in Melbourne, Hobart and Sydney. She was also a cartoonist, journalist and Illustrator (*The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, the *Illustrated Sydney News* and the *Centennial Magazine*).



In Sydney, she conducted a noted artistic salon in her extravagantly decorated “aesthetic” city studio where artists, actors and musicians met (**Tom Roberts** and **Charles Conder** met there in 1888).

The salon was decorated in the *aesthetic* style.

Constance Roth, *Apples*, 1890 – purchased by AGNSW



Charles Conder (1868-1909)

- Had attended Art Society School drawing classes with Julian Ashton in Sydney and studied painting under Alfred Daplyn.
- In 1888 joined the painting group of Julian Ashton at Griffiths' farm (near North Richmond) and at other sites along the Hawkesbury River.
- Blossoms became an important motif for Conder, their brief life on the branch alluding to the larger theme of the transience of life and beauty.



Charles Conder, *Springtime*,
1888

Conder had befriended Tom Roberts during Robert's visit to Sydney in 1887 – which led him to move to Melbourne for short period.

Conder's *Coogee Bay*, 1888, and Roberts' *Holiday sketch at Coogee*, 1888, were painted on the same day and from the same headland looking over the sweep of the bay.

Conder's more decorative manner, expressed in the silhouettes of the tree branches, and his paler, more pastel palette with notes of pink in hats and parasols, contrasts with the Naturalism of Roberts's picture and his bolder palette.

Conder left Australia in 1890 for England.



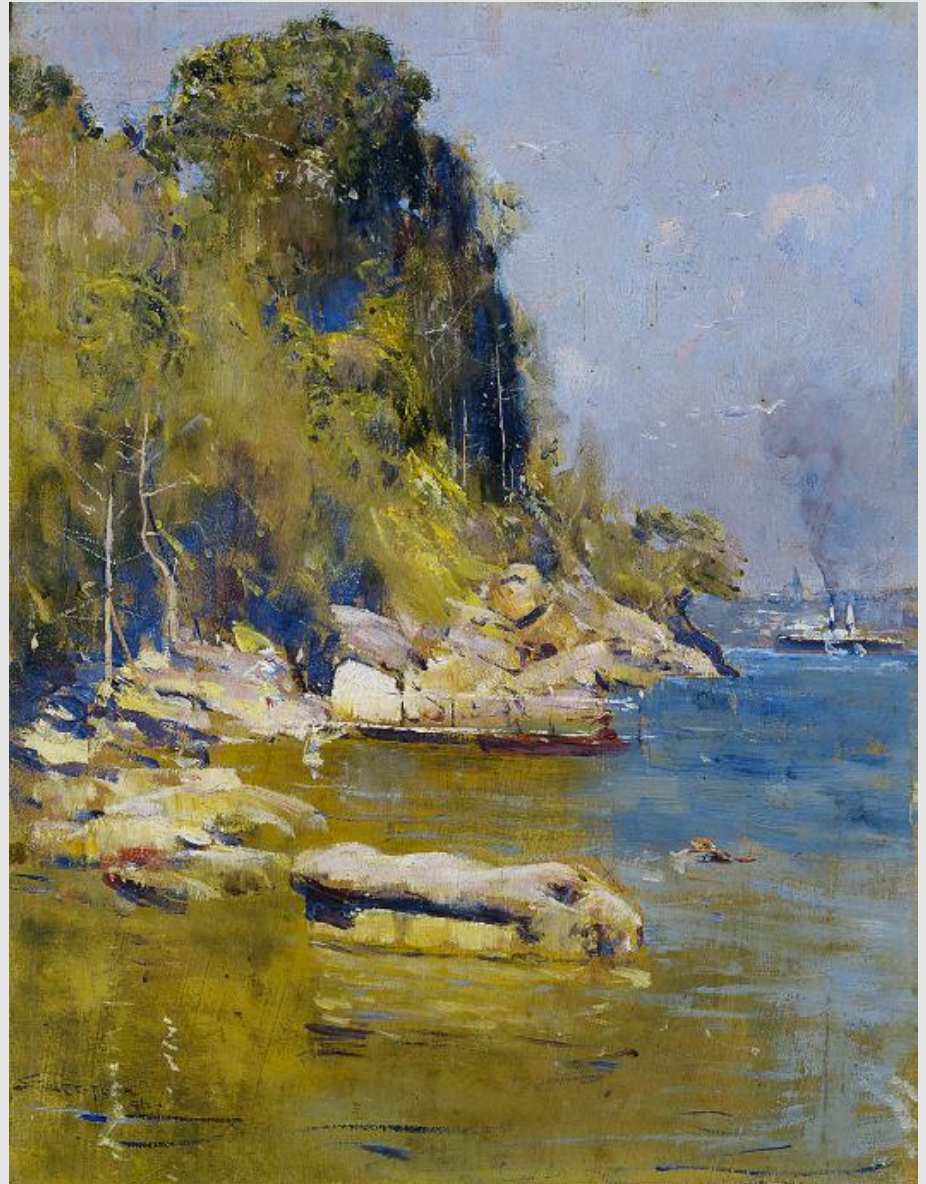
Charles Conder, *Coogee Bay* 1888 (top)

Tom Roberts, *Holiday sketch at Coogee* 1888

Artists camps around Sydney harbour:

Balmoral and
Curlew camp on shore of
Little Sirius Cove (now part of
Mosman)

Also painted near the city
and other beaches such as
Cremorne, Coogee, Manly
and along the South Coast



Arthur Streeton, *From my Camp, Sirius Cove*, 1896

- Livingston 'Hop' Hopkins, Australia's cartoonist, established **Balmoral Artists' Camp** in 1883.
- He rented 50 acres of bushland near a freshwater creek and pitched a four-roomed tent there.
- Julian Ashton and Arthur Henry Fullwood subsequently joined him.
- Described as a *'retreat from bourgeois urban existence, a good place for painting, swimming, fishing and conviviality'*. Some of the tents had wooden floors and carpets.
- 'Mosman may well have been painted more than any other Australian landscape'.
- Access was usually by ferry to Mosman Bay and then by foot.
- Robert Louis Stevenson visited in the 1890s



Camp at Edwards Beach, Balmoral

- **Curlew Camp** established on the eastern shore of Little Sirius Cove, now part of Mosman Bay in Sydney.

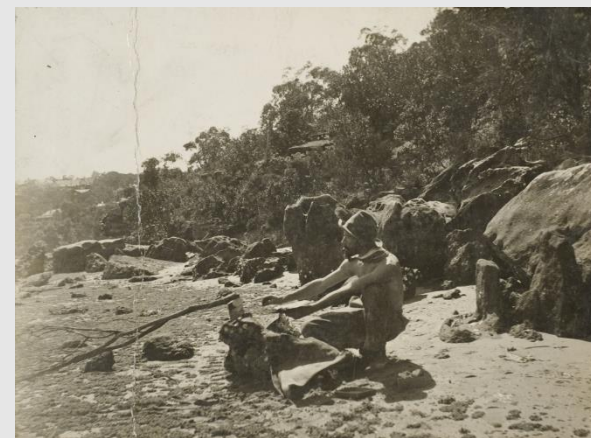
In 1891 Arthur Streeton moved to camp at age of 24

Tom Roberts joined him soon after at age 36. As a source of income they held art classes in a Sydney studio.

They had half a dozen tents between them and there was a dining tent, a dancing floor and even a small piano.

Roberts left for Balmain in 1896.

- Streeton stayed for another 2 years before leaving for England until 1907.





Tom Roberts
Mosman's Bay 1894



John Mather, *Mosman's Bay*, 1990

Arthur Henry (A.H.) Fullwood (1863-1930)

Employed first by John Sands Ltd, Fullwood worked as a black and white artist for the *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* in 1883-86.

A member of the Art Society of New South Wales from 1884, Fullwood, with Roberts, Collingridge and was active in setting up the breakaway Society of Artists, Sydney, which was confined to professionals.

In early 1900s exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1906 and the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français, Paris.

Arthur Henry
Fullwood, *Mosman*,
c1890



- Fullwood lived and painted at Curlew Camp in Sirius Cove with Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts during the 1880s and 1890

- Joined William Ashton, Alfred Daplyn, Charles Conder and Girolamo Nerli on painting excursions to the countryside at Richmond



Arthur Henry Fullwood, *View from Balmoral*, 1885



Arthur Streeton, *Sydney Harbour*, 1895

William Lister Lister (1859-1943)

In 1888 Lister Lister returned to Sydney from England & became an art teacher

Early Australian period images were mainly watercolours with English themes, but by the mid 1890s his work was dominated by watercolours and oil views of Sydney and regional NSW.

Lived in Mosman so many paintings from that area.

He won the Wynne Prize seven times before he died at the age of 83.



William Lister Lister, *The Ever Restless Sea*, 1892

From 1898 until he died he was president of the Royal Art Society of New South Wales; from 1899 he was on the Board of Trustees of the National Art Gallery.



William Lister Lister, *The Federal Capital Site, Australia*, 1913

Sophie Steffanoni (1873–1906)

- became a pupil of **Lister Lister** in 1893
- Charles Conder a strong influence
- exhibited paintings from 1895 to 1903 with the Art Society. regularly sold her paintings at a good price, the equivalent of three times a labourer's weekly wage.
- painted and sketched at many sites around the Harbour.
- A journal entry states:
Was too windy for anything so took the ferry to Mossman's Bay and spent a quiet afternoon in a little gully near the head of the creek. I had taken my sketching materials and was not put off by such trifles as wind and rain, so I started to sketch a few rocks close at hand and Lalla held the parasol for me when it rained a little.



Sophie Steffanoni, *Rock Shelf at Austinmer*



Sophie Steffanoni, *About Windsor*, 1898

Jessie Scarvell (1862 – 1960)

Scarvell was a pupil of **Lister Lister** and exhibited over 60 of her plein air landscapes at the Art Society of NSW throughout the 1890s and in London in 1898.



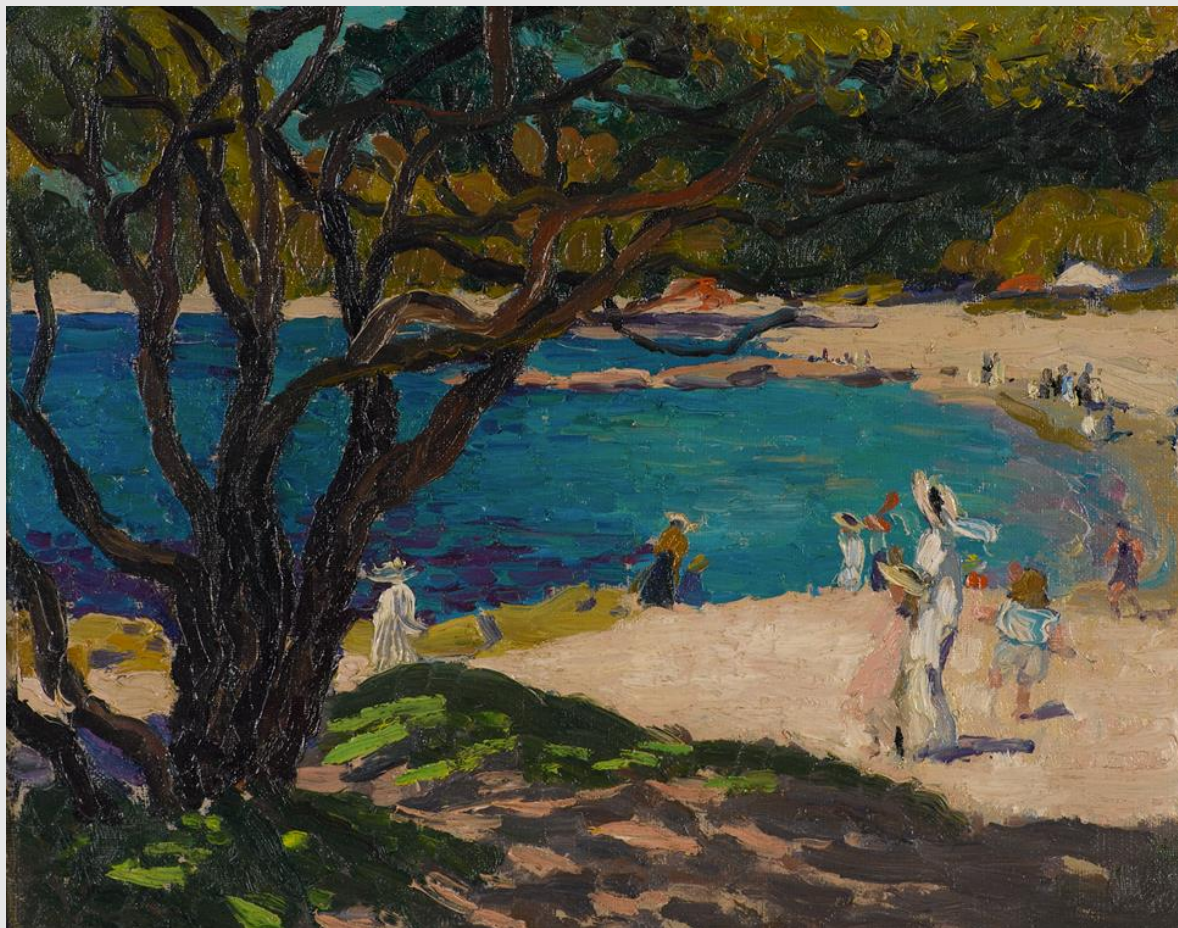
Jessie Scarvell, *The lonely margin of the Sea*, 1894

Ethel Carrick (1872 – 1952)

Studied at the Slade School in London, studying drawing with Francis Bate, who was known for encouraging *en plein air* painting, a bright palette and close observance of tonal values.

She met her future husband, Emanuel Phillips Fox at the St Ives plein air painting colony in Cornwall.

Visited Australia during her long and successful painting career, with her first visit in 1908



Ethel Carrick, *On Balmoral Beach, Sydney*, 1913

Aline M. Cusack (1867-1949)

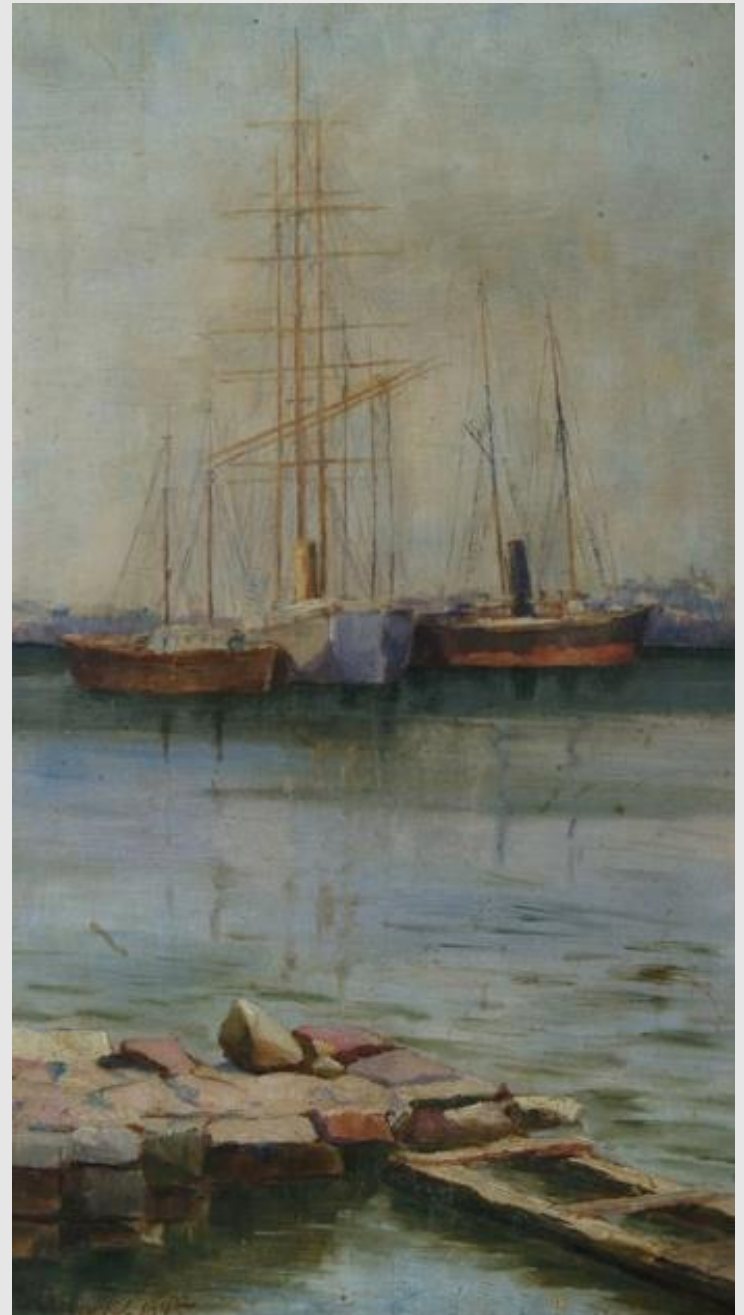
Aline Cusack was a prominent professional Sydney-based artist who worked from the 1890s to the 1930s.

Together with her sister, Edith, her work was included in the **Exhibition of Australian Art in London** in 1898 at the Grafton Galleries.

The Art Gallery of NSW collection has two portraits of Aline made by Edith in the 1890s.

They taught art from their Paling's Building studio and conducted "*Outdoor Landscape Painting Classes*"

In 1906 Aline travelled to Europe to study at London's School of Animal Painting (1906–1907) under Frank Calderon, and at **Academie Colarossi** in Paris.



Aline Margaret Cusack, *Moored Ships, Darling Harbour*, 1896



Arthur Streeton, *Manly Beach*, 1895



Ethel Carrick, *Manly Beach, Summer is Here*, 1913

In Sydney, Roberts continued to paint well paying commissioned portraits.



Tom Roberts, *Adagio*, 1893

Tom Roberts epic paintings in NSW

In the late 1880s and 1890s, Roberts was motivated to paint large nationalistic painting of masculine Australian workers, set in rural New South Wales.

He travelled to areas such as Newstead and Corowa to paint what he saw was a dying way of life in Australian Shearing Sheds.

Roberts painted *In a Corner near the Macintyre, The Bushranger* while staying at Newstead, a station near Inverell.



Tom Roberts, *In a Corner near the Macintyre, The Bushranger*, 1895 (71 x 84 cm)

Roberts painted *A break away!* during a severe drought in southern NSW in 1891, at Corowa.



Tom Roberts, *A Break Away!*, 1891 (137.3 cm × 167.8 cm)

He painted *Bailed Up* work in 1895 while staying at a sheep station near **Inverell**.

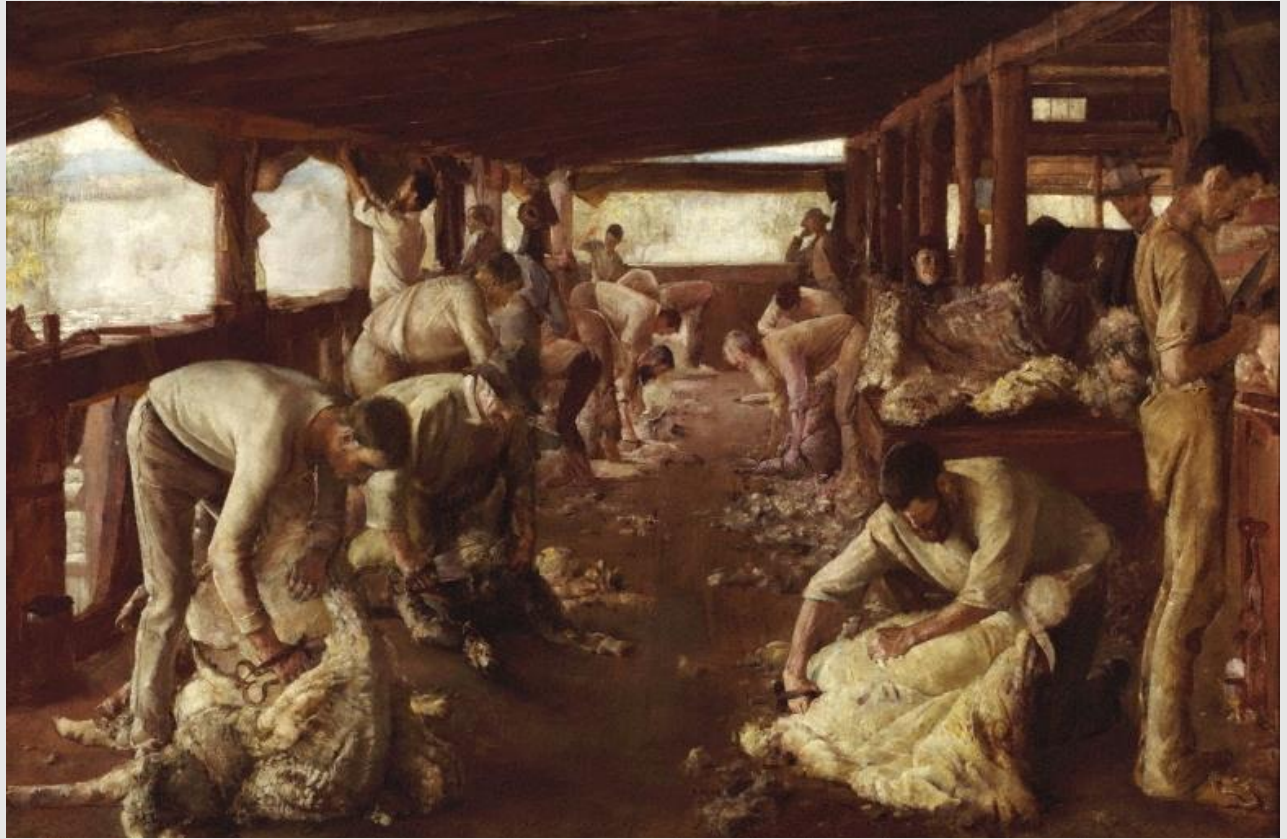


Tom Roberts, *Bailed Up*, 1895 (134.5 x 182.8)

Originally called '*Shearing at Newstead*', this painting was renamed to reference the Greek myth in which the Argonauts voyage to the end of the world in search of the Golden Fleece.

The title reflects Roberts' creation of the rural worker as 'hero', and his evocation of Australia as an Arcadian land of pastoral plenty.

Part of a series in which Roberts paid homage to rural life and pastoral industry, and captured what he believed were vanishing traditions such as the use of manual shears.



Tom Roberts, *Golden Fleece*, 1894 (104.0 x 158.7)



Tom Roberts, *Shearing the Rams*, 1889 (122.4 × 183.3 cm)



Painted at Brocklesby Station,
about 20 minutes north-west of
Corowa.

Tom Roberts, *Shearing Shed, Newstead*, 1893-4 (220 x 330cm)



Tom Roberts, *Shearing the Rams*, 1889 (guache)

In 1901 Roberts was commissioned to paint a vast representation of the opening in Melbourne of the first Federal Parliament of Australia and, in 1903, he returned to England where he completed the work.

During the First World War he served as an orderly at the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth. After visits to Australia in 1919 and 1920, he returned in 1923 where he painted landscapes in a low-key palette. Tom Roberts died in 1931 at Kallista, Victoria.



Tom Roberts; the artist

Arthur Streeton also painted several large works in the Australian Bush in the 1890s

The man who posed for the picture was Jack Whelan, the tenant farmer of the Eaglemont estate in Victoria.

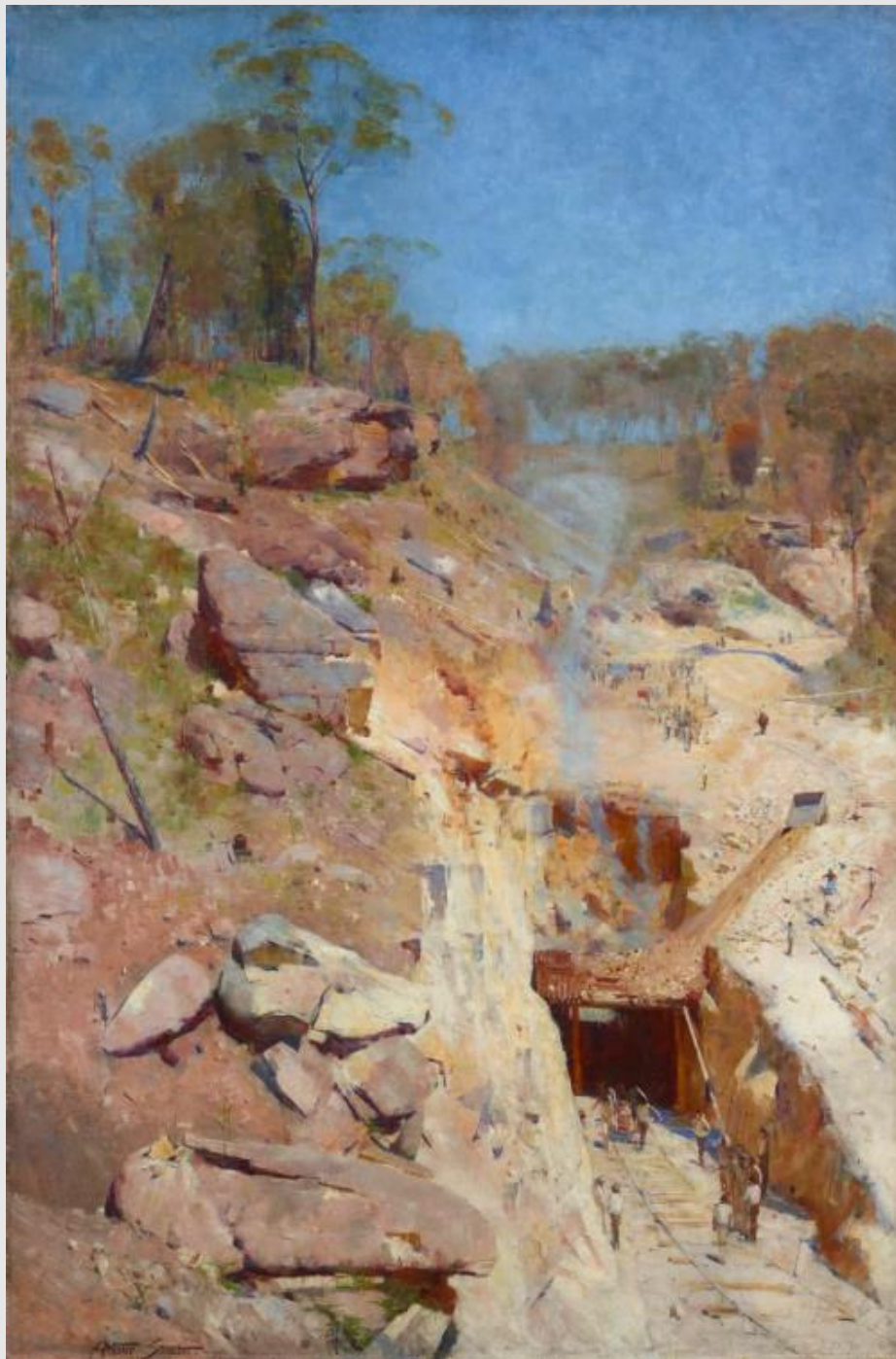
Arthur Streeton, *The Selector's Hut* (Whelan on the Log), 1890 - 512 x 767 cm



Painted a year after Streeton left Melbourne for Sydney, it constitutes a radical new type of landscape in his oeuvre. Its vertical composition and the high horizon line bring focus to the steep terrain with precarious rocks and dead tree-trunks.

The painting captures a critical moment during the construction of a railway line across the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney: the death of a railway worker in an explosion

Arthur Streeton, *Fire's on, Lapstone Tunnel*, 1891 - 183.8 x 122.5 cm



By the late 1890s many of the key players has moved on, and as would be expected, continued to develop their styles and move into new areas.

New artists were emerging, and the next period of art, from around 1900 was known as Federation art, although painting plein air and in an Impressionistic style endured.